

SHORT TAKES

TENURES OF THREE ADVISERS END IN JUNE

From page 1

The tenures of three other advisers – Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, G.V.D. Krishna Mohan and M. Samuel – will also end by mid-June, and the fate of Samuel too hangs in balance. “Of the 25 or so advisors to either Chief Minister or government, Jagan Mohan Reddy utilises fully the services of only Krishna Mohan (communications) and Ramakrishna Reddy (public affairs) while for many others these posts are just ornamental,” sources close to the Chief Minister pointed out. The extension of term of only these two advisors is certain, they added.

Kallam, who played a vital role in the formative days of the YSR Congress regime in 2019, was appointed as the Principal Advisor with great fanfare. The party leaders were also happy over the Chief Minister duly accommodating Kallam in recognition of his efforts to mobilise the support of government employees across the state in the 2019 assembly polls. He was made the head of the CMO and allotted several crucial subjects. But soon, he went out of the orbit of power in CMO, and the entry of Praveen Prakash further tilted the balance of power. Last year, the Chief Minister stripped all powers of Kallam by removing subjects he was handling in the CMO on the pretext that retired bureaucrats should not process files.

JAGAN FULFILLED 107 OUT OF 129 PROMISES: PERNI

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

Minister for Information, Public Relations and Transport, Perni Venkatramaiah alias Nani said on Wednesday that TD leaders Chandrababu Naidu and Nara Lokesh are unable to digest the “welfare-oriented” governance of Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy and are engaged in attention-diversion tactics.

Addressing a press meet at the party central office here, the minister said Naidu and Lokesh lost their mental balance as the CM has implemented large welfare schemes which Naidu couldn’t do in 14 years of his rule. “Jagan will be completing two years of governance on May 30 and he has fulfilled 107 out of 129 promises the YSRC made in the poll manifesto for the 2019 assembly polls.”

Minister Nani said the TD had published volumes as party manifestos for votes and ignored their content altogether as soon as the elections were over.

JAGAN'S LAST CHANCE TO COUNTER PLEA TO CANCEL BAIL

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MAY 26

The CBI court at Hyderabad on Wednesday gave the last opportunity to the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and the CBI, to file their contentions by June 1, in a petition filed by Narsapur parliamentary constituency Member Kanumuri Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, who requested the court to cancel the bail granted to Reddy in the disproportionate assets case.

The CBI court had on two occasions earlier directed both the CM and the CBI to file counters stating their contentions against the petition. However, on Wednesday also both the respondents sought more time to file counters. Ashok Reddy, the counsel for Jagan, submitted that the counter affidavit has been ready but, due to the lockdown they could not file before the court.

On the other hand, Venkatesh, the counsel for Raju, said that Jagan Mohan Reddy only wanted to prolong the hearing of case with an intention to delay the filing of his affidavit.

The counsel for CBI submitted that they were waiting for some instructions from the CBI headquarters to file the affidavit.

Agreeing to the request of both parties for some more time to file their affidavits, the court hinted that it was the last chance for both the respondents to file affidavits; otherwise, the court would go for arguments to decide the case.



Police seize vehicles of lockdown violators and shift them to the police station along with the motorists, in Vijayawada on Wednesday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Industrial safety not a prime concern yet

Sources: No regular inspections, safety studies, review meetings are held

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

Industrial safety has been a cause of concern in Visakhapatnam following a series of incidents, the fire mishap at HPCL being the latest case. Even a minor incident of industrial mishap jolts the denizens into recalling the disquieting memory of the major mishap at LG Polymers plant claiming 12 lives and making thousands fall sick due to leakage of styrene gas in May last year.

Though the state government took several measures and an action plan, a coordinated implementation of the same is lacking, with the result that mishaps, minor or major, continue to take place. There are nearly 211 industrial units including 19 hazardous in and around the city.

At the time of phase 1 of a special drive taken up for industrial safety in the wake of last year mishap, authorities inspected 84 units and served notices on 76 for non-compliance

with safety norms, and cases were booked against 17 units. Subsequently, they also inspected the remaining units and booked cases against 12 more units. They issued directions to take up a series of rectifications and submit safety compliance reports. Sadly, that turned out to be a one-time affair with no further follow-up on corrective steps or compensation to the families of victims.

Highly placed sources privy to industrial safety maintain that several major and inherent issues remain unaddressed, resulting in a compromise on safety norms by the hazardous industrial units. Adherence to the Hazardous Chemical (Amendment) Rules, 1989, amended in 1994 and 2000, in various aspects from manufacture, storage to import of hazardous chemicals is not monitored. They say state and central agencies should regularly take up inspections, call for rectifications and act against erring units. Alas, it is not

being done.

It is said that the department of factories lacks adequate manpower to carry out its mandate. Out of sanctioned 22 posts of inspectors, eight are vacant and a few posts of deputy inspector of factories are also lying vacant in some districts. In Visakhapatnam alone, which is a highly sensitive place given the presence of several industrial units and being the hub of state’s pharma industry, the post of deputy inspector of factories has been vacant since July last year. An inspector from Srikakulam is made the in-charge for the city. And there is only one inspector working on regular basis under the supervision of a joint chief inspector.

The Visakhapatnam district administration has an age-old ‘off-site emergency plan’ prepared in 2007. It deals with details of hazardous industries, storage capacity of hazardous chemicals, personnel handling them, their contact numbers, chance of mishaps and their

on/off-site impact and details for rescue and relief operations. The district authorities fail to update it even after LP Polymers mishap. The district crisis group meeting to be chaired by the Collector to take up a regular review of industrial safety is also not being held.

Sources maintain that unless all stockholder agencies inspect the units, bring about awareness on safety norms and organise mock drills on emergency situations involving workers and neighbourhood people at regular intervals, industrial safety remains at stake. Joint chief inspector of factories J. Siva Sankar Reddy said, “We are ensuring that all hazardous industrial units comply with safety norms. Those who were served notices got rectifications done, barring a few who took legal course. We are planning to hire a private agency to update off-site emergency plan shortly and the district crisis group meet is deferred due to Covid-19.”

Meanwhile, District Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu confirmed that 54 patients, who had Anandaiah medicine, got admitted to GGH

Many fall ill after ‘miracle’ treatment, hospitalised

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC NELLORE, MAY 26

Even as the opposition parties are mounting criticism against the state government for not restoring the distribution of herbal concoction of Bonigi Anandaiah, as many as 54 persons, who took the herbal medicine, got admitted to the Government General Hospital at Nellore during the last two days.

While a majority of patients were rushed to the hospital with low oxygen saturation levels and bloodlessness, some came with complaints of conjunctivitis (inflammation of the outermost layers of the white part of the eye and the inner surface of the eyelid).

Doctors treating the patients attribute the ailments to their failure to take the prescribed Covid medicines after taking the Krishnapatnam medicine.

The patients include a retired headmaster Baina Kotaiah, 65, belonging to Thinnelapudi village in Kota mandal. His lungs are infected and his condition is alarming, the doctors said. Kotaiah shot to fame after a video clip, wherein he praised Anandaiah’s preparation soon after he was administered eye drops, went viral. His CT scan score is 20 out of 25 but he tested negative for Covid-19, a medical officer said, adding that he is suffering from pneumonia.

“We were happy as the number of cases kept falling during last four days. Now we are worried over a possible surge in Covid-19 cases in the next few days because of the mingling of a large number of Covid-19 patients at Krishnapatnam on May 21, 2021,” a medical officer said.

Meanwhile, District Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu confirmed that 54 patients, who had Anandaiah medicine, got admitted to GGH

KEEP DOCTORS STRESS-FREE, STRESSES CM

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, MAY 26

CM Jagan Mohan Reddy is all praise for the efficient services rendered at Kurnool Government General Hospital (KGGH) by the doctors who are working under testing conditions, caring for more than 1,200 Covid patients. In a teleconference with the CM, a doctor from Kurnool and a nurse from Nellore, and a ward boy from Visakhapatnam participated. The CM told the administration to keep doctors stress-free as then they could render their services.

WILL PAY BACK WITH COMPOUND INTEREST: LOKESH

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

Telugu Desam MLC Nara Lokesh on Wednesday criticised that the Jagan Mohan Reddy government was handing over valuable public and private properties in Andhra Pradesh to Gujarat-based companies. He said the CM turned into an ‘Amul Baby’ by giving away all the long-standing dairies in the state to Amul Dairy.

Clinical trials soon on Anandaiah’s mixture

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, MAY 26

Government Whip and TTD Trust Board member Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy on Wednesday informed that Suglen Life Sciences Laboratory, which has been approved by National Ayurvedic Research Institute under the central government, will take up research and conduct clinical trials on Anandaiah’s concoction in four phases.

The TTD Board member, along with a team of Ayurveda experts from TTD and the family members of Anandaiah, on Wednesday inspected the facility of Suglen Life Sciences located under Perumallapalli limits, close to Tirupati. It is a contract research organisation focused on pre-clinical safety, efficacy, toxicology, and clinical research services to biopharma industries and research organisations. It has also been recognised by SV University for performing research leading to PhD degree in several areas of biomedical sciences. Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvaavidyalayam also recognises the scientists of Suglen Life Sciences as research mentors.

Speaking to media persons, Bhaskar Reddy said that the investigations on the concoction would take place in four phases, including retrospective

with various complications. He opined that patients should have continued regular medication instead of assuming that Anandaiah’s concoction would suffice. He assured to take care of the patients with proper medical care.

On the huge demand for Anandaiah’s preparation from various quarters, he

study, toxicity studies, in vitro studies and clinical studies, to establish the scientific authenticity of the concoction.

“As per experts, the drug will be first tested on small animals like rabbits and rats. The AYUSH department, the TTD Ayurveda wing and Suglen Life Sciences will do research simultaneously, but separately, and the results will come out very soon. Based on the results, the TTD would be ready, as per the directions of the state government, to manufacture the medicine on a large scale,” he said.

He said some of the raw materials used in Anandaiah’s concoction were also used in TTD’s Srivari Prasadam and apart from that, the herbs used in the concoction are abundantly available in the Seshachalam forest ranges. He also said that these researches would help prevent any problems with the medicine in the future.

“Lab experts said it would take about three months to examine regular medicines, but in the case of Ayurvedic medicines, it would be reported within 20 days,” he said, concluding that in any case there would be a positive statement from the CM on manufacturing and distribution of Anandaiah’s concoction which enjoys a huge public demand.

Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) and TTD Ayurvedic College have taken up studies on it.

“We have provided 600 phone numbers of the persons who used the medicine, with the help of village volunteers, and the researchers are contacting them,” he said.

MINISTER: STATE-OWNED COMPANY TO IMPLEMENT FREE INSURANCE SCHEME

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

Agriculture Minister Kurasala Kannababu on Wednesday announced that the state government has decided to set up an insurance company of its own to implement the free crop insurance scheme. Until then, the scheme will be implemented as per guidelines of the PM Fasal Bima Yojana.

Addressing media here, he pointed out that during the last two years, the state government has paid ₹3783.25 crore to farmers under the YSR free insurance scheme.

Slamming TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu and

other Telugu Desam leaders for launching “false propaganda” against YSR free insurance scheme, the minister countered that the then Naidu government had not paid premiums for insurance most of the times, making the farmers suffer. Further, the TD government was vindictive with Pulivendula farmers for not mentioning the date of cropping.

It was CM who released ₹112 cr to these farmers, Kannababu pointed out.

He took TD leader S o m i r e d y Chandramohan Reddy to task for claiming that their govt had paid ₹4,000 crore as insurance.

REBEL MP RAJU ADMITTED TO AIIMS, DELHI, FOR BETTER MEDICAL CARE

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

YSR Congress rebel MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju was discharged from Military Hospital in Secunderabad and flown to New Delhi to take admission at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) for better medical treatment on Wednesday.

The MP’s lawyers said that as the Supreme Court issued an order earlier to release the MP from the judicial custody after the conduct of medical examination subject to submission of personal sureties and bond papers

for bail in 10 days from the date of its issue, the Military Hospital authorities discharged the MP.

The MP flew to New Delhi in a chartered flight from Hyderabad.

His lawyers said that they would submit all requisite papers including hospital discharge summary, personal sureties and bail bond paper in the court of Sixth Additional Junior Civil Judge on May 28.

However, it is yet to be seen how the Guntur district jail authorities would take the issue as it is mandatory for the MP to sign the bond paper in person to secure the bail.

AP pressing Centre for black fungus drugs: CM

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Wednesday expressed serious concern as the state was staring at shortage of medicines even as the deadly black fungus infections were on the rise.

During the Spandana review meeting, the CM noted that each patient should be given at least 50 injections a week. But the fact was that the state received only 3,000 injections from the centre which said another 2,000 would be sent soon. The state was impressing upon the centre for more vials.

On the supply of remdesivir injections, the CM said that around 50,000 injections a week were being made available to government hospitals, and around 60,000 to private hospitals, thus ensuring no shortage of the drug in the state. He ordered stern action against those selling the life-saving medicines in the black market.

Reddy called upon District Collectors to ensure that ‘104’ call centers become one-stop solution centre for all the needs of people affected by Covid-19. He cautioned them against any negligence in this aspect given the pandemic situation. He said the number of calls to the toll-free num-

Vax supply reins with Centre: CM

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He asked the officials to focus on those areas, especially Chittoor, East and West Godavari districts, where the Covid-19 incidence is high.

The CM said that as on date, 23,69,164 people were vaccinated with two doses, while 33,11,697 people received the first dose.

As the vaccine production in the country is very low, the entire country would need 172 crore doses and the state 7 crore doses. He said the distribution of vaccines was centrally controlled. The state was primarily focussing on vaccinating all those above 45 years, as the risk factor is high among them, he added.

ber fell from 19,000 calls to 7,000 calls, a sign of decline of positive cases. He directed the officials to focus on arranging oxygen and other medical facilities for beds at temporary German hangars.

Regarding the oxygen supply, the Chief Minister appreciated the increase in oxygen supply to over 600 tonnes from 330 tonnes earlier. As of now the state had enough oxygen to last for two days even during the cyclone, he observed. He advised against oxygen wastage and called for replenishing stocks wherever necessary. He said oxygen reserves should be maintained at every Covid hospital in order to avoid any loss of life. Reviewing the enforcement of curfew, Reddy asked officials not

to brook any violations.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Krishna Srinivas, Ministers Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and Botsa Satyanarayana, DGP Gautam Sawang, Chief Commissioner of Land Administration Neerab Kumar Prasad, Special Chief Secretary (Agriculture) Poonam Malakondaiah, Covid Command Control Chairman Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy, Special Secretary (Municipal Administration) Y Srilakshmi, Panchayat Raj Commissioner Girija Shankar, Principal Secretary (Health) Anil Kumar Singhal, Principal Secretary (Women and Child Welfare) Anuradha and other officials were present.

NELLORE | CIVIC BODY

4 varieties of door numbers in rolls; many voters with single door numbers

Poll officer told to submit a factual report on electoral rolls

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MAY 26

Though election were held for most of the civic bodies across the state in April, polls did not take place in Nellore Municipal Corporation (NMC) because of cases in the High Court against irregularities in the delimitation

of divisions and serious lapses in the electoral rolls.

Against this backdrop, one of the petitioners and former civic body member Vuchi Bhuvaneshwari Prasad alleged that official laxity in submitting the factual report on the lapses in the voters list to the Chief Electoral Officer of

Prasad urged the Collector to submit the report sought by the CEO.

AP (CEO) is further delaying the elections.

According to Prasad, the CEO in his letter dated April 2, 2021 directed the Nellore District Electoral Officer to furnish a factual

report to set right the anomalies in the electoral rolls. The CEO had also referred to the allegations of Bhuvaneshwari Prasad over the discrepancies in the voters list even after Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls in 2016-17.

“Based on the CEO letter, Collector forwarded the same to Nellore city and

Rural EROs, Municipal Commissioner and RDO, seeking their report but Collector’s office is yet to receive a report from the two officers,” Bhuvaneshwari Prasad alleged.

“The voter’s list contains door numbers without any numerics except ‘0’ (zero) and there are hundreds of

voters with one single door number. In addition to this, there are 4 varieties of door numbers in the rolls,” he alleged. He urged the Collector to submit the report sought by the CEO AP as early as possible to enable him to take a decision to correct the electoral rolls for a free and fair election.

SHORT TAKES

GOV. CONDOLES DEATHS OF GUEST WORKERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Wednesday expressed anguish and grief over the deaths of a woman and five children and missing of two persons in a boat accident in Sileru reservoir in Visakhapatnam district.

The Governor offered heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family members and directed the officials to provide all necessary medical care to the rescued persons.

Earlier, the officials informed the Governor that the guest workers hailing from Kandaguda and Guntawada villages in Malkangiri district in Odisha were returning home from Hyderabad, as they feared hardships due to imposition of lockdown.

They met with a tragic end as the two country boats capsized in the reservoir.

₹10L DEPOSIT FOR KIDS IF PARENTS SUCCUMB TO COVID

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 25

The Women and Child Welfare Department would deposit ₹10 lakh in the bank on the name of children if both their parents succumb to Covid-19.

As per the guidelines issued by the Project Director of the department, the orphaned children of the BPL category can make use of the interest on the deposit till they turn 25 years old.

As per the guidelines, the benefit is applicable for children below 18 years of age if the mother and father expired due to Covid-19. Even if one of the parents succumbed to Covid-19 and another because of some other reason in the past, such children also can apply for the benefit. However, there should not be any insurance cover to become eligible for the scheme. The applicants should submit a certificate confirming the Covid-19 positive as the cause of death.

The state government would deposit ₹10 lakh in the name of the eligible children in the bank and hand over the bond to them. They can withdraw the money only after attaining the age of 25 years. They can enjoy interest on the deposit till they attain maturity.

● As per the guidelines, the benefit is applicable for children below 18 years of age if the mother and father expired due to Covid-19.

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IMD forecasts severe heat wave in AP for next four days

Severe heat wave conditions will prevail on May 27 in as many as 68 mandals

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

India Meteorological Department (IMD) has warned that severe heat wave conditions are likely in parts of Andhra Pradesh during the next four days.

As per the IMD forecast, severe heat wave conditions will prevail on May 27 in as many as 68 mandals, including 12 in East Godavari district and two in Vizianagaram district. There will be moderate heat wave conditions in 36 mandals of West Godavari district and 15 of Krishna district.

In a statement, AP State Disaster Management Authority commissioner K. Kanna Babu said day temperatures will range between 45–46 degrees Celsius in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakha-

AP to witness light to moderate rain, thunder shower in next five days

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

Andhra Pradesh is set to witness light to moderate rain or thunder showers were likely at isolated places and warned of the prevalence of strong winds with 30 to 40 kmph velocity on May 27 and thunderstorms and lightning on May 30 and 31 in north/south coastal AP and Yanam.

Maximum tempera-

mandals including 28 in East Godavari, 18 in West Godavari and 14 in Vizianagaram will witness wave conditions. Districts including Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari and West Godavari will witness day temperatures rang-

here said in a statement that light to moderate rain or thunder showers were likely at isolated places and warned of the prevalence of strong winds with 30 to 40 kmph velocity on May 27 and thunderstorms and lightning on May 30 and 31 in north/south coastal AP and Yanam.

Maximum tempera-

tures are likely to be two to four degrees Celsius more above the normal temperature at isolated places on May 27 to 29. Several cities and towns recorded higher temperatures than normal in the state. Visakhapatnam recorded 41.4 degrees Celsius which was 8.2 above normal level.

ing between 45–46 degrees Celsius while Visakhapatnam, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore will record between 42–44 degrees Celsius. Chittoor, Kadapa, Anantapur and Kurnool districts will record temperatures between

39–41 degrees Celsius.

On May 29, parts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts will record temperatures between 45–46 degrees Celsius while Visakhapatnam, Prakasam and Nellore will record 42–44 degrees Celsius. Parts of Chittoor, Kadapa, Anantapur and Kurnool districts will record 39–41 degrees Celsius.

On May 30, parts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts will record temperatures of 44–45 degrees Celsius, while Visakhapatnam, Prakasam and Nellore will register 42–43 degrees Celsius. Parts of Chittoor, Kadapa will record temperature of 39–41 degrees Celsius.

AP NEEDS CENTRE'S NOD TO REJIG DISTRICTS TO GET FUNDS

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN |
DC
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

As the central government has fixed the date for freezing of all the boundaries of all administrative units in the country to be March 31, 2021 for taking up census and any changes made in jurisdictions thereafter may not be considered, the Andhra Pradesh government may have to take permission from the centre for its proposal to set up new districts in the state.

RTI activist Inaganti Ravi Kumar sent a query under RTI Act, 2005 to the office of Registration General recently, seeking to know whether the AP government could go ahead with its proposed reorganisation of districts and formation of a new municipal corporation by merging Tadepalli and Mangalagiri municipalities, to avoid any denial of sanction of funds under various schemes for their development from the Centre. He received a reply stating that any changes made in boundaries of administrative units after March 31, 2021 would not be considered.

BURIAL GROUND ASST PASSES AWAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 26

Srinivas, popularly known as Anantapur Harischandra who performed final rights for more than 1,100 bodies at burial and cremation grounds in Anantapur over the past few decades, passed away due to Covid-19 in Bengaluru late on Tuesday.

The 75-year-old was in the vocation for the past five decades. He had migrated from Adoni area in Kurnool district.

Sonu Sood becomes India's superhero

From Page 1

“As a migrant worker myself, though privileged and lucky, I could empathise with their angst. It started with serving food and giving basic financial help to organising to help them in larger numbers.”

The legend grew quickly because of the vacuum. None of India's conventional heroes — film stars, cricketers, billionaires — was there to really make a significant difference. Sood's rise to being recognised as a saviour is also a deep reflection of the indifference of others.

“How do you feel about being recognised and trusted so much by people that they tag you on twitter for help before government agencies or ministers? Do you feel pressure to deliver?”

He smiles, and in one of the most humane voices I have heard in a long time, replies, “There is no pressure when a friend or family member expects you to stand for them. It is no different. Every bit of time, money and effort I can muster, I am out there because I know somewhere, someone who has reached out to me is waiting and expecting. It is a call I must respond to, and I can't let them down.”

I scratch my head, a bit bewildered. Is it a mere PR exercise? Or did I get connected to the Dalai Lama by mistake? I do not think it is his fault that others in the cine world have used charity to sell more tickets for their next release. Last year, we were stuck with the tragic story of another SS in Bollywood— Sushant Singh. This SS has risen now to become India's superhero, without a cape, just a twitter handle.

Are you a bit embarrassed Sonu, I ask him, that others in your film fraternity, Bollywood or Tollywood, who have received greater stardom and earned far more money and influence, never cared to take up work like yours in one of our worst years ever? He answers candidly, but with sangfroid. “You can't force a feeling of wanting to help people. It can't even be taught beyond a point. It must come from within.”

What next? Will this image harm your film career? Next time any film fans see him on screen as a villain, will the portrayal be convincing? “I am not thinking of the next film. Just my next SOS call.”

He disappears to do good for someone, somewhere. A villain has refined heroism, forever. My vote for the biggest star in films in India in a dark year — Sonu Sood.

Teachers join farm work as schools shut

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI |
DC
KURNOOL MAY 26

Teachers find life difficult to sustain as their schools are closed and their management has stopped paying them. While some teachers are seeking employment as rural job assurance schemes, the others began doing farm work.

The measly wages they get out of the work is hardly sufficient to manage a square meal a day. In addition, there is the threat of being infected by Covid-19 as several teachers lost their lives in the past two months, said Nandeeshwar, a mathematics teacher working at the Nandyal private school.

According to data compiled by the teachers' association, the district has lost 45 teachers to Covid-19 infection. Some were in their 20s while most were middle-aged, said Umakanth, a teacher.

District education officer (DEO) Sai Ram said all the deaths cannot be treated as Covid-19 deaths. Some teachers died of chronic ailments. He said the cause of the death as certified by a government doctor is valid.

The Andhra Pradesh government pays ₹237 a day as wage under MGNREGS,

said Krupakar, a teacher working in Dhone, adding, “That too they pay in staggered installments.”

“We are working there in the hope that someday we will get paid in real terms for our labour,” he said.

“With the schools closing after their opening for three months in 2021, life has gone topsy-turvy for us, said Hemalata, an English teacher in Koilkuntla. Teachers with mathematical skills were on-demand earlier as they were taking tuitions. But now, with the online teaching, very few rural teachers are adapting to online teaching, said Sainath, a teacher at a tech-nool school in Kurnool.

Kurnool DEO Sai Ram said strict instructions have been given to private school managements to arrange salaries for teachers. If not full salary, at least part salary should be paid to them, he said.

On the plight of the teachers doing MNREGS works, the DEO said it was really a pity. He said he was going to send one more letter to private schools, advising them to pay salaries to the staff, failing which they would face stiff penalties like cancellation of their registrations.

GGH RESPONDS TO TREAT PATIENTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 26

Medical authorities have started treatment for the patients suffering from black fungus at the ENT Ward at the Government General Hospital here. Following a report in these columns on the scarcity of essential drugs to treat the dreaded fungal infection, District Collector Gandham Chandrudu on Wednesday

alerted the GGH authorities and asked them to render all necessary.

Hospital Superintendent Dr Venkateswara Rao inspected the ENT ward where black fungus patients were being treated and streamlined the system as many were unable to get treatment.

The patients were also provided the much-needed anti-fungal injections at the ward.

Vaccination in full swing



People in large numbers wait to get vaccinated with the first dose of Covid vaccine at Swarnabharathi Urban Primary Health Centre at Resapuvanipalem in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

AP to rope in NGOs to combat Covid-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

The state government is planning to avail the services of NGOs to combat the Covid-19 pandemic in an effective manner in the state.

The AP State Disaster Management Authority, following a directive from the National Disaster Management Authority and Niti Aayog, held a meeting recently under the aegis of Mahila Abhivruddhi Society, Andhra Pradesh (APMAS) and the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) to rope in NGOs, voluntary agencies and others. The meeting was chaired by the Special Chief Secretary and chairman of Covid Command and Control Centre, Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy.

The meeting resolved to set up government and NGO coordination centres at state and district levels with nodal officers. It was

decided to make use of the services of self-help groups (SHGs), village/ward volunteers, frontline healthcare workers, NGOs and others to disseminate state government-approved IEC (information, education and communication) materials to provide psychosocial support to the Coronavirus affected patients and their families.

Other activities such as management of isolation centres, vaccination centres, testing centres, separate quarantine centres for girls and boys, shelter to orphan children in residential homes will also be taken care of by these non-governmental bodies.

They would help in distribution of financial aid of ₹10 lakh to the orphaned children who lost one of their parents to Covid-19.

The meeting also resolved to urge banks to extend deadline for loan renewals to avoid gatherings at banks.

18,285 NEW COVID CASES, 99 DEATHS REPORTED IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 26

Andhra Pradesh recorded 18,285 fresh Coronavirus infections and 99 deaths in the last 24 hours. The state health authorities reported here on Wednesday that 18,285 out of 91,120 samples tested were infected with Coronavirus.

Out of a total 1,88,40,321 samples tested so far in the state, 16,27,390 persons were found infected with the virus. Of them, 14,24,859 were recovered in the course of treatment while 1,92,104 are under treatment.

Among the daily cases of Coronavirus infections, 10 districts recorded over 1,000 cases each — with East Godavari at the highest at 3,296 followed by 1,876 cases in Anantapur, 1,822 in Chittoor, 1,800 in Visakhapatnam, 1,664 in West Godavari, 1,211 in Guntur, 1,207 in Srikakulam, 1,159 in Nellore, 1,056 in Prakasam, 1,026 in Kurnool, 877 in Kadapa, and 652 in Krishna.



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SHORT TAKES

ASSAM TO HAVE GUARDIAN MINISTERS

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MAY 26

In an obvious attempt to improve the governance and create a pro-people image of the government, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday embarked upon an innovative idea of appointing guardian ministers for all the districts to implement government policy decisions, administrative reforms, and other welfare schemes for the public.

The decision was taken at the cabinet meeting on Wednesday. The Panchayat and Rural Development Minister and Assam BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Das has been given the responsibility of Barpeta, Bongaigaon, and Dhubri districts.

Agriculture minister Atul Bora will be the guardian minister of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia while minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma has been allotted the responsibility of Baksa and Chirang districts.

Transport, industries, and commerce minister Chandra Mohan Patowary has been given the responsibility of Darrang, Kamrup (R), and Kamrup (M) districts.

Environment minister Parimal Suklabaidya will be the guardian minister of Karimganj, Hailakandi, and Hojai. Health and family welfare minister Keshab Mahanta has been given the responsibility of the Golaghat and Morigaon districts.

JEE-ADVANCED POSTPONED DUE TO COVID-19

New Delhi, May 26: The Joint Entrance Examination (JEE)-Advanced scheduled for July 3 has been postponed in view of the Covid-19 situation, according to officials at IIT-Kharagpur, the institute which is conducting the exam this year.

The exam is conducted for admission to the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology and the National Institutes of Technology.

"Considering the prevailing pandemic situation due to Covid-19, JEE (Advanced) 2021 which was scheduled to be held on July 3 stands postponed. The revised date of examination will be announced at an appropriate time," an official said.

For the JEE-Advanced, the JEE-Mains is considered as a qualifying exam and it is conducted for admission to engineering colleges across the country.

For admissions to IITs, apart from qualifying the JEE-Advanced, candidates are required to secure either minimum 75 per cent marks in their class 12 board exams or a rank among the top 20 percentile in their qualifying examinations.

The requirement pertaining to class 12 scores has been waived in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

FARMERS' STIR COMPLETES SIX MONTHS

Chandigarh, May 26: Farmers in Punjab and Haryana put up black flags atop their houses, burnt effigies of the central government and held protests on Wednesday, joining a 'black day' call given by farmer unions to mark six months of their agitation at Delhi borders against the Centre's three contentious farm laws.

In Punjab, protesting farmers burnt effigies of the BJP-led central government at many places.

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Singh Badal also raised a black flag at his house in Badal village in Muktsar district and urged the central government to accept the demand of protesting farmers. In Haryana, state Bharatiya Kisan Union chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni said farmers at many places hoisted black flags atop their houses and vehicles to register their protest. Several political parties including the Congress, SAD and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have extended their support to the farmers' call of observing the day as 'black day'.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of protesting unions, had announced that farmers will observe May 26 as 'black day' to mark the completion of six months of their protest. Farmers carrying black flags while women wearing black chunnis held protests in villages.



Police officers distribute food to the needy people during landfall of cyclone Yaas in Kolkata on Wednesday. — PTI



Residents take shelter inside a primary school building in Balasore district of Odisha state as cyclone Yaas barrels towards eastern coast in the Bay of Bengal. — AFP

Yaas leaves a trail of devastation

Thousands of kutcha houses washed, trees uprooted; standing crop lost in Odisha

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BALASORE, MAY 26

The cyclonic storm Yaas on Wednesday morning made its landfall at Bahanaga in Odisha's Balasore district with a wind speed of 130 to 140 kilometre per hour (kmph) and left a trail of devastation in the coastal districts.

Initial reports suggest an elderly person named Purnachandra Naik in Keonjhar died as a tree collapsed on him while he was going to a temple near his house for his morning prayers. Similarly, a youth in Balasore district died as a large branch of a tree fell on him.

Thousands of kutcha houses in coastal villages in Bhadrak, Balasore and Kendrapara districts were washed away in the high tidal surge that accompanied the roaring landfall. Massive tides ranging from 2 to 4 metres high gushed into seaside villages resulting in marooning of innumerable households in Basudebpur and Chandabali areas in Bhadrak district.

In Balasore district, Chandipur, Baliapal, Bahanagar, Talasari and Bhograi areas were severely hit by the disaster. Kutcha houses and houses with asbestos roofs could not withstand the gusty winds and heavy downpour and collapsed.

Several areas in Rajanagar area in Kendrapara district also witnessed tidal ingress that led to complete disruption of road communication. Four to five feet high sea water was seen flowing over the roads connecting Kendrapara district with Bhadrak.

Farmers, especially the paddy growers, vegetable and betel-leaf growers, were worst hit as the squally wind and incessant downpours destroyed the standing crops.

"During its landfall, Yaas had turned into a very severe cyclonic storm. It hit the coast at Bahanaga, 20 km south of Balasore town at 10.30 am and the landfall process continued for nearly three hours. With its impact, several coastal Odisha districts including Kendrapara, Bhadrak, Balasore and Jagatsinghpur received heavy rainfall ranging up to 150mm in the last 24



A priest shifts an idol of Lord Jagannath from a seafront temple to a safer place in Balasore district in Odisha as cyclone Yaas barrels towards eastern coast in the Bay of Bengal. — AFP

● FARMERS, especially the paddy growers, vegetable and betel-leaf growers, were worst hit as the squally wind and incessant rain destroyed the standing crops.

hours. It also precipitated heavy downpours in the adjoining districts of West Bengal," India Meteorological Department (IMD) director general Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said.

He added that the cyclone was moving further north and northwestwards and it would enter Jharkhand on Thursday morning after weakening into a deep depression. "From a severe cyclonic storm, Yaas will gradually weaken into a deep depression and enter Jharkhand with a wind speed of 50 to 60 km per hour," the IMD chief said.

Speaking to reporters after the cyclone passed the Odisha coast, state Special Relief Commissioner P.K. Jena efforts were being made to restore the road communication, power supply and drinking water systems.

"Till now, we have not received any reports of any major mishaps except loss of a couple of lives which unfortunately happened as they did not obey the government's order not to venture out during the cyclone. Now, we are focusing on restoration of essential services. We have asked collectors to submit the loss assessment reports as early as possible," said the SRC Mr Jena.

The SRC informed that Mayurbhanj, Balasore's adjoining district in the north had received heavy rainfall and it is likely to cause flash flood in Budhabalanga river which originates from the Similipal National Park in the district.

Meanwhile, exhibiting their high-skilled rescue expertise and daredevilry, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and Odisha police personnel on Tuesday night rescued at least 10 fishermen whose boat capsized near Japa village in Odisha's Jagatsinghpur district.

According to reports, after the fishermen sent

distress calls about the imminent danger they faced in the sea, the NDRF jawans immediately reached the spot and evacuated them from the ill-fated vessel to a rescue boat.

Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik praised the efforts of the rescue teams. The jawans also rescued hundreds of domestic animals in Odisha and West Bengal from drowning or getting swept away in tidal waves.

Apart from rescue activity, the NDRF personnel served cooked food to evacuees accommodated in various cyclone shelters.

The NDRF jawans also cleared almost all major roads in Odisha and West Bengal which were blocked by uprooted trees.

"The NDRF focused on saving lives of the people, domestic animals and evacuation of people during the cyclone. Post the landfall of the storm our men have begun the restoration work. We are also taking care of people in shelters," NDRF director general Satyanarayan Pradhan said.

CYCLONE IN FIGURES

15,04,506 No. of people evacuated in West Bengal

5.80 lakh No. of people in vulnerable areas of Odisha shifted to safe shelters

1 crore No. of people affected in West Bengal

3 lakh No. of houses damaged in West Bengal

6 No. of flights cancelled by Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in view of cyclone Yaas

17 No. of columns deployed by the Army to assist the WB administration

969 tonnes Of liquid medical oxygen moved to six states and a Union Territory through 12 Oxygen Express trains in a span of 24 hours

404 No. of rescue teams been deployed in Odisha

MASSIVE RESCUE AND RELIEF OP. ON IN BENGAL

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MAY 26

In a large scale rescue and relief operation in cyclone-hit West Bengal the Indian Army and Indian Coast Guard on Wednesday evacuated around 800 villagers stranded in East Midnapore and Howrah, which are among the worst-affected districts.

Eastern Command spokesperson Wing Commander Mandeep Huda said that around 700 villagers were rescued by the Army soldiers from the flooded areas of the two districts. Most of the rescued are from East Midnapore.

At Bodhra, more than 500 people were rescued while 50 more were evacuated from New Digha Market apart from 32 others from Old Digha Natun Kali Temple and 15 from another place in Old Digha. In Howrah the Army jawans conducted evacuation at Orphull.

The Indian Coast Guard informed that it shifted around 100 people to safer places in its hovercraft after the group was found stranded at Nayachar Islands near Haldia in East Midnapore.

It stated, "Headquarters, Coast Guard Region (North East) at Kolkata is monitoring the overall situation and directing the Coast Guard Commanders/ Stations of both the states to execute the relief operations on ground. Three Coast Guard ships along with onboard helicopter, already on operational mission in the Bay of Bengal, have been diverted to coastal areas of both states with fastest speed to assess the situation in area and render appropriate assistance to any mariner in distress. They will be joined by two more ships to augment the efforts at sea. Coast Guard Dornier aircraft will be carrying out aerial reconnaissance of the affected areas on improvement of weather."

It added, "Two inflatable boats have been dispatched to Contai/Digha area."

Cyclone Yaas: Tidal water flows into Haldia dock; assets safe

Kolkata, May 26: The cyclone Yaas has put the Kolkata port authorities on tenterhooks for some time as the rising water of the Hooghly river surpassed the height of the external lock gate of its Haldia Dock System, leading the draught level to go up to around eight metres on Wednesday, an official said.

However, water entered into the lock barrel the area between external and internal lock gates for not more than 30 minutes and no damage was done to ships or assets of the

Haldia Dock system in Purba Medinipur district, port chairman Vinit Kumar said. Lock gates help Haldia dock to maintain the required draught level at berths. Being a riverine port, the level of draught (the depth of water required to float a ship) is very crucial for ships coming in and going out of the facility.

Kumar, who was in Kolkata, and Union Shipping Minister Mansukh Mandaviya from Delhi were monitoring the cyclone situation to ensure that prompt action

is taken in case of any eventuality, officials said.

"The situation is well under control. All ships and equipment assets are secured. There is no casualty. Water seeped into the barrel and the tide led the draught to rise to eight meters while the height of the lock gate is seven meters," Kumar said.

However, an official of the Haldia Dock said that they were on tenterhooks for some time but the problem was temporary.

"There was no major problem. Pumps are pressed into service to

drain out the extra water," he said. Kumar said that he is not expecting any major damage in the port due to the cyclone.

"A clear picture would emerge after more reports come. Shipping operations will begin once the effects of the cyclone are dissipated," said the chairman of the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port.

Meanwhile, it was learnt that six deer that strayed into residential areas from the Sundarbans, amid the cyclone were rescued and sent back to their habitat.

People living in darkness

Balasore, May 26: Trees and electric poles were uprooted, low-lying areas inundated while kutcha houses were badly damaged as cyclone Yaas left a trail of destruction in Odisha's coastal districts of Balasore and Bhadrak on Wednesday.

Residents of several parts of the two districts, which bore the brunt of the 'very severe cyclonic storm', are staying without power since Tuesday night while many people have been evacuated to safer places by the government.

Officials are yet to assess the damages caused by the storm in the two districts but said that it appears that devastations have

been less than previously feared.

"There has been a lot of damage here. Many trees and electric poles have been uprooted and there was very heavy rainfall," Sritam Mahajan, a resident of Soro town in Balasore district said.

"Now, there is intermittent rainfall, though the winds have subsided," said Mahajan, 27, adding that his area was out of electricity since Tuesday night.

He said he would try to arrange a generator so that he can continue working from home.

Pradyut Mohapatra, a 60-year-old resident of Balasore town, also said that there has been no

electricity in his house and was apprehensive that the power supply might not be restored anytime soon.

Sangram Tripathy, a resident of Chhadabali in Bhadrak district, said that the tiled roof of his house got partly blown away in heavy wind and agricultural fields near his house got inundated due to the storm surge.

He said that there had been no electricity in his house since Monday night.

Special Relief Commissioner PK Jena said that the administration is yet to assess the damages in Balasore and Bhadrak district.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

JAPAN BOAT, RUSSIA SHIP COLLIDE, 3 DIE

Tokyo, May 26: A Japanese fishing boat collided with a Russian ship off the northern island of Hokkaido on Wednesday, killing three crew members, Tokyo said.

Japan's coast guard was informed that five crew members from the fishing boat were recovered by a Russian cargo ship, government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told reporters.

"We have been told that three were confirmed dead, while the remaining two suffered non-life threatening injuries," he added.

Japan and Russia are locked in a sovereignty dispute over four islands administered by Moscow, which refers to them as the southern Kurils.

Tokyo claims the islands, which it calls the Northern Territories, and the dispute has prevented the two countries from signing a formal peace treaty since World War II.

Fishing vessels in the area have sometimes been involved in tensions.

U.S. CUTS MEXICO'S AVIATION SAFETY RATING

Washington, May 26: US regulators have downgraded Mexico's aviation safety rating, a move that prevents Mexican airlines from expanding flights to the United States just as travel is recovering from the pandemic.

The Federal Aviation Administration said Tuesday it downgraded Mexico after finding that the country does not meet standards set by a United Nations aviation group.

The downgrade means that US airlines won't be able to sell tickets on flights operated by Mexican airlines, a setback that will mainly hit Delta, which has a partnership with Aeromexico.

The FAA said it will increase scrutiny of Mexican flights to the United States, but the downgrade does not immediately affect current flights.

The FAA decision to lower Mexico from "Category 1" to "Category 2" puts it in a group of countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan and Thailand.

ZUMA PLEADS NOT GUILTY IN GRAFT TRIAL

Pietermaritzburg, May 26: South Africa's former president, Jacob Zuma, pleaded not guilty on Wednesday in a much-postponed corruption case dating back more than two decades.

The 79-year-old faces 16 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering relating to a 1999 purchase of fighter jets, patrol boats and military gear from five European arms firms for 30 billion rand, then the equivalent of nearly \$5 billion.

Zuma — who at the time was president Thabo Mbeki's deputy — is accused of accepting bribes totalling four million rand from one of the firms, French defence giant Thales. Impeccably dressed in a dark blue suit and a red tie, wearing an anti-coronavirus mask, he was repeatedly asked by the judge, Piet Koen, to confirm in person the response of his attorney, given "the magnitude of what we're dealing with."

"I plead not guilty," Zuma said without hesitating.

Thales also pleaded not guilty to charges of corruption and money laundering.

PAK JOURNALIST ATTACKED FOR CRITICISING ARMY

Islamabad, May 26: A Pakistani journalist, known for his criticism of the armed forces, has been attacked by unknown assailants outside his home in Islamabad, in another series of assaults on media persons.

Asad Ali Toor, who is also a YouTuber, was tied, gagged, severely beaten outside his residence in the upscale F-10 sector late on Tuesday night, according to police. A video showed three men briskly walking away from the apartment building after thrashing Toor who was staggering and trying to recollect himself.

Another video showed Toor moving in a hospital with his shirt soaked in blood at his elbow but apparently out of danger. Talking about the details of the incident in the clip, Toor said the attackers had asked him about the source of his funds. He also revealed in a separate video that he was being threatened and was informed by a "well-wisher" of some attack after Eid. Last year, a case was registered against Toor, a known critic of the armed forces.

EU asks for big penalties against AZ

European Commission begins legal action as pharmaceutical company failed to give vax

Brussels, May 26: The European Union on Wednesday asked a Belgian court to impose penalties running to millions of euros per day on AstraZeneca for Covid-19 vaccine doses it has failed to deliver to the bloc.

The request came as EU countries and their executive, the European Commission, began legal action against the Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical company for "flagrant violation" of its contract with Brussels.

The EU is suing AstraZeneca to force it to deliver 90 million more doses of its coronavirus vaccine before July, arguing that it failed in its contractual duty by handing over only a quarter of the shots it promised for the first three months of 2021.

The deadline for the contract is set for mid-June, according to the Commission, and the EU says the company should face financial penalties if it does not meet this deadline.

Its legal team demanded an upfront fine of 10 million euros (\$12 million) plus "10 euros per dose and per day of delay" in that event.

AstraZeneca delivered only 30 million doses in the first quarter, out of the 120 million it was contracted to supply. For the current quarter which runs until June 30, it plans to deliver only 70 million of the 180 million doses initially promised.

A Commission official close to the case said this month that AstraZeneca was currently delivering doses at a rate of only 10 million per month, well below the planned pace.

The company's defence — articulated ahead of the court case in a series of media interviews by AstraZeneca's French-Australian boss Pascal Soriot — relies on a part of the contract that speaks of "best reasonable efforts" by AstraZeneca and declarations that production was hit by unavoidable delays.

But the lawyer for the EU, Rafael Jeffareli, argued in court that the firm had prioritised supplies to Britain and beyond, while failing to make the best effort to step up production at its EU site in the Netherlands. — *AFF*

PAKISTAN OPENS JABS TO ALL ADULTS

Islamabad, May 26: Pakistan is offering jabs to its entire adult population in hopes of boosting Covid-19 vaccination rates, with only five per cent of the population inoculated so far.

Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar announced on Twitter that the registration of those ages 19 and above will begin from Thursday.

So far, the vaccination was open to those 30 years and above.

Pakistan has reported a steady decline in infections and fatalities from Covid-19 in recent days, but the vaccination response has been sluggish. The only shots given are three Chinese-made vaccines.

Pakistan has registered 908,576 confirmed cases and 20,465 deaths since last year. — *AP*



A photograph taken on Wednesday shows placards stuck on buses windscreens reading "SOS coach operator in danger", "Who's our minister", "Help" and "Silence we are sinking" during a slow-down operation in front of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, in Paris to protest against the lack of help by the French government concerning the professional situation of bus drivers due to the Covid-19 pandemic. — *AFF*

UK study finds long-term lung damage after Covid

London, May 26: Researchers in the UK have identified persistent damage to lungs in Covid-19 patients at least three months after they were discharged from hospital, and in some cases the duration is even longer.

The study, conducted by Sheffield and Oxford researchers using a cutting-edge method of imaging, said the damage was not detected by routine CT

scans and clinical tests, and the patients would consequently normally be told their lungs are normal. Early research by the team has shown that patients who have not been hospitalised with Covid-19 but who are experiencing long-term breathlessness may have similar damage in their lungs, and a larger study is needed to confirm this, a release by the Sheffield University said

on Wednesday.

In a paper published in Radiology, the world's leading radiology journal, the researchers from the University of Sheffield and the University of Oxford said 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. — *PTI*

TWO INDIANS OF FIRE-HIT SHIP TEST VIRUS +VE

Colombo, May 26: Two Indian crew members, who were rescued from a container ship that caught fire off the coast of Sri Lanka last week, have tested positive for Covid-19, according to a media report on Wednesday.

All 25 crew members, including five Indians, of the container ship, MV 'X-PRESS PEARL', were rescued on Tuesday after a 'fire alarm' dispatch was sent.

Of the five Indians, two of them sustained injuries during the rescue operation and were hospitalised at the Colombo National Hospital.

The two Indians tested positive with Covid-19 after undergoing a rapid antigen test (RAT) at a private hospital, reported newspaper *Daily Mirror* on Wednesday.

The Indians have not yet been identified. According to Johns Hopkins University, the Coronavirus has claimed 1,269 lives in Sri Lanka so far, along with 169,900 confirmed cases. Sri Lanka has received 500,000 doses of Sinopharm Coronavirus vaccine donated by China. — *PTI*

WHO asked to review Italy report, whistleblower case

Rome, May 26: Whistleblower protection groups urged the World Health Organisation on Wednesday to launch an independent review into the case of an Italian researcher who reported being pressured to falsify data in a now-spiked WHO report into Italy's Coronavirus response.

The groups, including Transparency International, Whistleblowing International Network and some 30 other public health

and anti-corruption groups, sent an open letter to the president of the World Health Assembly.

The assembly, WHO's highest decision-making body, is made up of all WHO member states and is meeting this week.

In the letter, the signatories called for the UN agency to commit to reforming its whistleblowing protection policy. They said the Italian researcher, Dr. Francesco Zambon, had suffered retaliatory

treatment for having reported the incident within WHO's internal ethics system.

Zambon resigned in March, saying he had been isolated and marginalised after he complained internally, and then publicly, about the scandal.

Zambon has said he was pressured by a then-assistant director general, Dr. Ranieri Guerra, to falsify data about Italy's preparedness going into the pandemic. — *AP*

Taiwan: China curbing vax deal

Taipei, May 26: Taiwan on Wednesday accused China of hindering its efforts to obtain Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines from Germany as it struggles with a sudden spike in Coronavirus cases and a slow inoculation campaign.

For much of the Coronavirus pandemic Taiwan has had one of the world's best responses. But a sudden outbreak and trouble securing enough vaccines has taken the shine off that fight. On Wednesday President Tsai Ing-wen explicitly accused China of being a stumbling block to getting Pfizer shots.

"We had almost completed the contract-signing with the German manufacturer at one point but it

has been delayed till now because China has interfered," Tsai said in a post on her Facebook page.

Back in February Taiwanese officials previously hinted China was causing difficulties, but officials steered clear of explicitly naming Beijing.

Authoritarian China regards democratic and self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and works to keep the island diplomatically isolated.

Taiwan is currently locked out of the World Health Organisation and its annual health summit which is meeting this week. Tsai's administration has not detailed why it believes China has been a stumbling block and Beijing has previously

denied putting up roadblocks. Pfizer-BioNTech's distributor for the Greater China region — which includes Taiwan — is Fosun Pharma based in Shanghai. Taipei has insisted it only wants to deal with the German firm, something which Beijing would likely balk at.

"Only by purchasing (the vaccines) from the original manufacturer can we obtain direct guarantee in quality and safety to avoid legal and political double risks," Tsai said.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian on Wednesday said "Taiwan's access to vaccines from the mainland is smooth," without elaborating further. He also included a swipe at Tsai.

"We don't recognise this so-called President, she is only the leader of a region of China," he added.

BioNTech's German office has previously said it still intends to provide Taiwan with vaccine doses and that discussions were ongoing. Fosun has also said it is willing to supply doses. But still no jabs have materialised.

Taiwan — population 23.5 million — has so far only received some 726,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine via the Covax global sharing scheme and from the manufacturer itself. It has pre-order deals with AstraZeneca, Moderna, the Covax scheme and local vaccine makers to get some 30 million doses. — *AFF*

Ex-top aide: Boris thought Covid 1st wave 'scare story'

London, May 26: Dominic Cummings, the former top aide of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, on Wednesday said that the government had fallen "disastrously short" in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic's first wave in early last year as the premier believed, it was just a "scare story" at that time. In a series of explosive claims during his evidence before a joint House of Commons hearing of the Science and Technology and Health Committees, Johnson's former Chief Strategy Adviser before an unceremonious exit last year declared that the officials in charge of the crisis were "out of their depth" and apologised to the families of those who died in the early days of the pandemic.

"At that stage, the Prime Minister believed it was a scare story, a new swine flu... I certainly told him it wasn't," Cummings told cross-party MPs during the evidence hearing, in reference to the period before the UK went into a complete "stay at home" lockdown to control the spread of the deadly virus on March 23, 2020.

"We have the Prime Minister chairing Cobra [Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms] meetings and he just tells everyone 'it is swine flu, don't worry about it. I'm going to get Chris Whitty to inject me live on TV with Coronavirus so everyone realises it's nothing to be frightened of. That would not actually help serious planning," he said.

Taking on some of the blame himself as one of the senior officials at Downing Street at the time, Cummings defended his stance as he did not feel equipped with all the facts and expertise to pull a so-called "emergency panic button" to push harder for a complete lock-



Boris Johnson

down earlier.

"The truth is, senior ministers, officials, advisers like me fell disastrously short of standards required by the public," he said. "When the public needed us the most, the government failed. I want to apologise to all those families who had people that died... In retrospect, it's completely obvious that many institutions failed," he said.

He also made a withering attack on UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock and claimed that he should have been sacked for 15-20 things including "for lying" to people, an allegation for which he was asked by the parliamentary committee chairs to submit further written evidence. During the questioning, Cummings was asked about the government's preparations for a pandemic in general and whether it was the intention of ministers to allow the virus to spread until there was so-called herd immunity.

He told the MPs the original plan had been for limited intervention, with the hope of achieving herd immunity, but that was abandoned when it became clear the scale of the death toll that would result. In reference to delayed lockdown, he claimed that by mid-March there was still "pushback in the system" against telling people to stay at home. — *PTI*

UK vax plan to cover over-30s

London, May 26: The UK's health service on Wednesday extended its Covid-19 age-based vaccination programme to the next cohort to cover everyone aged 30 and over.

The National Health Service (NHS) said 1 million more people aged 30 and 31 will be invited by text over the coming days, leaving only adults between 18 and 29 yet to get the nod to come forward for their first doses. It is the latest in a series of expansions this month opening up the vaccinations to people in their thirties, who are to be offered an alternative to the Oxford/AstraZeneca jabs — either Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna — following medical advice related to rare blood clot concerns for lower age groups.

"Our vaccination programme is moving at such a phenomenal pace and I am delighted that less than six months after

Margaret Keenan received the first authorised jab in the world, we are now able to open the offer to everyone in their thirties and over," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

"The vaccine is our way out of this pandemic and recent data has shown the life-saving protection a second dose of the jab can give, especially against the new variant (B.1.617.2 variant first discovered in India)," he said.

On the advice of the government and Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), people aged 50 and over and the clinically vulnerable are having their second doses brought forward to counter the spread of the B.1.617.2 variant.

The NHS said it has now delivered almost 32 million first doses of the jab, and well over 19 million of adults have had both doses. — *PTI*

BETTER | ACCESS

Brussels also plans to present by the year end a draft regulation on political advertising

EU wants more from Big Tech against disinformation

Brussels, May 26: The EU on Wednesday tasked tech giants such as Facebook, YouTube and TikTok to do more against disinformation and provide much better access to their algorithms as well as beef up fact-checking.

The proposal is the EU's effort to strengthen its existing code of conduct against disinformation, which was launched in 2018 after revelations that platforms had facilitated and amplified false information in the ramp up to the Brexit vote and elec-

tions in the US in 2016. It was signed by Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and in June 2020 by TikTok, as well as players in the advertising sector.

In the wake of the Covid pandemic, the EU executive is now asking the signatories to go even further in their commitments, which are non-binding and voluntary, at least for now.

The pressure on the companies to deliver is great, given that the EU is also hammering out its Digital Services Act (DSA) that will give Europe power to

slap penalties on Facebook and others when they fail to demonstrate strong action against disinformation. European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova said the stricter and more detailed code of conduct was necessary to better root out "systemic risks" on platforms.

Jourova said that it was time for big tech companies "to stop policing themselves alone and stop allowing to make money on disinformation".

"After the DSA will come into force, this code of

● **THE EUROPEAN Commission is also asking platforms for regular reports with clear benchmarks to assess the measures put in place.**

practice will become semi-obligatory," she warned.

Among the many proposals, the EU is calling for messaging platforms such as Facebook's WhatsApp to also be included, given the vast disinformation campaigns seen in India and elsewhere.

The Commission is also asking platforms for regular reports with clear benchmarks to assess the measures put in place.

In addition, the EU executive is seeking to create a designated task force composed of the code's signatories, representatives of the EU diplomatic service and media regulators from the member states.

The proposals will be discussed with the signatories, who will have to submit a first version of the revised code late this year so that it can be opera-

tional by the beginning of 2022.

Marisa Jimenez Martin, Facebook's director of EU Affairs, said that "the reality is that we think the code works".

"It just needs to be now strengthened and we will work with the other stakeholders to make that happen in the next months," she told reporters.

The code is one of the many EU workstreams to limit the reach of Big Tech. The DSA, along with a companion law, the Digital Markets Act, are

currently under negotiation at the European Parliament and among the 27 member states in wrangling that could take at least another year.

Those proposals, when approved, will give the EU unprecedented powers on defining how Big Tech can operate and do business in Europe. Brussels also plans to present by the end of the year a draft regulation on political advertising and the targeting of users based on their personal data. — *AFF*

DECCAN
Chronicle

27 MAY 2021

Protest in time of Covid
needs urgent resolution

Thousands of farmers protesting against the three laws that will govern Indian agriculture henceforth on Wednesday observed a “black day”, marking the completion of six months of their agitation at the gates of the national capital. “We are not going anywhere,” they said and insisted that they have no plans to go home unless the government listened to them, repealed the three laws and offered them legal guarantee for minimum support price for their produce. They also want protection from the impact of the proposed Electricity Bill. Farmers in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and several other states also joined the protest, called by the umbrella organisation of farmers unions, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM).

The government has been playing hot and cold on the issue of the repeal of the Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

The government must resume talks at the earliest and convince the farmers about its earnestness or be convinced by their fears. Letting the annadatas go on an unending agitation does not behove a democratic government.

It is curious that all the tall figures in the government, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to agriculture minister Narendra Tomar to defence minister Rajnath Singh who tried to mediate with the farmers, have all declared their intention to alleviate the fears of the farming community but they have remained on the streets for the last six months despite 11 rounds of talks!

The farmers have been apprehensive of the intentions of the government when it legally and effectively opens up the Indian farm sector and leaves it for the market forces to control. They cannot be faulted given that the government’s track record of planning and executing its ideas on the ground has been dismal. If its bungling on demonetisation and the introduction of Goods and Services Tax is not enough, then the government’s vanishing act while the nation fell prey to the second wave of the pandemic Covid-19 would add to the fear in the minds of the farming community.

The Opposition parties have also lent their support to the farmers’ demands. The government must stop being obdurate and immediately resume talks with the SKM, they have stated in a letter to the Prime Minister this week, reminding the government that it will help “protect lakhs of our annadatas becoming victims of the pandemic so that they can continue to produce food to feed the Indian people”.

While the government has been saying it had the welfare of the farming community at its heart, anti-social elements have been working overtime to malign the agitation. They almost succeeded in their mission with the drama played out on the Republic Day but for the dexterous move by the Bharat Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait. A similar attempt was made when a section of the media accused the protesters of stopping oxygen carriers to Delhi. That, too, was exposed in no time.

The government must realise that no agitation can be drawn this long unless there is a genuine cause. The government must resume talks at the earliest and convince the farmers about its earnestness or be convinced by their fears. Letting the annadatas go on an unending agitation does not behove a democratic government.

CJI plays a judicious hand

The fresh approach used in the selection of senior IPS officer S.K. Jaiswal, the current head of the CISF, as the new director of the CBI, commends itself.

In the selection meeting last Monday, the Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana, who is on the three-member panel to choose the CBI chief, besides the PM and the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, proposed that a Supreme Court judgment of March 2019 — that an officer should have at least six months’ service remaining in order to be considered for the position of DGP — be extended to the post of CBI director as well. The panel accepted the view.

It is to be hoped that the criterion will henceforth be adopted in selecting the chief of the IB and the R&AW as well. In the case of the appointment of the CBI Director, the government could well have taken shelter behind the CVC Act if it wished to torpedo the CJI’s well-considered suggestion.

But the notion is *ipso facto* sound. In too many cases, officers are selected for top slots with only days, weeks, or a couple of months remaining before their superannuation. This reinforces the impression of favouritism, the absence of neutrality at the highest levels of governance, and gives rise to the undue play of political factors. The ideals of transparency and fair play are undermined. In the event, the country is frequently deprived of the services of the most meritorious amongst those available.

The CBI chief has an assured two-year tenure. This is to reinforce the idea of autonomy and independence in decision-making in so sensitive a position. It is bad enough that the CBI has widely come to be seen as “a caged parrot” — the colourful description once supplied by the Supreme Court. It is now up to its new leader to disabuse us of this impression.

When the high-level panel accepted the CJI’s suggestion, two high-profile officers, who had less than six months’ service left but were deemed close to the powers-that-be, were taken out of contention. For reasons of good governance, this is just as well.

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Subhani



Asymmetry of power
& politics of revenge



Shikha Mukerjee

The asymmetry of power, resources and responsibilities between the Centre and the states in India’s federal structure has been so overwhelmingly tilted that it was but natural for the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to assume that it was unchangeable and universally so, allowing him to try to scare and repress a puny [*sic*] regional party, namely Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamul Congress party, after her splendid third-time victory. He and his party should have known better.

There is the power of the State, expressed through hundreds of articles in the Constitution of India, and then there is the power of the ultimate sovereign, the ordinary woman and man, who votes and delivers a verdict. In a statement that was unusually long and politically sagacious, CPI(M) West Bengal state secretary Surya Kanta Mishra delivered a summary of the attempt to induce turmoil and destabilise the Mamata Banerjee government as “revenge politics,” adding, for good measure, that the “BJP should remember that the people of Bengal rejected their ideology in the Assembly elections”.

That the CBI’s sudden swoop and arrest on May 17 of three Trinamul Congress leaders, two of whom are ministers with responsibilities vital to bringing the Covid-19 surge and the six-week election administrative disarray under control, is vendetta politics is not any doubt in the minds of West Bengal’s voters. The CBI’s raid that netted three TMC leaders and one politician with no party affiliation in a case of bribery and corruption, aka the 2014 Narada sting operation, brought into sharper focus the “washing machine” politics of the BJP. Left out of the list of those arrested

were Mukul Roy and Union home minister Amit Shah’s prize recruit Suwendu Adhikari, prompting the public through the social media to question the exception.

The outcome is a further boost to the Trinamul Congress’ standing with the people and a further erosion of the BJP’s already tarnished credibility. The courtroom drama has further incensed the man/woman on the street, regardless of what the Centre’s lawyers may have argued, backed by the entirely irrelevant social media commentary by governor J.P. Dhankhar.

There is no difference of opinion on what these antics are all about — first the tweets by the governor about the near breakdown of the state’s constitutional machinery that were meant to signal that President’s Rule could be imposed at any moment, overthrowing the just elected government, followed by the raids have been identified by the Congress, CPI(M) and privately by some sane BJP leaders as well. In repeating behaviour similar to cattle raiders to hit back at the Opposition parties, the Narendra Modi government used exactly the same tactics of using or perhaps misusing the power to awe and smear vested in the Centre that had failed; governments led by Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi, Pinarayi Vijayan

In a statement that was unusually long and politically sagacious, CPI(M) West Bengal state secretary Surya Kanta Mishra delivered a summary of the attempt to induce turmoil and destabilise the Mamata Banerjee government as ‘revenge politics’...

The BJP’s wizards have created a bigger problem for themselves out of the West Bengal defeat. The queue of defectors pleading to rejoin the Trinamul Congress is the best indicator. As is the letter from a defeated BJP candidate, Locket Chatterjee...

in Kerala, Hemant Soren in Jharkhand, Uddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra and Ashok Gehlot in Rajasthan were all raided and pushed back and Narendra Modi and his party were the losers.

In the preceding decades the capacity to push back, a complex mix of regional political culture and history that shaped the popular perception, was weaker than it is now. In West Bengal, the capacity to fault the Centre and winkle out vendetta politics against the legitimately elected and popular government has been honed over decades, when the Congress used Article 356 to impose President’s Rule against the rickety coalitions of the United Front in the 1960s. Over years of experience of the politics of discrimination and the consequences of the asymmetry of power between the Centre and the state, the average man in the street and especially in the rural areas, is politically well educated.

If these were diversionary tactics as has been argued in some quarters, it was politically foolish. The frantic family members of all those who died because the Modi government had not taken steps to ensure adequate supplies of oxygen to meet the surge that every expert said was coming are not diverted or deceived. The scandalous incompetence of the ruling establishment to handle the crisis is evident in the number of deaths across the country — three lakhs and counting.

If these were tactics to assert the power of the Centre over the state, it was so badly timed that it has been described by BJP insiders as politically suicidal. Neither West

Bengal’s electorate nor voters across the country are impressed by the display of power when the lives of loved ones have been sacrificed to feed the Modi government’s hubris. There is so much traffic on the social media on this that there can be no room to challenge how the people have interpreted these shenanigans.

What is worse is that the judiciary has now been embroiled in what for the BJP is nothing more than a game that has gone wrong. A split decision on granting bail to the arrested leaders says it all. The simple conclusion, regardless of the complex interpretations by the Centre’s lawyers, is that the decision to arrest by the CBI is doubtful in law. No matter how long these hearings last, it is not possible to repair the political damage that the BJP has inflicted on itself in the people’s court.

The BJP’s wizards have created a bigger problem for themselves out of the West Bengal defeat. The queue of defectors pleading to rejoin the Trinamul Congress is the best indicator. As is the letter from a defeated BJP candidate, Locket Chatterjee, who is still an MP, to Amit Shah asking for the Central security detail to be removed, because she cannot be a protected entity while the party’s workers are unsafe.

Violence to settle political scores, before, during and after an election, is always condemnable; but that unfortunately is West Bengal’s culture. Having flaunted its arsenal of Central security forces to enforce peace before and during the elections, by constructing a narrative of locally uncontrollable violence, the BJP overplayed its hand. The post-election sending out of Central probe teams, frantic tweets by the governor or meddling by the Prime Minister are pointless gestures and understood by the public to be so. The verdict is out, and the BJP cannot overturn it, that West Bengal is not impressed by its leaders and categorically rejects its communal and divisive politics.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

VACCINATION

Now, it’s clear that vaccines have to be procured by the Centre (*Vaccines: Fix schedule, focus on procurement, DC, May 26*). The Opposition leaders are insisting on procurement by the Centre. With the precarious shortage, we may fail to achieve herd immunity before the third wave. As such, the government should leave no stone unturned to get foreign vaccines at the earliest.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

CONCOCTION SUPPLY

Public and Opposition leaders are demanding restoration of Anandaiah’s concoction (*TD: restore supply of Anandaiah’s concoction, DC, May 26*). Before supplying the concoction, clinical trials are necessary to see if it is working temporarily or permanently on Covid patients. Ayush teams are also confused if it is an Ayurvedic medicine or root drug. Without considering any lab reports, if the government restores supply of the concoction, there could be some adverse results. Then the same people and Opposition will criticize the AP government again.

D. Ravikumar
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN
Chronicle

Nations urged to
intervene in
Bangla Dsh

NEW DELHI, May 26.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi today asked the countries of the world to intervene in the situation in Bangla Dsh and to see that peace and security was re-established and maintained there.

Mrs. Gandhi was replying to an eight-hour debate on the genocide in Bangla Dsh and the attacks of Pakistani military forces in the border areas of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. The Prime Minister said the international community must associate with the very critical character of the situation that had now developed.

“Any failure to do so may well indeed lead to disastrous consequences for what was happening in Bangla Dsh is not a political or economic problem but the problem of the very survival of the people,” she said.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Did PM pep talk
with DMs, others
breach protocol?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s pep talk to district magistrates on the Covid-19 issue in an online meeting has got some raising the issue of whether it was right for Mr Modi to interact directly with district magistrates and other officials while bypassing their respective ministers. Moreover, the event was telecast live when, just a few weeks ago, the Centre had objected sharply to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for a live feed during Mr Modi’s meeting with chief ministers.

While seemingly there is nothing wrong with the Prime Minister addressing government officials whenever he chooses to, the question is about propriety and federalism. District officials work under elected state governments and chief ministers and report to them as well. Bypassing the state governments indicates thumbing one’s

nose at the federal structure, which is problematic, it is being said.

Interestingly, Mr Modi’s interaction follows a similar meeting organised by Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal who spoke directly with state education secretaries, overlooking the state education ministers. This was one reason why the Tamil Nadu government boycotted the meeting.

‘DOCS’ IN SERVICE DEPUTED
TO ASSIST MEDICAL TEAMS

Taking a cue from Gujarat which took this step during the first wave of Covid last year, the Haryana government is using IAS and IPS officers who have a medical degree in the state’s fight against the pandemic.

Sources say that five Haryana cadre IAS officers and three IPS officers who have MBBS degrees have been pulled off their administrative duties and directed to

assist medical teams running Covid hospitals in the state. They have been deputed to additional chief secretary for health Rajeev Arora for the creation and administration of 500-bed hospitals in Panipat and Hisar and other related duties.

The IAS officers are Dr Chander Shekhar Khare, Dr R.S. Dhillon, Dr Sangeeta Tetarwal, Dr Manoj Kumar and Dr Vaishali Sharma. The IPS officers are Dr Dheeraj Kumar, Dr Anshu Singla and Dr Arpit Jain. The state government has also deputed 22 senior IAS officers to oversee Covid preparedness in different districts.

No doubt, this is a temporary arrangement to combat the second wave of the pandemic. However, it also coincides with the growing demand by some medical experts and organisations that the government create a special all-India cadre of medical officers along the

lines of the IAS and IPS, etc. If this stopgap measure is successful, it might prod the Centre to seriously consider the demand for a specialised medical service.

TWO SENIOR COPS
LOCK HORNS IN HARYANA

An intra-service battle has erupted in Haryana Police. IGP Y. Puran Kumar, a 2001-batch IPS officer, has filed a petition in the Punjab and Haryana high court against the state police chief Manoj Yadava for alleged “discriminatory behaviour” towards Mr Kumar.

Sources say that Mr Kumar has accused DGP Yadava of “partial attitude, discriminatory treatment and violation of service rules”. He has sought directions from the court to direct the additional chief secretary for home to take immediate decision on his complaints submitted against Mr Yadava.

The spat does not seem to be new.

Mr Kumar has accused Mr Yadava of targeting him since July 2020 “in a vindictive manner” ever since Mr Kumar was posted to Ambala instead of another officer favoured by the DGP. Mr Kumar has also sought directions from the court to restrain Mr Yadava from writing his annual performance appraisal report until the petition is decided.

The feud at the top in the state’s police service has happened at a time when the state is struggling with the Covid epidemic and also dealing with the farmers’ agitation against Central laws, and which shows no sign of disappearing. And when two senior cops take on each other instead of the issues facing Haryana, it can’t bode well for law and order in the state.

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

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,017.52	0.75
Nifty 50	15,301.50	0.61
S&P 500*	4,201.23	0.31
Dollar (₹)	72.78	0.26
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.19	0.00
Euro (₹)	89.19	0.00
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,589.527	1.08
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.59	-0.09
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.559	-0.005

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Mondelez to buy European snack maker Chipita

Mondelez International Inc, the packaged-food giant known for Oreo cookies and Ritz Crackers, agreed to buy European snack maker Chipita SA for about \$2 billion. Chipita had about \$580 million in revenue in 2020 and has "a proven track record of consistent growth from its portfolio of croissant and baked snack brands," Mondelez said. The European firm produces in 13 plants and its goods are delivered to over 50 countries.

PharmEasy completes Medlife acquisition



Online pharmacy PharmEasy said it has completed the acquisition of Medlife to become India's largest healthcare delivery platform. All the users of Medlife would be migrated to PharmEasy. "This acquisition significantly strengthens our position in the healthcare industry, and further helps us in providing quality healthcare to a greater number of households," PharmEasy co-founder Dharmil Sheth said.

Cadila, Taiwan's TLC in pact for black fungus drug

Zydus Cadila and Taiwan-based specialty pharmaceutical firm TLC said they have signed a pact to market liposomal amphotericin B, a critical drug to treat mucormycosis (black fungus), in India. The companies have announced signing of an agreement to commercialise AmphoTLC (amphotericin B liposome for injection 50mg) in India, Zydus Cadila said. TLC will produce and supply AmphoTLC to Zydus.

REIT provides O2, BiPaP machines in Pune, Delhi

Embassy REIT, India's first listed Real Estate Investment Trust and the largest in Asia by area, has sponsored oxygen concentrators and BiPaP machines in Pune and Delhi to ease the burden placed on the existing healthcare infrastructure. Embassy REIT has donated 10 oxygen concentrators with a capacity of 10 lpm each for two hospitals in Pune and 15 BiPaP ventilator machines to a government hospital in Delhi.



MGM's 4,000-title film library to strengthen streaming Amazon to buy MGM Studios for \$8.45 bn

KELLY GILBLOM & SPENCER SOPER MAY 26

Amazon.com Inc agreed to buy the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer movie company for \$8.45 billion, a bet that a nearly century-old Hollywood icon can feed an insatiable demand for streaming content.

The proliferation of streaming services, including newer arrivals such as HBO Max and Disney+, has put pressure on Amazon to acquire more programming. Chief executive officer Jeff Bezos has made no secret of his desire for movie moguldom, and MGM's vast backlog provides an abundance of streaming material, not to mention an opportunity to mine the iconic James Bond and Rocky franchises for new films and television shows.

Moreover, with retail rivals like Walmart Inc rolling out more sophisticated online stores, Amazon must work even harder to keep its 200 million Prime subscribers loyal.

"This jumpstarts them by 50 years," said Michael Pachter, an analyst with Wedbush Securities. "That's really what it comes down to. They weren't going to be able to produce enough content to ever get close to Netflix."

Pachter said that Amazon's studios produce a few hundred hours worth of television shows and movies a year. MGM adds a back catalogue of 25,000 hours that Amazon could



divvy up between its Prime Video offering, or its free-to-stream, ad-supported IMDb TV.

The takeover is Amazon's biggest acquisition since it agreed to buy Whole Foods in 2017 for \$13.7 billion but follows investments of about \$11 billion on content for its streaming video and music services last year alone. Mike Hopkins, senior vice president of Prime Video and Amazon Studios, in a statement pointed to MGM's "deep catalogue" as justification for the purchase.

MGM has been seen as a takeover target for years, but was never able to close a sale before. The company made a fresh push last year, when it reportedly hired advisers to seek offers.

For MGM, the studio that brought James Bond and Scarlett O'Hara to the big screen, the deal provides a finale to a bumpy era of hedge-fund ownership that began with a bankruptcy over a decade ago. MGM's lead shareholder is the Anchorage Capital Group LLC, which became an owner with three other investors as part of a 2010 bankruptcy agreement

that erased about \$4 billion in debt.

MGM's Ebitda rose 48 per cent to about \$307 million last year, lifted by profit from its 4,000-title film library. But with a lack of new releases, sales declined 3 per cent to \$1.5 billion.

Under Anchorage Capital the studio aspired to its old glory—a legacy that includes "Gone With the Wind," the top film of all time in ticket sales, and the biblical classic "Ben-Hur," which shares the record for most Academy Awards at 11.

The new owners hired a moviemaker CEO in Gary Barber, a Hollywood heavyweight known for films such as "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" and "Ace Ventura: Pet Detective." He oversaw a new James Bond movie, "Skyfall," that generated more than \$1 billion in ticket sales—the studio's biggest-grossing film ever—and partnered with Warner Bros on the blockbuster "Hobbit" films.

MGM also branched out into television. The studio took control of the premi-

um cable network Epix, and acquired the TV production company owned by famed producer Mark Burnett, known for creating "Survivor" and "The Apprentice." The studio also created the critically acclaimed series "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Fargo," adding to a lucrative library.

Hedge funds rarely hang on to such investments for more than a few years, and observers long thought that Barber was prepping the studio for sale. In 2017, reports suggested that MGM was in discussions with a Chinese company, though no deal materialised.

MGM traces its roots back to the 1920s merger of Marcus Loew's Metro films with a film company run by Hollywood legend Louis B. Mayer. The studio, while making great pictures like "Dr Zhivago" and "2001: A Space Odyssey," drifted in and out of financial distress in the second half of the 20th century. Over the decades it was owned by Time Inc, CNN founder Ted Turner and more than once by the late billionaire Kirk Kerkorian.

Turner kept much of MGM's library, which is now owned by AT&T Inc's WarnerMedia, soon to be part of Discovery Inc.

"I am very proud that MGM's Lion, which has long evoked the Golden Age of Hollywood, will continue its storied history," said Anchorage CEO Kevin Ulrich, who is chairman of the board of MGM.

—Bloomberg

GST: Centre has to borrow ₹1.58L cr more to pay states

VRISHTI BENIWAL & SUBHADIP SIRCAR MAY 26

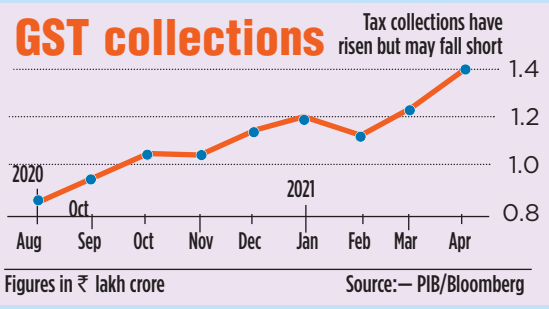
India may need to borrow more for a second straight year to compensate its states for their revenue loss due to a shortfall in a nationwide consumption tax collection, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The additional borrowing requirement is estimated at Rs 1.58 lakh crore (\$21.7 billion) in the fiscal year started April 1, said the people, who asked not to be identified citing rules. A panel on goods and services tax will meet on Friday to discuss compensation to states, among other issues.

While the amount to be paid to states works out to Rs 2.7 lakh crore, the government is expected to muster only Rs 1.1 lakh crore, the people said.

Calls made to a finance ministry spokesperson weren't immediately answered.

The amount is part of a compensation that the central government agreed to pay states for any revenue loss on account of introduction of a nationwide GST. But the economic downturn caused by the world's worst coronavirus outbreak risks hurting tax collection, possibly forcing the administration to consider additional borrow-



Figures in ₹ lakh crore

Source:—PIB/Bloomberg

ings.

Should the borrowing materialise, it will be in addition to the over Rs 12 lakh crore budgeted this year to bridge the fiscal deficit gap. The RBI, has so far, been able to keep yields under check through its various moves such as 'Operation Twist' and the announcement of a Rs 1-lakh crore bond purchase acquisition programme for the current quarter. The benchmark 10-year yield is down 20 basis points to 5.97 per cent this fiscal year.

Any additional borrowing will replicate an arrangement followed last financial year, where New Delhi borrowed Rs 1.1 lakh crore on behalf of the states and passed them on as back-to-back loans, the people said. The decision on the extra borrowing, the amount and the timing would be made after consulting with the Reserve Bank of India and states, the people said.

While the payment to

states was initially supposed to be for five years starting 2017, the central government last year extended its scope beyond 2022 to meet the revenue gap caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Government spending is key to sustaining the recovery of Asia's third-largest economy from a rare recession last year.

Although GST receipts have come in at more than Rs 1 lakh crore each month for seven successive months as of April, there are worries that it will slow amid regional lockdowns implemented by most states to curb the deadly second wave of the pandemic. The economic costs of the recent surge in cases are rising rapidly with economic losses estimated at \$74 billion, all of it contained in the second quarter, Barclays Plc said in a report to clients on Tuesday. The bank lowered its economic growth forecast by 80 basis points to 9.2% for the fiscal year.

—Bloomberg

Kia offers 30-day return on Carnival for unhappy buyers

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 26

Kia India, the fastest selling Korean automaker, on Wednesday said it has rolled out a scheme under which buyers of its premium MPV Carnival can return the vehicle, if they were not satisfied with it, within the first 30 days of buying it and get 95 per cent of the total cost refunded.

Under the 'Satisfaction Guarantee Scheme' offer, private owners of the Carnival luxurious car can return the vehicle if they are not pleased with



the car within the first 30 days of its purchase.

This one-of-a-kind initiative allows buyers to avail of this new offer valid on all variants of the Carnival.

"It will cover 95 per cent of the ex-showroom cost and overhead cost incurred for the registration and finances, etc. of the vehicle," the company

said in a statement.

Available in five trims, the 7-seater Carnival is priced in the Rs 24.95 lakh-Rs 33.95 lakh range at Delhi showroom.

Customers need to ensure that the vehicle has not clocked more than 1,500 kilometres from the purchase date and is completely free of damages, failures, pending claims, to be able to return the car.

Additionally, the owner's agreement for the transfer of the vehicle, including all documentation and charges, etc in the name of a person will be obligatory, the automaker said.

Xiaomi gains from Huawei's exit

May 26: Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi Corp reported first-quarter revenue growth of 55 per cent on Wednesday, exceeding analyst expectations as it nabbed market share from one-time sector leader Huawei Technologies.

Revenue rose to 76.88 billion yuan (\$12 billion) in the quarter ended March 31, from 49.70 billion yuan a year earlier. Analysts

expected revenue of 74.5 billion yen, according to Refinitiv data.

Adjusted net profit rose to 6.1 billion yuan, versus market estimates of 3.97 billion yuan.

Xiaomi's share of the smartphone market in China increased 75 per cent year-on-year in the quarter, according to research firm Canalys, as Huawei retreated from the

market following US trade restrictions that cramped its ability to source key handset components.

Revenue from smartphone sales jumped 69.8 per cent year-over-year to 51.5 billion yuan.

In India, one of its key overseas markets, the company will invest more in online sales as the government imposes strict lockdowns.

—Reuters

Court orders Royal Dutch Shell to cut net emissions by 45%

MIKE CORDER THE HAGUE, MAY 26

A Dutch court on Wednesday ordered Royal Dutch Shell to cut its carbon emissions by net 45 per cent by 2030 compared to 2019 levels in a landmark case brought by climate activism groups, which hailed the decision as a victory for the planet.

The Hague District Court ruled that the Anglo-Dutch energy giant has a duty of care to reduce emissions and that its current reduction plans were not concrete enough.

The decision could set a

precedent for similar cases against polluting multinationals around the world. Activists gathered outside the courtroom erupted into cheers as the decision was read out loud. The climate won today, said Roger Cox, a lawyer for the Dutch arm of Friends of the Earth, one of the organisations behind the case.

This ruling will change the world. Worldwide, people are in the starting blocks to take legal action against oil companies following our example, Cox added.

The Hague court did not say how Royal Dutch Shell

should achieve the ordered cutback, saying the energy giant's parent company has complete freedom in how it meets its reduction obligation and in shaping the Shell group's corporate policy.

In a written reaction, Shell said it expects to appeal the "disappointing court decision."

The firm said it is already investing billions of dollars in low-carbon energy, including electric vehicle charging, hydrogen, renewables and bio-fuels. Shell says it has set an ambition to be a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050.

—AP

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 26

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has collected a total of Rs 1,612 crore as net penalties under GST since its introduction in July 2017. Experts want the CBIC to consider waiver of the penalties for violations, which were resultant of unintentional delays and breaches.

The CBIC collected net penalties of Rs 102 crore for the nine months of financial year 2017-18 since it was introduced in July. For the full year of 2018-19, it collected Rs 480 crore and in 2019-20, the net penalties went up to Rs 570 crore. The net penalties for the 11-month period of 2020-21 till February stood at Rs 460 crore, as per CBIC data, provided as a reply to an RTI filed by a chartered accountant Ram Bajaj from Rajasthan.

Experts find that some of the penalties could have been due to unintentional delays as GST was newly introduced in the country and there were several teething troubles when implemented. Some of the anomalies were corrected

during the subsequent years.

"These are still early stages of the GST law and in the last few years there have been several changes in the law, procedures and compliance timelines. Given the same, some of the penalties may have arisen due to unintentional delays or breaches and in such cases, the government may consider being lenient and waving penalties," said Abhishek Jain, tax partner, EY.

Contrary rulings by GST authorities in different states continue to be a major issue. Experts have been asking for the constitution of a Central Advance Ruling Authority to avoid confusion created by such rulings.

In a recent case related to the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Maharashtra Authority of Advance Rulings held that the liaison office needs to discharge GST on the supplies undertaken by them. The AAR also ruled that the office should obtain GST registration. Earlier, the Advance Ruling Authorities of Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu had held that the liaison office was outside the GST purview.

NO TOLL IF QUEUE IS LONGER THAN 100 METRES



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 26

Vehicles will be allowed to move without paying toll if the queue is longer than 100 metres from the toll booth. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has issued guidelines to ensure seamless flow of traffic at the toll plazas by not allowing vehicles to queue up more than 100 metres.

A yellow line at a distance of 100 metres from toll booth will be marked in each toll lane. This is to inculcate further sense of accountability in toll plaza operators, the NHAI said in a statement.

Waiting time at toll plazas also should not be more than 10 seconds even during peak hours.

The NHAI, said it has transitioned to 100 per cent cashless tolling from mid-February 2021. The overall FasTag penetration in NHAI toll plazas has reached 96 per cent, with many having 99 per cent penetration.

The NHAI said as social distancing has become the new norm, commuters are increasingly looking at FasTag as a toll payment option as it nullifies the chances of any human contact between the drivers and the toll operators.

The constant growth and adoption of FasTag by the highway users is encouraging and has helped in bringing more efficiency in toll operations, it added.

"It has been emphasised to have a new design, and construct the upcoming toll plazas as per traffic projections for the next 10 years to have an efficient toll collection system," it said.

SHORT TAKES

Milkha is stable, wife catches Covid

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh “continues to be stable on oxygen support” and he was on Wednesday shifted out of the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital where he is being treated for Covid pneumonia, indicating signs of improvement in his condition. However, his 82-year-old wife Nirmal Kaur, a former India volleyball captain, was on Wednesday admitted to the same hospital in Mohali after testing positive for Covid pneumonia.

“Mr Milkha Singh continues to be stable on oxygen support. However, he is weak and we are trying to persuade him to increase his food intake,” Fortis hospital in Mohali said in an update. “Today, we have stepped him down from the ICU to a room which he is sharing with his wife who was admitted earlier in the day with Covid pneumonia,” he added. — PTI

Former hoopster Jagan no more

Hyderabad: Basketball Federation of India referee M. Jagannatham, former AP state basketball player and of TSRTC and erstwhile APSRTC breathed his last on Wednesday morning. He is survived by his wife and two sons.

Jagan represented AP state which won the first Sub Junior National Championship at Kothagudem in 1975 and went on to represent AP in the Junior National Championships, Osmania University in the South Zone Inter University Championships before joining the APSRTC.

The Telangana Basketball Association and Hyderabad District Basketball Association condoled the death of Jagan who was also the General Secretary of Medchal Malkajgiri District Basketball Association.

Ex-cricketer Rane passes away

Mumbai: Former Mumbai player and scorer Ranjita Rane died here on Wednesday after battling cancer.

She was in her mid 40s. “Deeply saddened to inform that ex-Mumbai cricketer and scorer Ranjita Rane has passed away,” a senior Mumbai Cricket Association official said. A well-known MCA scorer, who knew Rane, said she was admitted to a city hospital for the past fortnight. Rane, an all-rounder, who bowled medium pace, played 44 first class matches for Mumbai from 1995 to 2003. Another cricketer Prabhuhai Parmar, who had represented Saurashtra in domestic cricket, died due to Covid-19 on Tuesday. The 76-year-old had played four Ranji Trophy matches for Saurashtra in 1968-69. — PTI

Ankita out of French Open race

Paris: Ankita Raina's yet another attempt to qualify for the singles main draw of a Grand Slam failed as she bowed out of the French Open Qualifiers with a second-round defeat, here on Wednesday. Ankita, up against higher-ranked German Greet Minnen, could win only two games in the entire match that lasted one hour and 21 minutes. The 125th ranked Indian could convert only one of the three break-points and eventually lost 2-6, 0-6. It was Ankita's seventh attempt to crack the singles main draw of a major. She had reached the final round of the Australian Open qualifying event early this year, falling at the final stage. — PTI

Davis, James pair too hot for Sun

Los Angeles: Anthony Davis and LeBron James delivered down the stretch on Tuesday as the NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers bounced back to beat the Phoenix Suns 109-102 and knot their playoff series at one game apiece.

Davis had said he blamed himself after scoring just 13 points in the Lakers' 99-90 defeat in game one of the best-of-seven Western Conference first-round series. He wasn't about to let it happen again. Davis scored 34 points while LeBron James added 23 points as the Lakers gained the split of two games in Phoenix. — AFP

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TWEAKING TWINS

Kiwis wary of spinners Ashwin and Jadeja ahead of WTC final

New Delhi, May 26: India's pace attack is on par with New Zealand's world class swing operators but the Black Caps batsman Henry Nicholls is more wary of the threat spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja may pose during the upcoming World Test Championship final. India and New Zealand will fight it out for the inaugural title at Southampton's Ageas Bowl, one of those rare English tracks known to aid the slow bowlers for a considerable period in Test matches.

“India have a very good seam attack and also have the experienced spinners like Ashwin and Jadeja. They have been consistent in all parts of the world (of late) and bring quality (to attack),” Nicholls said.

If there are no injury concerns, the Indian pace troika that is expected to be in the playing XI for the clash starting June 18 would be Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami.

“Mohammed Shami along with Jasprit Bumrah and Ishant Sharma have proven their quality over the years which is similar to our seamers (Trent Boult, Tim Southee and Neil Wagner) on whom we really pride ourselves on.

“So if you are facing that kind of a line-up, it's an exciting challenge and as a group we are expecting it to be tough but also looking forward to the challenge,” he added.

His teammate Devon Conway's strategy of pouring dry kitty litter on the track in order to create rough was backed by Nicholls as they are playing at a “neutral venue” which is known to assist the spinners. — PTI



Indian allrounders Ravichandran Ashwin (left) and Ravindra Jadeja in this file photo.

Kohli, Rohit static in ODI chart

Dubai, May 26: India skipper Virat Kohli and his deputy Rohit Sharma held on to their second and third positions respectively in the batting chart, while pacer Jasprit Bumrah remained static at number five in the bowling list of the latest ICC ODI player rankings issued on Wednesday.

Kohli and Sharma were sitting pretty with 857 and 825 points respectively in the batting list headed by Pakistan's Babar Azam with 865 points.

In bowling, Bumrah was at the 5th position with 690 points, while New Zealand's Trent Boult was

● **Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma were sitting pretty with 857 and 825 points respectively in the batting list headed by Pakistan's Babar Azam with 865 points.**

atop with 737 points, followed by Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan (725), Afghanistan's Mubeeb Ur Rahman (708) and Kiwi pacer Matt Henry (691).

Bangladesh off-spinner Hasan became only the third bowler from his



Virat Kohli

country to be ranked among the top two after a fine showing in the first two matches of their ongoing World Cup Super League series against Sri Lanka.

Hasan has advanced three places to reach the

second position after returning figures of four for 30 and three for 28 bowling with the new ball.

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan had grabbed the number one position in 2009 for the first time, while left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak is the other Bangladesh bowler to have been in the top two, reaching the second position in 2010.

Left-arm fast bowler Mustafizur Rehman is another one from Bangladesh to move up the list, his hauls of three for 34 and three for 16 lifting him eight places to ninth position. — PTI

Umar pays hefty fine, to take part in ACU's rehab

Karachi, May 26: Controversial Pakistan batsman Umar Akmal has paid a hefty fine of 45 lakh (Pakistani) rupees to PCB, which now entitles him to join Anti-Corruption code of the board,

A source in the PCB confirmed that Akmal had deposited the fine imposed on him by the Court of Arbitration for Sports (CAS) in February while disposing off cases filed by the batsman and the PCB.

“Umar has deposited the

full amount of 45 lacs rupees (Pakistani) with the board which means he is now eligible to start the rehab program of the Anti-Corruption code of the board,” the source said.

“But practically it will take some time before Akmal can resume his cricket career as his rehab program will take some time since the anti-corruption unit of the PCB is presently busy with the Pakistan Super League matches to be held in Abu Dhabi next month,” the

source said. Earlier the board had rejected Akmal's request that he be allowed to pay a 45 lacs (Pakistani) rupees fine in installments to pave the way for him to return to cricket after serving a ban since February 2020 for breaching clauses of the Anti-Corruption code.

Umar Akmal, who will turn 31 this month, has not played for Pakistan since November, 2019 when he last appeared in a T20 series at Lahore against Sri Lanka. — PTI

18,000 FANS ALLOWED FOR ENGLAND-N. ZEALAND TEST

London, May 26: Around 18,000 cricket fans will be allowed to attend each day of next month's second Test between England and New Zealand at Edgbaston, which will be the first of the government's next wave of pilot events.

Under current guidelines, smaller outdoor venues are only permitted to be at 25 per cent capacity, but the stadium will be 70 per cent full for the second Test against the Black Caps, which takes place between June 10 and 14.

To gain entry to the ground in Birmingham, each ticket holder will need to present a negative

lateral flow test, taken within the preceding 24 hours. The first Test at Lord's, which starts on June 2, will be played in line with existing regulations, meaning a capacity of around 25 per cent, or around 7,000 people.

“Having crowds back into cricket grounds is so important for the game and for our fans too. The last 15 months have shown just how big a role cricket plays in many people's lives, and we cannot wait to welcome a growing number of fans back to our stadia over the coming months said ECB chief executive Tom Harrison. — AFP

BITTER BRAWL

The shine is off HCA top brass

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 26

The Hyderabad Cricket Association heavyweights got involved in another round of skirmish on Wednesday over a slew of appointments and counter claims.

First, secretary R. Vijayanand sent out a press release stating appointment orders were issued to members of several committees that were finalised at last month's 85th Annual General Meeting, which had continued after president Mohammed Azharuddin adjourned it without completing the agenda and walked out with his supporters even as other members of the Apex Council stayed on.

Azhar hit back saying the appointment letters were invalid as were the appointees and the AGM at which they were picked.

The Cricket Advisory Committee, Cricket Talent, Junior Selection, Umpires, Senior Tournament, Tour and Fixtures, Technical, TTL Governing Council, Grounds, Differently Abled, Technical and Finance, Infrastructure & Law and Women's Selection were among the panels named on Wednesday. “The Women's Selection Committee and Men's Senior Selection Committee will be finalised by CAC and the names given under Women's Selection Committee are only in consideration,” the Secretary's note read.

Popular names to figure

● **Secretary R. Vijayanand issued appointment letters to members of several committees while president Mohammed Azharuddin termed them invalid.**

in the list include former Test players Narasimha Rao and Arshad Ayub; internationals Noel David, Sudeep Tyagi, Sravanthi Naidu and Diana David; Vivek Jaisimha, Vijay Mohan Raj, former Hyderabad captain Nandakishore and a clutch of club secretaries.

“I do not recognise these appointments,” Azhar stated.

“I shall not be held liable as president of HCA and member of the Apex Council for any commitment, promise, compensation, honorarium or any other pecuniary benefit that is conveyed to you through the invalid letter as an entitlement to you by virtue of your appointment,” he addressed the appointees.

The former India captain then threw down the gauntlet. “Let's see how far & how long this goes. Cricket may inadvertently become the victim but this culture of nepotism, using positions in the Association to gratify power groups to strengthen vote banks has been prevalent over ages here. As I mentioned repeatedly in the past, I will not cease,” he signed off.



India's Amit Panghal (left) lands a punch on Mongolia's Kharkhuu Enkhmandakh at the Asian Boxing Championships in Dubai on Wednesday.

Boxers poised for a rich medal haul

Dubai, May 26: Defending champion Amit Panghal (52kg) and the redoubtable Vikas Krishan (69kg) were among three Indian boxers who advanced to the semi-finals on Wednesday as the country assured itself of an unparalleled medal haul of 15 in the Asian Boxing Championships here.

Debutant Varinder Singh (60kg) was the other Indian to make the last four.

Panghal secured a second successive medal after overcoming a stiff challenge from Mongolia's Kharkhuu Enkhmandakh in the last-eight stage, while Varinder defeated Filipino Jere Samuel Dela Cruz 5-0.

India's previous best medal haul was 13 that was achieved in 2019.

The World Championship silver-winning Panghal won 3-2 in a high-octane contest in which he overcame a sluggish start and used his combination punches to telling effect in the last two rounds.

After being somewhat

bested in the opening three minutes, the top-seeded Army man's trademark pace came to fore in the second round as he cleverly dodged his rival's aggressive attempts at connecting.

Meanwhile, National champion Varinder scored on counter-attacks against the swift-moving Dela Cruz to secure a medal on debut at the event.

Late on Tuesday night, Sanjeet (91kg), Sakshi (54kg), Jaismine (57kg) and the Olympic-bound Simranjit Kaur (60kg) joined Shiva Thapa (64kg) in the last four stage following wins in their quarter-final bouts.

They added to the seven medals, including that of six-time world champion M. C. Mary Kom (51kg), that were assured on the day of draws.

India Open gold-winner Sanjeet defeated Jasur Qurbonov of Tajikistan 5-0 to enter the semifinals in the men's draw along with Thapa. — PTI

ACHINTA CLINCHES SILVER IN JUNIOR WEIGHTLIFTING

Tashkent, May 26: Indian lifter Achinta Sheuli shattered seven national records, including three senior marks, en route clinching an overall silver medal in the 73kg category at the Junior World Championship here on Wednesday.

The 19-year-old lifted a personal best of 313kg — 141kg in snatch, followed by 172kg in clean and jerk — at the gold level Olympic qualifier event, creating three new senior and four junior national records.

The Commonwealth Championship gold medalist bettered both his earlier personal best in snatch and clean and jerk by two kilograms each. He had lifted 309kg (139kg+170kg) at the Asian Championships here last month. — PTI