

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | THURSDAY 6 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 36°C
Min: 23°C
Rainfall: 1 mm

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Chithirai 23
Tithi: Dhasami
Star: Sathayam
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
Yamagandam: 6 am to 7.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.34 am
Luhar: 12.11 pm
Asar: 3.16 pm
Maghrib: 6.24 pm
Isha: 7.38 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.35 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.02 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 2.31 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 3.20 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+4,06,383)	(+3,838)
2,10,64,862	2,30,010

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+23,310)

TN: 12,72,602 14,779

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

15,55,77,209

DEATHS

32,49,003

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 219

worldometers.info

UK variant dominates north India: NCDC

New Delhi: The United Kingdom strain of coronavirus is currently dominating parts of north India while the double mutant variant is found mostly in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat, Director of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Sajeet Singh said on Wednesday. He, however, added that the B.1.1.7 lineage of SARS CoV-2 (UK variant) is declining in proportion across the country in the last month and a half.

Maoist party withdraws support, Oli loses majority

Kathmandu: Nepal's embattled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli-led government on Wednesday lost majority support in the House of Representatives after the CPN (Maoist Center) led by Pushpakamal Dahal 'Prachanda' officially withdrew support to it.

The party submitted a letter to this effect to the parliament secretariat, informing about its decision to withdraw support to the government, according to a senior leader of the party, Ganesh Shah.

Customs cleared 1L oxygen concentrators: Govt

New Delhi: The Centre on Wednesday told the Delhi high court that from April 24 to May 4 it has cleared over one lakh oxygen concentrators and only 907 units were pending clearance as of Tuesday. In a status report filed before a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli, the central government has said that it has cleared 1,09,689 oxygen concentrators in the given period.

COUNTER POINT



Hike the prices by a paise where we won, and by a rupee where we lost!

CITY | 2

Sterlite may start oxygen production in next 7 days



Wine aged aboard ISS to sell for \$1mn

WORLD | 5

SPORT | 8

Mahrez fires Man City into CL final



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Tech glitch in O₂ supply kills 13

■ **Patients at Chengalpattu Medical College hospital had no oxygen: kin**

SINDHIYA SAMUEL, P.A. JEBARAJ | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 5

As many as 13 patients died at the Chengalpattu Government Medical College Hospital on Tuesday night due to alleged oxygen shortage though district collector A. John Louis denied shortage but admitted a ‘technical glitch’ could have disrupted the supply of oxygen. The director of medical education would probe into it, he said.

Narrating the harrowing incident, the relatives of the deceased patients said that the deaths were caused due to insufficient oxygen supply. The 13 patients, aged between 40 and 85, who were in critical care unit, passed away one after the other at around 10.30 pm, they said.

They also claimed that hospital staff took oxygen cylinders from ambulances and tried to save a few patients who needed oxygen the most when the situation went out of control. But it was in vain. Then the situation was brought under control around midnight by transporting cylinders from SRM and Karpaga Vinayaga medical colleges to the hospital GH.

Mr Louis said he received a call at 11 pm that there were some issues in the hospital and rushed there. The hospital had 10 kilolitre oxygen as against the total capacity of 23 kilolitre, he said, adding that there were also two external 3 kilolitre oxygen set ups. ■ P3



Post-graduate doctors at the Chengalpattu government hospital in Chennai stage a protest against the alleged negligence on Wednesday. — DC

New curbs: groceries, veg shops to close by noon

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Grocers, vegetable vendors, tea shop owners and other shop keepers would have to down shutters by 12 noon from Thursday as the new set of restrictions come into force with a view to controlling the spread of Covid-19, which is wreaking more havoc in its second wave.

Announcing a new timing for the sales of liquor, the government announced that TASMAC shops will remain open from 8 am to 12 noon, while bars, clubs, pubs, and other places of public gathering

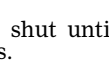
NEW CURBS TILL MAY 20
(Monday to Saturday)

Grocers, vegetable vendors, tea shops, other shops: till 12 noon

TASMAC shops: 8 am to 12 noon



Govt, private offices: 50 per cent attendance



Public transport: 50 per cent occupancy

have been shut until further orders.

In the new restrictions that will be in force till May 20, government and private offices will work with 50 per cent attendance and public trans-

Bars, clubs, pubs, places of public gathering: Shut fully
Restaurants, hotels, mess, bakeries: 6 am-10 am; 12 noon-3 pm; 6 pm-9 pm. (only take-away services)

Fish, meat, chicken vends: 6 am-12 noon

port, too, would run with 50 per cent occupancy.

Government employees with disabilities have been fully exempted from attending office during the period between May 6 and 20, an official order said. ■ P3

THIRD COVID-19 WAVE INEVITABLE, SAYS CENTRE

New Delhi, May 5: The government on Wednesday said that a third wave of coronavirus pandemic was “inevitable” although a time-frame for it could not be predicted.

In a press briefing by the ministry of health and family welfare on Wednesday, officials said the long Covid wave of such “ferocity” that the country was experiencing currently “was not predicted”.

Twelve states, including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh, have more than 1 lakh active Covid cases, the government said.

Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Bihar are among the states that show increasing trend in daily cases, it said.

EC AGAINST PLEA SEEKING GAG ORDER ON MEDIA

New Delhi, May 5: The Election Commission on Wednesday said it was unanimous that there should not be any prayer before the Supreme Court for restriction on media reporting over oral observations made by judges.

The Commission was responding to a news report that the poll panel’s plea in the Madras High Court to gag the media from reporting oral observations of judges and its subsequent special leave petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court against the high court’s “murder charges” remark were not unanimously approved by the poll panel.

A senior functionary said the EC had moved the top court against the oral observations of the Madras High Court. He said based on the observations people could seek action against EC officials. — PTI

2 of MEA team to UK test positive

London, May 5: Members of the small delegation accompanying external affairs minister S. Jaishankar to the United Kingdom have tested positive for Covid-19, forcing the minister to take his remaining schedule here, including his in-person meetings at a G7 gathering, virtual as a “measure of abundant caution”.

“Was made aware yesterday evening of exposure to possible Covid pos-

itive cases,” Mr Jaishankar said on Twitter on Wednesday.

“As a measure of abundant caution and also out of consideration for others, I decided to conduct my engagements in the virtual mode. That will be the case with the G7 Meeting today as well,” he said. According to numerous sources, two members of the delegation tested positive on Tuesday with further test results still awaited.

Sources in Delhi said all the members of the Indian delegation had tested negative for Covid-19 before they left for the UK on Sunday. “Test result of all four were negative,” said a source.

They said none of the delegation members are unwell and India will see what the British authorities say about their protocol and process.

Mr Jaishankar was to join ministers from the other G-7 guest nations for

the first formal gathering of the summit over a working dinner on Tuesday evening and further meetings on Wednesday.

“We deeply regret that Foreign Minister Dr Jaishankar will be unable to attend the meeting today in person and will now attend virtually, but this is exactly why we have put in place strict Covid protocols and daily testing,” a senior UK diplomat. — PTI

Covid tops Mamata priority but Guv says stop violence first

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MAY 5

In a first, Mamata Banerjee and Jagdeep Dhankhar sparred with each other face to face at Raj Bhavan over the immediate priority of the new government --- battling the Covid-19 pandemic or an end to the deadly post-poll violence -- in West Bengal as soon the Trinamul Congress supremo was sworn in by the governor on Wednesday morning as the state’s chief minister for the third consecutive term. The simple ceremony was boycotted by BJP MLAs in protest against the alleged

killings of their party cadres by TMC workers.

Standing next to Mr Dhankhar, Ms Banerjee prioritised the Covid-19 battle over tackling the post-poll violence, downplaying the deadly clashes as “sporadic incidents”, orchestrated by a “political party”, in her veiled reference to the BJP. Irked by her remarks, Mr Dhankhar not only publicly differed with her but also said that ending the post-poll violence should be the top agenda of her new government.

“Our first priority is to control the Covid-19,” Ms Banerjee said. “Reaching Nabanna (state secretari-



MC Supremo Mamata Banerjee takes oath as the Chief Minister of West Bengal for the third time consecutively during her Swearing-in-Ceremony, at Governor House in Kolkata, Wednesday. — PTI

at), we will hold a meeting on this and inform everyone about our decisions.

Second, I urge all political parties to maintain peace, order and harmony.” ■ P4

BJP workers flee to Assam with families to escape TMC violence

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MAY 5

Assam BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Dass on Wednesday rushed to western Assam’s Dhubri district with relief material for more than 400 BJP workers and their family members who crossed over to Assam to escape post-poll violence in neighbouring West Bengal.

Informing that a team of

BJP workers are accompanying him to look after the victims of Bengal violence, Mr Dass told reporters, “the BJP workers and their families from Bengal can live in Assam as long as they don’t feel safe about returning to West Bengal. We are giving shelter and food to all those who fled their state.” The BJP has alleged that goons backed by the Trinamool Congress have killed their workers,

attacked women members, vandalised houses, looted shops belonging to party members and ransacked party offices.

The party has claimed that nine people have died in violence across six districts so far.

The exodus of BJP workers along with their families from West Bengal continued even on Wednesday due to post-election violence unleashed allegedly by TMC goons. ■ P4

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DMK president M.K. Stalin hands over a resolution of DMK legislature party electing him leader to Governor Banwarilal Purohit at the Raj Bhavan in Chennai on Wednesday. — DC

Stalin appointed Chief Minister

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Governor Banwarilal Purohit appointed M.K. Stalin, who has been chosen leader of the DMK legislature party, as Chief Minister on Wednesday and invited him to form the next government in the state.

Mr Stalin would be sworn in Chief Minister along with his ministerial colleagues on Friday 9 am at the Raj Bhavan in a simple function, which will be attended by around 200 persons.

Earlier in the day, the DMK president, along with his party general secretary Durai Murugan, treasurer T.R. Balu, principal secretary K.N. Nehru and organisation secretary R.S. Bharati, called on the Governor at Raj Bhavan.

Mr Stalin handed over the resolution passed at

the meeting of the DMK legislators on Tuesday at Anna Arivalayam, electing him as the leader, and also a list of some 28 ministers to be sworn in along with him.

Following that, the Governor’s office handed over a letter to him inviting him to form the government. Raj Bhavan officials have been coordinating with the state officials on the conduct of the swearing-in function.

The names of ministers chosen by Mr Stalin became a matter of speculation that too many lists were making their rounds in social media with people making their own guesses and conjectures.

Though the DMK cadre and functionaries would have preferred to have a gala function to mark the installation of the government at a public place in view of the party returning to power after 10 years. ■ P3

Quota cannot go beyond 50 p.c: SC

New Delhi, May 5: The Supreme Court on Wednesday struck down the Maharashtra law granting quota to Marathas in admissions and government jobs, terming it as “unconstitutional”, and held there were no exceptional circumstances to breach the 50 per cent reservation cap set by the 1992 Mandal verdict.

The top court also refused to refer the Mandal judgement to a larger bench for reconsideration, saying it has been upheld time and again by its various verdicts.

A five-judge constitution bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan concurred on three major issues, and said the MC Gaikwad commission report which was the basis for the Maratha quota did not highlight any exceptional circumstances for grant of reservation to the community.

The five-judge bench gave four verdicts, while concurring unanimously on three major issues including that the grant of

Maratha quota is invalid. Justices L.N. Rao, Hemant Gupta and S. Ravindra Bhat concurred with Justices Bhushan and S. Abdul Nazeer in upholding the constitutional validity of the 102nd amendment but said states cannot decide on the list of Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) and only the President has the power to notify it.

Justices Bhushan and Nazeer in their minority view said both the Centre and state have powers to decide on the list of SEBC.

The majority verdict directed the Centre to notify a fresh list of SEBCs, and said till the time notification is being issued the existing list will holds its place.

The bench said appointments made in government jobs and admissions in post-graduate courses after the Bombay High Court upholding Maratha quota and September 9, 2020 order of the top court staying the implementation of quota will not be affected.

SHORT TAKES

Welcome hotels offer quarantine facilities

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Select Welcomhotels, across India are offering quarantine facilities to Covid-19 patients in collaboration with partner hospitals in a bid to flatten the Covid-19 curve. The hotels offer clean accommodation, advanced safety and cleaning protocols with full attention to in-room hygiene including food delivery. Processes are re-engineered to maximise safety across hotel touch points. The stay entitles guests to avail of all meals at the hotel.

On-site medical care will also be provided by the partner hospitals as per their guidelines. As part of the affiliation, the hospital would place a few of their medical and healthcare professionals to monitor key parameters and details as they deem fit. Anil Chadha, COO-ITC Hotels, said that the collaboration between Welcomhotels and partner hospitals would be able to provide some relief and comfort to the community.

O₂ concentrators arrive from Malaysia, China, UKDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Oxygen concentrators from Malaysia, England and China arrived at Chennai on Tuesday. According to Chennai Customs, they had facilitated speedy clearance of 38 oxygen concentrators imported by M/s Orthodynamics from the UK and 2 by M/s VRP enterprises in China. Similarly, a consignment of 3 oxygen concentrators was imported by M/s Aptiv Components from Malaysia. The customs said it had completed all clearances within 15 minutes of the concentrators reaching Chennai International Airport.

Anna Nagar, Ambattur & Adyar turn Covid hotspots

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Three zones - Anna Nagar, Ambattur and Adyar - have become Covid-19 hotspots as active cases continue to spike. Teynampet and Kodambakkam have now reached a plateau.

New hotspots, however, will increase the demand for hospital beds and medical oxygen in the coming days. The active cases continue to surge in specific zones at a time when the city started reporting over 6,000 new cases daily.

Till last week, three zones - Teynampet, Kodambakkam and Anna Nagar - were reporting 3,000-plus active cases each. But now the number of zones which crossed the 3000-mark touched five adding Adyar and

Ambattur.

On Tuesday, these five zones together contributed 16,063 cases out of a total of 33,222. According to Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) data, Anna Nagar (3,800) topped the table overtaking Teynampet (3,038). Adyar, which reported around 2,479 cases last week, now claimed second position with 3,098 cases.

The cases in Ambattur also jumped to 3,071 from 2,689. However, other critical zones such as Teynampet (3,038) and Kodambakkam (3,056) showed a downward trend. While Teynampet had reported 3,293 cases last week Kodambakkam added 3,100 on Wednesday. Thiru Vi. Ka. Nagar added 2,656 cases, a surge from last week's 2,549.

Perungudi, which reported below 2,000 cases last week, recorded 2,132 cases and Valasaravakkam registered 2,350 cases, a surge from 2,033.

Teynampet continues to retain the top slot in death toll among zones with 601 cases. Anna Nagar (563) and Kodambakkam (558) have also crossed the 500 mark. The zonewise total death toll goes as follows: Tondiarpet (383), Royapuram (416), Thiru. Vi. Ka. Nagar (499), Ambattur (346), Adyar (390), Madhavram (125), Valasaravakkam (251), Alandur (189) and Perungudi (168).

The total death toll in the city reached 4,894 till Tuesday while it was 4,661 on April 28. As many as 233 patients in the city succumbed to Covid-19 in

the last six days.

However, the GCC administration till May 4 was able to administer at least 15,13,628 doses of vaccine since January 16. On Tuesday alone, 9,374 beneficiaries in the city took the jab.

According to officials, work was underway to add 2,400 beds to the already available 2,545 oxygen-supported beds in the city in the government sector. Out of this, at least 250 new oxygen-supported beds each in Government Royapettah Hospital and the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Egmore are functional now. A total of 500 beds being set up for the Covid Care Centre to come up in Chennai Trade Centre will also be oxygen-supported.

Sterlite may start oxygen production in next 7 days

M ARULOLI | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, MAY 5

The production of medical grade oxygen at the Sterilite Copper plant is expected to commence in the next seven days.

The Thoothukudi district collector-headed committee, constituted as directed by the Supreme Court to monitor the oxygen production for medical use at the Sterilite plant, on Wednesday inspected the readiness of the oxygen units within the factory premises.

The monitoring committee also comprises oxygen plant expert Joseph Bellarmine, Anto Soris, deputy chemist at the Tangedco-run TTPS, Amarnath, retired fire safety officer at Thoothukudi Zirconium complex, and Prof. Kanagavel, head, department of chemistry, Kamaraj College. They will inspect the oxygen production units, which according to Sterilite have been kept ready

to resume operation, once the state government gives all statutory permissions.

Thoothukudi collector Senthil Raj told the media that after getting approvals from various departments like the TWAD board, corporation, fire and industrial safety, Sterlite would be given the power and water supply required to operate the oxygen plants on a standalone basis.

Senthil Raj added, "Sterlite has submitted a list of personnel to be involved in the oxygen production which will be vetted by the technical experts in the monitoring committee, based on which permission will be granted for entry of the personnel to work in the oxygen plant."

Once all permissions are given and the machineries are verified by conducting a hot run test, a safety audit by the monitoring committee will be conducted and on successful completion of these processes, Sterlite will start oxygen production in the next seven days, added the collector.

Covid surges with 23,310 new cases, 167 deaths

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Registering another day of surge in Covid-19 cases, the state on Wednesday reported 23,310 new cases and 167 deaths. This is a leap from 21,228 new cases and 144 deaths on Tuesday.

A total of 20,062 patients were discharged from hospitals after treatment across the state.

According to health department data, the total Covid-19 tally in the state has reached 12, 72, 602 while death toll reached 14,779 including 4,952 in Chennai.

Chennai registered another single day spike with 6,291 cases, an increase from 6,228 on Tuesday. The district also reported 58 deaths. Total number of cases in the district touched 36,4081.

Chengalpattu district, which added 1,608 new cases on Tuesday, registered 1,755

cases. At least 16 people succumbed to Covid-19 in the district. Total cases in the district now stand at 88,192.

Thiruvallur district crossed the thousand mark for the third straight day with 1,152 cases, a dip from 1,207 on Tuesday. A total of 12 people lost their lives in the district on the same day.

The contribution of Chennai and surrounding districts including Thiruvallur and Chengalpattu went up to 9,431 from 8,975 on Tuesday. Daily active cases have also gone up to 1,28,311 from 1,25,230 on Tuesday. Daily total active cases in the Chennai district touched 32,917, a dip from 33,222 on Tuesday.

A total of 1,48, 695 persons took RTPCR tests through 264 labs while total individual tests on Tuesday were 1,34,141. At least 2,29,79,687 individuals tested so far in the state.

VACCINE, OXYGEN AND BEDS NEED OF THE HOUR



(Left) Corporation Commissioner P.Kumaravel Pandian inspects a Covid-19 swab test camp at ward 15 in Coimbatore on Wednesday. For the Second day, A "Vaccines out of stock" board was kept outside the vaccination centre in Govt Arts College in Coimbatore on Wednesday showing the great demand for vaccines now. —B.Vignesh



(Left) Patients with oxygen cylinder waiting outside RGGGH on Wednesday. JITO Chennai Chapter donates Oxygen On Wheels for emergency Oxygen outside Government Omandurar Hospital. —DC



Ease COVID-19 restrictions, say Tirupur exporters

Coimbatore, May 5: Tirupur Exporters' Association (TEA) on Wednesday sought relaxing of Covid-19 restrictions between May 7 and May 20 for the benefit of exporting units and job-working units during the period. The association has requested Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary Dr Rajeev Ranjan to permit shops selling accessories, dyes and chemicals, and fabrics to function with less number of workers in Tirupur. The knitwear exports sector,

consisting of 95 per cent MSMEs, have to purchase from shops accessories, dyes and chemicals and fabrics and items required for manufacturing of COVID protecting PPE and masks, the association said. Closure of shops for 15 days would delay the manufacturing and exports apart from delay in supplying of the much-required PPE and masks, it said.

Most of the exporting units do not have enough financial

strength to procure the required items immediately and permitting these shops to be open would help the knitwear sector at this hour of crisis, TEA president Raja M Shanmugham said in a letter.

Copies of the letter have been sent to Industries Department Principal Secretary N Muruganandam and Tirupur district collector Dr K Vijayakarthiseyan, too, to take up the issue with the government, he said. —PTI



Congress MP Vijay Vasanth calls on TN Congress president K.S.Alagiri at party office on Wednesday. —DC

Cong to elect leader on Friday

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 5

The TNCC has called for a meeting of its newly elected MLAs to choose the leader of the Congress Legislative party on Friday, May 7, 6 pm at their headquarters, Sathyamurthy Bhavan.

A communique from the party instructed all the MLAs to attend the meeting, which will be presided over by TNCC President K S Alagiri, without fail.

The party's Tamil Nadu in-charge, Dinesh Gundu Rao and AICC national secretaries Sanjay Dutt and Sirvelli Prasad, will also attend the meeting, the communique said.

The Congress is now the third largest party in the State Assembly with 18 of its nominees winning their seats. The party was allocated 25 seats by the alliance leader, DMK, and 18 of the nominees emerged victorious. The party's nominee

who contested the bye election to the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat also won the seat.

The Assembly constituencies to be represented by the Congress are Chennai city's Velachery, Ponneri, Sriperumbudur, Sholingur, Erode East, Udhagamandalam, Vridhachalam, Aranthangi, Karaikudi, Sivakasi, Myladuthurai, Tiruvadanai, Srivalkuntam, Nanguneri, Killiyor, Tenkasi, Colachel and Vilavancode.

HC rejects plea to quash charge memo

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 5

The Madras high court has dismissed a petition filed by an Associate Professor of Thiruvalluvar University, challenging the charge memo issued against him for allegedly producing a fake experience certificate a decade ago. Justice S.Vaidyanathan dismissed the petition filed by A.Paneerselvam, challenging the charge memo dated January 19, 2020 issued against him.

According to petitioner, he joined the services as an Associate Professor (Zoology)

in the department of Zoology on November 9, 2010. Earlier on November 28, 2014 a show cause memo was issued with regard to a fake experience certificate alleged to have been given by the petitioner for which a detailed explanation has been given and thereafter no further proceedings took place.

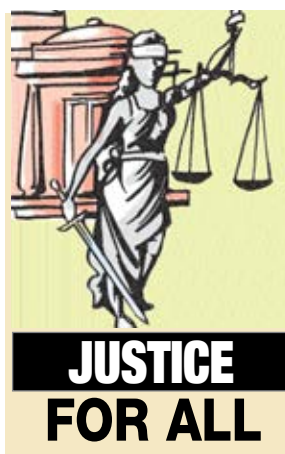
On January 19, 2020, the petitioner received a communication that the Registrar-in-charge, Thiruvalluvar University has proposed to hold an enquiry on the charges framed against the petitioner. The charge memo itself was illegal on three counts.

The judge said based on the 85th Syndicate meeting held on August 9, 2019, a departmental action has been initiated against the petitioner for which a charge memo has been issued. The syndicate alone has got power to initiate action against a Professor, which has been done in this case, communicated by the Registrar, who may be a witness, who may or may not go into facts at a later point of time. It does not mean that the Registrar-in-charge cannot communicate the Syndicate decision to the petitioner, even if he was going to be a witness in this case, the judge added.

THE 'SPURIOUS' CASE OF COVID 2.0



Sanjay Pinto



When helmets were made compulsory decades ago, there used to be quality checks and insistence on the ISI mark. This was for personal safety. Masks during a pandemic are for both personal and public safety. But what are the quality checks in place for a preventive measure with life or death ramifications?

How do you know if the ubiquitous N95 masks sold in the market are genuine? Look for a 7 digit Testing & Certification (TC) approval

number printed on each mask. If it does not exist, that's a red flag. N95 denotes the standard set by the US based National Institute of

Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH) for the classification of 95% filtration of air borne particles. Similarly, the Bureau of Indian Standards has set quality standards such as IS:9473 for masks with a particulate filtration efficiency of 95%.

Gullible folks wearing fake N95 masks would be under a legitimate belief that they are protected against aerosols containing the corona virus. Due to a false sense of safety, these users could end up getting infected and spreading the dreaded virus to other unsuspecting victims. With people dying every day and the authorities struggling to get those going outside to wear masks properly, pushing spurious products into

the market is nothing short of a crime against humanity. At the very least, in addition to other statutes, such manufacturers should be prosecuted under Sections 269 and 270 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for negligent or malignant acts likely to spread diseases dangerous to life.

It is the duty of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) to crack the whip against manufacturers of not just low quality masks, but also sub-standard devices such as digital thermometers, nebulizers, syringes, blood pressure monitors and glucometers under the Medical Devices (Amendment) Rules, 2020.

I wonder why commonly

used items during the pandemic like pulse oximeters, infra-red thermometers and oxygen concentrators do not figure in the list of 37 notified devices. Shouldn't they fall under the definition of 'devices' for "diagnosis" under Section 3(b)(iv) of the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940 under which these rules are framed? Even empty gelatin capsules are within the meaning of 'drugs' under these provisions. With hospital beds full, the common advice to patients with Covid symptoms is to seek admission if their oxygen saturation falls below 93. This is how crucial the reading on a simple oximeter is. With unbranded products flooding the market, false readings on defective devices

constitute a serious issue that warrants urgent attention.

Then there is an abominable breed of criminals out to exploit human misery by selling chalk powder solution as the much in demand Remdesivir injections. Despite two recent circulars from the Drugs Controller General of India to all States and Union Territories calling for "a strict vigil" and "stringent action" to stop hoarding, black-marketing and overcharging, there are media reports of Remdesivir and Tocilizumab being sold even 10 times higher than MRP. The Delhi High Court in Bram Health Care Private Vs Union Of India (2021) recently warned of separate contempt action

against such offenders.

It is imperative that raids are conducted under Rule 30 of the Drug Price Control Order, 2013 at warehouses, stockists and pharmacies to arrest this pernicious practice of hoarding and black-marketing of life saving drugs during a health crisis. Offenders must also be arrested under Section 3 of the Prevention of Black-marketing & Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980, Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code and relevant provisions of the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, amended in 2008. The licences of medical shops found violating Rule 26 of the Drug Price Control Order, 2013, by selling drugs above the stipulated rate must be sus-

pending pending an expeditious investigation.

The Delhi High Court in Bhavreen Kandhari Vs Govt Of NCT Of Delhi (2021) lit a flame of hope. "We the people, need to stand up to showcase our best qualities and virtues...collectively conduct ourselves with sensitivity and empathy...shun selfishness, greed and indifference."

The pandemic has been a battle of good versus evil – of the medical fraternity toiling incessantly in those PPE kits to save lives and of Shylockian mercenaries out to make a quick buck even over funeral pyres.

(The writer is an advocate at the Madras high court, columnist & author)

IN BRIEF

Gold smuggled from Dubai seized

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Air Customs at Chennai Airport foiled a gold smuggling attempt by a Dubai passenger and seized gold worth ₹28 lakhs. The passenger was arrested.

Based on suspicion, Elangovan Panchanathan (46) of Puducherry, who arrived from Dubai by an Emirates flight, was intercepted at the exit. During his personal search, three bundles of gold paste weighing 668 grams were recovered from his person. On extraction, 578 grams of gold valued at ₹28 lakhs was recovered and seized under Customs Act.

VITEEE 2021 to be conducted online from May 28 to 31

Vellore, May 5: The VIT Engineering Entrance Examination (VITEEE) 2021 will be conducted as online remote proctored examination on May 28, 29 and 31, 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic. The applications will be closed on May 20. Candidates are requested to complete the application at the earliest and take the examinations in a safe environment. Further details are available in the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) website "www.vit.ac.in".

TVS Motor registers sales of 238,983 vehicles in April

Chennai, May 5: The country's two and three wheeler giant, TVS Motor Company registered sales of 238,983 vehicles in April 2021 as against 9,640 in April 2020. The domestic sales in April 2021 came down due to pandemic lockdowns in many states. However, the retail sales continue to be ahead of dispatch. "We have reduced dealer stocks to support the channel partners and will produce to maintain adequate inventories for customer demand when it reopens", a company release said.

The year-on-year growth is not comparable due to the low base of sales in April 2020 because of the lockdown imposed by the Government of India during that period. Two-Wheeler Total two-wheelers registered sales of 226,193 in April 2021 as against 8,134 in April 2020. The domestic two-wheeler sales registered 131,386 in April 2021. The scooter registered sales of 65,213 in April 2021. The motorcycle registered sales of 133,227 in April 2021.

Exports: The Company's total exports registered sales of 107,185 vehicles in April 2021 as against 9,640 units registered in the month of April 2020. Two-wheeler exports recorded sales of 94,807 units in April 2021 as against 8,134 units in April 2020. The company recorded three-wheeler sales of 12,790 vehicles in April 2021 as against 1,506 in April 2020.

Activists want stricter environment laws

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Social, environmental activists and film personalities have requested the Chief Minister (elect) MK Stalin to evolve stricter laws to protect the environment in the State as the Central government is attempting to dilute the environment laws.

Greeting Stalin for steering the DMK to a victory with an absolute majority, and the progressive alliance for its commendable performance, they have stated that at a time when development needs a reorientation and the country needs strong environmental laws, the Union government is busy diluting even meagre protections offered by the laws such as EIA Notification and Coastal Regulation Zone Notification.

Environmental degradation hurts women, the poor, the historically marginalised communities, the farmers and fish workers disproportionately. In order to remain true to its values of social justice and equity, Tamil Nadu has to evolve stricter laws and better environmental due dili-

Write to CM elect Stalin

gence to make up for the lack of it in the central laws. They requested the new government that the Vedanta copper smelter in Thoothukudi should not be allowed to reopen, and the company and its directors should be prosecuted for their environmental crimes. They have demanded the government to scrap the environmentally degrading eight lane Salem Chennai expressway, Adani port expansion in Kattupalli, the Kanyakumari International Container Terminal, the Chittoor-Thachur six-lane expressway and the setting up of four additional nuclear reactors in Koodankulam.

They have sought the new government to withdraw the previous government's request for denotification of Vedanthangal Sanctuary, and for the reduction of protective buffer for the Pulicat Sanctuary, to clean up Hindustan Unilever's mercury-contaminated Kodaikanal factory site to global standards, prohibit use of Genetically Engineered seeds in Tamil Nadu.

The government must introduce a comprehensive groundwater legislation with stringent norms to limit commercial extraction and use and to evolve comprehensive policy against forced eviction of economically disadvantaged urban communities to distant and often environmentally vulnerable areas.

The government must enact state-level laws to strengthen and realise the objectives of the CRZ and EIA Notifications, to strengthen panchayat and ward-level committees to monitor and act against environmentally degrading practices within their jurisdiction.

They sought promotion of district-level economic and environmental conservation plans for hill districts to safeguard the ecological integrity of the Western and Eastern Ghats, which are sources of Tamil Nadu's life-giving rivers, to promote decentralised, small-scale renewable energy systems and announce an end to all proposed and in-the-pipeline coal thermal power projects in the state

and to strengthen the process of public consultation and participation in environmental decision-making particularly in relation to infrastructure and industrial projects.

Among those who signed the memorandum are - V. Vasanthi Devi, former Vice Chancellor and President, Movement to Save School Education, Tamil Nadu & Puducherry, former Madras High Court Judge, Justice D. Hariparanthaman, Nityanand Jayaraman, Social Activist, Chennai Solidarity Group, ace Kollywood director Vetri Maaran and actor Vijay Sethupathi, T.M. Krishna, Musician, retired IAS officer, M.G. Devasahayam, Madras High Court Advocate R. Vaigai, Dr. S. Janakarajan, former Professor, MIDS, Chennai and President, South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies, Chennai, G. Sundararajan, Poovulagin Nanbargal, S.P. Udayakumar, People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy and Prof. Ramu Manivannan, Professor & Head, Department of Politics & Public Administration, University of Madras.



With Covid deaths increasing everyday, relatives request the hospital authorities to expedite the process of handing over the body government hospital in a sad state of affairs.

—DC

Court sentences youth to life term for rape

DC CORRESPONDENT
PUDUOKKOTTAI, MAY 5

The district fast track mahila court on Wednesday sentenced a 28-year-old youth to undergo life sentence for sexually assaulting a teenage girl studying in Class 12 at Perambur village in Pudukkottai.

According to the prosecution, the accused Rajiv Gandhi sexually assaulted the girl. Based on the victim's father's complaint, the Mathur police arrested the accused under the Pocso Act and filed a case against him before the mahila court.

The judge, Dr.Sathya, awarded a life sentence

on one count and sentenced and convicted the accused to undergo two years on another count. She also slapped a fine of ₹1.20 lakh. The judge directed the Tamil Nadu government to pay a compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the victim in addition to the already paid compensation of ₹2.5 lakh.

BJP youth leader held for murder threat

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, MAY 5

The Pattukottai police arrested Anbarasan, the Thanjavur south BJP youth wing secretary, on Wednesday for an alleged murder threat on Facebook to Shanavaz, the Nagapattinam MLA and deputy general secretary of Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi. The arrest was based on a complaint lodged by Mohamed Yahya, co-ordinator of Pattukottai Islamiya Makkal Nala Sangam.

Anbrasan wrote on Facebook, "that lotus bloomed in Tamil Nadu as per the prediction made by sister Tamilisai. I thank those who worked for this victory. As a tribute to you all, death news of Shanavaz will come to you". The police booked Anbarasan under sections providing punishment for murder threat and inciting riots.

Nine Covid-19 testing centres in Thanjavur

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, MAY 5

Corona testing centres are functioning at nine places in Thanjavur district, said M. Govinda Rao, Thanjavur collector, here on Wednesday. He told presspersons after inspecting the preparations at Rajah Mirasudhar Government Hospital here that corona tests are conducted at government hospitals at Thiruvaiyaru, Papanasam, Orathanadu, Kumbakonam and Pattukottai.

Tests are also conducted at corona care centres at Kumbakonam and

Pattukottai and Thanjavur medical college hospital and private hospitals.

People who tested positive are advised to be either in home quarantine or take treatment at hospitals. The collector also said that there are 1,250 oxygen beds in the district and at present only 50 per cent of the oxygen beds are occupied. He inspected the ophthalmology building constructed at a cost of ₹16.40 crores at RMH.

Dr. Ravikumar, dean of Thanjavur medical college, and R. Velumani, RDO, Thanjavur accompanied the collector during his visit.

Wild tusker 'Rivaldo' to be treated in kraal

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, MAY 5

'Rivaldo', an injured wild tusker, will undergo treatment at the kraal set up in Vazhithottam. The elephant was moving around the Masinagudi and Mavanallah areas in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) buffer zone limits.

The jumbo, which lost the tip of its trunk, was being fed idlis by some private resort owners in Vazhithottam in 2013 and was used by them to run shows for the tourists. When Deccan Chronicle brought this



to light, the forest department released the jumbo from the clutches of the resort owners to help it find its own way to live in the jungles.

The tusker adapted itself to pick fodder with its semi-functional trunk and managed to thrive all these years. Last February, the MTR administration made

efforts to guide it to the elephant camp at Theppakadu in MTR to treat the trunk injury and other related ailments. However, their efforts did not materialise then as the jumbo failed to respond.

LCS Srikanth, MTR deputy director, said that for the last four days Rivaldo was allowed to

use the kraal freely by giving it fruits and other fodder. As it adapted to the kraal culture, on Wednesday morning it was lodged inside the kraal. This is a first of its kind attempt of taking an elephant freely into the kraal without tranquilising or using force, he noted.

"As per the high court directions, necessary action will be taken to treat this jumbo. After a period of observation and treatment, a decision will be taken in consultations with a team of veterinarians and a report will be submitted to the high court", he added.

From P1

Another Government Order made it clear that all Group A officers and heads of departments should attend office regularly while the other staff would be attending work on alternate days or as per the schedule drawn up depending on their requirement in office. However, all officers and staff should be available for office work and accessible through electronic mode of communication and all govern-

ment staff have been barred from leaving headquarters without permission.

As far as eateries are concerned, the regulations restrict the timing on all days other than Sundays when a total lockdown will be observed. Only those in the services that are exempted from the lockdown would be allowed to function on Sundays.

For the takeaway services, the timing for restaurants, hotels, mess and bakeries is between 6 am

and 10 am, 12 noon to 3 pm and 6 pm and 9 pm. Tea Shops, however, would have to shut down at 12 noon. No dine-in facility would be allowed in any of the establishments.

On Sunday, too, the timing for parcel services in eateries will be the same and applicable even to e-commerce services like Swiggy and Zomato. However e-commerce services for businesses other than food delivery would not be allowed on Sundays. Fish, meat and

chicken vends would be allowed to open only between 6 am and 12 noon from Monday to Friday and closed completely on Saturdays and Sundays.

All industries that have already been given exemption from the lockdown would be allowed to function without interruption even when other establishments are closed, whether it is during the day or night or on Sundays, and that include the electronic and print media.

Patients died already critical: Collector

From P1

"We also had cylinders that were refilled and when the pressure dropped we continued this. There is no question of oxygen shortage," he said.

The collector said those who required oxygen at high pressures survived and that the patients who died were already critical with other comorbidities and issues.

Of the deceased, only one patient was Covid positive while others tested negative but had viral pneumonia and comorbidities. The collector deputed a deputy collector to

continuously monitor the beds and oxygen supply at the GH and shift the severe cases to the Covid Care Centres.

Meanwhile, the post-graduate doctors at the Chengalpattu government hospital staged a protest on Wednesday morning on the hospital premises against the alleged negligence exhibited by the administrators of the institute.

According to protesting doctors, the hospital could not meet the oxygen demand as almost all oxygen beds in the wards treating

Covid-19 and those suspected to have the infection were occupied. The hospital that usually requires 2.3 kilolitres of oxygen per day needed 4.5 kilolitres

on Tuesday which the hospital doctors deliberately ignored. Similarly, around 50 people from the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYF) staged a protest outside the Chengalpattu government hospital, condemning the negligence from the hospital side. They held placards and raised slogans against the hospital management.

Patient benefits from Ecmo

Chennai, May 5: A 34-year-old patient infected with Covid-19 and poor lung function has received a new lease of life with ECMO (Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation) at Fortis Hospital, Vadapalani. That ECMO can prove an effective treatment solution in these challenging times for patients with weak lung function was demonstrated by Dr Govini Balasubramani, Head, CTVS, Heart and Lung Transplant, Fortis Vadapalani and his medical team of cardiothoracic surgeons, pulmonologists and intensive care specialists. —DC

'Remove encroachments in Padi-Otteri Nullah'

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 5

The Madras high court has directed the Commissioner, Greater Chennai Corporation to consider and dispose of a representation which sought to remove the encroachments in the water canal along Padi-Otteri Nullah adjacent to Anna

Nagar Extension area.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy gave the directive while disposing of a Public Interest Litigation filed by Anna Nagar West Extension Association represented by its Secretary P.Vadivel.

The bench said the peti-

tioner complains of an encroachment in the water canal along the Padi-Otteri Nullah adjacent to Anna Nagar Extension area in Chennai. The Otteri Nullah was serving as a water way for many years and prevented flooding in the adjoining residential area. On account of encroachments and the

dumping of garbage, the width of the Nullah has decreased considerably. The petitioner said the matter was brought to the attention of authorities but that no action was taken to remove such encroachments. Multiple representations were submitted, the last of it on August 21, 2020, the bench added.

The bench said the government advocate and the standing counsel for Greater Chennai Corporation stated that the representation of the petitioner would be considered and, if it was found that there were encroachments, appropriate action would be taken in accordance with law. The petitioner was permit-

ted to submit a fresh representation to the Greater Chennai Corporation within two weeks, which is to be considered and disposed of by the Corporation within six weeks. Appropriate action should be taken by the corporation in accordance with law to remove the encroachments within four months, the bench said.

Stalin to assume office in simple affair

From P 1

The decision to make it a simple affair was taken in view of the pandemic.

Mr Stalin will be the third chief minister from the DMK to assume office after C.N. Annadurai, the party founder, and M. Karunanidhi. The party first captured power in the state in 1967.

The DMK now has a combined strength of 133 MLAs - 125 DMK members and the rest members of alliance parties who contested on the symbol 'rising sun' in the 16th assembly and thus is not dependent on other parties for a simple majority.

Ever since the election results were announced, senior state government officials

have been consulting Mr Stalin by calling on him at his residence on a regular basis.

Mr Stalin too made announcements like declaring media persons as frontline workers in the war against Covid-19 and also urged the people through a statement to follow the restrictions that are being brought in from Thursday.

It is also learnt that Mr Stalin, immediately after taking office as chief minister on Friday, will be addressing the district collectors through a video conference to brief them on the step to be taken on combating the second wave of Coronavirus that is taking a heavy toll in the state.

80 kg of ganja seized, 3 held at Thuraiyur

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC
TIRUCHY, MAY 5

The Narcotics Intelligence Bureau (NIB)-CID Police seized 80 kgs of ganja along with a lorry and arrested three persons by intercepting the lorry on the Musiri Road at Thuraiyur in Tiruchy district on Wednesday.

According to DSP, NIB-CID Tiruchy region E. Kamaraj,

the lorry came from Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh carrying a load of bricks to Pachaperumalpatti near Thuraiyur.

All the arrested were produced before a court which remanded them to judicial custody. Preliminary inquiries revealed that the contraband was meant for one Muruganantham of Theni and the police are looking for him.



IN BRIEF

Himachal goes into 10-day lockdown

Shimla: The Himachal Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to impose a lockdown in the state from May 7 to May 16 to check the spread of Covid-19, an official said here. The decision to impose the lockdown was taken at a state cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, the spokesperson added. The meeting was held to review the current Covid-19 situation in the state.

Kerala: Helpline for hearing impaired

Thiruvananthapuram: At a time when the Covid-19 cases are surging, the National Institute of Speech and Hearing (NISH), an autonomous organisation here and the State Disaster Management Authority, have jointly set up a 24 X 7 Covid-19 helpline exclusively for the deaf and hard of hearing. The facility is primarily meant for answering queries and concerns related to the pandemic and extending counselling to stress-related issues. Sign language interpreters will be available to attend the WhatsApp video calls made to the helpline, an official statement said here. The helpline will also reply to queries related to monsoon and the preparedness for and management of the season, it added. The Helpline numbers are: 9446750983, 9496918178, 9249505723.

ODISHA PERMITS HOME DELIVERY OF FOREIGN LIQUOR

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MAY 5

The Odisha government on Wednesday decided to allow home delivery of foreign liquor during the lockdown. A decision to this effect was taken as all the non-essential shops, including liquor outlets, have remained closed during the 14-day statewide lockdown that began with effect from Wednesday morning. In a letter to the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) P.K. Mohapatra, the excise department principal secretary S.K. Lohani stated the home delivery of liquor is proposed to be permitted during lockdown. "Home delivery of liquor Indian-made Foreign Liquor and beer (IMFL/beer) by duly authorised food aggregators/technology platforms/delivery service providers as well as by IMFL OFF/ON shop licensees following the extant guidelines of Excise Department," the letter read. The government has also decided to allow operation of all the godowns of Odisha State Beverage Corporation for wholesale trade between 6 am to 2 pm. Another decision was also taken to ensure smooth passage of vehicles carrying genuine duty-paid liquor, the letter stated. The decision for home delivery of liquor was taken in view of the past experience during which it was found that consumers had resorted to illegal means to avail the intoxicant beverages.

LOCAL TRAIN SERVICES SUSPENDED IN WB

Kolkata, May 5: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday took stock of the Covid-19 situation in the state, shortly after her swearing-in ceremony, and announced fresh curbs to combat the spread of Covid-19, including suspension of local train services. Banerjee, following a high-level meeting with top officials, said that metro rail and state transport services will be curtailed by 50 per cent from Thursday, as part of the newly imposed set of restrictions. Banks will be operational from 10 am to 2 pm, and government offices have been told to make do with 50 per cent workforce, Banerjee said at the press meet. The state administration has also requested private firms to encourage work from home, the Chief Minister said. "Local trains will be suspended from tomorrow. State-run transport and metro services will be reduced by 50 per cent. Starting May 7, air passengers will be allowed in Bengal only if they carry RT-PCR negative report, which is not older than 72 hours prior to boarding," Banerjee said.

13 states report more than 100 deaths a day

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 5

India reported 3,584 deaths in the last 24 hours. Over 900 deaths were from Maharashtra, while Delhi and Uttar Pradesh reported 338 and 351, respectively. At least 13 states are reporting more than 100 deaths a day. These include previously uncounted deaths from earlier days. The country reported 3,91,184 lakh cases of the Coronavirus in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Wednesday. Of these, Maharashtra recorded 51,880 cases, while Karnataka reported 44,631. Active cases are now more than 35.58 lakh. Maharashtra reported 57,640 fresh Covid-19 positive cases, 57,006 discharges, and 920 deaths. Karnataka reports 50,112 new positive cases, 26,841 recoveries and 346 deaths in the last 24 hours. 22,204 new cases, 85 deaths and 11,128 discharges reported in Andhra Pradesh in last 24

hours. Kerala reported the highest single-day rise of 41,953 new Covid-19 cases and 58 deaths. Active cases stand at 3,75,658 in the state, 23,106 recovered. Total 13,62,363 patients recovered so far, while 5,565 deaths have been reported till now said Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. 12 states have more than one lakh active cases, seven states have 50,000 to one lakh active cases, and 17 states have less than 50,000 active cases. Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh & Andhra Pradesh have around 1.5 lakh active cases, said Lav Agarwal, Union health ministry Joint Secretary. Meanwhile India has given emergency use authorisation for a Covid-19 antibody drug cocktail developed by Roche (ROG.S) and Regeneron (REGN.O), expanding its arsenal of drugs to battle a massive second wave of infections. India has become the fastest

country in the world to administer 16 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccine in 109 days, said health ministry. Liberalised policy (for vaccination) was started on May 1st. Under this, the drive has begun smoothly in 9 states and 6.71 lakh people in the age group of 18-44 years have been administered vaccines, said Lav Agarwal, Union health ministry Joint Secretary. K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor to Centre, has warned that a third wave of Covid infections is inevitable. "A phase three is inevitable, given the higher levels of circulating virus but it is not clear on what time scale this phase three will occur. Vaccines are effective against current variants. New variants will arise all over the world and in India too but variants that increase transmission will likely plateau. Immune evasive variants and those which lower or increase disease severity will arise going ahead," he said.

BJP workers flee to Assam with families to escape TMC violence

FROM PG 1

Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who regretted the incident on Tuesday claimed that around 300-400 people had entered Dhubri district in Assam from north Bengal. Mr Dass, accompanied by Assam MP Rajdeep Roy, visited the camps where the refugees have been kept and distributed relief material. Mr Roy informed that around 600 people from Bengal have been given shelter at a camp at Agamoni in Dhubri. He added that most of the people in the camp are children and women, and that more such camps have been set up at other places in the district. Mr Roy also said all the people who have entered Assam are from Cooch Behar district in West Bengal, where BJP won 7 out of 9 Assembly seats. "Can

only imagine the condition of the districts where TMC has majority seats. This is what Mamata has reduced Bengal to. Really deplorable," he added. The victims of Bengal violence who have fled to Assam told reporters that they were forced to flee after they were attacked by TMC workers. They said that they were beaten by the TMC goons, their women molested, the houses demolished, and their properties and livestock were looted. Meanwhile, the district administration of Dhubri has informed the Cooch Behar district administration about the development. They have said that when someone fears for their life, they will flee to a place where they feel safe, and therefore the district administration is providing them shelter to stay in Assam for the time being.

MAMATA SWORN-IN, SAYS COVID TOP PRIORITY

FROM PG 1

Bengal does not like any unrest. I also do not like it. I appeal to all - please take proper care so that no violence erupts anywhere. Post-poll, some sporadic incidents occurred. I will tackle law and order from today. I will deal with it with an iron hand. I will undertake some postings in law and order to avoid unrest. But I will not hold back myself from taking strong steps against anyone indulging in violence." She added: "I just took the oath. You know the police personnel of this government worked under the Election Commission for the last three months. A political party unleashed atrocities in the seats that it won. We will ensure that no one is spared. I will create a new set up today itself because this was not mine in the last three months. Moreover, a lot of ineffectiveness and inefficiencies were there. I call upon all not to mete out retribution to anyone." Congratulating Ms Banerjee on winning a third term, Mr Dhankhar told her: "I hope that governance will be according to the Constitution and the rule of law. India is a great democracy, where power emanates from the process of law. We are at the moment in a very difficult crisis. I am getting reports from within and outside the country. People are worried. I have been in touch with the honourable CM. She has taken steps when I indicated to her. Our first priority is that we must bring an end to this senseless and horrendous violence that has affected society at large. Post-poll violence, if it is retributive, is antithetical to democracy. I have every hope that the CM will take steps on an urgent basis to restore the rule of law. I will expect from the new government a new approach and cooperative federalism."

Referring to Ms Banerjee's excuses over the EC exercising authority, he angrily said later: "What have you seen from May 2 till date? If your eyes and ears are shut, I cannot help you. Look at the videos and reports. All on political considerations? What steps have you taken? Words are no substitute for action. Examine who is in the chair. She is in the chair. When was the Model Code of Conduct lifted? It has ended officially. Still, if someone says 'I am not in authority', what does that mean?"

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The Indian Railways has put together 70,000 isolation beds in more than 4,400 Covid care coaches across the country. A total of 232 coaches with nearly 4,000 beds are in use at 14 railway stations. Around 4,176 coaches are still available for deployment. — DOMAL KAMRAJ

EAM defends holding elections amid Covid spike

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 5

Elections are "sacrosanct" in India and "we are a deeply political society", external affairs minister S. Jaishankar said, defending the government from criticism that the election process including rallies led to the spread of Covid in the country. In an interaction as part of the "Global Dialogue Series", the Minister—who is currently on a visit to London—however conceded that the healthcare system in the country stood "exposed" in the country and blamed it on inadequate spending on health in the past 75 years, adding that this was why Prime Minister Narendra Modi had emphasised the Ayushman Bharat health scheme. EAM Jaishankar also conceded that everyone in the country had let their guard down after the number of cases came down drastically in February this year, adding that while the focus was on reviving the economy after the lockdown last year, the "attempt to instil confidence had created a societal complacency that all of us are part of". Describing the current pandemic crisis in the country as "difficult and painful" as the current strain of the Covid virus ravaging the country was "much more virulent", the EAM however said that the Government was tackling it by "giving it

everything we have and more". He made it clear that all people of the county need to "put the blame game aside" and look at "what we can do" to tackle the situation. Mr. Jaishankar also said that after the first wave of Covid, the Government had authorised 1,200 Oxygen plants and that money had been given to states since Health was a state subject in the Indian federal devolution of powers. "You can't not have elections in a democratic country like India. We are a deeply political country. ... Elections are sacrosanct ... We are a deeply political society," the EAM said. Responding to criticism on the Government allowing the Kumbh mela, the EAM shot back saying that one cannot argue that while religious crowds are a risk, (farmer) protest crowds are not. He pointed out that the Government had been accused in some quarters of imposing lockdown last year to quell the CAA protests when in fact, the Government had declared the Lockdown to save the country from the first wave of the Covid virus. On vaccines and why India exported millions of doses to foreign nations in the past few months, the EAM made it clear that the country had international obligations such as the Covax Initiative and that the Covishield vaccine itself was a British-developed vaccine manufactured in India.

Isolation coaches



BIZZARE | EVENT Villagers felt that Covid will go away if water is poured on temple

Guj: Women flout norms to 'eradicate' virus

Ahmedabad, May 5: Cocking a snook at Covid-19 norms, a large number of women turned up at a religious event organised in a village in Gujarat's Ahmedabad district to "eradicate Coronavirus", police said on Wednesday, adding 23 people, including the village head, have been arrested. A video of the incident, which occurred in Navapura village in Sanand taluka on May 3, showed around 500 women carrying water pots on their heads while walking towards a temple. The video grab also shows some men taking these pots to the top of the temple and emptying

them. After the video clip went viral on Wednesday, Ahmedabad rural police said appropriate action had already been taken. A police officer said villagers believed that Coronavirus will just go away if water is poured on the Balyadev temple. "The incident took place on May 3 at Navapura village where women had gathered in large numbers carrying water pots. A police team rushed to the spot on the same day and arrested 23 villagers, including sarpanch Gafabhai Thakor, for organizing this event. Police had also seized the music system from the

spot," said Deputy Superintendent of Police, Sanand Division, K.T. Kamariya. He said all the accused have been booked for violating a police notification regarding public gatherings under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and the Disaster Management Act and the Epidemic Diseases Act. In view of the surge in Covid-19 cases, the Gujarat government had banned all kinds of public gatherings in the state. As of Tuesday, Gujarat's overall Covid-19 tally stood at 6,20,472 with 7,779 fatalities, the state health department had said. — PTI

CORONAVIRUS NEGATIVE REPORT MANDATORY TO ENTER AHMEDABAD

Ahmedabad, May 5: Residents of Ahmedabad who visit other states for work are now required to produce a negative Covid-19 RT-PCR test certificate to return to the city, civic authorities said on Wednesday. Following a direction from the Gujarat High Court, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has scrapped its April 5 order which said Ahmedabad residents who visit other states for work will not be required to undergo RT-PCR tests

upon their return to the city. While hearing a PIL taken up suo motu (on its own) on the overall Covid-19 situation in the state, the high court on April 29 asked the AMC to scrap its order issued on April 5. The court noted that the AMC's announcement was in contravention of the state government's March 27 order, according to which a negative RT-PCR test certificate was compulsory for everyone entering Gujarat from other states. — PTI

16% vaccinated test +ve: Study

New Delhi, May 5: A small-scale study on 113 healthcare workers who had received at least one vaccine dose at a private hospital in Delhi found that 18 tested positive for Covid but all except one had mild symptoms. The study, published in the peer-reviewed journal Diabetes and Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research and Reviews on May 3, was conducted on employees of the Fortis Centre of Excellence for Diabetes, Metabolic Diseases and Endocrinology in Delhi. The participants in the study by researchers at Fortis, National Diabetes, Obesity and Cholesterol Foundation, and Diabetes Foundation (India), New Delhi, included doctors, nutritionists, nurses, paramedical workers, and maintenance staff. Of the 113 in the study, 107 had received the second dose of the vaccine. Taken in percentage form, the study found



that breakthrough infections — Covid infection in vaccinated individuals — occurred in 15.9 per cent (18 persons) of the vaccinated individuals and 95 per cent had mild symptoms. Of these, 17 incurred the infection after the second dose and one person. Except one person who required hospitalisation, all others had mild Covid-19 disease, the researchers said. According to the study, of the breakthrough infections in 18 persons, 17 incurred the infection after the second dose. These 17 had got their second dose after a mean of 34.8 days following the first jab. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

COPS NAB 31
NDRANGHETA
SUSPECTS

Rome: A joint Italian-German police investigation into the ndrangheta organised crime group led to the arrests of 31 people accused of drug trafficking, money laundering and “systematic” tax evasion on the part of Italian pizzerias and restaurants in Germany, authorities said on Wednesday.

Eurojust and Eurojust, which coordinate law enforcement activities in Europe, said more than 800 police officers and tax officials were involved in the operation in Italy and Germany.

Italian officials hailed what they described as a new model of cooperation and said experts from both countries formed a joint team to investigate the case, a job complicated by the encrypted phone systems the suspects used to communicate.

4 PAK SOLDIERS
KILLED IN
ULTRAS ATTACK

Karachi: Four Pakistani soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack from Afghanistan while they were working on fencing the Pakistan-Afghan border in the restive Balochistan province on Wednesday, the Army said.

A team of paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) was targeted in Manzakai Sector located in the Zhob district of Balochistan province in the south-west of the country, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) of the military said in a statement. Four soldiers were killed and six others were injured in the incident, it said.

“Terrorists from across Afghanistan ambushed FC troops moving for fencing... FC troops responded promptly,” the statement said. It did not confirm whether there were casualties on the Afghan side.

BOMB TARGETS
HEALTH STAFF IN
KABUL, 1 DEAD

Kabul: A bomb targeted a minibus carrying medical workers in the Afghan capital Wednesday morning, killing one person, a Kabul police official said.

Three medics were wounded and taken to hospitals by police, said Ferdaws Faramarz, spokesman for the Kabul police chief.

The bus was taking the doctors, nurses and other health workers from Kabul toward northern Panjsher province when it was attacked in the northern district of Kalakan in Kabul province, he added. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, and Faramarz said police were investigating.

The attack comes a few days after the remaining 2,500 to 3,500 American troops officially began leaving the country. They will be out by September 11 at the latest. The pullout comes amid a resurgent Taliban, who control or hold sway over half of Afghanistan. The top US military officer said Sunday that Afghan government forces face an uncertain future and possibly some “bad possible outcomes” against Taliban insurgents as the withdrawal accelerates in the coming weeks.

STORMS SPAWN
TWISTERS IN
MISSISSIPPI

Birmingham: Much of the South faced more severe weather Tuesday that has killed at least three people, spawned tornadoes Sunday night and Monday and damaged homes and uprooted trees from Mississippi to West Virginia.

Parts of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee, as well as corners of Arkansas and Georgia were at enhanced risk for the worst weather, according to the national Storm Prediction Center. That zone is home to more than 11 million people and includes the cities of Nashville, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Jackson, Mississippi, forecasters said. “We’ll see all three threats as far as hail, wind and tornadoes on Tuesday,” said Mike Edmonston, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Mississippi.

With warnings about possible tornadoes stretching from Louisiana eastward, dozens of school systems in Mississippi and Alabama dismissed students early so buses and cars would not have to be on the road during potentially violent weather.

Biden aims to vaccinate 70%
of American adults by July 4

US is administering first doses at a rate of about 9,65,000 per day

Washington, May 5: US President Joe Biden has set a new vaccination goal to deliver at least one shot to 70 per cent of adult Americans by July 4 as he tackles the vexing problem of winning over the “doubters” and those unmotivated to get inoculated. Demand for vaccines has dropped off markedly nationwide, with some states leaving more than half their available doses unordered. Aiming to make it easier to get shots, Biden called for states to make vaccines available on a walk-in basis and he will direct many pharmacies to do likewise.

His administration for the first time also is moving to shift doses from states with weaker demand to areas with stronger interest in the shots. “You do need to get vaccinated,” Biden said from the White House on Tuesday. “Even if your chance of getting seriously ill is low, why take the risk? It could save your life or the lives of somebody you love,” he said.

Biden’s goal equates to delivering at least the first shot to 181 million adults and fully vaccinating 160 million. It’s a tacit acknowledgment of the declining interest in shots. Already more than 56 per cent of American adults have received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine and nearly 105 million are fully vaccinated.

The US is currently administering first doses at a rate of about 9,65,000 per day — half the rate of three weeks ago, but almost twice as fast as needed to meet Biden’s target. “I’d like to get it 100%, but I think realistically we can get to that place between now and July Fourth,” Biden said of his new goal. He said the administration would focus on three areas as it tries to ramp up the pace of vaccinations: Adults who need more convincing to take the vaccine.

Those who have struggled or are in no hurry to obtain a shot. — Adolescents aged 12-15, once federal authorities approve vaccination for that age group. Acknowledging that “the pace of vaccination is slowing,” Biden predicted the inoculation effort is “going to be harder” when it comes to convincing “doubters” of the need to get their shots.

He said the most effective argument to those people would be to protect those they love. “This is your choice: It’s life and death,” he said. Biden’s push comes as his administration has shifted away from setting a target for the US to reach “herd immunity,” instead focusing on delivering as many



Workers wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) suits extend the crematorium area next to funeral pyres of people who died due to Covid-19 coronavirus disease, at a cremation ground in Kathmandu on Wednesday. — AFP

G7 WORKS ON
GLOBAL COVID
VACCINE PLAN

London, May5: The Group of Seven wealthy democracies on Wednesday worked on plans to scale up global Covid-19 vaccinations, as calls mounted for a drastic increase in funding to help developing nations virtually shut out of early efforts.

Underscoring the challenges faced, the foreign minister of India — where Covid cases have soared in recent weeks — said he decided to participate in the London meeting virtually after potential exposure to the virus.

India was one of several nations invited by Britain for the first in-person G7 meeting since the pandemic began last year, in an effort to rally democracies in the face of a rising China and assertive Russia. The G7 opened its final day with a session focused on open societies before taking up Covid-19. — AFP

shots into arms as possible. Officials said Biden’s vaccination target would result in a significant reduction in Covid-19 cases heading into the summer.

To that end, the Biden administration is shifting the government’s focus toward expanding smaller and mobile vaccination clinics to deliver doses to harder-to-reach communities. — AP

India, UK deal to
begin in autumn

London, May 5: India and the UK will begin negotiations for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) from autumn this year after the Enhanced Trade Partnership (ETP) was formally signed between the trade ministers on both sides on Wednesday. Following a virtual meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, UK International Trade Secretary Liz Truss confirmed that the ETP agreed between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson at a virtual summit on Tuesday has been officially signed off.

The trade and investment agreement worth around 1 billion pounds has been pegged as aiming for a “quantum leap” in the UK-India relationship, with India elevating the status of its relationship with the UK to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.” “Today I signed the UK-India Enhanced Trade Partnership with my friend Piyush Goyal,” Truss said on Twitter soon after her virtual

meeting with the Indian Cabinet minister.

“Together, we have committed to: negotiating a comprehensive free trade deal, starting this autumn; more than doubling trade by 2030; and reducing barriers to trade in key industries,” she said.

The sign off follows talks between Modi and Johnson, which culminated in the two leaders agreeing on a ‘2030 Roadmap’ as a framework for strengthening ties across health, climate, trade, education, science and technology, and defence. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who is in London for the G7 Summit, said he joined those discussions and declared there was a “new energy and thinking” for UK-India relations visible at the virtual summit.

“We are at an inflection point in our contemporary relations. We have two Prime Ministers very determined to take the relationship to a high level,” the minister said, during a virtual Global Dialogue Series. — PTI

WTO mulls IP
waivers for vax

Geneva, May 5: Ambassadors from World Trade Organisation countries on Wednesday resumed discussions on trade rules protecting the technological know-how behind Covid-19 vaccines amid growing pressure on rich nations to relax them — as a way to help poorer countries fight the pandemic.

The WTO’s General Council was taking up a temporary waiver for intellectual property protections that South Africa and India first proposed in October.

The idea has gained support in the developing world and among some progressive lawmakers in the West. Authors of the proposal, which has faced resistance from many countries with influential pharmaceutical and biotech industries, have been revising it in hopes of making it more palatable. No consensus — which is required under WTO rules — was expected to emerge from the ambassadors’ two-day meeting on Wednesday and Thursday. — AP

NEPAL EXTENDS
LOCKDOWN IN
KATHMANDU

Kathmandu, May 5: Authorities in the Nepalese capital on Wednesday extended the lockdown in Kathmandu and surrounding districts till May 12 due to the spike in Covid-19 cases. Nepal on Tuesday recorded yet another highest single-day rise of 7,660 new cases of the Covid.

The health ministry also confirmed 55 new deaths in the past 24 hours, which is so far the highest number of fatalities recorded in a single day. The local authorities have extended the ongoing prohibitory orders in the Kathmandu Valley till May 12. — PTI

India’s US envoy meets Fauci,
discusses on Covid-19 crisis

Washington, May 5: India’s Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu held a virtual meeting with America’s top public health expert Dr Anthony Fauci and discussed the current Covid-19 crisis in India, the efficacy of vaccines against the new strains and variants of the virus.

The meeting was part of the Ambassador’s intensified and focused outreach to key stakeholders of healthcare and pandemic response in the US. This was for the first time that

a top Indian government official had a meeting with Fauci, who is the top advisor to President Joe Biden on the pandemic. During the meeting, Fauci expressed his solidarity and support with India in this hour of crisis. The meeting came a day after he termed the situation in India “very desperate” and suggested that the government marshal all its resources, including the armed forces, to immediately build makeshift field hospitals, and urged other countries to help

with not only materials but also personnel.

During his talks with Ambassador Sandhu, the virus strains and variants in India, and the efficacy of vaccines against these came up for discussion. Fauci, who is also the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institute of Health, offered American assistance, including in research and development. Discussed virus variants, vaccines, response mechanisms. — PTI

FB oversight
board upholds
ban on Trump

Washington, May 5: Facebook’s independent oversight board on Wednesday upheld a ban on former US president Donald Trump while ordering further review of the case, in a decision with a potentially far-reaching impact on the regulation of online speech.

The board, whose decisions are binding on the leading social network, said Trump “created an environment where a serious risk of violence was possible” with his comments regarding the January 6 rampage by his supporters at the US Capitol.

“Given the seriousness of the violations and the ongoing risk of violence, Facebook was justified in suspending Mr. Trump’s accounts on January 6 and extending that suspension on January 7,” the board said after its review.

But the panel also ruled that “it was not appropriate for Facebook to impose the indeterminate and standardless penalty of indefinite suspension.” “Within six months of this decision, Facebook must reexamine the arbitrary penalty

it imposed on January 7 and decide the appropriate penalty,” said the board in its written opinion.

“It is not permissible for Facebook to keep a user off the platform for an undefined period, with no criteria for when or whether the account will be restored,” it added.

The panel said Facebook “can either impose a time-limited suspension or account deletion.” “The case had been intensely followed for its repercussions for social networks seeking to curb misinformation and abusive content while remaining open to political discourse.

Trump was suspended from Facebook and Instagram after posting a video during the deadly storming of the Capitol by fired-up supporters challenging his election loss, in which he told them: “We love you, you’re very special.” Shortly after the board ruling,

Trump issued a statement reiterating his false claims that voter fraud caused his defeat in November, and urging his followers to “never give up.” — AFP

Netanyahu again
fails to form
new Israeli govt

Jerusalem, May 5: Beleaguered Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is Israel’s longest-serving premier, has failed to meet a midnight deadline of forming a government, giving his rivals a chance to end his uninterrupted stint at the helm of politics since 2009.

Netanyahu, 71, who is facing trial on a series of graft charges, was tasked by President Reuven Rivlin to put together a government on April 6 following inconclusive polls, the fourth in the last two years.

The mandate given by Rivlin to Netanyahu to form a government expired on Tuesday at midnight with no breakthrough in coalition talks, prolonging the country’s political stalemate.

His Likud party emerged as the single largest party in the 120-member Parliament but did not have the necessary 61-member support to form a government.

Likud had won 30 seats in the general election in March. While tasking

Netanyahu with the responsibility of forming the government, Rivlin said that he was doing so reluctantly and also mentioned his “moral dilemma” given the court proceedings and lack of enough support for the Likud leader.

Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing. President Rivlin’s spokesman in a statement said: “Shortly before midnight, Netanyahu informed the President’s Residence that he was unable to form a government and so returned the mandate to the president.”

Rivlin on Wednesday contacted the parties represented in the Knesset (Israel’s unicameral parliament) on the continuation of the process of forming a government. The President met with Yesh Atid party’s chairman, Yair Lapid, and Yamina party’s chairman, Naftali Bennett.

Both Lapid and Bennett reiterated their desire to be given the mandate to form the next government, press releases from the Presidency said. — PTI

Despite warning, GOP moves on voting bills

Austin, May 5: Republican lawmakers around the country are pressing ahead with efforts to tighten voting laws, despite growing warnings from business leaders that the measures could harm democracy and the economic climate. More than 50 companies and business organizations, including some in Texas, released an open

letter on Tuesday expressing opposition to “any changes” that would make it harder to vote in that state. The letter — signed by American Airlines, Microsoft Corp., HP Inc., Patagonia, Levi Strauss & Co. and others — comes amid votes on legislation that critics say would place disproportionate burdens on minority and disabled voters.

“We believe the right to vote is sacred. When more people participate in our democratic process, we will all prosper,” the letter said. “The growth of free enterprise is directly related to the freedom of its citizens.” The state- ment stopped short of stating opposition to the specific legislation proposed in Texas. Nonetheless, it amounts

to a cautious rebuke of lawmakers using former President Donald Trump’s false claims about a stolen election to make it harder to vote. Texas is emerging as the next major battleground in the fight over voting laws.

The Texas House could vote, as soon as this week, on a bill that effectively targets Harris County, home of Houston and a

Democratic hub, after officials there dramatically expanded voting options in 2020 amid pandemic.

The Texas Senate has advanced its own package, with the two chambers likely headed to a compromise committee that would fashion a final version. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has expressed broad support for the effort. — AP

EXPENSIVE | WINE

A bottle of Bordeaux spent 14 months in space station

Wine aged aboard ISS to sell for \$1mn

New York YORK, May 5: If a bottle of Petrus 2000 that Christie’s is selling tastes out of this world it might be because it aged for 14 months aboard the International Space Station.

Christie’s hopes the bottle, now up for grabs in a private sale, will fetch \$1 million, which would make it the most expensive wine ever sold.

The bottle is one of a batch of 12 that European startup Space Cargo Unlimited sent into orbit as part of research into how food and drink

matures in space.

The wine spent almost 440 days in space, or the equivalent of 300 trips to the Moon, Space Cargo Unlimited Nicolas Gaume said in a press release.

It left for the ISS on November 2, 2019 in a spacecraft known as a Cygnus capsule and returned on January 14, 2021 aboard a Dragon capsule manufactured by Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

Tests carried out in March by a wine science institute in Bordeaux found that the bottles “positively endured all the



constraints of preparation, travel, and storage on the ISS,” Christie’s said in its press release.

At the end of a blind tast-

ing, the researchers noted “remarkable differences in the colour, aroma and taste components,” between the celestial bottles and equivalents which had remained on earth.

“The wines sampled were commended for their complexity and considered to be great wines,” Christie’s added.

The sale is expected to smash the record price for a standard 750 ml bottle of wine.

The most expensive was a 1945 Romanee-Conti Burgundy which sold at Sotheby’s in New York for

\$558,000 in 2018.

The private sale means the buyer and price will remain confidential unless the buyer chooses to identify themselves publicly.

Proceeds will go towards funding future space missions focused on agricultural research.

Petrus from the Pomerol region near Bordeaux, is considered one of the world’s finest wines. A classic bottle of Petrus 2000, considered a great vintage, currently sells for around 4,500 euros (\$5,400). — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

6 MAY 2021

In the end, IPL proved to be a bridge too far

No normal cricket is possible in the face of an abnormal health crisis. That is the message for the Indian Premier League (IPL), which was a bridge too far to normality when the nation has been overwhelmed by the catastrophic coronavirus pandemic. A dystopian scenario is playing out as Covid-19 patients, gasping for oxygen, die due to gross inefficiencies in reaching the life-giving elixir and funeral pyres are lighting up the night skies over the nation's capital and several major cities across the country. There was no guarantee that one of the world's richest sports boards could run an inviolable bio-bubble at a time when a minuscule organism is playing havoc with lives, snatching loved ones and sending millions into poverty. Was cricket necessary on Indian soil at such a time?

Partners in the cash-rich cricket league may have to take a ₹2,000-crore hit as the league is suspended after 29 of 60 games were played in a bubble for close to a month before it burst. There will be little sympathy for those assumed losses, not among the millions of migrant workers whose lives

The franchises had to hide far too much and if not for the Union home minister's son marshalling the cricket caboodle, the IPL would have had shutters drawn on it long before this virtual cancellation of the season came about in early May.

have been thrown into turmoil once again even as severe restrictions incommode the lives of over a billion people. There is no one that the pandemic has not touched in some way, though it must be said that for about 97 per cent of 1.4 billion people not infected, the cricket on view every evening did provide some entertainment. The brutal power of the willow, as exemplified in Kieron Pollard's match-turning blitz, was the epitome of aggression at the crease but even that pales in front of an insidious organism that slips in to destroy lives.

The franchises weren't too forthcoming on the Covid-19 trouble that had touched the IPL even before a ball was bowled, as in Devdutt Padikkal testing positive. To keep the show going, they had to hide far too much and if not for the Union home minister's son marshalling the cricket caboodle, the IPL would have had shutters drawn on it long before this virtual cancellation of the season came about in early May. In hindsight, the league would have been better off in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) venues, which hosted the 2020 season without too much ado. The talk then of running the Indian Premier League for "the sake of humanity" was simply pretentious and aimed at staving off criticism that was building up for blithely playing cricket in juxtaposition with death amid chaos.

The attempts to start the IPL as any other economic activity in the time of the pandemic could not be faulted. A full series of matches against the visiting England team was played without stress, but that seems a long time ago now. Timing is the essence of any enterprise and in that the IPL proved a failure because a safe bubble was impossible to maintain when mutating strains are cleverly sidestepping the protection of the vaccine too and infecting people.

And it was when the Indian Premier League began to move as a travelling circus across cities that it invited trouble. Once players were infected, the IPL had to stop, not for any moralistic reason but because it had joined the list of Covid-19 spreaders. A return to an atmosphere of good health for the nation would be a prerequisite for cricket to resume in India. Greed cannot be the engine driving sport.

Action on hate speech welcome

The decision by microblogging site Twitter to permanently suspend the account of actor Kangana Ranaut for her tweet calling for violence in West Bengal is most welcome. The social media platform has found her tweet to be in gross violation of its Twitter Rules, which do not allow the "targeted harassment of someone or incite other people to do so". Stopping people from airing their opinion is not without consequences in a democracy which guarantees the right to speech and expression, and any response to it needs to be measured against a template formed by far too many factors. But the present case offers little defence for the blatant call to violence, which has triggered strong reactions across all the social media platforms.

The actor has responded to Twitter's action by playing the victim card, saying that "a white person feels entitled to enslave a brown person, they want to tell you what to think, speak or do". That, however, hardly washes. The mayhem that West Bengal has witnessed after the Assembly election results were declared may have infuriated the actor, and she has every right to protest against it. In fact, every right-thinking human being must share her angst, but the fact that she can recollect only what happened in Gujarat in "early 2000" as the solution to it is troublesome, whether she is brown or white.

Her request to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to show his "virat roop" of those times could baffle even the most ardent followers of both Ms Ranaut and Mr Modi. If she was referring to the planned loot, arson, rapes and murders that the state witnessed in those horrific times, then she breaches all the limits of acceptable behaviour. Taking recourse to racism to justify her blatant criminal intent is unlikely to convince the defenders of the right to free speech.

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Subhani



Inequity & privilege in the time of a pandemic



Patralekha Chatterjee
Dev 360

As India reels under a devastating second wave of Covid-19 infections, I hear people say that "we are all in this together, we are all equally affected". But I wonder.

Are we? We may be all trying to survive in a lifeboat on the same viral sea, but some of the lifeboats are just more seaworthy than others, as someone pointed out. Even as we grieve and try to navigate our way through these terrifying times, it is important to recognise that some of us are more privileged than others.

I am alive. My family is with me. We are under the same roof. We have food on our table. I have had both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. I can work from home. These are huge privileges when so many friends, colleagues and people one has loved and cared for have been felled by the coronavirus.

The infection tally has zoomed past the 20-million mark; more than 222,408 people are dead across the country, says the health ministry; the actual number of those who died is likely to be much higher.

It's true that the virus doesn't discriminate; it doesn't care if you are posh or poor. But Covid-19 will bludgeon the poor and marginalised unless urgent remedial steps are taken. Those of us who are not that old, not that poor, do not have co-morbidities or a compromised immune system have a responsibility to protect those who don't have our advantages.

The first step is to acknowledge our privilege.

New Delhi, where I live, continues to be under lockdown, and continues to gasp as friends and families of critical patients run helter-skelter trying to

organise medical oxygen. Hospitals have taken their battle to the courts. The Delhi high court has become the last hope for so many hospitals scrambling to get oxygen for their Covid-19 patients as supplies become precariously short and government officials engage in verbal jousts over who is responsible.

This week, the high court issued a show cause notice to the Central government over the "non-compliance" of its order from last week to provide 700 metric tonnes (MT) of medical oxygen for the treatment of Covid-19 patients in the in Delhi. "You can put your head in sand like an ostrich, we will not," the high court said.

Even from my vantage position, it is easy to relate to that.

How does one reconcile the rage and helplessness of people on the street with the Centre's claim that there is no shortage of oxygen? Or the grotesquely grandiose Central Vista redevelopment project continuing in the heart of the nation's capital as part of "essential services" despite a petition in the courts arguing that the project was not an "essential service" and that it posed "a threat to the lives of the citizens of Delhi and beyond, including the lives of the workforce/labour engaged in the project", and that the project construction could prove to be a

Those of us who know someone who knows someone else who is resourceful and whose voice is amplified in the social media have a far better chance of saving our loved ones...

It's true that the virus doesn't discriminate; it doesn't care if you are posh or poor. But Covid-19 will bludgeon the poor and marginalised unless urgent remedial steps are taken.

Covid-19 "super-spreader".

How does one recognise privilege at a time like this wherever we are?

I found a pandemic privilege checklist on the website of Arizona State University's initiative, Project Humanities.

Some privileges it flagged were: If you have health insurance, if your racial group has not been disproportionately affected by Covid-19, if you have easy access to private outdoor space, if you do not live alone, if you have not been quarantined from someone you live with, if you are below the age of 65, if you have not experienced an income/wage loss in the past two months, if you do not have a compromised immune system, if you have home access to high speed Wi-Fi, if you have not felt unsafe because of your job in the past two months, if you have received professional counselling in the past two months, if no one you know personally has contracted and died from Covid-19, if you have not received food assistance in the past two months, if you have exercise equipment in your home, if you do not have someone in your home that needs adult supervision, if you have a pet.

This is a list for people living in the US. But some of it could apply in this country too.

Even in these traumatic times, those of us who can work from home, for instance, are massively better positioned than those whose nature of work does not offer them that luxury or those who have no work right now.

The first wave of the pandemic took a heavy toll of those working in the service industry,

especially in the lower rungs. People survived by tapping into their meagre savings. Many people went into debt, were forced to cut down on nutritious food. I wonder what is happening to the young spa attendant who shared her dreams with me few months ago, the tailor down the street, the man selling flowers in my neighbourhood market.

Knowing people who matter have always been part of privilege. It continues during the pandemic. At a time when money can't necessarily buy you medical oxygen or an intensive care bed, being on top of the food chain, having connections do help. Those of us who know someone who knows someone else who is resourceful and whose voice is amplified in the social media have a far better chance of saving our loved ones than those with no connections.

Of course, even that does not always work. A former Indian diplomat lost his life while waiting for a ICU bed in the parking lot of a top hospital in the national capital region.

We all live in fear of the virus, of losing our loved ones at a time when citizens appear to have been left to their own devices. Lack of privilege is when one copes with the fear of slipping into destitution.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has promised help to auto rickshaw and cab drivers in the city whose incomes have taken a huge hit due to the coronavirus. The Delhi government also says it will give free rations to 72 lakh ration card holders. These are baby steps but in the right direction.

However, there needs to be a strong nationwide social safety net for people who are likely to fall through the cracks in the coming days.

We must not let them fall. We must speak out. Privilege brings greater responsibilities.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and the emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

END VIOLENCE

It is quite unfortunate that violence erupted in WB in the aftermath of the announcement of election results in which some 14 people had died. Political animosity is the cause for the bloodshed. The goonda raj should not be re-established since innocent people lose their lives. At this point in time when the pandemic is haunting the country and the state, political parties should shed their differences and help the state and the people win the virus war. Ms Mamata has been given a fresh ticket to rule the state for the third time in a row by the people. She should take the state towards development and shun violence.

Sravana Ramachandran, Chennai

ASTRONAUT COLLINS

I am saddened by the news of the passing away of Michael Collins, one of the triumvirate that had made the moon landing and exploration of the moon's surface possible in 1969. Though he personally did not set foot on the moon he had been of immense support by helping Neil Armstrong to accomplish the feat by remaining in command of the satellite module and enabled his colleagues to return to Mother Earth. The great astronaut had lived a full and purposeful life of 91 with extraordinary courage and dare devilry for the cause of scientific pursuit and exploration and research of space. It is strange that the passing away of this hero may have gone unnoticed when people's attention was fully engrossed in election results related news.

V. Rakesh Kaushik, Coimbatore

FEDERAL FRONT IN FORM

It is interesting that the successful DMK, TMC and LDF are considering formation of a Federal Front to take on the ruling BJP-led NDA in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The RJD, Samajwadi party, Shiv Sena etc., will add strength. Considering the lethargic and irresponsible attitude and shoddy approach of the BJP government in handling the pandemic situation the new Federal Front has great prospects of winning the next elections hands down. But choosing the right partners and poll strategy requires an intelligent and Chanakya like approach. Unity among the partners of the front is foremost. The million dollar question will be who will be the Prime Minister candidate? Fissures among partners could arise resulting in an advantage for the BJP which is to be avoided. Removing the tyrannical BJP-led NDA government should be the main agenda. The front has to concentrate in states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh which is ruled by the BJP.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

TAILPIECE

A significant recent non-babu event was Dr Karan Singh's ninetyeth birthday, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi released a unique edition of the Bhagavad Gita, in 11 volumes with 20 commentaries on each verse in facsimile. The function held at the Prime Minister's residence was attended mainly by family members and a few bureaucrats involved in evolving Kashmir policy. Dr Singh opened the proceedings with a talk on the Gita and steered away from current political matters. The Prime Minister spoke, as expected, on the Gita, and closed his speech by paying fulsome compliments to Dr Karan Singh, the elder statesman of the Kashmir region. What the babus were left wondering was how the tea leaves of this event needed to be read.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



While the administration has been widely rebuked for complacency in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, a district magistrate in Tripura is under fire for being overly enthusiastic in enforcing night curfew rules during a marriage in Agartala, the state capital. A video that recorded the incident went viral on the social media and political parties are gunning for him.

West Tripura DM M Shailesh Kumar Yadav is in the dock for his arrogant behaviour with a bride and groom in the middle of a wedding. Angry citizens and politicians have written to Tripura CM Biplab Kumar Deb seeking strict action against Mr Yadav. Some have even demanded an FIR against the official and sought his removal from service.

In the viral video, Mr Yadav is seen shoving attendees and arresting everyone for flouting Covid-19

norms and tearing up the permission certificate for the wedding that he himself had signed! Sources say the CM has formed a committee of two IAS officers to investigate the incident and submit a report to chief secretary Manoj Kumar for further action. Watch this space for updates.

AD HOCISM IN J&K

If Jammu and Kashmir's change of status was meant to have a positive impact on governance in the Union territory, those hopes have been belied, many say. Ad hocism has become an integral part of governance in J&K, as evident from the list of top bureaucrats and officials who are holding more than one post. Just two examples: Shaleen Kabra, the principal secretary (home), is also the principal secretary (revenue) and financial commissioner. Similarly, Dheeraj Gupta, principal secretary (housing and urban development), is also

J&K's principal resident commissioner in New Delhi.

Sources say as many as 10 IAS officers in the Union Territory are holding additional charge of different departments and institutions due to a shortage of manpower in the higher echelons of the administration. J&K has a stipulated strength of 137 IAS officers, but only 58 are serving in the cadre, of which at least nine officers are on Central deputation. The Centre is apparently aware of the situation, and it recently moved to depute IAS and Group A service officers to the new UT. But this seems to have done little to solve the problem which has afflicted governance for decades in J&K.

PROBE INTO HARYANA COPS

Former Haryana home secretary and retired IAS officer Navraj Sandhu has been appointed chairperson of the Haryana State Police Complaints Authority (PCA). In

addition, retired IPS officer Kamleshwar Kumar Mishra and retired IAS officer Ramesh Chand Verma have been named as members of the authority.

Haryana is one of 17 states that set up a PCA to protect citizens against the abuse of police powers. It adjudicates allegations of improper or shoddy investigations, refusal to register FIRs, allegations of custodial torture and police high-handedness. However, it should be noted that the recommendations of the PCA aren't binding on the state government — which makes the PCA merely a paper tiger.

For five years, the government did not appoint a chairman even as the the complaints piled up. Apparently, until 2019, the authority received 681 complaints, but it is not known how many were investigated and forwarded to the government for action. Hopefully, Mr Sandhu's appointment will make up for the lost time.

Tripura DM who cracked whip at a wedding faces storm of protest

SHORT TAKES

MacGill kidnapped and then released

Sydney: Former Australia leg-spinner Stuart MacGill was allegedly kidnapped from his home in Sydney and then released after an hour-long ordeal last month, New South Wales police said on Wednesday. Quoting Australian police, the country's media reported that four men were detained in connection with the alleged kidnapping following a raid. The incident took place on April 14 when he was bundled into a car and driven to a remote location, after which he was assaulted and threatened with a firearm. "I know it was only an hour that he was held but it would have been a horribly frightful hour to endure," NSW Police superintendent Anthony Holton was quoted as saying by the local media. New South Wales state police said an incident was reported to them on April 20. — PTI

Hockey coach Kaushik tests +ve

New Delhi: Former India hockey player and coach MK Kaushik has tested positive for COVID-19 and admitted to a nursing home here. The oxygen saturation level of the 66-year-old, a member of the 1980 Moscow Olympics gold-medal winning Indian team, keeps fluctuating, according to his family. "He is suffering from COVID-19 and is hospitalized in a city nursing home here," his son Ehsan said. "He first developed symptoms on April 17 but RTPCR and RAT tests came negative. Then we did his CT scan on chest on April 24 and pneumonia due to Covid was detected. Since then he has been hospitalized and his condition is between, neither stable nor serious. His oxygen level drops drastically at night which is a major issue," he added. — PTI

Mary Kom to begin Games preparation

New Delhi: Six-time world champion MC Mary Kom, along with two other Olympic-bound boxers, will train at the Army Sports Institute in Pune leading up to the Tokyo Games after the national camp for women in Delhi had to be disbanded owing to COVID-19 cases among pugilists and support staff. Mary Kom (51kg) will join another Olympic-bound boxer Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), who is already at the facility. Simranjit Kaur (60kg), also bound for Tokyo, will train there too but after completing the COVID-19 post-recovery isolation. The boxers will be placed in three separate groups with two sparring partners each to ensure that the risk of infection is minimal. — PTI

Sailors want Oz coach retained

New Delhi: Olympic-bound Indian sailors Varun Thakkar and KC Ganapathy want to continue training under experienced Australian coach Ian Stuart Warren, who helped the duo qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. The duo said it will be "difficult" to push themselves to the next level and perform well at the quadrennial event if the Australian is not around in the next three months. "We have been working with a coach (Warren). We are his fifth team that he has helped to qualify for Olympics. The experience he brings in helps in keeping our mind calm," Varun said in a virtual press-conference conducted by SAI. — PTI

Bucks move into NBA playoffs

Los Angeles: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 36 points as the Milwaukee Bucks punched their playoff ticket with a 124-118 win over the Brooklyn Nets on Tuesday. The heavyweight showdown between the Eastern Conference rivals did not disappoint, with the two sides matching each other shot-for-shot before the Bucks pulled away in the final quarter. Antetokounmpo led from the front for Milwaukee, with 12 rebounds, four assists and five turnovers to seal the Bucks win. — AFP

MAD SCRAMBLE

Left in lurch Aussie cricketers await flight to Maldives

New Delhi, May 5: The Englishmen were the first ones out with eight of them landing in London, while the Australians awaited an escape to Maldives as the now-suspended IPL's foreign recruits charted their way back home assisted by the BCCI on Wednesday.

Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Chris Woakes, Moeen Ali and Jason Roy landed in London to begin a 10-day quarantine before heading to their respective homes. The league was suspended indefinitely on Tuesday after multiple COVID-19 cases in its bio-bubble.

England skipper Eoin Morgan, Dawid Malan and Chris Jordan are expected to board a flight to London within the next 48 hours.

England players to quarantine in London

"I can confirm that 8 of the 11 England players in India managed to get on a flight to Heathrow last night and have landed this morning," an England and Wales Cricket Board spokesperson said.

"They will now quarantine in government approved hotels. The remaining three — Jordan, Malan, Morgan — should leave India within the next 48 hours," he added.

The Australians, on the other hand, were still waiting to know when they can fly out to Maldives, where they will stay for a few days before flying home. The detour has been forced by the Australian government's travel ban on India till May 15 because of the explosion of COVID-19 cases here.

Their Prime Minister



(From left) Australia's David Warner, Tom Moody and Trevor Bayliss.

— IPL

Scott Morrison has refused to consider an exemption and Cricket Australia has also ruled out seeking one from the government.

"All Australians are assembling in Delhi and from there they will head to Maldives by a charter flight," a franchise said.

CA acknowledges BCCI help

CA's interim chief Nick Hockley said the BCCI is helping in every possible way to ensure a smooth return for the 14 players,

members of the coaching staff and commentators, who are in India right now.

"What the BCCI is working to do is to move the entire cohort out of India where they will wait until it's possible to return to Australia," Hockley told reporters in Sydney.

"The BCCI has been working on a range of options. That's now narrowed down to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. The BCCI is committed not only to the first move but also to putting on a

charter to bring them back to Australia," he added.

IPL also featured cricketers from South Africa (11), New Zealand (10), West Indies (9), Afghanistan (3) and Bangladesh (2).

Kiwis to fly to UK after May 10

New Zealand's players association head Heath Mills told *ESPNcricinfo* that one group of Kiwis will head to the UK for an upcoming series but that would be after May 10,

when the travel ban on flights from India is reconsidered there.

"Due to the UK border restrictions, that group cannot get into England until May 11. It is obviously challenging for them to wait for another few days," Mills said.

The ones headed for UK include Kane Williamson, Trent Boult, and Kyle Jamieson among others.

The ones who have to get back to New Zealand are Stephen Fleming, Brendon McCullum, Kyle Mills, Shane Bond, and Mike Hesson among others.

"The group going home to New Zealand is a real challenge. Might be one or two of the franchises might put them on a charter plane, which will be fantastic," Mills said.

"We'll have that confirmed in the next 24 hours," he added.

Hussey to complete quarantine in Delhi

CSK batting coach Mike Hussey will stay in India to serve out his quarantine while others head back in the next few days.

The 52-day 60-match tournament would have concluded in Ahmedabad on May 30. However, only 24 days of cricket was possible with 29 completed games before the virus halted proceedings.

India is currently recording over 3 lakh cases everyday and more than 3,000 daily deaths.

The unprecedented number of cases has severely burdened the country's health-care facilities causing an acute shortage of oxygen, hospital beds and crucial medicines. The gut-wrenching scenes at hospitals and funeral places have had an impact on the participating players as well. — PTI

IPL could have tweaked a few things: Pat

Melbourne, May 5: Australia pacer Pat Cummins feels the IPL organisers, in hindsight, could have "tweaked a few things" after deciding to host the league in India amidst a raging COVID-19 pandemic.

Cummins, a key part of the Kolkata Knight Riders team, said previous edition held in UAE was incredibly "well-run" and the organisers pushed it "little step further" by organising it at home this year.

The IPL was "indefinitely suspended" on Tuesday,

following multiple COVID-19 cases inside the bio-bubble.

Last year, IPL was first postponed and then shifted to the UAE with India being in the grips of the first wave of virus.

"Last year we had the IPL held over in the UAE and that was an incredibly well-run tournament," Cummins told *Foxsports*.

"This year, they tried to push it that little step further and have it over here in multiple cities in India. I'm sure looking back they might have tweaked a few things."



Pat Cummins

Cummins, however, didn't specify what exactly could have been done differently in his comments which were made before the postponement of the league on Tuesday.

There were a lot of criticism for conducting the T20 league at a time when India was facing such a devastating health crisis.

"It's two different worlds. We're lucky, we're safe, we're comfortable and there's people just trying to get basic medical treatment," the Australian vice-captain said.

"First thing was to find out whether us playing the IPL was the right thing and basically everyone said, we would be lost without the IPL for three or four hours every night.

I'm just trying to do my bit. India's been such a good country to me and cricketers."

With the T20 event being postponed, the Australian IPL players and support staff might fly off to Maldives in a bid to get home.

The Australian government had last week banned travellers from COVID-ravaged India till May 15 with the country's Prime Minister Scott Morrison making it clear that the IPL players will have to make their own arrangements. — PTI



Delhi hosted four IPL matches this season.

— IPL

Bookies hired a cleaner at Kotla

New Delhi, May 5: The recently-suspended IPL witnessed potential corruptors plugging an accredited cleaner at Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla ground for doing "pitch-siding" which helps ball-to-ball betting, BCCI Anti-Corruption Unit chief Shabbir Hussain Shekhadam Khandawala has revealed.

The new modus operandi was observed during one of the IPL games at New Delhi where a designated cleaner was using the time lag between actual match action and live TV coverage to help in ball-by-ball betting, which is also known as court-siding or pitch siding.

Pitch-siding is the practice of transmitting information from sporting events for the purpose of gambling, or directly placing bets.

"One of my ACU officers caught a person and handed over the details to Delhi Police. While that particular offender managed to flee leaving behind his two mobile phones, ACU lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police," Hussain, a former DG of Gujarat Police, said.

"We are thankful to Delhi Police that in a separate incident they caught two other persons from the Kotla on ACU tip-off."

The Delhi Police arrested two people with fake

One of my ACU officers caught a person and handed over the details to Delhi Police. While that particular offender managed to flee leaving behind his two mobile phones, ACU lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police

— SHABBIR HUSSAIN
BCCI ACU chief

accreditation cards during the IPL match between Rajasthan Royals and SunRisers Hyderabad on May 2.

So how did cleaning staff come under the ACU radar? "He was standing (inside Feroz Shah Kotla premises) in a secluded area all by himself and so one of our officers approached and asked him 'What are you doing here?'"

"He said: 'Main apne girlfriend se baat kar raha hoon. (I am talking to my girlfriend).'"

"My officer then asked him to dial the number he was talking to and then asked him to hand over the phones. Just when he was going through the contents of his phone, the guy fled from the spot," Hussain revealed but did not divulge during which match the incident took place. — PTI

ACA CHIEF SAYS PLAYERS UNDER ENORMOUS STRESS

Melbourne, May 5: Australian Cricketers Association chief executive Todd Greenberg has asked its players to do their "homework" and consider the risks involved before signing overseas T20 deals in the near future as the world grapples with an evolving pandemic. "I'm not sure it will create reticence (in the future) but it will ensure players do their due diligence before they sign agreements," Greenberg was quoted as saying *ESPNcricinfo*.

Greenberg acknowledged the Aussie contingent may be dealing with anxiety and stress at the moment, but promised help once they return to their country. "I was at pains to point it out during the week, the public will see our best Australian cricketers as almost superheroes, they're brilliant athletes, great cricketers, but they're human beings, some of them are fathers and husbands and they're under enormous amounts of stress," Greenberg, said. — PTI

ARSENAL LOOK TO SET UP DATE WITH UNITED

London, May 5: Arsenal's season appeared to be ending with a whimper when they were reduced to 10 men after falling 2-0 behind against Villarreal in last week's first leg of their Europa League semi-final.

Instead, a precious away goal gave them hope they can finish an inconsistent campaign on a high by setting up a showdown in the Polish city of Gdansk against Manchester United. Arsenal are ninth in the Premier League table and are unlikely to qualify for Europe next year via that route but winning the Europa League would give them a ticket back to the Champions League.

Mikel Arteta's side won the FA Cup last season but have failed to build on that triumph and are on course for a fifth consecutive finish outside the top four in EPL. Standing in Arsenal's way is their former boss Unai Emery, who won the trophy three years in a row from 2014 when he was in charge of Sevilla and also took Arsenal to the 2019 final.

Villarreal have never reached the final of the Champions League or Europa League. They have put out a promotional video, with the message: "Let's flip the script... It's our time."

— AFP

Smart City storm into final

Manchester, May 5: After a decade of disappointment, Pep Guardiola is back in a Champions League final and just one game away from delivering on his task to make Manchester City champions of Europe for the first time.

In the battle between two clubs with seemingly endless resources but no Champions League titles to their name, City kept their cool to beat Paris Saint-Germain 4-1 on aggregate as the French champions paid for losing their heads in both legs of the semi-final tie.

Riyad Mahrez, born and raised in Paris, scored twice to secure a 2-0 win for City in Tuesday's second leg before Angel di Maria's red card for lashing out at Fernandinho rounded off another miserable European exit for the French champions.

A first Champions League final for City, against Real Madrid or Chelsea in Istanbul, is the culmination of the club's rise since an Abu Dhabi takeover in 2008 transformed their fortunes. In the coming days, they will seal a fifth Premier League title in the past 10 years.

Once dubbed the "noisy neighbours" by legendary former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson, City are now not just the dominant force in Manchester but also in English football.

By the end of the month,



Manchester City's Algerian midfielder Riyad Mahrez (left) vies with Paris Saint-Germain's Neymar during their UEFA Champions League second leg match in Manchester on Tuesday.

— AFP

the mix of Emirati wealth and Guardiola's coaching may have also conquered Europe.

"Of course we invest a lot of money since Sheikh Mansour took over, but it is not just this," said Guardiola. "It is a lot of incredible things behind the scenes."

"Reaching the final of the Champions League, helps us realise in the bigger picture what we have done in the last four years. What we have done these four years is incredible."

'Remarkable' consistency

THE RESULT

Manchester City (Mahrez 11, 63)	2
PSG	0
<i>City advance on aggregate (4-1)</i>	

It was a similar story for the Catalan in his three years at Bayern Munich between 2013 and 2016 as three Bundesliga titles were overshadowed by three semi-final exits to Spanish opposition.

"People believe because it happened in the past I have to arrive every year in the final of the Champions League," added Guardiola. "This is a little bit unfair because the consistency these guys have shown in every competition these last four or five years is remarkable."

City exorcised many of their Champions League demons against PSG.

Missed chances, controversial refereeing decisions and sloppy defending frequently combined to cost them in recent seasons.

This time an early penalty awarded against Oleksandr Zinchenko was overturned after a VAR review, Mahrez was deadly with his two chances and City's much-improved defence withstood a first-half barrage.

"The first-half they were so good but we defended so well. We defend all together, helped each other," said Guardiola.

— AFP



Lewis Hamilton

Hamilton, Max to resume title battle

Madrid, May 5: The race for the Formula One title has quickly become a two-man show, and it's not expected to change when the circuit goes to Barcelona this week for the Spanish Grand Prix. At a track all teams know well, Mercedes and Red Bull are expected to continue to dominate with Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen separated by eight points after three races.

"The picture is starting to clarify. Red Bull and Mercedes are the two standout teams, and Lewis and Max are the two standout drivers," Red Bull team principal Christian

Horner said.

"If we get a pretty standard Barcelona, I think you'll get the four races and we can see where our strengths and weaknesses are. But what we can see is it's incredibly tight."

Hamilton, the four-time defending champion with Mercedes, has the edge over Verstappen after winning the season-opener in Bahrain and last week's race in Portugal.

But Red Bull has significantly closed the gap this season, with Verstappen picking up a win in Italy and a pole position in Bahrain. — AP