





## SHORT TAKES

## 2 held for burglary at shop, godown in Sadar Bazar

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 18

Delhi Police have arrested two accused persons for allegedly committing burglary at a shop and a godown in Sadar Bazar area in North Delhi. The police said that a complaint was received on PCR by the shop owner that there had been a burglary at his shop. The police rushed to the spot and found the shutter of the shop broken and several sports items were found stolen. In the second incident the godown owner also complained that the shutter had been broken and items stored there were stolen. The police swung into action and arrested both the accused persons Md. Kasim (26) and Sahid (38) on a tip-off and recovered the entire stolen items from them. During the interrogation both the accused persons confessed about their involvement in the two burglary cases, the police alleged. Both the accused persons are AC mechanics and reside in the neighbourhood of the shops. They further told the police that they had run short of money during the lockdown to meet their expenses. Therefore, they committed burglaries, the police alleged.

## Prostitution racket busted, 6 arrested in Greater Noida

**Noida:** Police have busted a prostitution racket with the arrest of six people, including three women in Greater Noida, officials said on Tuesday. The arrests were made on Monday from a house in the phase 3 police station area, where one of the accused women lived as a tenant, they said. "This woman would contact clients over the phone and invite them over to her place. She would also arrange for other women to offer their service," a police spokesperson said. "Altogether six people - three women and their three male clients - were arrested from the spot," the official said, adding four mobile phones, 9,860 and some "objectionable items" were seized from the house. An FIR has been lodged under the Prevention of Unethical Trade Act, 1956 and further proceedings are underway. — PTI

## Black fungus cases rising in Delhi, docs flag 'irrational' use of steroids

**New Delhi, May 18:** Hospitals in Delhi have reported a rise in the number of black fungus cases or mucormycosis among people recovering from Covid-19 during the second wave and it could be ascribed to the "irrational" use of steroids at home without consulting a doctor, medical experts said on Tuesday.

The fungal infection, which affects the brain, lungs, and sinuses, can be lethal to those suffering from diabetes and having compromised immune systems.

According to Dr Suresh Singh Naruka, a senior consultant (ENT) at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, mucormycosis is more prevalent among people with low immunity due to diabetes, kidney disease, liver disorder, old age, cardiac issues, or those on medication for auto-immune disease like rheumatoid arthritis.

"If such patients are administered steroids, their immunity reduces further, allowing the fungus to thrive," he said.

Dr Naruka said he has been dealing with three to four patients with severe

COVID-19 KILLS one or two per cent of the people infected while black fungus has a mortality rate of 75 per cent. Drugs used in the treatment of mucormycosis have severe side-effects and can lead to kidney issues, neurological dysfunction, and stroke, said Dr Suresh Singh Naruka, senior consultant (ENT) at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals.

mucormycosis every day as compared to one or two cases a month before Covid-19 began. "Covid-19 kills one or two per cent of the people infected while black fungus has a mortality rate of 75 per cent," he said.

Drugs used in the treatment of mucormycosis have severe side-effects and can lead to kidney issues, neurological dysfunction, and stroke, the doctor added.

Dr Ajay Swaroop, the chairman of the department of ENT at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, termed the mucormycosis situation as "terrible." "We have more

than 35 cases, of which around 10 are Covid positive. The rest developed the fungal infection post Covid," he said.

Dr Sumit Mrig, the head of ENT at Max Hospital in Saket, said 15-20 cases have been reported at their facility in the last three to four days.

"We have operated on 14-15 patients so far and four to five surgeries are planned for Tuesday. The factors responsible are extensive use of steroids to an extent that people have taken them without doctor's advice at home," he said.

Patients from rural areas are also coming in with mucormycosis, Dr Mrig added.

He said one should seek medical advice if experiencing symptoms such as unilateral headache, facial pain, pain in the eye, decreased sensation on one side of the face, or bloody nasal discharge.

Dr Suresh Kumar, the medical director of Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital, said steroids should be used under medical supervision when oxygen saturation is below 93 per cent. — PTI



Workers carry firewood for pyres of Covid-19 victims at Ghazipur crematorium in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

## Monthly pension of ₹2,500 for families who lost sole breadwinner ₹50K ex-gratia to Covid-19 victims' families: Kejriwal

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, MAY 18

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday announced an ex-gratia of ₹50,000 to families in the national capital that lost a member to Covid-19 disease. CM Kejriwal also announced a monthly pension of ₹2,500, in addition to the ex-gratia, for families where its sole breadwinner succumbed to the deadly viral disease.

"If the husband dies, the pension will be given to the wife, if the wife dies it will be given to the husband. If an unmarried person dies, the pension will be given to her or his parents," Kejriwal said.

In a further relief for children who lost their parents in the Covid-19 disease spread, Kejriwal said, "Children whose both parents die either due to Covid-19 or with one parent already dead and the one succumbing to Covid-19 now will be given ₹2,500 monthly pension till they attain the age of 25 years.

The children who have lost their parents to



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— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi CM

Covid-19 will be provided free education by the Delhi government," Kejriwal further added.

Explaining the move to financially aid the bereaved families, Kejriwal said that in the last 4-5 days the Delhi government ministers and officers assessed ways to save money being spent by the authorities and help the citizens in the city-state who are reeling under

## New strain from Singapore dangerous for children: CM

**New Delhi, May 18:** Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, on Tuesday, appealed to the Central government to immediately cancel all air services with Singapore, saying a new strain of coronavirus from there is said to be "very dangerous" for children.

This new strain of virus could invade India in the form of a third wave, he said in a tweet.

the crisis. Assisting families with ration cards, Kejriwal announced free ration for the month of May up to 10kg — by both the Delhi government and Centre.

"There are 72 lakh ration card holders in Delhi and they are given 5 kg ration by the government every month. This month, the ration will be given free of cost. Besides this, an additional 5 kg free ration is being given by the Centre, so they're being given 10 kg free ration

"The new form of coronavirus in Singapore is said to be very dangerous for children. It could reach Delhi in the form of a third wave. My appeal to the Central government: 1. Cancel all air services with Singapore with immediate effect 2. Work on vaccine alternatives for children on a priority basis," Mr Kejriwal said.

— PTI

this month," Kejriwal said. The announcement from CM Kejriwal comes on the day the national capital recorded 4,482 cases of coronavirus infections in the last 24 hours, pushing the cumulative case tally to 14,02,873, and 265 related deaths, a health bulletin released by the government on Tuesday showed.

The positivity rate has significantly dropped to 6.89% from 8.42% on Monday, when the city had logged 4,524 cases, the lowest since April 5.



Patients at Guru Tegh Bahadur Covid Care Centre at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

## Delhi receives over 60K Covaxin doses for 45-plus

**New Delhi, May 18:** Delhi on Tuesday received over 60,000 Covaxin doses for key workers and those aged above 45, AAP MLA Atishi said. Still, the city has only two days of Covaxin stock left for this category, while Covishield doses for the group can last up to four days, she said.

She also said that 1.13 lakh beneficiaries received jabs on May 17. Around 10.75 lakh people have got both the doses since the inoculation drive

began on January 16.

"After Tuesday evening, the city will have only three days of Covishield stock left for the 18-44 age group. We appeal to the central government to make more vaccines available for this category immediately," she said, adding the city government might have to stop vaccination for them from next week.

Releasing the city's latest "vaccination bulletin", Atishi said the city will have only three days of

Covishield stock left for the 18-44 age group after Tuesday evening.

"We appeal to the Central government to make more vaccines available for this category immediately, else we might have to stop vaccinating this group next week," she said.

However, she added Delhi received 60,240 Covaxin doses for those aged above 45, healthcare and frontline workers on Tuesday.

But for this category too, she said, the city has now

two days of Covaxin stock left, while Covishield doses can last up to four days.

However, she added, the number of "walk-in" centres for this age group will be increased in the coming days.

The Centre has been providing doses for those above 45 years and all healthcare and frontline workers across India. States were allowed to procure and vaccinate those between 18-44 years starting May 1.

— PTI

## Youth held for blackmailing girl over video

**New Delhi, May 18:** A 21-year-old man was arrested for allegedly extorting money from a girl by threatening to make her nude videos viral on social media, police said on Tuesday.

The suspect was arrested from Nehrour in Uttar Pradesh's Bijnor district after the 13-year-old girl's father complained at the Alipur police station in Delhi, police said.

He demanded ₹5,000 from the girl who then paid him Rs 2,000 via online transaction, but kept threatening her to pay the remaining amount, police said.

According to police, Md Aamir, who was learning work at a saloon in his native village, represented himself from a good family background and became friends with unknown girls on Instagram.

Thereafter, he lured them to send their naked videos. After getting them, he started threatening and extorting money from those girls on the pretext that he would upload the video on social media, police said.

— PTI

## Renowned cardiologist &amp; ex-IMA head dies of Covid

Dr K.K. Aggarwal gained prominence with informative videos on corona

**New Delhi, May 18:** Eminent cardiologist and Padma Shri awardee Dr K.K. Aggarwal, who gained more prominence with his informative videos about Covid-19 on social media, has succumbed to the deadly virus, according to a statement posted on his Twitter handle.

Aggarwal, 62, was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here and was on ventilator support since last week. He died at 11.30 PM on Monday after a lengthy battle with Covid-19, the statement said. He had received both the doses of vaccine. However, he had co-morbidities as he was suffering from Crohn's disease and had pulmonary embolism three years ago, a friend said.

"The show must go on," the former Indian Medical Association (IMA) president, who has been among the prominent faces of the medical fraternity, had said in his affable and unassuming manner in one of his last videos as he sat with a nasal cannula for oxygen support. "We have to get people out of this crisis," he said, urging doctors to see more and more patients with similar symptoms at one go during teleconsulta-



K.K. Aggarwal

DR. K.K. Aggarwal was among the first frontline workers to take the first dose of the anti-Covid vaccine in January, which he revealed during a live video broadcast from his car.

Hospital, Saket and was discharged, according to a family friend.

People from all walks of life took to Twitter to express grief over the demise of the doctor who had touched the lives of many through social media during the pandemic.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said it was a "setback for the whole nation". "He acted all his life for the health rights of common people especially poor, deprived n marginalised. A great human being. RIP! (sic)," the chief minister wrote on Twitter.

Aggarwal was among the first frontline workers to take the first dose of the anti-Covid vaccine in January, which he revealed during a live video broadcast from his car.

The video of the broadcast, however, went viral after he was interrupted by his wife's call and their conversation was heard by the audience.

— PTI

## Minister conducts surprise inspection at fair price shops

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 18

To check quantity of ration being provided to pregnant women and children under the Integrated Child Development Scheme-ICDS, Delhi minister of women and child development Rajendra Pal Gautam on Tuesday conducted a surprise door to door inspection in the JJ Colony of Wazirpur, Shakti Nagar Extension, Ashok Vihar and Subzi Mandi area.

Mr. Gautam, along with the officials investigated the nutritional food being provided under the ICDS scheme. He took direct feedback from beneficiaries about the quality and quantity of ration being provided to them.

Under this ICDS scheme, nutritious food is given to children younger than 6



Rajendra Pal Gautam

years and pregnant or lactating women twice a month. In this diet, raw wheat porridge, raw black gram, sweet khel

and roasted gram are given according to the beneficiaries based on the prescribed standards of nutrition. Mr Gautam said that the main objective of his visit was to ensure that the beneficiaries get high quality nutritious food according to the prescribed standards. He said that such a surprise inspection will send a message to the Anganwadi workers and officials that they will not be spared for any irregularities in the quality of the ration or its distribution.

## Light rains bring down mercury in Delhi

**New Delhi, May 18:** Light rains pulled down the mercury in the national capital with the maximum temperature settling at 30.8 degrees Celsius, nine notches below the season's average, while the weather department has warned of squalls in the NCR region on Wednesday.

As Cyclone Tauktae weakens further, its remnants will bring moderate rains to several parts of north India including the Delhi-NCR region, the Indian Meteorological Centre said on Tuesday.

"Tomorrow, it will stretch from Rajasthan to Haryana. Due to this, east and west Uttar Pradesh, east Rajasthan, the Delhi-NCR region will witness moderate rain. There is a possibility of heavy rains in some parts of Delhi," said Kuldeep Srivastava, Head of the Regional Meteorological Centre of the IMD.

The IMD has issued an orange colour-coded warning for Wednesday for the NCR region with a forecast of rains and squally winds of 50-60 km per hour. It has predicted thunderstorms with rain for Thursday.

— PTI

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority	
<b>noida</b> Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida G.B. Nagar, (U.P.) Website: <a href="http://www.noidaauthorityonline.com">www.noidaauthorityonline.com</a>	
E-TENDER NOTICE	
E-Tender are invited from firms / contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened / downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website : <a href="http://www.noidaauthorityonline.com">www.noidaauthorityonline.com</a> & <a href="https://etender.up.nic.in">https://etender.up.nic.in</a> . Please ensure to see these websites for any changes / amendments & corrigendum etc.	
(A)	1. 02/NOIDA/GM/SM(WC-9)/ET/2021-22, Name of Work:- D/o Sector-168 (Repair of drain in front of Commercial Plot Parallel of 45.00m wide road in Sector-168), Noida Cost - Rs. 9.52 Lacs 2. 47/GM/SM(WC-10)/ET/2020-21, Name of Work:- D/o Sector-154 (Repair of drain around Sector-154), Noida Cost - Rs. 24.72 Lacs 3. 59/GM/SM(WC-8)/ET/2020-21, Name of Work:- M/o Building (C/o Toilet on Gejha Bhangel road behind Police Chowki), Noida Cost - Rs. 7.33 Lacs
Which can be uploaded by date <b>03.06.2021</b> upto <b>5.00 PM</b> . Pre-qualification Shall be opened / downloaded on date <b>04.06.2021</b> at <b>11.00 AM</b> .	
(B)	1. 52/GM(R)/SM(WC-5)/2020-21, Name of Work:- M/o Drain (Construction of Gate for cleaning of main Irrigation drain in Sector-34), Noida Cost - Rs. 13.01 Lacs 2. 47/GM/SM(WC-6)/2020-21, Name of Work:- D/o Village (M/o Primary & Junior High School in Village Sorkha Jahidabad, Sarafabad & Parthala Khanjarpur under Operation Kayakalp Programme), Noida Cost - Rs. 2.82 Lacs
Which can be uploaded by date <b>26.05.2021</b> upto <b>5.00 PM</b> . Pre-qualification shall be opened / downloaded on date <b>27.05.2021</b> at <b>11.00 AM</b> .	
General Manager Noida	
CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA	



## SHORT TAKES

## 2-week extension to Odisha lockdown

**Bhubaneswar:** The Odisha government, on Tuesday, extended the lockdown restrictions in the state till June 1 to arrest the steady surge in cases of Covid. The first two-week long lockdown that came into force in the state on May 5 is set to end on Wednesday. According to chief secretary Suresh Kumar Mohapatra, after thorough consultation with health experts the government decided to extend the lockdown for two more weeks. Sources said the state had exhibited a test positivity rate (TPR) of 20 per cent but after nearly two weeks of lockdown, the TPR has now dipped to 18.2 per cent. Mr Mohapatra informed that during the extended lockdown period, vaccination will continue in places as notified by the state health department. People intimated for the vaccination can travel to the Covid vaccination centres on their own.

## Badrinath opens after winter closure

**Gopeshwar:** The famous temple of Badrinath in the upper Himalayan region of Uttarakhand opened after the winter break early on Tuesday amid traditional rituals. The chief priest of the temple, Ishwar Prasad Namboodiri, opened the portals of the temple at 4.15 am chanting Vedic hymns and praying for the well-being of all. However, the opening ceremony was a subdued affair with only a limited number of people, including the priests, the Dharmadhikari and administrative officials, attending it in compliance with the Covid standard operating procedure (SOP). In normal circumstances, thousands of people turn up at the high-altitude temple dedicated to Vishnu to witness its opening ceremony. For the second consecutive year, the temple witnessed a simple, thinly-attended opening ceremony. The temple was decorated with around eight quintals of marigolds on the occasion. — PTI

## DELHI HIGH COURT STAYS TRIAL IN INX MEDIA CASE

**New Delhi:** The Delhi High Court on Tuesday stayed the proceedings before the trial court in the CBI's INX Media corruption case involving Congress leader P. Chidambaram and his son Karti. Justice Suresh Kumar Kait issued notice and sought responses of Chidambaram and others on the CBI's plea challenging the trial court order directing the agency to allow inspection of documents kept in Malkhana (designated place in police station to store seized property) by the accused and their counsel. The CBI has sought to set aside the special judge's March 5, 2021 order to the extent that it directed CBI to allow inspection of documents kept in Malkhana by the respondents/accused/ their counsel. The agency contended that trial court's order reflects intrusion into the investigative process of the CBI and if accused persons are allowed to inspect documents available at the Malkhana, the same would subvert the probe and there is every likelihood that they may tamper with evidence. It added that this would impinge the power of the CBI to investigate into the allegations of huge economic fraud and corruption at the highest level, having national and international ramifications. It said out of 14 accused, only Karti had made the prayer to inspect Malkhana documents, however, the trial court erroneously allowed all the accused to inspect it and exceeded the judicial powers by giving relief which was not prayed for. — PTI

## Sharp spike in black fungus cases in MP, C'garh

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
BHOHAL, MAY 18

Surge in black fungus infection cases in Madhya Pradesh has sent alarm bells ringing in the state administration forcing the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government to launch microbiological surveillance in the hospitals in MP, on Tuesday, to detect such cases.

State medical education minister Vishwas Sarang told reporters here that the government has launched a

drive to detect black fungus infection cases in the state by conducting medical examinations of all the people who have recovered from Covid-19 in MP.

An official report said a total 500 cases of black fungus infections have been reported in the state so far.

The infection has claimed the life of a man who had recovered from Covid-19 recently in the state.

The state government has created dedicated treatment facilities for such cases in the five government-run major hospitals

AN OFFICIAL report said a total 500 cases of black fungus infections have been reported in the state so far. The infection has claimed the life of a man who had recovered from Covid recently in the state.

in Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Gwalior, and Rewa.

"We are facing a shortage of antifungal drugs and injections in the market. We have approached the Centre to ensure adequate supply of antifungal drugs and injections to the state

as soon as possible," Mr Sarang said.

The Madhya Pradesh government had earlier declared that all the patients suffering from black fungus infection would be treated free of cost in all the government hospitals in the state.

The state government, on Tuesday, fixed prices of the anti-fungal injections manufactured by various pharmaceutical companies and warned that action would be taken against druggists who were found selling the products at inflated prices.



NALASOPARA

(Anti-clockwise) Children play volleyball on a waterlogged street after heavy rain due to cyclone Tauktae in Nalasopara. A fisherman sits at a damaged structure near a shore of the Arabian Sea, which collapsed due to Cyclone Tauktae near Una Town in Gir Somnath district. NDRF personnel clear a fallen tree from a road as they carry out restoration works following the landfall process of Cyclone Tauktae in Gujarat on Tuesday.

— PTI



GIR SOMNAT



VALSAD

## No factionalism in Punjab, just diversity of views: Congress

**New Delhi, May 18:** Amid a public war of words between Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and former minister Navjot Singh Sidhu, the Congress Tuesday said it just reflects a diversity of views among its leaders which cannot be termed factionalism.

"Why do you forget that democracy is all about diversity?" Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete told a press conference. "It is wrong to give it the name of factionalism."

She said the priority of Punjab chief minister is to fight and defeat the Covid pandemic, and not anything else including the alleged infighting.

She also said there was no need for the central leadership to intervene in the state unit matters as issues arising out of differences of opinions can be resolved within the party at various levels.

"In Punjab, there is diversity of views as there could be differences of opinion between the leaders, but there is no factionalism," she said when asked about the open sparring between Singh and Sidhu.

Amarinder Singh and Sidhu have publicly sparred over the probe into the sacrilege issue, after the High Court quashed the probe report by the SIT headed by Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh. Sidhu raised questions over the delay in granting justice in the sacrilege case.

— PTI

## 'Rockstar' minister not in Vijayan 2.0

**Thiruvananthapuram, May 18:** Days after leading the ruling LDF to a stupendous electoral victory, CPI (M) veteran Pinarayi Vijayan was on Tuesday elected its Parliamentary Party Leader for a second term as chief minister but the omission of 'rockstar' health minister K.K. Shailaja from the new cabinet sparked a debate.

Having won international accolades for her deft handling of the first wave of Covid-19 in Kerala after it reported India's first case in 2020, Shailaja's surprise omission drew instant comparisons with the late KR Gowri Amma, the firebrand Marxist who was once tipped to head the state but never did. However, Shailaja, described as a "rockstar health minister" by section of international media, said she was not



Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan with governor Arif Mohammed Khan.

— PTI

disappointed at being denied berth in the new cabinet.

"There is no need to be emotional. I became the minister earlier because of the party's decision. I have absolute satisfaction in what I have done. I am confident that the new team can perform better than me," she said.

"Not the individual but the system is showcasing the fight against the pandemic. I am happy that I could lead the team," the leader added.

She was, however, entrusted with the position of party whip, a CPI(M) statement said here, even as the party took the position that all members except the chief minister should be fresh

faces in the new cabinet.

Among the fresh faces is Vijayan's son-in-law P. A. Mohammed Riyas. The state committee of the Marxist party nominated 11 freshers including two women as its ministers in the new government which would be sworn-in on May 20 at the Central Stadium here in adherence to Covid-19 protocol.

The state committee, which met at its headquarters AKG Centre, elected Vijayan to lead the party, the statement said.

Vijayan had scripted history in the April 6 Assembly polls by leading the ruling Left front to a consecutive term, bucking the over four-decade-old trend in the state of the people choosing between the Communists and Congress-led governments alternatively.

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## SHORT TAKES

## Minor Assam girl kills self after rape

**Guwahati:** After sending a message to a friend that she had been subjected to sexual assault, a 14-year-old girl allegedly killed herself in the house of a college teacher in Assam's Chirang district. The assistant professor of a college in Bengtoli, at whose house she had been staying for around a year for the purpose of studying, was arrested on the charge of rape and abetment to suicide. The police said that the minor girl was found hanging on Monday but the matter was not informed to the authorities. The teacher and her family members were trying to perform her last rites when the police, after getting a tip-off from someone, reached the spot and stopped them. During the investigation, it was found that the girl had sent a message to a friend, saying she did not want to live anymore as she had been subjected to sexual assault. — *PTI*

## Farmers block Tomar's convoy

**Sheepour, MP:** A group of farmers blocked the convoy of Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar in Sheepour in Madhya Pradesh, demanding that the Centre scrap three new agri-market-ing laws. Mr Tomar was on his way to the district hospital when a dozen farmers blocked his vehicle. Mr Tomar spoke to the farmers while being seated in his car, after which the group was removed by the police and the convoy moved ahead, he said. One of the protesters, Anil Singh, claimed they had demanded time from the administration to meet Tomar but permission was denied. Talking to reporters later, Tomar said 11 rounds of talks had been conducted with farm groups over the three new laws but some of those opposing them "don't want to accept the interests of farmers, and we do not have a solution for this attitude".

## Bihar cardiologist dies of Covid in Hyd

**Patna:** A leading cardiologist of Bihar, who was recently airlifted to Hyderabad for treatment of Covid-related complications, on Tuesday breathed his last at a hospital in the southern city. Condolences came pouring in for Dr Prabhat Kumar, credited with having launched the first angioplasty facility in the city, as the news of his death spread. Chief minister Nitish Kumar, Union minister and local MP Ravi Shankar Prasad, state health minister Mangal Pandey and leader of Opposition in the assembly Tejashwi Yadav were among those who expressed their shock and surprise over the death. Dr Kumar had tested positive for coronavirus in the beginning of the month and taken to Hyderabad a few weeks later. — *PTI*

## Live-in relations

■ **Continued from Page 1** the issue in the past. A three-judge bench of the apex court held in May 2018 that an adult couple had the right to live together even without marriage. It had made this clear while asserting that a 20-year-old Kerala woman, whose marriage had been annulled, could choose whom she wanted to live with. The top court had held that live-in-relationships were now even recognised by the legislature and they had found a place under the provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. In another landmark case filed by actor S. Khushboo, the Supreme Court had said live-in relationships are permissible and the act of two adults living together cannot be considered illegal or unlawful. While it is true that the mainstream view in our society is that sexual contact should take place only between marital partners, there is no statutory offence that takes place when adults willingly engage in sexual relations outside the marital setting, with the exception of "adultery" as defined under Section 497 IPC, it said. The apex court had also referred to its decision in Lata Singh vs State of UP. That judgment had said a live-in relationship between two consenting adults did not amount to any offence, with the obvious exception of adultery, even though it may be perceived as immoral. A major girl is free to marry anyone she likes or "live with anyone she likes". — *PTI*

## ED, CBI raids on Sena MLA's Lonavala resort

Raids come days after BJP leader Kirit Somaiya's jibe

BHAGWAN PARAB  
MUMBAI, MAY 18

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the CBI officials on Tuesday conducted raids at a resort owned by Shiv Sena MLA Pratap Sarnaik at the Lonavala hill station in Maharashtra.

The raids are seen as a fresh blow for Mr Sarnaik, who is facing an ED probe into a money laundering case involving security agency TopsGroup.

The ED officials reached Mr Sarnaik's resort in the morning and held raids. But the reason behind the action is not yet known, said sources.

The raids interestingly came after the BJP leader Kirit Somaiya had asked if Pratap Sarnaik had gone missing. "Where is Pratak Sarnaik?" he asked in a tweet.

"Pratap Sarnaik has bought 78 acre of land at Titwala from NSEL scam money. His partner Yogesh Deshmukh was arrested by ED a few weeks back. Sarnaik's other partner Mohit



Pratap Sarnaik

■ **EARLIER,** THE ED had summoned Pratap Sarnaik for its probe into a money laundering case involving TopsGroup

■ **THE ED** has already arrested Amit Chandole, Mr Sarnaik close aide, and had questioned his brother-in-law Yogesh Chandegala

Agarwal has siphoned ₹216 crores of NSEL Scam. ED searching (for) Sarnaik for a few weeks. Sarnaik is also named in the MMRDA scam," Mr Somaiya said in another tweet.

Earlier, the ED had summoned Mr Sarnaik for its probe into a money laundering case involving TopsGroup. A few months ago, the agency had raided various premises linked to his family in Mumbai and neighboring Thane. The ED is probing alleged suspicious dealings of Amit Chandole, the promoter of the Tops Securities Group. Mr Sarnaik and others, all of whom have denied the allegations.

According to sources, Tops Security Agency and some other companies

had allegedly got contracts from the MMRDA between 2014-2017 and again from 2017 to 2020.

The ED is investigating Mr Sarnaik and Rahul Nanda, who is the promoter of TopsGroup, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. Mr Sarnaik's two sons — Vihang and Purvesh — are also under the scanner of the agency. Mr Nanda remains in the UK and has not yet been questioned by agency.

The ED has already arrested Amit Chandole, a close aide of Mr Sarnaik, and had questioned his brother-in-law Yogesh Chandegala and close aide Sanket More. ED officials had also arrested M. Sasidharan, who was managing director of Tops Group in the case.

## Cong MLA booked for death of his girlfriend

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
BHOPAL, MAY 18

The police late on Monday night filed an FIR against Congress MLA and former minister Umang Singhar for allegedly "abetting" the suicide of his "girlfriend" Sonia Bhardwaj, giving a new twist to the high-profile case.

Hours after the law-maker was booked for abetment of suicide, the deceased's son produced him before the media here to give clean chit to the tribal leader.

"Neither I nor my grandmother have put him (the Congress MLA) under scanner in the case. There is no justification for police to book him for instigating suicide of my mother. He is my only guardian now," the 18-year-old son of the deceased said.

Later, a delegation of Congress met DGP Vivek Johri here in the afternoon demanding an impartial probe into the incident.

The Congress called police action against the party legislator as "politically motivated".



Devotees gather at Sangam to take a holy dip on the occasion of Bada Mangal festival, amid COVID-19 pandemic, in Prayagraj on Tuesday.

— *PTI*

## Ulfa-I ceasefire a 'ray of hope': Assam CM Sarma

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, MAY 18

Himanta Biswa Sarma

(when Ulfa came into existence) Assam has seen a lot of bloodshed and violence and it has helped none. Paresh Baruah (Ulfa-I chief) must pay heed to the wishes of the people of Assam. People of Assam want peace, not violence," he said after meeting the family members of Mr Ritul Saikia, an ONGC employee who was abducted along with two others on April 21.

The day Assam police in a major breakthrough caught the perpetrator of a grenade blast killing two civilians, Mr Sarma told reporters, "We are looking into the announcement of a unilateral ceasefire by the Ulfa-I as a ray of hope. But, this doesn't imply that the Ulfa-I would be allowed to carry on with its subversive activities. We will take action against Ulfa-I when the need arises."

The CM, while renewing his appeal to Ulfa-I commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah to join the peace process, reiterated that the people of Assam are fed up with bloodshed and violence. "Since 1979

employees of the ONGC — Mohini Mohan Gogoi and Alakesh Saikia — were rescued on April 24 after an encounter with security forces and the help of local villagers near the Indo-Myanmar border in Mon district of Nagaland.

Earlier, the Ulfa-I was denying the presence of an ONGC employee in its captivity but on Tuesday Ulfa-I chief Baruah again spoke to a local news channel and admitted that Ritul Saikia was in their captivity. "We have set some terms and conditions before the ONGC and negotiation was going on. As soon as it materialises, we will release their employee," said the Ulfa-I chief, who also appreciated the Assam chief minister's call to Ulfa-I for peace talks saying that it was a positive move of the government.

Meanwhile, Assam police in a major breakthrough on Tuesday apprehended the Ulfa-I cadres involved in the Tingri grenade blast in which two civilians were killed.

The two other abducted

## Sunni Waqf board furious, terms action 'misuse of power' 100-yr-old mosque razed in Barabanki

Lucknow, May 18: The All-India Muslim Law Board and the UP Sunni Central Waqf Board on Tuesday

alleged that the administration in Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki pulled down a mosque and demanded a judicial probe into it.

Meanwhile, the authorities said they demolished an illegal structure on court orders. "The century-old Garib Nawaz mosque in Ram Sanahi Ghat tehsil was demolished by the administration without any legal justification on Monday night in the presence of police," claimed All-India

Muslim Law Board working general secretary Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rehmani in a statement.

"There was no dispute relating to the mosque. It is also listed with the Sunni Waqf Board. The SDM of Ram Sanahi Ghat had asked for papers of the mosque from the mosque committee in March against which the mosque management committee had approached the Allahabad high court," he said, adding that the mosque was pulled down by the administration without any notice. He demanded a judicial

inquiry into the case by a sitting high court judge and suspension of officials responsible for the action.

Meanwhile, district magistrate Adarsh Singh described the construction, said to be a mosque and its residential area, as illegal. "A notice was served on people concerned on March 15, giving them an opportunity to put forth their views over the ownership but those residing there fled after receiving the notice," the DM said in a statement.

He said the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad high court had disposed of

a petition filed in this connection on April 2, which proved that the construction was illegal.

The UP Sunni Central Waqf Board also condemned the incident, terming it as the misuse of power. "The mosque near the tehsil premises has been demolished by the Ram Sanahi Ghat SDM in the name of removing encroachment. I strongly condemn this illegal and arbitrary action," said Waqf Board chairman Zulfar Farooqui, adding that they will soon file a case in the court in this regard. — *PTI*

## 3 jailed Trinamul leaders

■ **Continued from Page 1** Shaba Hakim, one of the daughters of the minister, who met him at the prison, said: "My father is sad because he cannot work for the people now amid the pandemic despite being the administrator of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation." Baishakhi Banerjee, a close friend of Mr Chatterjee, who visited the jail late Monday night to meet him but failed, alleged she was not allowed to hand over his medicines to him. She, however, met him at the hospital on Tuesday.

The sting operation was conducted by Mathew Samuel of Narada News, a web portal, in 2014 where in some people resem-

bling TMC ministers, MPs and MLAs were seen receiving money from representatives of a fictitious company in lieu of favours. These tapes were made public just before the 2016 Assembly polls in West Bengal. The Calcutta high court had ordered a CBI probe into the sting operation in March 2017.

It is learnt that the CBI has found nothing "so far" against Mukul Roy, a former Union minister, who switched from the Trinamul Congress to the BJP, and TMC Lok Sabha MP Aparupa Poddar in the 2014 Narada case, while its application seeking sanction to prosecute four others, including Suwendu Adhikari, was pending with the Lok Sabha

Speaker for over two years. Officials said on Tuesday that the investigation was still open and no clean chit had been given to anyone.

The officials said the CBI had written to the Lok Sabha Speaker on April 6, 2019 for sanction to prosecute Suwendu Adhikari, Sougata Roy, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar and Prasun Banerjee as all of them were members of the Lower House of Parliament when the alleged incident occurred.

Mr Adhikari, once a close confidant of chief minister Mamata Banerjee, joined the BJP in December 2020 and stole a narrow victory over her in Nandigram. He is now Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly.

against Mr Singh for alleged corruption.

In his petition, the former Mumbai police chief says he has submitted the phone conversation transcripts to the CBI in which the inquiry officer is threatening him. He has urged the top court to direct the CBI to act on the representation.

Mr Singh was summarily transferred to head the Home Guards in the state on March 17 and three days later, on March 20, he wrote a letter to the chief minister alleging corruption and misuse of official position by Mr Deshmukh.

## Justice Gavai recuses self

■ **Continued from Page 1** before a bench of which Justice Gavai is not a member. Why Justice Gavai has recused himself is not known. Justice Gavai, when he was a practicing lawyer in Bombay, was appointed as advocate general of Maharashtra. He was also a judge of Bombay high court.

The former Mumbai police top cop has alleged that he faced a "witch-hunt" after he accused then home minister Anil Deshmukh of telling his subordinate officers, including now suspended assistant inspector Sachin

Waze, to collect ₹100 crore per month for him from Mumbai city, including from those running bars and restaurants.

The former top cop has alleged that the state government's inquiry officer had threatened him with false cases unless he withdraws the complaint against Mr Deshmukh, which is being probed by the CBI under the Bombay high court's direction.

The inquiry officer is the director general of Maharashtra Police, Sanjay Pandey. The Maharashtra government has also registered an FIR

## Covid cases fall

■ **Continued from Page 1** of the population. This should also make us wary of protecting the still vulnerable/susceptible 98 per cent population. We cannot let our guards down, hence, continued focus on containment is critical," Lav Aggarwal of the Union health ministry said.

NitiAayog member (health) Dr V.K. Paul said efforts at containment and testing are resulting in stabilisation but still a few states continue to be "cause of concern".

"There is a mixed picture but overall there is stabilisation and what we know from scientific analysis is that the reproduction number is below 1 now, which means the pandemic is shrinking. We are hoping and keeping the case fatality rate reasonably under control. We have to be very mindful that when we are achieving a declining positivity rate it is a result of what we are doing and that doing cannot be slackened. We cannot again let this go out of hand," Dr Paul said. He added it has been seen that children were affected and that they are largely asymptomatic.

"Severe disease in children is uncommon but we have a protocol for that too. Children can have asymptomatic infection and they can also spread it. We have reasonable clarity on it," he said, adding Covaxin is beginning trials on children in 10-12 days.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday urged the Centre to stop flights from Singapore where a variant of Covid has been detected in children. Singapore has shut all schools at the moment.

The new form of Corona that came to Singapore is being said to be extremely dangerous for children, in India it may come as a third wave. My appeal to the Central government is to cancel air services with Singapore with immediate effect and the priority on vaccine options should be worked out for children too," said Mr Kejriwal.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with leading doctors and deliberated on the recent challenge of Mucormycosis. He urged doctors to make extra effort in spreading awareness about it and underlined the need to strengthen the reach of telemedicine in tehsils and districts of the country by training students and interns. "You understand the challenges of your district much better. So when your district wins, the country wins. When your district beats Corona, the country defeats Corona," he said and commended officials who were working without taking any leave in spite of contracting Covid-19."

## 390 missing off Mumbai

■ **Continued from Page 1** barge GAL Constructor have been rescued, there is no word yet on the progress of rescue operations for the accommodation barge SS-3 and the Sagar Bhushan oil rig.

The Indian Coast Guard tweeted, "#CycloneTauktae #NationFirst Update on grounded barge GAL CONSTRUCTOR. Effective coordinated rescue operations resulted in saving all the 137 precious lives from the distressed barge. Rescue mission accomplished. We Protect."

The ONGC said, "Due to severe cyclonic storm, unfortunate incidents have occurred involving three construction barges of Afcorns working on a project of ONGC in Western Offshore fields in the Arabian Sea and one drilling rig of ONGC deployed for exploration purpose. ONGC is taking all possible measures in coordination with ODAG (offshore defence advisory group) and MRCC (Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre) to ensure the safety of personnel and vessels."

Search and Rescue Operation efforts were also in progress off the coast of Gujarat for three vessels — Support Station 3, Great Ship Aditi and Drill Ship Sagar Bhushan — which are 15-20 nautical miles South East off the Gujarat coast (Pipavav), said the Indian Navy.

The Directorate General of Shipping said it will

conduct a thorough probe into the conditions and reasons behind the two barges going adrift near Bombay High despite early warnings of Cyclone Tauktae.

The cyclone sank a barge that had living quarters for employees working offshore, while two other construction barges lost anchors and drifted away.

The cyclone crossed the Gujarat coast as an "extremely severe cyclonic storm" around midnight and gradually weakened into a "severe cyclonic storm," before further weakening to a "cyclonic storm" now, the IMD said. An orange colour-coded warning has been issued for the national capital region for Wednesday with a forecast of rains and squally winds of 50-60 km per hour. The weakened cyclonic circulation will also move to Uttara-khand and bring rains to the state along with Himachal Pradesh in the next two days, an official said.

Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani said 16 hospitals providing Covid treatment faced power outage due to the cyclone. The electric supply was restored in 12 of them, while the remaining four were operating on backup power generators, he said. The production of medical oxygen at a plant in Bhavnagar was disrupted due to the cyclonic storm, but the supply continued using the buffer stock, Mr Rupani said.



## THE ASIAN AGE

19 MAY 2021

### CBI's partisanship mars its actions over Narada

Those who are found to have broken the law must face the full force of the law. In a democracy no one is too high to be placed above this principle, which cannot but apply in the case of the West Bengal ministers and MLAs arrested in the Narada sting case that came to light in 2016 though the sting had been carried out two years earlier.

Where public servants are concerned — and the expression includes legislators — there is a moral dimension as well. They are keepers of public trust and exercise authority, including over public finances, in the name of the people. When they misuse their position for their private gain, the faith of the people in the system as a whole is shaken, and that is why they must not be permitted to get away when they do that.

However, in order that public servants are not harassed through motivated or frivolous complaints, or for vexatious ends, procedures are laid down for their investigation or arrest. The first step here is grant of sanction for their prosecution by appropriate authority.

In the case of chief minister Mamata Banerjee's ministers — Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee — and MLA and former minister Madan Mitra — ordinarily the Speaker of the Assembly should have been the proper authority to accord sanction for their prosecution. This is pretty much standard procedure.

Instead, state governor Jagdeep Dhankar, who appears to be fast acquiring a reputation for political partisanship losing over his status as high constitutional authority, was approached by the CBI and the arrests followed in five days flat.

The Assembly had just been constituted after the recent state election and the Speaker would have been place in a matter of days. Yet, the CBI chose to approach the governor for sanction although it could just easily have waited a few days more in such an old case. This cannot but re-confirm its status as the Centre's "caged parrot". Sadly, the governor did not send the file back either. This is so much the pity and does no good to India's claim to be a constitutional democracy.

Is it not a little curious that the CBI did not seek permission for the prosecution of Mukul Roy, who defected to BJP some years ago, and Suwendu Adhikari, who defected to the saffron party weeks before the recent election and is now the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly? This episode re-asserts the widely held impression that the BJP has become a dry-cleaner and acquiring its membership permits allegedly tainted politicians to come out smelling of roses.

This is a time when a responsible Centre should be working in partnership with states to fight the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic. But the Modi government's priority evidently lies elsewhere.

It is signalling that after BJP's emphatic defeat at the hands of the Trinamul Congress in the recent state polls, the Centre would take the fight against the legitimate victors to the extremes through the blatant manipulation of procedures even at the cost of hurting the spirit of democracy. Centre-state relations become collateral damage in such a scenario. Development and people's welfare will be on the backburner as political fights escalate, probably in the end leading to street battles. Truly, all this means the willful negation of the mandate of the people.

**This is a time when a responsible Centre should be working in partnership with states to fight the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic. But the Modi government's priority evidently lies elsewhere.**

have been place in a matter of days. Yet, the CBI chose to approach the governor for sanction although it could just easily have waited a few days more in such an old case. This cannot but re-confirm its status as the Centre's "caged parrot". Sadly, the governor did not send the file back either. This is so much the pity and does no good to India's claim to be a constitutional democracy.

Is it not a little curious that the CBI did not seek permission for the prosecution of Mukul Roy, who defected to BJP some years ago, and Suwendu Adhikari, who defected to the saffron party weeks before the recent election and is now the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly? This episode re-asserts the widely held impression that the BJP has become a dry-cleaner and acquiring its membership permits allegedly tainted politicians to come out smelling of roses.

This is a time when a responsible Centre should be working in partnership with states to fight the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic. But the Modi government's priority evidently lies elsewhere.

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### Taxes & FDI: Change attitude

It is one of life's simplest aphorisms that you can't have the cake and eat it too. If the Government of India's approach to getting foreign investment is akin to having the cake, its attitude towards trade disputes in which foreign investors emerge victorious as in international arbitration is the equivalent of wanting to eat the cake. The Scottish oil exploration company Cairn Energy has exposed this contradiction in official India's approach even as it has escalated the process by moving to attach Air India's properties abroad on the legal premise that the national carrier is India's alter ego.

A law on retrospective taxation that the previous UPA government passed in 2012 had proved extremely damaging to the country's reputation as an investment destination. Vodafone hit the arbitration trail to expose India's income tax claims as arbitrary. The basic approach hasn't changed despite NDA being in the saddle when losing such claims in arbitration awards. Far from being graceful in defeat and settling, official India has pursued matters legally through appeal and this after having acted in a questionable and predatory manner in the Cairn issue by selling the company's assets and shares to monetise its claims.

Official India can lay a claim to a sovereign right to its tax laws but this does little for the image of a country desperately seeking foreign investments in industry as they come with considerable job generating qualities while also fulfilling the "make in India" criterion dear to the central government as a policy initiative best serving national interests. At one time, there were as many as 17 claims, stemming from disputes over undelivered incentives, retrospective taxation and payment disputes, with regard to investments under bilateral treaties through which capital flowed into India.

The impression India leaves in potential foreign investors is it is a difficult country to deal with because its track record is not that good in keeping its word and delivering on promises after attracting investments. Only a change in attitude can help correct that and settling Cairn's \$1.2 billion award would be one way to demonstrate that India is keen on facilitating ease of doing business.

#### THE ASIAN AGE

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Sanjay Kumar



### The political fallout of the Covid crisis across India

Various factors contributed to the BJP's poor performance in the West Bengal Assembly elections and one can't relate its poor showing only to the severe Covid-19 crisis and its mismanagement across the country. But the political fallout of the Covid crisis and its mismanagement for the BJP can't be ruled out. The results of the Uttar Pradesh panchayat elections have already given a glimpse of the challenge the BJP may face in the near future. It faced a tough challenge from the Samajwadi Party in the panchayat polls. The severe health crisis that India is facing at the moment may not have yet made the extremely popular Prime Minister Narendra Modi unpopular, but disappointment among a large number of Indians has started building. People may not directly blame the PM for the present health crisis, though some do, but what seems to have disappointed many Indians is his continued campaign for his party in West Bengal, which saw eight phases of voting.

With Covid cases rising alarmingly in several states, and cities gasping for

oxygen, there were even demands to merge the last few phases of the West Bengal polls to reduce the campaign, but the Centre was silent and BJP leaders continued to address big rallies in that state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi cancelled his rallies, which seems to have done damage control over people's disenchantment with Mr Modi, but the Election Commission, that announced a ban on big rallies hours after Mr Modi's announcement that he was cancelling his rallies, created the perception among ordinary people that his move was guided by the EC's decision, of which he may have got a hint in advance.

What seems to have disappointed many people is Mr Modi's somewhat delayed effort in trying to address the Covid crisis, weeks after India plunged from one crisis to another - from non-availability of beds to the shortage of oxygen, not to mention the non-availability of ventilators for patients in desperate need of it for treatment. When the country faced these multiple health crises, what people saw was Prime Minister Modi addressing several election rallies in West Bengal. People saw

this as a huge contrast to last year's Covid crisis and Mr Modi's handling of it. Last year, when Covid-19 had just erupted in India, Prime Minister Modi was in full command, as he took charge and announced a nationwide lockdown. There was criticism of the way the lockdown was announced and implemented without giving advance notice, but overall Mr Modi was applauded for his bold decision which seemed to have prevented the spread of Covid-19 across India.

Now, when people were looking towards Mr Modi for his leadership in handling this crisis, he failed to establish a connect with people. Citizens remember that during last year's crisis, that was far less severe than this one, he led from the front, addressed the nation several times, and kept a connect with ordinary people. It is true that the Centre is trying its best to solve even this present crisis and started the import of Covid vaccines and oxygen, along with several other such steps, but these should have been done much earlier. Though the Centre took these initiatives, at the same time it always tried to shift the responsibility to state

governments, on the ground that health is a state subject. Putting the blame on state governments for the current health disaster was not appreciated by most people. It is important to note that there has been no change in the constitutional provisions — health was a state subject last year, as it is this year - so why did the Centre take all the praise last year and now, as things are going out of hand, is trying to pass the blame to the states?

What might complicate the issue further and contribute to the growing disenchantment of people with the Central government, Prime Minister Modi and the BJP, is the emerging controversy around the pricing of the Covid vaccines. Not that there were no controversies around vaccination earlier, there were news about a shortage of vaccines and India having exported vaccines to various countries, but the *tu-tu-mai-mai* between the states and New Delhi may increase further on the differential pricing of the vaccines. It is understood that as of now the same vaccine will be procured by the states at a higher price, but it would be available to the Centre at a lower price. This dif-

ferential price is understandable if it is between private and government hospitals, but it is hard for an ordinary citizen to understand why he has to pay a higher price if he is given a vaccine purchased by a state government and a lesser price if the same vaccine is purchased by the Central government.

What seems to have made people feel unhappy with the Centre is its lack of initiative in negotiating with the Serum Institute of India for a better price, and instead advising the states to negotiate the price themselves. The question is — why can't the Centre take the initiative on this? This is not a "normal" health crisis across the country, in the midst of a raging pandemic, the question of whether health is a state subject or not should not even arise. Some states may have erred in their preparations, but it is not the time to play the blame game. This is a time for all the states and the Centre to work together and fight a national calamity.

*The writer is a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and a political analyst. The views expressed here are personal.*

Subhani



### India can vaccinate swiftly by using 'mohalla method'

Probal DasGupta



The irony is stark. Millions scramble for oxygen cylinders and hospital beds, oscillating between life and death. Around the same time, several other millions decided the political fortunes of five states/UTs.

Earlier this year, Indians defied a mortal fear of the coronavirus and voted in large numbers, with a turnout of 70 per cent or higher across states. On jabs, though, it was different. A listless rollout plan curtailed the availability of vaccines and people's tentativeness only hastened the inevitable. In two weeks, a second wave swept India, spiralling into its biggest crisis. An overpowered medical infrastructure burst at its seams.

But that's not the point. While every life-saving equipment is a survival kit, it's the pace of vaccinations that will ultimately ensure India's endurance against the virus. The point is: the secret to winning this war lies in our learning from past experience, including elections.

January 13, 2011 was a historic day for India. A two-year old child in West Bengal was found crippled by polio but was later cured. It was the last time polio would strike here. That day, India became polio-free. Two years earlier, India housed half the world's polio cases. No one thought the country could ever eradicate it. However, aided by the state, Unicef and others, India's feverish campaign against polio, led by 2.5 million vaccinators, touched 200 million homes, with 700,000 vaccinations in each round. Despite its challenges of poor infrastructure, India relied on its strengths: a "mohalla", or community, outreach.

Today, only 12 per cent Indians have got their first dose, against 50 per cent in America. Currently, the vaccination rate is less than half million a day, sometimes falling further, given the shortage of vaccines. At this rate, it may take until summer 2022 to vaccinate 75 per cent of India. Are we prepared for more casualties until then?

A more dynamic and swifter pace of vaccinations is the antidote to arrest fatality numbers, build confidence and encourage a quicker economic revival. The polio experience is a test case. Juxtaposing the polling principle onto the vaccine execution plan gives it the kick it requires. The polling database, with details of citizens and their residences, is a ready master-sheet. In December 2020, Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla asked (then) chief election commissioner Sunil Arora to identify people above 50 at the polling station level. A promising start was made, but the plan ignored key aspects of our election experience. We should replicate our polling expertise, that was used in the polio campaign: the "mohalla method".

Currently, the approach of using hospitals for vaccinations has proved counterproductive. A sudden desperation and opening up of vaccinations for the 18-44 age group has led to longer queues. This inevitably means a high probability of an infection while on a hospital visit. Using the CoWin platform to register and then showing up with identifiers like PAN or Aadhaar cards at selected jab centres like schools, community halls or sports venues often used as polling booths will decentralise the process. Mumbai and Gurgaon recently started "drive-in" jabs. More such measures must be undertaken across the country. The aim should be to reach people, rather than herding them at overcrowded hospitals.

The "mohalla method" will increase vaccinated numbers in clusters. The knock-on effect is that as

neighbourhoods vaccinate, infections will slow down in clusters, creating identifiable safe zones. Earmarked vaccinated zones enable city administrations to loosen lockdowns methodically in areas where jabs have crossed high numbers and infections have fallen.

Using age as the sole criteria for prioritisation, instead of a combination of age, economic status and population density, was always expected to pose challenges. The prioritisation of senior citizens meant most people unlikely to go to work were vaccinated first. Next in line were the 45-plus population, many of whom can afford private vehicles. The most vulnerable population was the 18-45 age group — where more people use public transport. Given India has over 70 per cent people under 45, and most frontline workers including delivery personnel fall in this category, the approach meant most of India was unvaccinated against the second wave.

States with worse Covid numbers could form the bigger focus in this vaccination plan. At a city level, densely populated areas require more vaccine booths — based on voter lists from elections. Citizens who aren't on voters' lists in their neighbourhoods can use Aadhaar cards. This also helps those facing a tech challenge in online registrations.

The "mohalla method" demands deployment of substantial numbers of health workers, logistics, and vaccines. Cynics may say this isn't possible. But it actually works. India has over 12 lakh medical professionals, 7.8 lakh alternative medicine professionals, around two lakh medical students, diagnostic centre professionals,

armed forces doctors, nursing assistants to provide jabs, the local police and paramilitary to handle the logistics and the armed forces to provide administrative support. Every neighbourhood can plan 5-6 centres of 25-30 volunteers each. Neighbourhood clusters could be simultaneously vaccinated in around 45-60 days (given availability of healthcare resources, vaccine supplies and errors in calculation). We can reach a national jab rate of 10 million (one crore) a day, which means vaccinating the country in 4-5 months. In a worst-case scenario, if a third wave were to arrive in late 2021, most of India would have been vaccinated.

But do we have vaccines? Choosing just two vaccines and then exporting them when just eight per cent of India was vaccinated was bound to lead to shortages. India needs over two billion jabs. Scaling up is a no-brainer. J&J's Phase 3 trials are set to begin. Russia's Sputnik V is here and will be distributed by Dr Reddy's Labs. Bharat Biotech has ramped up its capacity from 200 million to 700 million doses a year. India has asked for a waiver on intellectual property and barriers on vaccines from Europe and America.

It's taken a catastrophe for us to realise we must speed up vaccinations. To execute the blueprint, the bottom line is to shed lethargic bureaucracy and ensure an efficient supply chain and execution. A crisis taskforce needs to have a crack team of senior experts from amongst medical professionals, the armed forces and civil services. Like the polio campaign earlier, a targeted media campaign involving cricket and movie stars must be the focus. The campaign must be on a war footing and the national leadership has to make this period count. The war isn't over till we have enough ammunition to fight for our citizens. And we must vaccinate to win.

*The writer, a retired Army officer, is the author of Watershed 1967, based on a forgotten war between India and China, and a member of the guest faculty at New York's Columbia University*

#### LETTERS

##### BJP EXPOSES HAND

The way Prime Minister Narendra Modi used his caged parrot to arrest Trinamul leaders Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee in connection with the 2016 Narada sting has raised many an eyebrow. Why have defectors Mukul Roy and Suwendu Adhikari who accepted bribes in the case been allowed to evade action? Since Mr Hakim is in charge of municipal affairs, the fight against Covid-19 will receive a setback. Importantly, the open partisanship of the CBI is bound to erode the credibility of the BJP in the state.

**Bidyut K. Chatterjee**  
Faridabad

##### COURSE CORRECT

**THIS REFERS TO** the editorial, "Stop targeting critical voices" (May 18). The Narendra Modi dispensation faces criticism both within the country and from the international media for failing its vaccine policy that causes a major crisis. The Supreme Court has warned that any attempt to stifle the people's voices would attract action for contempt. The government should correct its course rather than bluster and blunder on and harass the people to silence them. Otherwise, it is sure to pay for both its poor performance as well as its repression in the forthcoming elections.

**Sankar Paul**

Chakdaha, West Bengal

##### PUBLISH DISEASE DATA

**WHEN THE COUNTRY** is still grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic, the outbreak of Black Fungus or mucormycosis disease has triggered another scare. Black fungus is an opportunistic fungal infection occurring in Covid-19 patients whose immunity levels are heavily compromised because of viral disease. Black nasal discharges and black patches of skin around the nose in the initial stages characterise it. The government is yet to publish national data on mucormycosis, but with scores getting affected every day, we cannot afford to take the disease lightly.

**N.J. Ravi Chander**

Bengaluru

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



## SHORT TAKES

SHARK KILLS  
SURFER OFF OZ  
EAST COAST

**Sydney, May 18:** A surfer was killed by a shark on Tuesday off the Australian east coast, police said.

The man, aged in his 50s, had been surfing off Forster, 220 kilometres (137 miles) north of Sydney, when he was attacked late in the morning, a police statement said.

Onlookers pulled the man from the water suffering critical injuries to his upper right thigh, police said.

The Ambulance Service said the man could not be resuscitated despite the best efforts of paramedics and bystanders at the scene.

Forster beaches have been closed. Police said they were working with government authorities to identify the species of shark.

Lower North Coast Surf Life Saving branch president Brian Wilcox said a drone search after the attack had spotted two sharks in the area.

JET RETURNS TO  
SAN JOSE AFTER  
ENGINE ISSUE

**San Jose, May 18:** Federal officials say an American Airlines plane returned to the main San Jose airport shortly after take-off on Monday after pilots reported an issue with one of the plane's two engines.

The airline said the pilots shut down the engine after an indicator light came on. The Federal Aviation Administration said it was investigating the incident. American Airlines flight 2049 took off for Phoenix but circled and returned to Mineta San Jose International Airport shortly after takeoff. The airline said the plane landed safely and taxied to the terminal, and no one was injured.

There were 112 passengers and five crew members on board the Airbus A320.

The two engines on the 20-year-old jet were made by International Aero Engines, a joint venture of Pratt & Whitney and German and Japanese companies.

In February, a Pratt & Whitney engine shed pieces of the housing over Denver during a United flight.

400 KG COCAINE  
BOUND FOR  
KOSOVO SEIZED

**Rome, May 18:** Italian border police said Tuesday they seized more than 400 kilogrammes of cocaine from South America in a joint operation with Kosovar and Albanian authorities.

The drugs, with an estimated market value of more than 100 million euros (\$122 million), were first detected at the port of Gioia Tauro, in the southern Italian region of Calabria.

They were hidden in a container coming from Santos, Brazil "officially containing chicken," the Guardia di Finanza border police said in a statement.

Italian authorities decided to let the container continue its journey and arrive at its final destination in Lipjan, Kosovo.

There, Italian, Albanian and Kosovar police intervened and arrested 25 people, including seven charged with international drug trafficking.

Italy is known as a key hub for the illegal drugs trade, and its fearsome 'Ndrangheta mafia, based in Calabria, controls most of the cocaine entering Europe.

CANADIAN JAILED  
FOR SMUGGLING  
IMMIGRANTS

**Washington, May 18:** A Sri Lankan-origin Canadian national on Monday was sentenced to 32 months in prison on charges of smuggling undocumented immigrants from Sri Lanka into the US for financial gains. Sri Kajamukam Chelliah, aka Mohan, in his February guilty plea admitted to conspiring with others to facilitate the travel of undocumented immigrants from Sri Lanka through Haiti, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the Bahamas to the United States from on or about July 1, 2019, through on or about October 10, 2019.

Federal prosecutors said during the course of the conspiracy, Chelliah worked with other human smugglers, arranging housing and transport for undocumented immigrants en route to Canada through the United States.

Chelliah arranged for the individuals to be transported from the airport in Port Au Prince, Haiti, to a hotel where he housed and provided them with food. He then arranged for transportation by boat from Haiti to Turks and Caicos Islands, then to the Bahamas, and then by boat to Miami, Florida.

HK suspends  
operations of its  
Taiwan office

**Hong Kong, May 18:** Hong Kong is temporarily shutting its representative office in Taiwan, officials said Tuesday in the latest indication of strained ties.

"The Hong Kong Economic, Trade and Cultural Office (Taiwan) has temporarily suspended operations with effect from today," Hong Kong's government said in a brief statement, which did not give a reason for the closure. A government spokesperson said that the decision "has nothing to do with the Coronavirus situation" in Taiwan where cases have recently spiked and prompted the reimposition of some social distancing measures.

Asked whether the closure was tied to politics, the spokesperson declined to comment.

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, which handles relations with China, said it "deeply regrets the Hong Kong government's unilateral decision" and vowed to keep its own office in the financial hub open despite strained ties.

Hong Kong abides by authoritarian China's view that democratic, self-ruled Taiwan is part of its territory and must be seized one day, by force if necessary. Like Beijing, Hong Kong does not recognise Taiwanese authorities as legitimate.

NEW CATHOLIC  
BISHOP: RESPECT  
PLURALITY

**Hong Kong, May 18:** Hong Kong's incoming Roman Catholic bishop Stephen Chow called for plurality to be respected, in a time of polarisation in the Catholic community as the city's political situation deteriorates.

Chow said while he had "no big plan" on how to unify a diocese that had become politically polarised over the last two years amid months of anti-government protests in Hong Kong, he believed that God wanted them to be united.

"Unity is not the same as uniformity," Chow said at a news conference Tuesday. "One thing I've always mentioned recently in schools is (there is) unity is plurality. — AP

However, there is a huge amount of trade between Hong Kong and Taiwan. According to Hong Kong's government, Taiwan is its second-largest trading partner, its third-largest market for domestic exports, its fifth-largest market for re-exports and its second-largest source of imports. — AFP



Bangladeshi journalist Rozina Islam, (C), is escorted by police to a court in Dhaka on Tuesday. — AP

Scribe's health  
anomaly stories  
lands her in jail

**Dhaka, May 18:** A senior Bangladeshi woman journalist, known for her investigative reporting, was arrested on charges of violating a colonial-era official secrecy law, the police said on Tuesday, triggering protests by the rights groups and her colleagues. Rozina Islam, a senior reporter of Bangla daily *Prothom Alo*, the largest daily newspaper based on circulation, was on Monday detained for over five hours by the Health Ministry officials for allegedly clicking a picture of a document with her cell phone without permission.

She was later arrested by the police. The ministry filed a case against her at around midnight under the 1923 Official Secrets Act while she spent her night under the police custody, the police said. She was produced before a court here with a petition seeking her to be remanded in custody for five days, which the judge rejected and sent her to jail to await the routine

legal procedures.

The judge said he would entertain the prosecution charge and the defence statements including her bail petition on Thursday. A prosecution lawyer told reporters that "whether the allegation is true or false, a case has been filed" which needed a procedure to be disposed of.

Rozina, who earned the reputation of being an investigative journalist, has in recent months published several reports exposing the health ministry's alleged malpractices during the Covid-19 pandemic, drawing public attention. She also published several reports involving the health sector which included alleged graft in procurement at the health ministry, corruption in doctors' recruitment and how urgent medical equipment for Coronavirus treatment were left at Dhaka airport for months. "The incident is unfortunate," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told TV channels without elaborating further. — PTI

## VAST | RESOURCES

## Shrinking polar ice offers opportunities for shipping routes

## Russian base projects its Arctic power

**Nagurskoye (Russia), May 18:** During the Cold War, Russia's Nagurskoye airbase was little more than a runway, a weather station and a communications outpost in the Franz Josef Land archipelago.

It was a remote and desolate home mostly for polar bears, where temperatures plunge in winter to minus-42 Celsius (43 degrees below zero Fahrenheit) and the snow only disappears from August to mid-September. Now, Russia's northernmost military base

is bristling with missiles and radar and its extended runway can handle all types of aircraft, including nuclear-capable strategic bombers, projecting Moscow's power and influence across the Arctic amid intensifying international competition for the region's vast resources.

The shamrock-shaped facility — three large pods extending from a central atrium — is called the "Arctic Trefoil" and is painted in the white-red-and-blue of the national

10 wounded, 4 seriously, in  
Gaza strike: Israeli medics

Attack came as Palestinians went on strike in a rare collective action

**Gaza City (Gaza Strip), May 18:** A strike launched from Gaza on Tuesday wounded 10 people in southern Israel, four of them seriously, Israeli medics reported, as Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers continued to trade attacks.

The projectile attack Tuesday afternoon hit a region in southern Israel, according to the Magen David Adom rescue service. It came as Palestinians across Israel and the occupied territories went on strike in a rare collective action against Israel's policies. With the war in Gaza showing no sign of abating and truce efforts apparently stalled, the general strike and expected protests could again widen the conflict after a spasm of communal violence in Israel and protests across the occupied West Bank last week.

Israel's airstrikes toppled a six-storey building that housed bookstores and educational centres used by the Islamic University and other colleges, leaving behind a massive mound of rebar and concrete slabs. Desks, office chairs, books and computer wires could be seen in the debris. Residents sifted through the rubble, searching for their belongings. Israel warned the building's residents ahead of time, sending them fleeing into the predawn darkness, and there were no reports of casualties.

Israel said it was targeting militants, their tunnels and rocket launchers across the territory. "The whole street started running, then destruction, an earthquake," said Jamal Herzallah, a resident of the area. "This whole area was shaking."

Heavy fighting broke out May 10 when Gaza's militant Hamas rulers fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem in support of Palestinian protests against Israel's heavy-handed policing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint site sacred to Jews and Muslims, and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers. — AP



Palestinians carry the body of Obaida Jawabreh, killed on Monday during clashes with Israeli soldiers, at his funeral in al-Aroub refugee camp, north of Hebron city in the the occupied West Wank, on Tuesday. — AFP

Biden supports Israel's  
right to self defence

**Washington, May 18:** US President Joe Biden, in a telephonic call with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, supported Israel's "right to defend itself" against indiscriminate rocket attacks and encouraged him to make every effort to ensure the protection of innocent civilians, the White House said on Monday, Biden reiterated his firm support for Israel's "right to defend itself" against indiscriminate rocket attacks, it said. He encouraged Israel to make every effort to ensure the protection of innocent civilians, it said.

● **BIDEN WELCOMED efforts to address inter-communal violence and to bring calm to Jerusalem, the White House said in a readout of the call.**

The two leaders discussed progress in Israel's military operations against Hamas and other terrorist groups in Gaza, the White House said. "The President expressed his support for a ceasefire and discussed the US engagement with Egypt and other partners towards that end," said the readout.

Palestinian militant group Hamas has fired more than 3,000 rockets over Israel during the past seven days, pushing more than half of Israel's popu-

lation into shelter houses and Israel has carried out hundreds of devastating retaliatory attacks in Gaza. More than 200 people have been killed in the recent escalation in the region, including a caregiver from India.

US Secretary of State Tony Blinken, who is travelling right now, also spoke to his Israeli counterpart, Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi and discussed America's efforts to bring an end to the violence, which has claimed the lives of Israeli and Palestinian civilians, including children, said State Department Spokesperson Ned Price.

"Blinken also expressed deep concern at the inter-communal violence," Price said.

— PTI

EU MULLS WAYS  
TO HELP DEFUSE  
ONGOING CONFLICT

**Brussels, May 18:** European Union foreign ministers are meeting Tuesday to discuss how to use the 27-nation bloc's political clout to help diplomatic efforts to end the fighting between the Israeli armed forces and Palestinian militants.

The EU has been united in its calls for a ceasefire and the need for a political solution to end the latest conflict — now in its second week — but the nations are divided over how best to help. No firm decisions involving threats of sanctions or other measures are likely from the ministers' video-conference. At least 212 Palestinians have been killed in heavy airstrikes so far, including 61 children, and over 1,400 people wounded, Gaza's Health Ministry said.

— AP

## China offers to host Afghan peace talks

**Beijing, May 18:** China, which has stepped up its diplomacy between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the wake of the US troops withdrawal from the war-torn country, has offered to host peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Significantly, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who in the last two days held telephone talks with his Pakistani and Afghan counterparts, said that

China will back the Afghan government headed by Ashraf Ghani in playing a leading role. The offer to facilitate peace talks was made during Wang's phone talks with his Afghan counterpart Mohammad Haneef Atmar on Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told a media briefing on Tuesday.

Asked to elaborate, Zhao said, "China is ready to facilitate intra-Afghan tal-

ks and will provide necessary conditions for negotiation in China." The US had announced its plans to withdraw its troops completely from Afghanistan by September.

The US troop pull-out has raised concerns in Beijing that it may lead to the regrouping of Xinjiang province's Uyghur Muslim militants in Afghanistan, which shares borders with China.

During their telephonic

conversation, Wang told Atmar that "China will continue to support the Afghan government in playing a leading role in the country's peace and reconciliation process", state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported.

Wang also called on all parties to support and implement relevant UN Security Council resolutions to promote a smooth transition of the Afghanistan situation, to avoid in

particular a resurgence of terrorist forces, it said.

In a comment that may not go down well with the Taliban, Wang, according to the report, expressed his hope that Afghanistan's future leadership will pursue a moderate Muslim policy, promote a foreign policy of peace, maintain friendship with neighbouring countries, and firmly combat all forms of terrorism.

— PTI

6K migrants arrive by sea:  
Spain, Morocco square off

**Madrid, May 18:** Spain faced a humanitarian and diplomatic crisis Tuesday after thousands of Moroccans took advantage of relaxed border controls in their nation to swim or paddle in inflatable boats onto European soil.

By Tuesday morning, around 6,000 people had crossed the border into

the Spanish city of Ceuta since the first arrivals began early Monday, the Spanish government said, including 1,500 thought to be teenagers.

The city of 85,000 people lies in North Africa on the Mediterranean Sea, separated from Morocco by a double-wide, 10-metre (32-foot) fence.

The sudden influx of migrants into Spain has deepened the diplomatic row between Rabat and Madrid in the wake of Spain's decision to allow in for medical treatment of the chief of a militant group that fights for the independence of Western Sahara.

— AP

Moeed Yusuf is  
Pakistan's NSA

**Islamabad, May 18:** Pakistan PM Imran Khan has appointed his Special Assistant on National Security Moeed Yusuf as the country's National Security Adviser (NSA).

Yusuf's elevation comes in the backdrop of the reported backchannel communication with India early this year, resulting in the restoration of the 2003 ceasefire agreement on the Line of Control in February. A notification dated May 17 was issued by the Cabinet Division to appoint Yusuf as the NSA. "The Prime Minister has been pleased to approve that Dr Moeed W. Yusuf, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Security and Strategic Policy Planning, shall function as National Security Adviser with the status of Federal Minister, with immediate effect," the notification read.

Last month, Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry was asked by several journalists about reported backchannel talks with India.

Instead of outright rejection, he said: "States

have their ways and means to communicate which remain available even during wars. Therefore, whether any talks are taking place between India and Pakistan is not important."

In New Delhi, asked about the media reports that backchannel talks between India and Pakistan were going on for more than a year, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi did not give a direct reply.

"If you talk about channels of communication on this issue, let me just recall that our respective high commissions exist and are functioning. So that is a very effective channel of communication," Bagchi said last month. India has told Pakistan that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Islamabad in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. India has said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility.

Yusuf is an academic with experience of working at various think tanks in the US. — PTI



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,203.73	1.26
Nifty 50	15,108.10	1.24
S&P 500*	4,159.06	-0.10
Dollar (₹)	73.04	0.24
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.58	-0.30
Euro (₹)	88.95	0.05
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,833.333	0.69
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.56	-2.74
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.976	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.654	0.014

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Credit Suisse to hire over 1,000 IT staff in India

Credit Suisse Group said it planned to hire over 1,000 IT employees in India this year to show its commitment to the country and its intention to establish it as a global technology innovation centre for the bank. The hires will comprise developers and engineers with capabilities in technologies such as cybersecurity, data analytics, cloud, API development, machine learning and artificial intelligence.

CCI okays APSEZ stake buy in Krishnapatnam



The Competition Commission of India (CCI) gave nod to proposed acquisition of additional 25 per cent stake of Adani Krishnapatnam Port Ltd by Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd. The acquirer already holds 75 per cent shareholding in Adani Krishnapatnam Port. "As a result of the proposed combination acquirer will hold 100 per cent shareholding and sole control of the Target," a release said.

Maruti opens ₹126-cr hospital in Ahmedabad

Maruti Suzuki, in partnership with Zyudus Hospitals, has announced the start of a multi-speciality hospital at Sitapur in Ahmedabad. With a total capital expenditure of Rs 126 crore, the hospital has been fully funded by the Maruti Suzuki Foundation—a CSR initiative of Maruti Suzuki. At present, it is being used as a Covid care facility to help treat patients in the region. The facility is expected to serve more than 3.75 lakh people.

Ujjivan SFB Q4 net jumps 86% to ₹136 crore

Ujjivan Small Finance Bank (SFB) reported an 86 per cent jump in its net profit to Rs 136 crore for the fourth quarter from Rs 73 crore a year ago. Total income was down by 9 per cent at Rs 735 crore from Rs 810 crore. Net interest income also fell by 21 per cent to Rs 368 crore against Rs 467 crore. "The quarter was exceptionally good. Our disbursement was at an all-time high," MD & CEO Nitin Chugh said.

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Occupancies improve, but revenues nearly halve Covid hotels stay in biz on thin margins

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 18

In order to address the scarcity of beds, hospitality chains have tied up with hospitals to provide accommodation with care for Covid patients. While this has improved the occupancies, the revenues are significantly lower.

Since mid-April, several hospitality chains, including Taj Hotels, Ginger, ITC, Crowne Plaza, Radisson, Sarovar, Welcomhotel and Oyo, have opened their properties for Covid patients with mild symptoms as well those seeking isolation.

"At present, we have over 80 active quarantine and isolation facilities. Additionally, we have mapped and ensured readiness across 750 properties, which can be turned into quarantine centres across



the country, in case the need arises or demand increases," said Rohit Kapoor, CEO, Oyo India and South-East Asia.

"For mildly affected employees, we have isolation facilities with health-care service providers. This includes 24\*7 nurse care, on-demand pathology and pharmacy support, daily doctor visits, meals, among other services," he said.

According to Pradeep Shetty, honorary secretary

of the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India, more than 100 properties should be offering accommodation to Covid patients across key cities. "The occupancies should have been otherwise nil in these hotels due to the lockdown and Covid fears. Now the properties would be having around 30 per cent occupancies," he said.

However, the revenues are significantly low for the rooms. Some of the

state governments have capped the room rates for these facilities. As per the directive of the Delhi government, five star properties should not charge more than Rs 5,000 per patient per day and Rs 4,000 for four and three star properties.

"The average revenues per room would be around 50 per cent of the usual tariffs. Further, there could be some revenue sharing with the hospital partner," said Shetty.

According to Jaison Chacko, secretary general, FHRAI, there is also reluctance from the part of the staff. "We have been requesting the government to categorise hotel staff as frontline workers and provide them vaccination. Most of the hotel employees are not vaccinated and this puts their lives at risk," he said.

Sensex rises above 50000 pts, Nifty regains 15K zone

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 18

The market trended higher for the second consecutive session on further drop in fresh daily Covid cases and gained over 1.2 per cent, anticipating limited impact of lockdowns currently in place in various parts of the country.

The Sensex gained 612.60 points, or 1.24 per cent, and settled well above the 50000 mark at 50193. The

Nifty-50 too crossed the 15000-mark to close at two-month high of 15108, gaining 184 points.

"Barring the rising daily deaths and slower vaccination drive, we observe more positivity around the Covid-19 situation. Daily cases have fallen below 0.3 million mark this week with visible peaking, driven by Maharashtra, UP, Delhi, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana,

Gujarat, MP, Telangana, Jharkhand and Bihar. India's recoveries exceeded daily cases for the first time since mid-March and India's share in global recoveries rose to 53 per cent versus 50 per cent in daily cases," JM Financial said about Covid situation.

"Even as 25 states/Union territories (UT) comprising 90 per cent of GDP have lockdown-like curbs overlapping between May

12 and May 24, cases in 20 states/UTs comprising 70-72 per cent of GDP have peaked. Thus these restrictions could be eased soon," analysts from JM Financial said.

"NSE's India VIX index, an indicator of market volatility fell further by 1.89 per cent from 19.60 to 19.24 levels, a new low for 2021. Declining volatility is supporting the bullish market sentiment," said analysts.

LNG IMPORTERS DEFER DELIVERIES ON WEAK DEMAND

STEPHEN STAPCZYNSKI MAY 18

India's liquefied natural gas importers are asking suppliers to defer deliveries as measures to curb the spread of the deadly Covid-19 virus have cut demand for the fuel.

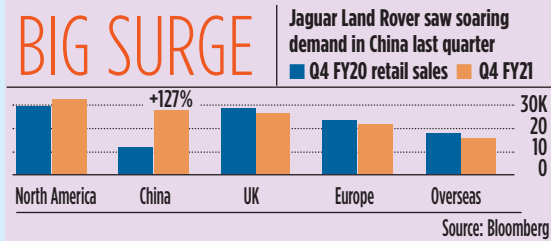
At least three companies, including Indian Oil Corp, have asked to delay shipments slated for May and June delivery, according to traders. Inventories at import terminals in western India, such as Dahej, are near full capacity, the traders said.

The deferrals illustrate the extent of the natural gas glut, which has worsened over the past several weeks. While Indian firms have been accepting most contracted LNG deliveries, they have disappeared from the spot market since the virus worsened last month and shipments became too pricey.

To make matters worse, a cyclone in the vicinity of import terminals has also forced diversions.

—Bloomberg

Tata Motors Q4 loss narrows to ₹7,600 cr



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 18

Tata Motors, India's biggest automaker, which owns British iconic luxury car maker Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), narrowed its losses in the March 2021 quarter.

The Mumbai-based passenger and commercial vehicle maker's consolidated net loss for the quarter came down to Rs 7,605.4 crore, mainly on account of asset write downs in its subsidiary JLR, compared with a net loss of Rs 9,864 crore in the year-ago quarter. The company has incurred cash write downs on assets worth Rs 9,606.1 crore during the quarter. This is apart from the restructuring costs of Rs 5,388.2 crore. This is apart from the restructuring costs of Rs 5,388.2 crore. In total, the exceptional loss in Q4 related to JLR stood at nearly Rs 14,000 crore.

It posted a loss of Rs 9,894.2 crore in the corresponding period last year and profit at Rs 2,906.45 crore in the December 2020 quarter.

The carmaker's revenue from operations came in at Rs 88,628 crore for the fourth quarter, up 42 per cent from the revenue of Rs 62,492 crore clocked in

the same quarter last year.

On a standalone basis, Tata Motors reported a net profit of Rs 1,646 crore as against a loss of Rs 4,871 crore in the year-ago period.

For the full financial year 2020-21, the company reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 13,395 crore, against a net loss of Rs 11,975 crore in the previous year.

JLR sold 12 per cent more luxury vehicles in the March quarter as purchases more than doubled in China.

However, Tata Motors has flagged global supply-related challenges, where coronavirus cases are still high in many markets.

"Supply chain issues, in particular for semi-conductors, have become more difficult to mitigate and are now impacting production plans for Q1. The company is working closely with affected suppliers to resolve the issues and minimise the effect on customers," Tata Motors said in an exchange filing on Tuesday.

"While demand remains strong, the supply situation over the next few months is likely to be adversely impacted. We expect Q1 FY22 to be relatively weak," it said.

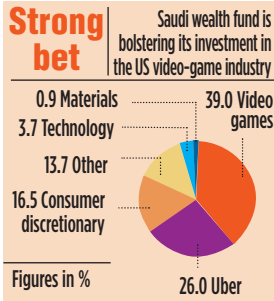
Saudi wealth fund loads up on video-game makers

PAUL ABELSKY MAY 18

Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund doubled down on its pandemic-era investments in video-game makers and added new bets as it raised holdings of US stocks by about a fifth to \$15.4 billion while exiting oil shares.

The Public Investment Fund brought its total commitment to video-game makers, including Activision Blizzard Inc, Electronic Arts Inc and Take-Two Interactive Software Inc to \$6 billion during the first quarter, according to regulatory filings. Those holdings were valued at \$3.3 billion at the end of the fourth quarter.

The PIF also added to its roster by buying \$141 million worth of stock in South Korean e-commerce



giant Coupang Inc, whose biggest backer is Japanese conglomerate SoftBank Group Corp.

Another new investment last quarter included Compute Health Acquisition Corp, a blank-check company set up by Intel Corp chairman Omar Ishrak, with the PIF buying a 8.7 per cent stake for \$75.7 million. The fund exited its stake in Suncor Energy Inc, Canada's top

integrated oil producer, selling \$1 million shares.

The \$400-billion PIF is funded through a mixture of borrowing, cash and asset transfers from the government, and retained earnings from its investments. Chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and managed by governor Yasir Al Rumayyan, the fund has outlined a plan to grow its assets to over 4 trillion riyals (\$1.1 trillion) by 2025.

As the PIF is positioning itself to power the local economy, it's also made several high-profile investments in recent years, including a stake in Uber Technologies Inc and big commitments to Softbank's Vision Fund.

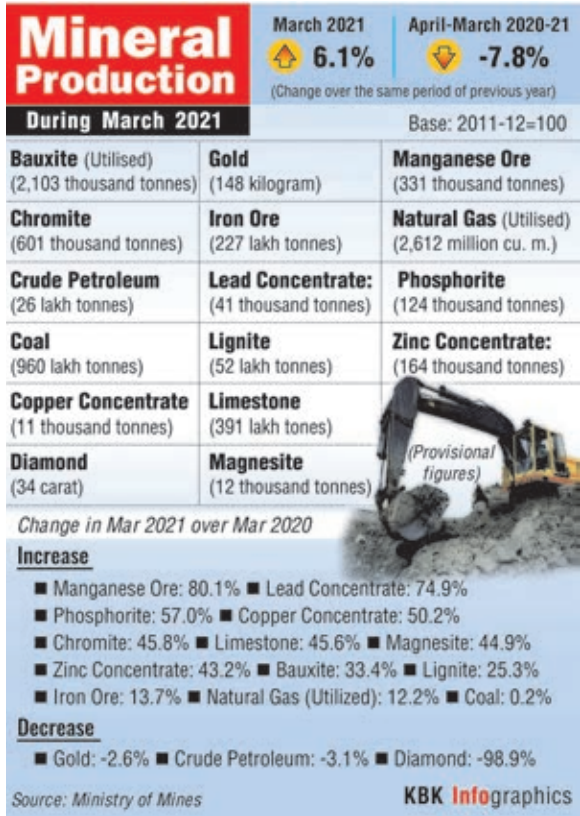
The Riyadh-based fund acquired more than \$3 billion worth of stock in the three US video-game mak-

ers for the first time during the fourth quarter. By contrast, its exposure to US equities in the third quarter fell by \$3 billion, mainly because the PIF sold stakes in exchange-traded funds that track the real estate and materials sectors.

Prince Mohammed is a big fan of video games, particularly "Call of Duty," Activision's best-selling franchise. He told Bloomberg Businessweek in 2016 that he was part of the first Saudi generation to grow up with the gaming technology.

In the first quarter, the fund more than doubled its Activision Blizzard stake to 33.4 million shares and almost doubled its holding in Electronic Arts, reaching 14.2 million shares at the end of March.

—Bloomberg



IT & BIZ SERVICES MARKET GROWS 5.4% TO \$13.4 BN IN 2020: IDC

New Delhi, May 18: The IT and Business Services market in the country recorded a lower year-on-year growth of 5.41 per cent to \$13.41 billion in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic on organisations, research firm IDC said on Tuesday.

However, the IT and Business Services market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 7.18 per cent between 2020-2025 and touch nearly \$19 billion by the end of 2025 on the back of increased spending in areas like cloud and artificial intelligence.

The Indian IT and Business Services market had grown by 8.43 per cent in 2019, but the growth rate fell in 2020 due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on businesses in the country, as per IDC Worldwide Semi-annual Services Tracker.

Of the IT and Business Services market, the IT Services segment contributed 77.06 per cent and grew by 5.97 per cent in 2020. This is against a growth rate of 8.91 per cent in 2019. —PTI

STOCKING | UP Once viewed as liabilities, fatter inventories are back in vogue

World economy is running low on everything

BRENDAN MURRAY, ENDA CURRAN & KIM CHIPMAN MAY 18

A year ago, as the pandemic ravaged country after country and economies shuddered, consumers were the ones panic-buying. Today, on the rebound, it's companies furiously stocking up.

Mattress producers to car manufacturers to aluminum foil makers are buying more material than they need to survive the breakneck speed at which demand for goods is recovering and assuage that primal fear of running out. The corporate buying and hoarding is pushing supply chains to the brink of seizing up. Shortages, transportation bottlenecks and price spikes are nearing the highest levels in recent memory, raising concern that a supercharged global economy will stoke inflation.

Copper, iron ore and steel. Corn, coffee, wheat and soybeans. Lumber, semiconductors, plastic and cardboard for packag-



ing. The world is seemingly low on all of it. "You name it, and we have a shortage on it," Tom Linebarger, chairman and chief executive of engine and generator manufacturer Cummins Inc., said on a call this month. Clients are "trying to get everything they can because they see high demand," Jennifer Rumsey, the Columbus, Indiana-based company's president, said. "They think it's going to extend into next year."

The difference between the big crunch of 2021 and past supply disruptions is the sheer magnitude of it, and the fact that there is - as far as anyone can tell - no clear end in sight. Big or small, few businesses are spared. Europe's

largest fleet of trucks, Girtelka Logistics, says there's been a struggle to find enough capacity. Monster Beverage Corp. of Corona, California, is dealing with an aluminum can scarcity. Hong Kong's Momax Technology Ltd. is delaying production of a new product because of a dearth of semiconductors.

Further exacerbating the situation is an unusually long and growing list of calamities that have rocked commodities in recent months. A freak accident in the Suez Canal backed up global shipping in March. Drought has wreaked havoc upon agricultural crops. A deep freeze and mass blackout wiped out energy and petrochemicals operations across the central US in

February. Less than two weeks ago, hackers brought down the largest fuel pipeline in the US, driving gasoline prices above \$3 a gallon for the first time since 2014. Now India's massive Covid-19 outbreak is threatening its biggest ports.

For anyone who thinks it's all going to end in a few months, consider the somewhat obscure US economic indicator known as the Logistics Managers' Index. The gauge is built on a monthly survey of corporate supply chiefs that asks where they see inventory, transportation and warehouse expenses - the three key components of managing supply chains - now and in 12 months. The current index is at its second-highest level in records dating back to 2016, and the future gauge shows little respite a year from now. The index has proven unnervingly accurate in the past, matching up with actual costs about 90 per cent of the time.

To Zac Rogers, who helps compile the index as an assistant professor at

State University's College of Business, it's a paradigm shift. In the past, those three areas were optimized for low costs and reliability. Today, with e-commerce demand soaring, warehouses have moved from the cheap outskirts of urban areas to prime parking garages downtown or vacant department-store space where deliveries can be made quickly, albeit with pricier real estate, labour and utilities. Once viewed as liabilities before the pandemic, fatter inventories are in vogue. Transport costs, more volatile than the other two, won't lighten up until demand does.

"We're going to continue to see some price increases over the next 12 months," Rogers said.

A growing chorus of observers are warning that inflation is bound to quicken. The threat has been enough to send tremors through world capitals, central banks, factories and supermarkets.

—Bloomberg

DISRUPTIONS MAY DELAY COMPLETION OF HOUSING PROJECTS

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 18

Supply chain disruptions and worker migration due to localised lockdowns are affecting the construction of residential properties in key cities. The completion of more than 4 lakh housing units scheduled for this year might be delayed due to these disruptions.

Over 4.22 lakh units are scheduled to be completed by 2021-end across the top 7 cities, according to Anarock Property Consultants. Of this, 72 per cent of the total homes to be delivered by 2021-end are already sold out. Though there is no outright ban now during the current localised lockdowns unlike the first lockdown last year when construction activity came to a complete halt, disruptions in raw material supply chain may cause some delay in completion.

"The tally of 4.22 lakh homes scheduled for delivery across the top 7 cities by 2021-end must, however, be viewed in context with the severe second wave of Covid-19 infections. All the top cities have been affected, and it is likely that a part of these project deliveries will be pushed to 2022," said Anuj Puri, chairman, Anarock Property Consultants.

The transportation of raw materials is getting affected due to restrictions. Further, the closure of stores selling non-essential goods and restricted timings are affecting the availability. Most of the construction sites are permitted to deploy only a fraction of the workforce by ensuring social distancing norms. This too has affected the pace of work.

Moreover, the migration of workers to their native places ahead of lockdown in some cities has considerably constrained the construction activity.

"Now, amid the ongoing second wave of Covid-19 and the various curbs due to the lockdown in various states, the sector is facing a gradual slowdown which has made it extremely difficult to sustain the momentum," said Ashok Mohanani, president, Naredco Maharashtra.



## SHORT TAKES

## Covid-free Saha fit for English tour

**New Delhi:** Wriddhiman Saha has recovered from Covid-19 and will be available for India's tour of England next month. Saha has reached his home in Kolkata after completing over a fortnight-long quarantine at a Delhi hotel. The wicketkeeper was picked for the England-bound squad subject to fitness. The 36-year-old was among the players who contracted the dreaded virus in the currently-suspended Indian Premier league while playing for SunRisers Hyderabad. "Wriddhiman is back home yesterday after two and half weeks of hotel quarantine in Delhi," a source close to the player said. Saha will have to return another negative RT-PCR test before joining the pre-departure bio-bubble in Mumbai, where the squad will undergo hard quarantine before boarding the flight to England. — PTI

## Women to play Test Down Under

**New Delhi:** Indian women's cricket team are set to play a Test in Australia after playing one in England next month. India, who play their first Test in seven years from June 16 in England, will play another one during the tour of Australia. They will also play ODI and T20I matches Down Under. India last played a Test against Australia in 2006. "England and Australia are the two teams that still play Tests and going forward you will see a Test slotted in when they visit India or when India tour the two countries," a BCCI official said. "The idea was floated on the sidelines of the men's pink ball Test and later discussed in the Apex Council meeting (last month)." The tour of Australia is not yet announced but Australian pacer Megan Schutt said earlier this month the series is planned for mid-September. — PTI

## BCCI pays for Oz players' quarantine

**Sydney:** The BCCI is footing the bill for the 14-day quarantine of Australian IPL players, who have arrived here from Maldives, Cricket Australia interim CEO Nick Hockley said on Tuesday. Most of the 38 members of the Australian contingent, including top players such as Pat Cummins and Steve Smith, officials and commentators, landed at the Sydney airport on Monday after a forced stop-over at Maldives. The players had to spend 10 days in Maldives due to a ban imposed by the Australian government on travellers from Covid-ravaged India till May 15. Hockley said the BCCI has kept its promise and funded the whole operation. "Yes," Hockley told *Sydney Morning Herald* when asked if BCCI was paying for the mandatory quarantine. — PTI

## Owner to fund City fans' CL trip

**London:** Manchester City owner Sheikh Mansour is to pay the travel costs of the newly crowned English champions fans attending the Champions League final in Portugal later this month the club announced on Tuesday. City have received an allocation of 6,000 tickets for the May 29 showpiece against Chelsea in Porto and Sheikh Mansour has said all those travelling on the official package will see their costs covered. Fans are permitted to stay in the country for just 24 hours due to Covid protocols. "Thousands of City supporters will benefit from the initiative which is designed to ease the financial pressure on fans who have faced challenging circumstances," a club statement read. — AFP

## Cricketer Priya's mom dies of Covid

**New Delhi:** India international Priya Punia, who is part of the UK-bound women's cricket squad, has lost her mother to Covid-19. The 24-year-old wrote a heartfelt post on social media after her mother succumbed to the deadly virus. "Today I realised why you always told me to be strong. You knew that one day I would need the strength to bear the loss of yours. I miss you so much mom," Punia wrote on Instagram. — PTI

## GHOST FROM PAST

Bancroft backtracks, other Aussies urge to end ball-tampering row

**Sydney, May 18:** Cameron Bancroft backtracked after dropping hints of other bowlers' involvement in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal while the men in question, including top pacer Pat Cummins, claimed innocence and pleaded for an end to "rumour-mongering and innuendo" surrounding the incident that tarred Australia's cricketing reputation.

Bancroft kicked up a storm recently when he stated that it was "pretty self explanatory" when asked whether other bowlers in the team knew of the plan to use a sandpaper on the ball during the Cape Town Test against South Africa in 2018.

On Tuesday, a *Sydney Morning Herald* report, quoting sources familiar with the situation, stated that Bancroft had no fresh information to give to Cricket Australia's integrity unit, which contacted him. CA had offered a reinvestigation after Bancroft's interview.

The men who were caught in the storm triggered by his statement were Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon, who were all part of the team during the series. They issued a joint statement to deny any knowledge of the illegal plot.

"Bancroft, who is playing county cricket in the UK, had responded overnight on Monday in a conciliatory manner and indicated that he did not have significant new information to share with CA," the *Sydney Morning Herald* report stated.

"Bancroft is said to have told CA he is supportive of the investigation and satisfied with the outcome," it added.

The Australian bowling attack in the Cape Town



A file photo of Cameron Bancroft addressing a press conference in Perth to issue an apology for his role in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal.

Test also comprised all-rounder Mitchell Marsh.

According to the report, Bancroft also reached out to the affected bowlers in order to explain his recent comments.

"...Bancroft had claimed he was left flustered by the unexpected line of questioning and that there was no malice behind his remarks."

The joint statement issued by Cummins, Starc, Hazlewood and Lyon sought closure.

"We pride ourselves on our honesty. So it's been disappointing to see that our integrity has been questioned by some journalists and past players in recent days in regard to the Cape Town Test of 2018," the statement read.

"...we feel compelled to

put the key facts on the record again: We did not know a foreign substance was taken onto the field to alter the condition of the ball until we saw the images on the big screen at Newlands."

The four bowlers said they learned valuable lessons and it is time to move on from the issue.

"None of this excuses what happened on the field that day at Newlands. It was wrong and it should never have happened.

"We've all learned valuable lessons and we'd like to think the public can see a change for the better in terms of the way we play, the way we behave and respect the game."

"We respectfully request an end to the rumour-mongering and innuendo.

It has gone on too long and it is time to move on," the statement said.

## WARNER CAN REVEAL MORE, SAYS BROAD

England pacer Stuart Broad feels Australian cricket would be in for an "interesting time" if David Warner ever decides to write a book and open up about the ball-tampering scandal that led to him being barred from national captaincy for life.

Broad also agreed with Bancroft — who was banned for nine months for his role in the scandal — and then Australian bowling coach David Saker that the knowledge of the illegal play was not limited to the three men who were suspended for

their part in it.

"I have seen a couple of comments from David Warner's agent, too, and I think it will be an interesting time when he stops playing for Australia and writes a book," Broad said.

"There's no doubt the Aussies would have been hoping this episode was signed sealed and delivered. It was an incredibly tough thing for those three players to go through. I can't see it still being a conversation (when the Ashes start) in November, but I can see it being sung in the Barmy Army stands if they're allowed."

Broad said in his experience, a bowler is very sensitive to the condition of the ball. — PTI

## DE VILLIERS' SA RETURN RULED OUT

**Johannesburg, May 18:** Cricket South Africa on Tuesday announced that AB de Villiers won't be coming out of international retirement ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup in India, saying that he has decided "once and for all" to not change his mind.

Putting to rest speculations around his comeback, CSA said that "discussions with AB de Villiers have concluded with the batsman deciding once and for all, that his retirement will remain final."

The statement was reportedly made after CSA announced the team for upcoming tour of the West Indies, though it focussed largely on the squads for the two Test matches and five T20Is in the Caribbean islands rather than de Villiers' retirement.

In May 2018, de Villiers had announced his retirement from international cricket. He played 114 Tests, 228 ODIs and 78 T20Is before announcing the surprise decision.

However, last month the 37-year-old versatile cricketer said it would be "fantastic" to make an international comeback ahead of the T20 World Cup. — PTI

## Kane ready for showdown

**London, May 18:** New Zealand captain Kane Williamson is excited to face India in the World Test Championships (WTC) final next month as he considers showdowns against Virat Kohli's men to be a "fantastic challenge". India and New Zealand square-off in the final of the inaugural World Test Championships in Southampton from June 18.

"When we play against India, it has always been a fantastic challenge and so it is really exciting to be playing against them," Williamson said in a video posted by the ICC on its Twitter handle.

"It's really, really exciting to be involved in the final, obviously to win it would be that much better," said the 30-year-old considered one of the best current batsmen in the world.

Talking about championship and how it progressed, Williamson said, "We saw the contests in the WTC has brought real excitement."

"...the games were really tight such as in the India-Australia series and our series against Pakistan as well where you had to really fight hard to get the results, which is really great."

New Zealand pacer Neil Wagner admitted India possess fast bowlers who



India skipper Virat Kohli and his New Zealand counterpart Kane Williamson.

can exploit the English conditions but said the wickets can change anytime and become flat also.

"India has a lot of quality fast bowlers who have done well in different conditions, they can swing (the ball) under overcast conditions but when the sun comes out it (wicket) is flat and nothing happens."

"(English) Conditions can change throughout and so I am not getting carried away too much,

trying to control the controllable."

India batsman Hanuma Vihari, who is in England for a county stint with Warwickshire, said it would be a great feeling to play for his country in the WTC final.

"I am excited but I would want to be in that moment and not to get too much carried away by the importance of the situation," he said.

"But as a sportsman, to play for India in the final

of inaugural World Test Championships is always a great feeling," said the 27-year-old batsman who is currently playing county cricket in England.

The majority of the Kiwi players have reached the UK as they play a two-match series against England starting June 2 before the WTC final.

The Indians are expected to reach here in the first week of June. — PTI

## Faf received death threat for Cup debacle

**New Delhi, May 18:** Former South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis has revealed that he and his wife received death threats after a mix-up with AB de Villiers led to the latter's run out during their 2011 World Cup semi-final defeat to New Zealand.

Played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Dhaka, South Africa lost the match by 49 runs to be knocked out of the tournament, which was won by co-hosts India.

"I received death threats after that (match). My wife received death threats. We turned on



Faf du Plessis

social media and we were blown away. It became very personal. There were some very offensive things said that I won't repeat," du Plessis was

quoted as saying by *ESPNcricinfo*.

"It makes you introverted towards people and you put a shield up. All players go through this and it

forces us to keep our circles very small. It's why I've worked so hard on creating a safe space within our camp," he added.

## SOUTH AFRICA ANNOUNCE SQUAD

South Africa named 19 players for two Test matches to be played in St Lucia and 20 players for five T20 internationals in Grenada. — PTI

**Squads: Test:** Dean Elgar (c), Temba Bavuma (vc), Quinton de Kock (wkt), Sarel Erwee, Beuran Hendricks, Marco Jansen, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi,

Anrich Nortje, Keegan Peterson, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Prenelan Subrayen, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne, Lizaad Williams. **T20:** Temba Bavuma (c), Quinton de Kock (w), Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, George Linde, Sisanda Magala, Keshav Maharaj, Janneman Malan, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne, Lizaad Williams.

## WRESTLER | MURDER CASE

## Court denies bail to 'hiding' Sushil

**New Delhi, May 18:** A Delhi Court on Tuesday refused to grant anticipatory bail to absconding Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler.

Additional Sessions Judge Jadgish Kumar denied the relief to Sushil Kumar against whom a case of murder, abduction and criminal conspiracy has been registered.

Wrestler Sagar Rana died, while two of his friends Sonu and Amit Kumar got injured, after they were allegedly assaulted by Sushil Kumar and other wrestlers on May 4 night, at the stadium premises in the national capital.

Fearing arrest, the international wrestler moved the Rohini court in Delhi on May 17 seeking anticipatory bail, asserting that the investigation against him is biased and that no injuries are attributable to him.

In the plea, the sportsman showed his willingness to join the investigation and provide a true and correct picture of the incident to help the investigating agency reach a logical conclusion.

It appears that the statement of the victims has already been recorded and alleged recoveries have already been made. No custodial investigation is required as nothing is to be recovered at the instance of the applicant, Sushil Kumar's plea stated.

He further claimed to have no connection with the alleged firing that took place during the brawl, adding that the firearm and vehicle found at the place of the incident do not belong to him.

However, Additional Public Prosecutor Atul



Sushil Kumar

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Srivastava, representing the police, told the court that there is electronic evidence where he could be seen with a stick and hitting the wrestler.

The Prosecutor also asserted that Sushil's passport has been confiscated to alert the authorities as there is an apprehension that he may flee the country. According to Investigating Officer (IO) Inspector Dinesh Kumar, wrestler's custodial interrogation is required to unearth the chain of conspiracy and recover the weapon of offence from him.

He is the main accused in the whole incident, who has played a key role in the commission of offence. Data retrieved by FSL experts confirms his active role in commission of crime, the Investigating Officer told the court. — PTI

## ENGLAND REST IPL STARS FOR SERIES AGAINST KIWIS

**London, May 18:** England on Tuesday rested IPL stars including Jos Buttler and Jonny Bairstow for the upcoming two-Test series against New Zealand while Jofra Archer and Ben Stokes were not considered for selection due to injuries. England named a 15-man squad for the series starting June 2.

"Multi-format players Moen Ali, Jonathan Bairstow, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran and Chris Woakes are rested after completing a quarantine period following the cancellation of the Indian Premier League earlier this month. They will spend some time resting before joining up with their respective counties in due course," said the ECB in a statement referring to the four players who had to undergo a 10-day quarantine upon their return from India.

Gloucestershire wicketkeeper-batsman James Bracey and Sussex seamer Ollie Robinson have been called up to the Test squad for the first time. Stokes (fractured finger) and Archer (right elbow) were not considered for selection as they are recovering from injuries. — PTI

**Squad:** Joe Root (captain) James Anderson, James Bracey, Stuart Broad, Rory Burns, Zak Crawley, Ben Foakes, Dan Lawrence, Jack Leach, Craig Overton, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, Dom Sibley, Olly Stone, Mark Wood.

## Shuttle umpire Sudhakar dead

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MAY 18

Sudhakar Vemuri, renowned badminton official, passed away in Hyderabad on Tuesday morning due to Covid-19. He was 71 and left behind by his wife and two daughters.

Sudhakar umpired at three consecutive Olympics — Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000, the only Asian to do so.

The respected umpire also officiated in several tournaments including two Asian Games in 1982 (New Delhi) and 1994 (Hiroshima, Japan), one Special Olympics in 1995 (Connecticut, USA), Thomas and Uber Cups, Sudirman Cups and World Championships.

He was the deputy chairman of Badminton Asia's Technical Officials Committee.

National badminton coach Pullela Gopichand led the tributes as condolences poured in from the badminton fraternity. "A much loved, revered and respected figure in Indian badminton has left us. His



Sudhakar Vemuri

loss saddens us all ever so deeply," Gopi said.

"A colossal figure in the badminton circuit, he passed on his wisdom to several upcoming players and officials. He leaves an unparalleled legacy of integrity, honesty and commitment to badminton, and will remain irreplaceable in the hearts of those who knew and loved him," Gopi added.

World champion P. V. Sindhu too expressed her sadness. "I am shocked to hear that Shri Sudhakar Vemuri sir, international badminton umpire has passed away. I extend my deepest condolences to his family," she tweeted.

Badminton Association of India and Asian Badminton also condoled Sudhakar's demise.