

ANALYSIS 7
MAKE THE COVID JABS
FREE FOR EVERYONE**MONEY 8**
MARKETS RECOUP INITIAL LOSSES
TO END FLAT; RIL, BANKS WEIGH**SPORTS 11**
COVID BURSTS
IPL BUBBLE

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY MAY 4, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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THALAPATHY
VIJAY TO JOIN
HANDS WITH
VAMSHI...
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CENTRAL VISTA: GOVT SETS DEADLINE FOR NEW HOUSE FOR PM

A new home for the Prime Minister is to be built by December 2022 as part of the grand Central Vista project that has received an environmental all-clear in the middle of a raging pandemic that has halted most activities. The Central Vista project, designated an 'essential service' so that construction work in the heart of Covid-hit Delhi is uninterrupted by the virus lockdown, has taken a big step forward after the government's green clearance. Despite strong objections by opposition parties and activists, the government has worked out a strict time line for the ₹ 20,000 crore makeover plan.



MAMATA: NANDIGRAM RO DID NOT ORDER RECOUNTING AS HE FEARED FOR HIS LIFE

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee claimed on Monday the returning officer of Nandigram did not order recounting of votes even after she demanded it as he feared for his life. Addressing a press meet, Banerjee reaffirmed she will move court over the election result in the constituency where she lost narrowly to BJP's Suwendu Adhikari. Banerjee made public a purported SMS from the RO to an official in the office of the state's Chief Electoral Officer, where he voiced fear he could face dire consequences if he ordered recounting, and may even have to die by suicide.



FULL ADVANCE OF OVER RS 1,700 CR RELEASED TO SII FOR 11CR DOSES: GOVT

The Health Ministry on Monday said that 100 per cent advance of Rs 1732.50 crore was released to the Serum Institute of India on April 28 for 11 crore doses of Covishield vaccine during May, June and July. The amount, which after TDS was Rs 1699.50 crore, was received by the SII on April 28 itself, it said. As on date, against the last order of 10 crore doses for supplies of Covishield vaccine, 8.744 crore doses have been delivered till May 3, the ministry said, adding, media reports alleging that the Centre has not placed any fresh order for COVID-19 vaccines are "incorrect and not based on facts".



SC DIRECTS CENTRE TO REVISIT ITS VACCINE PRICING POLICY

The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to revisit its Covid-19 vaccine pricing policy, saying it would prima facie result in a detriment to the right to public health. A bench headed by Justice DY Chandrachud said as of date, manufacturers have suggested two different prices, a lower price which is applicable to the Centre and a higher price which is applicable to the quantities purchased by state governments. Compelling states to negotiate with manufacturers on grounds of promoting competition will result in a serious detriment to the 18 to 44 years age group, who will be vaccinated by state governments, the SC said.

**Opposition is misguided in its celebrations, it's the real loser**

2

**BJP hasn't lost anything, it's not a loss of face for Modi**

5

**IGST waived on import of relief material received as donation**

8

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Chaitra & Krishna Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi : Ashtami: 01:09 pm

Nakshatram : Shravana: 08:26 am

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

Rahukalam : 03:23 pm - 04:58 pm

Yamagandam : 09:02 am - 10:37 am

Varjyam : 12:33 pm - 02:12 pm

Gulika : 12:12 pm - 01:48 pm

Good Time : (to start any important work)

Amritakalam : 10:27 pm - 12:06 am

Abhijit Muhurtham : 11:47 am - 12:38 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly sunny

Temp: 37/26

Humidity: 53%

Sunrise: 05:48 am

Sunset: 06:37 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated on 3, 2021 5:00 PM

Partial curfew in AP from May 5

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With the spike in Covid-19 cases, partial curfew will be imposed in Andhra Pradesh for 14 days starting from Wednesday, May 5.

Section 144 will be in force and all shops shall be allowed to remain open from 6 am to 12 pm. Only emergency services will be allowed from 12 pm thereon.

The decision to impose partial curfew was taken by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy during the review meeting on Covid, vaccination, Nadu-Nedu (Health) and YSR Kanti Velugu on Monday in view of the spike in the number of new infections. The decision was taken balancing the daily needs of the people and ensuring that economic activity is not hit.

The Chief Minister directed officials to focus on identifying the primary contacts at the earliest possible, by conducting more tests. He also instructed the authorities to see that there was no shortage of doctors and paramedical personnel in the government empanelled hospitals.

Further, the Chief Minister directed them to ensure that all hospitals should have enough oxygen supplies to treat the patients. "In the worst case scenario, import oxygen and make suitable arrangements to store it," Jagan said, adding that no hospital should report oxygen shortage.

2



Some Nitrogen plants get nod to produce O2

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board on Monday permitted a few industries in Visakhapatnam to convert their existing nitrogen plants into medical oxygen generating units to meet the growing demand for oxygen due to spurt in Covid-19 cases.

APPCB Chairman A K Parida said the industries have been asked to use Pressure

Swing Adsorption technology for the conversion process. The Central Pollution Control Board would identify the vendors and provide technical support along with the APPCB to undertake the task on a war-footing to overcome the current short supply of medical oxygen.

Covid-19 hospitals identified by the state government would get direct supply of oxygen from these industries, Parida said.

AP logs 18,972 fresh Covid cases

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh crossed the one million mark in total recoveries of Covid-19 patients even as it added 18,972 fresh cases of the infection in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Monday.

The latest bulletin said 10,227 patients had recovered in 24 hours, taking the gross to 10,03,935. Also, 71 fresh fatalities

were reported in the state in a day, taking the cumulative toll to 8,207.

After 1.67 crore tests, the total confirmed positives shot up to 11,63,994. The state's active case-load now was 1,51,852, the bulletin said.

Only Kurnool district reported more than 2,000 fresh cases while Kadapa and Krishna registered less than a thousand each. Ten dis-

tricts added between 1,000 and 2,000 new cases each in a day.

East Godavari, Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram saw nine fresh Covid-19 fatalities each, Anantapur and Kurnool seven each, Krishna, Prakasam and Srikulam six each in a day.

Chittoor district reported five fatalities, Guntur four, SPS Nellore two and West Godavari one Coronavirus death.

24 die in K'taka hospital, O2 shortage blamed

PNS ■ BENGALURU

In yet another hospital tragedy in the country in recent days, 24 patients, 23 of them Covid- infected, died in Karnataka's Chamara-janagar due to alleged oxygen shortage in the district hospital in the last 24 hours, with the government warning of stringent action against those found guilty.

The government ordered a probe into the matter and appointed senior IAS officer Shivayogi Kalasad as the inquiry officer.

Following the incident, Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa convened a meeting with oxygen producers, where a number of decisions were taken to ensure supply of allocated quantity of oxygen to the state by the Centre.

Among these were to reduce the time taken to refill oxygen tankers, provide a green corridor for faster commuting of oxygen tankers and avoid unnecessary delay at toll gates. Utilising the service of the LPG tanker drivers in case of emergency was also another impor-

tant decision.

Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar maintained that only three people had died due to oxygen shortage and not 24 as reported, though he stressed that the probe would reveal the truth.

The incident evoked a sharp response from the Congress, with party leader Rahul Gandhi wondering "how much more suffering before the 'system' wakes up."

In heart-breaking episodes preceding today's incident in the country, a fire at a mall in Mumbai

housing a Covid- designated hospital in March left nine, including those on ventilators, dead, while 22 Covid-19 patients who were either on ventilator or oxygen support, suffocated to death when their oxygen supply stopped suddenly due to a malfunction in the main storage at a civic hospital in Nashik.

Similarly, 15 Coronavirus patients died after a fire broke out at the Intensive Care Unit of a private hospital in Palghar district, also in Maharashtra in April.

2

SCS hopes brighten on BJP's Pondy win

SNCH ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

The BJP coming to power in Puducherry and tasting defeat in West Bengal may be politically advantageous for Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

Those considered to be in the close circles of the Chief Minister opine that chances of achieving Special Category Status for Andhra Pradesh have improved after the results of the most recent elections.

In its election manifesto for Puducherry, the BJP promised Special Union Territory Status to facilitate increased devolution of funds from 25 percent to 40 percent to ensure development. The BJP said that this was included in

the manifesto after getting suggestions from 50,000 people.

When he was in the opposition and after becoming the Chief Minister, Jagan has been consistently demanding Special Category Status to AP as promised in Parliament.

In fact, every political party in Andhra Pradesh, and even the general public, has been demanding SCS for the state. The demand is so intense that it can best be described as 'sentiment' of the people of Andhra Pradesh. However, the BJP-led Union government has been refusing to grant Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh quoting the Finance Commission recommendation not to grant SCS to any state or Union Territory.

2



Gurumoorthy thanks Jagan for the trust

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Newly-elected Tirupati MP Maddila Gurumoorthy on Monday called on Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy at his camp office here.

He thanked Jagan for giving the opportunity to contest for the Lok Sabha seat from the YSRCP and for supporting him all the while. Dr Gurumoorthy presented his certificate of victory.

The Chief Minister congratulated the newly-elected MP and party leaders on his solid victory in the Tirupati Parliament by-election with a majority of 2,71,592 votes.

HC grants anticipatory bail to ABV

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In major relief to former Intelligence chief AB Venkateswar Rao, the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Monday granted anticipatory bail to the officer who has been under suspension for his alleged involvement in various corruption issues and also for his derogatory remarks against the state government.

The Anti-Corruption Bureau had registered a case against ABV, as the former Intelligence Chief is popularly known, in connection with the alleged irregularities over procurement of defence equipment. ABV headed the State Intelligence wing during the TDP rule and was close to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

2

HC adjourns AP capital shifting case to Aug 23

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A three-member bench of the AP High Court, headed Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami, on Monday deferred hearing of petitions against the shifting of executive capital of the State from Amaravati to Visakhapatnam to August 23.

The High Court had earlier declared that it would take up hear-

ing from May 3 petitions filed by farmers of Amaravati opposing the three-capitals' proposal and abolition of AP Capital Region Development Authority.

However, the High Court is in no mood to take up regular hearing of any cases at present in the wake of the rapidly rising number of Coronavirus cases.

2

MGNREGA spending in AP at highest-ever

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

While the whole world was reeling due to the Covid-induced times of distress, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was the unrivalled saviour for rural folks in Andhra Pradesh.

The job guarantee scheme was introduced by the UPA government to provide employment for rural folks in times and distress and it has fulfilled that objective.

An analysis of MGNREGA implementation in Andhra Pradesh had shown that expenditure under the Act has increased in 2020-21 compared to the last two years, to more than Rs 10,020 crore. This is in fact the highest in the history of



the scheme implementation in the state. Expenditure was only Rs 6,594.61 crore in 2019-20 and Rs

30 PERCENT INCREASE IN PERSON DAYS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In comparison to the last two Financial Years, there has been a significant increase in the wage employment provided under MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh. The total number of person days has increased to more than 26.04 crore in 2020-21, which is almost a 30 percent increase from 20.08 crore in 2019-20.

This makes it the year with the highest number of person days,

compared to 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Historically more person days are being generated during the summer which means the first three months in the financial year as agriculture and allied livelihood opportunities are minimal. Despite the lockdown due to the pandemic, this year also, more than 75 percent of all the person days generated in the whole year FY 2020-21, were from the first four months.

2

9,210.50 crore in 2018-19. Predominantly MGNREGA is a central funded program, and only

10 percent of the expenditure is borne by the state.

2

The BJP did not lose anything, real loser is the Congress

There is no doubt that Congress, Left parties and pseudo-secularists form a majority of those who are celebrating the BJP's failure to post impressive victories in Assembly elections to five states in general and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inability to lead BJP to victory in West Bengal in particular.

They would not understand if one says any number of times that the BJP is based on an ideology and always tries to enlist the support of the people irrespective of electoral victories and failures.

The party workers worked with the same zeal and enthusiasm when the Jana Sangh secured only two seats or when the BJP had over 300 seats in Lok Sabha. The BJP's style of working is based on its

ideological strengths rather than anything else.

But what about the Left parties that are celebrating the BJP's electoral reverses? The Left parties that ruled West Bengal for over three-and-a-half decades did not win even one seat. Why have the people rejected the Left in spite of having an alliance with the Congress that ruled the country for over five-and-a-half decades?

When will wisdom dawn on these parties? Did the people of West Bengal reject the BJP? Going through the election results reveals that this is not so, while the truth is that the people rejected the Congress and Left parties outright.

The BJP was never in power in West Bengal. In the last Assembly elections, it won

When will wisdom dawn on the Opposition parties? Did the people of West Bengal reject the BJP? Going through the election results reveals that this is not so, while the truth is that the people rejected the Congress and Left parties outright.

only three seats and this time, it won 77. The BJP got 38.13 percent of popular votes. Compared to the percentage of votes the BJP got in the Lok Sabha elections, its vote share shrank by a mere 1.5 per cent.

Bengal voters edged out the CPM (vote share 4.72 percent) and the Congress (2.94 percent) from the political scenario of the state.

In one way, the Congress and Left parties prostrated before Mamata Banerjee and destroyed themselves to halt

the victory march of the BJP. Had these parties given stiff competition to the TMC, the TMC votes would have split benefiting the BJP, if the statistics are any indication.

The BJP presented a strong development agenda to people of West Bengal, apprising them of the corruption and scams going on in the state. It raised the issues of industrialisation and quality of education.

In spite of it, the BJP was portrayed as a communal



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

party. In fact, it was the TMC that resorted to campaigning on communal lines.

Five years ago the BJP did not exist in West Bengal. Today, it emerged as the main opposition. What did the BJP lose in West Bengal?

A 70-year-old leader who

has no family and who is in no need to amass wealth is working hard day and night to take the country to the comity of developed nations and trying to make the people lead a life of dignity. But the opposition has hatched plans to deflect public attention from the good work of the leader.

It's extraordinary that the BJP retained power in Assam securing 32 percent of the popular vote. In Assam, there was a vicious campaign against CAA. In the name of Maha Ghatbandhan, the Congress joined hands with various religious and fissiparous forces and contested against the BJP. Seven parties formed an alliance against

the BJP, but the people responded to the development that took place in the BJP regime and gave it a clear majority.

In Kerala, the BJP was not a force to reckon with. For decades there was tussle between the Congress and its allied parties and Left parties and their alliance. The BJP failed to open an account in Kerala, but has polled 11.6 percent of the popular vote, an increase of 1 percent.

In Puducherry, the BJP had no existence till the other day but has polled 14 percent of the vote paving the way for an NDA government. In Tamil Nadu, the BJP had not won any seat in the last elections but has now won four of the 20 seats it contested.

On the whole, the BJP post-

ed better results this time, compared to the last time. It did not suffer any loss. The number of seats and vote share of the BJP have increased.

Secondly, the Congress is losing its identity in the country. It has been established that there is no leader in the country who can face Modi in elections. The regional parties, to face the BJP, have no alternative but to set their house in order.

The BJP has made its presence felt across the country. The BJP has become a terror for all other parties in the country. Therefore, leaders of the regional parties are busy safeguarding their posts.

Now that the elections are over, there is a need for all political parties to cooperate with Modi to stamp out Covid-19 from the country.

Vizianagaram best performer in AP

MGNREGA spending in AP...

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vizianagaram in north Andhra Pradesh leads the districts with the lowest percentage of worst performing Grama Panchayats (GPs), while Guntur has the highest.

The districts with the lower proportion of worst performing GPs are classified as laggards for this analysis, and the average category has an equal proportion of worst and best performing GPs.

Vizianagaram emerged as a leader with only 4.2 percent of GPs. Interestingly, three of four districts from the Rayalaseema region, which is economically backward emerged as leaders in this classification. There are

seven districts in the leading category and five districts in the laggard category. Vizianagaram, Anantapur, Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam, Prakasam, Chittoor, Kadapa were classified as leaders and West Godavari, Krishna, Nellore, Kurnool and Guntur as laggards. East Godavari district has been categorised as average. Guntur had 78.4 percent of the worst performing GPs.

Notably, each household on average received a little more than 54 workdays this year, which is way less than the 100 workdays that can be availed under the scheme. However this has increased compared to the average person days of the last two years, which was around 42 days in FY 2019-20 and 52 days in FY 2018-19 respectively.

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Significantly for the Financial Year 2020-21, a total of 4.4 lakh (4,46,571) new job cards were issued, and a total of 7.3 lakh (7,29,121) workers were added. This accounts for 3.44 percent of all job cards issued since the inception of the scheme in the state.

Processing of job card applications was moved from mandal to village level during the pandemic and the village secretariats helped accelerate the process of issuance.

Of these new job cards, the most were issued in Anantapur district (53,844) and Visakhapatnam district (52,062) while the least were issued in Nellore (15,687).

For the Financial Year 2020-21, the total number of active job cards stood at 47.8 lakh (47,82,745).

The analysis of the MGNREGA implementation in Andhra Pradesh for 2020-21 was done by a voluntary organisation LibTech India.

LibTech is a team of engineers, social workers and social scientists working in TS and AP for the last nine years, to improve public service delivery.

The analysis was prepared using the data available on public domain. The analysis has been done by using the data from the Financial Years 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21. "While the state celebrates more than Rs 10,000

crore of expenditure in NREGA, our field observations revealed that there is scope for improvement in its implementation. For instance, there are villages that have not generated any wage employment in the year 2020-21, especially in tribal areas. And job cards were made inactive deliberately by mandal/village officials to lower the labour budget, without the worker's knowledge. We hope that the administration looks closely into the discrepancies in implementation and fulfil the promises made by the parliament to the rural citizens of the country," Chakradhar Buddha of LibTech India told The Pioneer.

Former MP Sabbam Hari succumbs to Covid

Continued from Page 1

Sabbam Hari was initially close to Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and had played a key role and stood by the latter when he was arrested by the CBI in 2012. Both Hari and Jagan were Members of Parliament during 2009-2014.

However, due to some differences Sabbam Hari moved away from Jagan after the demise of YSR.

Later, Sabbam Hari joined Jai Samaikyandhra Party floated by the then Chief Minister N Kiran Kumar Reddy just before the 2014 polls.

However, just a few days before the polling he withdrew from the contest for the Vizag Lok Sabha seat and extended his support to BJP-TDP alliance candidate Kambhampati Haribabu.

After the 2014 polls, he stayed away from politics until the 2019 polls. Just before the 2019 polls he joined the TDP and contested from Bheemili Assembly segment and lost to present tourism minister Muttamsetti Srinivas Rao.

Partial curfew in AP from May 5

Continued from Page 1

The officials informed that so far, a total of 1,66,0,2873 tests have been conducted across the state at an average rate of 3,10,915 tests per month. There are currently 558 Covid hospitals in the state, with a total of 44,599 beds, of which 37,760 are occupied with Covid patients. Besides these, around 3,597 patients were being treated on

ventilators, and 1,01,204 were in home isolation, officials said.

As on date, there are 41,780 beds in 81 Covid Care Centres (CCCs) across the state, of which 9,937 patients have received treatment till May 2, officials said. Also, nearly 31,843 beds are still available at CCCs, said the officials, adding that a large number of calls are coming to the '104' call centre.

State needs oxygen tankers to ensure supply, Jagan told

Continued from Page 1

Reviewing progress of Nadu Nedu (Health) works, the Chief Minister asked officials to give priority to set up medical colleges across the state and expedite the works in this regard. Works should start in the colleges where judicial preview and tender process are completed, he said. Jagan asked officials to discuss the matter with district collectors to ensure no delay in sanction-

ing funds for acquisition of land for medical colleges in East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna and Kurnool districts.

The officials informed the Chief Minister that tenders related to medical colleges in Paderu, Pulivendula, Piduguralla and Machilipatnam were awarded and the tender process regarding the remaining 12 medical colleges will start by May 21.

HC adjourns AP capital shifting ...

Continued from Page 1

With Monday's deferment of the hearing, it appears that there is no hurdle in sight for the proposed shifting of the executive capital to Visakhapatnam.

It was reported that Jagan has fixed May 6 as the Muhurtham of his camp office in Vizag, without officially declaring that he is shifting administration from Amaravati.

Meanwhile, the High Court also postponed hearing of petitions pertaining to cancellation of SSC examinations and postponement of Intermediate exams in Andhra Pradesh to June 2.

The state government had submitted a report to the court to this effect.

SCS hopes brighten on BJP's Pondy win

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This stand is in stark contrast to the party's promise made in the election manifesto for Puducherry Assembly elections.

Since the BJP also heads the Central government, it will either grant Special Union Territory status to Puducherry or risk being alienated. If it does, the Opposition parties definitely bring pressure on SCS to Andhra Pradesh.

YSRCP leaders feel the defeat of BJP in West Bengal

also may help their party in getting importance at the Centre.

Since the BJP graph is dipping, the party will have to depend on strong regional parties in the states where it has no scope of coming to power.

Obviously the BJP wants to retain power at the Centre after the next Lok Sabha elections.

To achieve this, the support of the YSRCP in Andhra Pradesh would be crucial.

Such a development may

give Jagan the leverage needed to pressurise the Centre into granting SCS to AP, as assured by him in the Assembly elections.

As for the AP unit of the BJP, its position has gone from bad to worse after the party's Government at the Centre denied SCS and also after its decision to privatise the Vizag Steel Plant.

Keeping all these issues the Central government headed by BJP may grant SCS to Andhra Pradesh as hoped by the YSRCP.

HC grants anticipatory bail to ABV

Continued from Page 1

In April, the state government had also initiated fresh disciplinary proceedings against ABV for allegedly making derogatory comments against the investigating officers in the case of alleged irregularities in the procurement of

surveillance equipment.

Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das issued an order under Rule 7 that no member of the service shall communicate to the press any statement of fact or opinion which has the effect of adverse criticism of a current or recent policy or action of the

central government or the state government. In this backdrop, the senior IPS officer expressed fear that the state government would arrest him and send him to jail. He approached the court seeking anticipatory bail, which was granted to him, bringing him relief.

24 die in K'taka hospital, O₂ shortage blamed

Continued from Page 1

Further, 12 Covid-19 patients, including the HoD of the gastroenterology department of Batra Hospital in Delhi died allegedly due to oxygen shortage on Saturday.

A glitch in oxygen supply in Vizianagaram in Andhra Pradesh resulted in three deaths last week.

At Chamarajanagar, a pall of gloom descended on the district hospital as the grieving kin of the deceased gathered after hearing the news.

Family members of the dead also staged a demonstration at the hospital and alleged there was shortage of oxygen and raised slogans.

Speaking to reporters in Chamarajanagar, Sudhakar said 123 Covid patients were admitted to the hospital.

"Of these, 14 are on ventilator, 36 are on Non Invasive Ventilator, 58 were on High Blow Oxygen, 29 are on normal oxygen (Up to 10 litres per minute)."

According to Sudhakar, 14 people, all of whom had been undergoing treatment for the past 14 to 18 days, died due to Covid from Sunday 7 am to 12 midnight.

Their condition had worsened and they died naturally due to the disease, he added.

"Between 12 midnight to 3 am, three people died. From 3



am to 7 am, seven people died. So three people died due to shortage of oxygen, according to the district authorities, our health department officials and doctors," he told reporters.

He said 23 people died in the district hospital and one at Kamagere village in the past 24 hours.

Chamarajanagar district in-charge Minister S Suresh Kumar said he has ordered a death audit report from the district administration into the incident.

He, however, maintained that all the deaths did not occur due to oxygen shortage.

"It's not appropriate to say that all the 24 deaths were due to oxygen shortage. These deaths occurred from Sunday morning to this morning."

"The oxygen shortage happened in the wee hours of Monday - from 12.30 am to

Minister and the Additional Director General of Police Pratap Reddy, who is in charge of oxygen supply in the state.

"I have also told the officials to find a permanent solution for the supply of oxygen in Chamarajanagar district.

There indeed is a problem in Mysuru, but that should not hinder the supply of oxygen from Mysuru to Chamarajanagar and Mandya," Kumar added.

Rahul Gandhi and other Congress leaders, including former chief minister Siddaramaiah, hit out at the ruling BJP over the deaths.

"Died or Killed? My heartfelt condolences to their families. How much more suffering before the 'system' wakes up?" Gandhi tweeted.ongress Karnataka chief DK Shivakumar said the government was only interested in publicity and does not take any responsibility.

"The Chief Minister and ministers are not able to handle it (administration)," he said, adding he would take up the matter with the Chief Secretary and ask him to 'present the truth before the people.' Siddaramaiah demanded a judicial probe into the deaths. He said an inquiry by an IAS officer, as ordered by the government, would not serve any purpose.



Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan interacting with spiritual leaders through webinar from Raj Bhavan in Vijayawada on Monday.

Spread awareness on Covid norms, Governor tells spiritual leaders

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan on Monday called upon heads of various religious and spiritual organisations in the state to create awareness among the people on Covid-appropriate behavior to curb the spread of coronavirus.

Interacting with spiritual leaders through a webinar from Raj Bhavan, the Governor said that religious and spiritual leaders can play a larger role in saving lives and controlling the spread of the disease.

Religion is an inseparable part of people's lives in our country. In times of anxiety, faith can be a significant

source of comfort and resilience to the society, he added

As spiritual leaders wield influence among people of their community, they can create awareness among people to follow Covid-appropriate behavior such as wearing mask, maintaining social distance, washing hands frequently, keeping the surroundings clean, etc, the Governor said.

The Governor urged spiritual leaders to appeal to their followers to strictly follow Covid guidelines to protect themselves, their family members and neighbours from the deadly virus.

He advised them to make it a part of their regular discourses

to stress the need to stay at home, avoid unnecessary travel, avoid celebrating festivals and postpone functions.

He also stressed the need for all eligible persons to get vaccinated as it offers best protection against the virus. Early detection of infection followed by treatment under home isolation or at hospital can cure the disease and decrease the number of fatalities, he observed.

Participating in the webinar, A Venugopala Deekshithulu of TTD said that TTD is taking all precautions as per guidelines to prevent the spread of Covid and advising pilgrims on following Covid norms, besides arranging hand sanitisers at several

places for the benefit of pilgrims.

Tridandi China Jeeyar Swamy of Jeeyar Education Trust said that the second wave of Covid-19 was unexpected danger and stressed the need to follow rules stipulated by the authorities.

Jeeyar Swamy also stressed the need to instill confidence among Covid-19 patients that they can recover from the disease.

Religious heads from across the state T Koteswara Rao of Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, Puttaparti, Paripoornananda Swamiji of Sri Peetham, Kakinada, Moulana Abdul Qadeer of All India Milli Council, Kurnool, Mufti Yousuf Ali Saab, Imam, Milli

Council of India, Harmohinder Sahni, Guru Prabandak Committee, Vijayawada, Dilshah Singh Anand, Gurudwara Satsang, Visakhapatnam, Srisisha Behan, Brahmakumaris, Vijayawada, Dr T George Cornelious, Bishop CSI All Saints Church, Vijayawada, Dr T Joseph Rajarao, Bishop, RCM Churches, Hridayananda Maharaj, Ramakrishna Mutt, Vijayawada, Thero, Buddhist Monk, Amaravati Buddha Vihar and Pannalal D Jain, Jain Samaj, Vijayawada, participated in the webinar.

A Shyam Prasad, Joint Secretary to Governor, coordinated the webinar from Raj Bhavan.

Government to set up PSA plants in all hospitals soon

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Medical & Health Principal Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal on Monday said that PSA plants will be set up at all government hospitals in the state. He said that the state has imposed curfew from last Wednesday.

As many as 1,15,275 corona tests were conducted in the last 24 hours, while 18,972 persons were tested positive and 71 succumbed to virus, he added.

Singhal said that there was no new strain in AP and the existing strain has been in the state since July last year.

We have spoken to CCMB officials and they have not officially announced about the new strain. It is not correct to propagate false news on social media to terrorise the people, he added.

The corona virus can be prevented by following the Covid guidelines announced by the Central government.

In all, 447 MT of medical oxygen has been used across the state.

He appealed to the Central



Medical & Health Principal Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal addressing a press meet in Vijayawada on Monday

government to increase the oxygen allocation in view of the increasing number of cases in the state.

The first meeting of the state-level procurement committee was held and discussed the purchase and storage of oxygen, oxygen tankers required for transportation.

The committee has decided to set up PSA plants in all government hospitals, including teaching hospitals. Tenders will be finalised in three to four days for the purchase of equipment and pipelines required

for setting up these plants.

Due to spike in Covid cases, partial curfew will be imposed in Andhra Pradesh for 14 days starting from Wednesday May 5.

All shops shall be open only from 6 am to 12 pm with Section 144 in force and only emergency services will be allowed from there on.

He said that the Central government was providing vaccines to persons above 45 years of age. The AP government will buy the required vaccines for those between the ages of 18 and 45.

Swarnalatha assumes charge as first woman AD of I&PR

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM ■ AMARAVATI

L. Swarnalatha took charge as the first woman Additional Director of the Department of Information and Public Relations at commissionerate in Vijayawada on Saturday.

Information and Public Relations Commissioner Tumma Vijay Kumar Reddy had issued appointment orders to this effect.

Lingam Swarnalatha was selected through direct recruitment in 1992 by APPSC. She first served as DPRO in Guntur and later in Nellore. She also served as Assistant Director, State Information Centre, in Hyderabad, Vijayawada and Rajahmundry.

She then served as Regional Deputy Director in Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada. Later, she worked as Regional Joint Director in Vijayawada and Ongole.

Swarnalatha worked extensively throughout the state, especially in Zone-1, Zone-2 and Zone-3, and has gained



rich experience. She earned reputation in duty management by coordinating with field level officers.

Swarnalatha replaces D. Srinivas, who recently retired as Additional Director of department of Information and Public Relations.

After taking charge, Swarnalatha said that she would discharge her duties effectively by coordinating with the authorities.

Swarnalatha rendered exceptional services during Godavari and Krishna Pushkarams and natural disasters like floods.

Chinmaya YouTube channel to present free talks on Gita

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On the occasion of 105th birth anniversary of world renowned spiritual master and founder of Chinmaya Mission, Swami Chinmayananda, 'Chinmaya Channel' on YouTube is presenting a free series of talks in English by Swami Chinmayananda on Bhagavad Gita Chapter 7, from May 8 to 25 at 7.15 pm daily for 45 minutes.

The series will be inaugurated on May 8 by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, with a video message

"In the present times, all over the world and especially in India, there is an even greater requirement for peace and comfort of mind to gather courage within and to deal with all the



emotional turmoil that the pandemic has brought with it. We are all Arjunas today and Krishna's counsel in the Bhagavad Gita stands as

solid as ever," said one of the acharyas of Chinmaya Mission Swami Chidrupananda.

In one of the articles written by him, Swami Chinmayananda said that the Bhagavad Gita brings solace to our agitated minds, balm to our injured egos and relief to our over-wrought brains.

"The Gita has no artificial remedy for the maladies that beset us. She seeks to eradicate the very cause of the malady and hence the necessity to have patience, perseverance and great faith in the values preached by her immortal words. In the Gita-way of life, problems are nil. In the fire of Gita-knowledge, ignorance with all its misconceptions is reduced to ashes," he said.

Lokesh: Use official machinery properly to save lives

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Monday said that eight patients would not have died at the Hindupur Hospital if the YSRCP government focussed on oxygen supply instead of targeting its political opponents.

The TDP MLC condemned the death of eight persons at a hospital in Hindupur for want of oxygen and added that Chief Minister owed an explanation to the people on the issue.

"The official machinery is not being used to the fullest

possible extent to contain Covid spread. Instead, they are being used to file false cases against the Opposition leaders," he alleged.

In a statement here, the TDP MLC said that if the ruling party had used the official machinery to tackle infections, another six persons would not have died at Kurnool hospital.

The Jagannathan Reddy government is concentrating on political victimisation, but not on people's safety and security. Another 10 persons would have been saved at Anantapur hospital if the government paid attention.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Explaining the immediate threat posed by the rapid spreading of N-440K variant of the dreaded coronavirus, TDP chief and leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu demanded that the Jagannathan Reddy government impose lockdown immediately in the state as an effective step to tackle the dangerous strain.

Naidu on Monday discussed about the immediate threat posed by the N-440K variant of Coronavirus.

During the discussion, he explained how the scientists were describing the N-440K



strain as the most dangerous of all in the coronavirus family. It has the ability to cause 10 times more harm to human lives when compared to other strains. As such, the TDP leaders took several tough decisions unanimously at meeting.

Impose lockdown, save lives: Naidu to govt

among 30 per cent of existing patients.

Against this backdrop, the TDP chief said that the availability of hospital beds and supply of oxygen should be enhanced without further delay. Saving lives of the people should be the immediate concern for the rulers but not any other issue, he added.

The TDP leaders referred to the statement of Principal Secretary of Health department Anil Kumar Singhal that there was a paucity of beds in the state.

"Together with shortage of vaccine and oxygen, this would create havoc and cause a calamity in AP. The lockdown

would be the only solution and option for the government to prevent such a disaster which was waiting to happen anytime now," the TDP leaders said.

The TDP leaders said that already, other states have placed huge orders for vaccine procurement to save the lives of their people.

The AP government should also take similar measures. There would be no shortage of funds if the ruling party leaders would spare their commissions in the sale of liquor and sand. Over Rs 3,000 crore was misused wastefully just for the sake of painting government buildings with the colours of YSRCP party flag, they said.

SHORT TAKES

SANGAM DAIRY FUNCTIONING AS USUAL, FARMERS NEED NOT PANIC: APDDCF

Andhra Pradesh Dairy Development Cooperative Federation director Ahmed Babu on Monday said that Sangam dairy was functioning as usual and that Rs 14 crore was paid to about one lakh farmers. In a statement, he said that the farmers need not panic as the dairy was functioning as usual. He said that 771 permanent employees of Sangam dairy have received their salaries for the month of April and 415 contract employees will receive their salaries on Tuesday. On Monday, 4.95 lakh litres of milk was received by the dairy and the milk was packed and sent to the market as usual. All the dairy activities are being carried uninterruptedly and the contractors need not panic, he said.

SHODASHA DINA SUNDARAKANDA DIKSHA BEGINS AT TIRUMALA

The TTD spiritual endeavor to contain the corona pandemic, Shodasha Dina Sundarakanda Diksha parayanams commenced as per Agama traditions at Vasantha mandapam at Tirumala on Monday and will continue till May 18. As per the Shodashashari Maha Mantram, the first-day parayanams on the first keyword 'Raa' comprising of 269 shlokas (211 of first sarga and 58 of second sarga) were chanted by Vedic pundits. It was followed by parayanams of Bala Ramayana and the Visuchika Maha mantra of the Yoga Shaista which included Sri Rama Prarthana, Sri Anjaneya Prarthana and Sri Valmiki Prarthana. Thereafter, 16 upasakas performed Shloka parayanams. On Tuesday, 152 shlokas of 3 to 6 sargas of Sundara Kanda will be recited. Speaking on the occasion, Principal of Dharmagiri Veda Pathashala Acharya KSS Avadhani said that the TTD was performing the Shodasha Dina Sundarakanda Diksha for well being of humanity with blessings of Sri Sita Sameta Sri Ramachandra and Sri Anjaneya. He said besides the Shloka Parayanams at Vasantha Mandapam, 16 Vedic Upasakas would daily observe Japam and Homa programmness for 16 days at the Dharmagiri Veda Pathashala. He said in the unique Diksha, parayanams were based on the first word in a shloka as it had a specific meaning which heralded the Maha mantra for universal well-being. For the benefit of Srivari devotees across the world, the programme is live telecast by the SVBC every morning at 8.30 am.



Covid patient commits suicide

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A Covid patient committed suicide by jumping from the top of a Covid care centre in Vijayawada on Monday. The deceased was identified as M Sridhar (38) from Borripalem village in West Godavari district. He was undergoing treatment at a government Covid care centre in Vambay colony.

The incident happened in covid care centre block number 84 in Vambay colony.

RINL workers urge Centre to take over Air Liquide plant at Vizag

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

RINL workers urged Union Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan to take over French company Air Liquid India Holding Pvt Ltd and hand it over to Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP).

It was reported in these columns a few days ago that two Air Separation Unit (ASUs) erected by ALIH at VSP were lying idle since 2013 even as oxygen has become a critical resource in the present second wave of Covid.

The RINL workers' union on Monday wrote to Pradhan and said that despite stiff resistance from the trade unions, the then Union government in 2009, forcefully allowed the French Company, Air Liquid Holding Pvt Ltd, to use invest-



ments to build, own and operate a plant to produce oxygen and nitrogen in Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Accordingly, the Air Liquid Company had established the plant in Visakhapatnam Steel Plant with a production capacity of 1,700 tonnes per day. As per the MoU, the Company must sell its oxygen and nitrogen to Visakhapatnam Steel

Plant only for a period of 15 years after which the company must be handed over to Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

But the management of Air Liquid Company has kept the company idle for nine years after completion of construction. It has not produced and supplied a single tonne of oxygen and nitrogen till now.

It was stuck in litigation

since its inception on the pretext of low profits, said Steel Plant Employees' Union president J Ayodhyaram.

He added that the Air Liquid Company has demanded an amount much higher than the cost of building the company from VSP. This would not have occurred if Visakhapatnam Steel Plant was given permission to build the Air Separation Unit.

All this loss has occurred because of the faulty policy of allowing a foreign company to construct Air Separation Plant-2 at VSP in 2009. After several international arbitrations, the judgment was delivered on April 2, 2021, that the company must start its trial run from May, 2021. But the Air Liquid Company has not taken any steps in this direction so far.

Aspirants want re-evaluation of Mains answer scripts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Hundreds of aspirants swarmed APPSC office on Monday to give representation to the Secretary over alleged discrepancies in the recently released Group 1 (Mains) examination results.

The aspirants demanded physical re-evaluation of answer scripts, audit of the entire process from scanning to publishing of results, disclosure of security standards followed, release of name-wise list and medium of selected candidates among other things.

Following uproar from several meritorious candidates over their non-selection despite putting in their best efforts, the APPSC has released a note asking the candidates to meet the secretary with valid proofs.

An aspirant, who is expecting an interview call, said, "It is strange that the Commission is asking for proofs from the aspirants when all the evidence is with it. The onus lies on the commission to disclose the details sought by the aggrieved aspirants. UPSC releases names of aspirants who clear Prelims and Mains examinations. In a similar way, we demand APPSC to release names and medium of examination of the candidates."

Another aspirant said, "Many of us appeared for UPSC interviews and cleared several Central and state government examinations including the earlier Group 1 examination. Doubts are being raised over the entire examination process as none of the meritorious candidates got selected this time.

Pvt hospitals still fleecing patients ignoring norms

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The majority of the Covid patients were approaching hospitals with breathing issues and their first approach was to government hospitals, if not, the other option is private hospitals. The private hospitals were fleecing the patients and the charges were high during the corona pandemic than in the normal days. A peculiar situation was prevailing in East Godavari districts as the patients were being demanded cash payment instead of online transactions. According to the health bulletin, about 2831 corona cases were registered in a single day spike on Saturday and seven deaths were reported. The total active cases in the district were 15,878 till now.

Meanwhile, the district administration was on its toes to intensify vaccination programme in the government hospitals and the Covid cases were on the rise across the district. Kakinada Government General Hospital (GGH) was converted into a Covid Hospital. The government hospital in Rajahmundry and



Kims Hospital in Amalapuram were functioning as district Covid hospitals. Besides, 43 more private hospitals have been notified for Covid treatment in the first tranche and 30 hospitals in the second phase.

The CCTV cameras were set up in all these Covid hospitals and connected to the command control room set up at the District Collector's office to check how the treatment was being done in private hospitals. However, the private hospital managements managed to install the cameras only in the ICU where the corona patients receiving oxygen in a bid to hide their malpractices.

If someone takes a patient to the hospital for corona treatment, he/she has to pay Rs 1 lakh in

cash for admission even though they have Arogyasri and other health cards. Collector D Muralidhar Reddy has said that nodal officers were appointed at every private code hospital. But in the reality, the nodal officers were not seen anywhere and even there were no help desks. The shortage of oxygen was rampant in the private hospitals since Sunday.

A private hospital near Bhanugudi in Kakinada has been providing better treatment for corona but some patients have reported scarcity of oxygen since Sunday. Without advance payment of Rs 1 to Rs 2 lakh, the patients were denied admission in the private hospitals in addition to the cost of medicines,

scanning, doctor fee, room rentals. No hospital has so far provided treatment in Arogyasri despite the District Collector's directions to strictly enforce Arogyasri.

A total of 4461 beds were read in the district including 788 ICU beds, 2328 beds with a ventilator facility. Meanwhile, District Collector Muralidhar Reddy informed that as against the daily oxygen capacity of 76 kilolitres, 45 kilolitres were being consumed. However, there was an acute shortage of oxygen in the private hospitals. The Government Covid Hospital in Kakinada has 750 beds. The district administration has also set up Covid Care Centers in Bodasakurru and Bommaru.

Former BJP district president Y Malakondaiah suggested that the district administration should conduct surprise inspections in the private hospitals and the ministers and MLAs should visit the private hospital and enquire about the well-being of the patients at least to know how they were being fleeced by the hospital management.

Health staff appointed with MP's initiative

PNS ■ GUNTUR



Inadequate medical and health officials were unable to attend to the patients when there

was a sudden surge in the number of Covid patients at Vinukonda government hospital. The problem was resolved as the additional staff was recruited on war-footing, thanks to the initiative taken by Narasaraopet MP Lavu Srikrishna Devarayulu.

Two Medical Officers, three lab technicians, three data entry operators, three MNOs and six staff nurses were deputed to the government hospital in Vinukonda as the people were facing difficulties due to staff shortage. Soon the information reached, the MP took measures to treat the Covid patients. He also assured that additional health staff would be recruited wherever there was a problem in the hospitals in the Narasaraopeta Parliamentary constituency. The MP suggested that people should avail the services of the new staff.

With holding pensions for not voting YSRCP assailed

PNS ■ NELLORE

The villagers staged a protest on Monday in front of the Mandal Praja Parishad office alleging that the pension was discontinued for two persons for not voting in favour of YSRCP in the recently-concluded Parishad elections at Tatiparti in Podalakuru mandal of Nellore district.

According to reports, Ammireddy Hanuma Reddy of Tatiparti and Yamala Govardhan, a handloom weaver of the same villages approached the MPDO officials that their pension was abruptly discontinued. Hanuma Reddy did not vote for YSRCP in the just-concluded panchayat and parishad elections while Govardhan acted as an agent for the TDP candidate in the polls.

When asked about suspending the pension to the duo, the volunteer reportedly told them that they should meet the YSRCP leaders of the village, if they were not ready to do so the pension would be stopped.



The victims on Monday submitted a petition to MPDO Sushmita Reddy to expose the injustice done to

them. The villagers accused the YSRCP leaders of stopping pensions for not extending political support.

Red Cross chief donates blood for 53rd time!

PNS ■ NELLORE

As the blood reserves depleted in the blood bank during the second wave of the corona pandemic, Nellore District Red Cross District Vice Chairman and YSRCP leader Damishetti Sudhir Naidu donated blood for the 53rd time.

He said that pregnant women, thalassemia patients and the patients of road accidents were suffering due to lack of blood in the blood bank during the critical period. He appealed to the people to donate blood before getting vaccinated since it was not possible to donate



blood till 60 days after vaccination. State Red Cross working committee members

Dakarapu Raviprakash Jaladanki convener Srinath Reddy, Praneeth and others participated.

Woman sues hospital for ₹11.40 cr for causing hubby's death

PNS ■ ELURU

A woman filed a lawsuit against private hospital management in the Consumer Court seeking compensation of Rs 11.40 crore for causing the death of her husband.

According to reports, the woman's husband Ramindi Srinivasa Rao of Eluru was admitted to Jayashree Liberty Hospitals in Vijayawada on August 10, 2020, for medical treatment till August 23. However, doctors YV Ravi Prasad, Chinnam Deepthi and Matta Sasikiran who treated him for 14 days, charged Rs 15 lakh from them. Srinivasa Rao



died during treatment. Srinivasa Rao's wife Sarala alleged that hiding the death of her husband until the end, the hospital management did not

even inform us that he was inflicted with coronavirus. She said she had enough evidence that her husband was treated at the Liberty Hospitals. She alleged that the doctor at the hospital was treating patients without registering himself with the Medical Council. She had also complained to the Medical Council on this issue seeking an inquiry into his validity to treat the patients.

She was fighting for justice through the district Consumer Redressal Commission stating that the doctor who treated her husband has no valid registration and demanded compensation of Rs 11.40 crore.



SHORT TAKES

Housewife ends life, blames relatives in a selfie

GUNTUR: A housewife allegedly committed suicide by consuming sleeping pills following the harassment by her relatives. The incident occurred in the 17th ward at Ponnur in Guntur district on April 30 and she died on Sunday night. According to reports, Lakshmi Tirupatamma (32) committed suicide alleging that she was taking the extreme step following the harassment by her relatives. She revealed it in a selfie video. The police registered a case and are investigating.

Youth set afire over love affair, condition critical



ONGOLE: A youth was allegedly set ablaze by some unidentified assailants in a Prakasam village on Sunday night over a love affair. The youth was undergoing treatment in the hospital and his condition was said to be critical. According to reports, Yerra Johnny Ankamma Rao (20) of Nelaturu village in Maddipadu mandal of Prakasam district was allegedly set on fire by the miscreants on Sunday night. The villagers suspected that the love affair he had with a girl might be the reason for the incident. Ankamma Rao, who sustained serious burns in the incident, was shifted to Ongole Rims Hospital for treatment. On information, Sub-Inspector Y Nagraj reached the spot and arrested the suspects and started an investigation.

Goa liquor seized, six arrested

ONGOLE: The Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) sleuths have seized liquor from Goa worth Rs 20 lakh from chili fields in Karola village near Hanuman Junction Kunta in Peddaveedu mandal of Prakasam district. Six persons were taken into custody and a total of 946 full bottles, 229 quarter bottles, three motorbikes and auto were seized from them, SEB Assistant Commissioner B Srinivas Chaudhary said on Monday. He informed that Narasaraopet, Darshi and Podili SEB officials conducted the raid. He said another accused was yet to be arrested.



Hygiene maintained at Vijaya Dairy

PNS ■ NELLORE

While inspecting the Vijaya Dairy in Nellore on Monday, its chairman Ranga Reddy expressed happiness over the hygiene being maintained at the factory and lauded the services of the employees for rendering good services to the people.

Along with Managing Director Krishna Mohan Reddy and others, Ranga Reddy went round the Vijaya Dairy plant in Nellore.

He said people were happy over the quality standards being maintained by the dairy and all the programmes were being carried out as per the directions of Nellore

District Collector Chakradhara Rao. The Vijaya Dairy officials told him that the dairy was serving customers by delivering variety of products without compromising on quality.

Some milk products were distributed free of cost during the special circumstances, they added.



No patient shall suffer for want of bed: Collector

PNS ■ ELURU

The nodal officers, who were deputed in the private hospitals, should check from time to time on the availability of beds to ensure no patient should feel discomfort due to lack of beds, District Collector Kartikeya Mishra has said.

Reviewing the Covid sit-

uation through video conference from the Collectorate on Monday, Kartikeya Mishra said it came to his notice that some private hospitals were denying beds to the corona patients saying that the beds were fully occupied. Some patients were directly approaching the private hospitals for beds with ven-

tilators, the Collector said and warned that action would be initiated against the nodal officers if such complaints received from the patients.

About 528 people on Monday admitted to Covid Care Center of them some patients have only mild symptoms and they should be shifted to hospitals, he said.

BJP SC men stage protest over Govt building church

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The BJP SC Morcha on Monday organised a dharna in front of the Ongole Collector's office protesting against the state government's decision to allocate Rs 1.08 crore for the construction of a church.

The BJP SC Morcha activists alleged that instead of giving priority to the corona-hit patients, the state government was giving top priority for spreading Christianity.

Condemning the government's action to call for tenders for the construction of a church to promote one religion by allocating funds of Rs 1.08 crore, the Prakasam district unit of BJP SC Morcha astonished over the government's initiative to construct a church even without the demand from anyone in the village. The SC Morcha leaders said the church was proposed in between the residential houses of some Hindu families and raised a strong objection over it. They said a petition was submit-



ted to the DRO demanding that the irrigation authorities should immediately withdraw the tender for the construction of the church.

BJP SC Morcha general secretary Alla Ramaiah, Gautam Ashok, Swachh Bharat district convener Radhakrishna, Dharmika cell convener Rambabu and Ongole city president MS Durgesh and others participated in the agitation.

However, BJP district unit

president S Srinivas criticized that the government was spending money for propagating Christianity in the state after YS Jaganmohan Reddy became the Chief Minister. He shocked to see the tender published by the Water Resources Department for the construction of the church. He warned that if the government did not withdraw the tender immediately, a state-wide movement would be launched.

Vizag nitrogen plants to produce oxygen

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

The Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board on Monday permitted a few industries in Visakhapatnam to convert their existing nitrogen plants into medical oxygen generating units to meet the growing demand for oxygen due to spurt in Covid-19 cases. APPCB Chairman A K Parida said the industries have been asked to use Pressure Swing Adsorption technology for the conversion process.

The Central Pollution Control Board would identify the vendors and provide technical support along with the APPCB to undertake the task on a war-footing to overcome the current short supply of medical oxygen.

Covid-19 hospitals identified by the state government would get direct supply of oxygen from these industries, Parida said.



Step up health services, says Karanam Balaram

PNS ■ CHIRALA

Reviewing the Covid situation in Chirala of Prakasam district, MLA Karanam Balaram Krishnamurthy on Monday directed the officials to step up health services at the corona health centres and isolation wards as people should not suffer any inconvenience due to inadequate facilities.

The MLA asked the private

hospital managements to cooperate in controlling the coronavirus with humanity. ZP CEO Girish Kailash, Municipal Commissioner Yesaiah, DSP Srikanth, Chirala Area Hospital Superintendent Sheshukumar, Corona Health Center in-charge Narsimha Rao, Chirala, Vetapalam Mandals Tahsildars, MPDOs, CIs and representatives of the private hospitals participated.

BJP hasn't lost anything, it's not a loss of face for Modi

Why is the anti-Modi-Shah brigade rejoicing and reveling in joy in the aftermath of the declaration of election results in the five States? The BJP has, in fact, lost nothing. I just waited for the dust to settle down. Even at the risk of being branded as pro or anti someone, I would like to be subjective and assert that Modi has actually lost nothing in the five states that went to the polls.

The stellar performance of Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress has in no way diminished the image of the BJP. Wordsmiths may have been boisterously claiming that Didi has stopped the BJP juggernaut in its tracks. My response to this is an emphatic no. The BJP, with its 77 seats from a niggardly three in the outgoing Assembly, has actually posted a historic gain by increasing its number of

seats by more than 2,500 per cent.

Mamata Banerjee's party did extremely well. It has garnered 47.94 per cent of votes as opposed to the BJP's 37.19 per cent. The Left that ruled the State for an unbroken three and a half decades until Mamata's rise was wiped out and Siddharth Shankar Ray was perhaps the last Congress Chief Minister who demitted the office on April 30, 1977.

If the Centre handled the Covid crisis diligently and effectively, the BJP's gains could have been better.

So, big deal? The BJP has indeed made inroads into the Communist bastions and emerged as the most powerful challenger to the champ, Mamata di.

The party retained Assam with a dignified number and its



A SAYE SEKHAH
senior journalist

politics of CAA worked there. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won 75 seats as opposed to the 50 UPA in Assam. While NDA lost 11 seats, UPA doubled its tally compared to its previous performance in 2016.

The BJP has gained five seats

Leaders like KCR have a view of their own and cannot be mollified so easily. In fact, KCR was the one who propounded the idea of the Federal Front in 2019. But, he couldn't take it forward because of leaders like Mamata Banerjee

in Tamil Nadu Assembly by joining hands with AIADMK, which is voted out of power now, from zero. No mean achievement, here too.

Kerala remained what it is known for and the LDF under Pinarayi Vijayan achieved a rare feat by retuning power that was always elusive to the UDF and the LDF. The BJP lost the lone seat and Metro Man E Sridharan, who contested on

behalf of the BJP, was derided by critics as "the man who took millions for a ride in metro rail could not do the same in elections." Pondicherry became a cherry on the BJP's cake, albeit, the cake did not have any icing on it.

MAMATA CANNOT COBBLE UP AN ALTERNATIVE

Now, look at the suggestion by political pundits that Mamata Banerjee becoming a

rallying point to lead the alternative to the BJP.

With Naveen Patnaik, YS Jagan, KCR, MK Stalin, Pinarai Vijayan, Thackeray, Pawar, Amarinder Singh, Ashok Gholat, Akhilesh Yadav and Farooq Abdullah.

Will Sonia and Rahul Gandhi agree to be backbenchers by joining hands? Jagannathan Reddy would not be part of a coalition that comprises Sonia and Rahul.

Even if a coalition can be stitched, it remains an ironic combo. For, the BJP may spin the wheel in an anticlockwise direction to its own advantage by wooing some of these leaders who don't share ideological similarities.

Leaders like KCR have a view of their own and cannot be mollified so easily. In fact,

KCR was the one who propounded the idea of the Federal Front in 2019. But, he couldn't take it forward because of leaders like Mamata Banerjee. KCR has clear ideas on how a national alternative to the Congress and the BJP should be built. Will he agree to Mamata's leadership becomes a moot question.

Ms Banerjee's loss in Nandigram Assembly seat in the hands of a protégé-turned-foe Suwendu Adhikari of the BJP remains a blot in her long and chequered political career. What if someone rejects her leadership on this pretext? The defeat of the Chief Minister cannot be condoned.

How M K Stalin, who is poised to become the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu,

would be handled by the BJP becomes interesting what with the fact that the DMK was part of the NDA in the Vajpayee regime, before it aligned with the UPA. If, for any extraneous reasons, Stalin chooses to remain neutral or tilts in favour of the BJP, the Mamata-led coalition would be a stillborn baby.

The BJP has actually not done badly in the five-State polls. It's a case of new learnings for the BJP which always believed in a high decibel campaign with ostentation as its core. If it makes a course correction by minimising the rhetoric, it can contain the anathema against it even among some traditional sections. The next round of litmus test for the BJP is the elections to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly.

INDIA CORNER

Chhattisgarh: Two dead, two ill after consuming hand sanitiser

Two persons died and as many others fell sick after consuming hand sanitiser in Raipur district of Chhattisgarh, police said on Monday. The incident took place late Sunday night in a locality near a multi-specialty hospital under Gole Bazaar police station limits, they said.

Prima facie, the four men consumed the sanitiser due to unavailability of liquor during the curbs imposed here to contain the spread of COVID-19, a police official said. They fell sick and were rushed to the Dr B R Ambedkar Memorial Hospital where two of them died, he said. The deceased were identified as Raju Chura and Vijay Kumar Chouhan, both aged around 40, he said. The two others were undergoing treatment at the hospital and their condition was reported to be stable, the official said.



Pakistan opens fire along IB in Jammu & Kashmir's Samba

Pakistani Rangers violated the ceasefire by opening fire along the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district on Monday, a senior BSF officer said. A BSF spokesman said this is first-ever ceasefire violation by Pakistan along the IB after the two countries signed a fresh agreement to maintain calm along the border on February 25 this year. "Pakistan Rangers resorted to unprovoked firing along IB at 0615 hours in Ramgarh sector", Inspector General of BSF, Jammu frontier, N S Jamwal, told PTI here. There was no casualty in the firing. The BSF spokesman said Pakistani troops opened unprovoked firing on a patrolling party ahead of the fencing. India and Pakistan had agreed to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) and other sectors in the February agreement. The two countries had earlier signed a ceasefire agreement in 2003, but it was hardly followed in letter and spirit with more violations than observance of the pact.



V-P wishes journalists on World Press Freedom Day

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Monday wished the media fraternity on World Press Freedom Day, and lauded journalists for working tirelessly to bring information to the people amid a pandemic.

In the age of information, media professionals play a critical role in bringing out reliable and verified facts, and act as a protective shield to our society against disinformation, Naidu said. "While urging media professionals to always remain committed to the cardinal principles of journalism like truthfulness, objectivity, accuracy, impartiality and fairness, I commend them for working tirelessly in bringing information to the people during this pandemic," the Vice President Secretariat tweeted, quoting Naidu. The United Nations General Assembly had declared May 3 as World Press Freedom Day to raise awareness about freedom of the press.



SC raps Jharkhand electricity board, says it has to be fair

The Supreme Court has rapped the Jharkhand State Electricity Board for laying its own terms and conditions in the supply of electricity saying it has to be fair and reasonable towards consumers. A bench comprising Justices L Nageswara Rao and Vineet Saran made the observation while dismissing an appeal filed by the board against the decision of Jharkhand high court. The high court had allowed the plea filed by a small scale industry, Ramkrishna Forging Limited, challenging the decision of the board refusing its request to reduce the sanctioned load of electricity from 4000 KVA to 1325 KVA. "It is noteworthy that the Jharkhand State Electricity Board is a monopoly supplier of electricity which has laid down its own terms and conditions, regarding which the consumer has no say or choice but to sign on the dotted lines, if it wants electricity load varied for running its industry. "The Board is an instrumentality of the State. It has to be fair and reasonable," the bench said. The top court said that if the Regulations provide for contract load to be varied even through a written communication, then through fresh agreements it may have been done.



BJP hits a six in Puducherry, helps NDA ride to power

PNS ■ PUDUCHERRY

The Bharatiya Janata Party will be part of the government in Puducherry for the first time ever after having annexed six seats to grab power as part of the NDA in the April 6 assembly polls. The saffron party won six of the nine seats it contested while its ally AINRC led by former chief minister N Rangasamy bagged 10 as the NDA emerged victorious in 16 segments in the 30-member territorial Assembly.

Sixteen is the number required for a simple majority in the Puducherry assembly. The BJP, last had representation in the assembly in the 1990s.

Among the prominent winners for the BJP was former PWD Minister A Namassivayam, who till recently was with the Congress.

Namassivayam contested from Mannadipet, a new constituency for him as he all along fought electoral battles either from Villianoor or Uzhavarkarai.

He had quit the Congress on January 25 and shifted his allegiance to BJP in the presence of the BJP national president J P Nadda here. His defection from the Congress to the BJP paved the way for a good number of then Congress legislators to quit and move to the Saffron party or the AINRC. The other BJP nominees who were successful at the hustings were A John Kumar (Kamaraj Nagar) his son Richards John Kumar (Nellithope), P M L Kalyanasundaram a former AINRC legislator (Kalapet), 'Embalam' Selvam (Manavelly) and Ak Sai J Saravanan Kumar (Oussudureserved).

CM reconstitutes Covid task force, appoints Dy CM as its chief

PNS ■ BENGALURU

With an alarming surge in Coronavirus cases and deaths in Karnataka, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Monday reconstituted the COVID-19 task force to examine measures taken to curb the pandemic and create awareness among the public on its management. The four member task force will be headed by Deputy Chief Minister Dr C N Ashwath Narayan.

Karnataka has been hit hard by the second wave of Covid-19, reporting over 35,000 cases daily, while active cases have breached the four lakh mark and infections gone past 16 lakh.

"The reconstituted task force will examine measures taken to curb the pandemic and create awareness among the public on its management, an official release said.

PIL seeks all Remdesivir makers be allowed to sell in domestic market; HC asks for Centre's reply

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Monday asked the Centre and various pharma majors to respond to a PIL seeking that all drug firms making Remdesivir, used in COVID-19 treatment, be allowed to sell it in the domestic market.

A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh issued notice to the Health Ministry, Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, Director General of Foreign Trade and various pharma companies, like Cipla, Zydus and Cadila, seeking their stand on the plea which



claims only a handful of such firms are allowed to sell the medicine in the domestic market.

The remaining companies were involved in manufacturing the drug for export, petitioner Dincur Bajaj said, adding that since

export of Remdesivir has been banned by the Centre, the companies which were producing it for export be permitted to manufacture and sell it in the domestic market.

Bajaj, who is a lawyer and the Joint Secretary of the Delhi High Court Bar Association, has claimed that there are more than 25 companies in India which manufacture the medicine, but only six to eight of them are permitted to sell it in the domestic market and the rest were producing it for exports alone.

The plea, filed through advocate Amit Saxena and Imran Ali,

Thane reports 2,774 new COVID-19 cases, 42 more deaths

THANE: With the addition of 2,774 new cases of coronavirus, the infection count in Thane district of Maharashtra has reached 4,72,794, an official said on Monday. These new cases were reported on Sunday, he said. The virus also claimed the lives of 42 more people, raising the death toll in the district to 7,685, he said.

Coronavirus positive mother-daughter found dead in Wardha

WARDHA: The decomposed bodies of a woman and her daughter, both COVID-19 patients, were found in a home in Samudrapur tehsil of Maharashtra's Wardha district, police said on Monday. The mother and daughter, 80 and 45 years of age respectively, were living in a house in Sawangi village separately from the rest of the family, a Samudrapur police station official said.

Sikkim reports 27 new Covid cases, one more death

GANGTOK: Sikkim's COVID-19 tally rose to 8,468 as 27 more people tested positive for the virus while one new fatality pushed the death toll to 150, a health department bulletin said on Monday. The new Covid-19 cases were reported from East Sikkim district (13), West Sikkim (10) and South Sikkim district (4), it said.

Exploring feasibility of converting nitrogen plants to produce O2

NEW DELHI: The government on Tuesday said it is exploring the feasibility of converting existing nitrogen plants to produce oxygen. It said 12 states have over one lakh active COVID-19 cases, seven states have 50,000 to one lakh cases, and 17 states have less than 50,000 such infections.

BJP loses lone seat in Kerala; 'Metroman', state prez fail

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The BJP-NDA, which fought the April 6 assembly polls with the fancy claim of winning at least 35 seats in Kerala, on Sunday came a cropper as it failed to retain even its lone segment Nemom, even as all its major contestants, including 'Metroman' E Sreedharan and party state chief K Surendran fell by the wayside. The saffron party's poll ride came to a grinding halt in the state as former Mizoram Governor Kumanam Rajasekharan, who was entrusted to retain Nemom in the state capital, failed to repeat the magic created by party veteran O Rajagopal there in 2016 assembly elections. Ruling CPI(M) leader and LDF candidate V Sivankutty wrested the segment back by a margin of 3,949 votes. The success was also sweet revenge for Sivankutty this time as he had suffered an unexpected blow during the last assembly election when BJP opened its maiden account in Nemom. Rajagopal had defeated Sivankutty by 8,671 votes during the 2016 Assembly polls.

Delhi airport handled 25 flights carrying Covid relief cargo

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi international airport handled 25 flights carrying 300 tonnes of COVID-19 relief cargo in the last five days, its operator, DIAL, said on Monday. The airport has set up a 3,500 square metre dedicated logistics facility, called 'Jeevodaya warehouse', for interim storage and distribution of the relief materials, the Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) said in a statement.

India is struggling with the second wave of the coronavirus infection as hospitals in several states are reeling under a severe shortage of drugs, oxygen and beds. In a span of just 5 days – April 28 to May 2 – Delhi airport has handled around 25 COVID relief flights totalling around 300 tonnes cargo, originating from various countries like the US, United Kingdom, UAE, Uzbekistan, Thailand, Germany, Qatar, Hong Kong, China etc," the statement noted.

‘Single Covid vaccine dose boosts protection against variants’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A single dose of Covid-19 vaccine boosts protection against SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus variants, but only in those previously infected with the disease, according to a study.

The researchers looked at the UK and South Africa variants, however, they think it possible that the findings will apply to other variants in circulation, such as the Brazil (P.1) and India (B.1.617 and B.1.618) variants.

The findings, published in the journal Science, show that in those who have not previously been infected and have so far only received one dose of vaccine, the immune response to coronavirus variants of concern may be insufficient.

The researchers at Imperial

College London, Queen Mary University of London and University College London, looked at immune responses in UK healthcare workers at Barts and Royal Free hospitals following their first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

They found that people who had previously had mild or asymptomatic infection had significantly enhanced protection against the Kent and South Africa variants, after a single dose of the mRNA vaccine.

In those without prior Covid-19, the immune response was less strong after a first dose, potentially leaving them at risk from variants.

"Our findings show that people who have had their first dose of vaccine, and who have not previously been infected with SARS-CoV-2, are not fully protected



against the circulating variants of concern," said Rosemary Boynton, Professor of Immunology and Respiratory Medicine at Imperial College London, who led the research.

"This study highlights the importance of getting second doses of the vaccine rolled out to

protect the population," Boynton said.

The researchers analysed the blood samples for the presence and levels of immunity against the original strain of SARS-CoV-2, as well as the Kent (B.1.1.7) and South Africa (B.1.351) variants of concern.

Along with antibodies, the researchers also focused on two types of white blood cell: B-cells, which 'remember' the virus, and T cells, which help B cell memory and recognise and destroy cells infected with coronavirus.

They found that after a first dose of vaccine, prior infection was associated with a boosted T cell, B cell and neutralising antibody response, which could provide effective protection against SARS-CoV-2, as well as the Kent and South Africa variants.

However, in people without previous SARS-CoV-2 infection, a single vaccine dose resulted in lower levels of neutralising antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 and the variants, potentially leaving them vulnerable to infection and highlighting the importance

of the second vaccine dose.

It remains unclear precisely how much protection is offered by T cells.

The mutations in the Kent and South Africa variants resulted in T cell immunity which could be reduced, enhanced or unchanged compared to the original strain, depending on genetic differences between people.

"Our data show that natural infection alone may not provide sufficient immunity against the variants," Boynton said.

"Boosting with a single vaccine dose in people with prior infection probably does. As new variants continue to emerge, it is important to fast track global rollout of vaccines to reduce transmission of the virus and remove the opportunities for new variants to arise," she said.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Emphatic victory

The BJP lost the plot when it focused more on damning Mamata than advancing its core agenda

It's a classic case of "glass half full" battle of jibes for both the BJP backers and their critics. For the supporters of the saffron outfit, the victory in Assam and Puducherry and the massive rise in both the vote percentage and the number of seats in West Bengal are a reflection of the BJP's unmatched electoral management and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity. The saffron baiters have their own arguments. They contend that the BJP's victory against the Congress in Assam was predictable because the latter is no more a potent political force. Similarly, in Puducherry, it's the personal victory of All India NR Congress (AINRC) leader N Rangasamy and the BJP has merely benefited from the alliance. But in Bengal, where the real battle of 2021 took place, the BJP came a cropper. After all, it had thrown in everything it had in its ever-growing kitty of resources — political, financial and others. The Prime Minister himself addressed 18 rallies and Home Minister Amit Shah held dozens of massive road shows. Several other Chief Ministers, MPs, MLAs and party president JP Nadda camped in Bengal for months together and tried to create the necessary media buzz to defeat the TMC in the psychological space. Coincidentally, several initiatives of the CBI and the I-T department against the TMC leaders also came in handy for the BJP. Mamata and her supporters also kept alleging that the Election Commission was acting as a player rather than an arbiter.

On the other hand, Mamata got little support from the anti-BJP bandwagon. Though the Congress-Left alliance threatened to cut into her Muslim votes, a few erstwhile UPA leaders came in to campaign for her. Devoid of any serious policy and programme narratives, the campaign became highly personalised with Modi greeting Mamata with "Didi o Didi" catcalls and the TMC supremo hurling the choicest invectives at Shah. The BJP lost the plot when it focused more on damning Mamata than advancing its core political agenda. The Bengali-identity politics turned out to be far more assertive and lethal for the BJP which didn't realise that lord Ram would not threaten a woman who epitomised goddess Durga for millions of Bengalis. In fact, the more the BJP leaders ridiculed Mamata, the more sympathy she drew from the people of the State. The presence of a leader who could give a face to identity politics cost the saffron party in a big way. Most of the borrowed players — described as "rotten eggs" by Prashant Kishor — were seen as opportunists even by the BJP's own supporters. It's obvious that any cadre-based party can't assimilate such an overnight influx without alienating a section of its own supporters. The lesson for the BJP is loud and clear: Wherever the party is pitched against satraps, it would need to focus more on local issues and identity politics. The record of the last seven years shows that the BJP has not been successful in winning against powerful regional players in the State-level elections.



People buy vegetables at a crowded market during the lockdown in Jalandhar

Crunch time

The Centre must plan meticulously before it agrees to the SC's advice for another lockdown

Devastated by COVID-19's second wave, the nation is anxiously looking for solutions but seemingly can't find any. The Prime Minister, who had last year announced a hard lockdown, is now advocating a "micro-containment" strategy while the Supreme Court recently asked the Centre to consider imposing another lockdown. But considering the ferocity of the second wave — the exponential rise in cases, mounting death toll, shortage of medical oxygen, vaccines and hospital beds — and the loss of crucial time in the conduct of the Assembly elections and the Mahakumbh, the moot question is: Would another lockdown help contain the infection? There has been no significant improvement in Delhi even after a two-week lockdown — now extended for a third week — as the positivity rate continues to be alarmingly high. Further, even if a pan-India lockdown is imposed as a knee-jerk reaction to the court's suggestion, its impact on breaking the transmission chain is debatable. There's no doubt, however, that it would be a death blow to millions of underprivileged citizens already facing an existential crisis. We have seen how the hapless migrant workers again rushed back home from big cities fearing a lockdown, even before it was announced.

It is the duty of the Centre to make adequate arrangements for the return of these workers if it plans to enforce another lockdown. It must ensure that these people are not stuffed into trains or buses like last year because that would be another super-spreader. A reasonable period, at least two weeks, must be allowed for their safe return before the lockdown is effected. The Government should also transfer some funds via the DBT schemes into their bank accounts. Also, with the Supreme Court observing that no person shall be denied hospitalisation for lack of identity proof, the Centre must now consult States and formulate a national policy within two weeks. The situation is already out of hand and the entire population must be vaccinated as early as possible. With vaccine shortage and an uneven pricing policy haunting the States, getting the desired outcome from the inoculation drive is easier said than done. With reports that the second wave may hit its peak between May 11-16 before declining by May end, we must be prepared for the worst.

Ignoring the warning signs

We were wilfully unprepared for this tsunami of an outbreak of COVID-19, though the telltale marks were all in plain sight

Anybody who has seen videos of the horrific 2004 tsunami that killed an estimated quarter of a million people, and there are several of these on YouTube, might have noticed in some videos that as much as 10-15 minutes before the tsunami actually hit the shore, water had started withdrawing from the beach. The students of middle-school geography will remember that it is taught as a classic warning sign of an impending tsunami; and we are actually taught at a very early age that one needs to find higher ground in such a situation. This lesson is redoubled in many coastal areas. Maybe some people did seek shelter when they noticed this, many did not. Yes, the tsunami might have gotten many of those who escaped anyway; it was so devastating that running away could do only so much. But even if it saved a few lives, the lessons in school would have been worth it.

That was a real tsunami, what we have in India right now is not a second wave of COVID-19 infections. We have an overwhelming tsunami of COVID-19 infections and, in Delhi and in many other cities across India, the healthcare system is overwhelmed. We know that at least 3,500 people are dying every day, at least in official statistics. India is inching up to 2,50,000 deaths and almost every family in Delhi at least knows either a loved one or a close friend who has died from the Coronavirus Tsunami. While the authorities now struggle with managing the situation, we have to start taking into account as to why we all ignored the warning signs.

And these were there. These were there for all of us to see and read about in the news. We knew there was a deadly new British variant doing the rounds; we knew that there was a new "double mutant" variant. Even with limited testing, we knew that there were hotspots emerging in and around Mumbai and Pune. But instead of herding



people to a higher ground and safety, like we should have if this were a real tsunami, we were mesmerised and walked into the exposed seafloor, trying to pick up coral and seashells. We travelled to Goa, crowded planes and airports and instead of managing travel from hotspots like the United Kingdom, or even domestic travel, we "celebrated" the rising numbers of air passengers through tweets. Instead of restricting air travel, either within India, from India or into India, we allowed hundreds of people to come in likely carrying new and exotic variants of the virus. The world, however, is scared of the new variants emerging from India and has pretty much closed its doors to India.

Some of us had read about the sudden rise in cases in Brazil, starting with the Amazonian city of Manaus and spreading across that South American country, and wondered whether India too could see such a tremendously debilitating tsunami of cases. Instead, we were told stories of Indian exceptionalism, how India had beaten

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INSTEAD OF UNDERSTANDING WHY INDIA WAS SPARED THE 'FULL' IMPACT OF THE ORIGINAL CORONAVIRUS, WE ROLLED OUT A GRADUAL VACCINE PROGRAMME AND INDEED MADE A SONG AND DANCE ABOUT EXPORTING MILLIONS OF VACCINES ABROAD

back the virus and taking a cue from our leaders, across fields from politics to sports, we all let our guard down. Instead of understanding why India was spared the "full" impact of the original Coronavirus, we rolled out a gradual vaccine programme and indeed made a song and dance about exporting millions of vaccines abroad. Nothing against India's generosity to the world, but maybe here following a more selfish American philosophy might have ensured that more people in India were vaccinated and the death toll from this outbreak might have been less.

Yes, a large majority of those who have died were elderly and had led full lives, and while many of them might have died in this tsunami also, the issue is that a large number of people who died need not have died had the arrangements for more beds and oxygen been made earlier. Yes, the system might still have been overwhelmed, meaning that those who caught the disease early benefited from more resources but if the special COVID-19 hospitals in Delhi and

Mumbai had been established a week earlier, if a proper logistical programme had been thought out for oxygen transport a month earlier, many lives might have been saved. The Government is going around tom-tomming India's "low" COVID-19 Fatality Rate; in fact, with a bit of planning and organisation, it could have been lower still.

The fact of the matter is that we saw the warning signs but chose to ignore these; we all bought into the story of Indian exceptionalism. We blithely chose to ignore what was happening elsewhere in the world and believed that once we all start getting vaccinated, things will get even better. We went ahead and planned for massive religious functions like the Mahakumbh, we had parties on Holi and we put ourselves at risk. We ignored the warning signs, even though these were in plain sight for all of us to see. No wonder, now we find ourselves drowning in a tsunami.

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

SOUND BITE

So far, refrained from ordering a sweeping lockdown. But if the people do not comply with the restrictions, harsher steps might have to be taken.

Punjab Chief Minister
— Amarinder Singh

What we've witnessed over the last several years is China acting more aggressively abroad.

US Secretary of State
— Antony Blinken

Everybody is building more and more oxygen plants, getting tonnes and tonnes of oxygen cylinders. How are we compensating for all the oxygen that we are forcefully drawing from the environment?.

Actor
— Kangana Ranaut

Yeah, Sanju Samson is good fun to bat with. We all know he is a chilled fun character. He walked in and smacked his first ball for a six, which was quite amazing.

Rajasthan Royals opener
— Jos Buttler

Nirvachan Sadan is the new crematorium in Delhi. Constitutional bodies (are) burnt here.

TMC leader
— Mahua Moitra

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MATCHES ARE AN OASIS THESE DAYS

Sir — The Indian Premier League (IPL) match between archrivals Mumbai Indians (MI) and Chennai Super Kings (CSK) recently was a perfect entertainer and certainly the match of this season so far. Kieron Pollard's stunning onslaught took the Mumbai Indians to an improbable win in a run-fest. The defeat also ended the Super Kings' five-match winning streak.

The MI came out with flying colours in a last-ball thriller. With 138 needed from the last 10 overs, they knew there was just one way to go about it and, in Pollard, they found the man to pursue the Herculean task. He muscled Jadeja for three sixes in the 13th over before smashing two more off Lungi Ngidi in the next. By the end of 14 overs, Mumbai were 130 for three. At the same stage in their innings, the Super Kings were 126 for four. Pollard raced away to 50 in 17 balls, the fifth joint-fastest in the IPL, and reduced the equation to 66 required from the last five overs. A match that witnessed an equal number of fours and sixes (30 each) is absolutely a bad memory for the bowlers. Remarkably, both teams displayed true teamwork to arrive at such a mammoth total. But Ravudu and Moeen Ali from CSK and Pollard and Krunal Pandya from MI deserve special applause. Let's hope the richest cash league will offer the best entertainment in the remainder of the series.

Satish Reddy Kanaganti | Nalgonda

IT'S TIME TO BE HOPEFUL, CAREFUL

Sir — Winning over the first wave of COVID-19 was no mean feat for India. Buoyed by it, New Delhi started vaccine diplomacy to help other nations during the crisis. However, things turned upside down as the second wave hit us hard and sent our healthcare system reeling. Some sceptics applaud other countries for beating the second wave and compare it with India's "failure". However, we must keep in mind that we have a huge population and there are several other barriers. Despite all the constraints, our recovery rate is far better and mortality rate is too low. Even the US and Russia, among the developed

BJP should introspect its failure



In the West Bengal Assembly elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fell way below its expected number of seats. But in a surprise turn, Mamata Banerjee lost to Suwendu Adhikari, her former party colleague who switched sides months earlier and joined the BJP. It's time for the BJP and its leaders, who were earlier claiming to win more than 200 seats, to introspect about what led to their defeat. In an embarrassment for the BJP, its stalwarts such as Union Minister Babul Supriyo, former Rajya Sabha MP Swapna Dasgupta and Lok Sabha MP Locket Chatterjee fell like ninepins. The Assembly election

result is a dampener for the BJP if compared with the outcome of the 2019 Lok Sabha election. It had won 18 of the 42 seats and taken a lead on 121 of the 294 Assembly segments by garnering 40.2 per cent vote share. However, in this election, it won 77 seats — 44 seats less than the lead it had taken in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

The people of West Bengal chose to rally behind Mamata Banerjee despite the vigorous canvassing against her by tall BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. It seems that the Trinamool Congress was successful in consolidating the Muslim votes and that had a direct impact on the election results. In Kerala, the LDF Government got due recognition from the voters for its efficient management of the State during the severe flood and its proper handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's good for the BJP to be ambitious but the recent Assembly results have shown that over-ambition is counterproductive.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao | Hyderabad

TAMIL NADU'S DRAVIDIAN ICONS

Sir — These Tamil Nadu Assembly elections were the first time in the last five decades without the towering presence of the icons of Dravidian politics. This time, the State may well have seen the emergence

of one, perhaps two, new icons. Now the State has newly elected MLA and to-be-Chief Minister M K Stalin who is well suited for this new generation and for the DMK. He is 68 years old and has finally reached where he wanted to be for five long decades in the shadow of his father and one of the leading lights of the Dravidian movement, the late Muthuvel Karunanidhi.

However, the AIADMK hasn't done as badly as was expected, especially with the weight of an alliance with the BJP which was more like a liability. Stalin, because of his genealogy, long years in politics and two successive wins, in 2019, when the DMK-led grouping won 38 of the 39 Lok Sabha seats in the State, and now, can stake claim to being the next Dravidian icon.

Anshita Rochwani | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

TIME FOR COURSE CORRECTION



SHIVAJI SARKAR

Economic activities have been hit so hard by the lockdown that traders have cried for deferment of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and other taxes. According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), the daily loss of business owing to the lockdown in Delhi is likely to be around ₹600 crore while the total loss across the nation could be nearly ₹30,000 crore if full and partial lockdowns, night curfews and other forms of restrictions are taken into account. CAIT's secretary general Praveen Khandelwal says that non-compliance with these tax stipulations will attract huge penalties on traders across the country. There is no policy or revival plan and the economy is shrinking as people's incomes are in a tailspin, markets have sagging demand and activities are at a virtual thaw. A hard lockdown was imposed on March 24, 2020 without giving a simple thought on how 130 crore Indians would survive if their livelihoods were snatched away. It happened and the next three months revealed that the decision to close down all activities, except those centered around COVID-19, had led the country to a devastating path. Lakhs of the 18 crore migrant workers hit the road amid loss of work and dignity. Nearly 13 months down the line, the Government should have come out with a road map till now but, alas the nation became complacent about having conquered COVID-19 only to realise too late that the virus has not gone and has hit us with greater ferocity. Consequently, there has been an exponential surge in infections, a mounting death toll, lack of medical oxygen and medicines.

The State has largely remained a mute spectator compelling the courts to intervene and stop the administration from smothering voices being raised against the Government's monumental failure. Despite its massive failure to deal with the crisis, the Centre has claimed that all arms of the Government are working unitedly and rapidly to deal with the situation. The nation is still expecting some decisive action against the pandemic but with its ailing healthcare system and mounting death toll the situation is becoming grim day by day. Reports from the countryside say that half-baked hospitals are doing more harm and how the bodies are cremated remains a mystery. "The State has failed in its fundamental obligation to protect the basic fundamental right that is the right to life under Article 21", said Delhi High Court on April 30. The Bench, earlier during the same hearing, had noted the "complete failure of the State" when dealing with other pleas.

We have not suddenly plummeted into such a state. It appears that the nation was in euphoria of collecting brownie points and has given up all thoughts about the lives of its own people or the state of its economy. The latest indicators from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) about the banking system do not bring any comfort. The bank losses or Non Performing Assets (NPA) are mounting. In such a scenario, credit squeeze is obvious. The Rupee is plunging and petrol prices are at an artificial high. The time for correction has come. The Government needs to own up to failure on its part to control the pandemic. Further, it must also admit that it failed to provide employment and prevent loss of jobs following the demonetisation exercise and pushed the country into severe social and economic crisis. The Centre must reformulate the plan for resurgence of the country with the help of the Opposition, religious leaders and social groups not merely for Gross Domestic Product figures but for survival of the informal sector and the free flow of cash. It must give up all political ego. Healthcare should now become the bedrock of the nation's resurgence, supported by a prudent economic policy, even if that means forming a national Government.

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

Make the COVID jabs free for everyone



UTTAM GUPTA

There is a dire need to vaccinate at least one billion people within a short time and, given the pitfalls of differentiated pricing, the Centre should opt for inoculating everyone free of cost

Under the 'Liberalised Pricing and Accelerated National COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy (LPANCVS)', announced on April 19, which was kicked off from May 1, the Centre has plans to vaccinate all adults above 18 years of age. Before this, the inoculation drive that was launched on January 16, covered healthcare and frontline workers and people above 50 years of age and those with comorbidities. In the second phase of the drive the age limit was brought down to those above 45. Vaccine manufacturers were giving all their supplies to the Government of India (GOI) and charging ₹150 per dose even as the latter was arranging for inoculation of eligible people free at Government vaccination centres (GVCs). However, those opting to get vaccinated at private hospitals needed to pay ₹250 per dose. The GOI incurred a subsidy on vaccination done at GVCs equal to ₹150 per dose, plus the cost of administering it. It was funded from the Union Budget.

Even as the above arrangement involved differential pricing, like free for those who got vaccinated at GVCs and others getting the jab at private hospitals for a price, the proposed system from this month is much more complex. Under it, of its total supply, the vaccine manufacturer would give 50 per cent to the GOI at the rate of ₹150 per dose and make the remaining 50 per cent available to State Governments, private hospitals, industrial establishments at a price to be declared in advance (the price charged for vaccination by private hospitals would be monitored). People can make an "informed" choice at the time of booking an appointment at a private vaccination centre.

The vaccines will not be available for sale at pharmacists or chemist shops in the open market. The present system of private hospitals inoculating those above 45 years for ₹250 per dose will cease to exist as they will no longer be getting any supplies from the GOI quota and will have to procure directly from vaccine manufacturers at the price notified by the latter.

Meanwhile, the manufacturers have announced prices they intend to charge from the State Governments and private hospitals. The Serum Institute of India (SII), the maker of Covishield, will charge ₹300 per dose on supplies to States and ₹600 per dose from private hospitals. Bharat Biotech, the maker of Covaxin, will charge ₹400 per dose from States and ₹1,200 per dose on supplies to private hospitals. Both will continue to supply to the GOI at the rate of ₹150 per dose (this is as per a statement issued by Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare).

Putting all pieces together, there will be a minimum of five prices for the COVID-19 vaccination dose i.e. zero, ₹300, ₹400, ₹600, ₹1,200 (the cost to the recipients will be higher by an amount equal to the "service charge" levied by the State Governments/private hospitals to cover the cost of administering the vaccine) depending on the vaccine type and the channel through which it is done.

Meanwhile, more vaccines like Sputnik V, Nasal Covaxin and so on, are expected to get approval shortly. But those are likely to be priced even higher. The earlier arrangement was far from optimal as it entailed differential treatment of eligible people depending on the place they got the jab. While, those going to GVCs got it free, others opting for private hospitals, paid ₹250 per dose. Even as the involvement of private hospitals was justified in view of the need to cover a large number (there are 300 million in the 45 plus group) within a short time frame, putting a price tag to it and that too ₹100 over and above the price they paid to manufacturers militated against this objective. Indeed, this was a potent factor behind dismal results thus far with only about 20 million in a total of 300 million having got both the shots (even as other factors such as the initial vaccine hesitancy among the public at large as also supply constraints were equally responsible).

Under the new regime, even as the facility of getting a jab for ₹250 per dose at private hospitals for persons in the 45 years plus category has been withdrawn, the Central Government wants over 500 million people (50 per cent of about one billion of the adult population i.e. over 18 years whom it expects to get jabs from States and private hospitals' quota) to pay a price high enough to destabilise the budget of even a middle income family.

Consider the following two scenarios: First, let's take the lowest in the price spectrum i.e. Covishield — supplied for ₹300 per dose to States. Add service charge of ₹200 per dose (67 per cent of the price; this is the mark-up applied to ₹150 per dose being the price billed to private hospitals under the erstwhile dispensation), the recipient will pay ₹500 per dose. For two doses, this comes to ₹1,000. A family of four will have to shell out ₹4,000.

At another extreme, consider Covaxin supplied for ₹1,200 per dose to private hospitals. Plus service charge, the recipient will pay ₹2,000 per dose. For two doses, this will be ₹4,000. In this case, the dent on this family's budget will be ₹16,000.

Given the high prices at State centres and much higher at private hospitals and considering that vaccination from the GOI quota (50 per cent of total supply) is for free, people will tend to gravitate towards the latter. The clamour for getting vaccinated at GVCs will be so pronounced as to cause a complete breakdown of this network. This could be averted if only the State Governments decide to do free inoculation even out of the paid quota; however, this will require them to give heavy subsidy from the State Budget.

Already, some States like Maharashtra, Delhi and so on have announced their intent to give it all free and others are likely to follow suit. If, it has to be free for all involving subsidisation by the Centre or States then why go through such a cumbersome route?

Considering that the crisis is of an unprecedented magnitude (once in a lifetime) afflicting the entire population, there is a dire need for vaccinating at least one billion within the shortest possible time frame and given the pitfalls of differentiated pricing, the Centre should opt for inoculating everyone free of charge.

Apart from GVCs, all other stakeholders like the State health facilities, private hospitals, industrial establishments and so on should be involved in the vaccination drive. They can pick up their requirements directly from the manufacturers even as the GOI does overall coordination, negotiates a good price and makes payment.

Given the mammoth numbers i.e. two billion doses, a price of ₹200 per dose should be good enough to cover the cost and give good return to the manufacturers (here, it is pertinent to recall a statement by Adar Poonawalla, CEO, SII, "the firm was making a profit even at a price of ₹150 per dose"). The cost of purchase i.e. about ₹40,000 crore can be met from the allocation of ₹35,000 crore made in the Union Budget for 2021-22 (an additional ₹5,000 crore would be needed to make up for the deficit). As for the "service charge" for vaccination, this cost may be paid by the States from their Budgets.

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The writer is a New Delhi-based policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.



POINT COUNTERPOINT

I THINK THAT THE PEOPLE OF BENGAL MADE A HISTORIC MISTAKE BY NOT GIVING THE BJP A CHANCE AND BY RE-ELECTING THIS CORRUPT AND CRUEL LADY. —BJP MP BABUL SUPRIYO



IT IS THE VICTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF BENGAL AND THE VICTORY OF DEMOCRACY. BENGAL HAS SAVED INDIA TODAY. THIS VICTORY HAS SAVED HUMANITY. —WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE



The mysterious end of the quest for knowledge in India

What happened that made the development of science and technology less important after the great burst of scientific creativity in ancient India?



MARKANDEY KATJU

Joseph Needham a brilliant British bio-chemist who had obtained a doctorate from Cambridge University in 1925, visited China several times. In his book 'Science and Civilisation in China' Needham posed the problem, known as "Needham's grand question", in respect of China, but which applies equally to India.

The question is this: Why did China (and India), which were far ahead of Western countries in science and technology at one time, later fell behind, did not have an industrial revolution, became backward and consequently victims of imperialism and colonisation?

There is no doubt that both India and China were at one time far ahead of the Western countries in science and technology. China invented gunpowder, the magnetic compass, paper and printing,

which, according to Francis Bacon, were the three most important inventions facilitating Europe to pass from the dark Middle Ages to the Modern age. But why did China's progress in science and technology stop thereafter? According to Needham it could have been the Confucian philosophy, which was incompatible with scientific development, which was responsible for this. But is this explanation not superficial?

As for India, it was far ahead of the West in ancient times. Indians invented the decimal system in mathematics, which was one of the revolutionary inventions in history. The numerals in the decimal system were known as Arabic numerals by the Westerners, but the Arabs called them Indian numerals. Were they really Arabic or Indian? To answer this we may note that the languages Arabic, Persian, and Urdu are written from right to left. But if we ask an Arab, Persian, or Urdu writer, to write any number (say 259 or 1,379) he will write it from left to right. This indicates that these numbers were taken from a language which is written from left to right. And now it is accepted universally that the decimal system and the number zero, was invented in India.

The importance of zero can be understood by considering the following: The ancient Romans built a great civilisation of Caesar and Augustus. But if we were to ask an ancient Roman to write the number one million he would have been stumped. The reason for this is that the ancient Romans wrote their numbers in alphabets, V standing for five, X standing for ten, L for 50, C for 100, D for 500, and M for 1,000 (or millennium). There was no alphabet expressing a number greater than 1,000. So if an ancient Roman had to write 2,000 he would have to write MM and if he wanted to write one million he had to write M a 1,000 times.

On the other hand, according to the system invented by Indians, to write one million they had only to write one and then put six zeros after that. The ancient Greeks and Romans just did not have the imagination to conceive of a number called zero. By using zero our ancestors could conceive of astronomically large numbers. Thus, 1,000 had three zeros after one. If we add two more zeros we get one lakh and so on.

Aryabhatta, who reputedly lived in the 5th Century AD worked on quadratic equations, the binomial theorem and calculated the value of pi to a fairly accurate degree. He also made significant contributions to astronomy, being perhaps the first person in the world to prove that the Earth rotates on its axis, thus causing day and night.

Brahmagupta and Bhaskar also made great contributions in mathematics and so on. In medical science India was at least 1,000, if not 1,500, years ahead of any country. Thus, Sushrut, the father of surgery, invented plastic surgery in the 6th century BC while the Britishers discovered it only towards the end of the 18th century AD during the Anglo-Mysore wars, and that too, from a traditional physician who lived near Pune.

The harbour at Lothal in Gujarat, which is regarded as quite modern in its construction, was built around 5,000 years ago, and is regarded as part of the Indus valley civilisation. Why, then, did we fall behind the West? Why did we not have an industrial revolution? Why was our advance in science and technology blocked, while Europe produced Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Descartes, Robert Boyle, Cavendish, Priestly, Lavoisier, Maxwell, Gauss, Max Planck, Rutherford, Heisenberg, Pauli,

Niels Bohr, Einstein, Schrodinger, Chadwick, Madam Curie, Otto Hahn in physics, chemistry and mathematics, William Harvey, Ross, and so on in medicine, Edmond Halley and so on in astronomy, James Hutton in Geology, Linnaeus, Buffon, and Darwin in biology, and so on. No doubt we produced CV Raman, Srinivasa Ramanujan, Chandrashekhara, S Bose and so on but these are just a handful

What happened that made in the history of India the development of science and technology less important (after the great burst of scientific creativity in ancient India), while in the West it became more important? This mystery is yet to be solved. Were there cultural, economic, or historical factors involved in this deceleration in learning? A lot of scientific investigation is called for.

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

Markets recoup initial losses to end flat; RIL, banks weigh

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex staged a smart recovery from the day's low to end with marginal losses on Monday, propped up by robust buying in FMCG and telecom counters. Reliance Industries and banking stocks accounted for most of the losses, while a rebounding rupee also provided support, traders said. After plunging over 750 points in early trade, the 30-share BSE index made a U-turn to finish 63.84 points or 0.13 per cent lower at 48,718.52. In similar movement, the broader NSE Nifty closed 3.05 points or 0.02 per cent higher at 14,634.15. Titan was the top laggard in the Sensex pack, shedding 4.58 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries, Axis Bank, Kotak Bank, ITC, SBI, ONGC and ICICI Bank. On the other hand, Bharti Airtel, HUL, Maruti, Bajaj Finance, Asian Paints, NTPC and Nestle India were among the gainers, climbing up to 3.98 per cent. Domestic equities recovered

sharply from day's low despite weak global cues. While growing uncertainties about collection efficiency and asset quality of banks/NBFCs dragged heavy weight financials, strong buying in FMCG and Metals supported recovery in markets," said Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities. While persistent rise in second wave of COVID-19 cases has weighed on investors' sentiments, steady corporate earnings with positive managements' commentaries offered support to markets, he noted. On the macroeconomic front, India's manufacturing sector activity was largely flat in April, as rates of growth for new orders and output eased to

eight-month lows amid the intensification of The seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) was at 55.5 in April, little changed from March's reading of 55.4. Sectorally, BSE consumer durables, energy, bankex, oil and gas, com, metal, FMCG, industrials and basic materials closed in the green. Broader BSE midcap and smallcap indices outperformed the benchmark, spurring as much as 1.57 per cent. The daily COVID-19 cases in India showed a slight dip with 3,68,147 new coronavirus infections being reported in a day, taking the total tally of cases to 1,99,25,604, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday. The death toll increased to 2,18,959 with 3,417 daily new fatalities. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Hong Kong and Seoul ended on a negative note. Stock exchanges in Shanghai and Tokyo were closed for holidays. European markets were largely trading with losses in mid-session deals.

the COVID-19 crisis, a monthly survey showed on Monday. realty and finance indices fell up to 1.99 per cent, while tele-

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IGST waived on import of relief material received as donation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Monday waived Integrated GST (IGST) till June 30 on the import of COVID-related relief material donated or received free of cost from outside India for free distribution. The Finance Ministry in a statement said the government had received a number of representations from charitable organisations, corporate entities, and other Associations/entities outside India seeking exemption from IGST on the import of Covid-19 relief material, donated/received free of cost from outside India for free distribution. "Accordingly, the Central Government has ... granted exemption from IGST on import of such goods received free of cost for free distribution for covid relief," it said, adding the exemption would be applicable till June 30. This exemption would also cover goods already imported but lying uncleared at the Customs ports. The Government has already exempted from customs duty import of a host of COVID-related relief materials, including Remdesivir injection and its APIs, Inflammatory diagnostic (markers) kits, medical grade oxygen, oxygen therapy related equipment such as oxygen

concentrators, cryogenic transport tanks, etc, and Covid vaccines. The IGST exemption given on Monday would be subject to nodal authorities, appointed by the state governments, authorising any entity, relief agency or statutory body, for free distribution of such relief material. The said goods can be imported free of cost by a state government or, any entity/relief agency/ statutory body, authorized in this regard for free distribution anywhere in India. The importer shall before clearance of goods from Customs produce a certificate from the said nodal authorities that goods are meant for free distribution for Covid relief. After imports, the importer shall produce, to the Deputy or Assistant Commissioner of Customs at the port within a period of six months from the date of importation or within such extended period not exceeding nine months, a statement containing details of goods imported and distributed free of cost. This statement shall be certified by the said nodal authority of the state government. This exemption shall thus enable import of the Covid relief supply imported free of

Government received representations from charitable organisations outside India seeking exemption from IGST on the import of Covid relief material received free of cost from outside India for free distribution.

cost for free distribution without payment of IGST (up to the 30th June, 2021). As customs duty is already exempt, these imports will not attract any customs duty or IGST," the ministry added. India's single day COVID infections had crossed a record 4 lakh mark last week. On Monday, 3.68 lakh new infections and 3,417 deaths were reported. Last week, the government slashed IGST rate on import of oxygen concentrators for personal use to 12 per cent, from 28 per cent, for two months till June 30.

SBI allocates ₹71 cr for fight against virus

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's largest lender SBI on Monday announced allocating Rs 71 crore towards the fight against Covid a part of which will be used to set up a makeshift 1,000-bed hospital for the treatment of patients in some of the worst-affected states. SBI has allocated Rs 71 crore to undertake various support initiatives to combat the second wave of Covid, SBI said in a release. The state-owned lender has allocated Rs 30 crore for a makeshift hospital while Rs 21 crore will be used to support



initiatives such as procurement of life-saving healthcare equipment, oxygen supply to hospitals, Covid-care centres, ambulances, PPE kits, masks as well as food relief efforts. Besides, Rs 10 crore will be used to supplement government's effort in genome sequencing, and Rs 10 crore will be earmarked to collaborate with NGOs to address the community needs, SBI said.

MAHAGENCO to ramp up oxygen supply for patients

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Maharashtra State Power Generating Company (MAHAGENCO) has decided to boost the supply of medical oxygen for Covid patients from its various plants, state Energy Minister Nitin Raut said. On April 30, the Khaparkheda Power Station of MAHAGENCO handed over 25 of its oxygen cylinders to the Bhandara district collector for COVID-19 patients, he said in a statement issued on Sunday. Considering the possibility of a third COVID-19 wave in near future, the state-owned power utility has undertaken



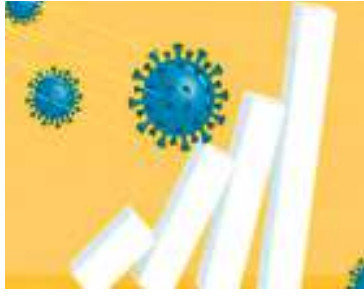
this comprehensive dynamic programme as per the government directives, Raut said. Rapid steps are being taken to supplement the oxygen supply from the MAHAGENCO's ozonation plants at Khaparkheda, Koradi (both in Nagpur district), Paras (Akola) and Parli (Beed), he said. In the first phase, the

MAHAGENCO's new Parli power station has set up an oxygen plant at the Swami Ramanand Tirtha Rural Hospital in Ambejogai with a capacity of 288 jumbo cylinders per day and 95.2 per cent purity. The commissioning of this plant on April 27 is a big boost for treating COVID-19 patients in Parli and Beed, the minister said. A similar plant with a capacity of 84 cubic meters per hour of oxygen is also being set up at the Parbhani Zilla Parishad's COVID-19 Hospital and will be operational next week, he said. Under the second phase,

Barclays cuts FY22 GDP growth forecast to 10%

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Blaming the slow pace of vaccinations and uncertainty around the number of those infected and dead in the second COVID-19 wave, global brokerage firm Barclays cut India's FY22 GDP growth estimate to 10 per cent from earlier 11 per cent. If the ongoing localised lockdowns continue till June, it will lead to economic losses of USD 38.4 billion, it said. In a more pessimistic scenario of the pandemic not being brought under control soon and mobility restrictions continuing till August, the growth can



fall to 8.8 per cent, Barclays warned. The country's economy is estimated to contract by 7.6 per cent in FY21 as the pandemic-induced lockdowns led

to chilling of economic activity, hurt jobs and demand. The lower base is set to help the economy in posting a faster growth in FY22, but the ongoing second wave and resultant localised lockdowns have led many analysts to review down their forecasts. The RBI is maintaining that the economy will grow at 10.5 per cent this fiscal. "As India's second COVID-19 wave continues, there is growing uncertainty around the number of cases and fatalities. Slowing vaccinations are also hurting India's recovery prospects. We lower our FY 2021-22 GDP growth forecast by 1 per cent to 10.0 per cent

to reflect this uncertainty," analysts at Barclays wrote. India is in the "unwelcome position" of being the centre of the global pandemic now, with infections rising at over 4 lakh a day, it said, pointing out that the geographical area of infections is widening with positivity rates surging in many states. "At the same time, India's vaccination programme has slowed, weighed down by rising supply constraints and logistical challenges," it said, adding that the move to liberalise vaccinations is unlikely to have any impact in the short term.

Sugar production reaches 29.91 MT

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's sugar production has reached 29.91 million tonne till April of the ongoing 2020-21 marketing season, industry body ISMA said on Monday. With regard to sugar exports, mills have contracted for shipments of 5.4 to 5.5 million tonne so far. Out of which, 3.5 million tonne has been exported, while another 1 million tonne is expected to be done by this month, it said. On ethanol, Indian Sugar

Mills Association (ISMA) said mills have supplied 117.72 crore litres of ethanol to oil marketing companies till April 19 of this year against the total contracted quantity of 302.53 crore litres, it added. Releasing updated production figures, ISMA said mills across the country have produced 29.91 million tonne of sugar during the October-April period of the 2020-21 marketing season (October-September). ISMA has estimated sugar production to be 30.2 million tonne in the 2020-21

marketing season, higher than 27.42 million tonne achieved in the previous season. As per the ISMA data, Sugar production in Uttar Pradesh, the country's largest sugar-producing state, remained slightly lower at 10.56 million tonne till April of this year, as against 11.65 million tonne in the year-ago period. Whereas the output in Maharashtra, the country's second-largest sugar producer, rose substantially to 10.56 million tonne from 6.09 million tonne in the said period.

Godrej Properties posts ₹191.6 cr loss

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Godrej Properties on Monday reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 191.62 crore for the quarter ended March on lower income, even as it achieved record sales bookings of Rs 2,632 crore. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 102.39 crore in the year-ago period. Total income fell to Rs 576.08 crore in

the fourth quarter of last fiscal, from Rs 1,288.17 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year, Godrej Properties said in a regulatory filing. In FY2020-21, the company reported a net loss of Rs 189.43 crore, as against a net profit of Rs 273.94 crore in the previous fiscal. Total income declined to Rs 1,333.09 crore in the fiscal, from Rs 2,914.59 crore in the previous year.

IDBI posts profit of ₹1,359 cr after 5 yrs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

LIC-controlled IDBI Bank turned profitable in the fiscal ended in March 2021 after five years, posting a net profit of Rs 1,359 crore for the year. In 2019-20, the lender had posted a net loss of Rs 12,887 crore. IDBI Bank is back in black after five years, said the lender. In the last quarter of the fiscal year 2020-21, the bank reported a nearly four-fold jump in its net profit to Rs 512 crore, IDBI Bank said in a release. The bank had posted a profit of Rs 135 crore in the year-ago quarter.



The bank, which came out of the RBI's prompt corrective action (PCA) framework earlier in March this year, said its turnaround strategies led to the transformation. Total income during Q4FY21 rose to Rs 6,969.59 crore from Rs 6,924.94 crore in the same period of 2019-20. The full year income, however, was down at Rs 24,557 crore as against Rs 25,295 crore.

CII for curbs on economic activity

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body CII has urged the government to take "strongest" national steps including curtailing economic activity to contain the spike in COVID-19 cases in the country. CII President Uday Kotak has asked for highest-level response measures to address the rising wave of COVID-19 cases, as currently safeguarding lives is key to cut the transmission links. "The healthcare infrastructure and supply build-up are being undertaken on an emergency basis by the governments at the centre and states, but will take time. "At this critical juncture



when the toll of lives is rising, CII urges the strongest national steps including curtailing economic activity to reduce suffering," the President has said in a statement. The chamber said that the current pace of daily case-loads, the requirement for hospital beds and ICU beds, oxygen, and medicines will continue to escalate. "Healthcare and frontline workers are giving their best

efforts to tackle the influx of patients, but it may not be possible to manage escalating case-loads with the present medical talent availability. We must heed expert advice on this subject - from India and abroad. Highest response measures are needed to break the chain of contagion and also use the time to rapidly build up capacity," Kotak added. CII also suggested certain measures such as deployment of armed forces and central security forces for logistics, infrastructure and personnel; security at hospitals for medical personnel; tapping manpower sources such as retired medical personnel, doctors and nurses; and distribution of vaccination supplies to states

according to well-defined criteria. "Nursing and medical students who have finished GNM/BSC training and who are awaiting exams can be roped in and this can be counted for future requirements/credits after one year of COVID ICU work," CII suggested. Further, it asked for scaling up RT-PCR testing to double the current daily numbers both in urban and rural India. The daily COVID-19 cases in India showed a slight dip with 3,68,147 new coronavirus infections being reported in a day, taking the total tally of cases to 1,99,25,604, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

MONEY MATTERS

TVS Motor company sales drop by 26 per cent in April



TVS Motor Company on Monday said its total sales stood at 2,38,983 units in April, down by 26 per cent from 3,22,683 units in March. TVS had exported 9,640 two- and three-wheelers in April 2020. The company's total two-wheelers sales in April stood at 2,26,193 units compared to 3,07,437 units in March. In April 2020, the company had exported a total of 8,134 two wheelers, TVS Motor Company said in a statement. Domestic two-wheeler sales of the company last month stood at 1,31,386 units, down 35 per cent as compared to 2,02,155 units in March this year. There were no sales in the domestic market in April last year due to nationwide lockdown.

Suzuki Motorcycle reports sales of 77,849 units in April



Suzuki Motorcycle India Pvt Ltd on Monday reported sales of 77,849 units in April 2021, a growth of 11 per cent from 69,942 units sold in March this year. The company's sales of April this year are not comparable with that of the same month last year when sales were hit due to the nationwide lockdown imposed to curb the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic. SMIPL said in April this year its domestic sales were at 63,879 unit sales, while exports were at 13,970 units. "It is very satisfying that despite all the challenges associated with the second surge of Covid in the month of April, we have posted of 12 per cent growth in domestic and an exceptional 57.5 per cent growth in our exports volumes vis-à-vis same month in 2019," SMIPL MD Koichiro Hirao said.

6% interest per annum on deposits of over Rs 1 lakh



At an increased interest rate of 6 per cent per annum on savings account deposit of over Rs 1 lakh. The move follows Airtel Payments Bank becoming the first payments bank to implement an enhanced day-end savings limit of Rs 2 lakh, as per the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines, the company said in a statement. Airtel Payments Bank has over 5.5 crore engaged users across its operations, the statement added. The interest rate is at 2.5 per cent per annum for a deposit up to Rs 1 lakh. Announcing the higher interest rate on savings account deposits of over Rs 1 lakh, Anubrata Biswas, CEO of Airtel Payments Bank, said, "RBI's increased savings deposit ceiling is a major milestone for payments banks as this was a key ask from customers". With an "attractive" interest rate on deposit sums above one lakh, Airtel Payments Bank is making banking proposition even more rewarding, Biswas added.

CHINESE AMBASSADOR TO INDIA RESPONDS TO SONU SOOD'S PLEA FOR OXYGEN CONCENTRATORS



Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Weidong has assured actor Sonu Sood of "smooth functioning of export channel of materials to India". Weidong's reply came after Sonu Sood

called out China for blocking consignments of oxygen concentrators being transported to India. Both Sonu and Weidong had a conversation over a series of tweets. Sonu took to Twitter and wrote, "We are trying to get hundreds of oxygen concentrators to

India. It's sad to say that China has blocked lots of our consignments and here in India we are losing lives every minute. I request @China_Amb_India @MFA_China to help us get our consignments cleared so we can save lives."

In his reply, Weidong wrote back to Sonu, "@SonuSood Noted your twitter info. Mr. Sood. China will do its utmost to support India fighting Covid-19. To my knowledge, freight air routes from China to India are operating normally. The past two weeks have witnessed 61 freight flights from China to India in operation. We've provided convenience in customs clearance & transportation for India to transport medical supplies from cities in China. Will continue to ensure smooth functioning of export channel of materials to India.

Pls let us know any problem you met (or email to hinaemb_in@mfa.gov.cn) so that we could try our best to help accordingly." Sonu later thanked the Chinese authorities for their prompt response. "Thanks for the prompt response sir. I am in touch with your office to solve the problems. Appreciate your concern. Warm regards," he tweeted. Sonu Sood has been at the forefront of helping people arrange for a hospital bed or oxygen as the cases of Covid-19 surge across India. The Bollywood star has also been doing much ever since the spread of coronavirus pandemic last year, helping thousands of migrant workers reach their hometowns when the lockdown came into force in 2020.

Superstar Rajinikanth to team up again with Annaatthe makers

Superstar Rajinikanth is currently working for a family drama *Annaatthe*, directed by Siruthai Siva. The shooting of the film is currently happening in Hyderabad, which will wrap in the next ten days. Meanwhile, as per reports, superstar Rajinikanth has agreed upon teaming up again with *Annaatthe* makers and the producer has always kept the actor in his comfort zone.

So, the duo has reportedly planned to team up again for the fourth time, and the announcement might arrive once the director is finalised. Rajinikanth's next film will be his 169th film, and fans are excited to know who will handle the camera for the film. *Kannum Kannum Kollaiyadithal* director Desingh Periyasamy and Karthik Subbaraj have reportedly narrated their stories to Rajinikanth, but the expert actor is yet to choose the

director for 'Thalaivar 169'. Let's wait to see whether Rajinikanth picks one from these two or someone else to direct his next. Rajinikanth is reportedly playing the role of a fun-loving village president in *Annaatthe*. The film also has popular faces like Nayanthara, Keerthy Suresh, Meena, Khushbu, Sathish, Soori, and several others, while the music is scored by D Imman.



Iron Man 3 poster a rip-off: Canadian comic book company

A copyright infringement lawsuit was filed in Canada against Marvel Entertainment on Monday, which claimed the company ripped off the design of their movie poster for *Iron Man 3* and *Avengers: Infinity War*, featuring Robert Downey Jr. Marvel Entertainment has earlier won a lawsuit in the US that claimed the company copied the design of their movie poster for *Iron Man 3* featuring Robert Downey Jr from a Canadian comic. The Montreal-based comic book company had claimed that there were striking similarities between the armoured costume worn by Robert Downey Jr. and "the suit worn by a Caliban, one of the characters portrayed in




Horizon's Works Radix 1." A US District Judge had ruled last year that Horizon failed to prove that the two posters were "strikingly similar," despite sharing some "noteworthy similarities." The judgement said that while

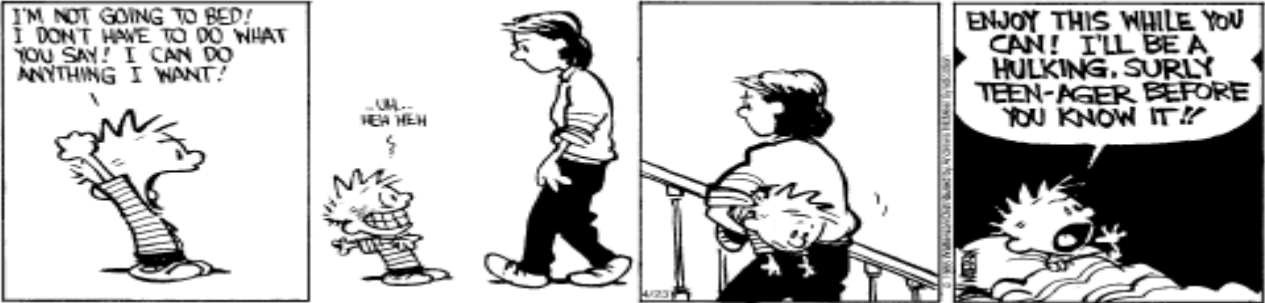
Horizon produced no evidence of copying, Marvel proved the poster was independently created. The Canadian company had then cited the high legal costs and said it was unable to continue the fight. The new lawsuit, filed in a Quebec civil court by Horizon, claims more Marvel movies featuring *Iron Man*, including *Avengers: Infinity War*, have continued to appropriate its works. It claims that the Iron Man suit in *Infinity War* closely resembles the one worn by the Radix character Maxwell. "In sum, not only are the distinctive features raised by Justice Oetken in the American proceeding no longer present in the *Infinity War* suit, but several additional strikingly similar features to the Radix suit were added," the suit reads.

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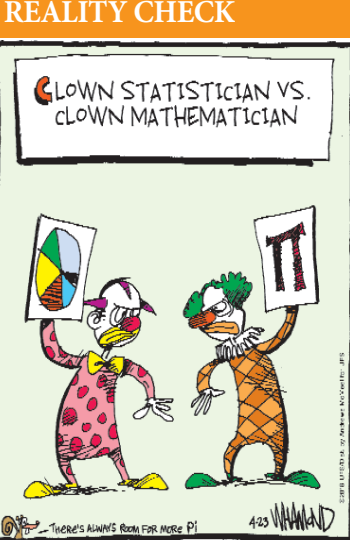
CALVIN AND HOBBS




GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP




CROSSWORD

JUNIOR CROSSWORD 842

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REAR VIEW MIRROR

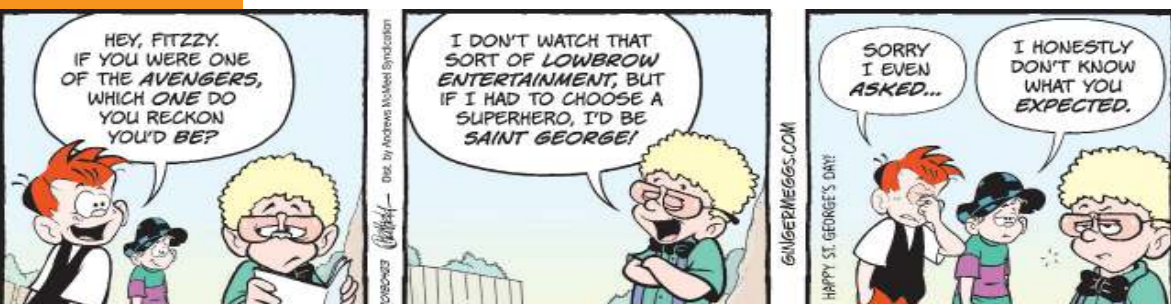


SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

GINGER MEGGS



CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Thief

3 Tidy your hair with this

7 Young woman

8 A dairy product

10 To turn round and round

13 Gleam

16 Truthful

17 Bitter-tasting

18 Thick cord

19 Defeated

DOWN

1 Great anger

2 A round wooden container with flat ends

4 Above

THE SILVER LINING

WE WANT TO SEE



Covid-19 has changed the world! The pandemic has caused devastation, pain, and loss with no corner of the globe untouched. But for climate activist Aakash Ranison, the unprecedented disruption has also brought about a previously unimaginable opportunity. The dramatic fall in air pollution that accompanied countries going into lockdown has provided a unique natural experiment, enabling many sustainable advocates to probe some of the long-standing mysteries surrounding cloud formation.

Did you know that over 70% of the surface water resources in India are polluted? Did you know that over one million people in India die every year as a result of outdoor air pollution? Did you know that India is the third-highest emitter of CO2 in the world? The well-known climate change activist and sustainability influencer explains it all as he launched his eBook *Climate Change Explained - For One And All*.

The book focuses on the serious topic of climate change and how it can affect every individual's life. "I was just a happy person living my life, and all of a sudden, I receive a comprehensive point that the whole world belongs to us and we're all one — there's no Delhi or Mumbai, because we belong to nature. I saw plastic everywhere! Global citizens come to India to see the Himalayan beauty but there's so much plastic there. I thought we can reduce it either by recycling or collecting prevalent waste material, but when I researched deeper about this persisting issue, it was brought to my notice that it's all about climate change. In the process, I also turned vegan and stopped purchasing and contributing to textile waste," shares Aakash.

With public transport shut down, schools, universities, and workplaces closed, and people confined to their homes, the streets became silent and air pollution plummeted in our country. Satellite data revealed that nitrogen dioxide had fallen by as much as 70% and as the virus swept, the atmosphere responded with smog being replaced by blue skies in New Delhi, the Himalayan mountain chain

When the world was locked in, the skies became clearer, smog disappeared and we breathed easy in 2020, one of the very few good things the Covid virus did to the planet. Climate activist Aakash Ranison talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about his recent book on climate change and how the book can help change things for the better.



years and city skylines being brought to sharp relief! "The history of the scientific discovery of climate change began in the early 19th century. Then why is it that even after centuries, and with technology in every hand where information travels at the speed of light, humans still don't seem to understand a crisis caused by our choices, consumptions, and daily actions?" asks the author.

Aakash, in his book, spotlights such topics as the greenhouse effect, global warming, carbon footprint, and its effect on the earth in the near future. He not only focuses on the problem but also provides easy solutions that can be adopted in our day-to-day life and can help to reduce the outcome of climate change.

Aakash proves that climate change is not a complicated topic to speak about and can be explained in mere simple words and illustrations! "As technical as it may sound, I tried my best to explain crucial topics such as carbon footprint or plastic related to crude oil in the most creative manner. I've built three different art installations

Climate Risk Index 2020 and the risk factor for the country is increasing every year through rising temperature, there is an increase in sea level around Mumbai every year, forest fires, plastic waste generations, etc. Among other hard-hitting facts, the book also states that every year more than 1 million people die as a result of outdoor pollution. Whatever I have penned down in the book isn't to blame the authorities but to let the readers know 'kaunsi gali mein, kiske saath burra hua tha' and what do I have to do now to resolve complications," he added. Aakash has been working in the climate space for over five years now, advocating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13 of climate action. Making changes in his lifestyle such as going vegan, not taking flights, not buying single-use plastic packaged products, limiting textile consumption, and educating others for the same, he strongly believes in the importance of 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Upcycle' because lesser the consumption, lesser the waste, lesser the pollution. Just as a small amount of sugar can make a cake taste very different, so can small changes in the composition of the climate trigger a chain reaction of interesting climate effects concocting new chemicals, make or break up clouds, and potentially change the weather at the surface!

Expressing his concerns further, he says, "Humans harming nature is one aspect of the climate change story. The other aspect is, climate change being a threat to humans' survival on earth. By destroying nature, we are creating an imbalance in the earth's functioning and if we continue to do so, sooner or later, the earth's atmosphere won't be able to support humans or any other life for that matter. Today, people might know the term 'Climate change' but they don't really know how we humans are causing it and what we can do to stop it. With my book, this is the gap I am trying to bridge. My journey of sustainability has been about spreading awareness about climate change and with this project supporting United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13, I hope I can make a difference and we all get to learn about how our daily habits are leaving an impact on climate change."

While coronavirus has not and cannot completely solve the issues of climate change, it has been able to provide insight into how the world can approach the global crisis of climate change. So, here's a book that motivates the masses to take their first step towards contributing to the fight against climate change and adopt sustainable living!



across India from Spiti Valley, Calicut to Rishikesh! According to the research conducted by my team for the book, India ranks 5th in the Global becoming visible from parts of northern India for the first time in 30



COLOUR-BLOCKING TO RELEASE VIBRANCE



Imagining the renowned American artist Ellsworth Kelly within a garden in Mexico is where 'Kellee' finds its inspiration! With Mexican motifs embedded in its prints that include marigolds, hydrangeas, anthuriums, along with birds such as toucans and the hornbill, this collection whisks you off and transports you to a tropical reverie with touches of Kelly's classic colour-blocking. The prints are bold and lively enough to make you feel like you're in one of his artworks.

Drawing further inspiration from Mexico, their 'Otomí' embroidery has been given a modern twist in this eclectic collection integrating Kelly's take

on dressing down figures to their simplest forms. Kelly's artwork was known to adopt shadows cast by architecture and has inspired the structured yet chic 'ARCO' series adding an air of graphic minimalism to an otherwise vibrant collection. With the prints being named as 'RGB', 'HSB', and 'CMYK', the collection is a homage to the artist, and his inter-pre

tation of nature — a true Kelly orchestrated drama!

"It's known for its prints and that has been an integral part of the label since its inception and this has only gained further significance with each moving year. It's interesting to note that the prints are all initially hand developed by working with artists in Bengal, and then they are digitally converted for printing and are printed onto fabrics. Each print is developed keeping the collection in mind, be it the Malagasy and Mozambique prints of Saigon or the latest collection that has been developed by reimagining Kelly's colour-block approach envisioned in a Mexican garden. Flowers like hydrangeas, anthuriums have been given a colour-blocked feel in a very contemporary twist," shares designer Kshitij Jalori.

Jalori is a passionate designer who focuses on working with Indian textiles while giving them a con-

temporary perspective. Converging primarily on working with traditional design elements of Benaras looms, his unique take on art motifs and modern weaving techniques gave a brand-new dimension to conventional craftsmanship. 'Documenting art' would be an appropriate phrase to characterise the label where the designer forms a union of his artistic inspirations and antique weaving crafts.

On the other hand, embroideries are something that we have been extremely focused on developing a very unique language of modern zardozi using the absolute finest techniques.

The focus has been on developing statement-looking engineered embroidered pieces rather than an overall embroidered piece.

The collection has embroidered trim details to lend a more athleisure lounge feel to it!





VARUN SANDESH MAKES A COMEBACK WITH *INDUVADANA*

Actor Varun Sandesh has been off the radar of Tollywood for a long time. Varun was part of hit films such as *Happy Days*, and *Kotha Bangarulokam*. But here's good news for

fans of the actor. He is now making a comeback with a new film titled *Induvadana* and the film's first poster is out.

The poster has Varun Sandesh and newcomer Farnaz Setti hugging passionately, with each of them

sporting a topless avatar. The first look has a periodic touch and certainly looks striking.

The lead pair is seen in retro-garments and that could be indicative of the film's plot.

The title also indicates that

the movie is going to be different from what Varun has acted so far.

Induvadana is directed by MSR and produced by Madhavi Adurthi. More details about the film's plot are to be unveiled along with the film's teaser and trailer.

Chay to head to Ladakh when he lands in India

As reported yesterday, actor Naga Chaitanya Akkineni is currently in Italy, for the shoot of *Thank You*. The actor might return to India sometime later as there are restrictions on travel to India. The crew of Vikram Kumar-directed *Thank You* is among the last to be able to shoot during this second surge of Covid. The latest we hear is that he will head to Ladakh as soon as he lands in the country, for the shoot of his Bollywood debut film titled *Lal Singh Chaddha*. The Hindi film is the official remake of Hollywood classic *Forrest Gump*. Amir Khan and Kareena

Kapoor Khan will be seen playing the lead roles in the movie.

Sources say that the makers of *Lal Singh Chaddha* planned a new schedule in Ladakh which will begin soon. They planned it for a non-stop 45 days where the battle sequence will be shot. Naga Chaitanya will reprise the role played by Mykelti Williamson in the original and his role is based on Benjamin Buford Blue aka Bubba.

Chay will be seen as Amir's close friend in the military. The schedule will comprise of scenes on both the actors.

Advait Chandan is the director of the movie. The complete details of the film will be out soon.



Thalapathy Vijay to join hands with Vamshi Paidipally for Telugu film?

Tamil star Thalapathy Vijay, compared to his contemporaries like Suriya and Karthi, arrived late to Tollywood with the dubbed versions of his respective Tamil films. However, most of the 46-year-old actor's films in recent years like *Master*, *Thuppakki*, *Policeodu*, *Adirindhi*, *Sarkar*, and *Whistle* performed exceedingly well in the Telugu states. *Master* is easily one of the first hit films the Telugu film industry saw post the lockdown last year.

Meanwhile, if the ongoing speculations are anything to go by, Vijay will be joining hands with *Maharshi* fame Vamshi Paidipally for a Telugu-Tamil bilingual and it will go on floors once the actor is done with his present commitments. Popular producer Dil Raju will reportedly bankroll the big-budget project on a large scale. Sources suggest that Vijay was mighty impressed with the script narrated by Vamshi and gave a nod. However, a confirmation on the same is awaited.

Remember, back in February, it was widely speculated that Vijay received a huge advance from Mythri Movie Makers for their future collaboration. The reputed production house is currently bankrolling big-ticket films like *Pushpa* and *Sarkaru Vaari Paata*.

Vijay headed to Georgia in the second week of April and finished the maiden schedule of his upcoming film popularly referred to as *Thalapathy 65*.

Bankrolled by Sun Pictures, the Nelson Dilipkumar directorial will feature Pooja Hegde as the leading lady with Anirudh Ravichander composing music.



Anupama Parameswaran trolled for *Vakeel Saab* tweet, apologises



Actress Anupama Parameswaran recently dropped a post praising Power Star Pawan Kalyan's *Vakeel Saab*, but little did she know what was coming. The actress was trolled mercilessly by fans of the star for not addressing him as 'sir' but choosing to call veteran actor Prakash Raj that.

But as soon as she dropped the post, Pawan Kalyan fans started trolling the actor.

While one of Pawan Kalyan's fans mentioned, "Oh, is Prakash Raj the only 'sir' for you?", another follower asked Anupama if she is comparing Prakash Raj with Pawan Kalyan and calling the former better than the other.

Soon, the *Sathamnam Bhavati* actress apologised to Pawan Kalyan fans via a tweet.

"So sorry guys... just now I realised @PawanKalyan gaaaru' with all respect and love," she mentioned. Going by their replies, the actress' damage control tweet did calm the fans.



Kajal's new hobby to beat Covid anxiety

homes. Now, actress Kajal Aggarwal, who got married last year, revealed her new-found hobby that she's using to beat Covid-19 anxiety.

The *Magadheera* actress, who was last seen in Jayam Ravi-starrer *Comali* in 2019, shared about the new hobby that has been truly therapeutic and helping her to beat anxiety.

Sharing a photo of a bundle of wool and knitting pins, Kajal Aggarwal posted, "KNIT. PRAY. LOVE. While the situation is very grim, there is a general feeling of helplessness and anxiety around us. It is very important to focus and apply our minds to something, it can be anything- The idea is to feel purposeful/ creative and

establish a sense of usefulness, productivity, and achievement." (sic)

"I have taken up knitting very recently and it helps me relax, it helps with mental well-being! I believe the act of creating something for others is truly therapeutic! What are you doing to stay occupied at home in your free time?", added Kajal Aggarwal.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Kajal Aggarwal has recently wrapped up the shooting of *Hey Sinamika* directed by Brinda master. While she awaits the shoot of director Shankar's *Indian 2* to resume, she is currently shooting for *Ghosty*, in which she will be playing a cop.

