



• Simultaneously published from Hyderabad | Warangal | Tirupati | Amaravati | Visakhapatnam | Khammam | Kurnool | Delhi: RNI No: DELENG/2017/74095 •

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1,072 new cases, 117 more deaths

NEW DELHI: Delhi recorded 117 more COVID-19 fatalities, the lowest since April 15, and 1,072 new cases on Thursday, while the positivity rate dipped to a nearly two-month low of 1.53 per cent, according to the daily health bulletin. This is the fifth day in a row when the daily cases in Delhi have remained below 2,000 and the second consecutive day when the cases are below 1,500. The number of deaths reported on Thursday (117) is the lowest since April 15 when the national capital had reported 112 fatalities. The national capital had recorded 1,491 cases and 130 fatalities on Wednesday with a positivity rate of 1.93 per cent.

'Milkman' held for supplying liquor

NEW DELHI: A 28-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly supplying liquor in milk containers in west Delhi's Mangolpuri area, police said on Thursday. While checking vehicles at a picket around 9.45 am on Wednesday, police stopped a motorcycle rider carrying four plastic milk containers. The two-wheeler was without a number plate and the rider, Manoj, could not give any satisfactory reason for the lapse, a senior police officer said. Upon checking the vehicle, 40 bottles of liquor, made for sale in Haryana only, were found from inside the plastic containers, the officer said. The accused, a resident of Rohtak, has been arrested.

3 arrested for selling used gloves

NEW DELHI: Three men were arrested in Dwarka for allegedly selling used surgical gloves after washing and repacking them, police said on Thursday. The accused were identified as Manish Kumar (30), Arun Shrinivasan (37) and Dinesh Kumar (28), they added. Preliminary investigation has revealed that used surgical gloves were procured from scrap markets and hospitals through a dealer based in the Tikri area, the police said, adding that efforts are underway to nab him. According to the police, a team led by SHO, Dabri, Surinder Sandhu raided two godowns in Dabri and Bindapur on Tuesday and seized 848 kg of surgical gloves. The used surgical gloves were mostly sold to factories, salons and hotels at cheap rates at washing and repacking, a senior police officer said.

HC ALLOWS DUTY FREE IMPORT OF DRUG TO TREAT BLACK FUNGUS

NEW DELHI

THE Delhi High Court Thursday allowed duty free import of Amphotericin B, used for treating black fungus patients, primarily those affected by it after recovering from Covid-19, on furnishing of a bond by the importers till the Centre takes a final decision on waiving the customs duty on it. The demand and supply gap for the medicine is widening by the hour and action on a "war footing" is needed by the central government to address it, the high court said. "The gap is widening by the hour. It has to be done on war footing. Please un-

derstand that fight. Every hour counts," it said.

The medicine is required to save the lives of thousands of people suffering from Mucormycosis and the central government shall seriously consider waiver of customs duty till the drug is in short supply in India, it added. "We direct that if any import is made by any person of this drug (Amphotericin B), it shall be allowed on a bond furnished by the importer without the actual duty being paid, till a decision is taken by the Centre. "The bond shall have the undertaking that in case the import duty is not waived, the duty shall be paid by the im-

porter," a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said. Central government standing counsel Amit Majahan informed the court later that there is a notification by the Centre on complete waiver of customs duty on all life saving drugs, if imported by an individual for personal use, and Amphotericin B is included in the list of life saving drugs. Advocate Nidhi Mohan Parashar, also representing the Centre, clarified however that it is exempted from duty if sent by a relative or friend free of cost from abroad. The court responded that the discussion was if Delhi government wishes to purchase the medicine from

abroad, it should also be duty free as the state will not be having any relative there and asked the counsel to take instructions on this aspect. The issue came up during arguments on a plea by a black fungus patient who was not getting the medicine.

While one of the advocates informed the court that the import duty on the medicine was in the range of 27 per cent, another one said it was 78 per cent. The Centre's counsel said he was not aware of the exact percentage and will inform the court after taking instructions from the competent authority. Central government standing counsel Kirtiman Singh submitted that the issue

of waiving the import duty on such drugs will be communicated to the authorities during the day and a decision will be taken soon. The bench said it was hopeful that the Centre will look at waiving the import duty.

"Considering the fact that the drug is required to save lives of people being infected with black fungus which is infecting thousands of people across the country, the central government shall seriously consider waiver of complete custom duties on these drugs at least for the period when it is in short supply in India to treat the patients of Mycormycosis," it said.

'Vax trials on children in India to begin soon'

Centre is allotting enough vaccines to the states: Dr Vinod Paul

NEW DELHI

THE Central government on Thursday announced that Covid-19 vaccine trials on children in the country would begin soon.

Member (Health) in NITI Aayog and the chair of National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC), Dr Vinod K. Paul, made the announcement on behalf of the government while clearing several myths on India's Covid-19 vaccination programme doing the rounds.

Clarifying one such myth that "Centre is not taking any step to vaccinate children", Paul said: "As of now, no country in the world is giving vaccines to children. Also, WHO has no recommendation on vaccinating children."

Paul, however, said that there have been studies about safety of vaccines in children, which have been encouraging. "Trials in children in India are also going to begin soon. However, vaccinating children should not be decided on the basis of panic in WhatsApp groups and because some politicians want to play politics," Paul said.

Paul further said that the decision in



this regard is taken by our scientists after adequate data is available based on trials. He also made it clear that the Centre is allotting enough vaccines to the states in a transparent manner as per agreed guidelines and they are also being informed in advance of the vaccine availability.

Paul also announced that Vaccine availability is going to increase in near future and much more supply would be possible. "In the non-Government of India channel, states are getting 25 per cent of the doses and private hospitals are getting 25 per cent doses.

Vaccination for 18-44 remains suspended for 4th day in Delhi

NEW DELHI: Around 34,000 people were vaccinated in Delhi on May 26 and the majority of jabs were provided by private hospitals, AAP MLA Atishi said on Thursday, highlighting the acute shortage of vaccines the city government has been grappling with.

She also said 42 per cent of the people (24.32 lakh) in the 45 plus category have received at least one dose of vaccine.

"This is the fourth consecutive day that the vaccination drive for the 18-44 age group has remained suspended," Atishi said. It's a cause for serious concern. Delhi has not received any more doses from the manufacturers so far.

The makers have made it clear that they have been supplying vaccine to states according to the directions by the Centre, she said. "As many as 34,147 people got vaccinated on May 26. Of this, most of the jabs were given at private hospitals," Atishi said.

Indian-origin Sikh man among 9 killed in US shooting

LOS ANGELES: A 36-year-old Indian-origin Sikh man was among eight people killed in the horrific railway shooting in San Jose in the US state of California, according to media reports on Thursday. Taptejdeep Singh was the first victim to be publicly identified by his family, The Mercury News reported.

Singh, born in India and raised in Union City, California, has left behind his wife, three-year-old son, one-year-old daughter, and a grieving Sikh community in the San Francisco Bay Area, which described him as a "helpful and caring" man. Co-workers at the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) hailed Singh as a hero, saying he left the safety of an office room, where some colleagues were hiding, to help others escape the line of fire. Samuel Cassidy, 57, a maintenance worker of the VTA, San Jose, on Wednesday gunned down eight of his co-workers and critically injured another in a one of the deadliest shootings in California state this year. As police arrived at the scene, the killer died of a self-inflicted gunshot.

Govt to give 11L vax doses to States and UTs in next 3 days

NEW DELHI

AFTER India crossed the 20-crore vaccination mark in 130 days, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said that more than 22 crore vaccine doses have been provided to States/UTs and about 1.84 crore doses were still available with the States/UTs to be administered.

The Government of India has so far provided, both through the free of cost category and through direct state procurement category, 22,16,11,940 doses to States/UTs. Of this, the total consumption, including wastages is 20,17,59,768 doses (as per data available at 8 a.m. Thursday).

Covid Vaccine doses to the tune of 1,84,90,522 were still available with the States/UTs to be administered, the government cleared in its data amid various attacks on social media on its vaccine policy. A total of 11,42,630 vaccine doses were in the pipeline and would be received by the

States/UTs within the next three days.

As part of the nationwide vaccination drive, the central government has been supporting the States and UTs by providing them COVID Vaccines free of cost. In addition, it has also been facilitating direct procurement of vaccines by the States/UTs.

Vaccination is an integral pillar of the comprehensive strategy of Government of India for containment and management of the pandemic, along with Test, Track, Treat and COVID Appropriate Behaviour.

Implementation of the Liberalized and Accelerated Phase-3 Strategy of Covid-19 Vaccination started from May 1.

Under the Strategy, every month 50 per cent of the total Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL) cleared vaccine doses of any manufacturer is procured by Govt. of India. It continues to make these doses available to the state governments totally free of cost as was being done earlier.



Police personnel inhale herbal steam, coming out from outlets connected to a pressure cooker, to clear nasal congestion, outside a police station in Ghaziabad on Thursday



Variant detected in India, now found in 53 countries: WHO

UNITED NATIONS/GENEVA

THE B.1.617 COVID-19 variant, first detected in India, has now been found in 53 countries, according to the WHO, which noted that India recorded a 23 per cent decrease in the number of new cases in the last seven days but they were still the highest in the world.

The World Health Organisation's COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update, published May 25, said that over the past week, the number of new cases and deaths continued to decrease globally, with over 4.1 million new cases and 84,000 new deaths reported, a 14 per cent and 2 per cent decrease respectively compared to the previous week.

According to the update, the B.1.617 variant,

first detected in India, is now prevalent in 53 countries globally. The B.1.617 viruses are divided in three lineages - B.1.617.1, B.1.617.2 and B.1.617.3.

The update gave a break-up of prevalence of the three sub-lineages of the B.1.617 variant in countries, territories and areas as of May 25.

According to it, B.1.617.1 is found in 41 countries, B.1.617.2 in 54 countries and B.1.617.3 in six. In addition, information for the B.1.617.1, B.1.617.2 sub-lineages was received by WHO from unofficial sources in 11 countries, including China, and will be reviewed as more information becomes available.

WHO has declared B.1.617 as a "variant of concern" and the update noted that this variant has "increased transmissibility", disease



severity is "under investigation", risk of reinfection is "under investigation, possible modest reduction in neutralization activity (B.1.617.1)".

It said that the highest numbers of new COVID cases in the last seven days were reported from India (1,846,055 new cases; 23 per cent decrease), Brazil (451,424 new cases; 3 per cent increase), Argentina (213,046 new cases; 41 per cent increase), the United States of America (188,410 new cases; 20 per cent decrease), and Colombia (107,590 new cases; 7 per cent decrease). "Despite a declining global trend over the past four weeks, incidence of COVID-19 cases and deaths remain high, and substantial increases have been observed in many countries throughout the world," it said.

The update further said that the South-East Asia Region reported over 2 million new cases and over 32,000 new deaths, a 21 per cent decrease and a 4 per cent increase respectively compared to the previous week. "While the overall incidence of cases continues to decrease (driven primarily by trends in India), death incidence continued to increase for a tenth consecutive week, and sizable increases have been observed in other countries in the region," it said.

In the region, the highest numbers of new deaths were reported from India (28,982 new deaths; 2.1 new deaths per 100,000; a 4 per cent increase), Nepal (1,297 new deaths; 4.5 new deaths per 100,000; a 6 per cent increase), and Indonesia (1,238 new deaths; 0.5 new deaths per 100,000; a 10 per cent increase).

Womenia

Multani mitti face packs for happy skin this summer



Shahnaz Husain

Clay is said to be beneficial for the skin and scalp due to its great capacity to absorb and also has healing properties. It is said to reduce oiliness and absorb sebum, the skin's natural oil. This helps to prevent and control eruptions and acne conditions. Clays cleanse and refine the skin and also tone and tighten the skin, performing the functions of an ideal face mask. Another benefit is the nourishing effect of clays, as they are rich in minerals.

Applying packs is an integral part of skin care, as it is an ideal way of preserving the good health and youthful qualities of the skin. Fuller's Earth (multani mitti) is commonly used. It has a drying effect, so moisturizing ingredients like honey, aloe vera, fruit pulp, etc., may be added to clay packs, especially if the skin is normal to dry.

For oily skin

Mix multani mitti with rose water into a paste and apply on the face, avoiding the lips and area around eyes. Wash it off when it is dry.



Clays, like multani mitti (Fuller's Earth) have been used in beauty care and in treating ailments for centuries. Multani mitti is natural clay and is used extensively in beauty care, even in homemade packs. It is mentioned in Ayurvedic texts and is said to balance all three "doshas"

For acne-prone skin:

Mix multani mitti with sandalwood paste, rose water and neem leaf powder into a paste. Apply the same way and wash off when dry.

For acne marks:

Mix multani mitti with one teaspoon lemon juice and rose water into a paste. Apply on the face. Wash it off when it is dry.

For normal to dry and normal to oily skin, mix 1 teaspoon multani mitti with aloe vera gel into a paste. Apply on the face, avoiding the lips and area around eyes. Wash it off after 15 minutes with plain water. If there is acne, add 2 drops of tea tree oil

to the mixture.

For normal to dry skin, 2 teaspoons of multani mitti may be mixed with one teaspoon each of honey, yogurt and almond oil into a paste. Apply and remove the same way.

Mix 2 teaspoons multani mitti with 2 teaspoons of rose water, half teaspoon pure glycerine and a pinch of turmeric; apply on oily, pimple prone skin and wash off when it dries, or after 15 minutes.

Activated charcoal can be used with multani mitti. To discourage blackheads and reduce oiliness, mix one teaspoon each of multani mitti, baking soda and active charcoal. Add rose water or mineral water to make a paste. Apply on the face, avoiding the lips and area around eyes. Wash it off after 15 minutes.

You can mix a pack at home, but keep your skin type in mind and add ingredients accordingly.

BEAUTY FUNDA

Try these simple hacks if you are suffering with wrinkles

Wrinkles are the most common problem in the women. They are the lines and creases that form in your skin due to various factors, age (and the years of sun exposure that comes with it) being the most obvious. As you get older, your skin becomes less elastic and more fragile. Decreased production of natural oils dries out your skin and makes it appear more wrinkled. Fat in your face also begins to diminish, causing loose, saggy skin and more noticeable lines. The appearance of wrinkles can be improved over time. While more severe wrinkles typically can't be entirely reversed, their appearance can be diminished if you're using these powerful products.



Sunscreen

UV rays are one of the biggest causes of premature wrinkles, so sunscreen is the ultimate secret to maintaining a youthful complexion. Protecting your skin from UV rays will help prevent the formation of new wrinkles as well as slow the worsening of existing ones on your face.

Retinoids

Retinoids, the gold standard for wrinkle reduction, are vitamin-A derivatives that stimulate cell turnover and boost collagen production, thereby reducing the appearance of wrinkles. Retinoids is the umbrella term for all such derivatives including retinol, which you can find in over-the-counter products, and Retin-A, available by prescription.

In addition to wrinkle-reducing capabilities, retinoids can soften skin, even out texture, and fade dark spots. But with great potency comes the risk of irritation. To avoid any redness and flaking, start using a retinoid twice a week and follow it immediately with moisturizer. After a few weeks, step up your usage to three times a week.

And since retinoids can make you more sensitive to UV rays, experts recommend using it only at night, when you're not exposed to the sun. If you do use it in the morn-

ing, make sure to be extra vigilant when reapplying sunscreen.

Antioxidants

Antioxidants — vitamin C, niacinamide, or resveratrol work to neutralize free radicals, which cause damage to our skin cells and therefore cause wrinkles, and boost collagen production. To get the most protection, cleanse the skin, apply an antioxidant-packed serum immediately, and then wait five minutes before putting on sunscreen. This will prevent you from diluting the formula.



NEWS ROUNDUP

Elnaaz Norouzi: Nobody functions well under pressure

Actress Elnaaz Norouzi says she is not one to stress over performing well on screen or choosing the right project. The actress, who has been seen in the web series "Sacred Games" as well as the OTT-released film "Hello Charlie", feels if she takes on pressure, she won't be able to perform well.

"I believe that nobody functions well under pressure, especially me. So, I never put myself in a place where I feel the pressure of performance. That's detrimental, especially in a creative field like ours," says Elnaaz. Talking about how she comes on board with a script, she says that it all depends on if she likes it and how different it is from what she has done before.

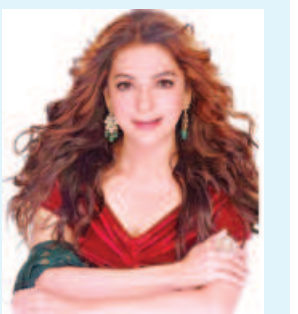
"I read the script and if I like it, and if I feel that it has potential, then I go for it. I never go for what I've done before or what people expect of me. It's my career, and the first priority is always what I love to do, and something that can be challenging for me as an actor. Hopefully, that's the right script to choose," she says.

TWEET PATROL



JUHI CHAWLA
@IAM_JUHI

Just loving the outdoors.. Went for a long walk down Clifton... the clear blue Ocean, clean crisp Air & the mountains; a Spectacular sight to behold



WORLD MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY

Take care of your hygiene health

TEJAL SINHA

WAYS TO CELEBRATE MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY

- Normalize conversation around periods by encouraging the ones who would not talk about it usually.
- Get the periods-related changemakers to share their journey and impact.
- Design and execute campaigns where non-menstruators take the effort to understand the issues faced by menstruators.
- Work closely with the organizations that impact the menstrual hygiene policies and advocacy.
- Encourage women to speak on the topic.

tion to this, we came up with India's 1st Feminine Pain Relief Patches. It would help women sleep and work better. Disposal of sanitary pads/tampons/diapers on the go was a big challenge and hence Sirona introduced India's 1st oxo-biodegradable disposal bags for clean and hygienic disposal of used sanitary products."

After this, as per their customers concerns, they started offering sustainable and menstrual flow products for which they introduced natural and chemical free products. They have also introduced India's 1st Coloured Biodegradable pads.

He further adds, "When we started out, we faced a lot of resistance from retailers, because of the stigma around feminine intimate and toilet hygiene. What is our star product today (PeeBuddy), did not have a place in the offline market, simply because of the word 'pee' on it. But the e-commerce that is more dynamic, welcomed us with open arms. The online

channel brought us closer to our target audience. Our innovative products come with the promise of fixing critical intimate hygiene problems that women face daily."

As reflected by their sales, more women are adopting menstrual cups than earlier. They are realising the benefits of menstrual cups that offer longer, leak-proof protection and prove to be far more economical in the long run.

Sirona has been conducting menstrual cup distribution drives in rural areas across India and the world with the help of local groups and healthcare professionals, who help women adopt the cup. They identify reusable menstrual cup as the most economical, eco-friendly, and hygienic solution to managing periods. So far, they have observed that the cup has solved a lot of menstrual hygiene issues for rural women. Thoughtful innovation that promotes sustainability across all sections of society is the way forward.

Hamburger Day

Let's face it; there isn't anything in the world quite so delightful as your first bite of a rich, juicy hamburger. Don't believe us? One of the first popular vegan-faux-meats? The Veggie Burger. Even vegetarians couldn't resist the taste of a tasty burger; they had to create an alternative so that they wouldn't have to leave all that was good and right about the world in the past. Hamburger Day celebrates the history of this most irresistible of sandwiches.

But why are hamburgers so amazing? Well, it's clever really, it matters not who you are, there will be some form of burger for you. Unlike some popular dishes where you just get what you get, a hamburger can be designed and created for the person who is eating it.

In a strange way, a hamburger resembles an art form that you chew. While that last statement may sound crazy, it's far from it. If you sit back and think about it, whenever you make a burger at home, you have specific ingredients that you like to mix with your pate, and more than this, a burger is one food that welcomes OCD. What do we mean by that? Well, can you honestly say that you don't freak out if the cheese is in the wrong place?

The truth is, a burger is a universal food; it's a food that has many forms; it's a food that brings people together, and ultimately it's loved. So, if you really look at things from a logical perspective, a hamburger is more than a food, it's almost the basis for a religion.

So, next time Hamburger Day comes around, and you find yourself craving a hamburger, don't settle for a flat, plain pate. It's time to think big, think outside the box, think of the power of the pate and celebrate Hamburger Day in style.



UP Congress launches campaign to help rural people amid Covid

LUCKNOW

UTTAR Pradesh Congress has launched a campaign called 'Sewa Satyagrah - Mera Gaon, Mera Abhiyan' to provide help to the people, especially in the rural areas, amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The party has also set up a helpline for residents of all 823 blocks of the state.

During the campaign, party workers will distribute medical kits to the residents and

sanitise villages to prevent the spread of the deadly virus.

According to UP Congress president Ajay Kumar Singh Lallu, "A special drive to extend much-needed help to the people of rural Uttar Pradesh has been launched on the direction of party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Congress workers will distribute 10 lakh medical kits to villagers after medical consultation and also sanitise villages for which 15 lakh-litre of sani-



tiser has been procured." Lallu said that Priyanka

Gandhi had earlier written to all the newly-elected village

heads and members of district panchayats, seeking their help for making the programme a success.

The Congress leader said, "The first batch of medicines and sanitiser tanks has been dispatched with party leaders from UPCC headquarters in Lucknow and they would start functioning from Thursday.

Similarly, teams will be dispatched from zonal headquarters in order to cover all the blocks of the state within

the next one week. "Our party is already working for public welfare by providing oxygen concentrators, medicines, food packets and three oxygen tankers which were provided to a Lucknow hospital by Priyanka Gandhi during the acute oxygen crisis."

Meanwhile, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has sent oxygen concentrators to Amethi, his former parliamentary constituency, and has plans to organise a sanitisation campaign in the dis-

trict.

Amethi district Congress chief Pradeep Singhal said that 10,000 litres of sanitiser will soon be arriving in Amethi and teams have been formed to carry out the sanitisation drive amid the second wave of the pandemic.

"Rahul Gandhi has already sent five oxygen concentrators and 20 oxygen cylinders to the district on May 21 while 15 more concentrators have been dispatched," he said.



Over 10k inmates released to decongest UP jails

LUCKNOW

OVER 10,000 undertrials and convicts across jails in Uttar Pradesh have either been granted interim bail or parole in order to decongest the over-crowded prisons in the wake of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This has been done in compliance with the Supreme Court directives.

According to a Prison Department spokesman, nearly 8,463 undertrials have been released on bail, while 1,660 convicts were given a six-week parole.

Of the total 10,123 released from 71 central and state prisons, a maximum of 704 undertrial inmates were freed on interim bail from the Ghaziabad district prison, 445 in Aligarh, 398 in Lucknow and 397 in Gautam Buddha Nagar.

There are more than 1 lakh inmates lodged in jails across the state.

The Department had come up with 54 temporary jails where suspects arrested in fresh cases are quarantined for 14 days before they were moved to permanent ones.

In a statement, the Department said the more than 24,000 inmates, above the age of 45, have been vaccinated.

Earlier, a high-powered committee, comprising Acting Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court Justice Sanjay Yadav, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Avansh Kumar Awasthi and the state's Director General (Prisons) Anand Kumar had sought a list of eligible prisoners in compliance with the Supreme Court directive.

A similar exercise was undertaken last year during the first Covid-19 wave when 11,000 prisoners were granted parole.

Several inmates had jumped parole after which efforts were made to trace them and bring them back.

UP: WARRING ABAP SAINTS CALL FOR TRUCE

PRAYAGRAJ

THE warring saints of the Akhil Bhartiya Akhara Parishad (ABAP) have finally called for a truce.

ABAP President Mahant Narendra Giri has pardoned his disciple, yoga guru Anand Giri after the latter sought forgiveness from his guru and the Panch Parmeshwar of Shri Panchayati Akhara Niranjani.

This comes days after Anand Giri was expelled from the Akhara for violating its traditions.

Mahanat Narendra Giri, after the apology, lifted the ban on Anand Giri from entering Bade Hanuman temple and the Baghambari Mutt.

Anand Giri reportedly apologised to his Guru Narendra Giri at the residence of a fellow disciple.

According to sources, the on-



going dispute between Mahant Narendra Giri and his disciple has been resolved following the intervention of senior seers of the Shri Panchayati Niranjani Akhara and the ABAP.

In a short video, shared with the media by Mahant Narendra Giri, Anand Giri is heard pleading for forgiveness.

"I am taking back all the comments and statements made by

me in newspapers, TV news channels or social media and plead for forgiveness from my guru."

In the video, Narendra Giri says: "On the auspicious occasion of Buddha Purnima, Anand Giri has sought forgiveness from me and the Panch Parmeshwar of the akhara, and so I am forgiving him. Now, he is free to come and perform puja at the mutt.

Gurugram first district in Har to administer over 6L jobs

GURUGRAM

GURUGRAM became the first district in Haryana to administer the anti-Covid vaccine to over 6.49 lakh people, health officials said on Thursday. According to officials, so far over 5,72,000 people in the district have been administered with the first dose of the vaccine, and over 1,42,000 have been given their second shot.

"In order to run the vaccination smoothly, a drive was being conducted in the government and private health facilities across the district. Under the immunisation campaign, 59,191 healthcare workers have so far received the first dose of Covid vaccine and 37,161 workers the second dose," Yash Garg, Deputy Commissioner of Gurugram, said.

Similarly, around 51,213 frontline workers have received the first dose of their Covid vaccine and 36,001 people were administered their second dose. Besides,

around 88,080 people in the 18-44 age group have received their jobs. Over 2,37,000 in the 45-59 age group have also been administered with first and second dose of the vaccine.

Over 1,52,000 people above 60 years have received their first dose and over 60,000 the second dose.



On Wednesday 578 people were discharged after recovery, while 187 new cases were reported in Gurugram. Health officials said testing is being done to curtail the Covid infections in Gurugram. In the last 24 hours the health department has conducted 6,757 Covid tests.

According to the figures, the number of total active cases in Gurugram district is 2,961 out of which 2,513 patients are in home isolation.

"We appeal to the people not to step outside unnecessarily. They should stay indoors and follow Covid norms," Garg added.

BJP to distribute Covid essentials to mark 7 years of Modi govt

LUCKNOW

THE Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has directed its cadres to distribute masks, sanitisers, and immunity boosters across rural Uttar Pradesh on Sunday to mark the completion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's seven years in power.

The party has decided not to hold any celebrations on the occasion but to dedicate itself to service of the people.

The BJP also plans to hold blood donation camps and launch a campaign to increase awareness regarding Covid vaccination in rural areas, where the state government has already launched an aggressive test-trace-treat campaign.

BJP leader Govind Narayan Shukla, who will coordinate the rural outreach campaign, told reporters, "We will cover at least 20,000-gram sabhas



across the state on Sunday. Covid essentials like face masks and immunity boosters would be distributed and villages will also be sanitised. We will reach out to every household in the village."

All party MPs, MLAs and minister have been asked to remain in their respective con-

stituencies and participate in the programme on Sunday.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the state has now moved into a Covid 'safe zone'.

In a statement, he said that the state has proved the critics wrong and managed to "successfully blunt" the surge

through the trace, test and treat method.

"We are now preparing for a probable third wave. In Deoria, we will work on encephalitis control along with Covid care. The rainy season, which triggers encephalitis is just months away. Gorakhpur-Basti divisions previously bore the brunt of the scourge. We have reduced the encephalitis death rate by 95 per cent and now there are hundreds of health wellness and encephalitis treatment centres, which will help control the disease," he said.

The Chief Minister added that paediatric ICUs (PICU) in district hospitals and mini-PICU in community health centres were being operationalised.

A new 20-bed PICU has been planned for Deoria and a mini-PICU in Laar assembly segment.

Ramp up stock of alternate drugs to treat black fungus: Punjab CM

CHANDIGARH

WITH 188 cases of mucormycosis or black fungus reported in Punjab, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Thursday ordered to ramp-up stocks of alternate drugs to treat the disease in view of the shortage of Amphotericin.

With only Liposomal Amphotericin B injections in the stock and just 880 more Liposomal expected to be received shortly, the Chief Minister stressed the need to strengthen alternate drug stocks, as recommended by the expert group constituted by his government to deal with the crisis.

Stressing the need to ensure that every patient has a chance to recover from black fungus, a disease reportedly caused by overuse of steroids in Covid-19 patients, especially those suffering from diabetes, the Chief Minister said along with efforts to get more of the Amphotericin drug, the state has already made available the alternate drugs --



Itraconazole (4,000 tablets) and Posaconazole (500 tablets) -- as suggested by the expert group.

He also noted with satisfaction that the six-member expert group constituted has begun its task of advising hospitals on the treatment protocols and the use of various drugs being supplied to them.

Health Secretary Hussan Lal said of the 188 cases, 40 were not related to Covid, while 148

were of Covid-infected persons with 133 having been on steroid therapy and 122 on oxygen support prior to onset of mucormycosis.

As many as 154 had diabetes, 56 were immunocompromised and 47 comorbid. A total of 156 are currently under treatment, nine have been cured and 23 have died.

Amarinder announced extension of the restrictions in the

state till June 10, but ordered the limit on the number of passengers in personal vehicles to be removed in view of decline in the positivity and number of active Covid-19 cases.

The Chief Minister also directed the resumption of elective surgeries in both government and private hospitals, as well restoration of OPD operations at all government hospitals in the state in view of the improvement in the overall Covid situation.

The elective surgeries were stopped from April 12 to ensure adequate availability of beds and oxygen for serious Covid cases, but the Chief Minister has now allowed these to be resumed, subject to the condition that there shall, for the present, be no reduction in beds for L3 patients in the hospital.

Medical Education Minister O.P. Soni said three government medical colleges have already started 50 per cent OPD operations, which will soon be scaled up to 100 per cent.

BAREILLY

IN a shocking incident, a man has alleged that the Bareilly police hammered nails into his hand and foot for violating the Corona curfew.

The victim, Ranjit, along with his mother, on Wednesday evening, reached Baradari police station with nails drilled in his hand and foot, and blamed the police.

However, Bareilly SSP Rohit Singh Sajwan, refuted the allegations and termed them baseless. He said that the injuries were self-inflicted to evade arrest in another case registered against Ranjit at Baradari police station.

"He did all this drama to save himself from the police. The charges levelled by him were not found to be true in the probe," the SSP said.

He said that an FIR was registered against Ranjit, a resident of Jogi Navada, on May 24 for misbehaving with a police constable who had asked him not to move out without a mask



in public.

The FIR was registered under IPC sections 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 504 (intentional insult with intention to provoke breach of peace), 506 (criminal intimidation), 332 (voluntarily causing hurt to deter public servant from his duty), 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life).

"The accused was absconding after the incident and police were searching for him," the SSP said.

The police went to Ranjit's house on Tuesday night, but he was not found.

In 2019, Ranjit was arrested

by the police for entering a temple in an inebriated state and damaging the idols there.

However, Ranjit refuted these allegations and claimed he has now been framed in eight cases.

"This happened on Monday night. I was not wearing mask but had one in my pocket. The cops stopped me and started beating me up. When I told them, I have a mask in my pocket, they started abusing me. They then called 3-4 people and started beating me again," he alleged.

Following this, the cops allegedly took him to the local police post and beat him up again.

"They tied my hands and nailed my hand and feet. I cannot even properly hear from my left ear as it is bleeding. The cop who nailed me lives in our locality. I can recognize him. They have now slapped eight cases against me. I am a poor man and hardly earn 150-200 a day as a ragpicker," he told reporters.

A Himalayan blunder?

NEPAL has been pushed into a fresh political turmoil with its President dissolving the Parliament for the second time in less than six months and scheduling snap elections, prompting court challenges even as the country battles a disastrous surge in coronavirus infections.

With the Supreme Court set to hear petitions against President Bidya Devi Bhandari's order on May 27, dozens of people have rallied in main Nepalese cities against what they say is a bid by the head of state to protect Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli's political career.

Oli, 69, had renewed calls for a fresh election after he lost a confidence vote earlier this month. Critics say Bhandari's midnight order on May 22 came when it became clear that opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba from the Nepali Congress party had obtained the parliamentary support required to become the South Asian nation's next prime minister. Unfortunately for Nepal, wily Oli is all set to keep the country on the brink of uncertainty eternally with the help of his benefactors in the neighbouring China's Communist Party.

Oli keeps citing India's advantage in case of the Opposition taking over to China and seeks their mediation forever it seems. The crisis is threatening renewed instability in the Himalayan country, which saw 10 changes in governments in as many years prior to the 2017 election that brought Oli and his Nepal Communist Party (NCP) to power.

The NCP, which was formed through a merger between Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), - in 2018, is no longer

in existence. There is also fear the turmoil could worsen Nepal's COVID-19 crisis.

Already, hospitals in the country are running out of oxygen and beds, while some regions are resorting to mass cremations as the death toll mounts. Intellectuals and civil society members are asserting that COVID times are not the right times for politics. They are demanding that the politicians' immediate focus should be on obtaining oxygen and vaccines. People are dying in the country. Dissolving the parliament and holding a fresh election will not help those battling the pandemic.

The latest crisis has its immediate roots in the fracturing of NCP. Since last year, a faction of the ruling party has been accusing the prime minister of authoritarianism and sidelining them when making decisions and appointing members to key commissions and

watchdog bodies.

Rumours of a possible no-confidence vote swirled in December and Bhandari dissolved the parliament on Oli's request. The chamber was the first elected since the end of a bloody Maoist rebellion and the abolition of Nepal's 200-year-old monarchy in 2008. Bhandari's decision to dissolve the House in December immediately set off nationwide protests and several petitions at the Supreme Court. Alarmed by the unrest, Nepal's powerful northern neighbour China even sent an envoy to mediate between the two Communist Party factions.

But to no avail. In February, the Supreme Court overturned Bhandari's decision and reinstated the parliament, paving the way for a no-confidence vote against Oli. He lost, as expected, but the opposition struggled to form a government. Bhandari finally set a May 21 deadline for parties to demonstrate a majority. The vicious cycle of deceit continues in the neighbourhood, thanks to China.



PETA India advises Amul to switch to creamy dairy-free milk

CONCERNING demand for vegan food and beverages, PETA India called on Amul, an Indian dairy cooperative society, to realise which way the wind is blowing and switch to producing the creamy dairy-free milk that today's consumers want.

In the letter to Amul Managing Director R.S. Sodhi, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India said "we would again like to encourage Amul to benefit from the booming vegan food and milk market, instead of wasting resources trying to fight the demand for plant-based products that is only growing. Other companies are responding to market changes, and Amul can, too".

Pointing out that the demand for vegan food and beverages is so great that a report by Grand View Research revealed that the global dairy alternatives market is estimated to reach \$52.58 billion by 2028, PETA India Vegan Outreach Coordinator Dr Kiran Ahuja said: "Much of the world - and that certainly includes India - has turned sour towards dairy over animal welfare, environmental, and health concerns."

"PETA India is calling on Amul to realise which way the wind is blowing and switch to producing the creamy dairy-free milk that today's consumers want."

In India, most people would be astonished to learn that the dairy sector is the primary supplier of cattle to the beef industry and that most family farms are now gone, PETA India said.

Today, the group said, most cows and buffaloes used for dairy are raised in a factory environment and artificially inseminated and their calves are typically stolen from them shortly after birth so that the milk nature intended for them to drink can be consumed by humans instead.

"You've seen them on the street: male calves who are of no value to the dairy business, cast out to starve. Others are sold to be killed for their flesh and skin, while females are sentenced to the same fate as their mothers: they're used as milk machines until their bodies give out, at which point many are abandoned or slaughtered for cheap meat."

Such is the dairy industry's panic that the National Cooperative Dairy Federation of India has made a plea in the High Court of Delhi that only animal milk be permitted to be called "milk", PETA India said.

However, in a 2018 article, the Smithsonian Magazine explains that referring to plant-based milks as milk, such as coconut milk, dates back centuries and is consistent across countries. In vernacular terminology, it is referred to as badam ka doodh and nariyal ka doodh.

PETA India - whose motto reads, in part, that "animals are not ours to eat" and which opposes a human-supremacist world view - notes that major dairy companies around the world - including Nestle, Epigamia, Chobani, Danone, and Yoplait - are now investing in non-dairy options.

It also said analysts at the British financial services company Barclays predict that the vegan food and drink market could increase by more than 1,000 per cent by the end of the decade, and a 2019 article on a website run by Franchise India Holdings Limited found that the number of vegans in India has risen by 360 per cent in the past decade. (DANS)



Rural consumption slowed down due to rise in Covid cases, lockdowns

RURAL consumption slowed in financial year 2021, largely due to a rise in the number of Covid-19 cases in rural areas and consequent lockdowns, according to a report by Motilal Oswal Institutional Securities.

Balram Singh Yadav, Managing Director, Godrej Agrovet, was quoted as saying that the surge in agri-commodity prices is expected to be corrected shortly - as prices are not sustainable at this level (15-20 per cent decline may be expected) and reflect the change in global prices. Cereal prices are expected to remain elevated on increased demand from the Bio-Diesel segment.

Yadav said rural consumption slowed in FY21, largely due to a rise in the number of COVID cases in rural areas and consequent lockdowns.

The Central government has introduced various initiatives to revive rural demand, such as subsidising all the fertilizers (namely urea, DAP, and P&K).

Another Rs 190 billion has been allocated to 95 million farmers under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, of which 45 million farmers have received the funds. The drop in consumption is expected to be temporary, and demand is expected to bounce back faster than expected, he added.

India's domestic sector saw a bumper rabi season, thereby paving the way for robust growth in FY22. Food grain production for the year is expected to be north of 307 mmt.

Sameer Goel, Managing Director, Coromandel International was quoted as saying that as of April, the Food Price Index posted a rise for the 11th consecutive month and was at the highest levels since May 2014.

Growth was largely driven by vegetable oils and cereals, lower output and decline in inventory levels, and stockpiling in China. The monsoon forecast for CY21 remains normal, and reservoirs in South and West India are at good levels; these factors bode well for acreages.

As per the World Bank, prices in April increased 83 per cent YoY for maize, 64 per cent YoY for soybean, 76 per cent YoY for palm oil, 58 per cent YoY for sugar, and 43 per cent YoY for cotton. (DANS)

Maritime militia give China the edge in South China Sea

PROF. CARL SCHUSTER

ACCORDING to reports, China recently warned the United States that it will face defeat if the two superpowers go to war. This warning is a testimony to what China thinks about its military might.

The threat to the US has come from China in response to the joint military exercise carried out by the US, Japan, Australia, and France last week amidst tension in the East China Sea. Tension is also mounting in the South China Sea with the Philippines refusing to withdraw vessels from the disputed territory.

China's Maritime Militia is very often a party in these disputes due to its bullying tactics along the maritime boundary with Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan. The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) of China owes its origin to the Communist Party's 1950 consolidation of people's militia groups comprising mainly fishermen and coastal workers of China.

Its initial role was confined to keeping a close eye on People's Republic of China (PRC)'s coastal waters and reporting any suspected activities to the Chinese Army (PLA). These militia were recruited, trained, and equipped by the party's Bureau of Aquatic Products, which authorize former PLA officers [TSI] to train and direct the militias' operations.

These militia groups operated very close to the maritime boundary till the 1960s. However, their activities started expanding in subsequent years. They started bullying South Vietnamese fishermen in Paracel and Spratly islands in the late 1960s. Their first major victory came in January 1974 when they seized South Vietnam's Paracel Islands. They engaged the South Vietnam Naval unit with 400 militia troops and captured the islands. This island remained with China ever since.

The PAFMM have been leading the PRC's bullying in the East and South China Sea from the early 1980s. They threaten the Vietnamese and Filipino fishing ships, which are small, slow, and less robust. The militia threatens these fishing boats with small arms and attacks them with high pressure water cannons, very often sinking them. This is partic-

ularly true for Vietnamese fishing vehicles. The Chinese Coast Guards are often seen helping these militia groups in their nefarious activities.

In fact, due to the early gains by this militia unit, China built 'fishing shelters' to protect their fishermen in the Spratly islands. Their activities increased further after the US Navy pulled out of the Philippines in 1994. With the help of the PLA, the PAFMM isolated all the neighbouring countries and captured Mischief Reef and Scarborough Shoal. This compelled the US to follow a proactive strategy and support the Philippines in the South China Sea.

Despite all these activities by PAFMM, the Chinese government headed by Chairman Xi Jinping has never accepted any link between PAFMM and China's military. They claim that they are fishermen. This enables the PRC to deny any involvement of the Chinese government in these scuffles.

The PAFMM do not regularly use firearms or other military weapons so their actions cannot be called an 'act of war' which might trigger retaliation. It may also compel Manila to seek US support under the US-Philippine Mutual Defence Treaty. That is why the US calls PRC's actions 'Grey Zone Operations', which means they are acts of aggression, but fall short of military actions that would risk triggering a military response.

The PAFMM still continues with its activities in the East and South China Sea. For occupying an uninhabited island, the PAFMM does the initial seizure posing as fishermen. When other countries confront them with their Coast Guards or other law enforcement agencies, they find themselves confronting an armed militia, which is fully backed by China's Coast Guard or Navy. The situation can escalate into a full-fledged war if the other party insists on vacating the island.

Such is the highhandedness of China that when an International Arbitration held the Chinese occupation illegal, it refused to abide by the judgment saying all nations should 'respect' international law.

At the time of the real war PAFMM may shift to supporting roles like defensive mining. They did this during the PLA Navy ex-



China places greater importance to claims on the South China Sea because of its strategic location. The political and strategic payoff is bigger in the South China Sea compared to the East China Sea and the risks and operational difficulties are less. The South China Sea is easier to dominate. Such is the highhandedness of China that when an International Arbitration held the Chinese occupation illegal, it refused to abide by the judgment saying all nations should 'respect' international law

ercise in 2014. They would act as one of the many eyes of the fleet, land militia troops in remote areas or covertly land troops before the actual war starts.

A unit of the People's Armed Forces, PAFMM operates under direct military command for carrying out state-sponsored activities. Although they are locally supported but report to the head of China's military -- Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping.

The exact number of fishing vessels possessed by PAFMM is not known, but estimates put the figure at around 350, out of which 225 are deployed in the South China Sea. Their vessel hulls are made up of reinforced steel, which are very strong. On the other hand, most of the other fishing vessels in the South China Sea are made of wood or other light materials. The PAFMM vessels are faster, which puts them at an advantageous position in an encounter.

They can 'bump' the enemy's vessel at will with little risk of damaging their own strong hull.

Most of the fishermen from other countries are unarmed, but PAFMM vessels have small arms

and, in some cases, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) and machine guns. They are rarely used but are available on the vessels.

The PAFMM vessels have water cannons mounted above the pilot house. They aim the spray at the other vessels' pilot house to blind the crew, but sometimes they aim it at the engine exhaust. Cold sea water hitting a hot engine tends to damage the engine, leaving the craft non-functional in the water. The PAFMM vessel can then do what it wants -- bump, ram or just leave.

China places greater importance to claims on the South China Sea because of its strategic location. The political and strategic payoff is bigger in the South China Sea compared to the East China Sea and the risks and operational difficulties are less. The South China Sea is easier to dominate. The PAFMM base in Sanya is closer to the disputed territories in the South China Sea than the PAFMM base in Guangzhou to the Senkaku. They must pass through Taiwan to reach Senkaku.

The PRC's military bases and airfields are closer to the dis-



ise large donation camps and donors are not volunteering due to the fear of pandemic. Acute shortage of stock is affecting thalassemia patients and others who require blood transfusions frequently. Governments and socially conscious citizens must shed light on this problem, spread the words of encouragement in their groups to motivate eligible persons to donate blood and thereby help make the survival of regular dependents on blood easier. We are in this together.

Madishetti Vishal, Hanamkonda

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LETTERS

Lacklustre handling

THE editorial brought several valid and legitimate points lingering in the minds of people on the lack of seriousness of the administration in tackling grievances of disgruntled junior doctors, who are the front line warriors in the fight against the raging Covid pandemic in the State. First, the serious measures in the lockdown were rather late in coming, in Telangana that too after the judiciary intervened in no uncertain terms in goading the government to meaningfully behave in the present situation.

It is quite true that the state government in the first place, should not have allowed the strike to rear its head, when the demands raised by the doctors were justified to be reasonable. The erring hospitals and delinquent ambulances must be reigned in to behave responsibly without dilly dallying, by taking appropriate and stringent action, so that

such malpractices are not repeated by them under any circumstances.

If the CM is truly aware of the pulse of the masses, such costly errors at the time of the Covid situation prevailing in the state and the country must be avoided. One feels that KCR must believe in personal interaction with the sulking individuals rather than resorting to press statements dissuading the party concerned through press notes.

Venkata Narasimhan, Madurai

Vaccine mix up

PROPOS your report "Cocktail of Covishield-Covaxin given in UP (The Hans India 27 May). This is not the first time UP has seen this lapse. When India began the vaccination programme, three women in the Shamli district in UP were administered anti-Rabies vaccine instead of Covid vaccine and we don't what action was taken then. This time the 20 villagers in Sidharnath have become the first who got two different vaccines for the first and

second shot. It is good that so far no adverse effect report has come. Is the lapse is due to a lack of sensitising the staff to understand the difference between the Covishield and Covaxin and the importance of administering the same vaccine for the first and second dose. If such a mix can happen what is a guarantee that in such villages they would follow the frequent change of interval of Covishield. Probably the experts in India can seize this lapse as an opportunity to study whether the mixture is advisable to overcome the shortage of one vaccine or the other. Thanks to the media for reporting this and who knows it may have happened even in other states.

S Natarajan, New Delhi

Blood donation should continue

AS the nation is going through severe pandemic, blood banks all over the country are running dry. Covid guidelines do not allow blood banks to organ-

RUSH HOUR TRAFFIC CHOKING ROADS IN HYD

ESA BIN ABDUL REHMAN
HYDERABAD

DESPITE knowing that only four hours have been fixed as relaxation interval during the lockdown, tardy attitude of people with late hour syndrome is leading to traffic snarls at several junctions in City and suburbs, while police too appear to be jumping into the action only a few minutes ahead of closing time or when roads are choked with vehicles.

Though vehicular moment in City is seen completely normal during early hours of relaxation, the frequency is increasing by leaps and bounds during the last hour, especially at Mehdiptnam, Gudimalkapur, Hyderguda, Upperpally and Attapur, under PVNR Expressway, Tadbund, Bahadurpura Kamela, and Puranapul on the National Highway 44 stretch where vehicles are seen either moving rashly on roads or creeping bumper-to-bumper on main thoroughfares.

Despite knowing that the relaxation time ends sharply at 10 am, people, especially traders having business at faraway places from home, are closing their shops only at 9.30 or 10 am and

- Tardy attitude of people with late-hour syndrome leading to traffic snarls
- Vehicles seen either moving rashly or creeping bumper-to-bumper at main thoroughfares
- This will often lead to accidents as they indulge in rash driving to avoid frisking by police at checkpoints
- Police too appear to be jumping into action only a few minutes ahead of lockdown closing time, or when roads chok with vehicles



driving home in a hurry. This is often leading to road accidents, as they drive rashly to avoid frisking by the police at various check points. This is the regular situation being witnessed at several stretches from City to suburbs.

Informed Dastageer of Attapur that though the PVNR Expressway is over 100 feet wide, starting from Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital, Mehdiptnam, and culminating at Aramghar Crossroads, Rajendranagar, swelling frequency of traffic and bottlenecks at several junctions makes people feel the

route is to hard to drive even on ordinary days.

“It took me around half an hour to get rid of choked traffic at Attapur Junctions while returning from City as bumper-to-bumper vehicles made it difficult for every commuter to safely unwind from the gridlock situation. Leave alone commuters, even the police vehicles and ambulance are unable to pass through the route due to traffic congestion.”

Said R Shyam Sunder Reddy, CI, Rajendranagar Traffic Police: “we have seven check-posts

from pillar no 116 at Attapur to APPA Junction, Rajendranagar. People, especially the traders having shops and businesses in City are returning in a hurry after closing their shops at around 9.30 or 10 am.

This leads to traffic congestion at several junctions from the Mehdiptnam to Aram Ghar stretch. Although the traffic issues on this stretch last only for a few minutes, we find it hard to control the situation as the frequency of traffic exceptionally increases during the last hour.”

Country will produce 259 cr doses of Covid vaccines by year-end: Kishan

- Says Central & State governments will take stern action against hospitals which collect exorbitant charges from patients
- Visits black fungus-dedicated ENT Hospital, NIMS



HANS NEWS SERVICE
KOTI

UNION Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy on Thursday Reddy told the media that the country will produce 259 crore doses of various Covid vaccines by the end of 2021.

“The Centre is making all efforts to ramp up vaccine production. By December the monthly production of vaccines will go up to 59 crore doses”, he said.

The minister asserted that the Central and State governments will take stern action against hospitals which collect exorbitant charges from patients. He appealed to the media and public to unite in fight-

ing the Corona pandemic. “It’s time to work together; we need to build confidence among the affected”, Reddy remarked.

The minister earlier visited the Mucormycosis (black fungus)-dedicated ENT Hospital here. He inspected the wards and interacted with patients. Reddy also took stock of facilities being provided and required in the interest of speedy recovery of patients.

Reddy also visited Covid ICU ward in NIMS, Panjagutta and inspected facilities and treatment being provided to patients. in the Ward. He reviewed availability of beds, ventilators, including those provided under PM-CARES, oxygen and medicine supplies with the administration.

TS to seek Covid medical tax incentive

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

THE Telangana Government is set to present a plethora of demands before the first GST Council meeting of this financial year, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday.

The State government will demand the Union Government to lower GST on medical devices and also vaccines to reduce financial burden on State government amid the second wave of corona pandemic. Officials said that the key issues - compensation to states, tax waiver on corona medicines, medical devices and health services would take place prominently in the GST council meeting to be attended by Finance Ministers of all States and Union Territories.

Telangana Finance Minister T Harish Rao will present a report on State owned tax collections in the lockdown-2 period and the financial challenges encountered by State in addressing the health crisis in the current financial year.

Officials said that the Telangana State was already demanding to pay GST compensation to the states in view of economic slowdown for the second consecutive year. The demand to increase the FRBM limit to avail more funds through the financial institutions.

Kodandaram, Vishweshwar Reddy call on Eatala

Urge the former minister to join anti-KCR forum instead of joining BJP or Congress

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

AMIDST the talk of Former Minister Eatala Rajender planning to join the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Telangana Jana Samithi chief, M Kodandaram and former MP Konda Vishweshwar Reddy met him and advised the TRS leader to join the anti-KCR forum.

According to sources, both the leaders met Rajender only to stop him from joining any political party especially after the talk in the political circles that he would be joining BJP. Both the BJP and the Congress party are trying hard to get Rajender into their party.

Amidst this talk, Kodandaram and Konda Vishweshwar Reddy met Eatala at his residence at Shameerpet on Thursday. Talking to reporters after the meeting, both the leaders said that they had met the TRS leader to

provide moral support in the wake of action against him with political conspiracies. Kodandaram said that there was a strange political situation in Telangana. “KCR will not like the growth of any leader working under him and wants them to work under his direction. Instead of taking care of the health of the people during the crisis, the leaders are involved in politics,” said Kodandaram, adding all should work together against the government. He said that they see this as an attack on the Telangana self-respect.

Konda Vishweshwar Reddy said that they did not discuss politics. “We are here to provide moral support. We dare KCR to expel Rajender from the party,” said Vishweshwar Reddy.

However, sources said that both the leaders wanted Rajender to avoid joining any political party and join the anti-KCR forum in the State. It is learnt that

the TRS leader told them that he has taken a decision on his future and would soon resign from the TRS and also the MLA post. Followers of Rajender believe that he may quit the party on the Telangana Formation Day on June 2 to hog limelight and put forward his version of attack on Telangana self-respect and join BJP along with other unhappy TRS leaders. It is learnt that the BJP high command has given a green signal for the entry of Rajender into the party.

Meanwhile, the reports of Eatala’s possible entry into BJP have led to opposition in the party. Party senior leader E Peddi Reddy asked as to how his party, which works on principles, can include a person who has been dropped from the cabinet on corruption charges. Peddi Reddy said he would be contesting the Huzurabad bye-election because he had served people in the constituency twice as minister.

Meals served to 72,890 people on single day

HYDERABAD

IN wake of the State government orders that no one should go hungry in the current Covid-induced lockdown situation Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) provided a record number of free meals to 72,890 people through 282 Annapurna centres set up across city on Thursday. GHMC provides free meals through the Annapurna centres for the convenience of the homeless, poor, and attendants in various hospitals in the city. Meanwhile, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs K Tarakarama Rao has directed the officials to set up an additional one hundred centres to provide free five-rupee meals provided through Annapurna centres in the city.

With this, 100 Annapurna Centres have been opened in addition to the 150 Annapurna Centres currently operated by GHMC in the city. In addition to this, a special centre will be opened at the rate of one per circle and the food boxes will be provided to those who take shelter in the streets of the respective circles under the AMHOs. GHMC has provided 20,400 free meals through 134 Annapurna Centres in the city, 16,860 through 120 makeshift centres, and 35,630 free meals through food boxes in 28 circles. Meanwhile, on Thursday as part of the second phase of the Fever Survey, 1,32,032 people were tested for fever with 1,671 teams, bringing the total number to 7,46,392 homes so far in the second phase. Fever tests were conducted on 16,677 people through various hospitals in the city.

HUL to provide free oxygen concentrators to Covid-19 patients

Through the mission, HUL airlifted over 5,000 oxygen concentrators in India

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

AS part of mission HO2PE, Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) on Thursday partnered with KVN Foundation and Portea Medical, to make oxygen concentrators available free of cost to Covid-19 patients in the city.

Through mission HO2PE, HUL has airlifted over 5,000 oxygen concentrators into India. HUL’s partnership with KVN Foundation and Portea Medical will provide access to oxygen for Covid-19 patients directly in their homes, thereby reducing the pressure on our healthcare infrastructure which is already under duress.

“In Hyderabad, Covid-19 patients and caregivers can

request for an oxygen concentrator by giving a missed call on 08068065385. The mission HO2PE team will connect with the patient and assist with the request.



Once the request is validated, the concentrator will be delivered to the patient’s home. A trained volunteer will also visit to help the patients and caregivers and assist them in managing functions and operations of

the oxygen concentrator,” informs Sanjiv Mehta, chairman, and managing director, HUL.

The programme is operating under a ‘borrow-use-return’ model. Post usage, the concentrators will be sanitised, serviced, and provided to the next set of people who need them, thus ensuring the concentrators reach a maximum number of people and help save as many lives as possible.

Adding further, Meena Ganesh, Co-Founder, and CEO, Portea Medical said, “The second wave is unprecedented and has shown that there is an urgent need to treat patients with oxygen therapy and keep them out of the overflowing hospitals. In this regard, we have partnered with HUL to ensure access to medical oxygen for patients in their homes.”

TDP chief decries ‘State terrorism’

- Party two-day annual conclave Mahanadu begins in virtual mode
- Naidu accuses the ruling party leaders, police and official machinery of stifling the voice of all sections of people, particularly opposition parties



TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu addressing Mahanadu on Thursday

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday lashed out at the Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy government, alleging it was perpetrating state terrorism to mask its “undemocratic, autocratic and authoritarian” acts. Fundamental rights of citizens and civil liberties were grossly being curtailed while false cases and house arrests have become the order of the day, Naidu said, inaugurating Mahanadu, the two-day annual conclave of the TDP.

For the second year in a row, the Mahanadu is being held in a virtual mode through videoconferencing due to the prevailing coronavirus pandemic. “The ruling YSRCP leaders, the police and the rest of the official machinery have been stifling the voice of all sections of people, not to speak of the opposition parties. The state has become so intolerant and unnerved that it is foisting false cases and making house arrests (of opposition leaders) even on slightest pretext,” the former chief minister alleged.

“I myself am spending sleepless nights sometimes because of the unchecked harassment of TDP leaders by the YSRCP regime. It is indeed a difficult time for the party, considering how its leaders and activists are being put to physical, psychological and financial duress. But, everybody should know how those violating all laws and norms would eventually face much greater punishment,” Naidu said.

He referred to the arrest of senior TDP leaders K Atchannaidu, Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar, J C Prabhakar Reddy, Chintamaneni Prabhakar and others in allegedly false cases. Even the YSRCP’s own MP K Raghuram Krishna Raju was not spared and booked on sedition charge and beaten up by the police in custody, he charged.

“This exposed the lowest levels to which democracy has declined in AP. As a responsible opposition party, the TDP will continue to fight against these atrocities. The police and the government, who are violating the laws, will eventually be held accountable to the people,” the Leader of Opposition asserted.

E-pass must to enter neighbouring States

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIJAYAWADA

STATE police are asking the people to get the e-passes to travel to neighbouring states of Odisha, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telangana to avoid problems at the check posts. They said neighbouring states are strictly implementing the Covid lockdown and hence it is mandatory to take the e-pass to avoid problems. Director general of police (DGP) D Gautam Sawang announced the procedure to get e-passes to travel to other states and within the state. He said people have to plan in such a way that they should enter the Andhra Pradesh from 6 am to 12 noon so that there will be no restrictions at the check posts. Curfew is in force from 12 noon to 6 am in the state and vehicles from other states are not allowed into the state. This applies to intra-state travel too.

The DGP said people can log onto to citizens service portal (<http://apolicce.gov.in>) to get the passes to travel within the state. It can be get through [twitter@apolicce100](https://twitter.com/apolicce100) and facebook [@andhrapradesh.state](https://www.facebook.com/andhrapradesh.state). To enter the Telangana state, the applicants have to log on to <https://policeportal.tspolice.gov.in>.

Curfew timings in Telangana are 10 am to 6 am. E-pass is must to enter Telangana from AP. Exemption is given to emergency vehicles like ambulances. E-pass can be obtained to enter Tamil Nadu by logging onto <https://eregister.tnega.org/>. To enter Odisha, applicants have to log on to <https://covid19regd.odisha.gov.in/>.

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy directed the officials to provide strong foundational education to pre-primary and primary students. He conducted a review with education and child welfare departments on Thursday.

The officials of school education and women and child welfare departments put up proposals for strong foundational education to pre-primary and primary students as discussed in earlier meeting. Special focus is laid on children of age 3-8 years who have good brain development. The new proposals were made with focus on effective utilisation of teachers and providing best education to pre-primary and primary students and foundational schools will be set up in this regard. YSR Sampoorana Poshana will be implemented as usual in these foundational schools.

- Says it is his quest to provide best standards to poor student
- Anganwadi centres will be merged in nearby local primary schools forming foundational schools
- Their health tasks will be transferred to YSR Village Clinics and urban clinics



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy reviews pre-primary education at Tadepalli on Thursday

The proposals laid by officials include foundation schools for PP-1, PP-2, Preparatory, Class I and II. The Anganwadi centres will be merged in nearby local primary schools thus forming foundational schools.

The Anganwadi centres being converted into PP-1 and PP-2 will come under the purview of foundational schools.

Classes 3, 4, 5 of primary schools will be transferred to nearby upper primary schools and high schools. The upper primary schools will be

and Infrastructure Ltd) completed the crucial work by filling gaps in upper cofferdam by diverting Godavari river water flow from right to left side. Changing the natural flow of this gigantic river on this level is first-of-its-kind. Godavari floodwater will be diverted through approach channel to spillway and then will be released to spillway channel by lifting gates and then

through pilot channel it will re-join with the original Godavari river course. Normally, Godavari water from Bhadrachalam will reach Dhavaleshwaram. Due to closure of upper cofferdam, river water flow will be stopped at this point. For releasing water to downwards of Dowleswaram, it should be done through spillway. For this, Godavari river is diverted to spillway channel

via approach channel and then through river sluice gates, water will be released to downwards. When river receives floodwater after lifting of radial gates, floodwater will be released. This way water flow through spill channel via spillway will be diverted to original river course through pilot channel. MEIL has made all arrangements for this river diversion.

POLAVARAM PROJECT

Godavari water to be diverted for 6.5 km

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

AS a major breakthrough in progress of Polavaram project works, stage is set for closure of upper cofferdam to divert Godavari waters 6.5 kilometre away from its normal flow through approach channel towards spillway.

The MEIL (Megha Engineering

More trouble for Ramdev as IMA files police complaint

‘Ramdev is deliberately spreading false, baseless and malicious info with regard to allopathy’

NEW DELHI

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Thursday lodged a police complaint against yoga guru Ramdev, seeking an FIR over his "dishonest and wrongful representations" on allopathy.

In the complaint submitted at the IP Estate Police Station, the apex medical body said Ramdev has "wilfully and deliberately spread false, baseless and malicious information" about treatment of Covid patients by established and approved methods and drugs.

"We have received the complaint and enquiry is being conducted," a senior Delhi Police officer said. The IMA's complaint dated May 9 said, "Swami Ramdev, in order to take advantage of the Covid

situation, on a public platform in furtherance of his ulterior motives has put forth dishonest and wrongful representations with regard to allopathic medicines and other allied treatment techniques of modern medical science for the COVID-19 virus.

"In a video which has surfaced and is being shared widely throughout the social media, Swami Ramdev is seen wilfully and deliberately spreading false, baseless and malicious information with regard to the treatment of various patients suffering from Covid-19 by established and approved treatment methods and drugs," it said.

The IMA had earlier written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding that yoga guru Ramdev be booked immediately under sedition charges for alleged misinformation campaign on vaccination



and challenging government protocols for treatment of COVID-19.

The apex medical body of modern doctors has also served a defamation notice on Ramdev for his alleged disparaging remarks against allopathy and allopathic practitioners, demanding an apology from him within 15 days, failing which it said it will demand a compensation of Rs 1,000 crore from the yoga guru.

On Sunday, Ramdev was forced to withdraw a statement made in the viral video clip in which he is heard questioning some of the medicines being used to treat the coronavirus infection and saying that "lakhs have died from taking allopathic medicines for COVID-19". The remarks were met with vociferous protests from the doctors' association,

following which Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan asked him to withdraw the "extremely unfortunate" statement.

A day later, the yoga guru posed 25 questions to the IMA in an 'open letter' on his Twitter handle, asking if allopathy offered permanent relief for ailments such as hypertension and type-1 and 2 diabetes.

He went on to list modern-day ailments such as Parkinson's disease and wondered if allopathy had any painless cure to treat infertility as well as to reverse ageing and increase hemoglobin. Soon after, Ramdev's close aide Acharya Balkrishna took to Twitter, saying the yoga guru and Ayurveda were being targeted by allopathic practitioners under the IMA as part of a conspiracy.

WINDOW

Amend victim references in Tejpal verdict: HC to court

PANAJI: The Bombay High Court bench in Goa on Thursday directed the Additional District and Sessions Court in North Goa to rewrite references which revealed the identity of sexual assault victim.

In its 527 page order the sessions court on May 21 acquitted former Tehelka editor-in-chief Tarun Tejpal from charges of rape levelled against him by a junior colleague in 2013.

The High Court's single bench of Justice SC Gupte said that the alterations to the judgement should be made in three days, before the order is uploaded to the court's on-line portal for public viewing.

Justice Gupte's order came after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta pointed out that the order by the Additional District and Sessions judge Kshama Joshi contained references to the victim's husband, her email and her mother's name in paragraphs 55,177 and 182 of the judgement.

"In the interest of protecting the identity of the victim of an offence, such as the one with which we are concerned in the present case, it is appropriate to have the above references to be found in paragraphs 55, 177 and 182 of the impugned judgment redacted," the Court said in its order.

"The trial Court is accordingly directed to redact the above references, as also other similar references, wherever found in the order, whilst uploading the impugned judgment," the Court also said.

Speaking to reporters Assistant Solicitor General Pravin Faldessai said that the "judgement is not proper" and had "glaring irregularities".

"There is no question of why the state has filed the appeal. We find that the judgement of the Additional Sessions Court is wrong. The acquittal is not made on the proper prospects of law. So the state is right in filing an appeal..." Faldessai said. The Court is now expected to hear the state government's appeal against the acquittal granted to Tejpal on June 2.

‘Covid can damage lungs over a long period’

NEW DELHI

SCIENTISTS have identified persistent damage in the lungs of Covid-19 patients at least three months after they were discharged from hospital, and for some patients even longer.

This damage was not detected by routine CT scans and clinical tests, and the patients would consequently normally be told their lungs are normal, according to the researchers at the universities of Sheffield and Oxford in the UK. The study, published in the journal Radiology, also shows that patients not hospitalised with

COVID-19 but who experience long-term breathlessness may have similar damage in their lungs. However, the researchers said a larger study is needed to confirm this. They noted that hyperpolarised xenon MRI (XeMRI) scans had found abnormalities in the lungs of some Covid-19 patients more than three months -- and in some cases, nine months -- after leaving hospital, when other clinical measurements were normal.

"The findings of the study are very interesting, said Professor Jim Wild from the University of Sheffield.

YouTuber held for ‘flying his dog’

NEW DELHI

A 27-year-old YouTuber was arrested for cruelty against animals after he uploaded a video, showing his pet dog floating in the air with helium gas balloons tied to its collar, police said on Thursday.

The accused, Gaurav Sharma, who has 4.15 million subscribers on his YouTube channel, is a resident of Panchsheel Vihar in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar, they said. In the video shot on May 21, Sharma can be seen with his pet dog in a park. The dog is strapped to a bunch of balloons and is set loose to fly. A case was lodged against Sharma under section 188 (disobedience to order



duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code, the Disaster Management Act and relevant sections of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act on the complaint of Gaurav Gupta, a member of 'People for Animals Society', Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said, adding the footage was deleted. After receiving criticism for the video, the accused uploaded another one with apologies the next day. He said that he took adequate safety measures while shooting the video featuring his pet dog, Dollar, and assured his viewers that he would not repeat it in the future.

‘Hand over Mehul Choksi to India’

NEW DELHI

PRIME Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston Browne, on Thursday, asked neighbouring Dominica, where fugitive businessman Mehul Choksi was caught, to hand the diamondaire over to India directly, local media reported. Following reports of Choksi's arrest in Dominica on Tuesday night (local time), Browne told local media that he has given "clear instructions" to the Dominican authorities to repatriate Choksi to India.

"We asked them not to repatriate him to Antigua. He needs to return to India where he can face the criminal

charges levelled against him," Antigua News Room, a media outlet, quoted Browne's interaction with journalists in Antigua and Barbuda.

Choksi will not have the same rights in Dominica as he has in Antigua and Barbuda, where he had been staying since 2018 after taking citizenship in 2017 under the Citizenship by Investment programme, Browne indicated. The prime minister believes for this reason, it would be easy for Dominica to repatriate him directly to India, the report said. Choksi, who had recently fled from Antigua and Barbuda, was captured after an Interpol Yellow Notice was issued against him.

42L? Centre trashes New York Times report on Covid deaths

The government trashed as "baseless" a New York Times report that said India's Covid deaths were severely undercounted and underreported.

"The NYT report is not backed by any evidence and is based on distorted estimates," said VK Paul, NITI Aayog member and the head of India's Covid task force. The New York Times said in an article published on Tuesday that India's death count was more likely three times the official 3 lakh, basing it on data from three nationwide sero surveys or antibody tests. The article offered various scenarios and estimated 42 lakh deaths in the worst case, as it said the official figures in India "grossly understate the true scale of the pandemic in the country".

Dr Paul said it was possible that the number of infections was many times higher than positive Covid tests but it could not be the same for deaths.

"There may be some late reporting of deaths but

there's no intent of any state or the Centre. If I apply the same three times yardstick to New York, then there would be 50,000 deaths. But they say it's 16,000. So this is distorted," he said.

"Our number (fatality) is 0.05 per cent of those infected. They've said 0.3 per cent. Why? On what basis have you decided that it's 0.3 per cent of that large infection universe? There is no basis at all. Five people get together, make phone calls to each other and then throw this number. That's how this report has been done," alleged Dr Paul.

He asserted that a strong mortality tracking system was in place and "a so-called prestigious newspaper" should not have published such a piece.

Like the flu, COVID-19 is here to stay for generations, according to the Director of the Indian Institute of Public Health-Hyderabad, Prof. G V S Murthy.



Available data from different states suggests that June-end may see a significant downward spiral in COVID-19 cases in south and west India, he said.

"In north and east India, it may be mid-July for a significant decrease in the cases", Prof. Murthy told PTI on Thursday. Allowing political, social and religious gatherings too early in the life of the pandemic is one of the prime reasons for the rapid fueling of cases in the second wave, according to him.

Despite signals emerging from February that we could see an upswing of cases, prompt public health response was lacking, he said, adding this is because public health professionals have not been engaged in the response. "In all countries where the COVID-19 response was quick and need-based, there was authority and responsibility vested in the public health leadership. Unfortunately, the same was not seen in India

where it was more of a non-public health or political response," Prof. Murthy said. He said COVID-19 is here to stay with us for a long time. An infectious agent once introduced into the community, continues to simmer and lead to localised outbreaks. "Flu has been with us for generations now and the same will be the course of COVID-19," he said. He is of the view that outbreaks will occur whenever a large number of people susceptible to the infection are available.

"We know that post the COVID-19 infection, immunity is only for a short duration of 3-6 months, after which the same person is vulnerable to getting reinfected. The reinfection will depend on the viral load to which the susceptible person is exposed to. We have seen some Chief Ministers and national leaders also getting infected a second time. So nobody is permanently immune," Prof. Murthy said.

TODAY's QUOTE

Tech transfer key for vax making

“The Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) Fund will benefit 1.16 lakh home loan borrowers whose housing projects were stalled due to last mile funding issues. Departments of the government and SBICap despite Covid-19 worked relentlessly in getting the stalled projects completed.


— V K Paul, Niti Aayog Member



ECONOMY

US economy clocks 6.4% growth in Q1

First quarter GDP unchanged at robust 6.4 per cent annual rate The US economy grew at a robust annual rate of 6.4 per cent in the first three months of this year, unchanged from the government's initial estimate. The recovery from last year's deep recession gained steam at the beginning of this year

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	73.36		South
Euro	89.57		African Rand6.1
UAE Dirham	20.37		Hong Kong Dollar10.76
Thai Baht	2.56		Japanese Yen0.77
British Pound	103.62		New Zealand Dollar53.57
Australian Dollar	56.88		Saudi Riyal21.29
Canadian Dollar	60.61		Swedish Krona10.06
Swiss Franc	81.76		Singapore Dollar55.99

DELHI FRIDAY 28 MAY 2021

BIZ BRIEFS

Rupee at 2-mth high

The Indian rupee advanced by 17 paise to climb to over two-month high of 72.60 against the US dollar on Thursday, tracking upbeat Asian peers and positive domestic equities. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 72.75 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 72.53 and a low of 72.76. It finally ended at 72.60 against the American currency, registering a rise of 17 paise over its previous close. “The Indian rupee appreciated for the second straight session against the dollar, tracking gains in the Chinese Yuan. RBI also remained away from the spot market from accumulating dollars and this also aided the rupee's gain,” said Sriram Iyer, Senior Research Analyst at Reliance Securities.

ICICI PR's new scheme

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has introduced retirement solution by combining two variants of its popular guaranteed pension plan, which offers a guaranteed return on investments. This solution provides customers with increasing regular income that doubles after five years and triples after the 11th year, thereby shielding them against the rising cost of living. Amit Palta, Chief Distribution Officer, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, said: “We are delighted that consumers have voted guaranteed pension plan as product of the year. We believe the industry-first features of this product resonated very well with consumers and are a testimony of our approach to developing innovative products. It is imperative that customers plan for their retirement and the solution offered by our plan enables customers to receive increasing regular income.”

Whiz League gets strategic partner

Guru Randhawa has joined Whiz League, as a strategic partner. Whiz League is a learning EdTech startup that offers pre-recorded courses by industry experts and leading new age professions. These courses share invaluable insights, techniques, and strategies. The platform, was launched on April 13, 2021 and operates the courses via its own Whiz League app and website. Whiz League is the brainchild of co-founders Natasha Jain and Sonia A Bajaj. The two power-packed women entrepreneurs have envisioned education to be based on real world learning that is affordable for all. “We noticed a gap between the skillset and knowledge base between aspiring professionals and established industry experts and wanted to create a platform that provided affordable access to priceless insights from such industry experts,” says Sonia A Bajaj.

CAIT seeks extension

Traders' body CAIT on Thursday sought extension of the deadline for filing various GST returns till August as well as cut in tax rates for medical and surgical equipment required for treating coronavirus and black fungus infections. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has written to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman urging her to extend the date of filing of various GSTR returns till August under the GST Act and Rules, without late fee and interest. It said that GST officers should not resort to cancellation of registrations at this time unless there are pressing reasons for doing so. Also, for all traders having turnover of below Rs 20 crore in a year, no survey or audits or special assessments should be ordered for the years 2017-18 and 2018-19.

POST COVID

‘Pvt consumption key to GDP growth’

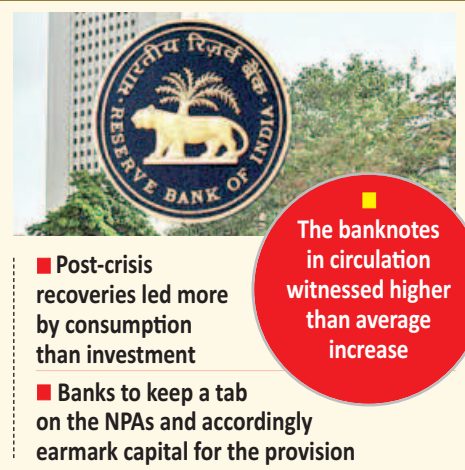
RBI says private investment will also play key role in economic recovery

RBI OBSERVATIONS

■ Pervasive despair is being lifted by cautious optimism built up by vaccination drives

■ Consensus gravitating towards forecast of 10.5%

■ Pandemic the biggest risk to economic outlook



■ Post-crisis recoveries led more by consumption than investment

■ Banks to keep a tab on the NPAs and accordingly earmark capital for the provision

■ The banknotes in circulation witnessed higher than average increase

AMID uncertainties arising out of the second wave of Covid-19, the Reserve Bank on Thursday said that a durable revival of private consumption and investment would be critical for sustaining economic growth post-pandemic.

Observing that 2020-21 has left a scar on the economy, RBI in its annual report said, “in the midst of the second wave as 2021-22 commences, pervasive despair is being lifted by cautious optimism built up by vaccination drives.”

The second wave of the pandemic has prompted revision of growth projections for the current fiscal and the consensus appears to be gravitating towards RBI's forecast of 10.5 per cent, the report added. The pandemic, RBI cautioned, “is the biggest risk to this outlook. Yet, upsides also stem from the capex push by the government, rising capacity utilisation and the turnaround in capital goods imports.”

In a separate box on what would drive growth recovery after the crisis, RBI said, “for a self-sustaining GDP growth trajectory post-Covid-19, a durable revival in private consumption and investment demand together would be critical as they account for around 85 per cent of GDP.” Typically, it added, post-crisis recoveries are led more by consumption than investment. “However, investment-led recoveries can be more sustainable and can also lift consumption in parts by better job creation. In either case, private demand plays a pivotal role,” the report added. The RBI has also cautioned banks to closely monitor their bad loans and prepared themselves for

higher provisioning in the light of the Supreme Court lifting ban on non-performing asset (NPA) classification and outbreak of the second Covid-19 wave.

The waiver of compound interest on all loan accounts which opted for moratorium during March-August 2020 may put stress on the financial health of banks, the report said. The apex bank, however, expressed confidence that banks are better positioned than before in managing stress in balance sheets in view of higher capital buffers, improvement in recoveries and a return to profitability. “Stress tests indicate that Indian banks have sufficient capital at the aggregate level even in a severe stress scenario. Bank-wise as well as system-wide supervisory stress testing provide clues for a forward-looking identification of vulnerable ar-

reas,” RBI said in its annual report 2020-21.

The report has emphasised the need for banks to keep a tab on the NPAs and accordingly earmark capital for the provision. The report also revealed that the banknotes in circulation witnessed higher than average increase during 2020-21 on account of precautionary holding of cash by people induced by Covid-19 pandemic.

The value and volume of banknotes in circulation increased by 16.8 per cent and 7.2 per cent, respectively, during 2020-21 as against an increase of 14.7 per cent and 6.6 per cent, respectively, witnessed during 2019-20, said the report.

In value terms, the share of Rs 500 and Rs 2,000 banknotes together accounted for 85.7 per cent of the total value of banknotes in circulation as

Flags risk of bubble in Indian stock mkts

NEW DELHI

THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday said the sharp rally in the domestic equity markets despite an estimated 8 per cent contraction in GDP in 2020-21 poses the “risk of a bubble”.

In its annual report for 2020-21, RBI noted that India's equity prices have surged to record highs, with the benchmark index Sensex crossing the 50,000 mark on January 21, 2021 to touch a peak of 52,154 on February 15. This represents a 100.7 per cent increase from the slump just before beginning of the nationwide lockdown (since March 23, 2020) and a 68 per cent rise over the year 2020-21.

“This order of asset price inflation in the context of the estimated 8 per cent contraction in GDP in 2020-21 poses the risk of a bubble,” RBI said. It also noted that the widening gap between stretched asset prices relative to prospects for recovery in real economic activity has emerged

as a global policy concern. The stock markets are mainly driven by money supply and foreign portfolio investor (FPI) investments, the apex bank said. Also, economic prospects contribute to movement in the stock market, but the impact is relatively less compared to money supply and FPI, it added.

According to RBI, the liquidity injected to support economic recovery can lead to unintended consequences in the form of inflationary asset prices, thus providing a reason that liquidity support cannot be expected to be unrestrained and indefinite. It, therefore, suggested that there is a need for calibrated unwinding once the pandemic waves are flattened and real economy is firmly on the recovery path. The apex bank said the rise in equity prices from 2016 to early 2020 was mainly supported by a drop in interest rates and equity risk premium (ERP) with increase in forward earnings expectations contributing to a lesser extent.

on March 31, 2021, as against 83.4 per cent as on March 31, 2020. On inflation, the report said supply-demand imbalances may continue to exert pressure on food items like pulses and edible oils, prices of cereals may soften with bumper food-

grain production in 2020-21. “Pressures from food items like pulses and edible oils are likely to persist in view of supply-demand imbalances, while cereal prices may continue to soften with the bumper foodgrain production in 2020-21,” it said.

SBI Hyd donates O₂ devices

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

SBI, Hyderabad Zone, has donated 10 oxygen concentrators of 5-litre capacity to Sparsh Hospice (Rotary club trust), a 15-bed palliative care centre, as a part of its support to Covid patients. The bank also distributed the ration kits to Covid-affected families in the city in co-operation with NGOs, Heaven Homes Society, Ashray Akruiti and Amma Cheyutha Foundation. “SBI has been discharging its social responsibilities by extending support in the fight against Covid-19. To address Covid specific requirements, bank is extending support to identified organizations who are setting up makeshift hospitals/ Covid-19 care centres. Recently Bank has inaugurated a 35 bedded facility that had come up at Andhra Mahila Sabha, Vidyanagar which was initiated by Seva Bharathi, NGO,” said Om Prakash Mishra, Chief General Manager, SBI Hyderabad.

The bank also donated 15 oxygen concentrators (five each to Narayanpet, Vikarabad & Gadwal). Last year too, bank has arranged supply of medical equipment like ventilators, multi patient monitors, ECG machines, 2D Echo, radio meter, dig-

CSR initiative in AP

HYDERABAD: State Bank of India has allocated Rs.71 cr for fighting the Covid-19 pandemic under Corporate Social Responsibility. State Bank of India Foundation has donated eight lakhs worth oxygen concentrators five, pulse oximeters two hundred and contact-less digital thermometers ten to Indian Red Cross Society, Guntur Branch, presented by M Naga Veni Regional Manager, Guntur Sub-urban Region in the presence of AS Dinesh Kumar, Joint Collector, Guntur. The Regional Manager said that SBI customers can utilise the Yono Digital application for all the banking services staying at home safely.

ital pulse oxy meters in addition to supply of 8000 PPE kits, food relief, dry ration kits etc., by spending more than Rs two crore, Mishra added. The bank is also organizing distribution of life-saving healthcare equipment, Oxygen support, PPE kits, masks, dry rations, food packets/meals. The representatives from all the NGOs who participated in the event, acknowledged the timely support by the bank, in these testing times.

Pharma cos line up IPOs worth ₹7,000 cr

MUMBAI

AMIDST the raging second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and many fearing a third wave, the healthcare sector is in the limelight for the second consecutive year as several pharma and life sciences companies are lined up to tap the equity markets through IPOs over the next few months, according to investment bankers.

Five such companies which have firmed up their initial public offering (IPO) plans are Glenmark Lifesciences, a fully-owned arm of Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, the city-based bulk drugs firm Supriya Lifesciences, drug formulations firm Windlass Biotech, Bain Capital-backed Emcure Pharma and CX Partners-funded Veeda Clinical Research. According to investment-bankers, they are planning to mop up over Rs 7,000 crore in primary share sales.

MEIL to set up 3,000 beds for the Covid-hit in TN

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

AS a part of its nationwide initiative to help the local governments in their fight against the pandemic by supplying beds and vital equipment the Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL) is establishing more than 3,000 beds in Tamil Nadu. These beds are established in hospitals that have oxygen facilities and will be served by the medical staff of the State government.

The engineering major has set up 500 beds in the temple town of Madurai in just 72 hours. While Chief Minister MK Stalin is directly supervising the programme, entire State machinery, Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (Credai) and G Square Realtors are tak-



ing part in this noble endeavour. In addition to 1070 beds, MEIL is setting up in hospitals under the Chennai jurisdiction on a war footing, 200 beds in Erode, 250 in Vellore, 100 in Ambur, 100 in Natramballi, 100 in Melvisharam, 200 in Ayappakkam, 50 in Sholingar, 100 in Vaniyambadi and 100 in Walajah are getting ready. MEIL which has established 660 beds, will be readying another 3,000 beds in the days to come. Chief Minister Stalin recently inaugurated the 500 scalable oxygenated bed facilities at the Government Hospital, Thoppur, in Madurai. In all

200 of these beds are currently available, the remaining 300 beds will be available to public use soon. MEIL could complete the entire work of setting up a 500-bed facility in a record time of 72 hours with the active help of Credai and G Square Realtors. Megha and G Realtors have established a 100-bed facility in Annanagar Government Hospital and another 100-bed facility at Omandurar Govt Hospital. “Since the day the pandemic has spread like wildfire and there was an acute shortage of oxygen, MEIL has stepped in and is augmenting oxygen supply to hospitals. The top management and the entire Megha team is concentrating only on this aspect of mitigating the oxygen crunch. We at MEIL feel that it is our top-most priority in serving the nation,” MEIL Director B Srinivasa Reddy noted.

AP's NEW IT POLICY

ENTREPRENEURS PIN HIGH HOPES

SANTOSH PATNAIK
VISAKHAPATNAM

EVEN as the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSR Congress Party Government in Andhra Pradesh is giving finishing touches to the New IT Policy, entrepreneurs in the field are panning high hopes that a lot of sops will be doled out to them for undertaking Greenfield and Brownfield investments.

After carving out the new State in 2014 amid pandemonium both in Parliament and outside, AP was left with only Visakhapatnam which had IT and IT enabled services units with a turnover of about Rs1500 crore. Conduent, an American company is on expansion spree at Millennium Tower, whereas all others including HSBC, Wipro, Tech Mahindra and Wipro are either on rightsizing or downsizing due to fallout of Covid-19 pandemic preceded by a long spell of economic slowdown. Not a single unit with major investment has come to AP in the IT area due to an uncertain situation and ambiguity with the approach of the new government for the investors. Now IT



and Industries Minister Mekapati Gowtham Reddy has already indicated that a comprehensive policy will be unveiled soon. The policy for which consultation from the stakeholders was sought earlier, is almost ready. It has been approved by the Cabinet Sub-Committee a few days ago. The government has already released the Electronics Policy.

“We expect the IT Policy to encourage new investments as well as the existing entrepreneurs to go for Brownfield expansion. It will be better if small and medium entrepreneurs, mostly locals, are encouraged in a big way for creating job oppor-

tunities for the youth,” IT Association of AP (ITAAP) president Sridhar Kosaraju told Bizz Buzz.

During the consultation, many entrepreneurs sought efforts to bring major companies to enhance brand name of AP like Telangana. Already there is buzz that the government is trying to rope in Microsoft, TCS, Infosys and other big players for major investment in the State by offering customised incentives. The Rushikonda IT Park Association RITPA has sought initiatives to encourage local investors to undertake expansion. RITPA vice-president O Naresh Kumar said they wanted

“We expect the IT Policy to encourage new investments as well as the existing entrepreneurs to go for Brownfield expansion. It will be better if small and medium entrepreneurs, mostly locals, are encouraged in a big way for creating job opportunities for the youth

— Sridhar Kosaraju, IT Association of AP president

higher bandwidth at a lesser price. “In the United States IT units get five times more speed at half of Indian price. What is important to bring investments is quality and price,” he remarked. He said power should be supplied at Rs.5 per unit by removing minimum demand charges.

No cheers as lockdowns take toll on liquor sales

NEW DELHI

NATIONWIDE lockdowns that were necessitated due to the Corona pandemic impacted sales of IMFL (an Indian made foreign liquor) products across India in 2020-21 with overall sales dropping by 12 per cent, according to CIABC, the apex body of the Indian alcoholic beverage industry.

Though the sales picked up in the second half of 2020-21 in most parts, the States which imposed high Corona cess and other taxes after the first wave of Covid-19 showed poor recovery. The total sales of IMFL products in 2020-21 was 305 million cases (nine litres each) which is nearly 12 per cent below the previous year, says the data compiled by the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC).

After an extremely poor first quarter (April-June 2020-21) due to Covid lockdowns, sales showed positive trend on an all India ba-



sis, improving through each quarter, and finally ending the year with a robust performance in the fourth quarter (January to March 2021), said the apex body of the Indian alcoholic beverage industry. While the liquor sales fell by a whopping 42 per cent in Q1 of the last fiscal, it declined by 9 per cent in Q2 and 1 per cent in Q3, before showing a recovery of 6 per cent in Q4.

The top five States in terms of recovery in sales were Maharashtra, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, while West Bengal, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh were among the big States which witnessed largest declines over the previous fiscal.

Second-best foreign coaches will make us second best and not the best: Gopichand

NEW DELHI

PULLELA Gopichand says a good mix of foreign and Indian coaches is important for the development of the system but strongly believes that "second best" overseas recruits will only produce the second best players.

Speaking at the virtual inauguration of the High-Performance Coach Education Programme, the national badminton coach highlighted the role of coaches in Indian sports. "Foreign coaches are very important for our development. It's very important that we always have a healthy mix of foreign coaches."

"In sports, where we don't have expertise it is good sometimes to have full foreign support teams in the beginning, but if for successive teams, we are having only foreign coaches then we are not doing justice to our system," Gopichand said.

The former shuttler feels the basic coaching structure should be led by Indians. "Our coaching system can have foreign coaches as consultants but the basic structure has to be led by Indian coaches. It's very important that we learn from them. And we've to gradually wean away from them because they will always be making us the second best, and not the best," Gopichand said.

The Dronacharya Awardee feels there is a need for programs that turn former players into coaches. "We'll never be able to get the best foreign coaches, we will always get only the second best, and probably the heart of an Indian coach who's really wanting India to win will be definitely more than the coach who wants the next contract."

"So, sports where we have consistently done well, and that we have produced players, it's important to make programs which change players into coaches."

India is an athlete centric system and this needs to change according to Gopichand, who called for more power being given to coaches. "From the perspective of a coach, who is not recognised, who has to work under associations, under administrators and also sometimes under an athlete's pressure, because once the athlete becomes bigger than the coach, then everybody starts listening to the athlete."

"It's time we need to kind of reverse that model and make it a coach-led model. For this we need more power being given to the coaches. Accountable, responsible power so that they perform and produce more and more results."

He also highlighted the tendency of coaches to hold onto players that have got them praise and recognition, a practice Gopichand believes must change. "Athletes start off somewhere, as a grassroots level

player with a certain coach. After that they have to move on to the next level to an intermediate level and to an elite level. At each level, the coaches are recognised many times for the players they produce."

"So, they hold on to players more than they are capable of handling. They should be encouraged to pass on players to the next level, that transfer is something which is really important."

"One good player might last for eight to 10 years. But imagine if we produce one good coach. He will last us for 30 to 40 years and the number of players he produces enormous," he reasoned.

Sport Minsiter Kiren Rijju said Indian athletes have a mindset that they require foreign coaches to win medals. "Whenever I meet athletes they tell me 'we need a foreign coach to win an Olympic medal.' That doesn't mean that they don't believe in In-

dian coaches but somehow they have the understanding that the edge of being in the medal bracket can come from a foreign coach," Rijju said.

The minister called for a change from the "makeshift" coaching system being followed in the country. "In India, we have no such professional approach in terms of coaching. So far things have been done in a makeshift arrangement looking for immediate upcoming sporting events."

"We're hiring coaches for a period of time, or for a particular tournament. We don't have that critical mass, or that kind of ecosystem in our country,

where we can truly say that even the people from other countries can come to India for coaching and training."

The High Performance coaching programme is set to run over a six-month duration. It will have seven modules with around 250 top coaches of SAI forming the core group of nurturing the best sports talent in the country as coaches.

Each batch will have a limited capacity of 20 students only. Besides the theoretical classes which will include assignments with case studies, research work and interactive sessions, participants will have two-week practical session at various high performance centres across the country. (PTI)



Thapa aims to turn record 5th Asian medal into gold

NEW DELHI

WHEN India's seasoned boxer Shiva Thapa steps into the ring for the men's 64kg semi-final match of the Asian Boxing Championships on Friday, he will be keen to turn his fifth continental medal into gold. He is already assured of bronze.



Thapa will play Bakhodur Usmonov of Tajikistan in the semi-finals. "This is my

fifth medal in the history of the championships and many people have followed my journey since Amman 2013. I am looking forward to my semi-final against the defending champion," Thapa was quoted as saying by AIBA, the world boxing governing body.

Thapa, 28, is the first Indian to achieve the feat of winning five medals at the Asian Championship.

Kazakhstan's Vassiliy Levit is the other male boxer to win five medals in the history of the tournament. But even he does not have five on the trot like Thapa at the continental meet.

Women's legends M C Mary Kom (7) and L Sarita Devi (8) have more Asian medals than Thapa with the latter having the distinction of claiming six successive, five of them gold, at the peak of her prowess.

As a teenager, Thapa won his first continental medal, a gold, at the 2013 edition held in Tashkent. In the 2015 Asian tournament in

Bangkok, he won bronze, while two years later in Tashkent he settled for silver. In the 2019 edition held in Bangkok, he got bronze.

The Assam boxer was candid in saying that his Kuwaiti opponent Nader Obah in the quarterfinal was strong. "He had powerful punches, which came to head several times, and I had to be careful the whole bout," he said in the post-match interaction.

The 2015 world bronze medallist was the recipient of the prestigious Arjuna Award in 2016.

In 2012, Thapa became the youngest Indian boxer to compete in the London Olympic Games. He also qualified for the 2016 Rio Olympics but failed to qualify for the upcoming Olympic Games in Tokyo.

"These days domestic competition is tough in some weight categories. There are good boxers in Thapa's group like Manish Kaushik who has qualified for the Tokyo Olympic Games in the men's 63kg. To make the cut for major tournaments in future Thapa should pack more power in his punches," said a national coach. (ANS)



The pandemic. This whole situation that the world is in. To be able to compete and win medals in such a time. Psychologically, it felt as if I have beaten the virus for once.

—Shiva Thapa

Covid: US experts flag concerns for Olympics 2021, call for WHO help

NEW YORK

THE International Olympic Committee (IOC) has not taken adequate steps to protect athletes, coaches, and support staff from Covid-19 during the impending July Olympic Games in Tokyo and the subsequent Paralympic Games, say experts from the University of Minnesota, the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and the University of California, San Francisco.

Writing in a perspective article in the New England Journal of Medicine on Tuesday, they called for an urgent meeting of World Health Organization (WHO) experts to address the crisis.

The Summer Olympics are slated to bring together about 11,000 athletes and 4,000 support staff from more than 200 nations in late July. One month later, the Paralympics will play host to 5,000 athletes, plus their support staff.

The experts including Annie Sparrow, Lisa M Brosseau, Robert J Harrison, and Michael

T Osterholm, noted that when the IOC postponed the Tokyo Olympics in March 2020, Japan had 865 active Covid-19 cases.

The country is now in a state of emergency, with 70,000 active cases, with less than 5 per cent of its population vaccinated against the coronavirus.



"We believe the IOC's determination to proceed with the Olympic Games is not informed by the best scientific evidence," the experts write.

They said that the IOC Covid playbooks assert that athletes participate at their own risk but fail to delineate these risks and do not recognise the limitations of measures such as temperature screenings and face masks. Nor do they adequately address airborne transmission, asymptomatic spread, and the definition of close contacts.

The letter comes at a time of Covid crisis in Japan, with hospitals buckling under the strain of cases in Osaka, the country's second-largest city, and the US State Department recommending that US citizens not travel to the country.

Football world rankings: India men's team retains 105th spot

NEW DELHI

THE Indian men's football team retained its 105th position on the FIFA world rankings released on Thursday.

In the women's category, the Indian team slipped four spots to be 57th in the rankings released last month.

It has been a quiet period for international football, and this is mirrored in the latest FIFA world men's rankings.

"With only one match played since the last edition was published -- a Ukraine-Bahrain friendly that ended all square (1-1) -- the top 50 remains unchanged, with Belgium leading the way from France and Brazil," FIFA said in a statement.

France is placed second, followed by Brazil, England, and Portugal in the men's category.

"Bahrain's one-place gain (98, +1) is the only movement among the 210 national teams that make up the Ranking. Ukraine remain 24th but, having dropped points, have enabled nearest pursuers Serbia to close the gap on them."

However, things are expected to change in the coming weeks, when a host of international competitions take place around the globe. Among the matches are FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Asia, as well as qualifiers for the FIFA Arab Cup 2021, involving teams from Africa and Asia in mid-June.

In the women's category, the USA leads the way, followed by Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Sweden. (ANS)

Villarreal beat United on penalties to clinch Europa League crown

GDANSK (POLAND)

THE penalty shootout was going badly for Manchester United goalkeeper David de Gea in the Europa League final, beaten by every Villarreal player who stepped up to the spot.

At 11-10, it got dramatically worse. The shootout -- after a 1-1 draw following extra time -- went on so long that all of the outfield players took penalties, meaning De Gea and Villarreal goalkeeper Gerónimo Rulli were the 11th men up. Rulli sent his penalty into the top corner, but De Gea's lacked power and was stopped by the Villarreal keeper.

As Rulli lay on the grass after his save, the entire team ran over and piled on top of him. It was an upset to savor as Villarreal -- a team from a city of about 50,000 people -- secured the first major trophy in the 98-year history of the club by beating one of European soccer's giants.

It also secured a lucrative Champions League spot for next season rather than playing in the new third-tier Europa Conference League after Villarreal only finished seventh in the Spanish league. And it stopped an English sweep of the two big European competitions before Chelsea and Manchester City play the Champions League final on Saturday.

"It feels really good," Villarreal midfielder Francis Coquelin said. "When you go down to the end it's the winner taking it all. It was tough, we had a tough game. Manchester put a lot of pressure on us, especially in the first half."

Villarreal players celebrate with trophy after winning the Europa League final



Nagal also fails to make French Open main draw cut

PARIS: India's top player Sumit Nagal could not make a hat-trick of Grand Slam main draw appearances following a straight-set defeat in the second round of the French Open Qualifying event here. The Haryana youngster crashed out of the Clay Court major with a 3-6 3-6 loss to Alejandro Tabilo from Chile, last night. In the engrossing contest that lasted one-and-a-half-hours, Nagal could break the serve of his rival, ranked 23 places below him at 146, only twice while he himself dropped his serve five times. With the defeat of the 23-year-old from Hajar, India's challenge has ended in the Qualifiers. Ramkumar Ramanathan, Prajesh Guneshwaran and Ankita Raina have already exited from the tournament. Now India will be represented through Rohan Bopanna and Divij Sharan in the men's doubles main draw. (PTI)

Zidane leaves Real Madrid

MADRID: Zinedine Zidane has resigned as head coach of Real Madrid, the Spanish club said on Thursday. "It is now time to respect his decision and show our appreciation for his professionalism, dedication and passion throughout all these years, and for what he represents as his figure for Real Madrid," the club said in a statement, DPA reports. The World Cup-winning former France captain had a contract until June 2022 but had reportedly already told Real Madrid players earlier in May he would leave the club at the end of 2020-21 season. Zidane won Champions League three times and Spanish league twice in two spells as Real Madrid coach. (ANS)





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Printed and Published by K. Hanumanta Rao, on behalf of Hyderabad Media House Pvt. Limited, Flat No.609, 6th Floor, Kirti Shikhar Building, Plot.No.11, Dist.Center, Janakpuri, New Delhi- 110058. and Printed at M/s. Marutinandan Printers & Publishers, A-15, Bara Bagh, G.T Karnal Road, Industrial Area, New Delhi - 110033. Editor: V Ramu Sarma. RNI No: DELENG/2017/74095