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New DNA vaccine for Covid-19 effective in mice, hamsters'

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DoT allocates spectrum for 5G trials to telecom operators

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Raashi Khanna: Shooting abroad as India battled Covid was upsetting

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In brief

Delhi will begin unlocking slowly from Monday, says Kejriwal

Delhi will begin unlocking gradually from Monday, thanks to the efforts of the two crore people of the city which helped bring under control the second wave, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said. "In the past 24 hours, the positivity rate has been around 1.5 per cent with only 1,100 new cases being reported. This is the time to unlock lest people escape corona only to die of hunger," Kejriwal said. He had announced a lockdown on April 19 after the city recorded over a lakh cases five days on a trot till then. "Today there was a meeting with the disaster management authority. Everyone is of the opinion we must open slowly, slowly. There has to be some balance," he said.

Actor Hooda removed as UN ambassador over 'joke' on Mayawati

Actor Randeep Hooda has been removed as the ambassador of Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), United Nations environmental treaty, following the controversy over his derogatory comments against Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati. Hooda has been under fire since Wednesday when a nine-year-old video of him making a "joke", which social media users termed casteist and sexist, went viral online. The 43-second clip from an event in 2012 resurfaced when a Twitter user shared it. The video has Hooda cracking a joke and then laughing along with the audience.

Take care of children orphaned by Covid: SC to States

The Supreme Court today came to the rescue of children orphaned during the COVID-19 lockdown, both national and state level, saying their basic needs must be taken care of by the state governments. It directed them to identify children who have lost their parents or the family breadwinner following the nationwide lockdown imposed in March 2020. "Children in need must be taken care of... Understand their agony and address their needs immediately," a bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Aniruddha Bose, hearing a case taken up suo motu said today.

India abstains from voting on UNHRC resolution to probe Gaza conflict

India was among 14 countries that abstained from voting on a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council to launch an investigation into the crimes during the 11-day conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. The resolution was adopted as 24 countries voted in favour of it while nine opposed it at the end of an all-day special session of the 47-member UN body in Geneva on Thursday. India abstained from voting together with 13 other member nations of the grouping. "The Human Rights Council this afternoon adopted a resolution on ensuring respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory," the UN body said in a statement.

TODAY

ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Vaishakha & Shukla Paksha
 Panchangam
Tithi : Tritiya: 06:33 am, Chaturthi: 04:02 am (Next Day)
Nakshatram : Purva Ashadha: 06:03 pm
Time to Avoid : (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam : 08:59 am - 10:36 am
Yamagandam : 01:50 pm - 03:27 pm
Varjyam : 01:36 am - 03:06 am
Gulika : 05:45 am - 07:22 am
Good Time : (to start any important work)
Amritakalam : 01:39 pm - 03:07 pm
Abhijit Muhurtham : 11:47 am - 12:39 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 41/29
Humidity: 45%
Sunrise: 05:41 am
Sunset: 06:45 pm
 Current Weather Conditions Updated may 28, 2021 5:00 PM

AP reports 229 Black fungus cases in 1 day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The gross number of Mucormycosis (Black fungus) cases went up to 808 in Andhra Pradesh on Friday with 229 cases being reported afresh in one day.

"Lack of sufficient stock of medicine to treat the affected patients has become a cause for concern," officials of the Health Department told Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy during a review meeting on Covid-19 on Friday evening.

They said that 3,445 new vials have reached the State taking the stock to 5,200, pointing out that this was not even 10 percent of the requirement.

So far, the Centre sent 5,200 liposomal Amphotericin-B injections to the state, but that was not even 10 percent of the requirement, a release from the CMO quoted the officials as telling the Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister said at least 40,000 injections would be required in a week, based on the caseload.



16 health hubs to come up in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Pointing out that people from Andhra Pradesh are going to Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai for tertiary care and treatment, Chief Minister YS

Jaganmohan Reddy on Friday said that health hubs should be set up at district headquarters and corporations to provide such tertiary care.

Since the injections were not available in the required quantity, he asked the health officials to look

into alternatives.

AP makes PSA plants must for pvt hospitals

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Friday made it mandatory for private hospitals and nursing homes to instal Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) technology oxygen plants in proportion to their bed strength.

Principal Secretary (Health) Anil Kumar Singhal issued an order, amending the Andhra Pradesh Allopathic Private Medical Care Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Rules, 2007, and prescribing the minimum standards for equipment and furniture for hospitals based on the bed strength.

Every hospital with more than 100 beds will have to instal a 1,000 Litres Per Minute (LPM) PSA oxygen plant and those with 50 beds, a 500 LPM plant, according to the order.

The hospitals should also have oxygen concentrators equal in number to the oxygen-supported beds.

The private hospitals are also required to have oxygen masks



with regulators in equal numbers.

"During the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, the government supplied oxygen even to private hospitals. But they charged their own rates from the patients. Now we are making it mandatory for them to instal their own PSA plants so that they will be self-sufficient," a senior health official said.

The Industries Department of the state government is working out a plan to extend a 30 per cent subsidy to the private healthcare establishments for installing the PSA oxygen plants.

"The Chief Minister approved this proposal and the modalities are being worked out," the official added.

Task force for paediatric Covid cases constituted

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government on Friday constituted a task force to deal with Covid cases among kids.

The AP Paediatric Covid-19 Task Force Committee will be headed by APMSIDC chairman Dr B Chandrasekhar Reddy who is an expert in neurosurgery.

Keeping in view the number of paediatric Covid-19 cases being reported in various hospitals in the state and to deal effectively with such cases, the government had decided to constitute a Task Force to look into the issue in detail and suggest preventive and preparatory measures.

The Committee will advise the Government on all technical/medical matters related to paediatric age groups and also prepare various protocols including treatment protocol and conduct extensive training programmes to medical, nursing and paramedical personnel.

Patients administered monoclonal antibodies reacting well: AIG chairman

NAVEENA GHANATE ■ HYDERABAD

The world-renowned Asian Institute of Gastroenterology (AIG) here has taken up a study of the efficacy of monoclonal antibodies on the double mutant B.1.617 variant of Covid-19. The drug cocktail, which was

administered to US former President Donald Trump, reduced the chance of hospitalisation by 70 per cent in patients with mild to moderate Covid-19 symptoms. Dr. D Nageshwar Reddy, chairman of AIG, told The Pioneer that the drug cocktail of Casirivimab and Imdevimab, showed promising results.

How are the patients to whom you have administered monoclonal antibodies responding?

They are doing well. The experience is very short. Usually it takes 3 days for the virus to go off, but what we are seeing is the immediate response is also very good.

HC to hear plea on KG-basin gas e-auction

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Friday said it will hear on June 4 a plea by state-run ONGC for vacating an interim order putting on hold its tender notice and the consequent e-auction for sale of natural gas from its block in the Krishna-Godavari (KG) basin in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh.

A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh was informed by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that the application has been filed against the High Court's May 20 order as stay of the e-auction was "ultimately leading to loss of public money".

The court said it will hear the matter on June 4, the date already fixed on May 20 when the notice inviting tender (NIT) and e-auction were stayed.

The application has been filed after the Supreme Court declined to entertain the appeals filed by ONGC and the Centre against the order and asked them to approach



the High Court for vacating of the interim order.

The High Court on May 20 had said that a prima facie case was made out in favour of the petitioner — two GMR group companies — and balance of convenience was also in their favour, as finalisation of the bidding would cause irreparable loss to them.

"We, therefore, stay the operation, implementation, execution and finalisation of the NIT dated April 12, 2021 as well as corrigendum to the NIT issued on April 27, 2021 and the consequent e-auction,

GST Council leaves tax rate on Coronavirus vaccines unchanged

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The GST Council on Friday left taxes on Covid-19 vaccines and medical supplies unchanged but exempted duty on import of a medicine used for treatment of black fungus.

A group of ministers will deliberate on tax structure on the vaccine and medical supplies, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told reporters after a meeting of the GST Council.

The GST Council, which is headed by the Union Finance Minister and comprises representatives of all states and union territories, exempted levy of I-GST on import of Amphotericin-B, which is used for the treatment of black fungus.

Currently, vaccines attract 5 per cent GST.

Sitharaman said the Council decided to continue a waiver of I-GST on free Covid-19 related supplies imported from abroad.



Also, the panel decided that the Centre will borrow Rs 1.58 lakh crore and pass it on to the states to make up for the shortfall in their revenues from the implementation of the GST.

A special session of the Council will be held soon to consider extending the five-year GST short-fall compensation period to states beyond 2022.

The panel provided relief to

small GST taxpayers through an amnesty scheme for late return filers.

Meanwhile, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that many finance ministers of BJP-ruled states strongly protested the proposal put up by Delhi to make essential coronavirus supplies tax-free.



Naidu reiterates 'Bharat Ratna to NTR' demand

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu paid rich tributes to party founder and former chief minister late NT Rama Rao on the occasion of the latter's 98th birth anniversary.

Naidu appealed to the Central Government to confer Bharat Ratna on NTR in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the country's political space and the film industry.

Making his opening remarks after garlanding NTR's photo on the second day of 'digital Mahanadu', Naidu asserted that "confering Bharat Ratna on NTR would be like honouring ourselves".

He recalled how NTR had left an unforgettable impression on the Telugu speaking people all over the world with his great achievements. Born in an ordinary family, NTR rose to the greatest heights in film and political careers and became a 'Yugpurush' for the people.

The TDP Mahanadu unanimously passed a resolution on the occasion urging the Centre to confer the highest civilian award on NT Rama Rao.

Naidu asserted that NTR's life and career had made the average Telugu person proud. Everybody should remember NTR's contributions and draw inspiration from them to do best possible service to the people.

NTR showed to the world that power and authority were not meant for one's enjoyment but they were something that should be used to render greater service to the public, Naidu said.

TDP resolves to offer 'issue based' support to NDA Government

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telugu Desam Party on Friday resolved to extend issue-based support to the Central Government in the best interests of the nation and its people.

On the concluding day of the party's two-day annual conclave, organised this year as 'Digital Mahanadu', the TDP also decided to adopt an intelligent strategy to make coordinated and cooperative efforts with like-minded opposition parties in Andhra Pradesh.

Delivering his valedictory address, TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu said that their political resolution had also proposed proactive steps against the unlawful activities of some police officials who were implementing the vendetta agenda of YS Jaganmohan Reddy. Naidu asserted that the retrogressive policies of the Jagan regime had spread unhappiness among the farmers, women, youth, workers, poor people and all sections of society.

Referring to the YSRCP's false promises, Naidu demanded the Chief Minister to explain to the people by which time his

PAGE 2
YSRCP has betrayed farmers of AP: Naidu

Government would get the Special Status for the State. Jaganmohan Reddy spoke of Special Status as a panacea for solving all the problems of AP people but after coming to power, he stopped talking about this. If the YSRCP could not fulfil this promise, the Chief Minister and his MPs should resign and tender an apology to the people.

Over 17 resolutions were passed in the 2-day Mahanadu on a variety of people's issues. Nine of these resolutions pertained to Andhra Pradesh and another five on Telangana. Three resolutions pertained to both the States. A total of 63 leaders spoke on the resolutions.

NGT fines 21 stone crushers Rs 1.17 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has slapped over Rs 1.17 crore penalty on 21 stone crushing and quarrying units for causing pollution and damage to the environment.

A bench comprising Justice K Ramakrishnan and expert member Saibal Dasgupta directed the violators to pay the compensation of Rs 1,17,40,800 within three months.

It warned that if the amount is not paid, then the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB) is directed to take appropriate steps to realise the amount with the aid of concerned District Collector in accordance with law.

The bench also asked the APPCB to make periodical inspection of these crusher units and if any violation is found or there is non-compliance of recommenda-

Lessons from the pandemic have the potential to lead to new ways of managing large gatherings of people -- a sort of a new normal for post-pandemic life. It is possible to learn from the experience of other countries in regulating large congregations (e.g. Haj management in Saudi Arabia) and adapt these to Indian conditions. Some strategic activities are discussed below.

Testing and quarantine
A negative PCR test result taken 48 hours prior to arrival for all people coming from outside would be mandatory. On arrival, all would have to undergo a mandatory quarantine at a Government-approved hotel for six days or take a PCR test after 48 hours of the quarantine. If the test results are negative, they could leave the quarantine facility. People arriving from areas designated as "high-risk" would be required to complete a mandatory, seven-day quarantine as well as get a negative PCR test after completion of

Post-pandemic: Managing large gatherings of people

the seven days. In addition, people who may want to enter key areas (e.g. *sanctum sanctorum* of religious places) would be required to have a COVID-19 vaccination certificate as well. The multiple layers provide additional security and reduce the chance of infected people from entering.

There have been several instances of people testing positive at their destination points even after obtaining negative test certificates at points of departure. Multiple layers guard against the risk of false negatives that may arise due to technical reasons or due to fraud. Furthermore, several layers of protection would avoid gatherings from becoming super-spreader events. This is based on a well-known principle of disaster management - redundancy - and excessive precautions at entry points.

It is possible to learn from the experience of other countries in regulating large congregations (e.g. Haj management in Saudi Arabia) and adapt these to Indian conditions.

Social distancing

The flow of people has to be well-organized in order to avoid congestion and crowding. One way is to allow only a limited number of people at a time into key areas with clear physical distancing. Police and volunteers should be deployed to monitor and direct people. It is well-known that face-masks provide a barrier and prevent the virus from spreading. Thus, facemasks would be mandatory and high penalties would be imposed on those not wearing masks or trying to enter main areas without

masks. High penalties have a deterrent effect as was seen in Delhi during the first wave of the pandemic when the traffic police effectively imposed mask-wearing. Additionally, daily bulletins in the form of text messages would remind people about the penalties and other public health measures. The number of people entering the place of congregation would be limited. This would lead to reliable enforcement of measures. Meals (e.g. *prasadam*) would be provided



DR. SAMEER SHARMA

ed in neatly sealed packages with labels indicating the stringent conditions of preparation so as to obviate the risk of transmission of COVID-19 during handling. Communal eating or sharing meals (e.g. water taps, eateries) makes for easy transmission of the virus, and these would be disallowed.

Food and water would be delivered to people. The principle is that instead of people going to the points to collect sealed material, it would be provided to them while they are maintaining social distancing at designated spots.

Use of digital tools
Digital tools (e.g. apps) would be deployed for the following purposes. First, allocate areas where individuals/families can move about. In case groups of people desire to gather for social events, they would use the tool app to apply for a gathering permit. Contact tracing would be built in to detect any positive case emerging after the event. Second, record, track, and monitor all COVID-19 related personal records. This would include test results and vaccination status of each individual. Third, the digital tool should

be able to access every place (e.g. shops, restaurants, hotels and vehicles); enable entry based on record of PCR results and vaccination status so that people who are positive-PCR are prevented from moving around; and warn of people moving out of their permitted zones with the help of a location tracker. Fourth, have a special feature for booking specific time slots for access to, say, *sanctum sanctorum* of temples based on their COVID-19 status. Fifth, monitor social distancing. For example, using Bluetooth, the social-distancing app would record people around a person. It would warn of people nearby who have tested positive. Sixth, have a provision to supply bar-coded wristbands on arrival, which would be scanned to confirm the COVID-19 status of the person.

Admittedly, apps that track people's movements - and that store their medical and personal data - would raise privacy concerns, particularly if the data falls into the wrong hands or is misused. However, one has to weigh the trade-offs in these unprecedented times, and steps are required to be taken to protect the data.

Managing large gatherings of people in the post-pandemic era would provide people with the option to visit events (e.g. sports, religious) as they were doing before the outbreak of COVID-19.

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

TDP resolves...
Continued from Page 1

On May 27, the TDP Mahanadu passed resolutions on condolences, State terrorism, breakdown of law and order, democratic backsliding, price rise, taxes, attacks on industry, Amaravati destruction, unemployment, agriculture crisis and welfare cuts for the weaker sections.

On the second day, the Mahanadu passed resolutions on self-respect struggle of NTR, damage to irrigation projects, organisational structure, fake welfare promises, problems in NREGS bills, betrayal on Special Status, neglect of public health, joblessness and indifference to women welfare and party future political agenda.

GST Council leaves tax rate...
Continued from Page 1

"Put up a proposal before the GST Council to make COVID-19 vaccines, oxygen cylinders, concentrators, PPE kits, sanitisers, masks, testing kits etc tax-free," Sisodia, who is also the Delhi finance minister, tweeted.

"Punjab, West Bengal, Kerala and many other states also did the same," he said. "However, finance ministers from the BJP strongly protested against it."

During a press briefing after the meeting, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the GST Council decided to waive the integrated goods and services tax on free Covid-related supplies imported from abroad.

Task force for paediatric...
Continued from Page 1

The member-convenor of the Committee may co-opt any specialist to fulfil the task. The Committee will meet as frequently as the situation demanded. The Committee will also submit a preliminary report in a week's time.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES

GOLD	₹ Rs.49, 860 (10 gm)
SILVER	₹ 76, 100 (1kg)
CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹145
Without Skin	₹165
Broiler at Farm	₹100

EGG RATES ₹/100

VIJAYAWADA	541
HYDERABAD	456
VISAKHAPATNAM	355
RETAIL PRICE	₹5.41

YSRCP Govt has betrayed farmers, alleges Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday accused the YSRCP government of deliberately sabotaging the irrigation projects in the State by adopting anti-farmer policies like reverse tendering, stoppage of project works and neglect of irrigation water to crops.

Naidu said that the Chief Minister has failed to provide irrigation water to even a single acre additionally during his two years in power.

"All projects were driven into a backward direction in the name of re-tendering. The YSRCP government had not even spent Rs. 1,000 crore on the irrigation projects since it came to power in 2019. The Galeru Nagari project has literally been shelved and the works on the Handri Neeva have been stopped," Naidu alleged.

In a statement here, the



TDP chief asserted that the farmers faced untold problems because of the State government's negligence.

"During our rule, the TDP government dug over 8 lakh farm ponds in Anantapur district alone as it faced the threat of turning into a desert. It was NTR who raised a ray of hope by coming out with the Telugu Ganga project in order to prevent Rayalaseema from turning into a land of rocks and stones. If the projects were neglected like in the present regime, it would not take at least 100 years to complete them," Naidu said.

The TDP chief demanded the Government to focus on agriculture and ensure remunerative prices to farmers.

"The extent of cultivation should be increased and new industries should come to the State.

There was no use in giving small monetary benefits to the farmers without supporting them on the field level. The YSRCP is spending more

funds for their publicity campaigns rather than farmers' welfare. In the TDP regime, water was provided to even Pulivendula and plants were saved there," the former chief minister said.

Naidu asked the Government to explain whether it had acquired one single acre for the Polavaram project and whether rehabilitation works were started. "The credit would only go to the TDP for achieving 11 percent growth rate in agriculture consecutively for five years. Polavaram and Amaravati were like the two eyes for the future development of the State. While the TDP remained accountable to the people, the Jagannathan Reddy regime was going forward with its anarchic and maniacal policies. The Chief Minister has also stopped the mega seed park that was sought to be developed in Kurnool," he said.

Naidu reiterates 'Bharat Ratna...'
Continued from Page 1

Earlier, Naidu along with TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh and other leaders paid floral tributes to the former chief minister at the NTR Ghat.

In a statement, Lokesh said NTR's life would be an inspiring tale of an ordinary person who became an extraordinary leader by dint of his discipline, hard work, determination and never failing sincerity. His was a chapter that should be read daily for drawing inspiration and motivation. "NTR led his life and career by imbuing the best qualities in his personality and practicing them without fail," Lokesh said.

He said that NTR would remain an inspiration for him to help fellow human beings without any selfish considerations.

He said that NTR was a 'Mahanayakudu' (Great Leader) who stood like a rock of support for the backward classes and weaker sections. Everybody should take inspiration from the humanist in NTR and work towards achieving an egalitarian society.

14,429 Covid cases, 103 deaths

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Continuing the downward trend, Andhra Pradesh on Friday added 14,429 new cases of coronavirus, taking the gross to 16,57,986.

In 24 hours ending 9 am on Friday, the State saw 20,746 patients recover from the pandemic infection and another 103 succumb, a health department bulletin said.

The active cases in the state is now 1,80,362 after a total of 14,66,990 recoveries and 10,634 deaths, the bulletin said.

Chittoor topped the chart

with 2,291 new case additions and East Godavari 2,022. Four districts reported between 1,000 and 1,200 fresh cases each while seven registered below 1,000 each.

Chittoor continued to report a high number of Covid-19 fatalities, with 15 in 24 hours.

West Godavari also had 15 more deaths, Visakhapatnam 10, SPS Nellore nine, Anantapur, East Godavari and Krishna eight each, Guntur and Vizianagaram seven each, Srikakulam six, Kadapa and Kurnool four each and Prakasam two in a day.



Patients administered monoclonal antibodies reacting well: AIG...

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We have already started, the reported literature response is also 70% complete recovery i.e. 70% of them do not become serious cases and they respond. Some 20% will respond slowly and a very small percentage could become serious cases. We are hoping that it will be similar in Indian patients also where antibodies are neutralising and clearing the virus. The findings of the study that we have taken up at AIG will be available in 4 weeks.

Are there more such cocktails of monoclonal antibodies which are artificially created in a laboratory and tailor-made to fight a particular disease?

The one we are using Casirivimab and Imdevimab are made and developed by Regeneron and Roche. There are other cocktails made by Eli Lilly. One more is coming in production. Single drug cannot be used as there won't be resistance; it has to be used as cocktail. This is the one which the Indian government approved two days ago. The others are yet to be approved. According New England journal article, efficacy is same for all of this for out-patient, but efficacy is not good in in-patients i.e. if a patient is admitted, or on oxygen and ventilator, it is not good.

Is it alternative to vaccine? Are you doing it as a study for prophylaxis?

No, we are not. But technically we can use it. Usually, if we give this injection, it will protect people from virus for 3 months. Right now there is no study in the world, because effective vaccine has come. Instead of using this as prophylaxis, we use vaccine as prophylaxis; within 6 weeks we can develop permanent immunity. But this is temporary immunity and again after 3

months we have to repeat this, so you can't go on doing this. This is passive immunization, while vaccine is active immunization. Active immunization should be preferred only in situations where vaccines cannot be used or if someone needs urgent protection and they can't wait for vaccine protection to activate for 6 weeks; then, they can use this method.

Is it possible to manufacture in India?

Yes, Zydus has already applied for study trial. Even in our lab at AIG we are able to generate the monoclonal antibodies. But we have not done any commercialisation. We have done only research work on it and we are able to generate from single cell huge amount of monoclonal antibodies.

How do you intend to stop the wastage as one mixture has to be used for two patients within 36 hours?

The demand right now is very high and we are getting patients in groups. So, we can use it. But if there are fewer patients, that's a problem. That's the reason why everybody cannot start this because within 36 hours we cannot get a patient, the injection will be wasted. It is expensive; together each of them costs about Rs 60,000. The price for a dose of 1,200 mg (600 mg of Casirivimab and 600 mg of Imdevimab) is Rs 59,750.

Was this strategy used for any other disease?

Monoclonal antibodies are used for many diseases, especially autoimmune diseases like Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis. But for infectious disease, this is only the third. We used for bacterial infective diseases.

Generally we do not use for infective diseases because the antibodies are available. For this virus infection, we don't have any other methodology; this process has come into use.

When will normalcy return?

We are seeing a downturn now. By the middle of next month we will see a significant downturn. This trend will continue to occur in July and August also. Complete normalcy to come out without masks and all will depend upon two things: firstly, if we can vaccinate people at rate of 1 crore per day, 3-4 times we can completely get herd immunity; secondly, if we have Covid appropriate behavior. Combination of vaccination and Covid appropriate behavior will definitely help us to get back to normal by October or November. If these things are not followed, this pandemic can go on for next year also because then we will have pockets of infection in the community and it will keep coming up. If variant develops and it escapes the immunity of the virus, then it is a problem and whole cycle will develop. Immediate priority will be how to vaccinate large population and in next three months. Despite vaccination, Covid appropriate behavior has to be followed.



16 health hubs to come...

Continued from Page 1

A total of 16 health hubs should be set up in district headquarters and Rajahmundry, Vijayawada and Tirupati.

The Chief Minister held a review meeting on the prevailing Covid situation, vaccination and oxygen supply and said 16 health hubs should be set up across the state.

The Chief Minister said at least 30-50 acres of land should be acquired and 5 acres should be allotted to each hospital free of cost.

These parcels of land should be given to hospitals which are ready to invest at least Rs 100 crore in three years. Through these health hubs, 80 multi or super-specialty hospitals will come up in the state.

Along with these hospitals, the government is setting up 16 teaching hospitals and nursing colleges due to which

the health sector will be strengthened from the government side and the private sector also gets better hospitals due to the encouragement by the government.

Tertiary care will be improved in the state as multi-specialty and super-specialty hospitals will come up in district headquarters and corporations and patients need not to go to other places for medical treatment.

The Chief Minister said quality treatment was being provided to patients under Arogyasri and directed the officials to bring the health hubs policy in one month. He said vaccines should be manufactured under the purview of the government and directed the officials to prepare a policy for it.

The officials also explained the prevailing Covid situation in the state.

AP reports 229...

Continued from Page 1

He asked them to coordinate with pharma companies and procure medicines for Black Fungus, the release said.

Meanwhile, the government has so far identified 78 children orphaned by coronavirus in different districts.

Of the 78, 10 children were given Rs 10 lakh each, as announced by the government.

The Rs 10 lakh would be deposited in a bank till the child attains the age of 25 years and the monthly interest could be used to meet the regular needs.

The other children would also be soon paid the amount, the officials told the Chief Minister.

The officials said 16 ISO tankers are available in the state and four oxygen Express trains with four tankers in

each train are available. The officials said they have made alternative arrangements in the wake of the cyclone and procured 812.78 metric tonnes of oxygen on May 26. They said 670 metric tonnes of oxygen on average is made available in the last five days.

The Chief Minister asked officials not to relax as the cases were declining and directed them to complete the installation of oxygen pipelines and storage works and be prepared in case of any surge in cases.

The officials said they have received 66 complaints on violation of rules and Rs 2.4 crore fines were imposed on 43 hospitals.

The State Government will take a decision on Anandaiah's 'miracle cure' after the CCRAS report is submitted and considering all the aspects.

HC to hear plea... NGT fines 21...

Continued from Page 1

The two companies had also contended that there was a stress faced by the power sector and the result of the e-auction would be that the natural gas will be supplied to the other sectors at a higher price.

They have also claimed that the auction was in variance with the statutory framework for allocation of coal for coal based power projects.

The two companies have also challenged a March 21, 2016 notification of the Petroleum Ministry which provides for forward auction - gas would be allocated to the highest bidder - and they have contended that this would be discriminatory to them.

The two companies had told the bench that if the auction was not stayed, they will be compelled to bid and participate in the e-auction for procuring allocation of the gas, which was to be allocated to them as per the assurances of the Centre and ONGC and therefore, irreparable loss and injury be caused to them.

The Centre and ONGC, on May 20, had urged the court not to pass the order staying the NIT and e-auction, but the bench declined the request, saying the NIT was issued on April 12, 2021, 60 months after the Petroleum Ministry's 2016 notification and "heavens are not going to fall" if another two weeks go by.

"We have considered the documents as aforementioned and examined the facts and circumstances, brought out above, including the investment of approximately more than Rs 1,000 crore by the petitioners, as averred in the petition.

crusher units enumerated in the report by a committee formed by it have caused damage and committed violation and they are liable to pay compensation for the violation committed and also the damage caused to the environment on account of their operations.

According to the plea, filed through advocate Sravan Kumar, these units are situated adjacent to each other and nearby villages as well as agricultural lands and old Anjaneya Swamy temple.

The NGT said these 21

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH SWACHHA BHARAT MISSION (GRAMINEEN) PFR&D DEPARTMENT SWACHHA ANDHRA CORPORATION

e-procurement Short Tender Notice

NIT. No.5 & 6/SAC/SBM/03/CE/SWM/2021-22 Dt.29-05-2021.

Name of Work: Manufacture, Supply and Delivery of Fogging machines & High Pressure Toilet Cleaners including testing, transportation to all GPs in 13 districts in AP State inclusive of all taxes (excluding GST) through DPOs at District Level (2nd call) [The above bid can be downloaded on "e-procurement" portal from 29-05-2021, 10.00 AM to 05-06-2021, 3.00PM and due date submission of Bid is on 05-06-2021 up to 5.00 PM. Bid opening on 05-06-2021 at 5.30 PM. Please refer to www.approcurement.gov.in for details.

SD/ Managing Director, SAC, Vijayawada

DPR R.O. No.: 118/PCL/ADVT/11/2021-22 02/05/2021

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Jagan looks at Delhi as AP runs out of funds for Polavaram works



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Friday directed officials to rush to Delhi to get bills pending with the Centre to the tune of Rs 1,600 crore spent by the state government on Polavaram project cleared.

The Chief Minister's directive came as the State is facing a precarious financial position due to several factors, including the Covid-induced situation.

It is estimated that Andhra Pradesh needs at least another Rs 1,400 crore in the coming months to spend on the Polavaram project which has entered a crucial phase.

Polavaram always remained a politically rallying point for all the major parties in the State — YSRC, TDP and BJP.

A controversy also erupted a few months ago over Centre stopping clearing bills asking the State government accept 2014 base price estimates.

At a review meeting on irrigation projects chaired by the Chief Minister on Friday, it was revealed that around Rs 1,600 crore of bills regarding construction of prestigious Polavaram project are yet to be reimbursed to the State by the Centre.

Reviewing the clearance of the bills, the Chief Minister said an amount of around Rs 1,600 crore was stuck in the form of bills. He said the state government is sanctioning money as Polavaram is a high priority project and should be completed on war footing.

He said the state government is moving forward with a positive attitude towards the project despite financial constraints. Jagan said it is not appropriate to have bills pending at the Centre and directed the officials to focus on getting them cleared.

The Chief Minister pointed out that officials believe that the State would need to spend at least Rs 1,400 crore in the coming three months. He directed officials to go to Delhi and get the pending bills cleared.

Explaining the progress of works of Polavaram project to the Chief Minister, the officials said 91 per cent of spillway concrete works were completed and the remaining works will be done by June 15. They said 42 radial gates have been erected and the remaining six gates will be completed soon. He added that the remaining 14 hydraulic cylinders from Germany will reach AP soon.

The officials said they have lifted all the gates to release flood-water.

They said the works of the spillway channel will reach a safe stage by May end. The informed that the gaps in upper cofferdam were closed and difficult works regarding it were also completed. The officials said Reaches 1, 2 of cofferdam to the targeted height will be completed by end of June and Reaches 3, 4 of the cofferdam to targeted height will be completed by end of July.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to expedite the works related to lower cofferdam.

Complete all pending irrigation projects, Jagan orders officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Friday directed officials to focus on constructing Naredi barrage on Vamsadhara river and consider it as a priority project.

Jagan on Friday reviewed priority irrigation projects with officials.

Chief Secretary Adityanath Das informed the Chief Minister that a letter had been sent to the Odisha Chief Secretary and a reply was awaiting. "We will take up discussion with the Odisha government regarding irrigation projects," he said.

The officials said the construction of Nellore barrage will be completed by June 31 and 84 per cent of works related to Sangam barrage are done and it will be completed by July 31.

The Chief Minister was informed that works are in progress on both sides of Ovk tunnel and the work of 116 meters is still pending and will be completed in the coming three months. They said the fault area is being filled with polyurethane foam through a fore-pulling method.

The officials informed the Chief Minister that Tunnel-1 of Veligonda project was ready and head regulator works of Tunnel-1 are almost completed. The Chief Minister directed the officials to expedite the works of



Tunnel-2. He said there should be no delay in work and instructed the officials to come up with an action plan for the next meeting.

Reviewing the Vamsadhara Stage -2, Phase -2 works, the Chief Minister said the project was a priority project and works should be expedited and there should be no delay. He said interlinking works for Vamsadhara and Nagavali rivers should be completed soon.

Reviewing the pending works of Thotapalli barrage, the officials said problems regarding land acquisition are solved and the pending works will be completed soon. The Chief Minister said to focus on Gajapathinagar branch canal to which officials said land acquisition will be solved soon.

Regarding Tarakarama

Thirtha Sagaram reservoir works, the officials said the contractor who was awarded the work by the previous government has approached court and efforts are on to resolve the legal problems.

The Chief Minister also reviewed the Mahendranagar offshore reservoir. He directed the officials to complete the repair works of the Brahmasagar and Paidipalem projects immediately and added to take immediate steps to store Brahmasagar at full capacity.

The Chief Minister also reviewed the Rayalaseema drought mitigation projects, AP Godavari Krishna salinity mitigation? and water security projects, Palnadu drought mitigation projects and Uttaranchal Sujala Sravanti projects.

The officials said a special purpose vehicle has been set up for Rayalaseema Drought Mitigation project. They said that the power finance corporation has agreed to give Rs 12,056 crore for this project.

The officials said Rural Electrification Corporation has sanctioned a loan of Rs 2,750 crore to YSR Palnadu Drought Mitigation project and Rs 850 crore was already released in March.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to release all bills related to R&R and land acquisition of all projects and also solve any other pending problems.

NGOs demand norms of orphan aid scheme changed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NGOs and orphanages want some important changes to be made to the norms extending Rs 10 lakh ex gratia to the children who have lost both their parents to Covid-19.

Among other changes, they suggest the Government make the deposit of Rs 10 lakh as a joint deposit in the name of the child and the Project Director of Women Development and Child Welfare in the best interest of the child.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had announced Rs 10 lakh as ex gratia in the form of fixed deposits in the name of the children who lost both their parents to Covid.

The government scheme is applicable for children below the age of 18 years whose families are below the poverty line.

Accordingly, 429 children across the state are eligible for the financial support offered by the State Government.

According to officials of the women and child welfare department, the highest number of children who lost parents during Covid 19 are from Srikakulam with 316 orphans while Visakhapatnam has no orphans.

The orphans from Covid in other districts in the state are 72 from Anantapur, seven each from Kurnool, Nellore, Prakasam and Krishna districts and three each from Kadapa, Chittoor and East Godavari districts.

Guntur has two such children while West Godavari has one orphan.

The district collectors have started distributing the documents for the Rs 10 lakh fixed deposit amounts to beneficiaries across the state. The Government hopes that by making a fixed deposit of Rs 10 lakh per child, they can utilise the monthly interest amount of approximately Rs 5,000 for their sustenance and fixed



They suggest the Government make the deposit of Rs 10 lakh as a joint deposit in the name of the child and the Project Director of Women Development and Child Welfare in the best interest of the child.

(care and protection of children) Act 2015 of the concerned districts, who can declare the child as an Orphan.

They suggest the Government make the deposit of Rs 10 lakh as a joint deposit in the name of the child and the Project Director of Women Development and Child Welfare in the best interest of the child.

The name of the guardian should not be mentioned in the Fixed Deposit. As per the banking procedures, if anything happens to the child, the deposit may go to the guardian. This is not safe in the interest of the child. Some children may have the risk of life from the greedy guardians, NGOs say.

BVS Kumar, former chairman, Child Welfare Committee, Krishna district said that the progress of these children should be entrusted to the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), which is a part of Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS).

CWC and DCPU should promote Foster Care programmes and strive to place the eligible children under Foster Care, which enables the child to grow in a family atmosphere, one of the important Rights of a Child as per the constitution.

He said that the government should consider giving a minimum of 5 per cent reservation in education and employment for the orphan children, which will enable them to live a comfortable life in future.

deposit as security for their future. After attaining the age of 25 years they can redeem the fixed deposit amount of Rs 10 lakh.

The Government has issued instructions to the Medical & Health Department which has issued guidelines for implementation. Accordingly all the District collectors are implementing the scheme transparently in their respective districts.

NGOs and orphanages welcomed the government move to support the Covid orphan children. A few NGOs said that the identified children shall be produced before Child Welfare Committees (CWC), constituted by Government of AP to function as a Bench of First Class Judicial Magistrates as per Sec 27(9) of Juvenile Justice

SHORT TAKES

Collector expedites work on 125-ft Ambedkar statue

VIJAYAWADA: Krishna district Collector A Md Imtiaz on Friday said that measures should be taken to acquire land for construction of the 125-foot statue of BR Ambedkar at Swaraj Maidan in Vijayawada city and hand it over to the Social Welfare Department within 48 hours. Speaking to the concerned coordination committee members and other officials at the Collector's camp office on Friday, Imtiaz said that the land for the prestigious project — construction of a 125-ft statue to honour Dr BR Ambedkar the architect of India's Constitution, along with a memorial — should be handed over to the Social Welfare Department by the Irrigation Department officials. The Collector made it clear that the offices and other structures in the Swaraj Maidan premises should be vacated in the next two weeks. In all 18.81 acres land will be acquired for the project, said Imtiaz. Joint Collector Dr K Madhavilatha, Sub collector HM Dhyan Chandra, DRO M Venkateswarulu, Irrigation division DE A Raja Swaroop Kumar, DD Social Welfare K Saraswathi, Tahsildar V Srinu and other officials were present on the occasion.

Essentials distributed to Covid-hit

VIJAYAWADA: Members of a charity organisation, Our Youth Social Community (OYSC), on Friday distributed essential commodities to around 100 workers at Auto Nagar APIC SEZ centre. Patamata S-I Ranganatulu who took part in the distribution said that services rendered by NGOs are commendable in view of the financial difficulties faced by the low-income groups in the wake of Covid. Sohan Pappu, vice-president of OYSC, said the charity was set up in 2017 for the empowerment of women. "Since last year, we have organised six service programmes and helped the poor during the lockdown. We have distributed 40,000 masks, 1,000 N 95 masks, 3,000 sanitisers and essential items so far," he said. Sohan said sanitary napkins worth Rs 3.50 lakh would be soon made and distributed free to the poor.

Amurata Trust donates 50 beds to GGH

VIJAYAWADA: Members of Amurata Hastam Charitable Trust and Consumer Association for Awareness and Protection (CAAP) on Friday gifted 50 beds and ten stretchers to the Vijayawada Government General Hospital. Appreciating them, GGH superintendent K Sivashankar said that during the Covid second wave, there is an acute shortfall of beds for patients. He said that the beds will be of great help to the patients and the hospital staff to serve the patients better. Dr Sivashankar complimented the trust founder and chairman Dara Karunasree. Karunasree said that the material was gifted to the hospital through the support from donors and donations. She said that they could procure the beds and stretchers with the support and encouragement of Consumer Court Chairperson S Madhava Rao.



Veteran kabaddi coach Nageswara Rao passes away

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Veteran kabaddi coach S Nageswara Rao passed away on Friday following a brief illness. He was 82.

Nageswara Rao donned the role of coach for the Indian team in the international kabaddi tournament for men and women held at Vijayawada in 1993 in which India won the gold medal.

Under his tutelage, many kabaddi players from Krishna district represented India. Players like VV Ranga Rao, S Bhaskara Rao, KDK Mohan Rao and G Sugandha Kumar were selected for the Indian team under his tutelage. Women players like Anuradha, Prabhavathi, Suneeta, and Martha too played for India under his training.

Players like V Jhansi Rani and P Padmaja Bala who worked as Indian women team coaches were trainees of Nageswara Rao.

KP Rao, former secretary, Andhra Pradesh Kabaddi Association, represented as technical official in Bangkok Asian games 1998, thanks to late Nageswara Rao. G Sudharani, who was nominated as a manager of the Indian women's team in 1993, was his trainee.

Not distributing medicine for Covid yet: Anandaiah

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ayurvedic practitioner B Anandaiah, who shot to fame in the recent past for distributing a 'miracle cure' for Covid-19, surfaced after a week on Friday.

Releasing a video message, Anandaiah said that there was no truth in the reports that he would resume distribution of this much-in-demand Ayurvedic preparation as there was no permission from the government. "So, there will be no distribution of my medicine as of

now," Anandaiah said.

He appealed to the people not to believe rumours doing rounds on social media platforms and come to Krishnapatnam.

"I don't have the raw material to prepare the medicine for curing Covid-19. I will resume preparing the medicine only after getting permission from the government and we will then start distribution," Anandaiah said. He said that once the "medicine" was ready, he would make an announcement well in advance so that the people

could get it.

It may be mentioned here that the AP High Court has already directed the State government to take a quick decision on the distribution of the "Krishnapatnam medicine".

The court asked the government not to delay the decision citing tests. Counsel for the state government told the court that the government was expecting a report from the Centre on May 29. The court posted the case to Monday asking it to submit a report by then.

VIT-AP offering sustainable legal education

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Board of Advisors to the VIT-AP School of Law met on Friday to deliberate upon the role of VSL in the current context. On the occasion, Chancellor and Founder of VIT G Viswanathan stressed the need to provide holistic legal education and to prepare the global legal professionals it is very important to instil the ethics, values,

empathy and principles of social justice to be ingrained among the law students.

Further, members appreciated the vision and progress made by the law school over the past one year and congratulated the management for taking efforts in making VSL a vibrant law school.

PS Rao, former member of the UN International law Commission, said teaching

new generations of law students is challenging and VSL must nurture the students towards learning fundamentals of the law subjects and these fundamentals will come in help to address the growing challenges.

Dr Sekar Viswanathan, Vice-President, Dr SV Kota Reddy, Vice-Chancellor, Dr Benarji Chakka, Dean, Dr CLV Sivakumar and others took part in the meeting.

Oxygen Express supply 1000 MT LMO in 13 days to AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a short span of 13 days, Indian Railways has brought more than 1,000 metric tonnes (MT) of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) to Andhra Pradesh, over the South Central Railway.

With the arrival of 77.76 MT of LMO in four containers from Rourkela, Odisha at Krishnapatnam Port, the cumulative Medical Oxygen delivered to Andhra Pradesh (over SCR) totalled 1,068.59 MT.

Starting with the delivery of the first Oxygen Express to the State on May 15 from Durgapur to Krishnapatnam Port, the Indian Railways has so far operated 18 Oxygen Express trains bringing 1,068.59 MT of LMO through

66 tankers.

All these trains have brought Medical Oxygen to Andhra Pradesh through container tankers.

Significantly, LMO has been delivered across various locations of AP over SCR — Krishnapatnam Port, Guntur and Tadipatri. Also, Oxygen Express trains to Andhra Pradesh have started from both the Eastern and Western parts of the country originating from West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand and Gujarat.

While 10 trains have come from Odisha, four trains from Gujarat and two trains each from Jharkhand and West Bengal states.

Further, to meet the medical oxygen requirements of the States at the fastest possible time, Railways have been oper-

ating these trains along the Green Corridors to ensure minimum transportation time.

Multi-disciplinary teams have also been formed to ensure that the Oxygen trains reach at the least possible time. As a result, the average time taken to transport these trains has been over 60 kmph.

Gajanan Mallaya, General Manager, SCR complimented the officers and staff of the zone for transporting more than 1,000 MT of LMO to AP. He said that these trains are being operated with the highest sense of urgency so as to ensure that medical oxygen to the States reaches in the fastest possible time. He advised the team to continue the same level of monitoring so as to provide hassle-free and seamless operation of these trains.



Debate over birthplace of Lord Hanuman ends in impasse

Hampi's Govindananda Saraswati Swamy leaves meet in a huff

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The debate over the birthplace of Lord Hanuman between Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and Sri Hanumad Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust of Karnataka ended in a stalemate.

The debate was held between the experts' committee of TTD headed by National Sanskrit University Vice-Chancellor V Muralidhar Sharma and Hanumad Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust founder Govindananda Saraswati Swamy at the university premises. After a heated argument between the two sides, Govindananda Saraswati walked out of the meeting in a huff.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, Govindananda Saraswati said that there was no point in having discussions over the birthplace of Lord Hanuman after several centuries when Valmiki Ramayana clearly mentions that he was born in Kishkindha on the banks of Pampa Kshetra near Hampi in Karnataka.

Stating that the experts'



committee constituted by the TTD on the issue had no authority and does not have proper evidence to decide the birthplace of Hanuman, he said the people's belief stems from the epic Ramayana which

has references to Kishkindha as the birthplace of Hanuman. Govindananda Saraswati further said such sensitive issues should be decided by the Hindu religious seers such as the Sankaracharyas,

Madhvacharyas and Jeeyar Swamijis.

He alleged that the arguments of the TTD were misleading the common people. "We cannot depend on the mythology but have to go by the epic Ramayana. Did the experts committee ever come to Kishkindha to examine the evidences?" Govindananda Saraswati asked.

Meanwhile, the National Sanskrit University Vice-Chancellor and head of TTD experts committee Muralidhar Sharma said that various ancient scriptures including Puranas and copper plate inscriptions clearly indicated that Anjanadri in Tirumala Hills was the birthplace of Lord Hanuman. The claims made by the Govindananda Saraswati that Lord Hanuman was born at Anjanahalli on the banks of river Pampa near Hampi in Karnataka doesn't have any mythological references and alleged that the Govindananda Saraswati has no proper knowledge and he did not come out with any pieces of evidence to prove his claim.

Corona medical kits donated to police personnel

PNS ■ KADAPA

A NRI doctor has donated 500 medical kits to the police personnel who were discharging duties in Kadapa district. NRI doctor Dr Anil Reddy Chamala from Tadipatri of Anantapur district handed over 500 medical kits to District Superintendent of Police KKN Anburajan on Friday as a social responsibility. He said the services rendered by the police personnel were priceless. Each medical kit comprises all materials required for a person after he/she tested positive for the corona and till recovered completely.

Dr Anil Reddy said a pamphlet with details of helpline numbers for medical assistance and usage of medicines were given in the kit. Thanking the NRI doctor, Anburajan said it was laudable to donate the medical kits keeping in mind the welfare of the police personnel.

Special branch DSP Sivareddy, SC, ST Cell DSP Ravikumar, Dr Anil Reddy's father Chamala Ramalinga Reddy, Police officers Association district president Doolam Suresh and others were present.

THE PIONEER EFFECT

Covid Isolation Centre shifted from marriage hall!

DHV SAMBASIVA RAO ■ KAKINADA

Reacting to the news report that appeared in these columns highlighting the official apathy in locating a village Covid Isolation Centre on the ground floor of a marriage function hall at Karapa, the officials have rectified their mistake and shifted it.

When there was a sharp rise in the Covid cases in East Godavari district, the officials established the Covid Isolation Centre at Chiranjeevi Kalyana Mandapam in Karapa town. When the Covid patients were placed on the ground floor, a wedding took place on the first floor on Wednesday last. With the news item 'Covid Isolation Centre on ground

floor, wedding on first' in 'The Pioneer', the officials prepared to initiate action against the staff concerned and the isolation centre was shifted to another place.

District Panchayat Officer (DPO) K Nageswar Nayak directed Mandal Extension Officer Cheekatla Balaji Venkata Ramana to immediately shift the centre from the marriage hall. He also clarified that action would be initiated against the responsible panchayat staff members.

Meanwhile, frequent shifting of the isolation centre drew criticism as the centre was initially set up at Karapa primary school. The Mandal Education Officer rejected it saying the school was preoccu-

pled with the Nadu-Nedu programme. Though attempts were made to shift it to the high school, it was again bounced back because of tenth class exams scheduled from June 7. Finally, it was set up at the Kalyana mandapam. The officials should not have permitted marriages when they proposed to set up the Covid centre there. But, succumbing to pressures from the panchayat staff, permission was given leading to a controversy.

Now, an old building of the auditorium behind the high school was selected to locate the isolation centre. The panchayat staff who permitted the wedding after setting up the isolation centre would be taken to task, the officials said.



MIRACLE DRUG



MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy surprising all by showing Anandaiah's Covid drug, after its production was suspended, at a meeting in Ongole on Friday. Ministers Viswaroop and Balineni Srinivasa Reddy and Collector Pola Bhaskar are also seen.

Cops playing vital role in containing Covid: MLA

PNS ■ NARASAPURAM

The services extended by the police personnel during the corona critical conditions were laudable and they played a vital role in executing the lockdown and partial curfew to save people from the dreaded coronavirus, Narasapuram legislator Mudunuri Prasada Raju said on Friday.

While inaugurating the Circle Inspector office building with modern facilities on the Steamer Road at Narasapuram in West

Godavari district on Friday, Prasada Raju said the services of revenue and the police were crucial in containing the Covid. Stating that the Tahasildar office building was renovated recently and now the police circle office had a new building. Measures would be taken to ensure all government offices would be located at one place after Narasapuram district was formed so that the people could not suffer.

District Superintendent of Police Narayana Nayak appealed to peo-

ple to cooperate with the police personnel by following self-restrictions to prevent the coronavirus. They should not come out unless there was an emergency and even in emergency cases they have to get permission by showing adequate proofs. He thanked everyone who supported the construction of the CI office.

Sub-Collector K S Viswanathan, DSP Veeranjaneya Reddy, CI Krishna Kumar, Tahasildar Mallikarjuna Reddy and others were present on the occasion.



SHORT TAKES

MP hailed for approval to produce black fungus drug in AP



GUNTUR : With the initiative of Narasaraopet MP Lavu Srikrishnadevarayalu, the Centre has permitted Safe Pharmaceuticals at Sattenapalli in Guntur district to manufacture much demanded Amphotericin medicine to be used in the treatment of black fungus. It may be recalled that manufacturing of Remdesivir injection began in the district with the initiative of the MP. It was a well-

coming feature that identifying the scarcity of the black fungus injection MP Krishnadevarayalu has written a letter to the Prime Minister and the Union Minister for Medical and Health requesting permission and they agreed for the same. When the MRP of Amphotericin medicine was Rs 7,000, it was sold in lakhs in the black market. He expressed hope that the situation would not be like that now as the black fungus medicines would be manufactured in AP. Several leaders hailed MP Srikrishnadevarayalu for his effort in getting permissions from the Centre for making emergency drugs in the state.

NHRC serves notices over Raghurama Raju's arrest

AMARAVATI: Responding to the reports the way YSRCP MP Raghurama Krishnam Raju was arrested and further developments, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Friday served notices to AP DGP and Principal Secretary of Home Department. The NHRC sought a reply within four weeks from the date of the notice. It ordered an internal probe into the police rude behaviour against Raghurama Raju in the custody. The DGP was asked to submit a report before June 7. The NHRC reacted to this effect on the complaint filed by Raghurama Raju's son Bharat over his father's arrest.

Fire destroys crops, ₹1.5 lakh loss estimated

KAKINADA : A fire broke out in the paddy fields of Balabhadrapuram in Biccavolu mandal of East Godavari district on Friday causing a loss of Rs 1.5 lakhs. About 100 bags of paddy was gutted in the fire accident. The fire destroyed paddy in about 1.2 acres belonging to farmer Manda Suryanarayana Reddy and 0.50 acre of Manda Satyavati. When some unidentified persons tried to put dry grass on fire, the fire engulfed the nearby fields. The farmers expressed deep concern over the loss due to the fire. They sought the government to pay compensation.

GMC to levy user charges for waste collection

GUNTUR: The Guntur Municipal Corporation has geared up to collect user charges from the residential houses and commercial establishments and it would be implemented in two wards on an experimental basis. About 400 tonnes of waste was being collected within the limits of Guntur Municipal Corporation per day. It became burdensome for the corporation to shift the waste to the dumping yards on the vehicles. In a bid to utilise the waste, it was implemented a home compost policy and encouraged people to produce compost with wet waste. It was in vogue in 15,000 households, so there was no need to collect waste. Since the cost of collecting waste was increasing day by day, the corporation mooted to levy user charges from the households. The state government too launched a special drive in this direction as part of the 'Clean AP' initiative. As per the 2016 solid waste management rules, the local bodies have a provision to impose user charges. Now it was being launched in wards 7 and 32 in Guntur. Each household should pay Rs 120 as user charges while it was Rs 60 in the slums.

Place indents for drugs through MM App, Collector tells hospitals

PNS ■ ELURU

All the 43 Covid government hospitals should download the 'Medicine Management App' to place indents for acquiring necessary stocks of medicines now onwards as the supply of medicines would be carried out only through the application, District Collector Karthikeya Mishra said on Friday.

Speaking at a video conference from the Collectorate here on Covid related issues on Friday, Karthikeya Mishra said the Medicine Management Application would function from Friday onwards and supply of medicine would be done through the app only. The medicine management application was introduced on an experimental basis in West Godavari and Chittoor districts and it would be introduced in all the districts from Saturday, he added.

The Collector advised the medical staff to use the existing stocks of 30,000 Covaxin vaccines only for people who come



for a second dose. About 45,000 people have to get their second job in the district. Apart from removing the names of duplications by examining the list thoroughly, the names of the people who have already taken their second dose should be removed, he said and directed that another 13,000 vaccines of Covishield were available in the district and they should be given to the eligible people, he added.

Karthikeya Mishra said a Triple - C Centre was established at Tadepalligudem NIT and now 26 people admitted there as of now. About 489 Covid patients were already undergoing treatment in the Covid Care Centres in Tadepalligudem.

Expressing satisfaction over the pace of recoveries and discharges in CCCs on Thursday, he said there should not be any compromise concerning the supply of food and sanitation facilities. He informed that the Amul Project would be formally launched in 63 areas in Dwarakaturumala, Nallajerla, Tadepalligudem, Ungatur, Denduluru and Bhimadolu mandals.

Joint Collectors K Venkata Ramana Reddy and Himanshu Sukla, Trainee Assistant Collector T Rahul Kumar Reddy, DRO V David Raju, DRDA Project Director J Uday Bhaskar and others were present at the video conference.

Acute water scarcity in Kakinada

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Though it is a smart city, Kakinada is facing an acute drinking water shortage. Having about 3.5 lakh population in the 50 municipal divisions, the city was witnessing water fights at the public taps and water tankers amid hot summer and deadly coronavirus. More number of corona positive cases was being reported in Kakinada rural and urban mandals every day. During the corona threat, women were vying with each other to fetch a pot full of water when the tanker reached their locality. There was no guarantee when it comes again once it left. Even without wearing masks, the women were fighting for their turn at the tanker.

The local women wanted an immediate solution to the water problem and they urged Kakinada Municipal Corporation Commissioner Dinakar Pundkar to take steps to mitigate water supply.

All set for laying stone for 3 medical colleges in AP

PNS ■ GUNTUR

All is set for laying the foundation stone for three medical colleges to be constructed at a cost of Rs 1500 crore in Andhra Pradesh. These medical colleges would be set up in Piduguralla and Bapatla in Guntur district and Kavali in Nellore district.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy will lay the foundation stone virtually for medical colleges in Piduguralla in the Palnadu region and Bapatla on May 31. Narasaraopeta MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy and MP Sri Krishnadevarayalu said the Chief Minister sanctioned Rs 500 crore for building medical college as per the dreams of the people of the Palnadu region. If it was completed, a 500-bed super speciality hospital would be made available to the people. The government had already acquired 47.50 acres at Brahmanapalli for the college

The govt had already acquired 47.50 acres at Brahmanapalli for the college and the farmers have come forward to give another 20 acres.

and the farmers have come forward to give another 20 acres. Deputy Speaker Kona Raghupati said a foundation stone would be laid for the medical college to be set up at a cost of Rs 505 crore in 60 acres of land in Bapatla. The people of Konaseema would get a modern medical facility with 500 beds. He praised CM Jaganmohan Reddy saying that he was the people's leader as he fulfilled his promise given during the elections within two years. Foundation stone would be laid for Kavali medical college on the same day, the leaders said.

YSR, YS Jagan allotted 450 acres for housing: Kodali Nani

PNS ■ GUDIVADA

State Minister for Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Kodali Srivenkateswara Rao (Nani) on Friday said that late YSR Rajasekhara Reddy and his son Jaganmohan Reddy have allotted about 450 acres of land for housing to the poor in the Gudivada constituency while they were at the helm of affairs as chief minister.

Speaking to the media at the camp office here on Friday, Kodali Nani said the late YSR and CM Jaganmohan Reddy were among the great people who bought such a huge extent of land in a constituency as they embarked on the construction of houses for the poor. About 181 acres of land had been acquired for the poor in Gudivada since Jaganmohan Reddy took over as chief minister. In 2008, the



then Chief Minister late YSR Rajasekhara Reddy bought 77 acres of land. The government was constructing 8,912 Tiddo houses on the land. "We are fulfilling the dream of 16,000 poor families to own a house in the town and 30 acres at Gudlavalleru in Gudivada constituency, 14 acres at Janardhanapuram Nandivada mandal, 7.5 acres in Tamirisa and 7.5 acres in Polukonda have been acquired for housing for the poor," the Minister said.

Kodali Nani said a 47-acre freshwater pond had been dug in Gudivada town during the British rule. Though the urban population has reached 1.20 lakhs, the pond was serving the drinking water needs of the people. A summer storage tank was constructed in an area of 106 acres in Pedaerukapadu. Clubbing the drinking water requirements of Gudivada rural and Nandivada mandals, a multi-village water scheme was proposed to provide a permanent solution to the fresh drinking water problem, he added.

Machilipatnam MP Vallabhaneni Balasouri assured that Rs 300 crore would be sanctioned from NABARD for the construction of the project. Efforts were on to acquire another 400 acres of land for the affordable housing scheme for the middle-class people.

Statue of SP Balu to be unveiled in Gudivada

PNS ■ GUDIVADA

Minister for Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Kodali Srivenkateswara Rao (Nani) has appreciated the efforts to install the statue of noted playback singer late SP Balasubramanyam in Gudivada town for the first time in the state.

Gudivada Kalakarula Samakya Treasurer Vinnakota Satyanarayana (Bujji), members Lankapalli Prakash, Sanagapati Nageswara Rao, BV Satyam and P Syam called on Minister Kodali Nani at the camp office in Gudivada on Friday. Speaking on the occasion, they said that the death of SP Balu, who introduced many new singers to the film industry, was a great tragedy for the artists. SP Balu's statue would be installed near the statue of singer Ghantasala at Rajabapayya Chowk Center in Gudivada under the auspices of the Kalakarula Samakya.

Later, the leaders of the samakya invited Minister Kodali Nani for the statue unveiling ceremony. YCP state leader Dukkupati Shashibhushan, former municipal vice-chairman Adapa Babji, YCP district steering committee member Mandali Hanumant Rao, town president Gorla Srinu, Gudivada area Govt Hospital



Development Association chairman MV Narayana Reddy and NTR Stadium committee vice-chairman Paleti Chanti and others were present on the occasion.

AAP: Centre creating artificial scarcity to benefit vax makers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP on Friday alleged that the Centre is creating "artificial scarcity" of COVID-19 vaccines to benefit Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India, a charge termed by the Delhi BJP as "unfounded".

Addressing a press conference, AAP spokesperson Atishi said the government's vaccine drive has stopped in schools and this is the case throughout the country while in private hospitals, vaccination is still going on at different rates.

India is currently using mainly two 'made-in India' jabs - Covishield manufactured by the Serum Institute and Covaxin of Bharat Biotech - and Russian-made Sputnik V at a smaller scale to inoculate its population.

"This is big racket. At government centres where vaccination was given free to the youth, vaccines are in shortage there, while vaccinations are going on at higher prices at hospitals," she alleged.

She further questioned the Centre over not giving emergency approval to more vaccines.

"Many vaccines are being approved across the world. Pfizer vaccine has been approved in 85 countries, Moderna vaccine has been approved in 46 countries and J&J is approved in 41 countries.



"Then why these three vaccines were not given emergency authorisation. If WHO can approve them, why can't India? This clearly shows that the Centre has created this artificial scarcity to favour Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech," she alleged.

She further said these two companies do not have manufacturing capacity but the Centre has not approved more vaccines.

"The Centre created such an artificial scarcity that states have to buy from them only. The Centre should respond to this," she said.

Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said Atishi's allegation is unfounded as scarcity has not been created by the government.

Atishi should know that SII and Bharat Biotech don't stand to gain by the scarcity because

Union Minister Prahlad Patel accuses Kejriwal of using national flag as 'decoration'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Culture and Tourism Minister Prahlad Patel has hit out at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, accusing him of using the national flag as a "decoration" during televised media addresses. In a letter to Kejriwal, the Union minister alleged that the flag seen behind the chief minister during his press briefings appears to be in violation of the flag code. "It appears that the national flag has been used for decoration. The white portion in the centre appears to have been reduced and the green portion added to it, which is not in tune with provisions of the Indian Flag Code specified by the Ministry of Home Affairs," Patel wrote in the letter. "I do not expect such

an act, knowingly or unknowingly, from the honourable chief minister," he added. A copy of the letter has also been marked to Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal. Patel also sought to draw the chief minister's attention towards section 2(ix) of The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, which states that the flag should not be used to decorate a speaker's stage. Section 2.2(1) states that the status of the flag should be respectful, he added. "Being a resident of India and holding the post of the proud chief minister of a state, everyone expects you to maintain the honour and the dignity of the Tricolour, a symbol of national pride," Patel wrote in the letter.

scarcity means entry of foreign manufacturers.

Creating scarcity and putting general people at discomfort is the speciality of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, he claimed.

"He spoke on hospital beds

scarcity which forced people to pay hefty fees to private hospitals, he spoke of oxygen scarcity and we saw oxygen mafia loot, we saw black marketing of Covid medicines as he spoke of medicines shortage," Kapoor claimed.

Yoga has helped many countries fight Covid: Minister

PNS ■ PANAJI

Union AYUSH Minister Shripad Naik on Friday said public awareness on yoga created by the Modi government at the global level has helped several countries fight back the COVID-19 pandemic.

The minister was addressing a group of people at the launch of a campaign to distribute 'Ayush 64' medicine, used for treating COVID-19, here.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government began celebrating International Yoga Day (June 21) seven years back due to which there was awareness about yoga, Naik said at the event where Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant was also present.

Now, many countries are recognising that they could fight COVID-19 through yoga because its benefits were propagated and explained to them, the Union minister said.

He hailed the PM as a visionary leader who spread across the world knowledge about the ancient practice focusing on physical, mental and spiritual aspects of human life.

Speaking on the occasion, Sawant said the state government has been taking the help of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) doctors in its COVID-19 management programme.

NEERI develops simple, fast method of swab test for Covid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) has developed a simple and fast method of swab collection and processing for RT-PCR coronavirus test which could be used in rural and tribal areas.

The method is simple, fast, cost-effective, patient-friendly and comfortable, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) said.

It is well-suited for rural and tribal areas, given minimal infrastructure requirements, it said.

The Nagpur-based NEERI is a constituent laboratory of CSIR.

Krishna Khairnar, senior scientist, Environmental Virology Cell at NEERI, said the swab collection method requires time. Moreover, since it is an invasive technique, it is a bit uncomfortable for patients.

"Sometime, it is also lost in the transport of the sample to the collection centre. On the other hand, the Saline Gargle RT-PCR method is instant, comfortable and patient-friendly. Sampling is done instantly and results will be generated within three hours," he said.

The method is non-invasive and so simple that a patient can collect the sample himself, said Khairnar.

Collection methods like nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swab collection require technical expertise and they are also time-consuming. In contrast, the Saline Gargle RT-



"Sometime, it is also lost in the transport of the sample to the collection centre. On the other hand, the Saline Gargle RT-PCR method is instant, comfortable and patient-friendly. Sampling is done instantly and results will be generated within three hours"

PCR method uses a simple collection tube filled with saline solution, he said.

The patient gargles the solution and rinses it inside the tube. This sample in the collection tube is taken to the laboratory where it is kept at room temperature, in a special buffer solution prepared by NEERI.

An RNA template is produced when this solution is heated, which is further processed for Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR).

This particular method of collecting and processing the sample enables to save on the otherwise costly infrastructural requirement of RNA extraction. The method is environment-friendly as well, since waste generation is minimised, Khairnar said.

The Nagpur Municipal Corporation has given permission to go ahead with the method, following which testing has begun at NEERI, the CSIR said.

PM Modi pays tributes to Savarkar on his birth anniversary

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday paid tributes to pioneering Hindutva ideologue Veer Savarkar on his birth anniversary. Tributes to the great freedom fighter and patriot Veer Savarkar on his birth anniversary, Modi tweeted.

Savarkar was born in 1883 in Maharashtra, and is seen as a hero, especially to parties and organisations which subscribe to Hindutva views.

Rahul's language, attempt show Congress behind toolkit: BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday lashed out at Rahul Gandhi for his criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the Covid vaccination programme, saying the kind of language the Congress leader used and the way he tried to stoke "fears" has confirmed that the "toolkit" was produced by his party.

Speaking to reporters, senior BJP leader and Union minister Prakash Javadekar also cited recent remarks of the Health Ministry to assert that the inoc-

ulation exercise in India will be completed by December this year.

The ministry has given a roadmap about producing 216 crore doses by December and how 108 crore people will be vaccinated, he said.

Gandhi's choice of words like "nautanki" for the prime minister at a time when Modi is working to curb COVID-19 is part of the toolkit's script, the minister alleged, referring to a controversial document about targeting the government.

The BJP has claimed that the

Congress is behind it, a charge the opposition party has rejected. It has instead blamed the BJP and sought police probe into the matter.

"It has been confirmed, and there is no need for any evidence. It is clear that the toolkit was produced by you. The kind of language you used and the way you tried to stoke confusion and fear among people is part of that politics," Javadekar said.

What Gandhi has said is an insult to the country and people, he added.

With over 20 crore doses being administered so far, India is second in the world and the vaccination is set to see a big jump from August, he said, rebutting the Congress leader's criticism about the alleged slow pace of the country's inoculation programme.

The BJP leader said Gandhi should rather be concerned about the Congress-ruled states as they have not been able to lift their quota from vaccine producers.

Noting that Gandhi had stressed the importance of vac-

ination, he said this is what the government has been saying and working on from the beginning and cited the production of two vaccines in India.

When Covaxin was produced indigenously, Congress leaders created doubts about its safety while Modi put any such question to rest by opting for this job, the minister said.

Gandhi had earlier asked the government to evolve a vaccine strategy for the entire population, warning of multiple waves of the virus at the current rate of vaccination.

Kerala promises to double farmers' income, lands to all

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The second Pinarayi Vijayan government on Friday promised to raise farmers' income by 50 per cent in the next five years and ensure there would be no landless people in Kerala even as it admitted that the COVID-19 pandemic would cost the state economy dearly.

All welfare and development initiatives and mammoth infrastructure projects, launched by the previous government including the flagship K-FON programme to provide free hi-speed internet to the poor families, would be completed in a time-bound manner despite financial constraints, it said.

The priorities of the second consecutive Left government were presented by Governor Arif Mohammed Khan in his policy address at the state Assembly here.

Detailing the impact of the pandemic on the state's finances, he said it is estimated

that Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) would decline by about 3.82 per cent in 2020-21.

"We expected a sharp recovery in the economic growth to 6.60 per cent in 2021-22. But the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic can be an impediment to this expectation," Khan said.

Though a sharp rise of 37.87 per cent growth was expected in revenue receipts in 2021-22, the consequences of lockdown necessitated by a surge in COVID-19 cases, is likely to constrain this, he said, adding that higher revenue as well as fiscal deficit were on cards.

A counter-cyclical fiscal policy to stimulate the economy has been initiated lest the economic slowdown should become steeper, he said.

In the address, the Governor recalled the comprehensive Rs 20,000 crore relief package implemented by the previous government during the first wave of the pandemic.

Student arrested for duping people looking for Remdesivir

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An 18-year-old college student was arrested from Madhya Pradesh for allegedly cheating people on the pretext of providing them Remdesivir injections, Delhi police said on Friday.

The accused, a resident of Seoni in Madhya Pradesh, is pursuing her graduation in Psychology from a distance university in Delhi, they said, adding she duped 11 persons in Delhi and the National

Capital Region of Rs 2,25,000. The woman was arrested on Monday from her house in Seoni.

On May 1, a case was registered at Defence Colony police station in south Delhi on the complaint of one Ankit Kumar, who contacted someone following the leads available online regarding the Remdesivir injections, police said.

Kumar was promised the delivery of five injections for Rs 32,400 so he trans-

ferred the amount to their bank but never received them, the complaint said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said the bank account details were used to trace the accused and she was held.

Two mobile phones, bank passbooks and four ATM cards were recovered from her possession and her bank account with a total balance of Rs 1,33,000 was seized, the officer said.

Kerala HC seeks Centre's view LDAR in Lakshadweep

PNS ■ KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Friday sought the response of the Central government on a PIL challenging the Lakshadweep administration's move to introduce Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation 2021 (LDAR) and the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act (PASA) in the islands.

Considering the PIL, the court declined to stay the operation of LDAR and PASA but directed the Centre to file a response in two weeks.

The PIL was filed by Congress leader K P Noushad Ali. In his plea, Ali alleged illegal interference with the social, political and cultural realities in Lakshadweep by the

Administrator.

He submitted that the residents of islands are opposed to the LDAR and the creation of a Lakshadweep Development Authority (LDA) issued by the administration as it gives powers to the administration to remove the small holding for property owned by the islanders belonging to the Scheduled Tribes.

'New DNA vaccine for Covid-19 effective in mice, hamsters'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Scientists in Taiwan have developed a new DNA-based Covid-19 vaccine that successfully induced long-lasting antibodies against the novel coronavirus in mice and hamsters.

Some currently available Covid-19 vaccines rely on messenger RNA or mRNA strands to teach the human immune system to recognise the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes the disease.

Most viruses have either RNA or DNA as their genetic material. The nucleic acid may be single- or double-stranded.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus has RNA as its genetic material. The new study, published in the journal PLOS Neglected Tropical

Diseases, demonstrates the successful development of a vaccine that instead uses DNA encoding the virus' spike protein, which allows it to enter and infect the human cells.

Both DNA and mRNA vaccines use genetic material encoding part of a virus to elicit an immune response.

However, DNA vaccines can often be produced more quickly and at lower cost, and transported without the requirement of cold temperatures, the researchers said.

Recent clinical trials have indicated that DNA vaccines are safe and effective in treating infections including HIV-1, Zika virus, Ebola virus and influenza viruses, they said.



In the latest study, researchers from the National Health Research Institutes, Taiwan, developed a vaccine that uses DNA encoding the SARS-CoV-2 spike

protein.

To overcome the poor delivery of DNA into cells often seen with DNA vaccines, the team coupled electroporation with the

delivery of the DNA vaccination.

Electroporation is a technique in which an electrical field is applied to cells in order to increase the permeability of the cell membrane, allowing chemicals, drugs, or DNA to be introduced into the cell.

The researchers showed that mice and hamsters immunised with the new DNA vaccine developed long-lasting antibodies against the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein.

Those antibodies peaked at eight weeks post-immunisation but levels remained relatively high at week 20, they said.

Hamsters that received two doses of the vaccine at a three-week interval and were exposed to COVID-19 after seven weeks

were protected from the virus, according to the researchers.

This shows no loss of body weight and less viral RNA in their lungs compared to animals that were not immunised, they noted.

"The DNA vaccine is thermally stable, which means no cold chain is needed, and can induce high level of long-lasting neutralising antibody titers against SARS-CoV-2," the authors of the study said.

"The DNA vaccine confers protective efficacy against SARS-CoV-2 infection in Syrian hamsters which is a severe COVID-19 disease animal model," they added.

Viral titre refers to the concentration of infectious viral particle which is different from the total virus.

INDIA CORNER

Nearly 41 tiger cubs spotted in MP's Bandhavgarh reserve

Madhya Pradesh's Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) has witnessed a big cat boom, as foresters have spotted nearly 41 tiger cubs, from newborns to one year olds, at the sanctuary, a senior forest official said on Friday.



Foresters have collected the information from camera traps and based on actual sightings of cubs in the reserve, which is a densely populated haven for big cats in the state, the official said. "The forest staff after analysing the data has found over 41 tiger cubs, from newborns to one year olds, at BTR," principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife) Alok Kumar said. As per the data, four eight to 10-month-old cubs were spotted in Kallavah beat, while 12 in the same age group were seen in Pator. Similarly, five cubs of a tigress identified as T-17 were seen in Tala beat, four six-month-old cubs were spotted in Dhamakhori, while Panpatha core and buffer areas have two three-month-old big cats each, it was stated.

YouTuber held for 'harming' Guj CM's reputation

A 22-year-old man from a village in Porbandar has been arrested for allegedly trying to harm Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani's reputation by creating and uploading a "doctored video", using a part of the latter's recent speech, police said on Friday.



Vivek Parmar, a resident of Gorsar village, was on Thursday arrested under IPC section 469, which deals with forgery for the purpose of harming reputation, sub-inspector A S Agrawat of Madhavpur police said. Investigations have revealed that Parmar, a Commerce graduate, shared funny videos at regular intervals on his YouTube and Facebook accounts, he said. The police recently came across a "doctored video" of the chief minister, which the accused had shared on his Facebook account, he said. "Parmar is accused of creating and circulating an indecent doctored video clip, using some portion of the chief minister's original speech, with an intention to harm the latter's reputation and position," the official said, quoting the FIR. The "indecent doctored video" has since been removed from Parmar's Facebook and YouTube profiles, he said. The accused had allegedly used Rupani's recent address to the media about cyclone Tauktae. Two weeks ago, a disc jockey (DJ) was arrested in Vadodara on the same charges for making a spoof video of Rupani by using the latter's old speech on potatoes.

Four booked for fake Covid report to evade autopsy

A 21-year-old woman allegedly committed suicide due to harassment by in-laws, following which, the latter procured a fake COVID-19 positive to evade autopsy in Beed district of Maharashtra, police said on Friday.



A case has been registered against four members of the family, two of whom have been arrested, an official said. Puja Ganesh Raikar, resident of Dhangar Javalka village of Patoda tehsil, allegedly consumed sanitiser on May 19 due to harassment by her husband and his family over dowry, the official said. The victim was admitted to a private hospital in Ahmednagar and was later taken to a hospital in Pune, where she died on Wednesday (May 26), he said. The victim's in-laws knew that an autopsy would reveal that she had consumed a poisonous substance and hence, decided to procure a fake COVID-19 positive report to cover up the cause of death, the official said. When the victim's family refused to believe that she had died due to COVID-19, another test was done, the result of which came out negative, he said. A case has been registered against the victim's husband Ganesh Raikar, father-in-law Shivaji, mother-in-law Vijubai and Namdev Sukde, a relative, who helped get the fake report, the official said. While two of the accused have been arrested and two are absconding, he added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

No child's play

India, like the world, is gearing up to protect its children from the next wave of COVID-19

Children are the last human frontier COVID-19 threatens to engulf. The second surge has seen quite a number of children infected. Even deaths have been reported, including one of a day-old infant in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Most of these patients were asymptomatic or with mild symptoms; they recovered within a week. A small percentage of cases needed hospitalisation and intensive medical care. India, like the rest of the world, is now gearing up to prepare to save children in the next surge, whenever that is. Lessons from the first two surges have chastened the Government and steps are already afoot to provide separate neonatal and paediatric wards in hospitals. Contingency measures are on for oxygen, monitoring equipment, ventilators and medicine. Medical and paramedical staff are undergoing re-orientation to handle young patients. Bharat Biotech of Covaxin fame is also ahead of the curve in coming up with a vaccine for the two to 18 age group. In fact, it has got approval for stage 2 and 3 human trials already. With 40 per cent of the population in this age group, vaccination becomes imperative. But tackling child COVID-19 is a matter not merely of logistics. It will be fought largely in the arena of the mind; a seesaw between the panic of parents and patience of doctors.

For instance, the question is: Are the hospital wards children-friendly? If a discernible part of the scarcity of beds and oxygen in the second surge was owing to panic among adults, imagine what parents can go through if their children become infected. Rationality will become scarce. The social media will press a panic button of its own, mostly of the illegal variety. Should the location and names of the infected children be revealed on social media posts for help? Should pictures be circulated? How will these violations of privacy be checked? There are many NGOs handling awareness campaigns to keep children safe. Apart from safety measures, there is the need for a healthy diet, mental agility and physical exercise, particularly when schools are closed and they are stuck at home. But what about the rural areas? Nearly half of the population below 18 lives in the countryside. There are issues with hygiene, availability of potable water and nutritious diet. Malaria, dengue and pneumonia are rampant. A large section of the rural parents is aware of their responsibilities, but hands of most would be tied by their economic situation. As yet, no data shows that the third surge will affect children, but it is equally important they be immunised. It is more important to inoculate their parents first. Both medical workers and parents need to realise that most children may not be able to recognise COVID-19 symptoms; how then to diagnose at the earliest? A beginning has been made, but it has to be seen to be real. The UNICEF web advisory on child protection, for example, is begging updation since September 2020.

PICTALK



Cyclists during the 19th stage of the Giro d'Italia race, from Abbiategrosso to Alpe di Mera, Italy

Regional cooperation

The pandemic is an opportunity for the member nations to revive the SAARC spirit

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), after 35 years of its existence, has almost become a relic of the past. An organisation that was launched for regional cooperation has been dying a slow death ever since its inception on December 8, 1985. It was to bring together the 21 per cent of the world's population living in South Asia. The idea was to help the region by economic cooperation. It, however, did not go beyond declarations that were never implemented by the member nations. South Asia remains one of the most impoverished regions in the world. The interaction among SAARC nations, which share a common heritage and history, is dismally low. The grouping was mooted on the lines of ASEAN, which would provide a common economic zone that would help trade and make people prosperous. It was supposed to increase people-to-people contact. To build a framework for economic cooperation, it contemplated the South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) to promote Free Trade Area, Customs Union, a Common Market and a Common Economic and Monetary Union.

The idea was indeed very promising, yet it never took off as it was defeated by regional politics. Pakistan's obsession with Kashmir made it impossible to make it a workable entity. The result was that no SAARC leaders' meeting took place after Kathmandu in 2014 till 2020. The 2016 meeting was, though, boycotted by India due to the Uri attack. A ray of hope for regional cooperation came in the form of the Corona pandemic. Just like elsewhere, the pandemic affected the people of this region as well. This was the time when regional cooperation could have helped the member countries in terms of medicine, medical facilities and other necessary equipment. Though some positive trends emerged but they had limited scope. Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the initiative on March 15, 2020, as India led from the front. It hosted a virtual meeting of the SAARC leaders; India pledged \$10 million to a fund to fight Corona and other nations followed suit. India also donated vaccines to the member nations. This meeting was indeed path-breaking. At the ground level, the SAARC Disaster Management Centre has set up a website (<http://www.covid19-sdmc.org/>) for SAARC countries. A special cell in the Ministry of External Affairs is coordinating and monitoring with SAARC countries. Hope this revives SAARC and regional cooperation gets a new lease of life.

Restoring sanity in national narrative

Despite the Corona setback, the motivation to overcome hardships shall emerge simply from the spirit of serving fellow human beings



JS RAJPUT

The true character of a people and nation reveals itself only in the toughest of times. India is going through such a phase and, sadly enough, instead of presenting a picture of national unity and socio-religious cohesion, the political class that had tasted power in the past and has been unseated by the electorate, is using the Corona crisis as an opportunity to reverse its fortunes. Those in power are, obviously, busy managing this crisis of unprecedented measure and magnitude; all they are getting from their political opponents is ridicule, allegations and accusations. The political scenario is indeed depressing for the common people who are suffering on so many counts due to the epidemic and its impact on practically every sector of human activity.

This has attracted international attention and painted Indian democracy in poor light. The Corona crisis, particularly in April-May 2021, weighed very heavily on India and its people. The inadequacies of the health infrastructure, as also the systems of public service and governance, have revealed distressing deficiencies. There were heart-wrenching reports of people dying in ambulances and even outside hospital gates. In the 21st century, should even a single life be lost simply because of non-availability of medical oxygen? It certainly was serious mismanagement, lethargy and lack of commitment.

But the extra efforts put in at every level to tide over the crisis also deserve to be noticed. We have the ingenuity to produce medicines and vaccines, distribute better and ensure adequate availability. If the mishap was an outcome of systemic complacency and unconcern, these shall have to be wiped out completely from the work culture in future. The Corona crisis shall certainly transform human approach to life, the nature of human interactions and re-establish the criticality of man-nature relationship. The economic, social and cultural implications of the pandemic are being assessed all around.

The motivation and the will to overcome the impediments shall emerge from numerous instances, initiatives, acts and actions that



were ignited simply by the spirit of serving fellow human beings, in the realisation of the "essential unity of all human beings". As one looks around, one finds great examples of courage, dedication and commitment to the cause of helping the needy. Working in conditions of severe deficiencies, they are great examples of human empathy and compassion. Think doctors, paramedics, police personnel, railways, teachers and other public servants, they all rose to the occasion, at the cost of grave personal risk, and hundreds of them sacrificed their lives.

Democracy depends on the dexterity imbued dialogue. Unfortunately, all this unequivocally emphasises the need for continuous, productive dialogue among the political parties, among those in powers, and out of it. There ought to be no hesitation in mid-course correction. The absence leads to instances of political immaturity, which are injurious to the polity. One of the former Chief Ministers, a fairly well-educated young person, thundered he would not get vaccinated since it was a party vaccine! Now, he is among those demanding free vaccine to all. Apparently having realised his folly, he could



THERE WERE HEART-WRENCHING REPORTS OF PEOPLE DYING IN AMBULANCES AND EVEN OUTSIDE HOSPITAL GATES. IN THE 21ST CENTURY, SHOULD EVEN A SINGLE LIFE BE LOST SIMPLY BECAUSE OF NON-AVAILABILITY OF MEDICAL OXYGEN? IT CERTAINLY WAS SERIOUS MISMANAGEMENT, LETHARGY AND LACK OF COMMITMENT

have been advised by someone that consistency is not a value that must be adhered to, even if the fallacy becomes obvious.

On April 29, 1933, MK Gandhi in an article in the *Harijan* stated: "I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search for truth, I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things...when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject." He said so as he had "not ceased to grow inwardly". This instance has great relevance not only for the particular person indicated, but also to all other ambitious young persons in politics.

Indian politicians must realise that elections are important, but this alone is not democracy. Most important is the public acceptance of its credibility. This they could comprehend if they practice *aparigraha* and, for that, the guiding light could come from Gandhi: "All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family, and each one of us is responsible for the misdeeds of all of the others." A person becomes a

personality only when he moves out of his own self and starts internalising his obligations to others. It was beautifully articulated by Einstein: "A person starts to live when he can live outside himself".

Corona has clearly established before every human being and every nation that, for it, every human being is just one more target. And therefore, it could be confronted only through coordinated global efforts; no nation, no race, no religion can do it in isolation. It is so succinctly articulated in the words of HH Dalai Lama: "In human societies, there will always be differences of views and interests. But the reality today is that we are all interdependent and have to coexist on this small planet. Therefore, the only sensible and intelligent way of resolving differences and clashes of interest, whether between individuals or nations, is through dialogue. The promotion of a culture of dialogue and non-violence for the future of mankind is thus an important task for the international community." Hope our politicians are listening!

(The author works in education and social cohesion. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TWITTER MUST ABIDE BY RULES

Sir — The freedom of expression has its own limitations. It can neither be overstepped nor does it act as a threat to the security of any nation. The standoff between the Twitter management and the Government is unwanted. As Twitter is a foreign entity, it has the obligation to abide by the rules and regulations of India if it wants to play here.

A part of Ladakh was shown as part of China by Twitter not too long ago. This is absolute mockery of the laws of the land and it is a shame on the nation, which needs to be condemned. It acted similarly in the aftermath of the Delhi violence though a social platform should not be instrumental in creating hatred, chaos or violence. Vaccine hesitancy too was professed, which was totally uncalled for. So the Government's move in this direction is absolutely right and necessary. Even in many European nations, there are watertight rules for social media.

The freedom of speech and working against national interests are two different issues. Twitter must obey the laws of the land, not join hands with the Opposition and the so-called liberals whose only aim is to dislodge the democratically elected Modi Government.

Sravana Ramachandran | Secunderabad

RAMDEV IS FEELING THE PINCH

Sir — The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has served a defamation notice on Baba Ramdev for making disparaging remarks against allopathy and allopathic doctors, and demanded an apology from him within 15 days failing which, it said, it will demand a compensation of ₹1,000 crore from the yoga guru. Around 2,000 allopathic practitioners are part of the association. As Ramdev's comment is a criminal act under Section 499 of the IPC, the notice demanded a written apology from him. The notice has also asked Ramdev to make a video clip contradicting all his "false and defamatory" allegations and circulate it on all social media platforms where he had uploaded his earlier video clip levelling the allegations.

It has also asked the yoga guru to withdraw all misleading "advertisements" from

Unbecoming of a doctor



Instead of being India's Health Minister, Harsh Vardhan should have been the brand ambassador for Patanjali. Otherwise, as the son of a doctor, let me tell Harsh Vardhan that giving the "vultures" metaphor to foreign media is highly unprofessional and unbecoming of a doctor. It smacks of fascist and totalitarian tendencies.

We know that it is problematic for Harsh Vardhan and the BJP's top brass to read Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's tweets or speeches, but that does not also mean that the *aamaadmi* would start believing his facts and figures over the COVID-19 death count. Because hardly any statistics put out in the public domain by the Modi Government in the

last seven years is authentic. Harsh Vardhan must admit that he has never been open, transparent, sensitive or honest.

The way he attacked Rahul in his tweet, it wasn't the language of a cultured person: "Politics on corpses, INIndia Style! Although vultures are disappearing from trees, it seems their spirit has been absorbed by vultures of the earth." @RahulGandhi trusts #NewYork more than #Delhi. One should learn to play politics on corpses from the vultures of the earth." No doubt Harsh Vardhan attacked Rahul on behalf of the Modi Government but people eagerly want to know from the Government that how would they silence people's belief, as Gujarati poetess Parul Kakkar said in her *shav vahan* poem: "Ek saath sab murde bole, 'sab kuch changa-changa', saheb tumahre Ramraj me shav vahini Ganga (Don't worry, be happy, in your voice speak the corpses: O King, in your Ram-Rajya, we see bodies flow in the Ganges).

Had Harsh Vardhan worked harder for India, he would not have been in this pitiable condition.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

all platforms endorsing the Coronil kit, a product of his firm, as an effective medicine against COVID-19, failing which an FIR and a criminal case would be lodged against him by the IMA. Ramdev, therefore, is in a soup and feeling the pinch.

CK Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai

LOCKDOWN IMPACTED MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

Sir — Periods don't stop just because there are lockdowns, cyclones or any other form of a calamity or the pandemic. However, the manufacturing units that are in the business of making affordable sanitary pads are facing disruption as the successive lockdowns have slowed down, almost halted in fact, the process of importing raw materials.

The sorry development has led to the shortage of availability of affordable sanitary

napkins across the country. This has caused millions of menstruating women to suffer, especially those belonging to the rural areas of India, as they could not access sanitary pads during the lockdowns.

It is forcing many women to adopt unhygienic methods of managing their monthly periods, which may give rise to other diseases. Therefore, both the Centre and the State Governments should act swiftly to restore normalcy in the production of affordable sanitary pads. Otherwise, the gains made over the last decade in improving menstrual hygiene and empowering women in this field may be reversed.

PS Swagatika Sahoo | Jagatsinghpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

From Monday, two activities will be open — construction and factories. We will take further decisions considering the COVID situation in Delhi.



Chief Minister

— Arvind Kejriwal

To the men and women who were taken to prisoner of war camps or jail without charge, people who are no longer with us to hear his apology...we are sorry.

Canadian Prime Minister

— Justin Trudeau

Our hearts go out to thousands of people who have suffered the impacts of #CycloneYaas. So many lives and homes affected.



Actor

— Dia Mirza

India look a superior batting side. How they tackle the conditions is important. To me, India's batting will hold the key.

Former India captain

— Kapil Dev

Such five-star politicians (Akhilesh Yadav) are responsible for the fall in level of politics because of their senseless comments. They should have actually been serving people of the State in such troubled times



Uttar Pradesh Minister

— Sidharth Nath Singh



FIRST COLUMN

POWERING THE GROWTH IMPETUS

How India should ensure sustained economic recovery post-pandemic



HIMANSHU RAI

The global economic slowdown caused due to the pandemic has been an eye-opener for various economies chasing growth. They have realized the importance of sustainable growth and contingency planning to cushion deep shocks. Although the scale of the spread of the pandemic was not foreseeable, a resilient and robust underlying policy framework has enabled many nations to get on their feet again. Notwithstanding the unique challenges that countries faced, let us attempt a comparative analysis of economic metrics to understand the hits and misses in terms of economic policies and practices and eventually help policymakers to replicate the successful ones. Australia and New Zealand got the basics right



early and concentrated efforts on health infrastructure to minimize the impact of supply shock and subsequent demand shock due to lockdowns. Spending on goods and services grew by 7.9 per cent in Australia for Q3 2020. In New Zealand, industrial production decreased by two per cent in Q4 2020 while the unemployment rate was 4.9 per cent. The GDP growth rate has been projected within the range of 4 - 5 per cent for 2021, while the IMF projects a GDP growth of three per cent % for 2021 for Australia.

Industrial production decreased by 1.9 per cent in January, 2021 in Europe. New job postings reduced by around 40 per cent in food and beverages sector, indicating challenges of employment. A report by McKinsey estimated that around 59 million jobs may be at risk. The GDP growth rate of the US economy for 2021 was projected earlier to be around 3.08 per cent. The recovery is slow but steady. The industrial production index decreased by 4.2 per cent in the last year, but the increasing market confidence due to ongoing vaccination drives is raising hopes for normalcy. Joblessness is still a major concern with a February, 2021 McKinsey report saying only 60 per cent of job losses have been recovered.

India has been on the path of recovery since Q4 2020, when the GDP increased by 0.4 per cent and GVA by one per cent. The GST collection and eWay bills generation have reached a high, signifying a boost in domestic spending. The share market also recorded significant growth. Indian Forex reserves have become the fourth largest in the world, surpassing Russia.

Though the economy is projected to contract in 2021, there is a 12.6 per cent projected economic growth by OECD for 2022. The Index of Industrial Production shrank by 12 per cent in the period April, 2020-January, 2021. The contraction in January, 2021 has been around 1.6 per cent, indicating slow-paced recovery. The unemployment rate increased from 6.53 per cent in January, 2021 to 6.9 per cent the next month and the major contribution to unemployment has been from the rural areas.

Thus, India needs to focus on the rural sector and boost employment opportunities and stimulate rural markets to develop a solid base for recovery. An important element in this would be the communication to remove skepticism and fear over vaccines, and chart out a robust vaccine-coverage strategy. Sustenance and empowerment of rural and local economies and strengthening the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative will go a long way in helping us recover and reinvigorate.

The author is Director, IIM-Indore. The views expressed are personal.

The dragon's footprint in selective spread of Covid?



VINAI KUMAR SAXENA

Surprisingly, the virus affects only the countries that may have a capacity to control China's hegemonist ambitions and not those securing aid and assistance from it

It is widely suspected that the COVID-19 virus was manufactured in a laboratory in China and was let loose on the world. It is China which is thus claimed to be largely responsible for the loss of more than 3.3 million lives and causing untold suffering to a far greater number of people.

If we look at the list of death by countries, we will see that over half a million died in USA, the biggest trade and military rival of China. Brazil and India, which are the two major members of the BRIC countries that together could make a formidable power of challenge to China have collectively recorded over another half a million deaths. Western European countries, which are allies of US and are power partners in the UN and NATO and dominate the world of commerce and military under the patronage and partnership of US, have collectively seen another half a million deaths.

Actually, a laboratory manufactured agent of death has allegedly been unleashed into countries that are the major threat and hurdle in China's marathon 100-year run to finish as the world's largest super power. In about a year, not just death, the health and hygiene framework and the economic fabric of these countries have been damaged to such an extent that the recovery could take years. On top of that, these nations, mostly democratic, are now facing people's ire due to unquantifiable suffering, and very stable political governance systems have been shaken to the core. This kind of warfare has never been witnessed before in human history.

From the same list of countries, one may observe that countries in the neighbourhood of these strategic nations have not been so much affected by the Chinese virus at all.

Is it a coincidence or a conspiracy that nations like Pakistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan, most of which have societies that are closely linked to India's in trade, cultural exchange, familial relations and interactive through our perforated borders do not have the viral infection anywhere near to the proportion in India? Is it a coincidence or conspiracy that a similar disparity in the viral spread happens across Europe and only NATO countries get severely affected and not the eastern nations on that continent? Why and how is it that the Chinese virus affects only countries that may have a capacity to successfully control the hegemonist ambitions and not the countries that secure aid and assistance from China and remain subservient to the growing power of the dragon?

This is only possible with the help of a laboratory generated virus and not through an organism spun out of organic evolution. For this very reason, India should never accept the vaccine, medicines or any material of mass consumption originating from China, because we could just become sitting ducks for a conspiracy that is deep and wide and is brought out through a careful fusion of science, technology and hegemonist strategy.

We are living in times when completely unthinkable and what we thought as impossible have begun to happen. This month, a rocket launched by China fell back into sea and space agencies have wondered what might have fallen from it into the Indian Ocean. We all remember not many years ago, across the world, unsolicited packets of seeds arrived at people's doors from China and agriculture experts warned people not to sow them, for they might be seeds that will destroy the native species and obliterate our food



IS IT A COINCIDENCE OR A CONSPIRACY THAT NATIONS LIKE PAKISTAN, MYANMAR, BANGLADESH, SRI LANKA AND BHUTAN, MOST OF WHICH HAVE SOCIETIES THAT ARE CLOSELY LINKED TO INDIA'S IN TRADE, CULTURAL EXCHANGE, FAMILIAL RELATIONS AND INTERACTIVE THROUGH OUR PERFORATED BORDERS DO NOT HAVE THE VIRAL INFECTION ANYWHERE NEAR TO THE PROPORTION IN INDIA?

The author is Chairman, Khadi and Village Industries Commission, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.



security.

Australia is in the eye of the storm of the dragon because of its developmental position in south east and scientists wonder if there is any Chinese connection to the devastating wildfire of last year that burned for weeks on end. For scientists, the devastating glacier burst in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, which lies in proximity to China, is also an unusual and rare occurrence in the peak winter months when the Himalayan glaciers remain in deep frozen state.

Technology companies in the Silicon Valley are increasingly being established and led by people of Chinese origin, which might help in China in global surveillance and information collection. Zoom, the leading Video Conferencing facility has been blamed on that count and nations have suspected that information from secretive and strategic video conferences may have already reached Chinese information archives.

A recent publication of NITI Aayog has elaborately traced the character of India's rural economy and put into perspective the importance of rural sustainability of the nation. Although India is in a transitional state of economic resurgence, 68.8 per cent of the nation's population and 72.4 per cent of nation's workforce are from rural areas. Nearly half of India's National Domestic Product (NDP) is still rural. While 96 per cent of agricultural employment is rural, 48.6 per cent of non-agricultural employment too is rural. Because of this, sustain-

able development of India depends predominantly on rural industriousness, productivity, dynamics and livelihood quality. The efforts of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) are intricately linked to this horizon of rural sustainable development of India through nearly 100 different kinds of rural industrial entrepreneurship and handholding activities. KVIC has been sustaining a major part of village industries in India through over 40 offices spread across the nation, around 5,000 aligned institutions, 23 departmental sales outlets and around 8035 Khadi sales outlets /Khadi Bhavans run by Khadi Institutions. The direct beneficiaries organized through this mechanism exceed 15 million people, while indirect beneficiaries run into several additional millions. If you put together the direct, indirect associated and familial beneficiaries of this carefully hand raised and sustained sector, it could well over be a billion people in the lifeline of village industries sustainable development programmes. China understands the socio-economic and socio-political power of this community and its influence on the mainstream life of our nation. And it engages itself in a calculated and consistent manner in which this delicate balance could be obliterated, so that the nation can be hollowed from within.

India annually, over 80 per cent raw material come from China and Vietnam.

Even the national flag of India that is only made with Khadi cotton or silk fabric was not spared by Chinese invasion. Counterfeit national flags made of plastic and other artificial material from China flooded Indian markets forcing the current government to place the National Flag under prohibited category of import in October, 2019.

Similarly, the traditional Indian Silk Industry, the heritage art of clay pottery, handmade paper and leather industry were driven to the verge of extinction. Imagine, the idols of Indian deities were made in China and worshipped in Indian households. Toys, honey, minerals, and dozens of other natural-resources-based village industries have been rendered unproductive due to Chinese economic aggression of pushing through our market a subsidized and quality-compromised product till recently, until the present government made corrections by imposing higher import duty and import restrictions on such Chinese products. It will, however, take years for the Indian village industries to recuperate from the Chinese intrusion and be self-reliant in all respects.

One can imagine the invasion of the dragon. The fire is not in the borders that guard the nation. The fire is burning the nation to its core and is devouring the integrity, national character and our very ways of existence. And we have unconsciously allowed that.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THIS IS THE FOURTH DAY; NO VACCINATION FOR YOUTH BETWEEN 18 AND 44 IN ANY OF THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS OF DELHI IS DONE. — AAP LEADER ATISHI



THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO PLAY POLITICS. BUYING VACCINES INTERNATIONALLY IS NOT SIMILAR TO BUYING OFF-THE-SHELF ITEMS. — NITI AAYOG MEMBER VK PAUL



Super inflation and income loss thaw India

The crisis is national and the country has to take prudent steps, prune expenses and not do politicking on issues of benevolence

Multiple Taxes, unemployment, high 10.49 percent wholesale price index (WPI) rise and severe income losses are thawing the nation amid high Covid-19 deaths.

The six-month high WPI figures in April would be straining the economy. Actual price rise at the retail level would be a minimum of 10.49 per cent plus 4.29 per cent CPI inflation, not less than 14.78 per cent. The super inflation in 1974 was at 28.66 per cent, and 16.94 per cent in 1973. Those days purchasing power of the people had collapsed and protests marked the national scenario. It may not look serious but if income losses of 84 per cent of the people are added it appears grim. As per a study of the Azim Premji University study, the pandemic has led to worsening in quality of employment, with a



SHIVAJI SARKAR

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

number of salaried employees joining the ranks of precariously self-employed.

"The annual rate of inflation in April 2021, is high primarily because of rise in prices of crude petroleum, petrol, diesel and manufactured products as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year," the Commerce and Industry Ministry (CIM) said.

As most rise in prices, fares, freight are due to the CIM stated factors, the economy is slowing down, indicating a lower GDP as well. It is being further complicated by rising joblessness at 8 per cent in April amid the second covid19 wave from 7.4 per cent in March 2021. A CMIE study - Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS) - observes weekly unemployment rate touched 14.5 percent on May 15. The CMIE says



that 84 per cent households have suffered a decrease in monthly income and that more than one-fourth of the country's working-age population is unemployed.

World Bank warns 70 per cent of employment and about a third of GDP comes from the 'informal' workers. They are likely to lose their jobs or suffer severe income losses during Covid-19 lockdowns and

they tend to be largely excluded from social safety nets. Informality has made eight lakh migrant workers move out of Delhi, according to the state government. No nation, World Bank says, could have actual recovery unless these 'informal' people, particularly women, are taken care of.

RBI governor Shaktikanta Das says that manufacturing and services PMI along with

inflation would continue the price pressure. It may aggravate because global prices continue to rise.

Amid such scenario it looks strange that RBI, itself in crisis, approves a dividend payout bonanza of Rs 99,122 crore for July, 2020-March, 2021. It is 73 per cent higher than the entire previous year's Rs 57,126 crore. It is time for austerity not only in the debilitated public sector units but also in its expenses on many real estate and cosmetic projects.

The country is avoiding discussing such criticality that leads to impasses. The recent farmers' stir against the three draconian laws is the result of the 'partycracy'. The nation does not want to discuss the irrationality of multiple taxes and the woes of the people. They are paying taxes on taxes - on old cars, multiple taxes on

petrol, bank deposits, vaccine, coffin, Rs 25 per km road toll and also a GST on that, junking their own cars and even on oxygen - that thankfully was undone by Delhi high court, and irrational atrocities and penalties on masks and Covid-19-related issues. A senior political observer and journalist, Ajai Setia, comments that even in government "ministers don't know what is going on in their ministries".

The discriminations are not being discussed. The Serum Institute of India is stated to have made profits of Rs 59,000 crore (\$8.2 billion) in 2020 and Rs 85,000 crore (\$12.7 billion) in 2021. Similarly, some select corporates are making tons as edible oil, fruit and gas prices are soaring apart from their international and national business. The concern of rising monopolies that are checked in

the US through anti-trust laws remains missing. The PSUs that are sustaining the nation are designed to become junks.

The second wave of spurt in cases of Covid-19 since April has not only caused loss of lives but has cast its shadows on growth prospects. A third wave has been warned. Downward revision of tax revenue and GDP projections are realities. The central government's gross tax revenue in Budget 2020-21 estimates was reduced by more than 20 per cent in 2021-22 Budget.

The governance method has to change with the participation even the opposition. The crisis is national and to surpass Bangladesh, the country has to take prudent drastic steps, prune expenses and not do politicking on issues of benevolence. One step would go through long chain of changes.

Sensex rallies 308 pts; Nifty hits fresh record at 15,436

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex rallied 308 points and NSE Nifty hit a fresh record on Friday, tracking gains in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, HDFC twins and Kotak Bank amid positive cues from global markets.

Further, decline in daily COVID-19 caseload too bolstered investor sentiment, analysts said.

The 30-share BSE index ended 307.66 points or 0.60 per cent higher at 51,422.88. The broader NSE Nifty surged 97.80 points or 0.64 per cent to close at its fresh peak of 15,435.65.

Reliance Industries was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, soaring nearly 6 per cent, followed by M&M, HDFC twins, Kotak Bank, ITC and Bharti Airtel.

On the other hand, Sun Pharma, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank and Dr Reddy's were



among the laggards.

"Domestic equities remained upbeat and recorded fresh high as improved prospects of economy recovery and strong 4QFY21 earnings continued to bolster investors' sentiments. A strong rebound in Reliance Industries was a key driving

force," said Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities. Sustained market rally added over Rs 3 trillion in investors' wealth this week, with the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies crossing the landmark USD 3 trillion during the week, he noted.

Further, a sharp drop in daily COVID-19 caseload in second wave (remaining below 2 lakhs despite higher testing) and improvement in recovery rates have emboldened investors in the last couple of days, he said. Elsewhere in Asia, bours-

Stock exchanges in Europe were also trading with gains in mid-session deals. International oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.25% higher at \$69.37 per barrel

es in Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo ended on a positive note, while Shanghai was in the red.

Stock exchanges in Europe were also trading with gains in mid-session deals.

International oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.25 per cent higher at USD 69.37 per barrel.

Govt considering policy tweak to facilitate BPCL privatisation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is considering a tweak in the current foreign direct investment (FDI) policy to allow overseas investors pick up majority stake in the India's second biggest oil refiner Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL), sources said.

The government is privatising BPCL and is selling its entire 52.98 per cent stake in the company.

For BPCL privatisation, mining-to-oil conglomerate Vedanta had put in an expression of interest (EoI) for buying the government's 52.98 per cent stake in the PSU. The other two bidders are said to be global funds, one of them being Apollo Global Management.

The proposal is under discussion between the departments of disinvestment (DIPAM), industry (DPIIT) and economic affairs (DEA), they said.

At present, only 49 per cent FDI is permitted through automatic route in petroleum refin-



ing by the public sector undertakings (PSU), without any disinvestment or dilution of domestic equity in the existing PSUs. With this provision, a foreign player would not be able to buy more than 49 per cent stake in BPCL.

According to sources, DIPAM has suggested to amend the existing FDI policy in order to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment in a central public sector enter-

prise (CPSE) in the petroleum and natural gas sector.

On the other hand, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has proposed for a separate provision for this specific situation.

The proposed amendment to the FDI policy is under consideration for enabling investment in BPCL as part of the disinvestment process, they added.

MONEY MATTERS

MG joins hands with Attero for recycling of EV batteries

MG Motor India on Friday said it has joined hands with Attero for recycling of electric vehicle (EV) batteries in the country. The partnership is aimed at reusing and recycling the Li-ion batteries used in the automaker's ZS EV units after their end-of-life, MG Motor India said in a statement.



Noida-based Attero, which is the country's leading electronic asset management company and clean-tech provider, deals in battery end-of-use management. "We have been continuously working on expanding the ecosystem in the EV space, as one of the first entrants in the segment. The partnership with Attero gives our customers more confidence with respect to the battery's end-of-life usage. The move will assist in responsible recycling and will further minimise the carbon footprint of ZS EV users while supporting the local economy," MG Motor India President and Managing Director Rajeev Chhaba said. MG Motor sells models like Hector and Gloster in the country.

JK Group announces support to Covid-affected employees

Diversified JK Group on Friday said it will provide financial support through continuance of salary, covering education for children and medical insurance for the family in case of demise of an employee due to COVID-19. Under its 'JK CARES' program, the group comprising companies such as JK Tyre, JK Paper, JK Lakshmi Cement, JK Fenner, JK Agri Genetics, Umang Dairy and PSRI Hospital, said it will provide support to affected families of employees who succumbed to the pandemic between April 2020 and March 2022, thus covering both the waves of COVID-19. "Safety and wellbeing of our employees is of utmost importance for us. As part of our value of 'caring for people', we have been extremely mindful of the need to provide extended support to the families of our beloved employees, who have unfortunately lost their lives," said JK Group Chairman Bharat Hari Singhania. Elaborating further, he said, "in case of any casualty of any of our employees, we will support the bereaved families on three fronts."



Sun Pharma acquires rights to trademarks of 3 drug brands

Drug major Sun Pharma on Friday said it has acquired the rights to trademarks of diabetes drug Dapagliflozin under brands Oxra, Oxramet and Oxraduo in India from AstraZeneca Pharma India's parent company. "Sun Pharma has now acquired the rights to trademarks Oxra, Oxramet and Oxraduo in India from AstraZeneca AB, Sweden, parent company of AstraZeneca Pharma India Limited, with effect from May 28, 2021," Sun Pharma said in a regulatory filing. Sun Pharma said it has also taken a patent license to manufacture and commercialise Dapagliflozin and Dapagliflozin with Metformin combination in India from AstraZeneca AB with effect from May 28, 2021, the filing added. Consequently, AstraZeneca India and Sun Pharma have discontinued their existing distribution services agreement signed in 2016, for distribution of Dapagliflozin. Under the said agreement, AstraZeneca India had granted rights to Sun Pharma to promote and distribute Dapagliflozin under the brand name Oxra.



Ipca Labs Q4 profit up 94 per cent at Rs 161 crore

Drug firm Ipca Laboratories on Friday reported 94.09 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 161.20 crore for March quarter 2020-21 mainly on account of higher sales and reduction in expenses. The company posted a net profit of Rs 83.05 crore for the same period a year ago, Ipca Labs said in a filing to BSE. Total income stood at Rs 1,134.58 crore in the quarter under review. It was Rs 1,087.49 crore in March quarter 2019-20, it added. Total expenses were Rs 939.95 crore in the quarter ended March 31, 2021 as against Rs 972.91 crore in the year-ago period, it said. For 2020-21, the company posted a net profit of Rs 1,141.14 crore as against Rs 603.56 crore in the previous fiscal year, Ipca Labs said. Total income during the last financial year was Rs 5,482.83 crore. It was Rs 4,715.71 crore in 2019-20, it added. In a separate filing, Ipca Labs said its board has approved reappointment of Prashant Godha as Executive Director of the company for a further period of 5 years with effect from August 16, 2021.



Canara announces three loan schemes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-run Canara Bank on Friday announced three loan schemes as part of the fight against the pandemic under which it will offer healthcare credit, business and personal loan to individuals.

The Canara Chikitsa healthcare credit facility will offer loans from over Rs 10 lakh to Rs 50 crore to registered hospitals, nursing homes, medical practitioners, diagnostic centres, pathology labs and all other units engaged in the servicing healthcare infrastructure.

The loan to be offered at a concessional rate of interest will have tenor of 10 years with moratorium up to 18 months, Canara Bank said in an advertisement.

The Canara Jeevanrekha healthcare business loan will offer loan up to Rs 2 crore at a concessional interest rate for manufacture and supply of healthcare products such as medical oxygen and oxygen cylinders and oxygen con-

centrators to registered hospitals and nursing homes or other manufacturers and suppliers.

Canara Bank said there will be no processing fee for this loan. For MSMEs, there will be no collateral security, which the lender will cover under CGTMSE, and the bank will bear the guarantee premium.

CGTMSE is meant to provide financial assistance to such kinds of industries without any third party guarantee or collateral.

For non-MSMEs, the collateral security will be minimum 25 per cent.

Canara Chikitsa and Canara Jeevanrekha loan schemes will be valid till March 31, 2022.

Under the third category of loan -- Canara Suraksha personal loan scheme -- the lender will offer loan from Rs 25,000 - Rs 5 lakh as immediate financial assistance to customers for COVID-19 treatment during admission or post discharge.

Rupee gains for third session; rises 15 paise to 72.45 against \$

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee strengthened for the third straight session on Friday and closed 15 paise higher at 72.45 (provisional) against the US dollar tracking positive domestic equities.

At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 72.46 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 72.31 and a low of 72.49 during the session.

It finally ended at 72.45 against the American currency, registering a rise of 15 paise over its previous close.

On Thursday, the rupee had settled at 72.60 against the US dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.14 per cent to 90.09.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.30 per cent to USD 69.67 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, the BSE Sensex ended 307.66 points or 0.60 per cent higher at 51,422.88, while the broader NSE Nifty advanced 97.80 points or 0.64 per cent to 15,435.65.

Foreign institutional investors were net sellers in the capital market on Thursday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 660.90 crore, as per exchange data.

Further, the rupee gained strength as daily COVID-19 cases declined, traders said.

The single day rise in coronavirus cases in India fell below the 2-lakh mark for the second time this month, while the recoveries continue to outnumber daily cases for the 15th consecutive day, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Friday.

DoT allocates spectrum for 5G trials to telecom operators

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Telecom (DoT) has allocated spectrum to telecom operators to start 5G trials in the country, sources said.

The trials will be conducted at various locations including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Gujarat, Hyderabad, among others, according to industry sources.

"Telecom operators have been allocated spectrum in 700 Mhz band, 3.3-3.6 gigahertz (Ghz) band and 24.25-28.5 Ghz band across various locations," a telecom company official said.

On May 4, DoT had approved applications from Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Idea and MTNL for conducting 5G trials without using technologies from Chinese companies.

DoT had approved trials of 5G with Ericsson, Nokia, Samsung and C-DOT. In addition, Reliance Jio Infocomm will be conducting trials using its own indigenous technol-



ogy. According to DoT, 5G technology is expected to deliver ten times better download speed than that of 4G and up to three times greater spectrum efficiency.

During the trials, application of 5G in Indian settings will get tested. This includes tele-medicine, tele-education and drone-based agriculture monitoring etc.

Telecom operators will be able to test various 5G devices on their network. The duration of the trials, at present, is for a period of 6 months. This

includes a time period of 2 months for procurement and setting up of the equipment.

The permission letters specify that each telecom service provider will have to conduct trials in rural and semi-urban settings in addition to urban settings so that the benefit of the 5G technology proliferates across the country and is not confined only to urban areas.

Industry sources, however, said none of the telecom operators has been allocated spectrum in Punjab, Haryana and union territory of Chandigarh.

Kenya donates 12 tonnes of food products

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Kenya has donated 12 tonnes of food products to India as part of its COVID-19 relief efforts, a statement said on Friday.

The east African country has sent 12 tonnes of tea, coffee and groundnut produced locally to the Indian Red Cross Society, it said adding that the packets will be distributed across Maharashtra with food aid.

"The Government of Kenya wishes to stand in solidarity with the people and Government of India during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic by donating consumable food stuffs," Willy Bett, high commissioner of the African country to India, said. Bett, who came to the financial capital from New Delhi to hand over the food articles, said the donation is directed to the frontline care givers who continue to work long hours to save lives.

JBM rolls out 'Eco-Life' electric AC buses in Guj

PNS ■ MUMBAI

JBM Auto has rolled out its electric air conditioned bus Eco-Life in Gujarat, with state Chief Minister Vijay Rupani virtually launching the first batch of 50 buses from Vastral Bus Rapid Transport System (BRTS) Depo in Ahmedabad on Friday.

The bus service has been rolled out under the BRTS scheme by Ahmedabad Janmarg Ltd (AJL), which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, JBM Auto said in a release.

Powered by fast charging lithium-ion batteries, these buses can run up to 250 km per day with opportunity charging, depending on the city's traffic conditions, the company said.

These buses are equipped with all high-tech features such as real time Passenger Information System (PIS), panic buttons for emergency, automatic bus vehicle location system, CCTV cameras, public address system and stop request buttons, among others.

Nishant Arya, Vice Chairman, JBM Group, said, "JBM is determined to create state-of-the-art e-mobility ecosystem across the country. The launch of electric buses in Ahmedabad is in line with our vision to provide green and sustainable transport solutions."

"Our buses are successfully serving the masses in many other states as well, such as Delhi, Maharashtra, Haryana, UP, Andaman and Nicobar, Karnataka, among others," he said.

Zydus Cadila introduces scratch code in drug packs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug firm Zydus Cadila on Friday said it has introduced a new feature in the packaging of its critical drugs to help patients ensure that the product is not fake or counterfeit.

To start with, technology is being implemented in the company's products Remdac (Remdesivir) and ViraFin Inj (Pegylated Interferon Alpha 2b) and will be seen on the product packs in the third week of June, the drug firm said in a statement.

The feature will also be extended to other products of the company, it added.

The company said it has incorporated a new IT-enabled scratch code which shall be printed under a scratchable surface.



The patients can check to see if the product purchased by them is genuine or not by scratching the surface and verifying the code through the app or the website, it added.

"The problem of counterfeit drugs undermines the painstaking efforts that are put in to ensure that the end user or patients receive a product that is safe and manufactured with the highest standards of quality excellence.

"Counterfeit drugs can be harmful as they may not have the desired outcome and could also be life threatening in some cases," Cadila Healthcare Managing Director Sharvil Patel noted.

To curb this menace, the company has looked at a user-friendly solution which can reassure the patient that the product is genuine and safe, he added.

'India well-placed to apply AI to solve challenges'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Aadhaar architect Nandan Nilekani on Friday India is well-placed on the government and businesses fronts to leverage artificial intelligence (AI) in unique ways to solve challenges and tap into opportunities.

Nilekani noted that over the last few years, the government has focussed on how to make transactions more efficient and effective, which has driven digitisation across the board.

He added that as a byproduct of this, huge data now across systems has been generated and that the time is right to apply AI across the board to India's most challenging issues across areas like healthcare and education.

On the business front,



Indian companies are looking at using AI to solve problems in a big way across the world, and especially after the pandemic that has accelerated digital adoption, Nilekani said during a fireside chat Making India a Global Leader of AI.

"I think India is actually on the cusp of some major AI innovation... both on the business side as well as on the government and national side, we are well placed to really apply AI in a very unique way to India's challenges as well as

opportunities," he added.

The discussion was organised on the sidelines of the one-year anniversary of INDIAai. INDIAai (The National AI Portal of India) is a joint venture by Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), National E-Governance Division (NEGD), and Nasscom that was set up to prepare the nation for an AI future.

It is a central knowledge hub on artificial intelligence and allied fields for entrepreneurs, students, academics and professionals.

MeitY Secretary Ajay Sawhney pointed out that AI can be applied to improve services, quality of delivery and decision making.

Sawhney's primary strength lies in scale.

"It is not technology, technology plays on top of the India scale. The data that comes from India scale, the demand comes from India scale, and it creates such a powerful combination when we have data, we have demand, we have talent, we have a supply of services that tremendous amount of innovation can happen on top of that," he said.

Sawhney said as things progress, one will see emergence of open, public digital platforms in healthcare, education, urban governance, logistics and even horizontals like language technologies that will make use of all emerging technologies, which will be facilitated with the skills India has.

FUNGUS ON LIFE

Even though the Covid curve has started to flatten, Covid deaths are an all time high. What is further wrecking havoc is the Black Fungus, which has been declared as an epidemic by several States including Jammu and Kashmir. This is not all. Alarm bells have rung yet again as four people in Patna was found to have White Fungus. What is it you ask? Doctor responds to your query.



"White fungus is caused by candida group of organisms and Aspergillus. It is found in those patients with low immunity, Diabetes mellitus, using steroids, case of cancer. It involves areas in the body like Mouth, private parts, heart, kidney and lungs. It is also very deadly but it is easily manageable with anti-fungal drugs like Fluconazole. It is present in the air and whenever there is a decrease in immunity, patient may get affected with this infection," Dr HK Mahajan, Anaesthesiologist, Indian Spinal Injuries Centre, Vasant Kunj, tells you. With not much study in place, it is difficult to find out the actual cause of the infection.

What is more alarming is the fact that the infection is apparently more dangerous than the Black Fungus, as per doctors.

"White fungus infections are more dangerous than black fungus due to its acute effect on lungs and other body parts such as other respiratory organs, brain, digestive tract, kidneys, nailed or even

private parts. White fungus is getting much more mortal because of the way it increases and can cause a big damage to the vital organs. Black and White Fungus infections were reported long before the Covid outbreak, but were rare. Now, there is a sudden increase in cases since the onset of the second Covid wave," he says. The signs and symptoms, he says, resemble to that of Covid.

"The signs and symptoms of black fungus include pain in cheekbones and face, eye swelling, congestion, nasal blockage, facial or cheekbone pain, nasal discharge with foul smell and black in colour, and impaired vision. However, the signs and symptoms of white fungus include those which are quite similar to Coronavirus like cough, cold and low oxygen levels along with 'white marks in the oral cavity,'" Mahajan explains.

He adds that Covid-related symptoms were seen in all the four white fungus patients of Patna hospital and all of them

Recently, several States declared Black Fungus an epidemic. While we continue to fight with rising fungal infections, cases of White and Yellow Fungus have started adding to the alarm bells. The Pioneer speaks with doctors to bring you a report

were not found positive in Covid test. "This clearly means that their lungs got infected as the white fungus damages the lungs and chest and may lead to cough, chest pain and breathlessness. This may have irritant symptoms and cause acute pain, headache and swelling. This can be traced through X-rays and CT scans. Such patients are given anti-fungal medication and the same was given to all the four patients in Patna and they have recovered," Mahajan says.

In order to prevent these fungal infections, judicious use of steroids for treating Covid-19 is recommended. "White infection, like I said before, comprises a risk of low oxygen levels and if detected late, may lead to death. Hence, early diagnosis is the key to proper treatment," he tells you.

Dr Shashank Vashist, ENT and Cochlear Implant Surgeon, Columbia Asia, Palam Vihar, Gurugram, tells you that the most effective treatment is a newer antifungal drug, voriconazole.

Amphotericin B is another option.

He adds that this is the most severe form of aspergillosis. It occurs when the infection spreads rapidly from the lungs to the brain, heart, kidneys or skin. "Invasive aspergillosis occurs only in people whose immune systems are weakened as a result of cancer chemotherapy, bone marrow transplantation or a disease of the immune system. Untreated, this form of aspergillosis may be fatal," Vashist opines.

This is not all. A case of yellow fungus was apparently reported in Ghaziabad yesterday. Many doctors say there is nothing called Yellow Fungus in science and that such names are creating confusion among the general public.

With that being said, the symptoms of Yellow Fungus are said to be lethargy, lack of appetite and loss of weight. While in certain severe cases, it may result in pus, wounds taking a long time to heal, malnutrition, organs not functioning or sunken eyes.

Consumption of ultra-processed food items, fast-food restaurant meals, soft drinks, and industrially processed convenience food with salt, sugar, fat, and additives lead to obesity. Besides having an adverse impact on respiratory and cardiac problems, obesity is a major risk factor for stone formation in the body. Considering the startling facts and statistics, on this World Digestive Day, let's zoom in on problems such as gallstones that are a result of obesity.

Excerpts from the interview with Dr Nirmaljeet S Malhi, Director and Senior Consultant at AGI — The Gastrocity, Ludhiana and Debasis Datta, Senior Consultant Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist Director, Fortis Hospitals, Kolkata and Overseas Advisor at Royal College of Physicians, London.

How are Body Mass Index and Bile Duct Stones Linked?

Body mass index (BMI) defined as weight in kilograms divided by square of height in centimetres, is a measure of body fat that applies to adults, and its results ranges from underweight to obesity. More than 135 million people are obese (BMI > 30Kg/cm2) in India. Now, with the increase in BMI, the risk of non-cardiac diseases has grown exponentially.

People who eat a high fat diet, have a sedentary lifestyle and are obese develop gallstones that in turn lead to bile duct stones. When cholesterol, calcium salts and bilirubin deposit in gallbladder, they form gallstones. The gallbladder contains digestive fluid called bile that is passed into the small intestine via bile duct. In some cases, stones that form in gallbladder slip into bile duct and get trapped in it. These are known as common bile duct (CBD) stones.

A stone in the bile duct can cause pain, block the bile duct, and damage the liver, pancreas, and digestive system. A person with bile duct stones usually experiences pain in the



Are Body Mass Index and Bile Duct Stones linked?

upper abdomen, back or shoulder, and around the ribs. Some people can also develop jaundice which may cause their skin and eyes to appear yellow along with fever and/or chills. A subset of patients can develop pancreatitis due to CBD stones that is a major medical emergency and could result in death in 5-10 per cent of cases, if not treated in time. When one develops such symptoms, it becomes imperative to seek timely medical intervention and to undergo the required treatment.

Treating Bile Duct Stones with advanced technologies

The doctor can confirm the diagnosis through medical history, physical examination of the abdomen, blood tests and imaging tests like ultrasonography of the abdomen. In cases of diagnostic uncertainty, Endoscopic Ultrasound (EUS) or MRCP have emerged as the modalities of choice. The treatment of CBD stones is done by a specialised endoscopic procedure called as ERCP (Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography). The dye is injected into the bile duct during this procedure that pro-

vides a clear visibility to locate bile duct stones causing the blockage, which in turn are removed by giving a small incision in a region called papilla in upper part of small intestine.

ERCP has been used for decades for diagnosis and treatment of bile duct stones. However, today, technological breakthroughs have redefined healthcare in India. We now have procedures like Cholangioscopy that enable faster and more accurate treatment in difficult to remove CBD stones, reduced risk associated with repeated procedures and give patients a better quality of life. The therapy is used to treat bile duct stones that cannot be treated using traditional methods and for elderly patients.

A small straw like tube with a camera and light at the end is used to disintegrate stones. The doctor monitors the stone location on a screen and bursts the stone using a tiny probe attached in the tube.

Reducing obesity to prevent Bile Duct Stones

While an outright control of gallbladder problems is inevitable, people can take appropriate mea-

asures to reduce the risk of developing stones and associated symptoms and complications. To prevent gallbladder or bile duct stones, it is imperative to reduce overweight and obesity. Choice of healthier foods and regular exercise can go a long way in preventing obesity. One can limit energy intake from sugars and total fats, increase consumption of vegetables, fruits, grains, and nuts and engage in physical activities for at least 60 minutes a day.

Although a lifestyle modification is the key to weight loss, newer endoscopic approaches like Intra-Gastric Balloon and Endoscopic Sleeve Gastroplasty are new additions to a Gastroenterologist's armamentarium to tackle obesity. As per the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), women and people over 40, obesity and a family history of stones are more prone to getting gallstones or bile duct stones. Gallbladder problems are usually managed easily in expert hands now-a-days. The main solution for managing stones is to spread awareness about the root cause and potential treatment options available.

FUN

ARCHIE



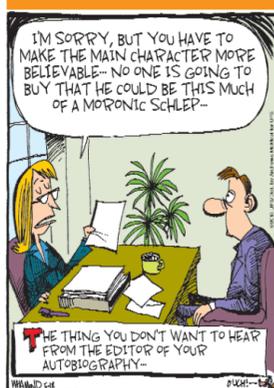
CALVIN AND HOBBS



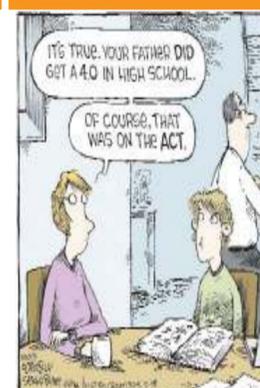
GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- 6 Below
- 8 Frequently
- 10 Water vapour
- 13 Snapshots
- 14 Words that name
- 17 An item of furniture
- 19 A surgeon performs these

DOWN

- 9 Devoured
- 11 Give a lesson
- 12 How old someone is
- 15 Second-hand
- 16 The line where two pieces of cloth join together
- 17 A metal piece of money
- 18 A female relative

SOLUTION



- ### DOWN
- 1 A hair tangle
 - 2 A blood vessel
 - 3 Comes to a finish
 - 4 A strong metal box for storing valuables
 - 5 A branch of science
 - 7 Friend

SHAYAN'S EMOTIONAL CONNECT WITH THE CITY

Charming and talented, Shayan Italia is an international musician hailing from our very own Secunderabad and is now residing in London. The singer-songwriter talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about his life in the city, his unbreakable bond with the City of Pearls, and more.



depicts optimism and positivity, he brings different layers and dimensions to the music he produces. Born a Zoroastrian in Hyderabad, his musical talent has also helped him raise enough funds to support his philanthropic endeavours such as research groups for cancer and multiple sclerosis in memory of his parents. While he's passionate about creating music for years, he always managed to receive the recognition he rightly deserves which continues to keep his faith in his work. Throwing light on his association with the city of pearls, Shayan shares, "I was born and brought up in Secunderabad and have my relatives and really close friends living there, those that I keep in touch with, play 'Fortnite' with, almost daily. I try my best to keep in touch with people, while I've also realised it's wasted energy and calories if the same love is not reciprocated. Then there came a time when I had to move out of Hyderabad as I lost my parents when I was too young and I wanted to study music abroad to hone my craft. My elder brother was in London at the time, so

that was my city of choice! London was already the centre of the music industry worldwide and the British have spawned some of the greatest music artists in history from there. It made sense to move as there was much to learn. There was nothing wrong with Hyderabad as a city and there still isn't though." Give Shayan any song and he will make it his own with his signature style — he keeps it melodious, effortless, and unhurried. He is one of those singers who don't need a big banner or a movie to own a song and can simply elevate the music with an impeccable performance. But, what is his outlook on the music industry down south? He says, "Music is the world's global language that needs no barriers and every culture has its own take on music. It's what makes the world of music wondrous. While some music has universal appeal, I mean the massive worldwide smash hits, music, in general, is highly personal! What is one man's dessert can be another man's poison when it comes to music. Music in the south has always been the heart and soul of all

creativity, long before movies became a turning point. It is why most movies have so much music in them, less now than before though. Music from the south has an energy to it that is infectious, be it a dance tune or a slow ballad. The instrumentation is also unique and instantly identifiable! Also, with the evolution of technology in both music and film, southern music is also starting to evolve and venture into experimental areas."

Secunderabad remains one of the cleanest cities in India according to the pianist and with the nicest and warmest of people. He feels although life is a bit slower compared to other metropolitan cities, they make up for it in a number of other ways like hospitality, care, etc. He adds, "People in Hyderabad look out for each other more; there is a sense of family and long-term friendships that you wouldn't necessarily find in faster-paced metropolitans like Mumbai, which can, for many, prove to be a lonely place to live. Also in terms of tourism, the twin cities perhaps have the most to see of any city in India bar none."

To lift spirits amid this pandemic, he released a song of hope and empowerment! The single has literally become music to the ears of those who have caught the novel coronavirus. He has penned down three different versions of it without the yearning of any publicity stunt but pure aspirations for Covid-infected people only because he certainly believes that music is a powerful medium that reaches the masses in no time. He's so deeply rooted with souls and inner psyches because he lost touch with a very dear friend of his from

the Nawabi city who he thought of as nothing less than a younger brother. But now when he's able to connect with him all over again amid the pandemic, he's so full of joy!

"We are both movie lovers, gadget lovers, gamers, and we try to connect on a daily basis and have a good laugh. It's priceless to me! He's a brilliant soul, kind, and comes from a wonderful family. He lives in Hyderabad. You can be in a different city altogether and be more connected than ever," he expressed.

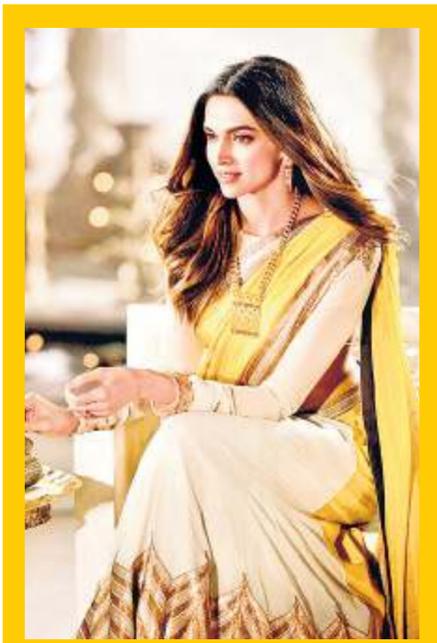
Labelling the Zoroastrian Parsi community as a heartfelt and well-mannered clique of people while he was here in Hyderabad, he finds their giving nature to be the most intriguing part of his life.

Recollecting one of his fondest memories spent here, he remembers, "I miss my parents, my home in Secunderabad, when it was completely lively — every day there were guests, people staying over, it was like a legit zoo because the energy was so infectious! I realised it's people that make a home, not material things. It's astonishing to recall how dead my old home in Secunderabad was when mum and dad were no more, for the few months when I was alone there. It was like a ghost house! So I've always taught myself thereafter, to have an 'open home' policy like my home in Secunderabad did — to always let people stay and adopt a 'my home is your home' policy. In faster-paced cities, this

is very weird for people, but I find this life policy far outweighs the opposite where one never opens their home to others. I would never want to be like that, and this is the greatest takeaway and lesson I have learnt from my parents and family."

An enthusiast for Hyderabad food, the only factor that he dislikes from here is its heat! "It's an age of my life lost, a chapter closed forever. There is much hurt tied to this city for me personally with all that I've gone through! But, it is my duty to overcome that, turn it into a great set of new memories and cherish the past for the good as it was and the moments of wonder it gave me. That will come in time and effort put by me into making it. I owe it to myself to go see my family members and my friends when this pandemic starts to wether away and normality returns. Secunderabad and Hyderabad are great cities with wonderful people and wonderful memories."

With Sir David Frost saying, 'Is the new Elton John going to come from India?' and Ratan Tata describing him as an extremely enterprising and talented individual, Shayan could not have been happier for the fruitful efforts that he's been putting into this diverse businesses of his.



Actress Deepika Padukone features on the list of 'Seven Happy Women'

Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone has featured in the Seven Happy Women list by Chopard under its *Happy Diamond* campaign.

The other names in the list include Aja Naomi King, Jung Ryeo-Won, Sadie Sink, Anne Nakamura, Dorra Zarrouk and Yang Zi. Chopard's Co-President and Artistic Director, Caroline Scheufele, has chosen the names with unparalleled influence to embody Happy Diamonds.

"Seven Friends of the Maison who represent, each through in their own way, a strong, free, joyful way of living in the world and of owning the spirit of the era. Deepika Padukone, Aja Naomi King, Jung Ryeo-Won, Sadie Sink, Anne Nakamura, Dorra Zarrouk and Yang Zi

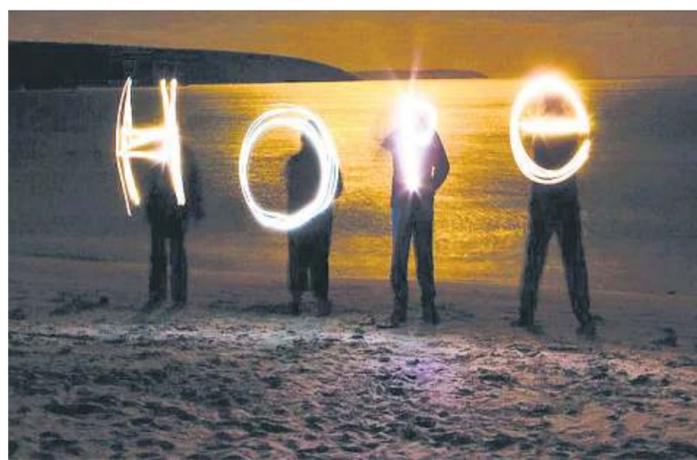
have all grasped the codes of their time to blaze their trail in a manner that is both singular and generous." Theirs are powerful voices that resonate with that of Karin Scheufele — Caroline Scheufele's mother — who once exclaimed, faced with the first sketches of the future Happy Diamonds: "diamonds are happier when they are free." The brand quotes: "An indispensable voice, she (Deepika) speaks of the fragility and strength of the human mind, which she describes with great intelligence: "To accept the highs and the lows. To embrace the various emotions that we are challenged with every single day. And to live a life that is fuelled by authenticity and purpose." A strong mantra for a free spirit that bears witness to a deep humanity, making her a true global icon."

Photography, as a field, is no longer limited to just professionals as millions of pictures are posted on social media platforms every day. So here are a few trends that one can dig in to catch up with the ever-evolving industry.

the lens of their eyes, a phone camera or a DSLR. Photography is an art of expression and with the evolution of time, the way people express their art has also transitioned. From black and white pictures to high-definition photography, the main agenda has always been to lock the subject or memories for life.

The photography industry is an unusual sector to say the least since it allows people to capture human emotions through a lens. The art was not easily accessible to anyone until a few years ago. It was within the reach of the privileged, who could afford the cameras and the expensive accessories it came with. However, with the introduction of the latest technologies and smartphones becoming cheaper, everyone in the world can now capture whatever they want whenever they want, allowing people beyond the professional photography circle to introduce newer trends and changing the photography industry landscape.

Photography, as a field, is no longer limited to just professionals, especially since millions of pictures are posted on social media platforms every day. So here are a few trends that one can dig in to catch up with the ever-evolving industry: **HDR photography:** This method of photography has



FRAME A LIFETIME OF MEMORIES

taken both advanced photographers and amateurs by the storm, especially because it does not require any specific equipment. Anyone who is interested in any kind of photography can take this up as several cameras available in the market have built-in HDR mode which adjusts contrast ratios, allowing the

user to take unrealistic pictures. Thus, high dynamic range photography is constantly getting popular in recent times.

Light painting: A fun technique that enables the photographer in taking the most artistic pictures by adjusting exposure time, natural lightening, aperture and

other features on the camera. This form of art allows the photographer to create great pictures with the use of soft glow or different sources of light. Every picture is equally unique as creativity varies from person to person as well as the camera settings.

Phoneography: Smartphone photography a.k.a. phonegra-

phy is a widespread phenomenon. Today, more and more people have access to smartphones, allowing them to explore their creative skills and capture subjects the way they see them. Clicking pictures has transitioned from managing background noise or free spaces to just making the subject of the image more aesthetic. This culture that has influenced the photography world. Over the last decade, it has created its niche in the industry. Some of the biggest developments since the invention of the smartphone are the ability to instantly share pictures with a large crowd at the click of a button, or even print it on the go using a portable pocket-size printer. It has allowed photographers to ditch their heavy DSLRs and move around easily.

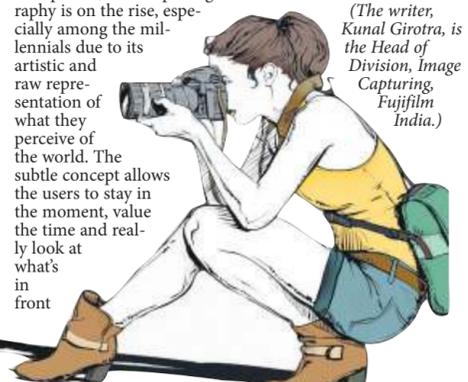
Panotography: Photography is not just bound by some limiting factors such as lighting, exposure time, etc. It is an art that takes shapes and sizes, and so, the frame size also helps the photographer to express a different kind of story. Panotography a.k.a. panoramic photography is 360-degree wide format photography. This form of photography allows the user to capture a landscape from an angle like a human eye would see it, creating unforgettable impressions of real life.

Instant photography: Next to phone and DSLR photography, instant camera photography has also found a sweet spot in the heart of the photographer for its ability to create a time capsule in form of small credit card size pictures. Earlier, the availability of instant cameras was only limited to people who could afford it, but with the technology being available for the masses, people have turned to instant photography to capture and behold their precious times. Besides, instant cameras allow users to take a normal, square or wide picture, inspiring them to tell the story behind a picture in a frame they like. The trend is influencing many every day. Embracing the art of unexpected, instant photography is on the rise, especially among the millennials due to its artistic and raw representation of what they perceive of the world. The subtle concept allows the users to stay in the moment, value the time and really look at what's in front

of them instead of looking at the display of the camera. Furthermore, it allows the users to get close to the subjects and capture them not just as a beautiful picture but also imprint them on their minds.

The way ahead: Technology is the solution to almost every problem today as it maximises convenience while improving quality. The Photography world is no different. In the coming times, technology will take the world of photography to the next level with advanced effects, precision, among other features. And, with a range of cameras available in the market, the trends take new forms enabling one and all to dive into artistic expression.

(The writer, Kunal Girotra, is the Head of Division, Image Capturing, Fujifilm India.)



IND, NZ TO SHARE TROPHY IF WTC FINAL ENDS IN DRAW

PTI ■ DUBAI

India and New Zealand will be adjudged joint winners of the inaugural World Test Championship if their final clash in Southampton ends in a draw or tie, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Friday.

According to the playing conditions unveiled by the global body, "a draw or a tie will see both teams crowned as joint winners..." The ICC has also allocated a Reserve Day to make up for any lost-time during the regular days of the Final, scheduled to be played from 18 to 22 June, with 23 June set aside as the Reserve Day.

"Both of these decisions were made in June 2018, prior to the commencement of the ICC World Test Championship."

The Reserve Day has been scheduled to ensure five full days of play, and it will only be used if lost playing time cannot be recovered through the normal provisions for each day.

"There will be no additional day's play if a positive result is not achieved after five full days of play and the match will be declared a draw in such a scenario," the ICC stated.



In the event of time being lost during the match, the ICC match referee will regularly update the teams and media about the way in which the Reserve Day may be used.

There will be no additional day's play if a positive result is not achieved after five full days of play and the match will be declared a draw in such a scenario

The final decision on whether the Reserve Day needs to be used will be announced at the scheduled start of the last hour on the fifth day.

While India play at home with SG Test and New Zealand use Kookaburra at home, the final will be played with Grade 1 Dukes balls.

The final will also feature the implementation of three changes to international playing conditions, which were brought into effect with the ongoing World Cup Super League series between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka:

Short Runs — The Third Umpire will automatically review any call of a 'short run' by the on-field umpire and communicate the decision prior to the next ball being bowled.

Player Reviews — The fielding captain or the dismissed batsman will be able to confirm with the umpire whether a genuine attempt has been made to play the ball prior to deciding whether to initiate a review for LBW.

DRS Reviews — For LBW reviews, the height margin of the wicket zone has been lifted to the top of the stumps to ensure the same Umpire's Call margin around the stumps for both height and width.

'I didn't realise importance of adding pace to my bowling'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar says he never realised the importance of adding pace to his bowling in his formative years but once he did, it helped him "maintain that swing" which keeps batsmen guessing.

"To be honest, first couple of years I didn't realise pace is something that needs to be added," he said in a video posted by his IPL team SunRisers Hyderabad on its twitter handle.

"As I kept playing, I realised with swing I need to improve my pace because bowling in late 120kph or just 130kph, batsmen were adjusting to the swing. So, I wanted to increase the pace, but I didn't know how to do it..."

The 31-year-old has so far taken 63 wickets in 21 Tests, 138 and 45 scalps in 117 ODIs and 48 T20Is.

"Fortunately, I was able to improve the pace and that



really helped me in the later stages. So yes, when you have pace, not the express 140-plus, but bowling in the mid-130kph helps maintaining that swing and keep the batsman guessing," he said. Bhuvneshwar has been

troubled by injuries and was not considered for the upcoming World Test Championship final against New Zealand in Southampton and the five-match Test series against England.

Allegri In, Pirlo Out

HARSHIT BISHT ■ NEW DELHI

Serie A giants Juventus on Friday reappointed former manager Massimiliano Allegri as new head coach hours after parting ways with Andrea Pirlo.

The former AC Milan and Juventus midfielder Pirlo was sacked as *Bianconeri* failed to retain the *Scudetto* and finished fourth in the Serie A table.

Even though he won Coppa Italia and Supercoppa Italiana in his first job as a manager, a failed bid to win 10th consecutive Serie A title and another disappointing exit from the Champions League (R16 loss against FC Porto) led to his dismissal.

The club released a statement headlined "Good Luck, Andrea Pirlo".

"Pirlo has just begun the first steps of what will no doubt become a brilliant career as a coach," Juventus' statement read. He followed Maurizio Sarri, who was also sacked last year after the club suffered a shock defeat against French side Lyon in the Champions League round of 16.

"My first season as a manager has ended," Pirlo said on *Instagram*. "It has been an intense, complicated but in any case wonderful year."

After Pirlo's departure, Juve turned back to serial winner Allegri, who won five straight



Serie A titles between 2014 and 2019 with The Old Lady, including four Serie A and Coppa Italia doubles (2014-2018).

He also reached two Champions League finals in 2015 (vs Barcelona) and in 2017 (vs Real Madrid) but Juve ended up losing both of them. He was fired by the club two years ago. "WELCOME BACK HOME, MAX! Massimiliano Allegri is the Juventus manager once more," Juventus said in a statement.

"Allegri finds a bench that he knows very well, a club that he loves and that loves him back, as today a new journey begins together, towards new goals."

The 53-year-old has reportedly signed a three-year deal with the club.

Konaté joins Liverpool

HARSHIT BISHT ■ NEW DELHI

Premier League club Liverpool FC on Friday completed the first summer signing after they snapped up young French centre-back Ibrahim Konaté from Bundesliga side RB Leipzig.

The Reds triggered the reported £36 million (\$50 million) release clause in his Leipzig contract.

The France Under-21 international has signed a five-year deal with boss Jürgen Klopp believing him to be the ideal long-term defensive partner for Virgil van Dijk.

Speaking to the club's website, Konaté said: "I'm really happy to be joining such a massive club like Liverpool."

"It's a really exciting moment for me and my family and I am really looking forward to meeting my new teammates, the staff and getting started on this new chapter."

The centre-back, who can also play right-back joined Leipzig in 2017 and made 95 appearances for the club. He was an integral part of the side which reached the Champions



League semi-finals in 2020.

"I'm really pleased we've been able to add a player of Ibrahim's quality to our squad and he is someone I've admired for a long time, ever since I first became aware of his potential," Klopp told the club website.

"After the problems we had with injuries in the centre-half position last season, there's no doubt it was clear it was an area of the team we needed to strengthen."

Klopp believes Konaté's physical qualities

make him ideally suited to the Premier League.

"In Ibrahim we are signing a player who will add to the quality we already have here. His physical attributes are very impressive; he is quick, he is very strong and he is dominant in the air."

The 2019-20 Premier League champions had suffered last season due to season ending injuries to Van Dijk, Joe Gomez and Joël Matip and Konaté's addition is part of a new long term project for the Merseyside club.

Tokyo hopes over for Saina & Srikanth

HARSHIT BISHT ■ NEW DELHI

2012 London Olympic Bronze medallist Saina Nehwal and former world number one Kidambi Srikanth hopes of qualifying for the Tokyo Olympics ended on Friday after Badminton World Federation (BWF) announced there will be no change in the current ranking list and no further tournaments will be played inside the Olympic qualification period.

"The Badminton World Federation (BWF) can confirm no further tournaments will be played inside the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games qualifying window," the sport body said in a statement.

"As such, while the qualification period officially closes 15 June 2021 as per the Revised Tokyo 2020 Qualification System, the current Race To Tokyo rankings list will not change."

Because of the ongoing health crisis, BWF on February 19 had decided to extend the qualification period to June 15 after postponing Malaysia Open Super 750 and Singapore Open Super 500 tournaments to a later date.

But with no improvement in the situation after a brief period too, the tournaments were



shelved, which dashed Saina and Srikanth hopes to earn a chance for qualification.

"The Olympic qualification process is in effect closed as there are no additional opportunities for players to earn points," BWF secretary general Thomas Lund said.

According to the qualification rules, the top 16 players — a maximum of two players each in men's and women's singles from a country — as on June 15 will gain direct entries.

Perera, Chameera star for Lanka

AP ■ DHAKA

Sri Lanka avoided being swept by Bangladesh in their one-day international series when it won the third match by 97 runs with a Kusal Perera century and Dushmantha Chameera's maiden five-for on Friday.

Perera struck a 122-ball 120, including 11 fours and one six, to lead Sri Lanka to a respectable 286-6. The fast bowler Chameera then took 5-16 to undermine the reply by Bangladesh, which was all out for 189 in 42.3 overs.

The victory marked Sri Lanka's first in the ODI Super League.

Perera and Danushka Gunathilaka opened with an 82-run stand after they won the toss.

Bangladesh fast bowler Taskin Ahmed, who claimed 4-46, brought the home side back in contention with a double strike, dismissing Gunathilaka for 39 and Pathum Nissanka for 0.

Perera drove Taskin to sweeper cover for a single in a bullet-proof 50 off 44 balls, but the skipper needed luck three times to reach his sixth ODI century.

He was dropped on 66 by Mustafizur Rahman at short third man, dropped on 79 by Afif Hossain at long on off left-arm spinner Shakib Al Hasan, and dropped on 99 by Mahmudullah at mid on off fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman.

Panghal cruises into final



PTI ■ DUBAI

The defending champion Amit Panghal punched his way into the men's 52kg final at the 2021 ASBC Asian Boxing Championships after outpunching Kazakhstan's Saken Bibossinov in the last-4 clash in Dubai on Friday.

During an intense battle between World Championships Silver medallist Panghal and Bronze medallist Bibossinov, the Indian made a cautious start and tried to keep a distance from the opponent. He looked more aggressive later in the second round and hit some clean punches to put pressure on Bibossinov.

Panghal carried on the momentum throughout the match and stamped his authority over Kazakh boxer to secure a commanding 5-0 win. Aiming to win second successive gold, the Indian boxer will take on Rio

Olympic champion Zoirov Shakhobidin of Uzbekistan in the gold medal match on Monday.

India is now assured of at least five Silver medals with four women already making their way into the finals earlier on Thursday at the prestigious event which is jointly hosted by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) and UAE Boxing Federation. With 15 medals confirmed, Indian contingent also achieved their highest medal haul, surpassing the previous best of 13 (2 gold, 4 silver and 7 Bronze) from the 2019 edition in Bangkok.

On Thursday six-time World Champion Mary Kom (51kg) alongside three more Indian women pugilists-Pooja Rani (75kg), Anupama (+81kg) and Labutsahi (64kg)-progressed into the finals. The defending champion Pooja received a walk-over against Mongolia's Munkhbat.

Our preparation far from being ideal: Stimac

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Livid with the strict quarantine arrangements in Qatar, Indian football team head coach Igor Stimac on Friday said their preparation is "far from being ideal" for the upcoming World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifiers.

Already out of contention for a World Cup berth, India will face Asian champions Qatar on June 3 before taking on Bangladesh (June 7) and Afghanistan (June 15) in their remaining group E matches, with an aim to qualify for the 2023 Asian Cup in China.

The Sunil Chhetri-led Blue Tigers, who were originally slated to reach Qatar on May 30, advanced their arrival to May 19. As per the strict quarantine, they are not allowed to train in gym, use the meeting hall or even eat together.

"If I knew that everything will be like it is today, I would never accept to be honest. We could organise such games in such way in India also. At the end we lost possibility of playing two home games," Stimac told reporters during a virtual interaction.

"Here we are now, not in great conditions. This is far away from a proper preparation for the World Cup qualifiers, but it is what it is. This is not a proper football work which needs to be obtained before the World Cup qualifiers."

Frustrated with the arrangements, Stimac continued: "I'm well aware that Qatar is future host of the World Cup, and we all know about the great facilities for football teams."

"But, as a coach, personally I expected a lot more from this organisation. I know that we changed all our plans due to the pandemic. I say a big thank you to Qatar government for allowing us to come over here."



Under the current circumstances, the Indian players are forced to practice on the corridor, in front of their respective rooms, the 53-year-old Croatian World Cupper said.

"I didn't expect this. I expected as a coach that we're going to have a possibility of using the gym."

"We are doing our morning sessions in the hall in front of our rooms, and our players are eating delivery food, which is left in front of our rooms."

"That's not proper preparation for a football players, I'm quite sure that the Qatari team is not in the same position." Stimac said they are forced to go through all this despite being tested COVID-19 negative three times.

"We were tested three times already, all the tests are negative. Why we don't have a proper meeting hall, so we can

discuss and analyse our opponents, why we don't have a possibility of spending more time together, eating together."

"Instead of that we have one chance going out in the evenings for the training session, that's all." With India reeling under a second wave of the pandemic, most of the players, barring the ones from Bengaluru FC and FC Goa who were involved in the AFC club tournaments, have not played any match since the ISL got over earlier this year.

But Stimac is hopeful that they would make the Asian Cup. Currently placed third with three points, India still have a bright chance to make the continental showcase even if they finish last in their group.

"I'm very confident that at the end of this journey, we will be in the AFC Cup. I know that our actual situation at the moment is far from ideal. The Qatar team is fully prepared."

"The Bangladesh side was playing in their league until recently."

They will be much better prepared. 23 out of 28 players in the Afghanistan side are playing in Europe or in the United States, so they will be in full swing."

"On the other hand, you know the situation of our team. But what I can promise to all of you we're going to give everything we have at the moment, playing these games."

"Our players will leave each atom of energy on the field, will do everything to get as many points as possible in these matches to qualify for the AFC Asian Cup. We can judge ourselves after that." Stimac said they are eyeing a third-place finish in the group to make the cut.

"We will try everything to finish third but if it's not possible, from whichever position we start further, we're going to do everything and qualify for the AFC cup."

Mental fitness is as important as physical fitness'

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian men's hockey team defender Jarmanpreet Singh on Friday stressed on the importance of mental fitness as they prepare for the Tokyo Olympic amid a raging COVID-19 pandemic.

The 24-year-old has been training at SAI centre in Bengaluru as part of the Senior Core Group ahead of the Olympics.

"I feel mental fitness is as important as physical fitness to deal with the current situations. A player needs to be mentally strong."

and for that, we have been helping each other," said Jarmanpreet in a release issued by Hockey India.

India were supposed to play their FIH Pro League away matches against Great Britain, Spain and Germany this month but the ties were postponed due to travel restrictions imposed in the wake of a surge in COVID-19 cases.

"We communicate with each other, we try to create a positive environment around so that everyone stays in a happy zone. I feel because of this, there's a very good team bonding, which has been helping us with our preparations for the Olympics," he said.

Asked how he is preparing for the Tokyo Games, Jarmanpreet said, "My focus remains only on giving my best, with the full energy, and trying to improve each and



every day at the training. "I put on a challenge to myself that, I should keep reducing my margin of error."

Jarmanpreet, who made his debut for the national team in 2018, feels he is fortunate to have the support from the senior players since the beginning of his career.

"I am very fortunate and thankful to all senior players as well as coaches because they knew my past (the two-year doping ban in 2015), they knew I was returning after a long time."

"They have always supported me since the beginning. They have guided me at each step, and have been motivating me a lot."

"Moreover, it also helps when you have a senior player as a roommate. Kothajit (Singh) paaji is my roommate here, and we share a good bond on and off the field."

RAASHI KHANNA: SHOOTING ABROAD AS INDIA BATTLED COVID WAS UPSETTING

Raashi Khanna says shooting in Italy was safe because people in the country very responsibly observed protocol.

"We were in the middle of the pandemic and I was at first scared to go there (Italy). Once there, I realised people in Italy were very responsible with wearing masks even though the second wave had passed. Very few people were shooting with us in the crew and all precautions had been taken," she tells.

"While I was there, the second wave in India intensified and I was constantly reading about what was happening in India. It was upsetting. It felt bad that our country was suffering and we were away. Now we are back and we can't do much. It's a helpless situation. We shot for what we had gone for, but it was upsetting humanly. We were constantly thinking about what was happening back home," Raashi adds.

Raashi made her acting debut with Shoojit Sircar's 2013 Hindi film *Madras Cafe*, and eventually forayed Telugu film-dom with hits such as *Touch Chesi Chudu*, *Tholi Prema*, *Venky Mama* and *World Famous Lover*.

Talking about how Covid brought obstacles for the production team of *Thank You*, the actress says: "Honestly, there is always pressure to finish on time but I had a very good team that had taken everything under consideration and they didn't put any pressure. We were all stressed about finishing the shoot as there were restrictions because we were from India. There were certain locations that were cancelled. There was this whole thing about the pandemic growing in India that went against us."

She adds: "There were challenges that the production team faced but other than that we were really protected. There were days when we were shooting for 18 hours a day because we didn't have a choice. It wasn't like pre-pandemic, that you could shoot at luxury and anywhere you want to. It was difficult this time."

Thank You will be her second release with Naga Chaitanya after *Venky Mama*, and Raashi says her role in the film will be relatable.

"People like me mostly in romantic films, and that is what I have figured out. In *Thank You* there is a nice part written for me. I think the audience will enjoy it because it is real. Usually, sometimes we play over-the-top characters and I am known for my comedy in the south. So this is something I am really looking forward to," she signs off.



Chiru demands Bharat Ratna for NTR

On legendary actor NTR's birth anniversary Megastar Chiranjeevi demanded that Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award of the country, be conferred posthumously former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao — NTR. Chiru took to his Twitter and requested the central government to confer Bharat Ratna to NTR.

Taking to Twitter, megastar said, "Pride of the Telugu people and well renowned leader NTR well

and truly deserves Bharat Ratna. If the prestigious award is conferred upon him, it would be a proud honor for Telugu community. I am fondly remembering the great personality Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao on the occasion of his 98th birth anniversary."

On the work front, Chiranjeevi will be seen playing the lead role in *Acharya*, which is being helmed by Koratala Siva. The sources close to the makers of *Acharya* revealed that the majority of the shoot has been wrapped up and only a 10-day shoot is left.



Ileana D'Cruz: You just want people to like watching you

Actress Ileana D'Cruz has had a great run down South and has also been doing her share of Bollywood films. She says everything comes down to people and, as an artiste, one just wants the audience to like watching you. Popularity, she explains, is the one thing that balances the fact that the film industry can actually be a very cruel place to survive.

"It (the film industry) is brutal, of course, but it comes down to people. If they (people)

like you that is all you need. You just want people to like watching you," she said. Ileana feels the moment an actor is not appreciated they lose the mark.

"It basically goes the same for me. I wouldn't want to watch a film with an actor I don't like watching. The minute you are not liked anymore, you sort of lose the mark. The industry is brutal in a sense, but it has got so many perks as well," she says. Acting is a profession that comes with its pros and cons, the actress notes, in this con-

text. "You cannot have all the good things only, there is always a little bit of con. I think that makes it interesting."

It makes you work harder. It makes you strive to keep doing better," she sums up. Ileana will next be seen in *Unfair N Lovely*, a comic take on India's obsession with fair skin.



SEERAT KAPOOR may consider going bald if role demands

Actress Seerat Kapoor, who is known for her big curls and is often showered with compliments for her hairstyle, says she doesn't mind going bald if a role requires.

The actress, who mainly works in Telugu films, will soon be seen in the Bollywood film *Maarich*, with Naseeruddin Shah and Tusshar Kapoor.

"If the character has depth, I will most likely consider it (going bald). My fans have always appreciated every hairstyle on me — be it straight, wavy or curly. Over the years I have come to realise that the bond we share goes beyond visual appeal. When they say we love her curls, it's not the hairstyle that they are attached to. It comes from the intent of loving who I am naturally. If I were ever to play such a role, I can only imagine how excited they'd be to watch how I'd carry it," she claimed.

Seerat is known for her work in Telugu films such as *Run Raja Run*, *Raju Gari Gadhi 2*, *Columbia*, *Touch Chesi Chudu*, and more recently, *Maa Vintha Gadha Vinuma*.

Her debut Bollywood act was in a 2014 film titled *Zid*, starring Mannara Chopra.



SR Kalyanamandapam to release in "theatres only"

With more and more films, amid the unprecedented pandemic, going to digital platforms this year, it was natural for rumours about many films willing to take the same route. One such film that became a victim of such rumours has to be *SR Kalyanamandapam*. But rubbing all those

rumours, the makers of the film said the film is all set to be released in "theatres only." The makers took to Twitter to make the announcement: "*SR Kalyanamandapam* is ready. We're pumped. Theatres are waiting. What about you? Coming only to theatres near you, get ready to witness all the fun! #SRK @Kiran_Abbavaram @ItsJawalkar

@sridhar_chotu @chaitanmusic @EliteGroupOfcfl @LahariMusic @IamEluruSreenu @Ticket_Factory (sic)"

Touted to be a family entertainer set against a Rayalaseema backdrop, the film that has actors Kiran Abbavaram and Priyanka Jawalkar in the lead, is directed by Sridhar Gade and produced by Pramod and Raju under the banner of Elite Entertainments. The supporting cast includes Sai Kumar, Tanikella Bharani, and Tulasi among a few others.

Kalyan Ram to play a barbaric king in his next

Daring and dynamic hero Nandamuri Kalyan Ram's next, his 18th film's title and first glimpse was finally unveiled. Produced by Hari Krishna K under the NTR Arts banner, the film has been titled *Bimbisara* and comes with the tagline 'A Time Travel From Evil To Good.'

Mallidi Vashist is directing

Bimbisara and on the occasion of NTR's birth anniversary, the announcements were made. The first glimpse shows Kalyan Ram in a never-before avatar.

Seen as a barbaric king, Kalyan Ram holds a sword that has blood stains and is seated above a pool of dead bodies. Kalyan Ram's look and the backdrop with vfx are just terrific. "We started the shooting of the

film last year. We are making the film with high technical values and involves a lot of graphic work. Huge sets were erected for this film and it is going to be a big budget film in Kalyan's career. Currently, the shooting is stalled due to the Covid and once things normalise, the works resume. We are planning to release the movie in the second half of this year," said the *Bimbisara* team.

Kalyan yet again proved that he is game for diverse content. Catherine of *Iddarammayilatho* fame and Samyuktha Menon of *Vellam* fame are to play important roles in the film.

