

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | MONDAY 31 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 36°C
Min: 26°C
Rainfall: 4%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Vaikasi 17
Tithi: Panchami
Star: Thiruvonam
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
Yamagandam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.23 am
Luhar: 12.11 pm
Asar: 3.30 pm
Maghrib: 6.31 pm
Isha: 7.49 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.31 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.42 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 10.43 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 11.22 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+1,52,644)	(+3,110)
2,80,46,254	3,29,108

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+28,864) 493
TN: 20,68,580 23,754

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

17,08,98,903

DEATHS

35,53,972

COUNTRIES
AREAS WITH
CASES 219

worldometers.info

Will supply 10 cr Covishield doses in June: Serum

Pune: Serum Institute of India has informed the government that it will be able to manufacture and supply nine to 10 crore doses of Covishield in June, official sources said on Sunday amid complaint by states about the shortage of anti-coronavirus vaccine jabs. In a recent letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, SII said its employees have been working round the clock in spite of various challenges because of the pandemic.

Stan Swamy tests positive for Covid-19

Mumbai: Father Stan Swamy, the 84-year-old Jesuit priest and activist arrested for his alleged involvement in the Elgaar Parishad case, has tested positive for Covid-19. The high court had on Friday directed state prison authorities to shift Swamy who was arrested by the NIA in October last year from Talaja Central Jail in Navi Mumbai to the private Holy Family Hospital for 15 days.

COUNTER POINT



Stay home, stay safe from price rise!

British PM marries, returns to work

London, May 30: Prime Minister Boris Johnson has married his fiancée Carrie Symonds in a secretly-planned wedding at Westminster Cathedral, becoming the first British premier to get married while in office in nearly 200 years. The couple tied the knot at the Roman Catholic Westminster cathedral with a small group of their friends and family present for the ceremony, the Downing Street confirmed on Sunday, hours after the British



media reported the news. “The Prime Minister and Ms. Symonds were married yesterday afternoon in a small ceremony at Westminster Cathedral,” a Downing Street spokesman said. The spokesman added

that the couple would celebrate again with family and friends next summer, with their honeymoon also delayed until then. He has already returned to work, the BBC reported. The wedding was officiated

by Fr Daniel Humphreys, who had given the couple pre-marriage instructions, and oversaw the baptism of their son Wilfred, who was born in April 2020.

This is the first marriage for 33-year-old Carrie Johnson, while it is the 56-year-old Prime Minister’s third. In February 2020, the couple revealed they were engaged and that she was pregnant. The last prime minister to get married while in office was Robert Banks Jenkinson in 1822. — PTI



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Sasikala hints at return to politics



WORLD | 5

Bolsonaro faces protests over pandemic handling

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Cummins to skip IPL phase 2



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India fighting Covid with all its might, asserts PM

■ Modi govt completes 7 yrs ■ Oppn calls it weakest

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, MAY 30

As the BJP-led NDA government completed seven years in office amid India grappling with the second wave of the Covid-9 pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the nation followed the mantra of “sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas” and that “India now moves ahead not under the pressure of other countries but with its own convictions”.

On a day the ruling BJP held welfare programmes across the country to mark the second anniversary of the NDA government’s second term as ‘Sewa Divas’, with party president J.P. Nadda flagging off Covid relief material for Delhi, the Opposition parties claimed the Narendra Modi government had proved to be the “weakest government in the country in the last 73 years”, saying that the government had given the country “unmeasurable pain” as it listed unemployment, petrol prices, inflation, the farmers issue and “mismanagement of the Covid crisis”,



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan distributing free ration to slum dwellers on completion of 7 years of PM Modi led BJP government, in Bhopal, Sunday.

— PTI

among other issues, to attack the government.

Mr Modi, asserting that India was “fighting Covid-19 with all its might”, on Sunday spoke to a number of people ranging from those engaged in transporting medical oxygen to lab technicians, and said the nation’s resolve to prevail over the virus was equal to the magnitude of the challenge it faces.

In his monthly “Mann ki Baat” radio address, Mr Modi noted that the nation also faced several natural disasters, including cyclones, landslides and earthquakes during the pandemic, and said more lives were saved than in the past with the Centre, states and local administrations coming together to carry out relief and rescue operations.

Report says Corona virus was created in Wuhan lab

London, May 30: Amid calls for a fresh probe into the origins of Covid-19, an explosive new study has found that Chinese scientists created the virus in a lab in Wuhan, then tried to cover their tracks by reverse-engineering versions of the virus to make it look like it evolved naturally from bats.

The novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 virus has no “credible natural ancestor” and was created by Chinese scientists who were working on a ‘Gain of Function’ project in a Wuhan lab, the *Daily Mail* reported on Sunday, citing

a new research paper by British professor Angus Dalgleish and Norwegian scientist Dr Birger Sorensen. The new research claims that scientists took a natural coronavirus “backbone” found in Chinese cave bats and spliced onto it a new “spike”, turning it into the deadly and highly transmissible Covid-19.

The paper also quotes that researchers found “unique fingerprints” in Covid-19 samples that they say could only have arisen from manipulation in a laboratory.

Authors Dalgleish and

Sorensen wrote in their paper that they had prima facie evidence of retro-engineering in China for a year, but were ignored by academics and major journals, reported DailyMail.com.

The study alleged “deliberate destruction, concealment or contamination of data” at Chinese labs and notes the silencing and disappearance of scientists in China who spoke out about the activities.

The research, which has been obtained by Daily Mail.com, is expected to intensify the ongoing debate on China’s role. ■ P4

NDRF to have own cryogenic O₂ carriers

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 30

Taking serious note of the acute shortage of oxygen faced across the country during the lethal second wave of the corona pandemic, the Union home ministry, in a major initiative, will soon allow the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to have their own “cryogenic oxygen containers and mini oxygen plants” that can be set up at any required location within a few hours.

The NDRF is a highly

specialised nodal agency of the government to deal with any natural or man-made disaster. The home ministry sources said the government had taken the oxygen shortage in the county extremely seriously and was putting in place a robust mechanism to avoid a repeat of such a situation in future.

Officials claimed a detailed analysis of the oxygen shortage revealed that apart from the sudden increase in the demand the other main reason was transportation of oxygen.

CENTRE TO ALLOT 12 CRORE VACCINE DOSES IN JUNE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 30

India on Sunday registered 1.65 lakh new cases - its lowest count in 46 days. The active caseload has further dipped to 21.14 lakhs and the daily recoveries continue to outnumber the new cases for the 17th consecutive day. The country’s recovery rate has increased to 91.25 per cent and the daily positivity rate at 8.02 per cent continues the streak of less than 10 per cent positivity for six days running. Deaths, however, continue to be high - with 3,460 fatalities recorded in the last 24 hours.

The Centre on Sunday said that nearly 12 crore anti Covid-19 vaccine doses will be made available to the states and Union territories in June, which is 50 per cent more than what they got in May, to boost the nearly halted vaccination drive. However, out of these 12 crores, nearly half will be provided by the Centre directly while the rest will be available for direct procurement by the states/UTs and private hospitals.

The health ministry said states have been informed about the availability of vaccines for June and a delivery schedule will also be shared with them soon for better planning.

Several major cities like Delhi and Mumbai have started witnessing a significant dip in daily cases. Delhi on Sunday had 946 new cases and 78 deaths. The deaths in the national capital have dropped below 100 for the first time in 47 days. In Uttar Pradesh, meanwhile, curfew has been eased in 55 districts from 7 am to 7 pm which have fewer than 600 cases, while the curfew will continue in districts with more than 600 active cases for one more week.

BAN CONTINUES

Italy extends entry ban for Indians

Italy extended Sunday an entry ban for people coming from India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, as a continued precaution against the more transmissible Indian variant of the novel Coronavirus.

■ REPORT ON PAGE 5

Covid spread in western dists must stop, says CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
COIMBATORE, MAY 30

With Covid-19 cases rising in Tamil Nadu’s western districts even as they have been seen coming down in the capital Chennai, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin inspected medical facilities in Erode, Tirupur and Coimbatore districts on Sunday.

Later in the day, the Chief Minister addressed the collectors of four districts of the region and stressed on measures to contain the spread of the infection.

The Chief Minister also inaugurated car ambulance facilities in Tirupur and Coimbatore districts where Innova cars were converted into ambulances to add to the medical infrastructure. Equipped with an emergency oxygen facility, they will be used to ferry Covid patients who are in home isolation to hospitals or Covid care centres quickly and free of cost.

At Erode and Tirupur, Mr Stalin gave appointment orders to doctors and nurses who have been deputed on a temporary basis to work in Covid care health care facilities. The Chief Minister also inspected an impressive array of oxygen beds set up in hospitals and special Covid care centres in the districts.

The Chief Minister was accompanied by the health minister Ma Subramanian and other Cabinet colleagues.



Chief Minister M.K. Stalin being assisted to wear a PPE suit before walkin into a Covid ward in ESI Hospital in Coimbatore on Sunday.

Stalin meets patients, docs in Covid ward

DC CORRESPONDENT
COIMBATORE, MAY 30

Clad in a PPE suit, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin visited the Covid-19 ward and intensive care unit in the Government ESI Hospital in Coimbatore on Sunday. He spoke to patients in the Covid ward while enquiring about their health and the treatment they were getting.

“I entered the Covid ward against advice to reassure doctors and

frontline workers who risk their lives besides patients and their families,” Mr Stalin tweeted. He also tweeted photographs of his visit saying,

“Besides medicine, the comfort and consolation that others provide will cure the disease,” the Chief Minister went on to say in his tweet even as the reassuring message he conveyed was welcomed by patients and doctors in the hospital.

Karate trainer held for molesting girl

NEHA SURANA | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 30

The Chennai police on Sunday picked up E. Kebi Raj, a Karate trainer in the city, on Sunday after a trainee registered a complaint of sexual harassment against him.

Mr Raj, who runs Hi-Impact Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) Academy, has been accused of sexually harassing a girl when she attended a tournament conducted at PSBB Millennium School in the city. He was a Karate trainer in the school when the incident happened.

“The victim is not a PSBB student, but was molested by him while she visited the school for a tournament,” said a source privy to the case on conditions of anonymity.

Apart from training students in his academy, Mr Raj currently teaches students from 15 schools across the city offline and online. He is known for training girl students in

‘self-defence’.

“A few other students have made an official complaint against him, which is still in the process. One of them was a minor when she was sexually abused by him. He will be mostly charged under POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act,” the source added.

Mr Raj is the president of the ITF Taekwon-do Association of Tamil Nadu and general secretary of Tamil Nadu Jujitsu Association. He has won several international medals in Karate and Jujitsu.

A few days before the arrest, a set of allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct against him was circulated on social media which accused him of ‘making inappropriate touches’ and ‘sexual misconduct’. Mr Raj also blackmailed the victim, which led to her quitting the institute and dropping out of judo training, the sources said.

WB chief secy may skip tryst with Centre as Didi yet to relieve him

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MAY 30

Speculation is rife that West Bengal chief secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay may not visit New Delhi on Monday, which is also the date of his retirement, to report to the Centre despite its direction for his deputisation as the Mamata Banerjee government has not relieved him yet from his present post in the state.

The state’s top bureaucrat, who got a three-month extension last week

from the Narendra Modi government after a request from the Trinamul Congress government for his efficiency in handling the Covid-19 pandemic, has been asked to report at 10 am on Monday at North Block, at the department of personnel and training under the ministry of personnel, public grievances and pensions which is headed by the Prime Minister himself.

The order was sent under the provisions of Rule 6(1) of the Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules 1954 on May

28 evening, hours after the 1987 batch IAS officer accompanied the chief minister in skipping the PM’s review meeting on Cyclone Yaas at Kalaikunda Air Force Station in West Midnapore.

While the Trinamul Congress supremo on Saturday appealed to the Prime Minister and Union home minister Amit Shah to withdraw the Centre’s controversial order after attacking them, the state government has received no further communication from the Centre till the

reports last came in on Sunday evening.

On the other hand, the state government has also taken a firm stand by not issuing Mr Bandyopadhyay order for his release, which is essential for all bureaucrats in the all-India service cadres to go for a Central deputation from their places of posting in the state.

It maintains that Mr Bandyopadhyay has not applied for a Central deputation and the Centre had sought neither concurrence nor empanelment for his Central deputation.

OTHER STORIES

Appeal for Covid aid to diff-abled

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 30

Tamil Nadu Udvakkaram Association for the Welfare of Differently Abled has demanded that the government issue an assistance of Rs 2,500 to 13.5 lakh differently-abled persons in the State as they have been facing hardship due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

In a representation, the association stated that last year the government issued ₹1,000 to them as they lost employment opportunities.

On the same lines, the government should consider increasing the amount to ₹2,500. Similarly, they sought of the government a solatium of Rs 10 lakh to the family members of differently-abled persons who died due to Covid-19 and earmark a special ward to Covid patients in government and private hospitals.

Oxygen Express delivers 1,734 MT to Tamil Nadu

Chennai May 30: The Southern Railway has delivered 2,114.21 metric tonnes of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) to Tamil Nadu and Kerala through 32 'Oxygen Express' trains to help these states tide over the difficulties in supply during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As many as 29 loaded Oxygen Express trains have so far delivered 1,734.01 MT of LMO to Tamil Nadu. The last two Oxygen Express trains from Rourkela reached the state with 116.85 MT of the life saving gas on May 29.

Indian Railways has delivered more than 20,770 MT of LMO in more than 1,237 tankers to various states across the country. As many as 305 Oxygen Expresses have completed their journey so far and brought relief to various states.

Running on the high priority Green Corridor, with the highest sense of urgency, Railways is creating new standards and unprecedented benchmarks in running of Oxygen Express Freight Trains, the statement added.

— PTI

Case registered for hiding coronavirus death

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, MAY 30

The Kabisthalam police have registered a case against Pichaiyammal (61) of Vadakku Mudaliar Street for keeping the body of her husband Ramasamy (69), who died of Corona, at her house stating he had a natural death and not due to Covid-19 and conducting a funeral procession.

Ramasamy and Pichaiyammal, who were admitted to Thanjavur medical college hospital following fever, tested positive for Corona on May 25.

Ramasamy died on May 28 and Pichaiyammal and her son took the body in an ambulance to Kabisthalam and kept it in the house the next day from morning till evening stating that the death was not due to Corona.

A funeral procession was also held and VAO, who came to know about the incident, informed the police. The police registered a case.

Following this Covid tests were conducted on 200 persons who attended the funeral on Sunday.

As vendors hike prices during pandemic lockdown

Docs say now is the time to quit smoking

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 30

The extension of the lockdown by the government to contain the spread of Covid-19 has left the smokers nervous with cigarettes becoming dearer due to a thriving black-market. With lockdown restrictions in place, the usual cigarette shops are shut.

Taking advantage of the situation and with their stocks running out, the vendors have hiked cigarette prices by ₹70 per pack.

A smoker in Ramapuram, who ran out of stock, told DC that retail sellers were creating an artificial shortage to mint money in this tough time. "I used to buy Wills Ice Burst for Rs 330 per pack before lockdown. When the lockdown was announced, the retailers asked for ₹20 over MRP

Apart from asking for a premium, stores have also begun rationing sales, by limiting the number of packs one can buy. During initial days, grocery shops had sufficient stocks and some even displayed packets in locked glass shelves near the entrance.

When asked about the price hike, a shopkeeper said he could do nothing in this regard. "We can't negotiate with distributors these days. If you want cigarettes, you have to pay what they ask for. The suppliers are citing shortage as the reason for the price hike. I hope the price will become normal and one supply chain will be active after lockdown. Till then, the high rate will continue," he said.

Dr Saravana Bharathy, consultant, internal medicine, Dr Mehta's Hospitals, reacting to the issue on World No-Tobacco Day on Sunday, said, "Tobacco control is a greater challenge than ever for health policy makers and health-

limiting the number of packs one can buy. During initial days, grocery shops had sufficient stocks and some even displayed packets in locked glass shelves near the entrance.

When asked about the price hike, a shopkeeper said he could do nothing in this regard. "We can't negotiate with distributors these days. If you want cigarettes, you have to pay what they ask for. The suppliers are citing shortage as the reason for the price hike. I hope the price will become normal and one supply chain will be active after lockdown. Till then, the high rate will continue," he said.

Dr Saravana Bharathy, consultant, internal medicine, Dr Mehta's Hospitals, reacting to the issue on World No-Tobacco Day on Sunday, said, "Tobacco control is a greater challenge than ever for health policy makers and health-

care providers during this pandemic. The smokers can use lockdowns as the first step towards quitting this bad habit. The World No-tobacco Day reminds us of the need for vigilant public health measures to combat smoking. Healthcare providers should provide evidence-based pharmacological treatment and behavioural smoking cessation therapies with remote support post pandemic," he said.

Dr Sindhura Koganti, associate consultant, Fortis Malar Hospital, also said that this is the best opportunity if you are willing to quit smoking. "During the lockdown, the number of cigarettes a smoker uses has come down. There are alternatives also like nicotine patches to reduce your urge. And there is no conclusive study on nicotine impact among Covid-19 patients," she said.

New Covid-19 cases continue to dip in TN, city

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 30

The dip in the number of new Covid-19 cases continues. On Sunday, 28, 864 new cases were found from among 1.62 lakh people tested.

The fatality rates does, however, continue to be high with 493 deaths being recorded in a 24-hour period, which is higher than the 486 Covid deaths recorded in the previous 24-hour period. Of the deaths, 93 were from the city while the districts saw 400 deaths.

The number of active cases on date in the state is 3.05 lakh while in the city the figure was 35,423. The dip in new cases in Chennai was evident in a count of 2,689 on Sunday.

Among districts Coimbatore continued to record the maximum number of cases with 3,537 followed by Chennai 2,689 cases, Erode 1,784, Tiruppur 1,496, Salem 1,295, Chengalpatt 1,194, and Tiruchirappalli 1,128.

The number of samples tested today was 1,73,351 pushing the cumulative number of specimens examined so far to 2.75 crore.



Health secretary Radhakrishnan inspects new arrangement of 130 beds along with oxygen facilities at Chrompet GH. — DC

Puducherry logs 930 new Covid-19 cases, 21 deaths

Puducherry, May 30: The union territory of Puducherry added 930 fresh coronavirus cases during the last 24 hours taking the overall case-load to 1,03,826, a senior official of Department of Health and Family Welfare Services said on Sunday.

Twenty-one more people succumbed to the virus in the last 24 hours pushing the toll to 1,518, Director of Health and Family Welfare Services S Mohan Kumar said. Twelve of the deceased were women, he said, adding 15 of the victims hailed from Puducherry, followed by Karaikal (3), Yanam (2) and Mahe (1).

The 930 new cases were identified at the end of the examination of 8,437 samples during the last 24 hours, the Health Department Director added. While the

The number of active cases in the union territory stood at 12,167 with 10,532 patients in home isolation and the remaining 1,635 in hospitals. As many as 1,895 patients recovered and were discharged during the last 24 hours. The fatality and recovery rates were 1.46 per cent and 86.82 per cent respectively.

The Health department Director said that so far 1.04 lakh samples were tested and it was found that 9.03 lakh of them were negative. The number of active cases stood at 12,167.

In all, 90,141 patients had recovered and were discharged so far while 34,681 healthcare workers and 21,673 frontline workers have been inoculated so far and 1,53,623 people coming under the category of either senior citizens (60+) or those above 45+ with comorbidities have been vaccinated since May 1.

— PTI



Youngsters stand in queue to get vaccinated against the coronavirus at Kodambakkam. — DC

Nasal cannulas spread viral load, says Prof

ARUL P. | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 30

Professor Harish Hirani, Director of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CMERI), fears that Nasal Cannulas, when used for oxygen therapy carry the risk of transmitting enormous amounts of viral load to attending healthcare personnel present nearby.

Addressing a webinar, Prof. Hirani suggested that at least N95 masks should be worn over the Nasal Cannula to help arrest the viral load transmission. Advanced versions of NIV hoods and NIV masks might also provide a solution to prevent the virus spread.

About 30 to 40 percent of oxygen supplied to Covid-19 patients goes waste as most of the oxygen related technologies available in

Addressing a webinar, Prof. Hirani suggested that at least N95 masks should be worn over the Nasal Cannula to help arrest the viral load transmission. Advanced versions of NIV hoods and NIV masks might also provide a solution to prevent the virus spread

the markets are not tailor-made to tackle patients with transmissible diseases, he pointed out. Various scientific reports reveal that oxygen has been supplied to patients indiscriminately and during a single complete respiration cycle the process of inhalation uses only a third of the total time. These practices render almost 30 percent to 40 percent of the supplied oxygen go waste.

This is because most of the oxygen related technologies available in the markets are based upon only providing oxygen therapy for the patients and they are not tailor-made to tackle patients with transmissible diseases. He said there is a need to explore avenues for generating and moderating oxygen in a decentralised manner. This will help in tremendously cutting down complex oxygen transportation logistics related issues as well as help opening up oxygen facilities in small clinics and small private hospitals, thereby substantially reducing dependence upon large medical establishments.

The webinar on 'Oxygen Enrichment Technology' was organised in association with the Indian Medical Association, Tamil Nadu, for doctors and associated medical fraternity.



Koyambedu wholesale vegetable market has been opened for vendors during the complete lockdown in Chennai. — DC

New labour codes decoded in webinar

Chennai, May 28: In a webinar arranged by Aparajitha Corporate Services Private Limited, the delay in implementation of the new labour codes amidst the resurgence of the pandemic crisis was explained in detail.

The session also highlighted that corporates need to learn and understand the codes in their current form and be ready to adopt them as and when

the date of commencement is announced despite the lack of clarity of how long the current situation might last.

Mr. Nagaraj Krishnan, MD, Aparajitha Corporate Service said, "The webinar session aimed to educate people that the labour codes will be active once things return to normal and that by not being ready companies can land into being scenarios of being non-compliant

which might lead to facing unnecessary penalties. In fact we feel companies can use this time to revamp their policies on HR and salaries to smoothen the transition."

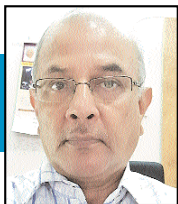
An overview of the new codes (The Code on Wages, 2019, on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2020, on Social Security, 2020, and on Industrial Relations, 2020) and their amendments revealed how

they may act as a new set of regulations consolidating the earlier largely cluttered 44 labour laws.

A roadmap was also given on how to adapt to and implement this change as this transition will not be easy and will require revamping the current aspects of employment contracts, HR policies, salary and bonus structures.

— DC

Netas' war of words serves no purpose



R. Mohan

Namma Chennai Diary

The politics amid the pandemic enhances only the image of the world's loudest democracy which is India. The infernal pathogen may be eating away at the vitals of our health infrastructure in its second avatar and taking away people who were perfectly healthy just days ago. That does not, however, stop our politicians from fighting their verbal battles as if the new wave is just an extension of their electoral war.

It is ironic that polls should have helped spread the India-dominant variant, or to use its scientific term of B.1.617 lest the ultra sensitive government take offence.

Politics of the peculiar Indian kind was ensuring that name calling went on at the same speed as the coronavirus was spreading. The mismanagement of the coronavirus pandemic after responding well in a national cause in the first lockdown,

despite all the unexpected problems that came in its wake, is squarely of those leading governments around the country, at the Centre and in the States. The early declaration of victory against the virus and the triumphalism behind the message may have led us down a garden path. But why did everyone fall for it hook, line and sinker that none even gave a thought to a second wave proving to be so overwhelming?

Having declared the pandemic a national disaster under the Disaster Management Act as early as in March 2020, it was incumbent upon the Centre to take over fully the reins of management of the disaster.

They were eager to do so

but while being quick to claim any positives arising from nationwide action, they were seen to be chary of accepting the responsibility when failure loomed in their handling of the national vaccine programme. They veered off science when it came to trusting the vaccine as the only passable aid in ensuring a rise in the immunity of all Indians.

The Indian government was the principal culprit in misjudging the universal need for vaccines as well as the numbers in India which are so overwhelming as to be self-defeating. Did they honestly believe 100 crore among 135 crore people could be given a two-dose immunity booster through the vaccine without any planning and without back-

ing the production of the large amounts of the vaccines needed to cover the population. The West did and not only because they had the money. They knew the vaccine was the answer to raising the immunity in a whole community.

What do we have now in the face of immense failure when only 42% of the most vulnerable population in the over-60 has been vaccinated when we are well into the fifth month of the programme that was kicked off on January 16, 2021? Only 12% of the population has had at least one jab and only 3.1% have received both doses so far whereas the most successful countries in the vaccine programme like Israel have fully vaccinated close to 60% of their population.

Vaccine hesitancy was viciously promoted against Covaxin by those in the national Opposition, but who are in power in several States and are as much to blame for the overall lack of vision regarding the vaccine being the route to boosting immunity. The Centre just did not possess the foresight to promote the production of vaccines by giving the manufacturers the money and the early support they needed. To give universal access to the jab, India had to be far less miserly than they were in doling out direct relief to the people.

Government triumphalism and vaccine hesitancy promoted by the Opposition were the two ruinous factors that led to this apocalyptic setting of 2021 in

which hospitals were overrun and crematoriums were full and bodies were found floating in the river or buried in riverine sand. But even now the politicians are only arguing about it in their ugly war of words.

The ruling party is fully into image management mode while some prominent leaders in the Opposition are unable to reply to the challenge whether they have taken the vaccine themselves while they go about lambasting the Centre for the mess the vaccine programme is in. Both are culpable of ignoring the public who are most affected while they are going at each other like Sumo wrestlers.

Why did the Opposition press for it and why did the Centre give in to make the

vaccination universal from 18+ since May 1 when they knew that the country is well short of the vials required?

This blame game between two sets of politicians, who have proved to be not so competent in governance at the Centre and in the States, is incessantly noisy. And the foreign minister is more worried about the negativity of international headlines about India than pushing for access to raw materials for increased production of vaccines.

The vaccine programme is a royal mess thanks to our netas.

(R. Mohan is the Resident Editor of the Chennai and Coimbatore editions of Deccan Chronicle)

OTHER STORIES

LJD minorities wing blasts Swamy

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MAY 30

The minorities wing of the Tamil Nadu Loktantrik Janata Dal (LJD) has condemned BJP leader Subramanian Swamy for threatening the DMK government by saying that if it attempts to damage the reputation of a Chennai school in the name of holding a probe into the sexual harassment case, there is no other alternative than to topple the government.

In a release at Tiruchy on Sunday, LJD's minorities wing state president J. Robert Christy said Dr Swamy had unnecessarily threatened the DMK government which has an absolute majority. Dr Swamy should withdraw his anti-democratic remarks against the DMK government; otherwise the LJD's minority wing will organise a state-wide black flag demonstration against him, Christy added.

23 fishers rejoin families in Nagai

DC CORRESPONDENT
NAGAPATTINAM, MAY 30

Twenty-three fishermen of Ariyanattu Thuru in Nagapattinam district, who were caught in the recent storm while fishing in the sea on two mechanised boats off the Kochi shore, returned home on Sunday.

Official sources said the fishermen and their boats were brought to the Cochin Harbour on Friday. From there they reached their home via Pamban. However, the search operation for nine other fishermen of Samanthanpettai fishermen hamlet whose mechanised boat capsized mid-sea in the storm is still going on, sources added.

Covid patient commits suicide at Tiruchy

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MAY 30

A 41-year-old Covid-19 patient, undergoing treatment at the Corona care centre at National Institute of Technology-Tiruchy, committed suicide by jumping out of the second floor of the NIT-T building on Saturday night.

Police said the deceased, Arokiaraj, and his wife Johnsi Rani were undergoing treatment for Covid-19 at the NIT-T centre. The deceased was allegedly an alcoholic. He was rushed to the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Government hospital here where he succumbed to injuries on Sunday morning, police added.

A. Raja's wife laid to rest

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC
PERAMBALUR, MAY 30

The mortal remains of Parameswari, wife of former union minister and DMK's deputy general secretary A. Raja MP, who died at a private hospital in Chennai on Saturday after a brief illness, were laid to rest at their farmland at Veloor village near Perambalur on Sunday.

Her body was placed at their house at Veloor for public homage in which scores of the general public, DMK youth wing leader Udhayanidhi Stalin MLA, ministers K.N. Nehru, M.R.K. Panneerselvam, Ramachandran, S. Raghupathy, Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, S.S. Sivasankar, P. Moorthy, Anita Radhakrishnan and C.V. Ganesan, DMK treasurer T.R. Bala MP, DMK MLAS and MPs, political party leaders, P. Srivenskatapriya, Perambalur collector, Anne Vijaya, DIG of police Tiruchy range, Nisha Parthiban, Superintendent of Police, Perambalur, and others paid their homage.



DMK's deputy general secretary A. Raja's wife Parameswari.



Wall painting by a sponsoring company adorns Ranipet flyover. — K. Senthil Nathan

Mythili Sivaraman no more

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 30

One of the prominent faces of AIDWA (All India Democratic Women's Association) since the founding of the pioneering women's organization in Chennai and a well-known Leftist activist-writer, Mythili Sivaraman, passed away at the age of 81 on Sunday. Survived by husband Karunakaran, daughter Kalpana Karunakaran, innumerable fellow travelers in the Left movement, followers and admirers, Mythili Sivaraman was a feminist par excellence, inspiring several generations of women to fight for their rights.

Though born into privilege – she was educated at Syracuse University in New York and had a promising job with the United Nations way back in the 1960s – she chose to come to India and work among the poor, particularly women.

She was one of the few to

document the 1968 Keezhvenmani massacre in English after visiting the village, where 44 poor Dalits, demanding reasonable wages, were brutally killed by a landlord. Ever since she had been writing exhaustively on a wide range of subjects relating to caste, class and gender.

A founder of AIDWA, Mythili Sivaraman was its former Vice President even as she was an active leader of the CPI(M), associating herself with the CITU and taking active part in workers' struggles. She also played a prominent role in bringing to light the 1992 Vachathi rape case in which scores of forest and revenue officials raided the tribal village in Dharmapuri district and raped women.

Though Mythili Sivaraman had not been doing well for a long time due to Alzheimer's and kept herself away from active politics, the news of her death due to Covid-19 came as a shock to many of her friends and comrades. For, she had worked

with a wide range of activists on a variety of causes through her career.

Even the younger generation of feminists wrote eulogies, thanking her for being an inspiration to them. The elder generation of Leftists had too many incidents to share on social media about her activities.

Condolences to the family also poured in from all quarters. Chief Minister M. K. Stalin said Tamil Nadu and CPI(M) have lost a fierce woman revolutionary. Also top CPI(M) leaders including Kerala Chief Minister Pinayari Vijayan mourned the death of their comrade.

A documentary on her life, titled 'Fragments of a Past' was taken by Uma Chakravarti in 2012 and gives a glimpse of her life and work. Mythili Sivaraman herself has written a book in 2006 titled 'Fragments of a Life: A Family Archive' and a collection of her essays was brought out under the title 'Haunted by Fire' in 2013.



The soldiers of MRC at Wellington near Ooty distribute food packets to villagers in Nilgiris. — DC

MRC soldiers give food to poor villagers

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, MAY 30

The army men at the Madras Regimental Centre (MRC) at Wellington near here have reached out to the jobless poor villagers across the Nilgiris with food.

In a release, the MRC stated that as the entire nation is battling Covid-19, the Indian army is not only guarding the borders but has also been engaged in facilitating the essential needs of the citizens. Keeping the spirit and

message of the Indian army "Har Kaam Desh Ke Naam" and spreading the ethos of Dakshin Bharat area, the gallant 'Thambis' (the popular name of MRC soldiers) have provided assistance in the form of cooked food packets to the poor daily wage earners, labourers and to the needy in the far-flung areas of Nilgiris. These villagers and labourers are deprived of their livelihood and daily income due to the pandemic and the

lockdown. The smile on the faces of children, their mothers and villagers was the real motivation and satisfaction to the gallant "Thambis" to continue their selfless service towards countrymen in difficult times, the MRC stated.

Meanwhile, the Nilgiris last week recorded 3,133 Covid-19 positive cases, which is the highest in a week in the hills in a year. On Saturday, the Covid-19 positive cases crossed the 500-mark for the first time in the hills.

Minister agreed to consider the demand by private school teachers, who lost their jobs due to the corona pandemic, to provide them jobs. He said he would also discuss with the chief minister the issue of providing relief to hairdressers

students have lost touch with classroom teaching and their mindset should be prepared to face examinations.

"So a buffer time will be given before examinations. Exams will not be conducted all of a sudden", the minister clarified

Sasikala hints at return to politics

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
CHENNAI, MAY 30

Expelled AIADMK leader VK Sasikala dropped the merest hint of returning to active politics after the Covid pandemic gets over. In an audio clip of a phone conversation between her and one of the party cadre, which has gone viral on social media, she is heard confirming her plans of her return to politics.



"Do not worry, surely will sort out the party things. All be brave ok. Once corona pandemic ends, I will come," Sasikala is heard telling the cadre during the phone call,

which has been verified as authentic by an AMMK source. "We will be behind you Amma," the cadre is heard replying to her.

In March, the former AIADMK leader had announced her retirement from politics and issued a statement saying that she will 'set herself apart from politics'.

Jaya's aide and confidante had said, "I set myself apart from politics and pray for the golden

rule of my Goddess Akka (Jayalalithaa). I will continue to pray for her vision always."

Sasikala has been staying in the city after returning in February following the completion of her four-year prison sentence in a disproportionate assets case.

She was discharged on January 31 from Bengaluru's Victoria hospital where she was undergoing Covid treatment.

Health checks for 70K families in Nagai: Minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
NAGAPATTINAM, MAY 30

The Nagapattinam district administration is going to check over 70,000 families in the district in the next 10 days by conducting temperature and oxygen tests at their doorsteps besides providing drugs and other safety measures like face masks, sanitizers etc, said environment, sports and youth welfare minister Siva.

V. Meyyanathan. Meyyanathan, accompanied by Nagapattinam collector Praveen P. Nair, inspected the vaccination drive in different parts of the district on Sunday.

He told the media that due to the effective measures taken by the district administration, the number of Covid patients has come down in the last two days and hoped the pandemic will be fully controlled within 10-15 days.

Earlier, Meyyanathan, accompanied by Tiruvur collector V. Shantha and Tiruvur MLA Poondi Kalaivanan inspected the construction of a new building for the Kulikkaraai PHC.

He said efforts are under way for holding temperature and oxygen tests for one lakh people at their doorstep in Tiruvur district.



Chief Minister M.K. Stalin along with officials inaugurated 100 oxygen supported beds kept ready to treat Covid-19 patients at Tirupur govt hospital on Sunday. — DC

Start admission in 11 new medical colleges, CM urged

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC
TIRUVARUR, MAY 30

The Tamil Nadu Consumer Protection and Environment Research Centre, Tiruvur, has appealed to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin to initiate the admission procedures in 11 new government medical colleges which were started last year.

In a letter to Stalin, centre's general secretary Ramesh pointed out that there are 24 medical colleges, under the Tamil Nadu Government, in which there are 3,350 first year MBBS seats. Eleven more medical colleges commenced at Ramnathapuram, Virudhunagar, Dindigul,

Ramesh wanted Stalin to take suitable action by approaching the MCI to ensure that these new 11 colleges commence its first year MBBS admission procedures in the ensuing academic year and to help the poor students

Nilgiris, Ariyalur, Nagapattinam, Kallakurichi, Thiruvallur, Tirupur, Namakkal and Krishnagiri last year. No admission took place in these 11 colleges following the Medical Council of India's (MCI) delay in issuing notification on

first year MBBS course admission, he added.

He wanted Stalin to take suitable action by approaching the MCI to ensure that these new 11 colleges commence its first year MBBS admission procedures in the ensuing academic year and to help the poor students.

Thanks to the 7.5 exclusive reservation scheme for students of government higher secondary schools, 227 students got admission to MBBS in that category in the last academic year, he said and wanted Stalin to fulfil his election promise there will be a 2.5 percent exclusive reservation for the students of government aided schools.

No need to apologise to Goa people: Thiaga Rajan

Chennai, May 30: Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Palaniivel Thiaga Rajan on Sunday said there was no need to apologise to the people of Goa as he has done no harm to them. In fact, his party and government always stood for rights of state governments including Goa and this was reflected in the GST meet too, he said.

A day after Goa Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho claimed his request for preferential treatment to smaller states like Goa in compensation cess was opposed in the GST Council meet on May 28 by Thiaga Rajan and that he should apologise to people of people, the TN Minister came up with a rebuttal. "I have no need to apologise to the people of Goa, for I have done you no harm. In fact, I have strongly advocated for your state government's rights. I do not require or expect any thanks for that as my position was dictated by my principles of strengthening states' rights and federalism with enhanced devotion," he said in a statement.



The Tamil Nadu Minister claimed that the allegation of Godinho that he insulted the Goa people was a baseless lie. In his statement, posted on his twitter handle, Thiaga Rajan, a former investment banker said he was not inclined to get into all the details of the nearly eight hour long deliberation of the GST meet to preserve confidentiality. "But, I will state the bare minimum to set the record straight." Every statement he made in that meeting was entirely consistent

with two principles. One was that the "one state one vote" model of the GST Council was fundamentally unfair and this stand is consistent with the principle of proportional representation and the Constitution, he said. The other was advocacy of local self-governance as the logical extension of his party's core principle of self-respect and self-determination. "As such we are always for states' rights and a truly federal governance model that devolves powers from the union government to the lowest level practical."

Even when this principle resulted in loss of potential future revenue to Tamil Nadu, the state still backed other state governments including Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Goa in that meet. The background to this could be traced to Thiaga Rajan's, tweet of May 29, in which he had said, "CM @mkstalin directed TN's vote to keep ENA (Extra Neutral Alcohol) out of GST,

despite being a net importer who'd gain Revenue by inclusion. DMK stands for Federalism & States' Rights." Also, Tamil Nadu backed fully the right of Sikkim to levy a special cess within its borders to raise funds for fighting the pandemic and by extension the right of any state, big or small to do so.

"There was no agenda item regarding Goa's intention to levy any cess, so I simply could not have voted at all on an agenda item that did not exist, let alone vote against it." The TN minister also slammed Godinho saying he was against lowering GST on COVID related drugs and vaccines from five per cent to zero per cent on humanitarian grounds. The Goa Minister was highly "repetitive," at the meet, Thiaga Rajan alleged. Godinho had said that he and Thiaga Rajan had clashed over compensation to states during the GST meet and demanded the latter to apologise for 'insulting' Goa people.

— PTI

Plus-2 students will get buffer time before exams: Min

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, MAY 30

A buffer time will be given to plus-two students before they are asked to write their examinations, said Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, school education minister, at Pattukottai in Thanjavur district on Sunday.

He told the media that

Minister agreed to consider the demand by private school teachers, who lost their jobs due to the corona pandemic, to provide them jobs. He said he would also discuss with the chief minister the issue of providing relief to hairdressers

students have lost touch with classroom teaching and their mindset should be prepared to face examinations.

"So a buffer time will be given before examinations. Exams will not be conducted all of a sudden", the minister clarified

when asked whether students will be asked to attend classes for two months or so before writing examinations.

He reiterated the state government's resolve not to allow Neet in Tamil Nadu. "We have made it an election issue and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin had said in the poll manifesto that Neet will not be

allowed in Tamil Nadu. We are firm in this and the Tamil Nadu legislative assembly will meet and take necessary steps", the minister said.

He agreed to consider the demand by private school teachers who lost their jobs due to the Corona pandemic and provide them jobs. He said that he would discuss with the

chief minister the issue of providing relief to hairdressers.

The minister said Covid-19 cases are coming down in Thanjavur district. Cases which touched 1,000 per day have now come down to 800 because of the efforts taken by the government. People should cooperate, take vaccination and follow preventive

measures against Corona.

So far he inspected six assembly constituencies in the district. The demands of people from these constituencies will be put before Chief Minister M.K. Stalin for redressal.

M. Govind Rao, Thanjavur district collector, accompanied the minister.

IN BRIEF

BJP activist stabbed in Kerala

Thrissur (Kerala): A BJP activist on Sunday suffered stab injuries when two groups of party activists clashed at Vadanappally in this central Kerala district on Sunday, police said. The activist, aged below 30 years, was stabbed by another person said to have a criminal background, on the premises of a government hospital here. They clashed over a Facebook post in connection with the recent hawala money case allegedly involving some party leaders, police said. The injured man was rushed to a government hospital and his condition is stable as of now, a police official said, adding that no one has been arrested in this regard.

Kangana Ranaut's bodyguard held

Mandya: Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut's bodyguard has been arrested from his native village in Karnataka on charges of allegedly cheating a woman in Mumbai on the promise of marrying her, police said. "A team of Mumbai police came here on Saturday and arrested Kumar Hegde from Heggadahalli in Mandya," a police officer said. He said Hegde allegedly entered into a relationship with the woman after promising to marry her. However, he fled Mumbai and started living in Heggadahalli, his native village, the officer said.

MAHA: FARMER HELD FOR HOAX BOMB SCARE CALL

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MAY 30

Mumbai police were sent into a tizzy after a call claiming a bomb threat in Mantralaya on Sunday. The Disaster Management Control Room of Mantralaya received the call from an unknown caller in the afternoon. However, no explosives were found after a thorough search operation, the police said.

Immediately after receiving the threat call a team of Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad (BDDS) was sent to Mantralaya which conducted a search operation at the Maharashtra government secretariat, but no suspicious material was found.

At around 12.40pm the Disaster Management of Mantralaya had received a phone call from an anonymous person threatening to blow up Mantralaya with a bomb.

During the course of investigation, the phone call was traced to Nagpur. Further probe revealed that a farmer, identified as Sagar Mandhare (40), from district Nagpur had made this phone call.

The farmer was detained within hours of making the hoax call. In the past too this person had issued threats to set himself on fire on Independence Day and Republic Day on multiple occasions. He has allegedly confessed to making the call and said that for a long time, he was worried about the compensation of the acquired land. But no one was listening to his pleas.

2 MEN CAUGHT ON TAPE THROWING BODY INTO RIVER

Balrampur (UP), May 30: Two men, one of them wearing a PPE kit, were caught on tape rolling down a Coronavirus patient's body from over a bridge into Rapti river in Uttar Pradesh's Balrampur district. Hours later, the two were arrested, a senior police officer said.

The video was shot by some people who were driving by the spot. After the visuals surfaced, police registered a case.

Additional Superintendent of Police Arvind Mishra on Sunday said, "the body of the deceased was sent home as per Covid protocol. In this context, two persons have been arrested for violation of Covid protocol after a case was registered, following a complaint lodged by the CMO. The person in the PPE kit has been identified as Manoj, while the other person was the nephew of the deceased (who received the body)." He added that the hunt is on for the third person, and investigations are going on.

Earlier, Balrampur's Chief Medical Officer Vijay Bahadur Singh said on Sunday that the body has been identified as that of Prem Nath Mishra, a resident of Sohratgarh in Uttar Pradesh's Siddharth Nagar district.

No fishing months to start

Fishermen secure their boats as fishing has been banned from June 1 till July 31 owing to the monsoon season, in Mangaluru on Sunday. Earlier this month, the IMD had predicted the arrival of monsoon over Kerala by May 31, but the onset day has been set back by four days. — PTI

India fighting Covid with all its might, asserts PM

FROM PG 1

With the demand for medical oxygen rising hugely during the recent surge in Covid-19 cases and many states and hospitals complaining of its shortage, the Prime Minister said the production of the liquid medical oxygen had risen by over 10 times to nearly 9,500 MT daily from 900 MT earlier.

"The demand for oxygen surged all of a sudden. This was a very big challenge and delivering medical oxygen to remote parts of the country was indeed a huge task," he said, noting that many plants manufacturing industrial oxygen were located in the eastern parts of the country and lauded those, including

cryogenic tanker drivers, the oxygen express (train) crew and Air Force pilots, involved in its transportation.

In New Delhi, many BJP leaders, including Union ministers, lauded the Modi government on its seventh anniversary, with home minister Amit Shah claiming the country had made "unprecedented achievements" in the fields of security, public welfare and reforms under NDA rule. He insisted that the people have "consistently expressed their unwavering faith" in the PM's "service and dedication".

The BJP had already told its leaders and chief ministers not to hold any celebratory event in the wake of the ongoing Covid-19

crisis, and instead hold welfare events, including in one lakh jhuggi clusters across the country. "The achievements of the past seven years have been those of the nation and its people... together we experienced so many moments of national pride... India now moves ahead not under the pressure of other countries but with its own convictions... it makes everyone proud," said the PM in his "Mann ki Baat" address.

Highlighting the government's initiatives on national security, the PM, without naming China, said a befitting reply had been given to those who had conspired against the country. "When we witness that now India gives a befitting reply to those

who conspire against us, then our confidence soars. When India does not compromise on the issues of national security, when the strength of our armed forces increases, we feel that yes, we are on the right path," Mr Modi said. He further said that many old disputes had also been resolved with complete peace and harmony, and a new confidence underpinned by peace and development has arisen from the Northeast to Kashmir.

BJP president J.P. Nadda said the nation has been moving towards the path of becoming "atma nirbhar" under the Modi government.

In a series of tweets in Hindi, home minister Amit Shah credited Mr Modi for improving the

living standards of the poor, farmers and deprived sections by bringing them into the mainstream with his determined, holistic and welfare policies and making India a powerful nation with his strong leadership. "The Modi government has presented a unique example of unparalleled coordination of development, security, public welfare and landmark reforms," he said.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh said India "wrote a new chapter in the field of social welfare, development, good governance" under the Modi government and the PM and the government was guided by the mantra of "sabka aarth, sabka vikas, sabka vishvas".

Naxal-hit areas: MHA awaits telecom dept nod on towers

New Delhi, May 30: As security forces battle to put an end to Naxal violence, the home ministry wants mobile phone towers installed in the affected region to remain operational irrespective of financial implications to give them the advantage of smooth communication and is awaiting the telecom department's nod, officials said on Sunday.

At a recent meeting chaired by Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla, it was conveyed to the telecom department in no uncertain terms that these mobile phone towers should remain active. Previously, a series of meetings were held on the matter.

A letter has been sent to Universal Service Obligation Fund administrator Anshuli Arya conveying the decision of the home ministry to extend the operation of all these

sites. USOF is the pool of funds generated by charging all telecom companies on their Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR).

This fund, which is handled by the department of telecommunications, is used for providing funds for telecom connectivity in rural and such areas which are not commercially beneficial for telecom operators.

Over 2,200 telecom towers were installed in Chhattisgarh and nine other Naxalism-affected states that form the 'Red Corridor' to ensure communication facility for security forces as well as state police agencies.

The towers, which were funded by USOF for five years, could be extended by another two years under an ongoing tender of BSNL to help the security forces maintain an easy access to the communication facility.

However, the silence of the telecom department for its extension has left everyone in despair, including the state-run BSNL which has been following up on it with USOF for almost 20 months.

The BSNL CMD has shot off a letter asking for a clear-cut decision and whether they need to shut down the operations as BSNL is losing money every month to run these commercially unviable sites.

BSNL wrote a letter to the telecom secretary asking for clear directions on whether the mobile towers have to be kept operational or not. It said that BSNL had installed 356 telecom sites in the Naxalism-affected areas from its own resources for which non-tendered OPEX (Operational Expenditure) was provided from the USOF from September 2014 to 2019. — PTI

BJP harmful for India, says Cong. on NDA 7th anniv.

New Delhi, May 30: The Narendra Modi dispensation is harmful for the country as it has failed on every front and betrayed people's trust, the Congress charged on Sunday on the seventh anniversary of the government.

"The truth is Modi government's seven years are a story of immeasurable pain, insurmountable devastation and unfathomable agony and anguish for a nation of 140 crore people," the party said.

The opposition party released a seven-point charge-sheet of "blunders" it accused the government of committing, and alleged that the Modi dispensation abdicated its responsibilities towards people.

The Congress listed out what it called the major failures of the government, including a declining economy, rising unemployment and inflation, and Covid-19 mismanagement.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the government needs to have the right intention, policy and determination to fight the Coronavirus and not just a monthly talk.

"You need the right intention, policy and determination to fight Corona and not just a pointless talk once in a month," Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi, on a day when Prime Minister Modi delivered his monthly "Mann ki baat" radio address.

Congress general secretary and chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the last seven years

SHAH LAUDS MODI FOR 'UNIQUE DEVELOPMENT'

New Delhi, May 30: Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday greeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the completion of seven years of his government and said during this period, the country made "unprecedented achievements" in fields of security, public welfare and reforms.

In a series of tweets in Hindi, Shah credited Modi for improving the living standards of the poor, farmers and deprived sections by bringing them into the mainstream with his determined, holistic and welfare policies and making India a powerful nation with his strong leadership.

"The Modi government has presented a unique example of unparalleled coordination of development, security, public welfare and landmark reforms," he said. — PTI

have been a story of unprecedented devastation, abdication of responsibility and abandonment of India's people by a government that was showered with all the love and affection.

"This government is harmful for the country as it has betrayed the faith of people of India," he said. — PTI

REPORT SAYS CORONA VIRUS WAS CREATED IN WUHAN LAB

FROM PG 1

In the 22-page paper which is set to be published in the scientific journal Quarterly Review of Biophysics Discovery, Dalgleish and Sorensen pieced together how Chinese scientists, some working with American universities, allegedly built the tools to create the coronavirus.

Incidentally, 'Gain of Function' projects, which involves tweaking natural viruses to make them more infectious, had been outlawed by former US President Barack Obama.

In an exclusive interview with DailyMail.com, Sorensen said that four amino acids on the spike have a positive charge, which causes the virus to tightly cling to the negatively charged parts of a human, becoming more infectious.

Because these positively charged amino acids also repeat each other, it was rare to find even three in a row in naturally occurring organisms, while four in a row is 'extremely unlikely,' he said.

"The laws of physics mean that you cannot have four positively charged amino acids in a row. The only way you can get this is if you artificially manufacture it," Dalgleish told DailyMail.com.

"The implication of our historical reconstruction, we posit now beyond reasonable doubt, of the positively manipulated chimeric virus SARS-CoV-

2 makes it imperative to reconsider what types of Gain of Function experiments it is morally acceptable to undertake," they wrote.

In the paper, the scientists wrote that a natural virus pandemic would be expected to mutate gradually and become infectious but less pathogenic, which did not happen in the case of Covid-19.

Dalgleish and Sorensen claimed that after the pandemic began, Chinese scientists took samples of the Covid-19 virus and 'retro-engineered' it, making it appear as if it had evolved naturally.

"We think that there have been retro-engineered viruses created. They've changed the virus, then tried to make out it was in a sequence years ago," Dalgleish told DailyMail.com.

The scientists also highlighted that Chinese scientists who wished to share their knowledge have not been able to do so or have disappeared.

Sorensen said that he believes the virus escaped from lower security areas of the institute, where he believes Gain of Function research was performed, reported DailyMail.com.

"We have seen lab leaks and we know it's happening. We also know from the reports we've seen, that coronavirus is worked on in Biosafety Level 2 or 3 labs. If they do Gain of Function in such labs, what do you expect?" he said.

MORE | FUNDS FMs of Kerala, Punjab, C'garh want GST Council to discuss issue**States contest Centre's GST estimates**

New Delhi, May 30: The compensation amount promised by the Centre is estimated to be higher than the ₹1.58 lakh crore projected by the Centre, and a special session of the GST Council will be convened to discuss it, three opposition-ruled states said on Sunday.

Finance ministers of Kerala, Punjab and Chhattisgarh said there was no consensus regarding the compensation requirement in 2021-22 in the May 28 GST Council meeting and a special session would be called only to discuss 'Revenue Augmentation and Post June 2022 compensation'. Punjab finance minister

Manpreet Singh Badal said all states are facing shortfall in the range of 20-50 per cent and "we have said that the Council should be meeting every quarter to discuss the revenue situation of states".

"The shortfall in compensation up to April is ₹5,000 crore for Punjab. All opposition-ruled states spoke in one voice that the compensation amount from Centre should be higher," Badal said.

Punjab, he said, has been pitching for a discussion on the compensation mechanism that would be adopted after June 2022, as states continue to face revenue gap following the GST implementation than

● **KERALA FINANCE** minister said ₹4,077 cr is due on account of compensation from the Centre and Centre should ensure that the states get the 14 per cent promised growth in revenue.

what was collected in the pre-GST times.

Kerala finance minister K.N. Balagopal said ₹4,077 crore is due on account of compensation from the Centre and the Centre should ensure that the states get the 14 per cent promised growth in revenue. "The 7 per cent revenue growth assumption is no assumption. Some states are facing negative

growth, hence this assumption does not stand. We will discuss the issue," Balagopal added.

Chhattisgarh finance minister T.S. Singh Deo said projections regarding compensation and borrowing were made by the Centre and a detailed discussion would happen at the special session of the GST Council, date for which has not been decided yet.

The Centre has estimated the compensation requirement of states at ₹2.69 lakh crore for the current financial year. Of this, over ₹1.11 lakh crore would come from cess on luxury, demerit and sin goods which will be given

to the states to compensate them for the shortfall in revenue arising out of GST implementation, according to the agenda note circulated before the Council meeting.

The remaining ₹1.58 lakh crore would have to be borrowed to meet the promised compensation, based on the assumption that a revenue growth of states would be 7 per cent this fiscal, the note added. In the last fiscal 2020-21, the Centre had borrowed on behalf of the states and released ₹1.10 lakh crore to compensate for the GST revenue shortfall. Another ₹68,700 crore was collected by way of levy of cess. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

ONE KILLED IN PLANE CRASH IN UTAH

Eden, May 30: One man died and another man suffered severe burns when their single-engine aircraft crashed Saturday morning near the Powder Mountain area near Eden in northern Utah, authorities said.

The National Transportation Safety Board said it is investigating the crash of the Cessna 172S.

It's not clear why the plane went down.

Authorities said the injured man was transported by air to the University of Utah burn center.

The plane had left Ogden's Hinkley Airport not long before the crash.

The crash resulted in a small fire, but officials say the crash site was cold and wet so the fire was quickly extinguished.

PLANE CRASHES INTO LAKE, 7 BELIEVED DEAD

Smyrna (US), May 30: A small jet carrying seven people crashed into a Tennessee lake on Saturday, and authorities indicated that no one on board survived. The Cessna C501 crashed into Percy Priest Lake near Smyrna after taking off from a nearby airport about 11 am, the Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement. Rutherford County rescue crews were still at the scene of the crash late Saturday and planned to work through the night, Rutherford County Fire Rescue Capt. Joshua Sanders said at a news conference.

He indicated that there were no survivors. "Our efforts have transitioned from a rescue effort to that of a recovery effort. ... We are no longer ... looking for live victims at this point," Sanders said.

He said none of the names of the victims would be released until their families had been notified. Earlier Saturday, officials confirmed that at least one person had died in the crash.

CHINESE CRAFT DOCKS WITH ORBITAL STATION

Beijing, May 30: An automated spacecraft docked with China's new space station carrying fuel and supplies for its future crew, the Chinese space agency announced.

Tianzhou-2 spacecraft reached the Tianhe station eight hours after blasting off from Hainan, an island in the South China Sea, China Manned Space said. It carried space suits, living supplies and equipment and fuel for the station.

Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, is third and largest orbital station launched by China's increasingly ambition space programme. The station's core module was launched April 29. The space agency plans a total of 11 launches through the end of next year to deliver two more modules for the 70-ton station, supplies and a three-member crew.

China was criticised for allowing part of the rocket that launched the Tianhe to fall back to Earth uncontrolled. There was no indication about what would happen to the rocket from Saturday's launch.

Beijing doesn't participate in the International Space Station, largely due to US objections.

TIGRAY WAR: ETHIOPIANS FLAY U.S. SANCTIONS

Kampala, May 30: Thousands of Ethiopians gathered in the nation's capital Sunday to protest outside pressure on the government over its brutal war in Tigray.

Protesters at the rally in Addis Ababa carried banners that criticised the United States and others in the international community who are voicing concern over atrocities in Tigray, where Ethiopian forces are hunting down the region's ousted and now-fugitive leaders.

Troops from neighbouring Eritrea are fighting in Tigray on the side of Ethiopian government forces, in defiance of international calls for their withdrawal.

But the protesters in Addis Ababa carried placards that said "Ethiopian young people denounce the western intervention."

Others said Ethiopia's sovereignty was at stake. The US said last week it has started restricting visas for government and military officials of Ethiopia and Eritrea, who are seen as undermining efforts to resolve the fighting in Tigray, home to an estimated 6 million of Ethiopia's 110 million people.



People on Boscombe beach, as the holiday weekend is expected to bring blue skies and widespread sunshine, in Boscombe, England, on Sunday. The holiday weekend and relaxation of Coronavirus restrictions has enabled many to visit the beach, as warm weather spreads across the region. — AP

More US states ease rules as vax rates rise

Infections fall just in time for Memorial Day weekend

Providence, May 30: Just in time for Memorial Day weekend, more US cities and states are shrugging off lingering Covid-19 restrictions as vaccination rates rise and the number of infections falls.

Massachusetts lifted a mask requirement Saturday, a day after New Jersey dropped its mandate. In New York City and Chicago, officials reopened public beaches, though winds and cool temperatures kept crowds away.

"Welcome back, Chicago," Mayor Lori Lightfoot said in a video announcement. The lakefront is open. "Chicago's Navy Pier also reopened retail stores and restaurants, carnival rides, and tour boats and cruises after the pandemic forced months-long closures at the busy tourist destination."

It's one more sign of progress that reflects increasingly positive health data. On Saturday, Illinois' Department of Public Health reported 802 new confirmed and probable infections, the second-lowest one-day total in the last six months.

For businesses nationwide, the improving outlook and long holiday weekend offered a chance to welcome customers back to in-person shopping. Midtown Scholar Bookstore in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, opened its doors to customers for the first time in nearly 14 months Friday. Masks are still required.

The business had switched to internet orders, sidewalk sales and virtual author events to survive the pandemic.

We had to get creative, we had to pivot, store manager Alex Brubaker said.

— AP

Rio De Janeiro, May 30: Tens of thousands of people in Brazil staged another day of protest against President Jair Bolsonaro, in particular for his chaotic handling of the pandemic, which has claimed more than 461,000 lives here. In downtown Rio de Janeiro, some 10,000 people wearing masks marched through the streets, with some chanting "Bolsonaro genocide" or "Go away Bolsonaro."

Similar rallies were held in other major cities, the

latest in a wave of anger against Bolsonaro that began months ago. After the United States, Brazil has the world's second highest Coronavirus death toll.

At the outset of the pandemic, the far right Bolsonaro dismissed Covid-19 as "a little flu" and as the death toll has risen steadily he has gone on to infuriate people in other ways, opposing stay-at-home measures and masks, touting ineffective medications, refusing offers of vaccines, and failing to anticipate oxygen shortages that left patients to suffocate.

One of the themes of the rally Saturday was how many lives might have been saved if the Bolsonaro government had started Brazil's vaccination drive earlier. The drive is going slowly and has sputtered frequently for lack of supplies.

"We must stop this government. We must say 'enough is enough,'" businessman Omar Silveira said at the Rio rally.

— AFP

PM TO UPDATE SINGAPOREANS ON VIRUS FIGHT

Singapore, May 30: Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Sunday he will share his government's plan on how to combat the Covid-19 pandemic while slowly reopening the country for business in a speech to be broadcast on Monday.

The prime minister said the Covid-19 restrictions were working and the government was taking strict measures to keep Singaporeans safe from the deadly virus.

"Thank you for staying home and complying with the guidelines," said Prime Minister Lee while announcing his address to the nation in a Facebook post on Sunday.

— PTI

Vax mandates: US hospital sued

Houston, May 30: A hospital in the US has been sued by over 100 staffers for turning them into Covid-19 vaccine "guinea pigs" by mandating them to get the shot. The plaintiffs filed suit against Houston Methodist Hospital Friday, the latest group of workers to challenge mandatory inoculations at essential workplaces.

Attorney Jared Woodfill said he is representing 117 workers. The lawsuit states that for the first time in US history, an employer is forcing its employees to be vaccinated "with an experimental Covid-19 mRNA gene modification injection" or be fired.

The lawsuit cited that

the US Food and Drug Administration issued its first emergency use authorisation for Covid-19 in December 2020, but the vaccines are awaiting full FDA approval and licensing, which will likely take months for the agency to review additional data.

The complaint cited that forcing employees to get the vaccine violates Nuremberg Code, a medical ethics code that bans forced medical experiments and mandates voluntary consent. "Methodist Hospital is forcing its employees to be human 'guinea pigs' as a condition for continued employment," the lawsuit states.

— PTI

Italy extends entry ban for Indians

Rome, May 30: Italy extended Sunday an entry ban for people coming from India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, as a continued precaution against the more transmissible Indian variant of the novel Coronavirus.

The ban, which does not apply to Italian citizens, was introduced in late April and was due to

expire on Sunday. It was prolonged until June 21, a spokesman for Italian Health Minister Roberto Speranza said in a statement.

The B.1.617 variant of the Coronavirus was first detected in India last year and has been blamed for much of a devastating Covid-19 wave that has battered South Asian

nations in recent weeks.

This week, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said the variant has officially spread to 53 territories, and has been linked to seven other territories by unofficial sources, taking the total to 60.

In an interview with AFP, WHO regional director for Europe Hans Kluge said the increased conta-

gioussness of the new variants of the Coronavirus, including the Indian one, was one of his main worries. "We know for example that the B.1617 (Indian variant) is more transmissible than the B.117 (British variant), which already was more transmissible than the previous strain," the Belgian doctor said.

— AFP

Call for action, inclusion at Seoul climate summit

Seoul, May 30: World leaders on Sunday called for more action and inclusion of all countries in the global drive towards a cleaner and greener planet at a climate summit hosted virtually by South Korea. Climate change is a major threat to global growth, with perils ranging from declines in crop yields, extreme weather that devastates tourist economies, disease outbreaks and other catastrophes that would sap productivity.

South Korea — which recently announced plans to cut finance for international coal projects — is seeking a bigger role in the global initiative to go green. "South Korea will play a responsible role as a bridging nation between developing and advanced nations," said President Moon Jae-in as he opened the 2021 Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030, or P4G, summit.

The two-day summit is the second of its kind following the inaugural meeting held in Copenhagen in 2018, and is focused on public-private partnerships, especially in develop-

ment. Earlier this month Germany tightened its targets to reduce CO2 emissions — including a 65 percent cut in emissions by 2030 — after a landmark ruling by the country's top court declared a flagship climate protection law "insufficient".

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said coun-

tries must now deliver on their green pledges. "It's a great start, but let's not pat ourselves on the back just yet because our planet and our people need more," he said.

"We need governments that will not just make promises on climate and nature but match those words with deeds."

World leaders committed under the 2015 Paris accord to keeping the global temperature increase to under two degrees Celsius — and ideally closer to 1.5 degrees C — by 2050.

Advanced nations have laid out ambitious emissions-cutting goals in recent months, as well as plans to ultimately go carbon neutral by 2050.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on the countries to phase out their dependence on fossil fuels, warning climate change is threatening people's lives and the economy as much as the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Yet many of the largest emitters have so far failed to keep up their commitments and countries have not even agreed on a unified rulebook governing how the Paris agreement works in practice.

The UN says that emissions must fall nearly eight percent annually to keep 1.5C in play — equivalent to the emissions saved during the pandemic every single year through 2030.

World leaders also stressed the importance of making sure that poorer countries are not left out in the global initiative to go green.

— AFP

CHINA FRICTION IN MORRISON ARDERN TALKS

Christchurch, May 30: Growing friction with China and how to reopen borders after the pandemic will likely be among the topics discussed by the leaders of Australia and New Zealand in their first face-to-face meeting since the Coronavirus outbreak began.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison arrived in the tourist resort of Queenstown for an overnight visit Sunday. He greeted his New Zealand counterpart Jacinda Ardern with a traditional Maori hongi, in which the pair pressed noses together. Morrison is the first major world leader to visit New Zealand since both countries shut their borders last year to contain the virus.

The neighbouring countries opened a quarantine-free travel bubble last month, although a recent outbreak of the virus in Melbourne has prompted New Zealand to suspend the travel bubble with Victoria state.

Morrison's visit came as New Zealand was dealing with extensive flooding in the Canterbury region following heavy rains. Video footage showed one farmer being rescued by helicopter from a raging river, while other swelling rivers threatened to flood thousands of homes.

— AP

INDIAN GETS 10-YEAR UAE GOLDEN VISA

Dubai, May 30: An Indian student has received the UAE's coveted 10-year Golden Visa, which is mostly reserved for prominent global personalities, for her merit and excellent academic credentials, according to a media report.

Tasneem Aslam from Kerala received the Golden Visa in the exceptional student category and is allowed to stay in the country till 2031, *Khaleej Times* reported.

The UAE government in 2019 implemented a new system for long-term residence visas, enabling foreigners to live, work and study in the UAE without the need of a national sponsor. These golden visas are issued for five or 10 years and will be renewed automatically.

This is one of the best moments in my life. I feel privileged to achieve this and I am thankful to Almighty Allah. My parents support has been enormous, and Insha Allah I hope to sponsor them in near future, Tasneem said.

Tasneem studied Islamic Sharia from Al Qasimi University in Sharjah and topped her class with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.94 on 4.

— PTI

RECENT EXCAVATIONS

In Nov., archaeologists had announced the discovery of 100 coffins

Egypt bets on ancient finds to revive tourism

Cairo, May 30: Workers dig and ferry wheelbarrows laden with sand to open a new shaft at a bustling archaeological site outside of Cairo, while a handful of Egyptian archaeologists supervise from garden chairs.

The dig is at the foot of the Step Pyramid of Djoser, arguably the world's oldest pyramid, and is one of many recent excavations that are yielding troves of ancient artifacts from the country's largest archaeological site.

As some European coun-

tries re-open to international tourists, Egypt has already been trying for months to attract them to its archaeological sites and museums.

Officials are betting that the new ancient discoveries will set it apart on the mid- and post-pandemic tourism market. They need visitors to come back in force to inject cash into the tourism industry, a pillar of the economy.

But like countries elsewhere, Egypt continues to battle the Coronavirus, and is struggling to get its

people vaccinated. The country has, up until now, received only 5 million vaccines for its population of 100 million people, according to its Health Ministry. In early May, the government announced that one million people had been vaccinated, though that number is believed to be higher now.

In the meantime, authorities have kept the publicity machine running, focused on the new discoveries. In November, archaeologists announced the discovery of at least 100 an-

cient coffins dating back to the Pharaonic Late Period and Greco-Ptolemaic era, along with 40 gilded statues found 2,500 years after they were first buried.

That came a month after the discovery of 57 other coffins at the same site, the necropolis of Saqqara that includes the step pyramid.

Saqqara is a treasure, said Tourism and Antiquities Minister Khaled el-Anany while announcing the November discovery, estimating that only 1% of what the site contains has

been unearthed so far.

Our problem now is that we don't know how we can possibly wow the world after this, he said.

If they don't, it certainly won't be for lack of trying.

In April, Zahi Hawass, Egypt's best-known archaeologist, announced the discovery of a 3,000-year-old lost city in southern Luxor, complete with mud brick houses, artifacts and tools from pharaonic times. It dates back to Amenhotep III of the 18th dynasty, whose reign (1390-1353 B.C.) is considered a gold-

en era for ancient Egypt.

That discovery was followed by a made-for-TV parade celebrating the transport of 22 of the country's prized royal mummies from central Cairo to their new resting place in a massive facility farther south in the capital, the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization.

The Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh is now home to an archaeological museum, as is Cairo's International Airport, both opened in recent months.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

31 MAY 2021

Centre petty in a needless confrontation with Bengal

The manner in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "review meeting" — or, really speaking, so-called review meeting, in light of everything that's transpired since — concerning the devastation caused by the cyclone Yaas with West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee was conducted, it would seem the idea was not so much to discuss cyclone-related damage in the middle of the second wave of Covid but to provoke a fresh round of confrontation between the Centre and the state.

In the three weeks since the state Assembly election result became known, and Ms Banerjee led her party to a record victory, in the process trouncing the BJP which had hoped to form government, not a day has passed without the exchange of bitterness and acrimony between the Centre and the state and the BJP and the Trinamul Congress.

Regrettably, governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has taken it upon himself to be at the centre of these activities in ways that suggest he values his party association more than the neutrality his constitutional duties cast on him. He had been invited to

the "review" meeting at the Kalaikunda air base, along with a clutch of BJP leaders, including the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly.

This is far from usual. In the event, the CM did well not to have any part in any of this. That would have set a dreadful precedent. A meeting between the PM and a CM ought to be just that, the presence of senior aides apart; else it would always be a crowd commandeered by the Union government. The governor decidedly has no role to play in such a meeting. Nor do Opposition party leaders since this was not billed as an all-party meeting.

The CM, therefore, met the PM at the airbase, handed him an estimate of financial requirements to repair the damage caused by the cyclone, and with the PM's "permission" proceeded to her next meeting along the damaged coastal belt. Nevertheless, through the BJP's propaganda network, which alas includes sections of the impressionable media, it has been given out that the CM "skipped" the meeting called by the PM to review the damage.

Ms Banerjee is a very combative street politician and is known to give as good as she gets. This does not always make a pretty picture. However, events initiated by the Centre after her party's recent electoral triumph suggest that her actions have been reactive, not pro-active. It is ironical that a PM who skipped talking about "federalism" after taking office and insisted on calling it "cooperative federalism" should be the presiding deity when ugly fracas plays out on daily basis in relation to a state in which his party has been firmly placed on the electoral mat.

Perhaps nothing shows this more graphically than the way the Centre chose to deal with the chief secretary, Alapan Bandyopadhyay. He was asked to report for duty at the Centre on the last day of his service as an IAS officer. Ironically, only four days before he was to superannuate, at the state's request, the Centre had granted him an extension of three months in service (as against the six sought). This has been widely viewed as an act of infinitesimal smallness — a part of the act of continuing jousting against a state with whose CM the Centre is at odds.

2 yrs of Modi 2.0: Little to celebrate

The conspicuous absence of celebrations around the completion of two years of the NDA-2 regime betrays how tumultuous they have proved to be. There are many reasons why this period was far from memorable from among the seven years of Narendra Modi rule since 2014. Waves of a rampant pandemic, which have tested the capacity to govern in over 200 nations, have had less to do with why the last two years have been particularly filled with turmoil in India.

The biggest mandate in democratic India's history in 35 years since 1984 was squandered by the regime giving primacy to a Hindutva agenda, beginning with the abrogation of Article 370 in the "taming" of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. The pursuit of an amended citizenship bill promising to give citizenship to all refugees except Muslims tore the fabric of a pluralistic democracy asunder leading to communal riots in New Delhi. The seeming foreign policy gains from the showmanship of the "Howdy Trump" and "Howdy Modi", besides the positive vibes generated by the banning of the triple talaq had all but evaporated.

While the verdict in the sticky dispute over the Ayodhya shrines, courtesy of an obliging judiciary, was welcomed with the enthusiasm reserved for the resolution of any historical disagreement, there was a ruthlessness persistence in a divisive agenda, which seemed to be driven by the itch to settle scores more than repaying the people who voted again for the BJP over the combined opposition. In prioritising a blatantly political agenda, from Kashmir to Lakshwadeep and Puducherry, even the new farm laws became suspect, triggering a long running agitation.

In promoting electoral aims above governance, which was largely left to bureaucrats even during the pandemic, the ruling party lost the perception battle, too. Image management and a retributory stance against the public media run by Big Tech are seen now like a pushback by a federal regime fast losing its popularity, also reflected by poll verdicts in many prominent states. The second Covid-19 wave has simply added to the image of a faltering Centre and the ruling party, which now has less than three years to undo the post-2019 damage.


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Mohan Guruswamy



Tobacco India's top health crisis: Act now, or just go up in smoke!

The consumption of tobacco in all its forms — cigarettes, che- roots, bidis, gutka and other forms of chewing tobacco — is our number one health challenge now.

According to the World Health Organisation, there are approximately 120 million smokers in India, and India is the home of 12 per cent of the world's smokers. More than 10 million die each year due to tobacco in India. According to the same study, 70 per cent of adult males in India smoke. Among adult females, the figure is much lower, at between 13-15 per cent. The total tax revenue derived from cigarettes and tobacco products is about ₹30,000 crores.

According to a study commissioned by the Government of India, the total economic costs attributable to all diseases related to tobacco consumption is over ₹104,000 crores.

In recent years, the cigarette business has been reporting a drop in consumption. But we do not know if there was a corresponding decrease in the incidence of cancer and other smoking induced ailments. The government, presumably under pressure from the rich and powerful cigarette industry, has not yet conducted a detailed study

of this and the consequential cost to the economy in spite of a specific request from the revenue department to enable it to evolve a scientific basis for cigarette taxation.

Whatever be the drop in stick sales, it is very evident that rupee sales and profits have not shown any decline. Industry bosses can, like the cigarette-smoking Dev Anand in the film Hum Dono did, continue to sing "barbadhion ka jashn manata chala gaya, har fikr ko dhuey mey udhatha chala gaya."

Objectively speaking, this is not a bad situation at all, and is proof that the government policy, whether deliberate or accidental, is still halfway good. For, as far as this industry goes, a good policy will ensure that the state gets more revenue, while the consumption keeps dropping each year. But this does not necessarily mean any good news on the health front, as dropouts may have switched to bidis? Nevertheless, the decline in consumption, attributed by the industry to higher excise duties in each of the previous few budgets, means the policy is in the right direction and that there is a case for further increasing the tariffs on cigarettes and bidis once again this year.

The cigarette industry will, no

doubt, argue now that it is not wise to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. In this case it is not a golden egg but a time bomb, as each cigarette smoked now implies a future medical cost. Very recently the US government negotiated a \$368 billion damages package from the US cigarette industry to pay for future health costs. As the finance minister's adviser, I had once recommended that the health ministry be asked to similarly estimate future health costs in India. It followed that excise duties should be determined with the idea of recovering these costs now. I also advised that raising excise duties each year is a win-win situation. If consumption drops, it means future savings.

It is not that the incidence of smoking is low in India if we take into consideration the widespread bidi habit. NCAER has estimated that 348 million people belong to households with an annual income of over ₹12,500. Logic suggests that the vast majority of cigarette and bidi smokers must come from this segment. This is, by any standards, a very high and dangerous figure. Another point of concern is that the US congressional investigations have revealed that cigarette companies rou-

tinely spiked tobacco with extra nicotine to intensify addiction. It is rumoured that similar practices are still widespread in India. There is, therefore, a case for pegging excise duties with nicotine content as well.

One reason suggested for the drop in stick sales in the first half is that smuggled cigarettes ate into the share of locally produced brands. Industry analysts estimate that a third of MNC production are for illegal exports. The port of Antwerp is the hub of the international cigarette smuggling business. Antwerp is to cigarettes what Dubai is to gold! The Indian cigarette industry estimates that smuggled international brand penetration now accounts for two per cent of the market and to some 30-40 per cent of the segment for king-size cigarettes.

Cigarettes are an easy target because they are in the organised sector. But the consumption of bidis and chewing tobacco is just as dangerous and these sectors are growing. Therefore, the danger to public health only keeps increasing. The unfortunate part of this is that the government actively supports and subsidises the increased production of tobacco. Tobacco farming makes a huge

footprint on our agriculture and now accounts for 4,95,000 hectares of the most fertile land. Apart from using up valuable agricultural land, tobacco farmers derive all the largesses the state and Central governments confer on them. Free water and free power are the more obvious ones. Then there is subsidised fertiliser and tax-free status for all farming. The government must review these policies. I would like to see tobacco farming taxed on an acreage basis to make it less profitable and for the government to recover all the unmerited subsidies that tobacco farmers encash.

This is easier said than done. The tobacco sector is a powerful vested interest. ITC and the other cigarette manufacturers are the top half of that pyramid. It is easy to take it on, but it's now time to take on the base.

Today, May 31, is World No Tobacco Day

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

Subhani



Flux in Centre-state ties with breakdown of trust



Sanjaya Baru

An outstanding address to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council by Tamil Nadu's finance minister P.T. Rajan, a contentious interaction between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal chief minister Ma-

mata Banerjee and the questionable remarks by V.K. Paul, a member of the Niti Aayog, blaming state governments for the mess over the Covid vaccination strategy once again draw attention to the sorry state of Centre-state relations today. Mr Modi came to power in New Delhi in 2014 promising to adopt "cooperative federalism" as his watchword. Seven years into office he is reminding many people across India of the Indira Gandhi era when the Centre rode roughshod over the states.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent direct interaction with district magistrates, ignoring their chief ministers, was also a reminder of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's attempt to empower the district level bodies, funding them directly from New Delhi, bypassing state governments.

The Indira-Rajiv era of unhappy Centre-state relations was challenged by several powerful chief ministers, including Jyoti Basu, N.T. Rama Rao and M. Karunanidhi. The Centre is a conceptual myth, declared NTR, who in the early 1980s emerged as a stout defender of the rights of state legislatures and state governments.

Seeking to retrieve the trust of provincial political leaders, Indira Gandhi appointed the Justice Sarkaria Commission on Centre-state relations in 1983. Every time that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had problems in dealing with state governments he would, in jest, recall NTR's assertion and remind himself of Justice Sarkaria's views.

India.

The "deterioration in the relationship of trust" that the Tamil Nadu finance minister spoke of contrasts with the environment of trust and mutual accommodation that former finance minister Arun Jaitley referred to when he addressed a special midnight session of Parliament launching the new GST system. The late Arun Jaitley paid handsome tribute to three state finance ministers affiliated to political parties that opposed the BJP — Thomas Isaac of Kerala, Haseeb Drabu of Jammu and Kashmir and Amit Mitra of West Bengal — for their cooperation and contribution to making the introduction of the GST possible. Jaitley's consensual style, which he learnt at the feet of Prime Minister Vajpayee, served the nation well.

Narendra Modi's imperious manner as Prime Minister contrasts with his attitude towards the Central government as the chief minister of Gujarat and his promise of pursuing "cooperative federalism". When Ms Banerjee objected over not being allowed to speak during the PM's interaction with district magistrates, BJP spokespersons chided her for speaking out of turn. This incident reminded me of what used to happen at New Delhi's Vigyan Bhavan during chief ministers' conferences during the first term of Dr Manmohan Singh. Mr Modi would step out of these meetings to address a group of select media people, summoned by the CM's staff, in the lobby of Vigyan Bhavan. Ms Banerjee may well have learnt from that example of how a CM could upstage a PM at a national conference.

Whatever the banter and the normal party political

Narendra Modi's imperious manner as PM contrasts with his attitude towards the Central government as the chief minister of Gujarat and his promise of pursuing 'cooperative federalism'

differences, the fact is that such interactions between the PM and CMs were usually cordial and businesslike during the tenures of consensual PMs like Narasimha Rao, Vajpayee and Dr Manmohan Singh. The current phase of discord and distrust must be brought to an end if India's political leadership as a whole has to deal with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and restore momentum to the economy.

Neither the management of the pandemic and the vaccination drive nor the challenge of fiscal stabilisation and restoration of growth momentum can be handled by the Central government alone. The citizen demands a rational and efficient vaccination programme, a humane and competent healthcare administration and revival of economic growth, employment opportunities and confidence in the medium-term prospects of the economy. The bizarre games of political one-upmanship, the consequent weakening of federal institutions and systems and the mutual blame game between politicians at the Centre and in the states does not serve the interests of the citizen and the nation.

India has lived through many crises and it has recovered speedily when the Centre and the states have shared a spirit of cooperative federalism. Any excessive politicisation of federal governance does no good to either pandemic management or economic revival, nor indeed to an overall improvement in the welfare of the citizen. A prolonged period of political grandstanding and continued tensions between the Centre and the states has already adversely impacted governance and economic development. In the event, the nation needs a renewed commitment to cooperative federalism as defined by the principles of the Constitution.

The writer is an economist, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His latest book is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution.

LETTERS

POETIC JUSTICE

Tamil poet and lyricist Vairamuthu has declared that he is returning the award conferred on him by the Kerala-based ONV Cultural Academy. He has argued that he considers the ongoing controversy to be a slight to his image. Did Vairamuthu not find any damage caused to his 'image' when allegations of sexual harassment were made against him by 17 women in the past? Has the importance of 'self-respect' dawned on the lyricist only after several celebrities denounced the jury's decision to confer the prestigious award on him?

P.G. Menon, Chennai

DIDI'S GIMMICKS

It seems West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee did not arrive at the venue fixed by the Centre for a crucial meeting between her and the Prime Minister (Mamata fumes at chief secy's call). The PM's programmes are always tight, especially in critical times like the pandemic and he has little extra time at his disposal. When the PM says he is coming to West Bengal to oversee the destruction wrought by cyclone Yaas, courtesy demands that the CM of the state is there at the appointed time to receive the PM and discuss with him the modalities necessary for bringing relief to the affected people. On the contrary, she makes the PM wait for 30 minutes and skips a scheduled meeting with him. She not only does not meet the PM on time but quickly changes the venue of the meeting to the airbase where the PM's flight lands. Mamata's reactions against Prime Minister Narendra Modi are sharp and unpredictable and unfit for the lofty position she holds as the CM of one of the largest states in India.

Kangayam R. Narasimhan, Chennai

WELCOME MOVE

The decision of the TN government to deposit Rs 5 lakh in the names of children who have lost their parents to Covid-19, which they could get along with interest when they turn 18 and to foot the education bill of those students till they complete their graduation, is laudable. At the same time, one feels, the government should ensure that only the intended beneficiaries get the benefits. To put it differently, the government should have the correct data of such families to deliver the socio-economic welfare scheme effectively. It must be remembered that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also announced a similar scheme — free education for the orphaned children in the nearest Kendriya Vidyalaya or in a private school, setting up of a corpus fund in their names and so on — under the PM CARESfor Children's scheme. One hopes the Centre and the government of Tamil Nadu would coordinate well to cover all the eligible children.

S. Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	51,422.88 0.60
Nifty 50	15,435.70 0.64
S&P 500*	4,204.11 0.08
Dollar (₹)	72.43 0.22
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.74 -0.24
Euro (₹)	88.28 0.23
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,910.205 0.42
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.78 0.46
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.003 0.27
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.599 -0.011

* As of Friday/Saturday

Nepal's CG Corp in talks to buy listed India hotel

Nepal-based CG Corp Global is in advance talks to acquire a publicly listed hotel brand in India. The firm also plans to add 26 new managed hotel properties, expected to be operational in 2022. "We are in the process of acquiring a very well known brand of a listed hotel company," CG Corp global chairman Binod Chaudhary said. The firm operates 112 hotel properties with 6,013 rooms in 10 countries.

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Five-year personal loans at easy rates Banks to offer ₹5L Covid loan

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MAY 30

Public sector banks on Sunday announced that they would be offering unsecured personal loans of upto Rs 5 lakh to salaried, non-salaried as well as pensioners to meet the treatment cost for Covid-19 at a concessional rate.

The banks also announced new loan schemes for hospitals/dispensaries, vaccine manufacturers, oxygen and ventilator manufacturers and suppliers, importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs logistics firms.

Loans extended under the above schemes would form part of the Covid loan book under the guidelines issued by the central bank this month and are under priority sector lending. Addressing a joint press conference, State Bank of India (SBI) chairman Dinesh Khara, Indian Banks Association (IBA) chairman Rajkiran Rai and IBA chief executive Sunil Mehta announced various support measures and launch of three new loan products by all nationalised banks to mitigate the impact from the pandemic resurgence.

Khara said, "Individuals, including salaried, non-salaried and pensioners, can avail of unsecured personal loans from Rs 25,000 to Rs 5 lakh to meet Covid-19 treatment. The repayment tenure would be five years. SBI would charge interest of 8.5 per cent per annum while other banks



are free to decide their interest rate."

The PSBs have also offered to provide upto Rs 2 crore as healthcare business loan for setting up oxygen plant along with power backup system to existing hospitals, nursing homes under the government's Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS).

The loan tenure is of five years. Capped at an interest rate of 7.5 per cent these loans are backed by 100 per cent guarantee cover of the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Ltd (NCGTC) under ECLGS 4.0, which was announced by the government on Sunday. The third product is a business loan for healthcare facilities up to Rs 100 crore to setup/expand healthcare infrastructure and to manufacturers of healthcare products at a concessional rate.

The government has announced modifications to the ECLGS by enlarging the scheme's scope. The validity of ECLGS has

been extended to September 30, 2021 and disbursement is permitted up to December 31, 2021.

Similarly, to address the disruptions caused by the resurgence of Covid pandemic, the Reserve Bank of India on May 5 announced several measures, including a term liquidity facility of Rs 50,000 crore to Ease Access to Emergency Health Services (Covid Loan Book) such as resolution framework 2.0 for Covid related stressed assets of individuals, small businesses and MSMEs, re-assessment of working capital limits, etc.

While the economy had revived well from the beginning of fourth quarter of FY21, the pandemic's resurgence from April 21 has impacted the lives of individuals, and cash flows of businesses and MSMEs.

"In regard to Resolution framework 2.0, PSBs have formulated a templated approach for restructuring of loans," a release from SBI and IBA said.

PAYTM BOARD OKAYS ₹22K CR IPO IN Q3

PRASOON SRIVASTAVA
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

Digital payments and financial services firm Paytm has received in-principle approval from the company's board to raise around Rs 22,000 crore through an initial public offering in the October-December quarter this year, according to an industry source.

The company is looking at an enterprise value of over Rs 2 lakh crore for the IPO, which is likely to be discussed at its board meeting scheduled for Friday.

"The board of directors of Paytm has given in-principle approval for the mega IPO planned to be launched in October-December quarter. The company expects to raise around Rs 21,000-Rs 22,000 crore from the IPO. This will also give some of the existing investors to offload some of their stake," the source told PTI.

The board meeting of the company was held on Friday.

When contacted, Paytm spokesperson declined to comment.

It is likely to be one of the largest IPOs in India. Paytm shareholders include Alibaba's Ant Group (29.71 per cent), Softbank Vision Fund (19.63 per cent), Saif Partners (18.56 per cent) and Vijay Shekhar Sharma (14.67 per cent). AGH Holding, T Rowe Price and Discovery Capital, Berkshire Hathaway hold less than 10 per cent stake.

Paytm claims to be 30-50 per cent larger than mobile apps in the segment.

— PTI

ECLGS extended to aviation, scope widened

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MAY 30



The government on Sunday announced extending the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) to the civil aviation sector that has been facing headwinds since the onset of the pandemic, besides expanding the scope of the scheme. It also extended the validity of the scheme till September 30, 2021 or till guarantees for an amount of Rs 3 lakh crore are issued.

Disbursement under the scheme will be permitted up to December 31, 2021. In a statement, the finance ministry said that on account of the disruptions caused by the second Covid-19 wave to businesses across various sectors of the economy, it has been decided to enlarge the scope of ECLGS.

In March, ECLGS 3.0 was introduced to cover business enterprises in hospitality, travel and tourism, leisure and sporting sectors.

The ministry has also removed the current ceiling of Rs 500 crore of loan outstanding for eligibility under ECLGS 3.0, subject to maximum additional ECLGS assistance to each borrower being limited to 40 per cent or Rs 200 crore, whichever is lower.

As per an official statement by the finance ministry under ECLGS 4.0, 100 percent guarantee cover will be extended to loans of up to Rs 2 crore given to hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, medical colleges for setting up on-site oxygen generation plants. The interest rate has been capped at 7.5 per cent for

the same, which means the banks can offer loans at lower rates than this ceiling.

"Borrowers who are eligible for restructuring as per the RBI guidelines of May 5, 2021, and had availed loans under ECLGS 1.0 of overall tenure of four years comprising of repayment of interest only during the first 12 months with repayment of principal and interest in 36 months thereafter will now be able to avail a tenure of five years for their ECLGS loan i.e. repayment of interest only for the first 24 months with repayment of principal and interest in 36 months thereafter," the ministry said.

Also, the new scheme has made a provision of additional ECLGS assistance of up to 10 per cent of the outstanding as of February 29, 2020, to borrowers covered under ECLGS 1.0, in tandem with restructuring as per the RBI guidelines of May 5, 2021.

The revised operational guidelines are being issued by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Ltd (NCGTC). Addressing a joint press conference, State Bank of India chairman Dinesh Khara, Indian Banks Association chairman Rajkiran Rai and IBA CEO

Sunil Mehta said the new measures and loan products announced by the banks were aimed at mitigating the impact from the resurgence of the Covid pandemic.

To implement the expanded ECLGS measures, the public sector banks have put in place systems and processes for seamless implementation of RBI's Resolution Framework 2.0, they said.

Declining to comment on the likely number of resolution applications by the MSMEs this time, Rai said last time out of the 8.5 lakh eligible firms only 60,000 had availed of the facility.

Recently the government had announced collateral-free automatic loans worth Rs 3 lakh crore for micro, small and medium enterprises, out of which Rs 2.54 lakh have been sanctioned, IBA and SBI officials said, adding there was still headroom to lend another Rs 46,000 crore under this scheme.

To a question, Rai said the Covid second wave has impacted the collections of public sector banks in the month of May. "It is difficult to give numbers but can say that we faced difficulty in collections in the month of May and we are offering the available reconstructing scheme to customers," Rai said.

COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: Your tireless efforts will bring a great difference in your life. On the romantic front you will desire a dreamy date with a newly found love interest today.



Taurus: Do not get stressed out by worrying about your health. Improve your rapport with family members to maintain domestic peace.



Gemini: You will get rid of items that clutter your house. Don't get frustrated by thinking about the impossible. Interactions with seniors at work is likely to help you.



Cancer: Increase in the inflow of income will encourage you to look for a savings plan. Failure in repaying debts on time will put mortgaged property in jeopardy.

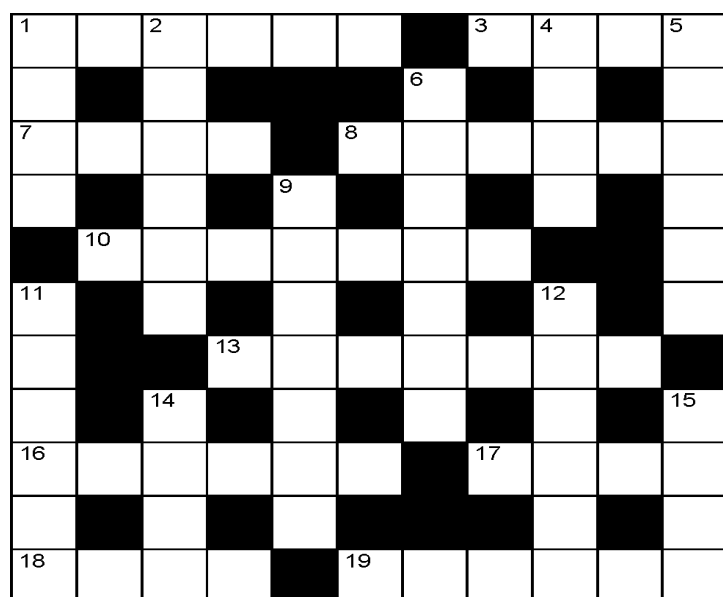


Leo: You might help a distressed person today. Avoid confronting family members today. Refrain from making investments without knowledge.



Virgo: You might have to tackle emotional problems at home. Make the best use of your time and energy by helping others. Professional failures will benefit you if you choose to learn from them.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

- Secret (6)
- Small flying fly (4)
- Poled boat (4)
- Debris (6)
- Addition to a will (7)
- Praise excessively (7)
- Shared (6)
- Sacking fibre (4)
- Title (4)
- Inventor's protection (6)

Down

- Sleeveless cloak (4)
- Selling (6)
- Calligrapher's tips (4)
- Pact (6)
- Stirs up (anag) (7)
- Throw off the scent (7)
- Fish (6)
- Read thoroughly (6)
- Tobacco pipe tube (4)
- Succeeding (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Etiquette, 6. Plaza, 7. Truss, 9. Nits, 10. Anthem, 12. Oracle, 14. Turn, 17. Egg on, 18. Prior, 19. Anthology.

Downs: 2. Toast, 3. Quay, 4. Extend, 5. Tough, 6. Pinhole, 8. Seminar, 11. Flinch, 13. Argon, 15. Using, 16. Opal.

Word Mine

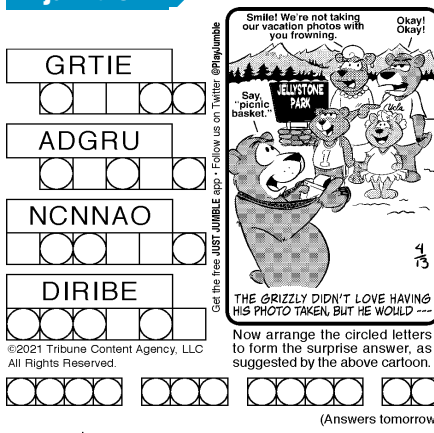
K
YLU
ILNCU

TODAY'S RATINGS: 9 AVERAGE; 10 GOOD; 12 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

Answers tomorrow

jumble



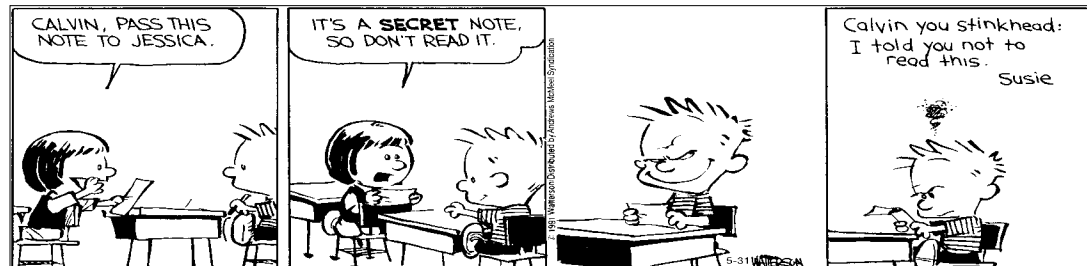
Yesterday's Jumbles: PLUMP ABIDE CANCEL PARADE
Answer: They designed their food truck to have — CURBS APPEAL

must eliminate a loser, simultaneously generating his 10th trick. Anytime declarer has more cards in a suit in his hand than on the board, he should plan to ruff on the board. After winning trick one, South continues with the ace and another diamond. Let's assume East returns a spade. Declarer wins with his ace and ruffs the diamond jack with dummy's heart ace. (Although it isn't necessary here, always ruff high if

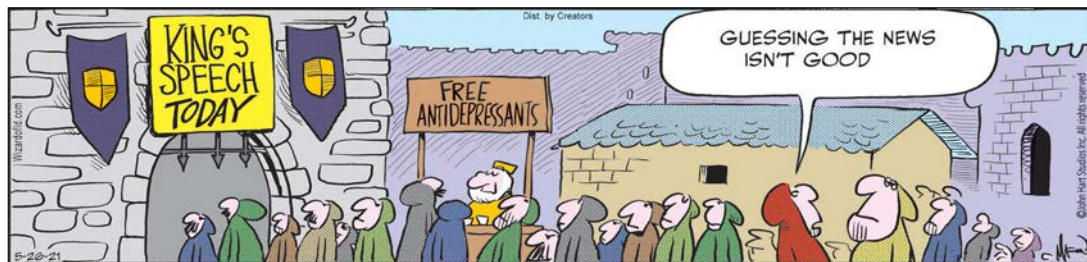
you can afford to do so.) South draws trumps and claims. Yes, declarer could have cashed one round of trumps, but if he had immediately pulled two, West would have defeated the contract by winning the second diamond trick with his 10 and returning his remaining trump to kill the vital ruff.

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



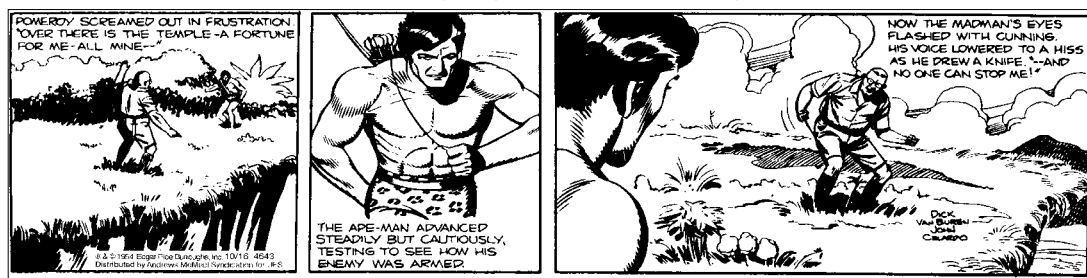
BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



bridge
PHILLIP
ALDER

GETTING VALUE FROM THE SHORTER SIDE

This week's theme, loosely, is looking at the handling of trumps. When should you draw trumps? The answer is multilayered, like an onion. A few people pack a lot into a short life. One example was Blaise Pascal, a Frenchman who lived for only 39 years and 2 months. He was known primarily as a mathematician, but was also a man of letters, and in one he wrote: "I have only made this (letter) longer because I have not had the

time to make it shorter." Today, the trump suit is shorter in the dummy than in hand, which can be helpful to declarer. In four hearts, South receives a spade lead. How should he proceed? First, declarer counts his losers by looking at his 13 cards and taking dummy's honors into account. Here, he has two in diamonds and two in clubs. Next, he counts winners. There are nine: two spades, six hearts and one diamond. South

must eliminate a loser, simultaneously generating his 10th trick. Anytime declarer has more cards in a suit in his hand than on the board, he should plan to ruff on the board. After winning trick one, South continues with the ace and another diamond. Let's assume East returns a spade. Declarer wins with his ace and ruffs the diamond jack with dummy's heart ace. (Although it isn't necessary here, always ruff high if

SHORT TAKES

Teen rider dies in Moto3 crash

Florence: Swiss motorcycle rider Jason Dupasquier has died following a crash during Moto3 qualifying for the Italian Grand Prix, the Careggi Hospital in Florence announced Sunday. He was 19. "Despite the best efforts of circuit medical staff and all those subsequently attending to the Swiss rider, the hospital has announced that Dupasquier has sadly succumbed to his injuries," MotoGP said in a statement. Dupasquier was involved in an accident with Ayumu Sasaki and Jeremy Alcoba toward the end of Saturday's session, which was immediately red-flagged. Meanwhile, Repsol Honda's Pol Espargaro took a 12th place finish in Mugello MotoGP. Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo won the race. After a promising start, star Honda rider Marc Marquez's race lasted just over a lap as he fell at turn three on lap two. — Agencies

Diya-Swastika assured of medal

New Delhi: Young Indian paddlers Diya Chitale and Swastika Ghosh put up solid performances at the 2021 WTT Youth Star Contender in Tunisia as they confirmed a medal in the U-19 girls doubles besides advancing to the knockout stage of the singles category. The Maharashtra duo of Diya and Swastika, who received a bye in the opening round, registered convincing 11-5, 6-11, 11-9, 11-8 victory against the local favourite Fadwa Garci and Maram Zoghiani in the last-8 match in Tunis, and secured at least a bronze medal with an entry into the semi-finals. The Indian pair will take on Czech Republic's Linda Zaderova and Croatia's Hana Arapovic in the last-four match. — PTI

Milkha is back home, wife in ICU

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh was on Sunday discharged from a private hospital where he was getting treatment for Covid-19 infection even as he continues to be on oxygen support. While the 91-year-old Milkha was discharged in stable condition on the request of his family, his 82-year-old wife Nirmal Kaur had to be shifted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) on Saturday night due to increasing oxygen requirement. "On the request of the family, Mr Milkha Singh was discharged from the hospital today in a stable condition. He is on oxygen and nutritional support," the Fortis hospital, Mohali, said in its update. "Mrs Milkha Singh had to be shifted to the ICU last night due to increasing oxygen requirements. She continues to be stable." The hospital had earlier said that they were being treated for pneumonia. — PTI

Mary goes down in summit clash

Dubai: Six-time world champion M C Mary Kom (51kg) signed off with a silver medal in the Asian Boxing Championships after going down in an intense final against Nazym Kyzalbay of Kazakhstan here on Sunday. Mary Kom lost in a split 2-3 verdict. It was her seventh medal in the tournament, the first being a gold that came way back in the 2003 edition. Up against an opponent 11 years younger to her, the 38-year-old made an impressive start and clinched the opening round comfortably by relying on her sharp counter-attacks. The intensity picked up in the second round and both the boxers showed aggressive intent. — PTI

Giannis delivers for Milwaukee

Washington: Giannis Antetokounmpo managed his first NBA playoff triple double on Saturday and the Milwaukee Bucks defeated Miami 120-103 to sweep the Heat out of the post-season in the opening round. Greek star Antetokounmpo had 20 points, 12 rebounds and 15 assists to spark the Bucks, who were led by 25 points from center Brook Lopez and 22 more off the bench from Bryn Forbes. — AFP



Chelsea players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Champions League on Saturday. They beat Manchester City 1-0 in the final. — AP

KINGS OF EUROPE

Havertz strikes as Chelsea edge City to win Champions League

Portugal, May 30: Chelsea won the Champions League for the second time as a Kai Havertz goal secured a tense 1-0 victory over Manchester City in Saturday's final in Porto, shattering Pep Guardiola's dream of lifting the trophy for the third time. Havertz rounded Ederson to score three minutes before half-time at the Estadio do Dragao and the Chelsea players ran to celebrate with the German.

Coach Thomas Tuchel, full of energy on the touchline just like his opposite number, punched the air in celebration, and later jumped with joy on the pitch after Chelsea held on for victory in the second half after City lost distraught skipper Kevin De Bruyne to injury.

The London club finished fourth in the Premier League, a huge 19 points behind champions City, but this, remarkably, was their third win over Guardiola's side in six weeks.

They ended City's hopes of a domestic treble when they triumphed in the FA Cup semi-finals in April and delayed their title celebrations with victory in Manchester.

Now, in a final watched by a limited crowd of just over 14,000 fans who created a raucous atmosphere, they have denied City the first Champions League crown they and Guardiola so crave.

City had to wait 13 years after being taken over by

CL WINNERS (SINCE 2010)

2010-11	Barcelona
2011-12	Chelsea
2012-13	Bayern Munich
2013-14	Real Madrid
2014-15	Barcelona
2015-16	Real Madrid
2016-17	Real Madrid
2017-18	Real Madrid
2018-19	Liverpool
2019-20	Bayern Munich
2020-21	Chelsea

It was an incredibly tough fight. They were determined to win this. We wanted to be the stone in their shoe. The effort was huge. We overcame some difficult moments and had a fantastic attitude to defending

— THOMAS TUCHEL, CHELSEA COACH



Chelsea's Kai Havertz celebrates after scoring a goal against Manchester City in the Champions League final in Porto on Saturday. — AP

Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour just to get to the Champions League final.

They are now the eighth consecutive team to lose in their first appearance at this stage. The same misfortune befell Qatar-owned Paris Saint-Germain last year as well as Tottenham Hotspur when they were beaten by Liverpool in the last all-English final in 2019.

"It is the first time we're here, we'll learn, we'll come back," Guardiola said.

"The players did everything, they wanted to do

well, to win this competition, sometimes you perform well, sometimes not."

Chelsea also lost when they first got to the final, on penalties against Manchester United in Moscow in 2008.

They overcame the final hurdle by beating Bayern Munich in a shoot-out in 2012 and now they have their second European Cup to move level with Juventus, Benfica and Porto as well as another English side, Nottingham Forest.

Their transformation into one of Europe's super clubs has been down to the riches of Roman Abramovich, their Russian oligarch owner who was in attendance in Portugal.

"It's such a special occasion. At this moment in time, we're the best team in the world. You can't take that away from us," said Mason Mount, who has been outstanding for the Stamford Bridge side this season.

Chelsea have been transformed since the appointment as coach in January of Tuchel.

— AFP

WORKED 15 YRS FOR THIS, SAYS HERO HAVERTZ

Portugal, May 30: German forward Kai Havertz said he had "worked 15 years" for the moment when he scored the goal that won the Champions League for Chelsea against Manchester City on Saturday.

"I don't know what to say, I waited a long time. I've worked 15 years for this moment, I am overwhelmed," 21-year-old Havertz told BT Sport.

COACH TUCHEL SET FOR NEW DEAL

Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel is set to reap the rewards with a handsome new contract, although whether he will be allowed to put down roots in west London remains to be seen given how managerial cycles tend to go at Stamford Bridge.

"We have a strong bond, a strong group who can really defend and play and have answers on all questions in the game," Tuchel said.

"Once the celebrations are over and once we digest this experience, it is the moment to grow, to evolve, to learn from it and become better."

There is huge room for improvement in the EPL after Chelsea finished 19 points behind champions City. — AFP

IPL PHASE 2 | IN UAE

Pat to skip, other Aussies doubtful

Sydney, May 30: Kolkata Knight Riders pacer Pat Cummins is set to miss the UAE-leg of the IPL and Cricket Australia needs to make a call if it is prudent to let other Australian players compete in the League and spend more time in mentally tough bio-bubble.

The BCCI on Saturday approved IPL's resumption in September in the UAE. The organisers were forced to suspend the league earlier this month after multiple cases of Covid-19 were reported inside the bio-bubble.

"Cummins, despite a multi-million dollar IPL contract, has already said he will not return to the T20 tournament this season," a report in the Sydney Morning Herald said.

Cricket Australia will have to factor in the workload and bio-bubble fatigue ahead of the T20 World Cup, scheduled to take place in India in October-November.

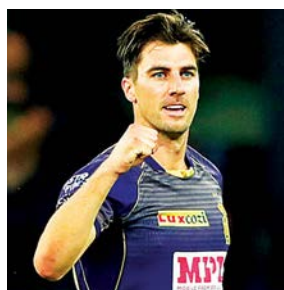
The Australian players had to serve a quarantine period upon their arrival back home via Maldives from India due to travel restrictions in the country in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic.

"CA will need to decide whether it's in the best mental health interests of its players to spend even more time in a bio-secure bubble," the report said.

"CA could decide the IPL will ensure players are fine-tuned for the World Cup, which could also be held in the UAE," the report added.

ECB's Director of Cricket Ashley Giles has already said due to a busy international schedule from June onwards, the English players are unlikely to be available for the remainder of the tournament.

Australia have a tour of West Indies scheduled from late June ahead of the T20 World Cup, followed by



Pat Cummins

a Test against Afghanistan and the Ashes series.

"The Australians could also have a short tour of Bangladesh in August but that has not been confirmed. However, the Bangladesh board is planning for five Twenty20 matches."

The currently-suspended IPL saw participation from over 40 Australian cricketers, support staff and broadcasters.

The IPL, which was held in the UAE last season, has 31 matches remaining.

BCCI WANTS CPL TO BE ADVANCED

The BCCI is trying to convince Cricket West Indies to advance the start of the Caribbean Premier League by a week or 10 days to ensure a seamless bubble-to-bubble transfer of players for the IPL's resumption.

The CPL is scheduled to get underway from August 28 with the final to be played on September 19, while the remaining part of IPL is likely to be held from September 18 to October 10, not leaving the players with any time to settle down.

"We are in talks with Cricket West Indies. We are hoping that if CPL can be finished a few days in advance, it would help in bubble to bubble transfer of all players to Dubai and in time to complete the mandatory three-day quarantine," a BCCI source, privy to the development, said on Sunday. — PTI

MITHALI MOVES ON FROM 2018 SPAT WITH POWAR

New Delhi, May 30: Personal likes or dislikes don't matter when one is playing for the country, India's Test and ODI captain Mithali Raj said on Sunday, insisting that she and head coach Ramesh Powar have "moved on" from a bitter past to take the team forward.

Mithali and Co. are currently quarantining in Mumbai ahead of the UK tour, which is expected to provide a big push to the team's preparations for the ODI World Cup in New Zealand early next year.

The full-fledged series comprising India's first Test in seven years will also be Powar's first assignment as head coach. The former India spinner returned to the role after being sacked following India's semifinal defeat in the 2018 World T20. Mithali was controversially dropped from that game and relations between the two went south with both accusing each other of unprofessional conduct.

"We can't be living in the past. I've played for so many years, I don't have an ego or I don't give attention to my personal likes and dislikes. And 21 years has been a long time for me to sort of, you know, go through many challenges," she said. — PTI



Japan's Naomi Osaka in action against Romania's Patricia Maria Tig during their first round match in the French Open in Paris on Sunday. — AFP

Osaka lets racquet talk, Andujar shocks Thiem

Paris, May 30: World number two Naomi Osaka let her racquet do the talking at the French Open on Sunday, maintaining her media boycott but briefly telling a TV interviewer that her clay court game is "a work in progress".

Osaka opened the first day of action at Roland Garros with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over Romanian world number 63 Patricia Maria Tig.

However, Osaka was threatened with disqualification from the French Open if she persists with her controversial media boycott, officials said.

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

"As might be expected, repeat violations attract tougher sanctions including default from the tournament."

Meanwhile, fourth seed Dominic Thiem blew a two-set lead to be dumped out in the first round by Spanish veteran Pablo Andujar on Sunday.

The 35-year-old Andujar staged a remarkable comeback to defeat the two-time Roland Garros runner-up 4-6, 5-7, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 after almost four-and-a-half hours on Court Philippe Chatrier.

It is the first time in his 17-year career that Andujar has come from two sets behind to win.

"It's a very special moment because I'm 35 and I don't know how long I'm going to play," said Andujar. "I had to believe to be able to get this result."

"It was very difficult, in the third set he wasn't quite as strong."

It is Thiem's first opening-round exit at Roland Garros and the first time he has failed

to reach at least the quarter-finals of the tournament since 2015. — AFP

RESULTS (ROUND 1)

Women: Anhelina Kalinina (UKR) bt Angelique Kerber (GER x26) 6-2, 6-4; Elena Rybakina (KAZ x21) bt Elsa Jacquemot (FRA) 6-4, 6-1; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x31) bt Christina McHale (USA) 6-4, 6-0; Danka Kovinic (MNE) bt Clara Burel (FRA) 6-3, 7-6 (10/8); Ana Bogdan (ROM) bt Elisabetta Cocciaretto (ITA) 6-1, 6-3; Naomi Osaka (JPN x2) bt Patricia Maria Tig (ROM) 6-4, 7-6 (7/4).

Men: Karen Khachanov (RUS x23) bt Jiri Vesely (CZE) 6-1, 6-2, 6-3; Henri Laaksonen (SUI) bt Yannick Hanfmann (GER) 6-1, 6-3, 4-6, 6-2; Roberto Bautista Agut (ESP x11) bt Mario Vilella Martinez (ESP) 6-4, 6-4, 6-2; Fabio Fognini (ITA x27) bt Gregoire Barrere (FRA) 6-4, 6-1, 6-4; Marton Fucsovics (HUN) bt Gilles Simon (FRA) 6-4, 6-1, 7-6 (7/5); Pablo Andujar (ESP) bt Dominic Thiem (AUT x4) 4-6, 5-7, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.

Iniyan qualifies for World Cup

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MAY 30

Indian Grandmaster P. Iniyan on Sunday qualified for the FIDE World Cup, scheduled to be held in July, by winning the AICF World Cup qualifier online chess tournament.

Iniyan and fellow GM from Tamil Nadu, D. Gukesh had finished on 12.5 points each after 17 rounds but the former took the top prize since he had emerged winner in the match between the two in round 14.

Iniyan entered the final day with 10.5 points in his pocket and ahead of Gukesh by half a point. He defeated Rithwik Raja in the 15th round and P. Saravana Krishnan in the 16th before losing to Deep Sengupta.

He scored 12 wins and suffered three losses in the tournament.

The Salem-based GM had scored wins over fancied B Adhian in the second round apart from scoring GMs S.L. Narayanan and Vishnu Prasanna but lost to Surya Sekhar Ganguly. GM S.P. Sethuraman fin-



P. Iniyan

ished third behind Iniyan and Gukesh with 10.5 points while Ganguly (10 points) took the fourth spot.

VAISHALI WINS SPEED CHESS QUALIFIER-2

India's R. Vaishali on Sunday won the women's Speed chess online championship qualifier 2, beating Polina Shuvalova of Russia in the final.

The 20-year-old from Chennai, a woman Grandmaster, became the second Indian to qualify for the main event of the 2021 women's Speed Chess Championship.

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