

**ANALYSIS 7**  
RISE OF RELIGIONS AND  
DECLINE OF THE WEST**MONEY 8**  
HOUSING SALES UP 21%, SUPPLY  
DOWN 40% IN JANUARY-MARCH**SPORTS 11**  
ENG TESTS AREN'T WARM-UPS FOR  
WTC FINAL: WAGNER

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



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

Page 12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2

**Cyclone: Maha CM  
reviews  
situation; 12K  
evacuated**

5

**Sensex rallies 848  
points; financial  
stocks sparkle**

8

## Curfew extended till May-end

\* Restrictions, timings remain unchanged during curfew across the State

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Monday directed officials to extend the curfew till May-end and to provide treatment to cases of the deadly 'Black fungus' infection under Arogyasri. Chairing a review meeting on the prevailing Covid situation and vaccination at his camp office, the Chief Minister said curfew should be extended to minimum four weeks to contain the situation and it has been only 10 days since it was imposed.

He said the guidelines will be the same for the extended curfew and the timings would be from 12 pm to 6 pm. Jagan directed the officials to ensure Covid cases do not increase in rural areas. "If need be, utilise the services of volunteers, Asha workers and secretariat staff effectively to contain Covid spread," he said.

The Chief Minister asked officials to test the people identified with symptoms during Fever Survey for Covid and to provide better medical facilities and medicine to all those who test positive. He asked the officials to focus on developing infrastructure facilities in Covid Care Centres.

The officials informed the Chief Minister that there are chances of Black fungus infection in diabetics and people who use excessive steroids and added that they have identified nine cases of the deadly infection across the state.

2



## 9 'Black fungus' cases reported in AP so far

VIJAYAWADA: Medical & Health Principal Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal on Monday confirmed that as many as nine black fungus cases have been reported in the state so far.

The state government has decided to include black fungus treatment under the Arogyasri scheme, Singhal said, adding that so far, there have been no reports of deaths from the deadly infection in the state. Black fungus treatment will be provided in private hospitals under technical expertise under Arogyasri. Singhal said that a committee

of senior officials has decided to call for tenders for the purchase of medicines and injections required for treating black fungus. Experts say that people with severe diabetes are more prone to developing black fungus, which can be easily prevented if diagnosed at the right time. "The state government has decided to launch awareness programmes on black fungus. Private hospitals will be instructed to inform the government immediately upon detection of the black fungus," said Singhal.

2

## State logs 18,561 new Covid cases, 109 deaths

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh reported a record high of 109 Covid-19 deaths in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Monday even as 18,561 fresh cases were also registered. The latest bulletin said 17,334 patients had also recovered during the period in the state. The caseload now touched 14,54,052 from 1.80 crore tests, with an overall positivity rate of 8 per cent. The total recoveries went up to 12,33,017 and the toll to 9,481, according to the bulletin. The overall coronavirus recovery rate in the state is now 84.66 per cent and mortality rate 0.65 per cent. The number of active cases stood at 2,11,554, it added. In terms of overall positive cases, AP is ranked sixth in the country but is at the fourth place in the number of active cases, government data said. In mortality, AP is ranked 18th.

2

## Confirmed: Covid is airborne

PNS ■ GENEVA

A quiet revolution has permeated global health circles. Authorities have come to accept what many researchers have argued for over a year: The coronavirus can spread through the air. That new acceptance, by the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, comes with concrete implications: Scientists are calling for ventilation systems to be overhauled like public water supplies were in the 1800s after fetid pipes were found to harbor cholera.

Cleaner indoor air won't just fight the pandemic, it will minimize the risk of catching flu and other respiratory infections that cost the U.S. more than \$50 billion a year, researchers said in



a study in the journal Science on Friday. Avoiding these germs and their associated sickness and productivity losses would, therefore, offset the cost of upgrading ventilation and filtration in buildings.

"We are used to the fact that we have clean water coming from our taps," said Lidia Morawska, a distinguished

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

2

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

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Six people died and 17 were injured in Maharashtra as Cyclone Tauktae, intensifying into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm", swept the coastal regions of the state through the day today. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to take stock of the situation. The storm was expected to cross the Gujarat coast between Porbandar and Mahuva, east of Diu tonight between 10 pm and 11 pm tonight, India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said.

## SC sends Raju to Army hospital in TS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief to jailed and rebel YSR Congress Party MP K Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, the Supreme Court Monday ordered his forthwith transfer to the Army hospital at Secunderabad in neighbouring Telangana for medical examination and hospitalisation till further orders in a sedition case filed by Andhra Pradesh police against him.

Raju, who is the Lok Sabha MP from Narsapuram Parliamentary constituency in Andhra Pradesh, alleged that the sedition case has been lodged against him by state police "because of political vendetta" as he has been criticising "the action of his own party".

A vacation bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and B R Gavai heard two appeals of the rebel YSRCP MP and ordered Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das to ensure his transfer to Secunderabad Army hospital during the day itself under Y-category security cover where he would be examined by a team of three doctors to be appointed by the head of the hospital.

The entire medical examination process would be video



graphed and supervised by a judicial officer to be nominated by the Chief Justice of the Telangana High Court, the apex court said.

The top court, in its order, considered the facts and circumstances that Raju has undergone heart "by-pass surgery very recently" and his injuries were noticed in the medical report and passed a slew of directions to the state police.

"The petitioner...shall forthwith be taken to the Army Hospital Secunderabad for medical examination. The Y category security, provided under orders of the Delhi High Court, shall escort him only till the Army Hospital and need not be present at the time of medical examination," the bench said in the order.

2

## TV channel asks SC to quash FIR

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A media outlet has moved the Supreme Court seeking quashing of an FIR registered against it in a sedition case in Andhra Pradesh, claiming the attempt is to create a chilling effect for news channels in the state so that they are wary of hosting any content which is critical of the government.

Shreya Broadcasting Pvt Ltd, which owns TVS news channel which has its bureaus in Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada, has alleged in its petition that the state intends to silence its critiques and the media by filing a vague FIR and abusing the process of law.

The FIR against the TV channel has connection with the sedition case lodged against YSRCP MP K Raghu Rama Krishnam Raju.

2

## No external injuries, edema on Raju's feet: Docs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A Medical Board appointed by a division bench of the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Monday said there were no external injuries on YSRCP rebel MP Kanumuru Raghurama Krishna Raju, as alleged by him.

The medical board, headed by the Guntur General Hospital (GGH) superintendent Dr G Prabhavathi, concluded that Raju's condition is stable.

2

## 'New ray of hope'

Anti-Covid drug 2DG rolled out

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The first batch of anti-COVID oral drug 2-DG, developed by the DRDO, was rolled out on Monday as a severe wave of the coronavirus pandemic continued to ravage large parts of India.

Releasing the drug along with Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG) has brought a "new ray of hope" in the treatment of COVID-19 patients and exuded confidence that it would be effective.

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

"This is a great example of the scientific prowess of our country," Singh said in his brief remarks.

The defence minister also listed the efforts of the armed forces in helping the civilian authorities deal with the pandemic across the country, but asserted that their deployment has not impacted the military's operational preparedness at the borders.

"Even after going through all these difficulties, we have ensured that our preparedness at the border does not have any impact. There is no shortage of enthusiasm of our forces anywhere. We know this very well, no matter how big the difficulty is, we will overcome it," he said.

2

## AP turns temples into Covid Care Centres

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has converted several major temples in the State into Covid Care Centres (CCCs) to accommodate the infected patients.

The Endowments Department has completed arrangements in major temples like Annaram, Dwaraka Tirumala, Vijayawada, Kanipakam, Srikalahasthi, Srikakulam, Mahanandi, Simhachalam, Srisailem and Peddakani, AP Digital Corporation (APDC), the State government's publicity wing, said in a tweet.

Temples will act as Covid Care Centres. Sixteen major temples will have 1,000 beds while smaller temples will have 25 beds. Primary medicare will be provided under the supervision of doctors, the APDC said.

The government has already opened 115 CCCs in all the 13 districts of the State with a bed capacity of 52,471.



As on May 16, a total of 17,417

coronavirus-infected people were lodged in the CCCs and 35,054 beds

were vacant, according to the Health Department.

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

Vaishakha &amp; Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

**Tithi** : Shashthi: 12:32 pm**Nakshatram** : Pushya: 02:55 pm**Time to Avoid** : (Bad time to start any important work)**Rahukalam** : 03:25 pm - 05:01 pm**Yamagandam** : 08:59 am - 10:36 am**Varjyam** : 04:11 am - 05:51 am**Gulika** : 12:12 pm - 01:49 pm**Good Time** : (to start any important work)**Amritakalam** : 08:06 am - 09:48 am**Abhijit Muhurtham** : 11:46 am - 12:38 pm**VIJAYAWADA  
WEATHER****Forecast**: Partly cloudy**Temp**: 37/27**Humidity**: 62%**Sunrise**: 05:43 am**Sunset**: 06:41 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated may 17, 2021 5:00 PM



# For some, politics takes precedence over Covid havoc

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

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

However for some, politics take precedence over Covid.

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

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

Jaganmohan Reddy remained busy targeting political rivals.

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

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

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

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

time, and Jagan.

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

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

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

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

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



**Y SATYA KUMAR**  
BJP National Secretary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Police playing crucial role in supply of oxygen: DGP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Pointing out that the state government is taking several steps to ensure liquid medical oxygen reaches Covid patients undergoing treatment at various hospitals, DGP Gautam D Sawang on Monday said that the Police Department is playing a crucial role to ensure timely and safe delivery of oxygen to all public and private hospitals in the State in accordance with the directions of the Chief Minister.

"All arrangements are being made to ensure that no inconvenience is caused to the public due to oxygen supply," said Sawang.

The DGP said that all the 11 liquid medical oxygen plants were mapped and steps taken to ensure unhindered transport from the plants to the hospitals. "We have already consulted with the DGPs of Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Steps



have been taken to provide escort vehicles without any hindrance on the routes of oxygen tankers in the respective states. Steps are being taken to instal GPS tracking system to the oxygen tankers," Sawang said.

He said that the Additional DGP (Law and Order) are constantly coordinating with the Additional DGs (Law and Order) of Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. AP Police

Covid Control Room is coordinating with the control rooms of the respective states and this facility was able to save a lot of time, Sawang said.

The Police Department is providing food parcels, breakfast and fresh water to every tanker driver and crew upon their entering AP. Additional drivers, technicians in case of repairs, coordination with the NHAI, installation of cranes to control traffic jams, etc are

arranged.

"Thus 18 police units have set up check posts at the respective district boundaries and set up a highly coordinated green channel. The respective SPs are coordinating while crossing the district boundaries," he said.

Similarly, escort vehicles and green channels have been set up for oxygen tankers plying through our state to neighbouring states like Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Three IPS officers were monitoring directly from the State Oxygen War Room set up by the government, said Sawang.

The DGP complimented the Kurnool police under the instructions of the District SP, oxygen cylinders are being set up immediately for patients suffering from oxygen shortage in ambulances parked at the TS-AP border and also admission of patients in hospitals.

# Curfew extended till...

*Continued from Page 1*

The Chief Minister directed the officials to bring Black fungus under Arogyasri Scheme and prepare a protocol to identify infections at the early stage. He asked them to prepare a protocol to provide immediate treatment to people affected with Black fungus under Arogyasri and to identify some notified hospitals for treatment.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to prepare an action plan to take measures to help the children who lost their parents due to Covid pandemic. He asked the officials to look into the possibility of depositing a certain amount of money in the name of orphans in banks so that the monthly interest will be used to fulfil basic needs.

The officials informed the Chief Minister that there are 47,825 beds in 625 Covid care hospitals across the state, of which 38,492 beds are occupied and 25,539 of them are being treated under Arogyasri.

There are 6,576 ICU beds, 23,463 non ICU oxygen beds,

17,246 non ICU non oxygen beds and 3,467 ventilators in Covid hospitals. They said 17,417 of 52,471 beds in 115 Covid care centres were occupied.

The officials said 590 MT oxygen per day is allotted to the state and the demand including all government and private hospitals is 590 MT to 610MT. In this regard, the officials said they have requested the Central Government to allot an oxygen express with 80 MT capacity every day from Jamnagar and also requested the Karnataka government to supply at least 130 MT from Bellary. They said that eight ISO containers have reached the state while another two yet to come.

The officials said 7,32,542 N-95 masks, 7,55,395 PPE Kits, 44,11,353 surgical masks and 23,383 Remdesivir injections are available in the state while another 8 lakh injections were ordered from Myland 50,000 from Reddy's laboratories. The officials also informed the Chief Minister that a total of 75,99,960 vaccine doses were received from the Centre, of which 62,60,400 doses are Covishield and 3,39,560 Covaxin.

As of May 15, the state had been allotted 6,90,360 doses of Covishield vaccines while the state has procured 8,90,360 doses, more than the allotted, they said. They said only 1,25,000 doses of Covaxin have been supplied to the state while 2,27,490 doses were allotted.



He said Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has decided to make a fixed deposit of Rs 10 lakh in the name of children whose parents have died of Covid and become orphans. During the past 24 hours, 73,749 Covid-19 tests were conducted. Of this, 18,561 returned positive while 109 people succumbed to Covid. As many as 12,926 people called '104' call centres in the past 24 hours for various information pertaining to Covid, Singhal said. He said the fever survey has been carried out for three days in the state, while 91,000 cases have been reported. Home isolation kits are being given to people suffering from fever. Every case is thoroughly monitored and district Collectors have been directed to make ambulances available for patients to bring them to hospitals. Singhal said 17,901 medical staff, including 108 specialists, 3,025 GDMs, 5,493 staff nurses, 4,144 MNO have been hired in 2021.

# 9 'Black fungus' cases reported...

*Continued from Page 1*

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# SC sends Raju to Army...

*Continued from Page 1*

The medical examination of Raju shall be conducted by the medical board of three doctors of the hospital to be constituted by the head of the Army Hospital, it said, adding, "Raju be medically examined in the presence of a Judicial Officer, who may be nominated by the Chief Justice of the Telangana High Court."

The proceedings of medical examination of Raju shall be video-graphed and be submitted to the Registrar General of the Telangana High Court in a sealed cover for being transmitted to this Court," the order said.

The top court directed the lawmaker to be admitted in the hospital and remain there for medical care until further orders, which shall be treated as judicial custody of him and "the expenses, if any, for hospitalisation in the Army Hospital shall be borne by the

petitioner."

The bench was hearing two appeals, including one by Raju, against the AP High Court order dismissing his bail and asking him to go to appropriate forum for the relief. In the second appeal, his son K Bha-rath sought Raju's medical examination by a private hospital.

The top court asked the state government to file its reply on the appeals by May 19 and posted the matter for further hearing on May 21.

The bench directed the registry that the order be sent through email to the Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh, the High Courts of AP and Telangana besides asking the top bureaucrat of AP to ensure compliance of the order.

During the hearing, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the MP, said that he was seeking two things — ad-interim bail and his medical examination by a neutral

hospital.

Rohatgi said it is a matter of "some extraordinary proportion" as the sitting MP is critical of the party leadership and the state government for some time.

At the outset, senior advocate Dushyant Dave, appearing for the state, requested the matter be kept for hearing on Friday so that he can file a short reply.

Rohatgi argued there are no allegations that the MP had incited any rebellion. "The MP is critical of the state government's handling of Covid. Along with him, FIR also names two TV media channels," he argued.

Rohatgi claimed that the MP was "beaten and tortured" by the police and when he was produced before the trial court, the magistrate had found some injuries on his feet and ordered that he be examined in hospital.

# TV channel asks SC...

*Continued from Page 1*

The channel, in the petition, has stated that the FIR has been lodged against it for airing programmes involving Raju who has been critical of the state government led by his own party.

Claiming that the FIR lodged on May 14 is an attempt to chill the free speech rights of the petitioner, the plea filed on Sunday has sought the apex court's direction to restrain the authorities in AP from taking any coercive action against the management and employees of the news channel in pursuance of the case lodged against them.

It has also sought a direction to Telangana government to ensure and take requisite steps to enable the petitioner and its employees to continue to pursue their profession without any interference by the police and officials of AP.

The Crime Investigation

Department (CID), which has arrested Raju in the case, has also named two media houses and others as accused.

In its plea filed in the apex court through advocate Vipin Nair, Shreya Broadcasting Pvt Ltd has said that freedom of speech of media is of great importance and the FIR clearly intends to breach the same by chilling the media houses into submission.

It submitted that the attempt of the FIR is to create a chilling effect for news channels in the state so that every news channel is wary of hosting any content which is critical of the government. By filing a vague FIR and abusing the process of law, the state intends to silence its critiques and the media, which is discharging its duty, the plea claimed. It alleged the FIR seeks to criminalise the bona fide act of the petitioner hosting an MP on its channel.

"Such FIRs will lead to a bad precedent, where media houses will refrain from hosting anyone who disagrees with the government in any manner," it said, adding the basis of alleging a criminal conspiracy in the case is that the channel had given Raju a premeditated slot which is in fact a standard practice in media business.

It is clear from the FIR that the FIR intends to punish speech made against the Chief Minister. It is clear from the catena of judgments of the Supreme Court that sedition can, in no way, be applicable when the criticism is that of a person holding a post in the government, the plea said, while also seeking quashing of the May 14 inquiry report which formed the basis of FIR.

It claimed that by invoking the colonial era law, the state has resorted to the classic technique of chilling free speech when there is even the mildest criticism against the government or any of its constituents.

The MP was examined by a cardiologist, a neurologist and a nephrologist. Raju was arrested by CID on sedition charges on Friday evening in Hyderabad. After his bail petition was rejected by a single judge bench of the High Court on Saturday afternoon, Raju's advocate B Adinarayana Rao wrote to the AP High Court Chief Justice stating that he was inflicted injuries by the police on Friday while in their custody and demanded examination by a medical board.

Acting upon the letter, the Chief Justice asked a division bench, comprising Ch Praveen Kumar and Kaneganti Lalitha, to look into it. The division bench constituted the medical board and asked it to submit a report in a sealed cover.

The Medical Board was headed by Guntur General Hospital (GGH), superintendent Dr G Prabhavathi, and had

# No external injuries...

*Continued from Page 1*

head of the department of general medicine, Dr YVL Narasimham, orthopaedics department head, Dr G Varaprasad, general surgeon Dr G Subba Rao as its members.

As many as 18 types of tests were conducted on Raju.

"He (Raju) was admitted on May 16, at 12:31 am with IP No H026237 with history of assault by unknown persons on May 14 around 11:30 pm at CID office, Guntur. On general examination he is conscious and coherent pulse 86 per minute, BP 120/80, SPO2 96 with room air, CVS/RS-NAD. Local examination edema of both feet were present, discoloration of plantar aspect of both feet present. No evidence any external injuries. As he underwent CABG on November 30, 2020 and complaining of chest pains case was referred to cardiologist. Cardiologist gave his opinion as no acute cardiac event at present.

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| VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES |              |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| <b>GOLD</b>              |              |
| ₹ Rs.49, 260/(10 gm)     |              |
| <b>SILVER</b>            |              |
| ₹ 76, 600 (1kg)          |              |
| CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg       |              |
| Dressed/With Skin        | ₹138         |
| Without Skin             | ₹157         |
| Broiler at Farm          | ₹95          |
| EGG RATES ₹/100          |              |
| VIJAYAWADA               | 481          |
| HYDERABAD                | 456          |
| VISAKHAPATNAM            | 355          |
| <b>RETAIL PRICE</b>      | <b>₹4.81</b> |

# ‘New ray of hope’

*Continued from Page 1*

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

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

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

tankers for the transportation of liquid oxygen.

"I am happy to say that the Medical Corps has also decided to take back its retired doctors so that our health system can be strengthened further. I heartily commend such physicians who are joining this campaign even after their service," he said.

The anti-COVID-19 therapeutic application of 2-DG has been developed by the Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), a leading laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) in Hyderabad.

"I was told that by using it (2-

DG), people have recovered two-and-a-half days earlier than the usual treatment period. Oxygen dependency has also been reduced by about 40 per cent in the patients. Its powder form is also a major feature as people will be able to use it very easily like the ORS solution," Singh said.

Urging all the institutions concerned to walk shoulder-to-shoulder, he said the country will come out victorious in facing any crisis if everyone works unitedly.

The defence ministry, on May 8, said the clinical trials of 2-DG showed that it helps in a faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces the supplemental oxygen dependence.

# State logs 18,561 new...

*Continued from Page 1*

In 24 hours, East Godavari logged the highest of 3,152 new cases, Visakhapatnam 2,098 and Anantapur 2,094.

Krishna district registered the lowest - 396, while three districts added between 800 and 1,000 each. Six districts logged between 1,100 and 1,700 new cases each.

West Godavari saw 16 fresh Covid-19 fatalities in a day while Anantapur, Chittoor and Guntur had ten each. East Godavari and Visakhapatnam reported nine each, Nellore, Vizianagaram and Krishna eight each, Kurnool and Srikakulam seven each, Prakasham four and Kadapa three Covid-19 deaths.

# Confirmed: Covid is airborne

*Continued from Page 1*

The study's authors, comprising 39 scientists from 14 countries, are demanding universal recognition that infections can be prevented by improving indoor ventilation systems. They want the WHO to extend its indoor air quality guidelines to cover airborne pathogens, and for building ventilation standards to include higher airflow, filtration and disinfection rates, and monitors that enable the public to gauge the quality of the air they're breathing.

A "paradigm shift is needed on the scale that occurred when Chadwick's Sanitary Report in 1842 led the British government to encourage cities to organize clean water supplies and centralized sewage systems," they wrote.

"No one takes responsibility for the air," Morawska said. "It's kind of accepted that the air could be of whatever quality -- containing viruses and pathogens."

SARS-CoV-2 multiplies in the respiratory tract, enabling it to spread in particles of varying sizes emitted from an infected person's nose and throat during breathing, speaking, singing, coughing and sneezing.

The biggest particles, including visible spatters of spit, fall fast, settling on the ground or nearby surfaces, whereas the tiniest -- aerosols invisible to the naked eye -- can be carried farther and stay aloft longer, depending on humidity, temperature and airflow.

It's these aerosol particles, which can linger for hours and travel indoors, that have been

stoked controversy. Although airborne infections, like tuberculosis, measles and chickenpox are harder to trace than pathogens transmitted in tainted food and water, research over the past 16 months supports the role aerosols play in spreading the pandemic virus.

That's led to official recommendations for public masking and other infection-control strategies. But, even those came after aerosol scientists lobbied for more-stringent measures to minimize risk.

Morawska and a colleague published an open letter backed by 239 scientists last July requesting authorities endorse additional precautions, such as increasing ventilation and avoiding recirculating potentially virus-laden air in buildings.

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# 6-step Aadhaar verification process deprives tribals of PDS benefits

Covid, economic crisis makes life that much tougher for the already vulnerable

SNV SUDHIR  
■ VIJAYAWADA

Field surveys and interviews in four Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) areas of Andhra Pradesh had revealed that thousands of tribal families have been excluded from the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the ongoing Covid induced pandemic situation has only increased their woes as economic activity slowed down.

The surveys revealed that introduction of a six-step verification process has turned to be a bane for these tribals.

“Our field survey was motivated by the observation that the number of ration cards declined by over 7,000 in ITDA areas following the introduction of the six-step verification process. We surveyed 32 families in 10 villages whose ration cards were cancelled due to the six-step verification process. Among them, 28 did not meet any exclusion criteria but were excluded for wrong reasons,” Chakradhar Budha of LibTech India told The Pioneer.

LibTech India, which is a team of engineers, social workers, and social scientists conducted field study in villages from two mandals, followed by telephonic interviews with people from 50 Gram Panchayats across four ITDAs of



Parvathipuram, Paderu, Rampachodavaram and Chintoor.

The interviewers included 23 volunteers, eight digital assistants and 19 Central Statistics Office (CSO) workers.

Chakradhar said that for instance Gangulamma, a resident of Pinalovasingi village, Luvasingi Panchayat, Gangaraju Madugula Mandal was excluded as she did not have an Aadhaar card.

Gangulamma had lost both her legs as a child. Until recently, the area was under Maoist control. Since the village has no roads, the villagers need to climb two hills and then cross a crocodile-infested stream to

reach a village called Balapam.

From Balapam they have to travel about 80 kilometres to reach the Aadhaar centre in Paderu. “This centre can serve a maximum of 50 people in a day. As such it is a matter of luck if the intended work happens as planned. As a village elder said, reaching the Aadhaar Centre from Pinalovasingi is like reaching the Moon. Now Gangulamma is without ration, pension, or for that matter, any other social welfare scheme,” Chakradhar said.

Similarly, one Vantala Balanna of Paderu ITDA name has been excluded as it was shown he was owing a four

wheeler. Balanna belongs to the Kondh tribe, which is classified by the government as a particularly vulnerable tribe. He was denied a ration card because he failed the six-step validation which recorded that he owns a four-wheeler.

“His fellow villagers wondered how a person can own a four-wheeler in their village that has no roads. The gram volunteers and villagers are ready to testify that Balanna doesn't own any four-wheeler. However, the village secretary at staff said that the problem will not be resolved unless Balanna visits the transport office in Visakhapatnam and changes his online status in that

office. This is an unreasonable expectation given that the burden of proof is being transferred from the government to the victim who has to spend Rs1,000 for a visit just to say that he does not have a four-wheeler,” Chakradhar said.

The interviews and the field study indicate that there are significant errors in the six-step process leading to the exclusion from the PDS thousands of families. In addition, there are families who had no ration cards even before the verification process. Finally, there are those who are eligible for a separate ration card but are attached to their extended families.

“Thankfully, by every indication most people are already covered by the PDS in ITDA. If one were to extrapolate from the state government's Saksham survey, there were 35,000 more families in the survey compared to the number of ration cards in all ITDAs. One can reasonably assume that it represents the higher end of exclusion from the PDS and exclusion is likely to be in the range of 7,000-35,000,” said another member of the LibTech team.

The team felt that while the proportion of people excluded is not high, the numbers are worth paying special attention to in the context of the worsening pandemic.

## Raju-backers should be exposed, say YSRCP MPs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP MPs on Monday opined that a detailed investigation would expose the conspirators and instigators behind MP Kanumuru Raghu Rama Krishnam Raju. Speaking to the media here on Monday, the ruling party leaders strongly condemned all those extending their support to the arrested MP.

MP PV Midhun Reddy said that TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu was behind Raju's actions, stating that under the former chief minister's directions, the rebel MP played the drama of being assaulted by the police, soon after his bail plea was rejected.

He said that Naidu has been using Raju's family for politicising things and did not make such remarks or rush in with a letter even when TDP leaders were arrested.

There is no rule that says an MP could not be arrested. The YSRCP MPs clarified that they can inform the Speaker during the Parliamentary session.

Midhun Reddy refuted Raju's accusations that he was beaten up by the CID police in custody and clarified that the doctors have reported to the court that no such thing happened and there were no injuries either.

He said that Raju was enacting such dramas to play the victim and avoid going to jail. Midhun Reddy stated that it was not right for Raju to ask for

## Raju's family apprehends threat to his life, alleges TDP MLC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam Party MLC Buddha Venkanna on Monday accused the ruling YSRCP leaders of wrongfully blaming Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu when an MP of their own party was exposing the irregularities and anti-people policies of their Government in AP.

Venkanna demanded the YSRCP to explain why the family members of an MP of their own party apprehended danger to his life from their own Government.

Addressing a press conference here, the TDP leader said even the fears expressed by the MP's family over threat to his life were also being politicised. The family members of even YSRCP MPs would also express similar concerns if the same treat-

ment were to be meted out to them, he said.

Venkanna said that the YSRCP was suffering from the Naidu phobia. “Day and night, Ministers and the YSRCP MLAs are chanting the name of the TDP chief non-stop. The people of the State know well which leaders and which political party is capable of ‘murder politics’, vendetta killings and casteist harassment,” he said.

Naidu had never resorted to such nasty political games. Venkanna added that with 14 years experience as a Chief Minister and 40 years in public life, Naidu was still fighting for the cause of saving the people.

“As a responsible Opposition party, the TDP would continue its agitation to protect the State's interests from the atrocious regime,” he said.



Syed Aleem, president, Muslim Development Society and Abdul Aleem handing over 250 ready to use Oxygen Cans to Krishna district Collector A MD Imtiaz at collector camp office on Monday.

## 200th Kisan Rail sets off for Delhi with Nuzvid mangoes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

South Central Railways' 200th Kisan Rail on Monday departed from Nuzvid railway station with 260 tonnes of mangoes for transportation to Adarsh Nagar in Delhi.

It took 187 days to transport the first 100 Kisan Rails from SCR, the next 100 Kisan Rails were transported in just 63 days. Overall, a total of 65,962 tonnes of agricultural produce has been transported by these Kisan Rails from different locations of the zone.

These trains have been started across three states over zone covering Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

A wide variety of commodities have been transported including watermelons, bananas, tomato, onion,



grapes, carrot, turmeric (dry) and mangoes among others. Simultaneously, these trains have also helped in transporting the agricultural commodities to different places spread over the country like Adarsh Nagar in New Delhi, New Guwahati, Malda Town, Agartala, Fatuha, Barasat and New Jalpaiguri among others.

The “Operation Greens - TOP to Total” scheme introduced by the Union Ministry of Food Processing Industries, this has become the most economical mode of transportation, wherein the agricultural farmers and traders receive 50 percent freight concession on their commodities being transported through Kisan Rails.

## TDP demands special Covid package for AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telugu Desam Party on Monday accused the Jaganmohan Reddy Government of ‘ignoring’ Covid preventive measures in Andhra Pradesh eventually leading to the State standing in the second place with regard to severity of the second wave infections.

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday discussed the prevailing Covid situation and came out with several demands to provide relief to the people.

The TDP supremo demanded the AP Government to follow in the footsteps of other States like Kerala. An urgent special package should be announced for the rescue of the people of AP from the epidemic impact, he said.

The TDP leaders pointed out that the Kerala Government was supplying over 16 items free of cost and was also giving Rs 6,000 financial assistance to each family. Likewise, the YSRCP Government should also announce its support for the AP people, they said.

The TDP meeting discussed the issue of the AP Government spending far meagre funds on Covid preventive and treatment measures when compared to other States. There were many doubts among the public and the Government should release a white paper on its spendings on the Covid-related measures.

The State was getting stuck in a deepening crisis because of the lopsided priorities of the current regime, they said.

## TTD employees to get tokens for second dose of Covaxin

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam employees who were yet to have a second dose of Covaxin would be vaccinated on Tuesday and Wednesday by TMC officials.

The TMC has prepared the list of TTD employees who had the first dose. The employees who have completed the appropriate time to have a second dose would get a phone call from the TMC authorities.

## VRO lands in ACB trap for taking bribe

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

ACB sleuths on Monday nabbed Debarika Abaddam, VRO, Thatiguda Cluster, I/c Bondapalli Cluster, Garividi Mandal, Vizianagaram, while he was accepting a bribe of Rs 3,000 to do an official favour. According to ACB officials, one Palla Seetharam, village volunteer from Siridevi village, Merakamudidam Mandal of Vizianagaram District lodged a complaint stating that Abaddam demanded

Rs 3,000 to issue new Pattadar Passbook and 1B of agricultural land of the complainant's father. The accused officer insisted the complainant pay Rs 1,000 as advance.

A trap was laid on Monday against the accused officer Abaddam and he was caught red-handed at the office of the MRO, Garividi while he further demanded and accepted the balance bribe amount of Rs 2,000.

Abaddam was arrested and produced before court.

## Land re-survey programme starts in Nuzvid

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Stating that the Jagananna Sashvatha Buhakku scheme would provide a permanent solution to land disputes, Nuzvid sub-collector Prathista Mangain, along with MLA Kokkilagadda Rakshanandhi, on launched the Jagananna Sashvatha Buhakku scheme through drones.

On the occasion, the sub-collector said that the land re-survey work in Nuzvid division was in progress and during the past two years, a land records clearance programme was underway.

The land records have been cleared and survey teams have taken the land records to the field level and re-surveyed the lands by GPS-enabled drones.

The survey is being conducted under the guidance of the National Survey Department. The re-survey programme will be carried out on agricultural lands, lands in rural and urban areas.

He said that with the current survey programme, the problems related to land surveys in joint families, undivided assets will be resolved. The staff had been imparted train-

ing on modern technology to expedite the land re-survey programme, said sub-collector Prathista.

MLA Rakshanandhi said that through Jagananna Sashvatha Buhakku scheme, transparent land records were possible. For the first time in the country, a land re-survey programme has been launched in the state in a big way. The MLA said that the land re-survey programme was carried out by drone in Munukulla, Vamakuntla, Mustikuntla, Chintalapadu and Rolupadi villages in Nuzvid division.



## O<sub>2</sub> cylinders, concentrators presented to DGP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Gannavaram MLA Vallabha neni Vamsi, along with Ramesh Jain, the General Manager of Modular Private Limited and CEO of RRHED Pulipati Kennedy presented 25 oxygen cylinders, 10 oxygen concentrators and 25,000 N-95 masks to DGP Gautam Sawang at the DGP office here on Monday in recognition of selfless services of the police department.

The DGP thanked them for their gesture to support the police during this pandemic-induced crisis.

Director-General Railways Dwaraka Tirumala Rao, ADG Law and Order Ravi Sankar Anyannar, ADG Training Sanjay, P and L I-G Nagendra Kumar, Law and order DIG Rajasekhar Babu, Welfare OSD Ramakrishna, SP of Krishna district Ravindra Babu and others were present.

## MPEDA's mud crab hatchery tech granted patent

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In an impressive milestone in India's aquaculture sector, MPEDA-RGCA's mud crab hatchery technology, the only one of its kind in the country, has been granted patent by the Controller General of Patent, Design and TradeMarks, of Government of India, for 20 years from 2011 to 2030.

The hatchery technology for mud crab, a much in demand species in South East Asian countries where live crabs are highly preferred as a delectable seafood, has been developed by the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Aquaculture (RGCA), the research and development arm of the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA).

MPEDA chairman KS Srinivas said it was a remarkable achievement in the history of Indian aquaculture as for

the first time the Central Government has granted a patent for this technology in the country.

“It will go a long way in meeting the seed requirement of farmers who intend to undertake diversified species for aquaculture instead of concentrating on shrimp farming alone. MPEDA is dedicating this achievement to the aquaculture farmers of the country for their support and to the young scientists of RGCA who have worked tirelessly to achieve this morale-boosting feat,” added Srinivas, who is also president of RGCA.

Taking into account that there is no other hatchery for mud crab in India, RGCA had applied for patent right for the mud crab hatchery technology in 2011 with the Controller General of Patent, Design and Trade Marks.

The patent was granted after



following a long arduous process. Various research institutions in the world discussed the matter with renowned experts, who referred various research references and held a string of meetings with RGCA's scientists with facts and figures. After ascertaining the various issues, it was finally decided to grant the patent right to the hatchery technology of

MPEDA-RGCA for 20 years, which is unique in India.

Keeping in view the huge demand of mud crab, especially in South East Asian countries, MPEDA had initiated a pilot project for mud crab seed (known as crab-instar) production during 2004 and subsequently made the commercial hatchery for the first time in India during 2013 with the

capacity of one million per annum. Due to its growing demand, the seed production capacity of RGCA's mud crab hatchery has been increased to 1.4 million per annum.

Dr Emilia T. Quinitio, an eminent scientist from Aquaculture Division of International Institute known as Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC), Philippines, had extended the consultancy service till 2013 to RGCA. Since then, the technology has been standardised by the RGCA's scientists within a short span of period.

The MPEDA chairman said the major achievement lies in increasing the survival rate of crab instar from three percent world record to seven percent.

Further, the hatchery unit is designed in such a manner that all sections are under one roof

with complete bio-security measures. So far, 7.28 million seeds have been produced and supplied to 659 farmers across the country.

RGCA has been set up to give a fillip to commercialisation of diversified aquaculture species such as sea bass, mud crab, Genetically Improved Farmed Tilapia (GIFT), cobia, pompano and artemia. It focuses on increasing India's marine products export by producing and supplying good quality seeds, which is a prime input for aquaculture.

“We would like to thank the Department of Commerce and Department of Fisheries of the Central Government besides the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for their continued support to MPEDA-RGCA for implementation of projects for promotion of diversified aquaculture in India,” Srinivas said.



**Suresh Babu appointed Endowments RJC**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The state government on Monday has issued orders appointing former executive officer of Kanakadurga temple, Vijayawada MV Suresh Babu as Regional Joint Commissioner, Endowments department Rajahmundry.

Revenue (Endowments) principal secretary Dr G Vani Mohan has issued orders to this effect on Monday. Suresh Babu had been waiting for posting ever since he was removed as the Kanakadurga temple EO. He will relieve V Trinadha Rao who was serving as Joint Commissioner and Executive Officer, Sri Veera Venkata Satyanarayana Swamy Vari Devasthanam, Annavaram, East Godavari district.

Earlier the State government removed Suresh Babu from duties following ACB and Vigilance raids which brought to light several lapses at Kanakadurga temple.



# Renovation of Peddapuram oxygen plant at brisk pace

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The renovation of the oxygen generation plant at Peddapuram which was not functional over the years was now going at a brisk pace. The APIIC has closed the plant in 2014 following some technical issues. Vedanta and Megha Engineering companies came forward to renovate the plant.

Joint Collector Laxmi Shah, ITDA PO Praveen Aditya and other district officials visited the plant on Monday and interacted with the engineers of Megha Engineering. In a bid to increase the oxygen capacity required for the Covid victims in the district, the revival of the oxygen plant was taken up using technology from various organisations.

As part of it, the government would be collaborating with Vedanta and Megha Engineering companies to renovate the plant. The officials were making arrangements to provide power and water to the plant.

JC Lakshmi Shah said the plant would provide additional oxygen supply to about 400 patients every day. It was estimated that 480 oxygen cylinders per day would be produced at the Peddapuram plant as well as the Rajahmundry paper mill.



## Oxygen supply system improved in EG: JC

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Dr G Lakshmi Shah, Joint Collector (Revenue), East Godavari District, on Monday said that oxygen supplies to the government and private Covid hospitals were improving and efforts were being made to strengthen the medical oxygen supply system to meet the growing demand on a daily basis. On Monday, the Joint Collector visited the Sri Chalapathi Gases (SCG) plant which was producing 20 kiloliters of oxygen per day at Ramanayapeta in Kakinada. He inspected the facilities for the unloading, storage and refilling process at the plant. The Joint Collector said the oil companies Slambargar and ONGC which



were serving the people under corporate social responsibility (CSR) had come forward and donated the mobile oxygen tanks in view of the Covid 19 spike. With their support, the medical oxygen supply system was improved, he added. He further said that as per the instructions

by the Collector, an action plan has been drawn up and was being implemented to get the maximum benefit from the tankers. Kakinada Municipal Corporation Additional Commissioner CH Nagnarasimha Rao and District Environment department General Manager, B Srinivas were also present.



Dr Veerapaneni Yallamanda Rao

## Ex-MLA finds fault with report by docs on Raju

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Former MLA of Vinukonda Dr Veerapaneni Yalamanda Rao has come down heavily on the three government hospital doctors who conducted medical tests on Narasapuram MP Raghurama Krishnam Raju and submitted a report to the court stating he was not beaten in the custody. They tarnished the image of the medical profession, he remarked. The report they submitted to the court on Sunday said Raju has no injuries on his person though his leg was swollen and the soles were blackened. It was cruel to say that there were no injuries, he lamented. A common man could guess that the bruises which were made with a sharp weapon or beaten with a stick, he alleged. He also accused the three doctors of succumbing to pressures. It was not appropriate to express this kind of report by the three such highly educated physicians. Dr Veerapaneni demanded that the medical degrees of the three doctors should be cancelled.

# Villagers take initiative to set up Covid-19 Care Centre

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The people of a tiny village in East Godavari district have come forward voluntarily to set up a Covid Care Centre with 30-beds as part of Rural Health Mission. The 30-bedded Covid centre was getting ready at Gollalamamidada village in Pedapudi mandal of East Godavari district. Anaparti MLA Dr Satti Satyanarayana Reddy extended his helping hand to the people to realise their crusade.

With the slogan 'Help each other', the villagers evinced interest to set up the Covid centre in the wake of the surge in cases in the rural areas. S Sivanarayana Reddy, a local senior journalist and former physical director took the initiative to save the village from the corona pandemic. On persuasion, the local elders donated Rs 50 lakh. They decided to establish a 30-bedded Covid care centre at a health centre affiliated to the Rural Health Mission and raised funds.

Taking support from the MLA, they completed the Covid centre and it was going operational shortly. The MLA praised the efforts of the villagers and asked the District Collector to provide the necessary assistance what the government could do.

Lauding the efforts of the villagers, Collector D Muralidhar Reddy appointed Joint Collector (Welfare) G



Rajakumari as the nodal officer for setting up the Covid Care Center. Currently, things were going smoothly under her supervision. In

the next two days, the first Covid Care Center completely set up by villagers in the state would be available.

Now intending to see the village as a Covid-free village, all the villagers started wearing masks, observing social distance and taking care not to let outsiders into the village.

An ambulance has also been set up at the Covid Care Center to make it available. MLA Shivannarayana Reddy said that the Covid centre would provide the necessary oxygen and oxygen concentrators for treatment. He told 'The Pioneer' that the patients were being provided food and also to their relatives.

# No impact of partial lockdown to contain corona pandemic

S BHANU PRAKASH ■ TIRUPATI

Despite the imposition of partial lockdown since ten days, the Covid situation in Chittoor district remained grim with 1,621 fresh cases reported on Monday. The cases continued to surge even after the partial lockdown restrictions with an average of 1600 to 2500 new Covid cases a day. The total infections reported during the last ten days were 24,784 since the imposition of lockdown. Incidentally, the tally of cases reported before the partial lockdown were lesser than after the partial lockdown.

It was attributed to overcrowding at vaccination and test centres, vegetable markets and provision shops with people openly flouting Covid norms and also the absence of proper monitoring by the health department. The persons who were in home isolation with Covid symptoms were seen moving around, putting others at risk.

"We witness a huge rush at the wine shops and at supermarkets, people are not even wearing masks are pushing each other in the shops and queue lines of the marts and many people tested positive are wandering freely in Tirupati putting others at risk," Mohan a resident of Tiruchanoor observed.

"Hectic movement of people and vehicles is seen during 6 to 12 am. The shops are overcrowded and after 12 noon



also people are roaming out ignoring the partial lockdown norms and the concept of physical distance has gone to wind at market places," resident of Kennedy Nagar A Malathi maintained.

The partial lockdown was not so effective to curb coronavirus as the daily spike of the Covid cases were on the rise. Doctors worried that the patients were resorting to self-medication. "Some people are simply following the medication prescribed to other Covid patients. It is not advisable and it may be fatal sometimes. They are approaching doctors at the eleventh hour when they encountered breathing problem," Dr Maheshnath, a physician commented.

The Indrapriyadarshini vegetable market which was shut down by the municipal authorities in the wake of the surge in Covid cases was opened for the

public. It was alleged that the police personnel were not so serious in implementing the curfew guidelines as they were not showing measures as they did during the first wave of the corona pandemic. However, the police claimed that they booked 9,121 cases and collected fines to the tune of Rs 36.37 lakh for violating Covid restrictions.

It was clear that the partial lockdown has not shown any impact in curbing the virus in the district. Daily Covid cases were surging and fatalities were soaring high. Corpses piled up at the crematoriums and burial grounds and relatives were waiting for hours together for the last rites. According to the medical officials, the district has 25,000 active cases and only 2000 oxygen beds are available for the Covid victims.

## 100-bed Covid centre opened

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Education Adimulapu Suresh on Monday inaugurated 100-bedded Covid Care Centre established with German sheds at Markapur Area Hospital in Prakasam District.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Suresh said the government was taking all steps to eradicate the dreaded Covid virus and prevention of Covid would be possible if the people extended their cooperation. The District Collector Pola Bhaskar, Markapuram and Giddalur MLAs Nagarjuna Reddy and Rambabu and RDO Seshi Reddy and others participated in the programme.

## COMBATING VIRUS



Minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy inspecting a vaccination centre in Ongole city on Monday.

# 18 more health centres sanctioned: Sucharita



Minister for Home Mekathoti Sucharita laying foundation stone for the YSR Urban Primary Health Center (UPHC) to be constructed at Nallapadu in Guntur district on Monday.

PNS ■ GUNTUR

A total of 18 more new health centres were sanctioned in Nallapadu, Reddypalem, Ethukurru, Swarnabharati Nagar and Choudavaram in the Pratipadu Assembly constituency, Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharita has said.

The Minister on Monday laid the foundation stone for the YSR Urban Primary Health Center (UPHC) to be constructed at Nallapadu in Guntur at an estimated cost of about Rs 80 lakh. Speaking on the occasion, the Home Minister said that tenders were completed for 14 buildings and the foundation stone was being laid. Similarly, Rs

## Rs 10 lakh has been sanctioned for each health centre for repairs to old buildings, she said

10 lakh has been sanctioned for each health centre for repairs to old buildings, she added.

The event was attended by city mayor Shivanaga Manohar Naidu, Municipal Commissioner Anuradha, division corporator Challa Rajyalakshmi, YCP leaders Venkatappa Reddy, Yogeshwara Reddy and others were present.

## Bomala Srinivas takes charge as PRO of VMC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Bomala Srinivas was appointed as Public Relations Officer (PRO) for Vijayawada Municipal Corporation. Srinivas took charge as PRO at the corporation office here on Monday.

Srinivas has vast experience as a journalist as he worked in several vernacular dailies and television channels.

He also served as a Public Relations Officer for Minister for Endowments Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao for two years. Several journalists greeted him on his appointment as PRO.



# Black fungus case detected in Tenali

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The outbreak of Mucormycosis also known as black fungus caused serious concern in Guntur district as a woman from Sultanabad was diagnosed with black fungus symptoms in Tenali.

The doctors said the patients who recovered from the corona pandemic were

infected with black fungus. The woman Malleswari and her husband Bhadraraj have recently recovered from the corona infection.

She noticed symptoms of black fungus and her eyes enveloped black circles and one eye was closed.

She was diagnosed with black fungus after she consulted the doctors.

# Health officials order to stop distribution

## AYURVEDIC DRUG FOR CORONA?

PNS ■ NELLORE

The medical and health officials on Monday ordered to stop the distribution of Ayurvedic medicine which was widely publicized in Nellore district for the past five days that it would cure the coronavirus.

Bonigi Anandaiah, a resident of Krishnapatnam village in Muthukur mandal of Nellore district was distributing Ayurvedic medicines free of cost to corona patients. Coronavirus medicine has become popular in a short period due to the positive results. Even the people who tested positive for the corona and the patients suffering from depleting oxygen levels were also recovering after using the drug, the villagers said.

However, some medical experts have raised objections over the distribution of the drug suspecting it as foul play. Acting on the directives of District Collector Chakradhara Babu,



District Medical Officer Rajalakshmi, District Gram Panchayat Officer Dhanalakshmi, Rural DSP Harinath Reddy and other health officials, visited Krishnapatnam and prevented people from distributing the medicines on

Monday.

It was suggested that the distribution of the drug should be discontinued until it was proved scientifically. The police dispersed the people with the help of volunteers while Anandaiah and his men were distributing the

**Even the people who tested positive for the corona and the patients suffering from depleting oxygen levels were also recovering after using the drug, the villagers said**

drug. The health officials spoke to the people and convinced them not to use the drug till it was proved scientifically. The people who have taken the Ayurvedic drug claimed that the medicine given by Anandaiah was giving good result.

# SP alerts police personnel over increasing corona threat

PNS ■ ONGOLE

As part of the implementation of ten principles, district Superintendent of Police Siddharth Kaushal conducted a review meeting with the officers and staff of all the police wings in the district on the precautions to be taken during corona.

The SP addressed the gathering about the conditions related to Covid and other aspects through a Zoom video conference from the district police headquarters. As many as 3,950 police personnel from senior rank officers to home

guards and other staff from all the wings across the district along with 950 village women protection secretaries attended the conference virtually.

The SP said that the services of Covid Care Center were expanded to village women protection secretaries and central police forces in the district along with police personnel, officers and their family members of all the wings. The CCC has been providing free CT scans and Covid related tests for police personnel and police families enrolled at the Covid Care Center, he added.





Pinarayi Vijayan Cabinet to have 21 ministers  
PNS ■ THIRUVANATHAPURAM

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

# Cyclone: Maha CM reviews situation; 12K evacuated

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday took stock of the situation in Mumbai, Thane and other coastal districts of the state in the wake of the cyclonic storm Tauktae. According to an official statement, 12,420 people living in coastal stretches of Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg and Raigad districts have been shifted to safer places. These include 8,380 people in Raigad, 3,896 in Ratnagiri and 144 in Sindhudurg. Thackeray reviewed the situation in Mumbai, Thane and neighbouring areas and instructed authorities to ensure that the treatment of COVID-19 patients in the region is not affected due to the cyclonic storm, the statement said. A red alert has been issued for Raigad district, while an orange alert has been issued for



Mumbai, Thane and Palghar, it said. A red alert is sounded for rainfall of over 20 cm and an orange alert is for rain between 6 cm and 20 cm. Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar visited the disaster management cell at the state secretariat here and took stock of the relief work. He asked administrations of all coastal districts of the state to remain alert. Pawar spoke to the collectors

of Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, Raigad, Thane, Palghar, Mumbai (city), Mumbai (suburbs) and Brihanmumbai Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal over phone to assess the relief works and preparations in view of the cyclonic storm. Cyclone Tauktae, which has now intensified into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm", is likely to reach Gujarat coast by Monday evening and cross the state coast between 8 pm and 11 pm, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Gusty winds and rains lashed Mumbai and its neighbouring areas overnight and on Monday morning as the cyclonic storm was heading towards Gujarat, officials said. Trees were uprooted at several places in Mumbai, they said, adding that no casualty was reported so far.

# Arrest of WB ministers in Narada case illegal: Speaker

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee on Monday dubbed as illegal the arrest of two Bengal ministers and others in the Narada case, contending that the CBI action on the basis of the governor's sanction was unlawful. "I have not received any letter from the CBI nor has anybody sought permission from me as per the protocol," Banerjee said. The central probe agency on Monday morning arrested ministers Firdaus Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, TMC MLA Madan Mitra as well as former minister Sovan Chatterjee in connection with the Narada sting case in which politicians were purportedly caught taking money on camera. Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar had recently granted sanction to prosecute all the four leaders, following which the CBI finalised its charge sheet and



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

moved to arrest them. "I do not know for what unknown reason they went to the governor and sought his sanction. The chair of the speaker was not vacant at that time, I was very much in office. "This sanction is absolutely illegal and arresting anyone on the basis of this sanction is also illegal," Banerjee claimed.



# PM speaks to Uddhav on Tauktae cyclone situation in Maha

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday on the Cyclone Tauktae related situation in the state, official sources said. The cyclonic storm over the Arabian Sea led to very strong winds blowing at a speed of 114 kmph in Mumbai on Monday afternoon, civic officials said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said that Cyclone Tauktae has now intensified into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm". It is likely to reach Gujarat coast by Monday evening and cross the state coast between 8 pm and 11 pm, the IMD said. Modi had on Saturday reviewed the preparedness to deal with the cyclone's fallout in a high-level meeting which was attended by several ministries and agencies concerned.

# Rajnath reviews Covid relief efforts of Armed Forces

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday reviewed efforts of the Armed Forces, defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs) and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in India's fight against a severe wave of the coronavirus pandemic. At a video conference, Singh was briefed about specific initiatives of the three forces as well as other wings of the Defence Ministry in helping civilian authorities deal with the crisis. The meeting was attended by Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat, Army Chief Gen MM Naravane, Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh, Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria and DRDO Chairman G Satheesh Reddy, among others. "Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh chairing a meeting of secretaries, CDS, service chiefs and Ministry of Defence officials via video conferencing to review the actions taken by the ministry and armed forces in India's fight against COVID-19



pandemic," Singh's office tweeted. Officials said the contribution of the DPSUs and other agencies of the Defence Ministry to the country's fight against the pandemic was also reviewed. In responding to the crisis, the Indian Army and the Indian Navy have set up a number of hospitals in various states for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. On its part, the Indian Air Force deployed a significant number of its transport aircraft to bring cryogenic oxygen tanks and other emergency medical supplies from several countries, including Singapore, Thailand and United Arab Emirates. The Indian Navy also deployed nine warships to bring filled oxygen containers to India from countries in the Gulf region and Southeast Asia. Last month, Singh granted emergency financial powers to the three services to allow formation commanders to establish and operate hospitals as well as quarantine facilities for COVID-19 patients. The emergency powers have been granted initially for a period of three months from May 1 to July 31 and are in addition to the similar powers delegated to the medical officers of the armed forces last week.

# 2 militants killed in J&K encounter

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

Two unidentified militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in Srinagar district in Jammu and Kashmir on Monday, police said. Security forces launched a cordon and search operation in Khonmoh area, in the outskirts of the city, following information about the presence of militants there, the police said. The search operation turned into an encounter after militants opened fire towards security forces positions, they said. Two militants were killed in the ensuing gunfight, the police said, adding that the identity and group affiliation of the slain militants was being ascertained.

# INDIA CORNER

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

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



# Leaders have no business to hoard Covid medicines: HC

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

# HC dismisses plea to convert CNG cylinders for transporting oxygen

The Delhi High Court on Monday declined to entertain a plea seeking conversion of CNG cylinder cascades for storage and transportation of oxygen, saying the issue falls in the policy making domain of the government. A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said conversion of CNG cylinder cascades, a bunch of cylinders, would require formulation of detailed policy by the Centre by also keeping in mind the feasibility and practicality of such a project. The court also noted that in a similar matter before another bench, the central government had said that it was not technically possible to convert CNG cylinder cascades for storing and transporting oxygen. "We, therefore, see no reason to entertain the petition. The writ petition is dismissed," the court said. The order came on a plea by a company which claimed to be an expert in testing of CNG cylinders.



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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Around 91,500 people have recovered from COVID-19 in Delhi in the last one week as compared to 70,000 infections detected during the period, according to government data. The number of cumulative cases increased from 13.23 lakh on May 9 to 13.93 lakh on May 16. Recoveries rose from 12.17 lakh to 13.09 lakh during the period. The number of recoveries has been greater than the number of infections since May 8, the data revealed. Delhi reported 9,706 recoveries on Sunday, 11,592 on Saturday, 14,140 on Friday, 15,189 on Thursday, 14,071 on Wednesday, 13,583 on Tuesday and 13,306 on



Monday. It registered 6,456 coronavirus cases on Sunday, 6,430 cases on Saturday, 8,506 on Friday, 10,489 on Thursday, 13,287 on Wednesday, 12,481 on Tuesday and 12,651 on Monday. The number of active cases in the capital have also reduced from 85,258 on May 10 to 62,783 during the period. On April 28, Delhi had 99,752 active cases, the maximum since the pandemic

began ravaging countries. The capital reported 1,843 fatalities due to the virus in the last one week -- 263 deaths a day on an average. The toll rose from 19,663 on May 10 to 21,506 to May 16. The national capital had 262 deaths on Sunday, 337 on Saturday, 289 on Friday, 308 on Thursday, 300 on Wednesday, 347 on Tuesday and 319 on Monday. The highest number of 448 deaths was reported on May 3. On Sunday, Delhi recorded a positivity rate of 10.40 per cent, the lowest since April 11. It was 11.32 per cent on Saturday, 12.4 per cent on Friday, 14.24 per cent on Thursday, 17 per cent on Wednesday, 17.8 per cent on Tuesday and 19.10 percent on Monday.

# Fire breaks out in Delhi building

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Five members of a family were rescued safely after a fire broke out in the basement of the two-storey building in which they live in Delhi's Dwarka Mor area, officials said on Monday. A call about the fire was received at 1:24 am on Monday and six fire tenders were rushed to the spot, the fire officials said. Two cars and as many two-wheelers in the building's parking lot in the basement caught fire. Five people were rescued from the first floor of the building and the fire was brought under control by 2:30 am, said Atul Garg, director, Delhi Fire Services.

# Railways reaches milestone of carrying 10k tonnes of O2

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The railways has reached the milestone of carrying 10,000 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen on Monday morning, Railway Board Chairman Suneet Sharma said. The service started on April 19 from Mumbai and it now covers 13 states. "We reached the milestone of carrying 10,000 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen on Monday morning on Oxygen Express... Oxygen Express delivered oxygen to 13 states," Sharma said. The railways also said that on the day Cyclone Tauktae is expected to hit Gujarat, the rail-



ways carried more than 150 tonnes of oxygen which is more than the average of 134 tonnes being logged since 20 days. The Western Railway carried 137 tonnes of the life-saving gas on Sunday and 151 tonnes on Monday from Gujarat to various parts of the country, it said. The WR started carrying oxygen tankers from April 25 and it is carrying an average of 134 tonnes oxygen daily.

# Delhi airport to shut T2 terminal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi international airport will shut down its T2 terminal from Monday midnight as the number of flights have reduced significantly due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, sources said. From Monday midnight, all flights will be handled at the T3 terminal only, they stated. Currently, the Delhi airport is handling around 325 flights per day, they mentioned. Before the pandemic, it used to handle around 1,500 flights per day. The

sources said average passenger traffic at the Delhi airport was around 1.15 lakh per day in February, which has reduced to around 30,000 per day right now due to the second wave. The Delhi airport's decision has come at a time when India and its aviation sector has been badly hit by the second wave. During the last few weeks, the number of daily domestic air passengers in India have come down from more than 2.2 lakh to around 75,000 right now, according to the Civil Aviation Ministry's data.

# Biomarkers can diagnose viral infections

PNS ■ BENGALURU

An Indian Institute of Science (IISc) study has identified a set of molecular biomarkers that can be used in the differential diagnosis of acute bacterial and viral infections. These biomarkers are different messenger RNA (mRNA) molecules found in the blood; differences in their levels can detect and predict with high probability if an infection is viral or bacterial, Bengaluru-based IISc said. The current COVID-19 pandemic is a grim testimony to the damage an infectious disease can cause to human health and welfare. A major challenge in treating such diseases is misdiagnosis, which can lead to trial-and-error treatments, and improper use of antibiotics.



Identifying the correct type of infection is therefore critical. The human body responds to bacterial and viral infections differently. It produces different types of molecules - such as proteins and RNA - in the blood, depending on the type of infection. While antibiotics can treat bacterial infections, they are ineffective against viral infections. However, indiscriminate use of antibiotics to treat any kind of infection has given rise to bacterial strains that are now resistant to our entire arsenal of antibiotics, an IISc statement noted. "Antibiotics are given even for viral infections in some cases because of misdiagnosis. With current methods, it can take a lot

of time to test for bacterial or viral infections," explains first author Sathyabharathi Ravichandran, Research Associate in the lab of Nagasuma Chandra, Professor at the Department of Biochemistry. A quick method to detect acute viral and bacterial infections and distinguish between them can be immensely useful in the clinic, as accurate diagnosis will win half the battle and guide the clinician towards the optimal treatment path, the statement said. It will also prevent the rise of such antimicrobial resistance. In the new study, published in the journal 'EBioMedicine', the IISc researchers have developed such a test using patient blood transcriptomes and sophisticated computational modelling.

# Satav's last rites performed at native place in Maharashtra

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





## Ready, go?

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

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

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



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

AP

## Stop the cruelty

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

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

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

# India is very much a democracy

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



PRAFULL GORADIA

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

of the Egyptians and brought them to Judea.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### TIME TO STAND UNITED

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

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

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

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

### ENSURE SAFE CREMATIONS

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

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

## Let's not be hesitant



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

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

### ARE THE PEOPLE COMPLACENT?

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

and vaccines.

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

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

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

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

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

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

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## SOUNDBITE

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



Delhi Deputy Chief Minister — Manish Sisodia



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

Czech President — Milos Zeman

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



Rocker, guitarist — Eric Clapton



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

Cricketer — Sachin Tendulkar

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



Model, actor — Milind Soman



FIRST COLUMN

INDIAN VIEWPOINT ON ISRAEL, PALESTINE

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



MARKANDEY KATJU

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

What do Indians think about all this?

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



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

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

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

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

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

# Rise of religions and decline of the West

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



SONAL SHUKLA

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Decline of the West:** The challenge

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

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

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

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

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



I WONDER HOW MANY WALLS OF DELHI THE POLICE HAS THOUGHT OF CLEANING, EXCEPT THOSE WHERE PM MODI IS CRITICISED.  
— ABHISHEK MANU SINGHVI  
CONGRESS LEADER

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

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

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

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



ORLY GOLDSCHMIDT

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

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



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

live in a place where there is no shelter?

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

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

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

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

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

peaceful days and for a brighter future.

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

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



# Sensex rallies 848 points; financial stocks sparkle



PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex zoomed over 848 points on Monday, driven by strong buying in banking shares amid a reduction in daily domestic COVID-19 caseload.

The 30-share BSE index ended 848.18 points or 1.74 per cent higher at 49,580.73, and the broader NSE Nifty soared 245.35 points or 1.67 per cent to 14,923.15.

IndusInd Bank was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying over 7 per cent, followed by SBI, ICICI Bank, HDFC twins, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv and UltraTech Cement.

On the other hand, L&T, Bharti Airtel, Nestle India, Sun Pharma and PowerGrid were among the laggards.

According to Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities, domestic equities witnessed strong rebound as

robust Q4 FY21 earnings and early sign of decline in second wave of daily caseload bolstered investors' confidence.

"A consistent reduction in COVID-19 daily caseload, which fell below 3 lakh on Sunday, certainly augurs well for markets. It indicates that prediction of receding second wave of COVID-19 by the end of May or mid of June holds true and adverse impact of second wave should not be felt beyond Q1 FY22," he said.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai and Hong Kong ended on a positive note, while Tokyo and Seoul were in the red.

Stock exchanges in Europe were trading on a negative note in mid-session deals.

Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.06 per cent higher at USD 68.75 per barrel.



## Rupee rises by 7 paise to 73.22 against dollar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee rose for the second straight session on Monday to close 7 paise higher at 73.22 (provisional) against the US dollar on the back of positive domestic equities and weak American currency.

At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened at 73.24 and hit an intra-day high of 73.16 and a low of 73.26. The local unit finally settled at 73.22, registering a gain of 7 paise over its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee had closed at 73.29 against the US dollar.

The domestic unit has appreciated 20 paise in the last two trading sessions.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Housing sales increased by 21 per cent while new supply declined 40 per cent year-on-year during January-March 2021 across seven major cities, according to data analytic firm PropEquity.

Housing demand in the April-June quarter is likely to be sluggish due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sales or absorption of housing units rose by 21 per cent across seven cities in the first quarter of the 2021 calendar year to 1,05,183 units as against 87,236 units in the year-ago period.

However, the new supply or launches of housing units fell 40 per cent to 59,737 units from 1,00,343 units.

Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Delhi-NCR and Pune saw a rise in housing sales, while Kolkata slipped by 20 per cent.



Samir Jasuja, founder and MD at PropEquity, said the first quarter of this calendar year was relatively better for Indian realty as compared to the last year.

"There was higher demand in ready to move in units and the projects nearing completion. However, the second wave of COVID will lead to muted demand going forward," he said.

Jasuja expects sales to pick up after the end of the second wave of COVID. According to the data, housing sales in

Bengaluru rose 13 per cent to 12,262 units in January-March 2021 from 10,878 units in the year-ago period.

Chennai saw a 29 per cent rise in sales at 5,055 units from 3,930 units, while Hyderabad witnessed a 16 per cent rise in demand to 10,964 units from 9,477 units.

In Maharashtra, housing sales in MMR grew 26 per cent to 41,323 units from 32,886 units, while Pune registered 31 per cent growth in demand at 25,252 units compared to 19,221 units.

## MONEY MATTERS

### Shilpa Medicare arm inks pact with Dr Reddy's

Drug firm Shilpa Medicare on Monday said its arm has entered into a definitive agreement with Dr Reddy's Laboratories for manufacturing of Russian COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V. "The company, via its wholly owned subsidiary Shilpa Biologicals Pvt Ltd (SBPL), has entered into a three year definitive agreement with Dr Reddy's Laboratories for production-supply of the Sputnik V vaccine from its integrated biologics R&D cum manufacturing center at Dharwad, Karnataka," Shilpa Medicare said in a regulatory filing.

The targeted production of the dual vector Sputnik V for the first 12 months is 50 million doses (50 million of component 1 and 50 million of component 2), from the date of start of commercial production, the company added. Shilpa Medicare said Dr Reddy's will facilitate the transfer of the sputnik technology to SBPL.

Under the agreement, SBPL will be responsible for manufacture of the vaccine, while Dr Reddy's is responsible for distribution/marketing of the vaccine in its marketing territories.



### HMSI extends warranty, free service till July 31

Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) on Monday said it has extended warranty and free service period till July 31, across all its dealerships in the country in the wake of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The extension is applicable to those customers, whose vehicle's free service, warranty and extended warranty was originally ending between April 1 and May 31, 2021, HMSI said in a statement. Reassuring customers facing restricted movement in several states, the company said it will support them to avail these services at their convenience at a later date before July 31, 2021, as lockdown eases.

As part of initiatives to support relief measures in the pandemic, Honda India Foundation (HIF), the corporate social responsibility arm of all Honda group firm in India, has pledged Rs 6.5 crore for five states -- Haryana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, UP and Gujarat. It includes setting-up of a 100-bed facility at Manesar, in Haryana and another facility at Tapukara in Rajasthan with a bed capacity of up to 100.



### Ashok Leyland lines up initiatives for employees

Hinduja group flagship Ashok Leyland on Monday said it has rolled out various employee-centric initiatives amid the coronavirus pandemic. The company said about 75 per cent of the 45-plus age group employees have been vaccinated so far against the infectious disease.

"Across age groups, 25 per cent have been vaccinated as we speak, this vaccination drive will continue with huge momentum," Ashok Leyland said in a statement.

The Chennai-based company noted that it has put up an emergency response team (ERT) in place which works round the clock to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of the employees. The commercial vehicle major said that COVID wardens -- employees in each location who along with their teams ensure that the safety protocols defined are adhered to strictly, have been instituted.



### Credit Suisse gives USD 1 million in COVID medical aid

Credit Suisse has extended USD 1 million (Rs 7.5 crore) to two non-profits to procure emergency drugs and other medical equipment in major cities to support India's fight against COVID-19 that has killed nearly 2.75 lakh people and infected about 2.5 crore so far. The funds will be utilised to procure critical medical supplies, oxygen concentrators, and ICU equipment in Mumbai, Pune, New Delhi and Bengaluru, the Swiss brokerage said in a note on Monday.

Last year, Credit Suisse had given Rs 4.5 crore (USD 6,00,000) grant to Concern India Foundation and United Way Mumbai to procure essential equipment at seven hospitals in Mumbai and Pune. The bank has also raised an additional Rs 2.8 crore through internal staff fundraising for GivelIndia's COVID response fund. The fresh funding will be extended to the Concern India Foundation and GivelIndia Foundation to procure critical medical supplies, as well as oxygen and ICU equipment for the COVID hospitals in Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, and Bengaluru.



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

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Even as new Covid infections have shown a declining trend, credit rating agency Crisil on Monday said it is "too early" to say that the second wave of the pandemic has peaked and flagged concerns over the vaccination drive.

After opening up the vaccination for all adults, the drive has suffered because availability of vaccines has become a "national bottleneck," the rating agency said in a report.

It said new cases touched 4.14 lakh on May 6, and have now declined to an average of 3.6 lakh a day for the week ended May 16.

The decline in new cases offers some respite, but, "it's too early to call a peak," the report noted. It also acknowledged that the new cases have fallen without a dip in testing numbers.

"India's Covid affliction curve has turned for the first time since the second wave began, with daily cases in the week ended May 16 falling 15 per cent sequentially," it said.

"While vaccination was opened to all adults two weeks back to battle the fierce second wave, vaccine availability has become a national bottleneck," it said. As a result of this, states have announced a temporary halt to their vaccination drive for the 18-44 age group and prioritised those in the 45 plus bracket, especially the second doses, it added.

# NEFT to remain unavailable on Sunday due to technical upgrade

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The popular National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) system for online transfer of funds will remain unavailable for 14 hours from Saturday mid-night till Sunday afternoon due technical upgrade, the Reserve Bank of India said on Monday.

National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) is a nationwide centralised payment system owned and operated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It is available round the clock availability on all days of the year.

A technical upgrade of NEFT, targeted to enhance the performance and resilience, is scheduled after the close of business of May 22, 2021, RBI said in a statement.

"Accordingly, NEFT service will not be available from



00:01 hrs to 14:00 hrs on Sunday, May 23, 2021. The RTGS system will continue to be operational as usual during this period," the RBI said.

The RBI has asked banks to inform their customers to plan their payment operations accordingly.

Similar technical upgrade for real-time gross settlement (RTGS) was completed on April 18, 2021.

RTGS facility is used for

high-value fund transfers. NEFT is also a near-real-time funds transfer facility. NEFT currently operates in batches on half-hourly intervals throughout the day.

Besides funds transfer, NEFT system is also used for a variety of transactions including payment of credit card dues to the card issuing banks, payment of loan EMI, and inward foreign exchange remittances, among others.



# AirAsia: Free rescheduling, cancellation for WB flights

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Budget carrier AirAsia India on Monday announced free cancellation and rescheduling for flights to and from West Bengal in the wake of a 15-day lockdown in the state.

A 15-day lockdown came into force in Bengal on Sunday, with the government putting in place a host of measures to curb the spread of Covid.

Further, the Bangalore-based private carrier said it was extending the similar facility, announced earlier for flights to

and from Karnataka, Delhi, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu as well for the current duration of the respective state lockdowns. While the lockdowns in Karnataka, Delhi and Tamil Nadu are in force till May 24, West Bengal will continue to be under lockdown till May 30, while in Maharashtra, it will last till June 1.

All AirAsia guests who booked their flights before the announcement of the lockdown can opt to cancel or change to another flight without incurring any change fees.

# LDB services extended to 9 SEZs across India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

announced extension of its LDB services at 9 major SEZ across India to improve last mile container visibility.

Major SEZs include Visakhapatnam, SEEPZ Mumbai, Surat, MEPZ Chennai, Cochin, Kandla, Noida, Mangalore and Dahej SEZ. With container tracking services now live at these locations, exporters and importers will be able to get near real-

time location information on container movement from ports to SEZs.

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

tify the bottlenecks and ease their operations. Last mile container visibility stands inline with NLDS' objective of improving the export and import (EXIM) trade and reducing the logistics cost."

The idea for NLDS' service extension was first proposed during NLDS's Logistics Data Bank (LDB)'s Open House Session held in January last year under the chairmanship of

Dr. Guruprasad Mohapatra, Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

During the event, stakeholders in the EXIM industry requested to install RFID readers at industrial zones, manufacturing hubs and SEZs, which would enable them to receive timely updates on last-mile cargo and improve supply chain efficiency.

# ONGC to procure 1 lakh O<sub>2</sub> concentrators

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Monday said it will procure one lakh oxygen concentrators to aid India's fight against the world's worst outbreak of coronavirus pandemic.

The company will use its understanding of the global supply chain and logistics to procure one lakh oxygen concentrators on behalf of the government of India, ONGC said in a statement.

The government of India will bear the cost of procuring

these concentrators.

"Within a short period, ONGC placed orders for 34,673 oxygen concentrators on overseas vendors for immediate supply.

Out of these, 2,900 are expected to be received by May 21, and the rest in staggered delivery from May to the end of June 2021.

"Further, to promote domestic capacity, the order has been placed for 40,000 units of oxygen concentrators on domestic manufacturers," it said. In addition, medical-grade oxygen generation

plants are also being set up with ONGC support in 10 government hospitals in three states.

This is part of the 93 oxygen plants oil PSUs are setting up across the country.

"Continuing its fight against COVID, ONGC has been an active part of the nation-wide vaccination drive promoting the vaccination efforts through regular social media posts. ONGC is also organizing vaccination camps at various work locations across the country for employees and secondary workforce," it said.

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

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Airports Authority of India (AAI)-run Bhubaneswar Airport, in Odisha has handled 20.53 MT of vaccines and other crucial COVID related cargo, including oxygen concentrators and cylinders, an official release said on Monday.

AAI-run airports are transporting medical essentials and equipment across the country to strengthen the country's fight against Covid. AAI's Bhubaneswar Airport and its stakeholders have

also been playing an active role by facilitating seamless transportation of medical equipment and materials 24x7, the official release said.

Besides, a total of 526 oxygen concentrators, 156 empty oxygen tankers, and 140 oxygen cylinders have been transported by some 75 aircraft such as C17, C130J and AN 32 of the Indian Air Force between April 23 and May 11, it said, adding as many as 41 oxygen concentrator were transported by airlines as well.



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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tech firm HCL on Monday said it has extended its COVID-19 mitigation efforts across the country to include Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and other states.

In Uttar Pradesh, the company said it has set up a 100 bedded COVID treatment facility (including 50 oxygen beds) at the Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS), Greater Noida.

In Lucknow, HCL has provided six ICU ventilators, 20 oxygen beds and a mini oxygen generator plant to the Fatima Hospital. In addition to these, HCL is supporting essential equipment and consumables at an L-1 COVID Care Facility as well as the District Hospital in Hardoi, the company said in a statement.

A 24x7 Integrated Control Centre, set up and supported by HCL at Gautam Buddha Nagar during the first wave, continues to respond to citizen queries in the wake of the second wave of the pandemic, it added.

# Hope for US boost pushes luxury goods recovery

PNS ■ MILAN

Luxury brands are already cashing in on promises of a 21st-century version of the "Roaring '20s" in the United States, where hefty stimulus packages and an advanced vaccine campaign are accelerating post-pandemic recovery in high-end sales, according to a new study by Bain & Co. consultancy released on Monday.

The rapidly rebounding US economy together with China -- already on an established growth trajectory -- could push the global market for personal luxury goods back to or even beyond pre-pandemic sales levels as early as this year, Bain partner Claudia D'Arpizio said.

"We expect a very positive cycle that is just starting in the United States, where luxury



brands can really take advantage," D'Arpizio told The Associated Press, citing the stimulus and positive stock market reaction.

"This together with the fact that probably consumers are already back to normal in terms of traveling, is pushing

the recovery of luxury goods."

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

Sales of luxury apparel, jewelry, leather goods and beauty products plunged to 217 billion euros in the pandemic year of 2020, from 281 billion euros in 2019, shedding six years of growth.

Europe remains the laggard, with tourism flows from abroad still suppressed by a vaccine campaign that is behind that of the US.

Other bright spots include the Middle East, in particular Dubai, which attracted high net worth individuals during the pandemic.

"They did vaccinations very quickly and many wealthy people during the winter moved to working remotely from Dubai," D'Arpizio said.

The pandemic is proving to be an accelerator in trends that were already happening, including more e-commerce,

an emphasis on greater inclusivity, a push toward sustainability and embrace of the second-hand market, she noted.

E-commerce grew to 23 per cent of sales in 2020 from 12 per cent in 2019, a bit more than a decade into the phenomenon. It is expected to reach 30 per cent by 2025.

The result is likely to be a rethink of retail footprints, with some reductions, but also emphasis on customer experience to support the on-line presence, both in terms of social media and retailing, D'Arpizio said.

The second-hand market helps brands emphasize the longevity and value of their products, she noted, qualities that are especially attractive for younger consumers who are starting to power the market.



# TIME TO SHARPEN YOUR INNER BLACK BOX

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

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

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

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

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



to engage in more social interaction.

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

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

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

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

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

Prioritise getting restful, routine sleep at night and incorporate daily de-stressing practices into your routine. Introduce a new way of nourishing your body.

Connect authentically with



others and maintain a vibrant social life.

So, let’s get down to brass tracks.

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

## Weeks 1 and 2:

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

Love to Learn by participating in cognitively stimulating activities.

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

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

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

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

## Weeks 3 and 4

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

## Weeks 5 and 6

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

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

## Weeks 7 and 8

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

## Weeks 9 and 10

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

## Week 11

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

## Week 12

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

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

Award-winning children’s author Vaishali Shroff belongs to a family of wildlife enthusiasts.

While her husband and children look for interesting sightings and topographies to photograph, she looks for stories and lessons to be learnt, like for instance, that life in a forest evokes empathy for all living beings.

A walk in the Chitwan National Park (CNP), in the Terai Lowlands of south-central Nepal on the border with India, inspired her to write *Sita’s Chitwan* (Penguin). One part is the story of a brave and confident eight-year-old girl who dreams of being a nature guide like her father, and the other details the dedicated efforts to catapult the Park — the size of 178,000 football fields — from the brink of extinction to what it is now, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

“As a family, we are wildlife enthusiasts. While my husband and kids look for interesting sightings and topographies to capture through their lens, I look for stories. For over a decade, we have been frequenting various national parks in India and other countries. With every visit, I fall more and more in love with forests, their rich biodiversity, the various beautiful species that call it their home.

“From bugs and spiders to big cats and elephants, from shrubs to sky-high tall trees, you form an innate bond with them that can’t be explained and you know that our planet cannot survive without them. We cannot survive if not for them,” Shroff told a news agency.

“A walk in the Chitwan National Park (CNP) in 2018 inspired me to write Sita’s story and also to capture the dedicated efforts that the forest department at CNP made to catapult it from the brink of extinction to what it is now. I wanted to show children that you can make a future while saving nature — that



exciting professions don’t just exist in concrete jungles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

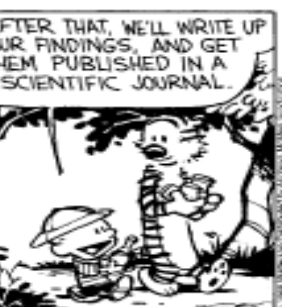
“Children, parents, and educators must read this book, not just to be inspired, not just to know more about CNP, but to feel that connect with nature and understand that the smallest of efforts can have a huge impact on the environment and climate crisis we are going through. No effort is too small.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

## FUN

### ARCHIE



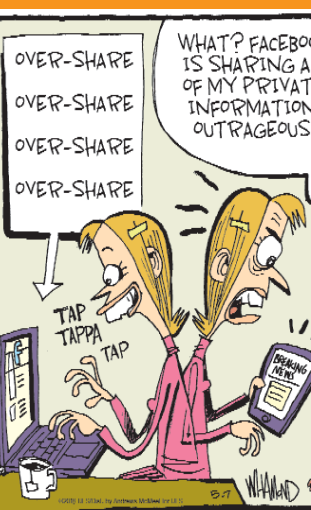
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



#### ACROSS

- A large animal
- Poultry product
- Shriek
- A teacher, usually for one pupil at a time
- Follows an order
- Car engine
- Very easy to do
- A young sheep
- A building material that sets hard

#### DOWN

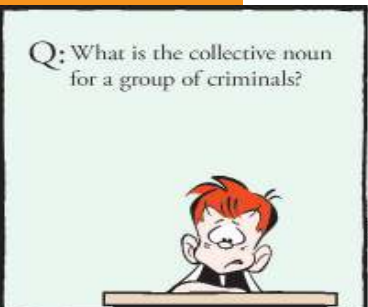
- These are held when people choose their government
- The number in an octet
- As well
- Big whirlwind
- A drink
- Very unhappy
- World sports games held every four years
- Buy and sell
- Observed
- Unwell



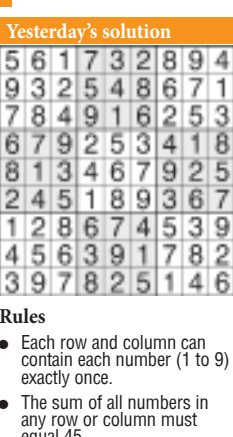
### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



### SUDOKU





# ROHIT SARAF — MORE THAN JUST A CUTE FACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

From time to time, every actor goes through a lot of media coverage and as mentioned earlier, Rohit is, these days, one of those actors! There's good publicity and there's bad publicity, while at times even good publicity can get onto your nerves in a pragmatic manner — too much of anything results in too many overwhelming feelings. Some feel all this makes you relevant in showbiz while actors like Rohit believes fortunately or unfortunately, today's population lives for the online world alone —

"The moment it gets overwhelming, I put my phone away. Although, it doesn't get mundane at all, the fan clubs and all the people who smother me with love manage to outdo themselves every single time and do not miss a chance to make me feel special. After the release of my latest music video, the best compliments that I received was from my mother who said 'I looked like a Bollywood hero in its truest form.' And that made me quite happy."

Rohit is not impending to live up to any prevalent legacies, yet there are many who have to and

they get massively trolled for it if they tend to fail. But the actor wants all these comparisons to end once and for all. Explaining to us that every individual has their own unique journey that should be celebrated, at the same time he also endures that it's incredibly difficult to do what, as actors, they do, and to be unkind about it, regardless of the graph, in his strong opinion is pretty ridiculous. Trolling in any circumstance is uncool and unacceptable.

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

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

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

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



## Love the unknown

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

**How did you get involved?**

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

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

Just that he's a fun-loving, energetic kid. He is always intended to be the younger character and almost comic relief, but with more depth than that. He is also the optimistic one of the group. He's always playing, and when other people are about to give up, he really wants to continue the journey.

He has a ton of fun on this adventure with Everest. Peng is the only one, along with Everest, who seems to be taking this journey more like a vacation. When the others are considering the next step, he's over there having a thumb war with Everest.

**What did you want to bring to the role?**

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

**Did Peng change at all as the film evolved?**

He stayed more consistent through the various stages of production. I feel like he was always going to be the younger member of the group, the comedic heart. I think there were slight personality changes... I don't know if he was quite the basketball aficionado that he became.

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

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

I think it's just part of our obsession with mythical creatures. We love the unknown, and what we haven't confirmed or discovered yet. Also, what's really exciting is, we bring a different version of the Yeti into the film, as opposed to sticking to the normal depiction, which is more gorilla-like, abominable snowman who is mean and scary. We bring a cuter, more innocent version. He's got these powers, which aren't normally part of the Yeti mythology, so it's really fun. Jill [Culton] said she wanted to base Everest off of her experience with her dogs, which is why he sort of has dog-like qualities. But he also has his own emotions and he's quite intelligent.

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

That was one of my favorite parts of this entire experience. It was fascinating for me to see how a scene could go from basic storyboards and sketches to animation and layout. It started

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# ‘Art’ attack against Covid

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

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

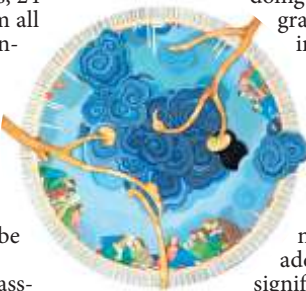
Art Rises for India features

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

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

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

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





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

► **shortpasses**

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dukes ball is used for Test matches in England.

He said he benefited from the camp.



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



A majority of the New Zealand Test players arrived in London for the two-match series against England and the WTC final against India. The players arrived on Sunday afternoon after flying from Auckland via Singapore and were transferred to the Ageas Bowl in Southampton where they will be based for the first two weeks of the tour @BLACKCAPS

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

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

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

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

preparation and everybody is excited bowling with it."

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

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

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

## Archer out of NZ series

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI

## INDIA'S TESTS WEREN'T FIXED: ICC

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

## DORTMUND, WOLFSBURG IN CL

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

## EVERTON END CL HOPES

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

## AC MILAN COMPLICATE CL FATE

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

## IGA ENTERS WTA TOP 10

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

# Oz IPL cricketers return home

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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



Glenn Maxwell arrives for hotel quarantine in Sydney on Monday

AP

of the coronavirus.

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

According to national broadcaster ABC, Smith,

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

Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey also

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

## CA GRATEFUL TO BCCI

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

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

# Starc back for WI tour

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

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

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

AFP

# Serena gets 1st clay win of season

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

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

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

Williams, however, was



Serena Williams in action during her match at Emilia Romagna Open

AP

full of praise for her teenage opponent.

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

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

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

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

# French title chase down to wire

AFP ■ PARIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

minutes later Mbappe pounced on a wayward pass across the area by Thomas Foket to tap home the second.

Marquinhos made it three in the 68th minute with a thumping header from Neymar's corner.

Kean rounded off an easy win for PSG one minute from the end.

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

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



Neymar hugs Mbappe after PSG win

AP

# Chinese TT world champ left out of Olympics singles

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

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

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

# Federer excited for his comeback



AFP ■ GENEVA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## BELGIUM INCLUDE WITSEL

Burssels: Belgium coach Roberto Martinez on Monday named a 26-strong squad for Euro including Axel Witsel.

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



# BELLAMKONDA GANESH TO MAKE ACTING DEBUT WITH VIVAH

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

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

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



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

**Z**EE5, the only OTT platform, has been catering to the varied tastes of its Telugu patrons with original web series, direct-to-digital releases, films and more.

Last year, the biggest political thriller *Chadarangam*, the universal comedy *Amrutham Dvitheeya*, the sports drama *Loser*, and the crime-action original *Shoot-Out At Alair* received widespread appreciation and reception.

This year, ZEE5 is back with a new web series, titled *Room No. 54*, which is presented by Tharun Bhascker, who directed the National Award-winning *Pelli Choopulu* and the new-age *Ee Nagarani Emaindi*. The web series, which will exclusively stream on ZEE5 from May 21.

The web series is set in the backdrop of an Engineering college and tells the story of four Engineering students who stay in a hostel. Their room (which is numbered 54) has got a unique feature. Whoever stays in the room ends up developing a special bonding with someone from the subsequent batch. What kind of issues do the four guys living in the room face? How do they overcome them? That is the rest of the story. Moin as Venkat Rao, Krishna Prasad as Yuvaraj, Pawan Ramesh as Prasanna and Krishna Teja as Babai will be seen in this web series. Swetha and Navya have played key roles. Several famous actors will be seen in guest roles.

Speaking about *Room No. 54*, Tharun Bhascker said, "Due to the pandemic, youngsters are missing

their college. I too miss my college days. Especially, Backbench students must be missing their college days more. Memories related to college days are for a lifetime. At a time when we are cooped up at home due to the pandemic, our web series is going to keep you all engaged with an interesting story. Newcomer Siddharth Gautham has written and directed this in iDream Media production. I am sure that you will find yourself and your friends in each of the episodes. Please don't miss it when it releases on May 21 on Zee 5."

From May 14th, *Battala Ramaswamy Biopic* started streaming on ZEE5. This is yet another original film from ZEE5 Telugu. From May 13th, Salman Khan-starrer *Radhe* (Hindi) started streaming on ZeePlex.



FIRST LOOK

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



## Vaishnav Tej is a hockey player

whose official announcement will be made soon. The young mega hero-starrer is set against the backdrop of hockey and the pre-production work is going on currently.

Vaishnav Tej will beef up for the role and the movie is expected to go on the floor early next year.

It is known news that before the release of *Uppena*, Vaishnav Tej had started the shoot of his second project *Kondapolam* in the direction of Krish which is gearing up for its release soon.

The film has *Manmadhudu 2* fame Rakul Preet Singh as the female lead.

Vaishnav Tej has also signed his third film in the direction of Gireesayya and the shoot commenced recently.

The upcoming untitled drama is being bankrolled by BVSN Prasad.

**V**aishnav Tej, who is basking in the success of *Uppena* has become the most sought-after busiest actor of the new generation after the blockbuster of his debut film. Expectations on the actor's next projects are at their peaks by mega fans and movie lovers.

According to the latest report, the young actor signed an interesting film which will be backed by Nagarjuna Akkineni's production house Annapurna Studios. The film is a sports-based drama in which Vaishnav



## Asuran fame Nitish no more

**A**ctor Nitish Veera, who was famous for playing Pandiyan in Dhanush's blockbuster movie *Asuran*, passed away in the wee hours of Monday. Nitish Veera was 45 years old. He succumbed to Covid-19 in Chennai's Omandurar hospital and breathed his last on Monday.

Nitish Veera is also known for his performances in films such as *Pudhupettai* and *Vennila Kabadi Kuzhu*. He had also played supporting roles in the movies like Rajinikanth-starrer *Kaala* and Dhanush-starrer action drama *Asuran*. Nitish Veera's role as the casteist accountant in Vetri Maaran's directorial venture *Asuran* brought him huge recognition and praise.

Nitish Veera's demise came as a shock to the Tamil film industry. The second wave of

coronavirus has affected scores of people, it has also been the reason for a number of deaths in Kollywood over the last few months.

Celebrities and the fans expressed shock over Nitish Veera's demise and offered condolences on Twitter. Vishnu Vishal took to his Twitter and wrote: RIP Nitish Veera It pains to write this... Acted with him in *Vennilakabadi Kuzhu* and *Maavaran Kittu*. This coronavirus 2nd wave is taking away so many lives. So be careful! Keep your loved ones really close to you.

"Actor #NitishVeera who acted in #Kaala, #Asuran, #VennilaKabadiKuzhu2 passed away due to #Covid complications in Chennai Omandurar hospital early this morning. He was 45. Another young life gone too soon.. RIP!" Ramesh Bela tweeted.