


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
VISAKHAPATNAM | SATURDAY | 8 MAY 2021

WEATHER

 **Max:** 35.2°C
Min: 24.6°C
RH: 62%
Rainfall: Trace
Forecast: Partly Cloudy Sky.
Max/Min temp. 35/24 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava; Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula Dwadasi till 5.22 pm
Star: Uttarabhadra till 2.48 pm
Varjyam: 4.08 am(Sunday)
Durmuhurtam: 5.50 am to 7.32 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 25,1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.05 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.00 pm
Maghrib: 6.19 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.19 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.27 AM
MOONSET TODAY 1.10 PM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.32 AM

RAMZAN TIMINGS
IFTAR: 6.24 PM (TODAY)
SEHRI: 4.08 AM (TOMORROW)

COUNTER POINT



He is staying in a bio-bubble these days!

SHORT TAKES

Petrol at ₹102 in Rajasthan, MP

New Delhi: Petrol price on Friday scaled to ₹102 per litre in some parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh after rates were raised for the fourth straight day after ending of more than two-week-long hiatus during assembly elections in four states. On Friday, petrol price was hiked by a steep 29 paise per litre and diesel by 31 paise a litre.

CoWIN introduces four digit code

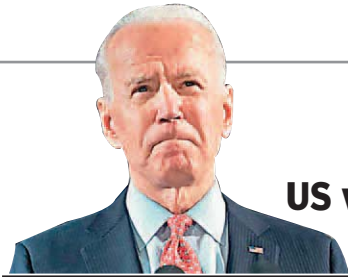
New Delhi: The CoWIN system is introducing a new feature of four-digit security code from May 8 to minimise data entry errors about vaccination status. The health ministry said in some instances that citizens who had booked their appointment for vaccination did not make it to the vaccination centre but the system has recorded them having received the shot.

Two elected UP village heads die

Sambhal (UP): Two recently elected village heads in Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls have died, officials said on Friday. Ambrish Kumar (45) and Dushyant Kumar (52), who were elected as village heads from Madhna and Rajha villages respectively, died due to breathing problems. The two had not tested positive for Covid-19, the officials said.

Covid impact to be muted: FinMin

New Delhi: The impact of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy is likely to remain muted as compared to the first wave, the finance ministry said in its report. "Learning to 'operate with Covid-19', as borne by international experience, provides a silver lining of economic resilience amidst the second wave," the report said.



WORLD | 5

US warplanes to save Afghan pullout

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SPORTS | 8

Hardik left out of Test squad

TABLOID

John outraged at cruelty to dog



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Oxygen flights



A military aircraft with two empty tankers being airlifted to get medical oxygen from Angul in Odisha. Four empty cryogenic tankers were taken on two aircrafts from Vijayawada airport on Friday.

CM for activating agri panels

Instructs officials to procure paddy directly from farmers

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has issued instructions to activate agriculture advisory boards and procure paddy at right at 'Kallalu' (farm gates) through Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs). Conducting a review on agriculture operations at his CM camp office at Tadepalli on Friday, the Chief Minister directed agriculture and civil supplies departments to work in coordination for direct procurement of paddy from farmers. He directed that agriculture advisory boards support farmers in all stages right from plan-

ning. He said farmers should be informed on alternative crops to be grown if paddy is not profitable due to various reasons, and the officials should ensure the income of farmers does not fall on account of this switch-over.

The advisory boards should function in coordination with RBKs and added that women farmers should be involved in all the activities.

Reddy said there should be no involvement of millers in paddy procurement and officials should keep tabs on farm produce going to the millers.

The Chief Minister said District Collectors should

procure gunny bags, if necessary, and added that metres are available at RBKs to measure moisture content during paddy procurement.

He said the procurement should be completed within the specified time as promised earlier and the whole process should be carried out by the government only.

The Chief Minister asked the civil supplies and the marketing departments to coordinate to ensure supply of quality seeds to farmers at RBKs. He particularly asked the former to conduct efficient door delivery of PDS rice to beneficiaries.

The officials informed

the government set a target to procure 45.2 lakh tonnes of paddy in this (2020-21) Rabi season. It is 15 per cent more compared to last year.

They said production of 65.23 lakh tons of paddy is estimated this year and they were procuring 50,000 tonnes of paddy per day, which would be increased to 70,000 tonnes soon.

Civil supplies minister Kodali Venkatswara Rao, agriculture special chief secretary Poonam Malakondaiah, civil supplies commissioner Kona Sasidhar, civil supplies managing director A. Surya Kumari, agriculture commissioner H. Arun Kumar and other officials were present.

NAIDU BOOKED FOR SPREADING COVID RUMOURS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 7

A case has been filed against former chief minister and Telugu Desam national president N. Chandrababu Naidu for allegedly spreading rumours that the N40K virus that was identified in Kurnool was deadly and causing infections across the state.

Naidu was accused of creating fear psychosis among children, women and Covid patients.

His interviews carried on electronic media painted a gloomy picture, saying the potency of the Kurnool virus was 10 times deadlier than the other variants devastating the country.

■ Page 2: Complainant wants Naidu punished

Jagan objects to Soren's sarcasm on Modi's call

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

A tweet of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy objecting to the comments of Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemanth Soren against Prime Minister Narendra Modi has surprised political circles. It comes at a time when Modi is being criticised for inaction in containing Covid-19 spread and averting the oxygen crisis across the country.

However, the CM, retweeting Hemanth Soren's post, said, "in this war against Covid-19, these are the times not to point fingers but to come together and strengthen the hands of our Prime Minister to effectively combat the pandemic."

The sudden reaction

from the YSR Congress president and CM to a remark of Jharkhand CM on Friday afternoon went viral, perplexing political observers in the state.

On Thursday night, Modi interacted with the Chief Ministers of various states on the Covid-19 situation, their preparedness as well as their requirements from the centre. After the conversation, Soren took to Twitter and said that the PM only did his 'Mann ki Baat' during the conversation. "It would have been better had he listened to and spoken on important matters," he tweeted.

The tweet was in Hindi and it would have sent whatever message Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leaders wanted to convey to Modi. That Jagan

should comment on such a purely personal comment from Soren on Modi's interaction is raising eyebrows. Surprisingly, he chose to react a day after Soren's interaction with the PM.

The CM's tweet is as follows: "Dear @Hemant SorenJMM, I have great respect for you, but as a brother I would urge you, no matter whatever our differences are, indulging in such level of politics would only weaken our nation. In this war against Covid-19, these are the times not to point fingers but to come together and strengthen the hands of our Prime Minister to effectively combat the pandemic."

■ Page 2: Political analysts surprised

HEALTH | PLAN

PG final year students want govt induct them as senior residents with higher stipend

AP all set to draft medicos for Covid duty

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

The Andhra Pradesh government will soon draft final-year medical PG students for Covid duty in view of the daily surge in infections. An order will be issued in a day or two, officials said on Friday.

The National Medical Commission had issued an advisory saying the final year exams of PG courses as also the PG-NEET test were delayed and there hence was a delay in start

of the new academic session for 2021-22. The services of PG students as Residents may continue to be utilised to handle the surge in Covid19 cases until fresh batches of post-graduate students joined, it said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has himself announced that PG-NEET is not being held before August 31 and the services of final-year PG students could be availed for Covid work until the fresh batch of PG first-year students joined

the courses. Even if PG-NEET is held in September, it may take nearly two months for the new batch of PG students to join the medical courses. This means that the services of PG final-year students can be availed until November.

In this backdrop, the PG final-year students under the aegis of the Andhra Pradesh junior doctors' association submitted a representation at the office of the director of medical education, pleading that

the extra period of residency may be considered to induct them as senior residents and sought a hike in stipend.

They said that though an assurance was given to them for such a hike last year, this was not implemented. They pleaded that a hike in stipend be given to senior residents of the order of Rs70,000 per month, on par with that of their colleagues in Telangana. They also sought the exam intimation at least 40 days before

its commencement so that they will have sufficient time to prepare and appear for the PG final exams.

Some students from government service and from self-finance medical colleges had signed a bond to serve them for two to three years respectively after completion of PG. They appealed for inclusion of the extended period of study/work in the bond period so that they can be relieved from such a commitment a few months in advance.

On the other hand, some PG final-year students from private medical colleges are requesting their college managements to give them an assurance of senior resident status and a hike in stipend before drafting them for Covid duty. There will be more than 2,000 PG final-year students pursuing medical education in 11 government and 17 private medical colleges in the state.

■ Page 2: DME promises to look into medicos' issues

3rd wave can be stopped: Centre


Top adviser says proper precautions can prevent new surge in Covid infections

New Delhi, May 7: There may not be a third wave of Coronavirus in the country if strong measures are taken and effectively implemented at the state, district and city-level, the country's top scientific officer said on Friday, two days after he warned that this wave was inevitable.

K. Vijay Raghavan, principal scientific adviser, said the "insidious asymptomatic transmission" can be stopped if the guidance about precautions, surveillance, containment, treatment and testing is followed.

"If we take strong measures, the third wave may not happen in all places or indeed anywhere at all. It depends on much how effectively guidance is implemented at the local level in the states, districts and cities everywhere."

"The guidance about precautions, about surveillance, about containment,

 **New opportunities for infection may arise if people become complacent or unprotected, assuming the surge is over.**

— K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal scientific adviser, Govt of India

about treatment and about tests. This insidious asymptomatic transmission can be stopped if we follow the guidelines. This sounds difficult, it is difficult and we can and must do it," he said in a press briefing.

On May 5, Vijay Raghavan said as the virus mutates further, a third wave of Covid infection is inevitable and it is necessary to be prepared for new waves.

He said it was not expected that the second wave would hit the country with

such ferocity. "Phase-3 is inevitable given the higher levels of circulating virus, but it is not clear on what time-scale this phase three will occur," he had said.

Responding to a question on when the second wave which has already infected lakhs and killed thousands, will ebb, Vijay Raghavan said it has already started declining in some places. "The number of cases and the positivity will decline and there will be a lag in hospitalisation and mortality," he added.

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

Infections rise when the virus has the opportunity to infect humans. When the virus runs out of opportunities, the infection falls, he said. — PTI

Sonia asks PM to call all-party meet on Covid

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 7


Congress president Sonia Gandhi, lashing out at the Narendra Modi government while addressing a Congress Parliamentary Party meeting on Friday, said: "I say this categorically — India is crippled by a political leadership today that has no empathy for people. The Modi government has failed the people of our country."

Mrs Gandhi said the government must urgently call an all-party meeting on the Covid-19 situation in India and added: "The Modi government has abdicated its fundamental responsibilities and duties towards the people, the Centre has ignored warnings and alerts from the EGOM, National Task Force and the parliamentary panel."

Mrs Gandhi termed the Congress' losses in the recent Assembly polls as "very disappointing". Adding that the Congress Working Committee will meet soon to review the Assembly poll results.

"Most unfortunately, our own performance in all the states was very disappointing and if I may say, unexpectedly so," she said while concluding her speech.

"The CWC is meeting shortly to review the results but it goes without

 **The Modi government has abdicated its fundamental responsibilities and duties towards the people, the Centre has ignored warnings and alerts from the EGOM, National Task Force and the parliamentary panel.**

— Sonia Gandhi, Congress president

saying that we as a party collective must draw the appropriate lessons from this setback in a spirit of humility and honesty," she added. The meeting was attended by its MPs and office-bearers.

The Congress has been repeatedly attacking the government for the last couple of weeks over its "mismanagement" of the Covid-19 crisis, which has been spiralling in the country, with a serious lack of medicines, oxygen, cylinders, hospital beds, ventilators and vaccines.

Referring to the letters written to the PM by Dr Manmohan Singh, the former PM, and by Rahul Gandhi, she said all these helpful initiatives had fallen on deaf ears as the government has made no meaningful response and continues to behave as if it alone has all the answers.

SC REJECTS PLEA AGAINST DELAY IN HEARING ON CENTRAL VISTA

New Delhi, May 7: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea against deferment of hearing on a PIL seeking direction to halt construction activity at the Central Vista Avenue Redevelopment Project during the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic but gave liberty to petitioners to approach the Delhi High Court for urgent listing of the matter.

The court was hearing the appeal against the May 4 order of the high court which had listed the PIL for hearing on May 17 saying it wants to first go through what the Supreme Court has deliberated in its judgement of January 5, giving a go ahead to the ambitious project.

The apex court asked senior advocate Siddharth Luthra to mention the matter before the High Court for urgent listing on May 10. — PTI

NO DEADLINE FOR WHATSAPP PRIVACY POLICY

New Delhi, May 7: WhatsApp has scrapped its May 15 deadline for users to accept its controversial privacy policy update and said not accepting the terms will not lead to deletion of accounts. WhatsApp had faced severe backlash over user concerns that data was being shared with parent company Facebook.

A WhatsApp spokesperson said that no accounts will be deleted on May 15 for not accepting the policy update. "No accounts will be deleted on May 15 because of this update and no one in India will lose functionality of WhatsApp either. We will follow up with reminders to people over the next several weeks," the spokesperson said in an emailed response to a query on Friday.

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

IN BRIEF

AP GOVT OFFICES TO FUNCTION FROM 8 AM TO 11.30 AM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

The state government on Friday issued a set of guidelines on the functioning of all government offices in the state in the wake of surge in Covid-19 infections and imposition of curfew from 12 noon to 6 am on next day.

An order stated that all employees in all departments of secretariat, heads of departments, district offices and sub-district offices shall report for work from 8 am work till at least 11.30 am with immediate effect. The head of the office shall take stock of the work and decide on how many and which employees have to stay back in the office and arrange appropriate passes for them if the work time is beyond 12 noon.

However, the change of timings shall not be applicable to the departments engaged in provision of essential services or Covid-19 management. They are medical and health, energy, municipal administration and urban development, Panchayat Raj and others.



Kakani Ramana Reddy

NOTED POLITICIAN KAKANI RAMANA PASSES AWAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 7

Noted politician of yesteryear Kakani Ramana Reddy, 93, passed away due to age-related ailments at a private hospital in Nellore on Friday.

He is father of Sarvepalli legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy.

He is survived by his wife, three daughters, apart from a son, Kakani Govardhan Reddy. He was a close follower of the Anam family, right from the days of A.C. Subba Reddy, and continued his relations with the next generation leaders in the Anam family such as Anam Ramanarayana Reddy.

The politics of the old Rapur assembly constituency rallied behind Ramana Reddy. He was Samithi President of Podalakur for 18 years, which is a record by itself.

Following the footsteps of Ramana Reddy, Govardhan Reddy entered politics and became the Chairman of Nellore Zilla Parishad.

With the guidance of his father Ramana Reddy, Govardhan Reddy was elected as a legislator for Sarvepalli constituency in 2014 as well as 2019.

Cutting across party lines, several political leaders, including Anam Ramanarayana Reddy condoled the death of Ramana Reddy and consoled his family members.

GOVT ALLOTS BEDS WITH O2 TO DOCS, KIN IN HOSPITALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

The state government directed all the district medical and health officers (DMHOs) to allot beds with O2 and ventilators support with adequate medication for doctors and their family members as per availability.

Following a request from AP Government Doctors' Association for allotment of beds and other amenities in the wake of surge in the Covid-19 infections, the Commissioner (Health and Family Welfare), K. Bhaskar, issued a circular on Friday, directing all the DMHOs to allot beds and provide adequate medication for doctors and their families to an extent of 50 beds in each district. However, the circular said that no bed shall be reserved, without allotting it to any other needy patient.



Health volunteers and medical staff take details from residents during a detailed survey about fevers at MVP Colony in Visakhapatnam on Friday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

1.45L people call 104 for teleconsultations

Round-the-clock 104 has emerged as one-stop for Covid issues

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

As many as 3,567 doctors and 608 specialists have registered in the last one week for 104-doctor teleconsultation service in Andhra Pradesh that renders service to people fighting the Corona pandemic. The virus in its second wave is spreading faster and the 104 helpline service was flooded with over 1,45,121 calls in the last 20 days.

Speaking on the response system, the in-charge of the 104 call centre operations, nodal officer Babu Ahmed said, "We receive calls 24/7 for testing, treatment, vaccine

and hospital allotment. We were able to admit around 22,877 patients to nearby hospitals in the last one month. In addition, we have around 3,567 doctors registered over the last one week, with 608 specialist doctors added to the facility to offer quick response and solution as regards bed, testing or treatment within three hours. These doctors will be linked to the patients of incoming calls from 104."

Babu Ahmed said the calls received from people enquiring about the testing, vaccination and test results will be handled at the executive level. People who have symptoms and requiring consultation are

handled by the doctors.

He said, "We have been providing training on Covid-19 protocols to all doctors along with providing them 104 teleconsultation mobile applications."

Babu Ahmed said this will be a continuous activity to reach out to as many people as possible and that the team is working round the clock. "In addition to this, we would like to decrease the pressure on the hospital in charges. Currently we have 1.2 lakh people under home isolation with mild symptoms. To these patients, we are also ensuring to make outgoing calls and connecting them to the available doctors."

"This way, the patients who are home-isolated are able to get a better picture in tackling the virus themselves at home. Medicines and treatment that the doctors are prescribing through teleconsultation bring down the undue pressure on hospitals."

Babu Ahmed said the AP government under the leadership of chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy is strengthening the 104 helpline system and ensuring that the people received the help they need. The round-the-clock 104 helpline number has emerged as a one-stop solution for all Covid-19 related issues in the state," he stressed.

Naidu defaming AP with false propaganda: Sajjala

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

Advisor to Government Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has slammed Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu for staying in Hyderabad and spreading false rumours about Covid-19 situation in Andhra Pradesh with a view to creating fear psychosis among the people.

Reddy lamented that Naidu floated the absurd idea of a new N440K strain spreading in AP, but Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, and central biotechnology authorities had already made it clear that the N440K was an old variant and no longer dangerous.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, the YSRC leader said the former Chief Minister was carrying out a malicious propaganda against the state government, because of which Delhi and Odisha governments imposed travel restrictions on people from AP. He lambasted Naidu for making AP people look as spreaders of Covid-19 in the eyes of other states. He felt a case should be filed against the opposition leader for spreading baseless rumours in these tough times when people were already distressed.

Reddy said that as the leader of opposition, Naidu must advise and coordinate with the state government in dealing with the pandemic situation. But criticising the

TD CHIEF DEMANDS RAMP UP OF VACCINE SUPPLIES TO SAVE PEOPLE FROM COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Friday expressed concern that one by one, all sections of society were becoming vulnerable to the Coronavirus because of the emergence of more dangerous variants in due course. He pointed out that even those below 18 years of age might become vulnerable once the virus turns more virulent in the third wave. He demanded sufficient quantity of vaccines should be made available and it the most essential thing right now.

Addressing an online meeting with Covid-19 experts and doctors, Naidu recalled how, in the beginning, the virus posed a huge risk to only those in 60-70 years age group. Later, even those in the 40-50 years age group were considered vulnerable. Gradually, the situation worsened with even those in 20-40 age bracket

government had become second nature for him. He felt Naidu, who boasts about his 40 years experience, should have acted responsibly and built confidence among people during such a tough time. Instead, he chose to remain in Hyderabad and spread false propaganda against the state govt.

becoming unsafe. He expressed concern that those with heart, liver, lung and renal illnesses were at a greater risk.

Naidu said that the High Courts and the Supreme Court also made serious comments on the situation and asked the governments on the steps taken to save the people. He recalled how the courts posed specific queries on the steps being taken by the governments to resolve the oxygen supply issue. He stressed the need for the government to build confidence among the people.

The TD chief called upon doctors, experts and scientists to come forward and create awareness and confidence among the hapless public. He stated that it was the duty of everybody to rise to the occasion and extend help to at least 10 others.

Reddy claimed that unlike any other state, AP administered over 6 lakh doses of vaccine on a single day. It has the capacity to continue at the same pace if enough vaccine doses are supplied. He reiterated that CM was taking all necessary measures by constantly reviewing the situation.

HC: Sangam Dairy can continue its biz

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

The Andhra Pradesh High Court issued an interim suspension order of GO 19 dealing with a direction to AP Dairy Development Corporation to hand over the management of feeder/balancing dairy located at Sangam Jagarlamudi to the Guntur District Milk Producers' Cooperative Union Limited for its operation.

A single judge bench headed by Justice D.V.S.S. Somayajulu issued the order on Friday, allowing the petitioner to continue in the management and control of the petitioners' union. The court observed that posting of an IAS officer would lead to administrative difficulties as it is a process industry requiring special expertise. It directed that the administration and management shall continue to be exercised by the directors of the

company. The court said that the Sub-Collector, Tenali, shall not be present on the premises or take part in the operations or administration.

The court asked the petitioner to carry out the regular day-to-day activities such as payment of salaries, payments of statutory dues and contractual obligations.

The court, however, said that the board of directors shall not, except with the permission of court, create any further charge or encumbrance on the properties and further said that all future transactions by which the movable and immovable assets of the petitioners are sought to be alienated, mortgaged and transferred should be carried out only with the prior permission of the court.

The court allowed normal business activities such as purchasing, processing and selling of milk and milk products to be continued without any hindrance.

Political analysts surprised

FROM PAGE 1

Political analysts were surprised that Jagan, rather than Modi, reacted so sharply to the Jharkhand CM's comment. They pointed out that Soren did not make any reference to any other state and the tweet was purely in Hindi and no way, CM Jagan would have noticed it so prominently.

They opined that it was a message aimed at the PM and there was no reason why Jagan should react to it.

The political analysts and sources wondered whether it was a spontaneous reaction from the CM or he got any message from Delhi to attack Soren.

They said there could be some political significance to Jagan's reaction to the Hindi tweet of the Jharkhand Chief Minister.

DME promises to look into medicos' issues

From Page 1

AP JUDA state president Dr Rahul Roy said, "We have submitted a representation to the DME with a request for their induction as senior residents, a hike in stipend and prior intimation to them about the exam schedule. We are told that without appearing for the final exams, there may

not be any provision to accord senior resident status."

Director of medical education Dr M. Raghavendra Rao said, "The state government is looking into their issues positively and an order may be issued in a day or two to draft them officially for Covid duty as they are already attending to such a service."

AP cops trace oxygen tanker

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

The Andhra Pradesh Police has traced a missing oxygen tanker and brought it to Government General Hospital (GGH) here on Friday. The Vijayawada-bound 18-tonne oxygen tanker went missing late at night on Thursday.

Within minutes after the tracking system failed, police commissioner Battina Srinivasulu alerted all SPs along the way to Vijayawada from Odisha. All police units sprang into action and traced the tanker to a

dhaba in the East Godavari district's Dharmavaram.

Investigations revealed that the driver halted at the dhaba due to fatigue. Local police assigned an experienced home guard to accompany the driver and the tanker was escorted to the destination via the 'green channel'.

Due to the proactive steps taken by the police force, the tanker reached GGH Vijayawada in time. The relatives of the Covid patients who were on oxygen thanked the police department for its timely help.

PDF MLCs URGE SPL VAX DRIVE FOR TEACHING STAFF

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 7

Progressive Democratic Front (PDF) MLCs requested the government to open special vaccination counters, especially for teachers, lecturers, government, contract and outsourcing employees and also retired employees.

MLCs Shaikh Sabji, I.

Venkateswara Rao, V. Bala Subrahmanyam, K.S. Lakshmana Rao and Y. Srinivasa Reddy wrote a letter to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy that the Covid-19 pandemic situation may not come under control in near future, but the vaccination to those above 45 years could not be completed even for 10 per cent people.

TWO AIRCRAFT LEAVE WITH EMPTY OXYGEN TANKERS FOR ODISHA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

As part of the government efforts to get medical oxygen from Angul in Odisha in a fast manner, two military aircraft took off with two empty cryogenic tankers each from Vijayawada airport on Friday.

Accordingly, an aircraft was loaded with two empty

pty tankers of 20 tonnes and 16 tonnes capacity to be airlifted to Bhubaneswar. From there, they will be taken by road to Angul to load medical oxygen. Later, the loaded tankers will return to AP by road within 48 hours.

Similarly, another aircraft airlifted two more empty tankers of 16 tonnes capacity each to Bhubaneswar.

COVID | CARE ₹180cr on plants, ₹25cr for civil works, and ₹50cr for laying 10k O2 pipelines

AP govt to set up 49 oxygen plants in 13 districts

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

The AP government has decided to set up pressure swing absorption-based oxygen generation plants in 13 district/area hospitals at a cost of ₹309 crore.

Principal Secretary (Health) Anil Kumar Singhal told media persons here on Friday that based on the number of

beds available in each hospital, they would set up such plants and sounded confident that the plants would become operational within three months.

Singhal expressed confidence that once the plants were set up there would not be any issues with respect to transport and storage of oxygen. He said administrative sanction was given for setting up

such plants on a permanent basis and out of the allotted ₹309 crore, the government would spend ₹180 crore on plants, ₹25 crore for civil works, and ₹50 crore for laying 10,000 additional O2 pipelines. He also informed that out of 50 cryogenic tankers planned to be procured, orders were placed for purchase of 25 tankers. It would cost ₹45 crore for

purchase of the tankers.

On the Covid-19 vaccination, the senior official stated that so far, AP received 73,49,960 doses. A total of 53,58,712 persons were given the first dose, while 17,96,000 were given the second dose, taking the total number of doses given so far to 71,55,000.

The official informed that the state government had sanctioned ₹45 crore

for purchase of 9,91,000 doses of Covishield and 3,43,000 doses of Covaxin and payments were already made for their procurement. Serum Institute of India conveyed that it would supply 3.5 lakh doses more than the allotted doses by the third week of May.

Singhal said the government would give weightage to health workers

working on temporary basis on Covid-19 duty for recruitments in the health department, which they had been asking for. A memo was issued to provide 15% weightage to the health workers who worked on Covid duty during the first wave of the pandemic. He assured to give an order with details on modalities to the health workers in recruitments.



IN BRIEF

DR REDDY'S GETS
NOD FOR MAKING
REMEDSIVIRDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 7

Dr Reddy's Lab in Visakhapatnam Special Economic Zone got fast track approval for manufacture of remdesivir, the life saving drug for the coronavirus patients.

The approval was accorded a couple of hours after an application was made by the company. Development commissioner A. Rama Mohan Reddy said in normal conditions the proposal is usually taken to UAC, but keeping in view the dire exigency, it has been approved by a committee of VSEZ, and the same will now be taken to UAC for ratification.

Shortage of beds in AP
hosps adding to toll

Each bed is occupied by two and even three patients

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 7

A 74-year-old former executive engineer of Anantapur municipality tested positive and tried many private superspecialty hospitals but could not get a bed. His oxygen saturation was falling rapidly two days ago and he was taken to the Government General Hospital where he breathed his last.

Two family members of a young software professional and his family from Anantapur tested positive and were admitted to an intensive care unit (ICU) in superspecialty hospital four days ago. It took more than 24 hours for the patient, who had a high fever and whose oxygen saturation was rapidly declining, to get admission into the ICU, despite multiple calls to the government helpline and private hospitals.

With the overcrowding of patients in Super Specialty Hospital, Cancer Hospital and shortage of beds continuing in the GGH hospital, a long wait for beds at hospitals is adding to the agony of patients and their attendants.

The scene is pathetic. Each bed is occupied by two and even three patients. It is horrific at GGH where Covid patients await on the roadside and available shelters in the hospital premises. In some instances, while one patient is dying on the bed, the co-occupant is treated oblivious of the presence of the deceased one. Several attendants wait outside the emergency wings of all hospitals, praying for a miracle. This situation continues all through day in and day out.

"My husband tested positive eight days back and he was completely fine all these days. He was discharged from a private nursing home on



Overcrowding of patients in a hospital in Anantapur district.

— DC

AP records 17,188 Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

Andhra Pradesh witnessed a slight dip in fresh Covid-19 infections by reporting 17,188 and 73 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state reported the highest ever so far at 23,920 on May 1 and since then, the cases have been slightly going up and down. The state health authorities reported here on Friday that out of 1,00,424 samples tested, 17,188 persons were infected with the virus. Out of a total number of 1,71,60,870 samples tested so far, 12,45,374 persons were infected with the virus and of them,

Sunday. On Monday his oxygen saturation dipped suddenly and then he began searching for hospitals. After facing a lot of difficulties, we admitted him to GGH. He was kept in the emergency ward as there were no vacant beds. He passed away on Tuesday.

"Even after the government was serious about private hospitals, no private hospital is admit-

ting critical care patients. More terrible is that they are discharging patients whose condition is worse. Most of the people are approaching Super Specialty hospital," a resident from Vidyuth Nagar said.

Hospital managements maintain that while they could not increase the number of ICUs and ventilators in a short time, they were trying to add

10,50,160 were recovered while 1,86,696 are still active with the virus. Among the daily cases, Chittoor reported the highest at 2,260 followed by 1,868 in Visakhapatnam, 1,823 in East Godavari, 1,779 in Anantapur, 1,632 in Srikakulam, 1,530 in Nellore, 1,515 in Guntur, 1,342 in Kurnool, 905 in West Godavari, 780 in Krishna, 749 in Vizianagaram, 620 in Kadapa and 385 in Prakasam.

Chittoor recorded the highest number of cumulative active cases at 20,960 followed by 20,924 in East Godavari, 19,472 in Srikakulam, 18,917 in Guntur, 15,920 in Visakhapatnam, 15,653 in Nellore, 14,675

in Kurnool, 14,185 in Anantapur, 13,071 in Prakasam, 10,218 in West Godavari, 8,545 in Krishna, 7,893 in Vizianagaram and 6,262 in Kadapa. Vizianagaram reported the highest number of daily deaths at 11, followed by 10 in Visakhapatnam, eight in East Godavari, seven in Chittoor, six each in Krishna and Guntur, five each in Kurnool, Prakasam and West Godavari, four each in Nellore and Srikakulam and two in Anantapur. With this, death toll scaled up to 8,519. The state health authorities discharged 12,749 patients after recovery in the last 24 hours in the state.

more oxygen lines to support as many patients as possible. With about thousands of active cases, Anantapur has reportedly the highest Covid-19 case-load in AP. Sources revealed out of 29 ventilators in Super Specialty Hospital only 20 are in good condition. The actual intake is 300 but there are more than 900 patients in the hospital.

Communities to the
rescue of patientsDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 7

With all the doors closed at government and private hospitals, patients are seeking help from communities to come out of the jaws of the deadly virus.

Taking the lead, Gurudwara Sadh Sangat is reaching out to patients in a big way by supplying oxygen cylinders delivered at homes for free of cost and admitting them at government hospitals by supplementing oxygen.

The Sangath has 450-odd members and of them 40 people have been infected with the virus. One person succumbed since he was severely affected.

"We are supplying oxygen cylinders free of cost with the funds drawn from Gurudwara and hiring nurses and technical staff to instal regulators and supervise the patients at their homes. We are also getting oxygen concentrate in two days," said president of

Gurudwara D.S. Ananad.

He said that all communities should reach out to the patients.

Joint secretary of the Agrwal Mahasabha, Naresh Agrawal, said his association was also helping out the members by supplying oxygen and getting them beds in the hospital.

He said that the cultural wing of the Mahasabha, Rajasthani Sanskrit Manch has taken up the task to supply the cylinders and refilling those who had already bought them. The Mahasabha has over 5,000 families and most of them have been affected and a couple of them died before they could be put into a good hospital.

A business community rescued a patient who could not get help from his company bosses or friends.

The community leaders swung into action and rescued the patient in the middle of night by putting him in a corporate hospital and paid the entire bill.

Home for children
of Covid couplesDC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, MAY 7

District collector J. Niwas has appealed to the people to admit their children in Homes if both the parents were infected with the Covid-19 and their relatives were not coming forward to look after them. He said children could be taken out of their homes even if the parents were undergoing treatment in home isolation.

He said that children could continue to stay at

4 PVT HOSPITALS
BOOKED FOR
WRONGDOINGDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 7

Flying squads from the vigilance and enforcement department booked four hospitals for lapses in providing treatment to Covid-19 infected patients in the state on Friday.

The sleuths inspected 15 hospitals across the state and booked criminal cases against four hospitals. Narayana Hospital in Guntur was booked for charging exorbitantly beyond prescribed rates and bills were not given for payment made. Sairatna Hospital in Anantapur was also booked for charging excessively, discouraging admission under Aarogyasri and misappropriation of remdesivir injections.

Hindupur hospital
officer suspendedDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 7

Hindupur Divisional Cooperative Officer V. Rajendra Prasad, who acted as the nodal officer of District Area Hospital here was suspended on Friday over negligence to coordinate with the doctors, staff and patients. The action was reportedly taken following a controversy over deaths of three patients due to oxygen supply failure, which triggered protests by opposition parties and organisations against authorities for the past three days.

Further, the ventilators donated by local MLA and film star Nandamuri Balakrishna were kept idle even as Covid positive patients with serious conditions rushed to the hospital. It may be noted that three

patients died in the hospital due to alleged failure in supplying oxygen to the ICU wards three days ago.

Collector Gandham Chandrudu, issuing the suspension orders, said the official neglected to meet the needs of Covid patients and alleviate their sufferings by coordinating with various departments. Sources said Prasad had also worked as a nodal officer during the last year's pandemic. Penukonda Sub-Collector Nishanthi was appointed as the nodal officer in his place to coordinate the situation.

Officials, meanwhile, replenished the oxygen stocks at Hindupur hospital. The district collector said Kalyanadurgam RDT hospital would be turned into a full Covid hospital in a couple of days to meet the demand for beds.

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S. No	Tender Notice No.	No of Works	Value of Works (ECV)	Down Loading Starting Date	Down Loading End Date	Last Date of Submission bid	Date of opening Tenders	Contact Phone No	
1	Short Tender Notice No.12/2021-22 EE-II(WORKS)JOB, Dt:06-05-2021 03 days Tender	02 Works	Rs. 7,73,568-00	06-05-2021 @ 10.00 AM	10-05-2021 @ 02.30 PM	10-05-2021 @ 03.00 PM	10-05-2021 @ 03.30 PM	90107 15555	
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2	STREET LIGHTING SECTION 'a' Procurement Short Tender Notice No.05/2021-22/EE(Elec Dt:06-05-2021 07 days Tender	17 Nos	Rs. 258.23 Lakhs	07-05-2021 @ 11.00 AM	15-05-2021 @ 09.00 AM	15-05-2021 @ 10.30 AM	15-05-2021 @ 11.00 AM	99480 78504	
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SHORT TAKES

TRIPURA: INPT TO MERGE WITH TIPRA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

U.P. POLL: WRONG CANDIDATES DECLARED WINNERS

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

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

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

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

LION AT ETAWAH SAFARI PARK TESTS COVID-19 POSITIVE

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

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

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

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

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

The safari park has already been shut for public.

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

Centre has to supply oxygen to Delhi: SC

SC refuses to interfere with Karnataka HC order directing Centre to supply more O2

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

In a stern message, the Supreme Court on Friday told the Centre to continue supplying 700 MT oxygen every day to the national capital as per its May 5 order, and to not push it to take coercive actions.

A top court bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and comprising Justice M.R. Shah took umbrage over the Centre not supplying Delhi with 700 MT oxygen as ordered by it on May 5, 2021, after the Delhi government informed the court that it did not get 700 MT oxygen on Thursday as ordered by it.

Making it clear that they mean “business” and don't want to be “coercive”, an apparently irked Justice Chandrachud said, “It has to be coercive and we don't want to be coercive. You proceed and arrange the oxygen.”

Cautioning the Centre that its order to supply 700 MT oxygen has to be complied with, Justice Chandrachud further said, “Don't make us go firm.”

Joining Justice Chandrachud, Justice Shah said, “You have to supply 700 MT oxygen every day till we further order.”

In another jolt to the Centre, the court refused to interfere with the Karnataka high court order directing the Centre to supply 1,200 MT oxygen to the state.

Describing the high court order as a “well calibrated judicious exercise of power”, the SC said that the high court cannot remain silent when people are dying in the state.

The Karnataka high court had ordered the Centre to increase the daily oxygen allocation to the state to 1,200 MT from 965 MT for treating Covid patients.

In a bid to present a larger picture which needs a pan India approach, solicitor general Tushar Mehta told the court that the entire system would collapse if all high courts start passing orders on oxygen supply in their states.

However, the Supreme Court said that it was not oblivious to the difficulties being faced by the Centre but they (court) also have to think what will happen if the requirement of oxygen in a state is not met.

“The order of the high court is based on the need to maintain at least a minimum requirement as projected by the state government until a decision on the representation is taken and the high court is apprised,” the court added.



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

India records 4 lakh+ cases; experts see peak in June

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

India on Friday scaled yet another height in terms of single-day Covid-19 cases with 4.01 lakh new detections and 4,191 fatalities in the last 24 hours. Rising number of infections continues to grip the population in fear which is still struggling hard to find hospital beds and oxygen to survive this second wave of pandemic. As per reports, the current wave is expected to peak by June end and thereafter there may be some respite.

Dr K. Vijay Raghavan, chief scientific advisor, said on Friday that the third wave of the pandemic can be handled if stringent, necessary steps are taken on time.

Two days ago Dr Raghavan had said the third wave was “inevitable given the high levels at which this virus is circulating”. He, however, did not give a timeline of the third wave. But on Friday he clarified that the third wave may not take place everywhere in the country if sufficient precautions are taken. “The pandemic has different peaks and falls across the country. The only condition for third wave waves is the presence of a susceptible population. If we take strong measures, the third wave of Covid-19 may not happen at all places or even

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

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, MAY 7

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

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

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

tered. It added over 10 lakh doses in addition will be received by the states/UTs in the next three days.

The Centre has decided to deploy AYUSH professionals to boost availability of medical personnel to fight Covid-19.

The Union health ministry said AYUSH doctors are institutionally qualified professionals, well-trained in various aspects of medical care and have proven their competence in various Covid-19 management roles in different institutions across the country. States/UTs have trained nearly 1.06 lakh AYUSH professionals in different aspects of Covid-19 management, and 28,473 professionals have been deployed for Covid-19 activities.

RSS slams Bengal violence

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

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

The RSS also reminded the ruling party of its duty in containing the post-poll violence unleashed against the Opposition party mem-

bers, in particular the BJP. It claimed that the state administrative machinery was “completely passive” and “remained mute spectators” during the violence and the “rioters seemed not to be afraid of anything”.

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

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

● **RSS GENERAL secretary said that there is widespread “fear psychoses” among the common people of West Bengal.**

castes and tribes, were forced to go in search of refuge to save their lives and honour.

“It is our considered opinion that this post-poll result violence is contrary to the Bharatiya tradition of co-existence and respect to the opinion of all, as also it is totally opposed to the very spirit of democracy and one people enshrined in our Constitution,” he said.

The “electoral victory belongs to political parties but the elected govern-

ment is accountable to the entire society”, he said.

The RSS general secretary said that there is widespread “fear psychoses” among the common people of West Bengal.

The RSS demanded legal action should be taken against those involved in violence and should also make effort to “instill a feeling of safety and confidence in the minds of affected people and to take necessary steps for their rehabilitation.” The RSS also urged the Union government to take necessary and all possible steps to establish peace in the state and to make the TMC government act in the above direction.

NIA seeks uranium details from ATS

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 7

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

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

details of the case from the ATS.

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

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

Karnataka, Goa under lockdown

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

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

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

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

All shops and commercial establishments, hotels, pubs and bars will remain closed during this period, Yediyurappa said. Essential goods and services like food, medicine,

milk, fruits and vegetables, etc will be available from 6 am to 10 am, he added.

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

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

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

MP to provide free treatment for poor

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MAY 7

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

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

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

The state government has prepared a package for the private hospitals to treat the Covid-19 patients who are beneficiaries of Ayushman Bharat Yojana.

The economically backward people who are not included in the Ayushman scheme can also avail the free treatment facility by producing their income certificates certified by a

gazetted officer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UK dispatches largest Covid relief for India

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

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

British High Commission said on Friday, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday spoke to his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison to thank him for Australian aid to India to battle pandemic. PM Modi has already thanked several world leaders including US President Joe Biden, British PM Boris Johnson and Russian President Vladimir Putin among

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

NIGERIA: 10 KILLED, STUDENTS ABDUCTED

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

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

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

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

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

29 PEOPLE FOUND FROM SEMITRUCK IN TEXAS

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

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

Authorities made contact with 29 of the people who had been in the semitruck. One person was taken to the hospital to be treated for dehydration, San Antonio Fire Department spokesperson Joe Arrington said. The traffic stop is being investigated for possible human smuggling, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement told KSAT-TV in a statement.

ISRAELI TROOPS KILL 2, INJURE 1 PALESTINIAN

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

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

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

On Thursday, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian suspected of carrying out a drive-by shooting earlier this week in the West Bank that killed an Israeli and wounded two others.

GERMAN SPY AGENCY TO CHECK ISLAMOPHOBIA

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

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

"By regularly offering right-wing extremists a platform to propagate anti-constitutional ideologies, this movement acts as a hinge between extremists and non-extremists," said agency president Dirk-Martin Christian. He added that "all people and activities" within the group would now be put under surveillance, with the exception of those merely taking part in peaceful demonstrations.

Pegida, which campaigns against what it calls the "Islamisation of the West", was born in October 2014 with xenophobic marches every Monday evening.

EU drug regulator taps new Covid pill

Begins accelerated authorisation process for sotrovimab to prevent deaths, hospitalisation

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

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

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

— AP

UK HEALTH DEPT WORRIED ABOUT INDIAN VARIANT

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

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

— PTI



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

— AP

Australia: Travel ban on India returnees only till May 15

oz might close borders till 2022

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

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

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

— PTI

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

Minister Dan Tehan said a wave of cases on the Indian sub-continent showed Australia's near blanket ban on arrivals was still essential to keep the country Covid-free. Since March 20, 2020, Australians have been barred from travelling overseas and a hard-to-get individual exemption is needed for foreign visitors to enter the country. It is "very hard to determine" when borders could reopen, Tehan told *Sky News*, "the best guess would be in the middle to the second half of next year".

— AFP

VACCINE MUST FOR SAUDI WORKERS

Riyadh, May 7: Saudi Arabia said on Friday that employees will only be allowed to return to their workplace in person once vaccinated against Covid. Vaccination will become a "mandatory condition" for the face-to-face return of public and private sector employees, the ministry of human resources and social development

said in a statement, urging workers to "begin the process" to get a jab. The health ministry said it has administered more than 10 million Covid-19 vaccine doses, in a country with a population of over 34 million.

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

— AFP

CHINA OPENS ITS SIDE OF EVEREST FOR -VE CLIMBERS

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

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

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

US favours freer flow of vaccine components

Paris, May 7: The new US position in support of lifting patents on Covid-19 vaccines has taken attention away from an equally significant change by Washington, which plans to open up trade in the raw materials used to make them.

After having recently taken heat for blocking such exports, Commerce Secretary Katherine Tai said Wednesday that the US government would "work to increase the raw materials needed to produce those vaccines".

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

Long legal and economic policy debates likely lie ahead about waiving vaccine patents, particularly at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Meanwhile, the difficulties faced by some laboratories in obtaining components to manufacture vaccines look set to stymie the drive to ramp up production.

Two labs have recently spoken out about their difficulties, laying the blame at Washington's door.

Germany's Curevac said it could not secure supplies of certain materials from the United States.

Several days earlier, India's Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, called on U.S. President Joe Biden to step in.

"Respected @POTUS, if we are to truly unite in

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

N-talks intensify in fourth round

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

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

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



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

— AFP

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

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

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

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

— AP

BUG | INVASION

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

US braces for cicada wave after 17 years

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

Before invading parks and people's gardens, the insects have already conquered the airwaves, social media and newspapers, especially in parts of the eastern, central and southern United States

where "Brood X" is due to emerge.

Billions of cicada nymphs that have been living underground since 2004 will burst out of the soil, shed their skin, mate, lay eggs and then die, all against the backdrop of the deafening noise that males make to attract females.

The last time they emerged, George W. Bush was the US president, Facebook had just been created and Athens was getting ready to host the

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

Summer Olympics.

So when will the swarm arrive?

Hard to say, as it depends to some extent on weather conditions, and in particular the temperature of the soil. Expected cooler temperatures could delay their emergence until mid-

May — or they could pop up any day now.

Residents have been watching for signs of their arrival for weeks, sharing photos of the tunnels the cicadas have dug to make their way to the surface when ready to briefly face the world.

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

swarm and were crawling on his porch.

He said that he was "more anxious than excited" and admitted that cicadas "are kind of gross as nymphs." "But watching some of them morph into the adult form in under an hour is fascinating," he said.

On the neighborhood email network Nextdoor, there are more and more comments about the looming bug invasion, including how best to deal with the flying critters.

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

Another user had the following advice for cyclists: "Pedal slow and use wide tires, those squished cicadas on the bike trail are mighty slick." It is important to remember that cicadas pose no real threat to humans, except for the high annoyance factor — and the even higher gross-out potential.

— AFP



DECCAN Chronicle

8 MAY 2021

Vaccines: IP waiver fine, but tech transfer crucial

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

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

The fresh thinking on the patent regime on Covid vaccines does not offer immediate relief but the government must do everything possible to get the technology transferred here and production increased in the shortest possible time

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

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

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

Stalin era begins

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

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

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

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Subhani



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

K.C. Singh

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

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

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

The pandemic is of course the immediate challenge. New technological challenges also lurk over the horizon. The seven nations reiterate their commitment to strengthen open societies, shared values, a rules-based international order, free and fair trade and the free and secure flow of capital. It concludes that "liberal democracy and free and fair markets remain the best models".

Before coming to the specifics of relevance to India, this broad template should be read carefully by the Indian government. Much of its actions in the second year of the Narendra Modi government's second term do not tally with this vision. Mr Jaishankar, even when overseas, has become a flag-bearer for the current Hindutva model, precursor to the RSS' Hindu Rashtra dream. Reflexive intolerance to criticism, having his ministry flail at the likes of pop star Rihanna and climate icon Greta Thunberg for supporting the farmers' agitation in India, ill behove India as a model for democratic governance. While the pandemic prevails, India may get a pass, but it won't be for long.

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

cine-sharing programme Covax.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

QUOTA CAP

Strict enforcement of creamy layer principle is necessary for the quotas to correctly percolate and meet the expectations or constitution writers (50 per cent cap on quotas ideal. DC, May 7). In the meantime, the Centre may consider establishing engineering and medical colleges with all facilities where the seats are filled only on merit. It will encourage talent in all groups and promote national integration.

P. Ramakrishna
Rajahmundry

BENGAL REVIEW

The post-poll violence in West Bengal was inevitable considering the surcharged atmosphere under which the eight phase polling was held. Both the main contenders left no stone unturned to win. That more BJP workers got killed in the violence is indicative of things to come. Didi is speaking in a confrontationist tone and almost threatening the Centre.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

BOOST HEALTH INFRA

The statement by the apex court is prompt warning of what is coming (Prepare for 3rd wave, SC tells Centre, DC, May 7). However, it is now important to focus on ramping up the health infrastructure with medical oxygen, ventilators and vaccine all age groups, hospital beds, equipment and manpower, just to name a few.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle Jewellery out of rare coins

HYDERABAD, MAY 7.

Yelliah, the waddar (stone-cutter), who found 200 rare gold coins of the 14th century A.D. belonging to the Vijaynagar empire at Mubarakpur village, about 35 miles from here in Vikarabad taluk, after making ingots from 100 of them, also made some jewellery for his wife.

After burying the remaining 100 gold coins in his house, the waddar came to the city with gold ingots for selling. When the waddar gave two gold ingots to a jeweller, the latter got suspicious and formed the police.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Her overseeing several of these crony appointments had led to the resignation of the previous Svengalish adviser, Dominic Cummings, who after his ejection

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

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

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

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

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

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

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49206.47	0.52
Nifty 50	14823.20	0.67
S&P 500*	4,234.60	0.78
Dollar (₹)	73.51	0.36
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.30	0.33
Euro (₹)	88.76	0.11
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,185▲474	1.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.29	0.29
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.015	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.545	-0.016

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Sovereign rating to stay for next two years: S&P

S&P Global Ratings said India's credit rating would be retained at the current level for the next two years, and the country will see a slightly faster pace of growth in the next couple of years that will support its sovereign rating. Speaking at a webinar, Andrew Wood, director-sovereign and public finance ratings, S&P Global Ratings, said, "India's rating remains stable on a 'BBB-' rating. We do not expect there to be a change."

Carlyle sells 4% stake in SBI Life for ₹3,900 crore



Private equity firm Carlyle Group divested 4 per cent stake in SBI Life Insurance for over Rs 3,900 crore through an open market transaction. According to bulk deal data available with the BSE, Carlyle Group, through its entity CA Emerald Investment, sold 4.1 crore shares, amounting to 4 per cent stake, of SBI Life for Rs 3,936 crore. The shares were offloaded at an average price of Rs 960.

HDFC net up 31% in Q4, interest income falls

Mortgage lender HDFC reported a 31 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 5,669 crore for the fourth quarter against Rs 4,342 crore a year ago. Total income on a consolidated basis more than doubled to Rs 35,754 crore from Rs 16,632 crore. Interest income fell to Rs 10,879 crore from Rs 11,391 crore. For the full year FY21, the net profit was down at Rs 20,488 crore against Rs 22,826 crore in FY20.

Cams lists on NSE to broaden investors base

Chennai-based Computer Age Management Services (Cams), India's largest registrar and transfer agent of mutual funds, got listed on the NSE. Cams shares were first listed on the BSE on Oct. 1, 2020 after the IPO. Since NSE Investments was a shareholder in Cams prior to the IPO, though they exited completely during the IPO, this prior shareholding precluded the listing of the company's shares on NSE then.



■ Banks have to disburse loans in 30 days

Quick on-lending of health fund ordered

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 7

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said that banks seeking funding from its special Rs 50,000 crore 'on-tap term liquidity facility' to on-lend to Covid-related healthcare services, should do so within 30 days from the date of availing of the funds from it. The banks will have to ensure that the amount borrowed from it should at all times be backed by lending to the specified segments till the maturity of the scheme.

The RBI early this week announced a Rs 50,000 crore liquidity window to banks under priority-sector lending to augment Covid-19 healthcare infrastructure to help raise treatment capacity, and availability of medicines and medical equipment in India. Loans under the scheme, for tenures up to 3 years, are available to banks at the repo rate till March 31, 2022. Such loans would also be classified under priority sector.

Consequently, banks are expected to extend these loans below current interest rates for companies engaged in health care activities. These include makers and suppliers of vaccines and drugs; hospitals; pathology labs; suppliers of oxygen; makers of emergency medical equipment; logistics firms; and Covid-19 patients.

According to Crisil Ltd, hospitals could be among the biggest beneficiaries as

₹10K-CR WINDOW FOR SFBs OPENS ON 17TH

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 7

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said that it will conduct the first auction for special three-year long-term repo operations of Rs 10,000 crore for small finance banks (SFBs) on May 17.

With an aim to soften the impact of the Covid second wave on small borrowers, the RBI this week announced a special long term repo operation (SLTRO) window for small finance banks and allowed classifying on-lending by small finance

banks to microfinance as priority sector lending. The special liquidity window to the tune of Rs 10,000 crore to SFBs, through SLTRO will be available at the repo rate. This Rs 10,000 crore facility is to be deployed for fresh lending with a maximum ticket size of Rs 10 lakh per borrower and would be available till October 31, 2021.

The RBI said it will conduct one auction for SLTRO each month. The unutilised portion of notified Rs 10,000 crore will be carried forward in each subsequent auction until fully utilised.

the incremental funding can potentially increase bed capacity in the country by 15-20 per cent. "As many as 354 Crisil-rated companies with aggregate bank exposure of Rs 40,000 crore will be eligible for such loans. Though pharmaceutical firms account for 68 per cent of rated bank exposure, hospitals at around 24 per cent of rated exposure are likely to avail majority of the funding available," said the rating agency.

The borrowing cost of hospitals rated by Crisil are 10.5-11 per cent and the new loans taken for expansion under this RBI scheme could be 300-350 basis points cheaper, leading to substantial interest

savings.

Subodh Rai, chief ratings officer, Crisil Ratings said, "Increased availability of funds at low cost will incentivise hospitals to augment beds, oxygen storage, ICUs and critical medical equipment. Even if half of the funding available is used to add hospital beds through brownfield expansion, it will mean about 5 lakh incremental beds, or 15-20 per cent of India's current capacity."

In comparison, for entities in other health care related sectors such as pharmaceuticals, the capital requirements for enhancing production capacity of critical Covid-19 related drugs is not very high.

LIC RELAXES CLAIM SETTLEMENT REQUIREMENTS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Keeping in view the safety of its customers in the current pandemic situation, Life Insurance Corporation of India said it has relaxed claim settlement requirements to make the processes easier and hassle free.

"To facilitate a speedy settlement of death claims in the prevailing situation where death has occurred in a hospital, in lieu of Municipal death certificates, LIC has allowed alternate proofs of death," the life insurance behemoth said in a statement. The alternate proof of death, which will be accepted by LIC include, discharge summary or death summary containing a clear date and time of death issued by hospitals run by government or ESI or Armed Forces or any corporate.

The company, however, said such hospital issued the certificate should be counter-signed by a LIC Class I officer or a Development Officer with 10 years standing along with cremation or burial certificate or authentic identifying receipt issued by the relevant authority. In other cases, the municipal death certificate will be required as earlier. For annuities with the return of capital options, the insurer said the production of life certificate is waived for annuities due up to October 31, 2021.

— Bloomberg

SONOVA BUYS SENNHEISER'S CONSUMER BIZ

New Delhi, May 7: German audio solutions maker Sennheiser on Friday said its consumer business will be acquired by Swiss firm Sonova Holding AG. The global provider of medical hearing solutions will fully take over Sennheiser's consumer electronics business, a statement said. Subject to regulatory approval, the plan is to complete the transfer of the business to Sonova by the end of 2021, it added.

With the takeover of the Sennheiser consumer business, Sonova is adding headphones and soundbars to its hearing care portfolio, which includes hearing aids and cochlear implants, among other hearing solutions.

TATA MOTORS HIKES PRICES BY 1.8%

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 7

Tata Motors on Friday announced that it will be hiking prices of its range of cars and SUVs by up to 1.8 per cent, depending on the model and variant, with effect from May 8.

The price rise was in order to partially offset the rise in input costs.

Increase in prices of

commodities, such as steel and precious metals, necessitates us to pass on a part of it through increase in price of our products," said Shailesh Chandra, president-passenger vehicles business, Tata Motors. Other car-makers have also raised prices recently, including Maruti Suzuki, Renault India, MG Motors, Toyota Kisloskar and M&M and Volvo Car India.

WHATSAPP SCRAPS MAY 15 DEADLINE FOR PRIVACY POLICY

STUTI ROY & MOUMITA BAKSHI CHATTERJEE NEW DELHI, MAY 7

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

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

A WhatsApp spokesperson said no accounts will be deleted on May 15 for not accepting the policy update.

"No accounts will be deleted on May 15 because of this update and no one in India will lose functionality of WhatsApp either. We will follow up with reminders to people over the next several weeks," the spokesperson said in an emailed response to a query on Friday.

The spokesperson added that while a "majority of users who have received the new terms of service have accepted them", some people have not had the chance to do so yet. But the company neither clarified the reason behind the decision nor divulged the number of users who have accepted the terms so far.

In January this year, WhatsApp had informed users about the changes in its terms of service and public policy through an in-app notification. — PTI

India's Covid relief comes to \$302 per capita: ADB

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 7

India's over \$410 billion Covid-19 relief package ranks as the second biggest among Asia's developing countries, but this, when translated to per capita relief, slips many places down the ladder.

Among ADB's developing members, the top three packages are those of China at \$2.3 trillion, India at \$412 billion and the Republic of Korea at \$248 billion.

However, the per capita package in India is a low \$302 against \$15,629 in Singapore, \$4,799 in Republic of Korea, \$2,528 in Malaysia, \$1,658 in China and \$1,208 in Thailand.

"If we look at ADB's developing members, we see large countries such as India or Indonesia with seemingly small packages per capita of \$302 and \$426, respective-



ly," the Asian Development Bank said in its study.

However, whether a package on a per capita basis is adequate to address the Covid-19 pandemic is a difficult question with no easy answer. It depends on the government's objectives, both with respect to the pandemic and other economic objectives like fear of running a fiscal deficit and how it perceives the situation, it added.

India allocated 38.6 per cent share of its total package for liquidity support, which includes short-term lending to the

private sector, regulatory adjustments to liquidity requirements and foreign exchange operations. India's actions included increased short-term repurchase agreements (0.1 per cent of GDP), variable-term repurchase agreements (0.5 per cent of GDP) and special refinancing facilities for rural banks, housing finance companies and small enterprises (0.2 per cent of GDP).

Among ADB developing members, China and India allocated the largest amounts to direct income support to households and individuals at \$1.3 trillion and \$194.4 billion, respectively.

In India direct income support makes up 10.9 per cent of the total package. Other actions implemented by India include subsidies for businesses, investments in health institutions and programmes for the agriculture sector.

IMF to revisit India's growth forecast

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 7

Considering the recent surge in Covid cases, the IMF will be revisiting India's growth forecast in July. The fund finds that the downside risks predicted by it are now materialising.

The IMF, in its April World Economic Outlook, had envisaged an economic recovery in India, with growth projected at around

12.5 per cent in FY22. "The recent upsurge in Covid-19 cases implies that downside risks, which we had also spoken of at that time, are materialising. So, we are following these developments very closely, and we will be revisiting that growth forecast in our World Economic Outlook update, which will be forthcoming in July, so not too far off in the distance, but we will be looking at that again," IMF spokesman

Gerry Rice told reporters. While making the growth forecast in April, IMF's chief economist Gita Gopinath had said that Covid-19 still posed a downside risk.

"We're all watching what is happening in India with concern. And I think really what the economic impact will be will really of course depend on the path of the pandemic and how long this serious situation goes on for," said Rice.

Patents: Pharma has limited legal options

EVEN WITH WAIVERS, EXTRA VACCINES MAY BE A YEAR AWAY

JAMES PATON & TIM LOH MAY 7

The US-backed effort to waive patent protection for Covid-19 vaccines, even if successful, is unlikely to narrow a yawning gap in access to life-saving shots anytime soon.

The proposal faces weeks of difficult negotiations and intense push-back from the pharmaceutical industry. And if it were to be approved at the World Trade Organization, it could take a year or more to meaningfully increase supplies, vaccine specialists said.

"The short answer is no, it's not going to make any big difference," said Klaus Stohr, a former World Health Organization official who helped mobilise governments and drug-makers to prepare for pandemics. "Patents are not the real hurdle. It's the

understanding of complex technology."

The Biden administration won plaudits from health advocacy groups for backing what they describe as an important step toward achieving equitable access to vaccines, and the European Union and China signalled willingness to take part in the debate. However, German Chancellor Angela Merkel appears opposed to the proposal.

"The limiting factor for the production of vaccines are manufacturing capacities and high quality standards, not the patents," a German government spokeswoman said in an email.

Even if companies diverted resources and know-how in a "full-blown technology transfer," it wouldn't make a difference before the middle of 2022, said Stohr, a former

executive at drugmaker Novartis AG. Countries with ample supplies could help more quickly by committing to increased exports and publishing when and how much they can share, Stohr said.

To boost production, the priorities should be addressing a lack of key materials and components needed to make vaccines, adding manufacturing lines and more sharing of expertise to support technology transfers, said Rajeev Venkayya, president of Takeda Pharmaceutical Company's vaccines business.

"It's important for the world to be focused on the more complex issues of scaling up manufacturing rather than spending time on patents," said Venkayya, who worked in the Bush administration to develop a US pandemic flu plan. — Bloomberg

lary in less developed nations.

"Under the law they can get just and reasonable compensation for the use of their patented inventions" by another company in the US. However, when trying to make up for losses from an international manufacturer producing the vaccine overseas, the lawsuit avenue isn't available.

"A lot of conduct outside the country wouldn't be covered," Howell said.

Drugmakers such as AstraZeneca PLC have pledged not to profit from

their vaccines for the length of the pandemic, while Moderna has said it won't enforce its patents during the pandemic. The companies have contracts with governments around the world to deliver vaccines at a set price.

The US may seek to limit the waiver to just the rights to produce the vaccine, but some WTO members, like India, also want access to manufacturing and distribution developments spawned by the rush to develop and deliver vaccines. "The pharmaceutical

industry has legitimate concerns about India's proposal, because the manufacturing and distribution innovations aren't just limited to producing the Covid vaccine," said Polk Wagner, a professor of intellectual property at the University of Pennsylvania.

"I don't know how they would legally stop this moving forward, because it just becomes a decision by the WTO," said Ellen 't Hoen, director of Medicines Law & Policy, a legal research group in the Netherlands. — Bloomberg

CYBER RISKS \$1.3 tn fund hires self-taught persons without a formal education

Norway fund in desperate search of cyber experts

LARS ERIK TARALDSEN MAY 7

Norway's sovereign wealth fund is widening its recruitment net to include people without college degrees as it searches for the brightest minds to protect its \$1.3 trillion portfolio from growing armies of hackers.

Nicolai Tangen, the Oslo-based fund's CEO, says he

occasionally picks up the phone himself to "encourage good candidates to apply," as part of the recruitment process. The kinds of attacks the fund encounters are "more and more sophisticated. The powers we're up against are huge," he said. "There's a lot of money in this fund, so it's a precious target."

Hackers attempted to breach the fund's systems



more than 1,000 times in 2020, representing a doubling from the previous year, Tangen said in an interview.

The 54-year-old CEO says

he's also interested in talking to ethical hackers.

The focus on cyber security has prompted the fund to rethink some of its traditional recruitment requirements. "In general, we're more open than we used to be," said Ada Magnaes, head of HR. Now applicants won't be expected to have the kinds of university or college degrees normally needed

to get past the screening process.

She says Norges Bank Investment Management - the fund's official name - has already hired people in Singapore and New York who were "without a formal education, practically self-taught."

"They've got exactly the mindset and the attitude we're looking for," she said. — Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Abid, Azhar put Pak in command

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

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

Nadal beaten in Madrid quarters

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

Laureus awards for Rafa, Osaka

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

Hazard sorry for upsetting Real fans

Madrid: Eden Hazard apologized to Real Madrid fans after he was seen laughing and joking with Chelsea players following the team's elimination in the Champions League. A video of the Madrid forward having fun with his former teammates after Madrid's loss on Wednesday attracted a lot of attention in Spain, upsetting fans who loudly complained against him on social media. Hazard was one of the Madrid players who performed poorly in the 2-0 defeat in London. "I am sorry. I have read lots of opinions about me today and it was not my intention to offend the Real Madrid fans," Hazard said in a statement on Instagram. "It has always been my dream to play for Real Madrid and I came here to win. The season is not over and together we must now battle or La Liga! Hala Madrid!" — AP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

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

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

FORMULA ONE

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

UFC FIGHT NIGHT

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

Pat bats for safety

Says if India is unsafe for T20 World Cup, shift to UAE is ideal

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

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

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

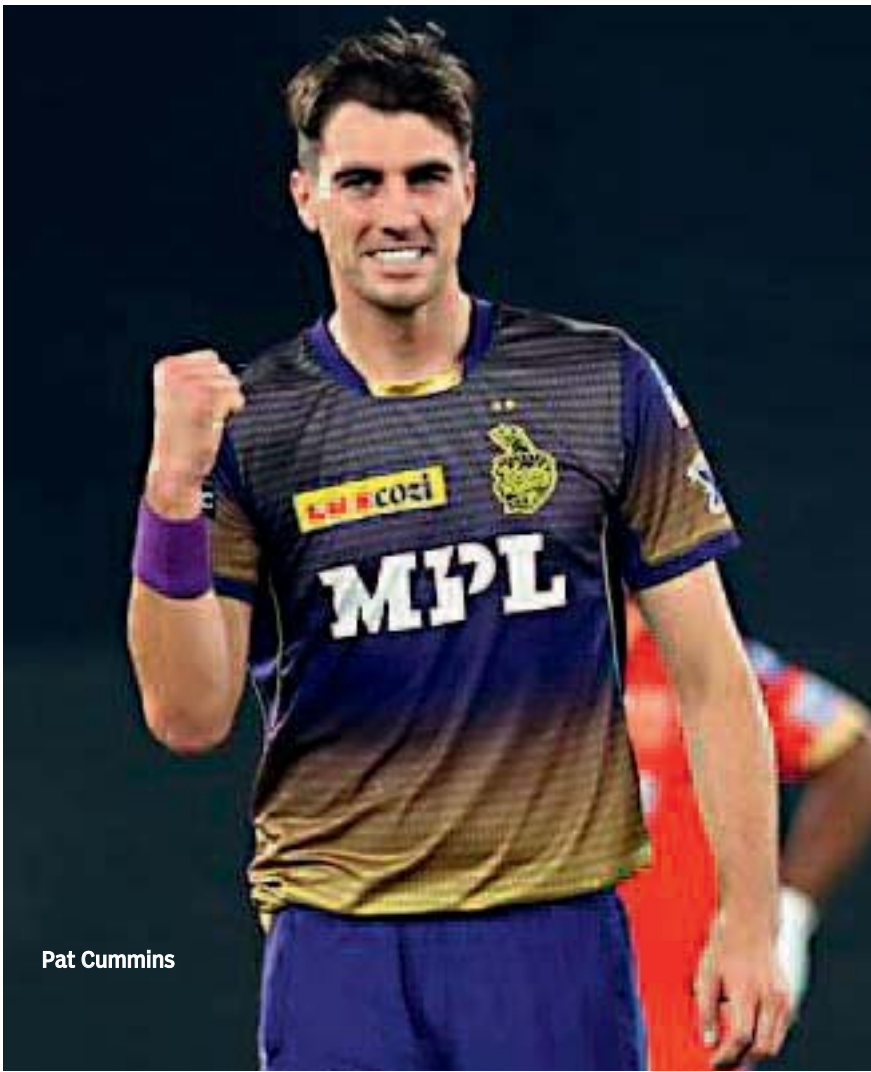
Cummins said cricket authorities should check with Indian government and do what's best.

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

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

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

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



Morris "relieved" after leaving bubble

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

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

"Look, obviously I'm

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

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

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

us," he said.

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

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

"I was chatting to our team doctor, whose room

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

ENGLAND | TOUR

No Hardik, Jadeja makes comeback

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INDIAN ROWING TEAM BOOK OLYMPIC BERTH

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

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

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

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

'NO ATMOSPHERE OF OLYMPIC BUILD-UP'

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

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

Seema & Sumit seal Tokyo spots

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

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

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

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

The 29-year-old is the fourth Indian to qualify for the Games after celebrated Vinesh Phogat (53kg), Anshu Malik (57kg) and Sonam Malik (62kg). It will be first time that four Indian women wrestlers will compete in the Olympics. In the 2016 edition, three Indian women



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

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

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

— PTI

Emery gets Arsenal revenge

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

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

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

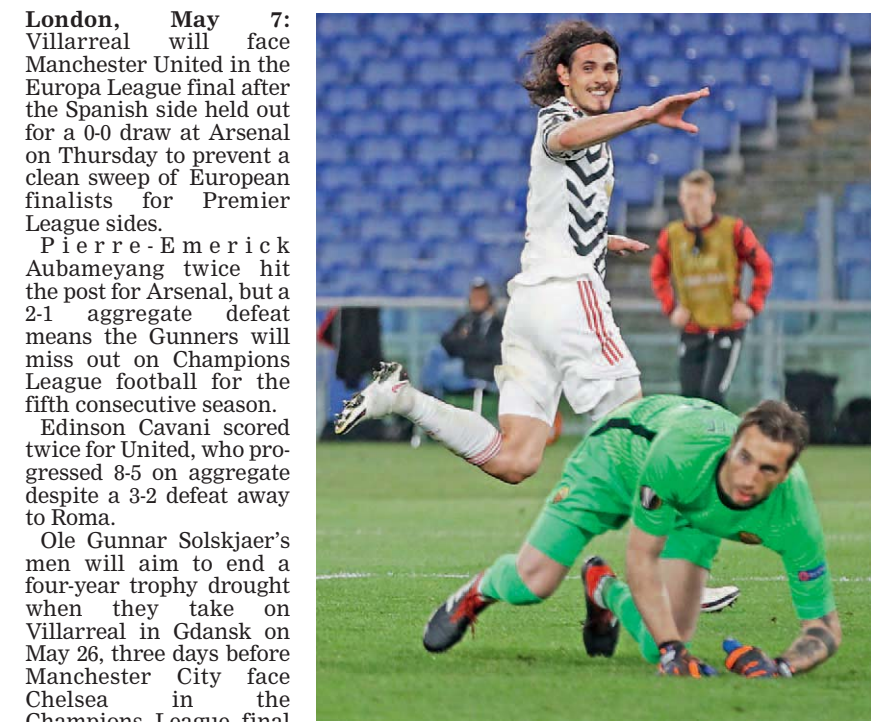
Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men will aim to end a four-year trophy drought when they take on Villarreal in Gdansk on May 26, three days before Manchester City face Chelsea in the Champions League final on May 29.

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

But former Gunners' boss Unai Emery got revenge for his sacking after just 18 months as Arsene Wenger's successor by leading Villarreal to their first European final.

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

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



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

Saina, Srikanth's Olympic hopes take hit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

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