

ANALYSIS 7
TIME TO EMBRACE THE
BIOLOGICAL REVOLUTION**MONEY 8**
SENSEX ENDS marginally HIGHER;
NIFTY STAYS BELOW 14,700**SPORTS 12**
RAMAN'S SACKING BRING
CAC UNDER SCANNER

HYDERABAD, SATURDAY MAY 15, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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CHIRANJEEVI'S
'LUCIFER' REMAKE
TO HAVE DIREC-
TOR CHANGE

Page 11

**SPUTNIK LIGHT MAY BE INDIA'S 1ST
ONE-DOSE VACCINE**

Russia's Sputnik Light could be the first single-dose vaccine to be used in India and Dr Reddy's will have discussions with the government and the regulator in June for an immediate launch, the company said. "We are working very closely with our Russian partner and the Gamaleya Institute on this. As you may be aware, the Sputnik Light has already been approved in Russia. It demonstrated an efficacy of 79.4%. This is a single-shot vaccine," Deepak Sapra, the CEO of Dr Reddy's, said. "What it essentially is, is that it is the first shot of Sputnik," he explained, adding that a second dose would take the efficacy to up to 91.6%.

**SECOND YEAR OF PANDEMIC SET TO
BE 'FAR MORE DEADLY': WHO CHIEF**

The WHO said Friday that the Covid-19 pandemic's second year was on track to be its deadliest, as he urged rich countries to donate vaccines rather than jab children. "We're on track for the second year of this pandemic to be far more deadly than the first," the World Health Organization's director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference, adding: "I understand why some countries want to vaccinate their children and adolescents, but right now I urge them to reconsider and to instead donate vaccines to Covax."

**OZ RESUMES REPATRIATION FLIGHTS
FROM INDIA FOR STRANDED CITIZENS**

The repatriation flights facilitated by the Australian government for its stranded citizens in India resumed from today, Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne said. Ms Payne said that a flight today departed from Sydney to pick up Australian passengers in New Delhi before arriving back in Darwin on Saturday. It has also carried life-saving oxygen equipment to India to support its COVID-19 response, she said. Ms Payne said the passengers would have to undergo a strict quarantine to make sure they are not carrying the variant of the coronavirus first identified in India.

**75 DEATHS AT GOA'S BIGGEST COVID
HOSPITAL FIGHTING OXYGEN CRISIS**

Seventy-five patients have died at the Goa Medical College and Hospital - the state's biggest Covid facility - in the past four days, because of 'logistic issues' in the supply of medical oxygen. Thirteen died on Friday, according to former Deputy Chief Minister Vijai Sardesai, whose Goa Forward Party was allied with the ruling BJP before quitting last month over 'anti-Goan policies'. On Thursday 15 deaths were recorded. The day before - Wednesday - 21 people died, and on Tuesday 26 people lost their lives. All 75 deaths, Mr Sardesai said, took place in the 'dark hours, which is the time from 1 am to 6 am...'

**Pandemic Wave 2.0:
Plan of action**

2

CMs under fire for interstate restrictions on Covid patients

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

Telangana government issuing guidelines for the entry of Covid patients from other states for treatment at Hyderabad hospitals had snowballed into a major political controversy on Friday even as scores of patients in ambulances on oxygen support at Andhra Pradesh - Telangana borders had waited for hours until a reprieve came in the form of TS high court's order.

While political parties in Andhra Pradesh had criticised Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao for his 'unilateral' and 'dictatorial' attitude of not allowing patients enter Hyderabad terming it denying medical treatment, a fundamental right, Andhra Pradesh chief minister had been accused of 'soft peddling' over the issue due to his



'friendly ties' with KCR. Leaders of various political parties reminded that Hyderabad still remained a common capital for both the states until 2024 and none could restrict anyone's entry to the city.

Though the state government had implemented in a case filed against Telangana government's guidelines

and restricting entry of AP ambulances into Hyd and AP government vociferously presented their arguments, leaders questioned the silence of Jagannathan Reddy, who was not inclined to talk to his Telangana counterpart to resolve the issue.

2

AP argues interstate movement is a fundamental right

Andhra Pradesh Advocate General Asirram Subramanyam in the TS High Court on Friday said that interstate movement was a fundamental right under article 21 of the Constitution of India. Such a restriction on travel was unconstitutional under article 21 of the Constitution of India, he said. He said the provisions referred to in the circular, epidemic diseases act and national disaster management act 2005 does not allow a state to discriminate on the basis of residence of a patient.

2

No entry in TS without hospital confirmation

- Entry of Covid patients from other States linked to nod from Hyd hospitals willing to treat them
- Over 80% of oxygen, ICU beds occupied in TS hospitals
- Over 45% of Covid patients in TS are outsiders: DPH
- State concerned over rising demand for medical oxygen, Remdesivir injections

ML MELLY MAITREYI
■ HYDERABAD

With the Union government apparently allocating to States liquid medical oxygen and other medical supplies in line with their respective segments of population to be covered in the cohort of 18-44 years, Telangana, facing the double whammy of surging Covid cases across the state in the raging second wave and the influx of Covid patients from neighbouring states seeking treatment in Hyderabad's famed hospitals, on Friday sought to further regulate the entry of Covid patients at inter-state borders. The government



issued a circular regulating the entry of Covid patients from the neighbouring States by stopping those without prior confirmation from hospitals in Hyderabad and elsewhere in the State.

2

**Black fungus has claimed 52 lives in Maha so far: Official**

5

HC stays order stopping ambulances

Says don't adopt any circuitous way

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Friday moved quickly to stay a contentious government order issued earlier by the Chief Secretary regulating the entry of Covid patients from other states into Telangana.

Terming the order as 'discriminatory', the High Court directed Police Department not to stop ambulances at inter-state borders and wanted its fiat to be communicated immediately to officials concerned. A Bench of Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijayen Reddy



responded to a PIL (public interest litigation) petition filed by moving a House motion challenging the Telangana government's recently issued guidelines on COVID-19 patients being brought

from other States to Hyderabad for medical assistance. The PIL was filed by retired IRS officer Garimella Venkata Krishna Rao. The Bench said that no authorisation was required for patients to enter the state. In case a patient or kin applies for authorisation, the authorities can assist them in securing hospitalization.

The Court said that the government "should not adopt any circuitous way of issuing fresh guidelines, circular or order putting pedals on inter-State travel of ambulances carrying COVID-19 patients".

2



100 ventilators received through PM Cares defective

NAVEENA GHANATE
■ HYDERABAD

Compounding the woes of the already stretched public health infrastructure in Telangana amidst the raging pandemic, as many as 100 ventilators received by the state through the PM Cares Fund have been found to be defective.

The service provider concerned has not been responding promptly to complaints regarding the

defective ventilators, according to sources.

The Government of India has been providing ventilators to States, which in turn allot them to various medical institutions. As part of this, TS has received around 1,300 ventilators.

An official in the Medical and Health Department said: "After supplying the ventilators,

2

AP CID arrests MP for sedition after he says 'cancel CM's bail'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Narsapuram MP, Kanumuri Raghurama Krishnam Raju, was today arrested by the Andhra Pradesh Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for sedition weeks after the rebel YSR Congress leader asked a CBI special court to cancel the bail granted to his party founder, Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, in a disproportionate assets case.

Raju was arrested from his residence in Hyderabad for allegedly acting in a way detrimental to the prestige of the state government, ANI reported. The 59-year-old MP's allegations include that of corruption against Mr Reddy's government.

2

230 teachers succumbed to Covid in second wave

15 teachers died after performing election dutiesANUSHA PUPPALA
■ HYDERABAD

In all, 230 government teachers in Telangana lost their lives in the current second wave of Covid-19.

The Telangana United Teachers Federation (UTF) said that majority of these teachers were forced to attend schools up to April 26, 2021 due to which they were infected. Some were infected after they performed election duties.

About 500 teachers were deployed for election duties in the Nagarjuna Sagar Assembly constituency as well as Warangal and Khammam Municipal Corporations. Among them, 15 teachers died due to Covid-19. Among the 230 teachers who died

About 500 teachers were deployed for election duties in the Nagarjuna Sagar Assembly constituency as well as Warangal and Khammam Municipal Corporations

in the second wave, 166 were in service and 59 were retired teachers. At 25, the highest death toll was recorded in Sangareddy district and 16 deaths occurred in Hyderabad district.

2



Sputnik V vaccine launched at Rs 995.4 per dose

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Friday launched COVID vaccine Sputnik V in India and the imported vaccine is priced at Rs 995.4 per dose.

2

Recoveries outnumber daily Covid cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's daily COVID-19 recoveries have outnumbered the daily new cases, taking the total recoveries to over two crore, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday.

This is the third time in the last four days that recoveries have outnumbered daily cases.

India's cumulative recoveries have surpassed 2 crore (2,00,79,599) with 3,44,776 patients recuperating in a day.

"It outnumbers India's daily new COVID cases for the third



time in the last four days," the ministry said, adding ten states account for 71.16 per cent of the new recoveries.

A total of 3,43,144 new coronavirus infections were registered

2

Rs 1.35 lakh crore disbursed under Kisan scheme: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the Centre has transferred around Rs 1,35,000 crore so far under the PM-KISAN scheme with the payment of eighth instalment on Friday and is also procuring higher quantity of paddy and wheat at MSP to boost farmers' income. Out of the total amount disbursed since the launch of the scheme in February 2019,

2

No vaccination today and tomorrow

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Government has suspended the ongoing vaccination drive for the second dose for two days --- Saturday and Sunday.

Director of Public Health Dr Srinivasa Rao said that the Government of India had increased the period of interval between the first and the second dose of Covishield vaccine from the present duration of 6-8 weeks to 12-16 weeks.

2

Monsoon to make early arrival over Kerala: IMD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The southwest monsoon is likely to arrive over Kerala on May 31, a day earlier than its normal onset date, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday.

The normal onset date of the monsoon over Kerala is June 1.

"This year, the onset of the southwest monsoon over Kerala is likely to be on 31st May with a model error of plus/minus 4 days," the IMD said.

In the Indian monsoon region, initial monsoon rains are experienced over south Andaman Sea and the monsoon winds then advance north-westwards across the Bay of



Bengal.

According to the new normal dates of monsoon onset or progress,

the southwest monsoon advances over the Andaman Sea around May 22. As a cyclone is expected to form

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Vaishakha & Shukla Paksha Panchangam

Tithi : Tritiya: 07:59 am

Nakshatram : Mrigashirsha: 08:39 am

Time to Avoid : (Bad time to start any important work)

Rahukalam : 09:00 am - 10:36 am

Yamagandam : 01:48 pm - 03:24 pm

Variyam : 05:57 pm - 07:43 pm

Gulika : 05:47 am - 07:24 am

Good Time : (to start any important work)

Amritakalam : 12:09 am - 01:55 am

Abhijit Muhurtham : 11:46 am - 12:38 pm

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 35/24

Humidity: 61%

Sunrise: 05:44 am

Sunset: 06:40 pm

Current Weather Conditions Updated May 14, 2021 5:00 PM

Pandemic management involves multiple tasks being performed at different levels. Subsidiarity provides one way of assignment of tasks (or functions) to multiple levels in a way that brings about coherence and maximizes their effectiveness. The principle of subsidiarity, popularized by Professor Walter Stohr at the University of Vienna, states that assignment of functions should start with the lowest administrative unit and all functions that are best performed by the lowest unit should be portioned out to it. What the lowest level is unable to do should then be assigned to the next higher level. The same process is repeated for succeeding levels. In the case of COVID-19 management, let us do the allocation of functions to three levels: locality (e.g. wadas, mohallas, purwas, petas), district and the State.

At the lowest level (locality), coronavirus medical facilities (called centres) would be established in buildings (e.g. banquet halls, community

PANDEMIC WAVE 2.0: PLAN OF ACTION

halls) or open grounds (e.g. exhibition grounds/stadia). These centres would contain beds, beds with oxygen (cylinders or concentrators) and would be manned by nursing and medical students and supervised by AYUSH doctors (India has more than 7 lakh AYUSH doctors). Testing would also be performed at this level. Administrative arrangements, such as hiring of beds from tent companies, identifying philanthropists/organizations to provide food/water, etc. would be looked after by the local tahsildars/BDOs/municipal inspectors.

These centres would be the first port-of-call for all afflicted people from the localities. Here, medical staff would assess their condition and divide the patients into three categories: (1) not so serious cases would be sent home with a medicine kit and their

Vaccination would be done strategically in order to break the link between infected and healthy people. The tactic would be to track down each and every case of Covid, seclude the patient and first vaccinate every person known to have physically come into contact with the carrier

condition would be monitored by doctors using teleconsultation, (2) patients requiring observation and/or oxygen would be admitted in the centre for a few days, and (3) serious patients would be referred to hospitals having a tie-up with the centres. Ambulances located at the centres would ferry serious patients to the hospitals for treatment in hospitals. Patients would also be referred to private hospitals from the centres only.

The second level (district/municipal) and

would perform the following functions: arrange for tie-up of hospitals to the centre(s); supply oxygen and medicines to centres; maintain and operate ambulances; mobilize and deploy AYUSH doctors and medical/nursing students; supply vaccines; collect data and act on information (including grievances); and coordinate between the multiple centres and linked-up hospitals.

The second level would also be responsible for the roll-out of active surveillance-containment in order to cre-



DR. SAMEER SHARMA

ate a ring of immunity around each infected person. Local level field workers (e.g. ASHA workers) would be identified to conduct house-to-house visits periodically in order to identify infected persons and prevent sick people from leaving their homes, and isolate the super-spreaders. Micro-level lockdowns would also be decided based on this information. In this way, the sur-

veillance-containment method would prevent the virus from spreading in other localities (social networks).

Vaccination would be done strategically in order to break the link between infected and healthy people. The tactic would be to track down each and every case of COVID-19, seclude the patient and first vaccinate every person known to have physically come into contact with the carrier. This would reinforce the ring of immunity created around infected people and seal off out-breaks from the rest of the population. For vaccination, the experienced pulse polio health workers are readily available.

The third level (State Government) would perform the following functions: (1) continuously review and revise the action plan based on regular feedback, (2) decide on locking down

localities/wards/cities/villages/districts based on the morbidity and mortality patterns, (3) ensure doorstep distribution of food, medicines and daily provisions, particularly to the poor and the vulnerable, (4) monitor and coordinate conversion of establishments coronavirus medical centres, (5) distribute pensions, direct cash transfer, etc. to the local residents, (6) procure and supply all medical and health supplies and technical assistance, (7) mobilize and provide digital solutions for monitoring operations at all levels, track patients and provide them access to tele-consultation with doctors, (8) organize advocacy on a range of issues that are connected to prevention of COVID-19 and its treatment, and (9) provide direct help if the districts/municipalities are overwhelmed by a large number of cases.

This action plan provides a basic template for integrating pandemic control operations in a way that the whole effort becomes greater than a mere sum of its parts. Most importantly, the action plan is a living document and is continuously updated and improved based on feedback received from lower levels. No matter what the upgrade to the action plan, the cornerstone would be adherence to the subsidiarity principle - processes and decisions that can be performed at a lower level should be performed there. Only those functions that cannot be satisfactorily done at the lower level would be 'delegated' to higher levels of government. Such reverse delegation would also include entrustment functions to the private sector and the 'third' sector.

(Author has a PhD from USA and a D Litt from Kanchi University. The article is based on his research and practice and views are personal)

AP CID arrests..

Continued from page 1

He has been charged under Sections 124A (sedition), 153A (Promoting enmity between different groups), and 505 (conducting public mischief). "There was information against Sri Raju, stating that he has been indulging in hate speeches against certain communities and promoting disaffection against the government," a states from the police said following his arrest.

"...it was found that through his speeches on regular basis Mr Raju was indulging in systematic, schematic effort to cause tensions...and by attacking various government dignitaries in a way which will cause loss of faith in the government which they represent," it said.

Raju had, on April 27, asked a special CBI special court to cancel the bail granted to Jagan Mohan Reddy in a disproportionate assets case from 2012. He had claimed that the Chief Minister had violated the bail provisions.

The Parliamentarian had quit the YSR Congress several years ago only to return to the party just before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

TRS moves to isolate Eatela base in Huzurabad

ML MELLY MAITREYI ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Rashtra Samithi leadership has moved to ensure that none from the party unit in Huzurabad constituency veers towards the camp of Eatela.

After Etela said that he had been vindictively targeted by the party leadership with allegations of encroachment on assigned lands and made it clear that he would not compromise on his self-respect and fight it out in 'people's court', the party leadership assigned Minister Gangula Kamalakara to manage the party affairs in the constituency.

Kamalakar, who figures among the other Ministers identified by the Congress as those who have encroached on assigned /wakf/temple lands (but spared by the ruling party), countered the criticism of Etela against party president and Chief Minister K.Chandrasekhar Rao.

Kamalakar said that, much before Eatela entered the constituency, i.e. since 2001 TRS had had with it committed



ZPTCs, MPTCs, Sarpanches and cadre in every village in the Huzurabad constituency. So, Eatela entered the constituency that was already a stronghold of TRS.

Eatela won six times as MLA on the strength of TRS flag, symbol and with KCR's photo, but was under the mistaken impression that it was due to his own individual strength, Kamalakara observed. Eatela used the BC card for convenience in the constituency and OC card in Hyderabad. It was KCR who introduced several schemes for empowerment of BCs, SCs, STs and minorities, Kamalakara said.

Kamalakar has been inter-

acting with TRS leaders and functionaries in every mandal and municipality of Huzurabad constituency, preparing the ground for the party to retain the seat despite the exit of Eatela. "It is not individuals but the organization that is important for a political party," he told them.

Kamalakar has been meeting people's representatives from local bodies and party leaders to ensure their loyalty to the TRS and its president KCR, though Eatela is believed to have his own followers in the constituency.

On Friday, some people's representatives and party cadre in various mandals, including

Jagga: We will field our candidate in Huzurabad

Congress shocker to Eatela Rajender

K VENKATESHWARLU ■ HYDERABAD

Former health minister Eatela Rajender, who was ejected from the state cabinet under a cloud of land-grab charges, may not get the support he expected from the Congress party, going by the remarks of Jagga Reddy, Congress party MLA from Sangareddy, at a press conference here on Friday.Jagga Reddy made it clear that the Congress party would field its candidate in Huzurabad "if by-elections are inevitable". He described the differences between Eatela and TRS party as 'their internal conflict'. The Congress party's Kaushik Reddy would carry the party flag in Huzurabad even in crisis, he underlined. "To my knowledge, TPCC chief Uttam or CLP leader Bhatti both would field Congress candidate in Huzurabad if a by-election comes", he said. This statement of Jagga Reddy has thrown cold water on the reported plans of Eatela to resign from the Assembly and TRS party,

and take on the TRS by winning the Huzurabad by-elections with the support of all opposition parties. According to media reports, Eatela wants to contest the Huzurabad by-election as an Independent with the support of all opposition parties. Jagga Reddy's statement comes in the wake of TPCC working president A Revanth Reddy's demand that the state government should order an inquiry into the encroachments by Ministers Ch Malla Reddy and KT Ramarao as well. This is seen as indirect support to Eatela. Former Congress MLA SA Sampath Kumar also extended his indirect support to Eatela by demanding the state government to order an inquiry into land encroachments by 12 Ministers. It may be recalled that Eatela, after expressing his intention to meet leaders of all political parties, first met Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka. It is learnt that Eatela sought the support of the Congress party, should he quit the Assembly as well as the pink party and contest the by-elections.

Huzurabad, Jammikunta, Illanthakunta and Veenavanka, reiterated their support and loyalty to the party.

Kamalakar also conveyed to them that whether it was issues

related to constituency development or party affairs, they could approach him and he would take them to the Chief Minister. He has been monitoring pending developmental

works in the constituency and following it up with officials. He is also collecting details of proposed works to take them to the Chief Minister for consideration.

CMs under fire for interstate...

Continued from page 1

However, Andhra Pradesh chief secretary, Adityanath Das spoke to Telangana chief secretary on the issue, but patients suffered in long traffic jams in ambulances at the borders.

"Why is Jagan not reminding KCR that Hyderabad is a common capital for 10 years? KCR and Telangana government has been treating Andhra people as second grade citizens though the law and order in Hyderabad is still with the governor and why Jagan is maintaining silence and not questioning about it? Telangana police are violating Article 14, 17 and 21. It is unfortunate that Telangana is not stopping those coming from other countries to Hyderabad for treatment but stopping those coming from Andhra Pradesh.

AP police should file cases against Telangana government and its heads for the deaths of Andhra patients," said BJP state

AP argues interstate movement is a...

Continued from page 1

Any power to classify persons for specific measure under the epidemic diseases act on the basis of residence would be unconstitutional, he argued. "Further, the measures prescribed have no nexus with the objective sought to be achieved under the circular. Why are these measures prescribed only for other than citizens of Telangana? Is residence disqualification? Medical infrastructure in the country irrespective of the state in which it is located is a national asset and the Supreme Court has directed that there should be seamless coordination between all the states," he said. "To restrict access or to condition access on the basis of residence is clearly unconstitutional and this circular issued to get over the judgment of the High Court on May 11 where the High Court directed state not to restrict. The circular was sent to AP by mail last night and since morning there is stopping of ambulances. The entire process is to work around the orders of the High Court lacking complete justification in law and on facts. Separate restrictions for covid patients belonging to other states are constitutionally impermissible.

general secretary, S Vishnuvardhan Reddy.

CPI state secretary K Ramakrishna too questioned Telangana government's rationale behind stopping ambulances from Andhra Pradesh.

TDP National General

Secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh demanded that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy spoke to his Telangana counterpart for getting permission for ambulances to carry Coronavirus patients from AP to Hyderabad for medical treatment.

Sputnik V vax...

Continued from page 1

The first dose of Sputnik V, also the first foreign-made vaccine used in the country, was administered in Hyderabad as part of a limited pilot project.

The first consignment of imported doses of Sputnik V landed in India on May 1, and received regulatory clearance from the Central Drugs Laboratory, Kasauli, on May 13, according to Dr Reddy's Laboratories.

"The imported doses of the vaccine are presently priced at an MRP of Rs 948 + 5 per cent GST per dose, with the possibility of a lower price point when local supply begins," it said in a statement.

Currently, the imported dose is priced at a maximum retail price of Rs 948 along with 5 per cent GST, which amounts to Rs 995.4 per dose.

HC stays order stopping ambulances

Continued from page 1

The Andhra Pradesh and the Central government were also made parties to the plea. The court asked them to file their counters to ensure uniformity.

No vaccination...

Continued from page 1

Accordingly, changes have been made in the CoWIN portal by GOI such that it will be possible to administer the second dose only after a minimum of 12 weeks.

In view of the above changes, the special drive for second dose for 45 years and above age group taken up by the Health Department will not be conducted tomorrow and day after tomorrow (Saturday and Sunday).

100 ventilators received..

Continued from page 1

The company which has supplied them is not at all responding to complaints. They are not coming and rectifying it even if there is a small problem. Amidst the crisis, we have not kept aside any ventilator, except those which are defective. We have placed tenders for comprehensive maintenance of all the biomedical equipment utilized for Covid treatment in the major State Government hospitals of Telangana through TSMSIDC".

100 ventilators received..

A total of 3,801 items of biomedical equipment are being utilised in the state exclusively for Covid-19 treatment in government hospitals. Of these, 1,449 are ventilators worth Rs 68.48crore. Life-saving equipment worth Rs 88.45 crore, including ventilators, HFNC, CPAP, BiPAP, multipara monitors, infusion pumps, suction apparatus, syringe pumps and defibrillators, is currently being used in government hospitals. The government is looking for an agency to ensure proper maintenance of the equipment.

Recoveries...

Continued from page 1

India's total active caseload has decreased to 37,04,893 and now comprises 15.41 per cent of the country's total cases. A net decline of 5,632 cases has been recorded in the active caseload in a span of 24 hours.

The National Mortality Rate currently stands at 1.09 per cent, the ministry said.

A total of 4,000 deaths were reported in a span of 24 hours. Ten states account for 72.70 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (850). Karnataka follows with 344 daily deaths. The cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country is nearing 18 crore, the ministry said.

A total of 17,92,98,584 vaccine doses have been administered through 26,02,435 sessions, according to the provisional report till 7 am.

HYDERABAD BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ Rs.48, 570(10 gm)	
200	↓
SILVER	
₹ 76, 000 (1kg)	
100	↑
CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹165
Without Skin	₹188
Broiler at Farm	₹114
EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	445
VIJAYAWADA	426
VISAKHAPATNAM	355
RETAIL PRICE (IN HYDERABAD)	₹4.45

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Corona in Hyd slums: Where home quarantine is difficult

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In the central part of Hyderabad is one of the largest slums in the city. Patigadda in Begumpet has multiple slum clusters which are home to a population of more than 50,000. Average size of occupants in some of the houses here, which is a mix of tin houses and concrete structures, is anywhere between 4 and 10.

Covid is spreading at a rapid pace across the state, which prompted the state government to mandate home quarantining. Quarantines aren't particularly easy to implement - they require sacrifices and trust in the government, but also adequate infrastructure so people can safely quarantine themselves. Those who live in single room in over 1400 notified slums under GHMC limits are facing difficulties to send their near and dear to home quarantine if anyone of the family members tests positive for the virus.

An auto-rickshaw driver who



lives along with wife and three children in Talabkatta was forced to work even as there is spurt in Covid cases under the impact of the Coronavirus second wave to support the family. Recently, he had developed Covid symptoms. Upon testing, he tested positive for virus. Doctors advised him to undergo treatment in home quarantine. He is at a loss of comprehension

where is the space for him to undergo home quarantine?

A mechanic working in a garage in Golnaka area of Amberpet in the city came here from Mahabubnagar for livelihood. He lives in a small room along with wife and two children. In the house, where he lived, there are three more families live there. All the tenants should share common bath-

room. His wife who works as a domestic help tested positive for the virus. The family is worried about quarantining her as there is no other room in their portion.

Besides slums, there are many housing colonies and slums mushroom all around the city. Many families that reach here for livelihood live in small rented rooms there. Official statis-

tics indicate that a majority of people who arrived here are from other parts of the state. They live in rented houses, narrow rooms and hence cannot afford quarantining at homes. The family has no alternative except sending wife and children to their relatives' homes. Their condition will worsen if relatives would not let them in.

Covid tests being done at urban clinics, urban primary health centres, PHCs, Area hospitals and government hospitals. How to quarantine the people living in slums and one room portions if they happen to test positive for the virus? There is none to think about their welfare. If they happen to test positive, the authorities wash off their hands giving them medicines. There is no information about free quarantine centres set up by the state government or civil society organisations at the Covid testing centres. Those who tested positive for virus are afraid of visiting the quarantine centres for fear of facing many more problems.

Rachakonda SHE Teams avert 100 child marriages, highest in Bhongir

DUGGU RAGHU
■ MEDCHAL MALKAJGIRI

The SHE Teams of Rachakonda and two women and child counselling centres have played a major role in improving the safety of children and women.

The SHE Teams have solved major cases and prevented 100 child marriages in just five years with the cooperation of self-help groups.

The Rachakonda SHE Teams have conducted several awareness programmes and counseled several parents and guardians for performing child marriages.

According to officials, the highest number of 43 child marriages was prevented in Bhongir area, followed by Choutuppal, 25, Ibrahimpatnam, 12, Malkajgiri, 8, Kushaiguda, 5, Vanasthalipuram, 4 while the lowest was three marriages in LB Nagar during the five years since the inception of the She Teams.

Of the rescued children from child marriages, 29 of them aged 15 or younger, 20 of them were 16-years-old and 40 of them were aged 17.

The Rachakonda



Commissioner of Police Mahesh M Bhagwat said, "According to Child Marriages Prevention Act, we counselled all the parents and guardians performing marriages below the stipulated age. Priests, wedding card printers, elders and supporters of the marriage, parents of child will be held responsible for the act. As per Child Marriages Prohibition Act-2006, people permitting, supporting, performing and attending, will be held accused under the Act. Encouraging such things would fetch a fine of Rs 1 lakh and minimum of two years imprisonment as punishment. Due to early marriage, the chances of maternal death of the mother are high."

"During the awareness pro-

grammes, the SHE Teams made the public understand the problems of child marriages. As a result of these programmes from 2017 to 2021, the Rachakonda SHE Teams stopped 100 child marriages and rescued the girls from child marriages," he said.

Mahesh Bhagwat, appreciating the good work of the SHE Teams, requested citizens not to encourage child marriages as it was a crime. Priests, wedding invitation printers, elders and supporters of the marriage and parents of the child would be held responsible for the act, he said, adding that citizens could report child marriages on Dial 100 facility or the Rachakonda Police WhatsApp number-9490617111.

CITY LIGHTS

Basavanna was greatest social reformer, says Cyb CP Sajjanar

Rich tributes were paid to Jagadguru Basaveshwara by Cyberabad Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar on the occasion of his Jayanthi. Sajjanar recalled the services of Basaveshwara for the society. "He was a 12th-century poet-philosopher and the founding saint of the Lingayat tradition, who devoted his life to service and social reforms. He was a social revolutionary much ahead of his times. His noble teachings, particularly the emphasis on social empowerment, harmony, brotherhood and compassion continue to inspire several people all over the world. All of us should follow him and re-dedicate ourselves for nation, the Cyberabad CP said. DCP Traffic SM Vijay Kumar, IDCP Madhapur M Venkateswarlu, Cyberabad CAR HOTRS ADCP Manikraj, Estate Officer ACP Santhosh Kumar, ACP Hanumanth Rao, all RIs, SCSC Volunteers and other staff were present on the occasion.



SCSC sends Covid relief to 30 district hospitals in Telangana

With the support extended by some of the members of Society for Cyberabad Security Council (SCSC) by the way of donations, Cyberabad Police Commissioner and Chairman of SCSC VC Sajjanar, flagged off 30 truckloads of medical material comprising of beds, pulse oximeters, thermometers, PPEs, N95 masks, stretchers, wheel chairs and sanitizers for staff and patients to 30 district hospitals in Telangana. On this occasion, Cyberabad CP VC Sajjanar, thanked SCSC and its members who generously donated funds to provide Covid relief during these troubled times. He appreciated all the member companies namely Providence, Harsco, Phoenix, Metrochem, Cigniti, Keste Software, Arcesium, Innominids, Nalsoft, Copart, Sundew and Rajapushpa Properties who supported SCSC with their CSR funds towards various initiatives of SCSC towards Covid Relief Measures. He appreciated efforts SCSC General Secretary Krishna Yedula and team DCP Traffic SM Vijay Kumar, Additional DCP Manikraj and other police officers for working relentlessly over last 10 days to make this happen.



Parts of Hyderabad record moderate rainfall on Friday

Light to moderate rains lashed the city on Friday afternoon, bringing the temperature down by quite a few notches. While the day started off on a dry, hot note, late-afternoon saw showers in many areas across the city, ranging from a light drizzle of 0.5 mm rainfall recorded at the Automatic Weather Station (AWS) at Malkajgiri to 33 mm at Gachibowli. The AWS at Lingampally MMTS station also saw moderate rainfall, at 32.2 mm, and the surrounding areas as well, like Miyapur, Khajaguda, Chandanagar also saw rainfall of 16mm, 16.8mm and 28 mm respectively. Bachpalle also recorded rainfall of over 30 mm. The south-eastern parts of the city, Saroonagar and Hayathnagar, also saw moderate rainfall between 16 mm recorded at Alkapuri and 29.3 mm recorded at Hastinapuram community hall. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Hyderabad, expects similar rainfall till May 18, with a possibility of rain or thundershowers towards evening or night.



SBI, Hyderabad officials elevated as Deputy, Chief Gen Managers

Om Prakash Mishra, Chief General Manager, SBI Hyderabad Circle has been elevated to the post of Deputy Managing Director, effective May 14. Mishra, a banker with over three decades of experience, has headed the Hyderabad Circle of State Bank of India since May 2019. Mishra joined the bank as a probationary officer in 1987 in Patna Circle. He worked in Guwahati and Delhi Circle in his earlier assignments as General Manager. Also, Ajay Kumar Singh, General Manager, SBI, Hyderabad Circle, has been elevated to the post of Chief General Manager. Singh joined the bank as a probationary officer in 1991 in Patna Circle and handled various operational assignments including in Corporate Centre, Mumbai and North Eastern Circle, Guwahati, said a release.



Exploring all possibilities to procure vaccine: KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Municipal Administration Minister KT Rama Rao said on Friday that the State government is exploring all possible options to procure a sufficient quantity of vaccines.

The Minister, who heads the Covid Task Force, discussed various alternatives to drugs that are in high demand like Remdesivir with representatives of pharma companies at Pragathi Bhavan here on Friday. He urged the medical fraternity to explore these options.

The Task Force, constituted to procure necessary vaccines and medicines for Covid management, met the top management of various pharmaceutical companies. The team discussed various issues in-depth with the heads of pharma companies involved in producing Covid vaccines.

Among the issues discussed in the meeting were the progress in the development of various types of vaccines by dif-

ferent companies, their production capacities, and the availability of vaccines in the market. The Minister assured the representatives of all help from the government to expedite various steps involved in the commercialisation of

vaccines. Among those participated in the meeting were representatives from Natco Pharma, Biological E Ltd, Bharath Biotech, Serum Institute of India, Sanofi India, Virchow Biotech, Zydus Cadila, Hetero Drugs, Gland Pharma, Indian Immunologicals, and Dr Reddys Labs.

Meanwhile, as part of its corporate social responsibility, the TSIC contributed Rs 1.19 crore towards Covid mitigation activities in the State. A cheque was handed over by EV Narasimha Reddy, Managing Director-TSIC, to Rahul, Commissioner of State Disaster Management Authority, in the presence of Minister KT Rama Rao, and Principal Secretary, Industries, Jayesh Ranjan.



4,305 new cases, 29 fatalities in TS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana has reported 4,305 new Covid infections and 29 fatalities on Friday taking the cumulative number of deaths to 2,896 and the total number of positive cases to 5,20,709. The number of active cases in Telangana, as on Friday evening, is 54,832.

Between Thursday and Friday, authorities conducted 57,416 Covid tests of which results of 1714 samples were awaited. On Friday, 6,361 individuals have recovered with a recovery rate of 88.91 percent. So far, a total of 1,39,52,378 Covid-19 tests have been conducted in the State out of which 5,20,709, tested positive and 4,62,981 persons have recovered.

The Covid-19 positive cases reported from the districts included 34 from Adilabad, 130 from Bhadrachal, 607 from areas under GHMC, 125 from Jagtial, 63 from Jangaon.

2 die as TS cops turn back AP ambulances

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a tragic turn of events, two patients from Andhra Pradesh died in the ambulance vehicles they were traveling in, as Telangana Police did not permit vehicles without valid online permits to cross the interstate border at Kurnool. The development took place at the Panchalingala Checkpost on National Highway 44, on Friday.

The two persons who died on Friday, were identified as natives of Nandyal and Kurnool respectively.

At least 40 ambulances from Andhra Pradesh were forced to return back from the Pullur toll plaza since Thursday when they tried to cross the state border on the way to Hyderabad. A similar situation played out at the Ramapuram cross border post near Suryapet.



While Telangana police officials said that ambulances not carrying the required online permits, were barred from entering, kin of some of the patients said that even those with permits issued by the Andhra Pradesh police were forcibly turned back.

With Covid cases on the rise in Andhra Pradesh, many critically ill patients are being taken to Hyderabad, which in turn is putting pressure on bed availability and medical care in the state capital.

Major fire breaks out at a shop in Jagadish Market

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A major fire broke out in a mobile phone and accessories shop at Jagadish Market in the Abid Road area here on Thursday night. No casualties were reported as the shop was closed at the time of the incident, police said.

Officials suspect a short circuit led to the fire.

Local residents who noticed the fire and thick smoke emerging from the closed mobile shop on the ground floor of a building, alerted the fire department and police immediately.

"It is a market place and the shop was full of gadgets, plastic, fibre and inflammable material. There was nobody present inside at the time of mishap," said an official.

Officials said the cost of the property damaged was yet to be estimated.

CPs inspect lockdown security arrangements

PNS ■ MEDCHAL MALKAJGIRI

The Police Commissioners of tri-commissionerates on Friday inspected the security arrangements for lockdown.

Cyberabad Commissioner of Police VC Sajjanar visited Rajendranagar, Attapur Pillar Number 151, Aramghar, Shastripuram, Mailadevally, Shamshabad and Thondupalli.

Sajjanar spent time with the field level police officers and supervised their functioning at the check-posts on roads. Also, he advised them to take all safety precautions while checking the vehicles and interacting with the public.

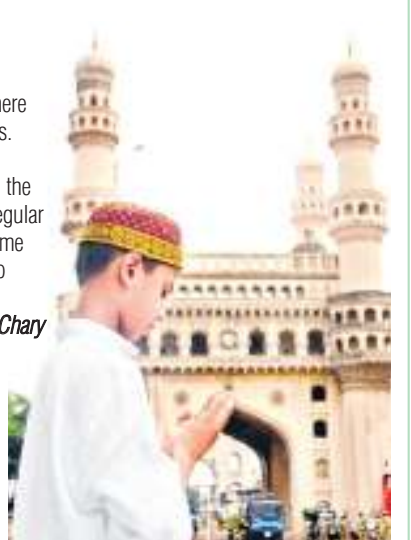
He reiterated that the police personnel need to be very vigilant as the pandemic is still rampant and expressed satisfaction that the citizens have been voluntarily following the lockdown orders and that the police on ground are actually trying to help citizens.

Sajjanar also appreciated the efforts of police personnel in ensuring strict implementation of lockdown while facilitating the movement of essential and emergency services men and materials as per the GO.

Rachakonda Commissioner of Police Mahesh M Bhagwat along with senior officials visited police check-posts at Hayathnagar, Abdullahpurmet, Uppal, LB Nagar and Meerpet and enquired with the staff about the implementation of lockdown.

"If anyone is caught violating lockdown rules and coming on the road for trivial reasons, that will be taken seriously. Those caught a second time will have their vehicles seized," Bhagwat said.

Hyderabad Police Commissioner Anjani Kumar too visited various places in the old city and reviewed security arrangements.



- Photos by SV Chary

Virus levels in Hyd lakes gave early warning of Covid waves

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Apart from confirming that Hyderabad's iconic Hussain Sagar Lake is teeming with the dreadful Coronavirus, researchers have found that the dynamic of viral load in the water serves as an early warning signal of impending pandemic waves.

In addition to the Hussain Sagar, the group of researchers, has identified some more lakes in the city vicinity, the waters of which, contain the virus.

These include the Nacharam lake and the Nizam Talab. Fortunately, so far, there are no documented studies to prove that Covid can be

spread through water unlike the polio virus.

The researchers, comprising of scientists from the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT), the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) here, and the Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research (AcSIR) in Ghaziabad, conducted the study, with support of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

The study, spread over seven months, roughly coincided with the first and second pandemic waves in the country.

"The SARS-CoV-2 gene fragments have been detected



which are surrounded by the anthropogenic activities," the study noted and further said,

"The surge in February 2021 sample showed the on shoot of the second wave of infection

In addition to the Hussain Sagar, the group of researchers, has identified some more lakes in the city vicinity, the waters of which, contain the virus.

which correlated well with the prevailing pandemic situation."

The study concludes that the presence of viral fragments and its load can be used as a surveillance tool to understand the infection spread.

"This study depicted the need for regular monitoring of the water bodies/wastewater as part of water borne epidemics (WBE) studies in the urban

and semi-urban areas to understand the outbreak and to assess spread of viral as well," the study concludes.

The findings have been compiled in a research paper titled 'Comprehensive and Temporal Surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in Urban Water Bodies: Early Signal of Second Wave Onset, and published in preprint server 'MedRxiv' on May 12.

Lack of sanitation plagues MGM Hospital in Warangal

PNS ■ WARANGAL

The Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Warangal is going through a troubled phase in this pandemic time. Sufficient sanitation workers are not there in the hospital and as a result of this proper sanitation work is not taking place in the hospital. Most of the sanitation and security workers are contractual labourers and they are demanding an increase in their salaries as their work burden has increased, but their demand has not been met.

Not just sanitation workers there are not enough doctors and paramedical staff too in the hospital and as a result of this the patients are suffering. On average there are at least two deaths everyday in the hospital. The dead bodies are also not being removed in time, adding to the woes of the patients.

Patient parties are demanding that the authorities must take steps to improve the sanitation system in the hospital. However, the situation instead of improving has deteriorated during this second wave of corona, many alleged. There is no proper monitoring of the patients in the hospital too.



Recently Panchayat Raj Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao visited the hospital and reviewed the situation with the doctors, but the situation in the hospital has not changed, patients alleged. The government must take steps in war footing to solve the problems plaguing the hospital. Recruitment of medical and paramedical staff must be done

on permanent basis, observers felt. MGM Hospital, Warangal being the biggest hospital in north Telangana, government must take necessary steps to set things right, especially in these times of corona. The patient parties demand that the Collector must take immediate steps to improve the sanitation facility in the hospital.

The facilities available in the Corona ward are not up to the mark, patient parties alleged.

The BJP State President Bandi Sanjay visited the hospital on Friday.

He too demanded that the state government took immediate steps to solve the problems plaguing the MGM Hospital.

Bandi Sanjay inspects Covid ward at MGM

PNS ■ WARANGAL

BJP State President Bandi Sanjay, who went to the Covid ward of MGM Hospital to boost the morale of patients, staff and doctors, inquired about the details of the treatment being given to the patients and said that steps should be taken to provide better treatment.

Sanjay, along with MGM Superintendent Nagarjuna Reddy, inspected the situation at the MGM premises, as he inspected the Covid ward. He said that the Covid wards were worse than the general wards in the hospital.

With the recent death of Doctor Shobharani, four lab technicians, the workload had fallen on the existing staff, making delivery of quality health-care in the hospital difficult.

"We are not criticizing in a political sense. We will cooperate in all ways," he said adding that the number of deaths due to Covid was being downplayed as was the number of corona victims.

Officials told to set up more CT scan machines in Medak

PNS ■ MEDAK

Minister for Finance T Harish Rao on Friday asked the District Medical and Health Officer to sanction two CT scan machines to private hospitals and ensure that four CT scan machines are at the service of the people, as already two machines are in operation in the town.

Addressing district collector, elected people's representatives and owners of CT scan centres and ICU Centres through teleconference mode here on Friday, Harish Rao asked the owners of CT scan centres to charge not more than Rs 2,000 for each scan without film and not more than Rs 2,500 with film, so that people would not be burdened during the current Covid period.

He pointed out that private diagnostic centres have been charging Rs 5,000 per scan. In all, 521 teams have surveyed 1.70 lakh houses for fever and identified over 7,000 as having mild Covid symptoms. The teams have distributed Covid kits among them. He asked the District Medical and Health Department authorities to monitor the Covid situation. It would reduce the death rate due to Covid-19 and also help save people from hospitalisation



Harish asked the owners of CT scan centres to charge not more than Rs 2,000 for each CT scan without film and Rs 2,500 for scan with film

and the need to be put on oxygen.

The Minister asked the health authorities to recruit nurses wherever there is shortage. He offered to visit Toopran, Medak and Narsapur district hospitals.

Out of 52 Covid hospitals in the district, eight have been authorised to treat Covid patients, he said adding that the government would ensure that there hospitals would have no shortage of Remdesivir injections. He said that the government hospitals have Remdesivir needed for 50 patients. Local MLA Padma Devender Reddy complained of villagers not willing to receive treatment under isolation, while some others are not coming forward to disclose their Covid symptoms. He asked the MLA to address

sarpanches, ward members and other local elected people's representatives through teleconference and explain them the need to sensitise people on the need to undergo isolation, receive proper medicines and food to recover fast. When she brought to the notice of how patients from Narsapur are going to Hyderabad for treatment, the Minister told her that he would ensure that the district received enough number of testing kits and vaccines.

He asked the police officials to enforce lockdown, without causing problems to the people. District Collector Harish, MP Kotta Prabhakar, MLC Seri Subhash Reddy, ZP Chairperson Hemalata Sekhar Goud, DMHO Venkateswarlu, district hospital superintendent Chandrasekhar, RDO and others were present.

'Govt is accountable for shortage of Remdesivir'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC working president and Malkajgiri MP A Revanth Reddy has demanded the Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, IT Minister KT Rama Rao and Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar to arrange for Remdesivir injections immediately for the patients requesting the officials for Remdesivir on Twitter, to believe that there is no shortage of injections in Telangana.

In his series of tweets on Friday evening, Revanth Reddy said that "If there is no shortage, why is it that people are requesting for injections in large numbers. Is the @TelanganaCMO @ktrrs and @SomeshKumarIAS listening...?!"(sic)

Replying to another tweet Revanth tweeted, "Will @TelanganaCMO @ktrrs and @SomeshKumarIAS arrange remdesivir for this patient in Suryapet. Please do not give

statements and run away. The government is accountable."

Meanwhile, Revanth Reddy has stated that it is not proper on part of the state government to stop the ambulances from neighboring Andhra Pradesh at the state border.

Suggesting both the Chief Ministers of Telugu states K Chandrashekar Rao and YS Jagan Mohan Reddy to find the solution for the issue immediately on humanitarian basis, Revanth said that a patient named Shiva Reddy has been admitted in Kurnool hospital after the TS police didn't allow Covid patients from AP into Telangana. He demanded both Telugu states to initiate steps to clear the stalemate in regard to permission to Andhra Pradesh Covid patients to enter into Telangana state.

Meanwhile, CPI national secretary Dr K Narayana found fault with the police for not allowing the vacant ambulances.

'Basava Jayanti' celebrated amid Covid lockdown

PNS ■ ZAHEERABAD

The 888th birth anniversary of Mahatma Basaveshwar was celebrated in the town on Friday.

Local MLA Manik Rao performed special prayers to the portrait of Basaveshwar at his camp office and paid floral tributes to the learned soul.

The MLA said that the Mahatma advocated that all humans are equal and paved the way for creation of a new and egalitarian society. He said that all religions are equal and laid emphasis on creating dharmic, political and economic rights of people. Society is indebted to him for the services rendered by him to it. Soon after KCR coming to power in Telangana, he took steps to celebrate the birth anniversary of the noble soul officially.

Lingayat Samaj leaders and others were present.



CARE FOR POOR

To serve the needy amid lockdown, the State government has decided to increase the number of Annapurna Canteens offering hot and hygienic meals for Rs 5. 150 Annapurna centres on an average serve food to 35,000 to 40,000 beneficiaries. The GHMC in association with Hare Krishna Movement Charitable Trust operates these canteens and the meals are a boon for daily wage earners and others. In addition to the present 140 canteens, the additional 102 new canteens will be set up which will become operational from May 14

Officials warn action against overcharging for CT scans

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

District Collector K Shashanka has clarified, responding to complaints of some private CT scan centres have been charging more from Covid patients at this crisis hour, has said that the CT scan centre owners will charge only Rs 2,000 for each scan.

In a meeting with CT-Scan centre owners here on Friday, he said that the owners immediately complied with the request of charging only Rs 2,000 per scan.

A four-member task force has been constituted to inspect the CT scan centres.

The committee inspected Sri Krishna Diagnostic Centre, Mahati Diagnostic Centre, KC Diagnostic and Adarsh Hospital on Friday and found that these centres are charging only Rs 2,200 per each scan along with the film.



Maoist killed in exchange of fire

PNS ■ JAYASHANKAR BHUPALAPALLY

In an exchange of fire between Maoists and the police in forest area under Geedam police station limits of Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh, a Maoist militia member was killed on Friday, the police officials said.

He was identified as Maoist militia member Ramchander Kirti.

The police recovered a gun, some arrows, essential commodities for daily use, several rounds of ammunition, bags, Maoist literature, the Superintendent of Police of Dantewada said.



No shortage of medicines and beds in district: Putta

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLY

There is no need for people to panic over the Coronavirus as the state government was fully vigilant and everyone should be courageous to fight against the virus, said Peddapally Zilla Parishad chairman Putta Madhukar on Friday.

Addressing the media persons, Madhukar said that the people are losing lives due to over thinking about the adverse effects of the virus, 99 per cent of people have the immune system to recover from the virus. Stressing that there is no shortage of medicines and beds in the district,

he said that over 100 oxygen beds and 100 ventilator beds are available across the district currently. The officials are preparing another 50 oxygen beds at the district hospital in Peddapalli, he added.

Madhukar requested the public to fully cooperate with the lockdown imposed by the state government.

He said Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Reddy and IT Minister KT Rama Rao are constantly reviewing the situation in the state and with the initiative of KCR only Telangana was ranked No. 1 nationally in Covid vaccinations.

Transport Minister comes to the rescue of Corona patient

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Minister for Transport Puvvada Ajay Kumar has come to the rescue of a Covid-19 patient who is receiving treatment in a private hospital but badly in need of a Remdesivir injection saving him from a life-threatening situation.

According to reports, the patient, identified as Bhukya Ramesh of Yenkur, was prescribed Remdesivir by doctors as part of the treatment, but his relatives could not find any. His relatives approached the Minister who was at that time inaugurating an oxygen tanker in Khammam District Headquarters Government Hospital and appealed to the Minister to come to their rescue.

Responding to the patient's need, the Minister immediately asked the District Collector and other officials to do the needful and ensured that Ramesh received the injection.



Everyone appreciated the minister's gesture for saving the life of a man in distress.

Minister greets Muslims

On account of Ramadan on Friday, the Transport Minister performed Namaaz at his residence along with elders of Muslim community while adhering to the Covid regulations. Later, he greeted Muslims on the occasion of Ramadan. He thanked every Muslim for observing month-long fasting and praying for the good of world during the prevailing Covid period. Referring to Chief Minister

K Chandrasekhar Rao's contribution to uplift Muslims, he said that the Chief Minister paved the way for the Muslims to lead a dignified life holding their head high. He appealed to Muslims to celebrate the festival observing the precautions for Covid.

There are 320 Covid beds in Khammam government hospital, but all of them are full. There are 1300 beds in private hospitals in the city, out of them 494 are vacant. There are 200 beds in Covid facility set up at Sarada Engineering College.

Srinivas Goud praised for initiative on 2BHK houses

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

Excise Minister V Srinivas Goud's measures to fulfil the 'own house dream' of the poor is being eulogised from all quarters. When contractors did not execute the contract given to them two years ago to build 2BHK houses in Mahabubnagar district and in several villages in Palamuru Assembly constituency, the Minister took special care to call for tenders again giving directions to engineering officials at a special meeting held here recently.

As a result of it, the construction of 2BHK houses for the homeless poor is going on at jet speed in the district.

With the perseverance of the Minister and coordination of the project by District Collector Venkat Rao, district in-charge director for housing project V Bhaskar stepped up on the gas on execution of the 2BHK houses. The government sanctioned several

2BHK houses for the district and released Rs 422 crore for their execution. In all, 2,907 have been allotted to urban areas, while 4,876 have been allotted to rural areas. Out of them, 2,666 have been completed, while 4,906 are in various stages of completion.

Construction of 1,021 houses did not ground yet.

The state government sanctioned 3,790 2BHK houses for Mahabubnagar Assembly constituency and allocated Rs 208 crore for execution of the houses. Out of them, 994 houses have been ready in all respects, while construction in respect of 1,706 houses is in progress. The government has spent so far Rs 125 crore. The government sanctioned 2760 houses for Jachcherla, 950 for Devarakadra and 140 for Parigi. Out of them, 418 have been ready in Jachcherla, 254 have been ready in Devarakadra. In Narayanapeta and Parigi, construction is yet to begin.

Collector seeks cooperation of people during Covid lockdown

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

People in the Narayankhed constituency should cooperate with the state government announced lockdown and people undergoing home quarantine should strictly isolate themselves, stated District Collector Hanumantha Rao.

The Collector and Narayankhed legislative member Bhupal Reddy spoke were addressing at a tele-conference

with officials on Friday, regarding the home isolation measures to be taken by the Covid patients.

The Collector advised all the people undergoing home quarantine to use the medicine kits given by the state government properly and suggested the diet to boost immunity. He suggested going to the government hospital in case of any health problem and getting good treatment for free.

'Why cannot TS offer free treatment while others can?'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee President and Nalgonda MP N Uttam Kumar Reddy on Friday demanded that the state government to add Covid testing and treatment facilities to Arogyasri Scheme.

"While the neighboring Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu states were offering free treatment for Covid patients, why could the Telangana not

do so?" Uttam questioned and said that both the state and Central governments should be ashamed as both failed to control the spread of Covid.

Demanding that the state government provided free treatment to Covid patients, Uttam said that he spent Rs.3 lakh for Covid treatment in a private hospital. "I am a Member of Parliament and I can bear it. What about the common people?" He questioned.

He was addressing the media at his residence on the occasion of the release of Rahul Gandhi Cares programme poster, along with Telangana Youth Congress president Sivanesa Reddy.

Under Rahul Gandhi Cares programme Youth Congress would take up several relief works for Covid patients in the state, he said.

Speaking on the occasion Uttam Kumar Reddy said that the central and the state governments had miserably failed

to contain Covid second wave in the country. He said that neither Prime Minister Narendra Modi nor Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao bothered to control the second wave in the country and in the state and forced the people to face severe hardship.

He said that it was atrocious to note that testing kits were not available in the state. He said that Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) were failing to find the virus and negative results had

been shown. This was one reason for the piling up of Covid positive cases in the state, he said. He also said that to overcome this problem the government should take up RTPCR tests for all the people of Telangana. It would cost just Rs 4 crore to the exchequer, he said.

Making scathing remarks on the Chief Minister, Uttam Kumar Reddy said that KCR was much more interested in making money than protecting

the lives of the people.

Uttam Kumar Reddy said that the government had devitalized 104 and 108 services in the state. As 108 Ambulance Service was not available, people were forced to cough up thousands of rupees to hire private ambulances.

Uttam Kumar Reddy informed that about Rs 50,000 and Rs one lakh had been charged for each general bed and each oxygen bed respectively in private hospitals.

Black fungus has claimed 52 lives in Maha so far: Official

PNS ■ MUMBAI

As many as 52 people have died due to Mucormycosis, a rare but dangerous fungal infection, in Maharashtra since the COVID-19 outbreak last year, a senior health department official said on Friday.

Mucormycosis, also known as black fungus, became a much talked about subject after some recovering and recovered coronavirus patients were found infected with the disease, whose symptoms include headache, fever, pain under the eyes, nasal or sinus congestion and partial loss of vision.

As many as 52 people in Maharashtra have died due to the Mucormycosis disease since the COVID-19 outbreak last year. All of them were COVID-19 survivors, but succumbed to the black fungus infection, the official told PTI.



For the first time, the state health department has compiled a list of deaths caused by black fungus," said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

On Wednesday, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope had said there were 1,500 cases of black fungus in the state, which is in the throes of a severe second wave

of COVID-19.

Rising Mucormycosis cases, whose treatment requires a multidisciplinary approach, is expected to put a further burden on the state's healthcare infrastructure which is already under a strain.

The state will float a tender to procure one lakh Amphotericin-B anti-fungal injections to treat Mucormy-

cosis patients, Tope had said a couple of days back.

Mucormycosis has a very high fatality rate and this has increased the woes of the health department which has deployed all its resources to combat COVID-19.

Mucormycosis was not a notified disease like malaria and hence its cases were not mapped and a database was not prepared, the official said.

With the rise in COVID-19 cases and preliminary reports of growing infection of black fungus, the state started creating a database.

This exercise revealed that so far 52 people have died due to the black fungus infection, the official said.

All the 52 patients died after the coronavirus infection spread in the country. However, very few deaths took place in 2020 in Maharashtra. A sizeable number of deaths

have taken place in the current calendar year, he said.

As per health experts, Mucormycosis is mostly found among COVID-19 patients who have diabetes, fluctuation in sugar level or increased iron level in the blood.

Tope has said patients with suppressed immune system and co-morbidities are vulnerable to contract the disease.

As part of a contingency plan to treat Mucormycosis patients, the state government has decided to set up separate wards for them at hospitals attached to 18 medical colleges.

The treatment requires multidisciplinary expertise because the fungal infection spreads through the nose, eyes and can reach the brain, Tope has said.

The Maharashtra government has already admitted that at least eight patients in the state have lost vision in one eye due to Mucormycosis.

PM-KISAN benefits reach 7.03 lakh farmers in WB

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time on Friday, the benefits under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme reached farmers of West Bengal as about 7.03 lakh of them got Rs 2,000 each under the programme launched more than two years ago.

Under the scheme, also known as PM-KISAN, a financial benefit of Rs 6,000 per year is provided to the eligible farmers, payable in three equal 4-monthly installments of Rs 2,000 each. The fund is transferred directly to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries. The scheme was launched in February 2019 but was implemented with effect from December 2018.

The scheme was not implemented till now in West Bengal as the state government and the Centre were at loggerheads over various issues, including verified data of farmers.

"Today, the first installment has reached lakhs of farmers of



Bengal. As the names of farmers from the state are received by the central government, the number of beneficiary farmers will increase," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after releasing the 8th installment of the financial benefit under the scheme at a virtual event.

About 7.03 lakh farmers from West Bengal on Friday got the first installment of Rs 2,000 in their bank accounts, the Prime Minister said.

Under the 8th installment disbursed on Friday, a total of Rs 20,667 crore was transferred to more than 9.5 crore farmers across the country, including

those from West Bengal.

The scheme is benefitting small and marginal farmers a lot in the current difficult times of COVID-19, Modi said.

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, who was present at the virtual event, recalled that the Prime Minister had directed his ministry to take measures to bring all states under the scheme as soon as possible.

"In the absence of West Bengal, we were not able to tell all states have joined the scheme... Today, West Bengal has joined the scheme and more than 7 lakh farmers will get the benefit," he added.

INDIA CORNER

Bring retired doctors to help fight COVID crisis: Former HP CM

Former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Shanta Kumar on Friday suggested that the state government should bring retired medical experts from the army and elsewhere to help deal with the crisis. With the transfer of doctors from Dr. Rajendra Prasad Government Medical College in Tanda to other parts of the state, he said, there was a need to make a special appeal to the retired people so that the state can overcome its human resource shortage. The CM should appeal to people of the state to come forward and make donations, Kumar said, adding that other political parties should also give full support to the HP government. So far, he has donated Rs two lakh to the CM relief fund for the battle against COVID, he said.



Woman sentenced to 5-years in prison in 33-year-old case

A local court has sentenced a woman to five years' imprisonment for helping three men in abducting and raping a 12-year-old girl 33 years ago. Additional Sessions Judge Parmeshwar Prasad on Thursday also imposed a fine of Rs 15,000 on Ramvati, government counsel KP Singh said. All the other accused in the case had died during the course of the trial, he said.



Singh said this was one of the oldest cases pending in the court. The incident had taken place on June 30, 1988. The girl had gone to attend a wedding in a village and later in the night, Ramvati and her mother Phoolmata handed over the minor to three men -- Mukku, Pussu and Lahri. An FIR in the matter was registered against five people -- Mukku, Pussu, Lahri, Ramvati and her mother -- at Bhinga police station under relevant sections of the IPC. Police had filed a charge sheet against the five accused and after 33 years, the court in April 2021 had found all of them guilty and reserved its verdict.

IYC president Srinivas BV questioned by police

Indian Youth Congress (IYC) president Srinivas BV on Friday said the Delhi Police's Crime Branch questioned him about the assistance being provided by him to people during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Police called me this morning and came to my office around 11.45 am. They questioned that how you are doing it," he said. However, the Delhi Police said the questioning has been done following a Delhi High Court order. The high court has directed the city police to conduct inquiry into politicians involved in distribution of COVID-19 medicines and other items, and take steps for lodging of FIR in case of offence, a senior police officer said. In compliance with the directions of the high court, inquiry is being conducted into several people, the officer said. On May 4, the Delhi High Court had asked the police to examine the instances of politicians allegedly procuring and distributing Remdesivir, used in treatment of COVID-19 patients, in the national capital and take steps for lodging of FIR in case of offence.



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2 more bodies found near Ganga cremated in UP

Two more bodies found lying on the banks of the Ganga were cremated by the Ballia district administration, after a video of a few stray dogs dragging and mauling the corpses went viral on social media. Fehna SHO Sanjay Tripathi said he got the information about the corpses on Thursday afternoon, following which a team of Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Rajesh Yadav reached Sagarpali village and cremated the bodies. It appears that the bodies were left in the river by family members after completing rituals, he said. According to Ballia residents, at least 52 bodies were seen floating at the Ujiyar, Kulhadia and Bharauli ghats in the Narahi area. However, the district authorities did not tell the exact number of bodies found there.



UP records 15,747 new COVID-19 cases, 312 deaths

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh on Friday recorded 15,747 fresh COVID-19 cases that took the infection count to 15,96,628 while 312 more fatalities pushed the death toll to 16,958, officials said.

In the past 13 days, the number of active cases in the state has come down by over 1.17 lakh. On April 30, there were about 3.10 lakh active cases and the number currently stands at 1,93,815, said Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Amit Mohan Prasad.

As many as 1,57,257 patients are in home isolation, he said.

While the state reported 15,747 fresh cases the previous day, 26,174 COVID-19 patients recovered from the disease. So far, 13,85,855 patients have recovered in Uttar Pradesh and the recovery rate stands at 86.8 per cent, Prasad said.

So far, over 4.41 crore samples have been tested in the state, including more than 2.63 lakh samples tested on Wednesday, he said.

Cong MPs, legislators in K'taka to use LAD funds for vaccines

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Congress' Karnataka unit on Friday announced that the party MPs, MLAs and MLCs will use their Local Area Development fund to the tune of Rs 100 crore for procuring vaccines.

"The government has miserably failed to protect the people and vaccinate people. Hence, the MPs, MLAs and MLCs of the Congress, who are 95 in number have decided to donate at least Rs one crore each to procure vaccines," former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who is also the Congress legislative party leader, said at a press conference here.

According to him, a total of Rs 100 crore will be given by Congress leaders of Karnataka for the purpose. The Congress stalwart said, "This is an unprecedented decision in the history of Karnataka."

The state Congress chief D K Shivakumar, who accompanied Siddaramaiah, said the Congress parliamentarians and legislators are ready to stop development works in their



areas.

"We are ready to stop all the development works in our area. It is our bounden duty to save lives rather than carry out development works," he added.

He said the party will write to Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa to utilise their funds for vaccine procurement.

Later in a statement, the state Congress unit said it needed two small permissions, one from the central government and another from the state government to allow diversion of LAD funds for vaccine procurement. "My appeal to the BJP is to

not let politics come in the way and in the spirit of Atmanirbhar Bharat allow Congress to directly procure and administer vaccines," it quoted Shivakumar as saying.

Currently, vaccine procurement rules in India allow central and state governments, hospitals and industries to directly procure vaccines, the party said.

The Congress had a Rs 100 crore plan to kick-start the vaccination drive, of which Rs 10 crore was being contributed by the Karnataka Congress party fund, the party explained adding another Rs 90 crore can come from the Congress MLA/MLC funds.

"I appeal to the Yediyurappa government to please allow us to use the MLA/MLC funds to procure vaccines directly in a transparent manner because the Modi and Yediyurappa governments are failing to do so for months now," party quoted Shivakumar.

The two leaders flayed Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers D V Sadananda Gowda for his 'suicide by hanging' remark.

Sterlite Copper oxygen plant develops 'tech snag'

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Vedanta Ltd owned Sterlite Copper Plant which recently, commenced production of medical oxygen at its facility in Tamil Nadu has faced a 'technical snag' in a cold box leading to a suspension of production, the company said on Friday.

The facility began production of medical oxygen and the first set of medical oxygen tankers was dispatched to the beneficiaries on Thursday from the Tuticorin plant, located about 600 kms from here.

In a statement on Friday, the company said, "a technical snag has developed in the cold box at our oxygen plant in Tuticorin, leading to a temporary pause in production."

The company said it anticipated a 'minor technical fluctuation' since the plant remained unattended for three years.

A technical expert group has been onsite from day one to monitor the situation and to provide real-time solutions to resume production at the earliest.



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"We plan to return to stabilised production soon," the company said.

On Thursday, the company said with the production of medical oxygen, it would initially dispatch two oxygen tankers on a daily basis and later it would be 'scaled up' by ramping up production.

Vax drive for 18-44 age group to begin in HP

PNS ■ SHIMLA

The vaccination drive against COVID-19 for the 18-44 age group will begin in Himachal Pradesh from May 17, a health official said on Friday.

The state recently received 1,07,620 doses of Covishield vaccine from the Serum Institute of India, Pune for this category, Special Health Secretary Nipun Jindal said.

Vaccination for the 18-44 age group will be given only on Mondays and Thursdays, and slots will be visible on the COWIN portal two days prior to each scheduled session, he said.

The state has already placed an order for more vaccines for this age group, Jindal added. All the eligible persons will

have to register themselves and schedule their appointment for vaccination on the COWIN portal, he added.

The health official said the available slots will be visible on the COWIN portal from May 15.

HRTC conductors and drivers, fuel pump operators, PDS depot holders, teachers on COVID duty, banks and financial services, chemists, staff of Lok Mitra Kendra, employees in child-care institutions under the WCD department and the workers of pharma industry who are engaged in manufacturing process have now been declared as prioritised group for the anti-coronavirus vaccination, he added.

Eid celebrated in subdued manner in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

People in Uttar Pradesh celebrated Eid-al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, in a subdued manner on Friday, due to COVID-19 restrictions.

With mosques closed and large congregations prohibited, Muslim families celebrated the festival with simplicity, offering namaz at home and giving away zakat (charity) to the needy.

At Lucknow's Aishbagh Eidgah, five persons offered namaz. Other mosques in the city also witnessed a similar scene due to restrictions, preventing congregational prayers.

Both Shia and Sunni clerics had appealed to the people to avoid shopping for Eid and help the poor and the needy, who have been affected by the pandemic.

National platform to track impact of Covid vax

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A national tracking platform will be established soon to determine the impact of the jabs against COVID-19 and the breakthrough infections that are likely to occur among those with complete and partial immunisation, official sources said.

The recommendation of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) to establish such a platform has been accepted by the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 and the Union Health Ministry, they said.

"The COVID-19 Working Group which is part of NTAGI has strongly recommended to urgently establish a national vaccine tracking platform to

determine the impact of the COVID vaccine(s) and the breakthrough infections that are likely to occur among those with complete and partial immunisation," said Dr N K Arora, the INCLEN Trust chairperson who heads the COVID-19 Working Group.

The vaccine tracker will be particularly important to monitor the impact of increasing the dosing schedule of Covishield, he said, as the government on Thursday accepted the working group's recommendation to extend the gap between the two doses of the Covishield vaccine from 6-8 weeks to 12-16 weeks.

The current data harmonisation work of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and other agencies can be leveraged to set up this



facility for review of ground realities on real-time basis, the NTAGI has recommended.

The government panel has also recommended that pregnant women may be offered the choice to take any of the

COVID-19 vaccines and that lactating women can be inoculated any time after delivery.

The NTAGI has also stated that those having laboratory test proven SARS-CoV-2 illness should defer COVID-19 vacci-

nation for six months after recovery, the sources said.

According to the health ministry's current protocol, vaccine is to be taken four to eight weeks after recovery from COVID-19 infection and pregnant and lactating women are not to be administered the shots.

The NTAGI recommended that all pregnant women visiting for antenatal care (ANC) may be informed about risks and benefits associated with Covishield and Covaxin. Based on the information provided, a pregnant woman may be offered the choice to take any of the vaccines.

An educational tool comprising information on risk of COVID-19 infection during pregnancy, benefits associated with the vaccination and rare

complications associated with vaccines like thrombosis and thrombocytopenia (with Covishield) may be developed.

In case of individuals who have received the first dose and before completion of the dosing schedule if they test positive for COVID-19, they should wait for 4-8 weeks after clinical recovery from the illness.

Also, COVID-19 patients who have been given anti-SARS-CoV-2 monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma may defer vaccination for three months from the day of discharge from hospital, the recommendations stated.

Individuals having any other serious illness requiring hospitalisation or ICU care should also wait for 4-8 weeks before getting the vaccine, it added.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

High and dry

Herd immunity is one thing; India needs to do a lot more to protect its people from the pandemic

The COVID-19 vaccination drive in India appears to be wafting in the air with a mind of its own. Never an easy task, what with a billion people to be vaccinated in time to avoid a third surge of the virus, the exercise is taking time even to take off. Whether it is owing to gigantic nature of the task at hand or the scattered nature of the vaccination management plan, one is not sure. The bare facts of the case, if the pandemic is to be brought under control at the very least by the end of this year, are before us. Scientists believe a minimum of 70 per cent of the population needs to be vaccinated for the herd immunity to set in. In India, that means the immunity can be achieved if nearly 94 crore people receive both



doses of the vaccine. At two doses each, that calls for 188-odd crore doses. That is a tall order. Even if one were to scale down the vaccination to one dose under the assumption that it is better to give at least half protection to all than complete protection to only a few, even then, just under a 100 crore doses are needed. Where to get the doses from? How long will it take to acquire them? How long will it take to complete the vaccination process? If, at the end, it is only one dose that is given, an identical task stares at the country for giving the second dose.

Bear in mind that all this is for vaccinating only 70 per cent of the population. That means just about a third of the population will be left high and dry unless they largely constitute children who are yet to come under the purview of vaccination. The Serum Institute of India has said it will be in a position to produce 10 crore doses a month after July. One can assume that Bharat Biotech can produce anywhere between five and six crore doses a month after July. Zydus Cadila and Dr Reddy's Labs will be able to pitch in with three-odd crore doses a month. That can stretch the total figure of available doses per month close to 20 crore by August 2021 or thereabouts. That leaves five months till December to complete the task of giving around 100 crore doses. There are reports that are not so confident; they contend that the task may actually take over two or even three years. In any case, assuming the exercise ends by December, a population of 94-odd crore will receive one effective dose or half of them will get two doses each, as the case may be. The result is there for all to see: It is simply impossible to achieve herd immunity before the end of 2021 unless 188 crore doses are available at once and an unprecedented, organised, synchronised, national campaign is undertaken to complete the process in five months. The question to the Centre goes abegging: Where is the plan?

PICTALK



ITBP personnel share a friendly moment at a training centre near Mana, Uttarakhand

PTI

Hogwash

Amid the raging contagion, a handful of politicians are providing comic relief to citizens, albeit unintentionally

Chandler Muriel Bing of the *Friends* fame said in the series: "I'm not great at advice. But can I interest you in a sarcastic comment?" Something similar in the nature of an emotion has ostensibly stirred Uttarakhand's former Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat. The BJP leader, no less adept at stoking controversy as the incumbent Tirath Singh Rawat, has now taken to bat for the accursed Novel Coronavirus because, as it would appear, everybody is only hurling doses of vituperation at the poor pathogen. Choosing to look at it "from a philosophical angle", Rawat said that the virus is a "living organism which has



a right to live". In the same vein, he warned the human species that despite considering ourselves to be the most intelligent on the planet and out to eliminate the virus, the killer is sensible enough to keep mutating itself. Slipping into some sense midway, he also clarified, to his credit, that people need to outpace the virus to stay safe. So far, so good! By that logic, do we need to go and offer ourselves to a tiger just because it has a life and the right to life? If the virus has the right to live, as an organism, all of us don't?

And, as most of us would agree, the new-age politicians are nothing less than pernicious viruses. But do they really need to open their trap and prove it? As the old saying goes, it is better to keep your mouth shut and let the world think that you are a fool, rather than open it and remove all doubts! The unusual observation, as must have been the desired outcome of the former Chief Minister, went viral at a time when the entire country is battling a killer second wave of COVID-19. A Twitter user sarcastically said: "This virus organism should be given shelter in the Central Vista." Another said: "Shri Rawat should invite the virus home, feed it well and stay with it for at least 14 days." All done and dusted, the statement just goes on to show how devoid of empathy are our political leaders who, in spite of seeing the mass scale of devastation in terms of life, employment and business opportunities, can't keep themselves away from courting a headline-worth-of controversy. As Chandler said, one more time: "Handle? I can handle it. Handle is my middle name. Well, actually it's the middle part of my first name."

The endgame in Afghanistan

There's a host of implications emanating from the withdrawal of American troops from that country, and India needs to watch out



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

The latest available estimates of the number of people, mostly school-girls, killed in three blasts in front of a co-educational school in Kabul on May 8, vary from at least 60 (BBC) to over 85 (CNN). The figure may rise further by the time this column is published. The diabolical intent to kill as many as possible is clear from the fact that a car bomb was first detonated and two improvised explosive devices followed as the girls rushed out of the school in panic.

Two questions arise. Who is behind this ghastly crime? What are its implications? As to the first, no one has claimed responsibility. The Afghan Government has blamed the Taliban, which has denied involvement and condemned the strike. This leaves one with the Islamic State, which has staged terror attack in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan and which retains its ability to strike despite losing a great deal of territory over the months.

The Taliban are the more likely culprits. There is no reason why one should believe them, particularly when the May 8 blasts have to be seen in the background of the surge in their attacks and terror strikes following President Joe Biden's announcement that all American troops will leave Afghanistan by September 11. They know they will not win an election and they do not believe in democracy. They want to control Afghanistan by force and establish the *Sharia* rule.

Will they be able to do it? What will happen if they do? The answer to the first would depend on the fighting qualities of the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces (ANDSF), the support they continue to receive from the US and its NATO allies. As to the first, despite serious problems of desertion and unwillingness to enlist, the Afghan National Army (ANA), the land warfare arm of the ANDSF, has emerged a battle-hardened force capable of confronting the Taliban and



other terrorist organisations it faces. Its commando and special forces units have been particularly successful.

Against this, the harsh fact is that the Taliban have expanded their control over huge tracts of Afghanistan's countryside and some cities, besides inflicting a number of heavy defeats on the Afghan troops. At least some of the reverses the latter suffered the beginning of 2020 are attributable to the Trump administration's atrocious policies. These included asking the Government forces early in 2020 to go on the defensive in the interest of its peace negotiations with the Taliban, and arm-twisting it into agreeing to the Taliban demand of releasing 5,000 of their fighters in Afghan jails as a precondition for talks. Many of the released fighters have gone back to combat despite the Taliban's promise that they would not do so.

The Taliban, however, began gaining ground even before the Trump Administration's policies and pressures hampered the ANDSF's operations. Also, while the capabilities of the Afghan troops have improved, a big question mark hangs

“AS THE DIVERSION TO KANDAHAR OF THE INDIAN AIRLINES HIJACKED FLIGHT IC-814 IN DECEMBER 1999 SHOWED, THE TALIBAN WERE ACTIVELY PROMOTING TERRORISM AGAINST IT BY JAISH-E-MOHAMMED AND LASHKAR-E-TAIBA. DO WE HAVE A COHERENT POLICY TO MEET THE CHALLENGE?”

against the future availability of effective air support, which has played an important role in many of the ANA's successful operations. According to one estimate, 80 to 90 per cent of the air support to it is now provided by the fledgling Afghan Air Force (AAF).

The AAF, however, has been supported by the massive air power of the US. Also, international contractors, now doing the bulk of the maintenance work on its planes and helicopters, will depart with the American troops. This will seriously affect its operational capabilities. This underlines the importance of continued American aid. On July 7, 2012, Hillary Clinton, then US Secretary of State, announced in Kabul that President Obama had designated Afghanistan as a major non-NATO ally of the US. The questions are: How much and of what kind?

Apart from military hardware, there is a need for funds. Countering a blend of insurgency and terrorism is a very expressive business. The US has provided over \$86 billion as security assistance to Afghanistan between financial years 2002 and 2019. Since 2014, it has been providing between five and six

billion dollars per year to fund the ANDSF. How much and what form of assistance will Washington provide Afghanistan after the withdrawal of its troops?

Clearly, the military outcome in Afghanistan hangs in the balance. So does the fate of Afghanistan. All indications are that the Taliban have every intention to re-impose the medieval, authoritarian theocratic system that had reduced Afghanistan to a cleric-administered prison. As Ahmed Rashid wrote in *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, edicts of the Taliban's Department of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice "had changed the lifestyles of Kabul's once easy-going population and forced Afghan women to disappear from public view".

India needs to watch out. As the diversion to Kandahar of the Indian Airlines hijacked Flight IC-814 in December 1999 showed, the Taliban were actively promoting terrorism against it by Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Do we have a coherent policy to meet the challenge?

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE OXYGEN CRISIS IN GOA

Sir — An oxygen crisis in the Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), the State's largest COVID facility, has led to the death of over 74 patients in the span of four days due to daily disruptions in oxygen supply. Just two days after 26 patients lost their lives at the GMCH within hours, the State Government told the Bombay High Court Bench in Goa that 15 more patients had succumbed.

The Bench was informed of 13 more deaths from the same hospital. The spate of deaths due to the lack of oxygen is causing a serious concern for the COVID-19 patients in Goa's hospitals. However, the Pramod Sawant Government and the hospital both told the court that all the deaths could not be attributed to the disruption in oxygen supply.

The issue relating to oxygen shortage is so severe that the court had ordered the State Government to drop everything and ensure that there are no deaths for "at least one night". The relatives of the patients did raise an alarm after the oxygen pressure began to drop overnight. But it was several hours before anyone was able to fix the problem and ensure a steady supply of oxygen. It was a simple case of utter negligence on the part of the health department and the Government.

CK Subbu | Goa

BE CAUTIOUS, BUT NOT SCARED

Sir — The recrudescence of COVID-19 in the form of the second wave has claimed many lives since mid-March 2021. Cold, cough, breathlessness and fever have been experienced from time immemorial. Cold triggers fever and cough triggers breathlessness if curative measures are not taken in time; it is a known fact.

Fever appears in many forms like flu, malaria, typhoid, encephalitis (brain fever), monkey fever, and so on. The said fevers have not given an undertaking that they would not appear since Corona has been appearing on a grand scale. But since Corona made an appearance, we have hardly heard of the fevers experienced ear-

Open up the barred humanity



The suggestion of the Supreme Court about placing convicts under house arrest is worth considering. If one may add, the release of political prisoners on bail or parole too merits consideration. Political and civil rights activists are often incarcerated for speaking out the truth to power or rebelling against the "system". Dissent is now a crime punishable with imprisonment!

It is a matter of immense significance in terms of human rights that the undertrials make up nearly 70 per cent of the total inmates in Indian prisons. Many of them do not have access to legal counsel or remedy. Pre-trial imprisonment in itself is punishment. As they say, the process

is the punishment in India. It is a logical premise that the undertrials could be convicted or acquitted. Eventually, be it conviction or acquittal, they cannot be kept in a place where they run greater risk of contracting Coronavirus. They must be spared the 'capital punishment' by the virus!

It is common knowledge that many of India's prisons are congested and have more inmates than they can accommodate and, as such, they remain the hotspots for the contagion. Needless to say, the prison conditions are conducive to the spread of the contagion. When prisons are crammed full of inmates, it is next to impossible to maintain physical distancing. The incorporation of decongesting prisons into the pandemic response is a much-needed measure. Prisoners also share the right to health with those outside prisons for anyone to be dismissive of their greater in-house susceptibility to contract the virus. The non-violent and low-risk offenders pose no significant risk to public safety. Releasing them is a containment measure that has a health benefit by reducing the risk of transmission and an uplifting humanitarian gesture.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

liar. If a patient with cold, cough or fever approaches a doctor, they do not treat the patient without subjecting her/him to a COVID test. Have all other fevers lost ground to Corona? If all other fevers are treated like COVID, the fatalities are bound to occur due to wrong diagnosis and wrong administration of medicines.

Whether malaria, typhoid and flu have not at all revisited after Corona first broke out in March 2020, the other normal ailments are still very much a reality. This aspect must be looked into by the Government, scientists and doctors.

KV Seetharamaiah | Hassan

PAY ATTENTION TO RURAL INDIA, TOO

Sir — This refers to the news report, 'Dozens of bodies found buried in sand near Ganga in Unnao', May 14. When COVID-19 first hit India, the biggest fear among both the

policy-makers and public experts was that the pandemic would travel to India's Hindi heartland — primarily across the rural belt of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar.

Given the size of the two States, the density of population, the abysmal healthcare infrastructure and the manner in which the virus could quickly transmit in these regions, this fear was legitimate. There was never any cogent explanation as to why this was the case, but this did not deter speculative, and clearly misplaced, theories about the innate immunity of those in rural India.

The tragic sight of the bodies floating in the Ganga confirms that the numbers of reported COVID fatalities are much higher than the official figures.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

The situation is extremely fragile as there are also constraints in lifting 100 MT of allocated #oxygen from Bumpur and Kalinganagar in the east.

Rajasthan Chief Minister — Ashok Gehlot

It will take time, but with great firmness, both defensively and offensively, we will achieve our goal to restore peace to the State of Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister — Benjamin Netanyahu

So thankful to all the love put into making me feel special on my birthday. (But) without family you are nothing.

Actor — Sunny Leone

My quarantine period is still not over. Otherwise, I am doing much better. Requesting everyone not to spread misleading stories/information without the whole context.

Cricketer — Wriddhiman Saha

#breakthechain COVID is not our friend. It's our enemy. Our focus is only & only to keep it as far away from us as possible.

Actor — Vinu Dara Singh

FIRST COLUMN

HEALTHCARE POLICY NEEDS A BOOSTER



ISHANEE SHARMA

While ushering in the era of the biological revolution one cannot fail to notice that one of the biggest ironies in biology is that microbes, which are the oldest self-replicating organisms on earth and which were among the last to be discovered, have largely been ignored. This is evident from the present crisis of the Coronavirus, which has devastated half of the world and has brought it almost to the brink of disaster, partly because of the late discovery of microbes and techniques of genome sequencing.

The lack of attention to micro-organisms is largely due to our observational bias. We tend to ignore what we cannot see. This predisposition allowed us to make great progress in astronomy observing visible objects billions of miles away from us, long before we could appreciate the role of bacteria and viruses on this planet. Life on earth is much more than there are plants. Our inherent knowledge gaps about viruses & microorganisms have brought us to the present-day crisis.

Hence, biological revolution is inevitable. The following facts expose us to the ongoing revolutionary and unprecedented biological research and its unique opportunities.

Microbes have evolved into a complex nanomachine even capable of splitting water via energy from the sun, billions of years ahead, than terrestrial plants. There is only one existing prokaryotic type of bacteria capable of producing oxygen without the sun — the cyanobacteria. We have yet to discover its mechanism.

If one happens to look to the list of noble laureates in the last decade one cannot fail to notice that most of the noble prizes even for physics and chemistry have gone for their study on solving the biological riddle. Several aspects of the mystery of biology are still to be unravelled. Dr Siddhartha Mukherjee of New York University observed that though cancer research started earlier than space travel, cancer is still an unconquerable 'emperor of maladies'. It is no surprise that MIT, an institution known for engineering and technology has changed its focus to molecular biology and some of its faculty members have even won noble prizes for their research on cell biology.

Dr Bruce H Lipton of Wisconsin University and subsequently at Stanford University, USA, in his ground-breaking work, has discovered how cell mechanisms receive and process information in the cell through the critical cell membrane. The cell membrane through its receptor and integral protein that serves as an antenna sends signals from the outside environment. The implication of this research will radically change our understanding of life. It shows that genes and DNA are controlled by signals from outside through the cell membrane. This research in cell biology and quantum physics is being hailed as a breakthrough showing that behaviour can be


economic development and ultimately takes lives of thousands of people in our country due to inadequate healthcare infrastructure. This pandemic has inadvertently helped our economy in highlighting the existing infrastructure lacuna in the medical and healthcare industry. Due to the glaring deficiency of an adequate infrastructure and sufficient human resource in the public hospitals, the most sought-after health care schemes such as Ayushman Bharat have also failed to meet the legitimate medicinal demands of the masses during the times of the pandemic. A report published in a leading daily newspaper highlights that barely 10 per cent of the Ayushman Bharat cardholders could take the benefit of this centrally sponsored scheme.

We have witnessed that ICUs, ventilators, availability of RT-PCR facilities, oxygen cylinders, cardiac monitors for operation theatres, electrocardiogram machines, adequacy of beds available, vaccines, ancillary medicines and steroids, vertical transport facilities, staff and most importantly sufficient number of doctors were also inadequate in most of the healthcare institutions. Scarcity of testing facilities and vaccines erodes the utility of rural and government hospitals and bulldozes the poor patients to hasten to distant places for availing urgent treatment. It can be said that the genesis of this problem accentuated in the year 1991 when our country adopted the LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation) policy. Since then the government allowed the private sector to take a lead in the health care industry and thereby the state in a gradual manner withdrew from its responsibilities for providing adequate health care means to the masses. This stunted public sector spending on medical services, resulting in excessive reliance upon the private sector in seeking health care benefits. The government needs to realize the fact that the private sector operates in a profit-centric manner and they will not take necessary initiatives to reach the masses at the grass root level. Presently in the rural areas, there are only 0.6 doctors per 1,000 population. A pure mercenary approach in the medicinal industry and inception of users' charges in healthcare sectors have placed the people at a disadvantage. Equilibrium in appropriating budgetary allocation between other sectors of our economy and the healthcare sector is a very crucial policy decision, which our country urgently needs to address for saving the lives of thousands of people who are dying due to the pandemic. Earmarking adequate precedence to the health care sector has also become non-negotiable in the present scenario.

(The writer is the Managing Partner, Ishanee Sharma Law Offices, and works towards achieving gender justice and freedom of speech. The views expressed are personal.)

The nation needs to come up with a transparent vaccine policy

We, as one nation, one people, need to come together. If all of us don't care for each other in this hour of crisis, who will?



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

experts leading the fight against pandemic. It may not be an exaggeration if one assumes India's second wave COVID battle is being fought in courts, national and local administrative offices. Each one in their desperation or compulsion to make the right announcement is giving a siloed decision, often overreaching each other's territory, therefore creating an unwarranted bottleneck at a critical time. Examples have been quoted of differences between Delhi and Mumbai and will continue to be a case study for any future pandemic management, but what it showed was any governance has to start right at the colony cluster level. The biggest bunch of caregivers/administrators/counsellors are right in the neighborhood and therefore healthcare and civic infrastructure has to be upgraded



at the mohalla level. Tossing a few social media posts with glossy pictures of infrastructure fail to impress when a person urgently needs to breathe. Running to courts to intervene is allowing the judiciary to walk into executive's core responsibilities while presenting a united face to any calamity/war or crisis is one of the basic rules of public administration. One does not start to

gain brownie points before the unconnected and potentially dangerous parties during a crisis situation. It is shocking to see central, state, local administrations if not judiciary, creating opposing guidelines for Covid management or trying to control surge with delays. Second, it is important for those at the top to understand that the pandemic is a blunt reminder of the gross neglect

of rationale domain experts in policy making and governance. India still is governed by bureaucrats, who by training are generalists with no special domain knowledge for handling new world challenges and therefore solutions. Political leaders of any hue would always cater to their constituencies and come up with the most populist schemes, which may or may not impact lives and livelihoods in the long term. An example, free food distribution, while at a humanitarian level it is a noble move yet ensuring a continuous supply of government subsidized ration is the only long-term solution. If the 'one nation one ration card' had been operationalised in major parts of India, along with various schemes for migrants and those out of the social net, tons of public sector human resources such as

police could have been better utilized for enforcing other Covid appropriate protocols. If a few scientists, epidemiologists, doctors had been permanently co-opted in a steering committee for Covid management in national and State governments (if not local) the permanent tag of India facing worst Covid wave in the world could have been avoided. Finally, the truth no matter how harsh or shaming if told honestly and with compassion, always benefits the orator. The government has been avoiding queries on vaccination supply and distribution. All domain experts have been suggesting vaccination being the only long-term solution for protecting a large chunk of population and avoiding mass graves. The government had nearly eight months to be prepared for the current onslaught and has

been blessed with one of the largest vaccine manufacturing sites in the world, along with a home grown vaccine. It therefore cuts a very sorry figure when despite all the wealth and a team to push India to the next lever of growth, only about 10 per cent of the population has been vaccinated while a sizeable chunk of India, even in most impacted districts of Delhi and Mumbai, are battling it for *qjab* in the arm. The current vaccine distribution policy of the government is opaque and needs clarity along with an almost daily update on the pipeline for next few months. Estimates suggest nearly one per cent of the India population would be willing to pay for vaccines. Government must prioritise COVID3 management by securing nearly 1.5 billion vaccines for India in the next few months.

Time to embrace the biological revolution

It is an inevitable, irreversible fact. Also, it hides within itself the potential of biological research and its unique opportunities for humanity



BKP SINHA



WE ALL NEED FRESH WATER TO SURVIVE BUT IT IS ONLY FIVE PER CENT OF THE TOTAL WATER VOLUME OF THE EARTH. MOST OF IT IS IN ICE SHEETS AND THE SOIL. HENCE, WATER PURIFICATION IS CRITICAL FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL. THIS DISCOVERY WILL USE CELL PROTEINS OF THE CELL MEMBRANE TO PURIFY WATER

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changed as we train our thinking. Thoughts and minds' energy directly influence how the physical brain controls the body's physiology. Mental 'energy' can activate or inhibit the cells' function to produce proteins.

Biologists in collaboration with biochemists, biophysicists are working hard to cutting-edge research on most of the areas of the burning issues to meet the demands of the growing population that consumes more and more transportable forms of stored energy. Scientists are turning to alternative sources of renewable energy like solar, hydro, wind and tide. But our energy needs are still not being met because of their intermittent supply and time difference between their production and demand. The alternative renewable energies are getting cheaper, better all the time. However, we are yet to find a way to store these energies ineffective, cheap, reliable ways, without much creation of waste.

If biologists can devise a battery that allows overcoming intermittency problems inherent in solar, wind, and other renewable sources, we could use clean and abundant sources to meet all our energy needs.

The battery converts chemical energy to electrical energy by moving electrons from one metal to another. Electrons are tiny negatively charged particles. The copper-zinc plates form positive and neg-

ative poles. It conducts the electric current. It can go as long as all the electrons get transferred. Thus, a battery is an energy transportation device. When the battery is discharged, we use electricity to charge.

Dr Angela Belcher, materials scientist at MIT, is evolving viruses into variants that could organize non-biological materials such as gallium arsenide and silicon for semiconductors. Her experiment gave her confidence to build new tools to build batteries. She found that metals and metal oxides worked particularly well. Viruses do not have cell walls or any structural elements. It is a protein capsule with DNA / RNA. She found that viruses-building elements could be used to make electrodes that can open a door to clean and efficient, new way for making batteries. Her next step is a virus-based state of art battery, but could this battery take the form of a dashboard, seat cover, door panel? Nobody knows.

Until recently, it was undisputed that cell membrane itself is a medium for exchange of water from cells and outside. Dr Peter Agre, molecular biologist at John Hopkin's Institute, in 1980 while purifying Rh protein from red blood cell membranes to identify it made a discovery that the membrane has Rh protein that works as a gate and alters a particular substance vehicle with a pass to allow entry into the cell. These proteins are known as aquaporins.

Starting with a large volume of the red blood cells, he separated the cell membrane from the rest of its content. Next, he carefully isolated Rh protein from other present proteins. We all need fresh water to survive but it is only five per cent of the total water volume of the earth. Most of it is in ice sheets and the soil.

Hence, water purification is critical for human survival. This discovery will use cell proteins of the cell membrane to purify water. We now know the whole family of aquaporin found in virtually all organisms on earth. A particular amino acid occupies a particular pattern of location and pattern.

Contrary to the theory by a famous economist, Thomas Robert Malthus, the world would be engulfed by war, famine and pestilence, but the convergence of biology and engineering is giving us great hope that we can avoid the gloomy future. How to bring together researchers from the fields of science for a collaborative effort in bioengineering by encouraging national investment in fundamental research that motivates scientists to work in interdisciplinary areas.

For all this to happen we must have convergence-minded policies and international collaboration in the field of biology, where scientists and technologists can work on a platform to defer the sixth mass extinction of Holocene or Anthropocene.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

AS PER TV REPORTS, MY NUMBER WAS FALSELY GIVEN AS BELONGING TO SOME AMJAD KHAN, OSTENSIBLY TO LINK ME WITH DRUG TRAFFICKING. — MAHARASHTRA CONGRESS PRESIDENT NANA PATOLE



ONE PARTY SHOULD NOT TAP THE PHONES OF THE OTHER PARTY OR LEADERS. THE MATTER SHOULD BE INVESTIGATED BY A COMMITTEE OF RETIRED JUDGES. — BJP LEADER SUDHIR MUNGANTIWAR

Sensex ends marginally higher; Nifty stays below 14,700

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex ended marginally higher after a choppy session on Friday as concerns over the economic impact of the second wave of COVID-19 and pace of vaccination weighed on investor sentiment.

While the 30-share BSE index ended 41.75 points or 0.09 per cent higher at 48,732.55, the broader NSE Nifty fell 18.70 points or 0.13 per cent to 14,677.80.

Asian Paints was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying over 8 per cent, followed by ITC, Nestle India, L&T, HUL and Reliance Industries.

On the other hand, IndusInd Bank, M&M, Dr Reddy's, SBI and NTPC were among the laggards.

"Indian equity markets remained largely range bound over the last week. The COVID situation in India is no doubt grim and

hence the health issue is something that could keep markets volatile in the near term," said Shibani Kurian, Senior EVP & Head- Equity Research, Kotak Mahindra AMC.

Going forward, market will likely track the pace of vaccinations, trajectory of active cases curve and management commentary of companies. Rollback of localised lockdowns and trend of inflation in many global commodities like crude oil and steel will be other key factors to watch out for, she noted.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended on a positive note. Stock exchanges in Europe were also trading with gains in mid-session deals.

Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.92 per cent higher at USD 67.67 per barrel.



Petrol, diesel prices rise again, reach record highs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Petrol and diesel prices on Friday touched record high levels across the country after rates were increased for the fourth time this week.

Petrol price was hiked by 29 paise per litre and diesel by 34 paise a litre, according to a price notification by state-owned fuel retailers.

The increase propelled rates in Delhi to climb to an all-time high of Rs 92.34 a litre for petrol and Rs 82.95 per litre for diesel.

Rates had already crossed the Rs 100-mark in several cities in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and with the latest increase, prices in Mumbai too were inching towards that level.

A litre of petrol in Mumbai now comes for Rs 98.65 and diesel is priced at Rs 90.11 per litre.

Fuel prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes such as VAT and freight charges. Rajasthan levies the highest



value-added tax (VAT) on petrol in the country, followed by Madhya Pradesh.

This was the fourth increase in prices this week and eighth hike since May 4, when the state-owned oil firms ended an 18-hiatus in rate revision they observed during assembly elections in states like West Bengal. Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan had the costliest petrol and diesel in the country at Rs 103.27 per litre and Rs 95.70 a litre respectively.

In eight increases, petrol price has risen by Rs 1.95 per litre and diesel by Rs 2.22.

Since March last year when the government raised excise duty on fuel to an all-time

high, petrol price has increased by a record Rs 22.75 per litre (after accounting for a handful of occasions when rates fell) and diesel by Rs 20.66.

Oil companies, who have in recent months resorted to unexplained freeze in rate revision, had hit a pause button after cutting prices marginally on April 15. This coincided with electioneering hitting a peak to elect new governments in five states including West Bengal.

No sooner had voting ended, oil companies indicated an impending increase in retail prices in view of firming trends in international oil markets.

Jio announces free talk time offer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Jio on Friday said it is working with Reliance Foundation to provide 300 free minutes of outgoing calls per month, which amounts to 10 minutes per day, for the entire period of the pandemic.

The scheme will be available to JioPhone users who have not been able to recharge due to the ongoing pandemic, the company said in a statement.

Reliance Jio is the first company to announce free talk time for users in the second wave of pandemic wherein many states have imposed lockdowns or lockdown-like restrictions as a desperate measure to restrict the spread of the virus.

"Jio working with Reliance Foundation will provide 300 free minutes of outgoing calls per month (10 minutes per day) for the entire period of the pandemic, to JioPhone users who have not been able



to recharge due to the ongoing pandemic," Jio said in a statement.

In addition to free talk time, Jio has announced that for every JioPhone plan recharged by a JioPhone user, they will get an additional recharge plan of the same value for free.

"In these unprecedented times of the COVID pandemic, we at Jio want to ensure that staying connected remains accessible and affordable for all customers, especially the less-privileged sections of our society," the statement said.

However, these offers are not applicable on annual or JioPhone device bundled plans.

Number of independent directors on decline; PSUs responsible: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The total number of independent directors (IDs) has decreased in 2020 as compared to 2019 and 2018, and the reduction is mainly on account non-appointment of directors on boards of state-owned entities, according to a report.

The total number of IDs reduced to 2,249 in 2020 as against 2,396 in 2019 and 2,494 in the previous year, said the report by Institutional Investor Advisory Services India Limited (IIAS) based on the study of the board composition of NIFTY 500 companies as on December 31, 2020.

"This reduction can mainly be attributed to the reduction in the number of IDs in PSU companies. The other reason for the decrease in IDs has been churn in the companies forming part of NIFTY 500 over this period," it said.

The outgoing companies in the NIFTY 500 in 2020 when



compared to 2019 had 208 IDs on their boards while the incoming companies had 188 ID, whereas when compared to 2018, the outgoing companies in 2020 had 395 IDs on their boards while the incoming companies had 331 IDs, it said.

The PSUs forming part of NIFTY 500 had 133 fewer IDs in 2020 compared to the earlier year, the report said, adding, there were 72 PSU companies as a part of the NIFTY 500 in both 2019 and 2020. PSUs in the NIFTY 500 companies needed to appoint around 141 independent directors to their board to be in compliance with the listing

guidelines of Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) as on December, 2020.

On December 31, 2020, 14 per cent (70 companies) were non-compliant with board composition norms. Out of these 70 companies, 55 companies were PSUs. Board independence has long been a problem for PSUs.

"The one area that drags overall board statistics is state-owned enterprises (PSUs). The board structure related issues are much more prominent in state-owned enterprises than in public sector banks (PSBs). Excessive carve-outs for PSUs embedded directly into regulation justify the exceptions, but violations of regulations continue on account of poor enforcement," it said.

RBI's recent regulations on governance of scheduled commercial banks also have a carve-out for PSBs, given them an unnecessary differential status, it said.

Go Airlines files draft papers for Rs 3,600 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Go Airlines, which has rebranded itself as 'Go First', has filed preliminary papers for an initial share sale worth Rs 3,600 crore and the proceeds will be mainly used to repay dues amid the aviation industry facing strong headwinds due to the coronavirus pandemic.

After taking to the skies 15 years ago, the Wadia group-promoted budget carrier -- which has ambitious expansion plans -- is looking to mop up the amount through issuance of fresh equity shares. It also has plans to raise up to Rs 1,500 crore by way of a pre-IPO placement.

Dr Reddy's Q4 profit dips 29 pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Friday reported 29 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 557 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2021.

The Hyderabad-based drug major had posted a net profit of Rs 781 crore in January-March period of 2019-20.

Net sales however rose to Rs 4,608 crore in the quarter under review as compared with Rs 4,336.1 crore in the fourth quarter of 2019-20, Dr Reddy's Laboratories said in a regulatory filing.

For 2020-21 fiscal year, the company posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 1,952 crore as against Rs 2,026 crore in 2019-20.

Net sales increased to Rs 18,420 crore during the last fiscal year as compared with Rs 16,357 crore in 2019-20.

"In FY 21, we continued to grow across all our businesses, enhance productivity and strengthen our development pipeline," Dr Reddy's Laboratories Co-Chairman



and MD G V Prasad said.

The company is prioritising its efforts to launch Sputnik V vaccine across India while working on the development and commercialisation of several drugs for the treatment of mild to severe COVID 19 infections, he added.

The drug maker said it has commenced a detailed investigation into an anonymous complaint which alleges that healthcare professionals in Ukraine and potentially in other countries were provided with improper payments by or on behalf of the company in violation of US anti-corruption laws. A legal firm is conduct-

ing the investigation at the instruction of a committee of the company's board, it added.

Dr Reddy's noted that it has disclosed the matter to the US Department of Justice, Securities and Exchange Commission and Securities Exchange Board of India.

"While the matter may result in government enforcement actions against the company in the United States and/or foreign jurisdictions, which could lead to civil and criminal sanctions under relevant laws, the probability of such action and the outcome are not reasonably ascertainable at this time," it added.

Govt appoints Vandita Kaul as nominee on board of BOI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Bank of India (BOI) on Friday said the government has appointed Vandita Kaul, additional secretary in the Finance Ministry, to its board as nominee director. The bank said it has received the communication from the Finance Ministry about Kaul's nomination on May 13, 2021. The government has nominated Vandita Kaul, Additional Secret-ary, Department of Financial Services as government nominee director on the board of directors of Bank of India with immediate effect, the lender said in a regulatory filing.

Covaxin dispatched to various states: BB

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bharat Biotech on Friday said it has dispatched COVID vaccine Covaxin to various states like Gujarat, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Odisha.

The Hyderabad-based vaccine major, which has come under fire from the Delhi government over supply-related issues, said it has also dispatched Covaxin lots to Kerala and Uttarakhand.

"Covaxin goes to Gandhinagar, Guwahati, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru & Bhuvneshwar. thank all our employees @ Bharat bio who worked thru the holy month of Ramzan..." Bharat Biotech Co-Founder and Joint Managing Director Suchitra Ella said in a tweet.

Earlier in a late night tweet on Thursday, she tweeted informing supply of the much in demand vaccine to Kerala

and Uttarakhand.

"Covaxin sent to Kerala & Uttarakhand. Thanq for the concern, many offered to help. Our work is highly stringent, realtime & technical, no work from home! All Our employees will be taken care of, won't deter us from our mission! Let's be thankful, helpful & hopeful always," she tweeted.

Ella however did not provide details on the quantum of supplies.

On May 12, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that Bharat Biotech has informed the state government that it cannot provide 'additional' Covaxin doses to the national capital.

Responding to the criticism, Ella in a tweet said that it was quite disheartening to listen to some states complaining about the company's intentions regarding supply of Covaxin.

Koo to raise funds; hopes to close deal in 4 months

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Twitter rival Koo is in discussions with investors to raise funding and hopes to close a deal in the next 3-4 months, Koo co-founder Aprameya Radhakrishna said.

Koo, which has over the past few months seen a massive surge in user base in the country, is looking at raising "more than what was raised in the last round".

In February, Koo said it had raised USD 4.1 million in series A funding from Accel, Kalaari Capital, Blume Ventures and Dream Incubator, and 3one4 Capital. In all, it has raised about USD 10 million in total fund-

ing through multiple tranches.

"We raised some money in January and we are in talks with folks who are quite interested to invest money. Talks are on, we will see what works out," Radhakrishna told PTI.

He added that the company is pretty hopeful of closing a transaction in next 3-4 months.

While Radhakrishna remained tight-lipped about the amount of funding Koo is looking at raising, he said the platform would want to raise more than what it had raised in the previous round.

"The kind of appetite for social media is being seen in the VCs," he said.

Akshaya Tritiya begins on sombre note

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Akshaya Tritiya, a highly auspicious day to purchase gold, has started on a sombre note and jewellers are expecting only 10-15 per cent sales as the onset of the COVID-19 second wave, local restrictions and partial lockdowns have affected consumer sentiment.

"As most of the states are under lockdown to curb the infections there is almost no business activity. The day of Akshaya Tritiya has begun on a slow note and whatever booking or enquiries are happening it is only through tele or digital medium," All-India Gems & Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) chairman Ashish Pethe told PTI. He said, jewellers are expecting



only 10-15 per cent sales this Akshaya Tritiya in places where the lockdown is not imposed or there are partial shutdowns.

The second wave of the pandemic is turning out to be much worse than last year with huge loss of life across the country causing an overall

negative consumer sentiment, Pethe said. India's COVID-19 tally of cases climbed to 2,40,46,809, while the death toll rose to 2,62,317 with 4,000 fresh fatalities, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Friday.

During the ongoing second wave of the COVID-19 infections, many states have imposed lockdowns or lockdown-like restrictions as a desperate measure to restrict the spread of the virus.

PNG Jewellers Chairman and Managing Director Saurabh Gadgil said the day has begun with enquiries and bookings, however, as delivery is not possible due to lockdowns the sales during this Akshaya Tritiya is likely to be tamed and muted.

MONEY MATTERS

Tata board to meet next week to consider fund-raise proposal



Tata Motors on Friday said its board will meet next week to consider a proposal to raise funds through various means. The board meeting is scheduled to be held on Tuesday, May 18, 2021 to consider and approve the audited financial

results for the quarter and financial year ended March 31, 2021. "The board in the said meeting would also consider a proposal for raising funds by way of issue of one or more instruments including convertible securities of any description or debt securities, through preferential issue, private placements, rights issue or any other methods or combination thereof in the domestic and/or international markets," Tata Motors said in a regulatory filing. However, Tata Motors did not give an indication on the quantum of the amount that the company intends to raise.

1K power sector employees succumbed to Covid: AIEPF



All India Power Engineers Federation (AIEPF) on Friday said as many as 1,000 power sector employees have succumbed to COVID-19 and more than 15,000 have been infected

from the virus. In Maharashtra, a total of more than 7,100 power employees are COVID positive and about 210 have died. While, in Uttar Pradesh, more than 4,000 power sector employees are suffering from coronavirus and there have been 140 casualties. "Amid a record surge in COVID-19 cases in the country, around 1,000 employees working in the power sector have died and more than 15,000 employees have tested positive for the virus," AIEPF Spokesperson V K Gupta said.

ADB commits record USD 3.92 billion loan to India



The Asian Development Bank on Friday said it has committed a record USD 3.92 billion in sovereign loans for 13 projects to India in 2020, including USD 1.8 billion in COVID-19 related projects to support the government's pandemic response. As part of the pandemic support to India, the Manila-headquartered

multilateral agency said it has provided emergency assistance to contain the disease and establish social protection measures for relief to the poor and other vulnerable groups. ADB also approved financing to help the government improve equitable access to comprehensive primary health care in urban areas. This is ADB's highest-ever annual lending commitment to India since the start of its lending operations in 1986, it said, adding it has also committed USD 356.1 million through its non-sovereign operations to India, including three COVID-19 support projects.

L&T bags construction order from Chennai Metro Rail Corp



Infrastructure company Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Friday said its construction arm has bagged an up to Rs 5,000 crore contract from Chennai Metro Rail Corporation. "The business has secured an order from Chennai Metro Rail

Corporation Ltd (CMRL) to construct nearly 12 km twin bored tunnels from Kellys station to Taramani Road Junction station," the company said in a regulatory filing. L&T said the business has also secured another order from Chennai Metro Rail Corporation to construct approx 8 Km of elevated Viaduct with 9 elevated metro stations starting from Power House to Porur Junction including other associated works. The engineering and construction company did not provide the exact value of the contract, but as per its project classification, "large" orders are those valued between Rs 2,500 crore and Rs 5,000 crore. L&T said these projects are the first packages of phase - II which have been awarded by Chennai Metro Rail.

Hyderabad



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Saturday
May 15, 2021

IN LOVE WITH A CITY!

Can you love a city? Not just love living in a city, but love a city like you love another person? Clinical director and speech-language pathologist Dr. Garima Vegivada, who was born and brought up in the country's capital Delhi, projects these very emotions, as she talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL.

The passion she has shown to us when speaking about her admiration for Hyderabad makes us believe that she's conscious about what place Clinical director and speech-language pathologist Dr. Garima Vegivad, calls home. Doctors are at the forefront of fighting epidemics and pandemics providing high-quality treatment and care! The Covid-19 pandemic has come as a stark reminder of the vital role doctors play in our lives. A relationship that Dr. Garima is building every day with the city feels definitely awakening. "It was the cadence of when I decided to do my Masters here in Hyderabad and then I got married to a person who's a permanent resident of the city. For the sake of coherence, I have the ability to postulate a lovely relationship with this city. I really love the weather here! Can't ever get tired of this place, evenings are so pleasant here. It feels like home!

Though a major part of the city is a concrete arena, the part in which I reside is full of greenery," shares the doctor who is a resident of Alwal. The city has places to eat at any time of the day. To be honest, she was apprehensive when it comes to finding a good food joint initially because she's grown up in an environment where the south and north share a drastic choice of cuisine! She thought she won't be able to get accustomed to South Indian cuisine but as time passed by, she developed a unique taste for it. The city can turn you into a new human, she feels. Apart from that, she's in



HYDERABOND



deep awe of the Telugu dialect, it's an interesting language she says, adding, "Basically, you can never be bored here, there is so much to do."

For many migrants, the warmth of the welcome they receive in another state can make or break their upcoming tenure and Dr. Garima had a hearty welcome! "I was met with utmost hostility. Felt so appreciating of the people, wasn't met with any horrors of a different city. The last thing you want to do is encounter rude people. Also, in comparison with Delhi, professionalism is given high regards in this city. I remember when we thought of setting up our own clinic, my mother gave us an option to shift back to Delhi although my husband was apprehensive of it because he knew the populace back there is so commercialised! However, I didn't understand his notion at that time and now I see it. The way Hyderabadis communicate and sign deals shows their tehzeeb altogether. You can also look forward to lots of pleasant interactions," adds Dr. Garima who is also a therapist. Everything about the city excites her, she



has explored and learnt the hotspots, which sides to avoid, the best places to eat and socialise! While learning every nook and cranny of its existence and being, she learns it more slowly and methodically. Her own eyes got to reveal and revel in all of the secrets, good and bad, of her newest adoration. In a city in which she doesn't speak the native language, another added difficulty only added to the romance of the relationship as she learnt words by association and context. Without a doctor, we can't win the current battle against the outbreak, hence we, through this special weekly column, thank every health worker out there who has kept his/her safety in a backseat to save thousands of lives.



INTRIGUING SHOWS

WE ALL AWAIT FOR

There are good series, then there are series that make it to the binge-watch list, and then there are only a few that intrigue the audience, making them hungry for more. Recently released *Hello Mini 3*, produced by Applause Entertainment in association with Goldie Behl's Rose Audio Visual was certainly one amongst them. Based on the Stranger trilogy series by Novoneel Chakraborty, the first two seasons of the show fascinated audiences so much that on popular demand, makers were forced to release the third season within a month of the release of the second season. So, as we sit and enjoy the 3rd season of *Hello Mini 3*, here is a list of shows which left audiences drooling for more.

Undekhi 2

Undekhi's first season immediately clicked with the audience post its release on Sony LIV. The show runs around the life of two film Institute graduates turned to wedding videographers who travel to Manali to cover a wedding.

One of them inadvertently captures a cold-blooded murder by the groom's father. He is horrified to see the killing being cleanly swept under the carpets and trying to do the right thing, he puts all of them in danger.

At the same time, a police inspector from West Bengal lands up in Manali investigating another murder which adds to the twists in Applause Entertainment's production, making things more complicated for the two families and the resort owner.

The suspense in the thriller keeps the audience on the edge of the seats and now, here we are all waiting for the sequel to release soon.



Made in Heaven 2

Made in Heaven actress Shobhita Dhulipala recently left audiences wanting more with her glimpse into the behind-the-scenes action from the sets of *Made in Heaven 2*. The brainchild of Zoya Akhtar and Reema Katgi, the nine-episode series chronicles the lives of Tara (Shobhita Dhulipala) and Karan (Arjun Mathur) who run a wedding planning agency called *Made In Heaven*. While the show itself is based on the recession-proof wedding industry, it is brilliant in the sense that it manages to capture almost every aspect of Indian society – from the snobbish 'Dilli ki billi' to the girl from the 'gutter' who is trying to



make it big in the world. The relatability of the show added it to the favourites list of audiences. Since the release of the first season, audiences have time and again asked *Amazon Prime Video* for the release date of the sequel. We hope there is an announcement soon....

The Family Man 2

After a lot of speculations on the release date for *The Family Man 2*, *Amazon Prime Video* along with the makers Raj and DK have confirmed the summer 2021 release of the second season of *The Family Man*, giving all Family Man fans another reason to await the summers apart from the mangoes. With a multi-layered narrative, the sequel of the action spy thriller marks the return of India's favourite Family Man, Srikant Tiwari, played by Manoj Bajpayee. This time Srikant, while struggling to balance



his personal and professional life, will be pitted against a new nemesis, Raji played by Samantha Akkineni. Replete with twists and turns, the upcoming season will see Srikant embarking on a new mission as 'This Time, No One is Safe'.

Broken But Beautiful 3

This one is the most awaited by all Siddharth Shukla fans as the heart-throb debuts into the web space with the third season of *Broken But Beautiful*. The *AltBalaji* series was a huge hit in the first two seasons. Audiences were already excited for the next installment and the recent video of Siddharth and Sonia Rathee created more agitation as it took social media



by storm. We surely can't wait to see the sizzling chemistry between the two in the upcoming season.

Mind The Malhotras 2

If you have grown up on a diet of comic family dramas like *Dekh Bhai Dekh*, *Family No. 1*, *Kiichdi*, *Baa Bahur Aur Baby*, *Sarabhai Vs Sarabhai*, *Mind the Malhotras* is the show that brings that flavour on OTT. The *Amazon Prime Video* show, produced by Applause Entertainment is based on the life of the Malhotra couple who are like any other urban middle-class family with a world of mundane problems. The show brings to light these issues



with rib-tickling comedy and this sugar of laughter is certainly what is needed by us during these tough times. So, mask up and stay safe as we wait for *Mind the Malhotras 2*!



Elegance encasing emotions

With the ongoing pandemic, people can't wait to meet, greet, gather and celebrate. Making the most of the various emotions one feels, many have channelled them to art. Encapsulating the most swoon-worthy outfits that emit elegance and grace is 'Mehfil' from Kaaisha — thoughtfully crafted while envisioning the perfect gala, it offers some of the most individualistic and unique designer wear. Every industry has been gravely affected by the Covid-19 outbreak forcing the sectors from factories to retailers to close their shutters for an indefinite period of time but this exuberant collection is crafted with a sense of realisation of the prevalent unprecedented times the world is experiencing. Founder of Kaaisha, Shalini Gupta elucidates, "I was drawn to artistic passions, and decided to



pay tribute to the unique beauty and grace of every woman by dressing each one to reflect this uniqueness. It's about celebrating homely, cultural functions surrounded by family, friends, and well-wishers. It is about appreciating those magic moments that we

can share with our loved ones."

With social distancing becoming the new norm, intimate celebration with our nearest and dearest ones is what we look forward to, this coming year. Kaaisha's 'Mehfil' is a collection for all these moments! The coronavirus crisis may have crippled the functioning of the industry, but not its spirit. Originating from intimate gatherings for poetry recitations, the word 'Mehfil' holds a warm meaning today. It is about closeness, warmth, like-mindedness. From intimate home festivities, private parties and functions, and intimate reception galas, there is something for everyone.

The label has introduced itself to a new form of fashion while acclimatising to the current scenario. It's your time to opt for easy, breezy, and comfortable to wear, while keeping a style quotient in mind.



SALMAN KHAN'S *RADHE* release: ZEE5 servers crash



Radhe has released in theaters and on ZEE5's pay per view platform ZeePlex. The craze of a Salman Khan film is not limited to the ticket counters of cinema halls. The fans of the 'bhai' are equally excited for the release of his latest action

entertainer *Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai* on the digital platform. On Thursday, the servers of the streaming platform ZEE5 crashed as many rushed to stream the Prabhu Deva directorial. ZEE5 Premium took to social media to share that they are working on their system and will fix the issue.

They also thanked the fans of Khan for their immense love. "Thank you for the unprecedented love, will be back soon," read the tweet. The servers crashed at around noon as over 1.25 million people tried to login to ZEE5. They were later fixed. *Radhe* is the first mega Bollywood film to release on

multiple mediums simultaneously. It has released in theatres overseas and in India, it is available on ZEE5's pay per view platform ZeePlex. It is also available to watch on DTH services, including Dish TV, D2H, Tata Sky and Airtel Digital TV. Salman Khan earlier spoke about losing money at the box office with *Radhe*. "We will lose money at the box office with *Radhe*. The reason why we are releasing this film is for the fans. I don't want them to come to a theatre to watch me. I don't want *ki kal ko koi bole ki Salman Khan ke fans ko coronavirus hogaya ya unhone faila diya*. I am glad Zee also was ready to take losses along with us," he said. Besides Khan, *Radhe* stars Disha Patani, Randeep Hooda, and Jackie Shroff in pivotal roles. The film is receiving a mixed response from the audience. While for some it is like a breather in these grim times, some have called the movie a waste of time.



Covid relief: Ajith donates Rs 25 lakh to TN CM fund

Tamil superstar 'Thala' Ajith Kumar had donated Rs 25 lakh to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Relief Fund for the fight against Covid-19. After the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu MK Stalin recently urged people to donate generously to the government's Covid-19 relief fund, many of the Kollywood bigwigs have come forward to contribute. Suresh Chandra, Ajith Kumar's manager, on Friday took to his Twitter handle to reveal the news. He wrote, "Shri Ajith kumar had donated twenty five lakhs to the

Chief minister relief fund today via bank transfer." Ace director AR Murugadoss also came forward to do his bit. He met MK Stalin recently and presented a cheque of Rs 25 lakh for the Tamil Nadu CM Relief Fund. Recently, Suriya and Karthi contributed a sum of Rs 1 crore to the Tamil Nadu government to battle the Covid-19 second wave in the state. On the work front, Ajith Kumar is busy shooting for *Valimai*, which is being directed by H Vinoth. He was last seen in *Nerkonda Paarvai*, a Tamil remake of critically acclaimed *Pink*.



Camila Cabello's beautiful transformation into Cinderella

The first look of singer-songwriter Camila Cabello in the upcoming movie *Cinderella* is out. Cabello, known globally for her megahit songs like *Havana* debuts as an actor in the Kay Cannon directorial fairytale adaptation. *Cinderella* is a musical romantic comedy. The official social media accounts of the movie shared two pictures from the film. One features Cabello alone in the role, while the second photo also has Nicholas Galitzine, who plays the role of Prince Robert. The film also stars Billy Porter, Idina Menzel, Pierce Brosnan, Nicholas Galitzine, and Minnie Driver. John Mulaney, James Corden, Romesh Ranganathan are also part of the film's cast. The story of *Cinderella* and the character has been adapted several times by Hollywood. Some

of the notable ones include *Into the Woods*, a mish-mash of fairy-tales in which Anna Kendrick played the role and 2015's *Cinderella*, with Lily James in the role. Corden was also a part of *Into the Woods*' cast. Although we do not know anything of the plot, Shannon told Entertainment Weekly in an interview, "I just felt like it was a great opportunity to show this loved, iconic character that is *Cinderella* in a way that's more relatable to what girls and young women, in particular, are going through, where they can really see themselves." She added, "She's going to surprise everyone, because nobody's ever seen her act before. She's so fantastic. She's so good, and she's so natural, and just funny and beautiful and really, really talented." Well, it does sounds like the shoe fits!

Friends reunion special gets release date



The first teaser for the *Friends* reunion special, starring Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry, and David Schwimmer, is out. The teaser, which features an acoustic version of the theme tune and the cast




walking into the distance, reveals the release date of the *Friends* reunion special titled *Friends: The Reunion*. It will premiere on streaming service HBO Max on May 27. HBO Max is currently not available in India. As if the short video was not enough to get fans excited, along with the teaser

trailer, HBO announced that the cast will be joined by a variety of special guests. The list includes names like David Beckham, Justin Bieber, BTS, James Corden, Cindy Crawford, Cara Delevingne, Lady Gaga, Elliott Gould, Kit Harington, Larry Hankin, Mindy Kaling, Thomas Lennon, Christina Pickles, Tom Selleck, James Michael Tyler, Maggie Wheeler, Reese Witherspoon and Malala Yousafzai. Naturally, the news set social media ablaze. At once, hyped, emotional, and super excited fans flooded virtual timelines with memories from their favourite sitcom. From sharing memes to videos and from posting quotes to iconic moments from the show, Twitterverse has got everything fans absolutely love about the show. In the unscripted reunion




special, Jennifer Aniston, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry, Courteney Cox and David Schwimmer will return to *Friends*' original soundstage Stage 24, on the Warner Bros. Studio lot in Burbank, California, to talk about playing Rachel, Phoebe, Joey, Chandler, Monica and Ross, respectively. Courteney Cox recently talked about the *Friends* reunion special in a conversation with talk show host Ellen DeGeneres. During the interaction, Cox said it was "unbelievable" to meet and film with her co-stars again. She also remarked that the reunion "was so emotional" and there are "a lot of special surprises." *Friends*, one of the most popular sitcoms of all time, ran for 10 seasons from 1994 to 2004. It chronicled the daily lives of six friends in a comedic way.

FUN




ARCHIE






CALVIN AND HOBBS





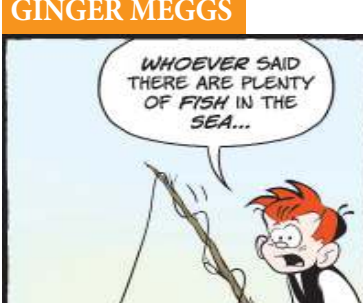
GARFIELD



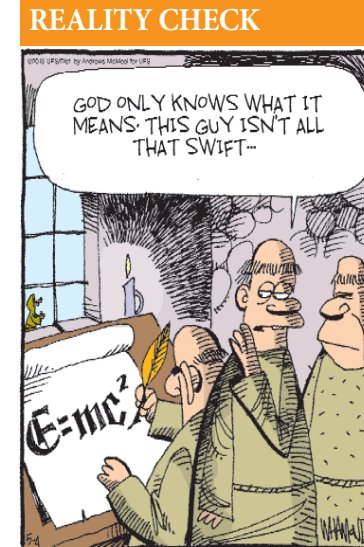
NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

1		2		3	4	5
				6		
7				8		
		10				
11					12	
			13			
16					17	
18				19		

SUDOKU

	1	5		4				
		2						9
	8				2			4
2		6			9			
1			2		4			6
		7				9		8
7			1					8
6						2		
				5		6	4	

Yesterday's solution

5	9	2	1	7	3	8	6	4
4	7	1	8	6	9	3	5	2
6	3	8	2	5	4	1	9	7
1	4	9	3	2	7	5	8	6
8	5	7	4	9	6	2	1	3
2	6	3	5	1	8	7	4	9
7	8	6	9	3	1	4	2	5
3	1	5	6	4	2	9	7	8
9	2	4	7	8	5	6	3	1

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- Baking instructions
- Factual
- Play this with two sticks
- Rub to a shine
- Young hen
- Extra document
- Extra-intelligent person
- Finished
- Playthings
- Almost

DOWN

- Travel by horse
- Captured
- Water from the sky
- Breathe out

SOLUTION

S	T	A	R	B	O	A	R	D
R	A	B	O	Y	O	U	T	H
T	E	S	T	B	O	N	A	
R	E	S	T	B	E	L	D	O
E	T	I	C	K	E	T	N	
T	I	C	K	E	T	N		
C	E	P	E	R				
H	A	L	V	E				
P	O	R	T	U	N	A	T	E

CHIRANJEEVI'S LUCIFER REMAKE TO HAVE DIRECTOR CHANGE



Chiranjeevi earned the reputation of being the best judge of stories. Most of the time his judgment never fails at the box office. Chiranjeevi is currently starring in *Acharya* under the direction of Koratala Shiva and apart from it, he is starring in Malayalam hit *Lucifer* remake. Chiranjeevi, after deciding to star in the *Lucifer* remake, chose Mohan Raja as the director. Mohan Raja of *Thani Oruvan* fame in Chiranjeevi's advice worked on *Lucifer* script and made changes according to the tastes of Telugu movie lovers. Mohan Raja in the due process met Chiranjeevi many times but the actor wasn't satisfied.

According to sources, Chiranjeevi is planning to change the director. Chiranjeevi is unhappy that

despite numerous suggestions and repeated meetings they are unable to work on the script.

People, however, feel that making changes in *Lucifer* as per Telugu movie lovers' taste is very difficult as Kerala and the politics in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are completely different. To top it all, Chiranjeevi's real-life political party happenings come as a hindrance.

Now we've learnt that Chiranjeevi gave a green signal to Mihana Krishna after being impressed with the changes and the script for the Telugu remake of *Lucifer* has been locked.

Kondapalem in peculiar trouble

Panjaa Vaishnav Tej, nephew of Mega Star Chiranjeevi created a sensation on the silver screen with his dream debut along with Kriti Shetty with *Uppena* directed by Buchibabu Sana. He captured the imagination of all by signing another different genre entertainer *Kondapalem* with creative director Krish.

According to the latest news, *Kondapalem* finds itself in a peculiar situation.

The film's first backdrop needs to depict wild animals and this requires extensive usage of VFX and CGI. Krish, who wrapped up the film shoot in a record 45 days

non-stop schedule, handed over the VFX work to VFX companies last December. 80% of computer graphics work is yet to be completed and the companies cite lockdown problems and coronavirus for the delay. Krish also added that *Kondapalem* theatrical release will not happen any sooner due to the current situation.

The film is inspired by the novel *Kondapalem* written by Sannapureddy Venkataramireddy and is all about how a youngster along with his father protected his sheep and also became a forest officer after completing B.Tech. Rakul Preet Singh is playing the role of Obulama and the film's shoot done in Vikarabad forests.



Sumanth approached for Mahesh-Trivikram film?



It is a known fact that Mahesh Babu is doing a film with Trivikram and the film was announced a few weeks back. So much is being said about this film time and again, and is making the fans excited.

Now, the latest gossip in the film circles is that Sumanth has been approached to play a key role in the film. Trivikram approached Sushanth in *Ala Vaikuntapuramlo...* and now Sumanth has been in talks for his film.

Though there is no confirmation, this news has caught on quite well in the industry. Watch this space for more updates on this film.

Chay's remarkable transformation for his Bollywood debut

Naga Chaitanya is making his Bollywood debut and this is exciting all Akkineni fans as he is playing an important role in mister perfectionist Amir Khan's upcoming entertainer *Lal Singh Chaddha* under the direction of Advait Narayan.

Naga Chaitanya, according to sources, will undergo a remarkable transformation in his physique. Naga Chaitanya already allotted 15 days for the shoot and will be joining the film's Ladakh schedule.

It is known that Amir Khan planned to cast Kollywood Star Vijay Sethupathi but Vijay couldn't due to his busy schedule. The makers then zeroed in on Naga Chaitanya. *Lal Singh Chaddha* is the official remake of the Oscar-winning Hollywood film *Forrest Gump*. Tom Hanks starred in the film which released in 1994. Naga Chaitanya is also starring in *Love Story* along with Sai Pallavi under the direction of Sekhar Kammula and in *Thank You* along with Rashi Khanna under the direction of Vikram Kumar.



HOLLYWOOD ACTRESS OPPOSITE PRABHAS?



Prabhas' stardom and craze for him are increasing at a rapid pace with each passing day. While top directors and banners are showing interest in making films with him, actresses' managers are said to be competing with each other to bag the golden chance to have them screen presence with him. We now hear that now it's not just Bollywood but Hollywood actress too might soon star opposite him.

An insider tells us that Bollywood director Siddharth Anand penned a powerful story for Prabhas and he already narrated it to the actor

who gave his green signal. Buzz is that the film is a high octane action entertainer and Siddharth Anand is planning to cast a popular Hollywood heroine. Now various Hollywood actresses' names are being speculated to act with the star. Siddharth Anand recently directed Tiger Shroff and Hrithik Roshan's *War* and scored a hit in Bollywood.

Prabhas is currently busy with films like *Radhe Shyam*, *Salaar*, *Aadi Purush*, and an unnamed project with Nag Ashwin.



Director-writer Nandyala Ravi dies of Covid

In some heart-breaking news, director and writer Nandyala Ravi succumbed to Covid-19. Ravi, who had been battling Covid for a while now, breathed his last on Friday morning.

Ravi had worked for several films as a dialogue writer. He made his directorial debut in 2014 with *Lakshmi Raave Maa Intiki* which starred Naga Shaurya and Avika Gor in the lead roles. He had worked as a writer for Raj Tarun's *Orey Bujjiga*. Ravi had an unfinished film, a comedy film with Sapthagiri and before it could go to the theatres, the tragedy took place.

Nandyala Ravi was hospitalised and was critically ill. When he was undergoing treatment, he was supported by a few of his friends from the film



industry including Naga Shaurya's home production Ira Creations, director Sriwasi, and comedian Sapthagiri. At a time, Ravi had shown signs of recovery, everyone thought he would make it, but he gave up on Friday morning.

Raman's sacking bring CAC under scanner

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former opener WV Raman's unceremonious ouster from the Indian women's team head coach's position has opened a can of worms with both the Madan Lal-headed Cricket Advisory Committee and Neetu David-led selection panel coming under the scanner of BCCI big-wigs.

Raman, who successfully coached the women's team to T20 World Cup final in Australia and is widely acknowledged as one of the best Indian coaches, was removed by Lal and Naik's CAC, which reinstated Ramesh Powar, who was removed from the same post in 2018.

IS LA'S COMMITTEE ILLEGAL?

"Maddi paaji (Madan Lal) celebrated his 70th birthday on March 20. The BCCI, in its appeal to Supreme Court against some of the reforms, doesn't ask for roll-back of age-cap of 70 years. So how come Madan Lal was allowed to sit in CAC meeting?" a senior member asked.

While the BCCI has no intention of using its veto to over-rule Lal and Naik, the board's top officials are unable to wrap their heads around as to what led to recommendation of Raman's removal.



DID RAMAN & NEETU HAVE A FALL-OUT?

It has been confirmed from multiple sources that Raman had red-flagged the kind of squad that David, Arati Vaidya, Renu Margrate, Mithu Mukherjee and V Kalpana picked for the South Africa series, for which teen batting sensation Shafali Verma was not picked for the ODIs and senior pacer Shikha Pandey was inexplicably dropped.

ably dropped.

"Do you know what kind of logic was given for dropping Shikha and Shafali? It is beyond comprehension," a peeved senior official said.

The selectors said that Pandey was unfit because she hasn't worked hard on training during lockdown and was "overweight".

"But when they were asked to prove their point, they couldn't simply do it," the official alleged.

In the case of Shafali, her fielding was questioned and put forth as the reason for her non-selection in the ODI team.

"If Raman had a counter-question that if Shafali's fielding is a problem for 50-over cricket, then it is bigger problem in T20 format where it is more important. Then how is she being selected in T20 format," the official asked.

The selection of leg-spinner C Prathyusha and left arm seamer Monica Patel has also been questioned as they didn't look ready for the rigours of International cricket.

Prathyusha gave 60 odd runs in 8 overs in one of the games.

"How did Monica get selected over Shikha Pandey?" is a question that is being asked.

COUNTER POINTS AGAINST RAMAN

While the majority believe that the stylish southpaw of yesteryears has been hard done by, there are a few critics who feel that there were some loose ends from his side too.

"Some girls complained that he will at times switch himself off during training sessions. Also some girls felt under-appreciated. Someone like Rajeshwari Gayakwad was not even once praised despite she being the best bowler during the series," a member from the anti-Raman camp said.

Another allegation against Raman is that he unwittingly gave

There's 'prima donna culture' in women's team: Raman writes to Ganguly, Dravid

New Delhi: Ousted Indian women's coach WV Raman has written to BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, alleging that there is a "prima donna culture" in the national team and it needs to change.

In the mail that has also been marked to National Cricket Academy head Rahul Dravid, Raman has also offered to present a roadmap for women's cricket in the country, if asked.

"As far as I know, Raman has said that he has always believed in team being placed above everybody else, and insisted that no individual can really be a prima donna," a source privy to Raman's mail said. The stylish former left-hander's crisp letter to the two former captains is sure to ruffle a few feathers given that it has always been the coaches who have either stepped aside or sacked following fallout with players, most notably ODI captain Mithali Raj.

While Raman's letter didn't ber from the anti-Raman camp said.

Another allegation against Raman is that he unwittingly gave

name anyone, it is understood that he has spoken extensively about the star culture that prevails in the team, which he said is probably doing more harm than good.

It is learnt that Raman has written about certain individuals who need to place the team above self.

"Raman has asked Dada (Ganguly) that if a past accomplished performer feels constrained by this culture, then he (Ganguly) as a former India captain, should take a call on this matter, whether the coach is asking for too much," the source added.

Raman, it is learnt, is dismayed by allegations that he is not proactive as a coach. "In case the president and secretary want to hear his opinion on allegations about his work ethic, he can explain."

The letter has been copied to Dravid because Raman sincerely believes that he can contribute towards building a roadmap for Indian women's cricket. PTI

gloveswoman Nuzhat Parween a debut cap without knowing that she has already played both ODIs and T20Is for India.

Paine clarifies on India comments after being slammed

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia captain Tim Paine on Friday stood by his comments that his team indeed got distracted by India's "sideshow" but clarified that he didn't even intend to use it as an excuse for their home Test series defeat in January.

A day after receiving online flak from Indian fans for his "side show" comments on Indian team, Paine clarified himself while chatting with Adam Gilchrist in a podcast.

"I was asked a number of



things, and one of those was talking about the challenges of playing against India. One of

them is the distraction they can create," Paine said in the *Gilly and Goss* podcast on Friday.

"There was a lot of talk that they weren't going to Brisbane. They're always changing gloves and bringing out physios and all that can get on your nerves. Just said that was one of the things that probably distracted me and took my eye of the ball at times."

The 36-year-old Paine had said that his team was distracted by the Indian team's "niggling" during the epoch-making Test series early this year

which the visitors rallied to win.

Soon Paine was trolled on Twitter by Indian fans.

"I did say that they simply outplayed us and that they deserved to win but they left that one out. The Indian fans have been slamming me on social media. They say that I'm making excuses again but it's all good fun," Paine said.

"I certainly wasn't making any excuses. I was asked about some of the challenges of the summer, and I said that was one of them for me," he added.

Bond played major role in shaping Bumrah's career

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's star pacer Jasprit Bumrah has said that former New Zealand speedster Shane Bond, who is currently the bowling coach of Mumbai Indians, has played a major role in shaping his career.

The Mumbai Indians fast bowler, who will lead India's attack in the upcoming World Test Championship final against New Zealand, expressed his views in a video shared by his IPL franchise.

"I always try to talk to him even when I am not here and with the Indian team. So, it's been a good journey, and hopefully, every year I keep learning something new and try to add new things to my bowling."

"He has played a major role in that. It's been a great relationship so far, and hopefully, this continues for many many years to come," Bumrah said.

He said he was always fascinated by how Bond bowled in his playing days and tries speaking to the MI bowling coach even when he is on India duty.

"I met him (Bond) for the first time



in 2015. As a child, I had seen him bowl and was always very fascinated by how he used to bowl for New Zealand, and how

he used to operate," the India pacer said.

Bumrah, who has so far played 19 Tests, said that Bond assisted him a lot in broadening his horizon which in turn helped him blossom as a cricketer.

"When I met him over here, it was a good experience. He helped me a lot to open my mind to different things that I could try on the cricket field. So that was very good and that relationship has only gotten better each and every year," added the Gujarat pacer.

Bond, on his part, termed Bumrah as the best death bowler in the world.

Seasoned New Zealand left-arm pacer Trent Boult also had words of praise for his compatriot, saying that Bond was a "tremendous thinker of the game and a pretty good tactician."

"He has been here for a long time, he knows what he is doing and he puts in a lot of work into making sure that the bowlers are well equipped and have got enough information to make some decisions on the day. Yeah, really enjoy working with him," said Boult, who has played 71 Tests.



Dortmund rout Leipzig in German Cup final

AFF ■ BERLIN

Jadon Sancho and Erling Braut Haaland both netted twice on Thursday as Borussia Dortmund won the German Cup with an emphatic 4-1 win over RB Leipzig to spoil Julian Nagelsmann's hopes of leaving with a title.

Dortmund turned on the style at Olympic Stadium, converting all of their three first-half shots on target to sweep Leipzig aside as Sancho netted twice either side of a superb Haaland goal.

"I am very happy that I could score two goals and set up one for Haaland," Sancho told ARD.

The England winger could have claimed a hat-trick late on after rounding Leipzig goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi, but failed to get his shot away.

Spain midfielder Dani Olmo pulled a goal back for Leipzig, before Haaland grabbed his second in the dying stages despite slipping as he connected.

Dortmund lifted the German Cup for the fifth time in the club's history.

"It's unbelievable. I am proud of the morale the team has shown in the last few weeks," said captain Marco Reus as Dortmund had also recently got back into the Champions League places.

Real trim Atleti's lead

Granada: Real Madrid kept the pressure on Atletico Madrid by thrashing Granada 4-1 on Thursday to reduce the gap to two points at the top of La Liga, with two games left to play.

A draw or defeat for Real Madrid would have given Atletico the chance to win the title on Sunday by beating Osasuna but goals from Modric, Rodrygo, Alvaro Odriozola and Benzema secured a comfortable victory at Los Carmenes.

Atletico could still be crowned champions this weekend if they overcome Osasuna



and Real fail to win away at Athletic Bilbao.

Even third-placed Barcelona are still in the running but they need an incredible swing of results if they are to overturn a four-point deficit. AFP

'Hardik needs to bowl for place in playing XI'

New Delhi: Former India selector Sarandeep Singh has backed the current committee's call to ignore Hardik Pandya from the Test squad and said the all-rounder doesn't fit into the playing XI even in the shorter formats if he can't bowl his quota of overs.

After undergoing a back surgery in 2019, Hardik has not bowled regularly since his comeback and not being able to offer his all-round skills cost him a place in the Indian Test squad for the UK tour.

Sarandeep, whose tenure ended with the historic tour of Australia earlier this year, was also surprised that a rare talent like Prithvi Shaw did not even make the standbys for the England tour.

"The selectors' decision to ignore Hardik for Tests is understandable. He has not been able bowl regularly after his surgery. I feel he has to bowl 10 overs in ODIs and four in T20s to be part of the playing XI even in shorter formats. He can't just play as a batsman," Sarandeep, a former India spinner, said.

"If Hardik doesn't bowl, it disturbs the balance of the side hugely. You have to play an extra bowler because of that and someone like Surykumar Yadav has to miss out. As we saw in the ODI series against England and Australia, we can't play with five bowling options."

"Then team now has other all-rounders in Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Jaddu is back, Shardul Thakur can also be an all-rounder, he has shown that. They all can do the job if Hardik can't bowl."

Talking about Shaw not being picked for the UK tour, Sarandeep said it was way too early to sideline a batsman like him.

"He has the potential to do what Schwag did for India. You can't sideline him so early in his career. He has scored tons of runs in domestic cricket after being dropped post Australia tour. He has corrected his technical flaws also and look how he played in the IPL."

"You have to back a talent like Shaw for that matter." PTI

Liverpool end Old Trafford hoodoo

AFF ■ MANCHESTER

Liverpool kept their chances of a place in next season's Champions League in their own hands with a thrilling 4-2 victory over Manchester United at Old Trafford on Thursday.

Jürgen Klopp's men still need to win their remaining three games over the next 10 days to guarantee their place in the Champions League for a fifth consecutive season, but cleared the biggest hurdle in their path with a first victory away to United since 2014.

Roberto Firmino scored twice either side of half-time after Diogo Jota cancelled out Bruno Fernandes' early opener for the home side.



Marcus Rashford's strike set up a grandstand finish, but Mohamed Salah secured a vital win in the final minute as Liverpool moved up to fifth in the table.

"We are still in the game, still in the race. That is all we could do tonight," said Klopp.

"It was necessary. Without this result we don't have to talk about it."

The clash between English football's two most successful clubs had been postponed 11 days ago as United fans stormed the pitch and clashed with police amid protests against the club's owners.

A peaceful protest took place before kick-off as supporters again voiced their anger at the Glazer family.

Nadal ends losing streak against Alex



AP ■ ROME

Rafael Nadal ended a run of three straight losses to Alexander Zverev with a convincing 6-3, 6-4 win over the German on Friday to reach the Italian Open semifinals.

Zverev had beaten Nadal in straight sets at the same stage in Madrid a week ago but their latest meeting went the Spaniard's way from the start.

Aiming for a record-extending 10th Rome title, Nadal raced to a 4-0 lead in the first set and saved all eight break points he faced in the second.

"I played more solid than Madrid. Conditions are different," Nadal said, alluding to the fact that the high-altitude of the Spanish capital allowed Zverev to dominate more with his serve. "Here are little bit more normal conditions. I was able to control a little bit more."

It was a stark contrast from Nadal's long three-set comeback win over Denis Shapovalov a day earlier, when the Spaniard saved two match points.

Nadal's semifinal opponent will be big-serving American Reilly Opelka, who reached his first Masters semifinal with a 7-5, 7-6 (2) win over Argentine qualifier Federico Delbonis.

In the women's tournament, 2019 Rome champion Karolina Pliskova rallied past 2017 French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko 4-6, 7-5, 7-6 (1) to set up a semifinal against Petra Martić. Martić eliminated Jessica Pegula 7-5, 6-4 for her biggest result since recently hiring former French Open champion Francesca Schiavone as her coach.

The only real moment of concern for Nadal came when he



Roger Federer in action during a training session prior to the start of Geneva Open tournament on Friday AP

tripped over the service line while running down a drop shot when he was serving for the first set.

The crowd of about 2,500 let out a collective gasp as Nadal tumbled onto the clay and rolled over onto his back wincing in apparent pain.

After putting Nadal's reply away for an easy winner — the Spaniard still managed to get the ball over the net — Zverev hopped over the net to check on the 20-time Grand Slam champion.

Nadal got up, though, dusted himself off and served out the set with his back and even head-band still covered in clay.

"Some lines are higher than the rest of court, so when you touch the line it's dangerous," Nadal said.

Zverev, the 2017 Rome champion and winner of the trophy in Madrid last weekend, had numerous opportunities to recover from an early break in the second set but Nadal stepped up his game each time and closed it out on his first match point with a perfectly executed serve-and-volley.