

SHORT TAKES

2 held for robbing ₹90K from Gujarat based man

New Delhi: Two persons were arrested for allegedly robbing a Gujarat based man of ₹90,000 who was returning from a hospital along with his daughter where his son was admitted, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place in south Delhi's Saket area. The accused have been identified as Suraj (26), and P Rohit (26), both residents of Ambedkar Nagar, they said. On Monday, complainant Ravi Srivastava, who is a resident of Ahmedabad in Gujarat, presently staying at Sheraton Hotel, Saket, reached Saket police station and lodged a complaint, police said. Srivastava stated that his son is Covid positive and admitted in Batra Hospital. He is on ventilator, police said. On May 20, he along with his daughter was returning to the hotel from the hospital in his car. Around 9:45 pm, when he reached in front of DIPSAR college at MB Road towards Mehrauli, two men came on a bike and told him that the tyre of his car got punctured, a senior police officer said. He stopped the car and got down from the vehicle. The bikers also stopped near them, police said. When he was checking the tyres, the pillion rider forcefully robbed the hand bag containing two mobile phones, ATM cards, Aadhaar card, cash ₹90,000 from his daughter and they fled towards Madangiri, the officer said. During investigation, police analysed hundreds of CCTV cameras near the spot. The accused persons were spotted on a bike without number plate. Police traced the motorcycle near Kabristan, they said. On inquiry, it was revealed that the bike was being used by Suraj and Rohit, police said.

'Mercury crosses 40°C but no heat wave till June 1'

New Delhi: The mercury breached the 40 degrees Celsius-mark in parts of Delhi on Wednesday, even as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said a heat wave is unlikely in the national capital in the next four to five days. The IMD's Safdarjung Observatory, considered the official marker for the city, recorded a high of 39.5 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature settled at 22.6 degrees Celsius, four notches below normal. Palam, Jafarpur, Mungeshpur, Najafgarh and Pitampura recorded a maximum of 40.6 degrees Celsius, 40.9 degrees Celsius, 41.2 degrees Celsius, 41.8 degrees Celsius and 42.1 degrees Celsius, respectively. The maximum temperature is likely to remain below 40 degrees Celsius till June 1, the IMD said, which means no heat wave is predicted in the city in this period. This is likely to be the first time since 2014 that Safdarjung did not record a heat wave in the pre-monsoon period. — PTI

4 juveniles among 6 sharp shooters of Kala Jathedi gang nabbed

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The Delhi Police has apprehended six sharp shooters and members, including four juveniles, of Kala Jathedi gang, officials said on Wednesday. The accused have been identified as Manjeet (22), a resident of Jhajjar district in Haryana, and Mohit Gill (24), a resident of Rohtak district in Haryana, they said. Information was received regarding firing at a person at Katewara Nahar in Bawana area. Police rushed to MV hospital where injured Mohit Lamba, a resident of Qutubgarh village, was found admitted with multiple gunshot injuries, police said.

He revealed that one of his known Nikhil had called him at Katewara Nahar. Five persons were also standing there, including Nikhil. When Lamba reached at Katewara Nahar, they fired at him. He somehow escaped from the spot to nearby field and saved himself, police said. Police came to know that one Prince was arrested in Arms Act in Kanjhawala, they said. During investigation, it was revealed that he had given motorcycle to one of the juveniles near Qutubgarh while they were going to kill Lamba. Prince also disclosed that he had received direction from criminal Priyavrat to help that juvenile in committing murder of Lamba, a senior police officer said.



Nationalist Congress Party leader Pratul Patel's photo was erroneously published along with the story 'Opp. intensifies campaign to recall top Lakshadweep official after row' on this page in the edition dated 26. 5. 2021. The error is highly regretted.

— Editor

■ 'Black day' observed to mark 6 months of stir against Centre's agri laws

Farmers raise black flags, burn effigies at 3 Delhi border points

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

A high drama prevailed at three Delhi border points when protest flags, slogans and marches were seen as farmers in Delhi, Punjab and Haryana observed "black day" to mark six months of the stir over Central Agricultural laws. People in Punjab also hoisted black flags atop their houses to mark six months of farmers' protest.

Farmers agitating at three Delhi border points raised black flags, shouted anti-government slogans, burnt effigies and took out protest marches as they observed 'black day' on Wednesday to mark the completion of six months of their stir against the three Central agri laws. A brief ruckus was also reported from the Ghazipur protest site where farmers burnt an effigy of the central government amid heavy police deployment. As part of their 'black day' protest, the farmers put up black flags and burnt effigies of government leaders at the three border points Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri to register their protest against the three laws as well as the Centre.

Senior farmer leader Avtar Singh Mehra said black flags have been hoisted not only at the protest sites but also in villages in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, adding that villagers have put up black flags atop their houses as well as on their vehicles. "Effigies of government leaders were burnt. This day is to reiterate the fact that it has been six months since we have been protesting, but the government, which also completes seven years in office today, is not listening to us," said Mehra. All those in soli-

arity with their movement also donned black turbans and dupattas.

At Ghazipur on the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border, hundreds of farmers, led by Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait, converged into groups as they burnt an effigy of the Centre in protest. A ruckus briefly broke out between protesters and the police, donning anti-riot gears, who had tried to stop them from burning the effigy at the UP Gate below the Delhi-Meerut Expressway. While many BKU supporters held black flags in their hands, several others had placards that condemned the government and demanded withdrawal of the contentious laws, even as Covid-19 protocols on social distancing and face masks were largely amiss at the site.

Tikait, who has been leading the protest at Ghazipur since November 2020 and had become a prominent face of the protest after the January 26 violence in Delhi, was seen sporting a black-colour turban and a black flag.

The influential BKU spokesperson from western Uttar Pradesh was credited with reviving the protest that had lost sheen after the January 26 violence with his emotional pull that overnight drew support for the farmers on Delhi's outskirts.

Thousands of protesting farmers reached Delhi borders on November 26 last year to protest against the Centre's three new farm laws.

Samkyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of protesting unions, had announced that farmers will observe May 26 as 'black day' to mark the completion of six months of their protest.



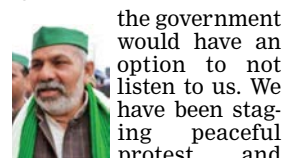
Farmers observing black day in protest against Centre's farm laws at Singhu border in New Delhi on Wednesday. — G.N. JHA

'We are here to stay, not going anywhere': Tikait

SHWETA SINGH
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

Farmers are here for a long haul and they will not return till their demand for scrapping the contentious farm bills is met by the Centre. Their leaders say six-months of farmers' protests have passed and they are ready to stay put till 2024 when general elections take place or even more if needed. They threatened to damage Bharatiya Janata Party politically in the upcoming elections in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand by appealing to people to support candidates who can defeat BJP.

"Every Indian farmer has an eye on the government. We live in a democratic country and not in the Gaddafi regime where



Rakesh Tikait would not be submissive in front of the central government. If the government thinks that by not listening to us, they would force us to roll back, it is impossible. The farmers are here to stay, protest and ensure that the law is amended," said Mr Rakesh Singh Tikait, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader, during an interaction with the journalists of Indian Women's Press Corps.

Farmers have been protesting against the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. Speaking on the ongoing Kisan Andolan that marked its 6-months through special events in Delhi, Haryana, and Punjab on Wednesday, Mr Tikait said: "The government has deceived us in every form. They have tried every trick in the book to send us back or force us to withdraw. During the six long months, we have witnessed police highhandedness, baseless accusations, endangering women security."

the government would have an option to not listen to us. We have been staging peaceful protest and the government thinks that by not listening to us, they would force us to roll back, it is impossible. The farmers are here to stay, protest and ensure that the law is amended," said Mr Rakesh Singh Tikait, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader, during an interaction with the journalists of Indian Women's Press Corps.

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Wrestler Sushil's 4 accomplices arrested

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The Delhi Police have started unearthing the wrestler-turned-murderer Sushil Kumar's criminal syndicate, being operated from Delhi's Chhatrasal stadium which is evident through the arrest of his four associates, who were involved in the alleged property dispute case that led to the death of a 23-year-old wrestler at the stadium.

Three cars including a Mahindra Scorpio and a Maruti Breeza seized by police from the crime scene belong to them and it is suspected that they came loaded with guns and batons after getting directions from Neeraj Bawana and Kala Asauda gangsters. They are residents of Rohtak and Jhajjar in Haryana.

Earlier, police had recovered a double barrel gun and batons from a Mahindra Scorpio car.

Police said that after getting police custody for interrogation, they were handed over to the Crime Branch for further investigation in the case related to abduction and death of wrestler Sagar Dhankar.

Meanwhile, Sushil Kumar, who turned 38 years-old on Wednesday, for the first time celebrated his birthday behind the bars with the Crime Branch putting in a long list of questions related to Sagar's abduction and death.

Sources said that now with the arrest of these four associates police may find out the exact reason behind the dispute and Kumar's role in it. On Wednesday, Kumar was also questioned



Sushil Kumar

identified as Bhupender (38), Mohit (22), Gulab (24), residents of Haryana's Jhajjar district and Manjeet (29), a native of Rohtak district. They were arrested from Delhi's Kanjhawala area in the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday. The arrests were made by the team of Special Staff of Rohini district of Delhi Police after a specific inputs was received by them.

Pranav Tayal, the Deputy Commissioner of

Police (DCP), Rohini district said that the special staff of our district received specific inputs that four persons of Kala Asauda Gang - Neeraj Bawana Gang involved in murder of a wrestler at Chhatrasal Stadium were coming to Ghewra village to meet their associate Kala.

"Acting upon specific inputs, a trap was laid near Ghewra railway crossing and apprehended all the four persons after their identification through secret informer," said the DCP.

"During interrogation, all the four accused persons disclosed that in the intervening night of May 4 and 5, they had gone to Chhatrasal stadium. They reached the stadium at around midnight in two vehicles, a scorpio car and a breeza car," said the DCP.

3 arrested from outer Delhi in 3 separate cases of cow slaughtering

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

Three men were arrested in connection with three separate incidents of cow slaughtering in the areas of outer Delhi, police said on Wednesday.

Accused Asif (36), his brother Mohnish (24) carrying a reward of Rs. 50,000 each have been arrested along with their accomplice Naem (20) on Tuesday from their hideouts in Jamia Nagar, they said.

The accused men slaughtered cows and sold them at Rs. 100 per kg to their customers including meat shop owners, police said.

Five teams were constituted to nab the culprits as three separate incidents of

cow slaughtering were reported from nearby areas in Outer Delhi, they said.

According to police, the first incident was reported at Ranhola police station on May 16 in Baprola village area and on visiting the spot, which was an empty plot, where carcasses of cow were found lying.

When the spot was inspected, the animal was found to be slaughtered and main parts of the body were taken away and only the innards were left there, police said.

The second incident of cow slaughter was also reported from the same village on the same day where again carcasses of cow were found at vacant plot in a similar pattern while another

similar incident was reported from Nihal Vihar area on May 20, police officials said.

Inspection of all the three spots showed a common link and indicated involvement of same set of criminals, they said.

Post-mortem was conducted and separate cases were registered under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code, Delhi Agricultural Cattle Preservation Act and Prevention of Cruelty of Animals Act, police said.

The knives used by them for slaughter have been recovered, police said, adding further investigation is underway as names of a few others have also cropped up during preliminary investigation and efforts are being taken to nab them.

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 reduce the frequency of following special trains, as per the details given below :-

Train no. & Name	Existing Frequency	Revised Frequency	With effect from
02275 Prayagraj Jn.- New Delhi Humsafar Express Special	Daily	Tri-weekly (Tue, Thu, Sun)	28.05.21 to till further advise
02276 New Delhi- Prayagraj Jn. Humsafar Express Special	Daily	Tri-weekly (Mon, Wed, Fri)	29.05.21 to till further advise
04163 Prayagraj Jn.- Meerut City Sangam Express Special	Daily	04 days a week (Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat)	28.05.21 to till further advise
04164 Meerut City- Prayagraj Jn. Sangam Express Special	Daily	04 days a week (Tue, Thu, Sat, Sun)	29.05.21 to till further advise
04113 Subedarganj-Dehradun Special	Tri-weekly (Mon, Wed, Fri)	Bi-weekly (Mon, Fri)	28.05.21 to till further advise
04114 Dehradun- Subedarganj Special	Tri-weekly (Mon, Thu, Sat)	Bi-weekly (Mon, Thu)	31.05.21 to till further advise
04125 Kathgodam-Dehradun Special	Tri-weekly (Wed, Fri, Sun)	Bi-weekly (Wed, Sun)	30.05.21 to till further advise
04126 Dehradun- Kathgodam	Tri-weekly (Tue, Thu, Sat)	Bi-weekly (Tue, Sat)	29.05.21 to till further advise

Rest all other enroute notified stoppages and its timings will hold good.

These Special Trains will be having Fully Reserved Service.

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

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

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of Rail Passengers that Railways have decided to change Time-Table of following trains for speed enhancement or to meet other operational requirements in Alipurduar Division of North Frontier Railway. The revised Time-Table will be as under:

Train No./ Originating Station and Date	Station	Existing Timings		Revised Timings	
		ARR.	DEP.	ARR.	DEP.
05910 Lal Garh Jn.-Dibrugarh Avadh Assam Spl. From Lal Garh from 27.05.2021	New Jalpaiguri	17:30	17:55	17:30	17:40
	Jalpaiguri Road	19:05	19:07	18:16	18:18
	Dhupguri	19:35	19:37	19:01	19:03
	New Cooch Behar	20:45	20:50	20:25	20:30
	New Alipurduar	21:10	21:15	21:07	21:12
09709 Udaipur City - Kamakhya Kavi Guru Spl. From Udaipur City from 31.05.2021	Kamakhya	02:30	02:35	02:05	02:10
	Dalgaon	17:15	17:17	16:58	17:00
	Alipurduar Jn.	18:55	19:00	18:20	18:25
09305 Dr. Ambedkar Nagar - Kamakhya Special From Dr. Ambedkar Nagar from 27.05.2021	Kokrajhar	20:15	20:17	19:23	19:25
	Alipurduar Jn.	07:45	07:50	07:35	07:40
	Kokrajhar	08:50	08:52	08:40	08:42

Rest of information notified will hold good.

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table and stations en route etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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SHORT TAKES

2nd wave: 12 docs die of corona in MP

Bhopal: As many as 12 doctors died of Covid-19 in Madhya Pradesh during the second wave of the pandemic that hit the state in the first week of April. The districts which reported deaths of doctors are Bhopal (two), Gwalior (four), Ujjain (one), Indore (one), Hosangabad (one), Jabalpur (one), Khandwa (one) and Dhar (one). "As many as 12 doctors died due to Covid-19 in April-May in the state", president of MP medical officers' association Dr Devendra Goswami said. With this, the number of doctors who succumbed to Covid-19 since the pandemic hit MP in March, 2020, rose to 22. Meanwhile, the state has witnessed a sharp decline in fresh positive cases in the last couple of weeks, although, there is no perceptible change in fatalities. The fresh positive cases which had reached a peak of 12,500 three weeks ago, came down to 2189 on Wednesday.

Azam Khan serious but stable: Hospital

Lucknow: Senior Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan's condition is serious but under control, the private hospital where he is undergoing treatment for Covid-19 said on Wednesday. The condition of his son, Mohammad Abdullah Khan, is stable, and he is being monitored by doctors, it added. "Treatment of Azam Khan (72) was started, after cavity and fibrosis was found in his lungs. Today (Wednesday), he needed 3-5 litres of oxygen. He is kept under the observation of a critical care team. His condition is serious, but under control. He is under observation of critical care team," a statement issued by the Medanta Hospital, Lucknow, said. An expert team of the critical care unit of the Medanta Hospital is making continuous efforts for his better treatment, it added. — PTI

JEE-Advanced on July 3 postponed

New Delhi: The Joint Entrance Examination (JEE)-Advanced scheduled for July 3 has been postponed in view of the Covid-19 situation, according to officials at IIT-Kharagpur, the institute which is conducting the exam this year. "Considering the prevailing pandemic situation due to COVID-19, JEE (advanced) 2021 which was scheduled to be held on July 3 stands postponed. The revised date of examination will be announced at an appropriate time," an official said. JEE-Advanced is an exam for admission to the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology and National Institutes of Technology. While the JEE-Mains is conducted for admission to engineering colleges across the country, it is considered as a qualifying test for the JEE-Advanced. — PTI

4-TIME MLA DIES OF POST-COVID COMPLICATIONS

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 26

Majendra Narzary, a 68-year-old legislator in Assam succumbed to post-Covid complications at Guwahati Medical College and Hospital. Narzary was a Bodoland People's Front (BPF) leader and four-time MLA from the Gossaigaon Assembly constituency in Assam's Kokrajhar district. The BPF, an ally of the Congress in the recently concluded state Assembly polls, had won four seats. The Assam Cabinet mourned the demise of the legislator while recalling his dedication for the Bodoland Territorial Council. The state health authorities said that Narzary had tested positive for Covid earlier this month. He tested negative a few days back but was put on ventilator on ICU when his post-covid complications intensified. Condoling the death of a senior legislator Assam health minister Keshab Mahanta who rushed to the hospital said, "Although he won the fight against Covid, unfortunately succumbed to comorbidity issues." Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "A dedicated social worker, committed politician and deeply loved, his absence shall be sorely missed."

'Vaccine very important to save lives'

New Delhi, May 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday described Covid-19 vaccines as "absolutely important to save lives and defeat the pandemic", noting that this "once-in-a-lifetime" crisis has brought tragedy and sufferings at doorsteps of many and caused huge economic impact.

Delivering the keynote address on the occasion of "Vesak Global Celebrations" on Buddha Purnima, he said the pandemic has impacted every nation, adding that the planet will not be the same after this and the events in future will be remembered as either pre or post-Covid.

He, however, added that there have been many noteworthy developments which strengthen our strategy to fight it.

"Most importantly, we have the vaccine which is absolutely important to save lives and defeat the pandemic," Mr Modi said, asserting that the emergence of jabs within a year of the Covid-19 outbreak shows the power of human determination and tenacity.

India is proud of its scientists for developing vaccines, he said, and also saluted healthcare and frontline workers for risking their lives to save others. Offering condolences to those who have suffered and lost near and dear ones in the pandemic, the Prime Minister said he grieved with them.

In Covid-19, the humanity has faced its worst cri-

PRIME MINISTER Modi also highlighted the issues of climate change and terrorism, saying one must not lose sight of the other challenges faced by humanity while fighting the pandemic

sis in decades and has not seen a pandemic like this for a century, he said.

His comments came amid several states complaining of a shortage of vaccines and also reports of vaccine hesitancy in a section of the population.

On the occasion, Mr Modi also highlighted the issues of climate change and terrorism, saying one must not lose sight of the other challenges faced by humanity while fighting the pandemic.

With the Prime Ministers of Nepal and Sri Lanka and the secretary general of International Buddhist Confederation in attendance at the virtual event, Mr Modi gave a call for all those who believe in humanity to come together and defeat terrorism and radicalisation. The life of Gautama Buddha was about peace, harmony and co-existence, he noted, adding that there are still forces whose existence depends on spreading hate, terror and mindless violence.

Such forces do not believe in liberal democratic principles, he added, according to a statement. — PTI



A beneficiary receives a dose of the Covid-19 vaccine during a vaccination drive for specially-abled at Gurgaon's Ambience Mall on Wednesday. — PTI

Vaccine mix-up: 20 villagers in UP get wrong second jab

Siddharthnagar (UP), May 26: In a major goof-up, health workers in Uttar Pradesh's Siddharthnagar district administered Covaxin to 20 villagers who had been given Covishield in the first dose.

The incident has been reported from the primary health centre in Barhni where people from Audahi Kala and another village received Covaxin shots on May 14.

Chief medical officer

Sandip Chaudhary on Wednesday said he has ordered an inquiry into the matter and assured stern action against those found responsible for this negligence.

He said that no one has yet reported any health complaints and a health department team has already met them.

The incident came to light when one of the villagers, Ram Surat, brought to the notice of the health workers that he received different vac-

cines in the first and the second dose.

Accepting the shortcoming on the part of the health workers, the CMO said 20 people have been administered a mix-up of vaccines and the medical teams are keeping a close watch on them.

The people who got different vaccines are under stress but no problem has been reported with any one of them so far, health officials said. — PTI

Govt is hiding Covid death numbers: Cong

New Delhi, May 26: The Congress on Wednesday accused the Centre of suppressing Covid-19 death numbers, with party leader Rahul Gandhi saying numbers do not lie but the government does.

The party also said that the Central government should have procured Covid vaccines globally and ramped their production in the country to improve access to vaccination.

"Numbers don't lie... GOI (government of India) does," Mr Gandhi said on Twitter while citing a *New York Times* estimate of the number of coronavirus deaths in India.

The report said that "just how big could India's true Covid toll be" and cited the official count of 3,07,231 as on May 24 and it estimated

600,000 deaths in a conservative scenario, 1.6 million estimated deaths in a more likely scenario and 4.2 million estimated deaths in a worse scenario.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, "We will never know the true number of Covid-related deaths as the government has worked harder on suppressing this data than they did fighting the pandemic."

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh suggested: "What Modi government should have done but did not: procured vaccines globally, ramped up production locally (through compulsory licensing), issued vaccines to states fairly and transparently and improved access to vaccines by reducing exclusions." — PTI

Speculation again over replacement of Yeddy as CM

Bengaluru, May 26: Even as Karnataka is battling the second wave of Covid-19, speculations were rife on Wednesday that some moves were on within the ruling BJP for replacing chief minister B.S. Yeddyurappa. Some ministers and MLAs, for the first time, openly admitted to such moves to exert pressure on unseating the Karnataka BJP strongman. Several legislators considered close to the chief minister rallied around him questioning the need for such a change, and asserted that the 78-year-old veteran will complete the term and will even lead the party during the next polls two years away.

Citing certain decisions taken by the government, its handling of Covid crisis, alleged instances of corruption, a few legislators are said to be pushing for convening a legislature party meeting after June 7, the last day of the lockdown.

"I have got information about several (legislators) camping in Delhi, I have even got to know about meetings taking place at various places, even today. I have seen in the media that several ministers are also part of it...it is true that such discussions are taking place," revenue minister R. Ashoka said.

"I have got to know about some (legislators) going to



B.S. Yeddyurappa

Delhi, it is hundred per cent true that developments are taking place...while some people are involved directly, some are indirectly involved. I'm seeing their statements in the media, but my priority is to stand with the people suffering due to Corona," he added.

However, deputy CM C.N. Ashwath Narayan, home minister Basavaraj S. Bommai, housing minister V. Somanna, industries minister Jagadish Shettar, said they were unaware of any such developments and ruled out leadership change.

Ashwath Narayan, terming the talk about leadership change as "far from truth", said Mr Yeddyurappa is their chief minister and leader. To a question about some legislators lobbying for leadership change in Delhi, Narayan said he was not aware of it and has heard about it only through the media. He also clarified that no legislature party meeting has been called on or after June 7, as is being speculated. — PTI

BJP more concerned about polls than Covid: Shiv Sena

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MAY 26

The Shiv Sena Wednesday said that even while the whole country is fighting the coronavirus pandemic, BJP's priority is elections. The Uddhav Thackeray-led party claimed that after its defeat in West Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah and UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath are working for a mission of Uttar Pradesh Assembly election, which will be held in 2022.

The Sena also warned the BJP that if the priority is not given on tackling the pandemic, the pious Ganga River would become a carrier of dead bodies of Hindus. The Sena, in an editorial

in its party mouthpiece *Saamana*, said that the BJP has been working for the elections of four states including Uttar Pradesh, which are scheduled next year. The people of West Bengal have rejected the BJP and now the BJP is planning to work towards Uttar Pradesh elections.

Slamming the UP government for not handling the second wave properly, the Sena said that the farmers' protests in western Uttar Pradesh is also proving troublesome for the BJP. "In such a situation, the BJP is likely to suffer a major setback in the upcoming Assembly election of Uttar Pradesh and Lok Sabha election in 2024," the editorial claimed.

Top medical body sends ₹1,000cr defamation notice
Ramdev must be booked for sedition: IMA to Modi

New Delhi, May 26: The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding that yoga guru Ramdev be booked immediately under sedition charges for alleged misinformation campaign on vaccination and challenging government protocols for treatment of Covid-19.

The apex medical body of modern doctors has also served a defamation notice on Ramdev for his alleged disparaging remarks against allopathy and allopathic practitioners, demanding an apology from him within 15 days, failing which it said it will demand a compensation of ₹1,000 crore from the yoga guru.

In its letter to Mr Modi,



the IMA said it was gratifying to note that only 0.06 per cent of people who received both the doses of vaccine "got minimal" infection by coronavirus, and "very rarely" vaccinated people had a severe lung infection.

"It is well proved that by vaccination we save our people and country from catastrophic cascades of severe infection. At this juncture, painfully we bring to your kind notice, the video claiming 10,000 doctors have died in spite of taking both the doses of vaccine and lakhs of people have died due to allopathic medicine are circu-

lating virally in the social media, as said by Mr. Ramdev, owner of Patanjali products," it said.

"We the members of the modern medicine professionals submit; we follow the guidelines and protocols issued by the ministry of health through ICMR or the National Task Force in our treatment offered to millions of people coming to our hospitals. If someone is claiming the allopathic medicine has killed people, it is an attempt to challenge the ministry which has issued the protocol for treatment to us," it stated. The IMA pointed out that as on date and according to its registry, 753 doctors died in the first wave and 513 lost their lives in the second wave due to Covid-19. — PTI

In bleak times, 'villain'
Sonu Sood redefines heroism

SRIRAM KARRI
HYDERABAD, MAY 26

If a scriptwriter had proposed a few years ago a logline for a movie which read – an actor from Punjab, with a six-pack body, who has played a villain on screen for over two decades, finds a calling in the midst of a pandemic.

His real-life antics make him the most beloved superstar across the country, the trust in him built rapidly as he works to connect, first with migrant workers and trying to help them, and as a second wave hits, responding to people from across the country, reaching out to him with a trust they repose in him greater than in governments. And in cineaste Telugu states, gods of decades slide down the charts, downed by a virus, leaving only one real star.

Such a script would never have found a director accepting it. Even the audiences would have found it beyond plausibility, even for a story. But when life scripts stories and reality screens it, not for two hours but years, anything is possible. Such has been the script starring Sonu Sood since Coronavirus spread its menacing tentacles and brought down every order of society and all semblances of sanity.

But in dark times, heroes arise from unexpected spots. Lending help, giving hope, sharing light, redefining love, and metamorphosing fan following.

Speaking to this newspaper about his inner motivations to emerge from the fringes of celebrity to becoming a trusted icon of a ravage nation's people, Sonu Sood, in a soft soothing voice of a healer rather than a preferred negative actor of the movie screen, said, "growing up in Moga, Punjab, I saw my mother, a teacher, give free tuition classes for decades. Outside my father's shop,



Sonu Sood

there would always be a langar, where I too would serve food. It was a lesson ingrained for life that you must always be there to serve in whatever capacity you have."

When asked about the incident that prompted him to emerge out of lockdown and pandemic fears to become a frontline hero, Mr Sood said, "last year, when I started hearing stories of migrant workers, I knew I could no longer sit in the security and comfort of my home. As a migrant worker myself, though privileged and lucky, I could empathise with their angst. It started with serving food and giving basic financial help to organising to help them in larger numbers."

The legend grew quickly because of the vacuum. None of India's conventional heroes – film stars, cricketers, billionaires – were there to really make a significant difference. Sood's rise in being recognised as a saviour is also a deep reflection of the indifference of the others.

How do you feel about being recognised and trusted so much by people that they tag you on Twitter

for help before government agencies or ministers? Do you feel pressure to deliver?

He smiles, and in one of the most humane voices I have heard in a long time, replies, "there is no pressure when a friend or family member expects you to stand for them. It is no different. Every bit of time, money and effort I can muster, I am out there because I know somewhere, someone who has reached out to me is waiting and expecting. It is a call I must respond to, and I can't let them down."

I scratch my head, a bit bewildered. Is it a mere PR exercise? Or did I get connected to Dalia Lama by mistake? It is, I do not think it is his fault that others in the cine world have used charity as a ticket to sell more tickets for their next release. Last year, we were stuck with the tragic story of another SS in Bollywood – Sushant Singh. This SS has risen now to become India's superhero, without a cape, just a Twitter handle.

Are you a bit embarrassed Sonu, I ask him, that others in your film fraternity, Bollywood or Tollywood, who have received greater stardom and earned far more money and influence, never cared to take up work like yours in one of our worst years ever? He answers candidly, but with sangfroid. "You can't force a feeling of wanting to help people. It can't even be taught beyond a point. It must come from within."

What next? Will this image harm your film career? Next time any film fans see him on screen as a villain, will the portrayal be convincing? "I am not thinking of the next film. Just my next SOS call."

He disappears to do good for someone, somewhere. A villain has refined heroism, forever. My vote for the biggest star in films in India in a dark year — Sonu Sood.

Rahul: Ignorant bigots in power destroying Lakshadweep

New Delhi, May 26:

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday threw his weight behind the people of Lakshadweep as he accused the "ignorant bigots in power" of destroying the islands.

His statement came a day after the Congress demanded the immediate removal of Lakshadweep administrator Praful Patel, alleging he is not only destroying the peace and culture of the islands, but also "harassing" the people by imposing arbitrary restrictions.

"Lakshadweep is India's jewel in the ocean. The ignorant bigots in power are destroying it. I stand with the people of Lakshadweep," Rahul Gandhi tweeted.

The Congress has also alleged that the administrator is allowing liquor on the islands, which is prohibited till now, and has brought in the Prevention of Anti-Social Activity Act with the objective of harassing locals, besides taking away powers of panchayats and is carrying out demolitions under new provisions brought in by him. — PTI

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001 Corporate Identity Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813 Website: www.pspcl.in Mobile No. 96461-07205	
E-Tender Enq. No. 7212 /P-1/EMP-W-11822 dated 20.05.2021 Dy. Chief Engineer/ Headquarter (Procurement Cell-1) GGSSTP, Roopnagar invites E-Tender ID No. 2021-POWER-65821.1 for PROCUREMENT OF SWITCH, SOCKET, PUSH BUTTON, MCBs etc UNDER EA GROUP FOR THE YEAR 2020-21. For detailed NIT & Tender Specification please refer to https://eproc.punjab.gov.in from 24.05.2021 onwards. Note:- Corrigendum & addendum, if any will be published online at https://eproc.punjab.gov.in RTP-19/21 RO No PR-Advt. No.:- 76155/12/274/2021/4843	

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED	
	General Public is hereby informed that one girl Namely: Princy Kumari, D/o: Ravinder Kumar Rakesh, R/o: A-24, UFG Flat No. 04, Shiv Park, Khanpur, New Delhi, Age: 15 Years, Height: 5', Complexion: Wheatish, Face: Long, Built: Thin, Wearing: Grey Colour Printed Suit and Orange Lower has been missing/kidnapped since 10.05.2021 from the area of P.S. Neb Sarai, New Delhi. In this regard FIR No. 205/21, U/s 363 IPC, 10.05.2021 , has been lodged at P.S. Neb Sarai, New Delhi . Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing/kidnapped girl but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing/kidnapped girl please inform the undersigned. Web-site : http://cbi.nic.in E-Mail ID: cic@cbi.gov.in Fax: 011-24368639 DP/534/SD/2021
SHO PS. Neb Sarai, New Delhi Ph: 011-29551326, 29551597 & 8750870835	

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED	
	General Public is hereby informed that one girl Namely: Neha Praveen, D/o: Mohd. Islam, R/o: H.No. F-522, J.J. Colony, Bawana, Delhi, Age: 17 Years, Height: 4'10", Complexion: Fair, Face: Round, Built: Thin, Hair: Black, Wearing: Yellow Colour Suit & Salwar and Green Colour Chappal in feet has been missing/kidnapped since 04.05.2021 from her house. In this regard FIR No. 265/2021, Dated 04.05.2021 , has been lodged at P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi . Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing/kidnapped girl but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing/kidnapped girl please inform the undersigned. Web-site : http://cbi.nic.in E-Mail ID: cic@cbi.gov.in Fax: 011-24368639 DP/1044/ON/2021
SHO PS. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi Ph: 011-27787592, 27787593 & 7065036324	

SHORT TAKES

22-yr-old lured with food, gangraped

Jaipur: A 22-year-old woman was allegedly raped by an ambulance driver and his accomplice who lured her into the vehicle after promising to give her food, the police said on Wednesday. The alleged incident took place on Monday, they said. The accused drove to a secluded area where they raped the woman, who is married, Moti Doongri station house officer (SHO) Surendra Pancholi said. He said based on the woman's complaint, a case has been registered against the accused under Section 376D (gang rape) of the Indian Penal Code and sections of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The ambulance driver and his friend have been taken into custody and are being interrogated, the SHO said. — PTI



FUGITIVE BIZMAN CHOKSI CAPTURED IN DOMINICA

New Delhi: Fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi, who had recently fled from Antigua and Barbuda, was captured in neighbouring Dominica after an Interpol Yellow Notice was issued against him, the local media reported on Wednesday. The police in Dominica captured Choksi on Tuesday night (local time) after an Interpol Yellow Notice was issued by Antigua and Barbuda. Choksi had been living in Antigua and Barbuda since 2018 after taking the citizenship, Antigua News Room reported. The Yellow Notice is issued by the Interpol to track missing persons. The efforts are on to hand him over to the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda, the local media reports stated. Choksi, who is wanted in a ₹13,500 crore loan fraud in Punjab National Bank, was last seen going for dinner in his car in Antigua and Barbuda on Sunday. His staff had reported him missing after his car was found. His lawyer Vijay Aggarwal had confirmed that Choksi had been missing since Sunday. — PTI

Huge Army ops in WB, 800 stranded villagers rescued

Navy deploys 2 diving, 5 flood relief teams at Digha, Fraserganj & Diamond Harbour

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 26

In a large-scale rescue and relief operation in cyclone-hit West Bengal, the Army and Coast Guard on Wednesday evacuated around 800 villagers stranded in East Midnapore and Howrah, which are among the worst-affected districts.

Eastern Command spokesperson Wing Commander Mandeep Huda said that around 700 villagers altogether were rescued by the Army soldiers from the flooded areas of the two districts till Wednesday evening. Most of the rescued are from East Midnapore.

At Bodhra, more than 500 people were rescued while 50 more were evacuated from New Digha Market apart from 32 others from Old Digha Natun Kali Temple and 15 from another place in Old Digha. In Howrah the Army jawans conducted evacuation at Orphuli.

The Coast Guard informed that it shifted around 100 people to safer places in its hovercraft after the group was found stranded at Nayachar Islands near Haldia in East Midnapore.

It stated, "Headquarters, Coast Guard Region (North East) at Kolkata is monitoring the overall situation and directing the Coast Guard commanders/stations of both the states to execute the relief operations on ground."

Three Coast Guard ships along with onboard helicopter, already on operational mission in the Bay of Bengal, have been diverted to coastal areas of both states with fastest speed to assess the situation in area and render appropriate assistance to any mariner in distress. They will be joined by two more ships to augment the efforts at sea. Coast Guard Dornier aircraft will be carrying out aerial rescue of the affected areas on improvement of weather."

It added, "Two inflatable boats with rescue gear and divers have been dispatched to Contai/Digha area to augment rescue efforts in these areas. In addition teams have been kept standby in Coast Guard ashore units for providing assistance at other locations. ICG



People (above) take shelter on a cart during landfall of Cyclone Yaas at Digha in East Midnapore district of West Bengal on Wednesday. Coast Guard personnel (below) carry out rescue and relief works in Odisha. — PTI



▶ **THE COAST GUARD** informed that it shifted around 100 people to safer places in its hovercraft after the group was found stranded at Nayachar Islands near Haldia

remote operating stations are also keeping a watch in the Bay of Bengal. Aircraft/helicopter sorties have also been planned."

Meanwhile, the National Disaster Response Force personnel rescued three men — Susanta Giri (60), Brajagopal Mondal (52) and Nanigopal Jana (55) — from getting drowned in a lake at Kalindi in Ramnagar of East Midnapore. They also conducted evacuation in other parts of the district.

The Indian Navy already deployed two diving and five flood relief teams (FRT) at Digha, Fraserganj

and Diamond Harbour.

It said, "The PRT at Digha was deployed, soon after landfall, to Khadalgobra Meenakshi village for relief and rescue operations. The Frazerganj Team was initially deployed to Sibarampur village and thereafter, to Mousuni island where they were involved in supply of three Boat loads of food and ration to the villagers. The team was later relocated to Narayanpur village for rescue of marooned villagers. Owing to the onset of dark hours and visibility, this mission had to be called-off and rescheduled on May 27."

The Navy added, "The FRT at Diamond Harbour was tasked to undertake relief measures in SSB (Kol). This team was later relocated to Contai to augment rescue and relief efforts by the district administration."

J'khand still on high alert, 10K evacuated amid cyclone warning

Ranchi, May 26: Jharkhand remains on high alert and has evacuated over 10,000 people to safer zones while operation is still on amid forecast that Cyclone "Yaas" would be hitting the state by midnight after pounding neighbouring Odisha and West Bengal, officials said Wednesday.

The state has imposed complete lockdown in some parts to prevent people from venturing out in view of prediction of severe cyclonic storm battering the state.

Operations are being executed on a war-footing in the vulnerable areas in East and West Singhbhum, besides some other districts due to cyclonic storm Yaas, Disaster Management Secretary Amitabh Kaushal said.

"We have evacuated 9,502 persons so far from the 506 sites and the evacuation operations are on. A total of 848 of our villages are impacted by it."

"We are witnessing heavy rainfall and there has been damage to the power transmission network besides trees have been uprooted," East Singhbhum deputy commissioner Suraj Kumar said.

The cyclone is likely to hit the district at midnight, Mr Kumar said.

— PTI

■ **Assam CM focuses on plan to improve governance**

Himanta names guardian minister for every district

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 26

In an obvious attempt to improve the governance and create a pro-people image of the government, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday embarked upon an innovative idea of appointing guardian ministers for all the districts to implement government policy decisions, administrative reforms, and other welfare schemes for the public.

The decision was taken at the Cabinet meeting on Wednesday. Panchayat and rural development minister and Assam BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Das has been given the responsibility of Barpeta, Bongaigaon and Dhubri districts. Agriculture minister Atul Bora will be the guardian minister of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia



while minister Urkhao G w r a Brahma has been allotted the responsibility of Baksa and Chirang districts. Transport, industries, and commerce minister Chandra Mohan Patowary has been given the responsibility of Darrang, Kamrup (R), and Kamrup (M) districts. Environment minister Parimal Suklabaidya will be the guardian minister of Karimganj, Hailakandi, and Hojai. Health and family welfare minister Keshab Mahanta has been given the responsibility of the Golaghat and Morigaon districts. Education minister Ranuj Pegu will look after Jorhat and Sivasagar while minister Ashok Singhal will be the guardian minister of Kokrajhar,

Udalguri and Cachar. Revenue and disaster management minister Jogen Mohan has been given the responsibility of guardian minister of West Karbi Anglong, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao districts. Minister Sanjay Kishan will be the guardian minister of Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur, finance minister Ajanta Neog of Nalbari, Goalpara and South Salmara, minister Pijush Hazarika of Nagaon, Sonitpur and Biswanath.

The guardian ministers will have the responsibility of ensuring the timely execution of all centrally sponsored schemes and state own priority programmes. The guardian ministers have been asked to visit the district headquarters at least once in a month besides looking into the grievances of common people.

TN, K'taka set for another fight over dam construction

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR and D. SEKAR
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Tamil Nadu water resources minister Durai Murugan's avowed on Wednesday that the state would not allow the construction of the Mekedatu dam, an ambitious ₹9,000 crore project that Karnataka has envisaged across the river Cauvery, set the tone for another showdown between the neighbouring states having a long history of water-sharing dispute.

Though the plan for the dam at a deep gorge in the confluence of Cauvery and Arkavati at Ontigondlu, about 100 km from Bengaluru, was prepared by Karnataka way back in 2017, Tamil Nadu managed to stall it by approaching courts on the ground the an upper riparian state cannot monopolise the water of an inter-state river.

But with recent reports emerging that preparatory work on the building of the dam has begun with the laying of roads and

▶ **THE MEKEDATU dam** is an ambitious ₹9,000cr project that Karnataka has envisaged across the river Cauvery

gathering of construction material, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) took a suo motu stand and send notices to the Union ministry of environment and forests (MoEF), department of Water Resources and Central Water Commission.

Mr Murugan, in his statement on Wednesday, said the NGT's southern bench has set up a committee comprising officers from the Integrated Regional office of MoEF, Cauvery Water Management Authority, Karnataka's Cauvery Neeravari Nigam and the Forest department to present a report on the alleged violation of norms by July 5.

The NGT has also made Tamil Nadu's chief secretary, forest department secretary, PWD secretary and Cauvery Water Management Authority as respondents.

Subodh Kumar Jaiswal takes charge as new director of CBI

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

Subodh Kumar Jaiswal, the former director general of police (DGP) of Maharashtra, on Wednesday took charge as the director of the CBI, country's premier investigation agency.

A 1985-batch Maharashtra cadre IPS officer, Mr Jaiswal will have a fixed tenure of two years in the Central probe agency. He was till now serving as the DG of the CISE. The CBI was working without a regular chief for over three months after Rishi Kumar Shukla completed his two-year tenure on February 3.

Mr Jaiswal was received by the senior officers of CBI on his arrival at the agency's headquarters in the national capital on Wednesday. "After taking charge, he was briefed by senior officers of CBI," said a high ranking official of the CBI.



WhatsApp says new rules end privacy

■ **Continued from Page 1** added. Senior counsel Dushyant Dave told this newspaper, "Right to privacy is a basic human right and also a fundamental right as a part of right to life and right to live with dignity guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. In today's time, the right to privacy is sacrosanct and the Supreme Court has rightly held it to be a core value of human life and a fundamental right. Any transgression of the right to privacy is therefore unconstitutional and void. Prima facie, Information Technology Rules 2021 which came into force today are unconstitutional and contrary to basic human values of our society."

However, a statement from Information Technology minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said, "As per all established judicial dictum, no fundamental right, including the right to privacy, is absolute and it is subject to reasonable restrictions. The requirements in the Intermediary Guidelines pertaining to the first originator of information are an example of such a reasonable restriction."

In its petition, WhatsApp has said that identification of the first originator of information in India would potentially put journalists, civil and political activists at risk and said that no other country compels intermediaries to change their systems

▶ **SOCIAL MEDIA** companies such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp previously enjoyed immunity as 'intermediaries' for content posted by any third party user on their platforms

to enable the identification of the first originator of information on end-to-end encrypted messaging services.

"We will continue to engage with the Government of India on practical solutions aimed at keeping people safe, including responding to valid legal requests for the information available to us," WhatsApp spokesperson said.

Social media companies such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp previously enjoyed immunity as "intermediaries" for content posted by any third party user on their platforms.

The new rules announced on February 25 require them to take down any content flagged by the authorities within 36 hours and set up a mechanism to respond to complaints.

Google and Facebook on Tuesday had said that they were ready to comply with the new rules.

IT minister Ravi Shankar

▶ **EARLIER** In April, a free-and-open-source programmer had filed a plea challenging the intermediary rules on the grounds of user privacy concerns before the Kerala HC which had issued a notice to the Centre on the plea

Prasad said on Wednesday that the new norms will not impact normal functioning of the popular free-messaging platform.

The requirement of tracing origin of messages under new IT rules is for prevention and investigation of "very serious offences" related to sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, a statement from his ministry said.

"The government respects the right to privacy and has no intention to violate it when WhatsApp is required to disclose the origin of a particular message. Such requirements are only in case when the message is required for prevention, investigation or punishment of very serious offences related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order; or of incitement to an offence relating to the above or in relation with rape, sexually explicit material or child sexual abuse material," the statement

said. WhatsApp's attempt to portray the Intermediary Guidelines of India as contrary to the right to privacy is "misguided," the government said and added that the last-moment challenge to the intermediary guidelines is an unfortunate attempt to prevent rules from coming into effect.

Separately, the ministry asked Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp to report their status on compliance with the new rules, which kicked in from Wednesday.

Non-compliance with rules would result in these social media companies losing their intermediary status that provides them exemptions and certain immunity from liabilities for any third-party information and data hosted by them. In other words, they could be liable for criminal action in case of complaints.

Earlier in April, a free-and-open-source (FOSS) programmer had filed a petition challenging the intermediary rules on the grounds of user privacy concerns before the Kerala high court which had issued a notice to the Centre on the plea.

As per data cited by the government, India has 53 crore WhatsApp users, 41 crore Facebook subscribers, 21 crore Instagram subscribers and 1.75 crore Twitter account holders.

by unscrupulous people as well as government agencies in the name of building marine drives and undertaking other construction activities, as environmentalists have always claimed, lead to the huge loss of life and property during sea storms.

Cyclone Yaas ravages West Bengal, Odisha as over 20 lakh evacuated

■ **Continued from Page 1** defence official said. Parts of the nearby tourist towns of Mandarmani, Tajpur and Shankarpur were also inundated, with sea water entering hotels and residential areas, besides causing damage to kutcha shops and houses.

Cyclone Yaas, which spared Kolkata unlike last year, was followed by heavy rain in the districts of East Midnapore, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas and Howrah.

In Odisha, seawater inundated several villages

in Bahanaga and Remuna blocks in Balasore district, and Dhamra and Basudevpur in the Bhadrak district, special relief commissioner P.K. Jena said.

Thousands of kutcha houses in coastal villages in Bhadrak, Balasore and Kendrapara districts were washed away in the high tidal surge that accompanied the cyclone's roaring landfall.

Farmers, especially paddy croppers, vegetable and betel-leaf growers, were worst hit as the

squally wind and incessant downpour thrashed the standing crops.

"The agriculture suffered heavy loss due to ingress of saline water which affected animal husbandry, horticulture among others. The actual extent of damage will be ascertained in assessment after 72 hours," Ms Banerjee said.

Odisha had shifted 5.8 lakh people to safer places, and West Bengal 15 lakh ahead of the cyclone, amid concerns over spread of Covid-19 infection at the

temporary shelters.

The cyclonic storm weakened during the afternoon but hollered on its destructive path towards Jharkhand. The state, already on high alert, continued evacuating low-lying areas during the day amid the forecast that it would be hitting by midnight, officials in Ranchi said.

Yaas is the second cyclonic storm to hit India within a week after Tauktae tore into its western coast, causing death and destruction.

Cases dip, but black fungus big worry

■ **Continued from Page 1** in the last 24 hours, with nearly three lakh recoveries. India's recovery rate is now 89.66 per cent, while the weekly positivity rate is 11.45 per cent. Officials said the daily positivity rate was 9.42 per cent and was less than 10 per cent for two consecutive days.

Several cities have started easing restrictions. In Punjab's Ludhiana, shops can now remain open till 3 pm and home delivery by restaurants is allowed till 9 pm, while night curfew timings have been changed in 36 Gujarat cities from 9 pm to 6 am instead of 8 pm to 6 am.

However, the bigger challenge for the government is to tackle the rising cases of black fungus. The Centre's records show 11,717 patients under treatment for black fungus, or mucormycosis. The highest number of such

patients are in Gujarat (2,859), Maharashtra (2,770), Madhya Pradesh (752) and Telangana (744). In Delhi, though the Centre's list shows 119 patients are under treatment for black fungus, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal said the number was actually 620. He said that a shortage of medicines was hampering its treatment.

"Delhi is getting about 400 vials of Amphotericin B needed to treat the fungal infection from the Central quota while 4,000 vials are required daily," said Mr Kejriwal. However, chemicals and fertilisers minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda said 23,680 vials of Amphotericin B were supplied across the country on May 21, and an additional 19,420 vials were allocated on May 24. On Wednesday, 29,250 more Amphotericin B vials

▶ **The Centre** said that India was the second country after the US to cross 20cr cumulative Covid-19 vaccination coverage, adding that 42% of the population above 60 had got the 1st dose of the vaccine

were allocated to all states and Union territories.

The Centre has, meanwhile, said that India was the second country after the United States to cross 20 crore cumulative Covid-19 vaccination coverage, adding that 42 per cent of the population above 60 had got the first dose of the vaccine.

However, a bizarre incident was reported from Siddhartha Nagar on the Uttar Pradesh-Nepal border, where about 20 villagers were given a cocktail of vaccines - Covaxin after Covishield. The vil-

lagers were injected with Covishield in the first week of April and then given Covaxin as their second dose on May 14.

NDTV reported that health department officials said there was no order from any authority to mix vaccines and an inquiry has been ordered into the incident. Officials claimed no one has reported adverse health effects from this mixup of vaccines so far.

"This is definitely an oversight. There are no instructions from the government to administer a cocktail of vaccines. So, it is an oversight. We have ordered an inquiry and have got the report. I have asked for an explanation from those who are guilty. We will take whatever action is possible," Siddhartha Nagar's chief medical officer Sandeep Chaudhary had told NDTV.

THE ASIAN AGE

27 MAY 2021

Protest in time of Covid needs urgent resolution

Thousands of farmers protesting against the three laws that will govern Indian agriculture henceforth on Wednesday observed a “black day”, marking the completion of six months of their agitation at the gates of the national capital. “We are not going anywhere,” they said and insisted that they have no plans to go home unless the government listened to them, repealed the three laws and offered them legal guarantee for minimum support price for their produce. They also want protection from the impact of the proposed Electricity Bill. Farmers in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and several other states also joined the protest, called by the umbrella organisation of farmers unions, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM).

The government has been playing hot and cold on the issue of the repeal of the Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020. It is curious that all the tall figures in the government, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to agriculture minister Narendra Tomar to defence minister Rajnath Singh who tried to mediate with the farmers, have all declared their intention to alleviate the fears of the farming community but they have remained on the streets for the last six months despite 11 rounds of talks!

The farmers have been apprehensive of the intentions of the government when it legally and effectively opens up the Indian farm sector and leaves it for the market forces to control. They cannot be faulted given that the government’s track record of planning and executing its ideas on the ground has been dismal. If its bungling on demonetisation and the introduction of Goods and Services Tax is

not enough, then the government’s vanishing act while the nation fell prey to the second wave of the pandemic Covid-19 would add to the fear in the minds of the farming community.

The Opposition parties have also lent their support to the farmers’ demands. The government must stop being obdurate and immediately resume talks with the SKM, they have stated in a letter to the Prime Minister this week, reminding the government that it will help “protect lakhs of our annadatas becoming victims of the pandemic so that they can continue to produce food to feed the Indian people”.

While the government has been saying it had the welfare of the farming community at its heart, anti-social elements have been working overtime to malign the agitation. They almost succeeded in their mission with the drama played out on the Republic Day but for the dexterous move by the Bharat Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait. A similar attempt was made when a section of the media accused the protesters of stopping oxygen carriers to Delhi. That, too, was exposed in no time.

The government must realise that no agitation can be drawn this long unless there is a genuine cause. The government must resume talks at the earliest and convince the farmers about its earnestness or be convinced by their fears. Letting the annadatas go on an unending agitation does not behove a democratic government.

CJI plays a judicious hand

The fresh approach used in the selection of senior IPS officer S.K. Jaiswal, the current head of the CISF, as the new director of the CBI, commends itself.

In the selection meeting last Monday, the Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana, who is on the three-member panel to choose the CBI chief, besides the PM and the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, proposed that a Supreme Court judgment of March 2019 — that an officer should have at least six months’ service remaining in order to be considered for the position of DGP — be extended to the post of CBI director as well. The panel accepted the view.

It is to be hoped that the criterion will henceforth be adopted in selecting the chief of the IB and the R&AW as well. In the case of the appointment of the CBI Director, the government could well have taken shelter behind the CVC Act if it wished to torpedo the CJI’s well-considered suggestion.

But the notion is *ipso facto* sound. In too many cases, officers are selected for top slots with only days, weeks, or a couple of months remaining before their superannuation. This reinforces the impression of favouritism, the absence of neutrality at the highest levels of governance, and gives rise to the undue play of political factors. The ideals of transparency and fair play are undermined. In the event, the country is frequently deprived of the services of the most meritorious amongst those available.

The CBI chief has an assured two-year tenure. This is to reinforce the idea of autonomy and independence in decision-making in so sensitive a position. It is bad enough that the CBI has widely come to be seen as “a caged parrot” — the colourful description once supplied by the Supreme Court. It is now up to its new leader to disabuse us of this impression.

When the high-level panel accepted the CJI’s suggestion, two high-profile officers, who had less than six months’ service left but were deemed close to the powers-that-be, were taken out of contention. For reasons of good governance, this is just as well.

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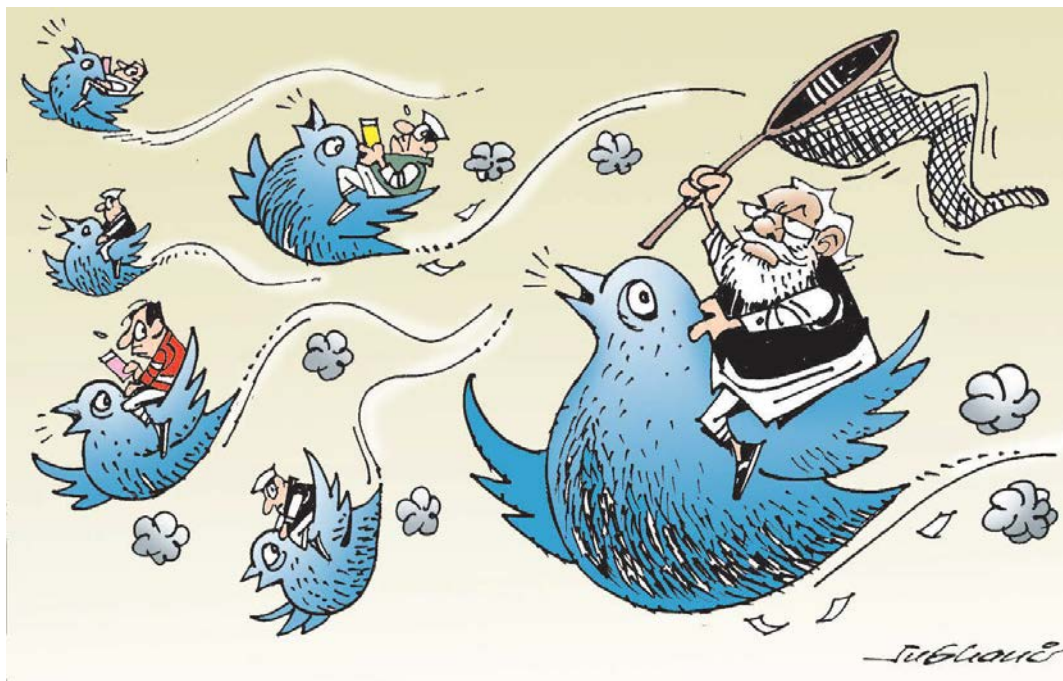
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Subhani



Asymmetry of power & politics of revenge



Shikha Mukerjee

The asymmetry of power, resources and responsibilities between the Centre and the states in India’s federal structure has been so overwhelmingly tilted that it was but natural for the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to assume that it was unchangeable and universally so, allowing him to try to scare and repress a puny *[sic!]* regional player, namely Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamul Congress party, after her splendid third-time victory. He and his party should have known better.

There is the power of the State, expressed through hundreds of articles in the Constitution of India, and then there is the power of the ultimate sovereign, the ordinary woman and man, who votes and delivers a verdict. In a statement that was unusually long and politically sagacious, CPI(M) West Bengal state secretary Surya Kanta Mishra delivered a summary of the attempt to induce turmoil and destabilise the Mamata Banerjee government as “revenge politics,” adding, for good measure, that the “BJP should remember that the people of Bengal rejected their ideology in the Assembly elections”.

That the CBI’s sudden swoop and arrest on May 17 of three Trinamul Congress leaders, two of whom are ministers with responsibilities vital to bringing the Covid-19 surge and the six-week election administrative disarray under control, is vendetta politics is not any doubt in the minds of West Bengal’s voters. The CBI’s raid that netted three TMC leaders and one politician with no party affiliation in a case of bribery and corruption, aka the 2014 Narada sting operation, brought into sharper focus the “washing machine” politics of the BJP. Left out of the list of those arrested

were Mukul Roy and Union home minister Amit Shah’s prize recruit Suwendu Adhikari, prompting the public through the social media to question the exception.

The outcome is a further boost to the Trinamul Congress’ standing with the people and a further erosion of the BJP’s already tarnished credibility. The courtroom drama has further incensed the man/woman on the street, regardless of what the Centre’s lawyers may have argued, backed by the entirely irrelevant social media commentary by governor J.P. Dhankhar.

There is no difference of opinion on what these antics are all about — first the tweets by the governor about the near breakdown of the state’s constitutional machinery that were meant to signal that President’s Rule could be imposed at any moment, overthrowing the just elected government, followed by the raids have been identified by the Congress, CPI(M) and privately by some sane BJP leaders as well. In repeating behaviour similar to cattle raiders to hit back at the Opposition parties, the Narendra Modi government used exactly the same tactics of using or perhaps misusing the power to awe and smear vested in the Centre that had failed; governments led by Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi, Pinarayi Vijayan

In a statement that was unusually long and politically sagacious, CPI(M) West Bengal state secretary Surya Kanta Mishra delivered a summary of the attempt to induce turmoil and destabilise the Mamata Banerjee government as ‘revenge politics’...

The BJP’s wizards have created a bigger problem for themselves out of the West Bengal defeat. The queue of defectors pleading to rejoin the Trinamul Congress is the best indicator. As is the letter from a defeated BJP candidate, Locket Chatterjee...

in Kerala, Hemant Soren in Jharkhand, Uddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra and Ashok Gehlot in Rajasthan were all raided and pushed back and Narendra Modi and his party were the losers.

In the preceding decades the capacity to push back, a complex mix of regional political culture and history that shaped the popular perception, was weaker than it is now. In West Bengal, the capacity to fault the Centre and wrinkle out vendetta politics against the legitimately elected and popular government has been honed over decades, when the Congress used Article 356 to impose President’s Rule against the rickety coalitions of the United Front in the 1960s. Over years of experience of the politics of discrimination and the consequences of the asymmetry of power between the Centre and the state, the average man in the street and especially in the rural areas, is politically well educated.

If these were diversionary tactics as has been argued in some quarters, it was politically foolish. The frantic family members of all those who died because the Modi government had not taken steps to ensure adequate supplies of oxygen to meet the surge that every expert said was coming are not diverted or deceived. The scandalous incompetence of the ruling establishment to handle the crisis is evident in the number of deaths across the country — three lakhs and counting.

If these were tactics to assert the power of the Centre over the state, it was so badly timed that it has been described by BJP insiders as politically suicidal. Neither West

Bengal’s electorate nor voters across the country are impressed by the display of power when the lives of loved ones have been sacrificed to feed the Modi government’s hubris. There is so much traffic on the social media on this that there can be no room to challenge how the people have interpreted these shenanigans.

What is worse is that the judiciary has now been embroiled in what for the BJP is nothing more than a game that has gone wrong. A split decision on granting bail to the arrested leaders says it all. The simple conclusion, regardless of the complex interpretations by the Centre’s lawyers, is that the decision to arrest by the CBI is doubtful in law. No matter how long these hearings last, it is not possible to repair the political damage that the BJP has inflicted on itself in the people’s court.

The BJP’s wizards have created a bigger problem for themselves out of the West Bengal defeat. The queue of defectors pleading to rejoin the Trinamul Congress is the best indicator. As is the letter from a defeated BJP candidate, Locket Chatterjee, who is still an MP, to Amit Shah asking for the Central security detail to be removed, because she cannot be a protected entity while the party’s workers are unsafe.

Violence to settle political scores, before, during and after an election, is always condemnable; but that unfortunately is West Bengal’s culture. Having flaunted its arsenal of Central security forces to enforce peace before and during the elections, by constructing a narrative of locally uncontrollable violence, the BJP overplayed its hand. The post-election sending out of Central probe teams, frantic tweets by the governor or meddling by the Prime Minister are pointless gestures and understood by the public to be so. The verdict is out, and the BJP cannot overturn it, that West Bengal is not impressed by its leaders and categorically rejects its communal and divisive politics.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

CBI’S NEW CHIEF

Senior IPS officer Subodh Kumar Jaiswal pipped director general of Sashastra Seema Bal Ramesh Chandra and special secretary (internal security) V.S.K. Kaumudi in the race for the post of CBI chief. The new CBI head honcho enjoyed long stints in the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing. Mr Jaiswal, a 1985-batch Maharashtra cadre IPS officer, is currently serving as director-general of CISF and will take over the baton of CBI director for a two-year term. He was also part of the team that probed the infamous Telgi stamp paper scam. Here’s wishing him well.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

TRY THE GANGSTER

ONCE AGAIN a known gangster has been in the news for links with wrestler-turned-murder-accused Sushil Kumar. These gangsters can operate even from inside the jail. The big question is why Delhi Police does not approach the courts for fast and quick disposal of cases involving them. Small-time criminals and anti-socials are often seen harassing people by falsely assuming links with their gang. The Delhi high court should take suo motu cognisance of the very slow pace of cases against these gangsters.

Subhash C. Agrawal
New Delhi

POOR STRATEGEM

RAIDS ON TWITTER offices are only going to strengthen the impression that the government is try to intimidate the platform into submission. The BJP makes the best use of all social media platforms and would be deprived of a strong tool to propagate their ideology. How else could the party and leaders each out to millions of their supporters all over the world? Banning it would be like cutting off the nose to spite the face!

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

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

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Did PM pep talk with DMs, others breach protocol?

Protocol, anyone? Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s pep talk to district magistrates on the Covid-19 issue in an online meeting has got some raising the issue of whether it was right for Mr Modi to interact directly with district magistrates and other officials while bypassing their respective ministers. Moreover, the event was telecast live when, just a few weeks ago, the Centre had objected sharply to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for a live feed during Mr Modi’s meeting with chief ministers.

While seemingly there is nothing wrong with the Prime Minister addressing government officials whenever he chooses to, the question is about propriety and federalism. District officials work under elected state governments and chief ministers and report to them as well. Bypassing the state governments indicates thumbing one’s

nose at the federal structure, which is problematic, it is being said.

Interestingly, Mr Modi’s interaction follows a similar meeting organised by Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal who spoke directly with state education secretaries, overlooking the state education ministers. This was one reason why the Tamil Nadu government boycotted the meeting.

‘DOCS’ IN SERVICE DEPUTED TO ASSIST MEDICAL TEAMS

Taking a cue from Gujarat which took this step during the first wave of Covid last year, the Haryana government is using IAS and IPS officers who have a medical degree in the state’s fight against the pandemic.

Sources say that five Haryana cadre IAS officers and three IPS officers who have MBBS degrees have been pulled off their administrative duties and directed to

assist medical teams running Covid hospitals in the state. They have been deputed to additional chief secretary for health Rajeev Arora for the creation and administration of 500-bed hospitals in Panipat and Hisar and other related duties.

The IAS officers are Dr Chander Shekhar Khare, Dr R.S. Dhillon, Dr Sangeeta Tetarwal, Dr Manoj Kumar and Dr Vaishali Sharma. The IPS officers are Dr Dheeraj Kumar, Dr Anshu Singla and Dr Arpit Jain. The state government has also deputed 22 senior IAS officers to oversee Covid preparedness in different districts.

No doubt, this is a temporary arrangement to combat the second wave of the pandemic. However, it also coincides with the growing demand by some medical experts and organisations that the government create a special all-India cadre of medical officers along the

lines of the IAS and IPS, etc. If this stopgap measure is successful, it might prod the Centre to seriously consider the demand for a specialised medical service.

TWO SENIOR COPS LOCK HORNS IN HARYANA

An intra-service battle has erupted in Haryana Police. IGP Y. Puran Kumar, a 2001-batch IPS officer, has filed a petition in the Punjab and Haryana high court against the state police chief Manoj Yadava for alleged “discriminatory behaviour” towards Mr Kumar.

Sources say that Mr Kumar has accused DGP Yadava of “partial attitude, discriminatory treatment and violation of service rules”. He has sought directions from the court to direct the additional chief secretary for home to take immediate decision on his complaints submitted against Mr Yadava.

The spat does not seem to be new.

Mr Kumar has accused Mr Yadava of targeting him since July 2020 “in a vindictive manner” ever since Mr Kumar was posted to Ambala instead of another officer favoured by the DGP. Mr Kumar has also sought directions from the court to restrain Mr Yadava from writing his annual performance appraisal report until the petition is decided.

The feud at the top in the state’s police service has happened at a time when the state is struggling with the Covid epidemic and also dealing with the farmers’ agitation against Central laws, and which shows no sign of disappearing. And when two senior cops take on each other instead of the issues facing Haryana, it can’t bode well for law and order in the state.

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SHORT TAKES

JAPAN BOAT, RUSSIA SHIP COLLIDE, 3 DIE

Tokyo, May 26: A Japanese fishing boat collided with a Russian ship off the northern island of Hokkaido on Wednesday, killing three crew members, Tokyo said.

Japan's coast guard was informed that five crew members from the fishing boat were recovered by a Russian cargo ship, government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told reporters.

"We have been told that three were confirmed dead, while the remaining two suffered non-life threatening injuries," he added.

Japan and Russia are locked in a sovereignty dispute over four islands administered by Moscow, which refers to them as the southern Kurils.

Tokyo claims the islands, which it calls the Northern Territories, and the dispute has prevented the two countries from signing a formal peace treaty since World War II.

Fishing vessels in the area have sometimes been involved in tensions.

U.S. CUTS MEXICO'S AVIATION SAFETY RATING

Washington, May 26: US regulators have downgraded Mexico's aviation safety rating, a move that prevents Mexican airlines from expanding flights to the United States just as travel is recovering from the pandemic.

The Federal Aviation Administration said Tuesday it downgraded Mexico after finding that the country does not meet standards set by a United Nations aviation group.

The downgrade means that US airlines won't be able to sell tickets on flights operated by Mexican airlines, a setback that will mainly hit Delta, which has a partnership with Aeromexico.

The FAA said it will increase scrutiny of Mexican flights to the United States, but the downgrade does not immediately affect current flights.

The FAA decision to lower Mexico from "Category 1" to "Category 2" puts it in a group of countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan and Thailand.

ZUMA PLEADS NOT GUILTY IN GRAFT TRIAL

Pietermaritzburg, May 26: South Africa's former president, Jacob Zuma, pleaded not guilty on Wednesday in a much-postponed corruption case dating back more than two decades.

The 79-year-old faces 16 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering relating to a 1999 purchase of fighter jets, patrol boats and military gear from five European arms firms for 30 billion rand, then the equivalent of nearly \$5 billion.

Zuma — who at the time was president Thabo Mbeki's deputy — is accused of accepting bribes totalling four million rand from one of the firms, French defence giant Thales. Impeccably dressed in a dark blue suit and a red tie, wearing an anti-coronavirus mask, he was repeatedly asked by the judge, Piet Koen, to confirm in person the response of his attorney, given "the magnitude of what we're dealing with." "I plead not guilty," Zuma said without hesitating.

Thales also pleaded not guilty to charges of corruption and money laundering.

PAK JOURNALIST ATTACKED FOR CRITICISING ARMY

Islamabad, May 26: A Pakistani journalist, known for his criticism of the armed forces, has been attacked by unknown assailants outside his home in Islamabad, in another series of assaults on media persons.

Asad Ali Toor, who is also a YouTuber, was tied, gagged, severely beaten outside his residence in the upscale F-10 sector late on Tuesday night, according to police. A video showed three men briskly walking away from the apartment building after thrashing Toor who was staggering and trying to recollect himself.

Another video showed Toor moving in a hospital with his shirt soaked in blood at his elbow but apparently out of danger.

Talking about the details of the incident in the clip, Toor said the attackers had asked him about the source of his funds. He also revealed in a separate video that he was being threatened and was informed by a "well-wisher" of some attack after Eid. Last year, a case was registered against Toor, a known critic of the armed forces. — PTI

EU asks for big penalties against AZ

European Commission begins legal action as pharmaceutical company failed to give vax

Ex-top aide: Boris thought Covid 1st wave 'scare story'



Boris Johnson

London, May 26: Dominic Cummings, the former top aide of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, on Wednesday said that the government had fallen "disastrously short" in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic's first wave in early last year as the premier believed it was just a "scare story" at that time. In a series of explosive claims during his evidence before a joint House of Commons hearing of the Science and Technology and Health Committees, Johnson's former Chief Strategy Adviser before an unceremonious exit last year declared that the officials in charge of the crisis were "out of their depth" and apologised to the families of those who died in the early days of the pandemic.

"At that stage, the Prime Minister believed it was a scare story, a new swine flu... I certainly told him it wasn't," Cummings told cross-party MPs during the evidence hearing, in reference to the period before the UK went into a complete "stay at home" lockdown to control the spread of the deadly virus on March 23, 2020.

"We have the Prime Minister chairing Cobra [Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms] meetings and he just tells everyone 'it is swine flu, don't worry about it. I'm going to get Chris Whitty to inject me live on TV with Coronavirus so everyone realises it's nothing to be frightened of. That would not actually help serious planning,'" he said.

Taking on some of the blame himself as one of the senior officials at Downing Street at the time, Cummings defended his stance as he did not feel equipped with all the facts and expertise to pull a so-called "emergency panic button" to push harder for a complete lockdown earlier.

"The truth is, senior ministers, officials, advisers like me fell disastrously short of standards required by the public," he said. "When the public needed us the most, the government failed. I want to apologise to all those families who had people that died... In retrospect, it's completely obvious that many institutions failed," he said.

He also made a withering attack on UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock and claimed that he should have been sacked for 15-20 things including "for lying" to people, an allegation for which he was asked by the parliamentary committee chairs to submit further written evidence. During the questioning, Cummings was asked about the government's preparations for a pandemic in general and whether it was the intention of ministers to allow the virus to spread until there was so-called herd immunity.

He told the MPs the original plan had been for limited intervention, with the hope of achieving herd immunity, but that was abandoned when it became clear the scale of the death toll that would result. In reference to delayed lockdown, he claimed that by mid-March there was still "pushback in the system" against telling people to stay at home. — PTI

UK vax plan to cover over-30s

London, May 26: The UK's health service on Wednesday extended its Covid-19 age-based vaccination programme to the next cohort to cover everyone aged 30 and over.

The National Health Service (NHS) said 1 million more people aged 30 and 31 will be invited by text over the coming days, leaving only adults between 18 and 29 yet to get the nod to come forward for their first doses. It is the latest in a series of expansions this month opening up the vaccinations to people in their thirties, who are to be offered an alternative to the Oxford/AstraZeneca jabs — either Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna — following medical advice related to rare blood clot concerns for lower age groups.

"Our vaccination programme is moving at such a phenomenal pace and I am delighted that less than six months after

Margaret Keenan received the first authorised jab in the world, we are now able to open the offer to everyone in their thirties and over," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

"The vaccine is our way out of this pandemic and recent data has shown the life-saving protection a second dose of the jab can give, especially against the new variant (B.1.617.2 variant first discovered in India)," he said.

On the advice of the government and Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), people aged 50 and over and the clinically vulnerable are having their second doses brought forward to counter the spread of the B.1.617.2 variant.

The NHS said it has now delivered almost 32 million first doses of the jab, and well over 19 million of adults have had both doses. — PTI



A photograph taken on Wednesday shows placards stuck on buses windscreens reading "SOS coach operator in danger", "Who's our minister", "Help" and "Silence we are sinking" during a slow-down operation in front of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, in Paris to protest against the lack of help by the French government concerning the professional situation of bus drivers due to the Covid-19 pandemic. — AFP

UK study finds long-term lung damage after Covid

London, May 26: Researchers in the UK have identified persistent damage to lungs in Covid-19 patients at least three months after they were discharged from hospital, and in some cases the duration is even longer.

The study, conducted by Sheffield and Oxford researchers using a cutting-edge method of imaging, said the damage was not detected by routine CT

scans and clinical tests, and the patients would be consequently normally be told their lungs are normal. Early research by the team has shown that patients who have not been hospitalised with Covid-19 but who are experiencing long-term breathlessness may have similar damage in their lungs, and a larger study is needed to confirm this, a release by the Sheffield University said

on Wednesday.

In a paper published in Radiology, the world's leading radiology journal, the researchers from the University of Sheffield and the University of Oxford said that hyperpolarised xenon MRI (XeMRI) scans had found abnormalities in the lungs of some Covid-19 patients more than three months — and in some cases, nine months. — PTI

TWO INDIANS OF FIRE-HIT SHIP TEST VIRUS +VE

Colombo, May 26: Two Indian crew members, who were rescued from a container ship that caught fire off the coast of Sri Lanka last week, have tested positive for Covid-19, according to a media report on Wednesday.

All 25 crew members, including five Indians, of the container ship, MV 'X-PRESS PEARL', were rescued on Tuesday after a 'fire alarm' dispatch was sent.

Of the five Indians, two of them sustained injuries during the rescue operation and were hospitalised at the Colombo National Hospital. The two Indians tested positive with Covid-19 after undergoing a rapid antigen test (RAT) at a private hospital, reported newspaper *Daily Mirror* on Wednesday.

The Indians have not yet been identified. According to Johns Hopkins University, the Coronavirus has claimed 1,269 lives in Sri Lanka so far, along with 169,900 confirmed cases. Sri Lanka has received 500,000 doses of Sinopharm Coronavirus vaccine donated by China. — PTI

WHO asked to review Italy report, whistleblower case

Rome, May 26: Whistleblower protection groups urged the World Health Organisation on Wednesday to launch an independent review into the case of an Italian researcher who reported being pressured to falsify data in a now-spiked WHO report into Italy's Coronavirus response.

The groups, including Transparency International, Whistleblowing International Network and some 30 other public health

and anti-corruption groups, sent an open letter to the president of the World Health Assembly.

The assembly, WHO's highest decision-making body, is made up of all WHO member states and is meeting this week.

In the letter, the signatories called for the UN agency to commit to reforming its whistleblowing protection policy. They said the Italian researcher, Dr. Francesco Zambon, had suffered retaliatory

treatment for having reported the incident within WHO's internal ethics system.

Zambon resigned in March, saying he had been isolated and marginalised after he complained internally, and then publicly, about the scandal.

Zambon has said he was pressured by a then-assistant director general, Dr. Ranieri Guerra, to falsify data about Italy's preparedness going into the pandemic. — AP

Taiwan: China curbing vax deal

Taipei, May 26: Taiwan on Wednesday accused China of hindering its efforts to obtain Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines from Germany as it struggles with a sudden spike in Coronavirus cases and a slow inoculation campaign. For much of the Coronavirus pandemic Taiwan has had one of the world's best responses.

But a sudden outbreak and trouble securing enough vaccines has taken the shine off that fight. On Wednesday President Tsai Ing-wen explicitly accused China of being a stumbling block to getting Pfizer shots.

"We had almost completed the contract-signing with the German manufacturer at one point but it has been delayed till now because China has interfered," Tsai said in a post on her Facebook page.

Back in February Taiwanese officials previously hinted China was causing difficulties, but officials steered clear of explicitly naming Beijing.

Authoritarian China regards democratic and self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and works to keep the island diplomatically isolated.

Taiwan is currently locked out of the World Health Organisation and its annual health summit which is meeting this week. Tsai's administration has not detailed why it believes China has been a stumbling block and Beijing has previously

denied putting up roadblocks. Pfizer-BioNTech's distributor for the Greater China region — which includes Taiwan — is Fosun Pharma based in Shanghai. Taipei has insisted it only wants to deal with the German firm, something which Beijing would likely balk at.

"Only by purchasing (the vaccines) from the original manufacturer can we obtain direct guarantee in quality and safety to avoid legal and political double risks," Tsai said.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian on Wednesday said "Taiwan's access to vaccines from the mainland is smooth," without elaborating further. He also included a swipe at Tsai.

"We don't recognise this so-called President, she is only the leader of a region of China," he added.

BioNTech's German office has previously said it still intends to provide Taiwan with vaccine doses and that discussions were ongoing. Fosun has also said it is willing to supply doses. But still no jabs have materialised.

Taiwan population 23.5 million — has so far only received some 726,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine via the Covax global sharing scheme and from the manufacturer itself. It has pre-order deals with AstraZeneca, Moderna, the Covax scheme and local vaccine makers to get some 30 million doses. — AFP

BETTER | ACCESS

Brussels also plans to present by the year end a draft regulation on political advertising

EU wants more from Big Tech against disinformation

Brussels, May 26: The EU on Wednesday tasked tech giants such as Facebook, YouTube and TikTok to do more against disinformation and provide much better access to their algorithms as well as beef up fact-checking.

The proposal is the EU's effort to strengthen its existing code of conduct against disinformation, which was launched in 2018 after revelations that platforms had facilitated and amplified false information in the ramp up to the Brexit vote and elec-

tions in the US in 2016.

It was signed by Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and in June 2020 by TikTok, as well as players in the advertising sector.

In the wake of the Covid pandemic, the EU executive is now asking the signatories to go even further in their commitments, which are non-binding and voluntary, at least for now.

The pressure on the companies to deliver is great, given that the EU is also hammering out its Digital Services Act (DSA) that will give Europe power to

slap penalties on Facebook and others when they fail to demonstrate strong action against disinformation. European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova said the stricter and more detailed code of conduct was necessary to better root out "systemic risks" on platforms.

Jourova said that it was time for big tech companies "to stop policing themselves alone and stop allowing to make money on disinformation".

"After the DSA will come into force, this code of

practice will become semi-obligatory," she warned. Among the many proposals, the EU is calling for messaging platforms such as Facebook's WhatsApp to also be included, given the vast disinformation campaigns seen in India and elsewhere.

The Commission is also asking platforms for regular reports with clear benchmarks to assess the measures put in place.

In addition, the EU executive is seeking to create a designated task force composed of the code's signatories, representatives of the EU diplomatic service and media regulators from the member states.

The proposals will be discussed with the signatories, who will have to submit a first version of the revised code late this year so that it can be opera-

tional by the beginning of 2022.

Marisa Jimenez Martin, Facebook's director of EU Affairs, said that "the reality is that we think the code works".

"It just needs to be now strengthened and we will work with the other stakeholders to make that happen in the next months," she told reporters.

The code is one of the many EU workstreams to limit the reach of Big Tech. The DSA, along with a companion law, the Digital Markets Act, are

currently under negotiation at the European Parliament and among the 27 member states in wrangling that could take at least another year.

Those proposals, when approved, will give the EU unprecedented powers on defining how Big Tech can operate and do business in Europe. Brussels also plans to present by the end of the year a draft regulation on political advertising and the targeting of users based on their personal data. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,017.52	0.75
Nifty 50	15,301.50	0.61
\$&P 500*	4,201.23	0.31
Dollar (₹)	72.78	0.26
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.19	0.00
Euro (₹)	89.19	0.00
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,589.527	1.08
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.59	-0.09
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.559	-0.005

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Mondelez to buy European snack maker Chipita

Mondelez International Inc, the packaged-food giant known for Oreo cookies and Ritz Crackers, agreed to buy European snack maker Chipita SA for about \$2 billion. Chipita had about \$580 million in revenue in 2020 and has "a proven track record of consistent growth from its portfolio of croissant and baked snack brands," Mondelez said. The European firm produces in 13 plants and its goods are delivered to over 50 countries.

PharmEasy completes Medlife acquisition



Online pharmacy PharmEasy said it has completed the acquisition of Medlife to become India's largest healthcare delivery platform. All the users of Medlife would be migrated to PharmEasy. "This acquisition significantly strengthens our position in the healthcare industry, and further helps us in providing quality healthcare to a greater number of households," PharmEasy co-founder Dharmil Sheth said.

Cadila, Taiwan's TLC in pact for black fungus drug

Zydus Cadila and Taiwan-based specialty pharmaceutical firm TLC said they have signed a pact to market liposomal amphotericin B, a critical drug to treat mucormycosis (black fungus), in India. The companies have announced signing of an agreement to commercialise AmphoTLC (amphotericin B liposome for injection 50mg) in India, Zydus Cadila said. TLC will produce and supply AmphoTLC to Zydus.

REIT provides O2, BiPaP machines in Pune, Delhi

Embassy REIT, India's first listed Real Estate Investment Trust and the largest in Asia by area, has sponsored oxygen concentrators and BiPaP machines in Pune and Delhi to ease the burden placed on the existing healthcare infrastructure. Embassy REIT has donated 10 oxygen concentrators with a capacity of 10 lpm each for two hospitals in Pune and 15 BiPaP ventilator machines to a government hospital in Delhi.

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■ MGM's 4,000-title film library to strengthen streaming Amazon to buy MGM Studios for \$8.45 bn

KELLY GILBLOM & SPENCER SOPER MAY 26

Amazon.com Inc agreed to buy the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer movie company for \$8.45 billion, a bet that a nearly century-old Hollywood icon can feed an insatiable demand for streaming content.

The proliferation of streaming services, including newer arrivals such as HBO Max and Disney+, has put pressure on Amazon to acquire more programming. Chief executive officer Jeff Bezos has made no secret of his desire for movie moguldom, and MGM's vast backlog provides an abundance of streaming material, not to mention an opportunity to mine the iconic James Bond and Rocky franchises for new films and television shows.

Moreover, with retail rivals like Walmart Inc rolling out more sophisticated online stores, Amazon must work even harder to keep its 200 million Prime subscribers loyal.

"This jumpstarts them by 50 years," said Michael Pachter, an analyst with Wedbush Securities. "That's really what it comes down to. They weren't going to be able to produce enough content to ever get close to Netflix."

Pachter said that Amazon's studios produce a few hundred hours worth of television shows and movies a year. MGM adds a back catalogue of 25,000 hours that Amazon could



divvy up between its Prime Video offering, or its free-to-stream, ad-supported IMDb TV.

The takeover is Amazon's biggest acquisition since it agreed to buy Whole Foods in 2017 for \$13.7 billion but follows investments of about \$11 billion on content for its streaming video and music services last year alone. Mike Hopkins, senior vice president of Prime Video and Amazon Studios, in a statement pointed to MGM's "deep catalogue" as justification for the purchase.

MGM has been seen as a takeover target for years, but was never able to close a sale before. The company made a fresh push last year, when it reportedly hired advisers to seek offers.

For MGM, the studio that brought James Bond and Scarlett O'Hara to the big screen, the deal provides a finale to a bumpy era of hedge-fund ownership that began with a bankruptcy over a decade ago. MGM's lead shareholder is the Anchorage Capital Group LLC, which became an owner with three other investors as part of a 2010 bankruptcy agreement

that erased about \$4 billion in debt.

MGM's Ebitda rose 48 per cent to about \$307 million last year, lifted by profit from its 4,000-title film library. But with a lack of new releases, sales declined 3 per cent to \$1.5 billion.

Under Anchorage Capital the studio aspired to its old glory—a legacy that includes "Gone With the Wind," the top film of all time in ticket sales, and the biblical classic "Ben-Hur," which shares the record for most Academy Awards at 11.

The new owners hired a moviemaker CEO in Gary Barber, a Hollywood heavyweight known for films such as "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" and "Ace Ventura: Pet Detective." He oversaw a new James Bond movie, "Skyfall," that generated more than \$1 billion in ticket sales—the studio's biggest-grossing film ever—and partnered with Warner Bros on the blockbuster "Hobbit" films.

MGM also branched out into television. The studio took control of the premi-

um cable network Epix, and acquired the TV production company owned by famed producer Mark Burnett, known for creating "Survivor" and "The Apprentice." The studio also created the critically acclaimed series "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Fargo," adding to a lucrative library.

Hedge funds rarely hang on to such investments for more than a few years, and observers long thought that Barber was prepping the studio for sale. In 2017, reports suggested that MGM was in discussions with a Chinese company, though no deal materialised.

MGM traces its roots back to the 1920s merger of Marcus Loew's Metro films with a film company run by Hollywood legend Louis B. Mayer. The studio, while making great pictures like "Dr. Zhivago" and "2001: A Space Odyssey," drifted in and out of financial distress in the second half of the 20th century. Over the decades it was owned by Time Inc, CNN founder Ted Turner and more than once by the late billionaire Kirk Kerkorian.

Turner kept much of MGM's library, which is now owned by AT&T Inc's WarnerMedia, soon to be part of Discovery Inc.

"I am very proud that MGM's Lion, which has long evoked the Golden Age of Hollywood, will continue its storied history," said Anchorage CEO Kevin Ulrich, who is chairman of the board of MGM.

—Bloomberg

GST: Centre has to borrow ₹1.58L cr more to pay states

VRISHTI BENIWAL & SUBHADIP SIRCAR MAY 26

India may need to borrow more for a second straight year to compensate its states for their revenue loss due to a shortfall in a nationwide consumption tax collection, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

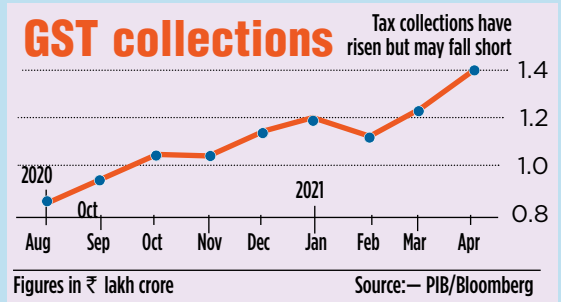
The additional borrowing requirement is estimated at Rs 1.58 lakh crore (\$21.7 billion) in the fiscal year started April 1, said the people, who asked not to be identified citing rules. A panel on goods and services tax will meet on Friday to discuss compensation to states, among other issues.

While the amount to be paid to states works out to Rs 2.7 lakh crore, the government is expected to muster only Rs 1.1 lakh crore, the people said.

Calls made to a finance ministry spokesperson weren't immediately answered.

The amount is part of a compensation that the central government agreed to pay states for any revenue loss on account of introduction of a nationwide GST.

But the economic downturn caused by the world's worst coronavirus outbreak risks hurting tax collection, possibly forcing the administration to consider additional borrow-



Figures in ₹ lakh crore

Source:— PIB/Bloomberg

ings. Should the borrowing materialise, it will be in addition to the over Rs 12 lakh crore budgeted this year to bridge the fiscal deficit gap. The RBI, has so far, been able to keep yields under check through its various moves such as 'Operation Twist' and the announcement of a Rs 1-lakh crore bond purchase acquisition programme for the current quarter. The benchmark 10-year yield is down 20 basis points to 5.97 per cent this fiscal year.

Any additional borrowing will replicate an arrangement followed last financial year, where New Delhi borrowed Rs 1.1 lakh crore on behalf of the states and passed them on as back-to-back loans, the people said. The decision on the extra borrowing, the amount and the timing would be made after consulting with the Reserve Bank of India and states, the people said.

While the payment to

states was initially supposed to be for five years starting 2017, the central government last year extended its scope beyond 2022 to meet the revenue gap caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Government spending is key to sustaining the recovery of Asia's third-largest economy from a rare recession last year.

Although GST receipts have come in at more than Rs 1 lakh crore each month for seven successive months as of April, there are worries that it will slow amid regional lockdowns implemented by most states to curb the deadly second wave of the pandemic. The economic costs of the recent surge in cases are rising rapidly with economic losses estimated at \$74 billion, all of it contained in the second quarter, Barclays Plc said in a report to clients on Tuesday. The bank lowered its economic growth forecast by 80 basis points to 9.2% for the fiscal year.

—Bloomberg

Kia offers 30-day return on Carnival for unhappy buyers

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 26

Kia India, the fastest selling Korean automaker, on Wednesday said it has rolled out a scheme under which buyers of its premium MPV Carnival can return the vehicle, if they were not satisfied with it, within the first 30 days of buying it and get 95 per cent of the total cost refunded.

Under the 'Satisfaction Guarantee Scheme' offer, private owners of the Carnival luxurious car can return the vehicle if they are not pleased with



the car within the first 30 days of its purchase.

This one-of-a-kind initiative allows buyers to avail of this new offer valid on all variants of the Carnival.

"It will cover 95 per cent of the ex-showroom cost and overhead cost incurred for the registration and finances, etc. of the vehicle," the company

said in a statement.

Available in five trims, the 7-seater Carnival is priced in the Rs 24.95 lakh-Rs 33.95 lakh range at Delhi showroom.

Customers need to ensure that the vehicle has not clocked more than 1,500 kilometres from the purchase date and is completely free of damages, failures, pending claims, to be able to return the car.

Additionally, the owner's agreement for the transfer of the vehicle, including all documentation and charges, etc in the name of a person will be obligatory, the automaker said.

Xiaomi gains from Huawei's exit

May 26: Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi Corp reported first-quarter revenue growth of 55 per cent on Wednesday, exceeding analyst expectations as it nabbed market share from one-time sector leader Huawei Technologies.

Revenue rose to 76.88 billion yuan (\$12 billion) in the quarter ended March 31, from 49.70 billion yuan a year earlier. Analysts

expected revenue of 74.5 billion yen, according to Refinitiv data.

Adjusted net profit rose to 6.1 billion yuan, versus market estimates of 3.97 billion yuan.

Xiaomi's share of the smartphone market in China increased 75 per cent year-on-year in the quarter, according to research firm Canalis, as Huawei retreated from the

market following US trade restrictions that crimped its ability to source key handset components.

Revenue from smartphone sales jumped 69.8 per cent year-over-year to 51.5 billion yuan.

In India, one of its key overseas markets, the company will invest more in online sales as the government imposes strict lockdowns.

—Reuters

GST penalty mop-up crosses ₹1,600 cr

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 26

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has collected a total of Rs 1,612 crore as net penalties under GST since its introduction in July 2017. Experts want the CBIC to consider waiver of the penalties for violations, which were resultant of unintentional delays and breaches.

The CBIC collected net penalties of Rs 102 crore for the nine months of financial year 2017-18 since it was introduced in July. For the full year of 2018-19, it collected Rs 480 crore and in 2019-20, the net penalties went up to Rs 570 crore. The net penalties for the 11-month period of 2020-21 till February stood at Rs 460 crore, as per CBIC data, provided as a reply to an RTI filed by a chartered accountant Ram Bajaj from Rajasthan.

Experts find that some of the penalties could have been due to unintentional delays as GST was newly introduced in the country and there were several teething troubles when implemented. Some of the anomalies were corrected

during the subsequent years.

"These are still early stages of the GST law and in the last few years there have been several changes in the law, procedures and compliance timelines. Given the same, some of the penalties may have arisen due to unintentional delays or breaches and in such cases, the government may consider being lenient and waving penalties," said Abhishek Jain, tax partner, EY.

Contrary rulings by GST authorities in different states continue to be a major issue. Experts have been asking for the constitution of a Central Advance Ruling Authority to avoid confusion created by such rulings.

In a recent case related to the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Maharashtra Authority of Advance Rulings held that the liaison office needs to discharge GST on the supplies undertaken by them. The AAR also ruled that the office should obtain GST registration. Earlier, the Advance Ruling Authorities of Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu had held that the liaison office was outside the GST purview.

NO TOLL IF QUEUE IS LONGER THAN 100 METRES



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 26

Vehicles will be allowed to move without paying toll if the queue is longer than 100 metres from the toll booth. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has issued guidelines to ensure seamless flow of traffic at the toll plazas by not allowing vehicles to queue up more than 100 metres.

A yellow line at a distance of 100 meters from toll booth will be marked in each toll lane. This is to inculcate further sense of accountability in toll plaza operators, the NHAI said in a statement.

Waiting time at toll plazas also should not be more than 10 seconds even during peak hours.

The NHAI, said it has transitioned to 100 per cent cashless tolling from mid-February 2021. The overall FasTag penetration in NHAI toll plazas has reached 96 per cent, with many having 99 per cent penetration.

The NHAI said as social distancing has become the new norm, commuters are increasingly looking at FasTag as a toll payment option as it nullifies the chances of any human contact between the drivers and the toll operators.

The constant growth and adoption of FasTag by the highway users is encouraging and has helped in bringing more efficiency in toll operations, it added.

"It has been emphasised to have a new design, and construct the upcoming toll plazas as per traffic projections for the next 10 years to have an efficient toll collection system," it said.

SHORT TAKES

Milkha is stable, wife catches Covid

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh "continues to be stable on oxygen support" and he was on Wednesday shifted out of the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital where he is being treated for Covid pneumonia, indicating signs of improvement in his condition. However, his 82-year-old wife Nirmal Kaur, a former India volleyball captain, was on Wednesday admitted to the same hospital in Mohali after testing positive for Covid pneumonia.

"Mr Milkha Singh continues to be stable on oxygen support. However, he is weak and we are trying to persuade him to increase his food intake," Fortis hospital in Mohali said in an update. "Today, we have stepped him down from the ICU to a room which he is sharing with his wife who was admitted earlier in the day with Covid pneumonia," he added. — PTI

Former cricketer Ranjita no more

Mumbai: Former Mumbai player and scorer Ranjita Rane died here on Wednesday after battling cancer.

She was in her mid 40s. "Deeply saddened to inform that ex-Mumbai cricketer and scorer Ranjita Rane has passed away," a senior Mumbai Cricket Association official said. A well-known MCA scorer, who knew Rane, said she was admitted to a city hospital for the past fortnight. Rane, an all-rounder, who bowled medium pace, played 44 first class matches for Mumbai from 1995 to 2003. Another cricketer Prabhuhai Parmar, who had represented Saurashtra in domestic cricket, died due to Covid-19 on Tuesday. The 76-year-old had played four Ranji Trophy matches for Saurashtra in 1968-69. — PTI

Ankita out of French Open race

Paris: Ankita Raina's yet another attempt to qualify for the singles main draw of a Grand Slam failed as she bowed out of the French Open Qualifiers with a second-round defeat, here on Wednesday. Ankita, up against higher-ranked German Greet Minnen, could win only two games in the entire match that lasted one hour and 21 minutes. The 125th ranked Indian could convert only one of the three break points and eventually lost 2-6, 0-6. It was Ankita's seventh attempt to crack the singles main draw of a major. She had reached the final round of the Australian Open qualifying event early this year, falling at the final stage. Later Wednesday, Ramkumar Ramanathan and Sumit Nagal will take court for their respective men's singles second round matches. — PTI

Eriksen, Kasper to lead Denmark

Copenhagen: Denmark coach Kasper Hjulmand named his squad featuring Inter Milan midfielder Christian Eriksen and Leicester goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel for Euro 2020 on Tuesday.

The 1992 European champions face Finland, Belgium and Russia in Copenhagen in the opening phase of the delayed competition. "The first objective is to qualify from the group stage in the best shape possible to continue our mission," said Hjulmand. "Playing in front of our fans will enable us to tackle the knock-out stage well armed and from then on anything can happen. "We can beat the best, but we can also lose against them," he added. — AFP

Davis, James pair too hot for Sun

Los Angeles: Anthony Davis and LeBron James delivered down the stretch on Tuesday as the NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers bounced back to beat the Phoenix Suns 109-102 and knot their playoff series at one game apiece. Davis had said he blamed himself after scoring just 13 points in the Lakers' 99-90 defeat in game one of the best-of-seven Western Conference first-round series. He wasn't about to let it happen again. — AFP

TWEAKING TWINS

Kiwis wary of spinners Ashwin and Jadeja ahead of WTC final

New Delhi, May 26: India's pace attack is on par with New Zealand's world class swing operators but the Black Caps batsman Henry Nicholls is more wary of the threat spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja may pose during the upcoming World Test Championship final. India and New Zealand

will fight it out for the inaugural title at Southampton's Ageas Bowl, one of those rare English tracks known to aid the slow bowlers for a considerable period in Test matches.

"India have a very good seam attack and also have the experienced spinners like Ashwin and Jadeja. They have been consistent

in all parts of the world (of late) and bring quality (to attack)," Nicholls said.

If there are no injury concerns, the Indian pace troika that is expected to be in the playing XI for the clash starting June 18 would be Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami.

"Mohammed Shami along with Jasprit

Bumrah and Ishant Sharma have proven their quality over the years which is similar to our seamers (Trent Boult, Tim Southee and Neil Wagner) on whom we really pride ourselves on.

"So if you are facing that kind of a line-up, it's an exciting challenge and as a group we are expecting it to be tough but also

looking forward to the challenge," Nicholls added.

His teammate Devon Conway's strategy of pouring dry kitty litter on the track in order to create rough was backed by Nicholls as they are playing at a "neutral venue" which is known to assist the spinners.

— PTI

18,000 FANS ALLOWED FOR ENGLAND-N. ZEALAND TEST

London, May 26: Around 18,000 cricket fans will be allowed to attend each day of next month's second Test between England and New Zealand at Edgbaston, which will be the first of the government's next wave of pilot events.

Under current guidelines, smaller outdoor venues are only permitted to be at 25 per cent capacity, but the stadium will be 70 per cent full for the second Test against the Black

Caps, which takes place between June 10 and 14.

To gain entry to the ground in Birmingham, each ticket holder will need to present a negative lateral flow test, taken within the preceding 24 hours. The first Test at Lord's, which starts on June 2, will be played in line with existing regulations, meaning a capacity of around 25 per cent, or around 7,000 people.

— AFP

Kohli, Rohit static in ODI rankings

Dubai, May 26: India skipper Virat Kohli and his deputy Rohit Sharma held on to their second and third positions respectively in the batting chart, while pacer Jasprit Bumrah remained static at number five in the bowling list of the latest ICC ODI player rankings issued on Wednesday.

Kohli and Sharma were sitting pretty with 857 and 825 points respectively in the batting list headed by Pakistan's Babar Azam with 865 points.

In bowling, Bumrah was at the 5th position with 690 points, while New Zealand's Trent Boult was atop with 737 points, followed by Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan (725), Afghanistan's Mujeeb Ur Rahman (708) and Kiwi pacer Matt Henry (691).

Bangladesh off-spinner Hasan became only the third bowler from his country to be ranked among the top two after a fine showing in the first two matches of their ongoing World Cup Super League series

● **Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma were sitting pretty with 857 and 825 points respectively in the batting list headed by Pakistan's Babar Azam with 865 points.**

against Sri Lanka.

Hasan has advanced three places to reach the second position after returning figures of four for 30 and three for 28 bowling with the new ball.

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan had grabbed the number one position in 2009 for the first time, while left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak is the other Bangladesh bowler to have been in the top two, reaching the second position in 2010.

Left-arm fast bowler Mustafizur Rehman is another one from Bangladesh to move up the list, his hauls of three for 34 and three for 16 lifting him eight places to ninth position.

— PTI

MUSHFIQUR TON HELPS BANGLA CLAIM SERIES

Dhaka, May 26: Mushfiqur Rahim hit a gritty 125 to set up Bangladesh's maiden series victory over Sri Lanka across all formats with an emphatic 103-run win in the rain-hit second one-day international on Tuesday.

The wicketkeeper-batsman lifted Bangladesh from a precarious 74-4 to 246 all out after they elected to bat first at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka.

Sri Lanka managed just 141-9 in the tourists' revised chase of 245 in 40 overs as Bangladesh took an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Mustafizur Rahman claimed three wickets each while Shakib Al Hasan took two key scalps. Mushfiqur remained the hero as he recorded his eighth ODI century and put on a crucial 87-run fifth-wicket stand with Mahmudullah Riyad, who made 41.

Brief scores: Bangladesh 246 in 48.1 overs (Mushfiqur Rahim 125, Mahmudullah 41; D. Chameera 3/44) bt Sri Lanka 141/9 in 40 overs (M. Rahman 3/16).

Boxers poised for a rich medal haul

Dubai, May 26: Defending champion Amit Panghal (52kg) and the redoubtable Vikas Krishan (69kg) were among three Indian boxers who advanced to the semifinals on Wednesday as the country assured itself of an unparalleled medal haul of 15 in the Asian Boxing Championships here.

Debutant Varinder Singh (60kg) was the other Indian to make the last four.

Panghal secured a second successive medal after overcoming a stiff challenge from Mongolia's Kharkhuu Enkhmandakh in the last-eight stage, while Varinder defeated Filipino Jere Samuel Dela Cruz 5-0.

India's previous best medal haul was 13 that was achieved in 2019.

The World Championship silver-winning Panghal won 3-2 in a high-octane contest in which he overcame a sluggish start and used his combination punches to telling effect in the last two rounds.

After being somewhat bested in the opening three minutes, the top-seeded Army man's trademark pace came to fore in the second round as he cleverly dodged his rival's aggressive attempts at connecting.

— PTI



DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION & PUBLIC RELATIONS, PUNJAB

"On the 57th Death Anniversary of India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Punjab Government rededicates itself to harnessing the power of modern science and medical institutions, whose foundations he had laid, to free our people from the pain and suffering caused by the deadly Covid pandemic."

Capt. Amarinder Singh
Chief Minister, Punjab