

ANALYSIS 7

TIME TO EMBRACE THE BIOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

MONEY 8

SENSEX ENDS marginally HIGHER; NIFTY STAYS BELOW 14,700

SPORTS 11

RAMAN'S SACKING BRING CAC UNDER SCANNER

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



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



CHIRANJEEVI'S 'LUCIFER' REMAKE TO HAVE DIRECTOR CHANGE

Page 12

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

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



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

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



OZ RESUMES REPATRIATION FLIGHTS FROM INDIA FOR STRANDED CITIZENS

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



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

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



Pandemic Wave 2.0: Plan of action

2



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

5



Akshaya Tritiya begins on sombre note

8

KCR, Jagan under fire as TS restricts inter-state movement

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telangana government's latest circular regulating the entry of Covid patients from other states into Telangana for treatment at hospitals in Hyderabad triggered a major political controversy on Friday, with scores of Covid patients on oxygen support in ambulances stuck on Andhra Pradesh-Telangana borders for hours together until a reprieve came in the form of TS High Court's stay order.

While political parties in Andhra Pradesh have criticised Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao for his 'unilateral' and 'dictatorial' attitude of not allowing patients to enter Hyderabad, terming it as denial of medical treatment, which was violative of the fundamental right to live, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has been accused of 'soft-pedaling' the issue though it impinges on AP's rights following bifurcation due to his 'friendly ties' with KCR. Leaders of various political parties reminded the two CMs that Hyderabad still remained a common capital for both the states until 2024; and, hence, none could restrict anyone's entry to the city.

Although the state government had been implemented in a case filed against the Telangana government's guidelines and regulations relating to entry of ambulances from AP into Hyderabad and the AP government vociferously presented its arguments, leaders questioned the silence of Jaganmohan Reddy, who was not inclined to talk to his Telangana counterpart to resolve the issue.



Stopping AP ambulances unfortunate: Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said that it was unfortunate that ambulances from Andhra Pradesh were being stopped at the Telangana border and added that the Telangana High Court had already directed the KCR government not to obstruct ambulances coming from other states at inter-state borders.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, he said that everyone had to come forward and work with humanity during the crisis caused by the pandemic. Further, he appealed to the Telangana government to permit the ambulances on humanitarian grounds, as the entire country was in emergency condi-

tions. He stated that it was not proper on the part of TS to stop ambulances and ask them to produce hospital letters and passes, as it was not possible to follow such rules in the current situation.

It is quite common for people to move to bigger cities, where they can access better medical infrastructure and being a neighboring state, the Telangana government should treat people of AP with humanity, he said.

Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said that patients from Andhra Pradesh were going for better treatment to Chennai and Bangalore also, but there were no such problems from those states.

2

Ambulances from AP intercepted at TS border; two Covid patients die

CPRADEEP KUMAR ■ VIJAYAWADA

Yet again the Telangana State police intercepted the ambulances coming from Andhra Pradesh carrying Covid patients at AP-TS border on Friday. Chaotic scenes were witnessed at the Pullur Toll Plaza on the Kurnool-Jogulamba Gadwal and on the Vijayawada - Hyderabad highway when the Telangana police stopped ambulances with covid patients on the pretext that the hospitals in Telangana were overbur-

dened. The Telangana High Court on Friday questioned the state government - "who has given the right to stop the ambulances at the state border" - and issued stay orders on the state guidelines.

Two patients from Andhra Pradesh died in the ambulance they were travelling in, as Telangana Police did not permit vehicles to cross the interstate border at Kurnool.

The deceased were identified as natives of Nandyal and Kurnool respectively. About 40 ambulances

from Andhra Pradesh were forced to return from the Pullur Toll Plaza since Thursday when they tried to cross the state border on the way to Hyderabad.

A similar situation played out at the Ramapuram cross border post near Suryapet.

During the past few days, the interstate border crossings at Pullur near Kurnool, and Ramapuram cross at Suryapet, have been witnessing poignant scenes of patients' kin pleading with Telangana police to allow their vehicles' entry.



Telangana HC stays order stopping ambulances

Says don't adopt any circuitous way

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Friday moved quickly to stay a contentious government order issued earlier by the Chief Secretary regulating the entry of Covid patients from other states into Telangana. Terming the order as 'discriminatory', the High Court directed Police Department not to stop ambulances at inter-state borders and wanted its fiat to be communicated immediately to officials concerned.



first dose of the vaccine was administered in Hyderabad, Dr Reddy's said.

2

Dr Reddy's Labs launches Sputnik V vaccine in India

■ Price at around Rs 995.4 per dose

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug firm Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Friday said it has launched COVID vaccine Sputnik V in the Indian market with the first dose being administered in Hyderabad, as part of a limited pilot.

The company said the imported doses of the vaccine are presently priced at a maximum retail price of Rs 948, with 5 per cent GST per dose, amounting to Rs 995.4 per dose.

"The imported doses of the vaccine are presently priced at an MRP of Rs 948 + 5 per cent GST per dose, with the possibility of a

lower price point when local supply begins," Dr Reddy's Laboratories said in a statement.

The first consignment of imported doses of the Sputnik V vaccine landed in India on May 1, and received regulatory clearance from the Central Drugs Laboratory, Kasauli, on May 13, 2021, it added.

As part of a limited pilot, the soft launch of the vaccine has commenced and the first dose of the vaccine was administered in Hyderabad, Dr Reddy's said.

2

Centre to supply 192L vax doses to states, UTs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 191.99 lakh doses of COVID-19 vaccines--Covishield and Covaxin--will be supplied to states/UTs free of cost from May 16 to May 31, the Union health ministry said on Friday.

The delivery schedule for the allocation will be shared in advance. States/UTs have been requested to direct the officials concerned to ensure rational and judicious utilisation of allocated doses and minimise vaccine wastage, it said.

The 191.99 lakh doses include 162.5 lakh Covishield doses and 29.49 lakh Covaxin doses.

"The basic objective behind informing the states and UTs in advance of the quantum of free vaccine doses to be made available from Government of India for 15 days is to ensure that they prepare effective plans for judicious and optimum utilisation of these free vaccine doses which are meant for

the age group of 45 and above, and for healthcare and frontline workers," the ministry said.

In the previous fortnight, that is 1 May-May 15, 2021, a total quantum of more than 1.7 crore vaccine doses has been made available by the Centre to states/UTs, free of charge.

In addition, more than 4.39 crore doses were made available for direct procurement by the states as well as private hospitals in the month of May, the ministry said.

The cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country is nearly 18 crore (17.93 crore as per the 7 am provisional report on Friday).

The COVID-19 vaccination drive has successfully completed 118 days wherein 17.93 crore doses have been administered to identified beneficiaries through collaborative efforts of all states and UTs.

2



MP Raghurama Krishnam Raju arrested

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP CBCID officials issued a statement on the arrest of the YSRC rebel MP from Narasapuram K Raghurama Krishnam Raju at his residence in Hyderabad on Friday.

The statement says that the Member of Parliament Raghurama Krishnam Raju has been arrested at his residence in Hyderabad. There was information against Raghurama Raju, stating that he has been indulging in hate speeches against certain communities and promoting disaffection against the government. A preliminary enquiry has been ordered by ADG CID PV Sunil Kumar IPS.

2

Hike oxygen quota, Jagan writes to PM Narendra Modi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy writing a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking increase in the allocation of medical oxygen and other measures taken by him, works related to supply of required oxygen are being expedited. Government of India has allotted additional three ISO containers and 110 MT of liquid oxygen from Jamnagar Reliance to the state.

Explaining the details, senior IAS officer MT Krishna Babu, who is monitoring the supply and storage of oxygen, has said two cryogenic containers, each carrying 20 MT of liquid oxygen had started from Durgapur Steel plant and the train would reach Krishnapatnam Port in Nellore district by 4 pm on Saturday.

He said Government of India had allocated another three ISO containers, which would be handed over at Durgapur on Saturday. Another train with 60 MT of liquid oxygen will start from Durgapur on Saturday evening and will reach Nellore within 24 hours.

2

Monsoon to make early arrival over Kerala: Meteorological Dept

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

In the Indian monsoon region, initial monsoon rains are experienced over south Andaman Sea and the monsoon winds then advance north-westwards across the Bay of Bengal. According to the new normal dates of monsoon onset or progress, the southwest monsoon advances over the Andaman Sea around May 22. As a cyclone is expected to form over the Arabian Sea, the cross-equatorial south west-



erlies have temporarily strengthened over the Arabian Sea.

The cross-equatorial flow is very likely to strengthen and deepen over the Bay of Bengal from May 20 and a sustained rainfall activity is likely over the south Bay of Bengal and Andaman Nicobar Islands from

May 21.

Hence, the monsoon advance over Andaman and Nicobar Islands is very likely around May 21.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said monsoon is expected to be normal this year.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Vaishakha & Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi : Tritiya: 07:59 am

Nakshatram : Mrigashirsha: 08:39 am

Time to Avoid : (Bad time to start

any important work)

Rahukalam : 09:00 am - 10:36 am

Yamagandam : 01:48 pm - 03:24 pm

Varjyam : 05:57 pm - 07:43 pm

Gulika : 05:47 am - 07:24 am

Good Time : (to start any important work)

Amritakalam : 12:09 am - 01:55 am

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

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 37/28

Humidity: 61%

Sunrise: 05:44 am

Sunset: 06:40 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated may 14, 2021 5:00 PM

Pandemic management involves multiple tasks being performed at different levels. Subsidiarity provides one way of assignment of tasks (or functions) to multiple levels in a way that brings about coherence and maximizes their effectiveness. The principle of subsidiarity, popularized by Professor Walter Stohr at the University of Vienna, states that assignment of functions should start with the lowest administrative unit and all functions that are best performed by the lowest unit should be portioned out to it. What the lowest level is unable to do should then be assigned to the next higher level.

The same process is repeated for succeeding levels. In the case of COVID-19 management, let us do the allocation of functions to three levels: locality (e.g. wadas, mohallas, purwas, petas), district and the State.

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

PANDEMIC WAVE 2.0: PLAN OF ACTION

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

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

The second level

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

The second level would also be responsible for the roll-out of active surveillance-



DR. SAMEER SHARMA

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

mation. In this way, the surveillance-containment method would prevent the virus from spreading in other localities (social networks).

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

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

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

number of cases.

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

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

Power utilities according priority for oxygen plants: Energy Secretary

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Power sector employees in the state, who have been relentlessly striving even during the Covid pandemic, had got a pat from Energy Secretary Srikanth Nagulapalli. Despite Covid second wave being more lethal than the first one, the power sector employees have been ensuring 24/7 power supply. AP Power utilities are providing quality and 24X7 uninterrupted power supply during the crisis particularly to the essential categories such as domestic, hospitals and oxygen centres.

Oxygen plants have become vital in the state during the second wave and these plants have to be run without any interruptions and the power sector employees have been ensuring that to their best.

Power utilities had accorded top priority in running oxygen plants and special nodal officers not less than the rank of



an executive engineer has been appointed to each plant to ensure a continuous power supply. There are 22 such oxygen generating plants under the purview of three Discoms with an energy demand of 249196 KVA (kilo volt-ampere).

During the review meeting held on Friday on power supply position particularly to the hospitals and oxygen-producing plants, the Energy Secretary

said that the power utilities should continue to be on high alert and monitor power supply particularly to domestic, hospitals and oxygen centres.

Thousands of engineers and staff, especially O&M (Operation & Maintenance) staff are working relentlessly and reaching out to the places where their services are required despite the risk of Covid pandemic.

Hats off to power sector staff who showed their commitment in supplying uninterrupted power in this critical juncture, said Energy Secretary

"I appreciate the employees of the power sector, who are undoubtedly the front line warriors, during the Covid doing effective and efficient service in continuing to provide reliable and uninterrupted power supply in the state. While most of the public are staying at homes during the ongoing curfew, the employees of power utilities are working

round-the-clock to ensure the accessibility of an uninterrupted power supply. As we know the electricity has become so vital like oxygen, the electricity department should put all-out efforts to avoid any inconvenience in supply to the consumers," he said.

"Hats off to all the officers and staff of power sector who showed their commitment with utmost service motive in supplying uninterrupted power in this critical juncture without taking leave even though their families are affected by Covid and I feel proud that the power sector is in the forefront in providing best service to the electricity consumers", the Energy Secretary added.

The Covid has caused irrecoverable loss to the power sector financially and affected the health of more than 1,500 power staff. I urge all the staff to follow social distancing norms, keep the face mask on and avoid unnecessary meet-

KCR, Jagan under fire as TS restricts inter-state...

Continued from Page 1

However, Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary Adityanath Das spoke to Telangana Chief Secretary Somesh on the issue, but patients in ambulances suffered in long traffic jams on the borders.

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

those coming from Andhra Pradesh. The AP police should file cases against the Telangana government and its heads for the deaths of Andhra patients," said BJP state general secretary, S Vishnuvardhan Reddy.

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

TDP National General Secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh demanded that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy must speak to his Telangana counterpart for obtaining permission for ambulances from AP to carry coronavirus patients to Hyderabad for medical treatment.

Lokesh said that the infected patients would not go to Telangana if proper treatment

were to be made available in AP itself. Only those patients whose condition had deteriorated badly were being shifted to Hyderabad. The AP Chief Minister should explain whether he was incapable to get even entry for the AP patients who were battling for their lives.

Lokesh pointed out that the ruling party ministers, MLAs and MPs were going and immediately getting hospital beds in the Telangana capital. How can they deny the same facility for ordinary patients? It was a very difficult situation for the AP patients. If they would remain in AP and get treatment, there was no guarantee for their survival. Now, their right to save their lives by getting outside the State was also being denied, he said.

Ambulances from...

Continued from Page 1

Though some of them had permission from Andhra police, the Telangana police said the patients in the ambulances did not have the consent of the hospitals in Hyderabad and other parts of Telangana. The police said they were strictly following the instructions given by the TS chief secretary Somesh Kumar, as there was too much pressure on the hospitals in Hyderabad and those could not accommodate more patients from other states.

Reacting to the stopping of the ambulances at the Pullur toll gate the ruling YSRCP MLA from Kurnool Abdul Hafeez Khan, reached the spot and spoke to the TS police. He asked the police to allow the ambulances to proceed to Hyderabad with e-passes. MLA Hafeez Khan also directed the Kurnool GGH officials to admit patients who did not have permission to get admitted in Hyderabad hos-

pitals.

On the other hand BJP leaders from Kurnool district requested the TS police and asked them to allow vehicles with e-passes, but in vain. BJP leaders then blocked the vehicles coming from Telangana towards Kurnool and that led to an argument with the TS police. The BJP leaders raised slogans against the TS government. As a result, a large number of vehicles on the Kurnool-Hyderabad highway came to a halt.

Several people from Andhra and Rayalaseema wondered whether Hyderabad had ceased to be the common capital of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. "At least for another three years, we have a right over Hyderabad. The hospitals in Hyderabad are not meant only for Telangana people. Anybody from any part of the country can come here and take the treatment," a patient from Andhra said.

AP govt argues that inter-state...

Continued from Page 1

"To restrict access or to condition access on the basis of residence is clearly unconstitutional and this circular issued to get over the judgment of the High Court on May 11 where the High Court directed state not to restrict. The circular was sent to AP by mail last night and since morning there is stopping of ambulances. The entire process is to work around the orders of the High Court, lacking complete justification in law and on facts. Separate restrictions for Covid patients belonging to other states are constitutionally impermissible. Such regulations can't be issued under any law," AG Sriram Subramanyam argued.

Stopping AP ambulances...

Continued from Page 1

The problems were arising only on the border with Telangana. It was unfortunate that the neighbouring state was keen to safeguard the interests of only its patients.

Revisiting reorganisation issues, he said that post bifurcation Andhra Pradesh was left with no tier-1 cities or the best medical infrastructure. Even the previous government failed to develop infrastructure. Had N Chandrababu Naidu had brought at least one super specialty hospital in the first five years of the state's formation, then AP patients wouldn't have faced these hurdles. Although Hyderabad was a common capital till 2024, because of the Chandrababu Naidu government's cheap politics, Andhra Pradesh had lost its rights. He said that the Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had been discussing the issue with the

Telangana government to sort it out at the earliest possible time.

Further, Ramakrishna Reddy said that the state government had been relentlessly working in containing the virus, providing better medical facilities, getting people vaccinated, and ensuring that there were no lapses in delivering welfare schemes even during Covid times.

He said that the state government had spent about Rs 5,000 crore for providing Covid treatment by arranging all the necessary medical facilities. Even in these hard times, the state government had spent Rs 68,000 crore for farmers in the last 23 months, whereas for Rythu Bharosa Rs 17,029 crore was spent.

In all these 23 months, the government had directly credited Rs 89,000 crore into the accounts of beneficiaries under various schemes with zero corruption.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ Rs.48, 570(10 gm)	
SILVER	
₹ 76, 000 (1kg)	
CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹170
Without Skin	₹193
Broiler at Farm	₹117
EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	461
HYDERABAD	456
VISAKHAPATNAM	355
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.22

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.



Lokesh demands ‘White paper’ on vaccination drive

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP National General Secretary Nara Lokesh on Friday addressed a letter to Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy urging him to buy and administer the free vaccine to people to save them from the second wave of Coronavirus. He asked the government to expedite tendering process to procure vaccines. The last day for tenders was put at June 3 and if the procurement was not speeded up, the crisis would become severe, he felt.

He further stated that people were expecting vaccines, but not conspiracies and political victimisation from the ruling party. The Chief Minister should come out with a white paper on the government's action plan for administering the free vaccine to all in the state.

He asked the Chief Minister how the vaccine shortage has turned into a serious crisis in just three weeks in the state. All this was because of the government's negligence and

inability to get proper vaccine allocations from the Centre.

The Chief Minister and his Ministers were only busy getting wide publicity for their programmes while leaving the health needs of people aside.

Lokesh said that a golden opportunity came between April 20 and 29 to procure vaccines directly from the manufacturers. However, the government had failed to respond during that time whereas Orissa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan placed orders for three crore vaccines each. Why did the State government fail to place advance orders to the vaccine makers to get timely supply as per the allotment schedule, he questioned?

Lokesh deplored that Rs 45 crore was allocated for vaccine purchase by the government would not be sufficient to meet the demand even in a single district. The Chief Minister and his Ministers would boast of spending thousands of crores on welfare, but they are unwilling to spend Rs 1,600 crore on the free vaccine to all, he alleged.



■ Lokesh said that a golden opportunity came between April 20 and 29 to procure vaccines directly from the manufacturers. However, the government had failed to respond during that time whereas Orissa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan placed orders for three crore vaccines each

■ Why did the State government failed to place advance orders to the vaccine makers to get timely supply as per the allotment schedule, he questioned?



Muslims offer prayers on the terrace to mark Ramzan in Vijayawada on Friday (Right) A family offer prayers at their residence



Covid dampens spirit of Ramzan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ramzan was celebrated on a low key with Muslim brethren offering prayers by confining themselves to their homes for the second consecutive year in the wake of the covid second wave.

The Covid curfew had a huge impact on Ramzan celebrations in the state as Muslims decided to celebrate the festival in a very simple manner without shopping and avoiding mass prayers in the mosques and Idgahs. Eid-ul-Fitr was the most auspicious and important

festival for Muslims. After observing 30 days of fasting, Muslims decided to celebrate the festival on Friday after seeing the crescent.

All mosques and religious organisations have called for the prayers at home and avoid congregations and prayers in the mosques. Muslims clad in new clothes offered special prayers from their homes and some in mosques with permission to only 50 persons. All Idgahs and open places of worship were shut to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus and they wore a deserted look.

There are no mass prayers in any part of the state and hundreds of Muslims usually congregate at Idgah grounds, Dargahs and open places to offer mass prayers on Ramzan were restricted to their homes.

The heads of families donned the role of Imams to perform Eid-ul-Fitr namaz in their homes. Some preferred to conduct prayers on the terrace in small groups by adhering to the social distancing norms.

Sufi mentor Altaf Ali Raza performed Ramzan namaz and offered prayers for the culmination of pandemic Covid for

the protection of mankind at ancient Kondapalli mosque. Similar special prayers seeking the end of the pandemic were offered in mosques in Vijayawada and Guntur.

Md Aleem from Vijayawada said that after 100 years Ramzan festival was celebrated on a very low key due to Covid second wave. This was because in a majority of Muslim families some are the other family member or relatives are either infected or succumbed to the virus leaving a gloom of sorrow among the family members.



Krishna District Collector A MD Imtiaz

Covaxin to be administered from May 15

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District Collector A MD Imtiaz disclosed that 6,74,272 doses of the Covid vaccine have been administered to people in the Krishna district till date. The first dose of Covishield was given to 3,77,363 people and the second dose was given to 1,48,144 and a total of 5,25,507 doses of Covishield was vaccinated till now. Similarly, the first dose of Covaxin was administered to 1,16,166 and the second dose to 32,599 and a total of 1,48,765 doses was administered.

According to medical experts, the Central government has extended the interval between the first dose and the second dose from 42 days to 84 days and people should make a note of this. The Central government has suggested that the Corona vaccine should be given six months after recovery from Corona.

The second dose of Covaxin will be administered at 40 Covid vaccination centres in the district from May 15. Vaccination will be given at 17 centres in urban areas and 23 centres in rural areas, said the Collector.

MLA complains against Covid hospital to Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP MLA from Mylavaram Assembly constituency Vasanta Krishna Prasad on Friday lodged a complaint with Collector A MD Imtiaz against a private hospital in the city demanding the cancellation of its permission. He alleged that the hospital management was extorting money in lakhs from the Covid patients' kin.

The MLA said that the hospital authorities were not disclosing the details of the deceased and were not handing over the bodies to their family members.

He said that the government should take action against the management of Nimra Hospital and cancel the permission. He lamented that the



YSRCP MLA from Mylavaram Assembly constituency Vasanta Krishna Prasad is seen with police after lodging a complaint against a private hospital, in Vijayawada on Friday

hospital staff was not providing basic facilities to the Covid patients.

He said that the issue would be taken to the notice of Chief

Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and added that the hospital management was rude with Joint Collector K Madhavilatha.

‘Govt striving to provide good medicare to Covid patients’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Medical and Health Alla Nani inaugurated the Covid Care Centre at Sheelanagar in Visakhapatnam on Friday, which was set up by YSRCP Rajya Sabha member Vijayasai Reddy with 300 oxygen beds, under the direction of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

Ministers Kursala Kannababu, Avanti Srinivas and MP Vijayasai Reddy

participated in the inauguration ceremony organised under the auspices of the Pragati Bharat Foundation.

Speaking on the occasion, MP Vijayasai Reddy said that the government was providing medical care without any hesitation with the highest standards.

He said the government aimed at helping the Covid? victims, who are suffering from low oxygen levels. Pragati Bharat Trust will provide nutritious food

to the Covid victims and a patient attendance display board has been set up at the Covid Care Centre, he added.

MP Vijayasai Reddy said that all security measures have been set up at the Covid Care Centre. Meanwhile, as many as 22,399 new cases reported in the state out of 96,446 samples tested. Thus, the total number of cases mounted to 13,66,786 cases.

‘Treat power staff as frontline warriors’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Electricity Backward Classes Employees Welfare Association (APE-BCEWA) urged the government to ensure the provision of timely medical aid to all electricity employees during the pandemic.

APEBCEWA state president P Srinivas Rao on Friday dashed off a letter to the Chief Secretary and applauding the instantaneous action of the government to fight against the Covid, which has been thrown the life of mankind out of gear.

“We extend our support and are thankful to the government for taking adequate precautionary measures by striving to maximise the provision of vaccination, arranging adequate oxygen supplements, ensuring timely hospital facilities with proper medical facilities and creating awareness among the public to fight against the Coronavirus,” he said.

He appealed to the government to support the employees during the critical times of Covid. He said that priority should be given to them in providing hospital admission, arranging adequate beds with oxygen if required.

He also mentioned that employees should be treated as frontline warriors while discharging their duties by arranging to issue requisite instructions to the authorities concerned and to all the hospital managements in the state. He also asked the government to provide ex-gratia of Rs 50 lakhs to employees, who succumbed to Covid.

3 Covid patients commit suicide

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A pall of gloom descended on Nallabelli village in Vepada mandal of Vizianagaram district as three members of a family committed suicide after all three tested Covid positive. The whole family committed suicide by jumping into a well on Friday.

According to sources, U

Satyanarayana Gupta (62), his wife Satyavathi (57) and her mother Venkata Subamma (84) of Nallabelli village went to Chodavaram of Vizag district in search of livelihood a decade ago and were living there. But, due to Corona lockdown, their small-time business was affected and they lost their livelihood.

Hence, they came back to Nallabelli recently and came to know that they are infected with Covid. The three feared that they would die of a deadly virus.

Therefore, they consumed poison and later jumped into a well. Locals found their bodies and informed the police. Bodies were fished out and sent for post-mortem.

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Revenge led to a murder of a former sarpanch in Srikakulam district. According to police, Kanugula Krishna Rao (76), a former sarpanch of Kanugulavanipeta village in Srikakulam district was brutally murdered by K Savararaju of the same village.

Addressing the media here on Friday, Srikakulam DSP Mahendra and Town CI Ambedkar said that Savararaju

was running an illegal liquor business at Kanugulavanipeta village.

When Kanugula Krishna Rao was at the helm as the sarpanch he lodged a complaint with the police alleging that illegal liquor business was going on in the village. Based on the complaint, Savararaju was arrested.

After his release, Savararaju had shifted to Attavari village in Narasannapeta with his wife and children and stayed there

Kanugula Krishna Rao, a former sarpanch of a village in Srikakulam district, was murdered by K Savararaju of the same village

for 15 years.

Since then he nursed a grudge against Krishna Rao

and was waiting for the right opportunity. Adding insult to injury, Krishna Rao had reportedly supported Savararaju's younger brother in a property dispute. This added fuel to his enmity with the former sarpanch. Savararaju arrived in the village on Thursday and went around his properties and farms in Kanugulavanipeta. In the meantime, he saw Krishna Rao sitting under a tree at a temple and asked Savararaju why he had come to the village.

In the process, a verbal duel ensued between Savararaju and Krishna Rao, and fit of rage he attacked him on the neck with a sharp weapon killing him on the spot.

The deceased is survived by a wife and two children. On receiving information, police launched a man-hunt and nabbed Savararaju. Rural SI Rajesh reached the spot and sent the body to RIMS for post-mortem and is investigating the case.

Reliance thanked for providing oxygen plant to Kakinada GGH

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The oxygen plant, which was donated by the Reliance, was inaugurated by Minister for BC Welfare Chennuboina Venu, along with the Collector and other officials, on Thursday. Addressing a gathering, the Minister said that there was a shortage of oxygen for Corona patients in the Kakinada Government Hospital and with the initiation of the Reliance Group oxygen shortage would be resolved. The Minister and District Collector Muralidhar Reddy thanked the Reliance Group for their gesture.

As the hospital was plagued by oxygen shortage, the Reliance Industries, which was extracting oil and gas deposits at KGD6 in Gadimoga in the district, has come forward to help patients.

T Narasimha Reddy, Head

of Support Services, said the Reliance took this initiative under Corporate Social Responsibility. It was manufactured in 10 days at Shree City near Chittoor and brought it to the Kakinada Government Hospital on Thursday.

With a capacity of 10 kilolitres, the oxygen plant would cost Rs 30 lakh. The plant and its chillers were capable of delivering oxygen up to 250 patients per day. Similarly, the TB ward at the Kakinada Government Hospital, which is currently serving TB patients, has been converted into a Covid ward from Friday. The Reliance Industries spokesperson P Subramanian said on Friday that the ward would be provided with 40 beds under the Corporate Responsibility. Doctors and staff working at the Covid Care Centre in Bommaru were provided with sanitisers, gloves and masks.

MLA appeals to public to remain indoors

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Former minister and Kandukur MLA Manugunta Mahidar Reddy appealed to people to remain indoors. He lamented that they were wandering on streets violating the rules imposed by the government to contain the spread of the Corona pandemic. He pointed out the relaxation given from 6 am to 12 pm was also being misused by people

as they are throwing social distancing norms into the wind, which may lead to further spread of the virus.

He also said that police, doctors, medical health personnel and nurses were discharging their duties without sleep, but the negligence among people was leading to the spread of the virus. He advised people to take care of their health, family well-being and welfare of society.



Former minister and Kandukur MLA Manugunta Mahidar Reddy pleading with people in Ongole on Friday to remain indoors to contain the spread of the Coronavirus

Naidu condemns Raghurama Raju’s arrest

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday condemned the ‘illegal arrest’ of YSRCP rebel MP Raghurama Krishnam Raju by the AP CID officials when he was celebrating his birthday with his family and friends in Hyderabad.

Expressing his displeasure, Naidu said: ‘This Chief Minister is not aiming at saving people's lives. The Coronavirus threat is being neglected. He is only bent on targeting Opposition leaders with vengeance. They are arresting even relatives of the Tirupati Ruia victims. Their only crime is that they questioned the government for its negligence.’

The government was deliberately using vindictiveness as a weapon to suppress all voices of dissent, he alleged. The vengeful and autocratic activities of the government were making it challenging for Opposition leaders to fight for the cause of the poor from oppression and exploitation.

Addressing an online meeting with the party Muslim leaders on the occasion of Ramzan, the TDP chief recalled how the government was suppressing the minority voices also. When the minority leaders questioned the government on the attacks on their people, the police filed counter cases against them instead of taking action on their complaints, he alleged.



In 21 days, family loses five members in fight against Covid

VASIREDDY RAVICHANDRA
■ GUNTUR

The corona pandemic created a trail of destruction in many families in Guntur district. More than 2-3 members succumbed to the virus in a family. Such a tragedy struck in the family of a retired teacher where five members died of Covid in a span of 21 days in Guntur.

The family of retired teacher Mohammad Fharuddin Shaw of Sriram Nagar in the Aghraharam area of Guntur lost five persons including him, throwing the kin into debt-trap. The incident shocked the teachers' community. Fharuddin Shaw, a middle-class family person, has two daughter and two sons.

His daughter Johnny Begum, who was initially infected with corona, was admitted to a private hospital in Guntur. Fharuddin's mother Nasser Bee and later Fharuddin died of Covid within a week.

Meanwhile, Fharuddin's wife Karimunnisa and eldest



son Subani also died at different hospitals on the same day. It was a tragedy that five family members died while being treated in different hospitals over a period of 21 days. Unbeknownst to one another, all the five family members were fallen prey to the dread-

ed coronavirus.

The family of Fharudeen's youngest son Jilani, who stayed in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh and his elder brother's wife Gausia and her children were living in dire straits. Gausia, who lost her husband, was concerned about the future of

their children.

The corona pandemic not only devastated the families but also pushed them completely into debt. Fharudeen's family spent about Rs 20 lakh on their beloved ones' medical expenses in different hospitals. Though they have Arogyasri in the name of Subhani, it would not help them during the critical times as the hospital rejected it. The family members worried that how to repay the debts at these difficult times. They urged the government to reimburse the amount which they paid to the hospitals for corona treatment. Despite spending lakhs of rupees, they have lost five members in the family, they lamented.

The teachers' union leaders sought the government to support the family of Fharuddin, a senior teacher in the district. Fharuddin master's services rendered to teachers in the district were invaluable. More than 30 teachers died of corona in Guntur district, they said and appealed to the government to extend immediate support to the bereaved family members.



Covid hospital sealed, quack arrested in Ongole

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The police arrested a quack for running a Covid hospital in Ongole on Friday. It was revealed in the raid by the Vigilance and Enforcement sleuths that the quack Aavala Srinivasa Reddy was running Aditya General Hospital on Sundarabhai Bhavan Road in Ongole and he was treating Covid patients charging huge amounts as a fee.

On information, district Collector Pola Bhaskar and the Vigilance and Enforcement officials conducted the raid on the hospital and questioned Aavala Srinivasa Reddy, who was claiming himself as a doctor. Shockingly, he was doing the treatment for Covid without an MBBS degree. Srinivasa Reddy dropped his studies while studying for his B.Pharmacy. The officials took him into custody and shifted the patients to GGH.

Infuse courage among Covid patients, Mekapati tells officials

PNS ■ NELLORE

The officials have to infuse courage among the Covid patients, who were receiving oxygen at the hospital by interacting with them and their attendants, Minister for Industries Mekapati Gautam Reddy has said.

The Minister inspected the Nellore Government General Hospital on Friday morning. He interacted with the Covid patients and enquired about the medical treatment and food they were receiving at the hospital. He also greeted the patients who came for medical check-ups on the hospital premises and the patients who came in the ambulance and enquired about their well-being.

The patients were also asked about the medical services they received at the hospital. Later, the Minister along with Nellore Rural MLA Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy and District Collector KVN Chakradharbabu handed over 50 oxygen concentrates to the Government General Hospital. Joint Collector, Asara Bapi Reddy, Government General Hospital Superintendent Dr Jonna Prabhakar and others were present.



3 teenagers die in quicksand



PNS ■ GUNTUR

In a tragic incident, three teenagers were killed after they entrapped in quicksand in Guntur district on Friday.

According to reports, three young persons fell into a pond of quicksand while jumping from a tree at Malapalle village near Korennapadu of Vatticherukuru mandal of Guntur district.

They were identified as Borla Vardhan Babu (17), Nelapati Prabhukant (17) and Bottula Sudhakar (17). Two boys died on the spot, while the other one succumbed to injuries on the way to Guntur hospital.

FIGHTING A DEADLY VIRUS



Minister for Information and Transport Perri Venkata Ramaiah (Nani), holding a review virtual meeting on Covid situation through Zoom with West Godavari district ministers, MLAs, district Collector and medical officers from Machilipatnam on Friday.

MLA Mahidhara Reddy flags off ambulance

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Kandukuru legislator Manugunta Mahidhar Reddy on Friday flagged off a free ambulance arranged by the Prakasam District Kandukuru Ayyappa Seva Samithi.

The MLA praised the services rendered by the members of the Seva Samithi. The Ayyappa Seva Samithi committee members said that the free ambulance was arranged for shifting Covid patients from Kandukuru to all parts of Andhra Pradesh. They said the Samithi was providing the ambulance facility for coro-

na pandemic victims and it could also be used to shift Covid victims during difficult times.

Sevadai General Secretary Chakka Venkata Kesava Rao handed over the cash donation to the members of Ayyappa Seva Samithi. Ayyappa Seva Samithi committee members, PDK Venkateshwarlu, Chenchuramaiah, Murali, Dasari Srinu, Iskala Venkata Narasimham, Veeraswamy, Kancharla Srikanth, Chakkavenkata Kesava Rao, Daram Malyadri, Rafi and Raja were present on the occasion.

Ganja seized, 11 peddlers held



PNS ■ KADAPA

The police seized 120 kg of ganja and arrested 11 persons for smuggling near the Chinna Chowk police station in Kadapa on Friday.

Addressing a press conference, Kadapa district SP Anburaj said the Chinnachowk police with the help of special teams nabbed the gang after receiving information.

The gang comprising 11 members including six women was transporting ganja from Chintapalli mandal in Visakhapatnam district and selling it in Kadapa.

Police seized 120 kg of ganja, a Tata Bolt car, Rs 7,000 cash and five cell phones from the accused. District SP congratulated Inspector K Ashok Reddy, Sub-Inspectors G Amarnath Reddy, M Satyanarayana and staff. Kadapa DSP B Sunil and other staff members participated.

'Hospitals on wheels' launched

PNS ■ KAKINADA

A bus 'Hospital on wheels' was launched in Rajahmundry to cater to the needs of Covid patients and it has health facilities like oxygen and mini ICUs. The 36-seater bus converted into a mobile hospital as 'Jagananna Pranavayu Ratha Chakralu'. Rajahmundry MP Margani Bharat Ram, who

inaugurated the bus, said the concept would be taken to the notice of Chief minister Jaganmohan Reddy once the system proved a success. He said two buses were getting ready and each bus would have six beds.

The people who found it difficult to get a bed or oxygen in hospitals would be treated in the hospital on wheels. They

would be given oxygen till they found a bed in the hospital.

Two Vennela buses from the Rajahmundry RTC garage were being used for the purpose. The MP said that Jagananna Pranavayu Ratha Chakralu was designed to overcome the shortage of oxygen beds. People could utilise the services during the emergency, he added.

A HELPING HAND



Minister for Power, Forests, Environment and Science and Technology Balineni Srinivasa Reddy inaugurating Balineni Covid Care Center at Government General Hospital in Ongole on Friday. (Right) The centre was set up with 100 beds with oxygen in German hangars sheds at a cost of Rs 62 lakh.

People buy gold on Akshaya Tritiya daring corona

DHV SAMBASIVA RAO
■ KAKINADA

Not deterred by the dreaded corona pandemic, the people of East Godavari flocked to gold and jewellery shops to purchase gold on the eve of Akshaya Tritiya.

There was no let-up in the purchases of gold on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya. The second wave of Corona was devastating the world in general and its impact was acute in the district in particular. A total of 3,327 cases were reported in the last 24 hours and 10 people were killed. Despite the intensity of the Covid, people left the houses for sentiment and hit the road on Friday. There were brisk sales of gold and jewellery on the eve of Akshaya Tritiya.

Akshaya Tritiya falls on the third Friday in Visakha Masam.



The day was very special for women and Vaishakh Shuddha Thadiya day was celebrated as Akshaya Tritiya. There were several mythological connections to Akshaya Tritiya. It was believed that the Ganges touched Bhudevi on the same day. Kuchela received huge fortunes and money from his

friend Lord Sri Krishna on this day. Vyasamaharshi started discourses Bharatham while Vinayaka penned it on the same day.

It was also believed that the day when Kubera prayed Eshwara and became the head of wealth with Lakshmi, the day when Lord Surya rec-

ognized the anonymous Pandavas and gave them the bowl of Akshaya and the day when Simhachalam Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swami appeared in real vision that was what the people believed.

They also believe that it was Parasurama's birthday and the day Adi Shankaracharya recited the Kanakadhara Stotram. Considering all these sentiments, the womenfolk would buy gold.

However, it was clear from the congestion on Friday that they have not stopped their purchases even during the critical times of the corona pandemic amid restrictions. There were shops only from 6 am to 12 pm. Hence, from 5 am, women and men in thousands lined up at gold shops. On Friday, 24-carat gold was priced at Rs 4,970 and 22-carat gold at 4,560 in the open market.

Covid effect: Low pilgrim turnout in Tirumala

TIRUAPATI: With surge in coronavirus cases, Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple in Tirumala, the world's richest temple was witnessing a low turnout of pilgrims. The temple was one among the most visited temples in the country as it was a major Vaishnavite pilgrimage centre. Under normal circumstances, the temple would witness a daily footfall of 70,000 to 90,000 pilgrims and average Sri Vari hundi collection of Rs 3 to 4 crore per day. After an unprecedented surge in corona cases, the flocking of pilgrim rush came down to just 2000 to 2500 pilgrims a day. The pilgrim turnout was low in

Tirumala because of the lockdown in the neighbouring states Karnataka, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. The pilgrims who booked arjitha seva tickets earlier cancelled their trips. However, the TTD has given opportunity to those who could not come to Tirumala due to partial lockdowns induced by corona to reschedule their trips. It should be applicable for pilgrims who booked tickets between April 21 to May 31 and they could have any day within a year. Keeping in view the rising number of cases in Tirupati, the TTD board has temporarily stopped issuing tokens tickets for slots of general darshan to devotees for paying obeisance at the temple.

TTD performs special puja on Akshaya Tritiya

TIRUAPATI: As part of its spiritual endeavour against pandemic Covid in the month of Vaishaka, the TTD organised the Lakshmi Narayana puja on the Akshaya Tritiya fete, at the Yagashala of SV Vedic University on Friday. The celebrations were telecast live from 11 to 12 am by the SVBC for benefit of Srivari devotees across the world. Speaking on the occasion, Vice-chancellor of SV Vedic University Acharya Sannidhanam Sudarshana Sharma said the performance of the Lakshmi Narayana puja would ensure Lord Sri Venkateswara's blessings.



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

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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



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

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

of COVID-19.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PM-KISAN benefits reach 7.03 lakh farmers in WB

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

those from West Bengal.

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

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

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

INDIA CORNER

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

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



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

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



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

IYC president Srinivas BV questioned by police

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



The high court has directed the city police to conduct inquiry into politicians involved in distribution of COVID-19 medicines and other items, and take steps for lodging of FIR in case of offence, a senior police officer said. In compliance with the directions of the high court, inquiry is being conducted into several people, the officer said. On May 4, the Delhi High Court had asked the police to examine the instances of politicians allegedly procuring and distributing Remdesivir, used in treatment of COVID-19 patients, in the national capital and take steps for lodging of FIR in case of offence.

2 more bodies found near Ganga cremated in UP

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



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

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ BENGALURU

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

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

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

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



areas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sterlite Copper oxygen plant develops 'tech snag'

PNS ■ CHENNAI

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

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

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

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

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



ated a 'minor technical fluctuation' since the plant remained unattended for three years.

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ SHIMLA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eid celebrated in subdued manner in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

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

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

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

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

National platform to track impact of Covid vax

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

nation for six months after recovery, the sources said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

www.dailypioneer.com
facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/
PAPER WITH PASSION

High and dry

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

The COVID-19 vaccination drive in India appears to be wafting in the air with a mind of its own. Never an easy task, what with a billion people to be vaccinated in time to avoid a third surge of the virus, the exercise is taking time even to take off. Whether it is owing to gigantic nature of the task at hand or the scattered nature of the vaccination management plan, one is not sure. The bare facts of the case, if the pandemic is to be brought under control at the very least by the end of this year, are before us. Scientists believe a minimum of 70 per cent of the population needs to be vaccinated for the herd immunity to set in. In India, that means the immunity can be achieved if nearly 94 crore people receive both doses of the vaccine. At two doses each, that calls for 188-odd crore doses. That is a tall order. Even if one were to scale down the vaccination to one dose under the assumption that it is better to give at least half protection to all than complete protection to only a few, even then, just under a 100 crore doses are needed. Where to get the doses from? How long will it take to acquire them? How long will it take to complete the vaccination process? If, at the end, it is only one dose that is given, an identical task stares at the country for giving the second dose.



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

PICTALK



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

PTI

Hogwash

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

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



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

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

The endgame in Afghanistan

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



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India needs to watch out. As the diversion to Kandahar of the Indian Airlines hijacked Flight IC-814 in December 1999 showed, the Taliban were actively promoting terrorism against it by Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Do we have a coherent policy to meet the challenge? (The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE OXYGEN CRISIS IN GOA

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

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

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

CK Subbu | Goa

BE CAUTIOUS, BUT NOT SCARED

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

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

Open up the barred humanity



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

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

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

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

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

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

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

KV Seetharamaiah | Hassan

PAY ATTENTION TO RURAL INDIA, TOO

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

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

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

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

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

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



Rajasthan Chief Minister — Ashok Gehlot



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

Israeli Prime Minister — Benjamin Netanyahu

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



Actor — Sunny Leone



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

Cricketer — Wridhiman Saha

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



Actor — Vinu Dara Singh

FIRST COLUMN

HEALTHCARE POLICY NEEDS A BOOSTER



ISHANEE SHARMA

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

The nation needs to come up with a transparent vaccine policy

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



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

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

experts leading the fight against pandemic. It may not be an exaggeration if one assumes India's second wave COVID battle is being fought in courts, national and local administrative offices. Each one in their desperation or compulsion to make the right announcement is giving a siloed decision, often overreaching each other's territory, therefore creating an unwarranted bottleneck at a critical time. Examples have been quoted of differences between Delhi and Mumbai and will continue to be a case study for any future pandemic management, but what it showed was any governance has to start right at the colony cluster level. The biggest bunch of caregivers/administrators/counsellors are right in the neighborhood and therefore healthcare and civic infrastructure has to be upgraded at the mohalla level. Tossing a few social media posts with glossy pictures of infrastructure fail to impress when a person urgently needs to breathe. Running to courts to intervene is allowing the judiciary to walk into executive's core responsibilities while presenting a united face to any calamity/war or crisis is one of the basic rules of public administration. One does not start to

of rationale domain experts in policy making and governance. India still is governed by bureaucrats, who by training are generalists with no special domain knowledge for handling new world challenges and therefore solutions. Political leaders of any hue would always cater to their constituencies and come up with the most populist schemes, which may or may not impact lives and livelihoods in the long term. An example, free food distribution, while at a humanitarian level it is a noble move yet ensuring a continuous supply of government subsidized ration is the only long-term solution. If the 'one nation one ration card' had been operationalised in major parts of India, along with various schemes for migrants and those out of the social net, tons of public sector human resources such as police could have been better utilized for enforcing other Covid appropriate protocols. If a few scientists, epidemiologists, doctors had been permanently co-opted in a steering committee for Covid management in national and State governments (if not local) the permanent tag of India facing worst Covid wave in the world could have been avoided.


Finally, the truth no matter how harsh or shaming if told honestly and with compassion, always benefits the orator. The government has been avoiding queries on vaccination supply and distribution. All domain experts have been suggesting vaccination being the only long-term solution for protecting a large chunk of population and avoiding mass graves. The government had nearly eight months to be prepared for the current onslaught and has been blessed with one of the largest vaccine manufacturing sites in the world, along with a home grown vaccine. It therefore cuts a very sorry figure when despite all the wealth and a team to push India to the next lever of growth, only about 10 per cent of the population has been vaccinated while a sizeable chunk of India, even in most impacted districts of Delhi and Mumbai, are battling it for *qjab* in the arm. The current vaccine distribution policy of the government is opaque and needs clarity along with an almost daily update on the pipeline for next few months. Estimates suggest nearly one per cent of the India population would be willing to pay for vaccines. Government must prioritise COVID3 management by securing nearly 1.5 billion vaccines for India in the next few months.

Time to embrace the biological revolution

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

“

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BKP SINHA

Sensex ends marginally higher; Nifty stays below 14,700

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Jio announces free talk time offer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Number of independent directors on decline; PSUs responsible: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

The outgoing companies in the NIFTY 500 in 2020 when



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

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

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

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

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

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

Petrol, diesel prices rise again, reach record highs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Go Airlines files draft papers for Rs 3,600 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

MONEY MATTERS

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



Tata Motors on Friday said its board will meet next week to consider a proposal to raise funds through various means. The board meeting is scheduled to be held on Tuesday, May 18, 2021 to consider and approve the audited financial results for the quarter and financial year ended March 31, 2021. "The board in the said meeting would also consider a proposal for raising funds by way of issue of one or more instruments including convertible securities of any description or debt securities, through preferential issue, private placements, rights issue or any other methods or combination thereof in the domestic and/or international markets," Tata Motors said in a regulatory filing. However, Tata Motors did not give an indication on the quantum of the amount that the company intends to raise.

1K power sector employees succumbed to Covid: AIEPF



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

ADB commits record USD 3.92 billion loan to India



The Asian Development Bank on Friday said it has committed a record USD 3.92 billion in sovereign loans for 13 projects to India in 2020, including USD 1.8 billion in COVID-19 related projects to support the government's pandemic response. As part of the pandemic support to India, the Manila-headquartered multilateral agency said it has provided emergency assistance to contain the disease and establish social protection measures for relief to the poor and other vulnerable groups. ADB also approved financing to help the government improve equitable access to comprehensive primary health care in urban areas. This is ADB's highest-ever annual lending commitment to India since the start of its lending operations in 1986, it said, adding it has also committed USD 356.1 million through its non-sovereign operations to India, including three COVID-19 support projects.

L&T bags construction order from Chennai Metro Rail Corp



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

Dr Reddy's Q4 profit dips 29 pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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



and MD G V Prasad said.

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

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

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

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

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

Govt appoints Vandita Kaul as nominee on board of BOI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Covaxin dispatched to various states: BB

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

Akshaya Tiritiya begins on sombre note

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



Radhe has released in theaters and on ZEE5's pay per view platform ZeePlex.

The craze of a Salman Khan film is not limited to the ticket counters of cinema halls. The fans of the 'bhai' are equally excited for the release of his latest action

entertainer *Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai* on the digital platform. On Thursday, the servers of the streaming platform ZEE5 crashed as many rushed to stream the Prabhu Deva directorial.

ZEE5 Premium took to social media to share that they are working on their system and will fix the issue.

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

Radhe is the first mega Bollywood film to release on

multiple mediums simultaneously.

It has released in theatres overseas and in India, it is available on ZEE5's pay per view platform ZeePlex. It is also available to watch on DTH services, including Dish TV, D2H, Tata Sky and Airtel Digital TV.

Salman Khan earlier spoke about losing money at the box office with *Radhe*. "We will lose money at the box office with *Radhe*. The reason why we are releasing this film is for the fans. I don't want them to come to a theatre to watch me. I don't want *ki kal ko koi bole ki Salman Khan ke fans ko coronavirus hogaya ya unhone faila diya*. I am glad Zee also was ready to take losses along with us," he said.

Besides Khan, *Radhe* stars Disha Patani, Randeep Hooda, and Jackie Shroff in pivotal roles.

The film is receiving a mixed response from the audience. While for some it is like a breather in these grim times, some have called the movie a waste of time.



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

Tamil superstar 'Thala' Ajith Kumar had donated Rs 25 lakh to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Relief Fund for the fight against Covid-19. After the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu MK Stalin recently urged people to donate generously to the government's Covid-19 relief fund, many of the Kollywood bigwigs have come forward to contribute.

Suresh Chandra, Ajith Kumar's manager, on Friday took to his Twitter handle to reveal the news. He wrote, "Shri Ajith kumar had donated twenty five lakhs to the

Chief minister relief fund today via bank transfer."

Ace director AR Murugadoss also came forward to do his bit. He met MK Stalin recently and presented a cheque of Rs 25 lakh for the Tamil Nadu CM Relief Fund.

Recently, Suriya and Karthi contributed a sum of Rs 1 crore to the Tamil Nadu government to battle the Covid-19 second wave in the state.

On the work front, Ajith Kumar is busy shooting for *Valimai*, which is being directed by H Vinoth. He was last seen in *Nerkonda Paarvai*, a Tamil remake of critically acclaimed *Pink*.

Friends reunion special gets release date



The first teaser for the *Friends* reunion special, starring Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry, and David Schwimmer, is out.

The teaser, which features an acoustic version of the theme tune and the cast

walking into the distance, reveals the release date of the *Friends* reunion special titled *Friends: The Reunion*. It will premiere on streaming service HBO Max on May 27. HBO Max is currently not available in India.

As if the short video was not enough to get fans excited, along with the teaser

trailer, HBO announced that the cast will be joined by a variety of special guests.

The list includes names like David Beckham, Justin Bieber, BTS, James Corden, Cindy Crawford, Cara Delevingne, Lady Gaga, Elliott Gould, Kit Harington, Larry Hankin, Mindy Kaling, Thomas Lennon, Christina Pickles, Tom Selleck, James Michael Tyler, Maggie Wheeler, Reese Witherspoon and Malala Yousafzai. Naturally, the news set social media ablaze.

At once, hyped, emotional, and super excited fans flooded virtual timelines with memories from their favourite sitcom.

From sharing memes to videos and from posting quotes to iconic moments from the show, Twitterverse has got everything fans absolutely love about the show.

In the unscripted reunion

special, Jennifer Aniston, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry, Courteney Cox and David Schwimmer will return to *Friends*' original soundstage Stage 24, on the Warner Bros. Studio lot in Burbank, California, to talk about playing Rachel, Phoebe, Joey, Chandler, Monica and Ross, respectively.

Courteney Cox recently talked about the *Friends* reunion special in a conversation with talk show host Ellen DeGeneres. During the interaction, Cox said it was "unbelievable" to meet and film with her co-stars again. She also remarked that the reunion "was so emotional" and there are "a lot of special surprises."

Friends, one of the most popular sitcoms of all time, ran for 10 seasons from 1994 to 2004. It chronicled the daily lives of six friends in a comedic way.

Camila Cabello's beautiful transformation into Cinderella

The first look of singer-songwriter Camila Cabello in the upcoming movie *Cinderella* is out.

Cabello, known globally for her megahit songs like *Havana* debuts as an actor in the Kay Cannon directorial fairytale adaptation.

Cinderella is a musical romantic comedy.

The official social media accounts of the movie shared two pictures from the film.

One features Cabello alone in the role, while the second photo also has Nicholas Galitzine, who plays the role of Prince Robert.

The film also stars Billy Porter, Idina Menzel, Pierce Brosnan, Nicholas Galitzine, and Minnie Driver. John Mulaney, James Corden, Romesh Ranganathan are also part of the film's cast.

The story of *Cinderella* and the character has been adapted several times by Hollywood. Some

of the notable ones include *Into the Woods*, a mish-mash of fairy-tales in which Anna Kendrick played the role and 2015's *Cinderella*, with Lily James in the role.

Corden was also a part of *Into the Woods*' cast.

Although we do not know anything of the plot, Shannon told Entertainment Weekly in an interview, "I just felt like it was a great opportunity to show this loved, iconic character that is *Cinderella* in a way that's more relatable to what girls and young women, in particular, are going through, where they can really see themselves."

She added, "She's going to surprise everyone, because nobody's ever seen her act before. She's so fantastic. She's so good, and she's so natural, and just funny and beautiful and really, really talented."

Well, it does sounds like the shoe fits!



FUN

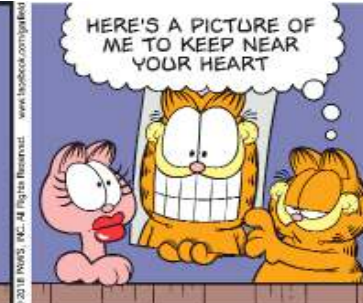
ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

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

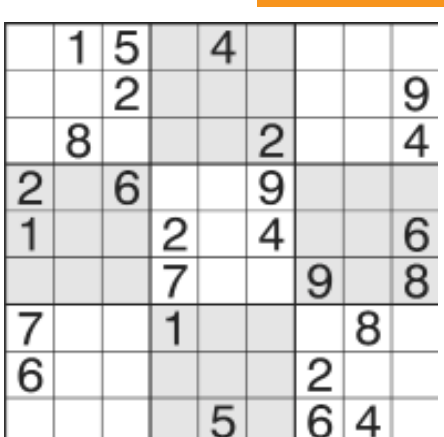
DOWN

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

- From another country
- A sea creature with many arms
- Aeroplane trip
- Motorist
- Jealousy
- Large group of soldiers



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution								
5	9	2	1	7	3	8	6	4
4	7	1	8	6	9	3	5	2
6	3	8	2	5	4	1	9	7
1	4	9	3	2	7	5	8	6
8	5	7	4	9	6	2	1	3
2	6	3	5	1	8	7	4	9
7	8	6	9	3	1	4	2	5
3	1	5	6	4	2	9	7	8
9	2	4	7	8	5	6	3	1

Rules

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

IN LOVE WITH A CITY!

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

The passion she has shown to us when speaking about her admiration for Hyderabad makes us believe that she's conscious about what place Clinical director and speech-language pathologist Dr. Garima Vegivad, calls home. Doctors are at the forefront of fighting epidemics and pandemics providing high-quality treatment and care! The Covid-19 pandemic has come as a stark reminder of the vital role doctors play in our lives. A relationship that Dr. Garima is building every day with the city feels definitely awakening. "It was the cadence of when I decided to do my Masters here in Hyderabad and then I got married to a person

who's a permanent resident of the city. For the sake of coherence, I have the ability to postulate a lovely relationship with this city. I really love the weather here! Can't ever get tired of this place, evenings are so pleasant here. It feels like home! Though a major part of the city is a concrete arena, the part in which I reside is full of greenery," shares the doctor who is a resident of Alwal. The city has places to eat at any time of the day. To be honest, she was apprehensive when it comes to finding a good food joint initially because she's grown up in an environment where the south and north share a drastic choice of cuisine! She thought she won't be able to get accustomed to South Indian cui-

sine but as time passed by, she developed a unique taste for it. The city can turn you into a new human, she feels. Apart from that, she's in deep awe of the Telugu dialect, it's an interesting language she says, adding, "Basically, you can never be bored here, there is so much to do."

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

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



INTRIGUING SHOWS

WE ALL AWAIT FOR

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

Undekhi 2

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

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

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

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



Made in Heaven 2

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



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

The Family Man 2

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



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

Broken But Beautiful 3

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



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

Mind The Malhotras 2

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



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

Elegance encasing emotions

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



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

can share with our loved ones."

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

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



Raman's sacking bring CAC under scanner

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

IS LA'S COMMITTEE ILLEGAL?

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

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



DID RAMAN & NEETU HAVE A FALL-OUT?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COUNTER POINTS AGAINST RAMAN

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

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

Another allegation against Raman is that he unwittingly gave

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

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

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

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

While Raman's letter didn't

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

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

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

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

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

Paine clarifies on India comments after being slammed

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

"I was asked a number of



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

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

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

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

which the visitors rallied to win.

Soon Paine was trolled on Twitter by Indian fans.

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

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

Bond played major role in shaping Bumrah's career

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

"I met him (Bond) for the first time



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

he used to operate," the India pacer said.

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

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

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

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

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



Dortmund rout Leipzig in German Cup final

AFF ■ BERLIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Real trim Atleti's lead

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

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

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



and Real fail to win away at Athletic Bilbao.

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

'Hardik needs to bowl for place in playing XI'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Liverpool end Old Trafford hoodoo

AFF ■ MANCHESTER

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Nadal ends losing streak against Alex



AP ■ ROME

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The only real moment of concern for Nadal came when he



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHIRANJEEVI'S LUCIFER REMAKE TO HAVE DIRECTOR CHANGE



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

despite numerous suggestions and repeated meetings they are unable to work on the script. People, however, feel that making changes in *Lucifer* as per Telugu movie lovers' taste is very difficult as Kerala and the politics in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are completely different. To top it all, Chiranjeevi's real-life political party happenings come as a hindrance. Now we've learnt that Chiranjeevi gave a green signal to Mihana Krishna after being impressed with the changes and the script for the Telugu remake of *Lucifer* has been locked.

Kondapalem in peculiar trouble

Panjaa Vaishnav Tej, nephew of Mega Star Chiranjeevi created a sensation on the silver screen with his dream debut along with Kriti Shetty with *Uppena* directed by Buchibabu Sana. He captured the imagination of all by signing another different genre entertainer *Kondapalem* with creative director Krish. According to the latest news, *Kondapalem* finds itself in a peculiar situation. The film's first backdrop needs to depict wild animals and this requires extensive usage of VFX and CGI. Krish, who wrapped up the film shoot in a record 45 days

non-stop schedule, handed over the VFX work to VFX companies last December. 80% of computer graphics work is yet to be completed and the companies cite lockdown problems and coronavirus for the delay. Krish also added that *Kondapalem* theatrical release will not happen any sooner due to the current situation. The film is inspired by the novel *Kondapalem* written by Sannapureddy Venkataramireddy and is all about how a youngster along with his father protected his sheep and also became a forest officer after completing B.Tech. Rakul Preet Singh is playing the role of Obulama and the film's shoot done in Vikarabad forests.



Sumanth approached for Mahesh-Trivikram film?



It is a known fact that Mahesh Babu is doing a film with Trivikram and the film was announced a few weeks back. So much is being said about this film time and again, and is making the fans excited. Now, the latest gossip in the film circles is that Sumanth has been approached to play a key role in the film. Trivikram approached Sushanth in *Ala Vaikuntapuramlo...* and now Sumanth has been in talks for his film. Though there is no confirmation, this news has caught on quite well in the industry. Watch this space for more updates on this film.

Chay's remarkable transformation for his Bollywood debut

Naga Chaitanya is making his Bollywood debut and this is exciting all Akkineni fans as he is playing an important role in mister perfectionist Amir Khan's upcoming entertainer *Lal Singh Chaddha* under the direction of Advait Narayan. Naga Chaitanya, according to sources, will undergo a remarkable transformation in his physique. Naga Chaitanya already allotted 15 days for the shoot and will be joining the film's Ladakh schedule.

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



HOLLYWOOD ACTRESS OPPOSITE PRABHAS?

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

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

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



Director-writer Nandyala Ravi dies of Covid

In some heart-breaking news, director and writer Nandyala Ravi succumbed to Covid-19. Ravi, who had been battling Covid for a while now, breathed his last on Friday morning. Ravi had worked for several films as a dialogue writer. He made his directorial debut in 2014 with *Lakshmi Raave Maa Intiki* which starred Naga Shaurya and Avika Gor in the lead roles. He had worked as a writer for Raj Tarun's *Orey Bujjiga*. Ravi had an unfinished film, a comedy film with Sapthagiri and before it could go to the theatres, the tragedy took place. Nandyala Ravi was hospitalised and was critically ill. When he was undergoing treatment, he was supported by a few of his friends from the film



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