



Need a movement to strengthen Panchayati Raj: Kamal Haasan

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Centre's negligence has led to COVID-19 crisis, says Mamata Banerjee

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Rahul, Shami and Bishnoi star in PBKS' win over MI

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NEARBY



Capital sees record 348 deaths, over 24K cases

NEW DELHI

Delhi logged 24,331 fresh COVID-19 cases and a record single-day jump of 348 deaths, pushing the fatality count to 13,541 on Friday. The test positivity rate has reached 32.43% and there are now 92,029 active cases in the national capital.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3



65 on Kumbh duty infected

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

RISHIKESH (UTTARAKHAND)
Sixty-five healthcare personnel, including doctors, deployed on Kumbh duty have tested positive for COVID-19, officials said on Friday. All of them have been put under isolation.

A total of 751 healthcare personnel – 336 doctors and 415 nurses and paramedics – had been deployed in the Kumbh Mela area after being vaccinated against the virus.

Centre allots 5 kg of grains free to poor

PM calls upon States to take a unified approach in dealing with resource scarcities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
The Union government on Friday announced that 5 kg of foodgrains would be provided to 80 crore beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) in May and June as many States were undergoing curfews and the high rates of COVID-19 infections had led to slowdown in economic activity.

The announcement came as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a meeting with the Chief Ministers, especially of the States with a high case burden. The outlay for the free grain programme has been pegged at ₹26,000 crore.

Mr. Modi assured the States that all resources, including those of the Railways and the Indian Air Force, were being deployed to reach oxygen to different corners of the country. He asked the States to strictly

15 COVID-19 patients die as fire engulfs ICU of Virar hospital

Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray orders probe; Opposition demands fire audit

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

Fifteen COVID-19 patients were killed in a fire that engulfed the intensive care unit of Vijay Vallabh Hospital in Virar, 50 km from Mumbai, early on Friday.

The tragedy comes less than a month after a fire in a hospital at Bhandup in Mumbai led to the death of nine COVID-19 patients.

Palghar district officials said 17 patients were in the ICU on the second floor of the four-storey hospital when the fire broke out around 3 a.m.

Three fire tenders reached the spot immediately, and the fire was doused by 5.20 a.m.

"While 15 patients died in this tragedy, the remaining patients have been moved to other hospitals," an official said. Some were sent to the Dahisar COVID Centre, run by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, and others to hospitals in Virar.

Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had ordered a detailed investigation to ascertain if the hospital had followed all safety norms.

Amid the surge in number of COVID-19 cases, Maharashtra has witnessed a series of hospital accidents this year. Two days ago, 24 COVID-19 patients on life support died after a leak in a medical oxygen tank disrupted the supply of the gas at Dr. Zakir Hussain Hospital in Nashik. In January, 10 infants died in a fire at Bhandara District Hospital in Vidarbha.

Reduced to ashes: Officials inspecting the ICU of Vijay Vallabh Hospital in Virar on Friday. ▶ PAGE 8

and on Friday, 24 COVID-19 patients on life support died after a leak in a medical oxygen tank disrupted the supply of the gas at Dr. Zakir Hussain Hospital in Nashik. In January, 10 infants died in a fire at Bhandara District Hospital in Vidarbha.

PM condoles incident
"The fire at a COVID-19 hospital in Virar is tragic. Condolences to those who lost their loved ones. May the injured recover soon," Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted. He approved an ex gratia of ₹2 lakh each to the families of the victims.

Mr. Thackeray announced an ex gratia of ₹5 lakh each for the kin of the victims and ₹1 lakh to those injured.

Leader of the Opposition and former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis questioned the State government on its preparedness and successive announcements of conducting fire audits. "After every incident, it is said that a fire audit will be conducted across the State. At a time when hospitals are running under pressure, the government seems to be avoiding its responsibility," he said.

Mr. Fadnavis demanded a time-bound fire audit of all the hospitals in the State.

State Urban Development Minister Eknath Shinde announced ₹5 lakh to the kin of the deceased residing in the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation limits. He held a meeting with the Palghar District Collector, the Municipal Commissioner and other senior officials, directing them to conduct fire and electric audits of all hospitals within the municipal area.

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray asked whether the State administration had learnt lessons from the past incidents.



Narendra Modi

tankers for oxygen to reduce turnaround time on supplies. The Railways had been roped in to run Oxygen Express trains. He urged the States fighting for scarce oxygen to set up coordination teams to allow free movement of tankers across the State borders. Tier 2 and tier 3 cities, which are now facing a rapid rise in cases, were highlighted as an area of concern. Mr. Modi also expressed grief at the accidents that had taken place in hospitals, adding that the staff had to be more aware of safety protocols.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, going head-to-head with the BJP in the Assembly election, did not attend the meeting.

Same rates for jabs
Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel made a strong demand that vaccines be provided at the same rates for both the Centre and the States.

The Serum Institute of India has announced that it would be providing the Covishield vaccine, which it currently sells at ₹150-₹200 a dose to the Centre, at ₹400 per dose to the State governments and ₹600 a dose to private entities. "Please provide an action plan for vaccine availability to the States for running vaccination drive for those above 18 years of age from May 1," Mr. Baghel said at the meeting.

MODI RAPS KEJRIWAL ▶ PAGE 8

CONTROL ROOM ▶ PAGE 9

85th worker of closed Assam paper mills dies

Amrit Lal Deb, suffering from liver disease, had not received dues for 52 months

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI
The 85th employee of two paper mills of Hindustan Paper Corporation in Assam, awaiting the much-promised revival since their closure in 2017, died on Friday.

The Joint Action Committee of Recognised Unions (JACRU), representing the employees of the two mills, said Amrit Lal Deb died of a liver disease without timely treatment due to non-payment of salary and other dues for 52 months. Before Deb's death, 84 employees had either taken their lives because of penury or died of hunger or inability to afford treatment for diseases.

The Nagaon Paper Mill, about 70 km east of Guwahati, and the Cachar Paper Mill, about 30 km from Barak Val-



Cachar Paper Mill during its heyday; (inset) Amrit Lal Deb.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ley's main town Silchar, were two of Asia's largest paper plants. They were also the fulcrums around which two towns – Jagiroad in Morigaon district and Panchgram in Hailakandi district – grew and prospered.

But the graph of the two mills began heading south three decades after they were established to showcase an

starving once-viable industries and their employees to death," JACRU president Monobendra Chakraborty told *The Hindu*.

4 lakh affected
JACRU leader Ananda Bordoli said the closure of the two mills affected over 4 lakh people who were directly and indirectly dependent on them.

"We would like to remind Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal of their promises to revive the paper mills prior to the 2016 Assembly elections. This was not all; Mr. Modi had addressed a huge rally near Cachar Paper Mill on March 27, 2016, and said he was committed to reviving 32,000 closed industries in Assam," said Mr. Chakraborty.

CJI pushes T.N. to let Sterlite plant reopen

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde on Friday voiced anguish at Tamil Nadu's objection to reopening Vedanta's Sterlite copper plant in Thoothukudi to produce medical oxygen, asking the State to "say something concrete as people are dying due to lack of oxygen".

The three-judge Bench led by the CJI was visibly exasperated when senior advocate Colin Gonsalves informed the court how the Tamil Nadu Advocate-General had stated in the Madras High Court on April 22 that "we are an oxygen-surplus State".

The Chief Justice of India thundered at the State, saying, "People in the country are in need of oxygen, and Tamil Nadu says it has surplus... This is not the way... You can't say you are in surplus, so you need not produce oxygen. The country is in bad need of oxygen. It should not be that every State produces and uses up its own oxygen."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Rising prevalence of U.K. strain in Delhi

Genome sampling shows proportion rose to 50% last week from 28% in March

JACOB KOSHY

NEW DELHI

The proportion of the U.K. variant (B.1.1.7) in genome samples sequenced from COVID-19 cases in Delhi has risen from 28% in the second week of March to 50% last week, Sujit Singh, Director, National Centre for Disease Control, said at a webinar on Friday.

The U.K. variant has a mutation N501Y that is reported to increase the transmission of the virus, leading to more numbers and a

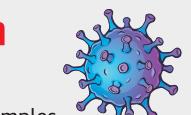
knock-on consequence of increasing disease severity and mortality.

Speaking at the webinar, organised by the Department of Biotechnology, Dr. Singh said there was also a rise in the Indian variant (B.1.617), which has two mutations associated with increased efficacy and decreasing the potency of vaccines.

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INDIA RECORDS 3.46 LAKH NEW CASES, 2,624 DEATHS ▶ PAGE 10

Variants of concern

The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG) has conducted genomic sequencing of over 15,000 samples



- Of the 553 sequences of the VOCs analysed in Punjab, 551 belonged to the U.K. strain while two belonged to the South African strain
- In Delhi, 415 out of the 438 sequences analysed belonged to the U.K. strain
- The South African variant accounted for 57 of the 227 sequences analysed from Telangana

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Amrit Lal Deb, suffering from liver disease, had not received dues for 52 months



Cachar Paper Mill during its heyday; (inset) Amrit Lal Deb.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

About 2,400 employees have gone without pay since the Cachar mill closed down in January 2017 and the Nagaon mill two months later.

"Deb and his family had been struggling to survive after he retired in December 2018. He did not die, he was killed because of the government's draconian policy of

starving once-viable industries and their employees to death," JACRU president Monobendra Chakraborty told *The Hindu*.

4 lakh affected
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"We would like to remind Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal of their promises to revive the paper mills prior to the 2016 Assembly elections. This was not all; Mr. Modi had addressed a huge rally near Cachar Paper Mill on March 27, 2016, and said he was committed to reviving 32,000 closed industries in Assam," said Mr. Chakraborty.

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1.5K policemen tested positive in April so far

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Around 1,500 Delhi Police personnel tested positive for the virus during the second wave in April this year, said officials.

On Friday, 29-year-old Delhi Police Sub-Inspector, Ankit Chaudhary, died due to COVID in Ghaziabad. He had tested positive on April 15.

A senior officer said more than 8,000 personnel of the force have been exposed to the virus. Out of them, around 7,000 have recovered and the rest are undergoing treatment. All the policemen have been vaccinated as per the protocol for front-line workers. The Delhi Police lost 45 personnel so far due to the virus that include four deaths in April, they said.

The police have been continuously arranging oxygen cylinders for hospitals and also for some patients, who are in home isolation. On Wednesday, the police said it has set up three COVID care centres in the city for its personnel and their family members.

City police chief S.N. Srivastava had said the facilities are being set up at Shahdara, Rohini and Dwarka.

Non-COVID bodies being turned away

Grieving families at Punjabi Bagh cremation ground report chaos, social distancing goes for a toss

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

A large crowd of grieving families waited outside the Punjabi Bagh cremation ground on Friday to perform the last rites of their loved ones, some of whom had died of COVID-19.

At noon, however, the cremation ground workers shut the main gate and informed: "Ab normal bodies nahin lenge. Sirf COVID bodies lenge" (We will not take bodies of those who have died of natural causes now).

Long wait

When the families – some of whom had been waiting for up to six hours – raised objections, another employee informed that they were merely following the new protocol introduced to cope with the sudden surge in deaths due to COVID-19.

As many as 1,541 people have died due to the virus in the last week, according to official data.

Deepak Kumar, 27, a resident of Mahatma Gandhi camp, had come to attend the last rites of his friend's father. "We had come around 10 a.m. but they did not move the body till 1 p.m.

They are collecting all the bodies and then cremating them in one go on separate



Punjabi Bagh crematorium; mass cremation of COVID victims at Old Seemapuri Crematorium on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR, PTI

pyres," he said.

The father had died of a heart attack, said Mr. Kumar, who was sitting with six friends. "There is no check on the number of people coming in with a body."

Roughly 15-16 bodies of people who have died of natural causes are cremated here daily, said workers.

No check on crowd

Mukesh Gupta, who had come for the cremation of his paternal uncle, complained no one was following social distancing rules.

Many people were also seen not wearing masks.

Pointing towards a large crowd of people trying to submit relevant documents

to get a cremation token, Mr. Gupta said: "There is total chaos. My uncle died of a heart attack. We had come here at 7.30 a.m. but the token counter did not open till 10 a.m. It has been six hours and it is only now that they are starting the process."

One side of the cremation ground has been reserved for burning COVID-infected bodies. "But there are so many people here, there is no separation between the place where normal bodies are being burnt and the infected bodies are being processed," said Mr. Gupta.

Vijay, who had brought his brother-in-law's body from a government hospital in Moti Nagar, said he has been running from pillar to post to get the body cremated.

that we need to get a token by 1 p.m. or else the cremation will not be performed the same day," he said.

"We took him to a government hospital where they said they don't have an oxygen bed. When we got our own cylinder, they would not let use it. They kept asking us to leave and take the patient away. This morning, he died waiting," he said, adding that the hospital gave them a discharge slip.

Necessary documents

At the cremation ground, he was asked for a COVID-19 report, which he didn't have.

"They are saying that the hospital should give in writing whether the person has died of COVID-19 or not. The employees are also saying

4 held in separate cases for black marketing Remdesivir injections

'Release seized vials immediately'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Four persons have been arrested in two separate incidents for allegedly black marketing Remdesivir injections, the police said on Friday. A senior officer said a special request will be made in the court on Saturday for the immediate release of recovered vials so that they can be given to patients.

The police said they received information about the crime following which they laid a trap on Wednesday near Parmanand Chowk, GTB Nagar, Delhi.

"Around 1.15 pm, one Talwinder Singh, a resident of Amritsar in Punjab, was apprehended and three vials of Remdesivir injections were recovered from him," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Monika Bhardwaj.

The accused said he used to sell the injection at a higher price as its demand was rising due to its scarcity in the market. Later, 68 more injections were recovered from his possession. The accused supplied the injection across the country through one courier company based

 A total of 81 vials of Remdesivir injections were recovered in the two cases

in Chandni Chowk.

On his instance, raids were conducted at Chandni Chowk from where supplier Jitender Kumar, a resident of Roshanara in Delhi, was apprehended. He used to charge ₹2,000 for the supply of one vial, Ms. Bhardwaj said.

On the basis of the interrogation, teams were sent to Amritsar and other places in Punjab to nab their co-accused, the police said.

In another instance, another police team arrested two accused persons from near Batra Hospital here while they were trying to sell the injections at exorbitant prices. Ten vials of Remdesivir were recovered from the accused, the police said. The accused have a network of persons who supply the injections on demand. A total of 81 vials of Remdesivir injections were recovered in two cases, the police added.

Help pours in for COVID patients at gurdwara offering 'Oxygen Langar'

Assistance given till hospital admission, says committee head

SAURABH TRivedi
GHAZIABAD

Amidst the COVID-19 crisis that has gripped Delhi-NCR, a gurdwara in Ghaziabad's Indirapuram has started an "Oxygen Langar" to help patients with respiratory problems.

The Shri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Indirapuram along with an NGO, Khalsa Help International, took up the initiative and started administering free oxygen on Thursday evening. By Friday evening, more than 700 patients had visited the "langar".

On Friday afternoon, a long queue of patients who were in dire need of oxygen was seen outside the gurdwara. There were arrangements made to provide oxygen support to patients who are unable to get out of their cars.

Gurpreet Singh, head of the gurdwara committee, said COVID patients are struggling to get oxygen and their relatives are running pillar to post to arrange for cylinders. "With the help of volunteers, we are providing oxygen support to patients who can come to the gurdwara," said



A man gets oxygen assistance at the gurdwara in Indirapuram, Ghaziabad on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT ■

Mr. Singh.

the patient gets a bed at any hospital," said Mr. Singh.

People from East Delhi, Sahibabad and other parts of Ghaziabad rushed to gurdwara after they got to know about the facility.

Sunita Seth said her husband required oxygen, but she was unable to manage a cylinder. "I dialed all helplines numbers that I found on social media but all in vain. My neighbour then told me about the oxygen facility at gurdwara and I rushed here with my husband. I am thankful to the gurdwara committee for providing oxygen support to her husband and other patients," she said.

"We are not giving or refilling cylinders. We are asking the patients to come here at the Indirapuram gurdwara along with someone in a car and we will give them oxygen. Be it two, four, or eight hours, we will provide oxygen till the time

NRMC issues new schedule to control spread of virus

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In view of a surge in COVID-19 cases, the Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC) said trains will be available between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. at a frequency of 15 minutes during peak hours and 30 minutes during non-peak hours. On curfew days, truncated services will be available at a frequency of 60 minutes.

The NMRC said, "On working days, trains will run from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. The frequency of trains will be 15 minutes during peak hours – 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. – and for the rest of the day, it will be 30 minutes. On curfew days, trains will run from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. only. Metro trains will have a headway of one hour each."

Officials said the schedule, set to be implemented on the Noida-Greater Noida Aqua Line, will come into force from Saturday. "In order to restrict the movement of public, NMRC is increasing trains' headway [frequency]. However, the fast trains will continue to run during peak hours," officials said.

Boulevard of broken dreams



A broken escalator at the foot overbridge across Ring Road in west Delhi's Rajouri Garden. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Temperature likely to stay in check: Met

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Overscast skies with light showers during the day in several part of the Capital brought relief from rising temperatures on Friday. The maximum temperature settled at 33.6 degrees Celsius, which was four degrees below normal for this time of the year. The minimum temperature settled at 22 degrees Celsius, which was one degree below normal for the season.

The Met department said the Capital received 0.6 mm of rainfall and although the temperatures are likely to stay in check, mainly clear sky is forecast for the weekend. "The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be around 35 and 20 degrees Celsius respectively," the bulletin issued by the Met department said. The temperatures are likely to rise steadily thereafter reaching a maximum of 39 degrees Celsius by April 27.

Man arrested for illegally storing 48 oxygen cylinders at home

Accused used to sell each at ₹12,500; police to raid his godown

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A man has been arrested for illegally storing oxygen cylinders in his house in southwest Delhi's Dashrathpuri, the police said on Friday. They said they have recovered 32 big oxygen cylinders and 16 small cylinders from Anil Kumar's house.

The matter came to the fore a secret informer told beat staff, who were patrolling at that time, about oxygen cylinders being kept illegally at Dashrathpuri. Next,

a raid was conducted at the said place. The big cylinders (capacity of 67 litres each) and small ones (capacity of 10 litres each) were found at the ground floor of his house.

"During enquiry, it came to notice that accused deals in trading of industrial gases and does not have a licence for it. The gas involved is combustible in its present form and he used to transfer gas into small cylinders from large ones, and sell them at ₹12,500 per piece to needy,"

The seized cylinders will be released by the court to an authorised gas vendor or any hospital that is in need by Saturday, the police said, adding further investigation is under way.

Courts to continue virtual hearings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

issued by the High Court for the District courts.

An order issued by the office of the Delhi High Court Registrar General Manoj Jain said, "All the Benches of this court shall continue to take up only extremely urgent matters filed in the

year 2021, through videoconferencing mode. All the courts of Registrars and Joint Registrars [Judicial] shall also continue to take up only urgent cases of their respective courts, through videoconferencing mode."

e-coupon applications

The application, filed through advocate Prasanna S, the NGO has sought directions to the Delhi government to also resume accepting e-coupon applications and to start operating kiosks and help desks facilitating such applications for benefiting all residents not already covered under the regu-

Hospitals told to first approach nodal officer for oxygen requirement

HC was hearing pleas by pvt. hospitals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday asked the AAP government to reply on a plea seeking directions to it to resume providing dry rations under the Mukhya Mantri Corona Sahayta Yojna (MMCSY) during the curfew imposed by the AAP government to meet the requirement of medical oxygen to treat seriously ill COVID-19 patients.

A Bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli was hearing two separate pleas by two private hospitals, which were running out of medical oxygen, seeking immediate supply of oxygen to treat seriously ill COVID-19 patients.

"We would expect all hospitals in the NCT of Delhi to approach the nodal officer Udit Prakash and such other officers... in the first instance for the purpose of meeting their requirement of oxygen," the court said.

The Bench said if the requirements are not met even after contacting the nodal officer, the hospitals shall contact senior advocate Rahul Mehra and lawyer Satyakam, before approaching the court.

During the hearing, the court was informed that Batra Hospital has now received 2.5 MT of oxygen but it will last only till 9 p.m. on Friday and the counsel raised the concern that if further supply is not made, critical patients will suffer.

would be supplied to Delhi daily, but the same has "not fructified" mainly for the reason that some of the suppliers are located in West Bengal and Odisha. "Whatever was allocated should be there," the court observed.

The observation came after Mr. Mehra said Delhi has received only 380 MT of oxygen on Thursday and before that it was even less and if it gets its entire allocation, the problems faced by the hospitals can be resolved to some extent.

The two hospitals, M/s Bram Health Care Ltd and Batra Hospital and Medical Research Centre, sought immediate relief of oxygen supply to treat critically ill COVID-19 patients admitted at their respective hospitals. The court also asked the nodal officer to look into the grievances of the two hospitals relating to supply of oxygen.

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Timings

DELHI

SATURDAY, APR. 24
RISE 05:47 SET 18:53
RISE 15:54 SET 04:01
SUNDAY, APR. 25
RISE 05:46 SET 18:53
RISE 16:59 SET 04:37
MONDAY, APR. 26
RISE 05:46 SET 18:54
RISE 18:07 SET 05:14

Delhi Weather

max	min
34	22
34	22
33	23

Delhi Palam Today

35°C Drop in morning temperature likely. Mainly sunny sky and very warm day with light winds likely.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

36°C Rise in day temperature. Day would turn very warm with few clouds and light winds likely.

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BJP blames Delhi govt. for shortage of oxygen in city

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Blaming the Delhi government for the present oxygen crisis being faced by hospitals in Delhi, the BJP on Friday asked why it was "observing silently" States like Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra announced the setting up of facilities to produce oxygen.

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, accused the Delhi government of shifting the blame to Centre and other agencies for its own failures and sought to assert that till date no firm action plan had unfolded from its side on dealing with the COVID crisis.

'Lack of effort'

"There is no effort by the Kejriwal government to augment oxygen facilities despite the situation. The Chief Minister is only working on the social media when it comes to oxygen instead of taking concrete measures. No storage of oxygen was done in the last few months," he alleged.

Meghalaya Guv extends support to farmers' stir

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GURUGRAM

Meghalaya Governor Satya Pal Malik on Friday wrote to Sangwan Khap president and Dadri Independent MLA Sombir Sangwan, extending support to the farmers' agitation and condemning the attitude of the government towards the farmers.

In the letter, Mr. Malik said that more than 300 farmers had lost their lives during the struggle, but the Union government did not express any regret. This, he said, was "cruel" and "condemnable".

He said that the government was trying to defeat and derail the movement by not holding dialogue with the farmers. Mr. Malik said that he had made several efforts on this front as per the expectations of the Khaps. He said that he had suggested to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah that the genuine demands of the farmers be met and justice be done to them.

Delhi govt. disburses ₹5,000 each as ex gratia to construction workers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has disbursed ₹5,000 as ex-gratia payment to each construction worker registered under the Delhi Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (DBOCWWB) as ex-gratia re-

Inside Lok Nayak Hospital: mad rush, cries and gasps for breath

The hospital's emergency room witnessed non-stop activity as cases piled up

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

Nearly 20 people on oxygen support gasping for breath, doctors urgently providing CPR to a woman in her 70s, four people on oxygen support squeezed into a single stretcher, and one Chief Medical Officer (CMO), in a green hospital gown, trying his best to attend to all patients in critical conditions. The scenes that rolled out in the emergency room of the largest Delhi government-run COVID-19 facility, Lok Nayak Hospital, were heart-wrenching.

Around 5.45 p.m. on Friday, the CMO checked the oxygen levels of a man, who seemed to be in his fifties, using an oximeter and spontaneously raised an alarm. In a jiffy, he was moved into a wheeled-stretcher. A separate oxygen cylinder was taken out for him, for his oxygen levels were dangerously low.

His oxygen mask was changed to an upgraded variety, a drip was started, and medicines were administered



Four people on oxygen support being moved on one stretcher at Lok Nayak Hospital in the city on Friday. ■ NIKHIL M BABU

through an inhaler. "Stay awake, stay awake," the CMO kept telling the patient, tapping gently in his cheeks. Doctors and nurses, clad in PPE kits, helped the CMO as he folded the patient's face from both sides.

Almost every patient was getting oxygen from cylinders. The transparent cables from the cylinders were split using green-and-blue connectors to give oxygen from one cylinder to several patients.

"Doctor, please see her," a shout of help reeled out in the room at around 6.20 p.m. An

unconscious woman, seemingly in her seventies, was wheeled into the emergency. The CMO checked her pulse and immediately started giving her CPR. Amidst all the bustle, about 12 patients, who were relatively less critical but were on oxygen, shared six beds. Some of them found breathing difficult.

Calls for help

Around 6.25 p.m., just outside the emergency room, a woman started crying with folded hands. "Please help our patient," she pleaded. A

stretcher attached with an oxygen cylinder was rolled in from another room for the patient.

As the CMO juggled between calls from senior doctors on his two phones and attending patients, he checked the man in his fifties again.

Around 6.40 p.m., relatives of a patient walked in with the patient and demanded treatment, furnishing some recommendations. The CMO checked the patient's details and stared at them. "Should I save him right now [the man in his 50s] or your relative? See his oxygen levels," he told them, gesturing at the clip pad on which his oxygen level was marked.

Around 6.45 p.m., the glass door opened and four people, who were breathing oxygen from a single cylinder, were shifted out in a single stretcher to another area by PPE-clad staffers. Meanwhile, the rush, shouts, and gasps for breath continued in the emergency room with white walls and grey-and-green flooring.

'Deploy Army to escort vehicles carrying oxygen'

A national plan is needed to defeat pandemic: Kejriwal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, during his interaction with Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the COVID situation in Delhi via videoconferencing here on Friday, asked that Army be deployed to escort vehicles carrying supplies from oxygen plants to various cities.

While expressing gratitude to the Prime Minister for increasing the quota of oxygen supply for Delhi to 480 tonnes, the Chief Minister complained that only 350 tonnes from this quota could reach Delhi in the last 24 hours.

"Sir, since the oxygen crisis has begun my phone keeps ringing. One hospital or the other calls to inform us that it has oxygen supply for only a few hours. When we ask the reason, we are told that the supply has been stopped beyond the border by one State government or another," he said.

"The citizens of this coun-



Arvind Kejriwal

nisters and ask them not to stop the supply meant for Delhi," he also said.

The situation at city hospitals was deteriorating by the day due to lack of oxygen supply, Mr. Kejriwal said. A 'national plan' to defeat the pandemic, he said, needed to be put in place.

Mr. Kejriwal suggested, the Centre should take over oxygen plants across the country and martial units should escort vehicles carrying supply to their destinations. If this was done no one would be able to stall such a vehicle, he said.

"I also request that 100 tonnes of oxygen allocated to Delhi from Odisha be airlifted or brought by Oxygen Express [train]. Please help us bring oxygen from West Bengal in a similar manner, if possible," he said.

"We request a corridor to Delhi for 100 tonnes of oxygen intended for the city... There should also be 'One Nation, One Rate' for vaccines," he said.

At testing centres, queue forms at 4 a.m., one's turn can take 2-3 days

Limited testing per day has common man in distress

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

People are waiting outside government-run COVID-19 testing centres from as early as 4 a.m. in parts of the city. Of them, many do not get a chance to test as the centres were testing only a limited number of people.

One centre took 40 people, while the other took only 10, officials at the centre said. Many of them had come for the second and third day on the trot to get tested. But their wait goes on. The process is relatively smooth in private testing centres, some of which even offer round the clock testing.

Around 8.30 a.m. at a COVID-19 testing centre in Gauhati Awas in Sarita Vihar, the situation has become tense as people began arguing with the security guards. More than 50 people were waiting in the queue. "We have been coming for three days. Tell us where else is testing happening then?" a person shouted at the guard.

The helpless guard replied: "We are taking only 10 people. Tajpur Pahadi has a

dispensary, you can go there if you want." "Give us a reference there," another person asked him. The guard did not.

Chandra Mohan, 34, who was part of the crowd, said he was coming for the second day. "I am a waiter at a restaurant and my employer has asked to come with a negative report. I came here at 4 a.m. and from 9 a.m., tokens were given, but I did not get one. They gave only 10 tokens," said Mr. Mohan, who earns only ₹15,000 per month, but is losing money as he can't go to work without the report.

Ujawal Kumar, 33, had another grouse: "There were 13 people before me. They

came at 3.30 a.m. and I came at 4.10 a.m. I did not get the token. I'm going to another centre now."

Same scenes

Outside another government centre at Meethapur Chowk, Darmendar Kumar, 33, said he has come for the third day and has been waiting since 5.15 a.m.

"The people who came after 5.30 a.m. did not get the token for testing. People are facing a lot of difficulties. There should be some solution," said Mr. Kumar, who had tagged his wife along too. He was lucky that he was the 32nd of the 40 people who were tested.

Safdarjung OPD guard's widow seeks ex gratia

HC asks Centre, Delhi govt. to respond

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A woman, whose husband was deployed as a guard in the OPD of Safdarjung Hospital here during the pandemic and died due to COVID-19, has moved the Delhi High Court seeking ex gratia payment of ₹50 lakh in terms of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh issued notice to the Centre, Delhi government and New India Assurance Company Ltd. seeking their stand on the woman's plea which also seeks an insurance scheme for health workers fighting COVID-19, and ₹1

crore in terms of the scheme of the Delhi government.

According to the petition, the guard had died due to COVID-19 on June 14 last year while he was deployed outside the OPD at Safdarjung Hospital.

She has claimed that she is entitled to an ex gratia payment, in terms of the schemes announced by the Centre and Delhi government for COVID warriors or family of employees on COVID-19 duty, who died due to the virus. She said she had approached authorities, but did not get a satisfactory reply.

Top Gurugram hospitals grapple with shortage of oxygen

'We are living on day-to-day supply'

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

Despite the district administration's claim of having adequate supply of oxygen for the hospitals in Gurugram, many top hospitals in the city continued to grapple with the shortage of liquid oxygen.

After Fortis Hospital spent tense moments on Thursday, Artemis Hospital in Gurugram put out a series of tweets on Friday saying that they were left with only three hours of supply. The supply to the hospital was not restored till the time of filing of this report.

"SOS: Less than 3 hours of #Oxygen supply at Artemis Hospital, Gurugram. Last night's commitment of delivering Oxygen remains unfulfilled. We request the government to help urgently [sic.]," said the tweet from the official handle of the hospital, during the day. It tagged the Prime Minister's Office, Union Health Minister and Haryana Chief Minister.

"We are living on a day-to-day supply of oxygen. Every morning, we have to make numerous calls to get a 24-hour supply. Doctors and other healthcare staffers are fatigued working round the clock. Lack of basic support, like oxygen can break their backs. It's a pity that we are not able to help hundreds of people gasping for breath."

Ritu Garg, Zonal Director, Fortis Memorial Research Institute, in a press statement, said they continued their operations "on very thin margin of oxygen support". "Seeing the surge in demand we are left at the mercy of our vendors and have to follow up with them regularly for supply. We have been coordinating with the local authorities," she said.

Columbia Asia hospital spokesperson said that they too had run out of oxygen last evening, but managed to get the stock after a little effort.

Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg did not respond to calls.



Requirement of Junior Research Fellow (JRF) under SERB-CRG sponsored Research Project

National Institute of Technology Srinagar invites online applications for Junior Research Fellow (JRF) position under SERB-CRG sponsored Research Project sanction no. CRG/2020/001120 dated 26th March 2021 at NIT Srinagar in the department of Electrical Engineering on purely temporary basis, co-terminus with the duration of the project. The project details, requisite qualifications & for experience please visit: <https://nitsri.ac.in/> uploaded files / Advertisement for JRF recruitment under DST-SERB-CRG Project.pdf Interested & eligible candidates are required to send his/her detailed CV with supporting documents(Single PDF) through email to: obbuchandran@nitsri.ac.in or between 09-05-2021.

No. NIT/R/21/178 (i-iii)
Dated: 23.04.2021

Sd/-
Dr. Obbu Chandra Sekhar
(Principal Investigator)

Congress hits out at Delhi govt. over ongoing COVID crisis

Real situation different from what govt. is trying to portray'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Friday hit out at the Delhi government for failing to tackle the surge in COVID-19 cases in the city.

The party said that sick patients are not getting oxygen, while those developing symptoms are not being able to get tested on time.

Delhi Congress leader Anil Bhardwaj alleged that due to reduction in number of tests in private hospitals and government hospitals, patients with symptoms were not able to get tested. "Some patients

have happened," Mr. Bhardwaj said. He added that the situation on the ground is far from the picture that the government was trying to portray.

Mr. Bhardwaj added that while the people of Delhi and Corona warriors followed norms, the governments showed negligence due to which Delhi is facing a crisis.

The Congress said that if the Delhi government had set aside funds to set up oxygen plants over the past year, then this situation could have been averted.

ed, the Delhi government had also set up food distribution centres across schools and construction sites in the city.

Around 7,000 food packets, the statement said, had already been distributed at the food distribution centres as of Thursday

evening, while the government was also taking action to set up a helpline for construction, daily-wagers and migrant workers expected to be active in the next two-three days.

Any worker in Delhi will be able to access information on the availability of beds in hospitals, food distribution centres, availability of medicines through the helpline.

During the nationwide lockdown in 2020, the government stated, ₹5,000 as aid had been disbursed to 55,000 construction workers.

Punjab CM calls for Centre-State parity in vaccination from May 1

At virtual meet with PM, Capt. Amarinder also asks for adequate oxygen supply

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Describing the new vaccination policy for the 18 years and above age group as unfair to the States, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Friday sought Centre-State parity in vaccination from May 1, while calling for urgent steps to ensure adequate oxygen supply.

While his government had adopted all measures to minimise the demand for oxygen given its necessity in treating critically ill COVID-19 patients, the Centre must ensure compliance on allocation by liquid oxygen manufacturers in other States, Capt. Amarinder said. "This is not happening at present. Punjab's supplies come from Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and



Capt. Amarinder Singh

for vaccination, with permission to fit the cost to funds available with the State Disaster Response Force in the interim.

Regular vaccine supply must be ensured to maintain the supply chain to the last vaccination booth, he said, adding that due to supply shortage, vaccination in last one week has been slightly low, that is, around 75,000-80,000 shots daily. While Punjab had received fresh vaccine supplies on Thursday, the current stocks could last only for three days as the demand for vaccine is increasing, he stressed.

Captain Amarinder also expressed concern over lack of clarity on the quantity of vaccines to be made available by Centre after May 1, and how manufacturers would

regulate supplies to different States and private buyers. The State government, on its part, had constituted an Expert Group to advise on Punjab's vaccination strategy for the 18-45 years age group, which States had been allowed to vaccinate at their cost, he said.

Blackmarketing

The CM also pointed to the shortage and blackmarketing of medicines like Remdesivir and Tocilizumab, which he said was creating great panic in the media and general public. Though the Central government was making efforts to increase their supply, clearer messaging was required to inform the public that these medicines were not magic wands, and also on the available substitutes, he said.

15 oxygen tankers leave for States

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha has sent 15 tankers containing more than 250 tonnes of medical oxygen from steel plants located in Rourkela, Jajpur and Angul towns to different parts of the country in last 24 hours.

These tankers left for Vizakhapatnam, Hyderabad, Indore, Pune, Mumbai and Nagpur.

The Odisha police said a dedicated corridor had been formed for prompt and unhindered movement for meeting oxygen requirement of thousands of needy patients without any delay.

Y. K. Jethwa, Additional Director General (Law and Order) has been designated as nodal officer for coordinated action for loading and transportation of medical oxygen.

Apart from 15 tankers, two tankers from Angul to Visakhapatnam, two tankers from Jajpur to Ghaziabad and Visakhapatnam were scheduled to leave.

According to Rourkela Steel Plant, a Steel Authority of India Limited company, it has been consistently supplying Liquid Medical Oxygen.

Odisha border entry curbs spark tension

Two grooms among several hit by new mandatory quarantine rules in the State

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

A day after the Odisha government announced a 14-day mandatory quarantine for all those entering the State from West Bengal, tensions ran high at various entry points, with people trying to sneak-in through the porous border.

Odisha's two districts – Balasore (Balasore) and Mayurbhanj – border West Bengal. While the Balasore administration has identified 44 roads through which visitors from West Bengal could enter Odisha, Mayurbhanj had 34 such entry points.

At the Udayapur border check post, tension prevailed

for an hour with people demanding immediate entry into Odisha. They alleged that as the Odisha government had started a blockade at border in the morning after declaring 14-days of mandatory quarantine just hours earlier in the night, people who wanted to return home could not cope with new system at short notice."

Two grooms were stranded at the Jaleswar border post in Balasore district, hit by the overnight order though marriages were scheduled well before the State government's curbs.

On Thursday evening, Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mohapatra announced

that anyone entering the State from West Bengal side would have to undergo quarantine for 14-days at a designated institution. The decision was taken in the wake of the steep rise in COVID-19 cases.

Police patrolling

Baleswar Collector K. Sudarshan Chakravarthy, who inspected various border points on Friday, said police were patrolling major entry points and people were allowed to enter after due registrations.

"There are reports of people trying sneak through village roads and paddy fields. Farmers, panchayati raj institutions

members and villagers have been urged to keep a tab on newcomers in their village and inform administration," said Mr. Chakravarthy.

Similarly, Mayurbhanj district had requested all persons coming from West Bengal through two border check-points to register.

"We have identified 34 different entry points. But, we are allowing people through two gates only. It is not possible to deploy manpower at every road and carry out registration. We will gradually increase entry points by expanding registration process," said Sumit P. Parmar, Mayurbhanj Superintendent of Police.

Minor domestic help burnt to death

Two arrested in Assam's Nagaon district

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The police in central Assam's Nagaon district have arrested two people for allegedly burning a minor domestic help to death.

The victim, a 12-year-old girl, was from the adjoining

Karbi Anglong district.

Her employer, Prakash Borthakur, and his son Nayanmoni Borthakur were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the girl's death, Nagaon's Superintendent of Police Gaurav Abhijit Dilip said.

"As per her employer, the girl committed suicide. However, after initial inspection, it is suspected that she was murdered and then

burnt. She was also undergoing to be working as domestic help. Therefore, the two accused were taken to custody immediately. The investigation is on," Assam's Director-General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta tweeted on Friday.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the girl had been employed as domestic help for five years but was not allowed to go home.

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OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

Sri Enuga Seetharama Reddy
1930 - 2021

Beloved husband, father, patriarch and friend to many,
Passed away on 23rd April 2021 in Bangalore.

We will miss this great man but will always cherish his memory, his charitable large heart and his wonderful storytelling.

Anil, Asha, Uma and Usha and their families, the extended Enuga family and his many friends and admirers.

In memory of your loved ones
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Gehlot seeks equitable resource allocation during pandemic

Rajasthan being discriminated against in oxygen supply'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR



CM Ashok Gehlot

numbers of active cases. No attention had been paid to the ratio of active cases in the supply of liquid oxygen as well, Mr. Gehlot said. The Union government should also formulate a definite plan for making the diagnostic test kits available in sufficient numbers to ensure proper treatment of patients, he added.

'Under allocation'

According to the data released by the Rajasthan government, the State has been allocated 205 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen which stands to 1.64 cubic metre per active case, when calculated with the 96,366 active cases till April 21. On the other hand, Gujarat with 84,126 active cases was allocated 975 MT oxygen, which is 544.15% higher than Rajasthan.

30 COVID-19 patients flee Tripura

CORRESPONDENT
AGARTALA

Law enforcing agencies in Tripura failed to prevent 30 patients, who fled from a COVID Care Centre (CCC) here late on Wednesday night, from leaving the State. Their mobile phone locations were detected at different places outside the State, officials said here on Friday.

Around 65 youths who had come from various States to appear for interviews for recruitment in the paramilitary Tripura State Rifles (TSR) underwent COVID-19 test. Forty of them tested positive and were shifted to the CCC at Arundhutinagar.

Thirty inmates subsequently broke a window at the back of the building, scaled the boundary wall and escaped, West Tripura district magistrate Shailesh Yadav told newsmen earlier.

Train hospital



Isolation coaches for COVID-19 patients at the Bhopal railway station on Friday. ■ A.M. FARUQI

Hooda flays 'sluggish' crop procurement

'Tall claims of Haryana govt. have fallen flat, farmers are suffering adversely'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH



Cong. leader B.S. Hooda

"Besides government apathy, bad weather has increased farmers' troubles as wheat in large numbers is lying under the open sky in the 'mandis' (markets) due to tardy lifting as the ready-to-lift scheme launched by the government has failed completely. The government claimed that under this scheme, the contractor would have to lift the wheat from the mandi within 48 hours but heaps of wheat in the mandis are themselves testifying to the complete failure of the plan," the former Chief Minister said.

Mr. Hooda said rain in the region has damaged the wheat crop.

"The government should compensate the farmer for the loss caused by wheat getting wet in the rain and till then, tarpaulins should be provided in the mandis," he said.

'Shortage of bags'

Mr. Hooda alleged that there is a shortage of gunny bags in the markets and farmers are not even able to find a place to keep grains in the 'mandis,' which is delaying the purchasing process.

Suspected Maoist rebel killed in Odisha

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

A suspected Maoist was shot dead by security forces in an exchange of fire that took place in Odisha's Kalahandi district on Friday.

According to Odisha police, security forces had launched an operation in a forest area under Madanpur-Rampur police station limit of Kalahandi district after being tipped off about assembling of a group of left wing extremists on Thursday.

"Teams comprising of Special Operation Group and District Voluntary Force personnel, while conducting search operations in the forest area were confronted by Maoists on Monday. Teams asked to them to surrender arms. However, Maoists resorted to indiscriminate firing and the SOG team had to fire in self defence," said police.

"During search, after firing stopped, one dead body of female Maoist was found at the spot. Many incriminating articles and ammunitions have been recovered," it said.

THE HINDU

THE WEST BENGAL STATE HANDICRAFTS CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LIMITED

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NIT NO. WBSHCS/NIT01(e)/2021-22 Dated 24.04.2021

e-tender is invited for supply of "Non Woven Fabrics for Hospitals" For use of WBH&FW Dept. & Others.

For details visit: wbtender.gov.in and Bangsree Notice Board.

Last date of submission of tender: 03.05.2021 (By 5:00 PM)

CEO, Bangsree

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person Rubodh S/o Sehdev R/o Village Milkana P.S. Tariyani Distt. Sheohar Bihar has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 236/2020, U/s 457/380 IPC has been registered at P.S. Lahori Gate, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said Rubodh cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Rubodh has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said Rubodh accused of FIR No. 236/2020, U/s 457/380 IPC, P.S. Lahori Gate, Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer said complaint on or before 28.05.2021.

By Order
Ms. Neha Gupta Singh, MM, Tis Hazari Court, Room No. 286, 11th Floor, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi

DP/101/N/2021-(Court Matter)

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IN BRIEF



Former A.P. MLA and Sangam Dairy chief held

GUNTUR
Chairman of Sangam Dairy and former TDP MLA from Ponnur in Andhra Pradesh, Dhulipala Narendra Kumar, was on Friday arrested by ACB personnel from his native Chintalapudi village over alleged irregularities in the dairy operations. TDP president N. Chandrababu Naidu condemned the arrest.

SNC-Lavalin challenges ED's summons

KOCHI
The Kerala HC on Friday directed the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to file an affidavit in response to a petition filed by SNC-Lavalin Engineering India Private Ltd., Mumbai, seeking to quash the summons issued over the probe into the SNC-Lavalin deal for renovation of three hydel projects

Hospitals helpless as patients gasp for air

Telangana sends two military aircraft to bring oxygen tankers from Odisha; Karnataka appeals to PM

G.V.R. SUBBA RAO
VIJAYAWADA

Fifty-three-year-old Krishna Rao (name changed), a resident of Ramavarappadu here in Andhra Pradesh, tested positive for COVID-19 three days ago. He went into home quarantine.

He reached out to the doctors when he started experiencing shortness. But they pleaded helplessness, and suggested that he make his own arrangements for oxygen, while promising paramedical support.

His is not an isolated case.

Hospitals in the city continue to grapple with oxygen shortage, leading to anxiety among patients and their relatives.

The demand for oxygen has gone up phenomenally in both government and private hospitals.

It used to be 2 to 3 KL per day at the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Vijaya-



Darkest hour: Family members of a COVID-19 victim at a cremation ground in Visakhapatnam on Friday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

wada. The supplier would do the refill once in four days.

"Now, 20-30 KL of oxygen is being used every day," said a senior doctor at the government hospital on condition of anonymity.

Indian Medical Association (IMA) State general secretary Garlapati Nanda Kishore said they had asked the IMA members and the

medical fraternity to postpone all elective or planned surgeries.

Noted cardiologist and IMA, Vijayawada chapter, secretary Karthik Tummala says there was a mismatch between oxygen supply and demand.

"There are many industries that use oxygen on a large scale. The government

can divert that oxygen to save lives," he said.

Price hits the roof

While this is so, the price of medical oxygen has gone through the roof. A 50 KL cylinder normally costs ₹450. Its price had touched ₹750 during the first wave. It is now priced at ₹1,350, excluding transportation cost.

Even if the hospital is willing to pay, there are no supplies. The patients' bill on oxygen alone is in the range of ₹5,000 to ₹7,000 per day.

The Telangana government has pressed two military aircraft (C-17) into service to bring oxygen tankers from Odisha.

Yediyurappa's plea

Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Friday appealed to the Centre to allocate more oxygen and Remdesivir to the State, as the number of COVID-19 cases

has seen an exponential increase.

Briefing Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a virtual meeting of Chief Ministers on Friday, Mr. Yediyurappa said the current positivity rate in the State was 16%.

While 500 tonnes of oxygen had been consumed across the State on Thursday, 1,142 tonnes was estimated to be the demand by April 25 and this was likely to go up to 1,471 tonnes by April 30. However, the Centre has allocated only 300 tonnes to Karnataka. If the same situation continues, several healthcare centres will have to be closed down," he told the Prime Minister, according to a note from the Chief Minister's office.

He also wanted 2 lakh doses of Remdesivir over the next 10 days.

(With inputs from Hyderabad & Bengaluru)

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Saturday: Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Kerala and Mahe. Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty wind likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Rayalaseema, Telangana, coastal & south interior Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala and Mahe

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	0.3...	34.7...	24.8...	Kozhikode	0.6...	33.6...	25.9...
Ahmedabad	...41.9...	25.9...	18...	Lucknow	...37.6...	19.7...	19.7...
Aizawl	...30.6...	16.5...	—	Madurai	...39.0...	27.2...	27.2...
Allahabad	...41.2...	20.4...	—	Mangalore	...33.3...	24.0...	24.0...
Bengaluru	...31.7...	21.0...	—	Mumbai	...34.4...	25.5...	25.5...
Bhopal	...39.1...	20.8...	—	Myssore	...33.7...	21.4...	21.4...
Bhubaneswar	...38.3...	26.1...	—	New Delhi	...33.6...	22.0...	22.0...
Chandigarh	...11.4...	29.4...	17.2...	Patna	...38.8...	19.2...	19.2...
Chennai	...36.6...	24.8...	—	Port Blair	...1.8...	32.7...	24.7...
Coimbatore	...34.9...	25.0...	—	Puducherry	...35.8...	26.4...	26.4...
Dehradun	...2.4...	20.6...	15.9...	Pune	...37.8...	22.5...	22.5...
Gangtok	...8.1...	21.6...	11.4...	Rajpur	...39.8...	22.5...	22.5...
Goa	...33.8...	26.5...	—	Ranchi	...36.2...	20.5...	20.5...
Guwahati	1.8...	35.0...	20.3...	Shillong	...24.8...	14.9...	14.9...
Hubballi	...36.0...	22.0...	—	Shimla	...35...	17.1...	7.6...
Hyderabad	...37.0...	25.4...	—	Srinagar	0.2...	14.1...	4.3...
Imphal	...31.3...	17.1...	—	Tiruchirapalliyuram	5.5...	33.9...	25.5...
Jaipur	...40.0...	22.8...	—	Tiruchi	...41.1...	27.8...	27.8...
Kochi	0.4...	31.8...	26.0...	Vijayawada	...38.5...	27.4...	27.4...
Kohima	...27.4...	—	—	Visakhapatnam	0.4...	33.8...	28.0...
Kolkata	...37.3...	20.5...	—				

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Yesterday

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	47.52	50.77	107	...107	...107	...107
Bengaluru	5.32	59.73	65	...65	...65	...65
Chennai	16.83	32.27	52	...52	...52	...52
Delhi	4.15	56.48	239	...239	...239	...239
Hyderabad	4.60	34.57	91	...91	...91	...91
Kolkata	16.20	41.190	127	...127	...127	...127
Lucknow	...63.74	131	113	...113	...113	...113
Mumbai	6.40	...108	123	...123	...123	...123
Pune	7.33	82	81	...81	...81	...81
Visakhapatnam	17.50	14	46	...46	...46	...46

Yesterday

Belagana reported 6,206 new cases and 29 deaths on April 22. New cases in Hyderabad touched 1,005.

Andhra Pradesh's daily tally touched 11,766 cases on Friday. The State added 38 more deaths to the toll.

Tamil Nadu recorded 13,776 fresh cases on Friday.

Among the fresh cases were 44 persons who came from other States and a Union Territory by road. The State reported 78 deaths.

(With inputs from

Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Chennai bureaus and PTI)

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor □ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

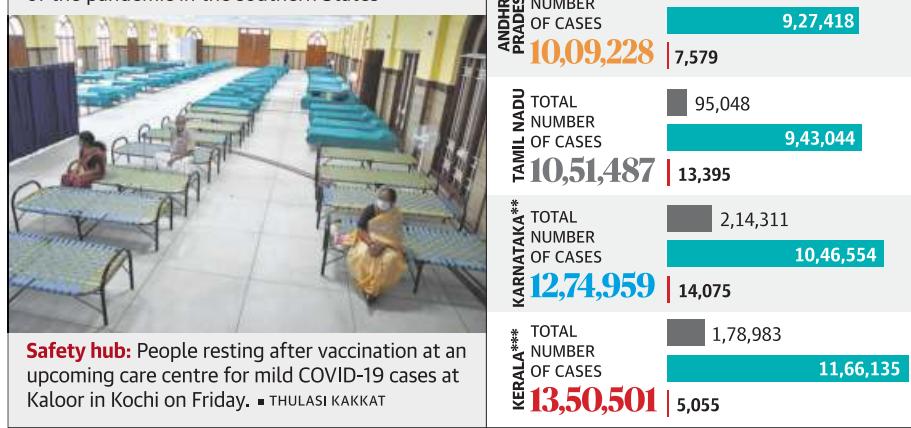
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death people with heart or lung disease

Registrars

Making room for all

With hospitals running at full capacity, States are frantically opening new facilities to take care of COVID-19 patients. The graph shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States



*Telangana numbers are as of 8 p.m. on Thursday | **Karnataka has 19 non-COVID deaths | ***Kerala has a mismatch of 328 cases due to unaccounted deaths, missing persons

Beds to be allotted through war rooms set up at ward level

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Friday said its medical teams would be visiting the houses of symptomatic COVID-19 patients before allotting beds to them through ward-level war rooms. Each of the 24 civic zones will be allotted 10 medical teams and 10 ambulances.

The visits will be conducted from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. and

Maharashtra sees record surge of 773 deaths

State registers 66,836 new cases; highest recoveries in a day at 74,045

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PUNE

Maharashtra on Friday reported its highest single-day recoveries with 74,045 COVID-19 patients being discharged even as the State reported 66,836 new cases.

The State also recorded its highest-ever fatality surge of 773 deaths to push the total toll to 63,252. As per the State Health Department, 360 of these occurred in the last 48 hours, while 224 patients died during the course of the past week. The State's active case tally has dipped to 6,91,851.

The total case tally has now reached 41,61,676, with over 2.78 lakh samples being tested in the last 24 hours, while the recoveries reached 34,04,792, with the recovery rate rising to 81.81%. The State's case fatality rate has incrementally declined to 1.52%.

THE HINDU

CM YK

E-pass system reintroduced

<b



Infernal infernos

As hospital fires are on the rise alongside a pandemic, Maharashtra must act on safety

Maharashtra has been facing the merciless onslaught of COVID-19 cases, but its public health response has also had to combat a second, connected scourge of hospital fires. In recent days, the State has been adding, on average, over 60,000 cases and losing a few hundred lives daily in the second wave of the pandemic, straining its infrastructure and institutions. It is also frequently hit by deadly fires, of the kind witnessed on Friday in the ICU of a small hospital in Mumbai's suburb of Virar, where at least 14 patients severely ill with the coronavirus died. With about seven lakh active cases now, many of the patients in the State require oxygen support and hospitals are stretched to the limit. Many are small institutions, while a number of facilities are simply not built for purpose, such as the hospital located in a mall in Mumbai's Bhandup area where several lives were lost in a blaze last month. Now that many COVID-19 hospital fires have been reported during the first peak of the pandemic last year and later, in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh in particular, State authorities should be able to document their learnings and put out a checklist to save patients. They should clarify whether fire safety guidelines for hospitals issued by the Centre in September last year, prioritising a strict compliance strategy, third party accreditation on safety, and adoption of a fire response plan were acted upon. This is particularly important in Maharashtra's context, given that devastating fires have been recurring, and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray should lose no time in ordering a comprehensive audit.

With no end in sight to serious hospital fires, there may be a case for judicial oversight and systematic inquiries into such mishaps. COVID-19 has turned into a conflagration, and the Supreme Court has taken *suo motu* cognisance of many aspects of pandemic management, such as availability of oxygen and essential drugs, method and manner of vaccination, and declaration of lockdowns. Nearly 10 High Courts have taken up pressing matters pertaining to COVID-19. It would be logical to add fire safety to such scrutiny, to make accidents rare. Evidently, State bureaucracies can achieve a lot more on their own, if they diligently implement existing regulations. There is a professional knowledge base available with important features. It calls for ICUs to be equipped with an exhaust system to prevent smoke accumulation in a fire, ventilation cut-outs to stop a blaze from spreading, periodic maintenance of safety equipment and, very importantly, an evacuation plan for the sickest patients, who may be attached to life-saving equipment. It is undoubtedly complicated to retrofit poorly designed hospitals for high safety standards, especially when it has to be executed on the go, and every bed is precious in the pandemic. But as each successive blaze proves, business as usual may extract a heavy price. Patients should be able to go to a hospital without the fear of fires threatening their lives there.

Too little

The ECI woke up late to the ill-effects the long campaign in Bengal had on public health

The Election Commission of India's decision to restrict campaigning for the remaining two phases of the West Bengal Assembly election is an instance of wisdom dawning late. Nevertheless, it will help limit the public health damage to what was already caused by an unreasonably extended election cycle in the State during the pandemic. After the Calcutta High Court sought an action taken report on what measures it was adopting in the context of the spreading pandemic, the Election Commission has ordered the cancellation of all rallies and roadshows. Only meetings that are attended by no more than 500 people will be allowed now. In its order, the Election Commission noted "with anguish" that parties and candidates were not adhering to safety protocols. Daily campaign hours had already been cut and campaigning was to stop 72 hours prior to polling, instead of 48 hours, as per an earlier directive. A bit of foresight would have been more helpful. The State is recording high numbers of infection. Bengal's health infrastructure is not robust to deal with a heavy surge. All parties organised rallies amid the pandemic. But parties other than the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been calling for clubbing the last phases together. In the face of the Election Commission's refusal to do so, the Congress, the Trinamool Congress and the Left had discontinued big rallies.

The only party that did not have a problem with the election being spread over eight phases over five weeks has been the BJP. Allegations that this helped the BJP that was dependent on its star campaigners and workers from other States moving from one region to the next carries weight. It is ironic that the BJP that argues for clubbing together all elections across the country has been happy about such a prolonged process in Bengal. Even after it became evident that the new surge was turning out to be severe, the BJP continued with big rallies in the State. Prime Minister Narendra Modi gloated about massive turnouts at his rallies. BJP leaders declared that there was no correlation between rally turnouts and the spread of the pandemic. It is not that India sleepwalked into this disaster; it was dragged in a boisterous procession of triumphalism and hubris by the political leadership. The unusual and unreasonable schedule of the Bengal election during the pandemic was unwise and avoidable. The Election Commission's corrective measures at the last moment can only be of limited help. The lack of foresight while drawing up the schedule and monitoring the campaign bordered on complicity in the surge of new infections.

India's COVID crisis – when difficult became worse

Its second wave is a result of poor political choices, bad communications, and neglect of public health principles



ASHISH K. JHA

India is in its darkest days of the pandemic, but there may be still darker days to come. With one in three new infections globally occurring in the country, India's astronomical surge in cases – more than 3 lakh daily – is propelling the global pandemic, and represents a grave threat to the economic and social well-being of the Indian people. The political leaders, who have been too slow and largely failed to take the outbreak seriously, are now coming to realise the gravity of the task at hand. Lockdowns are spreading, but always one step behind the virus. Given the catastrophic state of affairs, effective intervention will require much more rigorous and extensive action.

A data gap

It is difficult to grasp the true scope of this crisis. New Delhi's test positivity rate – the rate at which people getting tested for coronavirus receive positive results – recently climbed above 30%. If it takes three tests to find one positive patient, it means that we are likely missing many, many infections. Indeed, one would not be surprised if the true number of infections was now above 10 lakh daily. And we can see it in all those undocumented deaths. While the official statistics suggest 2,000 deaths daily, the true number again is much higher. One crematorium in New Delhi has gone from managing 20 bodies daily to 100; the constant running of the fur-

naces has caused its steel chimneys to melt.

Premature celebration

How did India find itself in this predicament? Certainly, the country faced many challenges in controlling the coronavirus, including the second largest population in the world, and one spread over an enormous, geographically and socially diverse country comprising both very rural areas and sprawling cities. But India's leaders have made a very difficult situation worse. Early this year, daily new infections dropped to less than 10,000 – a remarkable achievement, driven in part by successful efforts to enforce social distancing and other public health measures. India began to roll out homegrown vaccines to much fanfare. Bharatiya Janata Party President J.P. Nadda declared that Prime Minister Modi had "saved the country," comparing India's performance under Modi favourably to that of the United States.

But this premature celebration has ushered in a nightmare. The resumption of large, in-person political rallies and other large gatherings are part of the fuel that has caused COVID-19 to explode. The Prime Minister recently declared, "I can see a sea of masses" at a rally in West Bengal, apparently oblivious to the grave risk that such a sea poses to his supporters. The government also took almost no steps to limit the risk posed by the *Kumbh Mela* festival, ironically claiming that infection precautions would present too great a threat to crowd safety. As a result, the *Kumbh Mela* has resulted in thousands of positive tests, including several sadhus and former King Gyanendra of Nepal, with many thousands of infections sure to go undetected as pilgrims re-



turn to their home communities and expose their families and neighbours.

Control strategies

The virus has taken advantage of the overconfidence of the government over the past months, making matters worse. Viruses mutate constantly, but it is when they are allowed to spread unchecked through large populations that more infectious and more deadly variants become established and change the dynamics of outbreaks. India is now faced with managing a renewed epidemic driven at least in part by the B1.617 "double mutant" strain of SARS-CoV-2, with similar mutations to more virulent strains found in Brazil and South Africa. At the moment, however, scientists and public health policymakers are drawing on extremely limited data, as far too few cases of infection are being analysed to provide a complete and actionable picture of the spread of variants and their influence on disease dynamics. India must rapidly scale up its genomic surveillance efforts to give scientists and public health researchers the data they need to guide policy decisions.

How can the astronomical growth of the pandemic in India be brought under control? Short-term targeted lockdowns can help

– the kind we are seeing in New Delhi and elsewhere. They will break the chains of transmission and can curb the exponential growth we are seeing across the nation.

A second strategy is expanding access to vaccines although its benefits are likely to take weeks to be felt. Vaccine rollout without massive outreach and support for the complex, the challenging logistics of administering vaccines, and simply broadening eligibility requirements will do little to slow the virus. The lockdowns we are seeing now will almost surely need to be extended beyond a week and will need to be in place until infection numbers start coming down substantially. It is worth remembering that lockdowns exact a terrible economic and social cost and are a strategy of last resort.

Steps to take

So what might we do to minimise the time that cities and regions need to be in lockdown? India needs a surge of testing. Right now, given high test positivity rates, it is clear that the nation is not testing enough. Ideally, India would increase its testing rates several times over, with the goal of getting the positivity rate under 5%. The nation has the capacity to do that many more tests but has not made it enough of a priority.

We also know that universal mask wearing when people are outside their homes can be enormously helpful in curbing the spread of the disease. Given the crowds of Indian cities and towns and the high rates of infections, universal mask wearing, ideally with high quality masks, is critical and must be mandatory.

And banning all major indoor and outdoor events, including rallies, religious festivals, weddings,

and so forth, is essential. If those were to continue, any hope of bringing this outbreak under control would quickly vanish.

Of course, India's pandemic will finally come to an end when enough Indians are vaccinated – and targeting vaccines now most quickly and effectively can help control the spread of the virus. Whatever strategy India takes to administer vaccines (focus on elderly to save lives, young people to slow spread, etc.), the key is ensuring the country has enough vaccines. Here, the government needs to work with manufacturers like the Serum Institute, identify what is slowing them down, and use the full clout of the Indian government to drive production higher.

Looking forward

India is now suffering the worst days of the pandemic, going through a second wave of coronavirus as a result of poor political choices, poor communications, and neglect of public health principles. For months, too many celebrated that India had "beaten the virus" even though none of us could explain how that could be and why. In this crisis, there is much that individuals can do to protect themselves and their families. But political leaders must do much more. The good news is that we know it can be done, and we know how to do it. Focus on public health measures, improve vaccinations, universal masking, and effective coordination across public health efforts. If we do these things, infections can turn, hospitals can stop being overwhelmed, and life can begin to go back to normal.

Dr. Ashish K. Jha is Dean, Brown University School of Public Health, U.S.

Arise and rejuvenate the third layer of governance

Political acts depriving people of their rights must stop and there needs to be a movement to strengthen Panchayati raj



KAMAL HAASAN

What is progress? When has a government achieved its goals? What is the true indication that a government is not just planning, but also putting into action those plans? The half-hearted execution of a plan by a government that the people chose is not a sign of achievement. The government must ensure that even the last man sitting in the remote corner of the last row should have access to the benefits of the plan. This is why it is crucial that strong local bodies are formed to enable genuine feasibility and execution. The Cholas were the pioneers in the formation of local bodies as part of a well-organised hierarchy to oversee the implementation of progressive plans.

The journey of Panchayati raj
"The voice of the people is the voice of god; The voice of the Panchayat is the voice of the people," is the quote attributed to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Panchayati raj ensures that the voices of the people are heard loud and clear. But, drawing up a path for a brilliant organisational structure like the Panchayat raj, and then travelling along the path is not a simple task.

Realising that seamless administration is impossible without power sharing, the British, in 1884, passed the Madras Local Boards Act. With this, the British formed unions in both small towns and big cities and began to appoint members to ensure better administration. To a certain extent, this brought about positive changes in basic parameters such as health

and hygiene. With the advent of *gram panchayat* laws in 1920, people over 25 years of age were bestowed with the right to vote and choose their panchayat members.

Even though Gandhiji was constantly laying emphasis on the importance of autonomously ruled villages, the idea received constitutional recognition only in 1992.

It was only after the 73rd Amendment in the 1990s, that the Panchayati raj law came into force. This was the law that brought about massive turning points such as the initiation of *gram sabha*, a three-tier Panchayati raj methodology of governance, reservation for the downtrodden and women, consistency in economic development, local body elections once in five years, the formation of the State Election Commission, Finance Commission, and the power to draft the rules and responsibilities of the Panchayat.

The regions which were better equipped with basic facilities and which were more developed than the villages were brought under one coordinated body, namely, the municipality. The district capitals were further slotted into a combined parameter, namely, the corporation. Administration was transferred to the people, from the politicians and other officials.

The lofty dream of Gandhiji to make each village of the independent India a republic organisation, and to reiterate that the autonomous administration of villages should be made the foundation of the entire country's administration was heard and he lay stress on the active participation of the people in governance.

Ideal platform
For seemingly trivial and easily resolvable issues, the villages did not have to seek the assistance of the State or the Central governments. *Gram sabhas* could and can be the platform to resolve such is-



sues. According to the rules framed by the Tamil Nadu government, it is mandatory that *gram sabhas* meet at least four times in a calendar year. Besides, *gram sabhas* can be convened as and when the necessity arises. Every *gram sabha* meeting ensures the equal right to highlight the issues that disrupt life. In addition to this, the elected members of the Panchayat are obliged to read out the financial statements and balance sheet to ensure transparency.

The reality

The decisions taken during a *gram sabha* meeting and the proposed solutions with a feasible deadline are potent and powerful. Unfortunately, the reality today is that *gram sabhas* have become more like auction houses. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, the present government did not even make an attempt to seek the opinions and the consensus of the people on significant issues such as an eight-lane highway project and even a major hydrocarbon project. Even though the government announced that people's opinions would be considered, it went ahead and conducted meetings, which were marked by poor attendance and poor representation from the people. Even then, the government went ahead with the approval of projects which are impediments to normal life.

The truth is that keeping in mind a single goal, of profit, politi-

cians hold 'negotiations' with the officials. Several projects are being implemented for the benefit of private and corporate entities.

Sadly, in this age, women do not find themselves in major administrative roles in the local bodies, though, on paper, women are shown to be a considerable force.

The Makkal Needhi Maiam has been laying stress on the importance of *gram sabhas* and has been extending its support in a very transparent manner to rejuvenate the dying system of Panchayati raj.

The Kerala example

The neighbouring State of Kerala has been diligently working toward ensuring the proper use of allotted funds, and ensuring the efficiency of administration and eligible member appointments. Thus, it stands tall as being exemplary. If Tamil Nadu wants to stand tall too, it needs to take steps to enable the power of administration to Panchayats, as stated in the Constitution.

To ensure efficiency, we need to strengthen our *gram sabhas*, hold area *sabhas* in cities, form ward committees, hold online Panchayat meetings, ensure decent remuneration to Panchayat chiefs and councillors and also bestow the *gram sabha* with the power to revoke appointed members and representatives. These steps are what will ensure real growth in the State.

The State-appointed corporation commissioner faces mammoth challenges when a member of the Opposition party takes charge as a mayor. The constant and meaningless conflicts between the ruling party and the mayor from the Opposition party make it impossible for the corporation commissioner to execute what was agreed upon in a meeting. The officials kowtow to pressures from the ruling party. The same treatment is meted out to

municipal councillors and district councillors.

In Tamil Nadu

The Constitution is clear in stating that local body elections must be conducted once in five years. But the ruling party keeps postponing the holding of local body elections, which is a breach of the Constitution. Strangely, this form of disrespect never materialises when it comes to the Assembly elections!

Local body elections have been held once in five years for the last 25 years, since 1996. But for the first time, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government has travelled on without holding a local body election. This is not only an act of escapism but also a stain on the State's political history.

The recent reconstitution of nine districts in the State is an invalid excuse to postpone the holding of local body elections. The government gives a variety of empty and irrelevant excuses to postpone these elections and to cancel *gram sabha* meetings. The time has come to stop this act – of depriving people of their basic rights.

The demand for federal rule in the Centre and autonomous rule in the States should resonate along with the need to have autonomous local bodies too. We must collectively ensure that Panchayati raj should be strengthened. This should be the outcome of a people's movement.

I wish to end by citing Gandhiji's belief that the voices of people will resolve what violence can never be successful in resolving. Let the peoples' voices be heard. We should also note that every year, April 24 is celebrated as Panchayat raj day.

Kamal Haasan, actor, director and Padma Bhushan awardee, is President, Makkal Needhi Maiam

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the appointment of judges recommended by the Collegium rather than resorting to unworkable methods in a critical sector.
V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
A news report titled "FIR against private hospital in Kanpur" (April 23, 2021, some editions) erroneously listed Sec. 596 as one of the sections of the Indian Penal Code under which the FIR was lodged. It should have been Section 506.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Pandemic fight

The Centre cracking the whip when facing oxygen shortage is too little, too late. Scrambling to find supplies when people are battling for life is distressing. Lack of planning and public messaging have led to this nightmarish situation but we can still salvage it by strong public health measures to reduce transmission and strict isolation along with ramping up vaccination.

For the new CJI

Justice N.V. Ramana, the next Chief Justice of India, has the unenviable task of protecting and preserving the independence of India's great judiciary; one of the prime challenges he faces is the tremendous docket explosion. It is imperative that the judiciary is strengthened both

quantitatively and qualitatively by the new incumbent to ensure that the workload at all levels of the judiciary remains under control.

S.K. KHOSLA,

Chandigarh

Judicial appointments
Taking recourse to Article 224A for appointment of *ad hoc* judges shows poorly not only on the Centre which faltered in the appointment process of</p

Of mini-mutinies and shifting sands

As the BJP makes inroads into West Bengal, the incumbent Trinamool Congress government is pushing back, even as an experiment in Muslim politics is under way. **Shiv Sahay Singh and Sudipta Datta** report on the many strands of a polarised Bengal campaign

On the sinking island of Ghoramara, at the southernmost tip of West Bengal, which falls under the Sagar Assembly constituency, the impact of cyclone Amphan that hit the State last May is still visible. Homes near the coast lie flattened, the banks have eroded further, and uprooted trees are yet to be cleared. Ashima Giri got ₹20,000 as Amphan cyclone relief. "We are for [West Bengal Chief Minister] Mamata Banerjee," she says without any hesitation. But there are several others like Sareja Bibi who point out that they either did not get anything following the devastation or had to pay the local Trinamool Congress network "cut money" to get the amount. In the coastal areas of South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur, corruption in the Trinamool local leadership over Amphan relief is a common refrain.

In Bengal, where two phases of a long eight-phase election are yet to be held, the Trinamool's entire campaign is built around Banerjee. "Didi, didi aar ke, Bangla nijer meye keyi chaay (Didi, who else? Bengal wants its own daughter)" is the party's resounding slogan. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has quickly emerged to become the primary opposition to the ruling party, is trying to push the idea of "ashol paribartan (real change)" in its campaign. And the Samyukt Morcha, comprising the Left, Congress, and newly floated Indian Secular Front (ISF), has tried to shake things up by challenging both the main contenders. The contest has been marked by numerous defections, taunts, communal statements, violence, and aggressive campaigning even as the number of COVID-19 cases rises alarmingly in Bengal.

Fear of violence

Across the river, in Purba Medinipur district, all eyes are on the electoral contest at Nandigram where Banerjee is taking on Trinamool-turned-BJP rival Suvendu Adhikari. An injury to the Chief Minister on March 10 has restricted her movement, forcing her on a wheelchair for the rest of the campaign.

For several women in Nandigram who were witness to the violent land agitation of 2007-08, the high-voltage contest has rekindled fears of violence after results are declared on May 2. "Suvendu looked after us on behalf of Didi. And now we have been asked to pick one," says the elderly Narmada Sith, who was tortured during the anti-land acquisition movement.

Sith's fears are not unfounded. Despite the huge deployment of Central forces in West Bengal, the Election Commission of India has not been able to insulate the State from poll-related violence. Till April 22, several incidents of voters being threatened, clashes between political parties, and the killing of political workers have been reported. In the fourth phase of polling, at Sitalkuchi Assembly in north Bengal's Cooch Behar district, Central forces opened fire killing four people. They maintain that they fired in self-defence. A primary assessment of the violence suggests that more than 20 people have lost their lives since the Model Code of Conduct was put in place and more than 30 candidates have been attacked during the poll process.

Memories of violence and "area domination" clashes are heard not only in Nandigram, but in many other parts of the State too. In Singur, an elderly farmer, Vivekananda Das, says he was beaten up by the police during the land agitation in 2006 and was only able to re-cultivate his land after 14 years, in 2020.

In the Jangalmahal region, which was gripped by mindless violence from 2008 to 2011, 30-year-old Chiranjib Maity from Jhargram stays away from the rallies conducted by Chhatradhar Mahato of the Trinamool. Mahato led the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities, the frontal organisation of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), before joining the Trinamool last year after spending more than 10 years in jail. Maity's father was killed by the CPI (Maoist) before his own eyes in 2010.

In Darjeeling, which witnessed a 100-day lockdown and economic blockade in 2017, during which at least 11 persons lost their lives, the elections present an opportunity for the people to express their political preferences. While there are broad-based State-level issues dominating the Assembly polls, West Bengal remains a story of many revolutions and mutinies, big and small, and they will determine the outcome of the polls, say observers.

Delivery of welfare schemes

For the Trinamool, the biggest poll plank is the delivery of welfare schemes. Banerjee claims that her government has launched 70 welfare schemes. Some of them like Kanyashree (which provides a one-time grant of ₹25,000 for a girl child who studies till Class 12) and Rupashree (which provides a one-time handout of ₹25,000 for



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee protests against the Election Commission after being barred from campaigning for 24 hours for violation of provisions of the Model Code of Conduct, in Kolkata, on April 13. (Below): Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives at a public rally in Kawakhali on the outskirts of Siliguri on April 10. ■ AP; AFP



a girl's marriage for economically stressed families) are targeted towards girls.

In densely populated North and South 24 Parganas (64 seats, of which the ruling Trinamool won 56 in 2016), the party is banking on such schemes to see it through. But though the Trinamool chief is popular, there is resentment against the party. "Didi is good. But very few people can say the same of local Trinamool workers," says Bulti Das of Champahati in South 24 Parganas, who was given some seed money for poultry farming. Former bureaucrat Dipan Ghosh explains that though the Trinamool has done a lot of good work, such as giving rice at ₹2 a kg, it has not allowed people to voice their concerns. Recalling the words of Santosh Rana, one of the leaders of the Naxal movement, Ghosh believes that it is the "Trinamool's lack of democracy that has pulled the BJP to the State".

Ghosh, who was Secretary of Panchayat and Rural Development and later Health and Family Welfare, says during the 34-year Left Front rule, there was "a sort of class alliance in rural Bengal and it was an open secret that benefits were linked to party loyalty". With the Trinamool in power, "the MLAs and the bureaucracy appear to be more powerful than panchayat functionaries. Like in the later part of the Left regime, the Trinamool has also given an impression that you need to be with the party to get benefits," he says.

A professor who has followed the rise of the Trinamool points out that control of local administrative bodies is vital to the party's electoral success. "The Trinamool's narrative of welfare transfers may not work as a section of its leaders at the grassroots level were involved in corruption, taking 'cut money' for disbursement of schemes. In case of some schemes like honorarium to imams and muezzins, the BJP accused the Trinamool of appeasement politics," he says.

According to Ardhendu Sen, former Chief Secretary of West Bengal, some of the development schemes of the Trina-

mool government have been well implemented, "but the party has destroyed the panchayats". He says, "Whatever the people get today is what Mamata wants to give. The food situation has improved, but not health as she publicises. As for Kanyashree, I looked at whether the school dropout rate is going down, but there is no comprehensive evidence of that. Her reign has been a mixed bag." After the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the Trinamool government embarked on some "course correction", launching outreach programmes like Duare Sarkar (government at the doorstep), Paray Paray Samadhan (resolving issues in the neighbourhood) and Swasthya Sathi (a health insurance scheme where the medical card is handed over to the oldest woman member of the family).

Blow to democracy

For bureaucrats, the biggest difference between the Left and Trinamool governments is that the latter seems to have stopped taking into account inputs from the ground. "Under the Left regime, there was some semblance of consultation with the people. Now, if you ask for something, leaders get annoyed," says Sen.

The 2018 panchayat elections dealt a blow to grassroots democracy and the three-tier panchayat network, say voters and leaders. Not only were Opposition candidates not allowed to file nomination papers but even dissidents within the ruling party were not allowed to contest, say Left and Congress leaders. The Trinamool won 34% of the seats during that election, about 20,000 without a single vote being cast. State Congress president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury claims that on the day of polling, 70-80 people were killed. Veteran Left leaders who led their supporters to file nomination papers were assaulted. The ruling party ensured that not a single civic body was administered by the Opposition and all barring the Siliguri Municipal Corporation were run by the Trinamool.

It is this stifling of the Opposition that gave BJP oxygen in the State, say both

Left and Congress leaders. Also, the Trinamool's over-reliance on minority politics has afforded the Hindu right a political space. The BJP vote share in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls was 17%. It dropped to 10% in the 2016 Assembly polls and rose to 40% in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

"In Bengal, people vote for a party not because of ideological affiliation but because of the perception of protection against violence. If the party they have traditionally voted for cannot protect them in the face of violence perpetrated by hoodlums close to the party in power, their allegiance is bound to shift to the one which can. While the BJP's capacity to resist Trinamool violence has increased significantly over the last three years, it is ultimately this balance of coercion that will decide who wins

Left and Congress leaders. Also, the Trinamool's over-reliance on minority politics has afforded the Hindu right a political space. The BJP vote share in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls was 17%. It dropped to 10% in the 2016 Assembly polls and rose to 40% in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The BJP's might and muscle

Taking full advantage of this rancour, the BJP has used its "might and muscle" to set foot in Bengal. It has worked assiduously on the disgruntlement on the ground and used defections as a political tool to poach leaders of the ruling party. The politics of defections started in West Bengal in 2011, when MLAs of the Congress defected to the Trinamool even though both the parties had joined hands and contested polls to defeat the Left Front government.

In 2016, the Trinamool stormed to power for a second term with 211 seats, but the party continued to break into the rank and file of the Opposition. Of the 44 Congress MLAs who won the 2016 Assembly polls, more than 20 defected to the Trinamool, says senior Congress leader Abdul Mannan. Taking a leaf out of the Trinamool handbook, the BJP began to engineer defections before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Senior Trinamool leaders like Mukul Roy, Arjun Singh, Nisith Pramanik and Locket Chatterjee switched to the BJP and the party won 18 out of 42 Lok Sabha seats in the State. Once the BJP got its formula right, it began to woo more members of the Trinamool. In December 2020, one of the key ministers of the Trinamool,

Adhikari, joined the BJP. He was soon followed by Rajib Banerjee. By the time the State went to the polls, more than 30 MLAs of the Trinamool had defected to the BJP, and many were given tickets.

What is most crucial to the rise of the BJP in Bengal is that the party gained strength without participating in any prolonged people's movement like Singur or Nandigram, say observers. It has used defections, religious polarisation using the trope of infiltration and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, and also highlighted communal violence in some parts of the State to stake claim to power.

In many areas of rural Bengal, villagers talk about a desire for change. "Onek toh dekhilam, baam ke, didi ke, ebar dekhilam party ke die (We have seen the Left and Trinamool, let us try a new party)," says a young man waiting for Home Minister Amit Shah's road show at Nandigram. A farmer in the agriculture-rich Bardhaman district is candid: "If there is a new broom, do we use the old one?" Similar sentiments are echoed in Jhargram (the BJP did very well in this erstwhile Maoist belt in the Lok Sabha elections, winning all four seats), Howrah, Hooghly and North and South 24 Parganas. To build on this, the Prime Minister and the BJP top brass including party chief J.P. Nadda, Home Minister Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath besides State BJP president Dilip Ghosh held rallies and road shows. Modi held over 20 public rallies across the State.

Identity politics

The campaign has been bitter, fractious and communal. The Election Commission has taken some note of the polarisation, but not enough, says a senior Congress leader. Speaking in Bidhannagar, which went to the polls on April 17, on the city's north-eastern fringes, Shah said "only the BJP can stop infiltration in Bengal. Communists, Congress and the Trinamool have vote banks in 'ghuspiyas' (infiltrators)". Campaigning in Asansol, the Prime Minister raked up the 2018 riots: "Who supported the riot-

ers? Who undertook the policy of appeasement? For whom did the police support the rioters? There is only one answer. Everyone is saying 'because of Didi.' The Trinamool was quick to retort that the person the BJP had blamed then for being a bystander, Jitendra Tiwari, is now with the saffron party. In Nandigram and other parts of Purbo and Paschim Medinipur, Adhikari has constantly harped on the '70:30' divide of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal. The Muslims make up 27% of the population, according to the 2011 Census.

Biswanath Chakraborty, psephologist and professor at Rabindra Bharati University, says this is a watershed election because Bengal is witnessing the rise of identity politics – not just of Hindus and Muslims, but also Dalit sections like Matua and Rajbanshi. The BJP has focussed on getting the disaffected and neglected elements together from all walks of life to rally against the Trinamool. The Matuas are Hindu migrants from Bangladesh and the BJP has promised to implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act if voted to power. On the ground, a section of Matuas do not want special favours and point out that they already have Aadhaar and voter cards, markers of Indian citizenship. The Matuas had backed Trinamool earlier but are now divided between the BJP and the ruling party – they have a say in at least 30 seats.

An experiment called the ISF

With the Left vote share falling from 26.6% in 2016 to 7.5% in 2019, the Left Front felt it "had to do something" to stop all anti-incumbency votes from going to the BJP. In an attempt to remain relevant in the contest, the Left and Congress alliance joined hands with the ISF, formed by Fururia Sharif cleric Abbas Siddique. "This will help stop votes from going to the BJP, at least a part of them," claims Mohammed Salim, Polit Bureau member of the CPI(M). "The ISF is fighting in 28 seats," says Abbas Siddique's brother Naushad Siddique, chairman of the ISF and a candidate in Muslim-dominated Bhagarpur, located about 40 km from Kolkata. In 2019, the Trinamool had led in 60 of the 74 Assembly segments in which Muslims constitute over 50% of the electorate. "The Muslim vote is likely to be divided in places where the ISF is strong," says Chakraborty. "And that will not help the Trinamool."

"A section of Left supporters who first went to the Trinamool is likely to have voted for the BJP in 2019 and may go with either the BJP or the Left-Contingent alliance," says Ambikesh Majhiapatra, who teaches at Jadavpur University and had contested the 2016 Assembly polls with support from the Left and Congress. Things may have changed for the Congress, however, in the Muslim-majority seats of Malda and Murshidabad after the Sitalkuchi firing. "The Muslim vote may consolidate behind the Trinamool," says a local leader.

The BJP has targeted the Trinamool government over alleged corruption, particularly using the term "cut money". It has taken on Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, the ruling party's MP from Diamond Harbour. Those who have defected from the Trinamool to the BJP often attack the 'bhaiqa' or nephew saying he is a "tolabaj" (extortionist). While there have been cases of local-level functionaries at panchayats being involved in taking "cut money" and the Trinamool chairperson has asked people to return the money, Abhishek Banerjee has turned out to be an easy target for the Opposition.

High turnout amidst a pandemic

Charges of mismanagement in dealing with the pandemic are a cause of concern for the ruling party. But now there is anger against the BJP too, in some sections, as Modi continued to hold large rallies where most were seen packed in close proximity without masks, even as cases have soared. The Prime Minister has cancelled his rallies for the last two phases. Banerjee has also promised to connect with the electorate virtually. On April 21, the State's daily COVID-19 infections crossed 10,000 for the first time since the outbreak of the pandemic.

On April 22, the day of polling for the sixth phase, the Calcutta High Court came down heavily on the Election Commission saying it is only issuing circulars but not ensuring that COVID-19 protocols are implemented. Despite the surge, there has been no drop in voter percentage. In each of the six phases, more than 80% polling was registered.

The 2021 Assembly polls are no ordinary elections, say political observers. "This is the first time that the State is witnessing the rise of the BJP as well as a high-pitched campaign that started months before the poll dates were announced," says Chakraborty. The people on the ground have picked sides and while some are willing to stick their necks out, others maintain a strategic silence.



FROM PAGE ONE

As oxygen supply dips,
25 die in Delhi hospital

The distress calls began at 9.20 a.m. when authorities at Sir Ganga Ram said an oxygen tanker had reached and was being offloaded. "This will last four to five hours, depending on consumption," a hospital spokesperson said.

Around the same time, two other hospitals, Max Smart Hospital and Max Hospital Saket, too, said that they had less than an hour's oxygen supply. "Less than an hour's Oxygen supplies at Max Smart Hospital & Max Hospital Saket. Awaiting promised fresh supplies from INOX since 1 a.m. Over 700 patients admitted, need immediate assistance," the hospital said in a statement.

Later, Max Healthcare said it had stopped new admissions at all its hospitals in Delhi-NCR due to low oxygen stocks. "We regret to inform that we are suspending any new patient admissions in all our hospitals in Delhi NCR till oxygen supplies stabilise," Max Healthcare said in a tweet.

Other hospitals also announced that they were not taking new admissions due to the oxygen shortage. Around noon, an official from the Holy Family Hospi-

tal, which had 385 COVID-19 patients, said they had oxygen stock only for a few hours".

Around 2 p.m., Dr. Pankaj Solanki, medical superintendent of Dharamveer Solanki Hospital, which has 16 COVID-19 patients, said they had oxygen stock for just two hours. "We have been told by someone from government that oxygen will be given first to large hospitals and then to small hospitals. We have also admitted patients and the cost of life cannot be determined by whether the hospital is large or small," the hospital, which has 50 beds, said in a tweet in Hindi.

In a statement late in the evening, a spokesperson for Sir Ganga Ram Hospital again said: "We have 30 to 45 minutes of oxygen left." Hospitals in Delhi have been facing an oxygen shortage for the past six days. The Delhi government has been blaming the Haryana and Uttar Pradesh governments for not allowing smooth supply of oxygen from private oxygen plants in the States to Delhi.

(With inputs from Ashok Kumar in Gurugram and PTI)

CJI pushes T.N. to let Sterlite reopen plant

"We don't care if it is you, Vedanta, Centre, A, B, C who runs the plant, but oxygen must be produced from a place capable of producing it...The Constitution demands that material resources should be equally distributed all over the country," he told Tamil Nadu..

Tamil Nadu counsel, senior advocate C.S. Vaidyanathan, agreed that either the State or the Centre could run the plant to produce medical oxygen. Additional Advocate General Balaji Srinivasan also represented Tamil Nadu.

"The State cannot say we will not run it (plant). What is your problem? Just because you have a problem with Vedanta, you will not use their plant and deprive people of oxygen? What is this," Chief Justice Bobde asked Tamil Nadu point-blank.

"The country is in dire need of oxygen. Different States need it. For example, Orissa can come to Ra-

jasthan for oxygen. Law and order issues cannot be an excuse. Why should not we use the capacity when every MT of oxygen matters?" Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, for Centre, agreed.

Vedanta plea
The hearing was based on a plea by Vedanta to reopen its plant to produce medical oxygen. The plant was shut by the State in 2018 due to environmental pollution.

The debate began to heat up after Mr. Vaidyanathan raised apprehensions that reopening the plant would create law and order problem.

But the CJI shot back at the State, saying it had not mentioned any law and order problem on April 22 when the court had first heard the proposal to use the plant for producing medical oxygen.

The court listed the case on Monday for further hearing.

Rising prevalence of U.K. strain in Delhi

However, while the relative proportion of known variants of concern, or VoC, (the U.K., South Africa, Brazil variants) is around 11%, investigations were still on to determine to what extent they were responsible for the severity of disease.

Delhi is undergoing an unprecedented surge in its fourth wave, with a rise in instances of people with breathlessness and a demand for oxygen cylinders and beds that has led to health systems being overwhelmed.

Of the 438 sequences of the VoCs analysed in Delhi, 415 exhibited the U.K. strain and 23 the South Africa strain.

Delhi was among the States, along with Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat, where instances of the U.K. strain in the wider community far outnumbered those detected among international travellers and their contacts.

For instance, in Delhi, there were 324 instances of the UK strain in the "community" as opposed to 91 among travellers and their contacts (T&C). In Gujarat, it was 18 in T&C and 42 in the community and in Chhattisgarh there was only 1 case in the T&C as opposed to 14 in

the community.

Such numbers weren't yet present for the Brazilian and South African strains. Several of these States are showing unprecedented spikes.

The comparative data was presented by Dr. Singh.

So far about 15,000 genomes had been sequenced, which is about 1% of India's coronavirus case load.

Dr. Anurag Agrawal, Director, CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, said the concern with the Indian variants was that they possessed two mutations – E484K and L245R – that together would increase the likelihood of a wider range of antibodies being unable to counter the virus. "However immunity also includes a cellular level response that can generate cross reactivity and so we can still expect, a good antibody response which is why all vaccines, despite the variant, will be fairly protective (against disease)," he said.

Dr. Priya Abraham, Director, ICMR-National Institute of Virology, said the virus would continue to mutate and the best defence would be to continue following 'COVID appropriate behaviour'.

On the other hand, in the community, which had 324 instances of the UK strain, the best defence would be to continue following 'COVID appropriate behaviour'.

West Bengal yearning for a positive change, says Modi

People want dignity of labour and ease of doing business: Prime Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday addressed the electorate in West Bengal virtually and said that people are yearning for a positive change.

"From different corners of the State wherever I have campaigned I have seen a yearning for a change in the State," Mr. Modi said, addressing the virtual rally.

The Prime Minister was scheduled to address four rallies in Malda, Murshidabad, Suri and south Kolkata during the day but the rallies were cancelled because of his engagements at Delhi.

The Election Commission of India had banned roadshows and motorbike rallies and capped the number of people attending public rallies at 500.

In his 30-minute address that was video-streamed at the four venues, the Prime Minister made repeated references to 'Ashol Paribartan' and 'Sonar Bangla', the two



All ears: People listening to the virtual address of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Birbhum district on Friday. • PTI

phrases that have been used by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) extensively during their campaign.

"The people of West Bengal want dignity of labour,

ease of living and ease of doing business and the BJP has taken a pledge to fulfil these dreams," Mr. Modi said.

The Prime Minister, unlike in the earlier public rallies, made no direct attacks on the Trinamool Congress and avoided any mention of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. But in a veiled attack on the party, Mr. Modi said, "Illegal immigration, syndicates, and extortion are hurdles to West Bengal's development."

The Prime Minister said that after nearly four decades, the people of West Bengal had a chance to strengthen democracy in the State and appreciated the high turnout in the first six phases of elections in the State.

Pointing out that this was the last election meeting before the State went to the

polls for the seventh and eighth phases, he urged the people of the State to vote in large numbers. "You have to come out on the polling day and maintain all safety protocols related to COVID," he said.

The seventh phase of polling for 36 seats in the State will be held on April 26 and the last phase of polling on 35 seats on April 29.

During the speech the Prime Minister, who quoted Rabindranath Tagore at least twice, spoke about development of infrastructure in Kolkata, the benefits of PM Kisan scheme to about 70 lakh farmers in the State and the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme.

"This election is not only about change of government in West Bengal. I can see a

rise of aspirations. People of West Bengal yearn for peace, security and development," he said. The Prime Minister promised that the BJP government would use technology to transform Kolkata "to the city of the future".

'Centre's negligence has led to COVID-19 crisis'

No experts were consulted: Mamata

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday addressed a public meeting virtually in Paschim Bardhaman and said that it was because of the "negligence of the Centre" that the COVID-19 situation in the country had assumed alarming proportions. She also alleged that oxygen meant for health facilities in West Bengal was being diverted to other States.

unfortunate," she said.

The Trinamool Congress chairperson said that no experts had been consulted; oxygen and medicines had not been stocked for the second wave of COVID-19; and Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan had said on March 7 that the coronavirus was on its way out.

"There is no oxygen available in the market. Steel Authority of India Limited was meeting our oxygen demands for West Bengal, but that oxygen has been diverted to Uttar Pradesh," Ms. Banerjee said. She said that all industrial units had been asked to divert their supply for health care.



Oxygen and medicines have not been stocked for the second wave of COVID-19

Cong. attacks govt. over handling of pandemic

Centre responsible for COVID deaths'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the Centre was responsible for people dying due to shortage of oxygen and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds in the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Separately, former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram targeted the Centre over differential pricing policy for COVID-19 vaccines and suggested that the State governments come together to ensure uniform pricing.

"Congress has been advocating aggressive vaccination of all adult age groups but criticised the new vaccine policy that allows differential pricing.

On Wednesday, the Serum Institute of India (SII), which manufactures Covishield, had announced three slabs: ₹150 for the Central government, ₹400 for State governments and ₹600 for private hospitals per dose.

"The joint purchasing power of the State governments will force the manufacturers to agree to a uniform price. The Centre has abdicated its responsibility and surrendered to corporate profiteering," the former Finance Minister added.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh slammed Centre for going ahead with the Central Vista project in the midst of a public health emergency.

ities and life-saving anti-viral drugs such as Remdesivir and vaccines.

The Congress has been advocating aggressive vaccination of all adult age groups but criticised the new vaccine policy that allows differential pricing.

Through a tweet, the Chamoli Police urged social media users to refrain from spreading rumours. The police, however, said the Border Road Organisation (BRO) Commander concerned had informed them that reports of such an incident had been received and teams were being sent to the area.

Due to heavy snowfall, communication lines in the area were disrupted and, therefore, the incident could not be confirmed. The Uttarakhand DIG (Law and Order) Nilesh Anand Bharne said details were also being cross-checked with the ITBP.

Mr. Kejriwal, while calling for help from the Centre for fulfilling the rising oxygen requirements of hospitals in Delhi, live-streamed his remarks, which Mr. Modi objected to as it was happening, saying it went against the protocol of such closed-door meetings.

Mr. Kejriwal said he would not make the mistake again.

Government sources alleged Mr. Kejriwal's actions were aimed at politicising the meeting to give the impression that the Centre was being heavy-handed with

BRO reports glacier break in Uttarakhand

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Amid reports of a glacier breaking off in the Summa area, located close to the India-China border in Uttarakhand, the Chamoli Police on Friday night said there was no official confirmation of the incident. Efforts were under way to determine the location of the possible event.

Through a tweet, the Chamoli Police urged social media users to refrain from spreading rumours. The police, however, said the Border Road Organisation (BRO) Commander concerned had informed them that reports of such an incident had been received and teams were being sent to the area.

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Modi raps Kejriwal for live-streaming CMs' meet

PM says Delhi CM violated protocol of closed-door meets

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal got into a minor fracas during the Union government's videoconference with the Chief Ministers of States with a high COVID-19 burden, after Mr. Kejriwal live-streamed his interventions at the meeting.

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Mr. Kejriwal said he would not make the mistake again.

Government sources alleged Mr. Kejriwal's actions were aimed at politicising the meeting to give the impression that the Centre was being heavy-handed with

his version of events.

"Today, the Chief Minister's address was shared live because there has never been any instruction, written or verbal, from the Central government that the said interaction could not be shared live. There have been multiple occasions of similar interactions where matters of public importance which had no confidential information were shared live. However, if any inconvenience was caused, we highly regret it," the statement said.

Mr. Kejriwal did much of this for political effect. He spoke of airlifting oxygen tanks, which is already being done, spoke of the Railways providing 'Oxygen Express' trains, which, as the Railway Ministry said, the Delhi government hadn't got in touch with them about, and he basically did not give a single constructive solution, unlike other Chief Ministers who did," alleged a source in the government.

Mr. Kejriwal's office provided a statement explaining

IN BRIEF



Nine of family killed as van falls into Ganga

PATNA

At least nine people were killed on Friday and seven are missing after a van with 18 of a family fell into the Ganga at Danapur, near Patna. The tragedy occurred when a pick-up van with the family of Chandradeep Rai, returning from a pre-wedding ceremony, overturned and fell from a makeshift iron bridge into the Ganga.

A group Senators, including former Democratic primary progressive candidates Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have written to President Joe Biden, asking the U.S. to support a request by India and South Africa for a temporary waiver of intellectual property rights at the World Trade Organization to facilitate the production of vaccines and therapeutics globally.

On Thursday, State Department spokesperson Ned Price referred questions on export controls to the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR).

"You asked about intellectual property and certain controls. That was – is within the purview of USTR. What I will say broadly is that the United States first and foremost is engaged in an ambitious and effective and, so far, successful effort to vaccinate the American people," he said.

CJI Bobde's tenure draws to a close

I did my best,' he tells advocates

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The 47th Chief Justice of India, Sharad A. Bobde, on Friday completed his last working day in office after steering the Supreme Court through unprecedented months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I did my best," he told the assembled advocates and law officers.

The baton of the top judge will pass to Justice N.V. Ramana, the senior-most judge of the court, who would take his oath of office at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Saturday.

Chief Justice Bobde was joined, as is the custom, on the ceremonial Bench by Justice Ramana.

Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal said every CJI should have a minimum tenure of three years.

Chief Justice Bobde leaves behind a mixed legacy. The CJI, in his 18-month tenure, made sure that virtual hearings were started early. Though he staunchly believed that virtual hearings did amount to physical hearings, many lawyers disagreed vehemently.

In late February 2020, a nine-judge Bench led by CJI Bobde upheld a decision of the Sabarmati Review

Bench to refer to

INTERVIEW | SHIVSHANKAR MENON

'China tore up the *modus vivendi* in 2020, the LAC is now live'

We are still in the middle of a negotiation of a crisis, which is nowhere near over until Depsang and Gogra are resolved, says former NSA and Ambassador to China

ANANTH KRISHNAN

Shivshankar Menon, former National Security Adviser (NSA), Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to China, traces the evolution of India's foreign policy and place in the world in his new book, India and Asian Geopolitics: The Past, Present. The world, he says, is now facing a hinge moment, which will require India to be clear-eyed in its vision of what it seeks in the international order, and particularly in crafting a new modus vivendi with China after last year's crisis. Excerpts from an interview:

The very first sentence of your book tells us that the Indian subcontinent is the only subcontinent in the world. Do you see an inherent tension between our sense of uniqueness and our place in the world?

■ There is. In fact, that is precisely why I start the book with that, because it seems to me that because we are the only subcontinent, we are part of a larger continent and we're aware of that. But we also have a strong sense of our own exceptionalism, of our uniqueness, of how different we are. Therefore, there's always a tendency to draw down the shutters, withdraw to our own home.

That's the main point of the book actually, because

of leaders. Not that they agreed on everything or they all thought alike ... But they had an awareness of being engaged in something much bigger. And they weren't playing day-to-day politics with these big issues, which is why many of the things they did have lasted, and why we've gone back to that in various forms. You might say, "well, we are no longer non-aligned." But when we say strategic autonomy, we mean exactly much the same, that we keep the power of decision-making in our own hands on big issues. So, for me, that's actually a very important formative period.

Are there lessons that we can draw from that period in how middle powers navigated the world?

■ History never repeats itself exactly. It's not as though we are suddenly now in a bipolar world where China and the U.S. have replaced the Soviet Union and the U.S. China and the U.S. are co-dependent economically. Secondly, your interests have grown tremendously. Today,



Power in China shifted in favour of the PLA some time ago

we are much more connected to the world than we were [in the past]. Almost half of our GDP depends on the external sector. Maritime security across the whole Indo-Pacific today really matters to you, when 38% of your trade goes through the South China Sea. So, freedom of navigation in the South China Sea matters to you.

Today we couldn't make the economic choices we made in the 1950s and 1960s. We are part of the world, we are dependent on the world, for energy, for raw materials, for technology, for a whole host of things. So, we need to get out there and engage.

My fear is that we might be going in the wrong direction. We walked out of the RCEP [the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership trade agreement] and we are the only major economy that is not part of any regional trading arrangement. We have raised tariffs steadily for the last four years. By doing all this, we are saying that we don't think we'll be competitive for the next 20 years, because 20 years was the adjustment period under the RCEP. That's not a good message to send either to your own people or to the rest of the world. We're not part of global supply or value chains. We need to actually make ourselves more competitive rather than less, and more engaged rather than less, at a time like this.

On the current situation with China, does the post-1988 model not hold anymore?

■ Some of us have been arguing for a little more than a decade in fact, that the old *modus vivendi* no longer works. Those signs of stress were

clear. You saw it in the difference between what the Chinese did at the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2008 and what they did when we went for NSG membership in 2015. Most of all, you saw a huge increase in the Chinese commitment to Pakistan. If you look at CPEC [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor], it represents a Chinese stake in the continued Pakistani hold of Indian territory in Kashmir, because now they have assets there to protect.

In 2020, of course, the Chinese tore up the *modus vivendi* because the basis on which it was done was to maintain the *status quo* and keep the peace. The border had stayed much the same until then, without fundamental changes. But in 2020, they tried to change the *status quo* across the line in the western sector. And clearly, that whole LAC [Line of Actual Control] is now live.

The relationship needs a reset now. Whether it's done consciously or whether it just happens and evolves as a new normal depends on both governments. They're both saying different things. That was under the sea,

which was torn up by the PLA. You see this increasing role of the PLA across the board. In the South China Sea, for instance, Xi Jinping as President promises no militarisation, but what do you see? You've seen a militarisation of Chinese policy everywhere. My fear is that if you have a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.

In your final chapter, on India's destiny, you say we face two roads. One is of fear and polarisation, the other is of self-confidence and ambition. Which way do you think we are heading?

■ It is very hard to say where we're actually going. As somebody once said, pessimists are always right. But the optimists ultimately win.

It is clear from the book which road I think we should take, and what I think we should do in order to be true to ourselves and to our own people, and that is because that is our primary responsibility. I only hope the optimists win.

(Read the full interview at <http://bit.ly/shivmenon>)

25 production sites approved for Remdesivir

AFMS to procure 23 oxygen plants

IAF presses into service transport aircraft, helicopters to airlift oxygen containers and essential drugs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government has approved 25 new manufacturing sites for Remdesivir injections since April 12, said Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilizers Mansukh Mandaviya.

"Production capacity is now ramped up to over 90 lakhs per month, earlier it was 40 lakhs vials per month. Very soon, 3 lakh vials per day will be produced. Monitoring is being done on a daily basis," said Mr. Mandaviya.

The Ministry also decided to give an extension to Short Service Commissioned Doctors in AFMS till December 31, 2021. "This will augment the strength of AFMS by 238 more doctors," Defence Mi-

Crucial steps: A doctor inspecting an oxygen cylinder at a hospital in Delhi. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

nister Rajnath Singh said on Twitter.

"Twenty-three mobile oxygen generation plants are being airlifted from Germa-

said each plant had a capacity to produce 40 litres of oxygen per minute and 2,400 litres an hour, at which rate it could cater to 20-25 patients round the clock.

Separately, the Indian Air Force pressed into service transport aircraft and helicopters for carrying out sorties from various parts of the country to airlift oxygen containers, cylinders, essential medicines and equipment.

To speed up procurements in dealing with the surge in cases, Mr. Singh has also approved delegation of

emergency financial powers to AFMS.

As per the orders issued on Friday, the Director-General (DG) Medical Services (MS) of three Services have financial powers of up to ₹5 crore, Major General and equivalent up to ₹3 crore and Brigadier and equivalent up to ₹2 crore.

Emergency powers to the lower Competent Financial Authorities have been delegated up to September 30, 2021, with a provision for revision or extension, the Ministry stated.

SC raps lawyers for 'imputing motives'

It reacts to criticism on its intervention

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

A Special Bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde on Friday objected to senior lawyers "imputing motives" on the top court for attempting to "stall" proceedings in various High Courts concerning acute oxygen shortage and COVID-19 essentials for patients as deaths rise.

The Bench was reacting to various media reports, in which several senior lawyers voiced their perceptions on the Bench's sudden intervention on Thursday, taking *suo motu* cognisance of the issue. According to them, the top court should have neither disturbed the High Court proceedings nor attempted to transfer the cases to itself midway.

In Thursday's order, the Bench had asked the Centre for a 'national plan' to facilitate a uniform supply of COVID-19 essentials. It had issued formal notices to the Centre and States, the Union Territories, and parties who went to various High Courts. The Bench asked them why the top court should not go ahead and pass "uniform orders" on the supply of oxygen, essential drugs, the method and manner of vaccination, and lockdowns.

The order on Thursday triggered anticipation among the legal fraternity and the public that the sudden intervention of the top court would delay much-needed relief from High Courts or derail their ongoing monitoring of oxygen supply by the States and the Centre.

Lacklustre responses from authorities had been



met with proactive judicial orders and sharp remarks from the High Courts of Delhi, Bombay, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, Calcutta, Allahabad and Gujarat. But Thursday's order somehow presumed that the HCs' orders were only reaching out to a few and did not give uniform relief.

'Even-handed approach'
'Prima facie, we are inclined to take the view that the distribution of these essential services and supplies must be done in an even-handed manner according to the advice of the health authorities," Thursday's order said.

On Friday, however, the Bench accused senior advocates such as Vikas Singh and Dushyant Dave, who were vocal against Thursday's order, of "putting pressure on the court". "We never stalled the HCs from passing orders. Mr. Dave, you imputed motives on us without seeing the order... You have to protect this institution," Justice L. Nageswara Rao said.

Meanwhile, the court-appointed *amicus curiae*, Harish Salve, recused from the case, saying that his decision was in view of the imputations made that he and the CJI were school friends. He said he did not want important issues to be sidetracked by malignant imputations in the media.

SC intervention is wrong, says Congress

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court's intervention in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic is "wrong", "uncalled for" and may have the "unintended effect of legitimisation of the utter failure of the Central Government" in handling the crisis, the Congress said on Friday.

Addressing a virtual press conference, senior advocate and Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said various High Courts were upholding the citizens' right to life and were providing relief to the common people. "The Supreme Court's intervention on April 22, 2021 is totally uncalled for. Unfortunately, it is wrong, wrong and wrong. It is wrong because it is not *suo motu* ameliorative but a reaction to palliative High Court orders. It is wrong because decentralisation, not over-centralisation – judicial, administrative and societal – is the need of the hour," Mr. Singhvi said, reading out from a strongly worded statement.

"It is wrong because it may have the unintended effect of legitimisation of the utter failure of the Central government on all fronts in its anti-Covid policies and actions ... It is wrong because it, in fact, enhances the closed and incestuous circle of the Central government or connected/affiliated persona and seeks to find a solution from amongst those responsible for the crisis in the first place," he added.

The party's response follows criticism from several lawyers and jurists who had questioned the SC's intervention.

ACHARYA N.G.RANGA AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY Administrative office, Lam, Guntur-522034, A.P.

DIRECT RECRUITMENT (General including backlog for SC/ST)

ADVT NO.8/RC/2021, DATED: 23-04-2021

The Advt. No.7/RC/2018, dt:10.10.2018 stands canceled and now fresh

applications are invited in the prescribed form for the under mentioned posts. Candidates should possess prescribed qualifications as on the last date of submission of application.

Faculty	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor
Agriculture	Nil	16	84 + 4*
Agricultural Engineering & Technology	4	15	10 + 1*
Community Science (Home Science)	02	03	10

*Backlog Vacancies

The filled in application along with application fee should reach the University on or before 23-05-2021 by 4:00 PM. All other details and application can be downloaded from University Website: www.angrau.ac.in

DIPR 49PP/CL, Dt:23.04.2021

Sd/- T.Giridhara Krishna, Registrar

Office of the Commissioner and Director of Agricultural Marketing Government of Andhra Pradesh, Guntur.

E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

E-Procurement T.N.O. SE(AM)/AP/GNT/E/02/2021-22, Dated: 22-4-2021

Online tenders in *Reverse Tender process* are invited by the Superintending Engineer (AM) Guntur from the registered civil/fabrication (steel structure) contractors for construction of Multi Purpose Facilitation Centers (500/1000 MT Capacity Godowns) along with dry storage at RAK level across the State of Andhra Pradesh for Rs. 95,38,74,658/- approximately in two packages i.e., (i) Guntur (Guntur, Prakasam & Nellore Districts) & (ii) Visakhapatnam (Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram & Srikakulam Districts). Eprocurement site opens on DT.28-4-2021 at 2.00 P.M. Any other information can be had from the www.tender.approcurement.gov.in or from the office of the Superintending Engineer (AM) Guntur. Contact Nos. 918236142, 9182361369.

Sd/- Superintending Engineer (AM)
O/o Commissioner and Director of Agrl. Marketing Govt. of A.P., Guntur.

DIPR 43PP/CL, Dt:23.04.2021

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Fax: 91 0476 2680101, 2686721 E-mail: contact@kmmil.com, URL: www.kmmil.com

Competitive Tenders are invited for following. For more details please visit the E-Tendering Portal <https://etenders.kerala.gov.in> or www.kmmil.com

Chavara 24.04.2021

Sd/- DGM (Mts) For The Kerala Minerals & Metals Ltd.

KMMI Mineral Separation Unit Kovilthottam, Chavara, Kollam-691 583, Kerala, India

Ph: 0476-2680047, 2686047, 2686721 Fax: 0476-2686442 URL: www.kmmil.com E-mail: dgms@kmmil.com

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

Competitive tenders in two parts (Commercial/Technical & Price part-BQ) are invited for the preparation of Detailed Project Report for (1). Modernization and improving mineral recovery in Mineral Separation (MS) Plant of the KMMI, (2).

Wet Concentration Plant No.1 up-gradation and separating Sillimanite rich fraction from Wet Concentration Plant No.1 & 2 of MS Plant of the KMMI, (3). Installation of a new modular portable skid mounted concentration plant for processing of beach sand minerals at different locations of KMMI Mining Blocks as per the scope of work in the tender documents and further details are available in the e-tendering portal <https://etenders.kerala.gov.in>. of the Govt. of Kerala. The last date of receipt tender documents is before 6 pm on 21.05.2021. Any corrigendum in the future will be notified only in the above website & KMMI's web site only. Tender Reference No: KMMI/MS/PP/59-TS/2021; DTD: 26/04/2021 & Tender ID:2021_KMMI_421354_1 Chavara 24.04.2021

Sd/- Asst. General Manager & HOD (Mts) For The Kerala Minerals & Metals Ltd.

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MOE2

IN BRIEF



Jaishankar welcomes EU support to fight COVID

NEW DELHI External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Friday welcomed the offer of support from the European Union to deal with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis in India. The Minister had a virtual discussion with Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission.

Pakistan-based charity offers help to India

NEW DELHI Pakistan-based charity group, the Abdul Sattar Edhi Foundation has offered help to India to counter the deadly second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Faisal Edhi, Managing Trustee of the organisation, has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the offer of support of 50 ambulances and emergency staff to assist with medical efforts.

Chhattisgarh CM calls for uniform vaccine pricing

NEW DELHI Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has demanded that COVID-19 vaccines be supplied to State governments at the same rate offered to the Centre. He made the demand at an emergency meeting called by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chief Ministers of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Delhi, U.P., Punjab and Madhya Pradesh. These States have reported a spike in COVID-19 cases.

Drive against black marketing of drugs

LUCKNOW The police in Lucknow have launched a campaign against the alleged black marketing of drugs used in the treatment of COVID-19. The Uttar Pradesh Home department said it has so far arrested 29 persons on charges of black marketing. The government recovered 668 vials of Remdesivir and 185 oxygen cylinders from the accused, the Home department added.

Air India cancels flights to Toronto, Vancouver

NEW DELHI Air India announced on April 23 its decision to cancel all flights to Toronto and Vancouver after Canada banned flights from India and Pakistan for 30 days due to a surge in COVID-19 cases in the region. "Flights to Vancouver stand cancelled from April 25 to May 21 and to Toronto from April 24 to May 22," the airline said on Twitter. "Passengers who travel to Canada from India via an indirect route will need to obtain a pre-departure negative COVID-19 molecular test result from a third country before continuing their journey to Canada," a notification on the government's website said.

High demand for oxygen trains

Delhi, U.P., A.P. and M.P. have sought the service, says Railway Board Chairman

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Facing a severe shortage of medical oxygen, the State governments, including the Delhi government, are turning to the Railways to run 'Oxygen Express' trains for movement of liquid medical oxygen tankers.

"We have received demand from States like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and also Delhi for movement of liquid oxygen by railways. We are closely coordinating with the States," Railway Board Chairman and CEO Sunet Sharma said on Friday.

Mr. Sharma noted that two such trains were deployed to Maharashtra from Visakhapatnam and to Uttar Pradesh from Bokaro, Jharkhand.

On the demand from Delhi, Mr. Sharma said the supply would likely be brought from Rourkela in Odisha and the details were being worked out.

"We have told them to keep their tankers ready, we have kept our wagons ready. Our ramps are ready at different locations in Delhi NCR.



On track: Train wagons are being used to send tankers of liquid oxygen to the States that are facing a shortage in supply and a surge in COVID-19 cases. •AP

We expect this movement will shortly take place," he said.

He said there was a demand from Andhra Pradesh to run a service between Vijayawada and Angul, Odisha, and from Uttar Pradesh for transportation of oxygen from the Reliance refinery in Jamnagar, Gujarat.

"The Railways is transporting not only passengers, but also goods and other important items that are required to be transported quickly. As you are already aware, there are challenges, especially in transporting oxygen. We have been given a very, very challenging task to move liquid oxygen from one place to the other. It's a very big challenge," Mr. Sharma said.

On the use of train coaches as isolation facility, Mr. Sharma said about 3,816 coaches are available, and will be provided to States as per demand.

coaches are available, and will be provided to States as per demand.

Currently, 21 coaches (378 beds) have been provided to Maharashtra in Nandurbar where 32 patients have been admitted. Delhi has also been provided 50 coaches (800 beds) at Shakurbasti and 25 coaches (400 beds) at Anand Vihar. However, presently no patients have been admitted there.

Emergency use nod for Virafin

Antiviral drug for moderate infection

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) on Friday granted emergency use approval for pharma major Zydus Cadila's antiviral drug 'Virafin' to treat moderate COVID-19 in adults, company press release said.

"A single dose subcutaneous regimen of the antiviral Virafin [a pegylated interferon alpha-2b (PegIFN)] will make the treatment more convenient for the patients. When administered early on during COVID, Virafin will help patients recover faster and avoid much of the complications. Virafin will be available on the prescription of a medical specialist for use in hospital/institutional setup," the release added.

Safety profile

The drug's safety profile is already well known as it is used in treating people with chronic hepatitis B and C. The drug has been repurposed for treating moderate COVID-19 disease.

According to Dr. Sharvil Patel, Managing Director, Cadila Healthcare Limited, the therapy "significantly reduces viral load when given early on and can help in better disease management".

In a multi-centre trial in 20-25 centres across India,



Pharmaceutical group Zydus Cadila makes the Virafin anti-viral drug.

the company found the drug reduced the need for supplemental oxygen. This clearly "indicates that the antiviral was able to control respiratory distress and failure which has been one of the major challenges in treating COVID-19", the company said.

In the phase-3 trials, the drug was able to achieve "better clinical improvement in the patients suffering from COVID-19". A "higher proportion (91.15%) of patients administered the drug were RT-PCR negative by day seven as it ensures faster viral clearance".

According to an April 5 company press release, the drug reduced the duration for supplemental oxygen to 56 hours from 84 hours in moderate COVID-19 patients.

Both Covishield vaccinated sera and convalescent sera were found to offer protection against the double mutant variant (B.1.167),

according to Dr. Rakesh Mishra, Director, CCMB.

"Both Covishield vaccinated sera and convalescent sera were found to offer protection against the double mutant variant (B.1.167),"

Centre asks States to ensure oxygen supply

Home Ministry says non-compliance will invite contempt of court and other punitive actions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

As hospitals in Delhi continued to grapple with oxygen shortage, the Centre again shot off a letter to the States saying non-compliance with a Delhi High Court's order on transport of oxygen would invite action for contempt of court and they would be proceeded against under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the Indian Penal Code. The High Court had directed on Thursday that oxygen be supplied to Delhi from all plants as per the allocation order of April 21.

Fresh letter Reiterating the court's order, the Union Home Ministry's fresh letter on Friday to the States said that "supplies from all the oxygen producing plants is made, as per the

allocation order dated 21.04.2021, and transportation takes place without any hindrance".

On his return from a political campaign in West Bengal, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday reviewed the COVID-19 situation and oxygen shortage in various States. He directed the States to compile a list of oxygen plants in districts along with the installed capacity, and take action to revive plants that were shut.

A press release from the Ministry said that the Centre had prohibited supply of oxygen for industrial purposes, exempting a few essential sectors, through an April 18 order. "This has resulted in significant augmentation of supply of medical oxygen. Steps are being taken to further reduce consumption of industrial oxygen by industries, which will augment the supply for medical purpose," it said.

Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to the States to set up exclusive corridors for transportation of oxygen and to treat such vehicles as ambulances. Mr. Bhalla's letter said that keeping in view the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, the allocation of oxygen to States needs to be rationalised.

Covishield protects against double mutant: study

Preliminary tests on a small group showed efficacy in those who have received the vaccine

R. PRASAD
CHENNAI

Preliminary studies show that people who have been vaccinated with Covishield have protection against the double mutant variant (B.1.167) first found in India.

Researchers at the Hyderabad-based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) found that protection against the double mutant variant was also seen both when convalescent plasma from people who have been infected and have already recovered was tested in the lab.

"Both Covishield vaccinated sera and convalescent sera were found to offer protection against the double mutant variant (B.1.167),"



Precious doses: The study done with Covishield is also being replicated with those who got Covaxin. •SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

said Dr. Rakesh Mishra, Director, CCMB. "This is only a preliminary study involving four-five people for each group, and was carried out among young people who have recovered from prior infection and another group who received Covishield vaccine." Dr. Mishra said that in about 10 days, studies involving more people from both groups will be done. Also, the study will involve older people to understand the level of protection.

"The study, though preliminary, does show that vaccination with Covishield offers protection against the double mutant variant. So people should go ahead and get vaccinated quickly," said Dr. Mishra.

"The preliminary study also suggests that convalescent plasma may offer protection against reinfection with the double mutant variant."

Studies using plasma from more recovered and vaccinated people of different age groups are needed for confirmation," he said.

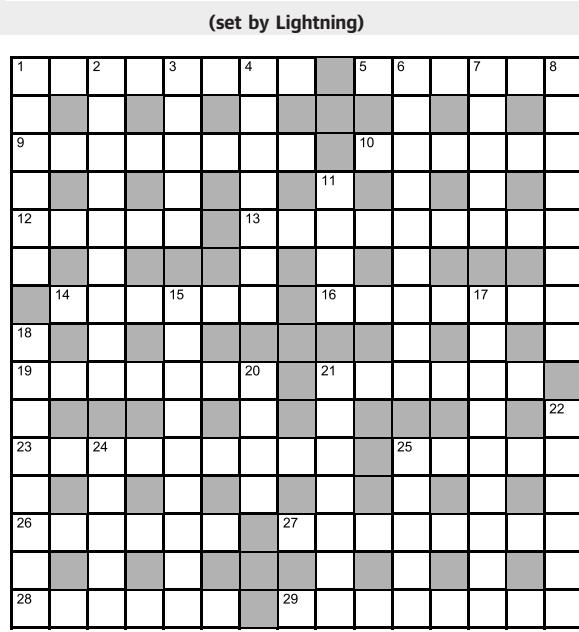
The institute is carrying out similar studies using plasma from people vaccinated with Covaxin. The B.1.167 variant has two mutations – E484Q and L425R –

TH CROSSWORD + 13230

(set by Lightning)

Display keystrokes of genius.
Type your answers into our online grids.
@ <https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn>

SCAN TO PLAY



ACROSS

- Mr. Newton and I interrupting clergyman (8)
- A fellow joining sizeable event (6)
- Let siren damage ear, perhaps (8)
- Enduring heartless command (6)
- It can lift a bird (5)
- Unidentified at first, thief leaving opposite house without borders (9)
- Appalled that contents of bag has tobacco (6)

CM YK

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13229

S	E	A	C	A	M	V
A	P	E	D	R	G	S
E	P	D	T	P	R	S
P	D	T	H	I	D	A
D	T	H	A	N	I	H
T	H	A	Y	N	I	H
H	O	R	A	Y	I	H
O	R	A	Y	I	I	H
R	A	Y	I	I	I	H
A	Y	I	I	I	I	H
Y	I	I	I	I	I	H

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

FAITH

Lord Siva's will

Thirumoolar in his Thirumandiram pays obeisance to Uma Devi, whose penance was blessed in Thiruvaduturai. Thirumoolar stayed in Thiruvaduturai, and he says that he had been reciting the many names of Lord Siva. Sitting under a peepul tree there, he acquired Siva jnana, he says. He calls the tree 'Siva bodhi.' Steeped in meditation, he did not notice the passage of time, said R. Narayanan in a discourse.

Thirumoolar then poses a question. If one has not done good in one's previous births, how can one attain good in subsequent births? Considering that he has been blessed enough to praise Lord Siva in Tamil, he says it is obvious that he must have done good in his previous birth. Here, by previous birth, Thirumoolar means his life before he entered the body of the cowherd Moolan.

Thirumoolar was originally called Sundaranatha, and he came to the earth to meet sage Agastya. Chancing upon a dead cowherd, and his agitated cows, Sundaranatha entered the body of the cowherd, who was called Moolan.

Sundaranatha could accomplish this because of his powers. He had the power of the eight siddhis. His idea was to take the cows to their shelter and return to re-enter his body. But when he returned, he found that his body was missing. And so he stayed on in Moolan's body, and came to be called Thirumoolar. It is these events that he is referring to here.

It was Lord Siva's will that he should continue to live on in this world for many years, so that he could write the Saiva Agamas in Tamil. He is referring to his life as Sundaranatha as his previous birth, and his present life as Thirumoolar as his next birth. He was chosen by Lord Siva to propagate the Saiva Agamas, which are as sacred as the Vedas.



Instapick

Mango shots: Low yields and insufficient labour mean mangoes will get more precious this year, but expect more farmer-customer connections. For now, Noshirwan Mistry in Mumbai is shipping hand-picked organic Kesar and Alphonso mangoes at ₹1,000 a dozen. •9323331304. From Salem, Shobana Senthil has organic Salem Bangalora, Alphonso, Imam Pasand (from ₹190 a kg). •9843533546.



Talking point

Ingenuity Mars Helicopter: The first controlled, powered flight on another planet climbed 10 ft, then touched back down on the surface of Mars. It will help understand how dust travels through the atmosphere. Meanwhile, it has also highlighted J (Bob) Balaram, IIT-Madras alumnus and the project's chief engineer at NASA. @NASAJPL

SPIT TAKE

KISS and tell

In our pristine culture, when did wives, heaven forbid, start behaving this way?

KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI

Chi chi, and by that I don't mean Govinda, what is our once great land coming to, I say?

Read with much sadness that when the Delhi police stopped a couple in a car for travelling without masks, apparently, the woman and her husband behaved in a most *unsanskari* manner with the law enforcement officers.

While the husband said, "Why did you stop my car? I was inside my car with my wife," the woman – *Shiva, Shiva* – was heard saying "If I feel like it, I will kiss my husband. What will you do?"

That this comes in the wake of 15,000 cheques made out by our brothers and sisters towards the building of a great monument, amounting to approximately ₹22 crores, bouncing like stuntmen hit by Allu Arjun is doubly devastating.

Is this what we have worked so hard for? Is this our culture? Is this the citizenry that de-



• SREEJITH R KUMAR

serves a bullet train, the world's tallest statue, windmills that can separate oxygen from hydrogen, Vedic internet, the extra 2ab in the (a + b)², Coronil, drought-reducing frog weddings, and a new movie from Akshay Kumar every three months?

In our pristine culture, when did wives, heaven forbid, start kissing husbands this way, I say? Even if they are their own. And that too in public? And declare it shamelessly to the law?

The job of wives, as we all know, is to wear 11-yard (inclusive of blouse piece) saris and stand demurely behind the doorway, one side of their faces illuminated by the flame from the kerosene stove making ginger tea for the father-in-law, mouths tightly shut, their eyes doing the talking. Provided they have helped the children with their Class 3 nuclear physics homework, packed them off to their virtual classrooms with a snack of Patanjali noodles in their tiffin boxes, pressed the

mother-in-law's swollen feet, politely brushed off the untoward advances of husband's cousin from the neighbouring town, and made sure the husband's shoes gleamed like mirrors before he went off to the club.

Women, please understand, 20 lakh buck-naked *sadhus* have dipped their bodily parts in the Ganga for the safety and well-being of our ancient nation. Before that, true patriots like the entire Bachchan family have taken time off from going to Maldives and clanged *thalis*, lit *diyas* and rung *ghantis*. All their prayers and efforts have been nullified by brazen *mahilas* like you who travel mask-free in their own cars, wear ripped jeans and speak of doing unspeakable things with their hear of this?

What will NASA and UNESCO think of us? What will our overseas brothers and sisters from Palo Alto to Palookaville, upholders of ancient Indian values, say if they hear of this?

Don't our women know that from time immemorial their desire, that terrible thing, is expressed by rubbing two flowers against each other and running away with a 'Chi, you naughty' every time the husband bites his lower lip suggestively?

What books authored by Nehru are you all secretly reading, *beti*? Detox yourself by watching Ramanand Sagar's old serial which is back on DD like a saviour from heaven. Don't forget to have a cold bath from the water you've drawn from the well of your 3BHK.

A final suggestion to the sister who wanted to kiss her husband: repent, *behen*, round up other misled sisters, and make yourself useful to the nation. Form a *nari* posse, and unearth the names of those 15,000 cheque bouncers. Try and persuade them in our uniquely gentle Indian way that they should pay up. You can't cheat God, you know.

Krishna Shastri Devulapalli is a satirist. He has written four books and edited an anthology.

Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and other events you just can't miss.



No Zooming at Oscars



Art imitates life



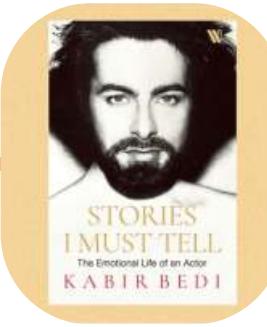
Sneakers from tees



Brides online



For Mumbai's mangroves



Kabir Bedi tells all



Face and body

Indian Ethnic Co, Mumbai

Hetal Desai started the brand in 2016 but it was her daughter Lekhinee – the company's co-founder and marketing head who created their first dance marketing Instagram Reel last October. Featuring Lekhinee, her sister and their friends, the quartet [all of whom have learnt Odissi] danced to 'Kangna Re' from *Paheli*, wearing ajrakh Kota doria and mul saris. "The drapes [from the brand's first sari collection] are so light and comfortable that you can do something as simple as walk in the park, or dance in them," says Lekhinee, adding that the Reel got a million views. Another one, where they danced to 'Main Albeli' from *Zubeidaa*, was featured by Instagram's official account on Women's Day, and its views are about to hit 20 million, says the MBA graduate. While the brand's turnover increased from ₹30 lakh last March to ₹65 lakh in June, this year, they have already done business close to ₹95 lakh. The launch of Instagram Reels in 2020 helped, she adds. Details: [@theindianethnicco](http://theindianethnicco.com)



The new sari sales pitch

How marketing the six yards through choreographed moves on Instagram Reels has helped homegrown brands widen their reach

APARNA NARRAIN

Young women doing backflips, somersaults and hoop dancing, all while draped in a sari. Maybe not the most comfortable of garments, you say? Tell that to international yoga gold medallist Mili Sarkar, national gold medallist Parul Arora, and hoop dancer Eshna Kutty, whose videos went viral over the last few months as they showcased their skills in their six yards. Drawing from this trend, several homegrown brands are now promoting their products through 'dance marketing'.

Interestingly, the people driving the phenomenon [across the brands we are featuring] have several things in common: a background in dance, working directly with artisans, selling hand-crafted products, and roping in friends and family [for the most part] for the videos instead of professional models. The relatability of the videos have boosted sales, they say. Here are four brands leading the trend:



Kancheevaram, Kakkad

Since 2018, this store has been retailing handwoven saris – block-printed Jaipur cottons, *kanjeevarams*, Uppada saris from Andhra Pradesh, and more. "When it came to marketing, we wanted our audience to see something they could recognise. We usually don't do high-profile photo shoots where there is no connection between the model, the products, and the audience," says partner Shermeen Siyad, who has been experimenting with various forms of marketing on social media [includes contests and giveaways]. They had done an IGTV video for Women's Day two years ago that got around 15k views, so when Instagram launched Reels, they decided to give it a shot. "We have about 10 'dance marketing' videos [with the most popular clocking nearly 70 lakh views], mostly featuring my friends and colleagues," says Siyad, adding that sales have gone up by 20% to 30% thanks to the new marketing trend. Details: @kancheevaram

Geetanjali Boutique, Darbhanga

Dedicated to the promotion and preservation of Bihar's Madhubani art through hand-painted products – saris, *kurtas*, home décor and the like – Sunanda Biswas runs the 26-year-old store with her daughter Geeti, and works with 100 women artisans. Geeti, an MBA graduate and Kathak dancer, had created a successful solo dance IGTV video during lockdown. "So when we were launching a sari collection [from our weavers in Banaras] this January, I thought we should do it through dance marketing on Instagram Reels," she says, because she felt people could relate more when they saw 'real' people dancing. "With there being so much saturation in digital marketing, people don't want to look at photos. If it is dance or something in motion, it catches attention," she says. The engagement has led to more sales and more customers visiting their site, which launched last September. Details: [@geetanjali_boutique](http://geetanjaliboutique.com)



Big brand speaking

"Taneira has always been keen to promote the various activities that women do while wearing a sari," says Raghuvir Seth, Head of Marketing, Taneira, the Titan brand which sells handwoven saris sourced from over 65 weaving clusters around the country. "This new dance video trend is one of the instances where we see that there are no bounds to the woman of today doing what she wants to do," he says, adding that they are "looking forward to collaborating with various dancers, who bring out the beauty of a sari with every move".

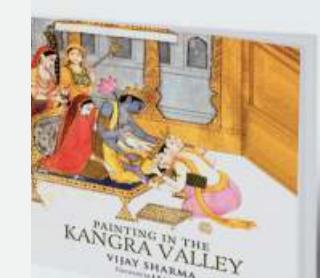
Khoj City, Greater Noida

An online platform that sells everything from handmade saris to stationery, two-year-old Khoj City was started to support artisans, says Sujata Adhikari, head of marketing. While they have been doing marketing collaborations from the beginning, Adhikari says the brand started dance Instagram Reels recently. "People engaged really well with the videos [sales went up by 15% to 20%]," she says, adding, "People have also shown interest in collaborating with us; singers, actors, yoga practitioners like Priyanka Moze and dancers like Deepika Das." Details: [@ekhojcity](http://khoj.city)



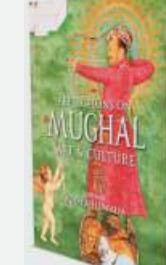
Picture tales

Two coffee table releases from the Niyogi Books stable tap into India's art history



Painting in the Kangra Valley by Vijay Sharma is a detailed survey of the painting styles of Guler and Kangra in the 18th and 19th centuries. It analyses the impact of the Bhakti movement and of Mughal art on the painting traditions of the region. Love is main subject.

Reflections on Mughal Art & Culture challenges long-held ideas, and explores themes as diverse as the portraits of royal women, sub-imperial patronage of temples, murals painted on architectural surfaces, the textile culture of Burhanpur, and more.



'I know I am not boring'

Mercurial, reflective, pragmatic — a new documentary shows the multiple facets of Osho's personal secretary, Sheela Birnstiel, and leaves viewers with more questions

SUNALINI MATHEW

In the two years that she has been in our public consciousness, after the investigative six-part documentary *Wild, Wild Country*, Sheela Birnstiel has seen polarised opinions of condemnation and sycophancy. "I am a mirror for them. I reflect the other, so what they want to see, they will find in me," she says, of people's opinions and questions. "I accept both without judgement. People have a habit of dissecting, so they should have their pleasure, and I know I am not boring."

You see both sides – the demonising and glorification – in the way journalists,

social influencers, and celebrities react to the 71-year-old, in a new documentary, *Searching for Sheela*. Shot by Dharmatic Productions across 22 days, during her visit to India in 2019, the film runs for 58 minutes. It begins and ends with her home in Switzerland, far from the life we saw her live in the previous documentary. In between are scenes from interviews and visits to her old family home in Gujarat – her first trip to India after almost 35 years.

Camera friendly

"My team found it [the movie] lovely," says Sheela, who watched this movie, unlike the previous one.



Ma Sheela • POSHALI GOEL & ADITYA KAPOOR/ NETFLIX

Shot in an observational style, by a team put together by executive producer Shakun Batra, it documents her navigation through people and places in India. When Batra looked at the rushes, he saw an "audience in need of this idea of redemption from her". So the film became about examining how "someone like her who is carrying this weight" responds to people's questions on her past with Osho: of assault, poisoning, wire tapping of which she was convicted in 1984, though now denies. "Some people wear their baggage on their face; I wear the baggage on my shoulders," she says, in the documentary.

In the film she seems, at times, to be laughing at those around her: "I feel like a *dulha*," she says, of the Raw Mango outfit before her interview with Karan Johar. At the event she tells the producer-director-host, "You know, I have bigger scandals than show business."

On a drive in a car she speaks to the camera matter-of-factly: "I didn't want to become spiritual...enlightened, or learn about meditation. I have no interest in them." At another time, pragmatic, when they're in the hills: "Just don't look down, there's garbage; look up." And reflective: "Life is multi-dimensional. There's no black and white. They have shades of colours, shades of information."

At socialite-entrepreneur Bina Raman's residence, she manages to put a slightly overbearing Raghu Rai in his place. And at an event at Gurugram's The Quorum, she does not react to a bizarre introduction: "Today we have the pleasure of asking her about her crimes, her past, and

Osho," checking, instead, with the team if they'd got some rest.

The film doesn't give answers, but Batra says that wasn't his job. "My effort is to not try and over-simplify things and to not arrive at answers, because I don't think I know the answers." Sheela says she simply accepts how people react to her, even though they are "stagnant", if all they want to ask her is whether she really did attempt murder. Instead, she wants people to ask about "the love that I feel, I felt, the work I have done".

Life and love

Love is a constant through all her interviews, but it's love for Rajneesh, the people she currently lives with, and her parents; she doesn't speak of her three husbands and her daughter though. "After Rajneesh, I focussed my love on my parents. They suffered my dark days in imprisonment.

“

My effort is to not try and over-simplify things and to not arrive at answers, because I don't think I know the answers

Shakun Batra

I wanted to take their pain away, and in love you can take pain away from people," she says.

She also talks about the people with disabilities and those with complex mental illnesses she currently takes care of in her two homes called Matrusaden and Bapusaden. "I live with them, just the way I used to live with Bhagwan's people in Rajneeshpuram."

Batra, whose forte has been films like *Kapoor and Sons* and *Ek Main Aur Ekk Tu*, says this experience has been different because in non-fiction "you arrive at the meaning after you've shot it".

In terms of the content, he says it's difficult to flesh out any person in such a short time, least of all Sheela with her range of experiences. "I can make another six-part series and there will still be questions, because that's just who she is. She is a person who leaves you with more questions than answers," says Batra, whose parents were followers of Osho, and who "were not very fond of Sheela..."

Even before *Wild, Wild Country*, Batra had gone to meet Sheela, with questions. Some days before the release of the movie she asked him if he'd found his answer: had he found Sheela? He still finds her an "enigma".

Perhaps the answer lies in Sheela's own words in an old interview when she was at the height of her fame as Rajneesh's secretary. In response to a reporter who asks what role she plays, that of Snow White or the wicked witch, she says, "Both."

Searching for Sheela is now streaming on Netflix.

Watch Ma Sheela and Shakun Batra in conversation, on weekend.thehindu.com

Food to heal

Top to bottom: gobi adraki with chapati; standard thaali; Amritsari chholey with rice • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



FOOD SPOT

Many small operations are offering simple, healthy meals at affordable prices to tide us through these difficult Covid times

plain paratha with *zeera aloo*, and vegetable coleslaw sandwich. On Sunday, there are various types of *parathas* with curd. Lunch consists of mixed vegetables, *kadhai* style *aloo mattar*, *petha* masala, *baingan* masala, *lauki channa*. There is something called gravy, which includes Amritsari *chholey*, *rajma*, and *kadhi pakora*.

I enjoyed the food. The vegetable – *muttar paneer* – had been cooked with a light hand, but was good to eat. Likewise the *chholey* was deliciously light – in taste and colour. The *aloo* *parathas* were soft, filled with a light potato mash, and served with curd. The samosas were the way I like them – with a crisp crust that was not oily, and a scrumptious potato and pea filling.

Another interesting place is Paanch Phoran, which has decided to keep its gourmet fare (from Exotisch Cuisines) on the backburner and focus on the kind of food that the body demands in times of crises. Sonali Chatterjee (WhatsApp 9910474449), who runs this service, does various kinds of soups and other dishes. On Thursday, for instance, she had prepared a clear chicken soup and clear vegetable soup.

She offers a vegetarian meal of dal, sabzi, roti and rice (₹150); all this with chicken or fish (₹200) and a meal of chicken/ mushroom/ paneer/ tofu grilled, a soup or stew or broth, with bread/ rice and sautéed vegetables (₹250). She has a delivery charge of ₹49; a classic meal that includes rice, roti, vegetable, gravy and pickle is at ₹69; and a standard *thali* has all this, but in somewhat larger quantities, and a salad, at ₹89.

For many people, this is not quite business – but almost a mission. And for many others, it's a life saver.

For breakfast, they serve masala *puri* with *bhaji*, *idli sambar*, *pao bhaji*, *poha*,

The writer is a seasoned food critic

as it had been cooked with few masalas, but was delicious nevertheless. I learnt it was started in 2020, and has four kitchens, three in Delhi-NCR and one in Bengaluru. The minimum subscription plan is of seven days (plans for a fortnight and a month are also available (WhatsApp 9311419770)). People can check the food out before opting for a subscription.

The prices are affordable, something one can appreciate in these times when everyone's pocket is hurting. The Chhota Bhojan breakfast or snack costs ₹45; combo meal of roti with *sabzi* or rice with gravy is priced at ₹49; a classic meal that includes rice, roti, vegetable, gravy and pickle is at ₹69; and a standard *thali* has all this, but in somewhat larger quantities, and a salad, at ₹89.

For breakfast, they serve masala *puri* with *bhaji*, *idli sambar*, *pao bhaji*, *poha*,



RAHUL VERMA

In this terrible time of chaos and death, the heartening news is that there are many lending a helping hand to people in need. Groups have been formed of people donating blood, or looking for donors. People are organising food for those who are in no position to cook. And some small entrepreneurs are supplying home-cooked food – at nominal costs – to those looking for nutritious meals that are tasty and prepared and delivered with precautionary measures.

I got a call from one such kitchen a few days ago. Called Bhojan, it has a subscription meal plan offering light meals and snacks, and has a small combo meal package. The food from Bhojan (bhojan.co.in) was healthy,

as had been cooked with few masalas, but was delicious nevertheless. I learnt it was started in 2020, and has four kitchens, three in Delhi-NCR and one in Bengaluru. The minimum subscription plan is of seven days (plans for a fortnight and a month are also available (WhatsApp 9311419770)). People can check the food out before opting for a subscription.

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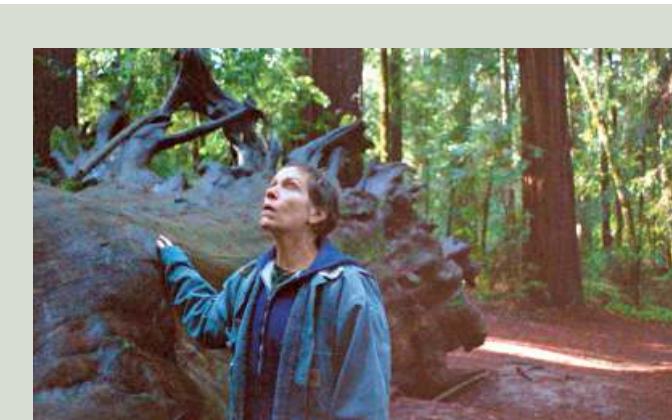
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(Clockwise from left) Stills from *Nomadland*, *Visaranai*, and *Asuran*, and director Vetri Maaran • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Taking India to the Oscars

Director Vetri Maaran on the country's constant hope for glory at the Academy Awards

NAVMI KRISHNA

In 2017, Vetri Maaran's *Visaranai* put up a strong (though unsuccessful) fight to find a footing in the Oscars run. This year, *Jallikattu* did the same, but couldn't make the final cut. What are we getting wrong? Vetri Maaran weighs in.

Why do producers spend a lot of money sending a film to the Oscars if it does not have a fighting chance of winning? The reputation the Academy Awards has garnered over the course of these eight decades is so imposing that every film enthusiast wants the film he likes to win an Oscar. A few days ago, I got a message from an acquaintance saying if *Asuran* had gone to the Oscars it would have won! They feel they know it. In this context of having a brand value, most of our producers want to be part of the race, even if they don't have a chance. And some of the producers are misinformed. In this day of getting your information online, some fans of certain films that are part of the screening think it's in the competition and put it out on social media. This year there were

What they say

"India has got better at choosing the films being sent to the Oscars, but our timing is still wrong. The selection is announced so late [by October], and by then the game has already started in the US. Right from Sundance Film Festival [end of January], distributors start doing their PR to create a buzz. If our selection is advanced by even a few months, it will make a huge difference. Perhaps around the time when the Cannes lineup is announced [around May]."

Anu Rangachar, LA and Mumbai-based producer, who was instrumental in the Oscar campaign for *Rima Das' Village Rockstars*, India's entry in 2018.

more such incidents.

How can a regular film enthusiast spot the difference?

The only official category our films can get in is the Best International Film, erstwhile called the Best Foreign Language Film. That is selected every year by a committee consisting of members of the selecting body – an autonomous body, not functioning under the government.

Sometimes if these international films are very impressive to the voting members, they are nomi-

nated in other 'main' categories as well, like Best Film, which are meant only for films produced or co-produced by American companies. We had the best actor award given to an international film for *Life Is Beautiful* and the *Parasite* phenomenon happened last year.

For such screenings, do filmmakers have to spend money on promotions as they would if selected as an official entry?

It is unbelievably expensive. The Academy will give you one free screening for which very few voting members turn up. You can have around four paid screenings. I've forgotten the exact numbers. Most of these happen at boutique screens set up in star hotels. The most-liked are the Soho House screenings, for which you pull a lot of strings. If I remember it right, we paid \$17,500 for that screening alone.

Read the full story on weekend.thehindu.com



Food in times of a crisis



RAHUL VERMA

In this terrible time of chaos and death, the heartening news is that there are many lending a helping hand to people in need. Groups have been formed of people donating blood, or looking for donors. People are organising food for those who are in no position to cook. And some small entrepreneurs are supplying home-cooked food – at nominal costs – to those looking for nutritious meals that are tasty and prepared and delivered with precautionary measures.

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The food from Bhojan (bhojan.co.in) was healthy,



Protests in Myanmar ahead of ASEAN meet

Demonstrators urge leaders to stand with people; Amnesty calls crisis the bloc's biggest test

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
YANGON

Protesters marched through downtown Yangon on Friday to demand that regional leaders "stand with Myanmar people", ahead of a weekend ASEAN summit to be attended by junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

The country has been in turmoil since February 1, when the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in a lightning coup.

Using violence and lethal force to quell a nationwide uprising, security forces have killed at least 739 people in near-daily crackdowns, according to a local monitoring group.

Coup leader Min Aung Hlaing is set to take part on Saturday in a summit of regional leaders – as part of the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – to address Myanmar's mounting crisis.

The meeting of ASEAN



Call for support: Anti-coup protesters marching on a street in Yangon on Friday. •AP

leaders and Foreign Ministers has drawn widespread criticism from activists, human rights groups and protesters for including the military regime.

In Yangon – where the anti-coup movement had laid low in recent weeks due to fear of crackdowns – protesters returned to the streets on Friday, flashing three-finger salutes of resistance.

"Mother Suu and leaders – release them immediately!" they shouted as they marched quickly past the Shwedagon Pagoda in downtown Yangon. "What do we want? Democracy!"

The protesters came from different Yangon townships, some carrying signs that read "ASEAN please stand with Myanmar people" and "ASEAN do you need more

blood... to make the right decision?"

Also angered by the bloc's invitation to Min Aung Hlaing was the so-called National Unity Government (NUG) – a group of ousted Myanmar lawmakers attempting to run a shadow administration.

Arrest the General'

On Thursday, they called on Interpol to arrest the senior General – the same day Myanmar state media announced the lawmakers in hiding were wanted for high treason.

Despite the threat of violence, nationwide demonstrations for a return to democracy persisted on Friday.

Scores of people young and old marched through the southern city of Dawei, holding signs that said, "Please, help us to arrest Min Aung Hlaing" as they chanted support for the shadow government.

Israeli police arrest dozens after clashes

Palestinians, angry over Ramzan curbs, protest as Jewish group holds anti-Arab march

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM

Israeli police say 44 people were arrested and 20 officers were wounded in a night of chaos in Jerusalem, where security forces separately clashed with Palestinians angry about Ramzan restrictions and Jewish extremists who held an anti-Arab march nearby.

Tensions have spiked in recent days in Jerusalem, which has long been a flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and is home to holy sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims. Residents braced for possible

further unrest as police stepped up security and the U.S. Embassy appealed for calm.

There were concerns the violence could reignite following Friday prayers at a major holy site in Jerusalem, but thousands of worshippers dispersed peacefully after Muslim religious leaders called for restraint. The Islamic militant group Hamas, meanwhile, staged demonstrations across Gaza reiterating its support for armed struggle.

Palestinians have clashed with Israeli police on a nightly basis since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramzan. The tensions began when police placed barricades outside the Old City's Damascus Gate, where Muslims traditionally gather to enjoy the evening after the daytime fast.

Late Thursday, hundreds of Palestinians hurled stones and bottles at police, who fired a water cannon and stun grenades to disperse them. Dozens of Palestinians were wounded in the melee.

Meanwhile, a far-right Jewish group known as La Havva led a march of hundreds of protesters chanting "Arabs get out!" toward the

Damascus Gate. The show of force came in response to videos circulated on TikTok showing Palestinians slapping religious Jews at random. Other videos made in response to them appear to show Jews assaulting Arabs.

Police used metal barricades to halt the far-right protesters a few hundred meters (yards) from Damascus Gate. Later, they used water cannon, stun grenades and mounted police to push them back toward mostly Jewish west Jerusalem.

Videos circulated online showed smaller clashes and fires elsewhere in the city.

Japan to host joint drill with U.S., France

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

Japan will hold a joint military drill with U.S. and French troops in the country's southwest next month, the Defence Minister said on Friday, as China's actions in regional waters raise concern.

The exercise, running from May 11 to 17, will be the first large-scale exercise in Japan involving ground troops from all three countries.

It comes as Tokyo seeks to deepen defence cooperation beyond its key ally U.S. to counter Beijing's growing assertiveness in the East and South China seas. France shares the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific," Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said. "By strengthening cooperation between Japan, the U.S. and France, we'd like to further improve the tactics and skills of the Self-Defense Forces," he said.

back is confirmed, "this would mean a real easing of tension."

He thanked NATO and the EU countries for offering "very firm and immediate support to Ukraine."

While ordering the pull-back of military personnel, Mr. Shoigu also ordered to keep heavy weapons in western Russia for a massive exercise later this year.



Heading back: Russian armoured vehicles rolling into vessels after drills in Crimea. •AP

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Frantic search for submarine as its oxygen reserve is depleting

Vessels are tracking a signal from an unidentified object

with high magnetism at a depth of between 50 m and 100 m.

Ships equipped with tracking equipment were deployed in the hope that it may be the KRI Nanggala 402, which was equipped with oxygen reserves that could last until early Saturday, authorities said.

The search zone covers an area of about 34 sq km.

"We've only got until 3 a.m. tomorrow (Saturday) so we're maximising all of our efforts today," Indonesian military spokesman Achmad Riadi said earlier.

The military said it had

picked up signs of an object

word on whether the object was the missing vessel.

"There was a strong magnetic field detected there," Mr. Riadi said, but he added that "we've yet to find the exact location".

India as well as neighbouring Singapore and Malaysia have already dispatched ships that are expected to arrive at the weekend, including the city-state's MV *Swift Rescue* – a submarine rescue vessel.

An oil spill spotted where the submarine was thought to have submerged pointed to possible fuel-tank damage, fanning fears of a deadly disaster.

But by Thursday afternoon, there was still no

China's national security office to open permanent base in HK

It will oversee the enforcement of laws in the city

REUTERS
HONG KONG

Hong Kong is set to grant a site on the western Kowloon peninsula, close to the high-speed railway to the mainland, to Beijing's national security office for its permanent base in the city, the government said on Friday.

The junta has justified the putsch by alleging electoral fraud in November's elections – which Ms. Suu Kyi's party had won in a landslide.

The U.S., EU and U.K. have already imposed sanctions on top military brass and some Army-linked businesses.

Before the coup, Gen. Min was already facing international sanctions over his Army's role in the Rohingya crisis. About 7,500,000 of the Muslim minority group fled Myanmar in 2017 following a brutal military crackdown.



Correctional officers during a drill to mark the National Security Education Day in Hong Kong on April 15. •REUTERS

has allowed officers from China's security forces to take enforcement action in the city for the first time.

The Hong Kong government said the site, measuring about 11,500 sq. m., is zoned for government use and the national security office would bear all construction costs.

The former British colony of Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997 with the guarantee of continued freedoms. Pro-democracy activists say those freedoms are being whittled away, especially with the national security law cracking down on dissent. China denies the charge.

ELSEWHERE



Navalny says he will end hunger strike

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said on Friday he is ending his hunger strike after getting medical attention and being warned by his doctors about the risk. He said he would start the strike after having been examined by doctors who were not affiliated with the prison, something he called "a huge progress." AP

Pak. Parliament defers debate on French envoy

ISLAMABAD
Pakistan's Parliament on Friday deferred debating the fate of the French Ambassador. A resolution tabled on Wednesday called for the Assembly to debate whether to expel the envoy. But the session descended into uproar after members disagreed on how to proceed. The speaker adjourned the session indefinitely. AFP

Terror probe begins after police officer is fatally stabbed near Paris

The attack took place at a police station, attacker shot dead

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

French prosecutors opened a terror inquiry on Friday after a police employee was stabbed to death at a station southwest of Paris by a suspected Islamist extremist from Tunisia. The assailant was then shot dead by the security forces.

President Emmanuel Macron said France would never give in to "Islamist terrorism" after the attack in Rambouillet, a tranquil commuter town about 60 km from Paris.



Fatal assault: French police officials blocking off a street near the station in Rambouillet near Paris. •AFP

France's national anti-terrorism prosecutors said they had opened a terror investigation into the murder of a person holding public authority.

A source close to the inquiry said the attacker shouted "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest) during the attack.

The 49-year-old woman, an administrative assistant and mother of two who was returning after a lunch

break, was stabbed in the throat twice and died of her wounds shortly afterwards, the source said.

The attack took place in the secure entrance area of the station at around 2:20 p.m. (1200 GMT), a police source added.

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break, was stabbed in the throat twice and died of her wounds shortly afterwards, the source said.

The attacker, 36, was fatally wounded when an officer opened fire on him.

He arrived in France illegally in 2009 but had since obtained residency papers, a police source said.

He had just moved to Rambouillet.

CENTER OF INNOVATIVE AND APPLIED BIOPROCESSING (CIAB)
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(Chief Executive Officer)

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The application form and all other details can be downloaded from University website: www.srvu.edu.in and the filled in application along with Registration Fee by way of crossed Demand Draft drawn in favour of The Comptroller, SVUU, Tirupati on any Nationalized Bank payable at Tirupati should be sent in person or by Registered Speed Post so as to reach The Registrar, Sri Venkateswara Veterinary University, Administrative Office, Dr.Y.S.R. Bhavan, TIRUPATI-517 502 A.P, on or before 22.05.2021 by 4.30 p.m. Applications received after the due date will be summarily rejected. The University is not responsible for postal delays.
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US Dollar	75.01	-0.09
Gold	47273	-0.37
Brent oil	65.92	0.82

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	725.35	-12.45
Asian Paints	2517.95	6.70
Axis Bank	671.35	12.65
Bajaj Auto	3672.50	-8.90
Bajaj Finserv	9916.65	62.80
Bajaj Finance	4667.80	-20.90
Bharti Airtel	522.60	-8.25
BPCL	423.05	4.70
Britannia Ind	3650.30	-101.70
Cipla	935.60	-8.75
Coal India	126.15	1.10
Divis Labs	3779.75	24.50
Dr Reddy's Lab	5066.70	-133.15
Eicher Motors	2317.30	-20.55
Grafix Ind	1278.10	-22.10
HCL Tech	955.65	-6.25
HDFC	2497.35	17.65
HDFC Bank	1414.15	-8.35
HDFC Life	686.35	7.30
Hero MotoCorp	2864.05	12.90
Hindalco	349.50	-6.35
Hind Unilever	2307.75	-41.65
ICICI Bank	569.95	-9.25
IndusInd Bank	850.00	14.30
Infosys	1333.80	-17.30
Indian Oil Corp	88.05	0.20
ITC	205.35	-0.55
JSW Steel	635.40	-5.35
Kotak Bank	1734.20	-1.85
L&T	1322.90	-13.90
M&M	777.90	-21.80
Maruti Suzuki	6676.10	-26.00
Nestle India Ltd.	16625.70	-164.75
NTPC	102.55	3.60
ONGC	102.40	-0.70
Power Grid Corp	211.15	7.70
Reliance Ind	1904.35	-2.05
SBI Life	922.85	8.45
State Bank	336.45	-0.20
Shree Cement	28106.30	-415.65
Sun Pharma	637.95	-2.00
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	664.60	-0.90
Tata Motors	294.00	-0.55
Tata Steel	925.60	4.20
TCS	3109.50	-9.30
Tech Mahindra	950.20	-17.60
Titan	1461.45	-19.40
UltraTech Cement	6067.90	-24.40
UPL	585.40	-6.20
Wipro	475.70	-10.95

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	74.81	75.13
Euro	90.21	90.63
British Pound	103.92	104.37
Japanese Yen (100)	69.41	69.73
Chinese Yuan	11.52	11.57
Swiss Franc	81.71	82.11
Singapore Dollar	56.37	56.62
Canadian Dollar	59.92	60.21
Malaysian Ringgit	18.19	18.29

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



RIL buys U.K.'s Stoke Park club for £57 million
NEW DELHI
Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd. has bought Britain's iconic country club and luxury golf resort, Stoke Park — which has featured in James Bond movies — for £57 million (about ₹592 crore). The acquisition is said to add to RIL's current stake in Oberoi hotels and the managed residences in Mumbai that it has been developing. PTI

DIPAM secretary Pandey gets charge of MoCA
NEW DELHI
The Cabinet's Appointments Committee on Friday gave DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey additional charge of the post of Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA). The charge is being given due to MoCA Secretary P.S. Kharola's 'leave of absence', the order said. Mr. Pandey will hold the charge from April 26 to May 13. The temporary appointment comes during a crucial stage of Air India's disinvestment.

RBI imposes curbs on Amex, Diners Club
MUMBAI
The Reserve Bank of India has imposed restrictions on American Express Banking Corp. and Diners Club International Ltd. from onboarding new domestic customers onto their card networks from May 1. "These entities have been found non-compliant with the directions on storage of payment system data. This order will not impact existing customers," the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

Wendt clocks ₹6-cr. net, declares ₹20 dividend
CHENNAI
Wendt India Ltd. reported a standalone net profit of ₹5.97 crore for the fourth quarter ended March on higher sales to user industries. The firm had recorded a net loss of ₹1.09 crore in the year-earlier period. Gross sales rose 83% to ₹40.59 crore, the Murugappa Group firm said in a filing. Exports for FY21 shrunk 18% to ₹32.8 crore. The board recommended a dividend of ₹20 per share.

CM YK

SBI trims GDP outlook on COVID wave

Bank's researchers forecast 10.4% growth in FY22 versus 11% earlier; see cases peaking May third week

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
State Bank of India has trimmed its projection for the economy's performance in 2021-22 to 10.4% real GDP growth and 14.3% nominal GDP growth, from 11% and 15%, respectively, citing the second wave of COVID-19 and the spate of ongoing partial and weekend lockdowns in almost all States.

Economists at the country's largest bank expect the second wave to peak in the third week of May, and pointed out that in the first wave Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra had peaked before the country as a whole did.

"Now new cases in Maharashtra seem to be stabilising but share of cases in total of various other States such as Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pra-



String of losses: April's lockdowns had already cost this year's GDP by 0.7%, the SBI research team reckoned. ■ AP

desh, Gujarat has increased and these are showing increase in daily new cases," the bank's research team observed. "So if other States also implement strict actions to control their spread, the

national peak may come within two weeks after the Maharashtra peak," the SBI research team estimated.

April's lockdowns had already cost this year's GDP by 0.7%, SBI reckoned, with to-

tal losses estimated at ₹1.5 lakh crore as economic activity hit a five-month low as per the bank's estimates. Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan account for 80% of these losses, with the worst-affected western State alone accounting for 54% of the economic cost.

Most industrialised'

Calling for a sharp ramp up in vaccinations in order to thwart any further waves, SBI's economics research team said in a report on Friday that Maharashtra had suffered an estimated ₹82,000 crore loss already which would 'definitely increase' if restrictions are further tightened.

"Being the economically biggest and most industrialised State in India, this lock-

down will have huge impact on growth," the researchers said, adding that reverse migration of labour was continuing unabated.

"For the first 12 days of April, almost 4.32 lakh people returned to U.P., West Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Odisha from Maharashtra," SBI's group chief economic advisor Soumya Kanti Ghosh wrote, citing data from the Western Railways. Another 4.7 lakh workers were estimated to have left for northern and eastern States, taking total migration out of Maharashtra in the period to more than 9 lakh.

"SBI business activity index shows a decline in activity with a latest reading of 86.3 for the week ending April 19. This is the lowest in 5 months," the team wrote.

help the government borrow its budgeted ₹12,06 trillion from the market at low interest rates. It said it would do more going forward, and this would be alongside its regular open market bond purchases and special open market operations – the simultaneous sale and purchase of government securities over different tenors – the equivalent of the U.S. Operation Twist.

"We also believe the RBI's policy priority of keeping a lid on G-secs (government bond) yields is more pressing than arresting INR depreciation," economists at ANZ wrote. The road ahead for the rupee is likely to be complicated by rising inflation and faltering economic fundamentals.

The RBI has stressed it intervenes to smooth volatility in the forex market. It aggressively bought dollars last year as investors flocked to India but economists are unsure if the intervention on the downside will be as strong.

A weaker rupee helps exports and the RBI may prefer it, said economists. Negative real interest rates, potential GDP and earnings downgrades and rising inflation have also become headwinds. "The INR could continue to weaken in the absence of a strong anchor from the" RBI, as per ANZ.



THE HINDU GROUP

'RBI intent is key to curb further rupee weakness'

'Bearish bets at highest since last April'

REUTERS

MUMBAI
The rupee's near-term fortunes may directly be influenced by the Reserve Bank of India's intent on preventing any further depreciation in the currency as the surge in COVID-19 cases hits jobs and growth, economists and traders said.

The rupee has already lost 2.6% against the dollar so far this month, putting it on the cusp of marking its worst month since the pandemic hit the country early last year.

"INR [Indian rupee] is likely to trade with a depreciating bias on the back of a stronger dollar, relatively weaker [emerging market or EM] currencies, muted EM inflows and rising COVID-19 cases in India," said Sameer Narang, chief economist at Bank of Baroda.

A fortnightly Reuters poll showed bearish bets on the rupee climbed to their highest since last April, as the surge in infections has halted what had been seen as a promising growth story in the region.

Forecast is for 74.50-76'

The rupee closed at 75.01 to the dollar, and traders said they expect it to stay in the 74.50 to 76.00 range against the greenback in the near-term.

India reported 3,32,730 new daily cases on Friday, the highest single-day tally anywhere globally. Rising cases have been one of the main factors behind the recent fall in the rupee, but the RBI's decision to commit to large bond purchases has added to downside momentum.

The WMA limit arrived at by the Committee based on total expenditure of States/UTs, works out to ₹47,010 crore. The RBI said it would review the WMA limit thereafer, depending on the course of the pandemic and its impact on the economy.

The Special Drawing Facility availed by State Governments/ UTs shall continue to be linked to the quantum of their investments in marketable securities issued by the Government of India, including the Auction Treasury Bills, it said.

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HCL Tech net falls 24% on staff bonus, higher tax

FY22 revenue to grow in double digits'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
IT services firm HCL Technologies on Friday reported a 24% year-on-year decline in consolidated net profit to ₹2,387 crore for the quarter ended March, on account of a one-time bonus to employees and a higher tax expense.

The company, which expects revenue in FY22 to grow in double digits in constant currency terms, also announced a special interim dividend of ₹10 per share to mark the ₹10-billion annual revenue milestone. This will be in addition to a dividend of ₹6 per share declared by the company.

During the most recent quarter, the company had announced a special one-



time bonus for employees worth ₹700 crore, to mark the crossing of \$10-billion revenue milestone in 2020. Net income stood at ₹2,962 excluding the bonus. Revenue increased 5.7% to ₹19,642 crore.

For full-year FY21, consolidated net profit increased 17.6% to ₹13,011 crore, while revenue grew 6.7% to ₹75,379 crore.

FinMin lifts spending cap to boost capex

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI
The Finance Ministry has relaxed the spending guidelines to enable ministries and departments to undertake capital expenditure totalling ₹44,000 crore envisaged in the budget for 2021-22.

According to an office memorandum (OM) issued by the ministry on Thursday, the monthly/quarterly expenditure plan ceilings and restrictions will not apply for expenditure under the capital heads under the budget.

To enable ministries/departments to expedite capital expenditure, it said, the cash management guidelines issued by the Ministry of Finance under the OM of 2017 have been relaxed.

Manufacturing highlights booming U.S. economy

New home sales race to 14-year high

REUTERS

WASHINGTON
U.S. factory activity powered ahead in early April though manufacturers increasingly struggled to source raw materials and other inputs, which could slow momentum in the months ahead.

The flow of strong economic data continued with another report on Friday showing new home sales racing to a more than 14-1/2-year high in March. The economy is being boosted by the White House's massive \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 pandemic rescue package and increased vaccinations against the virus.

"Microfinance sector is serving about 102 million accounts of the poor population of India," Sa-Dhan's executive director said.



expectations for robust growth in the first quarter and setting up the economy for what could be its best performance in nearly four decades.

Data firm IHS Markit said its flash U.S. manufacturing PMI increased to 60.6 in the first half of this month. That was the highest reading since the series

PBKS bowlers smother MI to snap three-game losing streak

Shami (two for 21) and Bishnoi (two for 21) the stars of an attack that limits Mumbai to 131 for six; Rahul (60 n.o.), Gayle (43 n.o.) take Punjab over the line

IPL 2021

AYAN ACHARYA

Punjab Kings got its IPL-14 campaign back on track at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai with a nine-wicket victory over Mumbai Indians on Friday.

Needling a modest 132 to win, K.L. Rahul and Mayank Agarwal got off to a rollicking start. The duo collected 15 off Krunal Pandya's first over – Rahul hitting two successive fours before Agarwal launched a six over extra-cover.

Rohit Sharma then turned to Jasprit Bumrah, who was pulled over fine-leg for six by Rahul. Agarwal brought up the 50 partnership with a boundary before holing out for Rahul Chahar.

Rahul and Chris Gayle struggled to keep the runs ticking over, with the dot balls racking up as Chahar and Jayant Yadav mounted the pressure in the middle overs. The boundary drought ended after 32 balls when Gayle put one away to the fine-leg fence.

With the ball turning square, there were a few close shaves but Rahul played the sheet-anchor's role to perfection, reaching his half-century at a run a ball. PBKS got over the line

- Rohit (63) and Suryakumar (33) shone for MI
- Rahul and Agarwal (25) got PBKS off to a rollicking start
- The Punjab side won by nine wickets with 14 balls to spare

with 14 balls to spare, riding on an unbeaten 79-run stand between Gayle and Rahul.

Earlier, batting first, Mumbai Indians' innings got off to a shaky start after Quinton de Kock dragged Deepak Hooda straight into the hands of Moises Henriques.

While runs didn't reel off the blade of Ishan Kishan – promoted to No. 3 – skipper Rohit, too, was slow up front. The first boundary of the innings came off the last ball of the fifth over when Rohit swept a low full toss behind square.

MI had limped to 21 for one in the PowerPlay before Ravi Bishnoi (two for 21) had Ishan caught behind in his first over of the season. On a slow turning pitch, Rohit targeted the slow left armer, Fabian Allen.

After scoring back-to-back boundaries off him, Rohit launched one over wide long-on. And when Hooda returned for his second spell, he was pulled over deep mid-wicket.



Kings of Punjab: After Bishnoi kept the Mumbai Indians batsmen on a leash, Rahul steered the team home. ■ SPORTZPICS/IPL



Kings of Punjab: After Bishnoi kept the Mumbai Indians batsmen on a leash, Rahul steered the team home. ■ SPORTZPICS/IPL

Rohit reached his 50 with a boundary to backward point. At the other end, Suryakumar Yadav batted as serenely as he usually does – an inside-out six over extra

cover off Arshdeep Singh being the highlight.

These two added 79 off 56 for the third wicket and were threatening to cut loose when Suryakumar was caught for 33 off Bishnoi.

Next over, Mohammed Shami (two for 21) had Rohit caught for 63, as the PBKS bowlers staged a late comeback to pick up four for 34 in the last five. They were duly rewarded with a win.

SCOREBOARD

MUMBAI INDIANS

Quinton de Kock c Henriques b Hooda 3 (5b), Rohit Sharma c Allen b Shami 63 (52b, 5x4, 2x6), Ishan Kishan c Rahul b Bishnoi 6 (17b), Suryakumar Yadav c Gayle b Bishnoi 33 (27b, 3x4, 1x6), Kieron Pollard (not out) 16 (12b, 1x6), Hardik Pandya c Hooda b Arshdeep 1 (4b), Krunal Pandya c Pooran b Shami 3 (3b), Jayant Yadav (not out) 0 (0b); Extras (b-4, w-2): 6; Total (for six wkts. in 20 overs): 131.

FALL OF WICKET

1-53 (Mayank, 7.2).

MUMBAI INDIANS BOWLING

Bout 2-4-0-21, Krunal 3-0-31-0, Bumrah 3-0-21-0, Rahul Chahar 4-0-19-1, Jayant 4-0-20-0, Pollard 1-0-11-0.

Toss: PBKS; MoM: Rahul.

Punjab Kings won by nine wickets with 14 balls to spare.

Innings scan

MI	PBKS
44	Dots
8	Fours
4	Sixes
21/1	PP
6.55	RR

PUNJAB KINGS

POINTS TABLE

Team	M	W	L	PTS	NRR
Royal Challengers	4	4	0	8	1.009
Chennai Super Kings	4	3	1	6	1.142
Delhi Capitals	4	3	1	6	0.426
Mumbai Indians	5	2	3	4	-0.032
Punjab Kings	5	2	3	4	-0.428
Sunrisers Hyderabad	4	1	3	2	-0.228
Kolkata Knight Riders	4	1	3	2	-0.700
Rajasthan Royals	4	1	3	2	-1.011

After the PBKS-MI match on April 23

Misfiring Knight Riders favourites against the fragile Royals

Morgan's side has more options than Samson's outfit

WRIDDHAAYAN BHATTACHARYYA

Rajasthan Royals' fragility and inconsistency in IPL-14 so far make Kolkata Knight Riders the favourite for Saturday's clash at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

Both sides have won just once in four games and are looking to revive their campaigns, but KKR is a little ahead in terms of planning and execution. It almost chased down 221 against Chennai Super Kings even after being five down for 31 inside the PowerPlay at the same venue.

RR slipped to eighth after failing to defend 178 against Royal Challengers Bangalore, losing by 10 wickets.

Welcome change

The slow strip in Chennai had curbed the big shots, resulting in low-scoring games. The Mumbai pitch has offered a welcome change.

If KKR wants to attack up front and at the death, Lockie Ferguson should be on pace duty with Pat Cummins, as the conditions suit the New Zealander.

It remains to be seen whether Sunil Narine makes



TODAY'S MATCH



MATCH
MUMBAI, 7.30 P.M.
HEAD-TO-HEAD
Played: 22
RR 10 | KKR 12
In 2020
Played 2 | RR 0 | KKR 2
STAR SPORTS 1 & SELECT 1 (SD & HD)

way for Ferguson. In that case, Harbhajan Singh may rejoin Varun Chakravarthy in the spin department while Kamlesh Nagarkoti sits out.

RR skipper Sanju Samson has not delivered since the ton in the opener against Punjab Kings. His inconsistency remains a talking point.

Morris under pressure

Even big-ticket all-rounder Chris Morris has not flexed his muscles except in one game against Delhi Capitals where his golf-like swing of the bat took RR home.

Andre Russell's 22-ball 54 against CSK has sounded an ominous note of warning to the bowlers. Samson will need a plan to restrict the Caribbean star.

Young left-arm pacer Chatan Sakariya has impressed

Archer out of IPL, says ECB

P.K. AJITH KUMAR

It is confirmed. Jofra Archer will take no part in this year's IPL.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Friday said that the fast bowler would not play in the current edition of the IPL. Archer had to undergo a surgery on his hand, following a freak injury that resulted in a piece of glass getting lodged in his finger.

"Archer returned to bowling this week with higher intensity, and the ECB and Sussex medical teams will continue to monitor his progress," the statement said.

Archer's absence is a severe blow to Royals, which has already lost the services of all-rounder Ben Stokes, who was injured and ruled out of the rest of the competition after just one game.

Archer's absence is a severe blow to Royals, which has already lost the services of all-rounder Ben Stokes, who was injured and ruled out of the rest of the competition after just one game.

with six wickets in four games. RR could include right-arm quick Kartik Tyagi in the mix as an experiment.

Andre Russell's 22-ball 54 against CSK has sounded an ominous note of warning to the bowlers. Samson will need a plan to restrict the Caribbean star.

Young left-arm pacer Chatan Sakariya has impressed

QUICK SINGLES

Guardiola applauds RCB's unbeaten run

NEW DELHI
Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola, after RCB's win over the Rajasthan Royals, posted a photo of himself holding an RCB jersey on Instagram and wrote: "It's time to finally learn cricket's rules. Thanks to my friend @virat.kohli for the shirt. Now is your turn to use your Man City shirt @pumaindia @pumafootball #PUMAXRCB"

Last year, during an Instagram live session organised by PUMA, the duo – brand ambassadors for the global sportswear brand – was seen engaging in an enthralling conversation about their love for football.



Natarajan to undergo surgery

CHENNAI
Sunrisers Hyderabad pacer T. Natarajan, who has been ruled out of the ongoing IPL due to a knee injury, will have to undergo a surgery. The 30-year-old Natarajan had played only two out of the four games for Sunrisers Hyderabad this season. He originally sustained this injury during the tour of Australia earlier this year. "I am sad to miss the remaining games (this IPL). Since I played well last season and went on to play for India, my expectations were high. Unfortunately, I have to undergo knee surgery and will miss this season," the yorker specialist said in a video posted by Sunrisers Hyderabad on its official Twitter handle. He, however, did not specify when the surgery will take place. "I have no words to say right now. I wish Sunrisers to go out and win every game this season. Best wishes," added the bowler. PTI



The six count

A comparison between the maximums hit in the first 16 matches of IPL 2021 and the one held in the UAE in 2020

2021 SIXES 207

Chennai Super Kings	34
Kolkata Knight Riders	34
Rajasthan Royals	31
Punjab Kings	27
Sunrisers Hyderabad	26
Royal Challengers	24
Mumbai Indians	19
Delhi Capitals	12

■ Maxwell (RCB), Hooda (PBKS), Russell (KKR) and Samson (RR) are second with 8 sixes each

2020 SIXES 237

Rajasthan Royals	51
Mumbai Indians	39
Kolkata Knight Riders	33
Delhi Capitals	27
Kings XI Punjab	27
Chennai Super Kings	27
Royal Challengers	20
Sunrisers Hyderabad	13

■ In both editions, all teams had played four games each at this stage

■ Stats up to the RCB-RR game on April 22, 2021

Top of the charts

ORANGE CAP

Shikhar Dhawan (DC)

Matches: 4 | Runs: 231

HS: 92 | SR: 148.07

PURPLE CAP

Harshal Patel (RCB)

Matches: 4 | Wickets: 12

BB: 5/27 | Econ: 7.25

After the PBKS-MI match on April 23

Axar recovers, rejoins DC squad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHENNAI

Delhi

TV PICKS

Sri Lanka v Bangladesh: 1st Test, Sony Six (SD & HD) 9.45 a.m.
IPL: Star Sports 1 & SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.
Premier League: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., 10 p.m., & 12.30 a.m. (Sunday)
Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m., 9.30 p.m., & 12.15 a.m. (Sunday)

IN BRIEF



Ibrahimovic extends AC Milan stay

MILAN
Zlatan Ibrahimovic is going to keep playing with AC Milan when he's 40. And he'll likely make his return to the Champions League. Milan announced on Thursday that Ibrahimovic, who turns 40 on October, had signed a one-year contract extension for a reported €7 million salary. AP

Euro 2020: Dublin joins Bilbao on sidelines

GENEVA
Bilbao and Dublin were removed as host cities for this year's European Championship on Friday because they could not guarantee having enough fans in stadiums, and the games were moved to Seville, St. Petersburg and London. The changes to the 12-city hosting plan for Euro 2020 come only seven weeks before the 24-nation tournament kicks off in Rome on June 11. AP



Arjun Kalyan wins in Serbia

CHENNAI
Arjun Kalyan, who recently became a Grandmaster, won the GM round robin Rujna Zora-3 2021 chess tournament, which concluded in Serbia on Friday, with seven points. "The tournament victory was expected as I was the top seed. It always feels good to win a tournament," said Kalyan. India's N. Krishna Teja finished second with six points.



France bars unruly Paire from Olympics

PARIS
The French Tennis Federation on Friday barred outspoken world number 35 Benoit Paire from the Tokyo Olympics. Paire will not be considered for selection to Tokyo due to his "repeated deeply ill-judged behaviour," a statement from the FFT announced. AFP

Deepika and Atanu in semifinals

ARCHERY WC

SPORTS BUREAU

GUATEMALA CITY

Ace archer Deepika Kumari and her husband Atanu Das came up with impressive performances to reach the semifinals of the women and men's recurve individual competitions respectively at the World Cup Stage 1 here on Thursday.

Deepika, who was third in the ranking round, got a first round bye.

She defeated Kelsey Lard of the USA 6-0, Aida Roman of Mexico 6-5 and Michelle Kroppen of Germany 6-0.

Atanu got past Oscar Tiwas 6-4, compatriot Pravin Jadhav 6-4 and Eric Peters of Canada 6-4 to make the last-four.

The Indian mixed recurve team beat Spain 6-0 in the quarterfinals before going down to Mexico 5-4 in the semifinals.

Messi turns on the style for Barca

Atletico stays on top; Leicester blitzes past West Brom; Atalanta blows chance

EURO LEAGUE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

Lionel Messi gave up the chance for a hat-trick on Thursday as Barcelona held off a late fightback from Getafe to win 5-2 and stay in the race at the top of LaLiga.

Messi scored twice and could have had a third in injury-time at Camp Nou but deferred a penalty to Antoine Griezmann.

"He's the best in the world, he never lets up," said Barca coach Ronald Koeman. "If he lowers his concentration you never notice. Hopefully he stays for many more years."

Back-to-back wins

Atletico had earlier brushed aside Huesca 2-0 to register back-to-back victories for the first time since January and go to the top, though Barcelona has a game in hand.

Jamie Vardy ended his two-month goal drought as Leicester blitzed West Brom 3-0 on Thursday to strengthen its grip on a Premier League top-four place and snuff out the Baggies' revival.



Largesse: Antoine Griezmann, left, scores from the spot after Lionel Messi decided not to go for a hat-trick against Getafe. AP

then its grip on a Premier League top-four place and snuff out the Baggies' revival.

Brendan Rodgers' men were wobbling after losing their previous two top-flight matches but produced a dazzling attacking display against the insipid visitors at

the King Power Stadium.

First-half goals from Jamie Vardy, Jonny Evans and Kelechi Iheanacho gave West Brom a mountain to climb and Leicester kept a firm grip on the match after the break.

Third-placed Leicester,

whose implosion at the end of last season cost it a Champions League place, now has a valuable four-point lead over Chelsea and West Ham, with just six games to go.

Ten-man Atalanta wasted a chance to move into second place in Serie A with a

1-1 draw at Europa League semi-finalist Roma. Still, Atalanta extended its unbeaten streak to six matches.

Also, Napoli beat visiting Lazio 5-2 to move within two points of the Champions League places.

Third-place Atalanta remains one point behind second-place AC Milan and moves level on points with fourth-place Juventus, which it beat last weekend.

The results:

LaLiga: Atletico Madrid 2 (Correa 39, Carrasco 80) bt Huesca 0; Granada 4 (Soldado 21, 77, Puertas 37, Kenedy 81) bt Eibar 1 (Kike 64); Real Sociedad 2 (Portu 25, Januzaj 39-pen) bt Celta Vigo 1 (Hugo Mallo 22); Barcelona 5 (Messi 8, 33, Chakla 28-o.g., Araujo 87, Griezmann 90+3-pen) bt Getafe 2 (Lenglet 12-o.g., Ubal 69-pen).

Premier League: Leicester 3 (Vardy 23, Evans 26, Iheanacho 36) bt West Brom 0.

Serie A: Roma 1 (Christante 75) drew with Atalanta 1 (Malinovskiy 26); Napoli 5 (Insigne 7-pen, 53, Politano 12, Mertens 65, Osimhen 80) bt Lazio 2 (Immobile 70, Milinkovic-Savic 74).



Cameron Green. AP

Australia is also scheduled to undertake a short format tour of West Indies and a Test tour of Pakistan in addition to the Ashes series and the Twenty20 World Cup.

"There is a considerable amount of international cricket to be played across all formats in the next 12 months and the door to national selection is never closed to players outside this list," Hohns said.

Contracted players (2020-21): Ashton Agar, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Aaron Finch, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Glenn Maxwell, Tim Paine, James Pattinson, Jhye Richardson, Kane Richardson, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, David Warner, Adam Zampa.

Vidit, Praggnanandhaa ready for tough tests

CHESS

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

Vidit Gujrathi faces Magnus Carlsen and Hikaru Nakamura among his five first-day opponents while R. Praggnanandhaa's list of early rivals include two-time winner on the Champions Tour, Wesley So, and Sergey Karjakin when the 16-player New in Chess Classic online rapid meet opens on Saturday. Vidit's return coincides with Praggnanandhaa's debut in the \$1.5 million Tour as the two young Indians get ready to test their preparedness against some of the best names in the game.

For this event, Praggnanandhaa has prepared under former World champion Vladimir Kramnik, among others.

Black pieces start
On the first day of the three-day preliminary rounds, Vi-

dit starts with black pieces and plays alternate colours against Aryan Tari (Norway), Levon Aronian (Armenia), Johan-Sebastian Christiansen, Carlsen (both Norway) and Nakamura (USA), in that order.

Praggnanandhaa, too, starts with black pieces against Jan-Krzysztof Duda (Poland), followed by Gawain Jones (England), So (USA), Shakhiyari Mamedyarov (Azerbaijan) and Karjakin (Russia).

After three days of league, the top eight finishers will advance to the quarterfinals.

Live webcast

All matches can be followed live on chess24.com from 10.30 pm.

The delayed start is to minimise the clash of match-times with the ongoing Candidates tournament.

The event concludes on May 2.

I have learnt from my setbacks'

Become mentally stronger, learnt a lot from Rio: Vinesh

WRESTLING

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

Setbacks have helped Olympic-bound Vinesh Phogat grow as an individual and as a wrestler, enabling her to make an objective assessment of her improvement in the run-up to the Tokyo Olympics.

Vinesh, a World championships bronze medalist, had a forgettable outing in the Rio Olympics as she retired midway through a bout because of a knee injury. Now, she sounds wiser about the episode.

"What happened in 2016 was disappointing. I am mentally ready now even if there is a negative situation," Vinesh said during an online interaction facilitated by the Sports Authority of India on Friday.

"I have learnt from my setbacks. I was thinking why this happened with me but then I realised the universe

to the Target Olympic Podium Scheme in 2015 and has been supported with ₹87 lakh in the current Olympic cycle – said, "I'm on the right track. I've reached 85 per cent. I don't want to peak early. I am making different strategies for different wrestlers. I have to fight with them accordingly."

"I am aware that people have a lot of expectations from me but I am not under pressure. This gives me extra incentive to train and perform. If they are expecting, I have to bring a medal for them."

The 26-year-old rates teenagers Anshu Malik and Sonam Malik, who have also qualified for the Tokyo Games, highly. "They have a strong passion for winning, no fear. That gives them confidence. I am happy Sonam and Anshu have joined me for the Olympics. I'm not the only woman wrestler now! They will push me and I will push them," said Vinesh.

dam 6-3, 6-3, while eighth-seeded Tejasvi got past third seed Janani Ramesh 6-4, 6-3.

The results (doubles finals):

Boys

Aditya Nandal & Daksh Prasad bt Aditya Balda & Yoge Panwar 7-5, 7-6(6).

Girls

Janani Ramesh & Kartika Vijay bt Sanvi Ahluwalia & Radhika Mahajan 7-6(5), 6-4.

Yogee, Tejasvi triumph

TENNIS

SPORTS BUREAU
JHAJHAR

Yogee Panwar and Tejasvi Dabas won the boys and girls titles respectively in the AITA National series under-18 tennis tournament at the Joygaon Academy on Friday.

Yogee beat Shivam Ka-

at the Grenke Open (Germany) and the second in the Mix-200 event last week in Serbia.

GM R.B. Ramesh, who has been training Savitha for nearly four years, said she is a natural. "Savitha is in need of financial support," he added.

Savitha Shri becomes WIM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

B. Savitha Shri has completed her third and final norm in the Belgrade Spring Festival chess tournament in Serbia to become an Woman International Master.

The 14-year-old achieved the first WIM norm in 2019

kyo Olympics this summer, after announcing a new state of emergency for Tokyo, Osaka and two other prefectures.

The measures will go into effect from April 25 to May 11, raising questions about Japan's ability to host the Olympics amid a resurgent coronavirus.

Meanwhile, the Tokyo Olympic organisers said on Friday the leg of the torch relay in Okinawa's Miyakojima island would not be held on public roads because the region is currently subject to priority measures for containing the spread of the coronavirus.

Walker turns it on for the Celtics

Doncic's all-round show takes Mavericks past Lakers



On the move: Boston Celtics' guard Kemba Walker drives past Phoenix Suns center Deandre Ayton. AP

NBA

REUTERS
BOSTON

Kemba Walker matched his season high with 32 points to lead banged-up Boston Celtics past visiting Phoenix Suns 99-86 in the NBA on Thursday.

Walker shot 11 of 17 from the field for the Celtics, who won for the ninth time in their last 11 games. Chris Paul had 22 points to lead the Suns, who lost for just the third time in their last 16 games.

Nikola Vucevic, Coby White and Thaddeus Young all scored 18 points as Chicago thumped visiting Charlotte 108-91.

The results: Boston 99 bt Phoenix 86; New Orleans 135 bt Orlando 100; Milwaukee 124 bt Philadelphia 117; San Antonio 106 bt Detroit 91; Chicago 108 bt Charlotte 91; Dallas 115 bt LA Lakers 110.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 27 points, 16 rebounds and six assists to lift host Milwaukee past Philadelphia.

Brandon Ingram scored 29 points and Zion Williamson added 23 as New Orleans routed Orlando 135-100.

Derrick White scored 26 points, 11 of them in the pivotal third quarter, to help San Antonio defeat visiting Detroit 106-91 in a battle of short-handed squads.

Nikola Vucevic, Coby White and Thaddeus Young all scored 18 points as Chicago thumped visiting Charlotte 108-91.

The results: Boston 99 bt Phoenix 86; New Orleans 135 bt Orlando 100; Milwaukee 124 bt Philadelphia 117; San Antonio 106 bt Detroit 91; Chicago 108 bt Charlotte 91; Dallas 115 bt LA Lakers 110.

Brandon Ingram scored

Japanese Prime Minister assures safe Olympics

Unveils new emergency measures

REUTERS
TOKYO

Only three months before the postponed Olympics is set to open, Tokyo and Japan's second largest metropolitan area of Osaka has been placed under emergency orders aimed at stemming surging cases of the coronavirus.

The measures, which take place during Japan's "golden week" holiday period, are meant to limit travel and keep people out of public places. They are to end on



Yoshihide Suga. AP

May 11, just ahead of a widely reported visit to Hiroshima by International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach.

Bach said this week that the visit, reported for May 17-18, is still in the "planning

phase." But Bach's presence was immediately criticised by opposition lawmakers who say the Olympics is being prioritised ahead of public safety.

"Japan should decide its own public health policies. There is no reason we should be told by Bach what to do," said Yuichiro Tamaki, the head of the Democratic Party for the People.