

SHORT TAKES

Man, driver held for hoarding black fungus drugs

New Delhi: A 46-year-old man and his driver was arrested for allegedly selling Amphotericin -B, a medicine used for treatment of Black Fungus infection at an exorbitant rate of ₹11,300 per injection, police said on Monday. The accused, Rajnish Shrivastava, whose firm "AmbuSmith Inc." deals in trading of medical equipments and ambulance modification brought these injections from Lucknow and sold them here at a higher price. His driver, Murtaza Khan (36), a resident of Harsh Vihar also helped him in this business, they said. The police claimed they were selling the drug at a price which was about 36 times the MRP and said further investigation is underway to ascertain the source of drug.

The accused duo were arrested on Sunday, after two students reported at Saket police station about Shrivastava and informed that as members of a Whatsapp group "Covid Helper", they help in arranging medicines for patients suffering from Covid-19 and black fungus, police said. "During preliminary interrogation, it emerged that accused Shrivastava has brought these injections from Lucknow and was trying to sell them at a very high price taking advantage of the needy persons during the pandemic," he said. The police have also recovered three mobile phones including the one used by Shrivastava to interact with complainant along with the car which was used by the alleged persons for black marketing injections and medicines required for patients of Covid-19 and black fungus.

Student dupes man promising Remdesivir, held

New Delhi: A 20-year-old college student was arrested for allegedly duping a man of ₹36,000 on the pretext of providing him Remdesivir injection required for treatment of Coronavirus patients, police said on Monday. Sagar Chaurasia, a resident of Baba Farid Puri, West Patel Nagar, is a student of B.Com final year. He worked for a person named Akram Khan who is still at large and efforts are being taken to nab him, they said.

Khan shared Chaurasia's bank account details to victims who would then transfer the amount into the provided account. As soon as Chaurasia received the cheated amount in his account, he would immediately inform Khan. Accused Chaurasia got a share of about 10 percent of the cheated amount on each fraud, police said. Accused Chaurasia was arrested after a complaint was filed at Dabri police station on May 15 by a resident of Palam who alleged that he was cheated by a person named Ajay who promised to deliver him Remdesivir injection but even after making payment, it was not delivered, a police officer said.

Complainant stated that he was in of Remdesivir injection for a relative and got in touch with Ajay through social media. He was promised delivery of the said drug at ₹38,000 and was asked to transfer ₹18,000 in his bank account. Later, the victim made another payment of ₹18,000 as per demand. Sagar was nabbed at Baba Farid Puri, said Santosh Kumar Meena, deputy commissioner of police (Dwarka). When Chaurasia was interrogated, he disclosed that he used to act on the instance of accused Akram Khan.

■ Delhi govt imported 6,000 oxygen cylinders from China, says Kejriwal

CM: Pfizer, Moderna refused to sell vaccines to Delhi govt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said US pharmaceutical giants Pfizer and Moderna have declined to sell coronavirus vaccines to the city government as they want to directly deal with the Centre.

"We have had talks with Pfizer and Moderna. They said they won't give us vaccine and will directly talk to the Centre," Kejriwal told reporters.

"I appeal to the central government with folded hands to talk to these firms, import vaccines and distribute them among states," he added.

The Delhi chief minister's remarks came a day after a senior Punjab official said Moderna had refused to send vaccines directly to the state government stating that it only deals with the Centre.

Kejriwal said the second wave of Covid-19 is declining gradually and the city government has started preparations for the third wave.

Kejriwal on Monday said his government has imported 6,000 oxygen cylinders from China which will be stored at three depots and used in case of a third wave of coronavirus.

"Around 6,000 oxygen

cylinders have been airlifted from China, of which we have received 4,400. The remaining 1,600 will arrive within two to three days," he told reporters.

The chief minister thanked the ministry of external affairs and the Indian Embassy in Beijing for the assistance in importing the oxygen cylinders.

The city government is creating three depots to store the cylinders. These can be given to people in need and can be used to create additional oxygen beds at hospitals, Kejriwal said.

"In case of a third wave of Covid-19, these 6,000 cylinders can be utilised to prepare 3,000 oxygen beds. Perhaps, this is the largest such consignment brought to India since the pandemic began," he said.

He said HCL and Give India Foundation donated for this purpose. "Besides, we are purchasing oxygen concentrators on a large scale. Oxygen concentrator banks have been set up in all the districts to provide them to people in need. We are also going to buy oxygen tanks and are creating oxygen storage space. "Whatever problems we faced during this wave are now being resolved," he said.



A medic walks past vacant beds at Shehnai Banquet Hall, converted into a Covid-19 isolation centre, in New Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

'500 black fungus cases in Delhi but vaccines in short supply'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said there are around 500 cases of black fungus or mucormycosis in Delhi and the city has been grappling with a shortage of Amphotericin-B injection used in its treatment.

"We have set up dedicated centres for the treatment of black fungus at Lok Nayak Hospital, GTB Hospital and Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital but we do not have drugs....

We did not get the injections on Sunday," he told reporters.

Four to five injections per patient per day are used in the treatment of the fungal infection. There are around 500 cases of black fungus in Delhi at present, he said, adding Delhi has been receiving around 400 to 500 injections per day.

The central government has been distributing the injection among states. There is a severe shortage of this drug in the market and its production should be ramped up, the chief minister said.

Vaccination halted for 18-44 age group in Delhi: Sisodia

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Monday said all the 400 vaccination sites for the 18-44 age group have been closed in Delhi after the vaccine stock was over, while the centres administering Covaxin to the 45+ age group, healthcare workers and frontline workers too have been shut due to unavailability of jabs.

Delhi has received 1.5 lakh doses of Covishield for the 45 plus age group, AAP MLA Atishi said on Monday. Issuing the vaccination bulletin, he said the stock of Covishield can now last up to 14 days.

"However, there are no Covaxin stocks available. It is worrying since there are many people who have received the first dose and are due for their second.

"If they don't receive the second dose within the stipulated time period, even the first dose would be considered wasted," she said.

There are no vaccine doses available for the 18-44 age group, she added.

Delhi recorded 1,550 fresh cases of Covid-19 and 207 fatalities on Monday even as chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said his government has begun preparing for what is being termed the "third wave."

This is the lowest number of daily cases recorded since March 27 (1,558 cases) and the count has gone below the 2,000-mark for the second consecutive day.

The positivity rate in the national capital stands at 2.52 per cent.

Twitter offices raided in Delhi, Gurgaon over Covid-19 toolkit

Cowardly raid on Twitter exposes lameduck attempts to hide fraudulent toolkit by BJP leaders, says Congress

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The Special Cell of Delhi Police on Monday evening raided the offices of Twitter India in Delhi and Gurugram. Earlier, police had sent a notice to social media platform 'Twitter' in connection with an inquiry into a complaint regarding the alleged Covid-19 toolkit and seeking an explanation for flagging the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) spokesperson Sambit Patra's tweet on alleged Congress tweet as manipulated media.

"Twitter had replied that they have no information to share. So, police teams were sent at South Delhi's Lado Sarai and Gurugram to record the statement of the people there, but the offices were locked," said a source.

Chinmoy Biswal, the Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Delhi Police said that the police team went to Twitter offices to serve a notice, as a part of routine process. "This was necessitated as police wanted to ascertain who is the right person to serve a notice, as replies by Twitter India MD have been very ambiguous," said Biswal.

The BJP has accused the Congress of creating a 'toolkit' that seeks to tarnish the image of the country and Prime Minister Narendra Modi by calling the new strain of coronavirus as India strain or

► **THE CONGRESS** on Monday alleged that the "cowardly raid" on the microblogging site's offices by the Delhi Police "exposes lameduck attempts" to hide a "fraudulent toolkit" by BJP leaders

Modi strain. "Delhi Police is enquiring into a complaint in which clarification is sought from the Twitter regarding the classification of a tweet by Sambit Patra as 'manipulative'," said Biswal.

"It appears that Twitter has some information which is not known to us on the basis of which they have classified it as such. This information is relevant to the enquiry. The Special Cell which is conducting the enquiry wants to find out the truth. Twitter which has claimed to know the underlying truth should clarify," Biswal added.

The Delhi police team went to Twitter office to serve a notice to Twitter, as a part of routine process. This was necessitated as we wanted to ascertain who is the right person to serve a notice, as replies by Twitter India MD have been very ambiguous, PRO added.

However, police refused to divulge the contents of the complaint or the identity of the complainant.

Last week, Twitter labelled as manipulated media a tweet by Patra on the alleged 'toolkit'. Twitter

said that it may label tweets that include media (videos, audio, and images) that have been deceptively altered or fabricated.

The BJP leaders, including Patra, have posted numerous tweets to attack the Congress over the purported 'toolkit'.

On May 19, the Congress lodged a police complaint seeking registration of cases against BJP chief J. P. Nadda, Union minister Smriti Irani, BJP general secretary B. L. Santosh and Patra over the alleged forgery of documents.

The Congress on Monday alleged that the "cowardly raid" on the microblogging site's offices by the Delhi Police "exposes lameduck attempts" to hide a "fraudulent toolkit" by BJP leaders.

Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said on Twitter, "Cowardly raid on @Twitter unleashed by Delhi Police exposes lameduck attempts to hide the fraudulent toolkit by BJP leaders." Such attempts to "murder" freedom of speech lay bare the BJP's guilt, he said and tagged his video statement on the issue.

In the video statement, Surjewala alleged that the "subjugation of free speech, attempts to stifle every voice that is a dissenting against this government and the state-sponsored fraudulent means to propagate and instill fear continue unabated in Modi government".

Inquire into Gambhir, others buying Covid drugs in bulk: HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The Delhi High Court on Monday directed the drug controller of Delhi to examine the procurement and distribution of FabiFlu by BJP MP Gautam Gambhir, and to take necessary action as per law. The high court also directed the drug controller of Delhi government to conduct a similar inquiry into the allegations of procuring and hoarding medical oxygen made against AAP MLAs Priti Tomar and Praveen Kumar and file a status report.

A division bench of Justice Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said Gambhir has been a cricketer who played for India. "We are sure he had good intentions. The way he has gone about it, he has actually done a disservice, unintentionally may be. This is not done." The bench took note that FabiFlu was in short supply at the time when the drug was being distributed by Gambhir.

The bench added that it is sure Gambhir had best intentions and he also started a charity and if he wanted to help maybe he could have provided funds. The bench added, is it a responsible behaviour to bulk purchase medicines when you know there is a shortage?

The High Court also took note of the AAP MLAs Preeti Tomar and Praveen Kumar's procurement of oxygen cylinders and directed an inquiry must be done by the drug authority.

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The court emphasised that the law must take its course.

The high court was hearing a PIL seeking lodging of an FIR on the allegations that politicians are able to procure in huge quantities and distribute COVID-19 medicines even as patients were running from pillar to post to get them.

An application was also filed in the pending petition seeking allegations of MLAs Tomar and Kumar.

The bench perused the status report of Delhi Police which said that Gambhir had purchased 2,628 strips of FabiFlu, used for treating Covid-19 patients, on the prescription of Dr Manish of Sanjay Garg Hospital and while 2,343 strips were distributed to patients, remaining 285 strips were deposited with Delhi government's Director General of Health Services for distribution, in view of court's earlier order.

Wrestler Sushil suspected of running criminal nexus

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The international wrestler turned alleged murderer, the 38 year-old Sushil Kumar is suspected of running a criminal nexus from the Chhatrasal Stadium in the National Capital. From grabbing lands illegally in Delhi and its peripherals and connections with the alleged gangsters, the Crime Branch of Delhi Police is investigating Sushil Kumar nexus and the death of 23 year-old budding wrestler Sagar Dhankar's connection with it.

Sources said that a huge nexus being run by the two time Olympian medalist from Chattarsal Stadium is evident by the recovery of a Mahindra Scorpio car by the police, which came during the brawl, all the way from Haryana's Jhajjar area carrying double barrel gun and lathis.

It is also suspected that Kumar was also sending wrestlers, who had retired due to injury or



Sushil Kumar

Rohini, West and Outer Delhi areas.

"Police is investigating the murder of Sagar with all angles. The vehicles and weapons recovered after the incident are also being probed. Police teams will be taking Sushil Kumar to the stadium to analyse the sequence of incident. Police will also investigate the role of gangsters including Neeraj Bawania and Sandeep alias Kala Jhatedi," said a senior police official.

"Sushil and Ajay were questioned by the police team on Monday for more than four hours and Sushil was also asked about his associates and friends who helped him in hiding," said the senior police official.

When asked about a video of the incident

which Kumar asked his associate to record, police refused to reveal further details and said that the accused will be interrogated.

A source told this newspaper that the brawl took place due to a dispute over a flat, located in Model Town area, in which both Sushil and Kala Jhatedi were partners, however, the further interrogation of Kumar will clear the reason behind the deadly attack on deceased wrestler Sagar Dhankar and his friends, Sonu and Amit Kumar, who were injured.

Sonu, who has 19 criminal cases registered against him, is nephew of Kala Jhatedi. It is also suspected that Kumar along with Kala Jhatedi and Lawrance Bishnoi were running several highway toll taxes in Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh (UP). "Several wrestlers were also managing these toll taxes on behalf of the alleged gangster and Sushil and recovering money," said 27 year-old Sumit, a wrestler.

'People quit tobacco to relapse faster'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

Quitting tobacco is easy but staying quit is difficult! People quit tobacco to relapse faster than they had quit leading to frustration and loss of confidence. It is important to seek help of certified tobacco cessation specialists for successful quitting.

The journey which begins following peer pressure or experimentation and a phase of happy life with tobacco, ultimately leads to frustration and a desire to quit

mostly due to health reasons. The only wish is of someone to help quit successfully.

Why is it so difficult to quit? There are two main reasons. One, nicotine affects the brain causing physical dependence, leading to severe cravings. The second is the psychological misconception of tobacco users that they can quit with willpower alone. The World Health Organisation recognises tobacco as a "complex disease" that needs treatment.

The book *Win Over*

Tobacco Made Easy, authored by Dr. Pawan Gupta, is a comprehensive guide in this regard.

Dr Gupta is director of surgical oncology at Max Super Speciality Hospital, Vaishali, Patparganj and Noida. He is highly recognised for his work on oral cancer and tobacco cessation.

He is the convenor for certified course in tobacco cessation under the Gujarat University. He launched the #SAVEtheyouth campaign and Tobacco MARSHALS in the community.



Walled City's cloth market area wears a deserted look during the lockdown in New Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

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 Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E-TENDER NOTICE
 E-Tenders are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in & <http://tender.up.nic.in>
 Please ensure to see these website for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.
A) (I) 13/DGM(JAL)/AO/SM(JAL)-I/21-22 M/o W/s (Two Year Annual Repairing of VT Motor, Transformer, TPMQ & Other Electrical Works in Network Sector-1 to 7) Noida. Rs. 27.86 Lacs.
 The above tenders can be uploaded by date 07.06.2021 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 08.06.2021 at 11.00 AM.
 Office Sector-5 Senior Manager (Jal)-I, Noida
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IMPORTANT NOTICE
 It is notified for the information of rail passengers that the Railways have decided to cancel the following Special Trains keeping in view the impending cyclone YAAS, as per the following details:-

CANCELLATION OF SPECIAL TRAINS	
Train No. & Name	Dates of Cancellation
02382 New Delhi-Howrah Jn. Superfast Express Special	25.05.2021
02381 Howrah Jn.-New Delhi Superfast Express Special	27.05.2021
02318 Amritsar Jn.-Kolkata Express Special	25.05.2021
02301/02302 Howrah Jn.-New Delhi-Howrah Jn. Express Special	26.05.2021
02369 Howrah Jn.-Dehradun Express Special	26.05.2021 & 27.05.2021
02370 Dehradun-Howrah Jn. Express Special	25.05.2021 & 28.05.2021
03005 Howrah Jn.-Amritsar Jn. Express Special	26.05.2021
03006 Amritsar Jn.-Howrah Jn. Express Special	25.05.2021
02311 Howrah Jn.-Kalka Netaji Express Special	26.05.2021
02312 Kalka-Howrah Jn. Netaji Express Special	25.05.2021
02333/02334 Howrah Jn.-Prayagraj Rambag-Howrah Jn. Exp. Spl.	26.05.2021
03009 Howrah Jn.-Yog Nagri Rishikesh Express Special	26.05.2021
03010 Yog Nagri Rishikesh-Howrah Jn. Express Special	25.05.2021
03019 Howrah Jn.-Kathgodam Express Special	26.05.2021
03020 Kathgodam-Howrah Jn. Express Special	25.05.2021
02313/02314 Sealdah-New Delhi-Sealdah Express Special	26.05.2021
03167 Kolkata-Agra Cantt. Express Special	27.05.2021
03168 Agra Cantt.-Kolkata Express Special	29.05.2021
02325 Kolkata-Nangal Dam Express Special	27.05.2021
02326 Nangal Dam-Kolkata Express Special	29.05.2021

Note: For any kind of information passengers are requested to contact
RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website: www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in

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SHORT TAKES

Lockdown extended till June 1 in Bihar

Patna: The Nitish Kumar government in Bihar on Monday extended till June 01 the Covid-induced lockdown that has been in force for nearly a month and was to be effective till Tuesday. An announcement to this effect was made by the chief minister on his official twitter handle. "The lockdown has had a good impact and there has been a decline in the corona contagion. Hence, a decision has been taken to continue with the lockdown till June 01", Kumar tweeted after chairing a high level meeting convened to review the pandemic situation in the state, which was attended by members of his cabinet and top officials. Lockdown was first clamped with effect from May 5, till May 10, after the state was rattled by an unprecedented spurt in Covid cases and fatalities. — PTI

Boy beaten to death in Unnao, 1 arrested

Unnao (UP): The main accused in connection with the death of a 17-year-old boy in Bangarman in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district has been arrested, police said on Monday. The boy, a vegetable vendor, was allegedly beaten to death for violating the Covid lockdown. With this, two of the three accused in the case have been arrested, they said. Home guard jawan Satyaprakash was arrested on Sunday in this connection. Three people — police constables Vijay Choudhury and Simavat and home guard jawan Satyaprakash — were booked on the charge of murder for allegedly beating up the boy first outside his house in Bhatpuri and then at the police station on May 21. A spokesperson of the social media cell of the police said constable Vijay Choudhury was arrested from Bijnor district on Monday. Efforts are on to arrest the third accused, he said. — PTI

Odisha twins die of Covid in 2 days gap

Berhampur: A pall of gloom descended on Chikili village in Odisha's Ganjam district where a family lost twin sons to Covid. The twins — Lav and Kush of Jagannathprasad area in Odisha — were together even during Covid suffering. The duo passed away in a gap of two days after paying tribute to their late father on his first death anniversary. According to reports, the twins had visited their native place recently to observe the rituals of the first death anniversary of their father. Two days later on May 19, Kush fell sick. While being treated at a Hospital, his Covid test report came out positive. On May 20 night, he died of the virus. The next day, Lav suffered from Covid complications. On Saturday night, he also passed away.

GUJ: MOB ATTACKS COPS IN ARVALLI, 30 PEOPLE HELD

Bhiloda: Police have arrested 30 people for allegedly hurling stones at policemen while they were trying to enforce social distancing norms at a locality in Bhiloda town of Gujarat's Arvali district, an official said on Monday. Three cops from Bhiloda police station were injured in the incident took place late Sunday night when a mob of over 50 people attacked them with stones. One of the police personnel received a serious head injury and was hospitalised, while two other security men received minor injuries, district superintendent of police Sanjay Kharat said. The cops were on routine patrolling duty in a police jeep when they received a message about a scuffle between locals in Malav area of Bhiloda town late Sunday night, he said. As more than 50 people had gathered in the area due to some dispute, the policemen rushed to the spot. They tried to convince the locals to go back to their homes and maintain social distance in view of the coronavirus pandemic, said Kharat. "When the policemen tried to disperse them in view of the pandemic, the locals, who were fighting among themselves over some issue, suddenly got angry and pelted the policemen with stones. To save their lives, the cops had to abandon their vehicle and leave the spot," the official said. — PTI



Labourers repair the roof of their houses due to Cyclone Yaas alert in Ranchi on Monday.

— PTI

INS Makar locates Tug Varaprada, says Navy

Mumbai, May 24: Navy ship INS Makar on Monday located tugboat Varaprada seven days after it went adrift in the Arabian Sea during Cyclone Tauktae fury, an official said. "Divers are trying to locate trapped Brave Nature's Victims (bodies) if any," a Navy spokesperson said.

All the 274 personnel who were on board barge P305 that sank and tugboat Varaprada that went adrift during Cyclone Tauktae fury have been accounted for with the recovery of 16 bodies along Maharashtra and Gujarat coasts, the official said.

"A total of 274 crew were reported missing on May 17 (261 from Barge P305 and 13 from Tug Varaprada). While 186 survivors from P305 and two from Varaprada were picked up at sea, 70 mortal remains (bodies) were recovered at sea by ships of Indian Navy and Coast Guard," the Navy spokesperson said. "Eight bodies have been recovered along the coast in Raigad district of Maharashtra and another eight bodies washed ashore the Gujarat coast near Valsad," he said.

Thus all the 274 crew (261 on board P305 and 13 on board Varaprada) have been accounted for, he said. The final confirmation will be pending till the identification of all the bodies recovered is completed, he added. — PTI

Yaas may make landfall in Balasore, claims IMD

May inflict severe damages to kutchha, old houses

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 24

India Meteorological Department (IMD), on Monday, predicted that the very severe cyclonic storm 'Yaas,' which lay centred at 490 km away from Odisha coast on Monday evening, will pass through Balasore on Wednesday.

Balasore is a northern Odisha district on the borders of West Bengal. It implies that apart from Odisha's northern districts such as Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Balasore, and Bhadrak, southern parts of West Bengal are most likely to bear the brunt of cyclone.

Speaking with reporters, IMD director general (DG) Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said the cyclone is likely to inflict severe damages to thatched houses, asbestos roofs, and even the old pucca buildings.

The sea tide would be as high as 4-5 metres above the mean sea level during the period in which plane areas close to the coasts in these four districts may be swept by tidal waves, he added.

The ports in coastal Odisha have been alerted to regulate their activities. Train, air, and road traffic should also be regulated in view of the cyclone, Dr Mohapatra said. On Monday, heavy rains accompanied by squally winds, thunder,

Vessels to be taken inside dock to avoid loss at Kolkata port

New Delhi, May 24: To avoid loss at the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata from the impending cyclone Yaas, all port vessels will be taken inside dock for shelter and ships inside docks will be fastened properly following best practices.

According to the India meteorological department, the deep depression over the Bay of Bengal intensified into cyclone Yaas in the early hours of Monday and it is likely to intensify into a severe cyclonic storm in the next 24 hours.

In a statement, a spokesperson of the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port (formerly Kolkata Port Trust) said separate control room at the

Kolkata Dock System and Haldia Dock Complex are manned by senior officers from the marine department, traffic department and CISE. The statement said no ships will be kept in river anchorages or jetties and all vessels in impound docks will be secured with additional mooring ropes and all masters to be advised to stay alert.

It said all survey launches have been advised to move to safe locations, and tugs and launches will be kept in the river for any emergencies.

According to the statement, all cranes, vessels at dry docks, caissons and electrical installation will be kept secured. — PTI

double challenge while the state was grappling with the Covid-19 crisis. The state administration has deployed 22 teams of the NDRF, 50 teams of the Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF), and 175 teams of fire services in coastal Odisha districts for relief and rescue operations. On Monday evening, the state administration also began evacuating people, including pregnant women, from low-lying areas to cyclone shelters and other safer places.

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SC asks govt to speed up registration process

'Registration of guest workers woefully slow'

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The Supreme Court, on Monday, directed the Centre and the states to expedite the registration of migrant workers and those working in the unorganised sectors so that the benefits of the schemes framed to mitigate their sufferings in the wake of Covid pandemic actually reach them.

"Every state has social security schemes but our anxiety is that the benefits of the schemes are not reaching the targeted section," said a bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan and Justice M.R. Shah while hearing a matter relating to the 'problems and miseries of migrant labourers' in the wake of coronavirus pandemic taken up by the court on its own motion.

Directing the registration of unorganised workers and the creation of a Common National Database for all organised workers across the country, the court ordered putting in place a suitable mechanism to "monitor

► **DIRECTING THE** registration of unorganised workers and the creation of a Common National Database for all organised workers across the country, the court ordered putting in place a suitable mechanism to "monitor and supervise" whether the benefits of the welfare schemes is reaching the beneficiaries with names and places.

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Observing that the registration of migrant workers ordered by the top court last year was woefully slow, Justice Shah said that the three steps in the execution of the welfare schemes has to be "identification, registration, and implementation (of the schemes)."

Justice Shah wondered how illiterate people coming from the downtrodden section of the society could be expected to register online and insisted

that the state agencies must go and register them. Justice Shah's observation came in the context of the online registration of migrant workers in Gujarat.

In an important observation, the court said that the authorities should not expect the migrant workers to approach them to get registered but the state machinery should reach them and register them.

Referring to the Code of Social Security Act, 2020, the court said that the Central government is under statutory mandate to register all the unorganised workers. Section 112 of the code contemplates the registration of unorganised workers, gig workers, and platform workers, the court noted.

Refusing to dwell on the prayer for the direct cash transfer in the accounts of migrant workers as it concerns policy decision, Justice Bhushan in the beginning of the hearing said that for migrant workers the situation in the second wave of Covid is not as bad as it was last year.

Ayodhya mosque plan submitted for approval

Ayodhya, May 24: The Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation has submitted to the Ayodhya Development Authority the building plan of the mosque, for which the Supreme Court had allotted five acres in the Babri Masjid-Raminabhoomi case. The verdict had paved way for the construction of a Ram temple on the site, where once the Babri Masjid stood in Ayodhya.

The mosque for which the building plan was submitted for approval will be constructed at Ayodhya's Dhannipur village. Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation member Afzaal Ahmad Khan held a meeting with officials of the development authority about the project, under which a 300-bed super-specialty hospital, a community kitchen and a research centre to highlight the Muslim's contribution in nation building will be constructed, a statement said. The mosque will have enough space to accommodate around 2,000 people at a time. — PTI

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
E-Tender Notice	
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRM's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, Invites open e-tender under single packet system for the under noted work:	
1 Name of work with its location	Replacement/Provision of missing/damaged traction bonds and caution boards over Delhi Division.
2 Approx. cost of work	Rs. 57,78,561.75/-
3 Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 0/-
4 E-Tender Bid Online Submission Period	03.06.2021 (00.00 Hrs.) to 17.06.2021 (15.00 Hrs.)
5 E-Tender Bid Submission End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time	17.06.2021 (15.00 Hrs.)
6 Fund Allocation	29366203
7 Website particulars where complete details of tender document can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in
E-Tender No. : 02A-TRD-NDLS-2021-22 Dated 24.05.2021 1111/21	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE	
The Sr. Divisional Engineer-III, Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites E-Tender for the following work.	
1 Name of work	Manual deep screening of plain track and associated works in the jurisdiction of SSE/P-way/SSB & SSE/P-way/DLI under ADEN/DLI in the section of Sr. DEN-I/IDLI
2 Approx. cost of work	Rs. 1,98,83,748.50 (Rupees One Crore Ninety Eight Lakh Eighty Three Thousand Seven Hundred Forty Eight and Fifty Paise Only)
3 Earnest Money to be deposited	Rs. 0/-
4 Cost of tender document	Rs. 0/-
5 Date & Time of submission of tender bid and opening of tender	15.06.2021 @15:00 Hrs.
6 Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for participating in the e-tender system. For all terms and conditions please refer tender document. No financial offers are acceptable. Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only. 	
No.: 128-W/280/e Tender Notice/NT/06/2021-22/W-3 Date: 21.05.2021 1105/2021	
Serving Customers with a Smile	

Singh says police filed FIR at behest of ruling Congress

Toolkit row: Cops grill Raman Singh

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, MAY 24

Police here on Monday recorded the statement of the former chief minister and senior BJP leader Raman Singh in connection with a FIR charging him and his party colleague Sambit Patra for circulating a fake toolkit.

The Civil Line police that registered the FIR on May 19 reached his residence at 12.30 pm to record his statement, as per the notice issued to him last week.

"A team of policemen led by city superinten-

dent of police (CSP) Nasser Siddique recorded Mr Singh's statement in the afternoon. Mr Singh had given the police written reply to the questions mentioned in the notice served to him earlier. Mr Singh said whatever he has posted or shared in the social media is in the public domain", a senior police officer told this newspaper unwilling to be quoted.

Mr Singh, however, denied access to his Twitter account to the police contending that protecting his privacy was his fundamental right.



Raman Singh

Mr Singh reportedly asked the probe team how the police could file the FIR against him without taking his statement and conducting a preliminary investigation into the matter.

Police filed the FIR on

May 19 on the basis of a complaint lodged by a local NSUI leader.

Later, Mr Singh along with a host of senior BJP leaders and workers marched to the Civil Line police station and staged a sit-in before the police station in protest against the FIR filed against him.

Talking to reporters, Mr Singh alleged that the police filed the FIR against him at the behest of ruling Congress.

"The complaint was filed at 4.05 hours in the afternoon on May 19. The FIR lodged against him at 4.06 hours on the same day", he said.

Bengal BJP chief: It's a new govt, won't seek Prez Rule

RAJIB CHOWDHURY
KOLKATA, MAY 24

Rejecting the TMC's cry against the Centre of trying to topple it's third term from power in Bengal, state BJP president Dilip Ghosh on Monday made it clear that his party would not press for the President's Rule in the state since a "new government elected by people's verdict" has just been formed.

In a Facebook post, the Midnapore BJP MP said, "A new government,

elected by the people's verdict, has just come into existence. No one wants such a government to be toppled and the President's Rule be enforced. We will not demand the President's Rule in any case."

His statement came days after many TMC leaders including Kunal Ghosh alleged that the BJP, frustrated by its defeat in the election, had plans to impose the President's Rule in the state by bringing down the Mamata Banerjee

government in the name of unabated post-poll violence as governor Jagdeep Dhankhar warned the ruling party of the constitutional powers.

Referring to the day-long incidents after the arrests of four TMC leaders by the CBI in Narada sting bribery case on May 17, Mr Ghosh, however, claimed, "But it is true that the TMC itself is feeling scared after the way the CM stormed the CBI office."

SEARCH FOR MISSING GIRL



General public is hereby informed that this girl Namely: Varsha Rani, D/o: Dhir Singh Mandal, R/o H. No. 1834, Pana Mamurpur, Narela, Delhi, Age: 25 years, Height: 5', Complexion: Fair, Face: Long, Built: Thin, Hair: Long Black, Wearing: Light Blue Colour Suit - Salwar and Sandies in feet, has been missing since 03.04.2021 from the

area of P.S. Narela, Delhi. In this regard a vide DD No. 71 A, dated 28.04.2021 has been lodged at P.S. Narela, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this girl but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about this girl kindly inform to the following.

E-Mail: cic@cbi.gov.in
Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>
Fax: 011-24368639
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641

SHO
P.S. Narela, Delhi
Ph. 011-27280435, 7065036323
DP/1041/ON/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

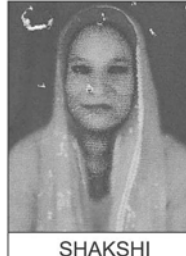
General public is hereby informed that one lady namely Shakshi W/o Ajay R/o H.No. 43/17 C-Block, Gali No. 37, I.P. Colony, Swaroop Nagar, Delhi has been missing/kidnapped from the area of PS: Swaroop Nagar, Delhi since 31.12.2020. In this regard, a case FIR No. 100/2021 Dated 19.03.2021 has been registered at P.S. Swaroop Nagar, Delhi. The description of the missing lady is as under.

Age: 34 Years, Complexion: Fair, Height: 5' 4", Face: Long, Built: Medium, Wearing: Grey colour suit, cream colour salwar and sleepers in feet. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out her but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone has any information about the missing/kidnapped lady then please inform P.S: Swaroop Nagar, Delhi at following Tel No./ e-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in and Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>

Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax No. 011-24368639

DP/1034/ON/2021

Sd/- S.H.O.
PS: Swaroop Nagar, Delhi
PH.: 011-27811231, 27811416



SHAKSHI

SHORT TAKES

RAJ, HARYANA, BIHAR, U'KHAND EXTEND CURFEW

New Delhi/Patna: Lockdown was extended in Bihar and Himachal Pradesh on Monday till May end while Uttarakhand too decided to continue with the Covid-induced curfew, as several states said that the restrictions have led to an improvement in the pandemic situation. States and Union Territories started imposing restrictions from mid-April for varying periods as the deadly second wave of coronavirus hit the country and most of them have now extended the curbs till the end of this month to rein in the spread of infection and the mounting deaths which have crossed the three lakh mark. The Nitish Kumar government extended till June 1 the lockdown that has been in force for nearly a month in Bihar. The Uttarakhand government extended the Covid-19 related curfew period, which was to end on Tuesday morning, till June 1. The Himachal Pradesh government has extended the corona curfew in the state till May 31. Extending the lockdown till May 31, the Haryana government said the positivity and fatality rates have to be brought down further, though it did allow some relaxations in the curbs. The Rajasthan government, which extended the coronavirus lockdown by 15 days till June 8, had also said the state may allow some relaxations in commercial activities from June 1 in districts where the Covid-19 situation will show significant improvement. — PTI

COVID POSITIVE MILKHA SINGH HOSPITALISED

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh, who has tested positive for Covid-19, was on Monday admitted to the intensive care unit of a hospital in Mohali with doctors saying that his condition is stable. The 91-year-old Milkha had been in home isolation at his Chandigarh residence after he tested positive for the virus on Wednesday. He has now been admitted to the ICU of Mohali's Fortis hospital, which said that Milkha has been diagnosed with "Covid pneumonia". "He is stable and presently on low flow oxygen and medical management," the hospital stated. Earlier Milkha's golfer son Jeev said that the decision to hospitalise him was a precautionary measure. "He has been hospitalised. He was weak and not eating since yesterday, so we had to hospitalise him. Though his parameters seemed alright, we thought it is safer to have him admitted where he would be under supervision of senior doctors," Jeev told PTI. "He is under good care of doctors there. He is a strong man, always positive and will recover soon," added the golfer, who reached here on Saturday from Dubai after his father tested positive. — PTI

Mid air wedding

■ **Continued from Page 1** on Monday, purportedly showing people standing extremely close to each other as the couple tied the knot. Responding to the incident, an airline spokesperson said, "a SpiceJet Boeing 737 was chartered by a travel agent in Madurai on May 23, 2021 for a group of passengers for a joy ride post their wedding". "The client was clearly briefed on Covid guidelines to be followed and denied permission for any activity to be performed on board. The approval for this flight was taken as a joy ride for the wedding group," he said. The spokesperson added that the agent and guest passengers were briefed in detail, both in writing, as well as verbally, on social distancing and safety norms to be followed according to the covid guidelines, both at the airport and on board the aircraft throughout the journey. — PTI

CBI moves SC

■ **Continued from Page 1** of 4 TMC netas custody which falls under Section 167." The Supreme Court in its judgment said that an accused under judicial custody could be sent to house arrest considering factors like "age, health condition and the antecedents of the accused, the nature of the crime, the need for other forms of custody and the ability to enforce the terms of the house arrest."

5,424 black fungus cases in 18 states; highest in Guj, Maha

Out of 5,424 cases, 4,556 have history of Covid-19 infection: Vardhan

New Delhi, May 24: As many as 5,424 cases of mucormycosis or black fungus have been reported from 18 states, with a majority of them in Gujarat and Maharashtra, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said on Monday. Nine lakh vials of Amphotericin-B are being imported by the Central government for the treatment of black fungus. Of this, 50,000 vials have been received and around three lakh vials will be available in the next seven days," he said.

Speaking at the 27th group of ministers (GoM) meeting on Covid-19, he said that Gujarat reported 2,165 cases, Maharashtra 1,188, Uttar Pradesh 663, Madhya Pradesh 590, Haryana 339 and Andhra Pradesh 248 cases. "Out of these 5,424 cases of mucormycosis, we have seen that 4,556 cases have a history of Covid-19 infection, while 875 cases are amongst non-Covid patients. Diabetes was present in 55 per cent of the patients."

"We have been warning, issuing advisories and, through our experts, it has been communicated that indiscriminate use of steroids must be avoided and diabetes must be treated thoroughly as best as possible," he said.

Nineteen states have already declared mucormycosis a notifiable disease under the Epidemics Act, he informed. A notifiable disease is required by law to be reported to government authorities.

On genome sequencing, Dr Vardhan informed that 25,739 samples have been sequenced and variant B.1.617 has been found in 5,261 samples, which is almost 65 per cent of the samples, "making it one of the most common mutations to be detected till now".

He also informed that states have been requested to send samples regularly for better analysis.

Giving a snapshot of India's efforts to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, Dr Vardhan said for the 11th day in succession, the recoveries are more than new cases in the country.

"This is also the eighth day in succession where we are having less than three lakh daily new cases. This is a positive sign. Right now, our active cases in the country are 27 lakhs. A couple of weeks back, we had over 37 lakh active cases," he said. — PTI



People wait in their cars for Covid-19 vaccine dose at a drive-in vaccination centre at Sector 38A, GIP MALL, in Noida on Monday. — PTI

MP begins easing curbs in some dists as cases dip

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAY 24

Graded unlocking of Madhya Pradesh which has been under 'corona curfew' or lockdown since April 24, began on Monday with the state government ordering relaxations in curbs in five districts. The five districts where the relaxation of lockdown was made were Jhabua, Alirajpur, Khandwa, Burhanpur and Bhind.

Accordingly, the functioning of government offices with cent percent officers and 25 percent employees has been allowed in these districts, while shops dealing with groceries have been permitted to open during the day. Construction activities have also been allowed with Covid-19 protocol in these districts.

The decision to lift curbs in these districts was taken in the wake of a sharp drop in fresh coronavirus positive cases and



A view of crowded vegetable market in Jabalpur after the state government relaxed the lockdown between 4 am and 8 am on Monday. — PTI

fatalities in the past couple of weeks.

Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has earlier dropped hints that unlocking the state would be done in a phased manner considering improvement of the pandemic situation in particular districts.

Madhya Pradesh has recorded a sharp fall in the active cases in the past one week.

The number of coronavirus active cases which

had crossed one lakh mark eight days ago came down to 53,653 on Monday.

The state on Monday reported 2963 fresh cases taking the tally of cases to 7,67,274. The state has recorded 60 deaths in the last 24 hours taking the death toll to 7618.

Meanwhile, the state government has started preparations to face the challenge of a possible third wave of the pandemic in the state.

SC not keen to hear plea for fresh loan moratorium

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The Supreme Court on Monday indicated its reluctance to entertain a plea seeking direction for an interest-free loan repayment moratorium for six months or till the situation arising from the second spell of Covid improves.

A bench comprising Justices Ashok Bhushan and M.R. Shah made the observation as a plea by advocate Vishal Tiwari was called for the hearing

through video-conferencing. The court also indicated that the scheme was only for last year and can't spill over to this year.

Though the hearing was adjourned as Mr Tiwari could not be connected for addressing the court through video-conferencing, the bench in an observation said that advocate petitioner can make representation to the government advancing his prayer.

Justice Shah said, "It is a policy decision. At the maximum, what we can do

is that we can allow him (the petitioner) to make a representation to the Central government."

The petition, which will now be taken up for hearing on June 11, 2021, says the Centre and concerned ministries as also the RBI have failed to bring in any sound relief in this present situation for the stressed sectors and individuals for whom sustenance and existence have come under a cloud.

"No such monetary relief and packages has been

Locket targets TMC for post-poll clashes Bengal BJP MP asks govt to take back her Y+ cover

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 24

In a surprising move, Hooghly BJP MP Locket Chatterjee has urged the Union home ministry to withdraw her Y-category central security cover, saying that if she could not protect grassroots level party workers, she should not have protection either.

Ms Chatterjee was provided protection by five Central Industrial Security Force commandos as part of the Y-category security cover.

"People of West Bengal are facing so much violence and the women are very much insecure at this point. As a representative of the common people, I am unable to secure my citizens, so I want to withdraw my security cover provided by your team and at the same time thank you for the service," the BJP MP wrote in an email to the ministry of home affairs (MHA) last week.

On Sunday, she verbally informed the CISF team,



People of West Bengal are facing so much violence and the women are very much insecure at this point. As a representative of the common people, I am unable to secure my citizens, so I want to withdraw my security cover provided by your team...

— Locket Chatterjee, BJP MP

deputed for her cover, about her move which however contrasts with the MHA's steps to beef up the security of the elected representatives of the BJP and Trinamul Congress in the state.

Ms Chatterjee also posted a video message in which she alleged, "Since the election results were announced on May 2, violence has been unleashed on the BJP workers. Many of those attacked have died. Women, including the pregnant even, are not spared also. In such a situation, how can I continue to enjoy my protection as a woman? How can I stand by those who have no protection and are subjected to atrocities in the rural areas? I can not accept it

mentally."

Chatterjee is MP from West Bengal's Hoogly constituency.

"I never had any security. The security was given to me ahead of the election. I have become a parliamentarian to serve the people. So when I can not give them their protection, what will I do with my protection? Several people are still homeless. When they call me, I have nothing except to give them some assurances and hope. Let them return home safely first and get security. I was thinking about leaving my security cover for the last 20 days and was discussing it with the concerned authorities as it involves a process," she added.

Param Bir gets relief from arrest till June 9

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MAY 24

The Maharashtra government on Monday assured the Bombay High Court that it will not arrest former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh till June 9 in the atrocities case lodged against him by Inspector Bhimrao Ghadge. The HC adjourned the hearing till June 9, when a regular bench will start hearing all sides.

However, the state government clarified that its assurance rests on the condition that Singh co-operates with the probe and he should not pursue relief pertaining to the said FIR before the Supreme Court.

A vacation bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and N.R. Borkar was hearing Mr Singh's petition seeking quashing of the FIR registered against him by Thane Police or transferring the case to the CBI for investigation.

Mr Ghadge in his complaint has alleged that Singh took money for transfers of officers and also in lieu of not taking action against a person accused in a cheating case in 2015. Mr Ghadge further alleged that after he refused to comply with the "illegal orders", Mr Singh had conspired with other officers to register five FIRs against him, of which four were registered within a matter of 10 days in 2015.

CISF DG Jaiswal may be next boss of CBI

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) director-general and former Maharashtra DGP Subodh Kumar Jaiswal is likely to be appointed as the next chief of the country's premier investigation agency, CBI.

According to sources, a high-powered committee led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi met on Monday and short-listed names of three senior IPS officers for the coveted post. "Three names that have been short-listed include Uttar Pradesh DGP and a 1985-batch IPS officer H.C. Awasthi, Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) DG K.R. Chandra and DG, CISF, Subodh Kumar Jaiswal," sources said, adding Mr Jaiswal is the front runner for the top post. The Union ministry of DoPT is likely to issue a circular in this regard on Tuesday.

A committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi comprising Leader of Opposition Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and CJoI N.V. Ramana discussed the names of these three IPS officers.

Shah chairs meet on Cyclone Yaas

■ **Continued from Page 1**

political science rather than on the topic."

Ms Banerjee said that 10 lakh people are being evacuated to 4,000 relief centres by Tuesday.

Mr Shah chaired a meeting on Monday morning to review the preparedness for Cyclone Yaas. Those present at the meeting, held through video conferencing, were Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik, Ms Banerjee, Andhra CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar, D.K. Joshi.

The home minister's focus at the meeting was on operations related to Corona that should not get disrupted due to Cyclone Yaas.

Mr Shah came up with some key suggestions at the meeting and in particular stressed on the need to ensure electricity backup in

hospitals with ICUs for uninterrupted ventilator function and oxygen supply.

In its bulletin at 4.30 pm, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) in Kolkata stated that Yaas "is very likely to move north-northwestwards, intensify further into a Severe Cyclonic Storm during the next 12 hours and into a Very Severe Cyclonic Storm in the subsequent 24 hours. It would continue to move north-northwestwards, intensify further and reach Northwest Bay of Bengal near north Odisha and West Bengal coasts by 26th May early morning. It is very likely to cross north Odisha-West Bengal coasts between Paradip and Sagar islands around Balasore, during noon of 26th May as a Very Severe Cyclonic Storm."

According to its forecast, Yaas is likely to clock its

maximum wind speed at 155-165 kmph gusting to 185 kmph from 11.30 am on Tuesday for the next 24 hours. Its maximum wind speed will however drop to 105-115 kmph gusting to 125 kmph 11.30 am onwards covering the landfall till late evening on May 26.

Deputy director general of Regional Meteorological Centre of the IMD at Kolkata, Sanjib Bandyopadhyay, said, "We often jump to draw comparisons in terms of strength. It has to be kept in mind that 'Yaas' is going over Balasore and not Bengal. So its comparison with Amphan will not be correct. There is no reason to panic for the people in Kolkata at least."

At the home minister's meeting it was disclosed that immediate steps are being taken for the safety of around two dozen oxygen

plants, mainly along the country's eastern coast, which supply oxygen to other parts of the country.

Adequate stock of vaccine, critical medicines, oxygen and ventilators are being rushed to the states where the cyclone is likely to make a severe impact.

The home minister also directed all concerned agencies that restoration of electricity and water supply in the affected states and UT should be done in minimum time as there are many Covid patients in home isolation.

States have been advised to use social media platforms to spread cyclone awareness. The home minister offered all possible reinforcements from the Centre as required by the states, including Armed Forces and paramilitary personnel, NDRF teams with all rescue and relief equipment.

in the capital Guwahati, used to feel safe."

Mr Sarma said that "in the last five years, the BJP-led government has succeeded in restoring peace and harmony among all communities" and added that his government would "create a working atmosphere for all legislators on dozens of issues on which there is a consensus between the Opposition and the ruling party".

Sarma thanks Ulfa chief in Assembly

■ **Continued from Page 1**

voted to power they will restore madrasa education. The people of Assam have given their verdict. We will close down the madrasas."

The chief minister said there were dozens of issues on which the elections were fought.

"Our focus and efforts will be to implement all the poll promises. Some members have expressed doubt on the implementation of our tall

poll promises like generating one lakh jobs. I am reiterating we will generate one lakh jobs and will provide evidence of it to the Opposition as well."

He said his government will also waive the microfinance loans of women besides hiking the monthly stipend to poor families through its flagship programme of "Orunodoi Scheme".

"The last five years has

given a new lease of life to peace and harmony in Assam," Mr Sarma, said responding to criticism by Congress' Bharat Narah, adding: "In the days of the Congress governments, they had to rush to Kokrajhar and Udalguri frequently due to communal unrest. The agitations of the Karbi and Dimas had vitiated the communal harmony of the state. Violence had become the order of the day. No one, even

On-site registration...

■ **Continued from Page 1**

syndrome. If symptoms are seen for more than 12 weeks, it is called post-Covid syndrome," Dr Guleria said.

The rising cases of Mucormycosis (Black Fungus) is now becoming a new worry. Punjab has recorded 111 such cases.

Delhi on Monday reported 1,550 new Covid-19 cases and 207 deaths, bringing down both fatalities and positivity rate which is now 2.52 per cent, prompting Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal to say that the second wave is under control now.

Several states like Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and Uttarakhand have extended the lockdown, while Madhya Pradesh and Chandigarh have started slowly easing restrictions.

Meanwhile, the Centre has allowed on-site registration in addition to online appointment for vaccination for those in the 18-44 years age group. This feature is enabled only for government Covid Vaccination Centres (CVCs) presently. This feature is not available for private CVCs presently and they have to publish their vaccination schedules with slots for online appointments.

However, the walk-in vaccination will be available only if there are vaccines left unused in case those who have registered online do not turn up on the day of the vaccination.

"Even though CoWIN provides for features such as registration of up to four beneficiaries with a mobile number... those without access to the internet or smart phones or mobile phones may still have limited access for vaccination. Therefore, the feature for on-site registration and appointment is now being enabled for the 18-44 years age group on CoWIN," Union

health ministry said.

The Centre has left states/UTs to decide on opening of on-site registrations for the 18-44 years age group based on the local context, officials added.

Union health ministry has advised states and UTs that abundant caution should be exercised and extreme due care should be taken while opening up on-site registration and appointment for 18-44 years age group, in order to avoid overcrowding at vaccination centres.

Meanwhile, the production of Russian vaccine Sputnik V is being scaled up. Indian firm Panacea Biotech has begun production of the Russian vaccine in the country and it is expected that annually 100 million doses of Sputnik V will be manufactured by this firm.

A new study by Argentina's Institute of Virology has shown that Sputnik V is highly effective against the new Manaus (Brazilian) variant of Covid-19. The study also showed 99.65 per cent of those vaccinated had IgG antibodies to Covid-19 after the second shot. According to media reports, Mumbai has got three bids from Sputnik V makers.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said the states and UTs are finding it impossible to procure vaccines from global markets as Pfizer and Moderna have refused to sell their vaccines to them. Mr Kejriwal said these two companies have made it clear that they will only deal with the Centre and not engage with other players. Earlier, the Punjab government said it was denied vaccines by these two firms.

With states struggling to meet the growing demand for vaccines, the nationwide vaccination drive will suffer further delays.

THE ASIAN AGE

25 MAY 2021

CBSE's Class 12 exams: Choose dates prudently

The consensus among states consulted about the conduct of CBSE's Class 12 examination for the academic year 2020-21 appears to be in favour of the board's proposal for a shortened format. Facing a very tricky decision on holding the qualifying exam for higher studies in the time of the pandemic, the Centre has gone in for an exhaustive consultation process. Opinion largely favours the conduct of the exams since they are crucial in defining what courses students will take as they graduate to college. Imposing the loss of a whole year on lakhs of school-leaving students is an inconceivable penalty though students and parents may nurse different opinions. The focus has to be on the greater good.

Any risk versus benefit calculation would show that to hold the exam sometime after the second wave of the Coronavirus is forecast to dip, say in August-September, would be beneficial though it will not come without risks. The Class 12 exam is a life-defining crossroads and requires detailed planning in view of the safety of the students and their exam supervisors.

The idea of holding the exams in the same schools that they used to go to when in-person classes were held last is worth considering because the familiarity of the environment might help assuage the fears of exams in the time of the pandemic.

States insisting on students as well supervisory staff being vaccinated is a fair call and must be heeded in the current circumstances. There are ethical boundaries to cross in vaccinating the young but since a majority of those taking the exam are likely to be as old as 17, vaccinating them will help protect them against any severe forms of the disease. The shorter format wherein tests in one language and three elective major subjects will be spread over 45 days and held in their own schools, with marks for other subjects to be judged proportionally, seems the better option as it would also limit the exposure of students. The trickiest part would, however, be in choosing the timing of the exams. The proposition would work better the later the exams are held in the year and the new college term can be adjusted to begin accordingly, perhaps at the start of 2022. The idea of holding the exams in the same schools that they used to go to when in-person classes were held last is worth considering because the familiarity of the environment might help assuage the fears of exams in the time of the pandemic.

All this, of course, assumes that a consensus would emerge among the states on holding the Class 12 board exams and that any student suffering from Covid-19 at that time would get another opportunity. The cancellation of Class 10 exams was a prudent decision but one that was relatively easy to take. To keep politics out of the decision making will also be challenging and it will still be the Centre's call on the feasibility of holding the exams in the safest manner possible with adequate precautions against such congregations of students becoming super spreader events. We need no reminder that the current dominant virus strain in India is affecting a greater proportion of young people and it is understandable if an element of fear should enter the decision-making process. It is not only their studies and careers that are at risk but their lives.

Act against those thrashing docs

Since Covid-19 gripped the world last year and caused devastation worldwide, including in India, our doctors — who practise allopathic medicine, the core of scientifically validated therapeutics — and nurses have been in the forefront of the war against the pandemic. Much more than three lakh people may have died in India if it weren't for their dedication.

And yet yoga teacher Ramdev thought it fit to traduce allopathy and by extension its practitioners, more than a thousand of whom died fighting the virus. He called allopathy "a stupid science", a "tamasha" (farce). In doing so, he mocked the national effort to fight the disease, which continues to claim thousands of victims daily. Perhaps the "Baba" is miffed that Coronil, made by the drug manufacturing units of his vast commercial empire, didn't pass the test of science and the false claims around it were exposed.

The Indian Medical Association has demanded action against Ramdev under the law for demoralising the medical community and weakening the national fightback against the disease. Options can be considered under the Epidemiology Act or Disaster Management Act. Is the government up to it? While promoting the ancient Indian discipline of ayurveda, the government regrettably ended up promoting quacks and superstition peddlers hiding behind the rubric "Hindu civilisation". It may not be easy for it to move against those publicly downgrading science.

It may be recalled that Bhopal BJP MP Pragya Thakur, once allegedly associated with a bomb blast in a minority community locality and for embarrassing the government by praising Mahatma Gandhi's assassin, has claimed she is safe from Covid as she drinks cow urine, which she touted as a cure. As a public servant, she sought to discount modern medicine and science, and backed a wholly untested belief among some Hindus about the medicinal virtues of cow urine — including for Covid — since the cow is an animal they revere. Does the Centre, the BJP or the Madhya Pradesh government propose to act against her?

The MP government, however, appears energetic about booking former CM Kamal Nath for making a reference to the "Indian" variant of Covid, now a subject of discussion in the global scientific community, including here. Mr Nath is accused of weakening the national effort in the anti-Covid fight.

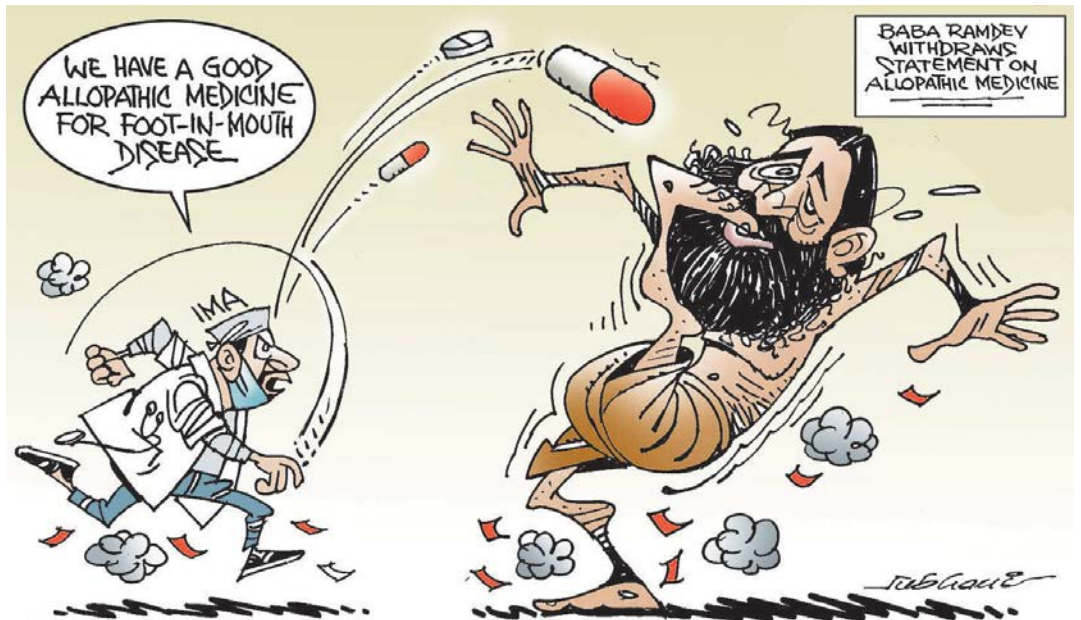
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Subhani



Israel & Gaza: Use truce to find a lasting solution



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections

America's President Joe Biden did well to stress that while the United States remains committed to Israel's security, only the promised two-state formula can really solve the Arab-Israeli conflict in the long run. That might atone to some extent for what Arabs call the "Nakba", or literally "disaster", in which the Zionists destroyed over 600 Palestinian villages and forced their inhabitants into exile.

Nothing is to be gained by fawning on Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi tends to do. History, once written, cannot be erased, as I told the last Arab mayor of Jerusalem when he claimed that Israel was doomed because even the Crusaders' kingdom did not last more than 80 years. In fact, Mr Biden would have done even better to emphasise that there can be no more effective guarantee of Israel's security than a sovereign Palestinian state as envisaged in the 1991 Madrid Conference.

The ceasefire between Israel and the radical Hamas movement, which rules the Gaza Strip, ended 11 days of bitter fighting that killed about 250 people, mostly Palestinian civilians. Although both adversaries accomplished their immediate political goals, the fragile peace can collapse any moment. It is in their interest, therefore, as well as of the entire Middle Eastern region and the world at large to take advantage of this respite from violence to lay the foundations of a lasting settlement.

Such plain-speaking would certainly have denied the US President the thanks that Mr

Netanyahu tweeted to some 25 governments, but would have ensured some respect for American diplomacy. India is not of course among the 25 recipients, but it would be a mistake to gloat over the seemingly fulsome thanks of Israeli and Palestinian diplomats for the speech by India's United Nations representative, T.S. Tirumurti, at the Security Council debate.

All that their praise meant was that South Block once again passed off opportunism as diplomacy, a skill India's leaders have raised to an art form during the long years of nonalignment, which the Americans called "neutrality". New Delhi was at pains then to claim equidistance from Washington and Moscow.

Not that India, with limited resources and the geopolitical handicap of location, could have taken a lead role even if it had wanted to. An impoverished and grossly overpopulated Third World nation at odds with its western and northern neighbours, struggling desperately to battle the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, should not even pretend to global authority. Even before events reduced his stature, Mr Modi was no Jawaharlal Nehru to be listened to when he spoke on global matters. Nothing in his background or career indicated any grasp of international affairs. Moreover, his bombastic style — demanding applause for saying "humanity from a big disaster by containing the coronavirus effectively" — hardly commands respect.

India's rulers have always taken an ad hoc attitude to Israel. Only Jawaharlal Nehru's disgust with Egypt's King Farouk, then heading the Arab League, prompted

him to recognise Israel almost as tit for tat. Morarji Desai probably wanted to develop closer ties but dared not. P.V. Narasimha Rao finally did so under American influence. India wanted Israeli weapons but would not admit it. Israeli diplomats contemptuously attributed India's pro-Arab stance to the Muslim vote at home.

Not that American policy was or is any more principled. When President Harry S. Truman reneged on Franklin D. Roosevelt's commitment to the Arabs, his frank excuse was that his supporters included influential American Jews who were anxious for the success of the Zionist state. He did not have to placate a similar Palestinian lobby.

Such calculations also operate in West Asia. In the lead-up to Hamas' rocket barrage, Prime Minister Netanyahu pursued a series of flagrantly reckless policies. Many believe that he deliberately provoked Hamas in order to prevent his domestic opponents from uniting against him and establishing a governing coalition. Israel has had four elections in the last two years, and if the Prime Minister fails to hold on to power, he might have to face corruption charges and a prison term. Yet, the war that he unleashed was more of a gift to Hamas than he bargained for. Hamas, too, needed a crisis to compensate for its declining reputation in the Gaza Strip, alienation from the Palestinian Authority under President Mahmoud Abbas, and the political confinement

imposed by 14 years of the land, air, and sea blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt. Systematically weakened and humiliated by Israel, President Abbas could do nothing about the unlawful eviction of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem or the Israeli military's attack on the Al-Aqsa mosque, which precipitated the conflict. Hamas exploited the two incidents as well as the leadership vacuum, in the process neutralising the blockade by demonstrating that it would not stand by while Palestinians suffered aggression.

For once Israel's armed forces found themselves simultaneously engaged in Gaza, East Jerusalem, the occupied West Bank and — what probably worries Mr Netanyahu the most — in Israel's ethnically "mixed cities". The Israeli police stood by as well-organised Jewish militias attacked the Palestinians who retaliated against Jews and their synagogues. Not only did the violence revive painful memories of the killing of 13 Palestinian protesters in October 2000, it also intensified the community's sense of disenfranchisement and discrimination that goes back to the Deir Yassin massacre of the Palestinians on April 9, 1948.

A mere ceasefire cannot address deep-seated grievances that are rooted in history. But atonement can be made for some evils of the past. Israel's withdrawal to the borders that it enjoyed in 1967 and independence for the West Bank and Gaza, as specified in the Oslo accords, might achieve that. The United States can help to ensure that it happens. But instead of the Palestinians promising to respect Israel's security, it's the Israelis who must now undertake not to seize any more Palestinian territory or indulge in any other hostilities against the Palestinian state.

A mere ceasefire cannot address deep-seated grievances that are rooted in history. Israel's withdrawal to the borders that it enjoyed in 1967 and independence for the West Bank and Gaza, might achieve that.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

HABITUAL DECEIT

Corpses are floating in the rivers, hundreds of graves are lying on the riverbed, and still the Centre seems to be indifferent. Have we brought this misery upon ourselves by electing it? There didn't seem to be any proper preparations and we were therefore caught off-guard when the second wave of the pandemic hit the country. The government deliberately ignored it in the quest for Assembly seats in several states. Today we have converted ourselves into a shameful talking point all over the world. Why do we still want to hide our incompetence? Perhaps because no other government can dare to twist the narrative on such a large scale.

Syed Abdul Monim
Navi Mumbai

SYMBOLISM IS ALL

ISRAEL'S DECISION to posthumously confer honorary citizenship on Soumya Santhosh, the nurse from Kerala who was killed in a rocket attack by Hamas, is quite extraordinary. The government of Israel has also decided to compensate her family financially and to take care of her nine-year-old son's future. Israeli citizenship is practically closed to non-Jews. Honorary citizenship is only conferred on people of exceptional merit and distinction, so the intent behind this award has left many people nonplussed.

K.A. Solaman
Alappuzha, Kerala

GURDWARA LARGESSE

THE SACHKHAND Hazur Sahab Abchalnagar Gurdwara in Nanded has displayed a big heart in planning to establish a super-specialty hospital and medical college with 50 years' offerings. The gurdwara's high priest, Jathedar Baba Kulwanth Singhji, made the proposal after he had fallen ill last year. To share whatever one has with others is a divine quality, but it manifests only in a few people. We would do well to inculcate this enduring habit.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



Why Twitter's action on BJP 'manipulation' is rattling govt

Twitter has marked tweets by Bharatiya Janata Party figures, including its spokesman Sambit Patra, as "manipulated media". The BJP leaders had publicised what it said was a Congress toolkit to defame India. But the fact-checking website Alt News showed that this content that the BJP was showing was fake.

The BJP said on its letterhead that the All-India Congress Committee had distributed instructions to Congress workers, volunteers and supporters to use the term "super spreader Kumbh", "not comment on Eid gatherings", "use dramatic pictures of funerals and dead bodies which is already being done by the foreign media". This turned out to be bogus and even the letterhead was forged, as Alt News quickly showed.

Twitter believed the fact-checking website, which is based in Ahmedabad, more than it did the Government of India, and branded the content fake. The BJP is upset and has sent another threatening note to Twitter saying that it should remove the "manipulated media" tag because the govern-

ment was investigating the matter. The problem of course is that the government first defamed the Congress, then it got caught peddling a lie and now it claims it is checking its own claim — amplified by all its ministers through their official accounts — to see if it is true. That is why a small news operation has more credibility today than the government of the Republic of India.

Twitter has a transparency centre where it puts up the data on take-down and information requests. These are legal notices from the Government of India asking Twitter to either block an account, take down some content which the government does not like or reveal the identity of a particular user.

From January 2012 to June 2014, it rarely received requests from the Indian government except for one or two. In the second half of 2016 it received 151 requests. This doubled to 306 between January and June 2018. It doubled again to 662 between July and December 2019. Between January and June 2020, the latest period for which the data is available, the Narendra Modi

government sent 2,367 requests, including those to reveal identities, those it wanted blocked and those whose content it did not like and wanted to be taken down.

The question is why is the government now sending thousands of "requests" to Twitter to comply? The answer is that the social media is reflecting a reality that the BJP does not want communicated. More people are saying things on the social media that are upsetting the government.

One way to deal with this would be to ignore it, which is what the various governments of India did in the past, which is why the number of takedown notices Twitter received were few. But if a government is sensitive to what is said about it, and sensitive to such an extent that it finds any criticism intolerable, then it will do what is going on in the India social media today.

Twitter is slightly different from Facebook and pretends to have more independence and pretends to be a guardian of free speech. Facebook is just a cutthroat corporate company that will go to bed

with authoritarian governments and do whatever they want in terms of blocking users and content and promoting the government's material even if it incites violence. Twitter says that it stands for freedom of its users, that it is "committed to the open exchange of information", and that it is why it publishes this transparency report from which the data above has been taken.

India is not the only democracy which makes such requests of Twitter. In the United States, the Secret Service which protects the President is obliged to assess every threat made against the President even if these are made casually. But this is not censorship of views. What is happening in India is that criticism of the government is not being allowed. And the deliberate vilification of the Opposition by the government is being pushed, and when it is caught it resists accountability.

India is going the way of China, where the social media has to be in full compliance with the government's desire to control the messaging and to carry out mass sur-

veillance. It is nobody's case and certainly not mine that India is ever some haven of free speech before the Narendra Modi government. It was not. Few democracies have the full force of government backing the blocking of free speech of citizens as is the case in India. We have jail terms for free speech under laws like sedition, criminal defamation, criminal contempt and laws which criminalise things communicated in words or even without words. This has always been the case.

But the criticism of the government was not intolerable as it has become now. This government insists on only one narrative and is willing and enthusiastic about stopping the other side from expressing itself. And it is also, as the toolkit fiasco shows, willing to fabricate material to invalidate what anyone else says. This is what the Emergency must have been like, and those who lived through it might not be feeling very different nowadays.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES

U.S. JOURNALIST
DETAINED IN
MYANMAR

Yangon: An American editor of a Myanmar-based news outlet was detained by authorities in Yangon as he attempted to board a flight out of the country on Monday, his employers said.

United States citizen and managing editor of Frontier Myanmar Danny Fenster “was detained at Yangon International Airport this morning,” his employers said in a statement on their verified Twitter account.

“We do not know why Danny was detained and have not been able to contact him since this morning. We are concerned for his wellbeing and call for his immediate release,” it added.

Myanmar has been in uproar since the February 1 coup, with near-daily protests and a nationwide civil disobedience movement.

ANA TURNS INTO
A POST-TROPICAL
CYCLONE

Miami (US): Ana weakened into a post-tropical cyclone late Sunday as it moved away from Bermuda after bringing rain and wind to the island in the Atlantic Ocean, forecasters said.

Ana was located about 680 miles (1,095 km) northeast of Bermuda with maximum sustained winds of 40 mph (65 kph), the National Hurricane Centre in Miami said in an 11 pm advisory. It was moving northeast at 28 mph (44 kph). Ana formed as a subtropical storm early Saturday, then transitioned to a tropical storm on Sunday. It then weakened to a depression later in the day.

The hurricane center said it would dissipate on Monday. No watches or warnings were in effect for the storm. It posed no threat to land. Ana was the first named storm in the Atlantic this year, though hurricane season doesn't officially start until June 1. Meteorologists expect the 2021 season to be busy, but not to the level of last year's the record-breaking season.

TURKEY DETAINS
I.S. BOMB EXPERT
WANTED BY U.S.

Istanbul: Turkish intelligence officers have arrested an Egyptian-born terror suspect wanted by Washington who was a top explosives expert for the Islamic State group, state media reported on Monday.

The suspect, identified as Mustafa Abdulwahab Mahmud and born in 1999, was detained with three others on the outskirts of Istanbul after fleeing Syria, the reports said.

The indictment said he joined the IS group in Syria, where he specialised in making suicide belts and various explosive devices.

The Istanbul prosecutor's office is seeking 22.5 years in prison on charges of membership of a terror group.

He was detained on a tip from US intelligence services, who have been tracking his movements, the media reports said, adding that he is believed to have been plotting attacks inside Turkey, including against US interests.

Once accused of letting jihadists pass freely through its territory, Turkey has stepped up its fight against the IS group.

OMAN SEES RARE
PROTESTS OVER
JOB LAYOFFS

Dubai: Scattered protests in Oman over layoffs and poor economic conditions drew a massive police presence on Monday in at least one city in the sultanate, with protesters throwing stones at one point and police firing tear gas.

Videos posted to social media show several dozen Omanis in the city of Sohar trailed by a long line of riot police vehicles. Other images appear to show a line of police in riot gear near a government labour office in the city, some 200 kilometers (125 miles) northwest of the capital, Muscat.

Other images appear to show Omanis fleeing and others being arrested. The images correspond to known landmarks around Sohar, the first major city people enter in the sultanate after coming over the border from the neighbouring United Arab Emirates.

Similar scattered protests on Sunday brought another mass police presence, activists said online. That demonstration was acknowledged by Oman's Labor Ministry in a tweet, which said it was aware of people gathering there to try to find new job vacancies.

3 Wuhan virology lab staff
ill before Covid disclosed

Undisclosed US intelligence may renew calls for probe into origins of virus

Beijing/Washington, May 24: Three researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology sought hospital care in November 2019, weeks before Beijing disclosed the Covid-19 pandemic, a US media report said, citing a previously undisclosed American intelligence document that could add weight to growing calls for a full scale probe of whether the Coronavirus may have escaped from China's top bio lab.

The details of the reporting go beyond a State Department fact sheet, issued during the final days of the Trump administration, which said that several researchers at the Wuhan lab, a centre for the study of Coronavirus and other pathogens, became sick in autumn 2019 “with symptoms consistent with both Covid-19 and common seasonal illness,” the *Wall Street Journal* reported.

The origins of the Covid-19 remain a widely debated topic, with some scientists and politicians maintaining that the possibility of a lab leak of the deadly virus exists. The Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) is near the outbreak's known epicentre of Huanan Seafood Market in central China's Wuhan city, where the virus first emerged in late 2019 and became a pandemic.

Former US president Donald Trump was among those who supported the theory that the virus might have escaped from a bio lab in China.

“Three researchers from China's Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick enough in November 2019 that they sought hospital care,” the paper said.

The disclosure of the number of Chinese researchers, the timing of their illnesses and their hospital visits come on the eve of a meeting of the World Health Organisation's decision-making body, which is expected to discuss the next phase of an investigation into Covid-19's origins.

The paper said that current and former officials familiar with the intelligence about the lab researchers expressed differing views about the strength of the supporting evidence, with one person saying it was provided by an international partner and was potentially significant but still in need of further investigation and additional corroboration.

China, however, denied the WSJ report on Monday, with Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian saying the WIV released a statement on March 23 that made it clear that there were zero Covid-19 infections at the institute. —PTI

Trained dogs could sniff out Covid: Study

London, May 24: People who are infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19 have a distinct odour that can be detected by trained dogs with a high degree of accuracy, according to new research in the UK.

In what has been described as the most complete study of its kind to date, combining dog trial, odour analysis and modelling, the London School of

Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) led collaborative research with the charity Medical Detection Dogs and Durham University to find that specially trained dogs can rapidly and non-invasively detect the disease with up to 94.3 per cent sensitivity and up to 92 per cent specificity.

The dogs were able to detect odour from individuals who were asymptomatic, as well as those

with two different strains of Covid-19, and with both high and low viral loads, the study released last week said.

With the threat of new variants entering the country, the need for testing means we face potential continued disruption for some time to come. That's where these amazing dogs could play a role, said Professor James Logan, Head of the

Department of Disease Control at LSHTM, who led the project. “Further research is needed to see if the dogs can replicate these results in a real-world setting, but these findings are hugely encouraging. The advantage of using this method is being able to detect Covid-19 with incredible speed and good accuracy among large groups of people, even in asymptomatic cases,” he said.

The dogs were trained by the team at Medical Detection Dogs to identify Covid using body odour samples which were sent to the research team by members of the public and National Health Service (NHS) staff. The team at LSHTM collected and processed a total of 3,758 samples and chose 325 positive and 675 negative samples for testing. —PTI



NHS staff directs public as they arrive by car to an NHS Test and Trace mobile Coronavirus testing unit in Hayes, Hillingdon in west London on Monday. Additional Covid testing was set to begin on May 24 in west London boroughs, including Hillingdon, after the identification of the variant first identified in India. — AFP

EU takes on Astra for its
failure to give vax on time

Brussels, May 24: At loggerheads for months with the Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical company it accuses of failing to deliver the promised number of Covid-19 vaccine doses, the European Union's executive branch will try to persuade a Brussels court on Wednesday that the case is urgent enough to justify ordering the company to make an immediate delivery of the missing shots.

AstraZeneca's contract signed with the Commission on behalf of EU member states foresaw an initial 300 million doses for distribution among all 27 countries, with an option for a further 100 million. The doses were expected to be delivered throughout 2021. But only 30 million were sent during the first quarter. Deliveries have increased slightly since then but, according to the

Commission, the company is set to provide only 70 million doses in the second quarter. It had promised 180 million. While the EU insists AstraZeneca has breached its contractual obligations, the company says it has fully complied with the agreement, arguing that vaccines are difficult to manufacture and it made its best effort to deliver on time. —AP

UK confident to lift
virus curbs by June

London, May 24: British health officials expressed optimism on Sunday that the Coronavirus restrictions remaining in England can be lifted in June after an official study found that the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines offer effective protection against the variant first identified in India.

Authorities in Britain have expressed concern in recent weeks that increasing cases of the Indian variant could jeopardise the UK's so-far successful plan to reopen its economy. More than 2,880 cases of the Indian variant have

been recorded in England, figures show. The government has said the variant appears to be more transmissible, but there was still uncertainty about how concerning this was. Jenny Harries, chief executive of the UK Health Security Agency, said officials in England are on track to proceed with the final stage of unlocking the country from June 21 if the public remains cautious. —AP

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BRAZIL CONFIRMS
1ST CASE OF STRAIN
FOUND IN INDIA

Brasilia (Brazil), May 24: Brazil's health minister said that the government is concerned about the Coronavirus variant first identified in India after the first cases of it were confirmed in the South American country.

Marcelo Queiroga denied, however, that there was community transmission of the variant, which was first identified in Brazil in the northeastern state of Maranhao, where 100 people are being monitored. A case was also confirmed Saturday in Ceara state. —AP

INDIAN HIGH
COMMISSION SAYS
OFFICIAL'S WIFE
TESTED -VE IN PAK

Islamabad, May 24: The Indian High Commission in Islamabad on Monday clarified that an official's spouse, who was reported by the Pakistani media to have been tested positive for the Coronavirus, has tested “negative” for Covid on RT-PCR conducted on arrival here and in Lahore.

“In response to media reports that the spouse of an official of the Indian High Commission tested positive for Covid on RAT, it is clarified that said individual has tested ‘Negative’ for Covid on RT-PCR, conducted on arrival in Islamabad. RT-PCR in Lahore, as per reports, was also ‘Negative’, the Indian High Commission tweeted.

Earlier, Pakistan asked 12 officials of the Indian High Commission (IHC) in Islamabad to quarantine, along with their family members and drivers, after one of them reportedly tested positive for the Coronavirus since their arrival from India last week, the Foreign Office said.

A group of 12 officials and their family members crossed over to Pakistan through the Wagah Border on May 22, Foreign Office Spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said on Sunday. —PTI

Blinken off to
West Asia for
peace talks

Washington, May 24: The United States' Secretary of State Antony Blinken departs on Monday for a Middle East trip aimed at consolidating the ceasefire that brought 11 days of deadly bombardment between Israel and Hamas to a halt.

“Secretary Blinken will meet with Israeli leaders about our ironclad commitment to Israel's security,” US President Joe Biden said in a statement.

“He will continue our administration's efforts to rebuild ties to, and support for, the Palestinian people and leaders, after years of neglect.” Biden, who came under criticism from many within his own Democratic party for not pushing US ally Israel more publicly to call a ceasefire, has touted his administration's “quiet, relentless diplomacy” to bring about a halt in the fighting.

Blinken's trip, in addition to meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, will take him to Cairo and Amman for consultations with officials there.

In a tweet, Blinken said that the trip will aim to support “efforts to solidify a ceasefire”.

MAN STABS TWO
IN JERUSALEM,
SHOT DEAD

Jerusalem, May 24: An assailant stabbed two young Israeli men before being shot dead by police at a tram station in Jerusalem on Monday, Israeli police said.

“Attacker shot and killed,” police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said.

Hadassah medical centre said it was treating two men in their 20s for stab wounds. Both were in moderate condition and one was identified by the army as a soldier.

There was no immediate confirmation of the assailant's identity.

The incident happened a short distance from Sheikh Jarrah, which saw weeks of protests against the planned expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in the occupied east Jerusalem. —AFP

“The United States has engaged in intensive diplomacy to bring an end to the hostilities and reduce tensions,” he added. —AFP

Suu Kyi appears for
first time in court

Bangkok, May 24: Myanmar's ousted leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, appeared in court in person on Monday for the first time since the military arrested her when it seized power on February 1. One of her lawyers, Min Min Soe, said over phone that Suu Kyi was able to meet with her defence team for about 30 minutes before the hearing began at a special court set up inside the city council building in Naypyitaw, the capital.

The lawyers also met with Win Myint, who was president of the government Suu Kyi led as state counsellor and faces some of the same charges. Suu Kyi's only previous court appearances have been by video link and she had not



Aung San Suu Kyi

been allowed to meet in person with any of her lawyers.

Min Min Soe said Suu Kyi wanted to tell Myanmar's people that her National League for Democracy party will stand by them. She said that “since the NLD was founded for the people, the NLD will exist as long as the people exist,” Min Min Soe said after the hearing. —AP

BBC to probe into
Diana interview

London, May 24: The BBC said on Monday it will review its editorial policies and governance after an independent report found one of its journalists used deception to secure a landmark interview with Princess Diana. The British broadcaster's board said that the internal probe would be conducted by a group of non-executive directors led by Nick Serota, its senior independent director, and report back by September.

“We must not just assume that mistakes of the past cannot be repeated to day — we must make sure that this is the case,” the board of governors said in a lengthy statement.

“We think it is right that we review the effective-



Princess Diana

ness of the BBC's editorial policies and governance in detail,” it added.

An investigation by retired judge John Dyson concluded last Thursday that journalist Martin Bashir had tricked Diana's brother Charles Spencer into helping to arrange the 1995 interview, in which she spoke about her troubled marriage. —AFP

BIZ | ON HOLD

Officials rules out quake as a cause, investigation to continue

‘Shaking building’ puts traders in tizzy

Shenzhen, China, May 24: Business owners face uncertain prospects after being shut out of a skyscraper in southern China that started to shake unexpectedly last week and sent passersby running in panic.

The 300-metre (1,000-foot) SEG Plaza in the city of Shenzhen near Hong Kong began shaking last Tuesday, prompting the evacuation of the occupants and causing pedestrians to flee for safety.

Emergency management officials quickly ruled out a quake as the cause of the

wobble in the tech hub's Futian district, and a probe is ongoing into the cause.

One business owner said that he was on the fifty-third floor last week when the building started swaying. “I saw something moved, (and) when I got up I saw everything moved,” said Arman Hasanpour, an Iranian businessman based in the building.

“After that we came out very fast.” He said there has been ‘a few shakes’ since the initial wobbling of the building, which was built in 2000. “Now, we

don't know how to make business and how to cope with it... everything is not clear.” The SEG Building on Monday was sealed off with red tape covering the entrances.

But a handful of business owners from the electronics market on the ground floor were rolling trolleys packed with taped-up goods out of the shuttered tower.

Across the road, an electronics trader surnamed Wang said that he had heard people complain before that the skyscraper had swayed. —AFP



People walk past the temporarily closed of 300-metre (1,000-ft.) SEG Plaza (C) in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen, in Guangdong province on Monday. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,651.90	0.22
Nifty 50	15,197.70	0.15
S&P 500*	4,199.50	1.05
Dollar (₹)	72.96	-0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.14	0.37
Euro (₹)	89.08	-0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,015.95	0.19
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.14	2.56
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.611	-0.021

* As of 8:30 PM IST

FDI jumps 19% to \$59.64 bn in 2020-21: Govt

Foreign direct investments (FDI) into the country grew 19 per cent to \$59.64 billion during 2020-21, the commerce and industry ministry said. Total FDI, including equity, re-invested earnings and capital, rose 10 per cent to the "highest ever" of \$81.72 billion during 2020-21 against \$74.39 billion in 2019-20. "FDI equity inflow grew by 19 per cent in 2020-21 (\$59.64 billion), compared to 2019-20 (\$49.98 billion)."

Jaypee CoC defers voting, may consider NBCC bid



Jaypee Infratech's financial creditors deferred the voting process on Suraksha Group's offer to acquire the realty firm and will decide later this week whether bids of Suraksha group as well as NBCC should be considered again. The Committee of Creditors on Monday decided to conduct voting on May 27-28 on whether offers from both the contenders—Suraksha group and NBCC—should be allowed.

Bank credit up 6.02%; deposits grow 9.87%

Bank credit grew by 6.02 per cent to Rs 108.69 lakh crore and deposits increased by 9.87 per cent to Rs 152.17 lakh crore in the fortnight ended May 7, 2021, RBI data showed. In the fortnight ended May 8, 2020, bank advances stood at Rs 102.52 lakh crore and deposits at Rs 138.50 lakh crore, according to RBI's Scheduled Banks' Statement of Position in India as on May 07, 2021, released on Monday.

MFIs credit costs may be in 3-6% range in FY22

With their collection efficiency getting impacted amid disruptions caused by the Covid second wave, microfinance institutions (MFIs) may see their credit cost in the 3-6 per cent range in the current fiscal, India Ratings and Research said. It said collections of micro lenders and small finance banks are likely to have declined 3-5 per cent MoM in April 2021 and additional 5-7 per cent in May 2021 (first fortnight of the month).

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■ Apex court may direct plea to RBI SC unlikely to grant another moratorium

KFALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 24

The Supreme Court on Monday indicated that it would not be able to grant relief in terms of an interest-free loan moratorium for another period of six months or till the Covid-19 situation improves. The apex court observed that this is a policy decision and the court cannot decide to pass such directions. The court said that a representation can be allowed to be made to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The court will hear the matter again on June 11.

In the light of the Covid second wave and the consequent lockdowns, a plea has been filed afresh by Advocate Vishal Tiwari before the Supreme Court this month seeking directions for relief to borrowers in the form of a fresh loan moratorium on term loans. Tiwari urged the court to direct that no bank or financial institution would take action for auction in respect of any property of any citizen or party or any corporate for a period of six months for non-payment of loans.

The petition stated that the central government and its concerned ministries along with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have failed to bring in any sound relief in this present situation for stressed sectors and individuals for whom sustenance and existence have become difficult.



A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and M. R. Shah made an observation while waiting for the video connection of Advocate Tiwari to be established.

Justice Bhushan asked Justice Shah, "Have you seen the prayers, brother?"

To this, Justice Shah said, "Yes. We cannot grant it. A representation can be allowed to be made to the RBI."

The court then deferred the hearing to June 11.

In a statement, Harsh Vardhan Patodia, president, Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (Credai), appreciated the Supreme Court's stance.

"We appreciate the view of Hon'ble Supreme Court for guiding the matter of extension of loan moratorium for a period of six months this year to the Reserve Bank of India. In line with the representation made to the apex court, we feel due relief for borrowers is an absolute necessity considering the prolonged

impact of the second wave of the pandemic, and consequent financial stress borne by individuals and businesses due to loss of employment and business opportunities. With the real estate sector being more severely impacted in 2021 as compared to 2020, as the apex industry body, Credai has already made separate representations to RBI and the Government of India on the matter."

The petition said, "No such monetary relief and packages has been declared by the sovereign in this stressed time and people are under tremendous pressure to maintain the EMIs and are always under the threat of accounts being declared NPA. With no salary, revenue for individuals it has turned out to be a hopeless situation for individuals. The RBI on 6-5-2021 has issued a circular for resolution plan 2.0, which cannot be said to be adequate relief to all in the present circumstances..."

POSTPAID-PREPAID SWITCH THROUGH OTP ON THE CARDS

New Delhi, May 24: Mobile phone subscribers may soon be allowed to switch from a postpaid connection to prepaid and vice versa by using an OTP-based authentication and without a need to change SIM card, according to an official DoT note.

Industry body Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI) has proposed the mechanism to the Department of Telecom (DoT) and the DoT has asked telecom operators to carry out proof of concept (PoC) on the same.

The final decision on allowing the change in the account will depend on the outcome of PoC, according to the DoT note.

"The PoC for conversion from prepaid to postpaid and vice versa may be carried out by the telecom service providers as per the procedure...The decision regarding implementation of the procedure shall be taken after the assessment of the outcome of the PoC," DoT ADG Suresh Kumar said in a May 21 note.

The COAI, whose members include Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, had requested the department on April 9 for permission to allow mobile customers to migrate from prepaid to postpaid and vice versa without undertaking fresh KYC procedure and by using OTP (one-time password) based authentication.

—PTI

It's a \$3 trillion stock market now

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 24

Indian stock market's capitalisation crossed the \$3 trillion mark for the first time on Monday on a closing basis, with the help of a big surge in mid-cap and small-cap companies' stock prices along with the rally in the shares of large companies.

Since market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50 peaked in February post-the Union Budget, the broader market has seen even a bigger rally than large-caps from the pandemic lows and this helped the market cap to rise to over \$3 trillion mark. The market-cap had briefly crossed the \$3-trillion mark on Friday in intraday trade.

The market capitalisation of the BSE, which has the largest number of listed companies on board, stood at Rs 218,94,202.30 lakh crore or \$3,00,085.00 lakh crore at Monday's USD-INR exchange rate of around Rs 72.96. One lakh crore is



equivalent to 1 trillion.

With a \$3-trillion market cap, the BSE is now among the top seven stock exchanges in the world. Only the New York Stock Exchange, Nasdaq, Shanghai Stock Exchange, Hong Kong Stock Exchange, Euronext and London Stock Exchange are now ahead of the BSE in terms of m-cap.

Though the benchmark Sensex reached an all-time high of 52,516.76 points on February 16 due to the rally in the large-cap companies, it is the broader market that has taken the BSE's market cap to \$3 trillion.

From the April lows, the

BSE Mid-cap Index has rallied 103.48 per cent and the BSE Small-cap index 141.53 per cent compared to the 71.67 per cent rally in the Sensex. This clearly shows the broader market rally since March 2021 was responsible for the big surge in the stock market capitalisation.

On Monday too the broader market outperformed with BSE Mid-cap up 0.86 per cent and BSE Small-cap 0.70 per cent compared to the Sensex gaining 0.22 per cent.

A total of 4,722 companies are listed on the BSE and a majority of them fall in the mid-cap and small-cap categories.

"Market capitalization of equities of listed companies on BSE reached \$3 trillion for the first time ever," said Ashishkumar Chauhan, MD and CEO, BSE.

The market's capitalisation had hit \$2.5 trillion on December 16, 2020. It took only 159 days for the market to gain \$500 billion to touched \$3 trillion in valuation on Monday.

Zeta raises \$250 mn from SoftBank Vision

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 24

Banking software platform Zeta on Monday announced it has raised \$250 million in funding, led by Japan's SoftBank, valuing the firm at \$1.45 billion. This is one of the largest single investments in a banking tech startup globally.

Zeta, founded by serial entrepreneur Bhavin Turakhia and Ramki Gaddipati was last valued

at \$300 million when it raised \$60 million from Sodexo—also Zeta's largest customer currently.

Zeta is the 14th company this year to cross the \$1 billion valuation mark after Meesho, Cred, Pharmeasy, ShareChat, Moglix and others. The proceeds of this funding round will be used to accelerate Zeta's growth in the United States, Europe and India, including scaling its operations, team, and platform to meet the demands of its

expanding customer base.

Zeta counts amongst its customers over 10 Banks and 25 fintechs, across eight countries, including Sodexo, HDFC Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, Yes Bank, RBL Bank, SBM Bank India and others.

A recent Aite Group study found 61 per cent financial institution executives believe investment in newer technologies will improve their customer experience.

RBI issues guidelines on co-op bank amalgamation

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 24

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said that it would consider the amalgamation of district central co-operative banks (DCCBs) with state cooperative banks (StCBs) subject to various conditions, including that a proposal should be made by the state government concerned. The guidelines will also apply for amalgamation of one or more DCCBs in a state with the StCB or amalgamation of one DCCB with another.

The Banking Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2020 has been notified for the StCBs and DCCBs with effect from April 1, 2021. Amalgamation of such banks needs to be sanctioned by the Reserve Bank of India.

The RBI said it would consider proposals for amalgamation when the state government makes a proposal to amalgamate one or more DCCB/s in the state with the StCB after conducting a

detailed study of the legal framework along with additional capital infusion strategy, assurance regarding financial support, if required, projected business model with clear profitability and proposed governance model for the amalgamated bank. Similarly, it would also consider a proposal when the scheme of amalgamation is approved by the requisite majority of shareholders or when such proposal of the state government has been examined and recommended by the Nabard.

"The proposal for amalgamation of DCCBs with the StCB will be examined by the Reserve Bank in consultation with Nabard and the sanction/ approval will be a two-stage process. In the first stage, an 'in-principle' approval will be accorded subject to fulfilment of certain conditions, following which the processes for amalgamation may be initiated by all concerned. After completion of the above

processes, Nabard and Reserve Bank may be approached for final approval along with a compliance report. To enable the Reserve Bank to consider the application for sanction, the state government shall submit the information and documents specified to the concerned regional office of Reserve Bank and Nabard," said the central bank said.

Detailing the regulatory criteria, the RBI said that the financial parameters of the amalgamated entity based on notionally consolidated latest audited financial statements should be robust. It should have its capital to risky asset ratio (CRAR) above the prescribed regulatory minimum, the gross non-performing assets below 7 per cent and net NPA below 5 per cent and availability of adequate liquid assets. Post-amalgamation, it should be a profit making and financially viable entity on a sustained basis, said the apex bank.

Roche Antibody Cocktail launched at ₹59,750/dose

New Delhi, May 24: Drug majors Roche India and Cipla on Monday announced launch of Roche's Antibody Cocktail in India priced at Rs 59,750 per dose for the treatment of mild to moderate Covid-19 in patients who are at high risk.

"The first batch of the Antibody Cocktail (Casirivimab and Imdevimab) is now available in India while a second batch will be made available by mid-June. In total they can potentially benefit 2,00,000 patients as each of the 1,00,000 packs that will be available in India offers treatment for two patients," Cipla and Roche said in a joint statement.

Cipla will distribute the product, it added.

The price for each patient dose [a combined dose of 1,200 mg (600 mg of Casirivimab and 600 mg of Imdevimab)] will be Rs 59,750 inclusive of all taxes. The maximum retail price for the multi dose pack (each pack can treat two patients) is Rs 1,19,500, inclusive of all taxes

As per the statement, the drug will be available through leading hospitals

and Covid treatment centers.

The Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation had recently provided an emergency use authorisation (EUA) for the Antibody Cocktail (Casirivimab and Imdevimab) in India. It has also received a EUA in the US and several EU countries.

We are optimistic that the availability of Antibody Cocktail in India can help in minimising hospitalisation...play a key role in treatment of high risk patients before their condition worsens, said V. Simpson Emmanuel, MD and CEO, Roche Pharma India.

Umang Vohra, MD and Global CEO of Cipla said we look forward to leveraging our solid marketing and distribution strengths in India to provide broader, equitable access to this innovative treatment option in the country.

The cocktail is to be administered for the treatment of mild to moderate Covid in adults and children (above 12 years weighing at least 40 kg) who are confirmed to be infected with Sars-Cov2.

—PTI

GUPTA'S LIBERTY STEEL TO SELL UK PLANT TO PAY BACK DEBT

ADITI KHANNA LONDON, MAY 24

Liberty Steel, the company led by British Indian businessman Sanjeev Gupta, on Monday announced very constructive and productive meetings as part of its ongoing restructuring plans, which will result in the sale of its Stocksbridge plant in south-east England to help pay back lender Credit Suisse.

Gupta, who heads the wider Gupta Family Group (GFG) Alliance, and his newly formed Restructuring and Transformation Committee held advanced discussions with Credit Suisse Asset Management (CS) in Dubai over the weekend to reach a formal standstill agreement on its Liberty Primary Metals Australia business while refinancing is completed that will repay Credit Suisse out in full.

The investment bank has, meanwhile, agreed to pause court proceedings against Gupta's empire while the sale of Stocksbridge is conducted.

Both parties also made significant progress in agreeing a framework to resolve GFG Alliance's remaining exposure with CS, Liberty Steel, the UK's third largest steel maker, said.

This work includes identifying a positive solution which will allow Liberty to complete the restructuring and refinancing of its UK operations, protecting thousands of jobs and supporting the fulfilment of its vision to be a leader in the decarbonisation of the UK steel industry, it added.

A formal sale process for the aerospace and special alloys steel business at Stocksbridge and its downstream plants, the narrow strip mill at Brinsworth and Performance Steels at West Bromwich will be launched shortly, according to a statement by Liberty Steel.

The company has been working on a refinancing plan since its main lender Greensill Capital collapsed earlier this year. This sale will allow it to focus on developing its Rotherham plant.

—PTI

SF90i | STRADALE The hybrid car is for the masses, with no production limit set Ferrari pitches \$500,000 supercar for daily driving

HANNAH ELLIOTT MAY 24

The main thing Ferrari will tell you about the 2021 Ferrari SF90 Stradale is how much of a bargain it is.

The arithmetic requires some squinting around the edges of elitism and a healthy injection of relative logic. It goes like this: The two-door coupe is the second hybrid from Modena, Italy's crown jewel, the first being the La Ferrari of 2013. That car, which had 950 horsepower, cost more than 1 million (\$1.2 million) when it debuted, and examples today sell for \$4 million (and an additional million for the convertible version). The new SF90



Stradale, with 986 horsepower, starts at the breezy bargain basement price of \$507,300. (One fine distinction: The SF90 is a plug-in hybrid, while the LaFerrari does not plug-in.)

And while the La Ferrari was limited to 499 units sold, plus one auctioned for charity, the SF90 is a veritable car for the masses, with no production limit set at all. So, see? Big

deal! Huge.

Well. A test drive of Ferrari's new hybrid across Los Angeles on May 19 did not convince me that this half-million-dollar machine spells a new era of budget-friendliness at the 81-year-old brand. But with an on-the-road dynamism born of the most advanced integration I've ever experienced with electric or conventional power, it does

convince me that the future of the brand is in good hands. Those who can afford the price tag have much to anticipate.

This car is extreme in every way, so of course that's reflected in its styling. Eat this: With 1000cv and at a dry weight of 3,461 pounds, it has a weight-to-power ratio of 1.57 kg/cv and produces 390 kg of downforce at 250 km/h-which, for the first time ever at Ferrari, puts a V8 engine, not a V12, at the most powerful and fastest of the production model range. It adds an eighth gear to the dual-clutch automatic transmission and adds 20 per cent torque over its predecessor, but the gearbox still weighs 10kg less. It

has brand-new actuation hydraulics that cut clutch times to 200 ms. (Compare that to the 488 Pista's 300 ms.)

A high-performance Li-ion battery provides power to all three motors and guarantees a 25 km (16 miles) range in all-electric mode, using just the front axle. Top speed is 211mph; it can go to 62mph in 2.5 seconds. The push to such great speeds feels instant; thank the electric motor gods for that.

The split nose and upturned grin of the hood, the dorsal fin on the roof, the unique placement of the rear air vents, and the big lip on the rear assist its spaceship-like speeds.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Renedy helps his state fight virus

New Delhi: Former India mid-field maestro Renedy Singh is working relentlessly to arrange oxygen cylinders and help his home state of Manipur win the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. In his prime Renedy was known for his ability to put in inch-perfect balls for the strikers inside the box. His penchant for "assisting" when the chips are down has not changed even after a decade of having last played for the Blue Tigers. "It is a difficult time for everyone. Our frontline workers have been working tirelessly. It was high time we stepped in to try and assist in any way possible," Renedy was quoted as saying by AIFF. "We have friends from different fields like doctors, police officers, IAS officers, businessmen — all of whom have joined the campaign to try and help," the former national team captain added. — PTI

BCCI to donate in Covid relief work

New Delhi: The Indian cricket board on Monday said it will distribute 2,000 oxygen concentrators of 10 litres each to various medical organisations, ramping up the country's overwhelmed healthcare infrastructure in its fight against the raging Covid-19 pandemic. The deadly second wave of the pandemic has caused unprecedented health crisis with thousands losing their lives. Last month, the national capital region emerged as the worst sufferer due to oxygen crisis, leading to fatalities in multiple hospitals. "The Board of Control for Cricket in India on Monday announced that it will contribute 10-Litre 2,000 Oxygen concentrators to boost India's efforts in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic," the BCCI said in a release. — PTI

Hurt Shapovalov out of French Open

Paris: Canada's world number 15 Denis Shapovalov withdrew from Roland Garros due to a shoulder injury on Sunday. "I am saddened to share that after consulting with my medical team I have made the difficult decision to withdraw from Roland Garros," the 22-year-old wrote on Instagram. "Unfortunately, my shoulder has been bothering me over the last few weeks and, while all medical tests look good, it is for the best to play it safe and rest." Shapovalov was runner-up to Casper Ruud in the Geneva clay court final on Saturday. At the Rome Masters last week, he had two match points in the third round against Rafael Nadal before the 13-time Roland Garros champion recovered to win. — AFP

Mickelson oldest to win golf major

Kiawah Island, USA: Phil Mickelson has delivered so many thrills and spills over 30 years of pure theater that no one ever knows what he will do next. His latest act was a real stunner: A major champion at age 50. Mickelson captured his sixth major and by far the most surprising Sunday at the PGA Championship. He made two early birdies and let a cast of contenders fall too far behind to catch him in the shifting wind of Kiawah Island. He closed with a 1-over 73, building a five-shot lead and not making any critical mistakes that kept him from his place in history. Julius Boros for 53 years held the distinction of golf's oldest major champion. He was 48 when he won the 1968 PGA Championship in San Antonio. — AP

Booker shines as Suns sink Lakers

Los Angeles: Devin Booker scored 34 points as the second-seeded Phoenix Suns outplayed the Los Angeles Lakers in their Western Conference playoff series opener with a hardfought 99-90 victory on Sunday. Booker — playing in the first NBA playoff game of his career — spearheaded a deserved win over the reigning NBA champions, rallying his team after an injury to Chris Paul restricted the Phoenix veteran's influence. — AFP

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LILLE BLOSSOM

Galtier's men pip powerhouse PSG to win French league

Paris, May 24: Lille won the Ligue 1 title on Sunday thanks to a 2-1 victory at Angers which ensured they were crowned French champions for the first time since 2011 on the final day of the season.

An early Jonathan David strike and Burak Yilmaz's penalty in first-half stoppage time ensured that Christophe Galtier's Lille finished one point ahead of second-placed Paris Saint-Germain, who won 2-0 at Brest.

Angelo Fulgini pulled one back in added time at the end of the match, but the hosts couldn't stop Lille becoming champions for the fourth time in their history.

The match was played behind closed doors due to Covid-19 restrictions but fans poured into the streets of Lille to celebrate at the final whistle.

Supporters lit flares and chanted songs in the northern city's central Place Charles de Gaulle in jubilation at a historic triumph against far wealthier opposition.

"This is exceptional. It's been a long day and a lot of pressure. To beat Paris Saint-Germain to the league title is something exceptional," a jubilant Galtier said to *Canal+*.

"The players were amazing... The credit goes to the players, they are the heroes," he added.

The title win came after another away success for Lille, who finish the season unbeaten on the road since November, and ends a three-year league winning streak for PSG.

It was fitting that it was David and Yilmaz who scored the crucial goals at Angers, as both have been key to an improbable run to the title that has also held significant pressure from Monaco.

— AFP



Lille players celebrate after defeating Angers to claiming the French top division football league title at The Raymond-Kopa Stadium in Angers, north-western France, on Sunday.

— AFP

Aguero ends City career in style

Manchester (United Kingdom), May 24: Sergio Aguero signed off for Manchester City in style on Sunday, scoring twice in a 5-0 romp for the Premier League champions against Everton before lifting the trophy for the fifth time in his Etihad career.

City's record goalscorer, who is leaving the club after next week's Champions League final, hit a quickfire double after coming off the bench with

25 minutes remaining.

His efforts added to earlier strikes from Kevin De Bruyne, Gabriel Jesus and Phil Foden as City showed no sign of letting up ahead of the showpiece clash against Chelsea in Porto.

"When I came here the first title for me was the most important, for the club and for me, that Man City started to win more titles so I'm so happy because it's not easy to be 10 years at one club, for me it's an honour," he told

Sky Sports.

"Before the game I felt so strange, the sensation is not good. I prefer to think about the good moments," added the Argentine, who said he hoped to feature in the Champions League final.

Manager Pep Guardiola was in tears after the final whistle in Manchester, describing Aguero as a "special person for all of us".

"He helped me a lot," the City boss said as fans cele-

brated in the stands. "We cannot replace him."

'SERGIO CLOSE TO BARCELONA DEAL'

Aguero is close to agreeing a move to Barcelona that would unite him with fellow Argentine superstar Lionel Messi, according to Pep Guardiola.

"Maybe I reveal a secret," Guardiola told the BBC. "Maybe he is close to agreeing a deal for the club of my heart — for Barcelona." — AFP

ASIAN | BOXING

Hussamuddin gives India winning start

Dubai, May 24: India were off to a confident start at the Asian Boxing Championships with Commonwealth Games bronze-winner Mohammed Hussamuddin (56kg) beating Kazakhstan's Makmud Sabyrkhan in his opening bout to enter the quarterfinals, here on Monday.

Hussamuddin prevailed 5-0 against the 19-year-old two-time Asian youth champion.

The Indian has a real tough one next up as he will meet reigning World and Asian Games champion Mirzazibek Mirzahalilov. Mirzahalilov is the top seed in the draw and is the defending champion as well.

The score-line might suggest otherwise, but Hussamuddin was locked in a gruelling battle with the youngster.

The exchange of blows was fierce as the two boxers put up an entertaining show. The Indian, however, proved to be a better defender than the Kazakh, who relied just too heavily on counter-attacks.

On Tuesday, Olympic-bound Simranjit Kaur (60kg), Sakshi (54kg),



Mohammad Hussamuddin (56kg) celebrates after winning his bout on Monday.

Jasmine (57kg) and Sanjeet (91kg) will fight their respective last-8 stage bouts at the event which is being jointly hosted by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) and the UAE Boxing Federation.

The continental showpiece features 150 pugilists from 17 countries this year including strong boxing nations such as Uzbekistan, Philippines and Kazakhstan. — PTI

KOCHI TUSKERS STILL OWE 35% MONEY TO PLAYERS

Melbourne, May 24: Former Australia batsman Brad Hodge on Monday cheekily enquired if BCCI has been able to "locate" the money that the now defunct Kochi Tuskers Kerala owed him for representing them in the 2010 edition of Indian Premier League.

"The 46-year-old had played 14 games for KTK, scoring 285 runs at an average of 35.63. He was bought by Kochi Tuskers for \$425,000 at the 2010 auction.

"Players are still owed 35% of their money earned from ten years ago from the @IPL representing Kochi tuskers. Any chance @BCCI could locate that money?," Hodge tweeted.

He was reacting to a report published in the *Telegraph* about Indian women's team not receiving their share of \$500,000 ICC prize money from the BCCI. — PTI

Juve, AC Milan qualify for Champions League

Milan, May 24: Juventus qualified for the Champions League on the final day of the season on Sunday with a 4-1 win at Bologna and were joined by AC Milan who beat Atalanta 2-0.

Napoli had to settle for a Europa League spot, finishing fifth, one point behind Juventus, after a 1-1 draw at home against Hellas Verona.

A pair of Franck Kessie penalties at the end of either half ensured AC Milan finished the season second — 12 points behind city rivals Inter Milan — and return to the Champions League for the first time since the 2013-2014 season.

"We deserved the Champions League as well as second place," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli, whose side had missed the chance to seal their berth last weekend against Cagliari.

"We went through the whole championship at the top, unfortunately we had thrown away the match point last Sunday.

"I'm really excited, happy, I have to thank the club because they made us work in a spectacular way."

Atalanta had already ensured a third consecutive season of Champions League football but



Juventus' Alvaro Morata scores against Bologna on Sunday. — AFP

missed out on a first second-place Serie A finish days after losing out in the Coppa Italia final to Juventus.

Cristiano Ronaldo was left on the bench by Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo, who opted for an attacking line-up of Paulo Dybala and Alvaro Morata flanked by Federico Chiesa and Dejan Kulusevski.

"It was a shared choice, Ronaldo was tired after the fatigue on Wednesday," said Pirlo.

"He made himself available to the team but I

chose to have another player named Morata play, who is not the latest arrival. I have a quality team, with many choices available."

A Morata brace along with goals from Chiesa and Adrien Rabiot prevented Juventus missing out on the elite European competition for the first time since 2012.

In Naples, Amir Rrahmani scored for Napoli after an hour against his former club, which would have been enough to secure a berth at the top table. — AFP

JAPAN OPENS MASS VAX BEFORE GAMES

Tokyo, May 24: Japan mobilised military doctors and nurses to give shots to elderly people in Tokyo and Osaka on Monday as the government desperately tries to accelerate its vaccination rollout and curb coronavirus infections just two months before hosting the Olympics.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is determined to hold the Olympics in Tokyo after a one-year delay and has made an ambitious pledge to finish vaccinating the country's 36 million elderly people by the end of July, despite scepticism it's possible.

Worries about public safety while many Japanese remain unvaccinated have prompted growing protests and calls for cancelling the games, set to start on July 23.

Suga's government has repeatedly expanded the area and duration of a largely voluntary request-based virus state of emergency since late April and has made its virus-fighting measures stricter. Currently, Tokyo and nine other areas that are home to 40% of the country's population are under the emergency and a further extension is deemed unavoidable.

With Covid-19 cases still high, Suga now says vaccines are key to getting infections under control. He has not made vaccinations conditional for holding the Olympics and has arranged for Pfizer to donate its vaccine for athletes through the International Olympic Committee, while trying to speed up Japan's inoculation drive as anti-Olympic sentiment grows.

Suga, speaking to reporters after a brief visit to the Tokyo centre, said accelerating the vaccine rollout is an unprecedented challenge. — AP

Government of Haryana

Keep following the Instructions after Corona Vaccination

Sh. Manohar Lal, Chief Minister, Haryana

Wear Mask Properly

Maintain 2 Gaj Social Distance

Wash hands regularly with soap and water or use sanitizer

In case of any symptoms, get Tested for Covid-19 and Immediately isolate yourself

Be aware and make others aware

Helpline For Assistance Regarding Covid-19

8558893911

(For Entire State)

& 1075

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