

ANALYSIS 7
RISE OF RELIGIONS AND
DECLINE OF THE WEST**MONEY 8**
SENSEX RALLIES 848 POINTS;
FINANCIAL STOCKS SPARKLE**SPORTS 12**
ENG TESTS AREN'T WARM-UPS
FOR WTC FINAL: WAGNER

HYDERABAD, TUESDAY, MAY 18, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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THARUN BHASCKER'S
ROOM NO. 54 TO
STREAM FROM MAY 21

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**APOLLO, DR REDDY'S ANNOUNCE COVID
VACCINATION DRIVE WITH SPUTNIK V**

Apollo Hospitals and Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Monday said they are collaborating to initiate a Covid-19 vaccination programme in the country with Sputnik V. The first phase of the programme will kick off with vaccinations at Apollo facilities in Hyderabad on Monday and in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday. The vaccinations would follow the SOPs as recommended by the government including registration on CoWIN. Dr Reddy's Labs CEO MV Ramana noted that the two entities were working to scale up the pilot and take the vaccine to other cities with an aim to inoculate as many Indians as possible.

**PAID SUVENDU TOO, WHY NO ARREST?:
JOURNALIST BEHIND NARADA STING**

Mathew Samuel, a senior journalist and the complainant in the 2016 Narada Tapes case, expressed happiness at politicians like Subrata Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim being arrested based on the sting operation he conducted. However, he remains dissatisfied because there's been no action against others like BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari despite the evidence against them. "It's a day of happiness...it's been years. The sting tapes were released in 2016...the politicians could not be touched by the CBI. It had the charge sheet ready three years ago," Samuel, an investigative journalist and founder of Narada News, said.

**MAMATA CAMPS AT CBI OFFICE FOR
6 HOURS AS 2 MINISTERS ARRESTED**

A furious Mamata Banerjee landed at the CBI office in Kolkata today as two of her ministers, Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee, were arrested in the Narada bribery case. "The way they have been arrested without due procedure, CBI will have to arrest me also," the Bengal Chief Minister reportedly said during her more than six-hour stake-out at the CBI office in Nizam Palace. A huge crowd of Trinamool workers protested outside the building as the ministers were arrested and tried to break barricades. They also threw stones at paramilitary personnel, who used batons to try and remove them.

**I DRINK COW URINE EVERY DAY, SO DON'T
HAVE COVID: BJP MP PRAGYA THAKUR**

Cow urine can cure lung infection caused by Covid, BJP MP Pragya Thakur has said, once again shooting her mouth off as the country fights to keep the pandemic in check. She also reveals that she takes cow urine every day and it has protected her from the coronavirus. "If we have desi gau mutra (urine from an indigenous cow) every day, then it cures lung infection from Covid. I am in deep pain but I take cow urine every day. So now, I don't have have to take any medicine against corona and I don't have corona," Pragya Thakur is heard telling a party gathering.

**For some, politics
takes precedence over
Covid havoc**

2

**Biomarkers can
diagnose viral
infections**

5

**Housing sales up 21%,
supply down 40% in
January-March**

8

**TODAY
ALMANAC****Month & Paksham:**

Vaishakha & Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi : Shashthi: 12:32 pm**Nakshatram** : Pushya: 02:55 pm**Time to Avoid** : (Bad time to start any important work)**Rahukalam** : 03:25 pm - 05:01 pm**Yamagandam** : 08:59 am - 10:36 am**Variyam** : 04:11 am - 05:51 am**Gulika** : 12:12 pm - 01:49 pm**Good Time** : (to start any important work)**Amritkalam** : 08:06 am - 09:48 am**Abhijit Muhurtham** : 11:46 am - 12:38 pm**HYDERABAD
WEATHER****Forecast**: Partly cloudy**Temp**: 35/24**Humidity**: 61%**Sunrise**: 05:43 am**Sunset**: 06:41 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated May 17, 2021 5:00 PM

Confirmed: Covid is airborne

PNS ■ GENEVA

A quiet revolution has permeated global health circles. Authorities have come to accept what many researchers have argued for over a year: The coronavirus can spread through the air.

That new acceptance, by the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, comes with concrete implications: Scientists are calling for ventilation systems to be overhauled like public water supplies were in the 1800s after fetid pipes were found to harbor cholera.

Cleaner indoor air won't just fight the pandemic, it will minimize the risk of catching flu and other respiratory infections that cost the U.S. more than \$50 billion a year, researchers said in a study in the Journal Science on Friday. Avoiding these germs and their associated sickness and productivity losses would, therefore, offset the cost of upgrading ventilation and filtration in buildings.

"We are used to the fact that we

**The study's authors,
comprising 39
scientists from 14
countries, are
demanding universal
recognition that
infections can be
prevented by
improving indoor
ventilation systems**

have clean water coming from our taps," said Lidia Morawska, a distinguished professor in the school of earth and atmospheric sciences at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, who led the study. Likewise, "we should expect clean, pollutant- and pathogen-free air" from indoor spaces, she said over Zoom.

The study's authors, comprising 39 scientists from 14 countries, are demanding universal recognition

that infections can be prevented by improving indoor ventilation systems. They want the WHO to extend its indoor air quality guidelines to cover airborne pathogens,

2

**WPI inflation hits
double digits in
April at 10.49 %**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The wholesale price-based inflation shot up to an all-time high of 10.49 per cent in April, on rising prices of food items, crude oil and manufactured goods, and experts believe that the uptrend is likely to continue.

This is the fourth straight month of uptick seen in the wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation. In March, 2021, it was 7.39 %. The low base in April last year, when WPI inflation was (-) 1.57 per cent, also contributed to the spike in April 2021. "The annual rate of inflation in April 2021, is high primarily because of rise in prices of crude petroleum, mineral oils viz petrol, diesel etc,

2



child who has lost both parents to COVID-19 ought to be produced before the District Child Welfare Committee (CWC) within 24 hours, excluding the journey time.

2

**Govt lays out procedure
to rehabilitate children
who lost parents to Covid**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has laid out a procedure for rehabilitation of children who lost their parents to COVID-19.

The public notice by the Women and Child Development Ministry comes amid reports that several messages offering children, who have lost their parents to COVID, for adoption are circulating on social media.

Advising the public to refrain from engaging or encouraging such action, which is in contravention to legal provisions, the WCD Ministry has laid out lawful procedure of rehabilitation of children who lost their parents to COVID-19.

The ministry has said that the

**Cyclone Tauktae kills
6 in Maha, 'highest
ever' wind speeds
sweep Mumbai**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Six people died and 17 were injured in Maharashtra as Cyclone Tauktae, intensifying into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm", swept the coastal regions of the state through the day today. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to take stock of the situation.

The storm was expected to cross the Gujarat coast between Porbandar and Mahuva, east of Diu tonight between 10 pm and 11 pm tonight, India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said.

Earlier in the day, windspeeds hit 114 kilometres per hour, the "highest ever for Mumbai in any recent records", according to state minister Aditya Thackeray.

FUTURE PROOF**KCR orders O₂ plants in 48 State hospitals**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao on Monday instructed officials of the Medical and Health Department to set up oxygen plants of 324 Metric Tonnes (MT) capacity in 48 government hospitals to prevent any shortage in future.

He said that another Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) plant of 100 MT capacity should be set up in Hyderabad.



Accordingly six units of 16 MT, 15 units of MT and 27 units

2

**Centre follows Telangana, asks states to
conduct TS-like door-to-door fever survey**

ML MELLY MAITREYI

■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana State Government can once again take pride that its decision to conduct door-to-door survey across the State to identify people with Covid symptoms is now being recommended for all the States across the country.

The strategy for fever survey helped in identifying people with symptoms of Covid and quickly put them on medication has been going on successfully in the State for the last two weeks and nearing its end now.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi was appraised by Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao of various

measures being taken by the State government to control the spread of the pandemic, including the lat-

2

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday directed rebel YSR Congress MP K Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, arrested in sedition case, be taken to Army hospital at Secunderabad in Telangana for medical examination.

In a relief to the MP, who had been quizzed by state police for several hours in the case, a vacation bench of Justices Vineet Saran and B R Gavai directed that he be kept at the Army hospital at Secunderabad till further orders.

It also directed that his medical examination be conducted in the presence of a judicial officer, to be appointed by Telangana High Court chief justice.



The top court said that the medical examination of Raju be videographed and report be sent in sealed cover to the top court.

2

**Hundreds dead, but TRS
Govt indifferent: Uttam**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee president and Nalgonda MP Captain N Uttam Kumar Reddy on Monday launched a barrage of criticism against the State government, accusing it of remaining indifferent to the Covid-19 crisis even as hundreds



of people were losing their lives to the pandemic.

Addressing representatives of rural local bodies in an online meeting organised by the Panchayat Raj Sangathan, Uttam alleged the KCR-led government has been inhuman and cruel.

2

**HC commends 3
CPs for enforcing
lockdown**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Monday acknowledged the work of three police commissionerates — Hyderabad, Cyberabad and Rachakonda — of ensuring that citizens followed lockdown norms during Eid.

The High Court expressed satisfaction over the imposition of the lockdown and said that the performance of Hyderabad,

2

For some, politics takes precedence over Covid havoc

For the first time since April 21, the number of Covid-19 cases dropped below 3 lakh this week, a dip of about 18 per cent.

The situation is improving on account of lockdown imposed in many states and the Centre putting the administrative machinery on full alert.

However for some, politics take precedence over Covid.

Andhra Pradesh logged 24,000 cases on Sunday alone and around 100 deaths due to Covid. The death toll in AP due to Covid has crossed 9,000 so far. The virus is playing havoc, especially in the Chief Minister's own Kadapa district.

People of AP were forced to rush to Telangana for treatment for want of medical amenities back in their state. Even as this was happening, Chief Minister YS

Jaganmohan Reddy remained busy targeting political rivals.

Attempts to take over Sangam Dairy and send YSRCP MP Raghurama Raju to jail using the CID are some of the victimisation measures. Apparently, the police used third degree on the MP at the behest of the CM, hinting at the latter's mentality. This took place even as people reeled under Covid impact, Telangana police denied entry to ambulances with Covid patients.

Jagan did not bother to discuss the ambulances issue with his Telangana counterpart but was busy resorting to targeting his political rivals to divert public attention from his failures.

There is no major difference between Mamata Bannerjee, who let loose her cadre on BJP activists soon after taking reins of the state for the third

In spite of the Opposition faulting the Prime Minister over the past several days for not sounding any caution regarding the second wave, Narendra Modi paid no attention to it and is discharging his duties with a stable mind.

time, and Jagan.

In Telangana, the High Court took a serious view of the death of a pregnant woman for want of proper medicare. The court also found fault with anarchic conditions prevailing in the state. It is evident KCR gives priority to politics over Covid.

The three CMs prove that there is no chance of better administration under regional party rule. Anarchy, despotism, corruption and nepotism prevail under regional party rule in these states.

In spite of the Opposition faulting the Prime Minister over the past several days for not sounding any caution regarding the second wave, Narendra Modi paid no attention to it and is discharging his duties with a stable mind.

In fact, the PM alerted the CMs about the second wave at the CMs' conference in March 2021. At that time, the daily case count in the country was only 30,000.

In fact, the Centre has been sending advisories to states since January 2021.



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

The Opposition blamed Modi's election rallies for Covid spread on one hand and on the other, provoked farmers to take out rallies. The Opposition also ignored the fact that their leaders addressed election rallies.

The Opposition complains of the Centre spending Rs 20,000 crore on Central Vista

project, but conveniently ignores allocation of Rs 2 lakh-crore during 2021-22 for health sector, including Rs 30,000 crore for vaccination.

The Centre's data centre gets statistics pertaining to Covid from states. Therefore, is there any truth in the allegation that the Centre is underreporting Covid deaths?

The population in India exceeds that of Europe and North America. Therefore, the number of Covid cases would be naturally very high.

Those who criticise Modi as inefficient, drawing a parallel with New Zealand's PM, should realise that the population of that country is less than half of Hyderabad's population.

The Centre is supplying 50 percent of the vaccine doses to states free of cost. BJP-ruled states are administering vaccines to people free of cost, but why is it not the case with states ruled by regional parties?

Is it not the duty of states to reduce the vaccine price by negotiating with the producers?

There is no truth to the allegation that India is exporting a large number of doses. In fact, India imported 17,000 crore vaccine doses from overseas. India exported only about one-third of the vaccines it imported.

Since the Global Alliance was formed with India as a member to supply vaccines to poor countries, vaccine producers have to honour some agreements. How is it justified to exaggerate the issue?

On one hand, the number of cases is on the decline and on the other, the government is implementing measures to import vaccines into the country. It is a welcome development.

The Centre is roping in another PSU to make Covaxin; seven companies have reached agreements to manufacture Russia's Sputnik V vaccine. Four more new vaccines are likely to get clearance soon. Soon, the country will be free of vaccine shortage.

One cannot discount the Centre's measures to overcome shortage of Oxygen cylinders, ventilators and beds.

However, some states have been politicising these issues. That is why the PM called for an oxygen audit to expose the sincerity of the states finding fault with the Centre.

Medchal DMHO bags Covid-19 Warrior Award

PNS ■ MEDCHAL MALKAJGIRI

Medical and Health Officer of Medchal Malkajgiri District has been conferred with Corona Warrior Award by Viswaguru World Records in appreciation of outstanding significant contribution shown during the pandemic and also displaying highest values of humanity and dignity in medical services in the district on Monday.

Dr K Mallikarjuna Rao has dedicated this award and thanked all the doctors, paramedical, field staff and every healthcare worker of our Medchal Malkajgiri district who are relentlessly working leaving their families behind and indulging in testing, vaccination and also field surveys and also urged them to show same enthusiasm in future.

WPI inflation...

Continued from page 1

And manufactured products as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said.

Inflation in food articles in April was 4.92 per cent as prices of protein-rich items like egg, meat and fish hardened. Inflation in this basket was 3.24 per cent in March 2021.

This was led by 10.88 per cent inflation in 'egg, meat and fish' basket during April, 10.74 per cent in pulses and 27.43 per cent in fruits.

In vegetables, the rate of price rise was (-) 9.03 per cent, against (-) 5.19 per cent in the previous month.

ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said at 4.9 per cent inflation in food articles was at a six-month high and data shows a greater impact of supply chain disruptions at the wholesale level.

"We expect the headline WPI inflation to rise further to 13-13.5 per cent in the current month before commencing a downtrend, whereas the core-WPI inflation may continue to rise over the next three prints to a peak of around 10.5 per cent.

HYDERABAD BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ Rs.49, 260(10 gm)	
SILVER	
₹ 76, 600 (1kg)	
CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹170
Without Skin	₹193
Broiler at Farm	₹117
EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	454
VIJAYAWADA	456
VISAKHAPATNAM	355
RETAIL PRICE (Vijayawada)	₹4.54

CT scan rates in Telangana depend on whom you elected

Rates slashed in Siddipet, K'nagar, M'nagar, Wgl after Ministers intervene

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Amidst the Coronavirus crisis, CT scans have become imperative in diagnosing Covid-19, and scanning centres that have such machines are taking advantage of the situation.

In Telangana, CT scan rates depend on who represents your constituency. What started in Siddipet, spread to Karimnagar, Mahbubnagar and Warangal. Realising that the cost of a CT scan was touching Rs 5,500, Finance Minister Harish Rao had a special talk with the administrators of the scanning centres in Siddipet district. The administrators agreed to conduct all types of CT scans for Rs 2,000.

Soon, BC Welfare and Civil Supplies Minister Gangula Kamalakara announced that all hospitals as well as diagnostic centres should only charge Rs 2,000 for CT scan in



Karimnagar. Even Minister Erabelli Dayakar Rao lauded diagnostic centres in Warangal for offering scanning tests for Rs 2000 each.

The latest to join the bandwagon is Mahabubnagar where Minister V Srinivas Goud said that CT scan rate was decided as Rs 1999. If you want a report including the film, you

have to pay Rs 2,790. In most of these cases diagnostic centres would charge Rs 2,000 for scanning and Rs 2,200 if patients wanted the scanning film.

Ministers even warned that strict action would be taken if the reduction in CT scan rates was not implemented. Ever since the Chief Minister asked

SC orders medical...

Continued from page 1

The apex court said he shall be granted Y-category security as directed by the Delhi High Court earlier.

Raju had moved the Delhi High Court last year for his security on the ground that he was facing threats for being critical to the state government.

The vacation bench was hearing two appeals, including one by Raju, against the Andhra Pradesh High Court order dismissing his bail and asking him to go to appropriate forum for the relief.

In the second appeal, his son K Bharath has sought Raju's medical examination by a private hospital.

The bench took note of the fact that Raju has undergone heart bypass surgery in recent past and the judicial magistrate had also observed that he

Hundreds dead, but TRS...

Continued from page 1

Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Raj Sangathan incharge (AICC) Jayanti Natarajan and Telangana incharge Kiran also participated in the meeting.

Uttam said that there were no ambulances to bring patients to hospitals, no beds, no injections or medicines. "Such neglect and abdication of duty cannot be seen anywhere in the

country. While other states have taken steps to provide free treatment to Covid patients, the Telangana government hasn't even bothered to take steps to contain its spread," Uttam said.

He pointed out that though the Chief Minister announced in the Assembly that Covid treatment would be brought under Arogyasri cover three months back, the promise was not kept till now.

Singapore...

Continued from page 1

Hours before Sunday's news conference, Singapore confirmed 38 locally transmitted coronavirus cases, the highest daily count in eight months. Some of the cases involved children linked to a cluster at a tuition centre.

Govt lays out procedure...

Continued from page 1

"The CWC shall ascertain the immediate need of the child and pass appropriate orders for rehabilitation of the child, either to restore the child to caregivers or place her/him in institutional or non-institutional care, on case to case basis," the WCD

‘New ray of hope’

Continued from page 1

The Drugs Controller General of India (DGCI) approved 2-DG for emergency use as an adjunct therapy in moderate to severe coronavirus patients earlier this month.

"This is a great example of the scientific prowess of our country," Singh said in his brief remarks. The defence minister also listed the efforts of the armed forces in helping the civilian authorities deal with the pandemic across the country, but asserted that their deployment has not impacted the military's operational preparedness at the borders.

"Even after going through all these difficulties, we have ensured that our preparedness at the border does not have any impact. There is no shortage of enthusiasm of

our forces anywhere. We know this very well, no matter how big the difficulty is, we will overcome it," he said.

About the coronavirus crisis, Singh said it is not the time to relax and get tired as there is nothing definitive about the course of the pandemic.

"We do not need to be relaxed nor should we get tired, because this wave has come for the second time and there is nothing definite about this. We have to take steps with full caution," he said at the event at the DRDO headquarters here.

Singh said the government has taken the overall situation seriously, whether it is the matter of oxygen supply or ensuring ICU beds or the arrangement of cryogenic tankers for the transportation of liquid oxygen.

Centre follows...

People displaying symptoms like fever, cough etc., were given medical kits by the teams and team members followed up on their progress and their oxygen saturation levels.

The strategy of the Chief Minister has been giving good results and the number of positive cases were coming down, said officials of the Medical and Health department. Early detection and confining the persons with symptoms to home isolation was helping in bringing down the spread of infection and positivity rate, they said.

Importantly, early intervention with medicines and checking the oxygen saturation levels would help in recovery without the need for hospitalisation, they added.

Outpatient centres in government hospitals and health centres were also providing

‘Implement Clinical Establishment Act’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In this tough hour of the Covid pandemic, it is not an overstatement to say that people are more scared of medical standards in private and government hospitals and bills in the private establishments than the dreaded Coronavirus. Though we have a stringent law in the form of the Clinical Establishment (Registration and Regulation) Act 2010, it is left to the Central government and States, particularly

Telangana, why they are not enforcing it.

Hospitals are inflating Covid bills which are running into lakhs of rupees and it is time the Telangana government implemented the Act in letter and spirit. Though the government has capped Covid treatment costs, not a single private hospital is following them, says Suresh Kumar Cherukula.

Passed by the Parliament in 2010, the Act secured the Presidential nod in 2012.

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Covid turned into opportunity for private sanitation services in city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

From disinfectant spraying to sanitisation showers, housing societies across Hyderabad are getting innovative, to prevent the Coronavirus from entering their compounds.

A number of residents' welfare associations (RWAs) have hired private pest controllers, to ensure that the compound is cleaned and sanitised. Besides the common corridor, even other things in plain sight, such as cars, elevators, children's play area and lawns, are often sprayed with disinfectants. As a result, the Covid pandemic has turned into an opportunity for private pest control companies, which are filling-in for government agencies at an extra cost.

With most households and housing societies restricting the entry of cleaners and sweepers, they have been left with no alternative, but to hire private agencies, to keep the society neat and clean. As a result, several housing societies rushed to hire them to disinfect their compounds.

According to Ravi, the owner of a pest control firm operating in Madhapur, "We are getting almost 10 inquiries per day and our staff is working overtime, to meet the requirements. The residents



in the colonies are often scared, once a number of Covid cases emerge." Adds Karthik, the owner of a pest control company in Secunderabad: "On an average, we are doing disinfection and sanitisation jobs in six-seven colonies in a day. Due to limited staff, we are unable to service 40 per cent of queries."

These pest control organisations sanitise homes and colonies by using chemicals in government-prescribed quantities to sanitise homes and offices so that there would be no harm whatsoever to children and the elderly.

According to the taste of the client, sanitising the homes is being done in eco-friendly methods. Under steam sanitisation method, floors, furniture and other household goods would be sanitised. Spraying of hot vapours would have no adverse impact on inmates of the house. The price tag fixed for sanitising 1BHK is put at Rs 800. The fee being charged for 2BHKs is Rs 1,200, while the fee fixed to sanitise 3BHKs is put at Rs 1,800. Some other home service agencies collect up to Rs 2,000.

Whereas the housing societies generally pay between Rs

15,000 and Rs 50,000 for the sanitisation drive, depending on the area. This includes all the towers in the complex, gazebo, play area, parking area, elevators, staircase and others.

Only the government-certified chemicals should be used, the house owner should get sanitised every room and all goods in the house. Once sanitisation is through, none should enter the house for one to two hours. The utensils should be used only after thoroughly washing them. Play goods should be given to children only after cleaning them with water.

Bindu Harish, business development manager, Vijaya Home Services, said that the organisation is engaged in providing home services for the past one-and-a-half decades. It takes up tasks like pest control, anti-viral disinfection, sanitisation and floor cleaning operations. Because of Covid, the patronage for home services has increased.

Mostly, those who live in home quarantine get their homes sanitised if anyone in their neighbourhood happens to test positive for Coronavirus.

Meanwhile, number of devices promising complete sanitisation from the Covid, have come up in the market. From gun sprayers to surface sprayers, online e-commerce websites are flooded with these latest devices to clean daily touch surfaces on a regular basis. A number of sanitiser room sprays have also been launched recently.

Apart from this, UV sterilisers for mobile phones have also gained popularity. This device promises to kill germs on your handset and can also be used to sterilise masks, jewelry, makeup brushes, lipstick and others.

There is a pocket version of this steriliser also available, for cleaning frequent-touch surfaces.

HC pulls up state government on tests, seeks plan on black fungus

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Monday came down sharply on the state government for not paying complying with its repeated orders to conduct at least one lakh tests daily.

A division bench of Telangana High Court comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijayen Reddy was hearing a batch of Public Interest Litigation petitions on Covid-19 on Monday.

When the government said an average of 69,185 tests were conducted from May 1 to May 14, Chief Justice Hima Kohli pulled it up for submitting an incomplete break-up of the RTPCR and RAT test conducted and said that the "report indicates such a plunging number of test being conducted." The High Court also questioned why the Covid vaccination drive is not being conducted in the state.

The court directed the government to immediately release salaries of contract and outsourcing employees working in hospitals.

The Court asked the government to submit details of how it is preparing to handle any possible Covid-19 third wave. The Court asked if the medicine kits given to Covid positive persons in the State included any steroids. The Court also instructed the State government to file a detailed



affidavit on how it was going to tackle Black fungus.

Responding, the A-G informed the court that government had designated the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) hospital at King Koti hospital to treat Black fungus infected persons.

The court directed the government to constitute a task force to look into complaints where hospitals are "fleeing" patients. The court also directed the government to fix the rate for treatment, CT scan and tests in private hospitals. The court directed the government to take a decision on the new rates as the GO given earlier was not enough now.

The court directed the government to set up a three-member committee on irregularities in private hospitals. The Advocate General on behalf of the central government told the High Court that 650 MT of oxygen and 10,000 remdesivir injections were being allocated by the Centre. The Court took note of the death of a pregnant woman

who passed away in an ambulance after hospitals refused admission and directed government and police to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

Regarding beds, the Court said that the figures on the Covid dashboard were contrary to reality. The court was informed that 390 hospitals in the Dashboard do not offer Covid treatment.

The High Court directed the government to set up community kitchens in every district and provide free meals during the lockdown.

Community kitchens should be set up in each district in agreement with corporations and NGOs. Community kitchen details should be embedded in each district website, the bench said. The bench directed the Department of Women Development and Child Welfare to submit an affidavit regarding its strategy to nurture kids whose parents succumbed to Covid. The High Court adjourned the next hearing to June 1.

CITY LIGHTS

Retired cop 'Gabbar Singh' dies of Covid in Hyderabad

Retired police officer K.S.N. Murthy, who was popularly known as Gabbar Singh, died of Covid-19. He was 78 and survived by wife and two sons. The former Indian Police Service (IPS) official breathed his last on Sunday at a private hospital in Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, where he was living since his retirement in the year 2000. Murthy served in various capacities in the police department in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. Hailing from Andhra, the officer's first posting in Hyderabad was in the old city in late 1980s. As Assistant Commissioner of Police, Charminar, he firmly dealt with anti-social elements and habitual offenders. Known as a strict officer in police circles, he came to be known as Gabbar Singh after the legendary character played by Amjad Khan in the blockbuster 'Sholay'. Citizens recall that his name used to terrify rowdy sheeters and he succeeded in bringing down the crime rate in the area under his jurisdiction. Telugu movie 'Gabbar Singh' starring popular actor Pawan Kalyan was said to have been inspired by Murthy. He also served in various capacities in City Task Force and Superintendent of Police. He was the police commissioner of Vijayawada in 1998-99. He was promoted as inspector general of police before his retirement.



Isolation centre inaugurated at Govt Hospital in Kondapur

A Covid isolation Centre in government hospital, Kondapur was inaugurated by Commissioner of Police, Cyberabad VC Sajjanar on Monday. The facility is equipped with five supporting staff, ambulance, breakfast and two meals facility, 10 oxygen cylinders with filling for next three months. Addressing the media on the occasion, VC Sajjanar said, "The district hospital here under the supervision of Dr Dashrath have been doing great job in providing medical facilities to the patients. He appreciated Pepsi Co Head Amarjeet along with his CSR head Priyaranjan for donating 15 beds for Covid patients, along with relief materials like oxygen cylinders and oxygen concentrators and other materials. VC Sajjanar, further urged the people to come forward and help people who are in need and stand united in the fight against the second wave of Covid. The programme were attended by S Srinivas Reddy, Director, SRD (Society for Rural Development), Priyaranjan Jha, Dr Dasarath, Superintendent, Kondapur Government Hospital and others.



PD Act invoked against burglar

PNS ■ MEDCHAL MALKAJGIRI

Rachakonda Commissioner of Police Mahesh M Bhagwat invoked PD Act against notorious inter-state habitual house burglar offender and detained him in the Central prison at Cherlapally on Monday.

The accused identified as Rama Rao, an auto driver by profession used to buy stolen gold ornaments from the offenders at lesser price and used to sell it to higher prices.

After he was arrested several times, he started committing house burglaries and he was arrested by police.

Rama Rao committed 31 house burglaries across TS and AP. With a view to prevent him from committing house burglaries, the police officials detained him under PD Act.

Corona recovery rate crosses 90%

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Covid recovery rate in Telangana crossed 90 per cent on Monday as the state continues to report more recoveries than new Covid cases.

A total of 5,559 people recovered from the virus during the 24-hour period ending 5.30 p.m. on Monday.

With this the cumulative number of recoveries rose to 4,80,458.

The recovery rate, which had dropped to 80 per cent early this month from nearly 99 per cent in March, has now improved to 90.17 per cent. This is better than the national average of 84.8 per cent.

According to the daily bulletin issued by the health department, the state now has 49,341 active cases.

The state logged in 3,961 new cases, pushing the cumulative numbers to 5,32,784. The virus claimed 30 more lives during the same period, taking the overall death toll to 2,985.

The case fatality rate increased marginally to 0.56 per cent but still lower than the national average of 1.1 per cent. The authorities conducted 62,591 tests during the 24-hour period. With this the state has so far tested 1,41,24,316 samples. Samples tested per million population stand at 3,79,481.

Greater Hyderabad recorded 631 new cases. The daily count in the state capital has come down considerably over last two weeks. No other district in the state reported more than 300 cases.

Every 5th person suspected Covid infected: T'gana Guv

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan on Monday called for strict compliance with preventive guidelines saying every fifth person is a suspected Covid infected.

"We are in a situation where almost every 5th person is a suspected Covid infected one. We must ensure the strict compliance with all the preventive guidelines," she said.

The Governor was interacting with the senior officials of the Raj Bhavan through video conference from Raj Nivas, Puducherry, where she is holding an additional charge as the Lt. Governor.

She gave a call to all the people to strive for ensuring Healthy Telangana State.



"We must be very cautious about the rapid spread of the Covid-19. We need to strictly adhere to all the preventive measures like wearing double mask and other Covid-appropriate behaviour to contain the spread and ensure healthy Telangana," she said.

She directed Secretary to Governor, K. Surendra Mohan, to constantly monitor the Covid situation and coordinate with the State government for

all the necessary steps to contain the pandemic.

The Governor emphasised on the protection of children from getting infected and expressed concern that more number of children were getting infected in the second wave. Referring to the launch of 2-DG anti-Covid drug by the DRDO, Dr Tamilisai termed the drug as a potential 'game changer' in the treatment of Covid. "I hope the 2-DG anti-Covid drug will be effective in preventing the virus growth by stopping viral synthesis as proved during the clinical trials. It is expected that the DRDO's drug will contribute for the faster recovery of the patients and reduce their need for supplemental oxygen dependence," she added.

Covid brings status quo to posting of IAS officers

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

The Covid-19 pandemic has turned to be a blessing for some IAS officers while it has been a bane for others, especially those who had been yearning for a change of posting or transfer.

The pandemic has also left some officers, particularly district collectors, with increased workload while others are left with precious little to do.

The angst of the IAS officers is compounded by the fact that portfolios of the Ministers who they directly report to, have been changed but they continue to head the same departments since the past three years and more. For example,



The angst of the IAS officers is compounded by the fact that portfolios of the Ministers who they directly report to, have been changed but they continue to head the same departments since the past three years and more

the Finance Department has seen two Ministers being changed, but the TRS government has continued with the same Secretary.

In his first term, Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao had entrusted Eatela Rajender with the Finance portfolio. In his second term, KCR chose T Harish Rao for the job. However, Principal Secretary K

Rama Rao continues to be the bureaucrat in charge of the Department since Eatela's time.

Similarly, in the first term of the TRS government, the Roads & Buildings portfolio was handled by Tummala Nageswara Rao and in the second term this portfolio was given to Vemula Prashanta Reddy. However, Principal

Secretary Sunil Sharma continues to head the departments since the days of Tummala. Likewise, the Information Technology portfolio was given to Jupally Krishna Rao in the first term of TRS government and in the second term, this portfolio is being handled by KT Rama Rao. IAS officer Jayesh Ranjan remains the Principal Secretary since the first term of the TRS government.

Also, the Excise portfolio was earlier handled by T Padma Rao and then by V Srinivas Goud in the second term of the TRS government. Somesh Kumar, the Chief Secretary continues to handle the Excise department till date. Meanwhile, the district

Collectors have been saddled with additional work since March 2020, ever since Covid-19 started to wreak havoc.

Early in his second term as Chief Minister, KCR had gone in for a major reshuffle of IAS officers. However, after Covid-19 emerged at the beginning of last year, no transfers have been made by the government.

Some district collectors and Secretary rank IAS officers also want change in their present posts. When some Secretaries, including the Chief Secretary, hold video conferences with the district Collectors, some of them request transfer.

A senior bureaucrat said that it may not be possible to transfer IAS officers in the present situation.

Man arrested for killing two wives

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Police on Monday arrested a man for murdering his two wives in separate incidents.

The accused Kiran, 36, attacked his wife Anjali, 42, on May 13 following a quarrel for money. Anjali succumbed to injuries on May 14. During interrogation, Kiran revealed that he had killed his first wife Padma in 2014 and buried the body in the house itself.

The police said that Kiran, used to torture his wives suspecting fidelity. The police found that Kiran had even taken videos while torturing his wives. The accused married Padma by duping her in the name of love.

‘Lockdown yielding results’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Implementation of lockdown and coordination among various departments is leading to a gradual decline in the new Covid positive cases in the state, ministers said on Monday.

Minister for Animal Husbandry Talasani Srinivas Yadav and Home Minister Mohammed Mahmood Ali reviewed the Covid situation in Greater Hyderabad with the Mayor, District Collector and officials of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC).

They observed that with the implementation of lockdown, proper functioning of government hospitals and Basthi Dawakhana, door-to-door fever survey and special sanitation drive, the number of positive cases have declined.

The government on May 12 imposed a lockdown after the High Court directed it to take strict measures to check the spread of Covid. The government had earlier ruled out imposing lockdown, maintain-



With the implementation of lockdown, proper functioning of government hospitals and Basthi Dawakhana, door-to-door fever survey and special sanitation drive, the number of positive cases have declined

ing that the move will not help in bringing down the number of Covid cases.

The state, which has been witnessing a downward trend in new cases, reported 3,816 cases on Sunday, as against 4,801 cases on May 11. Regarding the second dose of Covid vaccine, Yadav said vaccine doses have

not received from the Central government for the last three days and the programme has been temporarily stopped. He said that vaccination will resume as and when the state receives vaccines. He said a separate Covid Control Room has been opened in the GHMC with No 040-2111111. At the meeting,

it was also decided that with the monsoon expected next month, desilting of nalas should be taken up vigorously. The Entomology and Enforcement, Vigilance & Disaster Management wings of the GHMC are spraying disinfectant chemicals to control spread of Covid-19.

Noting that many NGOs are providing food to the needy during lockdown relaxation, the Minister said they should take prior permission from the local police.

Mahmood Ali said the steps being taken by the government are a model for the other states in the country. In order to provide food facility to the poor and needy, the quantity of food served at the Annapurna canteens has been increased.

Mayor Gadwal Vijayalaxmi said in order to contain the pandemic, strict implementation of lockdown is needed. She said isolation centres were identified in each circle for use in case of emergency and to improve sanitation efficiency, she would inspect the works regularly.



Union Minister inspects food meant for Covid patients

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy on Monday checked the food meant for distribution among Covid patients here on Monday.

Satya Sai said service to man is service to God, he recalled. When Saibaba was alive he implemented many service-oriented projects, which, he said, are continuing. Now, the Satya Sai Seva organisations have been providing nutritious food to Covid patients and distributing groceries among private school teachers.

Providing uninterrupted power to hospitals, says Transco CMD

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Power was being providing to all hospitals round-the-clock following the directive of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, said Transco and Genco CMD Prabhakar Rao. He said that the department had laid two special power lines from two sub-stations to all the hospitals in the city to ensure that there would be no power interruption.

These lines are providing power to the government as well as private hospitals. The department has two oxygen production plants, which are producing 130 tonnes of oxygen, and 30 oxygen refilling stations.

Speaking to the media at the Transco and Genco office on Monday, along with SPDCL CMD Raghurama Reddy, Prabhakar Rao said that he will visit the Yadadri Thermal Plant on Tuesday, along with the Power Minister. He said that they set up Control Rooms for Transco and Genco separately to monitor the power situation round-the-clock.



Transco and Genco CMD Prabhakar Rao addressing a press conference in Hyderabad on Monday

He said that they are providing quality power following the Covid guidelines. He asked the power consumers to pay the bills in time at collections centres and they are open from 6 am to 10 am every day.

SPDCL CMD Raghurama Reddy said that they are providing uninterrupted power to the TIMS, Gandhi and NIMS and Covid Hospitals. The department employees are working on three shifts and they are monitoring the power supply to these hospitals every day at the CMD level. “We are also supplying addi-

tional power to the Chest, Fever and Koti Covid hospitals”, he informed. He said that they are providing uninterrupted power to 113 Government Covid hospitals and 1,050 Private Covid hospitals across the state. He said that they are making all needful arrangements in the government hospitals within 10 days for additional usage of power,” he said.

He said that they appointed nodal officers to look after power supply to private hospitals. The hospitals have to inform nodal officers if they face any power interruption, he said.

CPI suspects Shah’s role behind arrest of YSRCP rebel MP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

CPI national secretary K Narayana ruled out the arrest of YSRCP rebel MP Raghurama Krishnam Raju without the permission of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao’s cooperation as the MP was arrested in Hyderabad.

He said that partisan politics is not justifiable and demanded that the Andhra Pradesh government implement the Supreme Court’s directions. He also found fault with Raghurama Krishnam Raju for making unsavoury remarks against his own party. Narayana reminded that the YSRCP didn’t take any disciplinary action against him for his open criticism.

He made it clear that Raghurama Krishnam Raju raised a banner revolt against his own party with the support of the Central government as he was sailing with the BJP unofficially.

In a statement issued here

on Monday, Narayana opined that vengeful actions are not justifiable against the leaders making criticism. There is no comparison between the allegations levelled against Raghurama and the cases filed under various Sections.

Cases filed against Raghurama clearly show that they filed only to take revenge against an MP and the government didn’t follow the directions of the court regarding the MP’s health condition.

He said that their party is condemning the BJP, which permitted the arrest on one hand, while the BJP state unit is condemning the arrest on the other hand.

He alleged that the BJP has been trying to eliminate the persons, which oppose it, after coming to power.

He alleged that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, too, is behaving in the same manner regarding former minister Eatela Rajender. It is not possible to eliminate the opposition parties through vengeful acts, he opined.

Puvvada distributes Remedisivir injections in Khammam hospitals

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Minister for Transport Puvvada Ajay Kumar on Monday distributed 1,100 Remedisivir injections sanctioned to private hospitals in the district. Addressing a high-powered review meeting held at Zilla Parishad meeting hall here, he warned of initiating action against anyone found selling the injections in black market.

Later, he visited the isolation ward of the Covid patients at

Government Hospital here and distributed food packets among them at his cost. He asked them not to give up their courage and instilled confidence in them by saying that all will soon recover from the virus. He said that the government will come to their rescue in all respects.

DMHO Malati, Government Hospital superintendent Venkateswarlu, district medical and health officers were present. Later, he proceeded to 25-bed isolation centre set up at the gov-

ernment hospital in Penuballi. He said that there was no shortage of oxygen and drugs and disposables at the Isolation Centre. All amenities are being provided to Covid patients here. Sattupalli MLA Sandra Venkata Veeraiah and others were present.

District Collector RV Karnam, Commissioner of Police Vishnu Warrior, additional collector Madhusudhan, medical and health officials and others were present on the occasion.



Free food at Covid patients doorstep



Additional Collectors Rajarshi Shah and Veera Reddy flagging off vehicles providing free food at the doorstep of the Corona patients in Sangareddy on Monday

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Additional Collectors Rajarshi Shah and Veera Reddy flagged off vehicles providing free food at the doorstep of the Corona patients at the Collectorate here on Monday.

People needing free food should call up 7207488745 to register their names. The beneficiaries will receive food directly at their doorstep. Municipal staff, armed with a route map, visited the relevant area and supplied food to

Covid patients. Patients’ attendants collected food from the vehicles.

Nutritious food would be provided to Covid patients as long as they are in isolation, Rajarshi said adding that 200 packets were distributed. He appealed to the Covid patients in the town to make use of the facility.

DRDO Radhika Ramani, District Backward Classes Welfare officer Keshuram and others were present on the occasion.

Trident Sugar Factory assets auction stopped

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

The open auction of the assets of the Kottur (B) Trident Sugar Factory in Zaheerabad mandal, which is scheduled for May 18, was stopped, disclosed Collector Hanumantha Rao. He said that the auction of the assets was stopped as the Trident Sugar Factory cleared the arrears on May 15.

Humanity has no religion

PNS ■ NARSAPUR

Humanity has no religion and it was proved many times by people with a human face. Corona may be created a social distance between individuals, but people irrespective of caste, creed or religion are breaking barriers and lending a helping hand to fellow beings, who are in dire need of help.

Of late, many incidents where persons belonging to a particular community have been performing the last rites of another community are being reported in the media. Yet another incident came to the limelight in Medak district. According to reports, Bondili Nanda Kumar (50),

who hailed from Gundegadda village in Narsapur mandal of Medak district, breathed his last on Monday while undergoing treatment in the government hospital in Sangareddy.

Hence, relatives and villagers did not attend funeral rites fearing contracting Corona. His wife Anuradha and children took part in the last rites. Some members from Madrasa in Narsapur came to know about the incident and they rushed to the village and performed the last rites.

Jabbar Khan, one of the members, said they are ready to lend a helping hand to those in distress. He said everybody should see the humanity in people irrespective of religion, which they belong to.



Muslims cremating the body of Corona victim at Gundegadda village in Narsapur mandal of Medak district on Monday

Swachhata Pakhwada begins at NTPC in Ramagundam

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLY

With an objective to maintaining cleanliness, Swachhata Pakhwada commenced at NTPC-Ramagundam on May 16. As part of the Pakhwada, on May 17, the Swachhata pledge was administered in a virtual mode. CGM (Ramagundam & Telangana) Sunil Kumar administered the pledge wherein employees from NTPC-Ramagundam and Telangana Project connected through an MS Team while staying at their respective workplaces.

Speaking on the occasion, Sunil Kumar underlined the importance of cleanliness especially during the pandemic. As part of the Pakhwada, cleanliness drive in the township, sanitation drive in the project affected villages and sapling plantation will be launched while essay writing, drawing competitions for children and motivational talk on Covid will be conducted.

Basavatarakam Cancer Hospital to treat ‘Black fungus’

PNS ■ NAGAR KURNOOL

The Basavatarakam Indo-American Cancer Hospital and Research Institute in Hyderabad has come forward to treat black fungus cases as the hospital has all amenities.

Black fungus has emerged as a life threatening disease in the backdrop of the

Coronavirus, which is ruling the roost in the country. Soon after the fungus attack, it spreads to the nose, eyes and ultimately to the brain. People can get relief from it by using medicines after identifying it early.

Therefore, ENT, head and neck surgical experts, neurosurgeons, ophthalmology sur-

geons, the reconstructive surgeon and maxillofacial surgeon, ICU, anaesthesia, internal medicine, diabetology, microbiology doctors team of the Basavatarakam Indo-American Cancer Hospital and Research Institute has decided to provide necessary treatment to cure black fungus.

Complete second round door-to-door survey: Collector

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

District Collector Shashanka has asked teams to complete the second round of the door-to-door health survey by Tuesday and asked the ANMs to assess the condition of the patients, identified in the first round of the survey, during the second round. He advised the medical and health authorities to give the survey teams pulse oximetre and thermometres and send them on the survey.

Addressing Covid nodal officers from his camp office here on Monday, the first round of

the survey is over in villages and municipalities and medical kits were given to patients identified during the survey.

During the second round, the Collector asked the officials to give the patients steroids if there is no improvement in their condition. If anyone’s condition is so severe, he or she may be referred to the government hospital.

The first round of the survey is underway in the municipal corporation limits and asked officials to immediately start the second round of the survey. He asked the district headquarters



District Collector Shashanka

government hospital superintendent Dr Ratnamala to give Covid test results within the specified time. He asked her to order 50 more beds for the hos-

Jagga seeks remedy for Remdesivir scarcity

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress MLA T Jagga Reddy alleged that the Centre is playing a spectator role when people are dying. Questioning Municipal Administration Minister KT Rama Rao chaired Task Force Committee on Covid to tell as to what it has been doing when the private hospitals are looting people while providing treatment to Covid patients.

Speaking to the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Monday, Jagga Reddy alleged that the scarcity of Remdesivir increased in the state. It is not available even in the black market though people are trying to purchase it for their family members. Remdesivir has become a Sanjeevani for Corona patients, he said.

However, there is no response from the government though more than 200 Corona patients are dying every day in the state.

He said that Remdesivir has been manufactured by the Telangana pharmaceutical companies, but the Centre is neglecting the Telangana state by not allocating sufficient quota to it, hence, the scarcity. Why the state is not pulling the Centre in regard to Remdesivir medicine, he questioned?

Why the four BJP MPs from the state are not trying to increase the number of Remdesivir injections quota to the state. He challenged the Animal Husbandry Minister to prove that the Corona cases are reduced. “I am ready to take Talasani to Sangareddy hospital to show the prevailing situation,” he said.



Collector Shashanka asked the government hospital superintendent Dr Ratnamala to give Covid test results within the stipulated time

pital. He wanted the medical authorities to set up Isolation Centres in Huzurabad and Jammikunta. The bio-medical wastage generated in Covid treatment facilities should be disposed of through the relevant agencies from time to time.

There are 16 patients under-

going treatment for Covid at the city Isolation Centre, he said describing their condition as stable. Additional Collector Shyam Prasaddal, municipal commissioner Valluri Kranti, DMHO Dr Juvaria, district immunisation officer Dr Sajida, nodal officers and others were present.

Pinarayi Vijayan Cabinet to have 21 ministers

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The second Pinarayi Vijayan government in Kerala, to be sworn in on May 20, will have a 21-member cabinet, LDF convenor and CPM acting state secretary A Vijayaraghavan said here on Monday. The oath-taking ceremony of the new Left government would be a low-key affair with limited invitees in view of the Covid, he said here after the crucial state committee meeting of the Left Democratic Front. He also said the portfolios of the ministers would be decided by the Chief Minister. "As the LDF has received immense support from every section of people during the Assembly elections, we want to form a government which has the representation of all sections," Vijayaraghavan said.

Cyclone: Maha CM reviews situation; 12K evacuated

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday took stock of the situation in Mumbai, Thane and other coastal districts of the state in the wake of the cyclonic storm Tauktae. According to an official statement, 12,420 people living in coastal stretches of Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg and Raigad districts have been shifted to safer places.

These include 8,380 people in Raigad, 3,896 in Ratnagiri and 144 in Sindhudurg.

Thackeray reviewed the situation in Mumbai, Thane and neighbouring areas and instructed authorities to ensure that the treatment of COVID-19 patients in the region is not affected due to the cyclonic storm, the statement said.

A red alert has been issued for Raigad district, while an orange alert has been issued for



Mumbai, Thane and Palghar, it said. A red alert is sounded for rainfall of over 20 cm and an orange alert is for rain between 6 cm and 20 cm. Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar visited the disaster man-

agement cell at the state secretariat here and took stock of the relief work. He asked administrations of all coastal districts of the state to remain alert.

Pawar spoke to the collectors

of Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, Raigad, Thane, Palghar, Mumbai (city), Mumbai (suburbs) and Brihanmumbai Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal over phone to assess the relief works and preparations in view of the cyclonic storm.

Cyclone Tauktae, which has now intensified into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm", is likely to reach Gujarat coast by Monday evening and cross the state coast between 8 pm and 11 pm, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Gusty winds and rains lashed Mumbai and its neighbouring areas overnight and on Monday morning as the cyclonic storm was heading towards Gujarat, officials said.

Trees were uprooted at several places in Mumbai, they said, adding that no casualty was reported so far.

Arrest of WB ministers in Narada case illegal: Speaker

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee on Monday dubbed as illegal the arrest of two Bengal ministers and others in the Narada case, contending that the CBI action on the basis of the governor's sanction was unlawful.

"I have not received any letter from the CBI nor has anybody sought permission from me as per the protocol," Banerjee said.

The central probe agency on Monday morning arrested ministers Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, TMC MLA Madan Mitra as well as former minister Sovan Chatterjee in connection with the Narada sting case in which politicians were purportedly caught taking money on camera.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar had recently granted sanction to prosecute all the four leaders, following which the CBI finalised its charge sheet and



The central probe agency on Monday morning arrested ministers Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, TMC MLA Madan Mitra as well as former minister Sovan Chatterjee in connection with the Narada sting case

moved to arrest them.

"I do not know for what unknown reason they went to the governor and sought his sanction. The chair of the speaker was not vacant at

that time, I was very much in office. "This sanction is absolutely illegal and arresting anyone on the basis of this sanction is also illegal," Banerjee claimed.



PM speaks to Uddhav on Tauktae cyclone situation in Maha

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday on the Cyclone Tauktae related situation in the state, official sources said.

The cyclonic storm over the Arabian Sea led to very strong winds blowing at a speed of 114 kmph in Mumbai on Monday afternoon, civic officials said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said that Cyclone Tauktae has now intensified into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm". It is likely to reach Gujarat coast by Monday evening and cross the state coast between 8 pm and 11 pm, the IMD said.

Modi had on Saturday reviewed the preparedness to deal with the cyclone's fallout in a high-level meeting which was attended by several ministries and agencies concerned.

Rajnath reviews Covid relief efforts of Armed Forces

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday reviewed efforts of the Armed Forces, defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs) and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in India's fight against a severe wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

At a video conference, Singh was briefed about specific initiatives of the three forces as well as other wings of the Defence Ministry in helping civilian authorities deal with the crisis.

The meeting was attended by Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat, Army Chief Gen MM Naravane, Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh, Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria and DRDO Chairman G Satheesh Reddy, among others.

"Raksha Mantri Shri @rajnathsingh chairing a meeting of secretaries, CDS, service chiefs and Ministry of Defence officials via video conferencing to review the actions taken by the ministry and armed forces in India's fight against COVID-19



pandemic," Singh's office tweeted.

Officials said the contribution of the DPSUs and other agencies of the Defence Ministry to the country's fight against the pandemic was also reviewed.

In responding to the crisis, the Indian Army and the Indian Navy have set up a number of hospitals in various states for the treatment of COVID-19 patients.

On its part, the Indian Air Force deployed a significant number of its transport aircraft to bring cryogenic oxygen tanks and other emergency medical supplies from several countries, including Singapore,

Thailand and United Arab Emirates.

The Indian Navy also deployed nine warships to bring filled oxygen containers to India from countries in the Gulf region and Southeast Asia.

Last month, Singh granted emergency financial powers to the three services to allow formation commanders to establish and operate hospitals as well as quarantine facilities for COVID-19 patients.

The emergency powers have been granted initially for a period of three months from May 1 to July 31 and are in addition to the similar powers delegated to the medical officers of the armed forces last week.

2 militants killed in J&K encounter

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

Two unidentified militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in Srinagar district in Jammu and Kashmir on Monday, police said.

Security forces launched a cordon and search operation in Khonmoh area, in the outskirts of the city, following information about the presence of militants there, the police said.

The search operation turned into an encounter after militants opened fire towards security forces positions, they said.

Two militants were killed in the ensuing gunfight, the police said, adding that the identity and group affiliation of the slain militants was being ascertained.

INDIA CORNER

'Bharat Biotech's K'taka facility will make 4-5 cr doses of Covaxin a month'

Bharat Biotech's Covaxin manufacturing facility that is under construction in Kolar district in Karnataka would have a manufacturing capacity of four to five crore doses a month by August-end, state Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar said on Monday. Talking to reporters here ahead of his meeting with the experts on mucormycosis, known as as black fungus, which is emerging as a new threat to those who recover from COVID-19, Sudhakar said he had a video conference with Bharat Biotech founder Dr Krishna Ella, his daughter Dr Jala Ella and rest of the team. "Dr Ella has assured me that their facility at Malur in Kolar will be able to produce one crore vaccines by June-end. By July-end it will be by two to three crores, and their target by August-end is four crore to five crore vaccine doses," Sudhakar said. According to him, Krishna Ella and all the directors assured him that they will give vaccines to Karnataka at the earliest. The minister said he asked them to provide a roll-out schedule as well, which they will do soon. Karnataka officials will be in touch with them on how to roll out the vaccine in the state in the coming days.



Leaders have no business to hoard Covid medicines: HC

Political leaders have no business to hoard stocks of COVID-19 medicines that are already in shortage and they are expected to surrender these drugs, said the Delhi High Court which on Monday also expressed dissatisfaction over a "vague and whitewashed enquiry" report filed by the Delhi Police over the allegations against politicians hoarding and distributing medicines, including Remdesivir, in national capital. "Just because some political figures are involved, you will not investigate, we will not allow this," said the court adding that it would have appreciated if the police had enquired into specific allegations levelled against each person and then filed the report. However, the court, which was hearing a PIL seeking lodging of an FIR on the allegations that politicians are able to procure in huge quantity and distribute COVID-19 medicines even as patients were running from pillar to post to get them, said since it is projected that these medicines were procured for public charity, it hopes and expects that they are not hoarded for political gains.

HC dismisses plea to convert CNG cylinders for transporting oxygen

The Delhi High Court on Monday declined to entertain a plea seeking conversion of CNG cylinder cascades for storage and transportation of oxygen, saying the issue falls in the policy making domain of the government. A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said conversion of CNG cylinder cascades, a bunch of cylinders, would require formulation of detailed policy by the Centre by also keeping in mind the feasibility and practicality of such a project.

The court also noted that in a similar matter before another bench, the central government had said that it was not technically possible to convert CNG cylinder cascades for storing and transporting oxygen. "We, therefore, see no reason to entertain the petition. The writ petition is dismissed," the court said. The order came on a plea by a company which claimed to be an expert in testing of CNG cylinders.



Delhi reports over 91,000 recoveries against 70,000 cases last week

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Around 91,500 people have recovered from COVID-19 in Delhi in the last one week as compared to 70,000 infections detected during the period, according to government data.

The number of cumulative cases increased from 13.23 lakh on May 9 to 13.93 lakh on May 16. Recoveries rose from 12.17 lakh to 13.09 lakh during the period.

The number of recoveries has been greater than the number of infections since May 8, the data revealed.

Delhi reported 9,706 recoveries on Sunday, 11,592 on Saturday, 14,140 on Friday, 15,189 on Thursday, 14,071 on Wednesday, 13,583 on Tuesday and 13,306 on



Monday. It registered 6,456 coronavirus cases on Sunday, 6,430 cases on Saturday, 8,506 on Friday, 10,489 on Thursday, 13,287 on Wednesday, 12,481 on Tuesday and 12,651 on Monday.

The number of active cases in the capital have also reduced from 85,258 on May 10 to 62,783 during the period.

On April 28, Delhi had 99,752 active cases, the maximum since the pandemic

began ravaging countries. The capital reported 1,843 fatalities due to the virus in the last one week -- 263 deaths a day on an average.

The toll rose from 19,663 on May 10 to 21,506 to May 16.

The national capital had 262 deaths on Sunday, 337 on Saturday, 289 on Friday, 308 on Thursday, 300 on Wednesday, 347 on Tuesday and 319 on Monday. The highest number of 448 deaths was reported on May 3.

On Sunday, Delhi recorded a positivity rate of 10.40 per cent, the lowest since April 11.

It was 11.32 per cent on Saturday, 12.4 per cent on Friday, 14.24 per cent on Thursday, 17 per cent on Wednesday, 17.8 per cent on Tuesday and 19.10 percent on Monday.

Fire breaks out in Delhi building

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Five members of a family were rescued safely after a fire broke out in the basement of the two-storey building in which they live in Delhi's Dwarka Mor area, officials said on Monday.

A call about the fire was received at 1:24 am on Monday and six fire tenders were rushed to the spot, the fire officials said.

Two cars and as many two-wheelers in the building's parking lot in the basement caught fire. Five people were rescued from the first floor of the building and the fire was brought under control by 2:30 am, said Atul Garg, director, Delhi Fire Services.

Railways reaches milestone of carrying 10k tonnes of O2

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The railways has reached the milestone of carrying 10,000 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen on Monday morning, Railway Board Chairman Suneet Sharma said.

The service started on April 19 from Mumbai and it now covers 13 states.

"We reached the milestone of carrying 10,000 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen on Monday morning on Oxygen Express... Oxygen Express delivered oxygen to 13 states," Sharma said.

The railways also said that on the day Cyclone Tauktae is expected to hit Gujarat, the rail-



ways carried more than 150 tonnes of oxygen which is more than the average of 134 tonnes being logged since 20 days.

The Western Railway carried 137 tonnes of the life-saving gas on Sunday and 151 tonnes on Monday from Gujarat to various parts of the country, it said.

The WR started carrying oxygen tankers from April 25 and it is carrying an average of 134 tonnes oxygen daily.

Delhi airport to shut T2 terminal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi international airport will shut down its T2 terminal from Monday midnight as the number of flights have reduced significantly due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, sources said.

From Monday midnight, all flights will be handled at the T3 terminal only, they stated.

Currently, the Delhi airport is handling around 325 flights per day, they mentioned. Before the pandemic, it used to handle around 1,500 flights per day. The

sources said average passenger traffic at the Delhi airport was around 1.15 lakh per day in February, which has reduced to around 30,000 per day right now due to the second wave.

The Delhi airport's decision has come at a time when India and its aviation sector has been badly hit by the second wave. During the last few weeks, the number of daily domestic air passengers in India have come down from more than 2.2 lakh to around 75,000 right now, according to the Civil Aviation Ministry's data.

Biomarkers can diagnose viral infections

PNS ■ BENGALURU

An Indian Institute of Science (IISc) study has identified a set of molecular biomarkers that can be used in the differential diagnosis of acute bacterial and viral infections. These biomarkers are different messenger RNA (mRNA) molecules found in the blood; differences in their levels can detect and predict with high probability if an infection is viral or bacterial, Bengaluru-based IISc said.

The current COVID-19 pandemic is a grim testimony to the damage an infectious disease can cause to human health and welfare. A major challenge in treating such diseases is misdiagnosis, which can lead to trial-and-error treatments, and improper use of antibiotics.



Identifying the correct type of infection is therefore critical.

The human body responds to bacterial and viral infections differently. It produces different types of molecules - such as proteins and RNA - in the blood, depending on the type of infection. While antibiotics can treat bacterial infections, they are ineffective against viral

infections. However, indiscriminate use of antibiotics to treat any kind of infection has given rise to bacterial strains that are now resistant to our entire arsenal of antibiotics, an IISc statement noted.

"Antibiotics are given even for viral infections in some cases because of misdiagnosis. With current methods, it can take a lot

of time to test for bacterial or viral infections," explains first author Sathyabharathi Ravichandran, Research Associate in the lab of Nagasuma Chandra, Professor at the Department of Biochemistry.

A quick method to detect acute viral and bacterial infections and distinguish between them can be immensely useful in the clinic, as accurate diagnosis will win half the battle and guide the clinician towards the optimal treatment path, the statement said.

It will also prevent the rise of such antimicrobial resistance. In the new study, published in the journal 'EBioMedicine', the IISc researchers have developed such a test using patient blood transcriptomes and sophisticated computational modelling.

Satav's last rites performed at native place in Maharashtra

The mortal remains of Congress MP Rajeev Satav, who died after recovering from COVID-19, were consigned to flames with state honours at his native place Kalamnuri in Maharashtra's Hingoli district on Monday. Several key Congress leaders, including AICC in-charge of Maharashtra H K Patil, party's Maharashtra unit chief Nana Patole and state ministers Ashok Chavan, Balasaheb Thorat, Vijay Wadettiwar, Aslam Shaikh, Nitin Raut, Varsha Gaikwad, Satej Patil, Vishwajeet Kadam and other party workers were present at the funeral. Satav (46), considered as a close associate of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, died at a hospital in Pune on Sunday, days after recovering from the coronavirus infection. The late Rajya Sabha member's family members bid him an emotional farewell as his mortal remains were consigned to flames at his native place on Monday. Paying tributes to the late leader, Shaikh said, "...he would always talk about the issues concerning the people of Maharashtra... the farmers have lost their leader. He is not among us. I am speechless." Kadam described Satav as his "big brother and mentor".



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Ready, go?

Are we on the right path to addressing the pandemic?
Do we have the right people on our right side?

One of the most prominent scientific voices of the COVID-19 pandemic, virologist Shahid Jameel has resigned as the head of the Indian SARS-COV-2 Genomics Consortia (INSACOG), the scientific advisory group coordinating the country's genome-sequencing work. The scientific body advising the Union Government on the epidemiological and virological aspects of handling the COVID pandemic is the poorer by the surprise resignation of the virologist. He chaired the INSACOG that the Government set up this January to use genetic sequencing to track the emergence of the COVID variants. The consortium first detected the deadly Indian variant, B.1.617, in February itself and shared the findings with the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) under the Health Ministry in early March. It stated that the variant may cause a spurt in infections across the country. The consortium found out that B.1.617 had two mutations, called E484Q and L452R, that could transmit faster and escape antibodies as well. The Health Ministry made this information public on March 24. Responding to a query by the Reuters news agency about the lack of a more robust response from the Government to the findings, Shahid Jameel said: "I am worried that science was not taken into account to drive policy. But I know where my jurisdiction stops. As scientists we provide the evidence, policymaking is the job of the Government." He may not have been mending bridges with his well-known candour. Jameel continued to follow the Indian strain and regularly inform the Government.

On May 13, he wrote a signed article in the *New York Times*, critical of India's response, specially about vaccination. "India should vaccinate with far more than the two million daily doses now....In India the virus was mutating around the new year to become more infectious, more transmissible and better able to evade pre-existing immunity....The timing and scale of the third wave would depend on the proportion of vaccinated people, whether newer variants emerge and whether India can avoid additional super-spreader events, like large weddings and religious festivals....." Jameel gave no reason for quitting the post, but he may just have reached the end of the long rope. Previously, Dr Gagandeep Kang, another scientist and the only Indian woman to be elected as Fellow, the Royal Society of London, resigned as the executive director of the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute. She is also the vice-chairperson for Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness, a global consortium facilitating promising vaccine candidates for COVID-19. Kang was also the head of the National COVID-19 task force constituted by the Indian Council of Medical Research for a similar purpose, but disbanded within a month. She is also known to speak out her mind. It is high time that the scientific task force is headed by virologists —with the bureaucrats handling the execution side.



People at an amusement park during the Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations, in Baghdad

AP

Stop the cruelty

The Hazaras, for decades at the receiving end, are still facing torture in Afghanistan

Afghanistan, a country where war and bloodshed never end, is again in the news. And for the same reason. As the US troops start withdrawing from Afghanistan, the ultra-radicals have found the right time to teach the minorities a lesson, in a bloody way, probably the only way they know. The Hazaras have always been at the receiving end in the Afghan society. They have faced discrimination but this time it was dastardly and inhumane as the attack targeted young schoolgirls. A bomb attack on Kabul's Sayed-ul-Shuhada High School killed over 60 people; most of the victims were young girls. It is still not clear which group was behind the attack. But whichever group did it, knew that it had the tacit backing of the majority of Afghanistan, or at least it assumed that. The Afghan Taliban and the Government are both condemning each other for the attack. The Taliban have all along held the Hazaras as heretics. Their Deobandi and Salafi belief system finds faults with the Hazara's religious practices and beliefs. The Hazaras are nine per cent of the Afghan population. They are considered the descendants of Changez Khan, who settled in Afghanistan.

Till the 19th century, they were being traded as slaves. Many radical groups still have the same notion about the Hazaras, a "sub-human" group that has no rightful place in that society. During the reign of Amir Abdur Rehman in the late nineteenth century, the slavery stopped but they still had to perform menial tasks. With the checks and balances provided by the US presence no longer in place, the writing on the wall is quite clear. The Hazaras are going to be targeted by the Taliban as they have always had strained relations. They supported Uzbek opponents of Gen Rashid Dostum in 1997, who massacred the Taliban trapped in Mazar-i-Sharif. Many Hazaras live across the border in Pakistan but they aren't safe either. According to a 2019 report by Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights, at least 509 Hazaras have been murdered since 2013. In *The Kite Runner*, Hassan was a Hazara, and we all know what he had to go through. In Afghanistan's current state, not much can be done. Pakistan is no better but, for its part, it is making efforts to promote reconciliation. By all possibilities, Hazaras may be left to fend for themselves.

India is very much a democracy

Contrary to what the critics might say, we have a nation that is strong enough to accommodate all the viewpoints



PRAFULL GORADIA

Lately, several observers of democracy, the Freedom House of the US, V Dem based in Sweden and the Democracy Index of the UK, have commented that India may be moving towards an electoral autocracy. Such a conclusion is extremely unfair and positively damaging. Evidently, these agencies and others are unable to appreciate India having a strong Government. While the American establishment, especially the Pentagon, would like a viable ally against the expansionist China, these so-called liberals prefer to see India as a permanent Third World Society.

Do they realise that India has a dominantly Hindu ethos which is intrinsically an epitome of freedom? Anyone who believes in the phenomenon of karma is a Hindu. Whether he/she is a whole-time worshipper or an agonistic, it enjoys or suffers the fruit of his karma. No god sits on judgement over any individual or his/her community; there is no anticipation of a doomsday or an end of the world. *Anadi-ananta*, or there is no beginning of life and no end, according to Hindu scriptures.

Karma is reminiscent of physics, which says that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Every action by an individual, whether virtuous or vicious, is spontaneously recorded by the grand nature or its celestial computer as well as its reaction or *bhagya*. There is no single judge, nor only two alternatives for the individual, namely heaven or hell.

Any assertion of a single god resembles Deductive Logic which asserts a premise namely so and so is my God and He is the only God. The corollaries that emanate from the premise are flawlessly consistent. In sharp contrast, Hinduism is a specimen of Inductive Logic. Herein lies the freedom intrinsic to Hinduism. To illustrate this contrast, say, four Hindus happened to meet somewhere and discuss the subject of roses. The person from the north may say that roses are red. The southerner could assert that he has seen only white roses. The easterner may express serious



disagreement and insist that the roses in his region are only pink. The person from western India may say you are wrong; roses are always yellow. After half an hour of animated argumentation, each would say: Possibly in your parts of the country, there are other colours of roses. Someone else would propose: Let us agree to disagree, and request that we exchange samples of all four colours.

A member of an Abrahamic or western background, in such a controversial situation, may well declare that roses are always red; the rest must be other flowers or, perhaps, weeds. Just as a Jew is a Jew, a Jew, the gentiles. That is where conflict and war begin. Prophet Abraham, when he first saw a vision, said God told him to prove his bonfires by sacrificing his own son Isaac. When he was about to obey God and behead Isaac, the Almighty told him to stop and sacrifice a goat instead. The western religion was thus born in violence; Prophet Moses had a much more violent experience when he freed the Israelis from the clutches

“KARMA IS REMINISCENT OF PHYSICS, WHICH SAYS THAT FOR EVERY ACTION, THERE IS AN EQUAL AND OPPOSITE REACTION. EVERY ACTION BY AN INDIVIDUAL, WHETHER VIRTUOUS OR VICIOUS, IS SPONTANEOUSLY RECORDED BY THE GRAND NATURE OR ITS CELESTIAL COMPUTER AS WELL AS ITS REACTION

of the Egyptians and brought them to Judea.

Again, Jesus Christ, the "son of God", was brutally crucified, more violence.

When we went to Jerusalem, one morning the guide took us all to the foot of the Calvary Hill on the top of which Jesus Christ was crucified. There are 14 stations, or stops, to the top of the hill where now is the Church of Sepulchre; the "son of God" was buried therein. At the time, I was too weak to climb all the distance. To please my wife and cousins, I said I would climb to station two and sit down and wait for them to return from the top. However, a magnet in the air drew me on and on. I went up all the 14 stations. I am not a Christian nor have been to a missionary school. So, I climbed to the top of the hill and returned without feeling any great extra weakness or fatigue.

In the deductive religions, there is limited scope for spirituality beyond the scriptures and places of worship. As a result, the believers tend to unite communally and fight in

order to fulfill themselves collectively in the service of God. Whereas, the inductive Hindus are dependent on individual karmas and have no pressure to unite to serve society and, in turn, God. In the bargain, they unite only in the face of severe collective danger. In the bargain, they believe they are peace-loving and in the eyes of others they might seem deficient in courage. But those who believe in the deductive approach have their histories littered with violence and war.

As early as the ascension of Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD, the Caliphs initiated the conquest of the Middle-East, including Morocco in the west, to Iran in the east. The Moors of North Africa invaded Spain in 712 AD and reached Poitiers in France soon. Historian Ian Morris, in his book *WAR*, calls it the "Five Hundred-Years War" but it was actually longer. Eventually, Britain alone conquered one-fourth of the world.

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TIME TO STAND UNITED

Sir — I refer to the article 'Corona: some real and some hype' (May 17). It is true that the Opposition and the so-called section who are against Modi decried lockdown and its adverse implications on livelihood of the people when the first wave struck us. They were against vaccines and questioned its potentiality. Everybody pointed fingers at the Centre.

Now Lockdown 2.0 is being unilaterally announced by the States. Similar is the case with the other States pertaining to the vaccination drive which had some hesitancy among the people earlier because of their false propagation earlier. Won't this lockdown ruin the economy of the States or the people? The creation of such impression among the people is against the people, the States and the entire nation. It is against national interest, basically. It shows the inability of the local Government. When the entire world is fighting Coronavirus, such unwanted criticism by the Opposition does not entail well; in fact, it vitiates the entire atmosphere of recovery from the pandemic.

Secondly, the Centre was forced to keep its commitment on exporting vaccines after getting the raw material. Now the States have invited global tenders for vaccines. Still, the Centre is distributing vaccines to the States. On the other hand, in many States, the medicines, vaccines, oxygen cylinders, Remdesivir or hospital beds are being offered at a high premium. It is not the time to indulge in politics. We, together, should fight the virus tooth and nail

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

ENSURE SAFE CREMATIONS

Sir — The Central Government has directed the States to be on guard against the dumping of dead bodies in the rivers and focus on their safe disposal, besides providing support for ensuring dignified cremation. Witnessing dead bodies in the rivers would amount to among the most undesirable and alarming situations.

The dumping of dead bodies, as well as their safe disposal and protection of

Let's not be hesitant



The surge in COVID-19 cases and the deaths across India, the vaccine hesitation in the rural populace and small towns has emerged as a major obstacle. A large number of people living in villages and small towns are going to "jhola chhap" doctors to get treatment for their fever, cough and cold, and not for a COVID test.

The fear of these sections is that "those who test positive will be transferred to COVID hospitals, where no one survives". It is the fear of positive testing that is clearly preventing these villagers from taking the test and the lack of infrastructure is another major reason for the lack of tests, lack of oxygen, hospital beds

Amit Singh Kushwaha | Satna

ARE THE PEOPLE COMPLACENT?

Sir — Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on May 15 accused the Government and the people of becoming complacent after COVID's first wave, which irritated the commoners. It was the day of the Modi Government's "eighth victory anniversary day" (May 16, 2014). But the big question: Is Bhagwat's accusation of the Government truly a warning to Prime Minister

and vaccines.

There are clear instructions from the Government that there should be no loss of wages. Is it being followed? People passing through, many people, especially those belonging to the economically weaker sections, still fear losing their livelihood. Among the other major factors contributing to the vaccine hesitation are the sample collection and the announcement of the report.

There may be a long waiting period. In fact, the "fear" chasing the villagers, and even some urban people who are pushing them to refuse vaccinations or tests, was due to the ignorance and the mass proliferation of fake news, mostly. A huge wall of suspicion, rumours, fake news and fear was hesitation or outright denial for both the vaccine and the trial. The fact of the matter is that the Government and medical fraternity put "ignorance" behind the hesitation of testing and vaccines in India, social workers and most doctors felt that a massive awareness campaign was needed to combat these obstacles.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Narendra Modi and his Government or an indirect way to play cover-up with Modi?

Did Bhagwat suggest that the people became complacent because Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP chief JP Nadda and UP's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath asked the people to attend their political rallies? Did these same people force the Government to set up the infrastructure for the Kumbh Mela where thousands got infected and took that infection to their native towns and villages? Now, only the public has been punished for this "leniency", losing lakhs of lives and wasting crores of rupees for the mismanagement.

The Government needs to accept that it failed to health infrastructure, beds, oxygen and vaccines

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

The Centre has informed that Delhi will be supplied 3.83 lakh doses in May and no vaccines to be supplied for the age group 18-44 years.



Delhi Deputy Chief Minister — Manish Sisodia



The Russian side is committing stupidity because it is a mistake to turn former friends into enemies

Czech President — Milos Zeman

My hands and feet were either frozen, numb or burning, and pretty much useless for two weeks.



Rocker, guitarist — Eric Clapton



Pressure, anxiety and all were always there. In my case, I realised all my preparations were there in a physical sense. After all of that, the anxiety was always there

Cricketer — Sachin Tendulkar

Back to the jungle! Went to Mumbai to donate plasma but didn't have enough antibodies for donation.



Model, actor — Milind Soman

FIRST COLUMN

INDIAN VIEWPOINT ON ISRAEL, PALESTINE

We proudly state that India is a secular State, but are we actually not communal?



MARKANDEY KATJU

For several days the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians has been going on. We in India have seen on *YouTube* rockets being fired by Hamas, which are often intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome, and the demolition of buildings in Gaza by the Israeli Air Force.

What do Indians think about all this?

About 80 per cent Indians are Hindus, and about 16 per cent are Muslims. Almost all Hindus, including the so called 'intellectuals' among them (academics, mediapersons, professionals like lawyers and doctors, writers, etc) support Israel in this conflict, and almost all Indian Muslims support the Palestinians. Only the so-called 'liberals' among the Hindus support the Palestinians, but these would be hardly five per cent of all Hindus. The rest believe all Muslims everywhere in the world to be trouble-makers and terrorists.



This is because despite the Indian Constitution calling India a secular country, the truth is it is highly communal. Most Hindus are communal, and so are most Muslims. This I can say from personal knowledge. When I am with my own relatives, and they are sure no Muslim is around, they often spout venom against Muslims, who are perceived as fanatics and anti-national. When a Muslim is lynched in India most Hindus are indifferent, and some even happy. One terrorist less! In fact, it is because most Hindus are communal that the BJP, which claims to represent the Hindus, won the parliamentary elections in India in 2014 and 2019, and came to power. Thereafter, polarisation of Indian society on religious lines has grown exponentially. No doubt the recent farmers agitation in India cut through caste and religious lines, and the ongoing pandemic has been a reverse to the BJP which is being blamed by the people for not properly handling it. But these are temporary phenomena. Once they are over, the country will again revert to the old status.

The truth is that secularism is a feature of industrial society, as in North America and Europe, but India is still semi-feudal, and most people here are strongly religious. The religious divide between Hindus and Muslims was fanned up by the British rulers by their policy of divide and rule (see my article 'The Truth about Pakistan' and BN Pande's 'History in the service of Imperialism' online), and continued even after Independence in 1947 by some vested interests, particularly after the BJP came to power in 2014.

Some people claim that the recent elections in West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu where the BJP and/or its ally (like the ADMK) suffered a reverse, shows that the BJP is on the decline. I do not agree. A few carefully engineered communal riots will neutralise this trend.

Unless India becomes a highly industrialised country, communalism will thrive in India. To end communalism, a radical transformation of Indian society is required, which is only possible by a mighty historical united people's struggle, culminating in a revolution, but this is as yet nowhere on the horizon.

(The writer is a former judge of the Supreme Court. The views expressed are personal.)

Rise of religions and decline of the West

In an increasingly globalised world, there is greater civilisational, social and ethnic self-consciousness. But cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people



SONAL SHUKLA

India has seen an uprising of religious consciousness, pride, assertiveness and aggression in recent years like never before. The credit or blame is reserved for the BJP generally, though now prominent parties like the AAP, TMC and Congress are also seen as following suit. But is rise of religious and civilizational identity particular to India, or is it a global phenomenon of our times? From Islamic nations to Europe, from Brazil to Philippines the phenomenon seems to be taking shape. Three decades ago, the American political scientist Samuel Huntington made such a prophesy for our times.

The post-Cold war world has changed fundamentally, so he wrote. The world has never been multipolar and multicivilizational before -- while being so interconnected - in the entire human history. The most important distinctions between people in this new world will not be ideological or economic but cultural; most important and dangerous conflicts will occur not between rich or poor but between people belonging to different cultural entities. End of Cold war has led to global resurgence of religions around the world, involving intensification of religious consciousness, rise of fundamentalist movements, escalating ethnic conflicts and ethnic cleansing.

Huntington identifies another significant phenomenon taking place in the post-Cold war world: the relative decline of the western power. East is on its way to equating with the West. The US and UN are unable to suppress bloody local conflicts and rising China is increasingly assertive. Asian civilisations are expanding economically. Economic growth creates basis for enhanced military power and political influence. As the power and self-confidence of non-Western societies increases, they assert their own cultural values and reject those imposed on them by West. Most notable cultural resurgence is happening in Asia and Islamic nations generated by their economic and demographic dynamism.

The multi-civilisational world and rise of religions: Huntington writes empires rise and fall, governments come and go, civilizations remain and survive political, social, economic, even ideological upheavals. The great religions are the foundations on which great civilisations rest (Confucianism, Hindu, Islam, Judeo-Christian). The 20th century ideological conflict between Liberal Democracy and Marxist Leninism was only a fleeting, superficial historical phenomenon, a temporary aberration in the centuries-old human history. History of the world has been the history of civilizations, and conflict between them. Religion is the most important factor in determining civilisation.

The most salient cause of religious revival is the process of social, economic and cultural modernization which has disrupted longstanding system of identity and authority. In an increasingly globalised world, there is greater civilisational, social and ethnic self-consciousness -- because people define themselves by what makes them different from others. Cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people.

In this new world, local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations. The rivalry of superpower is replaced by the clash of civilizations. Global politics began to be reconfigured along cultural lines: civilizational identities are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflict. Present day conflicts between West and China, West and Islam, cohesion and unity of Islamic nations, China and Islamic connection against



THE GREATEST CHALLENGE COMES FROM ISLAM AND CHINA, THAT EMBODY GREAT CULTURAL TRADITION VERY DIFFERENT FROM WEST AND, IN THEIR EYES, SUPERIOR TO IT. THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY, WHEN A CIVILISATION'S POWER HAS EXPANDED, IT HAS ALWAYS USED THAT POWER TO EXTEND ITS VALUES, PRACTICES AND INSTITUTIONS TO OTHER SOCIETIES

The author is a public policy analyst and a lawyer. The views expressed are personal.



West, Turkish and Iranian support to Azerbaijan in conflict can all be explained on the basis of this theory.

Is western liberalism universal? Most non-western nations take offence to the West's sitting as the jury on the level of democracy and freedom in their governing systems-while the non-western world can never judge the west. Huntington questions the imposition of western liberalism on the non-western world: its universalism. He states that western assumption that the only river of civilization is our own and all others are either tributaries to it or lost in the desert sand is an egocentric illusion of the West. Universalism justifies western cultural domination over others by making other societies ape western practices and institutions. What west calls universal, others see as imperialism. It increasingly brings West into conflict with other civilizations, most seriously with Islam and China.

He states major differences in political and economic development among civilizations are clearly rooted in their different cultures. East Asian economic success as well as difficulties in achieving stable democratic political system, has its source in East Asian culture. Islamic culture explains failure of emergence of democracy in much of Islamic world. Japan and India are the only two civilizations which had a class system paralleling that of the West; why only two non-western societies to sustain major democratic governments. The recent coup in Myanmar, dictatorial regimes in Russia and Turkey despite their proximity to the West, failure of West to import democracy to Iraq, Afghanistan,

North African nations after Arab Spring can be understood by Huntington's theory.

Huntington dismisses Fukuyama's End of History theory that predicts victory of western liberalism over all other ideologies. The collapse of communism in Soviet Union doesn't necessarily mean that other societies will import the Western ideology of liberal democracy - this underestimates the non-western culture's creativity, resilience and individuality. This thinking is rooted in Cold War perspective, that liberal democracy is the only alternative to communism. There are many forms of authoritarianism, nationalism, corporatism and market communism (China) that are alive and well in the world today. More significantly there are religious alternatives that lie outside secular ideologies.

Modernisation and Westernisation: Huntington questions that modernization essentially needs westernization. No one political ideology or set of institutions -- elections, civic associations and other hallmark of western life -- are necessary for economic growth. Non-western societies have modernised and can do so without adopting values, institutions, practices of the west. Gulf nations and East Asian economies are the living examples of this in our times.

In fundamental ways the world is becoming more modern and less western. Modernisation strengthens cultures adopting it and reduces relative power of the west. At individual level, modernisation breaks traditional bonds and social relations, creating crises of identity to which religious provides an answer.

Decline of the West: The challenge

that the west faces is not just economic but more importantly to its political influence and liberal value system. The greatest challenge comes from Islam and China, that embody great cultural tradition very different from West and in their eyes superior to it. Throughout the history when a civilisation's power has expanded, it has always used that power to extend its values, practices and institutions to other societies. The era dominated by western ideologies is over, new era will have multiple and diverse civilizations interact, compete and coexist and accommodate with each other.

Second generation indigenisation phenomenon is taking place all over the non-western world. In 1960-70s pro-west governments and west-leaning (often western educated) leaders were threatened by coups and revolutions; in 1980-90s they were increasingly in danger of being ousted by elections. Electoral competitions are won by most popular appeals of ethnic, nationalistic and religious character.

Another challenge that the West faces is the democracy paradox: democratisation conflicts with westernisation. Democracy is inherently a parochialising, not cosmopolitanising, process. As non-western societies take to democracy, or deepen democracy, they seek to assert their own value systems and rebel against the western diktats, often a change from friendly dictator to unfriendly democratic regime for the west. Regionalisation will be the central trend in post-cold war global politics. The US is not likely to have the military capability to manage regional contingencies.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE AAP IS BEHIND THESE POSTERS. I AM BEHIND THE POSTERS. ARREST ME AND OUR MLAs BUT DO NOT HARASS POOR PEOPLE WHO PASTE POSTERS.

— DURGESH PATHAK
AAP LEADER



I WONDER HOW MANY WALLS OF DELHI THE POLICE HAS THOUGHT OF CLEANING, EXCEPT THOSE WHERE PM MODI IS CRITICISED.

— ABHISHEK MANU SINGHVI
CONGRESS LEADER

My heart is in the West though I am in the East

When your country burns, there is nothing more important left to do than be with all your loved ones around, all together

For the last few days, despite the very challenging times in India, and Delhi in particular, where I have been living and working for the past two years, I haven't really "been" in Delhi. I mean: physically, I have. But while I am physically here, my thoughts, my prayers, and my fears are in Israel. My family, my friends, my co-workers, live mostly in areas that have been fired on by Hamas, and so have had to spend the last few days and nights running between their apartments and their shelters.

As a matter of fact, since last Tuesday, Hamas, the terrorist organization controlling Gaza, has fired about 3000 rockets towards Israel. Three thousand times in less than a week, the Israeli population, the elderly, the adults and children, had to move as quickly as possible and run to



ORLY GOLDSCHMIDT

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the closest bomb shelter. Or to the stairway. Or as far as possible from their apartments' windows. And then, after hearing the explosion and feeling the building shaking, they had to go back to what they were doing before the alarm started and try to keep on living their lives, as if this whole situation was normal.

It is almost impossible to understand this when you don't experience it (and God, I pray that no one has to ever experience this), but when the alarm sounds, you have less than 40 seconds (if you live in the South, you may not even have 10 seconds) to run to a shelter. Less than 40 seconds. Think about it: what can you do in less than 40 seconds? It takes me more time to put my shoes on. More time to write a text message to a friend. Much more time to wake my kids up in the morning!



I am a mother of three small children. Just to imagine -- practically -- how I would manage taking the three of

them to the shelter in the middle of the night worries me. What if I don't manage? What does it mean? And what if we

live in a place where there is no shelter?

These surreal situations and dilemmas happen day after day here. A few days ago, an Indian nurse, Soumya Santhosh, who had been working in Ashkelon in the South of Israel for the last eight years, was killed by a rocket fired at the house by Hamas. Soumya Santhosh, the mother of a nine-year-old boy, was working as a caregiver for an elderly woman, and was waiting for the woman's daughter to come home. When the alarm started, she didn't have the time to run to a shelter and unfortunately got hit. A matter of seconds...

My sister doesn't have a shelter in her apartment. When the alarm sounds, they don't have the time to run to a "public shelter". So, they remain at home all together, my sister, her husband, and

their children, and they wait until it passes. Imagine what kind of a feeling that must be, to know that you cannot protect your own children from danger, that you cannot calm them, reassure them.

When our children are born, we are quite clueless, but we all know one thing for sure: we will do everything we can to protect them and give them the best childhood possible. And no one, no one should live through what the families in Israel have been living.

My Indian friends and colleagues from Delhi have been sending me texts since Tuesday, showing love and support, and I know we are blessed to be serving in India in those times. And from here, all I can do is pray for better days in Israel and its surroundings, pray for the day that our neighbours can be our partners, and hope for more

peaceful days and for a brighter future.

There was a Jewish poet who lived in Spain in the Middle Ages, Rabbi Yehuda Halevi. He wanted one thing more than anything in his life: to be able to go to the Promised Land, to Israel. He said: "My heart is in the East and I am in the West".

This sentence reminds Israelis of those who didn't have the chance to go to Israel through the centuries but were dreaming of it. Today, this sentence resonates in me more than ever. As I am sure that it does for my colleagues, Israeli diplomats abroad too. Because when your country burns, you want nothing more than to be with your loved ones, at home, all together. So today, I am in the East, but my heart is in the West, with my loved ones.

Sensex rallies 848 points; financial stocks sparkle



PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex zoomed over 848 points on Monday, driven by strong buying in banking shares amid a reduction in daily domestic COVID-19 caseload. The 30-share BSE index ended 848.18 points or 1.74 per cent higher at 49,580.73, and the broader NSE Nifty soared 245.35 points or 1.67 per cent to 14,923.15. IndusInd Bank was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying over 7 per cent, followed by SBI, ICICI Bank, HDFC twins, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv and UltraTech Cement. On the other hand, L&T, Bharti Airtel, Nestle India, Sun Pharma and PowerGrid were among the laggards. According to Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities, domestic equities witnessed strong rebound as

robust Q4 FY21 earnings and early sign of decline in second wave of daily caseload bolstered investors' confidence. "A consistent reduction in COVID-19 daily caseload, which fell below 3 lakh on Sunday, certainly augurs well for markets. It indicates that prediction of receding second wave of COVID-19 by the end of May or mid of June holds true and adverse impact of second wave should not be felt beyond Q1 FY22," he said. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai and Hong Kong ended on a positive note, while Tokyo and Seoul were in the red. Stock exchanges in Europe were trading on a negative note in mid-session deals. Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.06 per cent higher at USD 68.75 per barrel.



Rupee rises by 7 paise to 73.22 against dollar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee rose for the second straight session on Monday to close 7 paise higher at 73.22 (provisional) against the US dollar on the back of positive domestic equities and weak American currency. At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened at 73.24 and hit an intra-day high of 73.16 and a low of 73.26. The local unit finally settled at 73.22, registering a gain of 7 paise over its previous close. On Friday, the rupee had closed at 73.29 against the US dollar. The domestic unit has appreciated 20 paise in the last two trading sessions.

Housing sales up 21%, supply down 40% in January-March

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Housing sales increased by 21 per cent while new supply declined 40 per cent year-on-year during January-March 2021 across seven major cities, according to data analytic firm PropEquity. Housing demand in the April-June quarter is likely to be sluggish due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sales or absorption of housing units rose by 21 per cent across seven cities in the first quarter of the 2021 calendar year to 1,05,183 units as against 87,236 units in the year-ago period. However, the new supply or launches of housing units fell 40 per cent to 59,737 units from 1,00,343 units. Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Delhi-NCR and Pune saw a rise in housing sales, while Kolkata slipped by 20 per cent.



Samir Jasuja, founder and MD at PropEquity, said the first quarter of this calendar year was relatively better for Indian realty as compared to the last year. "There was higher demand in ready to move in units and the projects nearing completion. However, the second wave of COVID will lead to muted demand going forward," he said. Jasuja expects sales to pick up after the end of the second wave of COVID. According to the data, housing sales in

Bengaluru rose 13 per cent to 12,262 units in January-March 2021 from 10,878 units in the year-ago period. Chennai saw a 29 per cent rise in sales at 5,055 units from 3,930 units, while Hyderabad witnessed a 16 per cent rise in demand to 10,964 units from 9,477 units. In Maharashtra, housing sales in MMR grew 26 per cent to 41,323 units from 32,886 units, while Pune registered 31 per cent growth in demand at 25,252 units compared to 19,221 units.

MONEY MATTERS

Shilpa Medicare arm inks pact with Dr Reddy's

Drug firm Shilpa Medicare on Monday said its arm has entered into a definitive agreement with Dr Reddy's Laboratories for manufacturing of Russian COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V. "The company, via its wholly owned subsidiary Shilpa Biologicals Pvt Ltd (SBPL), has entered into a three year definitive agreement with Dr Reddy's Laboratories for production-supply of the Sputnik V vaccine from its integrated biologics R&D cum manufacturing center at Dharwad, Karnataka," Shilpa Medicare said in a regulatory filing. The targeted production of the dual vector Sputnik V for the first 12 months is 50 million doses (50 million of component 1 and 50 million of component 2), from the date of start of commercial production, the company added. Shilpa Medicare said Dr Reddy's will facilitate the transfer of the sputnik technology to SBPL. Under the agreement, SBPL will be responsible for manufacture of the vaccine, while Dr Reddy's is responsible for distribution/marketing of the vaccine in its marketing territories.



HMSI extends warranty, free service till July 31

Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) on Monday said it has extended warranty and free service period till July 31, across all its dealerships in the country in the wake of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The extension is applicable to those customers, whose vehicle's free service, warranty and extended warranty was originally ending between April 1 and May 31, 2021, HMSI said in a statement. Reassuring customers facing restricted movement in several states, the company said it will support them to avail these services at their convenience at a later date before July 31, 2021, as lockdown eases. As part of initiatives to support relief measures in the pandemic, Honda India Foundation (HIF), the corporate social responsibility arm of all Honda group firm in India, has pledged Rs 6.5 crore for five states -- Haryana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, UP and Gujarat. It includes setting-up of a 100-bed facility at Manesar, in Haryana and another facility at Tapukara in Rajasthan with a bed capacity of up to 100.



Ashok Leyland lines up initiatives for employees

Hinduja group flagship Ashok Leyland on Monday said it has rolled out various employee-centric initiatives amid the coronavirus pandemic. The company said about 75 per cent of the 45-plus age group employees have been vaccinated so far against the infectious disease. "Across age groups, 25 per cent have been vaccinated as we speak, this vaccination drive will continue with huge momentum," Ashok Leyland said in a statement. The Chennai-based company noted that it has put up an emergency response team (ERT) in place which works round the clock to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of the employees. The commercial vehicle major said that COVID wardens -- employees in each location who along with their teams ensure that the safety protocols defined are adhered to strictly, have been instituted.



Credit Suisse gives USD 1 million in COVID medical aid

Credit Suisse has extended USD 1 million (Rs 7.5 crore) to two non-profits to procure emergency drugs and other medical equipment in major cities to support India's fight against COVID-19 that has killed nearly 2.75 lakh people and infected about 2.5 crore so far. The funds will be utilised to procure critical medical supplies, oxygen concentrators, and ICU equipment in Mumbai, Pune, New Delhi and Bengaluru, the Swiss brokerage said in a note on Monday. Last year, Credit Suisse had given Rs 4.5 crore (USD 6,00,000) grant to Concern India Foundation and United Way Mumbai to procure essential equipment at seven hospitals in Mumbai and Pune. The bank has also raised an additional Rs 2.8 crore through internal staff fundraising for GiveIndia's COVID response fund. The fresh funding will be extended to the Concern India Foundation and GiveIndia Foundation to procure critical medical supplies, as well as oxygen and ICU equipment for the COVID hospitals in Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, and Bengaluru.



Crisil: Too early to say Covid 2nd wave has peaked

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Even as new Covid infections have shown a declining trend, credit rating agency Crisil on Monday said it is "too early" to say that the second wave of the pandemic has peaked and flagged concerns over the vaccination drive. After opening up the vaccination for all adults, the drive has suffered because availability of vaccines has become a "national bottleneck," the rating agency said in a report. It said new cases touched 4.14 lakh on May 6, and have now declined to an average of 3.6 lakh a day for the week ended May 16. The decline in new cases offers some respite, but, "it's too early to call a peak," the report noted. It also acknowledged that the new cases have fallen without a dip in testing numbers. "India's Covid affliction curve has turned for the first time since the second wave began, with daily cases in the week ended May 16 falling 15 per cent sequentially," it said. "While vaccination was opened to all adults two weeks back to battle the fierce second wave, vaccine availability has become a national bottleneck," it said. As a result of this, states have announced a temporary halt to their vaccination drive for the 18-44 age group and prioritised those in the 45 plus bracket, especially the second doses, it added.

NEFT to remain unavailable on Sunday due to technical upgrade

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The popular National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) system for online transfer of funds will remain unavailable for 14 hours from Saturday mid-night till Sunday afternoon due technical upgrade, the Reserve Bank of India said on Monday. National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) is a nationwide centralised payment system owned and operated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It is available round the clock availability on all days of the year. A technical upgrade of NEFT, targeted to enhance the performance and resilience, is scheduled after the close of business of May 22, 2021, RBI said in a statement. "Accordingly, NEFT service will not be available from



00:01 hrs to 14:00 hrs on Sunday, May 23, 2021. The RTGS system will continue to be operational as usual during this period," the RBI said. The RBI has asked banks to inform their customers to plan their payment operations accordingly. Similar technical upgrade for real-time gross settlement (RTGS) was completed on April 18, 2021. RTGS facility is used for

high-value fund transfers. NEFT is also a near-real-time funds transfer facility. NEFT currently operates in batches on half-hourly intervals throughout the day. Besides funds transfer, NEFT system is also used for a variety of transactions including payment of credit card dues to the card issuing banks, payment of loan EMI, and inward foreign exchange remittances, among others.

LDB services extended to 9 SEZs across India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

PRNewswire/ -- NICDC Logistics Data Services (NLDS), a joint venture between the Government of India, represented by the National Industrial Corridor Development and Implementation Trust, and NEC Corporation, a leader in the integration of IT and network technologies, today

announced extension of its LDB services at 9 major SEZ across India to improve last mile container visibility. Major SEZs include Visakhapatnam, SEEPZ Mumbai, Surat, MEPZ Chennai, Cochin, Kandla, Noida, Mangalore and Dahej SEZ. With container tracking services now live at these locations, exporters and importers will be able to get near real-

time location information on container movement from ports to SEZs. Commenting on the occasion, Mr. Ichiro Oshima, CEO, NLDS said, "The need for more accurate end-to-end container visibility was apparent when exporters and importers experienced significant delays in container movement. With end-to-end container tracking, users can now easily iden-

tify the bottlenecks and ease their operations. Last mile container visibility stands inline with NLDS' objective of improving the export and import (EXIM) trade and reducing the logistics cost." The idea for NLDS' service extension was first proposed during NLDS's Logistics Data Bank (LDB)'s Open House Session held in January last year under the chairmanship of

Dr. Guruprasad Mohapatra, Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. During the event, stakeholders in the EXIM industry requested to install RFID readers at industrial zones, manufacturing hubs and SEZs, which would enable them to receive timely updates on last-mile cargo and improve supply chain efficiency.

ONGC to procure 1 lakh O₂ concentrators

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Monday said it will procure one lakh oxygen concentrators to aid India's fight against the world's worst outbreak of coronavirus pandemic. The company will use its understanding of the global supply chain and logistics to procure one lakh oxygen concentrators on behalf of the government of India, ONGC said in a statement. The government of India will bear the cost of procuring

these concentrators. "Within a short period, ONGC placed orders for 34,673 oxygen concentrators on overseas vendors for immediate supply. Out of these, 2,900 are expected to be received by May 21, and the rest in staggered delivery from May to the end of June 2021. "Further, to promote domestic capacity, the order has been placed for 40,000 units of oxygen concentrators on domestic manufacturers," it said. In addition, medical-grade oxygen generation

plants are also being set up with ONGC support in 10 government hospitals in three states. This is part of the 93 oxygen plants oil PSUs are setting up across the country. "Continuing its fight against COVID, ONGC has been an active part of the nation-wide vaccination drive promoting the vaccination efforts through regular social media posts. ONGC is also organizing vaccination camps at various work locations across the country for employees and secondary workforce," it said.

Bhubaneswar Airport handled 20.53 MT of vax, other Covid-related cargo

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Airports Authority of India (AAI)-run Bhubaneswar Airport, in Odisha has handled 20.53 MT of vaccines and other crucial COVID related cargo, including oxygen concentrators and cylinders, an official release said on Monday. AAI-run airports are transporting medical essentials and equipment across the country to strengthen the country's fight against Covid. AAI's Bhubaneswar Airport and its stakeholders have

also been playing an active role by facilitating seamless transportation of medical equipment and materials 24x7, the official release said. Besides, a total of 526 oxygen concentrators, 156 empty oxygen tankers, and 140 oxygen cylinders have been transported by some 75 aircraft such as C17, C130J and AN 32 of the Indian Air Force between April 23 and May 11, it said, adding as many as 41 oxygen concentrator were transported by airlines as well.



HCL extends Covid mitigation outreach to UP, TN, other states

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tech firm HCL on Monday said it has extended its COVID-19 mitigation efforts across the country to include Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and other states. In Uttar Pradesh, the company said it has set up a 100 bedded COVID treatment facility (including 50 oxygen beds) at the Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS), Greater Noida. In Lucknow, HCL has provided six ICU ventilators, 20 oxygen beds and a mini oxygen generator plant to the Fatima Hospital. In addition to these, HCL is supporting essential equipment and consumables at an L-1 COVID Care Facility as well as the District Hospital in Hardoi, the company said in a statement. A 24x7 Integrated Control Centre, set up and supported by HCL at Gautam Buddha Nagar during the first wave, continues to respond to citizen queries in the wake of the second wave of the pandemic, it added.

Hope for US boost pushes luxury goods recovery

PNS ■ MILAN

Luxury brands are already cashing in on promises of a 21st-century version of the "Roaring '20s" in the United States, where hefty stimulus packages and an advanced vaccine campaign are accelerating post-pandemic recovery in high-end sales, according to a new study by Bain & Co. consultancy released on Monday. The rapidly rebounding US economy together with China -- already on an established growth trajectory -- could push the global market for personal luxury goods back to or even beyond pre-pandemic sales levels as early as this year, Bain partner Claudia D'Arpizio said. "We expect a very positive cycle that is just starting in the United States, where luxury



brands can really take advantage," D'Arpizio told The Associated Press, citing the stimulus and positive stock market reaction. "This together with the fact that probably consumers are already back to normal in terms of traveling, is pushing

the recovery of luxury goods." In its most optimistic outlook, Bain forecasts a full recovery and even growth to as much as 295 billion euros (USD 358 billion) as soon as this year. A more cautious scenario puts recovery to 2019 levels off until 2022.

Sales of luxury apparel, jewelry, leather goods and beauty products plunged to 217 billion euros in the pandemic year of 2020, from 281 billion euros in 2019, shedding six years of growth. Europe remains the laggard, with tourism flows from abroad still suppressed by a vaccine campaign that is behind that of the US. Other bright spots include the Middle East, in particular Dubai, which attracted high net worth individuals during the pandemic. "They did vaccinations very quickly and many wealthy people during the winter moved to working remotely from Dubai," D'Arpizio said. The pandemic is proving to be an accelerator in trends that were already happening, including more e-commerce,

an emphasis on greater inclusivity, a push toward sustainability and embrace of the second-hand market, she noted. E-commerce grew to 23 per cent of sales in 2020 from 12 per cent in 2019, a bit more than a decade into the phenomenon. It is expected to reach 30 per cent by 2025. The result is likely to be a rethink of retail footprints, with some reductions, but also emphasis on customer experience to support the on-line presence, both in terms of social media and retailing, D'Arpizio said. The second-hand market helps brands emphasize the longevity and value of their products, she noted, qualities that are especially attractive for younger consumers who are starting to power the market.

ROHIT SARAF — MORE THAN JUST A CUTE FACE

All of a sudden there was a barrage of videos that shelled our Instagram reels with only one face and that was actor Rohit Saraf, not lying, he was everywhere. Not that he dreamt of becoming a viral sensation overnight but he did become a phenomenon instantly. With girls calling him the new-gen 'cutie' and wanting to see more of him, you definitely must have seen him showing some gritty moves on the latest track that has released — *Shola!*

The popularity of viral media has been fuelled by the rapid rise of social network sites wherein we as users, metaphorically are passive carriers making such content go viral. He definitely in the truest form caused a stir on social media for a while! But, he's a lot more than just a cute face! From consecutive *Netflix* projects with *Ludo* and *Mismatched*, the actor received much praise for his performance in filmmaker Anurag Basu's crime-comedy.

Talented actors are seeking offbeat creative challenges because of OTT! The era of 'star system' has gone, you can showcase your work through it to a global audience and also watch the work of others from across the world. "It's very reassuring to see that my work is getting accepted by the masses. To be honest, this is what I had been waiting for long time and now to see it happening — it's heartwarming. It only motivates me to work harder than before! OTT most definitely has been a blessing. Considering I've had two of my biggest releases in 2020, it's played a huge role in my career graph. The kind of love and adulation I've received in the past six months feels nothing short of a dream. It's everything an aspiring artist yearns for. To see total strangers from a remote part of a town tell me 'We believe in you and want to see you soar' is very humbling. With this exposure, comes a lot of responsibility too. And I'm just working hard to ensure I live up to their expectations," shares the latest crush of India.

Just like everyone else is stuck at home, Rohit also is and believes in staying healthy as he's trying to do just that. Ensuring he takes care of himself and the ones he loves, he has also dedicated all his time working with volunteers, trying to extend a helping

hand and do his bit in trying to procure whatever requirements he can get through social media leads.

Associating himself with a few initiatives that are largely driven by students across the country for Covid relief, he's of the opinion that social media truly is like a blessing right now!

"It's surreal to see every single human being coming together and helping one another in this dire situation. I find strength in knowing that no matter what, there's always somebody who's looking out for you and that's what social media has done for all of us right now," he adds.

From time to time, every actor goes through a lot of media coverage and as mentioned earlier, Rohit is, these days, one of those actors! There's good publicity and there's bad publicity, while at times even good publicity can get onto your nerves in a pragmatic manner — too much of anything results in too many overwhelming feelings. Some feel all this makes you relevant in showbiz while actors like Rohit believes fortunately or unfortunately, today's population lives for the online world alone — "The moment it gets overwhelming, I put my phone away. Although, it doesn't get mundane at all, the fan clubs and all the people who smother me with love manage to outdo themselves every single time and do not miss a chance to make me feel special. After the release of my latest music video, the best compliments that I received was from my mother who said 'I looked like a Bollywood hero in its truest form.' And that made me quite happy."

Rohit is not impending to live up to any prevalent legacies, yet there are

many who have to and they get massively trolled for it if they tend to fail. But the actor wants all these comparisons to end once and for all.

Explaining to us that every individual has their own unique journey that should be celebrated, at the same time he also endures that it's incredibly difficult to do what, as actors, they do, and to be unkind about it, regardless of the graph, in his strong opinion is pretty ridiculous. Trolling in any circumstance is uncool and unacceptable.

Cinema is a world that he loves to reside and thrive in, he was beyond words about it when asked what power it hold in his life. The actor says he loved watching two screens collide — music and a feature film and now Rohit Saraf's life is in a whirlwind. Each of his movies have a distinct vibe but he is all heart underneath!

His killer figure is prepped to set screens ablaze and the star is primed to rule. It's onwards and upwards from here on for Rohit Saraf!

With small yet powerful roles in films like *Dear Zindagi*, *Hichki*, *Sky Is Pink*, and more, the Nepali-born Mumbaikar has made critics sit up and take notice. He's cultivated a fanbase of his own with his roles in *Mismatched* and *Ludo*. Rohit Saraf talks to *The Pioneer's*

SHIKHA DUGGAL

about being called India's newest crush, handling the overwhelming feelings of stardom, and his projects.



Love the unknown

Abominable is a computer-animated adventure film which follows a teenage girl named Yi, who encounters a young Yeti on the roof of her apartment building in Shanghai. She names him Everest and embarks on an epic quest to reunite the magical creature with his family at the highest point on earth along with her mischievous friends Jin and Peng (played by Albert Tsai). But the trio of friends will have to stay one-step ahead of Burnish, a wealthy man intent on capturing a Yeti, and zoologist Dr Zara to help Everest get home. Actor Albert Tsai shares about his experience of working on the film and more.

Excerpts:

How did you get involved?
As soon as I read the script and the character description of Peng, I just fell in love with him, so I decided to audition for the role. I was really excited to be part of a film that was portraying Chinese culture, with a modern Chinese family, which we haven't had, ever, really. The last major film was *Mulan*, which was about ancient times.

How did animator and director Jill Culton pitch Peng to you?

Just that he's a fun-loving, energetic kid. He is always intended to be the younger character and almost comic relief, but with more depth than that. He is also the optimistic one of the group. He's always playing, and when other people are about to give up, he really wants to continue the journey. He has a ton of fun on this adventure with Everest. Peng is the only one, along with Everest, who seems to be taking this journey more like a vacation. When the others are considering the next step, he's over there having a thumb war with Everest.

What did you want to bring to the role?

I did try to really infuse some of my personality into Peng. A lot of his body language and movements were sort of inspired by what I did in the recording booth because they had a camera on us when we were recording the audio, just to see what we would do. Being a TV actor, I did the movements along with the lines, which was natural for me and that they imported onto Peng.

Did Peng change at all as the film evolved?

He stayed more consistent through the various stages of production. I feel like he was always going to be the younger member of the group, the

Actor Albert Tsai says that it is human nature to be drawn to what hasn't been confirmed or discovered yet. By *The Pioneer*

comedic heart. I think there were slight personality changes... I don't know if he was quite the basketball aficionado that he became.

What is it about the Yeti creatures that we're so obsessed with?

I think it's just part of our obsession with mythical creatures. We love the unknown, and what we haven't confirmed or discovered yet. Also, what's really exciting is, we bring a different version of the Yeti into the film, as opposed to sticking to the normal depiction, which is more gorilla-like, abominable snowman who is mean and scary.

We bring a cuter, more innocent version. He's got these powers, which aren't normally part of the Yeti mythology, so it's really fun. Jill [Culton] said she wanted to base Everest off of her experience with her dogs, which is why he sort of has dog-like qualities. But he also has his own emotions and he's quite intelligent.

Was it fascinating to see the film come to life step by step?

That was one of my favorite parts of this entire experience. It was fascinating for me to see how a scene could go

from basic storyboards and sketches to animation and layout. It started out as very rough 3D animation and it got finer and finer, with lighting and effects and all that, until finally it's what you see at the movies. The scenes I saw a lot of were Everest and Yi's escape from the city, and the blueberry sequence. I tracked those two from the beginning and it was exciting for me to see how they were animated.

You're usually on your own in the recording booth. What sort of challenge was that as an actor?

It was definitely very different than what I am used to. A lot of times in the recording sessions, we would do a certain line several times, changing the nuance, and then we'd move on to the next one. It had a sequential approach, and we could play around with it a lot more. Jill was so collaborative, along with the whole team, and nothing had been set in stone yet, so we were able to ad lib a bit and improv here and there. The few recording sessions we did do together as a cast were a lot of fun, too, because that was more like traditional acting.

You're a big fan of animated film. Any favorites?

I really love *The Lion King*. I think that was the first animated movie I watched, so it was special for me. And it was a little like *Abominable*, since it was nature-focused. A favorite DreamWorks movie of mine? I love *Shrek* and *Kung Fu Panda* too, those were really funny.

You're a producer these days, what prompted that?

I've always been fascinated by what happens behind the scenes and how a team of cast, writers, producers and directors put together a TV show, so I've always wanted to get into that side of things. I've been trying to do that, and it's where I see myself in the future.



‘Art’ attack against Covid

Who says only medicines are the perfect cure. The heart needs more than pills to stay fit amid these trying times and what better than art to accentuate that? And if that can help raise funds for those in need, bring it on!

India's leading auction house, Saffronart is hosting an online art auction titled 'Art Rises for India' — a Covid-19 fundraiser by the Indian Art Community on May 19-20, wherein 122 artworks are expected to be sold within 24 hours. All proceeds of the 'no reserve' auction, including reduced buyer's premium, will be donated to grassroots-level non-governmental organisations working for the relief of those afflicted. All lots can be viewed on the website saffronart.com.

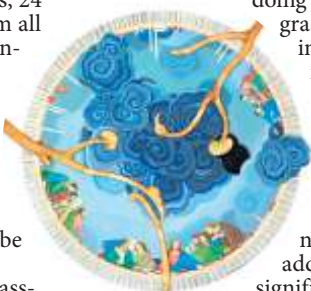
Art Rises for India features

modern and contemporary South Asian art, donated by 112 artists, 24 galleries from all over the country, collectors, and patrons to support the cause. The proceeds from the auction will be donated to seven key grassroots non-profits — Dastkar, Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, Goonj, Hemkunt Foundation, Khoj, Street Survivors, and YUVA, who are working on the ground to provide medical support and daily subsistence to those in need.

Saffronart CEO and co-founder Dinesh Vazirani said, "We, the Indian art community,

have decided to join forces in raising funds to assist NGOs doing critical work at the grassroots level, which includes providing medical support, basic amenities, and sustenance to daily labourers, migrant workers, street survivors, artists, artisans, craftspeople, and anyone in need." Saffronart, he added, hoped to raise a significant corpus of funds and do its small part in helping those in need.

Among the participating art galleries are Vadhera Art Gallery, Nature Morte, Chatterjee & Lal, Jhaveri Contemporary, Akar Prakar, etc. "I believe this is the time to pool resources to add another drop in the ocean to save lives and make a difference," says Reena Lath, director, Akar Prakar.



TIME TO SHARPEN YOUR INNER BLACK BOX

His three teen and preteen daughters find it hilarious that their father has written a book about memory; they believe he “literally can’t remember anything”. His wife, after reading the manuscript of the book, reminded him that she was, in fact, his truest love. He wisely conceded this point.

“Our brains sculpt who we are and the world we experience...Neuroscientists have their work cut out for them because the brain continues to mystify as if it were a distant planet light years away,” writes Dr Sanjay Gupta, CNN’s Emmy Award-winning Chief Medical Correspondent, in *Keep Sharp — Build a Better Brain at Any Age* (Headline Publishing Group) that also contains a brain training programme at whose core is the S.H.A.R.P. protocol.

The brain is “arguably the most enigmatic 3.3 pounds of life. Researchers even found a new kind of neuron recently — the rosehip — and still don’t know what it does. It seems to exist only in human brains but not in rodents, which may explain why so many mice brain studies never translate to humans. Our brains can be extraordinarily selfish and demanding as well. Of the total blood and oxygen that is produced in our bodies, the brain steals 20 percent of it, despite being only roughly 2.5 per cent of your body weight. There can be no life without a brain”.

“Time to meet your inner black box,” writes Gupta, who, in 2009, at the beginning of the Barack Obama administration, withdrew himself from consideration as the US Surgeon General for professional and personal reasons.

Along the way, he debunks common myths about ageing and cognitive decline, explores whether there’s the ‘best’ diet or exercise regimen for the brain, and explains whether it’s healthier to play video games that test memory and processing speed, or



to engage in more social interaction.

Discover what we can learn from ‘super-brained’ people who are in their 80s and 90s but show no signs of slowing down — and whether there are truly any benefits to drugs, supplements and vitamins. Gupta also addresses brain disease, particularly Alzheimer’s, and answers all your questions about signs and symptoms, and shows you both how to ward against it and how to care for a partner in cognitive decline.

The key to moving ahead, the author writes, is mastering the S.H.A.R.P. protocol: Slash the sugar, Hydrate smartly, Add more omega-3s from natural sources like wild cold-water fish, Reduce portions, Plan meals ahead.

Once you have done so, you’re ready for the 12-week regime that will help you achieve five important goals:

Move throughout your day and build an exercise routine into your life.

Find new ways to stimulate your brain through learning and challenging your mind.

Prioritise getting restful, routine sleep at night and incorporate daily de-stressing practices into your routine.

Introduce a new way of nourishing your body.

Connect authentically with



others and maintain a vibrant social life.

So, let’s get down to brass tracks.

“I’ve designed this programme to be as practical and easy to follow as possible. Most important, it will end up being tailored and highly individualised for you,” Gupta writes.

Weeks 1 and 2:

Dive into the five.

Move More; if you already exercise regularly, keep it up but try something different to surprise your body and use new muscles.

Love to Learn by participating in cognitively stimulating activities.

Sleep hygiene; if you get fewer than six hours of sleep per night, you can start by increasing this to at least

seven hours — the bare minimum if you want to have normal, healthy functioning physiology from your brain on down.

Eat Sanjay Style. As the author explains, he eats “only when the sun is shining”. Some have called this chrono eating — ‘chrono’ meaning relating to the body’s sense of time and its circadian rhythm throughout the twenty-four hour solar day. I believe when you eat is also important, not just what you eat.”

Connect with People; elevate your social life. For those who feel isolated, call someone you haven’t spoken with in a while and invite a friend over for dinner.

Weeks 3 and 4

Add more to your routine by choosing at least two of the following options: A 20-minute power walk after lunch most days of the week, have at least two of your meals each week feature cold water fish like salmon or trout, download a meditation app and use it daily, avoid colas.

Weeks 5 and 6

Add more to your routine by choosing at least three of the following options: Start a gratitude journal and list at least five people or situations

you are grateful for, add 15 more minutes to your exercise routine, try a yoga or Pilates class, avoid all processed foods, add a relaxing activity to your bedtime routine such as engaging in mindfulness meditation.

Weeks 7 and 8

Add more to your new routine by checking off all five of the following ideas: Look for opportunities to volunteer in your community, schedule a check-up with your doctor if you haven’t had one within the year, write a handwritten letter to a younger loved one in the family, read a book in a genre or subject area that interests you but that you’re not used to reading.

Weeks 9 and 10

Ask yourself the following questions and adjust accordingly based on your answers: Am I getting at least 30 minutes of exercise at least five days a week, am I learning something new that challenges my mind and demands developing different skills, am I getting more restful sleep on a regular basis and managing stress better, am I following the S.H.A.R.P. dietary protocol, am I connecting with friends and family members regularly?

Week 11

Think about how you’d want your family members to deal with a diagnosis of dementia, including Alzheimer’s disease.

Week 12

Make a list of all things you’ve done differently these past several weeks and ask yourself: What worked and didn’t? Can I improve? Then use the week to plan ahead. “There’ll always be a place for good old-fashioned habits like eating more vegetables and working out regularly. But for those time-tested habits coupled with what’s in store for us will ultimately make for the best life — one that we’ll want to remember and will remember. Keep sharp,” Gupta concludes.

‘Life in a forest evokes empathy for all living beings’

Award-winning children’s author Vaishali Shroff belongs to a family of wildlife enthusiasts. While her husband and children look for interesting sightings and topographies to photograph, she looks for stories and lessons to be learnt, like for instance, that life in a forest evokes empathy for all living beings.



exciting professions don’t just exist in concrete jungles.

“If you are committed to conserving the environment, you can be so many fascinating things inside a forest and save it for generations to come. Life in a forest teaches one to be patient, passionate, curious, adventurous, and above all, empathetic towards all living beings and ‘Sita’s Chitwan’ is an attempt to talk about that,” Shroff explained.

And, with illustrations by Kalp Sanghvi, what a story it is! With a spring in her step and a group of eager tourists, Sita breezes through the forest. But when astray and face to face with a mamma rhino, will she be able to listen to the stillness of the jungle? Join this young Nepali as she unravels the secrets of the forest through a tour of this magnificent Park that is home to 68 species of mammals, 544 species of

birds, 56 species of herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) and 126 species of fish, CNP is especially renowned for its protection of the One-Horned Rhinoceros, the Royal Bengal Tiger and the Gharial Crocodile.

Intermingled through this is Chitwan’s history, its people, culture, biodiversity, conservation practices, and forest-related professions.




How did Shroff choose this particular format for presenting the story?

“I love the format of informational fiction where you use an exciting story to talk about something that’s potentially mundane. I first experimented with this format in my award-winning book, *The Adventures of Padma and a Blue Dinosaur*, the first book that talks exclusively about Indian dinosaurs and all you want to know about palaeontology in India.”




“Children, parents, and educators must read this book, not just to be inspired, not just to know more about CNP, but to feel that connect with nature and understand that the smallest of efforts can have a huge impact on the environment and climate crisis we are going through. No effort is too small. Everything counts. Everything,” Shroff had asserted.

FUN




ARCHIE






CALVIN AND HOBBS





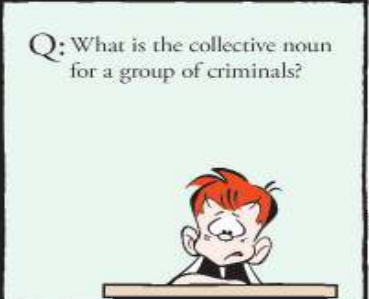
GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

JUNIOR CROSSWORD 854

1		2		3		4		5	
6									8
9									
12									
16									
18									

ACROSS

1 A large animal
6 Poultry product
7 Shriek
9 A teacher, usually for one pupil at a time
11 Train tracks
12 Follows an order
13 Car engine
16 Very easy to do
18 A young sheep
19 A building material that sets hard

3 As well
4 Big whirlwind
5 A drink
8 Very unhappy
10 World sports games held every four years
14 Buy and sell
15 Observed
17 Unwell

SOLUTION

P	C	A	S	E					
M	O	T	O	R	C				
E	D								
O	T	H	E						
A	C	E	L	E	B	R	A	T	I
A	T	T	E	R					
T	I	G	H	T					
O	V	E	R						
N	W	K	E	D					

SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

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.



BELLAMKONDA GANESH TO MAKE ACTING DEBUT WITH VIVAH

According to industry sources, it is learnt that the producer will turn actor with the Telugu remake of Hindi hit film *Vivah*. It is likely to star *Uppena* girl Krithi Shetty as the film's leading lady.

After his tryst with production of films like *Alludu Adhurs*, *Rabhasa*, etc., Bellamkonda Ganesh, the younger brother of Bellamkonda Sai Srinivas, is all set to test waters in acting. Produced under their family banner, the producer-actor also tried his stint in Bollywood. According to the latest buzz in the film fraternity, Ganesh Bellamkonda's father Bellamkonda Suresh is planning to remake the Hindi film *Vivah* in Telugu by launching his younger son as an actor. Apparently, Bellamkonda Suresh also bought the remake rights of *Vivah*. It is also being heard that the producer is

planning to cash in on *Uppena* girl Krithi Shetty's fame in this debut film. Currently, Krithi Shetty is basking in the glory of *Uppena*, and the young actress has her hands full with a number of projects in her kitty. She will be seen sharing screen space with natural star Nani in *Shyam Singha Rao*, which is one of the much-hyped movies of the Telugu film industry. Currently, Bellamkonda Suresh is on the hunt for a suitable director and the shoot is expected to commence in the latter half of this year. The Hindi film *Vivah* has Kabir Singh fame Shahid Kapoor and Amrita Rao in the lead roles. Set up for an arranged marriage, a young couple enjoys an old-fashioned courtship, until an accident days before their wedding tests their nascent love.



THARUN BHASCKER'S ROOM NO. 54 TO STREAM FROM MAY 21

ZEE5, the only OTT platform, has been catering to the varied tastes of its Telugu patrons with original web series, direct-to-digital releases, films and more. Last year, the biggest political thriller *Chadarangam*, the universal comedy *Amrutham Dvitheeya*, the sports drama *Loser*, and the crime-action original *Shoot-Out At Alair* received widespread appreciation and reception. This year, ZEE5 is back with a new web series, titled *Room No. 54*, which is presented by Tharun Bhascker, who directed the National Award-winning *Pelli Choopulu* and the new-age *Ee Nagarani Emaindi*. The web series, which will exclusively stream on ZEE5 from May 21.

The web series is set in the backdrop of an Engineering college and tells the story of four Engineering students who stay in a hostel. Their room (which is numbered 54) has got a unique feature. Whoever stays in the room ends up developing a special bonding with someone from the subsequent batch. What kind of issues do the four guys living in the room face? How do they overcome them? That is the rest of the story. Moin as Venkat Rao, Krishna Prasad as Yuvaraj, Pawan Ramesh as Prasanna and Krishna Teja as Babai will be seen in this web series. Swetha and Navya have played key roles. Several famous actors will be seen in guest roles. Speaking about *Room No. 54*, Tharun Bhascker said, "Due to the pandemic, youngsters are missing

their college. I too miss my college days. Especially, Backbench students must be missing their college days more. Memories related to college days are for a lifetime. At a time when we are cooped up at home due to the pandemic, our web series is going to keep you all engaged with an interesting story. Newcomer Siddharth Gautham has written and directed this in iDream Media production. I am sure that you will find yourself and your friends in each of the episodes. Please don't miss it when it releases on May 21 on Zee 5." From May 14th, *Battala Ramaswamy Biopic* started streaming on ZEE5. This is yet another original film from ZEE5 Telugu. From May 13th, Salman Khan-starrer *Radhe* (Hindi) started streaming on ZeePlex.

Vaishnav Tej is a hockey player

Vaishnav Tej, who is basking in the success of *Uppena* has become the most sought-after busiest actor of the new generation after the blockbuster of his debut film. Expectations on the actor's next projects are at their peaks by mega fans and movie lovers. According to the latest report, the young actor signed an interesting film which will be backed by Nagarjuna Akkineni's production house Annapurna Studios. The film is a sports-based drama in which Vaishnav Tej will play a sports person, whose official announcement will be made soon. The young mega hero-starrer is set against the backdrop of hockey and the pre-production work is going on currently. Vaishnav Tej will beef up for the role and the movie is expected to go on the floor early next year. It is known news that before the release of *Uppena*, Vaishnav Tej had started the shoot of his second project *Kondapolam* in the direction of Krish which is gearing up for its release soon. The film has *Manmadhudu 2* fame Rakul Preet Singh as the female lead. Vaishnav Tej has also signed his third film in the direction of Gireesayya and the shoot commenced recently. The upcoming untitled drama is being bankrolled by BVSN Prasad.



FIRST LOOK

Actor-comedian Srinivas Reddy, who is known for many films alongside Mass Maharaja Ravi Teja is starring in a multi-starrer *Mugguru Monagallu* being helmed by Abhilash Reddy. Kannada star Deekshith Shetty and Vennela Ramarao are part of the lead cast in the film billed to be a wholesome entertainer. On Monday, the makers of the film have released the first look of the film. Going by the poster, Srinivas Reddy is hearing-impaired, Deekshith Shetty is vocally challenged and Ramarao is visually challenged. The poster promises that *Mugguru Monagallu* is going to be a hilarious entertainer with a unique concept. The title reminds us of Chiranjeevi's yesteryear classic *Mugguru Monagallu* which saw iconic Chiru playing three roles. Achut Rama Rao is producing the film which has completed its production phase.



Asuran fame Nitish no more

Actor Nitish Veera, who was famous for playing Pandiyan in Dhanush's blockbuster movie *Asuran*, passed away in the wee hours of Monday. Nitish Veera was 45 years old. He succumbed to Covid-19 in Chennai's Omandurar hospital and breathed his last on Monday. Nitish Veera is also known for his performances in films such as *Pudhupettai* and *Vennila Kabadi Kuzhu*. He had also played supporting roles in the movies like Rajinikanth-starrer *Kaala* and Dhanush-starrer action drama *Asuran*. Nitish Veera's role as the casteist accountant in Vetri Maaran's directorial venture *Asuran* brought him huge recognition and praise. Nitish Veera's demise came as a shock to the Tamil film industry. The second wave of

coronavirus has affected scores of people, it has also been the reason for a number of deaths in Kollywood over the last few months. Celebrities and the fans expressed shock over Nitish Veera's demise and offered condolences on Twitter. Vishnu Vishal took to his Twitter and wrote: RIP Nitish Veera It pains to write this... Acted with him in *Vennilakabadi Kuzhu* and *Maaveran Kittu*. This coronavirus 2nd wave is taking away so many lives. So be careful! Keep your loved ones really close to you. "Actor #NitishVeera who acted in #Kaala, #Asuran, #Vennilakabadi Kuzhu2 passed away due to #Covid complications in Chennai Omandurar hospital early this morning. He was 45. Another young life gone too soon.. RIP!" Ramesh Bela tweeted.

Eng Tests aren't warm-ups for WTC final: Wagner

► **shortpasses**

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

New Zealand fast bowler Neil Wagner on Monday said his team is not going to treat the upcoming two-match series against England as warm-ups for the World Test Championship (WTC) final versus India.

India and New Zealand will lock horns for the inaugural WTC title, at Southampton's Ageas Bowl, from June 18-22, four days after the Test series against hosts England is scheduled to conclude.

"We're not going to treat these two Test matches against England just as warm-ups (for the WTC final)," Wagner told reporters at the Auckland airport before his departure.

"I know for a fact we're going to get out there and pride ourselves the way we've been playing Test cricket and we want to win Test matches for New Zealand," he added.

A majority of the New Zealand Test players arrived in London on Monday for the two-match series against England and the WTC final against India, but Wagner was part of the second batch of cricketers to leave for their UK tour.

Wagner, ranked number three in the world among Test bowlers, trained with the Dukes ball in Lincoln before departing for England.

Dukes ball is used for Test matches in England.

He said he benefited from the camp.



NZ pacers Neil Wagner, center, and Tim Southee, right, during training camp @BLACKCAPS



"It's been quite nice, it's obviously got different characteristics to the Kookaburra," Wagner said.

"The way we've been training for the last while is something we didn't always have in the past, having the facilities and having a marquee up and getting a number of training sessions in before going to England.

"On tours in the past you rock up there and you've only got a couple of training sessions and maybe one head out with the Dukes ball before the first Test and with that you can find yourself a little bit behind."

He added, "Having had those little bit of trainings leading into it has been quite beneficial, just because it's a little bit different, and obviously adapting to it. It's been really good

preparation and everybody is excited bowling with it."

This will be Wagner's third trip to England as part of the New Zealand squad, although he played there only during the 2013 Test series, besides playing in the County Championship for Lancashire.

"Sometimes you have to control all that because there's a high expectation of the ball doing a lot and moving around but sometimes you can get there and it can be quite flat and slow as well," Wagner said.

"The nice thing about it is we've got a wealth of experience and the guys have been there before so we can feed off each other and bounce ideas off each other as well," he added.

Archer out of NZ series

London: England pacer Jofra Archer, who recently returned to action after missing the now-suspended IPL, has been ruled out of the Test series against New Zealand as his elbow injury has resurfaced.

The 26-year-old played a game for his County side Sussex against Kent but had to be pulled out of the game after bowling just five overs.

Before this match, the fast bowler had also featured in a game against Surrey last week in a second XI game, bowling 29.2 overs.

"England and Sussex seamer Jofra Archer has been ruled out of the LV= Insurance Test Series against New Zealand starting next month," an England and ales Cricket Board (ECB) statement read.

".....He was suffering from pain in his right elbow when bowling and was unable to bowl in the final two days of the match."

Archer had declared himself fit for the Test series against New Zealand, starting June 2 in London, but the pain in his elbow scuttled his and ECB's plan.

The cricket board is now pondering the right treatment for Archer. The England squad for the New Zealand series will be named on Tuesday.

PTI

INDIA'S TESTS WEREN'T FIXED: ICC

DUBAI: The ICC on Monday dismissed claims made by news channel Al Jazeera that India's Test matches against England (2016) and Australia (2017) were fixed, saying the passages of play identified as fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore "implausible as a fix".

DORTMUND, WOLFSBURG IN CL

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund and Wolfsburg clinched Champions League qualification on Sunday night. Dortmund won 3-1 at Mainz & Wolfsburg drew 2-2 at Leipzig to ensure both sides will finish among the top four to qualify.

EVERTON END CL HOPES

LIVERPOOL: Everton's slim hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League were extinguished on Sunday by a 1-0 loss to last-place Sheffield United.

AC MILAN COMPLICATE CL FATE

MILAN: AC Milan complicated their passage to the Champions League with a goalless draw at home against Cagliari. They could have sealed a return to CL with a win but dropped points with a top-four finish going down to the wire in their final game.

IGA ENTERS WTA TOP 10

ROME: Iga Swiatek, who won the Italian Open on Sunday jumped six places on the WTA Tour rankings to enter the top 10 on Monday. The 19-year-old player is now ninth. Agencies

Oz IPL cricketers return home

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia's IPL players, including Pat Cummins, Glenn Maxwell and Steve Smith, arrived in Sydney on Monday after a stop-over at Maldives due to travel ban from Covid-ravaged India, almost two weeks after the T20 league was suspended due to the health crisis.

Most of the 38 members of the Australian contingent, including players, officials and commentators who participated at the non-suspended league, landed at the Sydney airport Monday morning after spending 10 days at Maldives.

Australian players, however, couldn't head home immediately as the country had imposed a travel ban from India, which is battling a deadly second wave



Glenn Maxwell arrives for hotel quarantine in Sydney on Monday

of the coronavirus.

They will all be spending two weeks in a Sydney hotel for the mandatory quarantine.

According to national broadcaster ABC, Smith,

Cummins, Warner and Ricky Ponting, who coached Delhi Capitals, were among the people on the Air Seychelles flight.

Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey also

headed home on Sunday via Doha after testing negative for Covid-19 on Friday.

CA GRATEFUL TO BCCI

Cricket Australia's interim chief executive Nick Hockley on Monday said he was "grateful" to the BCCI for ensuring a "safe and quick" return of Australia's IPL contingent from India following a stopover in Maldives.

"We are delighted. We're really grateful to the BCCI for getting them home quickly and safely. I haven't spoken to them since they've landed, but obviously we've been in text exchange and I'm sure they'll be very relieved and very appreciative to be home," Hockley was quoted as saying in *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Starc back for WI tour

Sydney: Australia welcomed back their star players and picked four spinners in an extended 23-man squad named Monday for a white-ball tour of the West Indies in July.

The team will be captained by Aaron Finch and will feature the return of Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, David Warner and Pat Cummins, who all missed the recent trip to New Zealand.

The whirlwind tour starts with the first of five Twenty20 internationals in St Lucia on July 9 and ends with the third of three one-day international in Barbados on July 24 as the teams prepare for the T20 World Cup in India later this year.

AFP

Serena gets 1st clay win of season

Parma: Serena Williams brushed aside the challenge of local teenager Lisa Pigato in the opening round of WTA tournament in Parma on Monday. Williams, ranked eighth in the world, beat the 572nd-ranked Pigato, making her WTA debut, 6-3, 6-2 in the first meeting between them.

Serena made a sluggish start as the 17-year-old came up with three glorious winners to break the 23-time Grand Slam champion in the first game.

The American, however, got into gear and dropped just five more points on her serve, firing down six aces and many more that Pigato could barely reach.

Williams, however, was



Serena Williams in action during her match at Emilia Romagna Open

full of praise for her teenage opponent.

"Lisa played really well," she said in her on-court interview.

"She told me she was only 17. Her future is super-bright. She handled the moment well, so I look forward to cheering for her in the future."

AP

'No surprise': Clarke on Bancroft's revelations on ball tampering issue

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former captain Michael Clarke won't be surprised if it comes to light that more players were aware of the ball-tampering plot in 2018 as he accused Cricket Australia of sweeping the issue under the carpet.

The scandal had led to a review of Australia's win-at-all-cost team culture and led to one-year bans being slapped on then captain Steve Smith, his deputy David Warner and a nine-month suspension on opener Cameron Bancroft, who had the sandpaper in his possession.

The issue was put under the spotlight again when Bancroft last week revealed that Australian bowlers in the team at that time might have had some knowledge about the plot.

"If you are playing sport at the highest level you know your tools that good it's not funny. Can you imagine that ball being thrown back to the bowler and the bowler not knowing about it? Please," Clarke told *Sky Sports* radio on Monday.

"I love how the articles in the paper are, 'It is such a big surprise that Cameron Bancroft has made a...' Actually, if you read his quotes, it is not what he did say as what he didn't say in regards to other people knowing about 'sandpaperage,'" he said.

Following Bancroft's interview, Cricket Australia said it was open to a re-investigation into the incident and its integrity team has already approached the pacer for more information.

"What's the surprise? That more than three people knew? I don't think anybody who has played the game of cricket, or knows a little bit about cricket, would know that in a team like that, at the highest level, when the ball is such an important part of the game," Clarke said.

"If you'd played the game of cricket, you would know more than three people know what was going on in there. The problem Cricket Australia has is the fact they've tried to sweep it under the carpet and not come out and tell the full story.

"You don't have to have played cricket at the highest level. If you know anything about the game of cricket, you know on that day, on that field, what went down, more than three people had to know about it. Impossible not to..."

"That's why there's going to be finger-pointing until, I think until someone writes their book and tells the complete, honest truth. It will continue because it hasn't been finished, so much is left unsaid from the players and even what happened with staff."

Clarke also threw his weight behind Bancroft. "I don't think Cameron Bancroft should be smashed for what he's come out and said, he's tried to say nothing but he's doing an interview," he said.



Barcelona players hold the trophy aloft after the UEFA Women's Champions League final match between Chelsea and FC Barcelona in Gothenburg on Sunday. Barcelona won 4-0 @FCBtermeni

French title chase down to wire

AFP ■ PARIS

Lille's bid to win the Ligue 1 title will go to the final weekend of the season after Sunday's goalless draw with Saint-Etienne allowed Paris Saint-Germain to moved to within a point of the leaders.

Reigning champions PSG strolled to a simple 4-0 win over 10-man Reims to pile the pressure on Lille, who will nonetheless claim the French title for the first time since 2011 if they win at mid-table Angers next Sunday.

Christophe Galtier's Lille hit the post in the final seconds of a frustrating match with little in the way of goalmouth incident.

It was not the display the fans who had gathered to follow the team bus to the Stade Pierre Mauroy ahead of the match expected and will leave those supporters with frayed finger nails next weekend.

PSG meanwhile were gifted a perfect start at the Parc des Princes when Yunus Abdelhamid handled Kylian Mbappe's shot in front of an empty goal, conceding a penalty and being sent off in the process.

Neymar slotted home the spot-kick in the 13th minute and 11

minutes later Mbappe pounced on a wayward pass across the area by Thomas Foket to tap home the second. Marquinhos made it three in the 68th minute with a thumping header from Neymar's corner.

Kean rounded off an easy win for PSG one minute from the end. Monaco are also still in with a potential shout for the title after their 2-1 home win over Rennes moved Niko Kovac's third-placed side three points behind Lille with one to play.

However the Principality club have a significantly inferior goal difference to both Lille and PSG.



Neymar hugs Mbappe after PSG win

AP

Ter Stegen out of Euro 2020

AFP ■ BARCELONA

German international goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen on Monday announced that he is to undergo an operation on his right knee that will rule him out of Euro 2020.

"I have decided together with the medical team of the club (Barcelona) that I will do a complementary intervention on my knee. I'm sad that I will miss the Euro 2020 this summer with Germany," the 29-year-old said on Instagram. "For the first time in many years I will be a fan at home supporting my country. I hope we win it!"

Barca said in a statement that Ter Stegen is scheduled to go under



the knife on May 20 in Malmö, Sweden, ruling him out of the club's final LaLiga game of the season next weekend.

His announcement comes a day after Barca were officially left out of the running for the La Liga title after a 2-1 home defeat by Celta Vigo left them seven points behind La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid with one game to play.

Ter Stegen has played just 24 times for his country as he has struggled to dislodge Bayern Munich stopper and Germany captain Manuel Neuer from the number one spot.

Germany are in Group F alongside world champions France, Euro 2016 winners Portugal and Hungary.

Chinese TT world champ left out of Olympics singles

Shanghai: Table tennis world champion Liu Shiwen has been controversially left out of China's women's singles line-up for the Tokyo Olympics and will instead play doubles and team events.

The 30-year-old won a team title as China swept all four Gold medals at the Rio 2016 Games, but she has never won the Olympic singles crown in her trophy-laden career.

China announced a six-member squad, with reigning Olympic champion Ma Long and world number one Fan Zhendong the two men's singles players. Liu, crowned singles world champion in 2019, will play the mixed doubles and women's team events. World number one Chen Meng and Sun Yingsha were named for the women's singles.

AFP

Federer excited for his comeback



AFP ■ GENEVA

Roger Federer on Monday said that he expects to return to the top tier of tennis even though the next generation of players will have gained ground during his lengthy injury lay-off.

Federer begins his comeback-proper on Swiss home soil in Geneva on Tuesday, with the 39-year-old tennis legend starting a run of tournaments including the French Open, Halle, Wimbledon and then the Tokyo Olympics.

Federer returned to the courts in March, having been out for more than a year follow-

ing two knee surgeries, winning his first match in Qatar before losing his second.

Doha was his first appearance since January 2020 and an Australian Open semi-final defeat to Novak Djokovic.

"I'm just concerned about where my game is at. The guys on tour are all in a good rhythm. The level that everybody is producing in great. I want to achieve that as well again," Federer told reporters.

His old rivals Djokovic and Rafael Nadal played out a two-hour 49-minute final in Rome on Sunday, with Nadal claiming a 7-5, 1-6, 6-3 victory to match the Serbian world number one's record of 36 Masters 1000 series titles.

"I'm excited about the comeback, that's what my focus needs to be on and not about trying to be at the same level as Rafa and Novak right now," Federer said.

But the 20-time Grand Slam title winner added: "I believe I will be part of the top tier."

World Cup in Russia in 2018 where they beat England in the semi-final before losing 4-2 to France in the final.

That group of experienced players includes defenders Domagoj Vida, Dejan Lovren and Sime Vrsaljko, midfielders Mateo Kovacic, Marcelo Brozovic and Milan Badelj as well as attackers Ivan Perisic, Andrej Kramaric and Ante Rebic.

BELGIUM INCLUDE WITSEL
Bursells: Belgium coach Roberto Martinez on Monday named a 26-strong squad for Euro including Axel Witsel.

Witsel underwent an operation on his achilles tendon in January and resumed running just a few days ago, leaving his availability for the June 11-July 11 tournament in doubt.