


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | THURSDAY | 3 JUNE 2021

WEATHER

 **Max:** 37.0°C
Min: 28.0°C
RH: 69%
Rainfall: One mm

Forecast: Humid and Partly Cloudy.
Max/Min temp. 39/29 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Bahula Navami till 2.23 am (Friday)

Star: Purvabhadra till 6.38 pm
Varjyam: From 5.06 am (Friday)
Durmuhurtam: 10.04 am to 10.56 am; 3.16 pm to 4.08 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm

HJRI CALENDAR
Shawwal 21, 1442 AH

PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5:25 am
Zohar: 1:30 pm
Asar: 5:00 pm
Maghrib: 6:26 pm
Isha: 8:30 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.28 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.33 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 00.54 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 13.42 AM

COUNTER POINT



Now, every day is bicycle day... we can't afford petrol!

SHORT TAKES

Arun Mishra to head NHRC

New Delhi: Former Supreme Court judge justice Arun Mishra on Wednesday took charge as the new chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, official sources said. The post had been lying vacant since justice H.L. Dattu, ex-chief justice of India, had completed his tenure in December 2020. "Justice Arun Mishra today joined as the new chairperson of the NHRC. One panel member also joined," the sources said.

BCI panel to fix law exams mode

New Delhi: The Bar Council of India has constituted a 'high level expert committee' to decide the method of examination and evaluation for LL.B students in view of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The apex bar body said the committee was formed in view of requests of several students from across the country, including 273 from the Faculty of Law, Delhi University (DU).

CEC pushes for new voters

New Delhi: Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra has made a fresh push with the government to allow multiple dates in a year for citizens turning 18 to register themselves as voters. As of now, an individual who has attained the age of 18 years as on January 1 of that year, or before is eligible to be enrolled in the voters' list.

'Dead' woman returns alive

Vijayawada: A curious situation has arisen here after a major goof-up by health officials. An aged woman presumed dead with Covid-19 walked back home alive, as her family members and local residents watched her return with a mix of emotions — shock and scare, followed by surprise and joy. The 75-year-old Muthyala Girijamma, a resident of Christianpet at Jaggayyapeta in Krishna district, had been infected with Covid19 and was undergoing treatment at the GGH here since May 12.

■ Report on Page x



WORLD | 5

Iran's largest warship sinks in fire

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SPORTS | 8

Big guns advance at French Open

TABLOID

'I am not single. However, I am far away from marriage'



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Mega housing works set to kick off today

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

The state of Andhra Pradesh is set to create a new record with the launch of construction work on a massive number of 15.6 lakh houses on Thursday.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will virtually launch the YSR Jagananna Colonies project across the state. An amount of ₹28,084 crore has been earmarked for this phase.

As promised in the election manifesto, the Jagan Mohan Reddy government has targeted to complete the 'Pedalandhariki Illu' scheme by June 2023. In both the phases, as many as 28,30,227 houses will be constructed at a cost of ₹50,944 crore. In the phase-2, 12.7 lakh houses would be constructed. While the first phase is set for completion by June 2022, the second phase will be completed by June 2023.

It may be recalled that the state government had already set a record even in distribution of house sites to about 30.76 lakh beneficiaries.

Of the 8,905 layouts in the first phase, 11.26 lakh houses are being constructed as YSR Jagananna Colonies. Similarly, construction of 2,92,984 houses is being started for the beneficiaries with their own land



Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

along with 1,40,465 houses for the beneficiaries with allotted land.

The Chief Minister says the government envisages new towns will emerge with these layouts. Authorities have been directed to focus on infrastructure facilities with an expenditure of ₹32,909 crore. The government is spending ₹4,128 crore on drinking water, ₹22,587 crore on roads and drainage, ₹4,986 crore on power supply, ₹627 crore on internet and ₹567 crore on other facilities.

Each house with a uniform design will be built in 340 square feet area with a bedroom, hall, kitchen, bathroom and porch.

Also each house is provided with two fans, two tube lights, four bulbs, and a plastic tank. The mapping and registration required for the construction of houses have already been completed

● **THE JAGAN** government has targeted to complete the 'Pedalandhariki Illu' scheme by June 2023. In both the phases, as many as 28,30,227 houses will be constructed at a cost of ₹50,944 crore.

● **EACH HOUSE** will be built in 340 square feet area with a bedroom, hall, kitchen, bathroom and porch.

and geo-tagging works are in the final stages.

It is estimated that the housing programme will provide 21.70 crore mandays of employment to labourers. Also, large-scale construction work will provide employment to masons, rod vendors, carpenters, electricians, bricklayers and cement sellers.

In another kind gesture, even as the prices of building materials are skyrocketing, the government has taken a decision to provide the material at affordable prices. Reverse tendering has even been done to supply quality materials below market price so as not to burden the beneficiaries. The government has set up warehouses at the village and the mandal levels to store cement and other materials for the construction works.

■ **Page 2: Three options given to beneficiaries**

GLOBAL FLIGHTS RESUME FROM VIJAYAWADA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Vijayawada International Airport has resumed operation of international flights destined to the Gulf nations such as Dubai, Kuwait, Muscat and Singapore from Wednesday after a gap of nearly two months since April 3.

Though a scheduled international flight was supposed to arrive at the airport on Tuesday itself, it was cancelled at the last minute. However, on Wednesday, an international flight from Dubai carrying 68 passengers including children, arrived at the Vijayawada International Airport marking the resumption of international flights from the airport at about 6 pm and the flight departed with a few passengers bound to Mumbai after some time.

■ **Page 2: Flight schedule for June completed**

Land survey by June 2023: Jagan

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has instructed officials to complete the first-of-its-kind comprehensive land survey programme in the state by June 2023. He conducted a review meeting on YSR Jagananna Saswatha Bhu Hakku — Bhu Raksha scheme at the CM camp office at Tadepalli on Wednesday.

The CM said that the survey would be conducted in three phases and directed the officials to procure required modern survey equipment for a smooth conduct of the programme. He noted that the survey work was moving at a slow pace due to the prevailing Covid situation and asked the officials to make suitable arrangements to complete the survey in the stipulated time. He called for regular review meetings and urged the officials to work with dedication to complete the project.

● **THE CM** said that the survey would be conducted in three phases and directed the officials to procure required modern survey equipment for a smooth conduct of the programme.

He also said that the registration process be continued in secretariats. He directed the officials to expedite comprehensive land survey in urban areas as well. He insisted that once the survey is completed, clear titles should be given and there should not be any scope for land disputes.

The officials said they set up 70 base stations till now and they are working with complete accuracy. They said they would set up more ground stations with the help of Survey of India and also use drones wherever needed.

■ **Page 2: Pilot project is almost ready**

SC asks Centre why not give vaccine free for all

Says government policy is irrational, asks for purchase data

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 2

The Supreme Court on Wednesday slammed the Centre for asking it to keep its hands off the Covid vaccination policy and termed the government's decision to provide free vaccination to 45-plus, health care and frontline workers in Phase I, but in Phase II allowing private hospitals to charge those in 18-45 group as "irrational" and "arbitrary". In a stern order, the top court asked the Centre to furnish details of the purchase of all vaccines — Covaxin, Covishield and Sputnik V — till date, including "file notings reflecting its thinking and culminating in the vaccination policy", dates of all procurement orders placed and the quantity of vaccines procured. It also asked the Centre to "place on record a roadmap of projected availability of vaccines till December 31, 2021".

Saying that the issue of vaccination is absolutely essential and is the "singular

Vaccine for all below 45 yrs going abroad

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

The Andhra Pradesh government will administer anti-Covid-19 jab to students and employees aged below 45 years and going abroad for study or work.

Disclosing this here on Wednesday, principal secretary (health) Anil Kumar Singhal said that based on a direction from Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to vaccinate all those below 45 years going abroad for study and work in order to avoid any trouble to them. Guidelines had been

issued to District Collectors to provide vaccination to such people.

However, as some Collectors took to the notice of the government that some students and employees, who went abroad, were facing trouble as their vaccine certificate showed only their Aadhaar number, the government took it up with the Union ministry of health to make some changes in CoWIN app to accept passport number while issuing the vaccination certificate.

■ **Page 2: Centre agrees to make changes in CoWIN**

The top court also sought data on the percentage of population that was vaccinated, as against eligible persons in the first three phases.

"Policy of Centre for conducting free vaccination for groups under first two phases and replacing it with paid vaccination by states/UTs and private hospitals for persons in 18-44 years age group is prima facie arbitrary, irrational," said a special bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, L.N. Rao and S. Ravindra Bhat hearing a suo motu case on Covid-19 management.

Referring to the Union Budget for 2021-22 which earmarked ₹35,000 crore for procuring vaccines, the SC also asked Centre to clarify "how these funds have been spent so far and why these funds cannot be utilised for vaccinating all (free of cost) in the 18-44 group".

"While filing its affidavit, UoI shall also ensure that copies of all the documents and file notings reflecting its thinking and culminating in the vaccination policy are also annexed on the vaccination policy. Hence, we direct the UoI to file its affidavit within two weeks," the bench said.

AP REGISTERS 12,768 FRESH COVID-19 CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

The Andhra Pradesh state registered 12,768 fresh Coronavirus infections, showing a slight surge when compared with 11,308 cases on Tuesday. It saw 98 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported on Wednesday that out of 98,048 samples tested, 12,768 persons were found infected with confirmed Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,94,48,056 samples tested so far in the state, 17,17,156 persons were found infected with the virus and, of them, 15,62,220 recovered while 1,43,795 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, East Godavari topped the state with 2,703, followed by 1,551 in Chittoor, 1,506 in Anantapur, 1,052 in West Godavari, 844 in Visakhapatnam, 841 in Krishna, 785 in Nellore, 765 in Guntur, 734 in Prakasam, 699 in Kadapa, 561 in Srikakulam, 474 in Kurnool and 253 in Vizianagaram.

■ **Page 2: East Godavari still the worst affected**

The sinking ship



The sinking *MV X-Press Pearl* at Kapungoda where it is anchored off Colombo port, Sri Lanka on Wednesday. Salvage experts were trying to tow the fire-stricken container ship that had been loaded with chemicals into the deep sea as the vessel started to sink on Wednesday.

— AP

Daily cases fall to 1.33 lakh

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 2

India on Wednesday recorded nearly 1.33 lakh fresh cases of COVID-19 and 3, 207 fatalities in the last 24 hours.

This is the sixth day when less than 2 lakh daily new cases have been reported. With 17.94 lakh active cases, the viral caseload in India is below 20 lakh for two successive days now.

As per Union Health

Ministry, daily recoveries in the country continue to outnumber the daily new cases for the 20th consecutive day as 2.31 lakh people got discharged from medical supervision.

The Recovery Rate has now climbed to 92.48 per cent and the daily positivity rate is 6.57 per cent — less than 10 per cent for the last nine days.

National Capital Delhi reported 576 new cases and its positivity rate fell below 0.78 per cent. There

were 103 deaths and 1,287 recoveries in the last 24 hours in the city.

With a target to vaccinate the entire population by December this year, the Centre is moving fast on foreign vaccine approvals. It is learnt that the government has agreed to grant Pfizer and Moderna "partial" indemnity against legal proceedings and these two companies will soon apply for Emergency Use Authorisation of their vaccines.

ORDER | ORDER

Action results in periodic interruption of hearing in case related to 5G wireless technology

Man sings songs of Juhi's films at 5G hearing

New Delhi, June 2: Some of the hit songs of actress Juhi Chawla's movies made their way in the proceedings before the Delhi High Court on Wednesday when a man started singing them during the virtual hearing relating to the Bollywood star's plea against the 5G wireless network.

The action of the man resulted in the periodic interruption of hearing and on the judge's directions, the person was repeatedly removed from the hearing, but he kept on joining and started singing till the time the proceedings were locked. Chawla



also joined the virtual proceedings from South Africa.

The man, who was logging in the virtual hearing with different names first started singing *Ghoonghat ki aad mein dilbar ka didaar adhura* from her block buster movie *Hum*

hai rahi pyar ke and he was then removed.

He again joined the proceedings and started singing from her another hit film *Naajayaz Lal lal hoton pe gori kiska naam hai* Juhi Chawla' and was again removed from the hearing. The third time, he joined and sang *Meri banno ki aayegi baraath ke dhol bajao ji* from the movie *Aaina*. At the outset, the man was heard saying where is Juhi Ma'am I can't see her and when the judge asked the court master to mute the concerned person, he said you want to mute me. Oh really! Initially, he joined the

hearing with the name of Azaan, thereafter, changed name to Manisha Koirala and then to Janvi. The film star herself on her twitter account last evening had shared the link for joining the proceedings.

She had tweeted "if you do think this concerns you in anyway, feel free to join our first virtual hearing conducted at Delhi High Court to be held on 2nd June, 10.45 am onwards".

Justice J.R. Midha asked the court master to lock the proceedings and to contact Delhi Police and ask them to identify the person so that a contempt notice could be issued. —PTI

Actor's plea defective: Delhi HC

New Delhi, June 2: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday termed as defective the suit of actress-environmentalist Juhi Chawla against setting up of 5G wireless networks in the country and said it was filed for media publicity.

The court also questioned Chawla for filing the suit without giving any representation to the government on her concerns related to the technology.

Justice J.R. Midha said the plaintiffs, Chawla and

two others, were required to first approach the government for their rights and if denied, they should come to the court.

The court, which reserved order on the suit after hearing the arguments of various parties, also asked as to why as many as 33 parties have been added to the plaint and said it is not permitted under the law.

It is not the sweet will of the plaintiff to join as many parties and cause of action. Please see the

memo of parties. Tell me how you have joined them. Every party cannot be arrayed in the suit, the judge said.

The court further said, It is a defective plaint. This suit has been filed only for media publicity and nothing more than that. It is very shocking.

Did you approach the government with a representation? If yes, is there any denial?, the court asked to which the plaintiffs' counsel replied in negative. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

AP WILL BE RULED FROM VISAKHA SOON: VIJAYASAI

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 2

YSR Congress MP V. Vijayasai Reddy announced that the state would be administered from the executive capital of Visakhapatnam soon.

The MP along with Minister for Agriculture K. Kannababu told media persons here on Wednesday that the state government would make all requisite measures to start governance of the state from the steel city soon and added that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had a prerogative to govern the state from the place of his choice.

He ruled out any role in the pending CRDA case, with regard to relocation of administrative capital. The MP assured to develop the Steel City as slum-free and said that a six-lane road connecting Kailasigiri to Bhogapuram would be developed.

SPECIAL PANEL, TRIBUNAL SOUGHT FOR WAKF LANDS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Andhra Pradesh Ahle-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (APASWJ) has urged Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to initiate measures for protection of wakf lands by appointing a state level committee headed by a special officer and establishing a wakf tribunal to resolve disputes related to wakf lands.

In a letter to the CM, APASWJ state co-convenor Altaf Ali Raza said many wakf lands in the 13 districts of AP state have been encroached. He lamented that earlier governments did not take any measures for regaining the wakf lands from encroachers.

Welcoming the decision of Deputy Chief Minister Amrutha Basha on demolition of illegal structures on wakf lands, APASWJ co-convenor said 90 percent of wakf lands are in clutches of politicians and influential persons. Altaf Ali Raza said CM Jagan should get these lands freed for the welfare of Muslim minorities, who have supported YSRC in the elections.

DOCTOR PLEADS WITH RAJNATH TO SNUB RAJU

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

A prominent doctor in the city has addressed a letter to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, stating that the letter of MP K. Raghunath Ramakrishna Raju against the military hospital at Secunderabad has hurt the sentiments of defense families.

Dr. Naga Radhakrishna Ambati said that Raju in his letter made baseless allegations against the military hospital where he was admitted for medical examination as per the Supreme Court guidelines. He said, "As a defence family member and doctor, painfully I would like to bring to your kind notice that the baseless allegations made by him against a serving officer of the military hospital have seriously hurt the sentiments of the defence families."

CM JAGAN URGED TO PROMOTE HINDI UNDER NEP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Welcoming the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) in AP, Hindi Sevadan Mahavidyalaya (HSM) has requested Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to initiate measures for sanctioning Hindi posts in schools, junior and degree colleges for the promotion of the national language.

HSM founder and general secretary S. Gaibuvalli said that Hindi is a national language which would create employment for youth at national level and, hence, the state government should take measures for its promotion.

Gaibuvalli deplored that the earlier government neglected the Hindi language as it did not sanction Hindi teacher posts in Adarsha, Gurukul and welfare schools in the state and a similar situation prevailed in junior and degree colleges.



Cops have a tough time managing crowds at an urban primary health centre during the vaccination drive at Chinnawaltair in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. —P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Bifurcation blues now haunt AP's Met Centre

Officials await capital works to plan permanent facility

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Bifurcation blues still haunt Andhra Pradesh as its Meteorological Centre located at Amaravati for weather forecast lacks a permanent building. At present, it is being accommodated on a private university campus.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) set up a meteorological centre at Amaravati for Andhra Pradesh in December 2018 and the authorities paid ₹1 crore for acquiring an acre of land at Thullur to develop permanent infrastructure to accommodate it. A ground plus two storied building was planned for setting up the met centre.

The met centre authorities say that as the capital city for AP was planned to be developed at Amaravati, they were

● **THE MET** centre authorities say that as the capital city for AP was planned to be developed at Amaravati, they were eagerly waiting for its development so that they would take up the construction of their permanent office at Thullur. They say that as they require infrastructure like roads, drains and other amenities to come up at the capital city, they are not going ahead with any works.

eagerly waiting for its development so that they would take up the construction of their permanent office at Thullur. They say that as they require infrastructure like roads, drains and other amenities to come up at the capital city, they are not going ahead with any works.

But the authorities are silent on the state government's plans to relocate the administrative capital to Visakhapatnam while keeping the legislative capital at Amaravati and the judicial capital in Kurnool.

However, they say that as

letins at regular intervals in a day for the benefit of the all the stakeholders.

Fortunately, the Met Centre seems to be having no issues of shortage of manpower including technical personnel to operate it, similar on lines of some other departments in the aftermath of split of AP to form a new Telangana state on June 2, 2004 and also finances as funds get allocated from the Centre.

AP Meteorological Centre head S. Stella said, "We are operating the Met Centre sanctioned to AP to be set up at capital city Amaravati, from a private accommodation at present and as we purchased land at Thullur, we will develop permanent structure once requisite infrastructure is developed at Amaravati. We have been successfully carrying out our weather forecast with no issues."

Special Covid care for electricity staff sought

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

The electricity department employees are seeking administering of Covid-19 vaccine to all, reservation of beds in the hospitals and treatment on the lines NTPC is following, ₹50 lakh insurance facility and ₹30 lakh ex gratia in case of deaths.

The AP Electricity Engineers Association lamented that electricity employees were brought under the essential services but the government is

reluctant to give them priority for vaccination and treatment facilities on par with other frontline departments.

APEEA president G.N. Reddy, general secretary P. Sridhar and adviser M. Srinivas said that the NTPC is taking several supportive measures for employees who were infected with Covid-19 and fight against the spread of the Covid-19 in an encouraging way.

They said that according to the ESMA Act-1971, power sector employees are considered as emergency service and they are making endless efforts to maintain round-the-clock power supply to hospitals, oxygen companies, water supply, diagnostic centres and other essential services amidst pandemic which is a big threat to them and their families.

They stated that the government had administered vaccine to frontline people like doctors, police, nurses, revenue and others but did not offer the same to electricity department employees who were also considered as frontline staff.

DOCTORS RESUME WORK AS GOVT TO CONSIDER PLEAS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Following an assurance from the state government to consider their demands, senior resident doctors and junior doctors have deferred their boycott of all duties including Covid care by a week and resumed work in the

state on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, representatives from AP Senior Resident Doctor Association and AP Junior Doctors' Association were invited for talks with the Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das, Principal Secretary (Health) Anil Kumar Singhal and Director of

Medical Education M. Raghavendra Rao.

The doctors said that their demands were heard positively by the government officials and the Chief Secretary assured to take the issue to the notice of the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and resolve the issue in seven days.

THREE OPTIONS GIVEN TO BENEFICIARIES

From Page 1

The government is procuring 69.7 lakh tonnes of cement, 7.44 lakh tonnes of steel, 310 lakh tonnes of sand and other materials for the initial construction.

The government will also provide 20 tonnes of sand at free of cost from nearby sand rigs for the construction works.

Further, the government has given three options to the beneficiaries, and made it clear that the beneficiary can make his own decision.

In the first option, the government will supply the quality construction materials required to build the house and will also pay for the labour charges, where the beneficiaries can build the house on their own. In the second option, the beneficiaries can bring the construction materials required for the construction of the house themselves and build a house as per their interests.

The government will make payments to the beneficiaries' bank accounts in a phased manner depending on the construction progress.

In the third option, the government shall build the house, taking the entire responsibility of the building materials needed.

PILOT PROJECT IS ALMOST READY

From Page 1

The pilot project was almost ready and would be conducted in 4,800 villages in the first phase. They said they would complete a comprehensive land survey in those villages and purification of records would be done from December 2020 to March 2021 and then a draft would be printed.

Regarding land surveys in urban local bodies, the officials informed that they started a survey at Tadepalligudem in West Godavari district. They said surveys would be conducted in 41 towns and cities in phase 1 from June 2021 to January 2022, and phase 2 would begin in February 2022 in 42 towns and cities. It would be completed by October 2022. The phase 3 would begin in November 2022 in 41 towns and cities and would be over by April 2023.

Deputy Chief Minister (Revenue) Dharman Krishna Das, Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, Chief Minister's Principal Advisor Ajeya Kallam, Land Administration Chief Commissioner Neerab Kumar Prasad, Municipal Administration Special Chief Secretary Y. Srilakshmi, Revenue Special Chief Secretary Rajat Bhargava, Finance Principal Secretary S.S. Rawat, Panchayat Raj Principal Secretary Gopala Krishna Dwivedi, Principal Secretary V. Usha Rani and other officials were present.

Covid-hit woman presumed dead, walks back home

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

A curious situation has arisen here after a major goof-up by health officials. An aged woman presumed dead with Covid-19 walked back home alive, as her family members and local residents watched her return with a mix of emotions — shock and scare, followed by surprise and joy.

The 75-year-old Muthyala Girijamma, a resident of Christianpet at Jaggayapeta in Krishna district, had been infected with Covid19 and was undergoing treatment at the GGH here since May 12. Her husband Gaddayya used to come to the hospital repeatedly to enquire after her condition.

On May 15, when he went to the hospital, he failed to find her in the Covid ward. When he inquired with the hospital staff, he was told that it meant she had succumbed to the infection. He went to the mortuary, collected the body of an aged woman, presuming that it was his wife, and took it to his home village, Jaggayapeta. The last rites were performed as per family traditions the same day.

With curbs having been imposed on performing the last rites on the Covid-dead, neither the family nor the villagers removed the tight wrapping on the

woman's entire body before conducting the last rites.

It so happened that her son Ramesh, 35, also died due to Coronavirus while in treatment at a hospital in Khammam on May 23.

The family members and the villagers conducted a memorial service for the loss of both the family members and condoled their death at the event in the village on June 1.

A pall of gloom hung over the village. However, a day later, on Wednesday afternoon, the elderly woman reached back home, giving a huge shock to her husband and others in the surroundings.

She explained to them that she recovered from the infection and was discharged from the GGH in the morning.

She told her family members, "I was very disappointed when no family member came to the hospital to take me home after my discharge. The hospital offered me ₹3,000 for transport to return home and take further care of my health."

With this, the family members and villagers recovered from the shock and surprise and it turned out to be a joyous occasion to all.

Repeated attempts to contact government hospital medical superintendent Dr. K. Sivasankar Rao to elicit his version on the issue proved futile.

TD THREATENS LEGAL BATTLE FOR SSC EXAMS CANCELLATION

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Telugu Desam MLC Nara Lokesh on Wednesday demanded the outright cancellation of Class 10 and Intermediate examinations in Andhra Pradesh just as the Central government scrapped the board examinations at the national level.

Lokesh threatened to launch another legal battle on behalf of the students if the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime did not change its "arrogant" and

adamant attitude. He objected to the CM not taking proactive steps for rescuing the AP students when the PM himself was reviewing and taking decisions on cancellation of examinations in view of the continuing threat from Coronavirus.

Addressing a virtual meeting with students, parents and student associations, Lokesh said the PM was finding time to hold review meetings on the students' issues but the AP CM was not caring to do so.

SUSPENDED JUNIOR CIVIL JUDGE SHIFTED TO PILER SUB-JAIL

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 2

Junior Civil Judge S. Ramakrishna was on Wednesday shifted from the Chittoor sub-jail to another sub-jail in Piler for security reasons. Ramakrishna is under suspension and was arrested and remanded to the sub-jail in Chittoor on charges of making derogatory and threatening remarks against Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in April this year.

Ramakrishna, who is known for levelling accusations against panchayat raj minister P. Reddy Ramachandra Reddy was arrested by the police following a complaint filed against him by a

YSRC functionary citing his remarks during a news debate on television in April this year. He allegedly called the CM 'Narakasura', saying that he would not mind taking his life.

Soon after his comments went viral, a YSRC functionary lodged a complaint with Pileru police. Ramakrishna was booked under various acts.

Following his arrest, Ramakrishna has been lodged at the Chittoor sub-jail on remand. However, his son recently approached the Andhra Pradesh High Court with a plea to "shift his father to the sub-jail in Piler, as there was a threat to his father's life at the sub-jail in Chittoor."

WATER | SUPPLY

Minister Anil Kumar reviews the pace of project works with senior officials

Polavaram water for kharif 2022: Minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

The Andhra Pradesh government has assured water supply for crops from Polavaram irrigation project for the kharif season in 2022.

Minister for water resources P. Anil Kumar Yadav reviewed the progress of Polavaram irrigation project with senior officials and the executing agency MEIL, at the project site at Polavaram in West Godavari on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, he said the government was committed to the supply of water for the kharif season in 2022 as assured by the Chief Minister Y.S.

● **OFFICIALS INFORM** that the existing command area spread over 23 lakh acres would be stabilised besides seven lakh acres in the new command area under the Left Main Canal in time. With this, nearly 30 lakh acres will get water from Polavaram project during the kharif 2022.

and downstream, to enable construction of the main dam i.e., earth-cum-rock-fill-dam. Water will be supplied through Polavaram spillway through Dowleswaram barrage to nearly 10 lakh acres in the command area from June 15 for the kharif season as

the southwest monsoon is becoming active in the state.

The minister slammed the former Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for failing to take up the construction of a diaphragm wall across the river to facilitate the construction of the main dam, as it was damaged for want of proper planning. He asked the former CM whether it should not be considered as his inefficiency and wondered how the previous TD could cover up such lapses and criticise the YSRC government which was committed to the timely completion of the project.

Irrigation authorities said that a nearly 180

metre stretch of diaphragm wall suffered partial damage on its surface following impact of high velocity water gushing out through gaps of cofferdam. They said that they thought of closure of the cofferdam gaps upstream while taking up construction of the diaphragm wall, but failed to do so for various reasons.

The minister directed the authorities to take experts' advice to go ahead with the repair works to the diaphragm wall in an expeditious manner. He also instructed the officials to expedite rehabilitation of Polavaram project affected people to their newly set-up colonies. He

said that though they thought of completing the construction of 17,000 houses in the rehabilitation centres by April, they could not do so as they were facing thousands of cases from the people in both the Godavari districts. However, he assured to complete the rehabilitation of all project-affected people in this season without fail.

The minister lauded the officials, engineers and workers who were working at the project, braving the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic. He took a dig at former CM Naidu and his son Lokesh for staying at home and holding virtual meets to secure their own lives.

SHORT TAKES

WILD ELEPHANTS
WREAK HAVOC IN
CHITTOOR DISTDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 2

A herd of wild elephants has been creating a flutter, raiding crops and plantations in Mandapeta and Kodur villages in Palamaner mandal in Chittoor district.

According to reports, farmers and villagers are living in fear as they are frequently witnessing nearly 39 wild pachyderms crossing roads and roaming in human habitations for the past two days. The herd was first spotted near Mandapeta in the late hours of Tuesday when they were crossing a road.

Villagers said that the wild pachyderms, which ventured into the farmlands on Tuesday night, continued attacking them even on Wednesday and damaged a large extent of crops.

They alleged that despite informing the forest official several times about the elephant menace, no concrete measure was taken to ward off the animals into the forest.

The forest officials, however, maintain that they roped in drum-beaters and took measures to scare away the tuskers back into the forests. They asked villagers to move only in groups and assured to prevent any further crop damage by the elephants.

EAST GODAVARI
STILL THE WORST
AFFECTED

From page 1

East Godavari continues to be the worst-hit in the highest number of total Coronavirus active cases at 29,791, followed by 18,695 in Prakasam, 17,706 in Chittoor, 11,889 in Nellore, 11,685 in Visakhapatnam, 10,123 in Krishna, 10,708 in West Godavari, 10,123 in Krishna, 8,732 in Guntur, 8,248 in Srikakulam, 4,358 in Vizianagaram, 4,120 in Kadapa, 4,001 in Anantapur and 3,739 in Kurnool.

With regard to daily cases of deaths of Coronavirus infected patients, Chittoor reported the highest at 15 followed by 10 in Nellore, nine in West Godavari, eight each in Anantapur, East Godavari and Vizianagaram, seven each in Guntur, Prakasam and Srikakulam, six in Visakhapatnam, five in Krishna and four each in Kadapa and Kurnool. With this, the death toll soared to 11,132.

The state health authorities discharged 15,612 Coronavirus infected patients after recovery in the last 24 hours in the state.

7 PERSONS DRINK
CONTAMINATED
WATER, FALL ILLDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL JUNE 2

Seven people including six children have been hospitalized at Kodumur after consuming contaminated water at Krishnagiri on Wednesday. All are suffering from diarrhoea. However, they are not in a serious situation, said DMHO Dr Rama Giddaiah.

The DMHO who visited the hospital on Wednesday afternoon said that out of the seven people, six were children and a woman patient. They told him that the water connections in the village were not properly fixed and sewage water was mixing with the drinking water. Rusted pipelines have developed cracks and the drain water is seeping into the drinking water lines, villagers alleged. They said the contamination was regularly happening, posing risk to their health, said Ayyanna whose son is hospitalised. Contaminated water and lack of sanitation are the two leading causes of ailments in the hinterland, he added. His son Madhusudhan and his wife Maheswari and other children including Dharmendra, Akhil, Vamsi, Mohan, and Suresh developed vomiting and stomach pains late on Tuesday after they consumed the contaminated water during the dinner. Following the incident, the village is in the grip of fear.

Meanwhile, the rural water supply engineers have been deputed by the district administration to go to the village and fix the problem.

● **RUSTED PIPELINES** have developed cracks and the drain water is seeping into the drinking water lines, villagers alleged. They said the contamination was regularly happening, posing risk to their health, said Ayyanna whose son is hospitalised.



Relatives carrying a Covid-19 patient for treatment at New Government General Hospital in Vijayawada on Wednesday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Medical colleges face
staff crunch in AP, TS

4 govt Ayurveda teaching hospitals in bad conditions

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JUNE 2

Medical colleges in Telugu states face a severe staff crunch. The GGH has no regular dentist and several posts are lying vacant there and at the Super Speciality Hospital. During every visit of the MCI team, the authorities have to struggle to satisfy it. The government's intention was to expand and provide quality medical services and also to concentrate on deputing faculty to proposed medical colleges, Dr. Suresh Babu of Praja Science Vedika felt.

According to MCI stipulation, there should be five in-patients per medical student. Every batch of 25 students should have one professor and two assistant professors of the reader grade. The medical college should have at least 90 junior residents and a minimum of 210

graduates in many colleges.

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staff nurses at the hospital attached to the medical college.

Four Medical colleges in Telangana have been denied permission to admit students from the 2019-20 academic year, thus reducing the existing count of 2,200 MBBS seats in private colleges by at least 600. Following the Medical Council of India (MCI) recommendations submitted last year, the Union Health Ministry made the decision after a thorough assessment of the facilities in these institutes.

RIMS Adilabad and the government medical college in Nizamabad are in pathetic states.

Many of the machines and equipment in the medical college are rusting as they have been kept idle due to the shortage of doctors. Dialysis machines and equipment in the neurosurgery department are

lying idle due to the absence of nephrologists and neurosurgery specialists. Almost all the operation theatres remain closed.

A dearth of anatomy professors has resulted in a new crop of doctors passing out without proper knowledge, the Vedika observed. There has been no professor for this subject in most medical colleges.

This apart, four government Ayurveda teaching hospitals in AP & TS face worse conditions. The management of the Ayurvedic medical colleges struggled hard to get their UG and PG seats as the CCIM issued only 'conditional permission' to two Ayurvedic medical colleges for the academic year 2020-21.

About 122 professor posts are lying vacant in the four government homoeopathy colleges.



Police personnel stop the vehicle users as part of Naka Bandi during the state lockdown to curb the spread of Covid among the public at Maddilapalem junction on the National Highway in Visakhapatnam on late on Tuesday night. The district administration and City Police have made a decision to stop all the vehicle movement on the roads for an hour and enquire the details on their movement on the roads during the lockdown. — DC

Centre agrees to make
changes in CoWIN

From page 1

He said that the authorities responded positively and added that, accordingly, those going abroad should feed their passport number instead of Aadhaar number on the CoWIN app once the Centre made the requisite changes.

Meanwhile, the state government took a decision to hike stipend to senior resident doctors to ₹70,000 from ₹45,000 per month. The resident doc-

tors boycotted all their duties including Covid care on Tuesday all over the state in protest against the inordinate delay in revising their stipend.

Singhal said that the state government had decided to hike the monthly stipend of senior residents to ₹70,000 from the present ₹45,000.

He added that as PG final year and MBBS students had also sought a hike in their stipend, they discussed the issue with

Chief Secretary.

He said that 350 senior resident doctors joined duty last September and 800 PG students submitted representations for hike in stipend and added that a decision on their request would be taken in a week's time.

With regard to consumption of medical oxygen in the state, the senior official stated that it had come down to 443 metric tonnes in the last 24 hours as against Centre's allocation of 590 tonnes per day.

PUBLIC | SPAT

Seers from AP, Telangana State to speak to claimant groups

Dispute continues over B. Matham head

NAGESWARA RAO
BALLEDA | DC
KADAPA, JUNE 2

Uncertainty persists over who will head Brahmangari Matham in Kadapa district.

Veerabhoga Vasantha Venkateswara Swamy, the 11th chairperson of the seventh generation, recently passed away due to illness. He had two wives. The first wife has four sons and four daughters,

and the second wife two sons. Both parties are sparring for the Matadhipathi position.

With the dispute raging for the last few days, five seers arrived from different parts of the state to hold talks and resolve it. Sri Saiva Kshetra chairperson Shivaswamy told the media that another seven seers would come from the Telangana region and that the dispute would be resolved

amicably.

Shivaswamy said talks were the only way to peaceful resolution and advised against sparring in the public. He said endowment minister Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao was asked to file a report on the controversy to the government. Therefore, the report would be made, after taking into account the views of Dharma, law, justice and people's wishes,

he said. If there are peetha dharmas, then bylaws need to be examined.

The existing laws of the land also would need to be studied. However, no outsider would be appointed as the head of Matham. He said the arrival of other Swamis from Telangana was being delayed due to the e-pass issue. He hoped that the final decision would be acceptable to all

with the blessings of Veera Brahmdendra Swamy.

Navashaktishaktachairperson Bhavani Sankarananda Swamy, B a n a g a p a l l y Ravvalakonda chairperson Gnaneshwarananda Swamy, Rudra Peetham chairperson Yogeshwarananda Swamy and Adhiveshananda Swamy from Saiva Temple accompanied him.

All set for preparation
of herbal concoctionPATHRI RAJASEKHAR |
DC
NELLORE, JUNE 2

Elaborate arrangements are being made to distribute the herbal medicine of Bonigi Anandaiah of Krishnapatnam to Covid-infected persons in Andhra Pradesh, to start with, and elsewhere later.

For those booking the medicine online, a deal was struck with the postal department and a private courier service to deliver the medicine in rural areas and urban areas respectively.

An official said on Wednesday that permission has been sought to create an E-commerce platform, with a payment gateway, to enable those booking the medicine online to pay the postal/courier charges.

The district administration has lent its support by arranging a machine and material to pack the medicine in sachets.

Anandaiah sought five days' time to procure all the ingredients to start

● **Anandaiah has plans to prepare his herbal medicine for Covid cure to 75,000 infected patients across AP.** Since honey is a main ingredient in the medicine, officials have arranged a tie-up with the Girijan Cooperative Corporation to supply large quantities of honey. District forest officer has been asked to help Anandaiah secure different varieties of herbs.

preparation of the concoction.

The production venue has been shifted from the garden of Anandaiah in Krishnapatnam to the premises of Security Academy located in Krishnapatnam Port as there is large space and facilities to store the raw material.

Anandaiah has plans to prepare his herbal medicine for Covid cure to 75,000 infected patients across Andhra Pradesh.

Since honey is a main ingredient in the medicine, officials have

arranged a tie-up with the Girijan Cooperative Corporation to supply large quantities of honey.

Similarly, the district forest officer has been asked to help Anandaiah secure different varieties of herbs being used in his concoction.

Officials aim to supply the medicine to 15,000 Covid positive patients in Nellore district and 5,000 infected patients in each district among the balance 12 districts of the state.

In Nellore district, the services of village and ward volunteers will be used to deliver the medicine to patients across the district after obtaining the list of patients in their areas of operation.

In case of other districts, the plan is to send the medicine to the collector for distribution in the area under his purview. The idea is to prevent people from coming to Krishnapatnam or Nellore for the medicine and avoid the spread of the disease.

CPI EXTENDS HELP
TO ANANDAIAHDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JUNE 2

CPI national secretary K. Narayana said the party would extend all cooperation to Bonigi Anandaiah for distributing the traditional herbal concoction.

During an interaction with Anandaiah at Krishnapatnam on Wednesday, he said people have faith in his herbal medicine and the state government also gave nod for the distribution. He appealed to the political parties to stop politicising this public service activity.

Reminding that there are many herbal medicines for jaundice, asthma and other such ailments, he said Anandaiah's concoction is also such a preparation and helps to treat many Covid-induced ailments.

The CPI leader felicitated Anandaiah and praised him for his sustained efforts to serve the poor and the middle-class without expecting any profits. Narayana said his noble ideals should be respected by everyone.

GUNTUR URBAN
GETS NEW SPDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

IPS officer K. Arif Hafeez assumed charge as new Guntur Urban SP on Wednesday. The new SP has been currently working as Guntur Rural and Urban SEB ASP. This was his first post as an SP. The government earlier transferred R.N. Ammi Reddy from Guntur Urban SP post and appointed Hafeez as the new SP.

Hafeez worked as the Additional SP, Special Enforcement (SEB) in Guntur Rural and Urban area for a year. He belongs to the 2015 batch. He met Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and DGP Gautam Sawang and thanked them for appointing him as the Guntur Urban SP.

OLD OFFENDER
HACKED TO DEATH
IN MADANAPALLEDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 2

A 22-year-old youth, who was an old offender, was hacked to death by unidentified assailants in Lakshmi Nagar in Madanapalle town on Wednesday.

The deceased was identified as P. Madhu, an autorickshaw driver by profession.

He was involved in various offences related to land settlements and had rivalries with his many people. On Wednesday, he was attacked by some unidentified assailants with lethal weapons and was killed on the spot in the Lakshmi Nagar area.

On being informed, Madanapalle DSP Ravimanohara Chary along with his team rushed to the spot and collected details. The body was shifted to the government hospital for autopsy. A case has been registered.



SHORT TAKES

PLEA TO REMOVE BODIES FLOATING IN GANGA

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 2

The Youth Bar Association of India on Wednesday moved the Supreme Court for an immediate removal of the human bodies floating in the Ganga and other rivers and give them dignified cremation or burial. The petition claimed that these bodies were of Covid-19 victims whose families did not have the resources for their disposal.

The petitioner has sought directions to the Centre, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, and West Bengal, to issue guidelines or formulate a standard operating procedure for proper disposal of the bodies.

The plea filed through advocate Manju Jaitley said floating of corpses in the river would cause environmental hazards besides violation of the guidelines of the National Mission for Clean Ganga.

It has sought directions to the chief secretaries of the four states and the district magistrates to ensure no corpse is allowed to be thrown in the river on any ground and stern action be taken against the culprits. It has referred to an earlier verdict of the top court that the dignity of a dead person must be maintained and respected.

HC ASKS MAHA TO SUBMIT INFO OF FIRS DURING COVID

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JUNE 2

Hearing a suo motu PIL on the issue of increasing number of Covid cases, the Bombay High Court on Wednesday directed the Maharashtra government to submit details of all FIRs registered and arrests made during the pandemic and the present crime rate in the state. The direction came after the state's counsel, advocate general Ashutosh Kumbhakoni, told the HC that while orders of the state high-powered committee were being followed on granting emergency parole to eligible inmates in a bid to decongest prisons during the pandemic, jails across the state were still crowded.

On Wednesday, the bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulkarni reiterated that the state must address the issue of overcrowding in prisons.

Advocate Kumbhakoni informed the court that following the HC's orders passed over the last two months on decongesting prisons and following Covid safety protocols in prisons, 2,168 inmates from seven prisons in the state had been released on interim bail as per the high-powered committee's guidelines.

He, however, said that many inmates who were eligible for the release were not applying for temporary bail.

WHY START VAX CENTRES WITH POMP: HC TO DELHI

New Delhi, June 2: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday said if the Delhi government could not ensure that people get both the doses of Covaxin within the stipulated time, then it should not have started so many vaccination centres with "much pomp and splendour".

Justice Rekha Palli issued notice to the Delhi government and sought its stand on whether it can provide the second dose of Covaxin to those who got the first jab, before expiry of the incubation period of six weeks between the two doses.

The court also issued notice to the Centre on two pleas to make the second dose of both vaccines against Covid-19 — Covaxin Covishield — available in the national capital.

"Why did you (Delhi government) start it (vaccination) if you were not sure you can provide the second dose also? You should have stopped. Maharashtra stopped when it found it cannot provide second dose. You opened so many vaccination centres everywhere with so much pomp and splendour and now you say you don't know when the second dose stock would be available," the court said while hearing the two petitions.

One of the petitions has been moved by a lawyer, Ashish Virmani, who received the first dose of Covaxin on May 3 and since May 29 has been unable to book a slot for receiving the second jab which has to be taken within six weeks of the first.



An old woman sells Indian blackberry (jamun) and vegetables during lockdown at a market in Coimbatore on Wednesday.

— PTI

Mob assaults doc, ransacks hospital in Assam; 24 held

The young doctor was kicked and thrashed with brooms, utensils

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, JUNE 2

In what has created anger in the medical fraternity as well as civil society of the state, a mob brutally assaulted Seuj Kumar Senapati, a young doctor, and other staff of a Covid Care Centre (CCC) at Udali in central Assam's Hojai district. The assault, recorded on a mobile phone, showed the young doctor being kicked and thrashed with brooms and utensils by the mob on Tuesday afternoon. The video triggered a sharp protest from doctors and others.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who was in New Delhi said, "24 culprits involved in this barbaric attack have been arrested and a charge sheet will be filed at the earliest. I am personally monitoring this investigation and I promise that justice will be served."

The incident took place after Giasuddin, a Covid-19 patient from Udali area, died at the hospital on

32 die of black fungus at Indore hospital in 20 days

Indore, June 2: As many as 32 patients have died of mucormycosis in the last 20 days at a government-run hospital in Madhya Pradesh's Indore city, an official said on Wednesday. Of late, several cases of mucormycosis, also known as the black fungus, a serious infection, have been found in people who have recovered from Covid-19.

The Maharaja Yeshwantrao Hospital (MYH) in the state's industrial hub Indore has been treating a number of black fungus patients not only from here, but also from various other districts.

Tuesday. According to a letter issued by the Hojai unit of Indian Medical Association to the deputy commissioner of the dis-

"The first patient of black fungus was admitted in the MYH on May 13 and since then, a total of 439 patients have been admitted till now in an hospital. Out of them, 84 people were discharged after treatment, while 32 patients have died so far," MYH superintendent Pramendra Thakur said.

The present black fungus mortality rate in the hospital is 7.29 per cent, he said, claiming that the fatality rate was lower than other hospitals in the state. "We have carried out more than 200 surgeries in the last 20 days to save the lives of patients

suffering from the black fungus," he said.

At present, 323 patients are undergoing treatment for the fungal infection in the hospital, the official said. Out of them, 14 contracted the fungal infection along with Covid-19, while 301 people got mucormycosis after recovering from Covid-19, he said.

The eight other patients suffering from the black fungus have no record of contracting Covid-19, he informed. The statistics show that 93 per cent of the patients contracted the black fungus after recovering from Covid-19.

— PTI

mob damaged the building and also ransacked instruments at the CCC besides "brutally assaulting" the doctor. The IMA unit said

tract, the patient was admitted on Tuesday at 11 am and died three hours later at 2 pm.

The letter said that the

MP, U'Khand, Guj. cancel state exams

DC CORRESPONDENTS
with agency inputs
BHOPAL, JUNE 2

Taking a leaf from the Centre, Madhya Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to cancel the class 12 state board examinations in the interest of safety of the students amid the raging Covid-19 pandemic. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan took to Twitter to announce his government's decision to not hold this year's class 12 board exam in the state.

"The class 12 board examinations (conducted by MP Board of Secondary Education) for the year 2020-21 have been cancelled. The life of students is precious for us. We can take care of their career

later. We have constituted a committee of ministers who will consult experts and decide on students' evaluation", he said.

The Gujarat government also decided to cancel the state board exams for class 12. "The state government decided to scrap the exams for class 12 of the Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Board after taking into consideration the Centre's decision to scrap the exams for class 12 students of the CBSE given the pandemic," state education minister Bhupendrasinh Chudasama said.

Uttarakhand intermediate board examinations were also cancelled in view of the prevailing Covid-19 situation in the state.

TN, Maha to take call on exams soon

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
CHENNAI, JUNE 2

The Tamil Nadu government will make known its decision on holding the plus two board exam in the state in two days' time, after conferring with experts, state school education minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi said.

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin will take the final call on the issue after the views of education and medical experts and teachers among others were elicited, besides considering the stand of other states in this pandemic times, he said.

"Children's health and safety is equally important as their future, as our Chief Minister had said. Echoing this view, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced cancellation of

the CBSE exam on Tuesday," the minister said on Wednesday.

Addressing reporters here after attending a meeting with Stalin, Poyyamozhi said during a meeting convened by Union defence minister Rajnath Singh earlier, several states opined that the board exam could be conducted with precautionary measures in place.

Maharashtra school education minister Varsha Gaikwad on Wednesday said a proposal has been sent to the disaster management authority regarding the state board exams for Class 12 students and a decision on the issue will be taken in a couple of days.

She said the issue was discussed at a meeting of the state cabinet here, a day after the Centre cancelled the CBSE Class 12

Maha launches 'corona-free villages drive'

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, JUNE 2

In order to curb the spread of Coronavirus in rural areas, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday launched 'Corona-Mukta Gaon' (Corona-free Village) competition, which will reward the successful villages with handsome cash prizes. The scheme has been inspired by the feat of five villages in the state, which have managed to eradicate the virus from their jurisdiction.

The competition shall be held in all the six revenue divisions of the state with top three villages in each division getting cash prizes worth ₹50 lakh, ₹25 lakh, and ₹15 lakh. In addition to this, these winning villages shall also be provided additional funds of ₹50 lakh, ₹25 lakh, and ₹15 lakh each, as incentives for various development works.

"The corona-free village competition has been launched with an aim to encourage the efforts to chase the virus away from the rural areas and make the entire state free of coronavirus at the earliest," said state rural development minister Hasan Mushrif.

The competition has been announced against the backdrop of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's appeal to people in rural areas to strive hard for making their villages corona-free. In his address, he had also praised the efforts of villages, which have attained Covid-free status in the state.

● **THE COMPETITION** shall be held in all the six revenue divisions of the state with top three villages in each division getting cash prizes worth ₹50 lakh, ₹25 lakh, and ₹15 lakh.

● **COMPETITION HAS** been announced on the backdrop of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's appeal to people in rural areas to strive hard for making their villages corona-free.

Rural areas in Maharashtra have been hit hard by the second Coronavirus wave than the urban parts of the state.

More Covid-19 cases have been recorded as villages compared to cities, prompting the state machinery to concentrate more on rural areas.

The total prize money for the corona-free competition will be ₹5.40 crore, said Mushrif. "Every village in the state will be asked to form five teams to implement various initiatives for the eradication of Coronavirus. Villages shall be judged on the basis of 22 different criteria by a special committee of experts for their work during the period June 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022," he added.

According to state officials, five villages in the state — Hivare Bazaar and Bhoyare Khurd in Ahmednagar district, Bhosi in Nanded district and Antroli and Ghatane villages in Solapur district have become Coronavirus-free by undertaking various initiatives in their areas.



People wait in a long queue to buy liquor from a wine shop after the ease in the ongoing lockdown restrictions in Jammu on Wednesday. Policemen were deployed outside wine shops to maintain order and ensure adherence of Covid-19 guidelines.

— PTI



Naveen Patnaik

PATNAIK WRITES TO CMs OVER VACCINE PROCUREMENT

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 2

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Tuesday wrote a letter to all his counterparts seeking a consensus on centralised procurement of Covid vaccines by the Centre in view of the challenges faced by states.

In his letter, Patnaik stated that no state is safe unless all states adopt vaccination as a top priority and execute it on war-footing. "However, states should not compete against each other to procure the vaccines. United efforts are required for vaccine procurement and states should have the flexibility to implement the vaccination drive based on local circumstances," Naveen said.

The Chief Minister had highlighted that many states have floated global tenders for vaccine procurement but it is quite clear that global vaccine manufacturers are looking forward to the Union government for clearances and assurances.

BOARD | EXAMS

Experts hail the decision to cancel the board exams in view of the pandemic

Challenge to decide fair evaluation criteria: Experts

New Delhi, June 2: Education experts and stakeholders believe the bigger challenge before the CBSE now is coming up with a fair evaluation criteria for class 12 students whose exams have been cancelled and demanded that the policy is notified soon.

The experts hailed the decision to cancel the board exams which were earlier postponed in view of the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. Given the current situation, it is the right decision to cancel the CBSE Board exams.

There is no way we could have held exams without compromising the safety of children. While we welcome the decision, we hope the modalities would be worked out quickly in consultation with stakeholders, they said.

"Since class marks are important factor that affects students' career, we expect CBSE to ensure students don't get affected with the methodology of awarding marks," said Praveen Raju, Co-Chair, FICCI ARISE, a collegium of stakeholders aimed at promoting quality educa-

tion. In a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, it was decided that the CBSE will take steps to compile the results of class 12 students as per a well-defined objective criteria in a time-bound manner.

"The next step is equally critical and crucial in terms of deciding the process and criteria based on which the children's performance will be gauged. This should be done keeping in mind that many of them make that extra effort during the last

mile and hence, should be given due advantage," said Charu Wahi, Principal, Nirmal Bhartia School.

According to Vishnu Karthik, CEO, The Heritage Schools, the decision on cancellation of board exams has provided some clarity and assuaged stress levels among students and parents but the challenge now is for the CBSE to arrive at an alternative criteria to determine grade 12 marks.

"Any delay or any confusion on the new grading criteria will lead to more confusion and stress

among students. Clear directions should also be provided to Indian universities to modify their admissions criteria so meritocracy and fairness are not compromised," he said.

Shishir Jaipuria, Chairman of Seth Anandram Jaipuria Group of Educational Institutions believes deserving students must be allocated grades or marks corresponding to their yearly performance.

"It's a challenge that will require a great deal of meticulous thinking for arriving at a just criterion

for academic assessment. I'm sure the schools and boards will rise to the challenge and deliver what's best for the students," he said.

Rajiv Bansal, Director-Operations - Global Indian International School (GIIS), said admission in undergraduate courses, across India and internationally are dependent on class 12 results, therefore, the sooner these details are announced, the better it would be for the students, their parents, and the entire academic community.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

23 MIGRANTS MISSING, TWO DEAD OFF TUNISIA

Zarzis, Tunisia, June 2: At least 23 migrants were missing and two bodies recovered from the sea off Tunisia, the Red Crescent reported Wednesday, after the military said more than 100 migrants were intercepted.

The Tunisian navy said a boat headed for Europe from Zuwara in Libya was intercepted on Tuesday near Miskar oil platform, some 67 kilometres (52 miles) off the coast.

The migrants – 37 Eritreans, 32 Sudanese and an Egyptian, aged between 15 and 40 – were handed over to the Red Crescent and International Organization for Migration in the southern port Of Zarzis.

POLISARIO LEADER LEAVES SPAIN, FLIES TO ALGERIA

Madrid, June 2: The leader of Western Sahara's independence movement, whose presence at a Spanish hospital sparked a diplomatic row with Rabat, left Spain overnight and flew to Algeria, a government source said Wednesday.

He's "in Algeria," the source told AFP.

Late on Tuesday, Spain's foreign ministry said Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali would be leaving from Pamplona airport but did not say where he would be going.

Ghali's departure came hours after he was quizzed by a Spanish judge over allegations of torture and genocide, which he denied, in a video hearing from the hospital in northern Spain where he spent six weeks recovering from Covid-19.

REMAINS OF U.S. KU KLUX KLAN HEAD TO BE MOVED

Washington, June 2: A project to disinter a Ku Klux Klan leader and move his remains to a museum started Tuesday, local US media reported, adding the work would be funded by \$200,000 of anonymous donations.

Nathan Bedford Forrest was a leading pro-slavery Confederate army general during the American Civil War, and the first "Grand Wizard" of the racist Ku Klux Klan organization from 1867 to 1869.

A pedestal on top of his grave in a park in Memphis, Tennessee, will be removed first, before his remains – along with those of his wife – are taken to the new National Confederate Museum, WMC5 news said.

BELARUS ACTIVIST STABS SELF, RETURNED TO JAIL

Moscow, June 2: A Belarusian activist who was hospitalised after stabbing himself in the neck in court has been returned to prison following surgery, the Viasna rights group said Wednesday.

Stepan Latypov, 41, on Tuesday rammed a pen into his neck on the first day of his trial on several protest-related charges during a hearing seen by government critics as part of a sweeping crackdown on political opposition.

Viasna, citing Latypov's relatives, said Wednesday the activist was returned to prison and that family had been able to deliver him a parcel there.

Latypov was detained last September and went on trial in the capital Minsk on several charges including creating protest symbols and resisting law enforcement.

PAK JOURNALIST SUMMONED FOR 'DEFAMING' ARMY

Islamabad, Jun 2: A Pakistani journalist recently beaten by unidentified men in his apartment said Tuesday he was summoned by authorities to answer allegations he defamed a key national institution, a term often used for the military. Asad Ali Toor, who works for the Aaj News Pakistani TV channel, said he was consulting his lawyer to decide whether to appear before the Federal Investigation Agency on June 4.

The development comes a week after three armed men forcibly entered Toor's apartment in the capital Islamabad, saying they were from Inter-Services Intelligence. The assailants repeatedly slapped Toor, accusing him of criticising the agency. However, the ISI has distanced itself from the attack, saying it was not involved. Pakistan Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad has said authorities are close to arresting the assailants.

Trump Hotel for lease

The Trump Organisation is trying to lease out the The Trump International Hotel, after it failed in the 2019 presidential election before the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world.

— AFP

Iran warship on fire, sinks in Gulf of Oman

Blaze began around 2.25 am, efforts to save Kharg failed

Tehran, June 2: The largest warship in the Iranian navy caught fire and later sank Wednesday in the Gulf of Oman under unclear circumstances, semi-official news agencies reported.

The Fars and Tasnim news agencies said efforts failed to save the support warship Kharg, named after the island that serves as the main oil terminal for Iran. The blaze began around 2:25 a.m. and firefighters tried to contain it, Fars said. The vessel sank near the Iranian port of Jask, some 1,270 kilometres (790 miles) southeast of Tehran on the Gulf of Oman near the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf.

Photos circulated on Iranian social media of sailors wearing life jackets, evacuating the vessel as a fire burned behind them. State TV and semi-official news agencies referred to the Kharg as a "training ship." Fars published video of thick, black smoke rising from the ship early Wednesday morning. Satellite photos from Planet Labs Inc. ana-

lyzed by The Associated Press showed the Kharg off to the west of Jask on Tuesday.

Satellites from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that track fires from space detected a blaze at the site of the Jask that started just before the time of the fire reported by Fars. The Kharg serves as one of a few vessels in

from Sri Lanka and India climbed onto the vessel and extinguished a blaze that had been burning for 12 days.

"The rear end of the vessel is being submerged. This was at the same time as the rescue team got on board in order to facilitate the towing of the vessel to deeper seas for safety reasons," Sri Lanka Navy spokesman Indika de Silva said.

"The ship is under water, the water level is above the deck. The ship is going down," de Silva said.

On Wednesday morning experts were trying to tow the ship farther out to sea, some 9 nautical miles away from the Colombo port where it had been anchored since May 20, to prevent its sinking at the current position which would have caused severe pollution.

— PTI

typically handles patrols in the Gulf of Oman and the wider seas, while the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard operates in the shallower waters of the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. In recent months, the navy launched a slightly larger commercial tanker called the Makran, which served similar functions as the Kharg.

— AP

Russia adopts 'extremist' bill**Kremlin to exit overflight treaty**

Moscow, June 2: Russia's upper house on Wednesday overwhelmingly backed legislation expected to be used to ban allies of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny from running in elections, the latest move in a crackdown on the opposition.

The bill, overwhelmingly approved by the Federation Council, would make it impossible to run in parliamentary elections for leaders, sponsors and rank-and-file members of "extremist" groups.

A Russian court is considering whether to designate Navalny's political network an extremist organisation and could make a decision as early as next week. Critics of President Vladimir Putin say Russian authorities are widening a campaign against the opposition ahead of parliamentary elections in September.

After Navalny was jailed

Moscow, June 2: The Russian parliament's upper house voted Wednesday to withdraw from an international treaty allowing surveillance flights over military facilities following the U.S. exit from the treaty.

The vote comes after U.S. officials told Moscow last month that President Joe Biden's administration had decided not to reenter the Open Skies Treaty, which had allowed surveillance flights over military facilities before

President Donald Trump withdrew from the pact. As a presidential candidate, Biden had criticised Trump's withdrawal as "short-sighted."

Moscow has signalled its readiness to reverse the withdrawal procedure and stay in the 1992 treaty if the United States returns to the agreement. After the Russian upper house voted to leave the treaty, it would now come to Russian President Vladimir Putin for signing.

— AP

and many of his allies arrested, two more political activists, Dmitry

Gudkov and Andrei Pivovarov, were detained over the past two days.

Pivovarov, the former executive director of Open Russia, a just disbanded pro-democracy group, was pulled off his Warsaw-bound flight on Monday.

The 39-year-old faces up to six years in prison for his involvement in an "undesirable" organisation. A court was expected to decide whether to remand him later Wednesday. On Tuesday, police detained Gudkov after conducting raids on homes of his allies and relatives. The 41-year-old former opposition lawmaker faces up to five years in prison for allegedly failing to pay a debt under an old lease agreement. Gudkov is likely to be formally charged on Wednesday, said human rights association Agora whose lawyer represents him. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the detentions were a purely legal matter.

— AFP

Pelosi rules out having Biden create Jan. 6 panel

Washington, June 2: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is ruling out a presidential commission to study the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol, telling House Democrats on Tuesday that having President Joe Biden appoint a panel is unworkable even after the Senate blocked an independent probe last week.

Pelosi laid out possible next steps after Friday's Senate vote, in which Senate Republicans blocked legislation to create an independent, bipartisan panel to investigate the siege by former President Donald Trump's supporters. She proposed four options for an

investigation of the attack, according to a person on the private Democratic caucus call, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal conversations.

The first option, Pelosi said, is to give the Senate another chance to vote on the commission. Six Republicans voted with Democrats to move forward with the bill, and a seventh missed the vote but said he would have backed it.

That means Democrats would only need support from three additional Republicans to reach the 60 votes needed for passage. The commission would be modelled after a

highly respected panel that investigated the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The other options involve the House investigating the attack, meaning the probes would be inherently partisan. Pelosi suggested that she could appoint a new select committee to investigate the siege or give the responsibility to a single committee, like the House Homeland Security panel, which wrote the original bipartisan bill to create the commission.

Alternately, Pelosi said committees could simply push ahead with the investigations that are already underway.

— AP

Cyberespionage: US seizes two domain names

Washington, June 2: The Justice Department said Tuesday that it has seized two domain names used in a cyberespionage campaign that targeted US and foreign government agencies, think tanks and humanitarian groups.

The campaign was disclosed last week by Microsoft, which linked it to the same group of Russian intelligence operatives responsible for the massive SolarWinds intrusion that breached federal agencies and private corporations. The company said over the weekend that it was "still not seeing evidence of any significant number of compromised organizations at this time."

The White House on Friday similarly downplayed the cyber assault as "basic phishing," in which hackers use malware-laden emails to access networks, and said US agencies had largely fended it off. Still, officials say the US government's action on Friday was aimed at preventing any further exploitation of victims, though the Justice Department also warned that the hackers may have used additional backdoor accesses to get into networks between when the hacking first began and the time that the domains were seized.

"Last week's action is a continued demonstration of the department's commitment to proactively disrupt hacking activity prior to the conclusion of a criminal investigation," Assistant Attorney General John Demers, the Justice Department's top national security official, said in a statement. — AP

WILL CONSIDER U.S. REQUEST ON CYBERATTACK, SAYS RUSSIA

Moscow, June 2: Russia said Wednesday it was open to considering any request from the United States for help in investigating the cyberattack on the US subsidiary of Brazilian meat processor JBS. "There are contacts through diplomatic channels," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"If there are requests from the Americans they will be promptly considered," Peskov said he expected the issue of cybercrime to come up during the June 16 summit in Geneva between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US counterpart Joe Biden.

"It is quite clear that criminality and challenges in the cybersphere will be on the agenda one way or another," he said.

— AFP

mitment to proactively disrupt hacking activity prior to the conclusion of a criminal investigation," Assistant Attorney General John Demers, the Justice Department's top national security official, said in a statement. — AP

Firefighter kills colleague, wounds another at fire stn.

Santa Clarita, June 2: An off-duty Los Angeles County firefighter fatally shot a fellow firefighter and wounded another at their small community fire station Tuesday before going to his nearby home, setting it on fire and apparently killing himself, authorities said.

A 44-year-old fire specialist died and a 54-year-old firefighter was shot when the gunman opened fire shortly before 11 am at Fire Station 81, which is about 45 miles (72 kilometres) north of Los Angeles, Fire Chief Daryl Osby told reporters. The wounded man was in critical but stable condition at a hospital. The shooter was a firefighter specialist and

engineer, authorities said. The fire chief said he could not speak to the motive for the attack and doesn't know about any disciplinary actions.

He was not scheduled to work today. He came back and confronted the on-duty personnel, a visibly shaken Osby said.

I cannot speak to the mindset of the shooter. I can say that it's very tragic and sad that that would be a decision point of one of the members of the Los Angeles County Fire Department. The gunman, who was not identified, then went to his house less than 10 miles (16 kilometres) away, which authorities found engulfed in flames.

— AP

ASIAN OFFICER ATTACKED IN 'HATE' CRIME

San Francisco, June 2: A San Francisco police officer responding to a call about a man making threats to people in Chinatown was attacked by the suspect, who was later arrested on assault and hate crime charges, authorities said.

Surveillance video showed the female officer, who is of Asian descent, approach Gerardo Contreras on Friday and tell him to turn around and put his hands on his head.

— AP

RACIAL | VIOLENCE

Last June, former President Donald Trump was greeted by protests during his visit

Biden marks Tulsa Race Massacre in graphic speech

Tulsa, June 2: An emotional President Joe Biden marked the 100th anniversary of the massacre that destroyed a thriving PoC community in Tulsa, declaring Tuesday that he had "come to fill the silence" about one of the nation's darkest — and long suppressed — moments of racial violence.

"Some injustices are so heinous, so horrific, so grievous, they cannot be buried, no matter how hard people try," Biden said. "Only with truth can

come healing."

Biden's commemoration of the deaths of hundreds of PoC people killed by a white mob a century ago came amid the current national reckoning on racial justice. "Just because history is silent, it does not mean that it did not take place," Biden said.

He said that "hell was unleashed, literal hell was unleashed." And now, he said, the nation must come to grips with the following sin of denial. "We can't just choose what we want

to know, and not what we should know," said Biden.

"I come here to help fill the silence, because in silence wounds deepen." After Biden left, there was a spontaneous singing by some audience members of a famous civil rights march song, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around."

The events on Tuesday stood in stark contrast to then-President Donald Trump's trip to Tulsa last June, which was greeted by protests. Or the former

President's decision, one year ago, to clear Lafayette Square near the White House of demonstrators who gathered to protest the death of George Floyd, a PoC man, under the knee of a white Minneapolis police officer.

In 1921 — on May 31 and June 1 — a white mob, including some people hastily deputised by authorities, looted and burned Tulsa's Greenwood district, which was referred to as Black Wall Street. On Tuesday, the President,

joined by top PoC advisers, met privately with three surviving members of the Greenwood community who lived through the violence, the White House said. Viola "Mother" Fletcher, Hughes "Uncle Red" Van Ellis and Lessie "Mother Randle" Benningfield Randle are all between the ages of 101 and 107.

Biden said their experience had been "a story seen in the mirror dimly" "But no longer," the president told the survivors. "Now your story will be known

in full view." Outside, Latasha Sanders, 33, of Tulsa, brought her five children and a nephew in hopes of spotting Biden. "It's been 100 years, and this is the first we've heard from any US President," she said. "I brought my kids here today just so they could be a part of history and not just hear about it, and so they can teach generations to come."

John Ondiek, another Tulsan in the crowd following Biden's speech on cellphones, said he was

encouraged that "There aren't just PoC people here. That tells me there's an awakening going on in this country." As many as 300 PoC Tulsans were killed, and thousands of survivors were forced for a time into internment camps overseen by the National Guard.

Burned bricks and a fragment of a church basement are about all that survive today of the more than 30-block historically PoC district.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

3 JUNE 2021

Targeting ex-chief secy to hit bureaucracy's morale

The way the Narendra Modi government is going about evidently trying to punish the recently retired chief secretary of West Bengal, Alapan Bandyopadhyay, is unlikely to fill the civil service with confidence or motivation.

Across the Union government bureaucracy, especially at senior levels where policies are grappled with, the Delhi Durbar under the present PM is widely thought to be hamstrung by signs of cliquishness, leaving the energetic and the hard-working demoralised. The Bandyopadhyay episode could deepen faultlines caused by favouritism.

Policy-making and policy implementation are apt to be a casualty in such a setting since civil servants hesitate to offer frank and unbiased assessments in the process of policy formulation for fear of falling foul of the regime and eventually be singled out for unwarranted disciplinary action on false pretences. The example of Mr Bandyopadhyay has every potential to exacerbate such anxieties. This is bad for India. Because only a favoured few were consulted, major policy missteps such as demonetisation ensued.

It is irrelevant how the Bandyopadhyay affair ends. What is pertinent is that the episode is malodorous. Its ramifications extend to weakening the structures of governance...

Senior levels of the civil service and retired top civil servants appear to have been flabbergasted by the treatment being meted out to the former West Bengal chief secretary. It seems hardly believable that the topmost civil servant of a state should be sought to be punished for being 15 minutes late for a meeting called by the PM. This was the so-called PM-CM meeting to review the impact of the cyclone Yaas which was full of BJP leaders who had no place in such a discussion. To make matters more absurd, Mr Bandyopadhyay is being proceeded against under the Disaster Management Act.

In a major newspaper article, a former cabinet secretary has noted that the chief secretary was to retire from service on May 31, but at the state government's request was granted an extension as chief secretary. However, only four days later, he was asked to report for work in New Delhi on the day he was to superannuate. This is after the Kalaikunda incident, giving scope for the conjecture that the Centre's action has a political trigger and an upright civil servant finds himself caught in the crossfire.

The retired senior official has indicated that the move against Mr Bandyopadhyay was peremptory in nature as Mr Bandyopadhyay had not been cleared for "deputation" by the state. Nor had the Centre requested his services on deputation. Besides, he had not been empanelled for the post of secretary in GOI. In the event, the relevant rule that the Centre prevails over a state — when there is a difference over the release of an officer on deputation — does not apply in this particular case.

It is not unlikely that the ayatollahs of rule-making in New Delhi were only too aware of this aspect and therefore chose to summon the former chief secretary under the National Disaster Management Act to receive his punishment. (It is telling that the yoga teacher-entrepreneur Ramdev does not attract the penal provisions of NDMA for traducing the medical effort against Covid.)

In the final analysis it is irrelevant how the Bandyopadhyay affair ends. What is pertinent is that the episode is malodorous. Its ramifications extend to weakening the structures of governance and administration in India, besides casting in prejudice the valuable principles of Centre-state relations on which our federalism rests.

Testing time for students

The cancellation of the CBSE and CISCE Class 12 board exams was, perhaps, the easier decision to make. It will resonate with the primary stakeholders who are students as anxiety levels were the highest among them and their parents amid the deadly second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. A state of cancellations of state board exams is bound to follow though only four states among all states and UTs had expressed their opposition to the proposal to hold the exams. The decision to cancel emanated from the Prime Minister who, well aware of the nervousness in youth, may have lent an empathetic ear to the students' cause.

Simpler it may have been to choose cancellation over conduct of exams but the hard part begins only now as acceptable objective criteria have to be defined in the onerous task of judging students on merit for university. The future of over one crore Class 12 students in various streams, including 14 lakh in CBSE, is at a crossroads (about 1.43 crore students appeared for different school leaving exams in 2020). While performance in internal school assessments during Class 12 or Plus-2 may be used to determine the tabulation of marks, it might be altogether fairer if a student's performances from classes 9 to 12 were to be collated and weightage given to that too. Fixing the evaluation procedure is going to be an unenviable task.

The elite institutions in engineering and medical have their own entrance tests to determine admissions, but arts and science colleges have traditionally depended on marks in school finals. A common universities entrance test might be worth considering but there too the question remains of timing an objective test amid the pandemic whose third wave is expected later in the year. The intricate task of finding a level playing field is not going to be achieved without inviting complications. Beyond that lies a greater threat to a whole generation of students who have to put up with less than satisfactory Zoom education as opposed to the congeniality of real-world learning in classrooms among peers.

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Too much PMO! Ex-babus chide Modi on vaccine policy, state ties

In the context of the second Covid surge, a group of 116 former civil servants has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi accusing the government of not addressing the crucial issues at stake.

What makes this "open letter" significant is that the signatories include former Cabinet Secretary K.M. Chandrasekhar, former foreign secretary and national security adviser Shiv Shankar Menon, former health secretary K. Sujatha Rao, former adviser to the Prime Minister T.K.A. Nair, former chief information commissioner Wajahat Habibullah and former Delhi lieutenant governor Najeeb Jung, among others.

Now unfettered by civil service regulations and free to speak their mind, these former babus, who call themselves the Constitutional Conduct Group, have alleged that the Centre has botched the efforts to tackle the spread of the pandemic and urged Mr Modi to take urgent action, including centralising procurement and supply of vaccines which should be administered

free and universally to all Indians. They have also expressed concern about the "steady erosion of the Cabinet system of governance" (too much PMO!) and deteriorating ties with the states.

Of course, there is nothing new in the missive. The ordinary citizens, Opposition parties, and even the judiciary in several states have been raising these same issues. The "coalition" of the willing that Mr Modi seemed to have created since his ascent to power in 2014 is now beginning to crack. The government had managed the narrative adroitly so far, but in the face of the Covid pandemic, it now seems unable to contain the growing dissent in the country over its pandemic policy.

KHEMKA SETS OFF CENTRE-HARYANA TUSSELE ON POSTINGS
 The unrelenting Ashok Khemka has struck again. The Haryana cadre IAS officer and whistleblower has brought to light blatant violations of the civil service rules by the Haryana government. It appears that the state

government has been appointing IPS, IAS and IRS officers to IAS cadre posts such as principal secretary without the Centre's sanction.

Sources say that Mr Khemka had made a representation to Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba in December last year, but it has taken a while for the department of personnel and training (DoPT) to sit up and finally take notice.

The department has now called for a detailed report from the Khattar sarkar on the status of these postings. It has advised the state administration to stick to the IAS cadre rules and not appoint other all-India cadre officers to IAS cadre posts of principal secretaries and certainly not for a period beyond three months, without the department's prior approval. Some may recall that a similar situation had arisen in Nagaland where the government was appointing state service officers to IAS cadre posts.

Mr Khemka, the officer who flagged the issue, should be satisfied with the Centre's response since it is such a

rare thing!

EXTENSION RAJ

The Modi sarkar has given a year's extension for Intelligence Bureau chief Arvind Kumar and RAW chief S.K. Goel in the interest of "continuity". Both are IPS officers. Interestingly, these extensions come after the setback to plans when both senior IPS officers, Rakesh Asthana and Y.C. Modi, were left out of the race to become the CBI chief. This, only after the Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana objected to their names, citing a Supreme Court ruling which states that only officers who have more than six months left for retirement could be considered.

But the government lost no time in quickly approving extended terms, in the case of IB and RAW chiefs. Note, it is only an extension and not a new appointment. Insiders say that the extension to the two officers was given after relaxing the existing rules.

Similarly, there is buzz that the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) chief Pramod Chandra Mody is hoping

for another extension. This, after two extensions, one of six months and another of three months already!

Of course, it will be argued that it is the PM's prerogative to retain trusted officers in supra-sensitive posts such as the IB and RAW chiefs. It also doesn't hurt a bit, if you are also close to the national security advisor Ajit Doval.

Questions will, of course, be asked about the problems such extensions create within the next line in. While the line of succession at IB is not really affected much by Mr Kumar's extended term, but in the case of Goel, the extension will ensure that at least two senior RAW officers will retire before his extended term ends.

While this practice allows the favourites to continue for a bit longer, it does kill the hopes of officers hoping to retire at the top of their service. But that's the subject for another day... keep watching this space.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherian](#) @Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

Subhani



Protect vulnerable to heal fractures, revive economy



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

India's prisoners offer a telling insight into the state of the country's economy. In Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populous state, 21 jail inmates have recently written to the authorities saying they don't want parole. Their reason: staying in prisons is "safer and healthier" during the Covid-19 pandemic. They know that in the world outside, there won't be free food nor regular health checkups and they will have to struggle for a living.

The signs of economic distress are everywhere. Even as the Centre and state governments continue to weigh in on the grim maths between lives and livelihoods, it is becoming obvious that social protection for our vulnerable makes for a compelling moral argument *as well as* an economic and social one.

Without it, neither the pandemic-battered economy nor the fractured will gain normality any time soon.

India has begun to take baby steps to emerge from the lockdowns that were triggered by the sharp spike in coronavirus cases in the "second wave".

Currently, there are flickers of promise: the daily infections are falling in many places though Covid-19 deaths still remain high at around 3,000 every day. Worryingly, the virus continues to course through the countryside.

This week, manufacturing and construction work was allowed to resume in Delhi and some other areas, but with many roads remaining barricaded, transporting material is not easy and there is an acute shortage of labourers. Many have gone back home.

This time around, there was transport so there have been no long marches down national highways like last year, after the first nationwide lockdown. But clearly, many

labourers who come to big cities in search of livelihoods have little faith in their employers or the State to look after them during lockdowns.

"In the past year, we have not put in solid social protection mechanisms for migrant workers or those working in the informal sector. There is the odd relief scheme for limited periods or cash transfer through Jan Dhan, but these have limited reach," says Amit Basole, associate professor of economics at Azim Premji University, one of the key authors of a study, "The State of Working India 2021: One year of Covid-19", brought out by the university.

In the absence of a real social protection mechanism in the cities, people have gone back to their villages. This should surprise no one. Neither should it come as a surprise that this will impact attempts to unlock the economy.

"Overnight, we may not be able to formalise all informal workers, but we need to definitely start putting in place a more solid social protection mechanism as a matter of immediate priority," Prof. Basole stresses. Why is not this a bigger issue? Perhaps the heart-breaking images of deaths, often without dignity, have something to do with it.

The huge health crisis and graphic images of the dead have overshadowed the severe economic crisis across the country. Not only has the informal sector been rendered more precarious, many who earlier had salaried jobs are now being forced into odd jobs and errands just to survive as a result of the pandemic, lockdowns and various other restrictions," says Prof. Basole.

He speaks movingly about a school bus driver he knows who is trying to make a living ferrying vegetable from wholesale markets to retail shops.

"But this is not a stable way of earning a living. Admittedly this is only anecdotal, but it's not difficult to imagine many more such cases may be there."

The report says mobility restrictions, such as those caused by lockdowns, predictably lead to income losses due to decreased economic activity. "We find that a 10 per cent decline in mobility was associated with a 7.5 per cent decline in income. This number is useful to keep in mind when estimating the impact of future lockdowns," it cautions.

Predictably, the poor who lack cushions have been the worst-hit. Nearly half of formal salaried workers moved into informal work, either as self-employed (30 per cent), casual wage (10 per cent) or informal salaried (nine per cent) workers, between late 2019 and late 2020.

Women have been affected more and households have tried to cope by cutting back on food intake, selling assets, and borrowing informally from friends, relatives, and moneylenders.

Government relief measures have helped, but exclusions were also common. In a recent commentary, "The Covid-19 Crisis and People's Right to Food", development economists Jean Dreze and Anmol Somanchi note that relief measures helped, but they were patchy.

"A large majority of the population had access to PDS in 2020 (with enhanced monthly rations for eight months), and this played a critical role in averting the worst. But it's possible some of the supplementary rations got diverted, initially at least, and significant minority of poor households had no access to PDS at all for lack of a ration card. Other relief

As Dreze and Somanchi put it: 'The Covid-19 crisis brings out once again that India needs a more reliable and comprehensive social security system'

measures such as NREGA and cash transfers also had a patchy coverage."

Given the unpredictable trajectory of the virus, it's hard to forecast when lockdowns may be reimposed. All the more reason to invest in a solid social protection mechanism to minimise the damage due to disruption.

"The State of Working India 2021" suggests some urgent policy measures. These include extending free rations under PDS beyond June, at least till the end of 2021, cash transfer of ₹5,000 for three months to as many vulnerable households as can be reached with the existing digital infrastructure, including but not limited to Jan Dhan accounts, expansion of MGNREGA entitlement to 150 days, revising programme wages upwards to state minimum wages, expanding the programme budget to at least ₹1.75 lakh crores, launching a pilot urban employment programme in the worst-hit districts, possibly focused on women workers, increasing the Central contribution in old-age pensions, automatically enrolling all MGNREGA workers who do construction work, as registered workers under the Building and Other Construction Workers (BoCW) Act so that they can access social security benefits and a Covid hardship allowance for Anganwadi/Asha workers of ₹5,000 per month for six months.

All these measures together will cost money — approximately ₹5.5 lakh crores of additional spending and bring the total fiscal outlay on Covid relief to around 4.5 per cent of GDP over two years.

But what will be the cost of not having this large fiscal stimulus, given the magnitude of the distress?

As Dreze and Somanchi put it: "The Covid-19 crisis brings out once again that India needs a more reliable and comprehensive social security system."

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at [patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com](#).

LETTERS

LIQUOR DELIVERY

Liquor buyers are lining up in large number at shops when the curfew is relaxed spreading Covid-19 (*Fear of infection in closed spaces hits liquor biz in AP, DC, June 2*). Rise and fall in Covid cases in AP is astonishing health authorities. AP government must immediately amend excise rules and bring a mobile app for home delivery of liquor so that we can reduce the crowding.

D. Ravi Kumar
Vishakhapatnam

3-CHILD POLICY

China's three child policy has signalled the end of an era of its demographic dividends. Till now it had reaped benefits of larger working force. Due to flawed intervention of the state since the introduction of one-child policy in 1979, it has lost healthy demographic trends leading to decreased fertility ratio, male and female sex ratio and increased number of aged people. India must take advantage by transforming its work force into skilled human resources.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

SEDITION LAWS

The pinch is being felt even at the grassroots (*Stop misuse of sedition, all other laws to stifle dissent, DC, June 2*). Adding fuel to the fire, the social media is replete with fake news of people being arrested for speaking/writing against the establishment. The bizarre statistics of 37% booked for speaking against PM alone should be taken seriously. Certainly, the apex court needs suo motu action regarding sedition cases.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Vishakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Thakur V. Hari Prasad arrested

HYDERABAD, JUNE 2. Thakur V. Hari Prasad, Honorary Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Welfare Fund, was arrested today. He has been lodged in the Central Crime Station.

Mr. Hari Prasad who is being produced before a City magistrate tomorrow for remand, has been charged with misappropriation, cheating, falsification of accounts and forgery.

The Andhra Pradesh Welfare Fund has been conducting the raffles in the State, for utilising the proceeds for welfare schemes.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,849.48	-0.16
Nifty 50	15,576.20	0.01
S&P 500*	4,209.71	0.18
Dollar (₹)	73.08	-0.23
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.36	0.01
Euro (₹)	89.01	0.18
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,772	116 0.23
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	71.15	1.28
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.005	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.593	-0.022

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Assocham seeks wage support, interest subsidy

Assocham asked the government to extend relief measures such as regulatory easing, wage support, and interest subsidy for the MSMEs. As the states are in the process of easing lockdowns, the trade and industry would need support to pick up their business thread again, it said. It has suggested that the surplus funds of ESIC should be used for providing wage support measures/stimulus packages for the employees.

Ruchi Soya enters nutraceuticals; to sell 10 products



Ruchi Soya Industries said it has made a foray into the nutraceuticals and wellness segment and initially will launch 10 products under the brand 'Patanjali' and 'Nutra'. Ruchi Soya aims to have a range of products across various categories in the next one year, it said. To start with, the firm is launching 10 products, including vitamin B12, iron complex, vitamin D, vitamin C and zinc complex, daily energy and weight gain, among others.

SMS alerts for IPO process via UPI only from next yr

Markets regulator Sebi gave time till January 1, 2022 for implementation of guidelines pertaining to SMS alerts under the UPI system for shares applied and allotted during an initial public offering. Earlier, the deadline for putting in place automated web portal with respect to IPOs through UPI system has also been extended to October 1. The framework was to come into force from May 1.

Rossari Biotech to acquire Unitop Chem for ₹420 cr

Speciality chemicals manufacturer Rossari Biotech announced the acquisition of Unitop Chemicals, a supplier of surfactants, emulsifiers, and specialty chemicals, for Rs 421 crore. Rossari will buy 100 per cent equity capital of Unitop, with 65 per cent shares acquired upon closure of the transaction, and the balance 35 per cent over the next two years. The total consideration for 100% stake is Rs 421 crore.



States will have to change rent laws Union Cabinet clears Model Tenancy Act

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 2

The Union Cabinet has on Wednesday approved the much-awaited Model Tenancy Act, which is expected to give a fillip to rental housing and property markets across the country.

The Act, the government said, will help overhaul the legal framework on rental housing, enable creation of adequate rental housing stock and enable institutionalisation of rental housing.

The states and Union territories can now adopt the law through fresh legislation or by amending existing rental laws.

As per the Act, the states can set up rent authorities in cities, and landlords and tenants will have to be present before the authority to get rent agreements registered. The Act will also enable setting up of rent courts or tribunals to address rent-related disputes. These courts will have to pass an order within 60 days of receiving a complaint.

Further, the Act has several provisions to safeguard the interests of both tenants and landlords. Tenants will be liable to pay double the rent for two months and four times the rent in the consequent months if they stay after expiry of the rental agreement.

Landlords can approach the rent court asking for eviction, if the tenants fail to pay the rent for two months in a row. Unless mentioned in the

UNLOCKING VACANT PROPERTIES

Tenants will be liable to pay double the rent for two months and four times the rent in the consequent months if they overstay in a property

Landlords can approach the rent court asking for eviction, if the tenants fail to pay the rent for two months

Landlords cannot ask for more than two months of rent as security deposit

Landlords will have to give three months' notice to the tenant before raising the rent



rent agreement, the landlord cannot hike the rent during the agreement period. The landlord will have to give three months' notice to the tenant before increasing the rent. Further, the landlord will be responsible for the structural maintenance of the property.

Landlords in states that adopt the policy will not be able to ask for more than two months of rent as security deposit.

The Act also stipulates that the tenant cannot sublet the whole or part of the accommodation without the landlord's permission.

Similarly, landlords need to give a written notice 24 hours in advance to visit the premises. They cannot make a visit before 7 am and after 8 pm.

Nareco president Niranjan Hiranandani said the new law "would make things easier for all stakeholders tenants, landlords

and investors to transact in rental housing."

The model Act will facilitate unlocking of vacant houses for rental housing. "It is expected to give a fillip to private participation in rental housing as a business model for addressing the huge housing shortage," Hiranandani said.

The new act would bring in over 11 million vacant urban houses into the rental market and help address the country's massive housing shortage, said Pankaj Bhansali, COO, Equo Guarantees, a surety solutions provider.

Samantak Das, chief economist and head-research & REIS, JLL, a global property consultant, said, "The Model Tenancy Act is going to give a guiding framework to all states to make their respective tenancy Acts contemporary. Current Acts will give way to the new ones where uniformity will prevail."

BYJU'S, GOOGLE IN TIEUP TO OFFER SCIENCE, MATHS IN SCHOOLS

New Delhi, June 2: Education technology firm Byju's on Wednesday announced a partnership with tech giant Google to offer a learning solution' for schools.

With this, the simplicity, flexibility and security of Google Workspace for Education and Byju's content pedagogy come together on the 'Vidya' platform to aid effective learning at school, according to a statement.

This integration of Google Workspace for Education with Byju's would offer a collaborative and personalised digital platform for classroom organisation, available for free to participating educational institutions, the statement added.

"With a commitment to digital education, Google Workspace for Education will combine Byju's unparalleled pedagogy to empower educators in their journey towards digital transformation," the statement said.

Build on the Vidya platform, this partnership will provide direct access to Byju's math and science pedagogy and visually rich learning solutions, including chapter-wise slides, readymade assignments, data banks, summary docs, handouts, tests, among others.

The acceptance of online learning in the last one year has led to the swift digitisation of the education system, Byju's noted. —PTI

Mercedes to sell cars directly to customers

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JUNE 2

Mercedes-Benz, India's biggest luxury car maker, on Wednesday announced it will completely revamp its sales model in the country and sell its new cars directly to customers.

Through a new 'Direct To Customer' model, which the company terms as the 'Retail of the Future', the Pune-based German car-maker said it will start selling its cars directly to customers from the October-December quarter.

The dealers will remain an integral part but will not be involved in transactions with the customer or buy stock from Mercedes-Benz.

In this new circular sales model, customers will contact dealerships (now called franchise partners) to buy a Mercedes car. But the dealer's responsibility will rest on providing a suitable brand experience to the customer through showcasing Mercedes-Benz cars, offering sales consulting and test drives.

The dealer will facilitate the sale of the car as well but Mercedes-Benz India will own all the stock of its manufactured/ imported models. Customers will be invoiced directly by Mercedes-Benz and there will be no financial transactions with the dealer.

For customers, it means transparent prices, and an end to bargaining for a better price, Mercedes-Benz said, as the cars will be now sold directly to customers by the company itself.

The industry's first new retail service will be



implemented in India from Q4 2021 onwards, Mercedes-Benz said.

The Indian arm of the German carmaker will now own the entire stock of cars, sell them via appointed dealers, invoice the new cars to its customers directly, process the order and fulfil them, and offer one price and purchasing experience for customers.

The dealer, on the other hand, will handle establishing and maintaining customer contacts, developing the market, and facilitating the sale of Mercedes-Benz cars.

"A key reason for introducing 'Retail of the Future' is to create an enhanced luxury buying experience for our customers," Martin Schwenk, MD & CEO, at Mercedes-Benz India, said.

He said it also will deliver a win-win solution for both customers and our dealers, underscoring our clear vision for a future which is sustainable, empowering, and digital.

The changes to the 'Retail of the Future' strategy for the customer include one price directly offered by Mercedes-Benz, cars will be invoiced

directly by Mercedes-Benz India and not by the dealers, and a much-simplified purchase process that is hassle-free.

For the dealers, the new retail model will help them reduce inventory costs and allow them to cater to the specific needs of its customers with a single centralised system that gives access to a larger pool of stock cars.

Mercedes-Benz India will be responsible for centrally managing the selling price of all new cars, owning and managing the entire stock of new cars, and processing and fulfilling the order, reducing delivery time.

Schwenk said dealers will continue as brand representatives, maintaining their connection with customers and strive to offer the best customer experience in the market.

The dealers will continue to cater to after-sales service, remain brand representatives in the market, will be responsible for developing customer relationships, will continue to manage operational handling of customer interactions, and will continue local retail marketing activities.

MPC begins meet, likely to hold rates

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JUNE 2

With the second phase of the Covid-19 pandemic impacting consumption and growth, the monetary policy committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to maintain status quo on policy rates, continue with an accommodative policy stance and ensure adequate liquidity in the system in an effort to stimulate growth. The MPC, which is the rate setting panel, began its three-day deliberations on Wednesday and would announce its decision on Friday.

The MPC has kept key policy rates unchanged in the last five bi-monthly policy meets.

The RBI's annual report 2020-2021, released last week, has already made it clear that "the conduct of monetary policy in 2021-22 would be guided by evolving macroeconomic conditions, with a bias to remain supportive of

growth till it gains traction on a durable basis while ensuring that inflation remains within the target".

The report added that the central bank would ensure that the system-level liquidity remains comfortable during 2021-22, is aligned with the stance of monetary policy, and monetary transmission continues unimpeded while maintaining financial stability. In the assessment of the RBI, the evolving CPI inflation trajectory is likely to be subjected to both upside and downside pressures. The food inflation path will critically depend on the temporal and spatial progress of the south-west monsoon in 2021.

While the country's GDP growth has sequentially improved, the near-term outlook for the economy remains clouded with extreme uncertainty and downside risks. Since the previous monetary policy review in April 2021, most of the states have

announced stringent lockdowns, reflected by a jump in Oxford's Stringency Index for India from 58 at the start of April to 74 during the month of May.

These restrictions have severely impacted business activities with the contact-intensive sector facing the highest strain while mobility dropped significantly compared with Q3 and Q4 of FY21.

M. Govinda Rao, chief economic advisor of Brickwork Ratings, said, "The better-than-expected GDP numbers provide much-needed comfort to the MPC on the growth outlook. However, with the imposition of partial lockdown-like restrictions to contain the virus spread in several parts of the country, the downside risk on growth recovery has intensified. Hence, the RBI is likely to continue with its accommodative monetary policy stance in the decision of the MPC meeting to be announced on June 4 2021."

Biden targets tax break on property capital gains

DAVID KOCIENIEWSKI & CALEB MELBY JUNE 2

President Joe Biden is pushing to close a tax break that helped his predecessor amass a fortune.

The Democrat has proposed narrowing a tax code provision that allows real estate investors to avoid capital gains taxes when they sell property, as long as they use the gains to buy more. Former president Donald Trump's most valuable investment, which traces back to his \$95 million purchase of a west-side Manhattan development site, has benefitted from the rule.

In 2005, when Trump's partners agreed to sell the site for \$1.8 billion—a deal Trump resisted—his cut was about \$500 million. Because the partners then used the capital gains from the sale to purchase two office towers, they and Trump didn't owe any tax on their gains. Today, Trump's stake in the buildings is worth about \$1.2 billion before accounting for debt. Biden's plan would

eliminate that kind of manoeuvre for Trump and thousands of others with real estate investments.

The so-called 1031 like-kind exchange rule, named after a section of the tax code, was created a century ago to aid family farmers. It has evolved into a beloved tool of property moguls, *Fortune* 500 companies and real estate trusts that can use it to create a daisy-chain of tax avoidance.

It works like this: An investor buys a building for \$4 million and sells it later for \$10 million. By redeploying the proceeds into a new property within six months, she can defer paying taxes on her gains. She can repeat that process indefinitely. When coupled with another tax break that wipes out all capital gains at death, the 1031 provision can enable real estate investors to forgo capital gains taxes entirely, enabling family dynasties to pass on riches to heirs virtually tax-free. Some wealth managers call the strategy "swap 'til you drop." —Bloomberg

MERCHANDISE EXPORTS JUMP IN MAY



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 2

Despite the second wave of infections, merchandise exports grew both yearly and sequentially in May. With imports declining sequentially, the trade deficit shrunk to an eight-month low of \$6.32 billion in May.

Merchandise exports in May 2021 stood at \$32.21 billion—67.39 per cent higher than the low base of \$19.24 billion in the lock-down-hit May 2020. The exports were also 7.93 per cent higher than \$29.85 billion in the pre-pandemic May 2019. Most importantly, exports continued to grow sequentially by 6.6 per cent compared to \$30.21 billion in April 2021, despite the second wave.

In the case of imports of \$38.53 billion, there has been an increase of 68.54 per cent over \$22.86 billion in May 2020, but a decline of 17.47 per cent over \$46.68 billion in May 2019. Imports were also 15 per cent down sequentially compared to \$45.45 billion in April 2021.

This helped India cut its trade deficit to \$6.32 billion compared with \$15.24 billion in April 2021 and \$16.84 billion in May 2019. However, the trade deficit was higher than \$3.62 billion in the lock-down hit May 2020.

"The merchandise trade deficit shrunk to an eight-month low \$6.3 billion in May 2021 from \$15.2 billion in April 2021 as the state-wise restrictions widened, curbing domestic demand for both gold and oil. A predominant 63 per cent of the decline in the trade deficit in May 2021 relative to April 2021 was on account of the collapse in gold imports, with the balance led by a narrower oil deficit," said Aditi Nayar of Ibra.

FENDING OFF THE VIRUS

Ginger, garlic, turmeric demand up globally

‘Halo’ crops reap pandemic profits

LIBBY GEORGE, SABRINA VALLE & NIGEL HUNT JUNE 2

In a flowing cream hijab, Karima M. Imam walks through her fields in scrubland in northern Nigeria as workers harvest a gnarled brown root that has turned gold since Covid struck: ginger.

"If I had the capital, I'd plant more. People are looking for ginger now, and there is not enough," she said at her five hectare farm on the outskirts of Kaduna.

As the pandemic rages, people around the world have sought to guard against illness by turning to so-called halo foods. While scientists have dismissed many claims on social media about how superfoods can fend off



the virus, their positive role as part of a healthy diet is widely acknowledged.

As demand for halo foods surges, prices for ginger in Nigeria and acai berries in Brazil have leapt while exports of Indian turmeric and Chinese garlic have jumped in the past year.

"The demand for ginger is high because they are using it as medicine," Imam said, adding that during the lockdown she

boiled ginger with turmeric and garlic to take as a remedy.

Increasingly health conscious consumers have given an already buoyant global spice market a further boost during the pandemic, heightening investor interest in the sector.

Singapore's Olam International completed the purchase of major US spice manufacturer Olde Thompson last month while Norway's Orkla took a controlling stake in Indian spice exporter Eastern Condiments in March.

In Nigeria, a 50 kg bag of ginger, which can help the body ward off germs and is used as a cold remedy, now sells for 15,000 naira (\$39), up from 4,000 to 6,000 naira two years ago.

Thanks to the ginger

rush, Imam has been able to start building a new house in nearby Millennium City, with a small warehouse attached so she can store and sell fresh ginger.

Prices began rising last year but since January they have taken off due to pandemic-related demand, said Florence Edwards, national president of the Ginger Growers, Processors and Marketers Association of Nigeria.

She said there had been demand from all over the world, citing India, China and Europe among popular markets.

There has also been a surge in demand for acai, a fruit rich in antioxidants hyped as a superfood. The state of Para in Brazil is the world's largest producing region. —Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Will miss Marin at Games: Sindhu

New Delhi: Star Indian shuttler P. V. Sindhu on Wednesday wished Spain's Carolina Marin a speedy recovery after she was forced out of the Tokyo Games due to a freak knee injury and said she will miss the reigning Olympic champion at the quadrennial event.

Marin suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee during training and pulled out of the showpiece event on Tuesday. "So sorry to hear about your injury. Hoping that you will recover soon and come back stronger," Sindhu, who had settled for the silver medal at Rio Games after losing to Marin in the final, said in a video message posted on Twitter. "I will miss you at the Olympic Games but hope we compete against each other soon, so come back fast and recover soon. Lots of love," Sindhu said. — PTI

Pak departure to England delayed

Islamabad: The Pakistan cricket team's departure to England has been pushed back by two days after the Pakistan Super League final was rescheduled for June 24 in Abu Dhabi. The PSL was earlier scheduled to end on June 20 and the national team was due to leave for England on June 23 to play three ODIs and three Twenty20s.

However, with the PSL final pushed back by four days, the national team will leave for England on June 25. The first ODI is scheduled for July 8 in Cardiff.

Abu Dhabi will host the remaining 20 games of the PSL after Pakistan's premier domestic twenty20 league was postponed in March when several players and support staff tested positive for Covid-19. — AP

Task cut out for Ind against Qatar

Doha: Their preparation was far from ideal but India would take inspiration from the draw against Asian champions Qatar in 2019 when they face the same opponents in the second-leg match of the joint World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers, here on Thursday.

India had held mighty Qatar 0-0 in September 2019 here, a result considered as one of the best for the side in recent times. But India are playing their home match here as the Qatari capital was chosen as the centralised venue for all the remaining Group 'E' matches after the qualifiers were halted last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. India's performance, however, has gone south since then while Qatar, the group toppers, have come into Thursday match on a high. — PTI

Ancelotti back as Real Madrid coach

Madrid: Carlo Ancelotti has rejoined Real Madrid as coach for the next three seasons, the Spanish club said on Tuesday. "Hello Madrid!" the 61-year-old Italian who succeeds Zinedine Zidane posted on Twitter.

Ancelotti, who won the Champions League for Real Madrid during his first spell at the club between 2013 and 2015, will sign his contract and be presented to the media on Wednesday, the club said in a statement. It took less than a week for Real Madrid to turn the page on Zidane criticising the lack of confidence shown in him by the club hierarchy.

Instead, Ancelotti is about to be reunited with the club president Florentino Perez who ruthlessly ousted the coach in 2015, just one year after he led the club to a 10th Champions League title. — AFP

Booker leaves Lakers in lurch

Los Angeles: Devin Booker scored 30 points as the Phoenix Suns left LeBron James and the depleted Los Angeles Lakers facing elimination from the NBA playoffs on Tuesday with a crushing 115-85 victory. Phoenix took full advantage of the injury absence of the Lakers' Anthony Davis to dominate the Lakers from early in the first quarter before romping to a comfortable win. — AFP

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NADAL MODE ON

Rafael, Djokovic start off with a winning note in French Open

Paris, June 2: Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal began their bids for Grand Slam history with comfortable wins on Tuesday.

World No.1 Djokovic kicked off his bid for a 19th Grand Slam title with a 6-2, 6-4, 6-2 win over Tennys Sandgren inside an empty stadium.

Nadal, the 13-time champion and chasing a record-setting 21st major, defeated Alexei Popyrin of Australia 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/3).

The Spaniard now has 101 wins against just two losses at the tournament.

Djokovic saw off world number 66 Sandgren in straight sets for his fourth win in four meetings with the American.

Top seed Djokovic, the champion in Paris in 2016, is attempting to become the first man in more than 50 years to win all four Slams multiple times.

The Serb fired 33 winners and broke serve five times as he set up a clash with Pablo Cuevas of Uruguay for a place in the last 32. Nadal, meanwhile, has now won 26 sets in a row at the tournament.

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NAVARRO LOSES MATCH AFTER CANCER RECOVERY

A "proud" Carla Suarez Navarro came close to winning her first match back after recovering from cancer at the French Open on Tuesday, but bowed out in the first round with defeat by Sloane Stephens.

The Spaniard was told in September 2020 that she was suffering with Hodgkin's lymphoma.

But almost nine months later, Suarez Navarro is back after recovering following eight chemotherapy and 15 radiotherapy sessions. The 32-year-old served for the match against 2018 runner-up Stephens but lost 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

OTHER RESULTS

Men's singles second round: Alexander Zverev (GER x6) bt Roman Safiullin (RUS) 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 7-6 (7/1); Henri Laaksonen (SUI) bt Roberto Bautista Agut (ESP x11) 6-3, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2; Casper Ruud (NOR x15) bt Kamil Majchrzak (POL) 6-3, 6-2, 6-4; John Isner (USA x31) bt Filip Krajinovic (SRB) 7-6 (8/6), 6-1, 7-6 (7/5); Reilly Opelka (USA x32) bt Jaume Munar (ESP) 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 7-5.

Women's singles second round: Elena Vesnina (RUS) bt Petra Kvitova (CZE x11) — walkover; Daria Kasatkina (RUS) bt Belinda Bencic (SUI x10) 6-2, 6-2; Polona Hercog (SLO) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA) 7-5, 6-4; Ana Bogdan (ROM) bt Naomi Osaka (JPN x2) — walkover; Victoria Azarenka (BLR x15) bt Clara Tauson (DEN) 7-5, 6-4.



Rafael Nadal of Spain returns the ball to Alexei Popyrin of Australia during their men's singles match at the French Open tennis tournament in Paris on Tuesday. Nadal won in straight sets at 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/3).

Questions won't stop for Osaka

Paris, June 2: Unfortunately for Naomi Osaka, the questions will keep coming. There's nowhere to run and certainly no place to hide when you're a superstar travelling the world and playing on the biggest stages in tennis.

Some of the questions may be repetitive. Some may even be a bit negative, though for the most part those in the tennis media tend to treat top players with kid gloves.

Regardless, it's part of her job to answer them. That's not going to change, even with Osaka's withdrawal from the French Open after refusing to appear at the news conferences every other top player accepts as part of the job.

Only now she'll have even more questions to answer.

That's not entirely Osaka's fault, though she did herself no favors by the clumsy way she handled her mini media revolt in Paris. She blew off her first post-match news conference, after declaring earlier in a posting online that she didn't want to



Naomi Osaka reacts to losing a point in this file photo.

hear the same questions over and over and saying that reporters tend to kick players while they are down.

In other words, she didn't want to answer questions about why she didn't play better on clay.

Osaka rebounded a bit in a second statement announcing her withdrawal, and that's where it gets tricky. She revealed she had suffered long periods of depression after winning the U.S. Open in 2018 and that she suffers great anxiety when faced

with having to answer questions from journalists at news conferences.

We all can and should be sympathetic to that. Depression and anxiety can be devastating and debilitating, as anyone who has suffered from them or dealt with a family member who has them knows so well.

Nobody should begrudge Osaka's decision to withdraw from a major championship because she's having trouble coping with those issues. Indeed, we should all support her

efforts to improve her mental health.

But let's make this clear: this isn't a media problem. It isn't a news conference problem.

Frankly, until Osaka said she would not show up for her news conference and then blew off tournament organisers who wondered why, no one even knew there was a problem.

There's nothing inherently wrong with a system that requires athletes who are paid millions of dollars to perform to be asked about their play afterward. There's also nothing wrong with reporters asking an occasional question that may not fit the positive narrative Osaka wants when writing about the newest star in tennis.

It's part of the reason why tournaments like the French Open sell out expensive seats every year. It's a lot of the reason Forbes said Osaka made \$37 million in 2019, most of it in endorsements from companies that expect Osaka to generate lots of press for their products. — AP

Virat charged up for WTC battle

Mumbai, June 2: India captain Virat Kohli is not too concerned about the limited preparation time that his team will get for the World Test Championship final against New Zealand as he believes that it has the requisite understanding of conditions from its past experience of playing in England.

India take on New Zealand in the marquee game at Southampton from June 18. Currently, New Zealand are engaged in a two-Test series against England, while India would be in quarantine after landing there, including three days of hotel quarantine.

"...look, in the past we have landed in places three days prior even in a proper schedule and have had a hell of a series and hell of competition, so it is all in the head," Kohli said in the pre-departure press conference.

Virat insisted that it was also about the mindset. "...it is not the first time we are playing in England, we all know what the conditions are like," he said.

"And even if you are used to the conditions, if you don't enter the field in the right frame of mind, you are going to nick that first ball or you are going to find it tough to pick wickets," added the superstar.

According to Kohli, his side would not have any issues even if it gets just

We don't have any issues even with four practice sessions heading into the WTC final, because we are absolutely sure of what we can do as a team and we all have played in England.

— VIRAT KOHLI
India cricket team captain

four practice sessions.

"...we don't have any issues even with four practice sessions heading into the game, because we are absolutely sure of what we can do as a team and we all have played in England.

"Whether it is with the Indian team or India A as well, for the likes of (Mohammed) Siraj...so we are not bothered by that at all and we just want to get there and make the most of the opportunity at hand," he added.

Kohli echoed coach Ravi Shastri's thoughts about the World Test Championship final holding a lot of value.

"All of us take a lot of pride in playing Test cricket, and the way, we have progressed as a side is an example of what Test cricket means to us. So, for all of us as a unit, those who have been part of the Test side for many years, this is like an accumulation of all the hard work," he said.

— PTI

DOMESTIC PLAYERS PITCH FOR CENTRAL CONTRACTS

New Delhi, June 2: As the BCCI works out a compensation package and a formula to distribute it for the Covid-19 hit domestic cricketers, voices demanding central contracts for such players are getting louder with seasoned names like Jaydev Unadkat, Sheldon Jackson and Harpreet Singh Bhatia leading the chorus.

Last month, former India player and domestic veteran Rohan Gavaskar had also called for state associations to introduce contracts for players over and above their match fees, just like it is for the national team.

Majority of domestic players don't get to play IPL, don't have job security and rely heavily on match fees, which took a beating last season with Ranji Trophy being cancelled due to the pandemic.

Saurashtra captain and India player Jaydev Unadkat doesn't need the security of a contract but he feels it should be introduced for the top 30 cricketers of the state.

"Talks over central contracts were happening even before the pandemic. Even cricketers at the age group level should be compensated for the lack of cricket, it will keep them motivated and then hand contracts to senior players," Unadkat said.

— PTI

Conway hits ton to bolster Kiwis

London, June 2: New Zealand's Devon Conway joined a select group of cricketers on Wednesday by marking his Test debut with a splendid hundred (136 off 240 balls) at Lord's to lead New Zealand to 246 for 3 against England at the end of first Day's play.

The South Africa-born opener found himself thrust into the action straight away after New Zealand captain Kane Williamson won the toss and batted in the first of a two-match series against England.

But while star batsman Williamson and the experienced Ross Taylor both fell cheaply, the 29-year-old Conway pressed on to a 163-ball century, reaching the landmark with a flamboyant whipped legside four, his 11th boundary off England debutant fast bowler Ollie Robinson.

Only five other batsmen had previously scored a Test debut hundred at

Lord's, with Conway the first New Zealand international to achieve the feat.

New Zealand had the better of the morning session to be 85-1 at lunch after Williamson won the toss.

But James Anderson, equalling retired former captain Alastair Cook's England record of 161 Test appearances, struck in the first over after the interval to remove star batsman Williamson for 13 as the runs dried up.

And fast bowler Robinson, who'd earlier dismissed Tom Latham, then had the 37-year-old Taylor lbw for 14.

Latham and Conway made a steady start against England new-ball greats Anderson and Stuart Broad after Black Caps skipper Williamson won the toss.

Brief scores (Day 1): New Zealand 246/3 in 86 overs (Devon Conway 136 batting; O. Robinson 2/50) vs England.

AUSSIE PLAYERS TO RAISE FUNDS FOR COVID-HIT INDIA

Sydney, June 2: Top Australian cricketers including star pacer Pat Cummins will participate in a 12-hour gaming live stream on Thursday to raise money for UNICEF Australia's India Covid Appeal.

The brainchild of pacer Josh Lalor, the initiative will let fans watch the likes of Cummins, spinner Nathan Lyon and the pace duo of Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood on a live stream when they talk about cricket and showcase their gaming skills in a bid to raise AUD 100,000. The fundraiser will begin at 1:30 pm IST and will also see participation from Moises Henriques, women cricketer Alyssa Healy and South African Rilee Rossouw among others.

"Being a cricketer from Australia, we have a unique relationship with Indian people," Lalor told cricket.com.au.

— PTI

Croatia, Armenia play 1-1 stalemate

Paris, June 2: World Cup runners-up Croatia were held to a 1-1 draw by Armenia on Tuesday in their first warm-up match for Euro 2020.

Inter Milan winger Ivan Perisic opened the scoring for the home side in the 24th minute, with coach Zlatko Dalic's team up against England, the Czech Republic and Scotland at the Euros.

But Armenia made the most of a rare sortie into Croat territory when Wbeymar Angulo equalised in the 72nd minute.

Lazio striker Vedat Muriqi hit all four goals, including one penalty, as Kosovo outclassed San Marino 4-1.

Kosovo's neighbours North Macedonia came

close to claiming the scalp of Slovenia after Napoli midfielder Elif Elmas scored the opening goal.

But home hearts were broken as Domen Crnigoj snatched an equaliser for Slovenia in the seventh minute of injury time.

North Macedonia are drawn with Austria, the Netherlands and Ukraine at the June 11-July 11 Euros.

Slovakia, in Group 'E' alongside Poland, Spain and Sweden, were held to a 1-1 draw by Bulgaria.

In the only game pitching two Euro-bound sides against each other, the Poles played out a 1-1 draw against Russia, in Group 'B' with Belgium, Denmark and Finland.

— Agencies



Croatia's Duje Caleta-Car (left) and Armenia's Tigran Barseghyan fight for the ball during a friendly match at Velika Gorica on Tuesday.

Veda recalls Covid trauma in family

New Delhi, June 2: "Completely destroyed" after losing her mother and sister to Covid-19 recently, Indian women's team cricketer Veda Krishnamurthy says she is slowly learning to tune herself out of that grief and stressed on the importance of mental health assistance in crisis situations.

Nine members of Krishnamurthy's family battled the disease and her mother and sister passed away within two weeks of each other last month in Karnataka.

"I'm a big believer in

what destiny holds for you, but I really hoped that my sister would come back home. When she didn't, I was completely destroyed. All of us were broken to pieces," Krishnamurthy told ESPNcricinfo.

"...I still had to put up a brave face for the rest of the family. What I had to do in those testing couple of weeks was learn to tune myself out of my grief. But it keeps coming back to haunt you," she said. The middle-order batter said she was the only one in the family not to contract the virus and



Veda Krishnamurthy

ended up coordinating all the medical needs at that time. It was then that she realised how difficult it would have been for several other people to access basic care. "Going through my Twitter feed

at the time, I felt a lot of people were struggling with something as basic as getting a doctor to instruct them on what they should be doing — whether that was isolating at home or something else," she recalled.

Speaking about the mental aspect of dealing with a health crisis and the ensuing tragedy of such a magnitude, Krishnamurthy said her mother and sister also suffered from anxiety while battling the illness.

"Mental strength is important. My oldest sister, Vatsala, had panic

attacks before she passed away from Covid," the 28-year-old said.

Krishnamurthy also revealed that she has dealt with mental health issues of her own in the past and called for a structured support system for those in need.

"A lot of people who are playing cricket currently know what mental health is, but it is also important to accept that if the system is not doing anything to offer you mental-health assistance, you can and must find the support for yourself if you can afford it," she added. — PTI