

ANALYSIS 7
THE RENEWABLE
ENERGY-LAND CONFLICT**MONEY 8**
SENSEX, NIFTY SNAP 4-SESSION
RALLY AMID GLOBAL SELLOFF**SPORTS 11**
DHAWAN LIKELY TO
LEAD IN LANKA

VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY MAY 12, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

**SARKAARU VAARI
PAATA FORCED
TO CANCEL CELEBRATIONS**
Page 12**DELHI MINISTER: COVID PEAK SLIDING, POSITIVITY RATE DROPS FURTHER**

Delhi Health Minister Satyender Jain confirmed today that while the second wave of Covid is still very much on, the national capital is past the peak and the number of cases and the positivity rate are both on their way down. "But you cannot get to the comfort zone right now. The infection rate has to fall below 5 per cent and the corona cases should be below 3 or 4 thousand," he told reporters. Delhi has recorded 12,481 COVID-19 cases and 347 deaths over the last 24 hours, the positivity rate has dropped from 19% to 17.7 per cent. This is the lowest since April 14 when the positivity rate was around 36%.

**'SHARE VACCINE FORMULA,' KEJRIWAL SUGGESTS TO PM MODI AMID SHORTAGE**

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday urged the centre to share COVID-19 vaccine formulas and allow more companies to manufacture doses - of which there is an acute shortage as the Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech scramble to match demand. At present, India has two vaccines and only two companies making them - Covishield (by the Serum Institute) and Covaxin (by Bharat Biotech) - and both have struggled to raise output. A third - Russia's Sputnik V - has been cleared but not yet rolled out; this will be produced by five companies.

**BODIES FOUND FLOATING IN GANGA IN U.P. DAY AFTER BIHAR HORROR**

Dead bodies washed up on the banks of Ganga were sighted for a second straight day today -- this time in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh. The spot is around 55 km upriver from Bihar's Buxar, where more than a hundred bodies were found yesterday. The Bihar authorities had argued that the corpses had floated down from UP, as their state has no tradition of consigning bodies to water. With Covid rapidly spreading through the rural parts of north India, the bodies are suspected to be of Covid patients. In absence of any Covid protocols at rural crematoriums, locals are fearful of further spread of the infection.

**COVID CASES DOUBLE IN WORLD'S MOST-VACCINATED NATION**

Seychelles, which has vaccinated more of its population against Covid-19 than any other country, saw active cases more than double in the week to May 7, raising concerns that inoculation is not helping turn the tide in some places. The World Health Organization said vaccine failure couldn't be determined without a detailed assessment and that it was working on evaluating the situation. Kate O'Brien, director of the the WHO's department of immunization, vaccines and biologicals, told a briefing Monday that the body was in direct communication with Seychelles.

**No politics please, when people are dying for vaccine!**

2

CM asks Modi to free Covaxin tech of manufacturer shackles

■ Allowing other manufacturers will boost production, help public at large: Jagan

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to direct Covaxin manufacturer Hyderabad based Bharat Biotech to transfer the technology and ICMR, NIV (the viral strain to make the vaccine) to other such production firms so as to ramp up vaccine production and availability.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Jagan said that the total manufacturing capacity of this vaccine doesn't cater to the country's requirement at present.

Covaxin has been developed jointly by Bharat Biotech, ICMR and National Institute of Virology (NIV). At present Bharat Biotech has the production capacity of 10 million vials per annum.

It may be worth mentioning here that due to shortage in production of both Covishield and Covaxin, the Centre has been allocating the vaccines to the states as per population on a pro rata basis.

Short supply of vaccines is leading to serpentine queues and jostling at the vaccination centres triggering fear of these centres turning hotspots for Covid.

2

**State seeks 910 MT oxygen**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday seeking to enhance oxygen allocation to 910 MT to Andhra Pradesh and also 20 LMO tankers.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Jagan said that the allocation of medical oxygen to Andhra Pradesh as on April 24 was 480 MT.

2

Spl officers to ensure O2 supply

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Principal Secretary Medical & Health Anil Kumar Singhal on Tuesday said the state government has appointed three senior officials to ensure timely supply of oxygen to the state from other states.

The three officials will stay in

Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Odisha for two weeks to ensure that the oxygen supply to AP is maintained without any interruption.

Singhal said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has appointed Karikala Valavan, Special Secretary to the Government for Tamil Nadu,

and Anantaramula, Special Secretary to the Government to Karnataka and AK Faridar, former IAS officer to Odisha.

The three senior officials will coordinate with the respective state governments and plants to ensure that there are no delays or problems in the supply of oxygen.

2



AP reports record 108 fatalities in 24 hours

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh reported a record number of 108 Covid-19 deaths in 24 hours ending 9 am on Tuesday, taking the overall toll to 8,899.

The previous high was 97 deaths in a day on August 14 and 22 last year.

The latest bulletin said 86,878 sample tests turned out 20,345 coronavirus positives in the state in 24 hours.

The state also saw 14,502 recoveries, the bulletin added. The cumulative positives now increased to 13,22,934 and recoveries to 11,18,933. The active caseload is now 1,95,102, according to the bulletin. Chittoor district reported the highest number of 2,426 fresh cases and 18 deaths in a day.

Visakhapatnam added 2,371 new cases while eight districts reported between 1,100 and 2,000 each.

Visakhapatnam and Anantapur crossed the one-lakh cases mark on Tuesday. In all, six out of 13 districts in AP have logged coron-

Govt caps fee for Covid treatment under Arogyasri

2

avirus cases in excess of one lakh each, with East Godavari topping the chart with 1,67,072, followed by Chittoor with 1,43,906. Three districts registered less than 1,000 new cases each in 24 hours.

Visakhapatnam district also reported 12 fresh Covid-19 fatalities, East Godavari, Guntur and Vizianagaram ten each, Prakasam nine, SPS Nellore eight, Krishna seven, Srikakulam six, Anantapur, Kurnool and West Godavari five each and Kadapa three.

**TN CM Stalin, newly elected MLAs take oath**

5

**Mining, construction equipment industry may grow by 20% in '21**

8



For political parties, rivals still Enemy No. 1

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

While the entire world in general, and India in particular, is reeling under the whirlpool of Covid-19 second wave, it seems that both the Telugu states continue to suffer from 'political coronavirus' which remains as lethal as ever.

The ruling and opposition parties in both states continue to criticise each other, target each other, and blame each other, instead of joining hands in controlling the spread of the pandemic.

While most sensible people are on the verge of panic due to Covid-19 (there are always some Covidiot that believe nothing will happen to them), political parties continue trying to score over their opponents.

While in Telangana the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) and main opposition Congress are both on the same page while criticising the Central government, the situation in Andhra Pradesh is peculiar to say the least.

In AP, the ruling YSR Congress Party and the main opposition Telugu Desam Party are continuing their no-holds-barred fight against each other and there is not one leader from



either party uttering a word against the Central government.

In Telangana, the Congress is also criticising the State government, while going hammer and tongs at the Central government, but in AP, the TDP does not seem to see anything amiss in the Centre's handling of the pandemic.

Almost all states are facing a shortage of vaccine and oxygen and both these crucial issues are the responsibility of the Centre.

It is only on the directions of the Central government that the State governments are getting vaccines and oxygen. Despite being aware of this, the TDP keeps pointing fingers at the AP state government and does not utter a single word against the Centre.

Everyone knows that the TDP is trying to get close to the BJP after the drubbing it received in the Assembly elections in 2019.

As the ruling party, the YSRCP is maintaining cordial relations with the Centre in the name of state interests.

However, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy defending Prime Minister Narendra Modi when Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemanth Soren criticised him remains inexplicable.

2

Rs 10 lakh ex gratia to kin of Ruia victims

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Tuesday announced a compensation of Rs 10 lakh each to the kin of 11 Covid-19 patients, who died in a hospital in Tirupati due to a problem in oxygen supply.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy announced this during a videoconference with district Collectors. Eleven Covid-19 patients died due to a problem in oxygen supply inside the ICU in Ruia hospital late on Monday. There was a five-minute lag in reloading liquid medical oxygen, which caused the pressure to drop, resulting in the deaths, Chittoor district Collector M Hari Narayanan said.

2

Prioritise vaccinating those due for 2nd dose vaccine: Centre to states

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre appealed to states on Tuesday to prioritise vaccinating those due for second dose of COVID-19 vaccine and reserve at least 70 per cent of the shots supplied from the central pool for the purpose.

States have also been urged to minimise wastage of vaccine doses, the health ministry said in a statement. All wastage more than the national average hereafter is to be adjusted from the subsequent allocations to that state or union territory.

The urgent need to address a large number of beneficiaries waiting for second dose of vaccine was stressed in a meeting held by Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan and Dr R S Sharma, the Chairman of Empowered Group on Technology and Data



Management to Combat COVID-19, with state officials to review the status of COVID-19 vaccination on Tuesday.

States were urged to "ensure all beneficiaries who have taken the first dose are prioritised for the second doses", the ministry said in the

statement.

In this regard, states can reserve at least 70 per cent of the vaccines supplied to them from the Government of India channel for second dose vaccination and the remaining 30 per cent for first dose.

2

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

Chaitra & Krishna Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi : Pratipada: 03:05 am (Next Day)**Nakshatram** : Krittika: 02:40 am (Next Day)**Time to Avoid** : (Bad time to start any important work)**Rahukalam** : 12:12 pm - 01:48 pm**Yamagandam** : 07:24 am - 09:00 am**Varjyam** : 01:05 pm - 02:54 pm**Gulika** : 10:36 am - 12:12 pm**Good Time** : (to start any important work)**Amritakalam** : 11:57 pm - 01:45 am**Abhijit Muhurtham** : NIL**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER****Forecast**: Mostly sunny**Temp**: 36**Humidity**: 47%**Sunrise**: 05:45 am**Sunset**: 06:39 pm**Current Weather Conditions****Updated** may 11, 2021 5:00 PM

India might see 'serious livelihood crisis'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India might be heading towards a "serious livelihood crisis" as the situation seems to be worse this time for the working class amid the COVID crisis and local restrictions by states already add up to something close to a nationwide lockdown, according to noted economist Jean Dreze.

In an interview to PTI, he also said the government's target to make India a USD 5 trillion economy by 2024-25 was never a "feasible target" and was just to pander to the "super-power ambitions" of the Indian elite.

About the impact of the second wave of COVID on the Indian

Says noted economist Jean Dreze

**"The economic consequences of local lockdowns may not be as destructive as those of a national lockdown. But in some respects, things are worse this time for the working class," he opined**

economy, the eminent economist said the situation today is not very different from what it was around

this time last year as far as working people are concerned.

"The economic consequences of

local lockdowns may not be as destructive as those of a national lockdown. But in some respects, things are worse this time for the working class," he opined.

Further, the eminent economist said the fear of infection is more widespread and that will make it hard to revive economic activity.

"Despite mass vaccination, there is a serious possibility that intermittent crises will continue for a long time, perhaps years.

"Compared with last year, many people have depleted savings and larger debts. Those who borrowed their way through last year's crisis may not be able to do it again this time," he observed.

2

No politics please, when people are dying for vaccine!

People in Telugu states are panicky and waiting anxiously for their turn to get a vaccine for Covid -19 as early as possible. They literally have nothing else on their agenda for the days ahead. However, the authorities in both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are as helpless as their people, considering that they do not have as yet the required number of vaccines for the targeted people. No doubt, the two Telugu states are making vain bids to get adequate number of vaccines by contacting manufacturers of vaccines for Covid -19 directly.

As per experts, there are variations in the time gap required to administer the doses with regard to the two types of vaccines that are presently available all over the country: Covaxin and



PIN POINT

Covishield. As for the former, the second dose should be administered to a particular person immediately on completion of one month time period. The latter should be repeated after 6-8 weeks' time. Otherwise, the vaccination would be in vain. Those who have taken Covishield have some kind of relief as there is still time to get the vaccine and they hope to get their second dose in time.

Primary health centres and government hospitals are crowded by those seeking vaccine. It is a tough time even for the police to control the swelling crowds at the vaccine centres. There are fears that people at these centres may also be asymptomatic carriers of the virus.

Acquiring vaccines to meet the requirement seems to be an uphill task for the author-

Primary health centres and government hospitals are crowded by those seeking vaccine. It is a tough time even for the police to control the swelling crowds at the vaccine centres. There are fears that people at these centres may also be asymptomatic carriers of the virus.

ities in both states. The Andhra Pradesh government is desperately looking for 10 lakh vaccines per day. There is strong belief among restive people that the authorities are not giving the correct picture relating to Covid-19 deaths. They point to the piles of bodies at graveyards! Recently in Gujarat, 230 ads relating to local obituaries had to be carried in 6 pages in a newspaper on a single day. This happened on the

day when the state government claimed there were only 25 deaths.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was criticized by Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren after Modi's virtual meeting with Chief Ministers of various states, including Soren. Springing a surprise in political circles, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy batted for Modi, and advised his Jharkhand coun-



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

terpart that it was time for supporting the PM, keeping aside political differences. Surprisingly, none of the other non- BJP Chief Ministers in the country reacted on Hemant's comments on Modi and none of them came forward in support of Modi. Some say Jagan sought to send positive sig-

nals to Modi. Others ask: Is Jagan cautiously stepping forward on his political journey in future? He has already set a goal for himself to retain power in 2024. For achieving that goal, he has to see that Naidu goes to polls alone in 2024. Splitting anti-government vote will be the motto for Jagan, rather than joining hands with Modi. Jagan has already invited his poll strategist Prasanth Kishor to work for him in 2024 also. He described Prasanth, while introducing him to party cadre in a meet held at Guntur, as "the person who would steer them (YSRCP) to power".

It may be mentioned here that Kishor, who worked for the resounding victory of Mamata Banerjee of TMC in West Bengal, later announced that he would be distancing himself from such work. Nobody knows whether he

has other plans for YSRCP.

There is strong criticism from Jagan's political detractors that he deliberately came forward in support of Modi in the name of fight against Covid-19 considering his delicate position in the DA cases filed against him by CBI & ED. The rank and file of YSRCP is praying the Almighty for 'favourable situation' in courts in the event of any move for cancellation of his bail.

All political strategies can be kept aside for a while in the interests of people who are crying for attention from the governments. If Jagan's designs to impress Modi really work, he would get sufficient stocks of vaccines for Covid -19. Noticeably, some states like Maharashtra, whose government is at loggerheads with Modi, are getting more stocks of vaccines than states like AP.

Amidst all this, it is heart-rending to note that ambulances carrying Covid -19 patients from AP are not being allowed to reach Hyderabad by the Telangana police ostensibly due to non-availability of beds in hospitals there. VIPs and rich people from AP are free to go to Hyderabad for Covid-19 treatment, whereas middle-class and poor people are badly treated at the borders.

At the end of the day, people of AP have a right to use the health infrastructure available at Hyderabad, at least considering that Hyderabad is the joint capital for both states of TS&AP for 10 years as per the provisions of AP Reorganisation Act -2014.

The ugly incidents on AP-TS border areas suggest that the status of Hyderabad as a joint capital is just on paper!

Early trend of decline in daily Covid cases, deaths: Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An early trend of decline in daily new COVID-19 cases and deaths has been noted in the country, the government said on Tuesday, indicating that the devastating second wave of the pandemic is on the wane.

According to the government, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Chhattisgarh were among 18 states and union territories showing continued plateauing or decrease in daily new COVID-19 cases.

Addressing a press conference, a senior official, how-

ever, said Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Punjab were among 16 states and union territories showing continued increasing trend in daily new COVID-19 cases.

Thirteen states have more than 1 lakh active COVID-19 cases each and 26 states have a positivity rate of over 15 per cent, the government said.

India has been reeling under a calamitous second wave of the coronavirus infection. However, the daily numbers of deaths and infections have started to go down.

New cases of coronavirus in India fell to 3.29 lakh

after 14 days, taking the infection tally to 2,29,92,517, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

A total of 3,29,942 infections were reported in a span of 24 hours, while the death toll climbed to 2,49,992 with 3,876 fresh fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

After registering a steady rise for two months, the active cases have reduced to 37,15,221, accounting for 16.16 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate was recorded at 82.75 per cent.

For political parties, rivals still Enemy No. 1

Continued from Page 1

The situation in Andhra Pradesh is such that both the ruling and main opposition parties file police complaints against each other with stunning regularity. Presently, Cases have been slapped on TDP supremo N Chandrababu

Naidu and State Minister Appalaraju and on other leaders of both parties. In Telangana the BJP is criticising the TRS government for it's 'failure' in controlling Covid-19 which the ruling party counters with criticism against the Centre for insufficient supply of vaccine and oxygen.

Govt caps fee for Covid treatment under Arogyasri

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Government on Tuesday issued a GO capping the fee for treatment of Covid-19 in Arogyasri network hospitals across the state. The orders were issued by Anil Kumar Singhal, Principal Secretary, Medical and Health department.

As per the GO, the government has fixed Rs 4,000 per day for general treatment in National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) while Rs 3,600 per day in hospitals not approved by NABH. For general Covid treatment, including oxygen, the government has fixed Rs 6,500 per day in NABH hospitals and Rs 5,800 for hospitals not approved for similar treatment.

The fee for critical, ICU and NIV treatment has been fixed at Rs 12,000 in NABH hospitals and Rs 10,800 in non-approved NABH hospitals.

The fee for ICU (ventilator) treatment is Rs 16,000 in NABH hospitals and Rs 14,400 in non-approved NABH hospitals.

MURDER FOR GAIN

Woman found dead in house

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A woman was found murdered in her house at Chintal in Jeedimetla here on Monday night. Jewelry worth Rs 5 lakh has been reported missing from the house, with the police suspecting it to be a murder for gain. The victim, identified as Suvarna, 48, was alone in the house when unidentified assailants are suspected to have entered and strangled her to death with a saree. Her husband, who returned home in the night, found her lying

dead on the floor with a saree tied around her neck.

"The house was ransacked and when he checked the almirah, a gold chain and other ornaments were missing," the Jeedimetla police said.

The CLUES team and Dog Squad have examined the spot while the body was shifted to the Gandhi Hospital for autopsy. Footage from surveillance cameras in the surroundings is being examined. Police suspect the murderers could be known to the victim.

CM asks Modi to free Covaxin tech...

Continued from Page 1

Covaxin is being manufactured at Bharat Biotech's Biosafety Level (BSL)- 3 high containment facility in Hyderabad.

"It may take several months to vaccinate the entire population at this pace. Considering that Covaxin manufacturing is intended to be ramped up, we would request you to please direct Bharat Biotech to do technology transfer of manufacturing of Covaxin and ICMR, NIV to provide the viral strain to whoever interested and capable of manufacturing the vaccine. Please explore the possibility of involving all such production firms and enable them with the technology, IPR etc to deliver the vaccine as quickly and as affordable as

possible. This shall ensure that IPRs/patents if any are not a hindrance. Anyone who can manufacture or is interested to manufacture the vaccine should be encouraged to do so in larger public interest. Entire manufacturing capacity should be mobilised and put to use in these testing times," said Jagan in the letter. He added that if implemented, his suggestions will go a long way in encouraging the manufacturers and accelerate supply of vaccines to be made available to the population at large. Jagan said that while certain temporary measures like curfew restrictions are taken up, the ultimate solution is in vaccinating every individual as early as possible.

"We have in the past been able to demonstrate capability of administering over 6 lakh

vaccinations per day, however due to the short supply of vaccines we are not able to vaccinate our population at large," he said.

The Centre had recently paid an advance of Rs 787.50 crore to Bharat Biotech for 5 crore Covaxin doses for the months of May, June and July.

Covaxin has been developed under public private partnership between Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Bharat Biotech International Ltd. (BBIL).

The PPP was executed under a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ICMR and BBIL which includes a 5 percent royalty clause for ICMR on net sales and other clauses like prioritisation of in-country supplies.

State seeks 910 MT oxygen

Continued from Page 1

"On May 8, a revised allocation was made to AP at 590 MT. Of this allocation, 210 MT is allotted from Odisha which is around 1400 km from Rayalaseema region," Jagan wrote.

"Getting LMO from 1,400 km is leading to delays as availability of LMO tankers for transporting the oxygen is also a constraint. The four Rayalaseema districts and

Nellore are continuously drawing liquid oxygen from Bellary in Karnataka, and Chennai in Tamil Nadu and hospitals have binding contractual agreements with the suppliers from these locations," he said.

Jagan added that the AP government was currently drawing 35 MT from St Gobain and 25 MT from Inox in Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu. This has to be main-

tained otherwise AP hospitals will face a severe crisis, he wrote. "On May 10, supplies from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were delayed and led to the unfortunate incident of 11 persons dying due to lack of oxygen in Tirupati. Further allocation from JSW Bellary in Karnataka has to be increased from 20 MT to 150 MT as this plant has enhanced its capacity recently," the Chief Minister wrote.

Prioritise vaccinating those due for 2nd...

Continued from Page 1

"This however is indicative. States have the liberty to enhance this to as much as 100 per cent. State-wise numbers on CoWIN have been shared with states for their planning purposes.

"The states were asked to undertake awareness campaign for reinforcing the importance of complete vaccination with two doses of the vaccine," the statement said.

Presenting details of states who have ensured high coverage of priority groups (like population aged 45+, frontline workers and healthcare work-

ers) and the others, the Union Health secretary urged states to ensure that priority groups are vaccinated.

States have been informed in a transparent manner in advance about the COVID vaccines being provided to them from Govt of India channel. The visibility for the forthcoming fortnight is conveyed to them in advance to enable better and more effective planning by them, the statement stated. The next allocation for the period 15-31st May will be conveyed to them on May 14. It was pointed out that states can utilize the information regarding dose allocation for

the next 15 days to plan their vaccination sessions.

States were also urged to minimise vaccine wastage, the statement said. While the overall levels have considerably reduced, Union Health Secretary pointed that there were many states which still needed to substantially reduce the wastage. It was suggested to states and UTs to retrain and reorient vaccinators to ensure judicious usage of the vaccines.

"All wastage more than the national average hereafter is to be adjusted from the subsequent allocations to that state and UT," the statement said.

In this context, it was also

Spl officers to ensure O2 supply

Continued from Page 1

They will stay in their assigned states for two weeks and work to supply oxygen.

Singhal said that the Chief Minister held a review meeting with Collectors of all districts and instructed them to set up German Hangers on the hospital premises to avoid shortage of beds.

Jagan directed the officials to ensure appropriate steps be taken to utilise industrial oxygen cylinders for medical oxygen. He directed officials to pay special attention to oxygen supply and monitoring. Four teams were set up by the Eastern Navy to manage the oxygen supply in all the hospitals that have already visited some districts and gave advice and instructions.

The Chief Minister described the Ruia Hospital tragedy as 'very unfortunate' and said that ex gratia has been announced to the families of the deceased.

Singhal said the state government has taken concrete steps to prevent crowding at vaccine centres.

"Steps have been taken to give a second dose to people above 45 years. Information is being sent through SMS

and volunteers to the second dose beneficiaries, and this process will avoid crowds at vaccination centres," Singhal said.

He said that 3,496 doctors were serving the corona victims in home isolation through the 104 telemedicine call centre. "In the past 24 hours, doctors have advised 9,796 patients in home isolation. Authorities are arranging for 15,000 people to call 104 from Wednesday. The '104' call centre received 16,002 phone calls in the past 24 hours. Of these, 6,492 were for various information, 3,652 for admissions, 3,146 for corona tests and 2,076 for test results.

During the past 24 hours, 86,878 corona tests were performed, 20,345 turned out to be positive while 108 people succumbed to the virus. In all 10,201 Remdesivir injections were given to licensed Covid private hospitals. Of these, 7,754 injections were provided by the state government and the rest were purchased by the respective private hospitals. He said 22,399 injections were available in government hospitals across the state.

India might see 'serious livelihood crisis'

Continued from Page 1

Dreze also pointed out that last year there was a relief package and today relief measures are not even being discussed.

"On top of all this, local lockdowns may give way to a national lockdown relatively soon. In fact, they already add up to something close to a country-wide lockdown.

"In short, we are heading towards a serious livelihood crisis," he said.

On how the government could have missed seeing the second COVID-19 wave coming, Dreze said the Indian government has been in denial all along.

"Remember, the government refused to admit about any 'community transmission' of COVID for a long time, even

as recorded cases were counted in millions.

"When an early analysis of official data exposed the collapse of health services, the government retracted the data," he said.

He pointed out that misleading statistics have been routinely invoked to reassure the public that all is well. "Denying a crisis is the surest way to make it worse. We are now paying the price of this complacency".

India has been reporting more than three lakh new COVID cases daily in recent weeks and the death toll due to the infection is also rising.

Noting that India is also paying the price of a long history of neglect of the health sector, especially public health, Dreze said nothing is more important

than health for the quality of life, yet public expenditure on health in India has hovered around a measly 1 per cent of GDP for decades.

When asked about the sort of relief measures that could be put in place to deal with possible livelihood crisis, he said as a starter, the central government could replay the 2020 relief package.

"But it is important to go beyond that, and to consolidate the social security system on a durable basis," the eminent economist said, adding that ad-hoc, short-term relief measures tend to breed confusion, corruption and waste.

Dreze, who was also part of the National Advisory Council (NAC) that had advised the previous UPA government,

said much can be done within the framework of existing social security schemes and laws such as the public distribution system, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), the National Social Assistance Programme, and the Integrated Child Development Services.

He also noted it would be easy to provide supplementary food rations to all ration-card holders for much longer than the proposed two months, and also to expand the coverage of the public distribution system.

"Going beyond existing schemes, I think that a well-designed, inclusive cash-transfer programme would be useful," Dreze opined.

According to him, if intermittent crises are going to

continue for years, which is very possible, it would really help to have a well-functioning system of cash relief that can be activated whenever the need arises.

"Turning India into a USD 5 trillion economy by 2024-25 was never a feasible target, and it is a useless target in any case. The function of this target is to pander to the super-power ambitions of the Indian elite," the Belgian-born Indian economist said. In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi envisioned to make India a USD 5 trillion economy and global power house by 2024-25.

According to Dreze, even if we accept GDP as a valid development indicator, the standard approach is to look at GDP at its per capita terms.

Rs 10 L ex gratia...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, a team of engineers from the Eastern Naval Command of Indian Navy visited Ruia Hospital to inspect the oxygen supply system and suggestive corrective measures, if required.

However, all opposition

parties came down heavily on the state government, squarely blaming it for causing the death of 11 Covid-19 patients. They called the deaths "government murders" and demanded that the Chief Minister step down if he could not protect people's lives.

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

Oppn is deliberately spreading falsehoods to create panic: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday lashed out at continued criticism over his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic by saying that the opposition parties are intentionally spreading false propaganda against him.

He said that the situation as far as vaccines are concerned is not particular to Andhra Pradesh but is prevalent in almost every state.

Talking to district collectors and SPs in the Spandana programme via video conference, Jagan said, “Everyone knows that the country has the capacity to produce only seven crore doses per month, but opposition leaders are unable to digest the fact since they are not in power.”

He said that of the total seven crore doses, almost six crore doses are being produced per month by Covishield, while Bharat Biotech is producing one crore doses of covaxin. “While the country needs 172 crore doses to vaccinate those above 18 years of age, only 17 crore



doses were provided so far, which is less than 10 percent of the demand,” Jagan said.

He said there are 1.48 crore people in the state who are over 45 years old, health workers and frontline workers as well as around two crore people between the age of 18-44. This means a total of seven crore doses is required. “So far, AP has received only 73 lakh

doses from the Centre. Although the state wants to purchase it directly from the companies, they are unable to supply it to us as distribution is centrally controlled,” Jagan said.

“The Centre has already filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court, which clearly states that the quota will be determined on the basis of

population. The Centre said in its affidavit that states are not in a position to buy as many vaccines as they need and the vaccine companies should be under Centre’s control,” he added.

Jagan said despite knowing all these facts, a section of the media with opposition leaders are falsely propagating that the only Rs 45 crore was given for

vaccines, and the government couldn’t spend Rs 1,600 crore just to create panic among the people.

“Bharat Biotech actually belongs to a close aide of N Chandrababu Naidu, which is common knowledge,” Jagan said.

He said that better medical services are being provided in the state despite it not having Tier-1 cities like Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai. Even the death rate in Andhra Pradesh is much lower compared to most states, he said.

The Chief Minister directed the authorities to focus on the purchase of oxygen concentrators, which would be made available in all Covid Care Centres. He told the officials to monitor Oxygen Pipelines in Hospitals and to hire technical staff, ensuring that Oxygen flow is at the correct pressure according to specified criteria. He also told officials to consider setting up pressure boosters in the ICU. Besides these, three officials were given responsibility of fetching oxygen from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Odisha.

Indian Navy sets up Covid Care Centre at Bheemili

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As part of the Indian Navy’s efforts to assist the general population in dealing with the devastating Covid second wave, a 60-bed Covid Care Centre has been set up at INS Kalinga, Bheemunipatnam.

This facility was dedicated to the public by Tourism Minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao on Tuesday.

INS Kalinga Commanding Officer Commodore Neeraj Uday stated that the Covid Care Centre has adequate facilities to provide treatment to positive patients with moderate symptoms from Bheemunipatnam Mandal and adjoining areas.

Administrative, logistic support food conservancy services and medical equipment is being provided by the Indian Navy. The Covid Centre will be manned by three doctors and 10 nursing staff provided by the Community Health Centre.

Towards the maintenance and the running of the Covid Care Centre, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by Neeraj Uday and the



Superintendent of the Community Health Centre Bheemunipatnam in the presence of the Tourism Minister and the DMHO Dr G Suryanarayana.

The Covid Care Centre has medical facilities to provide care to patients with mild to moderate symptoms. As many as 14 beds out of 60 have the provision for oxygen support through cylinders and oxygen concentrators.

Suitable accommodation for the doctors and nursing staff in the proximity of the Covid Care Centre has also been provided to ensure round the

clock services to patients.

In addition to the Covid Care Centre at Bheemuni-patnam, additional facilities are being created in consultation with State Governments.

The Eastern Naval Command (ENC) besides deploying ships for transporting relief material from overseas has also set up a 50-bed Covid Care Centre at INS Eksila, Gajuwaka for Covid positive armed forces veterans, and another 200-bed Covid Care Centre at Naval Dockyard Visakhapatnam for use by a large number of defence civilians.

Guv expresses anguish over deaths in Ruia hospital

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Tuesday expressed anguish and grief over the death of 11 Covid patients in Ruia Hospital in Tirupati late on Monday. Officials informed the Governor of the incident that occurred due to disruption in the oxygen supply while the arrival of the oxygen tanker was delayed.

Ruia deaths ‘govt murders’: Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh on Tuesday held the YSRCP Government responsible for the death of the 11 Covid-19 patients at the SVR Ruia Government Hospital in Tirupati due to a glitch in the oxygen supply.

Lokesh said “Those patients did not die of natural causes. It was the Government that has killed them. Not 11 patients but over 30 of them died. The relatives and protesters are say-

ing this with anguish in their hearts.”

In a statement here, he accused the Jaganmohan Reddy regime of coming out with all sorts of lies to escape from its responsibility for the ghastly tragedy. “It was a big lie that the oxygen supply was disrupted only for five minutes,” the TDP MLC alleged. Lokesh demanded the Ministers to answer to the protesters and relatives who were demanding the true picture be presented before the world.

AP lags behind in vaccination due to lack of planning: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday slammed the YSRCP Government for ‘causing’ Andhra Pradesh to stand on 28th place in the country in Covid vaccination by not having prior planning or proper strategy in place.

Naidu said that while all other States were competing with each other to administer vaccines to their populations, Chief Minister YS



Jaganmohan Reddy was competing with himself to file false cases and make illegal arrests of the Opposition

leaders.

The YSRCP leaders were still blind to the fact that total vaccination was the only solution in the protracted battle against the dreaded virus, Naidu said. Addressing a meeting of party senior leaders and mandal presidents, the TDP supremo said that any Government would have extensive powers and abundant resources to extend help to alleviate the suffering of the people in times of calamities.

Concern over rising number of Covid orphans

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Directly or indirectly, the pandemic has affected every family in the country. The Covid-19 second wave, in particular, has shattered almost every other family across the nation. Almost everyone knows personally, or knows of someone who had fallen victim to Covid-19.

In quite a few cases, the entire family gets infected, resulting in the deaths of the breadwinners.

In many of these cases, the children, though not infected, are left to the mercy of distant relatives or neighbours when the parents are quarantined or hospitalised.

Medical experts say that during the current second wave, a number of infants and children are getting infected, unlike in the first wave. The number of incidents where the children were left alone is increasing by the day, they say.

In some cases, the children are becoming orphans, having lost both their parents. In such cases, the Government, NGOs and civil society organisations should rise to the occasion to rescue such children and protect their future, say child welfare workers.

Covid orphans having guardians may be taken care by their distant relatives or guardians, however the worst hit will be the Covid orphans, who do not have fit guardians. It becomes the responsibility of their unfit guardians or neighbours to provide a safe and comfortable stay for these children.



Failing which, there is every possibility of these children getting trafficked. Such children should be produced before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) of the district, which were constituted by the Government to function as a Bench of First Class Magistrates as per Section 27 (9) of Juvenile Justice.

The children, who have lost their parents, can be given for adoption following the guidelines of CARA (Central Adoption Resource Authority) of Women Development and Child Welfare department of Government of India legally.

During the pandemic, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has identified three registered Child Care Institutions in every district to provide temporary shelter for children whose parents are either in quarantine or hospitalised.

Once the parents recover and are discharged, the children will be handed over to their parents. When parents

are infected, there is every possibility of the children too getting infected.

It is suggested to put the child in the designated Child Care Institution, where the child will be isolated and taken care. If the child is handed over to their grandparents or relatives, the asymptomatic child may spread the virus to them.

BVS Kumar, former Chairman Child Welfare Committee, Krishna district has said that wherever such children are noticed by anyone, they should immediately inform Childline 1098, Police or CWC.

Wide publicity on the details of Child Care Institutions identified in all districts with contact numbers of the responsible officers were being given by the Juvenile Welfare Department. It is the responsibility of every citizen to protect the orphan children and stop them from being trafficked for different activities like child labour, organ harvest, illegal sale etc, Kumar said.

SHORT TAKES

Woman tests positive, ends life

Probably afraid that she would be socially ostracised, a woman ended her life by suicide after she tested positive for Covid-19 in Guntupalli village of Ibrahimpatnam Mandal in Krishna district on Tuesday. The victim was identified as Egitala Kumari (50). According to sources, Kumari was suffering from illness and she has undergone Covid tests which returned positive. Kumari jumped into the NTPS cooling canal near Ibrahimpatnam to end her life. According to sources, she was a widow and is survived by a son and a daughter. Some time back, her daughter had tested positive and after undergoing treatment had regained her health. Kumari was tested positive two days back and despite her children telling her that she would be fine after undergoing treatment, she took the extreme step, said the Ibrahimpatnam police. The police reached the spot and fished out the body from the canal.



Free online guidance for IAS aspirants: Sharat Chandra

Candidates who have cleared UPSC Mains examination and are preparing for the interview can avail the free online guidance through Sharath Chandra IAS Academy, according to academy MD Sharat Chandra. He said that UPSC aspirants who cleared the Mains are preparing for the interview which is a crucial juncture to get through UPSC. Sharat Chandra said during the Covid lockdown times, the academy was providing free online guidance to prepare for the interview and clear it without difficulty. He said that the academy was providing free online preparation and guidance through experienced IAS officers. Through www.sharatchandraias.com they can login to the online classes. For mock interview, experienced people will give their valuable suggestions and guidance to the aspirants that include energy department principal secretary G Sai Prasad, Tobacco Board executive director A Sridhar Babu, YSR Kadapa joint collector Srikanth Varma, Income Tax deputy commissioner Krishnam Naidu.

Covid Step Down Centre opens in Guntur, 1st one in the State

A Covid Step Down Centre began functioning in Guntur on Tuesday, the first such centre in AP. It has been started by the Railways in coordination with Guntur



district administration to help Covid patients. Guntur Railway Division Manager Mohan Raja with district Collector Vivek Yadav inaugurated the Covid Step Down Centre and Covid Care Centre with oxygen facility which would work round-the-clock. Vivek Yadav said that of the 70 beds, 16 are with oxygen pipeline supply and nine with oxygen concentrators. He said that 40 percent of the facility is reserved for serving / retired Railways employees and their family members. Vivek Yadav explained this is the first of its kind Covid Step Down Centre which will function as a step down facility for Government General Hospital, Guntur. He explained that on reporting of patients and Triage, patients with mild conditions will be admitted in this Centre and the patients would be transferred in serious condition to the GGH. Mohan Raja said that the patients under treatment at GGH and improving will be brought to this Centre started in the Rail Mahal so that the GGH beds are released. He explained that similarly, if the condition of the patients at Rail Mahal deteriorates, they will be shifted to GGH. Guntur West MLA Maddali Giridhar affirmed that the state government under the leadership of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy is offering all types of medical services to cope with Coronavirus and to save lives of people. He stated that this Step Down Centre and Covid care centre serve the public to recover from the pandemic and appealed to people not to lose self confidence as it is essential to fight with Coronavirus. Joint collectors, AS Dinesh Kumar and P Prasanthi, DMHO Dr J Yasmin, GGH superintendent Dr Prabhavathi and railway officials participated in the programme.

300 kg ganja seized, two arrested

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Task Force sleuths on Tuesday seized 300 kg of ganja being smuggled by two persons near Keesara tollgate in Kanchikacharla mandal of Krishna district.

The duo was smuggling the contraband in a hydraulic earthmover and was caught by the police during a regular check at the Keesara tollgate on the Vijayawada- Hyderabad highway.

The duo was smuggling the contraband from Srikakulam district to Hyderabad in the earthmover when they were caught by the task force personnel. The vehicle was seized and a case under NDPS was registered.

Nurses seek 50L insurance cover

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP Government Nurses Association on Tuesday demanded insurance cover of Rs 50 lakh and more steps in place to protect them from Covid-19.

APGNA state president G Manjula Devi said that Florence Nightingale was called “the lady with the lamp” for her immense services during Crimean War and she wished all people in society to be healthy hence offered self-less services till her last.

She said that every nurse is serving the patients taking Florence Nightingale as their role model. Manjula Devi stated that presently nurses are facing a lot of difficulties but were still rendering best services to save the lives of Covid-19 patients at a risk to their own life.

Manjula Devi said the APGNA demands Rs 50 lakh



insurance cover for nurses rendering services to Covid patients, Covid nursing care incentives, recognition of their noteworthy services, sanctioning of Covid quarantine leaves and security to the lives of nurses, implementation of old pension scheme and regularising jobs for contract and outsourcing nurses.

She stated that APGNA leaders and nurses would remember Florence Nightingale on her 201st birth anniversary which was celebrated as International Nurses Day on Wednesday in 13 districts of AP State.

TDP team to ‘find facts’ behind Ruia tragedy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP on Tuesday formed a seven-member fact-finding team to ‘probe’ into the tragic death of 11 Covid patients at the Ruia Hospital in Tirupati late on Monday.

The team was constituted at the instructions of Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu.

“The AP Government is not taking sufficient measures to save the lives of the people and it was clear-

ly evident from how a human tragedy has taken place at the SVR Ruia Hospital now,” a statement released by TDP AP president K. Atchannaidu said.

In the statement, Atchannaidu alleged that the Government abdicated its responsibility at a very critical time when the Covid-19 second wave was shaking up lakhs of people all over the State. “No proper treatment was being provided to the infected patients,” he

alleged.

The fact finding team would consist of Tirupati Parliamentary constituency party president G Narasimha Yadav, former minister N Amarnath Reddy, party national general secretary Nallari Kishore Kumar Reddy, former MLA M Sugunamma, Chittoor Parliamentary constituency party president Pulivarthy Nani, Bathala Chengalrayudu and Mabbu Devanarayana Reddy.

CP’s intervention forces driver to return Rs 1.6 lakh to patient’s kin

ANUSHA PUPPALA ■ HYDERABAD

An ambulance driver from Hyderabad who had refused to drive unless the son paid him Rs 1,60,000 for taking his dad to hospital was forced to return the money after Rachakonda Commissioner’s intervention in the issue.

The ambulance driver had demanded Rs 1,60,000 from Nageshwaran for plying his 71-year-old dad to the hospitals. Despite the anxiety

and pain they were suffering due to unavailability of beds in the hospitals, the ambulance driver had refused to drive the vehicle unless they paid him the money immediately, alleged Nageshwaran.

Nageshwaran Gopal a resident of Yaprul said, “The ambulance driver had caused us a lot of pain during a life and death situation that my father was in on Monday night. The ambulance driver had refused to drive unless we paid him Rs 1,60,000 for taking us to hospital. My family

had contracted Covid and had been suffering since past one week. My father, 71-year-old Gopal Krishna, is a heart patient. His oxygen level had dropped to 85 percent yesterday due to covid, and we had taken him to Vijaya Hospital, Nagaram. But the hospital had refused to admit due to lack of beds, so we had to search for other hospitals. We had called an ambulance and he had taken an advance of Rs 5,000 for taking us to Mahavir Hospital, Masab Tank”.

Eatala-Bhatti meet raises many eyebrows



K VENKATESHWARLU
■ HYDERABAD

“There are no permanent friends and enemies in politics in a democratic country. Everyone is entitled to have his or her own opinion and pursue their own profession, subject to certain restrictions. Many politicians switch over their loyalties taking a cue from the aforesaid quote.”

Former minister Eatala Rajender is no exception as he called on Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka here on Tuesday at the latter's residence. They reportedly discussed the political developments taking place in the state.

It may be recalled that as he had stated in Huzurabad that he will discuss with all political leaders before taking a decision on his future of course of action. It is learnt that Eatala Rajender reportedly narrated the alleged injustice rendered to him in the TRS to the CLP leader. The discussion took place between the two leaders on the sorry state affairs in the state and how AICC chief Sonia Gandhi's aim of providing equal opportunities for all sections of society was not fulfilled after carving out a separate for Telangana.



It is learnt that they also reportedly discussed whether the Congress will extend its support to him in the by-election for Huzurabad in the case he tenders his resignation.

While speaking to The Pioneer, Bhatti Vikramarka said that Eatala Rajender calling on him was a courtesy call. “No discussion was held in particular as it is our first meeting. There will be another meeting between us. Eatala said to me that he will meet me again.”

When asked whether Eatala will join the Congress after quitting the TRS, Bhatti said that definitely he will quit the TRS, but not sure whether he will join the Congress, or not. “But meeting a CLP leader means there would be something in Eatala's mind,” Bhatti said.

However, Congress leaders have already made it clear that they will wage a movement on the issue of TRS leaders' encroachments. While Bhatti demanded that the government order an inquiry into the encroachment allegations against Ministers and give back their lands to the poor. He said that Congress will not leave the encroachers and it will continue its fight against them.

Impose lockdown for 15 days: Bhatti

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka blamed Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao for the rise in Corona cases in the state. He demanded that the Chief Minister impose at least 15 days lockdown setting up a Monitoring Committee to control the Corona spread with senior IAS officers at state and district levels.

He also demanded that the government include Corona treatment in Arogyasri and transform the PHCs into 30-bed hospitals. He also asked the government to take over the hotels and set up quarantine centres there.

Speaking to the media through Zoom meeting on Tuesday, Bhatti informed that scientists, doctors and IMA stating that the Corona chain link will break if the government imposes a lockdown for minimum quarantine days, hence,

CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka demanded that the government include Corona treatment in Arogyasri and transform the PHCs into 30-bed hospitals

He also asked the government to take over the hotels and set up quarantine centres there

the government should impose a lockdown for at least 15 days.

He alleged that the poor facing a lot of troubles as Corona reached the nook and corner of the state. The Chief Minister conducted municipal elections though the opposition parties asked him not to conduct. Therefore, Corona cases and deaths increased massively in Warangal and Khammam districts after the elections. The Chief Minister assured that he will examine the inclusion of Corona treatment in Arogyasri in the last budget suggestion, however, he didn't take any decision even after one year.

Bhatti demanded that the government appoint a committee with senior IAS officers to control Corona in the state. The government has to assign the committee to monitor the vaccination, Corona tests, treatment, beds, oxygen and others, he suggested to the government. There should be a special system to monitor the Covid conditions round-the-clock.

The government has to launch an app similar to the Delhi government to know the Covid conditions. The app has to provide information about the details of the hospitals, oxygen, ventilators and beds, he said.

Shabbir slams CM for creating confusion on lockdown

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

“The High Court has made serious remarks against the government for not taking adequate measures to prevent the spread of Coronavirus in the state. While the High Court was in favour of taking strict measures since the beginning, KCR, the then Health Minister Etela Rajender, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar and

other leaders kept misleading people by saying that there would be no lockdown or night curfew. However, citing High Court orders, initially, the night curfew was imposed and now a 10-day lockdown has been announced. People would have prepared themselves men-

tally if CM would've been a little realistic,” he said. Shabbir Ali said that the CM has habituated to keeping people in the dark. “KCR speaks lies with so much comfort and flow that innocent people take them for truth. When the first case of Covid was reported, he took it in a lighter vein and even claimed

that it could be cured with a paracetamol tablet. He kept on changing his statements, but never told the reality to people. Consequently, crores of people have been suffering due to his lies and wrong decisions,” he said. The Congress leader demanded that the government provide financial assistance to all the BPL and middle-class families during the lockdown.

Bandi wants govt to step up vaccination

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP state unit president Bandi Sanjay welcomed the government's decision to impose lockdown in the state from May 12 for 10 days and said that it is better late than never.

In a statement here on Tuesday, he said the Centre left the decision to the states, but all states and UTs in the country, except for Telangana, imposed lockdown long ago.

The lockdown should not affect medical services and movement of patients, he said adding that Covid testing and treatment should continue without any hiccups. The vaccine alone can rein in the virus, he said adding that it was proved. Therefore, vaccination should be stepped up.

The Centre sent Remedisivir injections and oxygen cylinders required for the state, he said suggesting setting up of a nodal system for distribution of these among the hospitals.

Care should be taken to ensure that there is no shortage of oxygen in private and government hospitals. All medicines required for Covid-19 should be made available, he said asking the government to solve the problems of private hospitals in providing treatment to Covid patients.

He called upon BJP activists to observe lockdown rules as was done last year and provide food to the starving. He directed them to



The Centre left the decision to the states, but all states and UTs in the country, except for Telangana, imposed lockdown long ago, said BJP state unit president Bandi Sanjay

Care should be taken to ensure that there is no shortage of oxygen in private and government hospitals. All medicines required for Covid-19 should be made available, he said asking the government to solve the problems of private hospitals in providing treatment to Covid patients

extend necessary support to the poorest of the poor under the jurisdiction of their respective areas.

SHORT TAKES



Mancherial DCP Uday Kumar Reddy visits Mustayala oxygen plant on Tuesday and requested the plant authorities to supply oxygen cylinders to hospitals which are facing shortage

Police solve oxygen shortage problem in Ramagundam

RAMAGUNDAM: The timely intervention of the Ramagundam police averted a major disaster and earned them kudos from relatives of many a Covid-19 patient. The police are working at night to enforce a curfew and also working to resolve a major crisis like oxygen shortage. On a tip-off from Dr Balaji, Ramagundam Commissioner of Police V Satyanarayana and DCP Uday Kumar Reddy came to know that many hospitals in the Mancherial district are turning away patients for want of oxygen. The top police officers immediately ascertained the oxygen situation in the hospitals and spoke to Mustayala oxygen plant authorities for oxygen supply. The Commissioner sent Mancherial DCP to the plant and requisitioned 20 oxygen cylinders to address the immediate shortage of oxygen in various hospitals. Out of 150 cylinders needed, 20 cylinders have been procured and supplied to hospitals where there is a shortage of oxygen. Several opine that if the oxygen was not supplied it would have led to a major catastrophe. The relatives of the patients also thank the police for their gesture.

Lightning claims life

MULUGU: An elderly man died when lightning struck him while he was working in a field on Tuesday. The deceased was identified as Md Ramzan (65) of Kasimdevpet village in Mulugu district. He is survived by two daughters and a son. Multiple lightning strikes took place due to untimely rains here. Kasimdevpet sarpanch Md Ahamed Pasha demanded Rs 10 lakh ex-gratia to the bereaved family. Tonnes of paddy and chilli crops were damaged due to hailstones in the district. Mulugu MLA Seetakka demanded that the government purchase the wet paddy and mirchi with MSP rates.

25 Home Guards who tested positive given Rs 5,000 each

RAMAGUNDAM: Acting on directions from Ramagundam Police Commissioner V Satyanarayana, ACP of Armed Reserve Police Sundar Rao and Reserve Inspector Vishnu Prasad met families of Home Guards, who tested positive for the virus and gave Rs 5,000 to each of the 25 Home Guards, who acquired the virus. They asked the Home Guards receiving treatment under isolation to be mentally prepared to face the problem and take medicines and food as advised by doctors. They advised the Covid patients to practice Pranayama regularly. Police officer will get feedback regularly on the progress of the police personnel. If they have any health problems, they should bring them to the notice of higher authorities to help them provide better treatment.



ACP of Armed Reserve Police Sundar Rao and Reserve Inspector Vishnu Prasad giving a cheque for Rs 5,000 to a home guard in Ramagundam on Tuesday

Cong faults CM for sudden announcement of lockdown

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC official spokesperson G Niranjana found fault with Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao for his contradictory statements on lockdown. He reminded that earlier he had stated that lockdown is waste and people will suffer with it and the State economy will collapse, but all of a sudden he declared lockdown.

With the statement of KCR as lockdown is waste, people were under the impression that there will be no lockdown and they are not prepared for this sudden imposition of lockdown.

Is there no need to give people an advance intimation and time to plan themselves? he

questioned. “Ramzan is within two days and the government did not think about preparations for the festival by the Muslim brethren. The government is unfortunately in such a state, which is unable to act unless there is a High Court direction. Everyone is admonishing the inhuman attitude of the government, which obstructed the entry of ambulances on the state border,” he pointed out.

KCR should realise that he cannot single-handedly deal with the present critical situation involving the lives of people. He should immediately convene a meeting of all parties to discuss and take their cooperation in dealing with the present situation, he said.

Case registered against Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Another case has been registered against TDP national president and former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu in Guntur. Arandapeta police registered a case following a complaint lodged by advocate Pachala Anil Kumar. He said in his complaint that N Chandrababu and TDP leaders were creating fear psychosis among people on Corona. The police registered cases against N Chandrababu under Sections 188, 505 (1) b and 505 (2) following a complaint by lawyer Anil. It may be recalled that earlier a case has been registered against N Chandrababu Naidu in Kurnool by lawyer Subbaiah alleging that he is making statements on Corona, which are creating panic among people.

Mayor pays surprise visit to assess door-to-door survey

The Mayor counselled people not to be disheartened by testing positive for the virus and make good use of the Covid kit being presented by the survey staff.

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Warangal Mayor Gundu Sudharani and District Collector Ragiv Gandhi Hanumanthi paid a surprise visit to Puppallagutta, Rangasaipeet, Chintal and Siva Nagar in 35th and 42nd divisions of the city and interacted with teams conducting a door-to-door survey to identify Covid-19 patients and enquired about the progress of the survey from the staff on the survey.

The Mayor counselled people not to be disheartened by testing positive for the virus and make good use of the Covid kit being



District Collector Ragiv Gandhi Hanumanthi interacting with one of the team members, who is conducting a door-to-door survey in Warangal on Monday. Mayor Gundu Sudharani looks on

presented by the survey staff. Warangal Urban District Collector Ragiv Gandhi Hanumanthi asked resource persons to survey all houses without fail.

ASHA workers, resource persons are undertaking the door-to-door survey and giving medical kits to those who have the virus symptoms.

Earlier, Rajiv Gandhi

Hanumanthi monitored the progress of the survey in Jawahar Nagar in Hanmakonda. In-charge Municipal Commissioner Satyanarayana, corporators Somisetty Praveen, Gundu Purnachander, DMHO Lalita Devi, MEPMA Project Director Bhadrar Naik, Deputy DMHO Krishna Rao, DE Ravinder and others accompanied the District Collector.

Liquor smuggling flourishing on Telangana-Maha border

Predicting that liquor would not be sold for the next 10 days, the bootleggers purchased lakhs worth of liquor at the three outlets.

PNS ■ JAYASHANKAR BHUPALAPALLY

Even as the government declared lockdown from Wednesday, serpentine queues were seen in front of liquor shops everywhere those in Mahadevpur, Palimela and Kaleshwaram are no exception. The government has permitted two shops each in Kaleshwaram and Mahadevpur and one in Palimela. There are allegations of liquor smuggling into neighbouring Maharashtra from these shops where prohibition was imposed. Complaints have also been lodged with the excise authorities, who allegedly turned a blind eye with an eye on receiving bribes from the



Liquor bottles being loaded in an auto-rickshaw in Jayashankar Bhupalapally district on Tuesday for smuggling into Maharashtra where prohibition is in vogue

liquor lobby.

In fact, the remote places like this would have no major demand for liquor. The liquor traders vie with each other to bag licence for liquor shops so that they can supply liquor to belt shops in Maharashtra. These shops sell each quarter bottle and beer bottle at Rs 40 more. Other bottles are being sold at Rs 100 to Rs 120 more per bottle.

Up to a distance of 100 km deep in Maharashtra from the inter-state border, hundreds of belt shops have been operating

illegally. Complaints have been lodged with excise official that each liquor shop has been supplying Rs 3-5 lakh worth liquor per day to these belt shops.

Locals question, why there is no action, has been taken so far across the border smuggling.

The moment the lockdown has been declared. The organisers of various illegal belt shops in Maharashtra, where prohibition is in force, and smugglers are taking liquor across the border transporting it on auto-rickshaws with their hired henchmen.

Predicting that liquor would not be sold for the next 10 days, the bootleggers purchased lakhs worth liquor at the three outlets.

Social activists Mohammad Rafi, Srinivas, Ramesh Reddy and others appeal to the government to check the smuggling of liquor. When excise superintendent Sasidhar Reddy was contacted, he did not respond.

Putta Madhu questioned again

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLY

In the sensational double murder case (High Court advocates), the Ramagundam police questioned the Peddapally Zilla Parishad chairman Putta Madhu on Tuesday about withdrawal of money from his bank account and spending one week underground.

The police said that a clear picture on the payments made to others out of funds withdrawn from the bank have to come out.

The police questioned him till Monday night on various aspects of his alleged involvement in the

double murder case. Earlier, in the wee hours of Tuesday, the police served notice on Madhu asking him to appear before authorities for questioning on Tuesday. The police have to ascertain speaking over mobile with the accused and payment of supari to the murders and other aspects.

Putta Madhu was in police custody for three days since Saturday. He returned home only on Monday night. Again the police called him for questioning. Political circles are agog giving vent to various doubts in the case. The result of the questioning of Putta Madhu would be made known only on Wednesday.



Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy launching sanitiser spraying vehicles in Hyderabad on Tuesday

Two sanitiser spraying vehicles launched

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP Boudh Nagar corporator contestant Mekala Keerti Harsha Kiran on Tuesday got two vehicles that spray sodium hypochlorite flagged off by Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy at a function held here on Tuesday. Later, with the help of the vehicles, they sanitised various slums in the area. Addressing a gathering, Kishan Reddy said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's work earned him appreciation from global nations.

He said the Centre alerted people and advised State governments and supporting them in all respects. He appreciated the service-mindedness of BJP activists, who are serving all private and government hospitals.

BJP leader Shyam Sunder Goud, Rajasekhar Reddy, Mekala Sarangapani and others were present.

States to get 7L addl Covid vax doses within three days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 90 lakh COVID-19 vaccine doses are still available with states and UTs which will receive over 7 lakh additional doses in the next three days, the Union Health Ministry said on Tuesday.

The Centre has so far provided more than 18 crore vaccine doses (18,00,03,160) to states and UTs free of cost.

Of this, the total consumption including wastages is 17,09,71,429 doses.

"More than 90 lakh COVID Vaccine doses (90,31,691) are still available with the states and UTs to be administered. States with negative balance are showing more consumption (including wastage) than vaccine supplied as they have not reconciled the vaccine they have supplied to Armed Forces," the ministry said.

States and UTs will receive 7,29,610 additional vaccine doses in addition within the



next three days. The ministry said the Government of India has been supporting the nationwide vaccination drive by providing COVID vaccines free of cost to states and UTs.

Implementation of the Liberalized and Accelerated

Phase 3 Strategy of COVID-19 Vaccination has started from 1st May 2021. In the strategy it is made clear that every month only 50 per cent of the total Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL) cleared vaccine doses of any manufacturer would be

procured by the Centre.

The Centre would continue to procure its share of 50 per cent of the monthly CDL cleared vaccines and would continue to make it available to state governments free of cost as was being done earlier.

Active Covid cases down by 30,000 first time in 61 days: Health ministry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The total active Covid-19 cases in the country dipped to 37,15,221 on Tuesday with a net decline of 30,016 cases being recorded in a span of 24 hours for the first time after 61 days, the Union health ministry said on Tuesday.

The total recoveries in a span of 24 hours too outnumbered the daily new Covid-19 cases after 61 days. The total active cases now comprise 16.16 per cent of the country's total coronavirus infections.

Thirteen states -- Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh cumulatively account for 82.68 per cent of India's total active cases, the ministry said.

The ministry said 24.44 per cent of the total active cases in the country have been reported from 10 districts including

Bengaluru Urban, Pune, Delhi, Ernakulam, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, Thrissur, Jaipur, Kozhikode and Mumbai.

Ten states -- Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi -- reported 69.88 per cent of the 3,29,942 new Covid-19 cases registered in a day, the ministry said.

Karnataka has reported the highest daily new cases at 39,305. It is followed by Maharashtra with 37,236 cases and Tamil Nadu which reported 28,978 new cases.

India's cumulative recoveries have surged to 1,90,27,304 with 3,56,082 recoveries being registered in a span of 24 hours.

Ten states account for 72.28 per cent of the new recoveries, the ministry said.

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

A total 3,876 deaths were



reported in a span of 24 hours and 10 states account for 73.09 per cent of the new fatalities, it said.

Karnataka saw the maximum casualties (596) followed by Maharashtra (549), it said.

Meanwhile, the cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has increased to 17.27 crore.

A total of 17,27,10,066 vaccine doses have been administered through 25,15,519 sessions, according to the provi-

sional report till 7 am.

These include 95,64,242 healthcare workers (HCWs) who have taken the first dose and 65,05,744 HCWs who have taken the second dose, 1,40,54,058 frontline workers (FLWs) who have received the first dose and 78,53,514 FLWs who have taken the second dose and 25,59,339 beneficiaries in the age group of 18-44 years who have been administered the first dose.

Besides, 5,55,10,630 and 71,95,632 beneficiaries aged 45 to 60 have been administered the first and second dose respectively while 5,38,06,205 and 1,56,60,702 people aged above 60 have taken the first and second dose.

According to the ministry, 5,24,731 beneficiaries in the 18-44 age group have received their first dose of covid vaccine in the last 24 hours and cumulatively 25,59,339 across 30 states and UTs since the start of the phase-3 of vaccination drive.

INDIA CORNER

Maha to divert 3 lakh Covaxin doses for 45-plus age group

Amid a shortage of COVID-19 vaccine doses, the Maharashtra government on Tuesday decided to divert three lakh vials of Covaxin meant for the 18-44 age group for the use of the people aged 45 years and above. Speaking to reporters, state Health Minister Rajesh Tope also said more than five lakh people above 45 years are awaiting the second dose for the want of the vaccine.

"Efficacy of the vaccine is largely affected if the second dose is not administered in a stipulated time. To avoid such health crisis, the state government has decided to divert three lakh vials (of Covaxin) purchased for the 18-44 age category for the people above 45 years," Tope said. He said only 35,000 vials of Covaxin are currently available with the state government for administering the second dose to the people above 45 years. According to the Liberalised Pricing and Accelerated National COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy, COVID-19 vaccination is free at government vaccination centres that receive doses from the Centre for eligible population groups comprising healthcare workers, frontline workers and people above the 45 years of age.



TMC leader shot at in Bengal's Hooghly district

A TMC leader was shot at by unidentified miscreants in West Bengal's Hooghly district on Tuesday when he was buying vegetables at a local market, a police officer said. Aditya Niyogi, former vice chairman of Bansberia Municipality, was taken to a nearby hospital in a critical condition, but the doctors there referred him to a clinical establishment in Kolkata, he said. BJP sources claimed the incident was a fallout of factional feud within the ruling party. Denying the charge, TMC MLA and former minister Tapan Dasgupta said, "Saffron party workers carried out the attack, aided by a group of traitors within the Trinamool who have been exposed after the just-concluded assembly elections". Several TMC activists hit the streets in Bansberia during the day in protest against the incident.



Three LeT militants killed in Jammu & Kashmir encounter

Three Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, police said. Security forces launched a cordon and search operation at Vailoo in Komernag area of the district early on Tuesday following information about presence of militants there, a police official said. "During the search operation, as the presence of terrorists got ascertained they were given an opportunity to surrender. However, they fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party which was retaliated leading to an encounter," the official said. He said the joint teams of security forces also rescued all the civilians trapped in the gunfire and halted the operation for the time to ensure safe evacuation of people from the area of gunfire.



7-day total lockdown in Nagaland from May 14

The Nagaland government on Tuesday decided to clamp total lockdown in the state for seven days from May 14 amid the surge in COVID-19 cases. State government spokesperson on COVID-19 and Minister Neiba Kronu said that the High Powered Committee (HPC) on COVID-19 decided to impose a state-wide total lockdown for one week starting from 6 pm on May 14 till May 21. The decision was taken during the HPC meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Tuesday, he said. The HPC decided that the week-long total lockdown will be enforced with a view to break the chain of COVID-19 transmission, said Kronu. He also said that existing restrictions will continue till total lockdown is in place while New SOPs would also be issued. However, Kronu said that essential services including agricultural activities will be exempted from the purview of the lockdown. Nagaland government on May 3 announced containment zones in some areas of the state capital Kohima and commercial hub Dimapur for seven days from 7 pm of May 5 following surge in COVID-19 cases, which will end at 7 pm on Wednesday.



TN CM Stalin, newly elected MLAs take oath

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, his Cabinet colleagues, AIADMK top leader K Palaniswami, who is set to be the Leader of Opposition on Tuesday took oath as MLAs in the Assembly.

As soon as the House convened with pro-tem Speaker K Pitchandhi in the chair, Stalin was the first to take oath.

Following him, other ministers, beginning with senior legislator and Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan took the oath. Two Ministers, S S Sivasankar (Backward Classes Welfare) and M Mathiventhan (Tourism), did not take the oath as they were being treated for COVID-19.

Former Chief Minister K Palaniswami who will be the leader of opposition, took the



oath following the ministers.

While Stalin, his Cabinet colleagues and DMK MLAs made a solemn affirmation, most AIADMK members including Palaniswami and former Deputy Chief Minister

O Panneerselvam took the oath in the name of God.

Some other members including AIADMK's K P Munusamy, who resigned his Rajya Sabha membership following his win in the Assembly polls, made the affirmation in the name of their conscience.

A total of 224 MLAs out of the total 234, took the oath from 10 am to 2 pm. The MLAs who did not take oath today are expected to do so in the Speaker's chamber in the days to come.

Also, Stalin proposed the names of DMK legislators M Appavu and K Pitchandhi for the posts of Assembly Speaker and Deputy Speaker. It was seconded by Duraimurugan, also the Leader of the House in the nominations for the May 12 election for the two posts.

‘Overstaying Covid patients in hospitals should go home’

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Tuesday asked COVID patients over-staying in hospitals 'unnecessarily' to go home to make way for serious ones to get treatment.

"What is the need for the 332 patients to remain in the hospital for 30 days? They should vacate the beds.

There are 503 patients in the hospital for 20 days. This way people who are staying in the hospital unnecessarily should go home," he said.

He was speaking to reporters after visiting a COVID war room in the city, which has generated data about the COVID patients, the status of beds in the hospitals, oxygen availability and other essential drugs for the pandemic.



The CM said the COVID War Room has generated information about those patients who can avail treatment at home but were staying put in the hospital depriving serious patients from getting treatment.

Responding to a query, Yediyurappa said those 503 people are in the hospital despite advice of doctors for their discharge.

According to him, such patients should be told that the treatment was over and they

should go home paving the way for admission of serious ones.

Hailing the COVID War Room management, Yediyurappa said it is a model in the country as the data are perfect giving every detail on a real time basis about the number of people admitted, for how long they are there and the availability of beds in the hospitals for COVID patients.

"We are operating this war room in a systematic manner, which probably cannot be seen anywhere in the country," he said.

To a query on BJP national general secretary B L Santhosh meeting him, Yediyurappa said he discussed for an hour with him COVID-19, the situation prevailing in Delhi and Karnataka and the ways to improve things.

Graph of Covid cases on decline in MP: Minister

PNS ■ BHOPAL

The graph of COVID-19 infections in Madhya Pradesh is on the decline, state Home Minister Narottam Mishra said on Tuesday, a day after the daily infections dropped to 9,715.

"It is a matter of relief to see that the new cases fell to four digits from the five digits. Since last three to four days, cases are showing a downward trend in the state," Mishra, also a spokesperson of the state government, told reporters.

He said Madhya Pradesh recorded 9,715 new cases on Monday while more than 8,400 people recovered from the viral infection on the same day.

"The infection is declining in cities. Infection continues in rural areas but it is being brought under control thanks to the efforts undertaken by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan," Mishra said. The state home minister further said 150 doses of COVID-19 vaccine wasted because members from the age group of 18 to 44 years who had booked slots didn't turn up for inoculation.

ATCs should undergo random breath analyser test: Delhi HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday directed that air traffic controllers (ATCs) and five per cent of pilots and cabin crew on duty would undergo random breath analyser (BA) tests for the next three months in view of the prevailing pandemic.

Justice Prathiba M Singh further directed the ATCs, pilots and cabin crew to give an undertaking that they have not consumed any alcohol or psychotropic substance within the 12 hours prior to a flight.

It made it clear that if a pilot, cabin crew or ATC is found to have consumed such substances and had given a false undertaking, such personnel would be "off-rostered" and appropriate action would be taken against such individuals.

With regard to the procedure to be adopted for carrying out the tests, the court said it would be held in a big and open space and the doctor and medical staff conducting the test would have to undergo a Rapid



Antigen Test everyday.

The court further directed that no more than six persons would be tested in a span of one hour and prior to each test the BA machine would be sanitised by UV radiation.

It asked the aviation regulator, DGCA, to issue guidelines with regard to the testing protocol to be followed and to communicate the same to all the airlines and airports in the country.

The directions came on the separate pleas by the ATC Guild and Indian Commercial Pilots Association (ICPA) opposing the conduct of BA tests during the prevailing pandemic.

The Directorate General of

Civil Aviation (DGCA) had on April 27 issued an order stating therein that 10 per cent of flight crew and cabin crew members involved in domestic operations shall be subjected to random preflight BA test.

DGCA had also told the court that undertakings are required to be furnished by flight and cabin crew that they have not consumed any alcohol or psychotropic substance in the 12 hours prior to a flight.

In March last year, the high court issued an interim order suspending BA tests through the tube process for ATCs.

Subsequently, in September 2020 it had modified the interim order and allowed BA tests through the tube process on the basis of the recommendations by a medical board.

The board had recommended that one machine would be used per next 12 hours.

The court, while allowing the BA tests, had said that DGCA would be bound by the June 16, 2020 recommendations of the medical board.

No Eid mass prayers due to Covid: Assam Masjid committees

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Masjid committees in Assam have decided not to have mass prayers in their premises during the upcoming Eid ul-Fitr festival due to the COVID-19 pandemic and state government guidelines.

Clerics of the masjids have appealed to the faithful in their area to offer prayers at their respective home to celebrate the festival at the end of the month-long Ramadan fasting.

An office-bearer of the Burha Jame Masjid Committee in Guwahati said there will be no mass gathering of people as usual during Eid at the masjids or Eidgah fields for offering prayers, traditional shake of hands with one another or exchange of embraces due to the pandemic protocols of social distancing.

As per the government

guidelines for all religious places, congregation of only five persons was allowed at either masjids or Eidgahs, the office-bearer said.

To avoid large congregations and for crowd management, most masjids have been kept locked by their committees since the pandemic last year, he informed.

Only five persons, including Maulana and the staff will offer prayers in Masjid premises this holy festival, he added.

Meanwhile, the clerics have asked the believers to not crowd mosques and to follow the state government's recent guidelines allowing congregation of only five persons at a time at all religious places.

The Burha Jame Masjid Committee member further said that Eid celebrations will most likely be on Friday but it would depend on the sighting of the moon either on that day or earlier on Thursday.

Experts against ‘non-scientific use’ of convalescent plasma

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Some clinicians and scientists have written to Principal Scientific Advisor K Vijay Raghavan, cautioning against the "irrational and non-scientific use" of convalescent plasma for COVID-19 in the country.

The public health professionals said the current evidence on plasma therapy in COVID-19 and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines are not based on the existing evidence.

They also pointed out some very early evidence that indicates a possible association between emergence of variants with "lower susceptibility to neutralising antibodies in immunosuppressed" people given plasma therapy.

This raises the possibility of

more virulent strains developing due to irrational use of plasma therapy which can fuel the pandemic, the letter signed by experts like vaccinologist Gagandeep Kang and surgeon Pramesh C S said.

"We are writing to you as concerned clinicians, public health professionals and scientists from India about the irrational and non-scientific use of convalescent plasma for COVID-19 in the country," it said.

"This has stemmed from guidelines issued by government agencies, and we request your urgent intervention to address the issue which can prevent harassment of COVID-19 patients, their families, their clinicians and COVID-19 survivors," said the letter which was also marked to Director General of the Indian Medical



Council of India Balram Bhargav and AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria.

The concerns were raised after the Union Health Ministry last month issued an updated revised

'Clinical Guidance for Management of Adult COVID-19 Patients' under which it recommended off-label use of convalescent plasma only in the early moderate disease preferably within

seven days of symptom onset.

It also stated that "no use after seven days" and only on availability of high titre donor plasma.

"The current research evidence unanimously indicates that there is no benefit offered by convalescent plasma for treatment of COVID-19. However, it continues to be prescribed rampantly in hospitals across India," the letter said.

Families of patients run from pillar-to-post for getting plasma, which is in short supply. The desperation of patients and their families is understandable because they like to try the best for their loved ones, when a doctor has prescribed this, the public health professionals said.

In the plasma therapy, antibodies from the blood of a patient who has recovered from COVID-

19 are used to treat serious patients.

They said the current evidence on plasma therapy in COVID-19 and the ICMR guidelines are not based on the existing evidence.

They cited the ICMR-PLACID trial which was the world's first randomised controlled trial on convalescent plasma in 39 public and private hospitals across India.

It found "convalescent plasma was not associated with a reduction in progression to severe COVID-19 or all-cause mortality. This trial has high generalisability and approximates convalescent plasma use in real life settings with limited laboratory capacity".

The large trial of 11,588 patients found no difference in death or proportion of patients discharged from hospital, the clinicians said.

Two to tango

Just like the Governments, the citizens are also responsible for the spurt in COVID-19 cases

American TV personality Wally Amos put it succinctly: “There are two reasons why people fail. One is irresponsibility. The second is fear.” The Governments at the Centre and in the States take a fair share of blame for the inadequacies in medical infrastructure, resource management and planning even though the second COVID-19 surge continues unabated. But what about the citizens of the country? They are equal shareholders in the system and must equally share the blame for the behaviour that crosses all borders of civic responsibility. The visuals of a big crowd attending the funeral of a Muslim cleric in Uttar Pradesh’s Badaun went viral on Monday. The cleric had died on Sunday and his body was kept in a local mosque for public viewing. Within hours, people began to converge near the mosque. It became an unmanageable crowd in no time, the people — most of them maskless — throwing all caution to the winds. There was no question of maintaining social distancing. There was no question of anyone asking them to at least wear masks. In fact, there was no mechanism available to either control the crowd or enforce safety guidelines. What does this show apart from the blatant neglect of the anti-COVID guidelines in public places? It is impossible to know how many among them were COVID positive or were recovering/had recovered or might contract

the virus due to transmission in a fortnight from now. The crowd has the potential to turn into a super-spreader by the end of May.

That the massing of people took the administration by surprise is one half of the story. The death of a prominent cleric should have automatically alerted the police department and the office of the district magistrate. The administration will now initiate action, file FIRs and maybe even order a probe. But the horse has bolted. If the officials had the latest contact tracing measures available, they would know how mammoth a task it is to contain the infection transmission. The other half of the story is the sad, thoughtless and irrational actions of the people who appear willing to put themselves and families at risk. Should we blame religious orthodoxy or obscurantism or retrograde beliefs for such irrational behaviour? No. Take the liquor shops, for instance. One will find long queues outside liquor vendors than at COVID hospitals, oxygen refill plants or vaccination centres. Marriages and other functions continue to take place with far more people in attendance than the permitted limit of 50. The families and friends of COVID patients continue to throng hospitals and often crowd the ICUs where their kin are admitted. Even now, very few people wear double masks and face shields are a rarity. It takes two hands to clap and if the people refuse to let common sense guide their actions, it may be the case of — to cannibalise a Marquez title — a chronicle of an unfolding, avoidable tragedy.



Stand united

It’s time for the political class to stop bickering and fight against our common enemy

At a time when the nation is besieged with an unprecedented human tragedy, India’s political parties have miserably failed to rise to the occasion. The daily war of words raging among headline-grabbers of our political class has given the impression that they are only bothered about consolidating their vote bank. Take the example of West Bengal. Both Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the BJP leadership have been blaming each other for the Corona bomb that has pulverised the State’s health system and seen an alarming positivity rate. But the fact remains that during the Assembly election campaigning, both sides brazenly flouted the COVID protocols and held massive road shows and rallies with thousands of unmasked people in attendance. It was the same scene in Uttar Pradesh, where a massive mobilisation took place during the panchayat elections. Once again, our political class showed a blatant disregard for the health risks that such campaigning posed for the common man. It’s not only a violation of the COVID norms, but the bigger issue is the absence of even a symbolic concern for coming together to providing succour to the masses by way of health infrastructure, oxygen and life-saving drugs.

Be it at the State level or the Centre, the political class is bitterly divided even as India’s hapless people are watching it with despair. The situation is so pathetic that even within the NDA, the alliance partners are blaming each other for the half-hearted measures being taken to control the pandemic. Anyone following the Bihar developments and noticing the attacks and counter-attacks by the JD(U) and BJP leaders, will feel nothing but shock. It’s time Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the initiative and invited the senior leaders of all political parties to keep aside their differences and stay united in the fight against the pandemic. The PM should also ensure that all senior leaders, including the MPs and MLAs, are accessible to their constituents at all hours. It’s unfortunate that many of them have remained locked inside their bungalows and flats in Delhi while, back home, those who voted them to power are running helter-skelter for a hospital bed or oxygen cylinders. At a time when profiteers and black marketeers are thriving on misery, the political class should mobilise the people to wage a war on such unscrupulous elements. Much can be done to help the people if only our political leaders show a collective resolve.

Francophobic in ‘land of the pure’

Incited by an ultra-religious outfit, Pakistan is protesting France’s views on the freedom of speech and radical Islam

The difference in the governance impulses and compulsions between the Fifth Republic, ie France, and the ostensible “land of the pure”, ie Pakistan, could not be more glaring. Like all nations who have a mixed bag of heroes and villains to define its preferred narrative — France chose intellectual liberals likes Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau, whereas Pakistan has seemingly come under the irrefutable grip of illiberal like Mumtaz Qadri, Saad Hussain Rizvi and the likes of Baitullah Mehsuds. Genealogically also, La France espoused *Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) whereas Pakistan invoked *Iman, Ittihad, Nazam* (Faith, Unity, Discipline), and the religiosity in the latter has only increased over time. It was only a matter of time before the sovereign sensibilities clashed directly, as they recently did, with the ensuing protest by the ultra-religious Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) which is protesting France’s views on the freedom of speech, radical Islam and blasphemy and, therefore, seeking the expulsion of the French ambassador.

The history of the two unlike nations had been surprisingly robust, despite their foundational and fundamental anchorages though, in recent times, the crevices have sharply widened. The Pakistan Air Force had been France’s largest aerospace customer, having got Mirage fighter aircraft, Exocet missiles, reconnaissance and civil aircraft, whereas the Pakistani Navy had ordered the Daphne-class and Agosta-class submarines — as also agreements to transfer civilian nuclear technology. But the recent strategic-bind in the Indo-French realm (including the much-banded Rafale fighters) has led to a definitive shift in the French preferences. But it did not go unnoticed across the restive Line of Control (LoC), especially since France also took a particularly hard line on terror (owing to its own unrest with Islamist extremism and violence)



and in openly siding with India at multilateral forums.

Beyond the visible optics, France was the only western power to support India after the latter conducted the nuclear tests in 1998 and was instrumental in facilitating India’s entry into the non-proliferation regimes of Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group. In reciprocal bonhomie, Delhi took an unusually assertive stand to condemn Turkish President Recep Erdogan’s (Pakistan’s closest ally along with China) diatribe against French President Emmanuel Macron, after the French leader had openly called out “Islamist separatism” in the case of beheading a French school teacher. India’s Ministry of External Affairs explicitly stated: “We strongly deplore the personal attacks in unacceptable language on President Emmanuel Macron in violation of the most basic standards of international discourse.”

Meanwhile, Pakistan’s patented double standards on religious extremism, dangerous dalliances and co-option of the clerical lot allowed for the

DESPITE IMRAN’S POSTURED MODERATION AND CLAIMS OF PROGRESSIVE OUTLOOK, HE HAD WILLINGLY DROPPED RENOWNED PRINCETON ECONOMIST ATIF MIAN FROM HIS ECONOMIC ADVISORY COUNCIL UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE LIKES OF THE TLP, OWING TO ATIF’S BELONGING TO THE AHMADIYYA FAITH

dangerous drift towards morphing the French beheading incident, into an uncompromisable *ummah* issue, triggering calls for the boycott of French products and expelling the French ambassador from Pakistan. Continuing to play to the electoral gallery simultaneously, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan kept reiterating and reminding that no one had done more than him in internationalising the issue of blasphemy — this whilst dealing with a supposedly “terrorist” organisation with a violent position and dubious track record on “blasphemy” in Pakistan. Despite Imran’s postured moderation and claims of progressive outlook, he had willingly dropped renowned Princeton economist Atif Mian from his Economic Advisory Council under pressure from the likes of the TLP, owing to Atif’s belonging to the Ahmadiyya faith.

France is moving in an exact opposite direction with counter-accusations of weaponising its famed policy of segregating the State and religion, a secular ideology known as Laicite. A new law called “Strengthening Respect for Republican Principles” has been introduced in the wake of

recurring Islamist violence to “free Islam in France from foreign influences”! Many accuse the same for right-wing populism with an electoral intent that will further the divide, suspicion and marginalisation of the minority community and the French State. The fact is that the right-wing parties led by Le Pen have gained enough traction to threaten Macron and, therefore, his competitive ‘right-wing’ stand have more to do with winning the next elections as opposed to concerns on dealing with extremism or personal conviction in free speech. It is this pandering, invocation and inflaming of the basest instinct of the masses that vitiates the popular emotions towards revisionism and “othering”, be it in Paris or in Islamabad. That the intrinsically liberal French sensibilities will militate culturally with the conservative moorings of a society like Pakistan is a given, yet it need not spiral to the violent extent that it has, only if the political leaderships didn’t play emotions selectively, in both countries.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IRRATIONAL PRICING OF ANTI-COVID VACCINES

Sir — A frustrated Centre has justified the differential COVID vaccine pricing, telling the Supreme Court that the three-slab “liberalised, market-driven” rates for the Centre, States and private hospitals will incentivise demand, lead to higher production, competition and attract overseas investors.

In my view, however, the claim is without any evidence or rationale. Why is the Centre procuring the vaccines at one rate and the States have to buy the same vaccines for double the price or more? The Centre submitted in the Supreme Court that judicial intervention on the issue may have serious consequences. “Any overzealous, though well-meaning, judicial intervention may lead to unforeseen and unintended consequences in the absence of any expert advice,” the Centre told the top court, adding that in such a “grave and unprecedented” crisis, the “wisdom of the Executive should be trusted”. The Serum Institute of India, which is producing Covishield, is selling it to the Centre for ₹150 a shot. But the State Governments are paying ₹300 a shot, and private hospitals have to shell out ₹600 per vaccine. Bharat Biotech, which is also selling each shot of Covaxin to the Centre for ₹150, is charging the States ₹400 a dose while the private hospitals have to cough up ₹1,200 for each dose. With this, the Centre has not been able to justify the vaccine pricing.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

A DISTANT DREAM

Sir — This refers to the editorial, “Hope floats” (May 11). There is no doubt that the regional parties have performed well in the latest Assembly elections. At the same time, the BJP hasn’t ceded any political space to its opponents. Rather, it is the demolition of the remaining vestiges of the Congress’ ability to present itself as a viable alternative to the BJP. The BJP’s defeat in West Bengal seems spectacular because of the hype its leadership had created over its poll prospects. Minus the hype, the party’s performance is alright. Over the last five years, its vote share has climbed from 10 per cent to 38 per cent; it has replaced the Congress and the Left as

Time gap between the shots



Amid the non-availability of slots and long queues for getting vaccinated, there exists some confusion over the duration before the second shot of Covishield. When this particular vaccine was first administered, the interval between the first and second doses was 28 days. In March, the Union Government sent revised guidelines that, based on experts’ recommendation, the gap be increased from 28-42 days to 42-56 days. All States were advised to follow the new schedule.

Surprisingly, the first-dose certificate continued mentioning that the second dose was due after 28 days; the Aarogya Setu app mentions the interval between 28-56 days and

the FAQs on the CoWin website claim the recommended interval is 28-56 days but 42-56 days’ gap gives enhanced protection, with the rider that people can opt for their choice as per their convenience. As a result of this confusion, only those in the age group of 45 and above who have waited 42 days are being allowed to take their second shot in Telangana. The others are being made to wait until 42 days but the special vaccination drive would already be over by May 12. Therefore, those who took their vaccine on or after May 1 would have to wait beyond 56 days of their having taken the injection.

The Government of India needs to address this confusion and end it before it spreads to other States and before the 18-44 age group starts getting its first dose of vaccination in right earnest. It is still a matter of conjecture as to why the Government, while accepting the experts’ advice, tampered with the minimum interval of 28 days. Instead, it could have simply increased the maximum interval to 56 days as per the experts’ suggestions.

N Nagarajan | Secunderabad

the principal Opposition party and set the political agenda for the State.

In Kerala, too, the BJP has changed the societal discourse, forcing the CPI(M) to repent its stand on women entering the Sabarimala shrine and emboldening a candidate in one constituency to declare that he did not want Muslims to vote for him. The party has also wrested Puducherry from the Congress. In this context, it would be premature to speak about the possibilities in 2024. Importantly, the third front experiments in the past have resulted in chaos and disasters. The consensus on leadership is a mirage and it instantly collides with the Congress’ ambition of being the primary Opposition force.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

ENSURE A DECENT BURIAL AT LEAST

Sir — The ongoing pandemic has exposed to the world the extent of India’s poor sys-

tems, be it healthcare or cremation grounds. The people have already paid a heavy price for the Government’s poor preparedness to tackle the second wave. But even if the Government can’t provide a decent life to its citizens, a decent cremation is not too much to expect or ask for.

For the Government, there is no dearth of funds for wrong priorities such as building statues, the Prime Minister’s residence and a new Parliament building. But there’s no money to be seen for free universal vaccination programme. India currently holds a whopping forex of \$580 billion but its citizens are dying on the streets for want of hospital beds, oxygen or medicine.

Girish R Edathitta | Kerala

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

We should not be dependent on just one or two companies. I suggest the Centre should collect the formula and give it to firms who can produce vaccines.

Delhi Chief Minister — Arvind Kejriwal



does not mean we should throw caution to the wind. We must remain vigilant.

UK Prime Minister — Boris Johnson

We have all been reading about the COVID crisis in India. They have been hit with 3,00,000 new cases a day.

Hollywood star — Drew Barrymore



Our fast bowling unit is a great package where everyone works really hard while also understanding the other counterparts really well.

Indian pacer — Mohammed Shami

This is not the time for anyone to violate the guidelines. Be it police or people, both must show some rationality in approach.

Karnataka Home Minister — Basavaraj Bommai

FIRST COLUMN

MANAGING THE WORLD ORDER AMID COVID-19

The India-EU summit has aimed to address contiguity issues among the member nations



SUDHIR HINDWAN

Amid the Coronavirus pandemic, the recent virtual summit between India and the European Union (EU) has provided a huge platform for negotiations in trade, economic partnership and issues related to investment protection, bringing about contiguity among member countries. There are also subtle efforts to establish joint collaborations in Asia, Pacific and African regions. This certainly exhibits high level insight and understanding of both sides. It also points to the vision leaders need to acclimatise to a changed world order necessitated by the current Covid-19 pandemic. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, EU President Ursula Von Der Leyen and President of European Council Charles Michel displayed foresight for creating channels of negotiations for trade and global security and a fresh pathway towards inclusive democratisation of world politics. The summit spells out a prototype for the world community handling bilateral and multi-lateral ties through cooperation rather than confrontation. The pandemic has reinforced the need for the member countries to trust one another and bury their differences. The key issue is to bring as many countries to the negotiating table as possible for, in the context of tackling the pandemic, relaxing vaccines related Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (Trips) to help save maximum lives. The increasing support and agree-



ment with regard to limiting climate change issues and opening up gateways for renewable energy and development in technological knowhow along with channelling the sources of power generation and creating a mechanism to withstand any sudden threat posed by China's BRI (Belt and Road Initiatives) augur well for peace and prosperity of all member countries. The 2019 Japan EU deal was an effort in this direction. India and the EU have shared a positive relationship, with their trade share having crossed a decent landmark during last five years, much more than expected. During the last few years, there have been closer ties with Germany, Italy and The Netherlands, them being the biggest importers from India while Germany, France and Belgium being the largest exporters of goods.

The recent efforts at the summit would further boost and cement their ties and create a genuine environment for stabilizing economic growth (along with ensuring free flow of goods and services) strategic security, prosperity, stability and combating sudden challenges arising due to climate change. Further, help to India from EU's Civil Protection System during the second surge of Covid-19 will open avenues for closer integration.

Foreign relations operate with the help of efficient diplomatic system and diplomacy is all about right gestures and cooperation and coordination at the time of crisis. The Prime Ministers of Belgium and Spain and the French President appreciating India's efforts to combat the pandemic can only lead to further cooperation. There is, however, no lack of unanimity with regard to nuclear energy, sustainable development and environmental issues. Further negotiations may lead to creation of a strategic mechanism to provide a shield against terrorism, international crime, drug dealing, smuggling and cyber threat unleashed by the non-state actors. This may also accelerate maritime friendly ties and bolster up security around Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific areas which have lately become areas of concern.

These are changing times and many changes have occurred in international relations recently. The India-EU summit outcome endorses the fact that sharing a common strategic vision and a combined approach to ensure mutual economic prosperity through a multi-layered and multi-lateral strategy is going to dominate the world order in the coming days. What is required is to develop a fresh perspective for a more matured reliance on international cooperation between nations to enunciate a new strategy of retaliation, threatening a severe response to any attempt of destabilising the order. There are areas where strong relations can generate development funds for integrated education, medicine, science, technology and biotechnology among various nations across the globe.

(The author is a Professor and an expert on strategic affairs. The views expressed are personal)

The renewable energy-land conflict

Designed in 1981, Agrovoltaics is a promising tool that helps a land patch to be used for both farming and power production using solar panels



PRABIR BANERJEE

Agrovoltaics (or Agrophotovoltaic), despite its recent resurgence, is not a new concept. Designed in 1981, Agrovoltaics is a sustainable technique where the same patch of land is used for both farming as well as production of electricity from solar panels. Conventionally, we believe that land can only be used for a single purpose; for instance, farmers would, ordinarily, have to choose between energy generation or farming but agrovoltaics maximizes land efficiency by co-developing solar and agriculture together on the same piece of land.

For a country like India, where agricultural products and practices dominate a major chunk of the national economy, innovative synergic models like agrovoltaics can be practiced to increase agricultural land productivity. In addition, it will also cater to the nation's target of making a big push for renewables through solar, expecting to increase its renewable energy capacity from 380 GW to 450 GW by 2030, about 60 per cent of India's total energy capacity.

How does Agrovoltaics work?

French scientists found that Agrovoltaic systems increase global land productivity from 35 to 73 percent. Likewise, German research revealed that overall efficiency was increased by 60 per cent.

For one year, the pilot project used 720 bi-facial solar modules covering one-third of a hectare, mounted high enough that crops received almost the same amount of sunlight as under natural growing conditions. The system costs as much as a small solar roof system while crop production is sufficiently high and can be profitably sold on the market.

Agrovoltaics system increases the efficiency of energy production as solar panels are inherently sensitive to temperature, they warm up faster. But the crops cultivated underneath the photovoltaic (PV) panels emit water through their natural process of transpiration, reducing the panels' temperature, thus, increasing their efficiency.

Similar efficiency gains are seen in cultivation, it is observed that cultivation under PV arrays provided greater temperature stability and more atmospheric moisture — effectively creating microclimates conducive for growth.

Agrovoltaics in India

Early experiments in India found that agrovoltaics can potentially increase the overall value of grape farms more than 15 times as compared to conventional farming while maintaining the same grape production.

If this dual use of land is implemented nationwide, it can make a significant impact by generating over 16,000 GWh of electricity, which has the potential of meeting the energy demands of more



FOR ONE YEAR, THE PILOT PROJECT USED 720 BI-FACIAL SOLAR MODULES COVERING ONE-THIRD OF A HECTARE, MOUNTED HIGH ENOUGH THAT CROPS RECEIVED ALMOST THE SAME AMOUNT OF SUNLIGHT AS UNDER NATURAL GROWING CONDITIONS. THE SYSTEM COSTS AS MUCH AS A SMALL SOLAR ROOF SYSTEM WHILE THE CROP PRODUCTION IS SUFFICIENTLY HIGH AND CAN BE PROFITABLY SOLD ON THE MARKET

(The author is the co-founder and Managing Member of the Balipara Foundation, an NGO. The views expressed are personal.)



than 15 million people.

Numerous small-scale experiments in agrovoltaics have mushroomed across the country, particularly in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, with some generating up to 3MW. These programs still require a full cost-benefit analysis and rigorous monitoring to understand the impact on crop growth, power generation — and the viability of feasibly scaling these programmes.

However, this also has a challenging side — As India pushes forward to achieve its renewable energy targets, the rights and concerns of small and marginalised farmers across India face a new threat.

Many cases of land acquisition and displacement are picking up pace in the country. According to recent reports from Assam, where the villagers from Amdanga village, who form a part of Mikir Bamuni Grant cluster of villages in Nagaon district, claim that a 'Green Energy Plant' is bulldozing the rights and claims of marginal farmers.

However, displacing vulnerable and marginal farmers with minimal compensation, in an

already climate-vulnerable region, will only reduce the rural capacity to deal with climate challenges all the while offering no guarantee that solar power will contribute to their resilience in the face of global risk.

Assam ranks among the five least climate-resilient States in India's Climate Vulnerability Assessment report, 2021, with rural poverty and marginal farming ranking among the top reasons for this vulnerability. A decarbonisation transition is needed, but only if it can equitably build climate resilience cross-sectionally from urban centers to rural, marginal farmers.

Policy framework for agrovoltaics

Year-wise national targets for scaling agrovoltaics in India must be defined, coupled with pilot projects to sensitise stakeholders.

The explicit mention of Agrovoltaics is necessary for any law, scheme, or policy when cultivable land is used with PV. An agrovoltaic system could be designated in the land use plan as a "special area for agrovoltaics".

A prerequisite of a minimum of 80 per cent of the total surface

to be available and used for agricultural purposes can be set in place to ensure that the farmer or landowner continues to receive the agricultural subsidy allocated to the area in which case statistically the area does not count as sealed. The improvement of livelihoods of the partnering farmers must be prioritised.

As a model, agrovoltaics reconciles the need to decarbonize India's energy production systems, while minimizing land conflicts, especially with small and marginal farmers at greater risk of eviction for solar expansion.

It can also be a tool to create sustainable rural electrification in viable landscapes and build solar micro-entrepreneurship among rural communities.

This, in turn, would augment their agricultural incomes with renewable energy incomes which they can package and sell to the government or distribution firms. It is an opportunity to explore routes to rural development that protect farmer incomes while creating entrepreneurship opportunities, build renewables into electrification and benefit people across all levels.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

SINCE INDIA IS HOME TO ONE OUT OF EVERY SIX PEOPLE GLOBALLY, ALLOWING THE UNCONTROLLABLE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS WILL BE DEVASTATING FOR EVERYONE.

— CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI



IN THIS FIGHT, THE CONDUCT OF THE TOPMOST CONGRESS LEADERS, INCLUDING RAHUL GANDHI, WILL BE REMEMBERED FOR DUPLICITY, PETTINESS.

— BJP PRESIDENT JP NADDA

Unmasking the face of political violence in West Bengal

The Government's failure to address the pre- and post-poll violence shows that there is no deviation from the established pattern

The recent spurt of political violence in West Bengal following the election results, allegedly perpetrated by the 'karyakartas' [party workers] of Trinamool Congress (TMC), is the latest in a series of recurring events of such violence in the state. There have been allegations that the state government, run by the winning party TMC, and the police administration, have turned a blind eye to it. Is the recent political violence a deviation from established pattern of governance in West Bengal? Has the state leadership addressed the issue? Will the newly elected government be able to protect the democratic space in the state?

The history of West Bengal is replete with instances of political violence. According to a report in India Today on May 16, 2019, between 1999 and 2016, West Bengal witnessed



AVNI SABLOK

The author is Senior Researcher with the Public Policy Research Centre (PPRC), New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.

365 politically motivated murders. That tradition has grown from strength to strength since, irrespective of the party in power. Not long ago, the Left Front government in West Bengal chose to remain silent about instances of political violence which ultimately led to its downfall in the State Assembly elections. With the popular support of the Left Front waning in West Bengal, it did not hesitate to use police force to suppress any form of resistance. As a result, criminalization and politicization became the order of the day. Consequently, the TMC came to power by defeating the Left which ruled the state for the longest period of time. However, today, the TMC and its party workers seem to be emulating the Left approach by ignoring the recent post-poll violence.

As per facts and figures this is not the first time that the

TMC has been lax in tackling violence in the state. Incidents of violence have been on the rise under the TMC pre and post elections. According to a report of National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), 2019, in the pre-election period, West Bengal saw the maximum number of political murders in the country under the TMC rule. Interestingly, and as stated in the NCRB's report, "the number is likely to increase after the state submits the revised numbers".

Violence paved its way during the 2016 West Bengal Assembly elections with TMC party workers allegedly involved in such violence. Similarly, and as reported in the media, in the run up to the recent state assembly elections, several BJP workers had been killed by the TMC workers for joining the BJP. Even prior to the elections, ver-



bal confrontations were reported between TMC karyakartas and BJP leaders including party president JP Nadda and general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya. In post-election phase, and more recently, the convoy of the minister of state for external affairs, V Murleedharan, was attacked in West Midnapore. The minister has blamed the TMC workers for the attack.

The above facts and fig-

ures testify to the criminalisation of the public domain under the patronage of the state and partisan police force in the state of West Bengal. The criminalization of politics, which has seeped in West Bengal because of the prolonged political violence, has diminished the scope of dissent and differences. The foundation of democracy is built on voice of dissent and respecting differences of views and opinions, irrespective of ideologies.

A corollary to this principle is the fact that expression of dissent and differences is both a right and duty. While everyone enjoys the right to dissent and expression of differences in a democracy, it also enjoins on the citizens a duty to ensure that any actions to exercise these rights are peaceful in nature. In contrast, if the voice of differences is

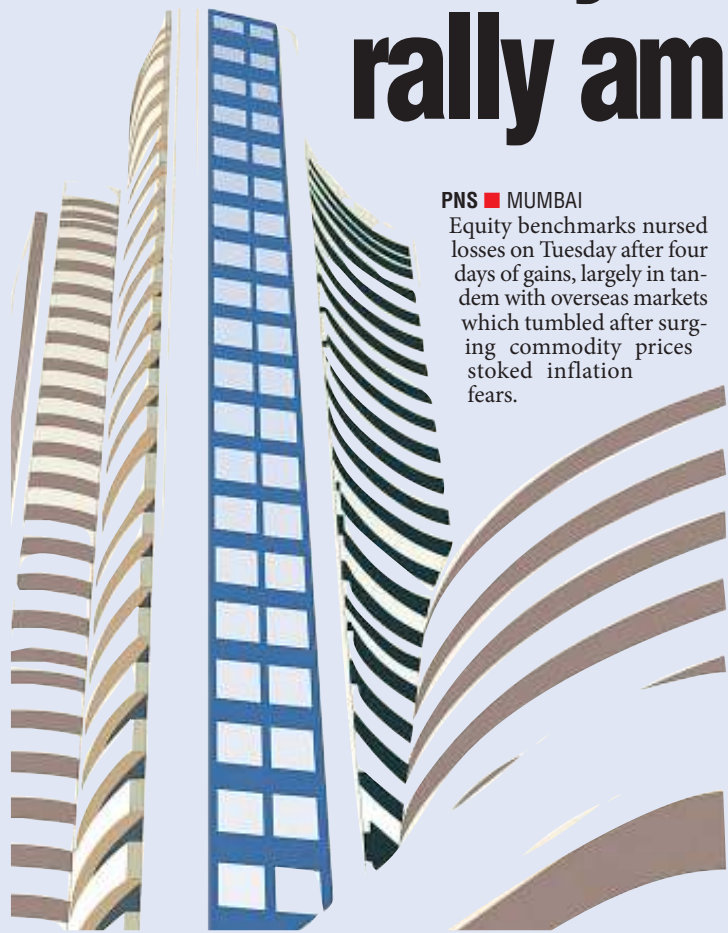
expressed through violent means, be it the party in power or in opposition, then it is the duty of the government in power to undertake all possible measures to prevent the violent acts so as to protect the very edifice of democracy.

Being the largest democracy in the world, it is also important that multiple perspectives and ideological moorings must be appreciated and accommodated. The onus also lies with the leadership, both at the central and state levels, to comprehend two basic aspects of democracy. First, democracy is a system of governance in which the supreme power is vested in the people and which is exercised by them directly or indirectly through free and fair elections held periodically. This means that any party can come to power or voted out through periodic elections. Second, it

is also a system where each one gets right to express his/her views and participates in all desired activities provided these are peaceful in nature. Implied, any form of expression of dissent cannot amount to violent public actions, including over election results perpetrated by the workers of the ruling party.

The failure of the Government to address the recent pre- and post-poll violence allegedly resorted to by the ruling party workers establishes that there is no deviation from the established pattern of [mis]governance in West Bengal. Considering that the state leadership has miserably failed to address the challenge of political violence so far, the willingness of the newly elected Mamata Banerjee Government to uphold the democratic space in the state appears to be bleak.

Sensex, Nifty snap four-session rally amid global selloff



PNS ■ MUMBAI
Equity benchmarks nursed losses on Tuesday after four days of gains, largely in tandem with overseas markets which tumbled after surging commodity prices stoked inflation fears.

Profit-booking in banking, finance and metal counters further weighed on bourses, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex opened on the backfoot and stayed in the negative territory throughout the session, ending 340.60 points or 0.69 per cent lower at 49,161.81.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty slumped 91.60 points or 0.61 per cent to close at 14,850.75. Kotak Bank was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding 3 per cent, followed by HDFC, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finance, Titan, Bajaj Finserv, HUL and Axis Bank. On the other hand, NTPC, ONGC, PowerGrid, Sun Pharma, UltraTech Cement and SBI were among the gainers, climbing up to 4.60 per cent.

"Rising commodity prices, like international steel price, are at a record high which has instilled a fear in the world market of rising inflation. Global markets are retreating in anticipation of future interest rates hikes, in which the technology sector will be heavily impacted as it has benefitted the most during a pandemic."

"Indian metal stocks witnessed

mild profit booking while buying interest is seen in PSE stocks," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. China inflation data also weighed on sentiments. However, domestic benchmark indices outperformed its Asian peers today, said Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities.

Sectorally, BSE metal, finance, bankex, IT and teck indices lost up to 1.07 per cent, while utilities, oil and gas, power, energy and industrials indices advanced as much as 2.74 per cent.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended on a negative note, while Shanghai finished with gains. Stock exchanges in Europe were trading with significant losses in mid-session deals. Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.66 per cent lower at USD 67.87 per barrel. The rupee pared its early losses to close almost flat at 73.34 against the US dollar.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) remained net buyers in the capital markets, as they purchased shares worth Rs 583.69 crore on Monday, as per provisional data.

Mining, construction equipment industry may grow by 20% in '21

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

ICRA on Wednesday said the mining and construction equipment industry is likely to grow by 15-20 per cent in the calendar year 2021 but stressed that the economy, in the grip of a pandemic, could throw up sudden negative surprises.

The first quarter of 2021 is estimated to have reported a strong equipment demand growth of 45-50 per cent, ICRA said in a statement.

"Following a 10-12 per cent contraction in CY2020, dragged down primarily by the 39 per cent decline in H1 CY2020, the mining and construction equipment (MCE) industry is poised to grow by 15-20 per cent in CY2021 (5-10% in FY2022)," it said.

However, the economy in the grip of a pandemic could throw up sudden negative surprises, as witnessed in April 2021, when demand was relatively subdued.

While overall equipment demand will be strong in 2021, partly due to the low base of 2020, volatility in demand is likely, with a strong first quarter, a relatively subdued second quarter in the



grip of the second wave, and the emission related pre-buy pick-up and post-buy slump in the third and fourth quarter of 2021.

While the second wave throws up challenges, particularly in the manpower-intensive construction sector, ICRA said that it expects a better prepared ecosystem, buffered by ample liquidity to limit stoppage of work, provided the lockdowns are limited to a relatively narrow window and are more localised, preventing a massive wave of reverse migration.

"Support to ICRA's equipment demand estimates originates from - the GoI (Government of India) continuing its 'Build India' momen-

tum to counter the economic slowdown and the ample liquidity in the ecosystem. Tailwinds from any pick up in state capex, compared to the pullback in FY2021, and strong construction activity picking up in other sectors like ports, metros, and airports, could aid demand.

"On the contrary, demand can be hit by the Covid second wave restricting mobility and equipment utilisation for a prolonged period, which in turn could result in an increase in delinquencies and lender pull-back and a likely equipment price increase of 5-10% for the emission norm change," Pavethra Ponniah, Vice-President and Co-Group Head, ICRA said.

World shares skid after tech sell-off on Wall Street

Bangkok: Shares dropped Tuesday in Asia after selling of several Big Tech companies pulled US benchmarks lower.

Paris, Frankfurt, Tokyo and Hong Kong declined while Shanghai advanced.

Despite reassurances from the Federal Reserve and a much weaker than expected US jobs reading last week, investors have refocused on

the potential for surging prices to pressure central banks into tapering off on their massive stimulus and ultra-low interest rates, analysts said.

"Investors seem to look past the jobs report and continue to place their focus on the inflation narrative with rising commodities prices and chip shortages in play,"

Jun Rong Yeap of IG said in a commentary.

Germany's DAX sank 2% to 15,101.18 while the CAC 40 in Paris gave up 1.8% to 6,272.36. Britain's FTSE 100 lost 2% to 6,980.62. US futures also augured losses, with the contract for the S&P 500 down 0.6% and that for the Dow industrials 0.4% lower.

China reported its strongest increase in producer prices since October 2017 last month, as supply constraints cascaded into manufacturing.

China's economy was the first to recover from the pandemic and the central bank, or People's Bank of China, has been adjusting policies to keep inflation in check.

The producer price index jumped 6.8% in April from a year earlier, up from a 4.4% increase in March. So far, though, the feed-through to consumer prices is relatively subdued, Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a commentary, adding that "we doubt that inflation is about to become a key driver of PBOC policy".



J&K Bank defers meet on Rs 500 cr-capital infusion from state govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Jammu & Kashmir Bank (J&K Bank) has postponed its board meeting to discuss the proposal of Rs 500 crore capital infusion from the state government.

The meeting of the board of directors of the bank scheduled for Wednesday, May 12, 2021 to consider/discuss the proposal of capital infusion by the government of Jammu &

Kashmir to the tune of Rs 500 crore in the bank stands postponed, the bank said in a regulatory filing.

The bank has not given the reason behind the postponement. The new date for the said meeting shall be communicated separately, it added.

Stock of J&K Bank traded at Rs 26.10 apiece on BSE, up 2.76 per cent from previous close.

IFFCO Kisan sells 1 lakh tonne of cattle feed worth Rs 160 cr in FY21

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fertiliser major IFFCO's arm IFFCO Kisan Sanchar Ltd on Tuesday said it has sold one lakh tonnes of cattle feed worth Rs 160 crore in financial year 2020-21 and is considering setting up its own plant to meet the rising demand.

IFFCO Kisan Sanchar had entered the compound cattle feed business on a pilot basis during 2019-20 financial year. It has currently partnered with third-party manufacturers.

The FY21 was its first full year of operation for the cattle feed business. IFFCO Kisan Sanchar Ltd said in a statement that it sold 1 lakh tonnes of cattle feed valued at Rs 160 crore during fiscal 2020-21.

The cattle feed business now contributes about 30 per cent of its total business, the company added. New Delhi-based



IFFCO Kisan is now looking at widening its tie-up with third-party manufacturers and is also considering setting up its own feed manufacturing facilities.

IFFCO Kisan Sanchar National Sales Head Ganesh Dash said, "We already have tie-ups with seven cattle feed manufacturers. As the customers have put in lots of faith in our products, we are now looking to tie up with five more manufacturers."

He said the company is also contemplating setting up its

own manufacturing plant or take plants on lease for meeting the rising demand for cattle feed.

"IFFCO Kisan cattle feed is getting a tremendous response from customers because our entire focus is on quality."

"Our cattle feed is manufactured from the best of the raw materials using the highest standards of manufacturing and as per the guidelines given by the Bureau of Indian Standards," Dash added.

The raw material is sourced directly from the farms.

"Our cattle feed maintains the right amount of urea composition. As per the standards, the urea composition in cattle feed should not be more than 1 per cent," Dash said. He added that high urea feed available in the market increases milk productivity.

Piaggio adds 100 dealerships pan-India in commercial, PV biz in 100 days

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Piaggio Vehicles on Tuesday said it has added 100 dealerships in both its commercial and passenger vehicle businesses across India in 100 days despite challenging times.

The company also said its two-wheeler business grew over 90 per cent in the first quarter of 2021 and has seen growth in market share in the commercial vehicle and two wheeler spaces, helped by an expanded network.

Piaggio Vehicles is Italian



auto major Piaggio's wholly-owned domestic subsidiary.

Besides having the largest network in the three-wheelers space, Piaggio has a strong presence in the two-wheeler segment as well.

The addition of 100 dealer-

ships takes the dealer network to over 725 dealerships and 1,100 touch points across the country, Piaggio Vehicles (PVPL) said in a release.

The company said it has increased its reach in the three-wheeler and two-wheeler business and expanded further in the commercial vehicle space by opening up electric experience; and the aim is to increase the presence further to various parts of the country.

The addition of 100 dealerships is part of this strategy, it said.

HCL to provide 21 oxygen plants to Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tech firm HCL on Tuesday said it is supporting the Delhi government with 12,000 oxygen cylinders and 21 oxygen plants.

In a statement, HCL said each cylinder has a capacity of 40 litres oxygen whereas 21 oxygen plants will generate 8,800 litres of oxygen per minute.

Public procurement of goods touches Rs 6,894 cr on GeM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Public procurement of goods and services touched Rs 6,894 crore on government buying portal GeM in April alone on account of steps taken by the platform such as rapid onboarding of buyers and sellers across India and development of custom features for large players, a senior official said on Tuesday.

The Government e-Market (GeM) portal was launched on August 9, 2016, for online purchases of goods and services by all the central govern-

ment ministries and departments.

"The total gross merchandise value of the orders placed on GeM platform in April was Rs 6,894 crore," Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of GeM Prashant Kumar Singh told PTI.

Singh said this value exceeds the value of procurement done over the platform in June quarter and September quarter of the previous financial year, and is a milestone in GeM's journey as the national public procurement platform for India.

India contracts for 56 lakh tonne sugar export: AISTA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has contracted to export 56 lakh tonne sugar so far in the ongoing 2020-21 marketing season, and is expected to conclude deals for shipment of the rest 4,00,000 tonne soon, trade body AISTA said on Tuesday.

The government has fixed a mandatory export target of 60 lakh tonne surplus sugar for ongoing the 2020-21 season (October-September). This export policy was, however, approved only in January.

During the 2019-20 season, India -- the world's second

largest sugar producing nation after Brazil -- had shipped 59 lakh tonne of the sweetener.

Releasing latest data, All India Sugar Trade Association (AISTA) said out of 56 lakh tonne export contracts undertaken, 34.78 lakh tonne of the sweetener has been already shipped to top 12 countries till May 6 of this season.

About 35 per cent of the total export quantity has been shipped to Indonesia (12.17 lakh tonne) so far this season, followed by Afghanistan (4.33 lakh tonne) and the UAE (3.66 lakh tonne) in the said period.

China warns of substantial damage to relations if Bangla joins Quad alliance

PNS ■ DHAKA

China has warned Bangladesh against joining the US-led Quad alliance, saying that Dhaka's participation in the anti-Beijing "club" would result in "substantial damage" to bilateral relations.

The unusual warning from Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming came weeks after visiting Chinese Defence Minister Gen. Wei Fenghe emphasised to Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid that Beijing and Dhaka

should make joint efforts against powers from outside the region establishing a "military alliance" in South Asia and practising "hegemonism".

"Obviously it will not be a good idea for Bangladesh to participate in this small club of four (Quad) because it will substantially damage our bilateral relationship," Ambassador Li said at a virtual meeting organised by the Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh on Monday.

Reacting to the Chinese envoy's controversial remarks,

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen said Dhaka maintains a non-aligned and balanced foreign policy and it will decide what to do according to those principles.

"We're an independent and sovereign state. We decide our foreign policy. But yes, any country can uphold its position," he told reporters on Tuesday.

"Naturally, he (Chinese ambassador) represents a country. They can say what they want. Maybe they don't

want it (Bangladesh joining the Quad)," Momen said, adding that no one from the Quad has approached Bangladesh yet.

The comment has been preemptive, the United News of Bangladesh (UNB) news agency reported, quoting said the foreign minister as saying.

Initiated in 2007, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Quad for short, is an informal grouping of India, the US, Australia and Japan.

Quad is a "small group of elites" working against China, Ambassador Li said.

Rupee pares losses to close flat at 73.34 against US dollar



The rupee pared its early losses to close almost flat at 73.34 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday amid a lacklustre trend in the domestic equity markets. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened lower at 73.47 against the greenback and declined to the day's low of 73.53. The rupee later cut losses and finally ended at 73.34, registering a rise of 1 paise over its previous close of 73.35 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.07 per cent to 90.14. On the domestic equity market front, the BSE Sensex ended 340.60 points or 0.69 per cent lower at 49,161.81, while the broader NSE Nifty declined 91.60 points or 0.61 per cent to 14,850.75. Forex traders said concerns over rising COVID-19 cases weighed on investors' sentiment.

Crude oil futures dip on weak spot demand



Crude oil prices on Tuesday fell Rs 62 to Rs 4,716 per barrel after the participants reduced their positions. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude oil for the May delivery dropped by Rs 62, or 1.3 per cent, to Rs 4,716 per barrel with a business volume of 5,977 lots. Analysts said the fall in crude oil futures was mostly due to trimming of positions by traders amid weak spot demand. Globally, West Texas Intermediate crude oil was trading 1.12 per cent lower at USD 64.19 per barrel. Meanwhile, Brent crude, the international benchmark, fell 1.07 per cent to trade at USD 67.59 per barrel in New York.

AMIT KUMAR: DIDN'T ENJOY INDIAN IDOL 12 KISHORE KUMAR SPECIAL



In last week's episode of Sony TV's singing reality show, *Indian Idol 12*, the contestants and the judges paid tribute to the legendary singer and actor Kishore Kumar. They sang 100 songs of the singer over the two episodes, and the makers also invited his son and singer-composer Amit Kumar as a special guest. However, the viewers got upset with the quality of the episode. Many complained that the contestants and the judges of the show, Neha Kakkar, Himesh Reshammiya, and Anu Malik, ruined Kishore Kumar's songs.

The son of the legendary singer Amit Kumar agreed with the netizens and said he also wanted to stop the episodes midway. Like the viewers, he too didn't enjoy how the creators of the show decided to pay tribute to his father.

In a recent interview with an English daily, Kumar was asked about his views about the episode and he replied, "Frankly, I wanted to stop the episode," adding that he was asked to praise every contestant irrespective of how they performed. "I did what I was told. I was told *sabko praise kamana hai*. I was told *jo jaisa bhi gaaye usko uplift karna hai* because it's a tribute to Kishore *da*."

I thought it will be a homage to my father. But once there, I just followed what I was asked to do. I had told them to give me portions of the script in advance, but nothing of that sort happened," Kumar said.

On Monday, a Twitter user shared he felt Anu Malik and Neha Kakkar sang Kishore Kumar's awfully. He tweeted, "#IndianIdol2021 #indian-idol #SonyLiv please spare

Kishore Kumar's songs.. this is a worst singing I've ever witnessed of Kishore's songs.. all my favorite songs are screwed by @iAmNehaKakkar @The_AnuMalik and all participants." Another user wrote, "Neha Kakkar do whatever you want to do with your songs, please don't even think to spoil Kishore Kumar Sir's songs #IndianIdol#100SongsOfKishoreKumar."

When asked about Kakkar and Reshammiya's poor singing, Amit Kumar responded by saying, "I didn't enjoy the episode at all."

Hosted by singer-actor Aditya Narayan, *Indian Idol 12* is being shot in Daman since shooting is not permitted in Mumbai.

Besides Kakkar and Reshammiya, Vishal Dadlani judges the show but has been replaced by Malik until the team returns to Mumbai.

Malayalam screenwriter-actor Madampu Kunjukuttan passed away on Tuesday. He was 81. The acclaimed writer was taken to a private hospital in Thrissur after he developed high fever. He was later diagnosed with the coronavirus.

A native of Thrissur, Madampu Kunjukuttan was a multi-talented person. He had studied Hasthyayurvedam (treatment of elephants), taught Sanskrit at school, and even worked as a priest at a temple. He also worked at Akashvani (All India Radio) and television channels. He entered the film industry as a screenwriter with *Ashwadhnamavu* in the year 1979. In 2000, he bagged the prestigious National Award for best screenplay for *Karunam*, which was directed by Jayaraj.

His film, *Parinamam* had won the award for the best screenplay at the Ashdod international film festival in Israel in 2003. Some of his other noted works as a screenwriter include *Makalkku*, *Gourisankaram*, *Saphalam* and *Deshadanam*. Besides



Screenwriter-actor Madampu Kunjukuttan dies of Covid-19

writing, he has also acted in a slew of movies, including Mohanlal's *Aaram Thampuram*, director Shyamaprasad's *Agnisakshi* and Jayara's *Shantham*. He is survived by his two daughters Jaseena Madampu and Haseena Madampu.

The Malayalam film celebrities have conformed the demise of Madampu Kunjukuttan.

Actor Prithviraj said that his social media timeline has started to look like an obituary column. "RIP! Folded hands

#MadambuKunjukuttan Sir. PS: Social media timelines are beginning to look like obituary columns. Prayers for the departed and their families..and hope that times change for the better soon (sic)," Prithviraj wrote on his Twitter page.

Madampu Kunjukuttan's demise comes at a time when the Malayalam film industry is still mourning the death of iconic screenwriter-director Dennis Joseph. The filmmaker passed away last night following a heart attack.

NBC won't air Golden Globe Awards amid outcry

Amid growing pressure on the Hollywood Foreign Press Association from studios, stars and large swaths of the film industry, NBC said Monday that will not air the Golden Globes in 2022, putting in doubt the viability of one of Hollywood's oldest and most-watched award shows.

Criticism of the HFPA, which puts on the Globes and has been denounced for a lack of diversity and for ethical improprieties, reached such a pitch Monday that Tom Cruise returned his three Globes to the press association's headquarters, according to a person who was granted anonymity because

they weren't authorized to speak publicly about the decision.

In a statement, NBC said it believes the Hollywood Foreign Press Association — which is facing possible boycotts over the inclusiveness of its membership from Netflix, Warner Bros. and many Hollywood actors — is committed to reform. But change can't come quickly enough for next year's Globes.

"However, change of this magnitude takes time and work, and we feel strongly that the HFPA needs time to do it right," the network said. "As such, NBC will not air the 2022 Golden Globes. Assuming the organization executes on its



recounted the organisation's questionable record on diversity — including, presently, no Black members among its roughly 90 voting members.

The press association has pledged to thoroughly reform, and last week approved a plan to, among other things, diversity its membership. But that hasn't stopped several studios from threatening to pull out of the Globes.

Last week, Netflix and Amazon Studios both said they would cut ties with the HFPA if it didn't swiftly enact more drastic changes.

The outcry against the Hollywood Foreign Press Association has gathered force over the last six weeks, as a film industry where racial and gender inequity long went unchecked has grown newly intolerant of the ways of the group, made up of mostly little-known journalists who profit considerably from the annual telecast.

plan, we are hopeful we will be in a position to air the show in January 2023."

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association, long a subject of ridicule from even its own telecast hosts, has come under fire following an investigative report in February by The Los Angeles Times that

Solos trailer: Exploring how humans connect strangely

Though we all feel alone in different ways, in feeling alone, we are somehow all together." When Academy Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman utters these words in the trailer of *Solos*, you get goosebumps. That's not just because they are coming from the thespian, but because deep down, we know we are still connected, despite the isolation and quarantine that the pandemic has forced on us.

In the season of anthologies, Amazon Prime Video released the trailer of its upcoming seven-part original series titled *Solos*, created by David Weil. The anthology explores things that make us human, and our strange, beautiful, heart-breaking and sometimes hilarious emotional journey.

The trailer has been voiced by Morgan Freeman where he explains in a voiceover, "A memory isn't simply a thing you have. It's a promise." The video cuts between shots of its ensemble cast, giving a

glimpse into each of their happy-stories.

Solos intends to highlight how even in our most isolated moments, we are connected through human experience.




Solos is loaded with a stellar star cast comprising of award-winning actors like Anne Hathaway, Helen Mirren, Uzo Aduba, Nicole Beharie, Anthony Mackie, Dan Stevens, and Constance Wu. While






Weil makes his directorial debut, helping three episodes, Sam Taylor-Johnson has directed and executive produced two episodes. Zach Braff and Tiffany and the remaining directors.

Talking about *Solos*, Weil said in a statement, "I am beyond thrilled to be bringing *Solos* to life alongside this group of artists who I so deeply admire. I created this piece with a desire to capture stories about connection, hope, and the search for that common hum of humanity that binds us all. I'm immensely grateful to Jennifer Salke and my incredible partners at Amazon for their unwavering support and collaboration on this special project."




ARCHIE




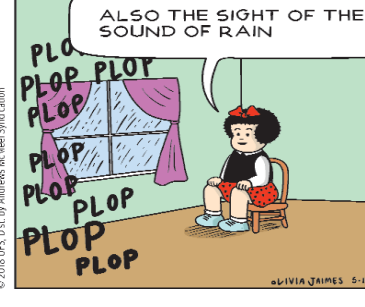

CALVIN AND HOBBS






GARFIELD




NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

JUNIOR CROSSWORD 849

1	2	3	4	5
6		7		8
9	10		11	
12			13	14
15				16
17			18	
19				

ACROSS

1 The lightest gas
6 Bang this in with a hammer
7 Cleaned with water
9 Egg centres
11 Very unkind
12 Leaves out
13 The first letter in the Greek alphabet
16 A male relation
18 A hired car
19 A famous French emperor

DOWN

1 A special holiday for a couple just married
2 Bore a hole with this tool
3 Robe
4 A hole in your nose
5 Tell a fib
8 A type of spotted dog
10 Cook in this room
14 Tranquility
15 Exchange
17 Finish

SOLUTION

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

SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

A HUG, NUDGE AND A PAT — IN WORDS

People who love poetry are the ones who care for and seek depth, meaning, and wisdom in words, verses and emotions. Poetess Shreya Bahirat from the city has been capturing the right emotions and serving them to her readers who can't help relish it all over and over again. She talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about *Unwise Love*, her days of putting out her poems on Orkut, and self-publishing her work today.



Shreya Bahirat, one of the best-known poets of Hyderabad city has the most natural prowess and elegance with which she brings verses to life! As a poet, she relishes the contradictions and complexities around her in the matter of love in her verses. *Unwise Love*, the texture of that ambivalence is something that's visible in her debut book of poems released recently across all the corners of the city! Poetry is a place where a moment can mean many things all at once. That's always drawn her to it and probably will always do!

Writing is a coping mechanism for me, everything excites me about poetry! Growing up, as an introvert, I found solace when I resorted to poetry. Its capacity to soar and dive are the qualities that attracted me to plunge into it. Poetry has always let me transpire my thoughts and feelings into powerful and brainy facets. Orkut was the platform to socialise back then! All my pieces were right up there on display and I could see my followers resonating with it well. The language can be startling and unexpected for an average reader while for an avid reader, it's unstarched, untethered, and unbound — it leads to freedom. Love, loss, and letting go are the three pillars that my debut collection is based on

and it's free from the tyranny of a beginning, a middle, and an end," shares the poetess who is a film-school graduate! Itching to defy the gravitas of love, Shreya obeyed all the prose lines of it with a wonderful inevitability. Its language at its most heightened, it's most alive. It's that mix of defiance and alignment that made her poems what it is — a buoyant compound of sound and sense



and silence! "Primarily, I write for myself, the external world seems to be a blur to me. Authenticity reflects in your craft only when you're doing it for yourself! Something's definitely in the air. And that's to be celebrated about poetry in our city! Over time, writing has been so rebellious that it can change viewpoints. We must own our truth," she adds. There are lit fests, poetry competitions, performance poetry sessions, spontaneous addas, and quite a flurry on the internet and in social media these days, that's the state of contemporary poetry in India! The form is suddenly on the upswing — self-assured and skilled voices have emerged on the scene and that's exciting.

There's a beautiful mix of innocence and experience, of assurance and bewilderment that is integral to a creative process in which Shreya has always looked into it. "Over the years, self-publishing is a route that's been taken often. With poetry, more than any other literary form, where the external validation is low-key and muted, the primary gratification is the process itself. I have always been riveted by poetry," she concludes. Rewriting, reworking, forgetting, retrieving — these are rhythms that matter to a poet! They are part of the joy of making poetry. There is no inspiration and perspiration as oppositional categories, they go together!



MAHIRA KHAN, FAWAD KHAN SET TO RETURN TO INDIAN SCREENS

Pakistani actors — Mahira Khan was last seen on Indian screens in *Raees* opposite Shah Rukh Khan, while Fawad Khan was last featured in *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* starring Ranbir Kapoor, Anushka Sharma and Aishwarya Rai in lead roles. They are now all set to entertain audiences with their upcoming show. A series of dramatic readings will air on Zee Theatre as the most recent project. "A treat for your eyes, ears, and mind! Watch Yaar Julahay, a series of dramatic readings of pure delight featuring scripts by legendary writers, starting from May 15 on #TataSkyTheatre," revealed ZEE Theatre on its official Instagram handle. Guriya, a classic will be read by Mahira, while Fawad too will read another. Mehra and Bano are two of Guriya's closest friends. Bano has a doll (Guriya) that looks a lot like Mehra, but the latter isn't fond of it. Their affection and hatred for the doll

develops over time. A surprising twist near the end reveals the mystery surrounding the doll. The series will also feature Sarmad Khoosat, Sarwat Gilani, Nimra Bucha, Yasra Rizvi, Sania Saeed, Irfan Khoosat, Samiya Mumtaz, and Faisal Qureshi. Mahira will be featuring in the opening episode of the 12-part series, which will start airing on May 15. "The dramatic readings are a celebration of the writers who have dared to look into the eyes of society and pull the blindfolds off the South Asian public. They are a celebration of the works that remind us to look beyond what is shown to us," it was reported. Yaar Julahay aims to bring to life the stories of legendary Urdu and Hindi writers such as Gulzar, Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Munshi Premchand, Amrita Pritam, Qurratulain Haider, Balwant Singh, Asad Muhammad Khan, Ghulam Abbas, Rajinder Singh Bedi, and Intezar Hussain.



British Indians' welcome change

Arranged marriages in India are still the ideal way to get married in most households today. But they occupy an awkward place in contemporary Britain. For some, they are equivalent to forced

marriage. Others see them as a quaint custom in need of adjustment to the modern ideal of western-style love marriages. However, decade-long research by Raksha Pande, a senior lecturer at the Newcastle University, England, with British Indians, paints a

rather different picture of this practice. Among the first generation, transnational arranged marriages were the norm. People would go back to India to find partners, with the added expectation that their children would follow a very traditional style of

arranged marriage. But there was a marked shift in the attitude of the British-born second generation. They felt that, unlike their parents, transnational marriages would not work for them and their children who identified more with Britain than with India. Her research has highlighted two styles of arranged marriage that lie between these extremes. "The first of these is called 'semi-arranged marriage', where parents who wish to help their child find a potential partner will intro-

duce them to several candidates from within the British Indian population that they think could make a suitable match. The other style is what her research participants called 'love-cum-arranged marriages', where the person who wants to get married finds someone they like themselves," Raksha notes. Young British Indians practising love-cum-arranged marriages felt they had the freedom to fall in love with anyone but within certain boundaries — typically making sure to fall in love with someone of the

same religion, ethnicity, and class. "The importance of caste is becoming rarer in these instances. And some negotiations in class boundaries were permitted among research participants! This hybrid form of marriage allows British Indians to adapt different elements to reflect both the British and Indian aspects of their identities. These two styles of marriage symbolise the future of arranged marriages in Britain," she informs. Raksha further adds that we need to move beyond the idea that love and

arrangement have to be mutually exclusive, embodying the differences between traditional Eastern and the modern Western cultures respectively. "In

fact, love and arrangement can exist in tandem, as shown by the marriage styles that are popular among British Indians today," she concludes.



Dhawan likely to lead in Lanka

First-choice Iyer's injury open door for Shikhar to captain India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran opener Shikhar Dhawan and flamboyant allrounder-turned specialist batsman Hardik Pandya will be locked in a two-way fight for India captaincy if Shreyas Iyer doesn't get fit in time for the white-ball tour of Sri Lanka in July.

India's limited overs specialists will be playing three T20 Internationals and as many ODIs in the island nation during the second half of July, when big guns like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma will be in England for a marquee five-match Test series.

"It is still not clear if Shreyas will recover fully and will be match-fit in time for tour of Sri Lanka. Normally, a surgery of this scale along with rest, extensive rehab and training to get back in shape takes around four months," a senior BCCI source privy to selection matters said.

"In case Shreyas was available, he would have been the automatic choice for captaincy."

It's only logical that the two contenders for captaincy are 35-year-old Dhawan, who has had good "one and half IPLs" in last two seasons and Pandya junior, who is one of the most accomplished match-winners.

"Shikhar has had two very good IPL including this curtailed one and being the senior



most among those who are available for selection, he is a very strong contender. Also he has been a solid performer for India for past eight years," an

official said. As far as Hardik is concerned, his reputation as a white-ball match-winner can't be discounted either.

"Yes, Hardik hasn't been regularly bowling for MI or India in recent times. However, he is the man with x-factor and among options available. He is

INDIA'S LIMITED
OVERS SPECIALISTS
WILL BE PLAYING
THREE T20
INTERNATIONALS
AND AS MANY ODIs
IN THE ISLAND
NATION DURING
THE SECOND
HALF OF JULY

miles ahead of his peers in terms of being an impact performer. And who knows, may be extra responsibility brings the best out of him."

Pandya was included in the four-Test series at home against England so that his bowling workload is increased keeping the England tour in mind but it is learnt that the Baroda man is unlikely to bowl more than an odd over or two in the shortest format or ODI in near future.

"Hardik, after his back surgery to cure stress fracture, is not the same bowler anymore. He was a fast medium bowler before injury but to bowl at a brisk 135 kmph plus pace consistently, it could impact his back.

"So he is focussing more on

his match finishing skills," a person in the know of things said.

MATCHES IN COLOMBO

Colombo's R Premadasa Stadium will host all the matches in India's upcoming limited overs series against Sri Lanka.

"We plan to host the entire series at one venue. As of now, it has been decided that the Premadasa Stadium will host the fixtures. Obviously, it depends on how the situation is around that time," Arjuna de Silva, Sri Lanka Cricket's (SLC) Administrative Committee chairman, told *Sportstar* on Monday.

"With the Covid situation fluid, we cannot allow fans yet, so all the matches will be closed-door affairs," De Silva said.

India are reportedly set to arrive in Sri Lanka for the series on July 5 and, after the team completes its week-long quarantine, will play the ODI series starting on July 13. The T20I series will begin on July 22.

"As of now, we will stick to the protocol where the players will have to undergo hard quarantine for the first three days and in the next four days, they will be allowed to train. However, if there are any revised guidelines by the Health Ministry around that time, we will have to follow that," he added.

India missed trick by not picking wrist spinner: Kaneria

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former Pakistan leg-spinner Danish Kaneria reckons India has missed a trick by not picking a wrist spinner for the World Test Championship final against New Zealand as young Rahul Chahar would have added another dimension to their attack.

Last week, India announced the squad for next month's World Test Championship final against New Zealand, to be held from June 18 in Southampton, and a five-match series against England from August 4.

"India has selected quite a strong team. Overall, their squad of is good. But the thing to note is that they have not selected a wrist spinner," Kaneria said from Karachi.

"They have finger spinners — Ashwin, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja — but they don't have a wrist spinner, a right arm leg spinner," the leg spinner added.

Kaneria, who represented English county side Essex, said that the conditions in England is conducive for leg break bowlers.

"When you play in England, and I have a lot of experience playing there — eight years of county cricket in different conditions — there is moisture.

"When the season starts the county matches are going on and after that the sun comes out and the wicket gets baked and the moisture stays."

"Where there are seam conditions, a leg spinner is very useful and that's why I had a successful tenure when I played county cricket. So, it is a little concerning that there is no leg spinner in the team.

"Finger spinners can contain but having finger spinner and a wrist spinner can make an impact on the team," he added.

The 40-year-old, feels Chahar could have been a useful addition in the Indian team.

"Rahul Chahar, his height, the way he delivers the ball, he should have been in the team. New Zealand has Ish Sodhi, a tall leg spinner and Virat Kohli always struggles against a leg spinner as we saw it with (Adam) Zampa.

"So, I feel if there is place open for a leg spinner than Chahar, who has played for Mumbai Indians and India and has performed well, has googly, flipper and leg spin, could have been useful."

India head to the UK on the back of series victories against Australia and India but Kaneria cautioned that New Zealand are also a formidable side that has a strong bowling line up.

"Indian is playing good cricket, they have won series in Australia and then against England but NZ will not be an easy opponent as they are very tough in this type of condition where the ball seams. They have a very strong bowling line up.

"India's batting needs to deliver like Rishabh Pant did well in Australia but Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara couldn't score many runs that is as cause of concern.

"You win Test cricket because of bowlers, once you have five top bowlers in your rank who can take 20 wickets there is a change of winning a Test match."



Some Indian players didn't like restrictions: Pamment

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

Mumbai Indians fielding coach James Pamment has claimed that some senior Indian players did not like being subjected to restrictions inside the currently-suspended IPL's bio-bubble but it felt completely safe till the time cases from participating teams hadn't come to light.

Pamment did not elaborate on his assertion about the Indian players and did not take any names either.

"Some of the senior Indian guys don't like being restricted and told what to do," he was quoted as saying by *stuff.co.nz*.

"But we did feel safe — at no point did we feel the bubble would be compromised... We felt the travel was always going to be a challenge."

The New Zealanders, said he and the MI players started to feel apprehensive shortly before the competition was halted.

"It was when cases started to come with the teams. They were a little more fearful, a little more apprehensive," said the 52-year-old, who returned home on Saturday.

"Chennai (CSK)

announced their cases and we'd played Chennai at the weekend, so straight away, the dynamic changed. I certainly noticed from within my group. I'd spend most of my time with the Kiwis and the Aussies, their mindset had changed.

"We started to get Indian guys in our environment whose families were sick. There were bereavements as well and we were taking a bit of a cue from those guys who were saying 'no, we want to carry on' and the messages were coming back that this is a good distraction."

Pamment said at no stage did he feel his health was going to be put in jeopardy within the bubble set up by MI at a Mumbai hotel.

He said long before the suspension of IPL, he was aware of the pandemic getting worse in India and the event should not have been spread across six venues.

"If it (IPL) had been held solely in Mumbai, perhaps it'd have been easily managed."



India covered all bases for WTC final: Parthiv

PIANS ■ NEW DELHI

India have all the bases covered for the World Test Championship (WTC) final against New Zealand, said former wicketkeeper Parthiv Patel. Parthiv said that the fact that a batsman like KL Rahul is not finding a place in the squad shows how strong the batting lineup is.

"If we talk about batsmen — Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane, Cheteshwar Pujara, Rishabh Pant — there's a proper band of proper bats-



men who can bat well in England. Everyone scored runs, and there is a spare batsman in KL Rahul. Imagine KL Rahul not finding a space in the Test squad, so how strong this squad could be," Patel told *Star Sports*.

The former Indian stumper from Gujarat said that India have a strong base of fast bowlers and spinners to pick from.

"You talk about fast bowlers, we've got (Jasprit) Bumrah, Ishant (Sharma), (Mohammad) Shami and if

either of them is not fit then there's Mohammad Siraj and Umesh Yadav. There's enough depth in the squad," he said.

"Then there is Axar Patel, who was probably been the man of the match in a lot of matches against England. He came in place of Ravindra Jadeja and it felt like Jadeja will be out. Now Ravindra Jadeja and (Ravichandran) Ashwin will be back, so I think this squad looks really strong," said Patel.

Eng players to skip remainder of IPL: ECB

PTI ■ LONDON

England have a busy international schedule from June onwards and the players are unlikely to be available for the remainder of the suspended IPL if the T20 tournament is rescheduled this year, says ECB Director of Cricket Ashley Giles.

The IPL was suspended last week after multiple COVID-19 cases inside its bio-bubble. There are two windows for the T20 event to be resumed this year — one is in the second half of September and before the T20 World Cup (October-November) and the other is



after mid-November.

But England's top players will be in action at both times. They have tours to Bangladesh and Pakistan in

September and October, while they will compete with Australia at the Ashes right after the T20 World Cup. "We're planning on

involvement of England players in England matches. We've got a full FTP schedule. So if those tours to Pakistan and Bangladesh are going ahead, I'd expect the players to be there," Giles said as quoted by *ESPNCricinfo*.

There were 11 Englishman in various franchises in the suspended IPL.

"None of us knows what a rearranged IPL looks like at the moment, where it's going to be or when. But from when we start this summer against New Zealand, our programme is incredibly busy," Giles said.

"We've got a lot of important, high-profile

cricket including the T20 World Cup and the Ashes. And we're going to have to look after our players."

Giles dismissed suggestion that this signals a change in approach from the ECB as the management had earlier allowed up to a dozen players to miss the Test series against New Zealand at the start of June due to their involvement in the IPL.

"The New Zealand scenario was very different. Those Test matches were formalised at the end of January, by which time all those contracts and NOCs (no objection certificates) were signed for full involvement in the IPL."

'Windies may never return to dominate world cricket'

PTI ■ KINGSTON

Pace legend Curly Ambrose believes the current lot of Caribbean youngsters doesn't really understand what cricket means to the West Indies and so the two-time world champions will never be able to relive the glory days again.

West Indies had lifted first two World Cup titles in 1975 and 1979 and it took 33 years for the team to claim another ICC title when Darren Sammy had guided them to the 2012 T20 World Cup crown and repeated the feat four years later.

"Most of the youngsters we have now probably don't quite understand what cricket means to West Indians in the West Indies and abroad because cricket is the only sport that really unites Caribbean people," Ambrose told *Talk Sports Live*.

"This is no disrespect to the players we have now because we have a couple of guys who have some quality in them and can become great, but what we



have to understand is that I don't think we will ever see those great, exceptional glory days again."

The 57-year-old, who claimed 405 wickets in 98 Tests between 1988 and 2000, said it is difficult to find talented cricketers from the island nation nowadays.

"It's going to be difficult to find another Viv Richards or a

(Demond) Haynes and (Gordon) Greenidge, a Brian Lara, Richie Richardson, you know, a Malcolm Marshall, Curtly Ambrose, Courtney Walsh, Michael Holding, Andy Roberts, and the list goes on and on, Clive Lloyd," Ambrose said.

"It's going to be extremely difficult to find those quality players again."

Ambrose said West Indies team can improve their ICC rankings but won't be able to dominate the way it did in the 80s and 90s.

"When we were the best team in the world, West Indians all over the globe could walk and boast about how good we were because we were the best, so it's going to be difficult to see those glory days again," he said.

"Yes, we can be competitive and climb up the ICC rankings and be a force to be reckon with again, but those glory days, I don't think we will see them again."

Nadal casts doubts over Olympics participation



Rome: Two-time Olympic champion Rafael Nadal on Tuesday became the latest top tennis player to admit that he had not yet decided whether he would participate in the Tokyo Games this summer, still giving himself time to decide according to "circumstances."

The 34-year-old Spaniard won Gold in the singles in Beijing in 2008, adding another Gold in the doubles with Marc Lopez in Rio de Janeiro five years ago.

"In a normal world I would never consider missing the Olympics. There is no doubt about that," he said. "Everybody knows how important the Olympics are for me.

"Under these circumstances, I don't know. Let's see what's going on in the next couple of months. But I need to organise my schedule."

Nadal is the latest top tennis star to voice his concerns about the Tokyo Games. On Monday, Serena Williams said she was undecided about going to the Olympics. AFP

Indian shooters leave for training-cum-competition tour of Croatia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Olympic-bound Indian shooting team on Tuesday left for Croatia for a two and a half months training-cum-competition tour, its final tune-up to the upcoming Tokyo Games.

With coaches and support staff in tow, a 13-member Indian shooting team took off for Croatian capital Zagreb, where it will undergo a training camp before leaving for Osijek to take part in the European Championships (May 20 to June 6) followed by the combined ISSF World Cup (June 22 to July 3).

"Team India takes off in 20 mins. Bon Voyage, Get the nose to the ground and work hard for your inevitable success team," Raninder Singh, president of the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) tweeted just before the team's departure.

The two Olympics bound skeet shooters Angad Vir Singh Bajwa and Mairaj Ahmad Khan will be based in Italy.

The Indians, including Gurjoat Singh Khangura, took part in the ongoing shotgun World Cup in Lonato, where they could not make

the final of the men's skeet event on Monday.

The team left in a chartered flight arranged by the NRAI.

After the stint in Croatia, the team will directly leave for Tokyo to participate in the Olympics, beginning on July 23.

The ISSF World Cup in Osijek is being organised in place of the earlier scheduled in Baku, Azerbaijan (from June 21 to July 2), which got cancelled due to a surge in Covid-19 cases in that country.

There will be nine coaches for the 13 rifle and pistol shooters but some coaches like Samresh Jung, Jaspal Rana and Ronak Pandit could not travel with the team for various reasons.

Foreign rifle coach Oleg Mikhailov was also a part of the travelling contingent but longtime pistol coach Pavel Smirnov could not leave on Tuesday as he did not get his visa. He is likely to join the team next week.

As per the standard Covid-19 protocols in Croatia, the Indian contingent will serve a mandatory quarantine before starting the training.

► shortpasses

MENDY SUFFERS TIBIA INJURY
MADRID: Real Madrid's hopes of clinching the La Liga title have been hit by another injury after the club confirmed that defender Ferland Mendy has a problem in his tibia.

VERRATI OUT FOR UP TO 6 WEEKS
PARIS: PSG midfielder Marco Verratti will miss the rest of the season because of a right knee injury. The Italian will be sidelined for four-to-six weeks, possibly forcing him to also miss the European Championship.

BUFFON TO QUIT JUVE
TURIN: Gianluigi Buffon said on Tuesday that he will bring the curtain down on his time at Juventus after nearly two decades at the end of the season, but will look to prolong his trophy-filled career elsewhere at the age of 43.

INIESTA EXTENDS KOBE STAY
TOKYO: Andres Iniesta celebrated his 37th birthday on Tuesday by signing a contract extension that will keep him at J-League side Vissel Kobe for two more years.

LÖW SET TO RECALL MÜLLER
BERLIN: Germany coach Joachim Löw has reportedly contacted Thomas Müller and is poised to reverse the forward's 2019 exile by naming him in his Euro 2020 squad.

BAUMGART TO COACH COLOGNE
COLOGNE: Relegation-threatened Bundesliga club Cologne on Tuesday named Steffen Baumgart from second-tier side Paderborn as head coach for next season — whether or not his new club remains in Germany's top flight.

IBRA TO MISS AT LEAST 2 GAMES
MILAN: Zlatan Ibrahimovic will be out for at least two matches with a knee injury, just a month before the start of Euro 2020. AC Milan coach Stefano Pioli said on Tuesday.

GUYANA RETAIN POORAN, HETMYER
ST KITTS: Nicholas Pooran, Shimron Hetmyer and Brandon King will be back in action for Guyana Amazon Warriors in the 2021 CPL after the franchise announced that it had retained 11 players from the last edition.

HUSSEY TESTS +VE AGAIN
CHENNAI: CSK batting coach Michael Hussey has tested positive for Covid-19 again. He had earlier got a negative result in his second test but tested positive in the third round and is now set to undergo another test on Thursday.

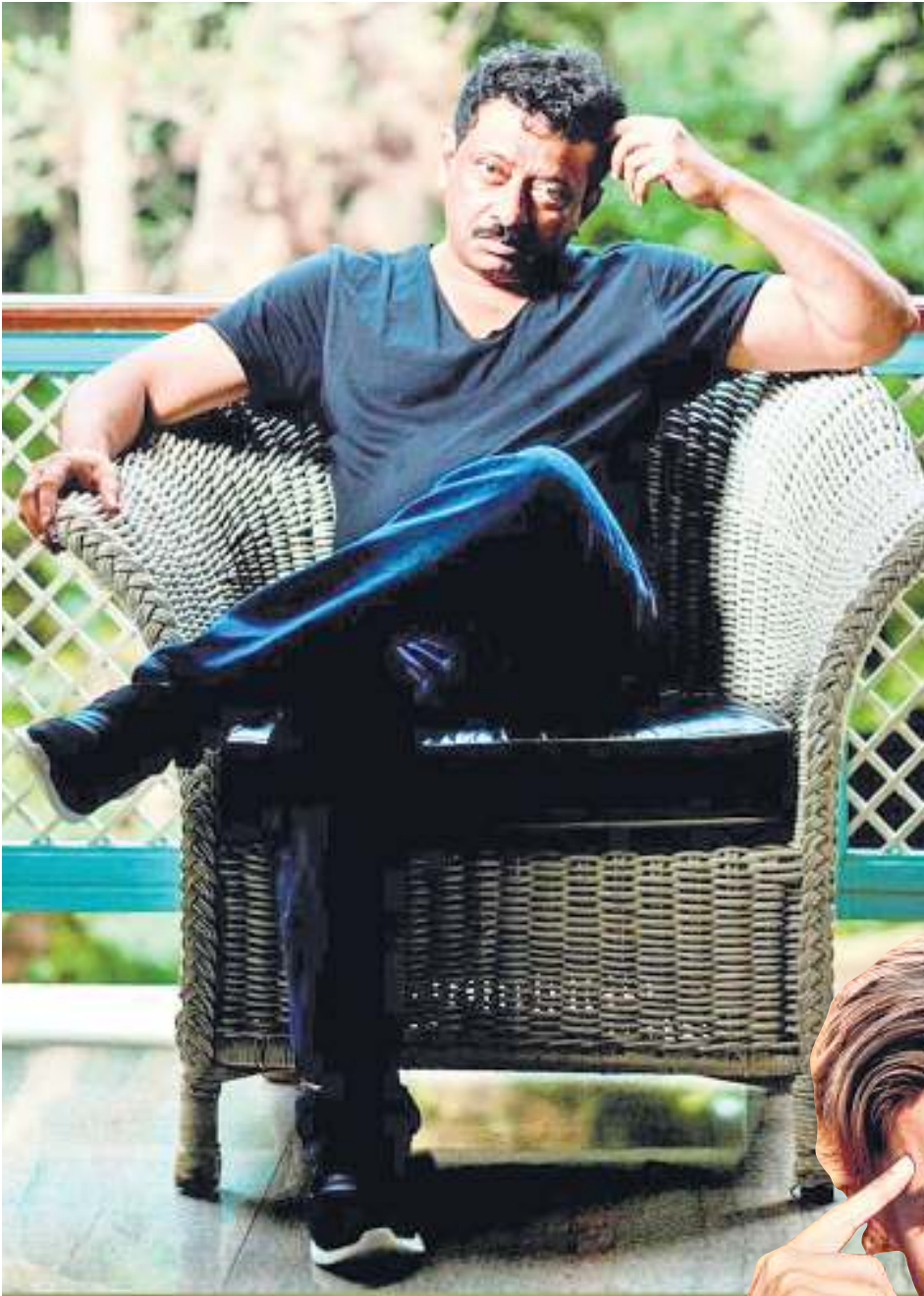
FULHAM RELEGATED
LONDON: Fulham were relegated from the Premier League with a 2-0 loss at home to Burnley on Monday that assured the Claret's of their top-flight status. Agencies

RAM GOPAL VARMA eyeing 'Spark' revolution

The advent of OTTs on digital media opened up a new mode of entertainment for movie lovers. With almost all the OTTs offering entertainment at affordable prices, people decided to prefer watching on OTTs than go to theatres. The coronavirus pandemic increased OTT subscribers as filmmak-

ers started releasing their films on digital media with theatrical releases stalled. Controversial filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma, who is always at the forefront of using the latest technology in filmmaking realised this before anyone else and ensured the release of his films during coronavirus on Shreyas OTT platform. Now, Ram Gopal Varma captured

the attention of all when he released a video featuring Prabhas announcing the arrival of Spark OTT. RGV shared that his films starting with the D Company will now be releasing on his Spark OTT. Spark OTT will be going online from May 15. Now all eyes are on Ram Gopal Varma's Spark and what revolution he will unleash.



SARKAARU VAARI PAATA FORCED TO CANCEL CELEBRATIONS

Fans have been eagerly awaiting Super Star Mahesh Babu's upcoming entertainer *Sarkaru Vaari Paata* directed by Parasuram that has become the talk of the town. Fans have been expecting a grand treat from the makers on Super Star Krishna's birthday on May 31. A couple of days back, reports came in that the makers are planning to release the teaser to delight everyone.

But now news has come out that the makers decided not to release the teaser owing to the grim situation in the country, due to the second wave of Covid. According to an insider, the makers will now release a new poster of Mahesh Babu and also the making of the film's video to assuage fans' feelings.

Mahesh Babu plays the role of a bank manager in the film

and he will be seen unearthing one of the biggest banking scams in the country. Actress Keerthy Suresh will be seen playing the role of Mahesh Babu's subordinate in the film.

Apart from *Sarkaru Vaari Paata*, Mahesh is also starring in the direction of Trivikram Srinivas and the film is tentatively titled *Parthu*. Mahesh also has a crazy project under the direction of S.S. Rajamouli.

Mahesh is on the successful run with hits like *Bharat Ane Nenu*, *Maharshi* and *Sari Leru*. *Neekevvaru* at the box office.



Sridevi Soda Center celebrates Sudheer Babu's birthday

Sudheer Babu, talent actor, former sportsman and brother-in-law of Mahesh Babu tasted his first success at the box office with *Prema Katha Chitram*. He went on to entertain movie lovers with films like *Sammohanam*, *V*, and

even made his Bollywood debut locking horns with Tiger Shroff in *Baaghi*.

The actor recently celebrated his birthday and on its eve, the makers of his upcoming entertainer *Sridevi Soda Center* released a special video that gives us a glimpse of what the actor's role would look like, in the film. In the video, Sudheer Babu surprised

fans with his well-toned and chiselled body. It at once went viral on social media. Sudheer plays the role of Lighting Sooribabu and in the film, he decks events and celebrations in nearby villages.

Karuna Kumar of *Palasa 1978* fame is directing the film for which Manisharma is the music director. Vijay Chilla and Shashi

Devireddy are producing the film on 70mm Entertainments banner. Sudheer Babu is also starring in his dream project, a biopic on badminton player Pullela Gopichand and *Aa Ammayi Gurinchi Cheppali* along with Kriti Shetty under the direction of Indraganti Mohana Krishna. Looks like the actor has his hands full this year.

Akhil enters Bangarraju?

Nagarjuna's forgotten project *Bangarraju* is once again making noise during the last couple of days.

It is known that *Bangarraju* is the planned prequel of his hit film *Soggade Chinna Naayana* directed by Kalyan Krishna. Right after the success of the film, Kalyan Krishna announced prequel to for the film and Nagarjuna also is said to have shown great interest.

But when Nagarjuna went on to star in other films and most recently in *Wild Dog*, many felt that the project has been called off because Nagarjuna didn't like the story. But a few days back, rumours began spreading that Kalyan

Krishna contacted Bollywood beauty Sonakshi Sinha to be cast opposite Nagarjuna and she showed seemed to have liked the idea.

Now another rumour too has been doing the rounds that Nagarjuna's son Akhil will be seen as *Bangarraju*'s grandson in the film. The first half of the film will be all about *Bangarraju* and after the interval, Naga Chaitanya will be introduced as his son. It shows how Ramyakraishna pampers her son Naga Chaitanya and later in the climax Akhil will appear as *Bangarraju*'s grandson in an inconsequential role. One has to wait for an official confirmation but Akkineni fans are thrilled about the very idea.



SONU SOOD BRINGS IN oxygen plant from France

Actor-turned-philanthropist Sonu Sood has been giving in oxygen cylinders and oxygen concentrators to varied hospitals and organisations to help save people amidst the ongoing pandemic. Now, Sonu is bringing oxygen plants from France and other nations for installing at varied places in India.

The *Dhookudu* actor is trying to prepare the country for the third wave of the pandemic. Sonu Sood plans to install at least four of the oxygen plants he is bringing in for the people in the worst-hit Covid-19 states of India. "We are bringing in oxygen plants for the people in need. We have

seen a lot of people suffering because of the unavailability of oxygen cylinders. We have got it now, and are already giving it to people. However, these oxygen plants will not only supply to entire hospitals but will also get these oxygen cylinders filled up, which will solve a major problem of the people suffering from Covid-19," he adds.

Sonu Sood informs that the first plant has already been ordered and it will be arriving in 10 - 12 days from France.

The *Julayi* actor further adds, "Time is the biggest challenge for us at the moment and we are working our best to make sure everything comes in time and we don't lose more lives".

