

SHORT TAKES

₹1L reward for clue on wrestler Sushil Kumar

New Delhi: Delhi Police has declared a reward of ₹1 lakh on information leading to arrest of Olympic medalist, Indian wrestler Sushil Kumar, who is absconding ever since his role surfaced in a brawl that led to the murder of a 23-year-old budding wrestler. A reward of ₹50,000 has also been declared by police on his associate. On Saturday, a Delhi Court had issued "non-bailable warrant" (NBW) against Kumar and six others. Police teams are conducting raids in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to nab him and his associates, who are changing their locations quickly to evade police arrest. Delhi Police on Friday had also written a letter to Delhi government stating that their official, Sushil Kumar, and his associate, Ajay Kumar, who is a physical education teacher, have been named by the victims and a departmental action should be taken.

AIIMS staffer held for ₹5L demand for patient's admission

New Delhi: An employee of Delhi's AIIMS and his sister have been arrested for allegedly demanding ₹5 lakh for getting a Covid positive patient admitted in the ICU of a hospital, police said on Tuesday. Police nabbed Pankaj Kumar (45), who works in the haematology lab of the AIIMS and his sister Kawalpreet Kaur alias Mamta (36) who is a housewife, from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district after the call detail records revealed their location, they said. Complainant Haripal told the police that a person named Bhushan Kumar and Sunil Kumar had taken ₹2.8 lakh for the admission of his Covid positive wife to the Safdarjung Hospital here, officials said. "Interrogations revealed that Pankaj, his brother Santosh and one of his two sisters Krana, all work at the AIIMS in Delhi, whereas, his sister Kawalpreet Kaur is a housewife and her husband was jobless for some time. Seeing it as a lucrative opportunity, Kawalpreet insisted her brother to demand Rs five lakh from the patient's family, the DCP said. — PTI

■ Vaccine to last 4 days for 45 and above age group in in Delhi: Dy CM

Sisodia requests Centre for 3.82L shots for 18-44 group

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia urged the Centre on Monday to make the data on vaccines supplied by it to the states public and sought 3.82 lakh doses of the vaccines for people aged 18-44 years in the city.

Currently, Delhi has a vaccine stock of four days for those aged 45 years and above, he said, adding that for the 18-44 age group, the city will run out of the stock in three days.

Sisodia said he has written to the Centre citing three requests.

"The Centre has written to us, saying we will get 3.83 lakh doses for the 45-plus age group but we will not get vaccines for the 18-44 age group in May," the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader told an online media briefing.

"We need more vaccines for the 18-44 age group. We are ready to buy those but at least make those available. We will have to close the vaccination centres for the 18-44 age group after three days," he said.

Sisodia urged the Centre to make the data of allocation of vaccines to the states public.



We need more vaccines for the 18-44 age group. We are ready to buy those but at least make those available. We will have to close the vaccination centres for the 18-44 age group after three days.

— Manish Sisodia, Delhi Dy CM

"There should be transparency in the data. For Delhi, we need to know how much is being given to the government and how much to the private sector and even for other states, we need to know the figures."

"Please let us know about the vaccine availability for the next two months so that we can chalk out the vaccination programme for June and July," the deputy chief minister said.

Delhi records 4,524 Covid cases, 340 more deaths

New Delhi, May 17: The national capital reported 4,524 new Covid-19 cases, lowest since April 5, and 340 fatalities on Monday while the positivity rate dipped to 8.42 per cent, according to the latest health bulletin released by the city government.

The Covid-19 situation has been improving in Delhi with the number

of cases and positivity rate going down steadily in the past few days.

Medical experts have attributed the lockdown as the main factor behind the dip amid the second wave of the pandemic. At 8.42 per cent, the positivity rate is the lowest since April 9 when it stood at 7.8 per cent.

— PTI

HC seeks govt's response on infra build-up for cremations

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI MAY 17

A PIL urged the Delhi High Court on Monday to direct the city government to formulate and implement a concrete plan for having sufficient infrastructure and transportation and cremation of corpses of Covid-19 patients.

Hearing a petition moved by Mujeeb Ur

Rehman, the division bench headed by Justice DN Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh sought a response from the Delhi government and sought its stand on the plea.

The bench further sought the response in order to set up a sufficient number of mortuaries to store the bodies of the large number of people dying of the viral disease.

Politicians have no business to hoard Covid medicines: HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

Hearing a PIL into the alleged black marketing or hoarding of Covid-19 drugs and essential commodities by political leaders for profiteering, the Delhi High Court on Monday observed that political leaders have no business to hoard stocks.

A division bench of Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Jasmeet Singh said that the court hopes medicines are not hoarded for political gains and political parties have no business to use the pandemic time for their personal benefits. If these politicians want to help,

▶ **THE HIGH court also directed the Delhi Police to conduct a thorough and timely investigation and submit a proper status report next week**

let them surrender it to the director general of health services for distribution to govt hospitals. "Political leaders have no business to hoard stocks. If their intention is to do public good, then they should surrender the same to the Director General of Health Services (DGHS) who will then distribute it to government hospitals," the court said.

The court was hearing a Public Interest Litigation

(PIL) alleging that politicians from several parties were involved in the illegal distribution of medicines used for COVID-19 treatment. The petition sought registration of an FIR against such politicians, including BJP MP Gautam Gambhir and Youth Congress leader Srinivas BV.

While rapping the politicians for hoarding medicines, the court also directed the Delhi Police to conduct a thorough and timely investigation and submit a proper status report, next week.

The High Court asked Delhi Police to find out how chemists supplied such large quantities of

medicines when there is a shortage in supply. As part of its probe, the Delhi Police has questioned several leaders including Gambhir, Srinivas, AAP legislator Dilip Pandey, among others.

On Monday, in its preliminary status report filed by the Delhi Police claimed that there was no proof to suggest that politicians like BJP MP Gautam Gambhir and Congress' Srinivas in alleged medicine hoarding cases and clarified that they have actually been helping people in getting medical aid in form of medicine, oxygen, blood plasma and hospital bed.

Swadeshi Jagran Manch starts campaign for 'universal access of vaccine, medicines'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

In an appeal to the government, global pharmaceutical companies, WHO and organisations involved in vaccines and medicines, RSS affiliate Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) has launched a digital campaign for "universal access to vaccines and medicines to fight against corona."

The signature campaign also appeals to the government to use its sovereign rights to grant a compulsory licence to more pharmaceutical companies for the production of Covid vaccines and medicines. "Humanity is facing the worst medical crisis these

days due to the second wave of the Covid-19. To deal with the situation, the country needs a sufficient supply of vaccines, medicines and different types of medical equipment. Patent protection is the major barrier to the generic production of these medicines," reads the statement issued by SJM, national co-convenor, Ashwani Mahajan.

Asking the people to sign the petition, the SJM said many Indian manufacturers have the capacity and expertise in the production of essential medicines and vaccines, provided intellectual property rights hurdles are removed with technology transfer and trade secret issues resolved.

Noting that many Indian companies are already making Remdesivir under voluntary licence, SJM said however, the quantity is not sufficient to meet the demand, and the price is also very high from the point of view of affordability.

The SJM said it understands that the government needs to use the public health safeguards in the Patents Act and permit more companies to produce these medicines in the coming days. "As we may be requiring nearly 2 billion doses of vaccine in the next 6 months, we need to involve many more companies in manufacturing of these vaccines," said the organisation.

Swasthya Vihar residents set-up Covid care facility

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI MAY 17

The Resident Welfare Association of Swasthya Vihar has set up a small Covid Care Facility, in their Club Premises.

The RWA members have set-up a Small Covid Care Facility (SCCF) with 10 oxygen beds in the premises for catering to asymptomatic patients, pre-symptomatic and suspected or mild Cases of Covid-19, but only for its residents.

The facility has been set up according to the guideline set by govern-

ment and has approvals from local authorities.

Clearing on the guidelines and criteria to use the facility, the RWA of Swasthya Vihar Residents, said, "There is an eligibility criterion to use the facility for admission like the patient must be a resident of Swasthya Vihar and must be between the ages of 10 years and 60 years and must not be suffering from any co-morbidities.

If female, patient must not be pregnant or lactating. Further advance payment of ₹20,000/ should be paid.



Covid-19 patients during the morning yoga session at Sardar Patel Covid care centre at Chhatrapur in New Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

Plot to kill Narsinghanand foiled, carpenter arrested

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

The Delhi police has claimed to have arrested a 24-year-old carpenter who was assigned the task to kill Dasna Devi temple's head priest, Swami Narsinghanand, officials said on Monday.

On the basis of an input, accused John Mohammad Dar, a resident of Pulwama district in J&K, was apprehended from a hotel in Paharganj, they said.

The police searched his luggage and recovered a pistol of .30 bore, two magazines, 15 live rounds, one orange kurta, one white pajama, one piece of kalawa, and one wooden bead mala from his possession, they said.

During interrogation, Dar said that he works as a carpenter. He was booked for stone pelting earlier in 2016 at the time of the death of Burhan Wani by Sangam police station in Anantnag, the police said.

It was revealed that he met one Abid while roam-



Narsinghanand

ing in his field in December 2020. Abid informed Dar that he was from Pakistan and associated with Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). Over the period, they became good friends and met twice, first in December 2020 and later in April 2021. However, they were constantly in touch with each other on WhatsApp, officials said.

In February 2021, he, along with his sister and her father-in-law, came to Delhi for the treatment of his nephew who has some heart ailment. They stayed at a guest house in Jama Masjid, the police said.

When he returned to Kashmir after the treatment of his nephew, he narrated the ordeal to Abid. Later, Abid assigned him with the task to assassinate Swami Narsinghanand as he committed Gustakhe-Rasool, officials said.

Abid taught weapon handling to Dar for the purpose of target killing. He gave the latter ₹6,500 in cash and transferred ₹35,000 in his account. Thereafter, Abid directed him to go to Delhi and procure weapons from one of his sources.

Abid promised Dar that he would be paid a substantial amount of money for carrying out the action. Abid informed that one Umar would take care of him in Delhi. On April 23, the accused left for Delhi, whereafter he claims that he did not contact Abid.

Dar and Umar were in touch with each other through Telegram. Umar was to arrange his recce and stay in Delhi and also to provide access to Yati Narsinghanand to carry out his killing, they said.

Dar met Umar in Jama Masjid area as directed by Abid. Umar shifted him to a hotel in Paharganj and booked a room. Umar brought the puja items and the bhagwa dress as a cover to gain entry in the temple, the police said.

Kalra sent to 3 days' police custody in O2 hoarding case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

A Delhi court, on Monday, sent businessman Navneet Kalra to police custody for three days in connection with alleged black marketing and hoarding oxygen concentrators amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The Delhi police arrested Kalra on Sunday night. He was on the run for over a week since the seizure of more than 500 oxygen concentrators from Khan Chacha, Town Hall, and Nege & Ju restaurants owned by him.

Metropolitan magistrate Archana Beniwal allowed custodial interrogation of Kalra by the Delhi police,

which had sought five days of police custody to quiz him.

Kalra will now be produced before the court on May 20.

Investigating officer (IO) Kamal Kumar asserted that his custodial interrogation is required to unearth the whole nexus and conspiracy behind the black marketing and know the trail of money transactions.

During the proceedings, additional public prosecutor Atul Shrivastava told the court that Kalra has to be confronted with the co-accused in the case and that documents are voluminous for which his custody is required.

"It is a case of conspiracy.

He had been evading arrest. This is a serious case. Without police custody, it will be impossible for the investigating agency to reach a conclusion," the prosecutor said.

Opposing the police custody, the counsel representing Kalra said that his bank details, mobile phone, laptop, and gadgets are already available with the police and that his custodial interrogation is not required.

"Remand must be granted only in cases of real necessity. For what purpose do they need custody? They need to know the trail? They can get any information they want from me. Request for the police remand is absurd," the counsel added.

Cop helps 82-year-old lady to get Covid shot

SUPRIYA KUMARI
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

A Delhi Police personnel has shown his humanity by lending a helping hand to an 82-year-old senior citizen so that she can be inoculated for Covid-19. Shaile D'Souza is a resident of Mori Gate and is frequently visited by police constable Kuldeep Singh who is presently posted at the Kashmeri Gate police station.



Delhi police constable Kuldeep Singh takes Shaile D'Souza to a vaccination centre in New Delhi.

responsible citizen immediately shared the information with the Kashmeri Gate police station SHO Dharmendra who personally took note of the old lady's issue. With the help of SHO and constable, the lady was registered for vaccination. Later, the constable Kuldeep Singh took her to the vaccination center at Aruna Asif Ali Government Hospital, got her vaccinated and after that dropped her back at her residence in his personal vehicle.

| NORTHERN RAILWAY Auction Notice | |
|--|---|
| Auction of Lot No 1, 11 number KM. 1537/48 TO 1571/20 (Under Laksar range on Laksar - Dasni Railway track) Dangerous trees, Lot No. 2, 63 number KM. 1537/48 TO 1571/20 (Sonali bridge Laksar in between Railway track to Bhagwanpur chudiyala on railway track Uttarakhand border) under Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway Roorkee will be auctioned in the office of Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway Roorkee. All the interested bidders are invited to participate in this auction. | |
| Auction place : Office of the Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway/ Roorkee on date 15.06.2021. at 11:00 AM | |
| 1. | All the bidders will deposit cash Rs 100/- in the office of Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway/ Roorkee which will not be refunded and shall also deposit Rs 8000/- (Each lot) in favor of Sr. Divisional Finance Manager Northern Railway Moradabad as a Demand Draft of SBI or Other Nationalized Bank. |
| 2. | All the bidders who will take part in the auction will also have proper knowledge of Auction rules and others allowances. |
| 3. | Successful bidders will deposit the Demand Draft of SBI or Other Nationalized Bank in favour of Sr. DFM/MB or station earning in cash on same day with following rate:- |
| a | 10% amount of selling price or minimum amount Rs 25,000/- whichever is maximum on purchase of more than Rs 1,00,000/- |
| b | Balance amount will be deposited within 10 days including the date of auction |
| c | GST @ 18 % will be deposited on total cost within 10 days including the date of auction |
| 4. | The work should be completed within 60 days including the date of auction. |
| 5. | Railway has right to close the work any time. In this situation the balance amount will be returned without interest. |
| 6. | Complete Details of tree with locations will be available in the Divisional Office Moradabad. |
| 7. | Bidders are requested to quote their rates according to the tree locations. |
| 8. | Trees will be delivered and handed over in the presence of SSE/works. ISA and RPF. |
| 9. | If the balance amount is not deposited within 10 days including the date of auction, then initial deposited amount will be forfeited. |
| 10. | Bidders will not make any Kutcha/Pakka construction in the land of Railway. |
| 11. | Bid will not be quoted below the base price. |
| 12. | Demand draft will be deposited in the office of Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway/ Roorkee from 09.00 am to 10.30 AM. After that no demand draft will be accepted. |
| No S/W/A/TREES/STORE/21-22 Dated -17.05.2021 | |
| 1051/2021 | |
| SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE | |

CANCELLATION/REDUCTION IN FREQUENCY OF SPECIAL TRAINS

It is notified for the information of passengers that due to low occupancy and other operational reasons, Railways have decided to cancel and reduce the frequency of following special trains, as per the details given below:-

| CANCELLATION OF TRAINS | |
|---|--|
| Train No. & Name | Date of Cancellation (From the originating Station) |
| 02481 Jodhpur Jn. - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Superfast Special | 19.05.2021 till further advice |
| 02482 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Jodhpur Jn. Superfast Special | 20.05.2021 till further advice |
| 04735 Shri Ganganagar - Ambala Cant. Jn. Special | 19.05.2021 till further advice |
| 04736 Ambala Cant. Jn. - Shri Ganganagar Special | 20.05.2021 till further advice |

| REDUCTION IN FREQUENCY OF TRAINS | | | |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Train No. & Name | Existing Frequency | Revised Frequency | Effective from |
| 09613 Ajmer Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Special | Bi-Weekly | Weekly (Wednesday) | 19.05.2021 till further advice |
| 09614 Amritsar Jn. - Ajmer Jn. Special | Bi-Weekly | Weekly (Sunday) | 23.05.2021 till further advice |
| 09611 Ajmer Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Special | Bi-Weekly | Weekly (Saturday) | 22.05.2021 till further advice |
| 09612 Amritsar Jn. - Ajmer Jn. Special | Bi-Weekly | Weekly (Thursday) | 20.05.2021 till further advice |

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind of Information such as detailed Time-Table and Stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <http://www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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SHORT TAKES

Another AMU prof dies of Covid

Aligarh: Another senior professor of AMU succumbed to coronavirus at the university's Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, according to officials, pushing the number of serving and retired faculty members who have died due to Covid or Covid-like symptoms to at least 39. Professor Mohammad Nasiruddin (55) from the department of pharmacology died on Sunday, the hospital officials said. Professor Shahid Ali Siddiqui, principal of Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, said Nasiruddin had tested positive for Covid and was admitted to the hospital two weeks ago. Aligarh Muslim University students have submitted a memorandum to vice chancellor Tariq Mansoor urging him to set up separate vaccination centres on campus for university staff and students. So far, at least 18 serving and 21 retired AMU faculty members have died due to Covid or Covid-like symptoms. Alarmed by the deaths, the medical college had sent some samples for genome sequencing to the Institute of Genomics and Integrated Biology Laboratory, Delhi. — PTI

Pinarayi Cabinet to have 21 ministers

Thiruvananthapuram: The second Pinarayi Vijayan government in Kerala, to be sworn in on May 20, will have a 21-member cabinet, LDF convenor and CPI(M) acting state secretary A Vijayaraghavan said here on Monday. The oath-taking ceremony of the new Left government would be a low-key affair with limited invitees in view of the Covid situation, he said here after the crucial state committee meeting of the Left Democratic Front. He also said the portfolios of the ministers would be decided by the chief minister. "As the LDF has received immense support from every section of people during the Assembly elections, we want to form a government which has the representation of all sections that can rise to the expectations of everyone," Vijayaraghavan told reporters here. — PTI

36 kids of orphanages in Tripura test positive

Agartala: Thirty-six girls, aged between 5 and 16 years, in two orphanages in the Tripura state capital have tested positive for Covid, a minister said on Monday. All of them are in a stable condition and are in isolation within the orphanages, a senior official said. Thirty-two children at the Jawaharlal Nehru Girls Home at Narsingarh tested positive for coronavirus while four cases were detected at Ujan Abhoynagar Childrens Home, state education minister Ratan Lal Nath said. "A girl who fell ill at the Jawaharlal Nehru Girls Home tested positive for coronavirus. After conducting tests, 31 more children were found to be coronavirus positive," Mr Nath, who is also the Cabinet spokesperson, said. — PTI



KOZHIKODE



NERUL



MUMBAI

Dark clouds cover the sky at Vellayil Harbour in Kozhikode, an uprooted tree collapsed on a house at Nerul, Maharashtra and trees fall on parked cars due to strong winds triggered by cyclone Tauktae in Mumbai on Monday. — PTI

Cyclone wreaks havoc in Mumbai, Maha coasts

Six persons were killed in the Konkan region due to 'Tauktae'

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, MAY 17

Cyclonic storm "Tauktae" wreaked havoc in Mumbai and the coastal Konkan region of Maharashtra, on Monday, as six people were killed in separate incidents across the state.

Gusty winds and heavy rains prevailed over the coastal Konkan region throughout the day bringing life to a standstill.

According to state officials, six persons were killed in the Konkan region due to the storm. Of them, three persons died in Raigad district, a sailor died in Sindhudurg district, and two persons were killed in Navi Mumbai and Ulhasnagar after trees fell on them in Thane district.

Two boats with seven sailors on board and anchored at the



BKC jumbo vaccine centre damaged due to strong winds rising from the affect of cyclone Tauktae at Bandra in Mumbai on Monday. — PTI

Anandwadi harbour in Sindhudurg district capsize. A sailor, identified as Rajaram Kadam from Devgad taluka in the district, died in the incident while three others were missing. The three other

sailors were safe, said the officials. A red alert was sounded in the Raigad district and an orange alert was declared in Mumbai. Over 12,000 citizens were relocated to safer places from the coastal areas.

These include 8,380 people in Raigad, 3,896 in Ratnagiri, and 144 in Sindhudurg districts.

Gusty winds and heavy rains lashed Mumbai, where the island city and suburbs received 189 mm and 194 mm of rainfall respectively. At 2.00 pm, wind speed of 114 kmph was recorded at the weather station based at Afghan Church in South Mumbai's Colaba area, which was the highest wind speed recorded during the day.

The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in the city extended the closure of operations thrice during the day due to the cyclone.

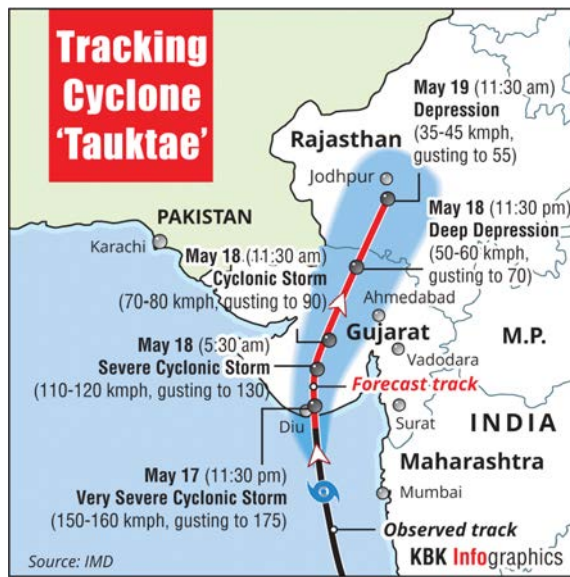
Meanwhile, the Indian Navy deployed three ships to rescue at least 410 persons stranded on two barges off the Mumbai coast.

PM calls up Guj CM to take stock of preparations

Ahmedabad, May 17: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday evening called up Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani and took stock of the preparations to deal with cyclonic storm Tauktae which has intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm and is expected to reach the Gujarat coast in the night.

The Prime Minister assured the state government of all possible help to deal with the situation. "PM Modi on Monday evening called up chief minister Vijay Rupani over the phone and sought details of preparation by the state government to deal with cyclone Tauktae," the chief minister's Office said in a release.

The chief minister apprised the PM about the precautionary steps being taken by the state government to tackle the situation, it said. — PTI



Over 1.5 lakh people have been shifted from low-lying coastal areas in Gujarat, while 54 teams of the NDRF and SDRF remained deployed, an official said. At least 17 Covid patients on ventilator support in the Porbandar Civil Hospital's ICU were shifted to other facilities on Monday as a precautionary measure because of cyclone Tauktae which is heading towards the Gujarat coast, an official said. — PTI

8 dead in K'taka, 121 villages hit

Bengaluru/Mangaluru, May 17: Eight people have lost their lives so far in the cyclone Tauktae-hit coastal and surrounding Malnad districts of Karnataka, officials said on Monday.

According to a situation report by Karnataka State Disaster Management Authority officials, till this evening, 121 villages in seven districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan and Belagavi have been affected by the cyclone.

Among the 121 villages affected, a maximum of 48 are from Uttara Kannada district.

Among the eight deaths reported, two each are from Dakshina Kannada and Belagavi, and one each from Uttara Kannada, Udupi, Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga, officials said.

While two deaths have been reported in Dakshina Kannada because of drowning in sea due to a tug being adrift, two died in Belagavi due to house collapse.

Among the eight deaths reported, two each are from Dakshina Kannada and Belagavi, and one each from Uttara Kannada, Udupi, Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga

A fisherman who went to tie his boat died in Uttara Kannada as he got hit by another boat, while one person died of electric mishap in Udupi.

One death each were reported in Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga due to house collapse and lightning respectively.

Damage to 387 houses have been reported. Among them, 57 houses are fully damaged and 330 are partially damaged, the report said. One animal loss has been reported from Dakshina Kannada.

A total of 711 poles, 153 transformers, 9,203 metres of lines, 56.2 km of road, 57 nets and 116 boats have been damaged, it said, adding that agriculture and horticulture crop losses have been estimated in about 30 hectares and in about 2.87 hectares, respectively. — PTI

Indian Army puts 180 teams, 9 engineer task forces on standby

New Delhi, May 17: The Indian Army said on Monday it has put 180 teams and nine engineer task forces on standby to face any contingency as Cyclone Tauktae is likely to hit the Gujarat coast on Monday evening.

"Sector commanders and Divisional HQ (headquarters) are in touch with district collectors and the revenue commissioner who is the nodal agency for relief activities in Gujarat," the Army said in a statement.

The Army said it has identified likely areas — talukas as well as districts — where the impact could

be higher and it has geared up its columns to react immediately.

"Focus is to save lives, speedy clearance of routes to ensure movement of oxygen and standby arrangements at Covid hospitals," it mentioned.

Gale-force winds, heavy rainfall and high tidal waves swept the coastal belts of Maharashtra and Goa as Cyclone Tauktae hurtled northwards towards Gujarat.

The cyclonic storm will intensify further and reach the Gujarat coast by Monday evening, the IMD said. — PTI

12 fishermen rescued from Kochi coast

New Delhi, May 17: The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Monday said it rescued 12 fishermen stranded around 35 nautical miles off the Kochi coast amid rough seas due to the incoming Cyclone Tauktae on the night of May 16.

According to the IMD, Tauktae has turned into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm" and is expected to hit the Gujarat coast by the evening. "Indian fishing boat Jesus stranded 35 nautical miles off Kochi. ICG ship Aryaman rescued the boat with 12 crew. Boat taken under tow by the ICG ship braving rough seas and brought to Kochi on May 16 night. All crew safe and healthy," the ICG said on Twitter.

The IMD, which had earlier not predicted that Tauktae would intensify into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm", said its rapid intensification happened in the early hours of Monday. — PTI

Orange, yellow rain alerts for MP districts

Bhopal, May 17: The IMD on Monday issued an orange or "be prepared" alert for heavy rains in 13 districts in MP even as the state received intermittent showers during the day due to cyclone Tauktae, an official said.

The IMD also issued a yellow alert for thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds at speeds of 40 to 50 kilometres per hour in isolated places of nine divisions till Tuesday morning.

The orange alert is for 13 districts, while the yellow alert has been issued for Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Gwalior and Jabalpur divisions among others. — PTI

NORTHERN RAILWAY PUBLIC NOTICE

Shri Gurvinder Singh S/o Shri Amar Singh, Sr. Tech, T.No-105, C&W/TKD Whose Last known Address D-1/897, Gali No-24, Harsh Vihar, Delhi-110093 was unauthorised absent from dated - 17.06.2020 to till date. An absentee notice were sent to your home address on date 06.01.21 through RAD but not any reply was submitted from your end. After that you were issued SF-5 by competent authority on date 01.02.2021 through RAD but you have not submitted any reply to this office and not turned up for duty till date. Therefore, Shri Gurvinder Singh is hereby informed through this public notice that if he desires to say anything about the D&AR proceeding against him, he may do so within 15 days. If no response is received from him within 15 days, ex-parte decision will be taken by Disciplinary Authority against him on the basis of evidence available on record.

(VINAY KUMAR)
ADME/Fr./TKD
1050/2021

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY PUBLIC NOTICE

Shri Avinash Kumar S/o Shri Suresh Chand, Tech-III, T.No-237, C&W/TKD Whose Last Known Address House No 657, Gali No. - 7, F-3, Sangam Vihar, Pushpa Bhawan, South Delhi - 110062 was unauthorised absent from dated - 20.07.2020 to till date. An absentee notice were sent to your home address on date 06.01.21 through RAD but not any reply was submitted from your end. After that you were issued SF-5 by competent authority on date 01.02.2021 through RAD but you have not submitted any reply to this office and not turned up for duty till date. Therefore, Shri Avinash Kumar is hereby informed through this public notice that if he desires to say anything about the D&AR proceeding against him, he may do so within 15 days. If no response is received from him within 15 days, ex-parte decision will be taken by Disciplinary Authority against him on the basis of evidence available on record.

(VINAY KUMAR)
ADME/Fr./TKD
1052/2021

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Haryana Government's objective
Protection of Rural Areas from COVID

Door to Door screening for COVID of everyone in Rural Areas

Strict adherence of Test, Track and Treat Strategy

Teams will identify COVID patients after screening

Helpline 8558893911 for Entire State & 1075 (Except Gurugram & Faridabad)

Patients with mild, moderate symptoms will be given 'Home Isolation Kit' and patients with severe symptoms will get immediate medical attention in nearby medical centres

Such multi-disciplinary teams will include Trainee Doctors, Asha / Anganwadi Workers etc.

Village Dharamshalas, Government schools & AYUSH centres etc. will be set up as isolation centres where oximeters, steam machines, thermometers and other essential medicines will be arranged

Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana
www.prharyana.gov.in
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SHORT TAKES

MP CONG MLA'S GIRLFRIEND KILLS SELF IN HIS HOUSE

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAY 17

The "girlfriend" of senior Congress MLA and former minister Umang Singhar, the tribal face of the party in Madhya Pradesh, committed "suicide" in his bungalow here, the police said on Monday. Thirty nine-year-old Sonia Bhardwaj, hailing from Ambala, was found hanging from the ceiling of a room in Mr Singhar's house on Sunday. A purported suicide note 'recovered' by the police in the room read, "Tum gusse mein bahut tez ho. Ab sahan nahin kar sakti (You are a very angry man. I can no longer take it)". However, the letter made no mention of any person responsible for her "suicide". Mr Singhar, who represented Gandhwani assembly constituency in MP, was out of town when the incident took place. "I was away. I talked to her the day before yesterday (on Saturday) to inquire if she had taken her food. She was a good friend (of mine). We were going to marry," Mr Singhar told reporters here. According to Bhopal additional superintendent of police Rajesh Singh Bhadoria, Mr Singhar's servants had found her hanging in a room on Sunday and immediately reported the matter to the MLA. The lawmaker and his 'girlfriend' were known to each other since last two years, the police said.

3 'VILLAGERS' DIE IN POLICE-NAXALS FIRING IN C'GARH

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, MAY 17

Three people were killed in a gun battle between security forces and Maoists in a forest in the borders of Bijapur and Sukma in south Bastar in Chhattisgarh on Monday. The police was ascertaining if the three slain persons were civilians, caught in the cross-fire between security forces and Naxals, or jan militia members (foot soldiers of Maoists). "It was yet to be known if the deceased were Maoists or civilians", Bastar range inspector general of police Sunderraj P. said. He said Maoists opened fire on a police camp set up at Silger on the side of Sukma district on the inter-district border at around 12.30 pm, provoking the security forces to retaliate. Local villagers have been staging protests against the establishment of a police camp in the area for the last several days. Naxals, taking the cover of the protest, opened fire on the police camp, leading to the gunbattle between them, he added. Bodies of three people were recovered by police. The encounter site is barely 10 km from the spot where Maoists ambushed a joint search party of security personnel killing 22 CRPF jawans on April 3.

KEDARNATH OPENS, PILGRIMS NOT ALLOWED

Dehradun: The portals of Kedarnath opened Monday after a six-month winter break with the first puja being held by priests on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Only a select few people attended the temple's opening ceremony in view of the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. It is for the second consecutive year that Covid has cast a shadow on the pilgrimage to the temple which has been kept out of bounds for pilgrims in view of rising coronavirus cases. A Chardham Devasthanam Board official said the first puja was held by priests on behalf of the prime minister as the gates of the famous Himalayan temple were opened at 5 am. A limited number of temple priests, including Rawal Bhim Shankar Ling and Chief Priest Bagesh Ling, and officials of the administration and Devasthanam Board attended the ceremony. Expressing happiness at the opening of the temple, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat prayed for the welfare and good health of the people. The yatra to the temple is temporarily suspended for the sake of people's safety, Rawat said, asking people to have virtual "darshan" of Baba Kedarnath and perform puja at home. — PTI

Pokhriyal reviews edu strategy with states

Seeks views on pending Class 12 exams amid pandemic

New Delhi, May 17: Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal on Monday chaired a review meeting with the education secretaries of states and UTs to discuss various measures adopted for the management of the education system during Covid, strategies adopted for online and offline learning in schools so far and the way forward.

According to officials, the issue of pending Class 12 board exams also came up for discussion and suggestions were sought from states in this regard.

The CBSE has already announced that a review will be done on or after June 1 and a decision will be taken on the pending board exams.

Class 10 exams have already been cancelled and a marking policy has been announced. A section of parents and students has been demanding that class 12 exams be cancelled and a similar marking strategy be adopted.

The education minister in the meeting stated that despite the pandemic, the Centre and the states, as well as agencies like the National Testing Agency (NTA), have managed to deliver education online as well as conduct public exams such as JEE and NEET-UG.

"Our efforts and commitment ensured continuance of education for 240 million students enrolled

TN objects to edu policy, skips HRD minister's meet

G BABU JAYAKUMAR
CHENNAI, MAY 17

Sending across a strong message to the Centre on Tamil Nadu's disillusionment over the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the DMK government did not let the state education secretary attend a meeting called by Union HRD minister Ramesh Pokhriyal "Nishank" on Monday.

When the HRD minister called for the online meeting to discuss the implementation of NEP, the DMK government wrote back saying that it would like its new minister for school education also to take part in the discus-

sions as the state had certain reservations on the issue. Since the Centre did not bother to reply to the e-mail, the education secretary kept off the virtual meeting at 11 am convened with three agendas — conducting online education in view of Covid-19, implementation of NEP and feasibility of holding Class 12 examinations in the present situation.

Stating that it would not be proper to call it a "boycott", school education minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi said the DMK government felt that the meeting should take note of the minister's view and not just that of the officials alone.

Minister of state for education Sanjay Dhotre stressed on exploring ways to provide hybrid education comprising of both offline and online teaching methods. — PTI

SC shifts rebel YSRC MP to Army hospital

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

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

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

A bench of Justices Vineet Saran and B.R. Gavai was hearing two appeals, including one by Raju, against the Andhra Pradesh high court order dismissing his bail and asking him to go to the



appropriate forum for the relief. In the second appeal, his son K. Raju Bharath has sought Mr Raju's medical examination by a private hospital.

The bench directed that a medical board of three doctors will examine Mr Raju and the medical board will be constituted by the commandant of the Army hospital.

The court further directed that the medical examination of Raju will be carried out in the presence of a judicial officer to be nominated by the Chief Justice of Telangana high court and the entire proceedings of the medical examination will be videographed.

The recording will be forwarded to the registrar general of the high court to be transmitted to the top court.

Daily number falls below 3L

■ Continued from Page 1

million doses, which is much lower than the 4 cases/million reported by UK's regulator Medical and Health Regulatory Authority. Germany has reported 10 events per million doses," the report said.

The health ministry is separately issuing advisories to healthcare workers and vaccine beneficiaries to encourage people to be aware of suspected thromboembolic symptoms occurring within 20 days after receiving Covid-19 dose (particularly Covishield) and report preferably to the health facility where the vaccine was administered. People have to watch out for breathlessness, pain in the chest, pain in limbs/pain on pressing limbs or swelling in limbs (arm or calf), multiple, pinhead size red spots or bruising of skin in an area beyond the injection site, persistent abdominal pain with or without vomiting, seizures in the absence of previous history of seizures with or without vomiting, severe and persistent headache with or without, weakness/paralysis of limbs or any particular side or part of the body, persistent vomiting without any obvious reason, blurred vision or pain in eyes or having double vision, change in mental status or having confusion or depressed level of consciousness, any other symptom or health condition which is of concern to the recipient or the family.

Cyclone makes Guj landfall

■ Continued from Page 1

heavy rains lashed Mumbai, where the island city and suburbs received 189 mm and 194 mm of rainfall respectively. The city witnessed waterlogging and tree falling incidents at several places across the city.

The Indian Navy has deployed three ships to rescue at least 410 persons stranded on two barges off the Mumbai coast. In the first instance, 273 people were stuck on a drifting barge near the Heera

Oilfield at Bombay High Fields of ONGC, around 175 km from Mumbai. Following an SOS from the Barge P305 which was adrift near the oilfields with the crew and ONGC personnel on board, the Indian Navy dispatched two ships INS Kochi and INS Talwar to render assistance.

In the second instance, another stranded barge GAL Constructor, with 137 people onboard, sent an SOS from its location around 15 km in the

Israelis hit Gaza tunnels

■ Continued from Page 1

cafe the car had just left was splintered and on fire. Rescue workers tried to put out the blaze with a small fire extinguisher. There was no immediate word on casualties.

Gaza's mayor, Yahya Sarraj, told Al-Jazeera TV that the strikes had caused extensive damage to roads and other infrastructure.

The UN has warned that the territory's sole power station is at risk of running out of fuel, and Mr Sarraj said Gaza was also low on spare parts. Gaza already experiences daily power outages for between eight and 12 hours, and tap water is undrinkable. Mohammed Thabet, a spokesman for the territory's electricity distribution company,

said it has fuel to supply Gaza with electricity for two or three days.

The war broke out May 10, when Hamas long-range rockets at Jerusalem after weeks of clashes in the holy city between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police. The protests were focused on the heavy-handed policing of a flashpoint sacred site during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers.

Since the fighting began, the Israeli military has launched hundreds of airstrikes it says are targeting Hamas' militant infrastructure. Palestinian militants in Gaza have fired more than 3,200 rockets into

Why Suvendu wasn't arrested, asks man behind Narada sting

Kolkata, May 17: Senior journalist Mathew Samuel whose brainchild was the Narada sting operation, on Monday said he is satisfied after the CBI arrested two Trinamul Congress ministers, an MLA and a former party minister in connection with its probe into the scam.

Samuel, however, expressed surprise that the CBI did not arrest former TMC minister Suvendu Adhikari, another accused in the same case who has joined the BJP.

Senior ministers Subrata Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim and former ministers Madan Mitra, who is now an MLA, and Sovan Chatterjee, were arrested in the morning.

Samuel said that steps against corruption are needed and investigations should be fair.

The sting operation was conducted by Samuel of Narada News, a web portal, in 2014 wherein some



Suvendu Adhikari

▶ **THE STING** was conducted by Samuel in 2014 wherein some people resembling TMC ministers, MPs and MLAs were seen receiving money in lieu of favours

▶ **SAMUEL SAID** that steps against corruption are needed and investigations should be fair

people resembling TMC ministers, MPs and MLAs were seen receiving money from representatives of a fictitious company in lieu of favours.

At that time, the four were ministers in the Mamata Banerjee government which also had initiated a probe against Samuel.

The operation was made public ahead of the 2016 assembly elections in West Bengal.

The Calcutta high court had ordered a CBI probe into the sting operation in March 2017.

"It's quite satisfying to see these leaders arrested. The CBI could not do anything even if it had the

chargesheet ready three years ago. They could not touch them, Samuel said when PTI contacted him.

"But I feel bad that Suvendu Adhikari's name is not there on the list of those arrested," Samuel said.

When pointed out that the CBI also did not take any step against former TMC MP and now BJP MLA Mukul Roy, another accused in the case, Samuel said that his is a different matter as there is no video evidence against him.

The arrests were made after governor Jagdeep Dhankar gave the CBI the go-ahead to prosecute the four leaders. — PTI

Param Bir challenges dept probe against him in SC

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MAY 17

Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh has approached the Supreme Court against the departmental inquiry initiated against him by the Maharashtra government. In his petition, Mr Singh has claimed that the inquiry is an attempt to frame him in false cases.

In his petition, he has claimed that the inquiry officer is threatening him with false cases unless the

complaint made by him against former home minister Anil Deshmukh is withdrawn.

The state had directed Maharashtra DGP Sanjay Pandey to conduct a preliminary inquiry against Mr Singh. The two enquiries were ordered on April 1 and April 20. Incidentally, Mr Singh made similar allegations against Mr Pandey that he was pressuring him to withdraw the complaints against Mr Deshmukh. Mr Singh had also alleged that he had recorded the

conversation between them following which Mr Pandey had recused himself from the probe against Mr Singh. Later, the government again ordered fresh inquiries against Mr Singh.

In his petition before the top court, Mr Singh has prayed that all the enquiries against him be transferred to another state. He has alleged that there is a threat of hosting multiple enquiries against him unless he withdraws the complaints against Mr Deshmukh.

Assam CM visits Guwahati medical college after midnight. Sarma asks sr docs to be on night shift

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 17

In what has taken many by surprise, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visited Guwahati Medical College and Hospital at about 2.30 am on Sunday to take stock of the Covid situation.

Informing that the state will start an "odd-hour management" process in government medical colleges and other hospitals, Mr Sarma told reporters, "I visited GMCH at about 2.30 am to ensure the presence of senior doctors at odd hours. There were reports of some patients coming to the hospital at

odd hours and after two-three hours patients died."

He, however, expressed his satisfaction over the arrangement of the hospital even in odd hours. "I was satisfied with the arrangements. I reiterate my gratitude to doctors and nursing staff for their help," he said.

He said, "We have already discussed odd-hour management where senior doctors have to do duty from 11 pm to 7 am. We have seen that maximum patients died during the night. Some of them came at night time in hospital and after two to three hours the patient died."

Pointing out that most



Himanta Biswa Sarma

senior doctors do duty during the day shift, Mr Sarma said, "Now they have to do duty during the night also. CCTV cameras have been fixed in every ward and we will monitor everything."

Mr Sarma who also entered the CCTV control room to take the stock of

doctors and nursing staff's activities said, "We have an adequate amount of oxygen cylinders till now. No bed scarcity at government medical college and hospital but we will increase bed capacity and the process has been started at Sarusajai sports complex."

Meanwhile, the government has extended curfew timings in the state from 2 pm to 12 noon. "We have noticed that Covid positive cases decreased from 1600 to 1000 in Guwahati after extending curfew timings. So, we have decided to extend curfew timings from 2 pm to 12 pm," the CM said.

2 mantris, TMC MLA held

■ Continued from Page 1

TMC MLA from Kamarhati. Mr Chatterjee, who defected to the BJP from the TMC earlier, quit the saffron party ahead of this year's Assembly elections.

The four heavyweight accused were Cabinet colleagues of Ms Banerjee when they, along with seven more TMC leaders, including many MPs, and IPS officer S.M.H. Meerza were allegedly caught accepting around Rs 5 lakhs in cash each in a sting operation by journalist Mathew Samuel ahead of the 2016 Assembly elections.

While Mr Hakim was then the municipal affairs and urban development minister, Mr Mukherjee held the panchayat portfolio. Mr Mitra was state transport minister and Mr Chatterjee was state housing minister, apart from being Kolkata's mayor.

The arrest of these four by the CBI, close on the heels of the TMC coming to power for the third consecutive time in the state,

triggered a volcano of protests in Kolkata and beyond. Violating the Covid-19 lockdown, ruling party workers came out on the roads and burst into anger. Some of them thronged to Nizam Palace and pelted stones at the Central forces deployed to guard the CBI personnel, while others demonstrated outside Raj Bhavan with their party flags.

A worried governor tweeted: "Invited attention @MamataOfficial: On channels and in public domain I notice arson and pelting of stones at CBI office. Pathetic that Kolkata Police @KolkataPolice and West Bengal Police @WBPOLICE are just onlookers. Appeal to you to act and restore law and order."

He alleged: "Message @MamataOfficial: Total lawlessness & anarchy. Police and administration in silence mode. Hope you realise repercussions of such lawlessness and failure of constitutional mechanism. Time to reflect and contain this explosive situation that is

worsening minute by minute. Concerned at alarming situation..."

Questioning why no CBI action was taken against two other accused in the case — Mukul Roy and Suvendu Adhikari — who are now in the BJP, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh claimed: "Protests are spontaneous because the arrests of the four are illegal and undemocratic. The BJP is misusing the governor and CBI to fulfil its grudge of poll debacle at the hands of our party and create a situation of unrest which will push the state towards President's Rule."

Mr Samuel also wondered why Mr Adhikari, who was seen accepting cash from him, had been spared.

Later, TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee tweeted: "I urge everyone to abide by the law & refrain from any activity that violates lockdown norms for the sake of the larger interest of Bengal and its people. We have utmost faith in the judiciary & the battle will be fought legally."

Speaker slams CBI, gov for nod, says it's illegal

■ Continued from Page 1

permission especially when the Speaker's chair was not vacant. I was holding the chair then. But I was surprised to see the governor still giving his sanction to the CBI. I do not know any law

which allows the governor to act when the Speaker's office is not vacant. I think the sanction was obtained in an illegal and undemocratic way. The arrests are thus illegal."

"Therefore, how far the approval, using which the

CBI made the arrests, is lawful is very much doubtful. If such a trend is followed, no one will have any legal entity or right in the state. Only the governor will exercise his power in every case," he added.

THE ASIAN AGE

18 MAY 2021

Use every tool to overcome hesitancy on tests, vaccines

The second wave of Covid-19 is wreaking havoc in rural areas as well as our big cities, unlike the first one which had mainly hit urban dwellers. Reports coming from rural India are quite depressing as everything that plagues Indian villages plays a role in frustrating the attempts by health workers and local government representatives in getting people tested for the deadly virus. The people who live there have very little access to authentic information on what is happening all around them; they trust the quack more than the qualified physician; they are comfortable with him and his magic potions and home remedies much more than with evidence-based medicine and its elaborate protocols; they have very little health infrastructure to depend on; they fear the ways of officialdom — once their names appear on governmental records, they are done, they fear. So, they assume that if they test positive, they will be forcibly moved to government facilities, from which they are not sure when or if they will ever return. What will happen to their jobs, and who will take care of the rest of their family — these are the big questions on their minds. Why take risk when the quack can more than cure them?

This is an area where the government must, and only the government can, intervene and set the record right. This message must pass down to every citizen that untested patients make themselves vulnerable.

There is an area where the government must, and only the government can, intervene and set the record right. This message must pass down to every citizen that untested patients make themselves vulnerable, and that they will spread the infection among their near and dear ones if they delay getting tested or in getting vaccinated. The government needs to make sure that no one loses his/her job or is harassed at their workplace for undergoing the test or even for contracting the infection. It must be driven home that home remedies are okay as long as people follow the physician's advice. They must be told upfront that we as a nation do not have the infrastructure that can take care of everyone who falls sick, and that they risk losing their lives if they don't follow the scientific ways of keeping the virus at bay. The government must put every tool at its command and in the collective armoury of our society to defeat the virus. There is an urgent need to launch an information blitzkrieg on the pandemic aiming at emboldening the people to go in for testing and vaccination at the earliest. Every societal asset, be it governmental, media, religious, cultural, tribal, social or otherwise, must be tasked with taking the message to every home and get people out for testing and vaccination. Better be late than never.

Stop targeting critical voices

Are we intent on proving right the wag who said that we are a democracy until we begin to criticise Prime Minister Narendra Modi? In the national capital a rash of ordinary-looking posters appeared asking the PM: "Why did you send vaccines abroad, denying our own people?" The Delhi police, which comes under the Union home ministry, swung into action and rounded up a clutch of poor souls who make their living from climbing on poles to stick posters on rectangular frames, carpenters, three-wheeler auto drivers and cycle-rickshaw pullers.

It is possible to be supportive of India's vaccine diplomacy, and yet note that the police action in this case is a distinct mark of intolerance by the government of those who dare to ask the PM a question which is increasingly coming to the fore.

In hindsight, it appears that if the Modi government was alert to science and followed expert advice, it would not have prematurely declared victory over the Covid-19 pandemic and wound up the temporary facilities set up to treat millions of patients hit by the virus. If expert recommendations were heeded, it would have been realised by policy-makers that India not only lacked oxygen, hospital beds and critical medicines, but also vaccines since advance bookings from manufacturers against payments hadn't been made.

Ergo, the rollout of vaccine diplomacy was premature. Today it seems more and more to have been a propaganda ploy to bring out the feel-good factor at home while earning goodwill abroad. In short, it was a political move, pure and simple, which left India defenceless. Its consequences are strewn everywhere for all to see and condemn. No wonder, there is talk now of ramping up the infrastructure of crematoriums, not just medical facilities.

If vaccine diplomacy has led to painful results, then the question posed in the poster must be answered by those in authority. Locking up those behind the poster, or wag fingers at Opposition leaders asking questions, besmirch the country even more. It must stop.

The so-called "positivity" and "constructive" approach by the government and its apologists appears cynical. If questions aren't raised, and we meekly submit to what we get as the natural law, God help our democracy, which is founded on the basic principle of accountable governance.

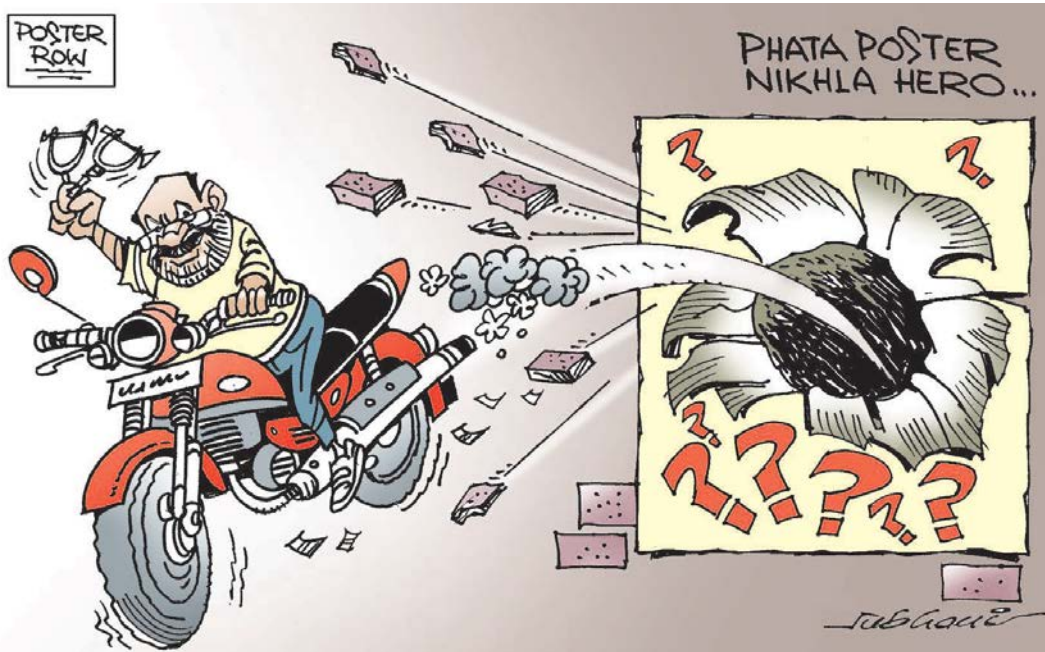
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Subhani



Positivity effect: Govt has to do things differently



Shashidhar Nanjundaiah

Confronted with an unprecedented international media focus and global criticism from several governments as well as global health experts, state governments, analysts, reputed medical journals, and the international and national media, the Central government and the ruling party's parent organisation, the RSS, have jointly begun a "positivity drive", in effect weaving a positive bias narrative both for itself and for the people at large. While one has the potential of a soothing impact on the audience, the other seeks to be politically self-serving. So have we indeed been communicating negativity in a crisis? Or have the Central government and the BJP been seeing it all wrong?

Earlier, in his monthly "Mann ki Baat" radio address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said a powerful positivity message needs to go out. Soon afterwards, the Covid Response Team chipped in with a five-day lecture series called "Positivity Unlimited", starting May 11. The stated intent was to instill confidence in a society struck by hopelessness and despair. Speakers included spiritual leaders, artists, writers, philanthropists and RSS leaders.

Meanwhile, the BJP machinery was hard at work with characteristic gusto, producing and reproducing messages of how hard Mr Modi and the government machinery were working. On May 12, health minister Harsh Vardhan's address repeatedly included "santoshjanak baat hai, yeh khushi ki baat hai" (it is a matter of delight) and other positive connectors to the vaccination drives. The government's obsession with image management could fall on deaf ears as even its own ambassadors are finding it increasingly hard to put a positive spin.

Positivity sounds a good thing. But has the government given positive developments to be articulated about? Given the overwhelming amount of heart-rending news, and news of the government's repeated attempts to thwart social media criticism, a positive perception is hard to justify.

Inconvenient truths
Rahul Gandhi has reacted to the positivity drive, calling it a "false assurance". The Congress has said positivity won't help people to breathe. Earlier, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wrote to Prime Minister Modi, listing five specific points on which the government could work. Rahul Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Arvind Kejriwal, Uddhav Thackeray and other leaders regularly tweet or talk critically of the government's handling. Expert after expert in television debates has been critiquing the government's handling of the situation. The media, which has finally reached the villages, routinely interviews ordinary citizens from a cross-section, most of whom place the blame on the government for the dire situation. All this has systematically been ridiculed by various ministers at the Centre, but in fact responsible criticism in general is also accompanied by recommendations, roadmaps and suggestions. In response, BJP chief J.P. Nadra shot off a strong repartee, telling Mrs Sonia Gandhi that she has been misleading people with negative messages. In his response to the former PM, the health minister's letter ridiculed the Congress.

To their credit, Mr Modi and others in the government have often tackled criticism with facts and numbers. To continued complaints from state governments about the acute shortage of oxygen, the government has been claiming the nation does not have a shortage — the bottleneck

lies in logistics. More recently, Mr Modi pointed out that the supply of oxygen was now more than three times of what it was during the peak of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. In September 2020, the number of infections stood at less than one lakh a day. This time, that number is in excess of four lakhs. According to the ICMR, while 41.5 per cent patients required oxygen last year, that figure for second wave patients is 54.5 per cent. So Mr Modi's statement is a fair identification of where the problem lies, but does not provide any solution. The government is, after all, responsible for logistics management too.

Unacceptable interpretation
Positivity studies indicate that based on their belief system, people with a positivity bias will tend to hold positive views, report positively using those views, and filter in positive information. One way that organisations and governments seek to achieve popularity is through positivity effect, nudging people to see a situation positively when the desired results aren't achieved, and obtaining a positive feedback. Positivity bias can shroud reality and create false euphoria, which dangerous in a pandemic situation.

Rather than viewing criticism negatively, this criticism-averse government can also help transform public perceptions by responding more positively. For example, a recent newspaper editorial pointed out that in contrast to last year's total lockdown, which had devastating impacts on the economy, this year's lockdown in several states had struck a balance between the management of health and economic activity. This should be

The government's expectation of what constitutes acceptable criticism is either unclear or unrealistic. Indeed, it is the government's interpretation of criticism that is negative.

relatively good news. But if the Centre reacts to it as a criticism of its decisions, it will be seen as protecting its narrow political image-mongering interests, not the larger national interest. Similarly, it is unfair to expect the media to run only positive stories. This government already enjoys the backing of a largely pliant media: it is well-documented that a significant section of the Indian media over the past seven years has held a pro-government bias. Television channels are often eager to politicise issues. For example, on May 12, leaders of 12 Opposition parties wrote to the Prime Minister demanding immediate action, funds for oxygen and free vaccination. Some TV news channels were quick to focus on which Opposition parties had not signed that petition. When BJP MP Tejasvi Surya purportedly made a surprise visit to an agency running a hospital bed allotment scam in Bengaluru, it was initially well-received by the media — until a video surfaced which revealed he and his colleagues had turned it into a communally objectionable exercise. With all its failings, we can expect legitimate media platforms and fair-minded people to compulsively turn to a fairness-for-all approach.

Positivity studies on communications patterns show that people use more positive than negative language, both written and spoken. Given that, the government's expectation of what constitutes acceptable criticism is either unclear or unrealistic. Indeed, it is the government's interpretation of criticism that is negative.

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The writer has led reputed institutes of media and communications, and is the founder of "Being Responsible", which promotes media literacy. The views expressed here are personal.

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LETTERS

NO ASSAM TRUCE?

This refers to the report, "Assam: Ulfa-I declares unilateral Covid-19 ceasefire for 90 days" (May 16). Ulfa(I) chief Paresh Baruah has rebuffed all offers for talks till date. His ceasefire offer can't be seen as a positive signal towards eventual peace talks. He will join the talks with the Centre only if sovereignty is the main agenda, which is totally unacceptable to India. The Centre should perhaps exert pressure on the pro-talks faction of Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa to ensure that Paresh Baruah takes part in the peace talks.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

ANGELS OF DEATH

UNFORTUNATELY, HOSPITAL beds at the Goa Medical College at Bambolim have turned into coffins for pandemic-stricken patients. Following the death of 75 Covid patients at the government facility last week because of a dearth of oxygen, eight more perished for the same reason on Saturday night. It is a shame that the hospital authorities have not learnt any lessons from past experience and sacrificed innocent lives at the altar of callousness yet again. These "angels of death" must be held culpable and brought to heel.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

MISSING IN ACTION

WEST BENGAL chief minister Mamata Banerjee seems to have dealt such a huge blow to Union home minister Amit Shah that he has not recovered yet. The results of the West Bengal Assembly elections were out over two weeks ago. In this hour of crisis, when people are dying left, right and centre, the nation needs Mr Shah to lead from the front. Instead, he has gone into hiding. Probably for the first time, the Prime Minister seems to be at a loss for words and appears disinterested in pulling the nation out of the morass, with the people left to fend for themselves.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

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

Aakar Patel



Govt needed to have 'grip' over Covid: That is what PM lacks

He is a famous name in the history of warfare, but Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery does not have many battlefield victories to his name. In fact, his most famous engagement, called Operation Market Garden (after which the Hollywood movie *A Bridge Too Far* was made), was a disaster. But historians agree that Montgomery had something that all generals should have, and this is "grip". This is the faculty of being aware of the situation, being knowledgeable about what resources are at hand and what may be required in the future and being conscious of what events to anticipate.

These are not qualities which we associate with our Prime Minister. His interest is not in the details but in the broad scheme. In a famous interview just before the 2014 general election he said to the journalist Madhu Kishwar: "Even today if my officers show me some paper, I say: 'Tell me what's in it in two minutes. For me, two minutes is sufficient for a 10-page document. This skill is something I have developed.'"

But while he has no interest in the details, his preference is not to stand aloof from on-ground operations but to insert himself through the bold and imaginative stroke. For instance, the BBC reported at the end of March this year that before the lockdown last year not a single ministry was consulted about the consequences.

The BBC filed 240 right to information applications with various Indian government departments — health, finance, disaster management — to find out if and how much they were consulted ahead of the lockdown.

The responses revealed that no experts or government departments were consulted. The government refused to give the BBC a statement explaining why the concerned departments were not consulted ahead of time. A second example of the Prime Minister's style of functioning is the famous demonetisation exercise of November 2016. Here also only a handful of people knew that this was about to happen. As a parliamentary democracy, India follows the principle of collective responsibility. But even the Union Cabinet was not told till the day

of the demonetisation — Tuesday, November 8, that India's ₹1,000 and ₹500 notes — 86 per cent of all currency by value — would be wiped out that evening. The government was not only unprepared for Prime Minister Modi's move: it was deliberately kept hidden from the government.

My point is not to say that this style is good or bad or whether it has advantages or disadvantages. The evidence is clear, and there is no point in discussing that here. The point is to examine whether it works in situations such as the one we find ourselves in. The problem of the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be approached through the single brilliant stroke. It needs the State to be aware of the situation, be knowledgeable about what resources are at hand and what may be required in future and being conscious of what events to anticipate. In a centralised system, where decision making is often the purview of a few people and sometimes that only of one man, this may be harder to do as we are now discovering.

The official position of our government in response to a shortage of vac-

cines and a shortage of oxygen and of ventilators is that nobody could have anticipated this. But the fact is that the rest of the world anticipated it. What we are receiving today as aid is not new material manufactured yesterday around the world. It is the surplus that was produced by many nations which had anticipated the crisis we are going through today. They dealt with it because of their preparedness and that is the reason this material became surplus. No nation keeps useless stocks of expensive things lying around in case India will urgently need them. The reason we don't have enough vaccines is that we did not order them at the right time because we didn't think we needed them. As the Prime Minister said to the World Economic Forum in late January: "India is among those countries which have succeeded in saving the lives of the maximum number of its citizens and the number of people infected with corona is rapidly decreasing." He added that "it would not be advisable to judge India's success with that of another country. In a country which is home to 18 per cent

of the world population, that country has saved humanity from a big disaster by containing corona effectively". We had decided based on the evidence we saw that India was unique and had overcome Covid-19. Other nations thought of the issue as a longer problem, and not limited to the first wave. They ordered the vaccines on time and received them. They let their scientists determine whether the battle against the pandemic was won instead of a divinely inspired leadership. Once the science revealed that only precaution, healthcare preparations and vaccination could stop the pandemic, that is where their execution capacities were deployed.

The question is why we did not anticipate a second wave or a wave of such destructive power. The answer is that if the leadership must take full control over situations, then it must have grip rather than genius strokes. There may theoretically be times when the latter style is advantageous, but this era is not among them.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES

TUNISIA TROOPS
KILL 5 SUSPECTED
JIHADISTS

Tunis, May 17: Tunisian forces on Monday killed five suspected jihadists in an air and ground operation targeting a rugged mountain hideout of Islamist fighters, the interior ministry said.

The operation launched at dawn was still underway, the ministry said in a statement, adding authorities were working to verify the nationalities and affiliation of the “five terrorists” killed. The operation targeted a jihadist base on Mount Chaambi, near the border with Algeria.

Tunisia has seen a surge in radical Islam since veteran president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted in the country’s 2011 revolution.

The army has been battling armed groups since 2012 in the country’s central mountains.

They include fighters from Jund al-Khalifa, or “Soldiers of the Caliphate”, linked to the Islamic State group.

SYNAGOGUE
BLEACHER
COLLAPSE: 2 DIE

Jerusalem, May 17: Israeli medics said at least two people were killed and more than 150 injured after a bleacher collapsed at an uncompleted West Bank synagogue on Sunday, the eve of a major Jewish holiday. The bleacher was packed with ultra-Orthodox worshippers and collapsed during prayers at the beginning of Shavuot. A spokesman for Magen David Adom told Channel 13 that paramedics had treated over 157 people for injuries and pronounced two dead, a man in his 50s and a 12-year-old boy.

Rescue workers were on the scene, treating the injured and taking people to the hospital.

The collapse comes weeks after 45 ultra-Orthodox Jews were killed in a stampede at a religious festival in northern Israel.

Amateur footage showed the collapse Sunday during evening prayers in Givat Zeev, just outside Jerusalem.

The ultra-Orthodox synagogue was packed with hundreds of people.

NINE DEAD IN
BURKINA FASO
JIHADIST ATTACK

Ougadaugou, May 17: At least nine people were killed in a weekend attack in Burkina Faso blamed on jihadists in the country’s restive north, local and security sources said Monday. A traditional chief and three civilian defence volunteers were among those killed in the attack on Sunday in a village near the town of Pissila, a local official said, adding that another three people remained missing.

He said the “terrorists” who waged the attack were killed, without stating a death toll.

“The attack occurred around 9:00 am when men from the village and volunteers were holding a strategy meeting after a series of incidents and attacks in the area,” he said.

A local elected official said hundreds of people had fled to Pissila in recent days.

Three of the dead belonged to the Volunteers for the Defence of the Motherland (VDP), an anti-jihadist civilian defence force created in December 2019 to help the former French colony’s poorly equipped military fight jihadists.

COURT CLEARS WAY
FOR SAMOA’S 1ST
WOMAN LEADER

Wellington, May 17: Samoa appeared set to get its first woman leader after the nation’s top court on Monday reinstated the results of a knife-edge election last month.

Two decisions by the Supreme Court have paved the way for Fiame Naomi Mata’afa to become prime minister of the small island nation.

Her ascent represents a significant milestone not only for Samoa but for the broader South Pacific region, where there have been few women leaders.

Like many of its neighbours, Samoa tends to be conservative, strongly Christian and deeply traditional.

An advocate for women’s equality, Fiame, who was born in 1957, broke new ground during her campaign by going on the road and robustly criticising the incumbent, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sialele Malielegaoi, who had been in power for 22 years.

The court’s decisions appeared to end what most people viewed as an attempt by Tuilaepa to cling to power. Fiame had served as his deputy before they had a bitter split.

Israel: Gaza tunnels destroyed in strikes

UN warns Gaza Strip’s sole power station is at risk of running out of fuel because of continued aggression

Anti-Semitic slur:
London increases
police presence

London, May 17: More police will be deployed to the streets of Jewish areas in London, mayor Sadiq Khan said on Monday, after four people were arrested for allegedly shouting anti-Semitic abuse and threats during a pro-Palestinian protest. “There are a number of things we are doing to reassure Londoners, particularly those from Jewish communities,” Khan told *ITV*, as he announced an “increased police presence”. Officers investigating a video circulating on social media, which appeared to show anti-Semitic abuse being shouted from

a car in north London on Sunday, made four arrests.

The car was travelling in a convoy of vehicles decorated with Palestinian flags, one of several protests held across Britain over the weekend in response the worst violence in years between Israel and Palestinian militants.

The men were detained on suspicion of racially aggravated public order offences.

“This behaviour was utterly shocking and will not be tolerated,” said Superintendent Jo Edwards. — *AFP*

BACK ISRAEL
CURBS, TURKEY
URGES POPE

Ankara, May 17: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has asked Pope Francis to support sanctions against Israel, saying Palestinians will continue to be “massacred” as long as the international community does not punish Israel. During a telephone call Monday with the Pope, he also said that “continued messages and reactions” from Francis in support of Palestinians would be of great importance for the “mobilisation of the Christian world and of the international community,” said a statement from the Turkish presidential communications directorate. — *AP*

AMID CLASH,
ISRAEL BATS
FOR TOURISM

Dubai, May 17: As violence flares within Israel and on a day in which Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City killed at least 42 people, it was business as usual for a senior Israeli tourism official in Dubai as she promoted the country as a must-see destination for Muslim visitors.

At Dubai’s Arabian Travel Market on Sunday, billed as the first travel and tourism event to happen in person since the global coronavirus outbreak, a small Israeli booth — tucked behind Slovenia’s — marketed the country as the “Land of Creation.” — *AP*

WRITS SEEKING
FRESH SWEARING
IN OF OLI FILED

Kathmandu, May 17: Four writ petitions were filed in the Supreme Court of Nepal on Monday demanding that Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli be sworn in again as he disgraced the office of the President by refusing to repeat all the words she recited during the oath-taking ceremony. President Bidya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office and secrecy to Oli as the prime minister at a scaled-down ceremony at Shital Niwas, the presidential palace, on Friday.

During the oath-taking ceremony, Oli, the 69-year-old Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), omitted the word vow when the President recited it, besides in the name of God. I will take oath in the name of the country and the people, Oli, who has become Nepal’s prime minister for the third time, said, while President Bhandari mentioned God, country and the people. All four writ petitioners have demanded that Oli take another oath of office and secrecy as the one taken on Friday was illegal. *The Kathmandu Post* reported. — *PTI*



A ball of fire erupts from a building in Gaza City’s Rimal residential district during massive Israeli bombardment on the Hamas-controlled enclave. — *AFP*

US asks Israel for proof of
Gaza media building strike

Copenhagen, May 17: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday he has asked Israel for any evidence of Hamas operating in a Gaza building housing news bureaus that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike over the weekend, but hasn’t seen any.

Blinken spoke at a news conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, as pressure is increasing on the Biden administration to ask for a ceasefire in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel destroyed a building housing The Associated Press and *Al Jazeera* claimed that Hamas used the building for a military intelligence

office. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called the building a “perfectly legitimate target” and told *CBS*’ “Face the Nation” on Sunday that Israel passes such evidence through intelligence channels.

“Shortly after the strike we did request additional details regarding the justification for it,” Blinken said Monday.

He declined to discuss specific intelligence, saying he “will leave it to others to characterise if any information has been shared and our assessment that information.” But he said, “I have not seen any information pro-

vided.” Blinken’s comments came after UN Security Council diplomats and Muslim foreign ministers convened emergency weekend meetings to demand a stop to civilian bloodshed as Israeli warplanes carried out the deadliest single attacks in nearly a week of Hamas rocket barrages and Israeli airstrikes.

President Joe Biden gave no signs of stepping up public pressure on Israel to agree to an immediate cease-fire despite calls from some Democrats for the Biden administration to get more involved. — *AP*

Calls mount for ceasefire

United Nations, May 17: United Nations Security Council diplomats and Muslim foreign ministers convened emergency weekend meetings to demand a stop to civilian bloodshed as Israeli warplanes carried out the deadliest single attacks in nearly a week of Hamas rocket barrages and Israeli airstrikes.

President Joe Biden gave no signs of stepping up public pressure on Israel to agree to an immediate cease-fire despite calls from some Democrats for the Biden administration to get more involved.

His ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, told an emergency high-level meeting of the Security Council that the United States was “working tirelessly through diplomatic channels” to stop the fighting. But as battles between Israel and Gaza’s militant

Hamas rulers surged to their worst levels since 2014 and the international outcry grew, the Biden administration — determined to wrench US foreign policy focus away from the Middle East and Afghanistan — has declined so far to criticize Israel’s part in the fighting or send a top-level envoy to the region.

Appeals by other countries showed no sign of progress. Thomas-Greenfield warned that the return to armed conflict would only put a negotiated two-state solution to the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict even further out of reach.

However, the US, Israel’s closest ally, has so far blocked days of efforts by China, Norway and Tunisia to get the Security Council to issue a statement, including a call for the cessation of hostilities. — *AP*

Shehbaz placed on no-fly list

Islamabad, May 17: The Pakistan government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday added the name of Opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif, who has been charged with corruption, to the no-fly list, barring him from leaving the country for medical treatment.

Earlier this month, the Lahore High Court granted Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shehbaz — also the younger brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif — permission to travel abroad once for medical treatment.

After obtaining bail, Shehbaz, 69, was about to fly to London on May 8

when an Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) team at the airport stopped him from travelling on the grounds that his name had been on the provisional national identification list (PNIL), which impose a temporary bar on someone to leave the country.

Shehbaz was offloaded from Doha-bound flight on May 8.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said that Shehbaz’s name was added to the exit control list (ECL) after it was given approval from the federal Cabinet. — *PTI*

Remarks: Pak pulls
up Kabul’s envoy

Islamabad, May 17: Pakistan on Monday served a demarche to Afghanistan’s ambassador Najibullah Alikhel, protesting against the accusations by the Afghan leadership.

Pakistan’s Foreign Office (FO), however, did not specify the statement which angered it. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, in a recent interview, alleged that Pakistan “operates an organised system of support” for the

Afghan Taliban. “The names of the various decision-making bodies of the Taliban are Quetta Shura, Miramshah Shura and Peshawar Shura — named after the Pakistani cities where they are located. There is a deep relationship with the state,” the Afghan leader said.

The FO said Pakistan was seriously concerned about the statements. — *PTI*

SMART CITIES Fourth Industrial Revolution guided Japanese choice models

Mumbai, Medellin: Knowledge networks

Singapore, May 17: Mumbai and Medellin would be the two knowledge sharing regional networks for South East Asia and Latin America respectively to help realise and align smaller cities in the zones to execute their vision to become smart cities in the coming years, a top industrial source has said.

Such a court ruling would put Navalny and his supporters and financial backers on par with members of the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda and threaten them with long prison sentences. “The opposition will be crushed,” Abbas Gallyamov, an independent political analyst and former Kremlin speechwriter, said, warning that the official ban on dissent would eventually backfire. “By destroying the opposition, they are destroying their own legitimacy,” he said. — *AFP*

Alliance with smaller cities in the region, will also help them have better cyber security as cyber attacks are becoming more frequent globally.

“Our ready for market approach with solutions for smart cities follows a recent announcement by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to launch two regional networks of cities in South Asia and Latin America with the aim to share knowledge on smart city development, while protecting public interests related to privacy, security and sustain-

ability,” the source, who did not wish to be named, said.

“With cyberattacks on municipalities rising and digital technologies becoming central to economic competitiveness and especially so in India, small cities need to invest in new technologies but have less capacity than their larger global counterparts to implement and ensure effective governance, said the source, who is close to one major technology group which is in talks with several parties to offer its products and

solutions tailored to specific need of each city. Bengaluru, Bhopal, Fardabad, Hyderabad, Indore, Kohima, Mangalore, Raipur, Shillong and Thane are on top Indian cities in the smart city list that would be seeking global best practices to be tech-driven municipalities for growth of local economies, according to the source.

He said global technology companies have positioned their solutions and products to help India realise and align its ambitions with the vision of smart cities in the coming

years. These networks selected last month as part of the WEF’s G20 Global Smart Cities Alliance are designed to help small cities implement new technology policies and will be supported by partners of the WEF and the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR) Global Network. Going forward, the Japanese cities are their choice models which were guided by the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution Japan, he noted. — *PTI*

quick BITES

| INDICATORS | | % |
|------------------------|------------|-------|
| Sensex | 49,580.73 | 1.74 |
| Nifty 50 | 14,923.20 | 1.67 |
| S&P 500* | 4,153.43 | -0.49 |
| Dollar (₹) | 73.21 | 0.10 |
| Pound Sterling (₹) | 103.26 | -0.20 |
| Euro (₹) | 89.00 | -0.29 |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹) | 47,547.348 | 0.73 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)* | 69.45 | 1.08 |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield | 5.972 | 0.00 |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.645 | 0.01 |

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Bharti Airtel posts ₹760 cr profit for Q4

Bharti Airtel reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 759 crore for Q4FY21 and an annual turnover of more than Rs 1 lakh crore for the first time. Airtel had posted a loss of Rs 5,237 crore in the year-ago quarter. Consolidated revenue rose 11.9 per cent to Rs 25,747 crore from Rs 23,019 crore. India revenue increased by 10 per cent in Q4 to Rs 18,337.8 crore from Rs 16,734.3 crore a year ago.

NEFT upgrade to disrupt services on weekend



The National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) system for online transfer of funds will be unavailable for 14 hours from Saturday mid-night till Sunday afternoon. A technical upgrade of NEFT, targeted to enhance the performance and resilience, is scheduled after the close of business of May 22, the RBI said. "Accordingly, NEFT service will not be available from 00:01 hrs to 14:00 hrs on Sunday, May 23," it said.

Federal Bank standalone net jumps 59%

Private sector lender Federal Bank reported nearly 59 per cent jump in its standalone net profit at Rs 478 crore for the March quarter against Rs 301 crore a year ago. Total income on a standalone basis was down at Rs 3,832 crore against Rs 4,108 crore. On a consolidated basis, the net profit for the quarter jumped by 65 per cent to Rs 500 crore. Income fell by 5.4 per cent to Rs 3,996 crore from Rs 4,223 crore.

Poonawalla exits Panacea, Serum picks up his stake

Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla offloaded his entire 5.15 per cent stake in Panacea Biotech for Rs 118 crore through an open market transaction. The shares were picked by Serum Institute of India (SII). As per BSE block deal data, Poonawalla sold 31,57,034 scrips he held in the firm at a price of Rs 373.85 per share, taking the total deal value to Rs 118.02 crore. The shares were picked by SII at the same price.

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FPIs net sellers by ₹2,256 crore Market cheers drop in daily Covid cases

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 17

A sharp drop in daily Covid infections to below 3 lakh cases triggered broad-based rally in the market, with investors expecting a return to normalcy sooner than expected before.

The Sensex gained 848 points, or 1.74 per cent, and closed at 49,580 after a bullish start on the first day of a new week. BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices also gained over 1.6 per cent each.

The market capitalisation of all stocks traded on the BSE touched a new all time high of Rs 213.64 lakh crore as investors wealth soared by over Rs 3 lakh crore.

The Nifty-50 index too gained 245 points to close at 14,923.15.

The market seems poised to regain earlier highs with NSE's India VIX Index, indicator of market volatility, fell 3.27 per cent from 20.26 to the 19.60 levels. India VIX is at the lowest levels of 2021, as it recorded the lowest close of last 87 trading sessions since January 1, said analysts.

"The Nifty rebounded sharply as domestic coronavirus cases fell below the 3-lakh mark for the first time since mid-April. Extended lockdowns by majority states has helped in curbing the cases. Sentiments turned buoyant that soon restrictions/curbs would be eased once cases decline



GAINING STRENGTH

- ▶ Market capitalisation of the BSE touched a new high of ₹213.64 lakh crore as investors wealth soared by over ₹3 lakh crore
- ▶ NSE's India VIX Index, indicator of market volatility, fell 3.27% from 20.26 to the 19.60 levels. India VIX is at the lowest levels of 2021

further," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Domestic institutions were net buyers of equities worth Rs 1,948.48 crore while foreign portfolio investors preferred to book profit and were net sellers of equities worth Rs 2,255.84 crore, as per the provisional data.

"Global cues were weak on the back of poor Chinese retail sales data and resurgence of Covid cases in some Asian countries. Gold scaled to three-month high as global inflation pressure rises," said Khemka.

Bank stocks led the rally on the bourses as the BSE Bankex closed 3.98 per cent up followed by Auto (1.90 per cent), Metal (1.93

per cent), Power (1.86 per cent) and Realty (1.59 per cent).

Barring telecom, all other sectoral indices closed in the green. The market expects the indices to regain earlier highs with financials leading the gainers list.

"It looks like we are going to head higher from here," because the authenticity of any move is measured by the quality of participation in it and today the banking space led from the front by giving a humongous intraday rally. When this pocket contributes heavily, the up-move can be considered a genuine one," said Sameet Chavan, chief analyst-technical and derivatives, Angel Broking.

HOTELS' BODY JOINS OYO INSOLVENCY CASE

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 17

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has allowed hotels' body to intervene in the insolvency case against Oyo on behalf of its member hotels.

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) sought intervention on behalf of its affected members over an outstanding of about Rs 72 crore. Around Rs 200 crore of claims have been registered against Oyo, the FHRAI said.

The NCLAT has permitted it to make its oral submissions on June 2.

"The FHRAI has been receiving several complaints from member hotels with respect to the non-payment of debts by Oyo for years. The FHRAI has presently filed the application before the NCLAT on behalf of aggrieved hotels and restaurants across India who have filed their claims with the Insolvency Resolution Professional (IRP)," FHRAI vice president Gurbaxish Singh Kohli said.

According to FHRAI, Oyo breached the terms of various kinds of agreement. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has allowed hotels' body to intervene in the insolvency case against Oyo on behalf of its member hotels.

Sebi proposes trading in electronic gold receipts

New Delhi, May 17: Markets regulator Sebi on Monday proposed an elaborate framework for setting up a gold exchange wherein the yellow metal will be traded in the form of electronic gold receipts and will help in having a transparent domestic spot price discovery mechanism.

Also, the proposed denominations—reflecting underlying physical gold—of Electronic Gold Receipts (EGRs) are 1 kilogram, 100 grams, 50 grams and subject to conditions, those can also be even for 5 and 10 grams.

Apart from issuing a consultation paper on the gold exchange, the watchdog has come out with draft norms for vault managers and they will be registered as a Sebi intermediaries.

The proposed gold exchange, encompassing the entire ecosystem of trading and physical delivery of gold, is extremely necessary to create a vibrant gold ecosystem in India, the Sebi said.

Presenting the Budget for 2021-22, finance minis-

ter Nirmala Sitharaman had said that Sebi will be the regulator for gold exchange and the Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority will be strengthened to set up the commodity market ecosystem. "Establishment of regulated gold exchange is a landmark measure and to give due prominence to the historic step, it is believed that the terminology for the instrument should be unique and one that carries a global resonance," the Sebi noted.

The regulator has suggested that the instrument to be traded on the bourse can be termed as an 'Electronic Gold Receipt' (EGR) and that the entire transaction mechanism can be divided into three tranches.

In the first tranche, physical gold would be converted to EGR. The EGR will be listed for trading in the second tranche. In the third tranche, the EGR will be again be converted into physical gold and the owner will surrender the EGR to obtain the physical gold. —PTI

TVS SRICHAKRA ENTERS EUROPE

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MAY 17

Two and three-wheeler and off-highway tyre maker TVS Srichakra has entered the European market.

Its first product launch is that of Eurogrip Bee Connect scooter tyres, to be available in 40 different sizes in the coming months. This is the first line of tyres launched since TVS Srichakra set up its Product Design and Development Centre in Milan, Italy.



Vaccine costs to strain already creaking state budgets

ANIRBAN NAG & VRISHTI BENIWAL
MAY 17

The world's worst coronavirus outbreak is set to stretch the already strained budgets of Indian states, making it more costly to borrow just when they need the money to cushion their economies.

The country's 28 states will have to foot about \$5 billion or more in vaccination costs after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's federal government suddenly made them responsible for inoculating most adults from May 1. Since they hadn't budgeted for the jobs or steps to tackle a second wave, their options to meet the additional expense are limited to cutting capital expenditures, selling public assets and boosting borrowing.

A simple calculation shows it will cost states Rs 35,400 crore (\$4.8 billion) to give two vaccine shots to about 590 million Indians in the 18-to-44 age group, at a combined cost of Rs 600 per person. If vaccinations are extended to those under 18 years old, the expense could rise to 0.25 per cent of gross domestic product, or about \$7 billion, according to Emkay Global Financial Services Ltd economist Madhavi Arora.

The additional burden couldn't have come at a worse time for states, which are facing higher yields on market borrowings this year amid the threat of widening fiscal deficits.

Failure by India's states

We will cut back on a bunch of spending that we don't think is essential during this time. We will try to raise new sources of funds. We will try to do some restructuring of the debt. We will look at asset sales"



— Palanivel Thiagarajan, Finance minister, Tamil Nadu

to raise and spend enough money risks holding back the recovery from a rare recession last year. That's because states account for 60 per cent of total government spending on asset creation and infrastructure building, which drive jobs creation and consumption.

In addition, states are having difficulty attracting foreign investors despite paying yields that are typically higher than those on federal government debt. Global funds have used only 1.2 per cent of the Rs 67,600 crore investment limit available to them in notes issued by states as of May 10, down from 4.8 per cent two years ago, data from the Clearing Corp. of India Ltd show.

"Finances are bound to be affected," said T. S. Singh Deo, health and commercial tax minister of Chhattisgarh. "The axe will certainly fall on capital expenditure."

Modi's government has encouraged states to sell assets to fund spending plans in the current year. That's one way to bring down the debt burden,

said Palanivel Thiagarajan, an ex-Wall Street banker and newly appointed finance minister of Tamil Nadu.

"Everything is on the table," he said. "We will cut back on a bunch of spending that we don't think is essential during this time. We will try to raise new sources of funds. We will try to do some restructuring of the debt. We will look at asset sales."

The pandemic has changed states' budgets significantly. The average gross deficit for states that presented their budgets before Covid was 2.4 per cent of output, while after the lockdown it stood at 4.6 per cent in the year ended in March, the Reserve Bank said.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, saw the gap widen to 4.17 per cent of the state's GDP in the year ended March 31, compared to the prescribed limit of 3 per cent. Bihar, among the nation's most impoverished states, estimated the gap at almost 7 per cent.

They may miss their goal of narrowing the

budget gap this year. Although there's no national lockdown this time to stem the deadly second wave of the pandemic, several states have imposed local movement curbs that are hurting economic activity and revenue collection. That's nudging many economists to cut their double-digit growth forecasts for the current fiscal year.

There's "renewed uncertainty regarding the near-term economic outlook," said economists led by Aditi Nayar at Icaia Ltd. That "may modestly constrain the indirect tax collections of those particular states."

To bridge the gap, Rajasthan is planning to sell or lease out unused properties. Telangana is planning to sell land parcels to raise about Rs 14,500 crore, according to local media reports.

Still, there's no guarantee these deals will come through. Even the federal government has failed to achieve divestment targets for the past two years after failing to sell flag carrier Air India Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corp, a state-owned oil refiner. Those sales have been carried forward to the current year.

Punjab plans to cut capital spending to boost health care expenditure, its finance minister Manpreet Singh Badal said. "States have to fend for themselves," he said. "Even though we increased our health budget by 18 per cent this year, I see my health budget going up further."

—Bloomberg

MS BOARD HAD GATES INVESTIGATED FOR RELATIONSHIP

LINUS CHUA
MAY 17

Microsoft Corp's directors started a probe into Bill Gates' alleged involvement with a female employee that was deemed inappropriate and decided that the co-founder had to step down from the board last year, Dow Jones reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The software giant had received a concern last year that that Gates had



Bill Gates

tried to have an "intimate" relationship with an employee in the second half of 2019, Dow Jones cited a Microsoft spokesman as saying. The

board reviewed the matter with the help of an outside law firm, the spokesman added.

Board members handling the matter hired the law firm to conduct the investigation after receiving a letter from a Microsoft engineer who said she had a sexual relationship with Gates for years, Dow Jones said. Gates left before the probe was completed. A spokesperson for Gates couldn't be reached for comment. —Bloomberg

Siddharth Shriram passes away

New Delhi, May 17: Industrialist and former chairman of Usha International Siddharth Shriram passed away on Monday due to Covid-19, according to people close to the family.

Shriram (76), who served as advisor to the board of Usha International after stepping down from executive role, was admitted to Medanta Hospital in Gurgaon for treatment.

A multi-faceted industrialist, Shriram served as the chairman of Mawana Sugars Ltd besides being the chairman of Usha



Siddharth Shriram

International, known for its sewing machines and home appliances.

He had led the Usha International Group in forming two joint ventures with Japan's Honda for passenger cars and power products.

However, in August 2012,

Usha International exited from its then joint venture Honda Siels Cars India, by selling its entire 3.16 per cent stake to the Japanese partner for Rs 180 crore.

Later, last year in April, Honda Motor Co and Usha International terminated their over two-decade old joint venture—Honda SIEL Power Products.

Born on January 18, 1945, Shriram was schooled in Welhem School and the Doon School at Dehradun, graduated in English Literature from St. Stephens College, Delhi University. —PTI

DOUBLE | LIFE

Companies that made pledges have fewer Black employees

#BlackLivesMatter: An optics play for US firms?

ELLEN HUET & KAREN TOULON
MAY 17

After the murder of George Floyd last year prompted widespread protests, dozens of companies released public pledges to promote racial justice. However, their support of the Black community wasn't reflected in the demographics of their workplaces.

A new study of diversity in the technology industry found companies that made statements of solidarity had 20 per cent fewer Black employees on average than those that didn't. The finding highlights a gap between what companies say about social issues and what they do in their own workplaces, said Stephanie Lampkin, the founder and chief executive officer of Blendoor, which conducted the study set to



be published on Monday.

Blendoor, a startup that helps companies recruit a diverse group of candidates, crunched publicly available data on 240 of the most prominent tech companies. Despite the shortcomings of many companies that put out

Black Lives Matter statements, the pledges could have a serious impact. Their financial commitments surpassed \$4.6 billion, more than double the amount of pledges made in the previous six years combined, according to the report.

Reviewing information released by companies over the past six years, Blendoor analysed trends in workplace diversity, inclusion policies and human-resources programmes, such as parental leave, flexible work arrangements and recruitment of underrepresented groups. It found, for example, that Pinterest Inc had the most robust policies and programmes for recruiting women; Mozilla Corp had the best for recruiting underrepresented minorities. McKesson Corp scored highest in Blendoor's rating of support-

ing women in leadership, while HP Inc tops the list for underrepresented minorities in leadership.

The analysis surfaced broader findings, as well, across hundreds of companies. Asian Americans have the widest gap between their representation in entry-level tech jobs and in leadership, and Asian-American women are the least likely to advance to executive roles. Women executives more commonly have C-level jobs that focus on areas such as HR, marketing or diversity, and those roles are among the least likely to be appointed to corporate boards. The analysis also found that 36 per cent of board directors are women or people of colour but that most of those are White women or Asian men.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Injured Jofra ruled out of Kiwi Tests

London: England pacer Jofra Archer, who recently returned to action after missing the now-suspended IPL, has been ruled out of the Test series against New Zealand as his elbow injury has resurfaced. The 26-year-old played a game for his County side Sussex against Kent but had to be pulled out of the game after bowling just five overs. Before this match, the fast bowler had also featured in a game against Surrey last week in a second XI game, bowling 29.2 overs. "England and Sussex seamer Jofra Archer has been ruled out of the est Series against New Zealand starting next month," an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) statement read. — PTI

Returned Oz stars picked for WI tour

Sydney: Pat Cummins and Steve Smith were among the stars of Australia's Indian Premier League contingent who arrived back in Sydney on Monday, almost two weeks after the lucrative tournament was suspended amid surging Covid-19 infections in the host country. Welcoming their star players, Australia announced a preliminary 23-man squad for the upcoming white-ball tour of the West Indies in July. — AFP

Squad: Aaron Finch (c), Ashton Agar, Jason Behrendorff, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Moises Henriques, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Riley Meredith, Josh Philippe, Jhye Richardson, Kane Richardson, Tanveer Sangha, D'Arcy Short, Steven Smith, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Mitchell Swepson, Andrew Tye, Matthew Wade, David Warner, Adam Zampa.

Honda's Espargaro comes home 8th

Le Mans (France): Repsol Honda's Pol Espargaro encountered all conditions, while Marc Marquez returned to leading a Grand Prix but was ultimately left disappointed at the French MotoGP on Sunday. Australian rider Jack Miller of Ducati made a great start to overtake pole-sitter Fabio Quartararo and then held him off to win the race. Honda's Marquez who started sixth didn't finish the race, while Espargaro held on to his starting position of eighth. It was a dramatic first lap for Espargaro who threw himself into the heat of battle alongside Marquez and Takaaki Nakagami after a strong launch. Contact with Franco Morbidelli forced the Honda rider to drop back and out of the top five. Alex Marquez took top Honda honours for the LCR Honda Team in sixth.

Das is women's batting coach

New Delhi: Gutsy former India opener Shiv Sunder Das has been appointed the batting coach of the Indian women's team for the tour of England and he is looking forward to use his coaching stint at NCA to guide the youngsters during the trip. Das, who has played 23 Tests between 2000-02, has a decent average of near 35 with more than 1300 runs, including two hundreds and nine half centuries. "It will be good experience and I am looking forward to it," the former Odisha skipper said. He has honed his skills as a batting coach at the NCA under Rahul Dravid's guidance and that, he believes, will help him while trying to solve the technical problems of the batters. — PTI

Curry captures 2nd scoring title

Los Angeles: Stephen Curry scored 46 points and claimed his second NBA scoring title as the Golden State Warriors won their sixth straight by beating the Memphis Grizzlies 113-101 on Sunday in San Francisco. Curry finished the regular season with a 32.0-point scoring average, claiming the league title over Washington's Bradley Beal who scored 25 points earlier Sunday to finish at 31.3 points per game. "I had a lot of good looks all night," Curry said. "We were in sync. The guys set great screens for me." — AFP

TWIST & TURN

ICC says fixing allegations 'implausible', concludes investigation

Dubai, May 17: The ICC on Monday dismissed claims made by news channel Al Jazeera that India's Test matches against England (2016) and Australia (2017) were fixed, saying the passages of play identified as fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore "implausible as a fix". Al Jazeera in a documentary — 'Cricket's Match Fixers' — released in 2018 had claimed that India's game against England in Chennai in 2016 and the one against Australia in 2017 in Ranchi were fixed. The International Cricket Council (ICC) also cleared five people — filmed by the channel — of any wrongdoing saying even as they behaved in a questionable manner but no credible evidence was available to charge them.

During the programme, an alleged bookie Aneel Munnawar was seen making claims about his dubious connections and history of fixing matches including two Tests involving Virat Kohli's Indian team.

The ICC had launched an investigation into the claims. "The programme alleged that two matches were fixed: India v England in Chennai in 2016 and India v Australia in Ranchi in 2017. To assess whether the passages of play highlighted in the programme were unusual in any way, the ICC engaged four independent betting and cricketing specialists to analyse the claims," the ICC said in a release after it concluded its investigation.

"All four concluded that the passages of play identified in the programme as being allegedly fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore implausible as a fix," the release added.

"No charges will be brought under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code," the ICC said. — PTI



A screengrab of Al Jazeera documentary in which 'bookie' Aneel Munnawar claimed to have fixed matches.

'Sandpapergate' to be reopened

Melbourne, May 17: As Cricket Australia (CA) on Monday made it clear that it was open to a re-investigation into the 'Sandpapergate', former captain Michael Clarke said he won't be surprised if it comes to light that more players were aware of the ball-tampering plot in 2018. He also accused CA of sweeping the issue under the carpet.

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



Michael Clarke

radio on Monday.

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

about 'sandpapergate'," he said.

Following Bancroft's interview, Cricket Australia's integrity team has already approached the pacer for more information.

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

"That's why there's going to be finger-pointing until someone writes

AUSSIE PLAYER CHARGED WITH CHILD ABUSE

Melbourne, May 17: Australian domestic cricketer Aaron Summers, who has also played in the Big Bash League, was produced in a court in Darwin on Monday after being charged with child abuse. The 25-year-old fast bowler was charged with two counts of possessing child abuse material and one count of grooming a minor.

Arrested last week, Summers appeared in the Darwin Local Court, with police alleging that his mobile phone contained child abuse videos.

Summers represented Deccan Gladiators in the Abu Dhabi T10 league and has also played domestic cricket in Pakistan, the first Australian player to do so. He turned out for Southern Punjab in the Pakistan Cup.

— AFP



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates with the Italian Open trophy after defeating Novak Djokovic in the final. — AFP

Nadal the king of Rome, again

Rome, May 17: Rafael Nadal defeated world number one Novak Djokovic to win a 10th Italian Open title on Sunday.

Second seed Nadal won through 7-5, 1-6, 6-3 in 2hr 49min against the defending champion to match Djokovic's record of 36 Masters 1000 titles and lay down a key marker two weeks out from the defence of his Roland Garros crown.

"I really wanted this title. This had been one of the first important titles I won in my career. I'd won 10 in Monte Carlo, Barcelona and Roland Garros and really wanted this one too," said 34-year-old Nadal.

Djokovic and Nadal were facing each other for the 57th time, having last played in the 2020 French Open final which the Spaniard won easily in straight sets.

The pair have won 15 of the last 17 Rome titles between them, while Nadal leads their head-to-head in finals in the Italian capital 4-2.

Despite losing his opening service game Nadal broke back in the third game hitting twice as many winners as the Serb with 21 in the set.

A dip in form in the second set allowed Djokovic, 33, to break twice and get back into the game.

But Nadal got back on track in the third with Djokovic having played nearly five hours on court on Saturday between his rain-delayed quarter-finals and semi-final matches.

The Spaniard saved two break points on his serve in the fifth game and broke for love for 4-2.

Djokovic saved a first match point in the eighth game but Nadal made no mistake on his second chance in the following to seal his 88th career title after winning in Barcelona earlier this month.

SERENA SAILS PAST TEENAGER

Serena Williams brushed aside the challenge of local teenager Lisa Pigato in the opening round of the WTA tournament in Parma on Monday.

Williams, ranked eighth in the world, beat the 572nd-ranked Pigato, making her WTA debut, 6-3, 6-2 in the first meeting between the two players.

The 39-year-old American had been given a wild card to play in Parma after her premature exit from the Italian Open, where she crashed out in the second round in what was her first match in nearly three months since her semi-final defeat in the Australian Open.

— AFP



Luis Suarez celebrates after scoring a goal against Osasuna on Sunday.

— AFP

ATLETICO ON TRACK

■ Suarez's late strike helps Madrid team edge closer to title

Madrid, May 17: Diego Simeone hailed Luis Suarez as "extraordinary" on Sunday after the Uruguayan scored the goal that could win Atletico Madrid La Liga, his late winner snatching a dramatic 2-1 win over Osasuna.

Atletico trailed Osasuna with nine minutes to go at the Wanda Metropolitano and faced a defeat that would not just have postponed their bid to be champions but allowed Real Madrid, who were beating Athletic Bilbao, to go top with one game left.

Instead, Atletico scored in the 82nd and 88th minutes to pull off a stunning turnaround. Renan Lodi smashed in an equaliser before Suarez proved the hero, firing in from eight yards to spark mass celebrations.

"He's extraordinary," said Diego Simeone. "He came here wanting to prove people wrong,

Victory maintains their two-point advantage and another win away at Real Valladolid next weekend will guarantee a second league title in 25 years.

wanting to show that he was a forward still at the top of his game. Who better than him to decide a match that seemed to be getting away from us?"

Atletico's players and substitutes piled onto Suarez in the corner and at full-time, some of their players dropped to their knees, not with ecstasy, but relief, the title now just one win away.

"These are moments of happiness," said Suarez. "It was one of the best first halves of the season. We missed a lot of chances, me in particular, but to win the league you have to suffer and today we stepped up."

To be crowned champions with a game to spare, Atletico needed Real Madrid to slip up at San

Mames but Nacho Fernandez put Real ahead in the second half and Atletico's priority quickly became preservation.

Victory maintains their two-point advantage and another win away at Real Valladolid next weekend will guarantee a second league title in 25 years.

MESSI'S FUTURE WITH BARCA DOUBTFUL

With Barcelona's season effectively over, Lionel Messi now has a big decision to make.

Should he finish out his career at the club that helped him become an all-time soccer great?

Or have the team's struggles to keep winning trophies convinced him that he can find more success in Paris or

Manchester?

Barcelona were left without any chance of winning the Spanish league on Sunday, bowing out the title race in demoralizing fashion after letting Celta Vigo overhaul a goal by Messi and rally for a 2-1 victory. Barcelona have one game left on the calendar, but with nothing to play for except third place in the league, the club's attention is now fully on the future of their inscrutable star.

Last summer, Messi had said he wanted to leave Barcelona after a campaign that finished without a title and a humiliating 8-2 loss to Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

When that exit was denied by the club, Messi said that he would focus on this season and put off any decision until this summer when his contract expires on June 30.

— Agencies

DORTMUND, WOLFSBURG BOOK BERTHS

Berlin, May 17: Borussia Dortmund and Wolfsburg clinched Champions League qualification, while Hamburger SV's hopes of rejoining the Bundesliga were put on hold for another year.

Dortmund won 3-1 at Mainz and Wolfsburg drew 2-2 at Leipzig to ensure both sides will finish among the top four to qualify for Europe's top club competition. Leipzig, who secured second place behind league champion Bayern Munich, were already assured of playing in the Champions League next season. Leipzig looked tired in their first game after losing the German Cup final to Dortmund on Thursday, but fought back with goals from Justin Kluivert and a penalty from Sabitzer.

— AP

GOD PUT HIS HAND ON MY HEAD: BECKER

London, May 17: Liverpool kept alive their dreams of qualifying for the Champions League in remarkable circumstances as goalkeeper Alisson scored a 95th-minute winner at West Bromwich Albion.

The emotional Brazilian, who lost his father in a drowning accident in February, dedicated the first goal of his senior career — a fine, glancing header — to his family as he said: "God put his hand on my head today".

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp claimed a partial assist for "the technically insane" goal that came after Mohamed Salah had cancelled out Hal Robson Kanu's opener for West Brom.

— Agencies

OVER 80 PER CENT IN JAPAN OPPOSE OLYMPICS THIS YEAR

Tokyo, May 17: More than 80 per cent of Japanese polled oppose hosting the virus-postponed Olympics this year, a new survey showed on Monday, underlining public antipathy less than 10 weeks before the Tokyo Games.

The latest downbeat poll comes after Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency Friday as the nation battles a fourth wave of infections.

The surge in cases has put pressure on the country's healthcare system, with medical professionals repeatedly warning about shortages and burnout.

The weekend poll by the *Asahi Shimbun* daily found 43 per cent of respondents want the 2020 Games cancelled, with 40 per cent wanting a further postponement. Those figures are up from the 35 per cent who backed cancellation in a survey by the paper a month ago and the 34 per cent who wanted a further delay.

"I am one of those in the 80 per cent. I think the Olympics should be postponed. Is it that difficult to postpone it?" passer-by Sumiko Usui, 74, said.

— AFP

WOMEN'S | CRICKET

Azhar bats for ousted Raman

New Delhi, May 17: Former India captain Mohammad Azharuddin on Sunday threw his weight behind WV Raman, saying there are very few sharper brains around in cricket than the recently-removed women's national team coach.

In a surprising move last week, former spinner Ramesh Powar replaced Raman as the Indian women's cricket team's head coach.

While the move surprised many, Azharuddin too fully backed his former India teammate Raman, who has represented the country under the stylish Hyderabad's captaincy. "WV Raman's knowledge of the game and coaching skills can be very useful for many. There are very few sharper brains than him and he has many years of experience. Hyderabad cricket association will do its best to engage him and draw immense benefit," Azharuddin tweeted.

Raman's unceremonious

WV Raman's knowledge of the game and coaching skills can be very useful for many. There are very few sharper brains than him and he has many years of experience.

— MOHAMMAD AZHARUDDIN
HCA president

ouster opened a can of worms with both the Madan Lal-headed Cricket Advisory Committee and Neetu David-led selection panel coming under the scanner of BCCI bigwigs.

Following his ouster, Raman alleged that a "smear campaign" against him has gained unwarranted traction and urged the BCCI president Sourav Ganguly to intervene.

Raman wrote it will be "extremely disconcerting" if his candidature was rejected due to reasons other than "my incompetency as a coach".

— PTI