

SHORT TAKES

FAKE TWITTER ACCOUNT ON DGP SAWANG NAME

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 31

With no bounds on cyber crime, AP's top cop was targeted by creating a fake Twitter account in his name with his photo and several tweets were posted on the account.

Cyber criminals created a fake Twitter account in the name of AP director general of police Goutam Sawang with his picture and claimed it to be official. Some police officers even posted some tweets on the fake account assuming to be genuine.

However, the DGP's office quickly noticed it and stopped its operation and booked a case.



Ch. D. Tirumala Rao

TIRUMALA RAO APPOINTED AS APSRTC VC & MD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 31

Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation has got a new vice chairman and managing director as the state government appointed Ch. D. Tirumala Rao.

The senior IPS officer Rao is currently working as director general of police, Railways. He was transferred and posted as commissioner, public transport and ex-officio vice chairman and managing director, APSRTC, in the vacancy caused due to superannuation of R.P. Thakur.

Rao is considered a straightforward officer and maintains a low profile. He worked very efficiently to curb land grab while serving as a commissioner Cyberabad police Commissionerate in combined AP.

RAJU LAMENTS TO NHRC ABOUT CID TORTURE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 31

YSR Congress rebel MP K. Raghuram Raju met National Human Rights Commission chairman justice P.C. Pant and complained him about custodial torture and violation of human rights in New Delhi on Monday.

Sources said that the NHRC chairman learnt to have assured to order a probe on the entire issue.

The MP Raju was earlier arrested by the APCID on charges of sedition and hate speech and stirring up communal violence. He alleged that he was subjected to torture during his interrogation by the CID sleuths.

Earlier, based on a complaint lodged by MP's son Bharat, NHRC ordered a probe and served notices on AP DGP and home principal secretary.

CM: TAKE STEPS TO CURB BLACK FUNGUS

From page 1

On black fungus, officials informed Jagan Mohan Reddy that 1,179 of these cases have been reported so far, with 97 recoveries and 14 deaths. They said investigations revealed that some people, who had not been infected by Covid-19, have instead contracted black fungus. The CM directed officials to make every effort to ensure that all requisite injections and tablets are available to patients.

The Chief Minister was further informed that they have identified 92 orphan children, whose parents have succumbed to Covid-19. ₹10 lakh each have been deposited into bank accounts of 43 of the children while documentation is on to provide the facility to remaining children. Jagan Mohan Reddy directed officials to vaccinate and issue certificate of vaccination to students who are going abroad for studies, as also those going overseas on work visas.



Medical Staff in PPE Kits show the dead bodies of Covid-19 patients to their relatives before taking them for the funeral outside the CSR Ward inside the King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Paderu medical college a gamechanger: Experts

New medical college will take care of all diseases and emergency surgeries

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 31

The proposed medical college in Anakapalle for which foundation stone was laid by Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy on Monday and the Paderu Medical College where construction works are going on in full swing will boost the rural and agency health sector in Visakhapatnam district.

"Five assembly constituencies-Anakapalle, Chodavaram, Sabbavaram, Paravada and Pendurthi having a population of 10 lakh - will be benefited from the proposed medical college that is coming up in the heart of Anakapalle town," said local MLA Gudivada Amarnath.

He said that along with the 100-bed NTR Hospital, the new medical college will take care of all diseases and emergency surgeries. "Such patients are now sent to King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam covering a distance of 40 km," Amarnath said.

Deaths due to road accidents will come down once the college is operational from December 23. The 458-bed hospital coming up at the erstwhile Agriculture Market Research institute will cost the exchequer ₹500 crore, the MLA said.

Similarly, the Dr YSR Tribal Medical College for which the CM laid the foundation stone on October 2 last, will cater to the needs of the six lakh tribal population of Visakhapatnam agency.

The 500-bed hospital is coming up on a 35-acre plot of the model residential polytechnic in Paderu town.

"Maternal deaths will come down drastically after the medical college opens. Now we are reporting 35 to 40 maternal deaths a year," said additional district medical and health officer Dr Leela Prasad.

He said around three lakh people from Paderu, Hukumpeta, Dumbiriguda, Munchingput and Peda Bayulu areas would have access to the medical college. The agency has 11 mandals with a total population of six lakh.

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 31

Thousands of rural medical practitioners (RMPs), who had been asked to shut down their clinics following the second wave of Covid-19, have requested Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to resume the programme for their training, which was initiated by his late father in 2008.

The government had ordered that clinics of

Medical facilities set to reach rural areas of AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 31

Medical services are set to reach rural areas in Andhra Pradesh with the YSRC government setting up medical colleges in each parliamentary constituency. Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy laid the stone for construction of 14 medical colleges in the state on Monday via online virtual mode. Out of these, four colleges are for East and West Godavari districts.

Participating in the virtual meeting, a resident of Konaseema area Lova Lakshmi said the rural people can soon get the medical services easily. As of now, they have to go to either Kakinada or Rajamahendravaram for medical treatment. "This is expensive and involves long-distance travel. The laying stone for a medical college at Konaseema now is a welcome gesture from the Jagan-led government."

Social Welfare Minister Pinepe Viswaroop said a medical college will be set up at Amalapuram Rural area in Konaseema. He thanked the officials for acquiring the land, inviting tenders etc. The medical college will be completed by December 2023.

Agriculture minister Kurasala Kannababu said a super-specialty medical college and a nursing college would be set up in every parliamentary constituency.

District incharge collector G. Lakshmisha said

GOLDEN ERA FOR AP HEALTHCARE: CM

From page 1

The Chief Minister said, "Never in the history of India, AP has accorded top priority to healthcare of the people by setting up 16 medical colleges attached with super speciality hospitals at one go. A new chapter of the golden era has begun for the people of AP to access healthcare. These colleges and hospitals will be having national standards and the existing 11 medical colleges also will be upgraded to the same level."

Referring to implementation of the Nadu-Nedu initiative in healthcare, the Chief Minister said they were spending a whopping ₹16,300 crore for giving facelift to all health facilities in the state and added that 10,111 YSR Village Clinics were coming up to provide access to healthcare. In every mandal, two PHCs with two doctors and two

units of 104 vehicles would be provided, he said.

Jagan Mohan Reddy said the scope of Aarogyasri scheme had been expanded by including 2,436 medical interventions from a mere 1,000 earlier and added that the government had paid ₹5.215 crore to Aarogyasri Trust so far since 2019 and out of it, ₹3,560 crore was spent for treatment under the scheme. The Chief Minister claimed the credit for filling up 9,712 posts including doctors, nurses, paramedics and others in government hospitals for providing better healthcare to the people as it never happened on such a large scale earlier.

He announced ex gratia of ₹5 lakh each to the kin of frontline workers including those working on outsourcing and contract basis in case of death due to Covid if they were not covered for relief from the Centre.

the setting up of a medical college in Konaseema area having a 15 lakh population is a major step forward in the health care sector.

MLC Pandula Ravindrababu, MLAs Chirila Jaggireddy, Kondeti Chittibabu and Rapaka Vara Prasada Rao were among those present.

At Rajamahendravaram,

state BC welfare minister Chelluboyina Srinivasa Venugopala Krishna said students who want to join medical courses can have this done closer home once the medical colleges are functional.

Rajamahendravaram MP M. Bharat said medical students can get employment and thus the medical facilities can be reached to the rural poor.

BJP praises CM for new med colleges

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 31

Former floor leader of BJP in AP assembly and state vice president of the party P. Vishnu Kumar Raju praised chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy

for his decision to have medical colleges in each parliamentary constituency.

Marking the inauguration of new medical colleges across the state, Vishnu Kumar Raju said the new institutions

would give a boost to health services in the state that would now reach remote corners of the state.

"This is the best decision the CM has taken in his two-year rule," he said.

Decentralisation of Anandaiah's mixture distribution on cards

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 31

Thanking Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for granting permission to distribute B. Anandaiah's herbal concoction, Sarvepalli legislator K. Govardhan Reddy said that they are planning to decentralise the distribution to avoid crowding at Krishnapatnam.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, he said that it will take three to four days for Anandaiah to procure the ingredients and prepare the medicine. He hinted that people interested in the medicine may provide the herbs and other ingredients to enable Anandaiah to concentrate on the pro-

duction. During a visit to Krishnapatnam on Monday, Govardhan Reddy greeted Anandaiah for succeeding in his mission to secure government nod for his medicine. He said the state government considered the issue as a priority after noticing unprecedented support for the concoction from all sections of people. He said they ignored the negative comments on the issue and waited for the final decision of the government.

He appreciated Jagan Mohan Reddy for respecting the sentiments of people and allowing preparation for public distribution which made him the people's leader.

160 PATIENTS IN GGH CONSUMED ANANDAIAH CONCOCTION EARLIER

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 31

Even as the state government gave its nod for distribution of Anandaiah's herbal concoction, except eye drops, as many as 160 Covid-19 patients who consumed the herbal medicine a few days back, are undergoing treatment at the GGH in Nellore.

Superintendent of the hospital Dr J. Prbhakar disclosed this while interacting with media persons over the death of retired Headmaster B.

Kotaiah at the GGH on Monday. Kotaiah had also used the eye drops produced by Anandaiah 10 days back. He said that eight out of 160 patients are in ICU and a majority of them are on oxygen.

Referring to their practice in GGH to record the previous history of the patients coming to the hospital, he said that they came to know about consumption of Krishnapatnam medicine while eliciting information before admitting the patients.

Analysis on eye drops to take two weeks

From page 1

Its report would be submitted by June 3. With regard to the eye drops, it would take two weeks' time for the analysis.

The court asked the pleader to suggest measures for preparation and administration of eye drops in ways as to ensure its safety. Pleader responded that he would come back with suggestions by June 3.

Petitioner's counsel N. Ashwani Kumar submitted that sample 'K' would be available for examination by Monday night. He submitted that the ayurvedic medicine was helpful in treating Coronavirus. It is having a "unique combination" and was proven to be having "no possible side effect."

The preparation is expected to be categorised under 'patent or proprietary medicine' as defined under section 3(h) of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, he said and argued that Anandaiah is a practising ayurvedic doctor for many years. The drug he was making needed no licence and, under provisions of Section 33 EEC the petitioner gets an exception from obtaining a licence, he added.

He claimed that the ayurveda doctor was having exclusive right to use the preparation and is not obliged to disclose the details of the combination. "The concoction is his intellectual property and he is having proprietary right on it and an exclusive protection could be sought through patent law."

He informed the court that the petitioner wanted to distribute the preparation to the public free of

cost. Special government pleader Sumon said the SP and the district collector of Nellore district were asked to ensure compliance with Covid-19 guidelines by the people while taking ayurvedic preparations made by Anandaiah. He suggested that instead of patients directly coming to Anandaiah, anyone on behalf of the patients could come and collect the medicine to avoid a spread of Covid-19.

The court directed Anandaiah and the district administration to discuss ways of maintenance of Covid-19 protocols and smooth administration of the medicine. The court posted the next hearing on June 3.

Earlier, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy held a high-level review meet on Covid-19 management and discussed Anandaiah's medicinal preparation with the officials. At the meeting, it was decided to permit administration of three traditional supplements of the medicine, except for the eye drops based on CRAS report.

The officials said infected persons were not supposed to visit Krishnapatnam personally for getting medicine but their relatives could get it. The officials also informed the CM that no evidence of adverse effects with the herbal concoctions were found and the ingredients being used for preparations were not harmful.

The officials said the CCRAS-conducted trials to find out whether the supplements could cure Covid-19 and made it clear that no such evidence was found.

RMPs act as bridge between patients and hospitals during pandemic, says federation's secretary

CM urged to utilise services of RMPs post training

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 31

Thousands of rural medical practitioners (RMPs), who had been asked to shut down their clinics following the second wave of Covid-19, have requested Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to resume the programme for their training, which was initiated by his late father in 2008.

The government had ordered that clinics of

these RMPs be shut down, as they had become a source point for spread of Coronavirus, particularly in rural areas.

With no other source of income, Federation of Experienced Medical Practitioners Welfare Association recalled that former chief minister Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy had mooted the idea of training RMPs, so that their services could be utilised in rural and agency areas. Accordingly, GO No. 429

was issued in 2008. Had that training been completed as per the idea of Dr. Reddy, who was an allopathic doctor, around 1.2 lakh RMPs would have been benefited in combined Andhra Pradesh.

"The late CM wanted to issue certificates recognising us as 'community paramedics' post the training in identifying and treating 303 basic diseases. Unfortunately, the chief minister died and our training programme was

wound up abruptly," federation's information secretary G. Chiranjeevi Rao, who used to practise medicine in Vizianagaram town, told *Deccan Chronicle*.

He asserted that RMPs have been the backbone of health system in rural and agency areas of AP. During the current Coronavirus pandemic too, they have acted as a bridge between patients and hospitals in these areas.

Chiranjeevi Rao said a

decade after their training was abandoned, their federation approached then Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, who immediately issued G.O. No. 465, providing recognition to rural medical practitioners. The then health minister even addressed meeting of RMPs organised in the University of Health Sciences in 2017. At the meeting, the minister also announced that an action plan will be chalked out to train RMPs and

utilise their services in a big way for improving the health system in rural areas.

"That was the last time anybody spoke of training RMPs in AP. We approached Jagan Mohan Reddy during his pada yatra and our association members also called on him after he took over as Chief Minister in 2019. But nothing has come out so far," Chiranjeevi Rao lamented on Monday speaking to DC.

Appreciating the services of RMPs, Joint Action Committee of Tribal Organisations state convener Rama Rao Dora said services of rural medical practitioners must be deployed particularly in remote places, though under supervision of the government. However, he said if vacant posts in 36 PHCs and 120 sub-centres in agency areas are filled with doctors and other staff, there would be no need for RMPs.

IN BRIEF

AP FORMS PANEL ON NAGARJUNA V-C's LAPSES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 31

The AP government has constituted a three-member committee to probe into the allegations of corruption on Acharya Nagarjuna University vice chancellor P. Rajasekhara (full additional charge) and submit its report in 90 days. The previous government had constituted a panel to enquire charges of graft when he was working as the registrar in the university. The panel submitted its report to the then government stating irregularities. However, after the change of government, no action was taken against him. Later, Rajasekhara was appointed as vice chancellor of the university with full additional charge. University professor Dr Ratna Sheela Mani complained against Rajasekhara for getting appointed as V-C despite facing charges of irregularities in various works of engineering departments and payment of wages of workers under EPF and others.

CALL TO FORM TASK FORCE FOR SHLC WORKS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 31

Minister for IT, Industries, and Skill Development Mekapati Goutham Reddy asked the district collector of SPSR Nellore district K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu to form a task force for speeding up Somasila High Level Canal phase-1 works.

During a review on the works in Nellore on Monday, the minister told the collector that the task force should have members from revenue, Irrigation and Forest departments and they should function under the supervision of the joint-collector (revenue).

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Dated : 29-05-2021

Divisional Electrical Engineer, Carriage Repair Shop, Tirupati acting for and on behalf of the President of India invites E - Tenders against Tender No. : mentioned hereunder closing date as mentioned below up to 15:00 hours. Bidders will be able to submit their original / revised bids up to closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

SI. No. : 1. : Description of work :
Tender No. : CRS-E-01-2021-22.
Carriage Repair Shop, Tirupati - Comprehensive Maintenance Contract of RMPUs fitted in AC coaches Including POH activity at Tirupati Shops for a period of 3 years.

Approximate Cost (in Rs.) : 3,02,52,090/-
Earnest Money Deposit (in Rs.) : NIL.
Period of Completion : 36 Months.
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Notice Board Location where complete details of tender can be seen : Office of the Assistant Divisional Electrical Engineer, Carriage Repair Shop, Tirupati.

Asst. Divisional Electrical Engineer, A0515 (CRS), Tirupati.

For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at <https://www.ireps.gov.in> or www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

Covid testing



A health worker takes samples for a Covid-19 test at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Monday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Land grab under Covid's disguise in progress

Land grabs have resumed aggressively in the last two months

NAGESWARA RAO
BALLEDA | DC
KADAPA MAY 31

Encroachments on government lands are increasing as government officials are busy with Coronavirus duties. Land grabs, especially in Rajampet revenue division where it had temporarily stopped for a while, have resumed aggressively in the last two months. Rajampet sub-collector Ketan Garg, the young IAS officer who has been a nightmare to government land grabbers, is away in Kadapa for the past two months as part of his Covid duties. He was unable to focus fully on revenue activities as he functioned as the nodal officer for oxygen supply to Covid hospitals. Land-grabbers took advantage of this situation.

The railway-linked Kodur town is close to Tirupati and the lands of this area are precious. Some 17.54 acres of government rivulet land existed in Mysuravaripalle village, under Survey

number 2085.

For the past few years, locals had been urging the authorities to allocate it to the homeless.

This land is currently worth about a crore per acre. Revenue officials have been saying that the places in rivulet lands could not be handed over to anyone as per the Supreme Court orders.

However, recently, some local Muslims said the authorities have allotted two acres of the land for the construction of an Idgah. Prayers were also held there a few days ago. It is rumored that five acres out of the 17.54 acres have been allotted for the construction of Idgah.

Following this, some local leaders focused attention on the rest of the land. They flattened the place. Lands belonging to the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (APIIC) also existed alongside. Local leaders are making attempts to occupy the land, claiming that this

land too belonged to APIIC and was allotted to them.

The villagers of Mysurivaripalle have requested the government that the entire land be surveyed and the encroachments removed. When *Deccan Chronicle* mentioned this to Railway Koduru tehsildar J. Sirisha, it was clarified that these 17.54 acres belonged to the government and this had not been allotted to anyone.

She explained that a sign board had also been put up there, stating that the land belonged to the government.

Meanwhile, a leader from Obulavaripalle Mandal is reportedly trying to capture about 25 to 30 acres of government land in Anantasamudram village in Pullampeta mandal. The government land is in survey numbers 46, 130, 133, 443, 437, 1429 belonging to Anantasamudram revenue village.

This leader is having some ancestral property adjacent to this land. About 25 to 30 acres of

adjoining government land has been flattened with excavators and made cultivable as part of the encroachment process.

In addition, fencing was done for the entire land. Bore wells are being dug and power supply has been obtained.

The Dasaripalle Dalits and Arundhatiwada residents have been urging local representatives and officials since 2002 to allot the land to them for agriculture. Now they have lodged a complaint with the Rajampet sub-collector.

When the *Deccan Chronicle* spoke to Rajampet sub-collector Ketan Garg about the matter, he explained that he was on Covid duty for the past two months. He is performing his duties from an office in Rajampet since Monday, but "will not also look into issues of government land grabs."

He said details of the two encroachments would be brought to the notice of the concerned tehsildars and appropriate action would follow.

AP SEES MAJOR DIP IN COVID CASES; DAILY TALLY AT 7,943

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA MAY 31

Andhra Pradesh has registered a major fall in Coronavirus infections at 7,943 and 98 deaths in the last 24 hours.

State health authorities reported here on Monday that out of the 83,461 samples tested, 7,943 were found infected with confirmed Coronavirus infections. The state has been witnessing a dip in daily tally of infections in the last few days from its peak level of over 24,000 cases.

Out of 1,92,56,304 samples tested so far, 16,93,085 were found infected with the virus so far. Of them, 15,28,360 have recovered while 1,53,795 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily cases of infections, East Godavari reported the highest at 1,877 followed by 1,283 in Chittoor, 765 in Guntur, 551 in Visakhapatnam, 544 in Anantapur, 499 in Kurnool, 461 in West Godavari, 447 in Kadapa, 378 in Nellore, 345 in Prakasam, 291 in Krishna, 271 in Vizianagaram and 231 in Srikakulam.

East Godavari continued to register the highest number of total active cases at 30,546 followed by 19,329 in Prakasam, 18,299 in Chittoor, 13,322 in Visakhapatnam, 12,994 in Nellore, 11,989 in West Godavari, 10,172 in Krishna, 9,567 in Guntur, 8,665 in Srikakulam, 5,558 in Vizianagaram, 4,982 in Kurnool, 4,429 in Kadapa and 3,943 in Anantapur.

Among the daily cases of Covid-deaths, Chittoor found to be the worst hit at 15 followed by 12 in West Godavari, 10 in Prakasam, and nine in Anantapur.

STATE HOPEFUL OF CURBING COVID SPREAD

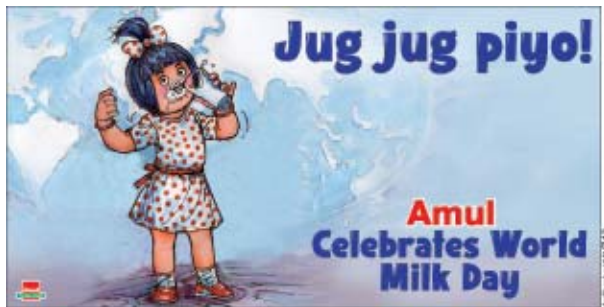
DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 31

Health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal said the state government had extended the curfew up to June 10 to help curb spread of the Coronavirus.

A health official said Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has decided to extend curfew period after discussing the matter with officials. Relaxations are on from 6 am to 12 noon and curfew is imposed from 12 noon to six am the next day up to June 10.

He said ayurveda practitioner Anandaiah's preparation could be used as a supplement. There was no base to prove it is a cure for Covid-19.

He said the number of calls to 104 had come down to 3,885 in the last 24 hours while 590 tonnes of medical oxygen was drawn in the last 24 hours.



Retired HM dies of lung infection

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE MAY 31

The sixty-year-old retired headmaster Baina Kotaiah of Thinnelapudi village in Kota mandal, who was in the news in recent days, died while undergoing treatment at the Government General Hospital in Nellore on Monday. He had been tested negative for Covid at the time of admission.

Kotaiah shot into fame after the release of a video clip wherein he praised the Anandaiah ayurvedic concoction. He had stated in the video that he could recover from breathing issues after taking the herbal eye drops at Krishnapatnam.

The retired headmaster was admitted to the GGH on May 23 with serious lung infection besides cough and breathlessness.

In view of the present buzz surrounding him, the local authorities had deputed a team of doctors including a pulmonologist, a physician and other experts to save him.

Speaking to the media here on Monday, medical officer Dr Sophia said the CT scan score of Kotaiah was 22/25 and both his lungs were damaged to the extent of 90 per cent by May 28.

"Since it was a high-risk case, we have treated him in the ICU on the third floor at the GGH. His oxygen saturation levels were hovering between 70 and 80 per cent then."

Though he had comorbidities such as BP and diabetes, they were under check. His condition deteriorated on May 30 and he collapsed around 7am on Monday" Dr Sophia

KOTAIAH DEATH LEAVES HIS FAMILY IN THE LURCH

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 31

Sandeep, 31, and sister Aruna, 28, are in deep shock. Their mother Bhudevi died about four years ago due to brain tumour.

Sandeep said he had borrowed ₹30 lakh for the treatment of the mother. Both he and his sister could not pursue studies after intermediate as they were busy serving their bedridden mother.

He said they lived under the shade of asbestos sheets as their father's dream to build a house was shattered by the expenditure they incurred for treatment of their mother.

Saying that they don't have any close relatives, he appealed to the government to help him and his sister secure jobs.

explained.

Children say they have no complaint against Anandaiah's medicine. They had found a good improvement after administering the same and Kotaiah had tested negative later. "We blame our fate and not the Anandaiah medicine" Sandeep said.

Sandeep and his sister Aruna took possession of the body of their father from the mortuary in GGH on Monday afternoon.

The last rites were done at Swarnamukhi River near Thinnelapudi village.



Rear Admiral I.B. Uthaiah (left) takes over as the Admiral Superintendent of Naval Dockyard Visakhapatnam from Rear Admiral Sreekrumar Nair (right) during a formal ceremony inside Eastern Naval Command in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

New chief for naval dockyard

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 31

Rear Admiral I.B. Uthaiah took over as the Admiral Superintendent, Naval Dockyard, Visakhapatnam from Rear Admiral Sreekrumar Nair, during a formal ceremony held on Monday.

Rear Admiral I.B. Uthaiah was commissioned into the Indian Navy in Nov 1987. The Admiral holds a B Tech degree in Marine Engineering, an M Tech degree in Mathematical Modelling and Computer Simulation and an M Phil degree in Strategic Studies.

In his 33 years of service, the Admiral has served the Indian Navy in various capacities, with appointments at the Warship Design Directorate, Training Academies, Naval Dockyard and at the Command and Naval Headquarters.

An alumnus of the Naval War College, he was awarded the Vishisht Seva Medal for distinguished service at Naval Dockyard and was instrumental in concluding major warship construction contracts with Russian and Indian Shipyards as the principal Director.

Rear Admiral Sreekrumar Nair would take over as Director General Naval Project in Visakhapatnam, on promotion to Vice Admiral.

2 YOUNGSTERS KILLED IN BIKE MISHAP

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAY 31

Two youngsters were killed on the spot after their two-wheeler was hit by a car at Kadapa crossroad in Kurabalakota mandal in the wee hours of Monday.

The deceased were identified as Ram Kumar (25) and Pavan Kumar (25), both hailing from Sangasamudram village in Gurrakonda mandal and working with a private firm at Bengaluru. They left their homes at Sangasamudram this morning and were on their way to Bengaluru to join their duty after the weekend.

Enroute the accident took place when a speeding car rammed into their bike at Kadapa crossroad junction in Kurabalakota mandal in the wee hours. Both Ram Kumar and Pavan Kumar died on the spot before help could arrive.

Kurabalakota police registered a case.

+ve cases come down drastically in N Andhra

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 31

Transport principal secretary and state Covid special officer M.T. Krishna Babu lauded the NRIs for donating 85 oxygen concentrators to AP through Indian Red Cross Society of AP branch for Covid care in the state.

At a meeting held here on Monday, he distributed the 85 oxygen concentrators to the AP branch IRC representatives to be further distributed in districts.

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 31

Positive cases nosedived in the north coastal Andhra districts of S r i k a k u l a m, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam during last 24 hours.

Srikakulam registered 231, lowest in the State followed by Vizianagaram 271. Visakhapatnam reported 551 cases, lowest since March second week.

"Early fever surveys helped us in identifying

the positive cases and starting treatment," said minister for fisheries Dr Seedari Appalaraju. He told *DC* on Monday that there was increased awareness among the people though the literacy rate was low.

He also added that there was no movement of migrating fishermen from the district.

In addition to conducting a fever survey, test results were given early to the suspected patients who began treatment early, said

Srikakulam collector J. Niwas.

He said early results restricted movement of patients, who otherwise would have roamed around and infected others.

OSD for Covid-19 for north Andhra and principal of Andhra Medical College Dr P.V. Sudhakar said testing was increased during the last few days which resulted in flushing out of the cases and sending them to the hospitals or Covid Care Centres.

COVID | WOES

State registers over 1,179 black fungus cases with 14 deaths

Self-medication causes black fungus

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA MAY 31

Self-medication and taking an overdose of steroids to avoid Coronavirus infection are believed to be among the prime reasons, alongside faulty post-Covid treatment, for the spread of black fungus in Andhra Pradesh. The state registered over 1,179 black fungus cases with 14 deaths so far and the caseload is rising day-by-day leading to huge short supply of Amphotericin B vials from the Centre to AP.

A few black fungus infected patients are reported to have confessed to doctors at government hospitals that they had taken preventive medicines to avoid getting infected with the Coronavirus.

Some of these infected patients initially approached private doctors or local quacks and mounted pressure upon them to prescribe strong medicines including steroids for use after finding Covid-19 symptoms. They have avoided going for either a Covid-19 test or vaccination.

The prolonged use of such steroids had their impact on their health as they raised blood sugar levels in the patients. Those who tested Covid-19 positive subsequently and were hospitalised for treatment, stayed on medical oxygen and ventilator for several days and got treated again with steroids, have developed black fungus disease in post-Covid-19 scenario.

In Guntur general hos-

pital alone, over 100 black fungus cases were reported for treatment and five to six cases are being referred for surgery per day when the patients developed the black pigmentation on their skins near their eyes, ears and jaws.

On an average, each infected patient requires eight to 10 vials of Amphotericin B per day. Nearly 80 to 100 vials are required per week to treat a patient properly.

Guntur Government Medical College associate professor Dr D. Jayadheer said, "Some black fungus-infected patients confessed to us that they opted for self-medication. They approached some private doctors or quacks to get medicines for Covid-19 in advance, assuming that it would be

a preventive care. But they realised that they went wrong. We are advising people not to go for self-medication for any health issue. They must rather consult a qualified doctor and take treatment."

So is the case in the government general hospital in Vijayawada where nearly over 40 cases of black fungus have been reported.

S i d d h a r t h a Government Medical College professor (ENT) Dr K. Ravi said, "Excessive inhalation of medicated fumes from hot water through the humidifier by the people also makes them vulnerable to getting infected with the black fungus. The virus-infected air enters the body through sinuses and affects it

causing the disease."

In East Godavari, nearly 56 cases of black fungus have been reported with no fatality so far.

East Godavari district medical and health officer Dr KVS Gowriswara Rao said, "Self-medication as a preventive care for Covid-19 along with long exposure to medical oxygen and ventilator, use of high dose of steroids and the subsequent rise in blood sugar levels and low immunity in post-Covid treatment are found to be some of the reasons for developing black fungus."

As the state government has been urging the Centre to allot more vials to treat black fungus in AP, the health authorities and the infected patients too have joined the chorus.

SHORT TAKES

SIX MORE BODIES FOUND FLOATING IN GANGA

Fatehpur (UP), May 31: Six more bodies of suspected Covid-19 victims were found floating in the Ganga in Uttar Pradesh, an official said on Monday.

Fatehpur Sadar Tehsil Sub-Collector (SDM) Pramod Jha said he was informed about the bodies floating in the river on Sunday morning, following which a search operation was launched.

Six decomposed bodies were recovered from the river, he said.

Later in the day, a team of doctors performed the last rites at Bhitara Ganga Ghat as per the Covid guidelines, the SDM said.

The bodies could not be identified as they were highly decomposed, the SDM said, adding that they appear to have come floating from far-off places.

Earlier this month, at least 52 bodies were seen floating at the Ujiyar, Kulhadia and Bharauli ghats in Ballia's Narahi area.

However, the district authorities did not tell the exact number of bodies found there.

PRIEST HELD FOR VIOLATING COVID-19 NORMS

Kochi, May 31: A Catholic priest and 21 others were arrested on Monday for allegedly organising the first holy communion for children at a church in Ernakulam district, violating Covid-19 protocol, police said.

The vicar of St Joseph Church, Poovathussery, Fr George Palamattom and 21 others, including the parents of three children and relatives, were arrested for organising the function violating lockdown rules and charged under relevant sections of the Epidemic Diseases Act.

They were later released on station bail, police said.

A Church official said some of the parents had come to India from abroad to attend the function and wanted to return as their leave had ended. So it was organised on Monday after twice being postponed earlier due to lockdown restrictions, he said.

He said the arrests were made when the first holy communion, one of the most important occasions in a Roman Catholic's life, was being organised for the three children.

The Kerala government on Saturday announced one more week extension of the statewide lockdown till June 9, to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

COVID SURVIVOR ENDS LIFE OVER FEAR OF FUNGUS

Ahmedabad, May 31: An 80-year-old man from Ahmedabad who had recovered from Covid-19 allegedly committed suicide out of fear of contracting the mucormycosis infection, police said on Monday.

Mucormycosis, also known as the black fungus, is a serious infection which has been found in several Covid-19 patients in various states.

According to police, the victim used to live with his wife at the Aman Apartments in Paldi area of the city.

He allegedly consumed a pesticide on the terrace of his apartment on Thursday and died at a private hospital on Saturday, police said.

The man contracted Covid-19 some time back and had recovered. He was not diagnosed with mucormycosis, but he developed a fear for it after he got mouth sores, he said.

The victim also left behind a suicide note in which he mentioned the reason behind his extreme step and expressed fear that he may suffer due to mucormycosis as he had just recovered from Covid-19 and also had diabetes.

"The man was scared as he learnt that the black fungus mostly targets those who had contracted Covid and people having diabetes. He also mentioned (in the suicide note) that the treatment may not yield any result and he would suffer due to that infection in future," Solanki said, based on the suicide note and statements of his family members.

The victim was from a well-off family and his fear was more psychological than about his financial condition and the ability to pay for the treatment, the official said.

"Since he had developed some mouth sores, he was under the notion that he had contracted mucormycosis and may not recover from it," the official said.



A shopkeeper cleans his shop that was opened after partial relaxation in the ongoing lockdown by the J&K government in Jammu on Monday. — PTI



Guest workers wait for trains to reach their work destinations amid the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic outside Hatia railway station in Ranchi of Jharkhand on Monday. — PTI

Delhi unlock: New woes for factories

Owners face shortage of workers, raw material, and fear losses due to slump in production

New Delhi, May 31: As the Covid lockdown restrictions were eased in Delhi, factory owners on Monday opened their establishments after six weeks with many grappling with shortage of labourers and raw materials, and fearing losses due to slump in production.

After a strict lockdown for six weeks since April 19, the Delhi government allowed industrial manufacturing and construction work in the city from Monday as part of its phased unlock process.

However, since the majority of the workforce had left for their native places fearing the unprecedented second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, and the markets yet to open for supply of raw material, the industrialists said they can only calculate their losses.

"We have only been able to enter the factory and that is it. There is no way we can start work," said Neeraj Sehgal, owner of Sehgal Doors in the Mayapuri industrial area.

"Only 20 per cent workers are here and there is no raw material because the government has not allowed the industrial use of oxygen, which is essential to make steel doors," said Sehgal, who makes fire-rated doors and steel doors.

And since the rules deny the use of oxygen for industries, the price for raw material has skyrocketed.

"What we were buying earlier for ₹55 per kg is now available at ₹90 per kg. An increase of 65 per cent, can you believe this," lamented Sehgal, who is also the general secretary of Mayapuri industrial area welfare association.

The pending electricity and water bills have only added to his woes.

As per an order issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on May 29, the workers and employees at manufacturing units and construction sites will be required to carry e-passes for movement during the ongoing lockdown that has been extended to June 7.

Another industrialist, Ashok Gupta of Jugmug Shoes in Udyog Nagar, Peeragarhi, was bogged



A worker busy at a factory in the Wazirpur Industrial area as the unlocking process of Covid-19 lockdown begins in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

down by not being able to get e-passes for his workers.

"The workers have been calling from their home in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar asking if we have arranged e-passes. But the system does not work. We are not able to get any passes. The entire operation has been shut," Gupta said.

Gupta, who manufactures shoes for other market players, has also incurred huge losses as he could not deliver the orders. "We had six orders from Dubai, but now they are buying from China. If this goes on we will have to scale down significantly. There is also a loan of ₹10-12 crore, how do we pay that without any work," Gupta said.

The unlock guidelines also allowed resumption of construction activities with staggered work hours, proper social distancing among workers, adequate gaps between shifts, and staggered lunch breaks of staff.

NBCC (India) Limited chairman and managing director P.K. Gupta said

labour contractors have been told to bring back labourers who were working at projects prior to the lockdown. — PTI

Lockdown extended in Bihar, Odisha, Ch'garh; K'taka to decide on June 4

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
PATNA, MAY 31

The Bihar government has extended the lockdown till June 8 to stop the surge in Covid-19 cases in the state. However, the state government has also announced some relaxation to boost business activities. The decision was taken during a review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Monday.

"In view of Covid infection, it has been decided to extend the lockdown for one week — till June 8. But some relaxation is also being given to boost business activities in the state. People are requested to wear masks and maintain social distancing", Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said in a tweet after he met with the crisis management group on Monday.

Officials said that the revised home department guidelines would come into effect from June 2 onwards. According to the

state administration, essential services like general provision stores and shops dealing with dairy products will be allowed to open from 6 am to 2 pm.

Meanwhile, Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Monday said the decision on the future of lockdown was likely on June 4 or 5, after discussion with experts and depending on the situation in the state. The state is currently under lockdown till June 7.

"After June 4 or 5, I will discuss with them (experts), also looking at how the (Covid) situation improves by then, we will take a decision," Yediyurappa told reporters. Earlier in the day, state health minister K. Sudhakar had said a decision on the future of lockdown has to be taken on a scientific basis as it is aimed at saving lives and that the Chief Minister will take a final call after examining the report from experts and discussing with cabinet colleagues.

The Odisha government also extended the lockdown by 16 more days till June 17 to further stem the spread of Covid-19. The second phase of the lockdown was to end at 5 am on June 1. It will now continue till 5 am of June 17.

The Uttar Pradesh government, meanwhile, extended the relaxations announced in the Coronavirus curfew to six more districts from June 1, allowing shops and markets outside the containment zones to open for five days a week. The relaxations will be applicable to a total of 61 districts from Tuesday, while 14 districts with an active Covid-19 caseload of over 600 have been kept outside the purview of the order for the time being.

The Chandigarh administration on Monday extended the Covid-induced restrictions till the morning of June 9, but allowed more relaxations such as reopening of barbers and salons. It also extended the shop opening time by an

hour. All shops will now be allowed to open from 9 am till 4 pm, from earlier till 3 pm. "After detailed discussions, it was decided to continue the existing restrictions until 6 am on June 9," according to an official release.

The Lakshadweep administration on Monday announced extension of the complete shutdown for seven more days, beginning May 31, considering the rising number of cases in the islands.

On the other hand, after a month-long lockdown imposed due to a surge in cases, markets reopened in Jammu and Kashmir on Monday as the process of partial unlock started in the UT, officials said.

According to new guidelines imposed by authorities on Sunday, shops have been allowed to open on alternate days. The public transport was allowed to ply at 50 per cent of the seating capacity in the Orange category districts, it remained shut in the Red category districts.

ODISHA GOVT PREPARES FOR THIRD WAVE

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 31

The Odisha government has started its preparation to avoid any kind of eventualities during the much apprehended third wave of Covid-19.

According to state additional chief secretary (ACS) Pradipta Kumar Mohapatra, the state government was emphasising on strengthening medical facilities and ramping up tests to deal with the pandemic.

"Some experts have opined about the possible third wave of the pandemic. The state government is fully prepared for the situation. On an urgent basis, Oxygen PSA and liquid oxygen plants will be set up in all the district headquarters hospitals and medical colleges in the next two and half months. We will also set up more paediatric beds in the hospitals as children may be more vulnerable to the disease," Mohapatra informed on Monday.

The state government has also set a target to set up RT-PCR laboratories in each district headquarters hospitals to ramp up testing in next two months.

"The Odisha government has placed an order for 5,000 sachets of 2-DG (2-deoxy-D-glucose) anti-Covid drugs for the treatment of hospitalised Covid-19 patients. The anti-Covid medicine is claimed to help faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduce Oxygen dependence. Hopefully the medicines will be delivered to the state on June 7-10," said Mohapatra.

He added that as many as 25 black fungus infected patients had been identified from the state so far. "Three of them have died. However, their death could be attributed to other reasons," he said.

The ACS informed that the test positivity rate in the state is currently at 14 per cent and hopefully the situation will improve in next 10 days as the peak of the second surge of the pandemic is already over.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

France set to double Covid-related support to India

India, France set up 'oxygen bridge'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 31

France and India have "set up an oxygen bridge across the Indian Ocean to bring several rotations of liquid oxygen donated by French multinational Air Liquide", the French Embassy announced on Monday, adding that France is doubling the Covid-related support to India following a phone call between French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week on May 26.

France said it was carrying out the largest solidarity operation undertaken by it so far since the beginning of the pandemic which "reflects the long-standing, two-way solidarity between France and



A shipment of 184 oxygen concentrators from Ukraine arrives in India. — PTI

India, which lies at the heart of our strategic partnership".

France also declared it would deliver at least twice as many oxygen generators plants as the eight already delivered earlier this month and that a special cargo flight with 10 such units would reach

India mid-June and that another flight would follow after that. The French Embassy pointed out that each of these French-made, high capacity plants produces 24,000 litres of oxygen per hour non-stop and can make a 250-bed Indian hospital oxygen self-reliant for a dozen

years. In a statement, the French Embassy in New Delhi said that on the directions of President Emmanuel Macron, France is bringing in additional support to India to continue fighting the second wave together.

"France and India have set up an oxygen bridge across the Indian Ocean to bring several rotations of liquid oxygen donated by French multinational Air Liquide. The containers are filled in Qatar, shipped to India by the Indian Navy, and then brought back empty by the Indian Air Force for refilling. In the last three weeks, 180 tonnes of liquid oxygen has already reached Indian hospitals through this bridge. The rotations are now being extended until the end of June,

which will enable the delivery of several hundred tons of oxygen in total." It added that several hundred Oxygen concentrators as well as high-grade ventilators would reach India in the coming days.

French Ambassador to India Emmanuel Lenain, said, "as discussed between President Macron and Prime Minister Modi in their May 26 call, France is doubling its support to India against the pandemic. It shows the solidarity of the French people, who have not forgotten that India helped us when France faced its first wave. There cannot be global victory against the virus without India. Together, we can show the way of international cooperation against the pandemic and the need for a multilateral response."

SHORT TAKES

**OVERLOADED JEEP
PLUNGES INTO
PAK RIVER, 9 DIE**

Peshawar, May 31: Nine people have drowned after their overloaded jeep fell into the Yarkhoon River in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to a media report on Monday. The accident occurred on the Onauch Suspension Bridge, near Yarkhoon Valley, on Sunday, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The jeep began its journey with 11 people aboard, including the driver, from Chitral city to the Yarkhoon Valley.

Assistant Commissioner, Mastuj tehsil, Shah Adnan told the newspaper that the vehicle was overloaded with cargo tied to the roof, which could have caused the vehicle to lose balance on the bridge and break through its railing.

Of the 11 travellers in total, 10 persons died, while one managed to swim to safety.

Rescue teams are trying to retrieve the bodies from the sunk vehicle.

**OZ MIN DROPS
DEFAMATION SUIT
OVER RAPE CLAIM**

Canberra, May 31: An Australian government minister dropped his defamation lawsuit against *Australian Broadcasting Corp.* on Monday and committed to contest the next election as the state broadcaster acknowledged a 33-year-old rape allegation against him could not be substantiated.

Christian Porter, minister for industry, science and technology, and the *ABC* said the case had been settled under confidential terms without any damages being paid. Porter said he did not decide to sue to make money. The hurt and harm that the reporting of this matter has caused to my reputation, to my family, is beyond any form of compensation, Porter said.

Porter said he would absolutely run for re-election at general elections to be held within a year.

**NZ, OZ PLAY
DOWN CHINA
DIFFERENCES**

Wellington, May 31: New Zealand and Australia downplayed policy differences on China Monday, with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern denying Wellington was taking a soft stance on human rights to avoid offending its largest trading partner.

Ardern's government has taken flak over its meek criticisms of China's rights record, while Australia's more outspoken position has drawn punitive trade measures from Beijing. The centre-left New Zealand leader insisted the trans-Tasman allies were lock-step on attitudes towards China after holding talks with her Australian counterpart Scott Morrison in the South Island mountain retreat of Queens-town.

The pair issued a joint statement expressing "deep concern" at the erosion of freedoms in Hong Kong and the treatment of the Uyghur Muslim minority in China's Xinjiang province.

"You'll see that Australia and New Zealand have broadly been positioned in exactly the same place on these issues consistently," Ardern said. "So I really push back on any suggestion that we are not taking a strong stance on these incredibly important issues."

**39 DEAD IN TWO
ATTACKS IN
DR CONGO**

Bunia, DR Congo, May 31: At least 39 people have been killed in two new attacks in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, monitors said Monday, as a local official blamed a notorious group linked to the Islamic State group.

"At least 20 civilians were killed overnight in the village of Boga and at least 19 in the village of Tchabi," in Irumu territory in Ituri province, the Kivu Security Tracker (KST) group said.

A local civil society leader attributed the attacks to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) — a historically Ugandan Islamist group blamed for a string of massacres in the past 18 months.

Two local officials reached in Boga by *AFP* said the assailants attacked a camp for displaced people.

They said 36 bodies had been found so far in Boga, a figure that had yet to be independently confirmed.

The two villages are located about 10 kilometres (six miles) apart on the border between North Kivu province and Ituri, an area that has long had a reputation for ADF attacks and ethnic friction.

Jet's emergency landing after bomb 'threat'

Warsaw, May 31: Polish police said Monday they were investigating a fake bomb threat that forced a Ryanair passenger plane travelling from Dublin to Krakow to make an emergency landing in Berlin.

"We were notified by the Krakow airport that an airport employee received a phone call saying an explosive device had been planted on the plane," said regional police spokesman, Sebastian Glen.

"German police checked and there was no device, no bomb threat at all. So we know this was a false alarm," he said. "The perpetrator has not been detained, but we are doing everything possible to establish their identity," he added, saying the person

faces eight years in jail.

With 160 people on board, the flight arrived at the Berlin-Brandenburg airport shortly after 8:00 pm (1800 GMT) Sunday. The passengers were later transferred onto another plane which took off early Monday morning.

German police said that officers had completed their security checks "without any danger being detected". The flight was emptied with the baggage also searched, German media reported.

"The Ryanair plane that made an emergency landed reported an air emergency and was therefore immediately given a landing permit at BER," airport spokesman Jan-Peter Haack said. — *AFP*

**TURKEY NABS
U.S.-BASED
CLERIC'S KIN**

Ankara, May 31: Turkish agents have captured a nephew of US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen in an overseas operation and have brought him to Turkey where he faces prosecution, Turkey's state-run news agency said Monday.

Selahaddin Gulen, who was wanted in Turkey on charges of membership in a terror organisation, was seized in an operation by Turkey's national spy agency MIT, the *Anadolu Agency* reported. The report did not say where he was seized or when he was returned to Turkey.

Gulen's nephew however, was believed to be residing in Kenya. His case is the latest in a series of forced repatriation of people affiliated with Gulen's movement, which the Turkish government blames for a failed coup attempt in 2016.

Gulen, a former ally of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who now lives in exile in Pennsylvania, has rejected the accusations of involvement in the coup attempt.

Turkey has designated his network a terrorist group, which it has named the Fethullahist Terror Organization, or FETO.

— *AP*

Chinese trio for 3-month stay in new space station

Beijing, May 31: China on Monday announced plans to send three male astronauts to its space station next month for a three-month stay, a day after the successful docking of a cargo spacecraft with it, hoping to achieve yet another milestone in its ambitious space programme.

The country launched cargo spacecraft Tianzhou-2 on Saturday, carrying supplies, equipment and propellant which had successfully docked with the space station core module Tianhe, according to the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA).

Combined with Tianhe, Tianzhou-2 will replenish Tianhe's propellant, it said. China, which launched its space station core

module Tianhe on April 29, now plans to complete the verification of key technologies and the in-orbit construction of the space station through multiple launches within two years, state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported.

Yang Liwei, director of the China Manned Space Engineering Office and the country's first astronaut, said that the three astronauts are getting ready to travel by manned spacecraft Shenzhou-12 in June to dock with Tianhe and stay there for three months. Yang, who went into space in the Shenzhou-5 craft on October 15, 2003, told the state-run *China Central Television (CCTV)* during the week-end that the three astro-

onauts of the Shenzhou-12 mission will stay in space for three months, during which they will conduct tasks, including repair and maintenance, appliance switch and scientific tasks. The three astronauts, who will take the Shenzhou-12 spacecraft to the space station core cabin in June, are now under Level-2 quarantine, with all related work having entered a final sprint stage, according to a report by the state-run *Global Times*. Although there will not be any female astronauts in the upcoming Shenzhou-12 crewed mission, they will basically participate in every following flight mission, Yang said.

— *PTI*

Ageing society: China allows couples to have a third child

Leaders: Need to raise retirement age to keep more people in workforce

Beijing, May 31: China's ruling Communist Party said Monday it will ease birth limits to allow all couples to have three children instead of two in hopes of slowing the rapid ageing of its population, which is adding to strains on the economy and society.

The ruling party has enforced birth limits since 1980 to restrain population growth but worries the number of working-age people is falling too fast while the share over age 65 is rising. That threatens to disrupt its ambitions to transform China into a prosperous consumer society and global technology leader.

A ruling party meeting led by President Xi Jinping decided to

introduce "measures to actively deal with the aging population", the official *Xinhua* News Agency said. It said leaders agreed "implementing the policy of one couple can have three children and supporting measures are conducive to improving China's population structure."

Leaders also agreed China needs to raise its retirement age to keep more people in the workforce and improve pension and health services for the elderly, *Xinhua* said.

Restrictions that limited most couples to one child were eased in 2015 to allow two, but the total number of births fell further, suggesting rule changes on their own have little im-

● **RESTRICTIONS THAT limited most couples to one child were eased in 2015 to allow two, but the total number of births fell further.**

impact on the trend.

Couples say they are put off by high costs of raising a child, disruption to their jobs and the need to look after elderly parents.

Comments on social media Monday complained the change does nothing to help young parents with medical bills, low incomes and grueling work schedules known popularly as "996", or 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. six days a week.

"Every stage of the problem hasn't been solved," said a post on the popular Sina Weibo blog service signed Tchaikovsky. "Who will raise the baby? Do you have time? I go out early and get back late. Kids don't know what their parents look like."

Another, signed Hyeongmok, joked bitterly: "Don't worry about aging. Our generation won't live long." China, along with Thailand and some other Asian economies, faces what economists call the challenge of whether they can get rich before they get old.

The Chinese population of 1.4 billion already was expected to peak later this decade and start to

decline. Census data released May 11 suggest that is happening faster than expected, adding to burdens on underfunded pension and health systems and cutting the number of future workers available to support a growing retiree group.

The share of working-age people 15 to 59 in the population fell to 63.3% last year from 70.1% a decade earlier. The group aged 65 and older grew to 13.5% from 8.9%.

The 12 million births reported last year was down nearly one-fifth from 2019. About 40% were second children, down from 50% in 2017, according to Ning Jizhe, a statistics official. — *AP*



In this photo released by Chris Allen, a car is abandoned in flooded waters in Ashburton Forks near Christchurch. Several hundred people were evacuated from their homes while others recounted helicopter rescues as heavy rain caused widespread flooding in the Canterbury region. — *Chris Allen via AP*

NZ floods: Hundreds evacuated

Wellington, May 31: Several hundred people in New Zealand were evacuated from their homes Monday with some recounting dramatic helicopter rescues as heavy rain caused widespread flooding in the Canterbury region.

Authorities declared a state of emergency after some places received as much as 40 centimetres (16 inches) of rain over the weekend and into Monday. Forecasters warned of possible heavy rain through Monday evening before conditions improved. The military helped evacuate more than 50 people, including several overnight in an NH-90 military helicop-

ter. One man was clinging to a tree near the town of Darfield when he jumped into floodwaters and tried to swim to safety but was swept away, the military said. Helicopter crews scoured the water for 30 minutes before finding the man and plucking him to safety. The military helicopter also rescued an elderly couple from the roof of their car.

"Seeing the community overnight pull together and support the displaced residents who were evacuated from their homes has been heartening," said Army Liaison Officer Cpt. Jake Faber. Another man was rescued by a civilian

helicopter pilot Sunday after he was swept from his farm as he tried to move his stock to safety. Paul Adams told news organisation *Stuff* he thinks he got hit by a wall of water he didn't see coming. He was swept down the raging Ashburton River before managing to drag himself onto a fence and then into a tree.

Another farmer spotted his headlamp and organised a rescue mission. "The rescuers are fantastic," Adams told *Stuff*, adding that he was now back on his farm and "good as gold". He said that so far he'd only found about 100 of his herd of 250 animals

alive. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who was visiting New Zealand, told reporters that he was thinking of those caught up in the floods. "Australia is no stranger to floods," Morrison said.

"Or fires, or cyclones, or, indeed, even mouse plagues. We have, both countries, endured a large amount of challenge over the course, particularly, of these last few years."

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern planned to travel to Christchurch later Monday to be briefed on the situation firsthand. — *AP*

Man accused of plotting Walmart attack arrested

Kerrville (Texas), May 31: Authorities in Texas arrested a man accused of plotting to carry out a mass shooting at a Walmart, and a search of the suspect's home turned up firearms, ammunition and materials officials described as radical ideology paraphernalia.

Coleman Thomas Blevins, 28, was arrested Friday in Kerrville and has been charged with making a terroristic threat to

create public fear of serious bodily injury, the Kerr County Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

Investigators said they intercepted a message from Blevins on Thursday indicating he was preparing to proceed with a mass shooting, and that the threat included Walmart. Blevins was taken into custody the next day.

Authorities searched his home and, according to the release, firearms,

ammunition, electronic evidence, concentrated THC, and radical ideology paraphernalia, including books, flags, and handwritten documents were seized.

Blevins is on felony probation and was not supposed to have guns, the release said. He was booked into the Kerr County Jail in Kerrville, a city about 70 miles (113 kilometers) northwest of San Antonio. — *AP*

RACIST | VIOLENCE

Some churches recognise 13 congregations that operated in Greenwood

Pastors honour 'ground' 100 yrs after massacre

Tulsa (US), May 31: When white attackers destroyed the prosperous PoC neighbourhood of Greenwood 100 years ago, they bypassed the original sanctuary of the First Baptist Church of North Tulsa.

By the church's own account, the attackers thought the brick veneer structure was too fine for a PoC-owned church. The mob destroyed at least a half-dozen other churches while burning and levelling a 35-square-block neighbourhood in one of the nation's deadliest spasms of racist violence. Estimates of the death toll range from dozens to 300.

On Sunday, First Baptist's current sanctuary throbbed with a high-decibel service as six congregations gathered to mark the centennial of the massacre and to honour the persistence of the PoC church tradition in Greenwood, as shown in the pulsing worship, call-and-response preaching and heavy emphasis on social justice.

Greenwood is holy ground, said the Rev. John Faison of Nashville, Tennessee, who preached at the service and is assistant to the bishop of social action for the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship.

He said the centennial both honours the victims of the massacre and celebrates the resilience and the resurgence of an amazing people of God. Similar commemorations took place at many houses of worship throughout Tulsa and across Oklahoma on Sunday, a day ahead of the

official centennial dates. More civic activities are planned for Monday and Tuesday, including a candlelight vigil and a visit by President Joe Biden.

The commission that organised the centennial designated Sunday as Unity Faith Day and provided a suggested worship guide that each congregation could adapt, including scriptures, prayers and the singing of *Amazing Grace*.

Particularly at historically PoC churches, speakers emphasised a call for financial reparations both for the few centenarian survivors of the massacre and for the wider, economically struggling North Tulsa area, where the city's PoC population is largely concentrated.

The main problem is that our nation is always trying to have reconciliation without doing justice, Faison said. Until repentance and repair are seen as inseparable, any attempt to reconcile will fail miserably.

The Rev Robert Turner, pastor of nearby Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church, which also traces its roots to before the massacre, echoed that sentiment in an interview before his own church's service.

It's not a tragedy that's left in 1921. It's a tragedy that continues to live each day that lacks justice, said Turner, who protests weekly outside Tulsa City Hall, calling both for reparations and for a posthumous criminal investigation of the massacre's perpetrators. — *AP*

The Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA) chief Dharshani Lahandapura said they were still assessing the ecological damage, but believed it was the "worst ever in my lifetime". — *AFP*



DECCAN
Chronicle

1 JUNE 2021

Propaganda fails in face of Covid crisis

In the aftermath of the suffering caused by the second wave of Covid, Prime Minister Narendra Modi might have been expected to apply balm in his monthly ‘Mann ki baat’ radio programme last Sunday. Even as he exhorted the nation to put fight together against the deadly virus. Instead, he chose to be propagandistic, as usual bombastic, diversionary, and for the most part irrelevant to the context of the present day. He was anything but contrite. In this respect, the PM’s approach was fundamentally at odds with the propaganda ploy that RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat laid out for him in order to win the trust of the country in these most trying of circumstances.

The RSS leader had commenced his address, winding up the four-day long “Positivity Unbounded” sessions promoted by his outfit, with words that expressed sorrow at the nation-wide tragedy that unfolded before us. He then held the “people” responsible (presumably for being careless about Covid protocols), and also the administration and “the government”. Only after pointing fingers did Mr Bhagwat speak of the need for “collective effort” to overcome the crisis. After this pep talk, it was evident that the RSS-BJP cadres across the country would fan out to apply the healing touch and engage in “sewa” or service. BJP president J. P. Nadda directed his party “not to celebrate” two years of the second Modi government but to throw themselves into the field to help those in need. Such exhortation is important when the “sewa” is meant to yield future electoral and political benefits. But the leader of the government did little more than self-promotion in his nationwide address last Sunday.

Showing scant sense of occasion, Mr Modi spoke of rural electricity connections, infrastructure, financial inclusion, availability of domestic water connections, “new confidence of peace and development” from the northeast to J&K, better farm yields in the year. He spoke of giving a “befitting reply(sic) to those who conspire against us” and not compromising on national security. This in fact appears out of line as even now Chinese soldiers remain parked deep inside our side of our perceived boundary. As distinct from Mr. Bhagwat and Mr Nadda, he was clearly grandstanding on the second anniversary of his second term. Few governments in a democracy might venture to do that.

In the backdrop of the severe shortage of medical oxygen which brought forth unprecedented scenes of suffering on a magnified national scale, eliciting the pity of the world, the PM boasted that India was now producing ten times the oxygen than it does in normal times. He did not pause to reflect that the grave crisis was self-inflicted as official recommendations regarding enhancing oxygen supply were consistently disregarded for more than a year. The PM cited offering free food grains to 800 million poor people as a signal achievement. For May and June this year, the additional amount of five kilograms per month — made necessary by utter economic dislocation and job losses — amounts to roughly ₹32/ per head- and there are no pulses in this pack, only rice or wheat. This alas is the real measure of Modi’s India. Is there much to write home about?

Tejpal case: Don’t judge victims

The Goa government’s decision to appeal against a palpably poor judgment acquitting Tarun Tejpal of rape and pressing for an early hearing in the Bombay high court is to be welcomed. The verdict, delivered by a woman judge, was shockingly stereotypical of warped thinking that it went beyond being just bad in law. This was a clear instance of victim shaming as the complainant was described in the judgment as “smiling and looked happy, normal, in good mood,” in photographs taken shortly after the alleged assault. The tone was accusatory as the judge recorded - “She did not look disturbed, reserved, terrified or traumatised in any way even though this was immediately after she claims to have been sexually assaulted.”

The investigation itself may have been shoddy, too long drawn and the prosecution apparently not competent in arguing against a defence typically loaded against victims and exonerating those accused of rape. In the aftermath of the Nirbhaya gang rape, the laws were rewritten in 2013 to specify that failure to physically resist was not evidence of consent. What does not get ready recognition is that sexual harassment, which can work at various levels, can go beyond physical molestation and that a woman could be at the mercy of the power and domination of a man who is her superior at work.

In a male-dominated society misogynistic rulings are not rare. But this verdict went well beyond misogyny, straying often as it did into slander. There have been any number of rulings by the top court stating clearly that assumptions or facts about a woman’s sexual history or character are not relevant. The standard of proof needed in a rape case, with the burden of proof devolving mostly upon the victim, is extremely high, which is why many may be getting away. The day a sexual harasser is punished for his intention as revealed in circumstantial evidence will represent true emancipation of women who are invariably at the receiving end. And that is when more victims will come forward to complain against sexual assaults.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

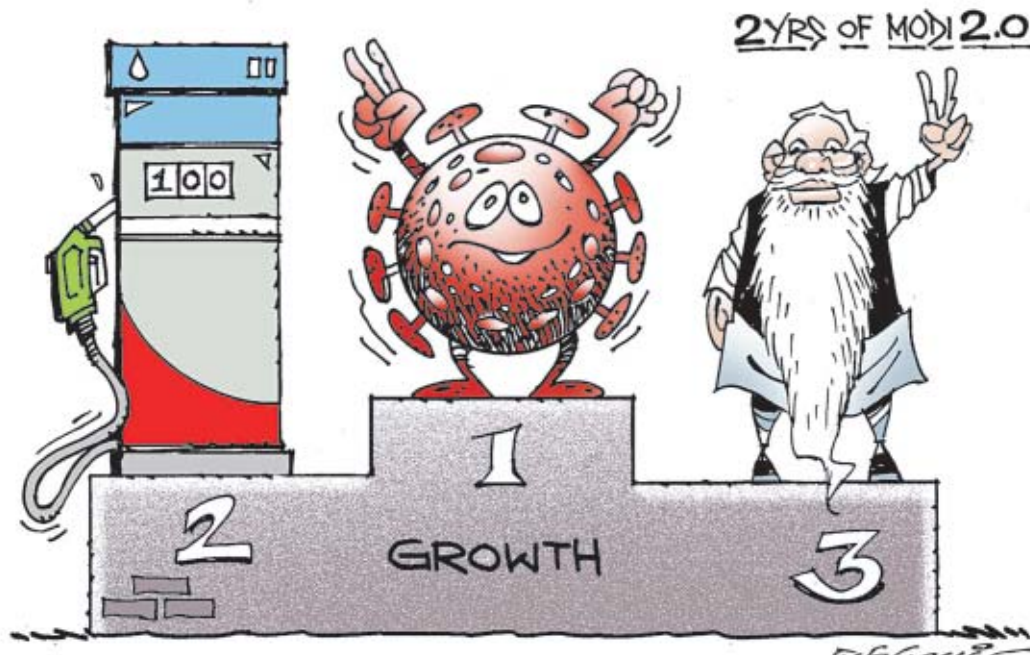
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Subhani



To improve India’s image, govt needs a reality check



K.C. Singh

External affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar’s five-day visit to the United States needs closer examination, not for what was publicly articulated but their real intentions. In the middle of the raging second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in India, the considerations must have been really weighty.

US secretary of state Antony J. Blinken tweeted that the two leaders had a productive discussion on “regional security and economic priorities to include Covid-19 relief efforts, the India-China border situation with closer US engagement. Mr Jaishankar also met the defence secretary, US trade representative and congressional leaders, but there was no contact with either President Biden, who has been known to “drop by” when key ministers are at the White House to meet the NSA, or Indian-origin vice-president Kamala Devi Harris, with whom Mr Jaishankar has had differences during the Trump presidency over India’s handling of Kashmir.

What then was the real purpose behind the visit, as indeed its timing? Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government have been on the backfoot since the BJP’s embarrassing defeat in West Bengal and the Covid-19 second wave, which the government clearly did not foresee or simply ignored despite warnings. To Mr Modi’s consternation, he has also lost face internationally, damaging his carefully nursed post-Godhra image as a statesman. The government seriously erred in resting its Covid handling strategy on the premise that neither the Kumbh Mela nor the endless election rallies would exacerbate the lingering pandemic.

The vaccination strategy was tailored to this assumption, with increased vaccine supply, treble the current production capacity of the two indigenous manufacturers, becoming available only after August. The aim was to

described his meeting with Mr Blinken as having “further solidified our strategic partnership and enlarged our agenda of cooperation”. Ignoring the usual hyperbole, it’s unclear how the agenda has “enlarged” when all the issues are old. India has been cautious to prioritise, keeping in mind the need not to provoke China, while working with the US and its partners in the four-nation Quad and carefully balancing India’s traditional ties with Russia with closer US engagement. Mr Jaishankar also met the defence secretary, US trade representative and congressional leaders, but there was no contact with either President Biden, who has been known to “drop by” when key ministers are at the White House to meet the NSA, or Indian-origin vice-president Kamala Devi Harris, with whom Mr Jaishankar has had differences during the Trump presidency over India’s handling of Kashmir.

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The vaccination strategy was tailored to this assumption, with increased vaccine supply, treble the current production capacity of the two indigenous manufacturers, becoming available only after August. The aim was to

ratchet up the daily vaccination rate in the period September-December to 10 million jabs a day, to in theory vaccinate the entire 45-plus and bulk of the over-18 population before the Uttar Pradesh election in February next year.

This tendency to have even our health policy bend to electoral priorities rather than medical science has proven disastrous. A C-Voter survey indicates that for the first time since the PM assumed office seven years ago those dissatisfied with his performance exceed those who are satisfied. With pictures of overflowing cremation grounds and even bodies dumped in the Ganga or buried along its banks, and the international media carrying those pictures on their front pages, the government’s immediate need was twofold - get an emergency supply of vaccines to bridge the gap till September and mend the Prime Minister’s shattered image.

Mr Jaishankar began his visit to address these two issues in particular. But instead of facing the editorial boards of major newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, he chose the easier option of a calibrated chat at a think tank to answer the critics of his government. Unlike someone like late PM Atal Behari Vajpayee who would have allowed an urbane Jaswant Singh leeway to meet the media halfway to allay their concerns, Mr Jaishankar simply dug in stubbornly.

He went on the offensive on the Modi government being portrayed in a “certain way”. In a tweet I asked if the minister understood whether this “way” was actually the media simply speaking truth to power? Which is their right, if not their

In the coming days, America’s willingness to bail out India will be known. Global Times, is taunting that Mr Jaishankar’s US visit was just “fanfare” and “blank checks”.

duty, in a democracy. The US state department released its 2020 Report on Religious Freedom on May 12, as the BJP-appointed administrator of Lakshadweep was busy imposing the Uttar Pradesh agenda on the Muslim-majority islands.

The minister may pummel the Indian media all he wants, but such actions bring international focus back on whether India under today’s BJP any longer shares “values” with the US?

Mr Jaishankar’s other agenda item was the emergency procurement of vaccines, out of the 80 million doses the US promised to release for international use. Two hurdles are in the way.

One, some AstraZeneca stock is feared contaminated during production and thus needs an audit. Two, the US may not divert the bulk to one nation, to maintain equity and its image. Interestingly, not a word was heard about the US pressing for a waiver at the World Trade Organisation on intellectual property.

In the coming days, America’s willingness to bail out India will be known. *Global Times*, the Chinese government’s English mouthpiece, is taunting that Mr Jaishankar’s US visit was just “fanfare” and “blank checks”.

The US will help but may extract greater alignment with its interests in the Indo-Pacific against China, on climate change and trade.

It may also force India to curtail its Russian arms purchases, especially the S-400 missile system. The US would also want India to not rock the boat in Afghanistan and meet Pakistan halfway on Kashmir. Meanwhile, the US is silent on restoring the Generalised System of Preferences, revoked by President Trump. Thus, the vaccines may come at a strategic cost, as global hegemonies don’t run charities. Mr Modi’s image is another matter, to recover which he needs more than aggressive wolf ministers. He needs a reality check.

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

LETTERS

WHY CELEBRATE?

Under the force majeure conditions due to Covid-19, one should not assess the performance of any government more so the ‘2 years of Modi-2.0: Little to celebrate (DC, May 31)’. In hindsight, we may easily speculate what could have been done, etc., etc. But the onslaught of Covid-19 since December 2019 world over, has taken the wind out of the sails of nations including India. There can’t be any celebration, obviously, with 2.8 cr infections and 3.26 lakh deaths (1.16% case fatality rate) so far and still counting. All governments are doing their best considering the situation of health sector prior to the pandemic.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

CENTRE VERSUS WB

The ego clashes between the Centre and the state of West Bengal are turning uglier day after day. The bone of contention this time is over orders of the Central government seeking sudden deputation of Chief Secretary there, who is about to retire. Still worse is that all the slugfest broken out while the state is reeling under pandemic and cyclonic damage. Both sparring parties should take equal share of blame as both are more interested to gain upper hand in the avoidable fight than help the people in distress. Both parties seem to have undermined the courtesies and Constitutional ethos in their haste to show their own supremacy.

Dr D.V.G. Sankarao
Vizianagaram

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Australian wheat for India

NEW DELHI, MAY 31.

Australia has given India 65,000 metric tons of wheat worth Rs. 2.85 crores. The rupee value of the wheat will be applied to the financing of development projects mutually agreed to by the two Governments.

This was formalised today in an exchange of letters between the Australian High Commissioner: Patrick Shaw, and the Secretary of the Department of Economic affairs I.G. Patel.

The wheat has already been shipped to India.

Pervez Hoodbhoy



Why are Arabs powerless? It’s not guns; ideas rule the world

FOR a terrible 11 days in May, the world watched hellfire rain upon the world’s largest open-air prison camp, otherwise known as Gaza. The dazed, bleeding survivors crawling out of the rubble of collapsed buildings have experienced this before. Everyone knows this tragedy will repeat. In faraway Arab cities, people glumly watched the unhindered, televised bombing by Israeli jets. But the most they could manage was a few toothless resolutions and a few impotent slogan-chanting demonstrations trampling upon the Israeli flag.

What makes Israel with nine million people a Goliath of biblical proportions? Equally, notwithstanding their fabulous oil wealth, why are 427 million Arabs the pygmies of international politics? Before Israel — which has almost zero natural resources — the Arab kings and sheikhs can only bow their heads.

Blame the West if you want and, in particular, America. Indeed, from 2000-2019 armaments supplied to Israel by the Western powers (US, UK, France, Spain, Germany) are documented at a

hefty \$9.6 billion. But within that 20-year period the same document shows this amount is dwarfed by arms sold by the same suppliers to Saudi Arabia (\$29.3bn), UAE (\$20.1bn), Egypt (\$17.5bn), Iraq (\$9.1bn), and Qatar (\$6bn). And yet these expensive weapons will provide little protection if Israel ever chooses to attack the Arab lands again. While the nine-country Saudi-led coalition has created a humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen, it is failing dismally against the ragtag Iran-supported Houthi forces.

Okay, so then let’s blame Palestine’s ill-fortune upon Arab disunity. There’s truth in this: Arabs are indeed bitterly divided. But when were they not? From about AD-634 to AD-750 is the only period in history when they stood together. Then, after Nasser won the Suez War against Britain, Arabs united again for a brief, euphoric moment. But this unity did nothing to avert their crushing defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, that which forever changed borders. And while friends and activists for Palestine would love to see Fatah and Hamas patch up their differences, doing so will not change things funda-

mentally. The secret of Israel’s strength is not hidden in its weaponry. Instead, this still-expanding and still-colonising apartheid settler state uses the same magic that enabled just a handful of 18th-century Englishmen to colonise the entire Indian subcontinent.

That weapon was a system of organised thought based upon a rational and secular approach to life, a modern system of justice, and a new set of social relations. This was sustained and enhanced by Enlightenment-era education that de-emphasised rote learning of the scriptures, was this-worldly and future-oriented, and which focused upon problem-solving skills using systematic, scientific thinking.

In a nutshell, imperialist conquests showed that brains would rule over brawn: a stark truth that got still starker with time. But where are brains produced? Obviously in the womb but it’s in schools, colleges and universities where minds are shaped and sharpened. Hence, these days everyone and their uncle rush to one single conclusion: fix education and this will level the playing field, greatly diminishing or perhaps ending the inequalities of

power. That’s so much easier said than done. To have buildings and classrooms with teachers is one thing but to coax the potential out of a student is altogether different. With their vast wealth, Arab countries have built impressive university campuses with well-equipped laboratories and well-stocked libraries. They have even imported professors from America and Europe. Yet, the needle has barely flickered so far. That’s because attitudes towards learning take forever to change; and only if they are somehow forced to change. Pakistan follows the Arab model as best as it can, and no university has a bookshop, a centre for students that hums with open debate and discussion, or a theatre where classic movies are screened. Looking for a philosopher or a high-grade pure mathematician will be in vain. For 20 years, papers and PhDs have been churned out at a frantic rate. But I suspect many of the country’s “distinguished national professors” with hundreds of research publications would be judged unfit to teach in a high-end Israeli high school for lack of scholarship.

The problem is not genetics – Arabs

have a brilliant past and may be just as smart as Ashkenazi Israelis. But the two groups have different attitudes towards success and different role models. The Ashkenazi child wants to be Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, John von Neumann, George Wald, Paul Samuelson, Gertrude Elion, Ralph Lauren, George Soros, or a thousand other such names that fill textbooks on physics, philosophy, technology, medicine, and business. Compare this with the Arab boy who wants to be Salallahuddin Ayubi. We live in a cruel world which, of course, we must try our best to make less cruel and more humane. But making a socially just world requires much more than condemning oppressors and crying with the oppressed. Instead, the weak must be made stronger. That strength does not derive from oil or nuclear bombs. Instead, it springs from the human brain, but only when that superb gift of nature is appropriately tutored and trained within a system of secular values that cherishes and rewards logical thinking, questioning and creativity.

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	51,937.44	1.00
Nifty 50	15,582.80	0.95
S&P 500*	4,204.11	0.08
Dollar (₹)	72.62	0.24
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.93	0.18
Euro (₹)	88.49	0.23
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,860.318	0.66
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.22	0.73
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.022	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.581	0.00

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Global tax deal unlikely till Oct, says OECD official

A full global deal to overhaul taxation rules and make multinationals pay more in countries where they operate may not be achieved until October, the chief of the OECD said on Monday. Speaking in Paris, Angel Gurria said a “180-degree change in the position of the United States” has accelerated the talks, making an outline of a deal possible at a meeting of G20 finance officials in July.

BMW drives in X7 M50d Dark Shadow edition



BMW Group India on Monday said it has launched X7 M50d 'Dark Shadow' Edition in the country priced at ₹2.02 crore (ex-showroom). The model comes to India as a completely built-up unit and only be available for booking at the company's website. “The BMW X7 is a statement of the luxury class. It opens up a brand-new dimension in luxurious driving pleasure,” said BMW Group India President Vikram Pawah.

Monetisation to gather pace in road sector: Crisil

Asset monetisation in the roads sector will see an acceleration as EPC companies in this space pursue growth and is also aided by various government initiatives, domestic rating agency Crisil said on Monday. It said that the healthy order book position of the road EPC companies, which stands at over three times revenue at present, is expected to improve further supported by new project awarding momentum.

Cognizant set to expand vaccine centres for staff

Cognizant on Monday said that it will spend \$8.5 million for Covid relief funding to vaccinate more than 6.5 lakh associates, their families, support teams. The company said its vaccination drive for associates and families, which was launched in Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Gurgaon, has been expanded to 100 vaccination centres across 40 cities. The company said it will cover the costs of vaccines.



Control on expenses beat Covid blues Listed firms post superlative profits

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, MAY 31

Listed companies, which have already published their results, have registered more than a 200 per cent growth in profits in the March 2021 quarter following a tighter control on expenditure. This would be the third consecutive quarter of superlative profits, according to CMIE.

The companies grew their top-line by 14.7 per cent in the March 2021 quarter against the same quarter last year. But net profits expanded by 212.4 per cent. In the March 2021 quarter, 935 companies have booked a profit of ₹1.58 lakh crore.

The companies managed to book superlative profits because of higher growth in profit margin. Compared to a 0.2 per cent profit margin in the March 2020 quarter, the companies managed to clock a 10.8 per cent margin in the March 2021 quarter, the highest rise in recent years.

In the March 2021 quarter, financial services companies saw a 2.1 per cent increase in the top-line and a 2.1 per cent fall in total expenses as a result, net profits expanded by 65 per cent.

In the same quarter, non-finance companies saw top-line expand by 18.6 per cent and total expenses grow by a much lower 8.9 per cent. As a result, net profits grew by 295 per cent. The share of non-



finance companies in total profits of the corporate sector increased from 73 per cent in the quarter ended September 2020 to 78 per cent in the quarter ended March 2021.

Further, the companies controlled expenses in spite of a significant increase in raw material costs. In the March 2021 quarter, non-finance companies saw their top-line grow well. But, this growth was accompanied by an increase in raw material costs. However, a tighter control on other costs delivered high profits during the quarter.

Manufacturing companies recorded a 22.9 per cent increase in net sales during the quarter ended March 2021. Growth in raw material expenses was close at 18.6 per cent. But the companies kept other expenses in much greater control. Wages grew by 10.3 per cent and

other expenses shrunk by 1.8 per cent. Overall operating costs of manufacturing companies grew by 11.9 per cent although raw material expenses grew by 18.6 per cent. Further, interest costs declined by 20.2 per cent. The much lower growth in or shrinking of costs of manufacturing companies helped them see a 610 per cent increase in profits.

“Nearly three-fourths of the listed companies are yet to declare their financial performance during the March 2021 quarter. These companies collectively made profits of about ₹25,000 crore in the September and the December 2020 quarter each. Assuming similar orders of magnitude to continue, total profits by listed companies could touch ₹1.8 trillion in the March 2021 quarter,” said Mahesh Vyas, the chief executive officer of CMIE.

EPFO allows 2nd PF advance now

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, MAY 31

Keeping in view the raging second wave of the pandemic, the labour ministry on Monday said that the members of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) can now avail a second non-refundable advance from their EPF accounts. Earlier, there was only a one-time advance available for the EPF members. The decision comes at a time when the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has made the financial position of many employees precarious and more difficult than the first wave.

“In such trying times, EPFO endeavours to lend a helping hand to its members by meeting their financial needs. The members, who have already availed of the first Covid-19 advance, can now opt for a second advance also. The provision and process for the withdrawal of the second Covid-19 advance are the same as in the case of the first advance,” the ministry said in a statement.

“Under this provision, non-refundable withdrawal to the extent of the basic wages and dearness allowances for three months or up to 75 per cent of the amount standing to member's credit in the EPF account, whichever is less, is provided. The members can apply for a lesser amount also,” it added.

“The Covid-19 advance has been a great help to the EPF members during the pandemic, especially for those having monthly wages of less than Rs 15,000. As on date, EPFO has settled more than 76.31 lakh Covid-19 advance claims thereby disbursing a total of ₹18,698.15 crore,” it added.

Bulls take Nifty to all-time high

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 31

Upward market momentum continued for the seventh consecutive session taking the Nifty-50 index to a new all-time high, even as post-market hour economic data showed that the economy has contracted by 7.3 per cent in FY 2020-21.

The Nifty-50 index gained 147.15 points or 0.95 per cent to close at a new all-time high of 15,582.80, while the Sensex gained 514.56 points or one per cent to close at 51,937.44.

The forward-looking equity market is more focused on brightening prospects of economic recovery as fresh Covid cases have fallen consistently after crossing over four lakh cases in early

Since we are in an uncharted territory, there is no historic level to consider as a next resistance, but taking a few ratios into consideration, there is no major level visible before the magical figure of 16,000 for the Nifty-50

— SAMEET CHAVAN Analyst, Angel Broking

May to over 1.52 lakh cases last Sunday, according to equity market analysts.

“The Nifty rose for the seventh consecutive session reaching and closing at fresh record highs. It has closed the month of May with a 6.5 per cent gain almost matching the February gains. The con-

tribution to this rise was broad-based on May 31,” said Deepak Jasani, head-Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

The top five gainers on the Nifty-50 were JSW Steel (3.25 per cent), ICICI Bank (3.00 per cent), Reliance Industries (2.80 per cent), Bharti Airtel (2.36 per cent), and Tata Steel (2.13 per cent).

On Monday, the last day of the month of May, foreign portfolio investors turned net buyers by ₹2,412 crore, while the domestic institutions also purchased shares worth Rs 179.78 crore.

Overall FPIs were net sellers in May but the latter half of the month saw an aggressive buying as the dramatic rise in Covid during the first half was followed by a

steep decline. “Bulls discarded the myth ‘Sell in May and go away,’” said Angel Broking.

“Since we are in an uncharted territory, there is no historic level to consider as a next resistance, but taking a few ratios into consideration, there is no major level visible before the magical figure of 16,000 for the Nifty-50,” said Sameet Chavan, analyst, technical and derivatives at Angel Broking.

PNB Housing Finance board approved a capital raise proposal of ₹4,000 crore led by the international private equity firm Carlyle and as the exchanges were informed, the PNB Housing Finance stock hit the 20 per cent upper circuit and closed up 19.99 per cent.

Real estate sector's size to hit \$1 trillion by 2030: Official

New Delhi, May 31: The size of real estate sector is projected to cross \$1 trillion by 2030, housing and urban affairs secretary Durga Shanker Mishra said on Monday.

“In 2019-20, real estate sector contributed nearly seven per cent to our GDP. Its total contribution was to the tune of \$200 billion to our GDP... And projections are that by 2030 this number is going to cross \$1 trillion,” Mishra said.

He also noted that real estate is an important sector for the economy with around 11 per share in the total employment numbers.

The secretary was speaking at a virtual event to launch Housing Price Index, created by realty portal Housing.com and Indian School of Business (ISB) in association with industry body NAREDCO.

“By 2030, when we are projecting our economy to go up to \$10 trillion, nearly 10 per cent of that will come from the real estate sector itself,” he added.

Mishra said the sector is also very important from the point of view of employment and high-



lighted that out of 50 crore jobs, real estate provides 5.5 crore employment opportunities.

The secretary said the real estate sector has transformed in the last seven years and implementation of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, popularly known as RERA, has played an important part in making a paradigm change.

He said the central law has already been implemented across all states/UTs, except West Bengal and Nagaland.

Mishra said a large number of real estate projects and property brokers are registered under RERA.

The government has taken various measures in the Budget of last seven years to spur growth in the real estate sector, he added.

“Every Budget has some announcement for real estate sector.”

The secretary emphasised on having robust digital platforms for smooth and transparent real estate buying-selling process.

Mishra said he had asked CREDAI and NAREDCO, the two major associations for real estate, to create a digital platform for real estate, similar to Amazon, and some progress has been made in this regard.

— PTI

Core sectors grow 56% in April over low base effect

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MAY 31

On the back of a low-base effect, eight core sector industries in the country registered a 56 per cent growth in April 2021, according to the government official data released on Monday.

The eight infrastructure sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity — had contracted by 37.9 per cent because of the national lockdown imposed by the government in April 2020.



The data, however, showed that the sequential decline in core sector output stood at 15 per cent in April on account of the second wave of the virus.

“This high growth rate in April 2021 is largely due to low index base in April 2020 consequent to the low industrial production across all sectors caused

by the nationwide lockdown imposed to contain the spread of Covid-19 last year. The month-over-month production of eight core industries, as captured by ICI, declined by 15.1 per cent (P) in April 2021 compared to March 2021(P) due to the emergence of the second wave of infectious Covid-19,” the official data said.

The RBI in its annual report also acknowledged the impact of the second wave on the economic recovery process. However, it said that the impact may not be as harsh as in the first wave.

NEW | WORLD

Work-from-home and study-from-home spiked gadget demand

Chip shortage to ease in two years, says Intel CEO

New Delhi, May 31: Global chip maker Intel on Monday said it could take a couple of years to address the supply shortage in the semiconductor ecosystem that is witnessing huge demand for tech products, accelerated by the Covid pandemic.

Intel CEO Pat Gelsinger noted that the work and study-from-home trends during the Covid-19 pandemic have led to a “cycle of explosive growth in semiconductors” that has placed huge strain on global supply chains around the world.

“We have been working diligently with our partners... to address constraints and increase output to meet demand, and we are acting to help



ensure capacity to meet the world's needs for this new era... But, while the industry has taken steps to address near-term constraints, it could still take a couple of years for the ecosystem to address shortages of foundry capacity, substrates and components,” he said at a

virtual session at the Computex event.

He stated that the company has doubled its internal wafer capacity in the past four years, and that it is driving a collaborative approach to help the supply chain.

Semiconductors play a crucial role in every-

thing, right from computers to appliances, communication devices, transportation systems to critical infrastructure.

“We’ve already announced more than \$20 billion of new investment in our foundry capability. This includes large scale capacity expansion in Arizona, in support for advanced semiconductor manufacturing technologies in New Mexico. We plan to expand to other locations in the US and Europe, ensuring a sustainable and secure semiconductor supply chain for the world,” Gelsinger said.

Intel Corporate Vice President and General Manager CCG Sales Steve Long announced the

launch of two new 11th generation Intel core SKUs that will help the company deliver performance and extend its leadership in the thin and light notebook category.

The company is also launching the Intel 5G solution 5000, its first 5G product for the next-generation of PC experiences.

“This is Intel's first 5G product coming out from our previously announced collaboration with MediaTek with global certification. Acer, Asus and HP are expected to bring these 5G-enabled PCs to market this year and the momentum continues in 2022, with over 29 designs expected,” Long said.

— PTI

CAPGEMINI TO USE ERICSSON'S SOLUTIONS FOR 5G LAB IN INDIA

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MAY 31

Capgemini on Monday said that it has tied up with Ericsson to accelerate the deployment of 5G solutions.

As part of this collaboration, the company has deployed Ericsson's 5G Industry Connect solution at its 5G Lab in Mumbai which will enable industry innovation, experimentation and deployment of 5G and Edge technologies for clients across industries.

According to Ashwin Yardi, CBO, India, at Capgemini: “The Capgemini 5G Lab offers a “ready to use” platform for our customers to ideate, innovate and deploy use cases as they adopt new technologies which will enable them to accelerate their digital transformation journey towards Intelligent Industry.”

SHORT TAKES

Zidane criticises Real in open letter

Madrid: Zinedine Zidane resigned as Real Madrid coach because he felt the Spanish club no longer had any confidence in him, he wrote in an open letter on Monday. "I'm leaving because I feel the club no longer has the faith in me I need, and doesn't offer me the support to build something in the medium or long term," the Frenchman wrote in the letter published in the daily AS. "I am a born winner and I was here to win trophies, but beyond this there are human beings, emotions, life and I have the feeling that these things have not been valued, that it has not been understood that this is also how the dynamism of a great club is maintained. But everything I built on a daily basis, what I brought to the relationship with the players... Has been forgotten," he said.

— AFP

Barca sign up Aguero from City

Barcelona: Barcelona announced on Monday that they had agreed to sign Sergio Aguero on a deal until 2023, after the Argentina forward quit Manchester City following a decade at the Premier League club. In a statement, Barca said that Aguero will become their player once his contract with Manchester City expires at the end of next month, adding that there is a buy-out clause "set at 100 million euros (\$122 million)".

The 32-year-old's signing for Barca comes two days after he missed out on winning the Champions League with City, Pep Guardiola's side losing this season's final to Chelsea. His final appearance for City was as a substitute for Raheem Sterling late in the final in Porto as the newly-crowned Premier League champions tried in vain to win Europe's top prize for the first time. — AFP

Draw vs Qatar not my best: Sandhu

Doha: India goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu says the memorable goalless draw against Asian champions Qatar, in the FIFA World Cup qualifier in September 2019, is not his greatest performance till date. According to him, he has performed his best, surprisingly, in a 0-4 loss to Iran in a 2018 World Cup qualifier at a packed Azadi Stadium in Tehran, and during a match against China in China.

"Almost everyone I speak to always makes me remember about the Qatar match. But if you ask me, that isn't my best performance so far. I understand that in the Qatar match, we got a result — and hence, it will always stay a highlight," Gurpreet told the All India Football Federation. — PTI

Gopi, Sindhu bat for youth health

Hyderabad: National badminton coach Pullela Gopichand and world champion P. V. Sindhu pledged to protect the youth of the country from the menace of tobacco products on the occasion of World No Tobacco Day on Monday. "Tobacco use not only harms our health but it is also a threat to the health of our friends and family. Additionally, tobacco users also have a greater risk of developing severe cases of Covid-19. I want all of you to break free from dependence on tobacco and stay healthy. Commit to quit," Sindhu said. "Let us all take a pledge to ensure that we stop the usage of tobacco for a healthy living," Gopi added.

Suns bounce back to level series

Los Angeles: Chris Paul overcame an injured shoulder and Jae Crowder busted out of a playoff slump on Sunday as the Phoenix Suns took a 100-92 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers, who lost Anthony Davis to another injury.

Paul had 18 points and nine assists, while Crowder delivered 17 points as half a dozen players finished in double figures for the Suns, who clawed their way level at 2-2 in the Western Conference playoff series against the reigning NBA champions. — AFP

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PLAN FOR FUTURE

T20 World Cup, FTP cycle to come up for discussion at ICC board meet

New Delhi, May 31: The BCCI will ask for one month's extension to decide on hosting the T20 World Cup in India amid the looming Covid-19 threat when the all-powerful ICC Board holds a virtual meeting on Tuesday to discuss a host of other issues as well.

While earlier, it was decided that BCCI president Sourav Ganguly will attend the meet in person, it is learnt that now he will be present virtually and will only leave for the UAE on Wednesday to have discussions on the organisation of IPL with Emirates Cricket Board.

There are no concrete outcomes expected at the meeting and after July 1, the BCCI will hold another SGM. The ICC is likely to make a formal announcement of its final decision during its annual conference that starts on July 18.

While the remainder of the IPL has been shifted to the United Arab Emirates between September 15 to October 15, the Indian cricket board doesn't want to let go the opportunity of hosting the global T20 event, which also has Emirates as back-up hosts.

"The Covid-19 cases are reducing but obviously it is still not a situation where we can firmly commit to hosting the World T20. Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah are right in asking for one month's time to decide," a senior BCCI source privy to developments said on conditions of anonymity.

FTP CYCLE 2023-31

The Futures Tours & Programme Cycle for the next eight years between 2023 to 2031 will also be discussed with provision for the flagship ICC events apart from the bilateral series.

"Obviously due to the pandemic, every cricket board has lost money and the bilateral events are the way forward to recover the costs. In any case, currently rested ICC CEO Manu Sawhney's proposal of a marquee ICC event every year was red flagged by the 'Big Three' much earlier.

"They need to look after the financial health of their boards," the official further added.

Also the future of the World Test Championship will also be discussed.

— PTI



BCCI president Sourav Ganguly (left) and secretary Jay Shah in this file photo. — BCCI

IPL-returned Aussies are home

Sydney, May 31: Amid hugs, tears of joy and relief, Australia's jumbo IPL contingent comprising players, support staff and commentators on Monday reunited with their family members after serving a 14-day hotel quarantine here.

The 38-member Australians landed in the country two weeks ago after a stopover in Maldives due to travel ban from Covid-ravaged India.

The highlight of the day was premier fast bowler Pat Cummins exiting the hotel and reuniting with his pregnant partner Becky Boston, a video of which was uploaded on Twitter by well-known Australian sports journalist Chloe-Amanda Bailey.

"Video of the day! After eight weeks away for the IPL, Pat Cummins finally leaves hotel quarantine and reunites with his pregnant partner Becky. All the feels!" Bailey tweeted alongside the video.

OZ PLAYERS AVAILABILITY IN IPL YET TO BE DISCUSSED: CA

Melbourne, May 31: Cricket Australia on Monday said it's yet to start discussions on whether Australian cricketers would compete in the IPL when the T20 league re-commences in the UAE in September.

Nick Hockley, who was confirmed as CA chief executive on Monday after performing the duties in an interim role, said a decision on IPL can wait as Australian players were just reunited with their families after completing a two-week hotel quarantine.

"Once we get back together as a group that (IPL) is something we'll obviously need to discuss," Hockley was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"Our players returning from the IPL have only today come out of quarantine, so our first priority is to make sure they are reunited with their families. We have a tour to prepare for in the West Indies," he added.

Hockley said the players will regroup at the National Cricket Centre (in Brisbane) in a couple of weeks before the West Indies tour and that would be the time to refocus.

— PTI

Besides Cummins, batting maestro Steve Smith, big-hitting all-rounder Glenn Maxwell and the swashbuckling opener Dave Warner were among

those who finally embraced their loved ones after nearly eight weeks away from home. Most of them had not seen their families since

heading into the Indian Premier League in early April. They were flown home via a charter flight after the IPL was postponed owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cricket Australia's newly-appointed chief executive officer Nick Hockley said the feeling among the players about going home to be with their families could not be understated.

"We've been texting, and I've spoken to a couple of the broader group, not just the players but there's commentators, match officials and physios," Hockley said.

"They are clearly quite shaken from the experience, very appreciative to be home back here in Australia."

The BCCI paid for the charter flights and accommodation of the Australians in the Maldives and Sydney, and Hockley thanked the Indian board for the manner in which it helped them after the abrupt suspension of the IPL. — PTI

OSAKA COULD BE BANNED FOR MEDIA BOYCOTT

Paris, May 31: Japanese superstar Naomi Osaka was on Sunday threatened with disqualification from the French Open if she persists with her controversial media boycott, officials said.

"We have advised Naomi Osaka that should she continue to ignore her media obligations, she would be exposing herself to possible further code of conduct infringement consequences," said a statement from the four Grand Slam tournaments after the world number two was fined \$15,000.

"Repeat violations attract tougher sanctions including default from the tournament and the trigger of a major offence investigation that could lead to more substantial fines and future Grand Slam suspensions."

Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam title winner and sport's highest-earning female athlete, was sanctioned for refusing to hold a press conference after her opening 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) win over Romanian Patricia Maria Tig.

The 23-year-old had said on the eve of the tournament that she would not carry out any media obligations, claiming news conferences are detrimental to her mental health.

She likened traditional post-match inquests to "kicking people when they're down".

French Tennis Federation president Gilles Moretton had described Osaka's vow of silence as "a phenomenal error". — AFP

ASIAN BOXING

Pooja strikes gold, silver for Panghal

Dubai, May 31: Defending champion Pooja Rani (75kg) was the lone Indian woman boxer to strike gold at the Asian Championships while defending champion Amit Panghal (52kg) and Shiva Thapa (64kg) lost gruelling and close final bouts to fetch silver medals here on Monday with the country seeking a review of the former's defeat.

The Olympic-bound Pooja (75 kg), who was competing in her first bout of the tournament after getting a bye and a walkover earlier, dismantled Mavluda Movlonova of Uzbekistan with a clinical performance.

She also earned \$10,000 for her marvellous one-bout show in which Movlonova was simply out of sorts, unable to keep pace with the Indian's intensity.

Panghal lost 2-3 to known nemesis Shakhobidin Zoirov of Uzbekistan in what was a repeat of the 2019 world championship final, which had also ended in Zoirov's favour.

India sought a review of the second round of the bout which Panghal won on a split count but looked to have dominated completely. The result of the review will be known later.

"I dedicate this silver medal to my coach Anil Dhanker. I wish he was here with in Dubai," Panghal tweeted referring to his personal coach.

Thapa (64kg) also lost by the same margin to Mongolia's Baatarsukh Chinzorig, the reigning Asian Games silver medalist. This was Thapa's fifth successive podium finish at the showpiece and second silver.

Both the contests had the Indian boxers doing most things right but not getting the judges' nod.



Pooja Rani (75 kg) celebrates her 5-0 win against Mavluda Movlonova of Uzbekistan at the Asian Championships in Dubai.

The Panghal-Zoirov clash lived up to the hype with both the Olympic-bound boxers engaged in a fast exchange of punches from the very first round.

Zoirov claimed the opening round. But in the second round, Panghal raised his game by a notch, evading Zoirov's range with his pace and landing his left straight precisely. Zoirov, on the other hand, struggled to connect.

The two went all out in the third round but it was Panghal who was more impressive with his body shots despite an injured eye.

He even had the judges' verdict in his favour for the round but it was not enough to alter the final scoreline. — PTI

PADDLERS DIYA, SWASTIKA END RUNNERS-UP IN TUNIS

New Delhi, May 31: Young Indian paddlers Diya Chitale and Swastika Ghosh's splendid run at the WTT Youth Star Contender ended with a runners-up finish following their 3-11, 6-11, 7-11 defeat against Russia's Natalia Malinina and Elizabet Abraamian in the U-19 girls doubles final in Tunis, Tunisia.

Earlier, the Indian pair made its way into the final, defeating Czech Republic's Linda Zaderova and Croatia's Hana Arapovic in the semifinals.

Diya and Swastika were also impressive in the U-19 singles as both finished their campaigns in the semifinals after suffering identical 2-3 defeats in hard-fought encounters.

Diya made life tougher for Russian paddler Vlada Voronina before losing the thrilling contest 8-11, 11-7, 11-6, 8-11, 7-11. The current junior national champion Swastika too lost to Turkey's Ece Harac 11-8, 4-11, 11-9, 3-11, 6-11 in an intense decider.

Since the Covid-19 outbreak, it was the first international youth event where Indian players were seen in action. — PTI

VIRUS | EFFECT

Copa America moved to Brazil

Asuncion, May 31: South America's largest football tournament, the Copa America, was moved Monday to Brazil after a Covid-19 surge in Argentina and social unrest in Colombia saw the co-hosts stripped of the right to host the event.

With two weeks to kick-off, South America's CONMEBOL football federation tweeted that "The CONMEBOL Copa America 2021 will be played in Brazil!" and the June 13-July 10 dates were maintained.

CONMEBOL is expected to announce the venues and dates of matches in the coming hours.

Brazil hosted the last Copa America, in 2019.

Originally scheduled for last year, the Copa was postponed by 12 months due to the coronavirus epidemic.

New host Brazil is one of the countries in the world worst affected by the outbreak, with the second-highest death toll of over 460,000 so far and more than 16.5 million cases.

It was to have been the first time in its history that the tournament would be co-hosted by two countries, Argentina and Colombia. — AFP

— AFP

Swiatek starts title defence with win

Paris, May 31: Reigning women's champion Iga Swiatek made a winning start to her French Open title defence with a straight-sets victory over Kaja Juvan on Monday, while men's second seed Daniil Medvedev finally reached round two for the first time at Roland Garros.

Poland's Swiatek, celebrating her 20th birthday, saw off her good friend Juvan 6-0, 7-5 on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Medvedev, who had lost in the first round in all of his four previous appearances in the tournament, put his poor clay-court form behind him by beating the dangerous Alexander Bublik 6-3, 6-3, 7-5.

The 23-time Grand Slam

THE RESULTS

Men's first round: Cameron Norrie (GBR) bt Bjorn Fratangelo (USA) 7-5, 7-6 (7/5); 6-2; Jannik Sinner (ITA x18) bt Pierre-Hugues Herbert (FRA) 6-1, 4-6, 6-7 (4/7), 7-5, 6-4; Gianluca Mager (ITA) bt Peter Gojowczyk (GER) 6-2, 3-6, 6-4, 7-5; Federico Delbonis (ARG) bt Radu Albot (MDA) 6-1, 2-6, 6-0, 6-1; Filip Krajinovic (SRB) bt Maximilian Marterer (GER) 6-4, 6-1, 7-6 (7/5); John Isner (USA x31) bt Sam Querrey (USA) 7-6 (7/2), 6-3, 6-4; Thiago Monteiro (BRA) bt Francisco Cerundolo (ARG) 6-3, 6-4, 6-3; Steve Johnson (USA) bt Frances Tiafoe (USA) 6-7 (5/7), 3-6, 6-4, 6-2, 6-1; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x2) bt Alexander Bublik (KAZ) 6-3, 6-3, 7-5.

Women's first round: Hailey Baptiste (USA) bt Anna Blinkova (RUS) 6-1, 6-4; Zarina Diyas (KAZ) bt Heather Watson (GBR) 6-4, 7-5; Elise Mertens (BEL x14) bt Storm Sanders (AUS) 6-4, 6-1; Rebecca Peterson (SWE) bt Shelby Rogers (USA) 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (10/8), 6-2; Iga Swiatek (POL x8) bt Kaja Juvan (SLO) 6-0, 7-5; Madison Brengle (USA) bt Maria Camila Osorio (COL) 7-5, 6-4; Polona Herczeg (SLO) bt Kiki Bertens (NED x16) 6-1, 3-6, 6-4; Harmony Tan (FRA) bt Alize Cornet (FRA) 6-4, 6-4; Marketa Vondrousova (CZE x20) bt Kaia Kanepi (EST) 4-6, 6-3, 6-0.

champion's match against Irina-Camelia Begu of Romania will be played behind closed doors, though, due to a 9pm Covid-19 curfew imposed by the French

government. Swiatek, who became the first major singles champion from Poland last October, hit 22 winners in an impressive opening to her bid for a

second straight Roland Garros triumph.

MEDVEDEV ENDS MISERABLE RUN

It is not just in Paris that Medvedev has struggled on clay.

The Russian had lost eight of his previous nine matches on the surface dating back to 2019.

But the two-time Grand Slam runner-up was too strong for Kazakh Bublik, setting up a second-round tie against either Australian wildcard Christopher O'Connell or US player Tommy Paul.

"It was a good match and I've been training really well," said the 25-year-old Medvedev, who lost the Australian Open final to Novak Djokovic in February. — AFP