

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 10 MAY 2021



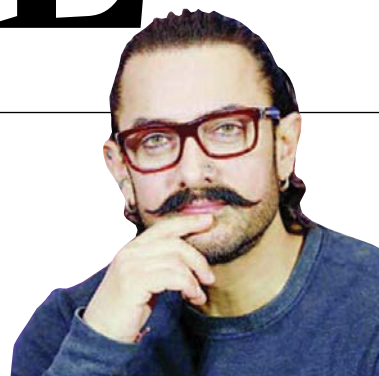
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Raids on to nab wrestler Sushil Kumar, victims record statements



SPORT | 8

Lewis wins Spanish Grand Prix after late overtake of Max Verstappen



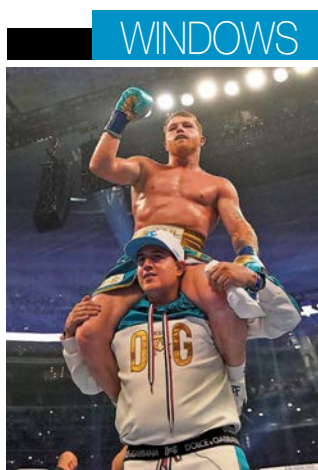
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Will Aamir Khan cycle again for Sanjay Leela Bhansali's new project?

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WINDOWS
Canelo Alvarez celebrates after defeating Billy Joe Saunders in a unified super middleweight world championship boxing match at Arlington in Texas on Saturday. — AP

No GST waiver on vaccines, to make them costlier: FM

New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday virtually ruled out exempting Covid vaccines, medicines and oxygen concentrators from GST, saying such an exemption will make the lifesaving items costlier for consumers as manufacturers will not be able to offset the taxes paid on inputs. Currently, domestic supplies and commercial imports of vaccines attract a 5 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST), while COVID drugs and oxygen concentrators attract a 12 per cent levy. — PTI

■ More on Page 3

Australia's borders to be shut indefinitely

Melbourne: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Sunday announced that the country's borders will remain closed indefinitely for the rest of the world to protect Australians from the deadly outbreaks of Covid-19 strains. — PTI

CBI may get a new director by May 14

New Delhi: The Central govt is all set to appoint a regular CBI director by May 14. While several names are doing the rounds, Gujarat cadre IPS Officer and currently DG of the BSF, Rakesh Asthana, is the front-runner for the post of the next CBI Chief. ■ More on Page 4

COUNTERPOINT



You are here for a bed in the hospital? But our MLA has gone for a berth in the Cabinet!

WEATHER

Max: 39°C
Min: 26°C
RH: 20%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula Chaturdasi till 9.56 pm
Star: Ashwini till 8.25 pm
Variyam: 3.56 pm to 5.44 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12.38 pm to 1.29 pm; 3.11 pm to 4.02 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
SUNSET TODAY 7.01 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.33 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 5.18 AM
MOONSET TODAY 5.50 PM

■ Buzz in state: Outgoing CM Sonowal may go to RS, get Central berth

Himanta Sarma to be Assam's next CM, will take oath today

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 9

Senior BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma, who was unanimously elected as the leader of the BJP legislature party here on Sunday, is all set to take the oath of office as Assam's next chief minister on Monday.

Union agriculture minister and BJP central observer Narendra Singh Tomar made this announcement in Guwahati on Sunday, after earlier asking his party's legislators to propose any other name if they wished. "Mr J.P. Nadda has sent me and Arun Singh to felicitate and conduct this meeting to choose the next chief minister for Assam. Mr Sarbananda Sonowal and other leaders proposed a single name — Himanta Biswa Sarma. Mr Sarma will be the next chief minister of Assam," Mr Tomar said at the BJP legislature party meeting.

Two new BJP MLAs avoid oath, want to remain MPs

Suvendu may be Leader of Opposition in House

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 9

Two first-time BJP MPs, who also contested and won the Assembly election in West Bengal, have not taken their oath as MLAs apparently in fear of losing their berths in the Lok Sabha. They are Nishith Pramanik and Jagannath Sarkar.

Their unexpected move, that has raised eyebrows within the BJP, came at a time chief minister Mamata Banerjee's protegee-turned-adversary Suvendu Adhikari has emerged as a strong contender for the post of the Leader of the Opposition, racing ahead of another frontrunner, Mukul Roy, the national vice-president of the party.

While Mr Pramanik is an MP of Cooch Behar in North Bengal, Mr Sarkar is an MP of Ranaghat in Nadia. Fielded along with three other MPs — Babul Supriyo, a Union minister, Locket Chatterjee

■ Turn to Page 4

Nalbari's Latima village in joy as native son will be new CM

Latima (Assam), May 9: Excitement gripped Latima village in Assam's Nalbari district on Sunday after it became clear that BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma is going to be the next chief minister of the state. Latima is Sarma's ancestral village where he spent his childhood and growing up days.

His paternal uncle Dandapani Sarma, who takes care of the ancestral home, said that the leader recently renovated the house which he often visits.

Mr Sarma will take the oath on Monday as the 15th chief minister of Assam.

Earlier, Mr Sarma's name was proposed by chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and seconded by BJP state

party chief Ranjeet Kumar Dass and newly elected Hailong MLA Nandita Garlosa.

The AGP legislature party, which held a meeting Sunday, also announced that it would support the leader elected

by the BJP legislature party. On Sunday evening, Mr Sarma met Assam governor Jagdish Mukhi and formally staked claim to forming the new government. Earlier Sunday, outgoing chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal tendered his resignation to the governor, who as per tradition asked him to continue in office till the formation of the next government. While there is nothing known officially yet on what Mr Sonowal will be doing next, there is considerable speculation here that he may be elected to the Rajya Sabha soon, and sources say that he is tipped for a berth in the Union Cabinet.

The party's central leadership had summoned chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, both

■ Turn to Page 4
■ BJP trouble-shooter Himanta has come a long way: Page 4

Gov allows CBI to chargesheet 4 TMC ex-mantris for Narada

■ 2 of them among 43 to take oath today ■ Mitra will be FM again

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 9

West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has given his "sanction for prosecution" to the Central Bureau of Investigation to charge sheet four former Trinamul Congress Cabinet ministers — Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee — in the high-profile Narada sting operation case.

Interestingly, except for Mr Chatterjee, the other heavyweights contested and won the Assembly election this time, becoming MLAs again.

Among them, Mr Hakim and Mr Mukherjee are also due to take the oath from Mr Dhankhar as Cabinet ministers, among a list of 43 for the swearing-in ceremony at Raj Bhavan on Monday morning.

It is pertinent to note that the rules require the investigating agencies to seek the permission of both the governor and the Assembly Speaker for the prosecution of state ministers and MLAs respectively.

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It is pertinent to note

SHORT TAKES

Raids conducted to trace owner of Khan Chacha bar

New Delhi: The Delhi Police on Sunday intensified the manhunt for businessman Navneet Kalra in connection with the recovery of over 500 oxygen concentrators from his restaurants and conducted multiple raids in neighbouring states, officials said. It is suspected that Kalra has left Delhi along with his family, the police said. Teams have been formed and raids are being conducted in Delhi-NCR and neighbouring states, a senior police officer said. On Friday, 105 oxygen concentrators were recovered from two upscale restaurants in south Delhi's Khan Market area. The restaurants are owned by Kalra. On Saturday, the police transferred the case to the Crime Branch. On Thursday, 419 oxygen concentrators were recovered from another restaurant owned by Kalra and a farmhouse in south Delhi. Four men were arrested during the raids. The oxygen concentrators had been imported from China by a private company. Kalra has been absconding since the raids and his mobile phone is switched off, according to police. — PTI

Lion dies after prolonged illness in Delhi zoo

New Delhi: A seven-year-old lion died at the zoo in Delhi on Sunday after a prolonged illness, an official said. Aman apparently died due to cardiac arrest. Post-mortem and visceral examination will ascertain the specific cause of death, Director Ramesh Pandey said. The feline was born at Chhatbir Zoo, Chandigarh, in June 2014 and brought to the National Zoological Park in Delhi in June 2015. "He had not been keeping well since early March and was admitted to the Veterinary Hospital of the zoo on April 13," Pandey said in a statement. The animal showed signs of infections, chronic bronchitis, physiological abnormalities and complexities in multiple organs, he said. Samples of the animal sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, for Covid testing on May 5 were found negative. He was under intensive medication and care for almost a month in the veterinary hospital. Views of experts from the IVRI and other veterinarians were also taken, Pandey said. The Delhi zoo now has a pair of lions left. — PTI

Sisodia slams Centre over export of vaccines

'It is heinous crime to export Covid vaccines when people are dying in our own country': Delhi Dy CM

Delhi records 273 Covid deaths, over 13K cases

New Delhi, May 9: Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, on Sunday, attacked the Centre over the export of coronavirus vaccines, saying a large number of lives could have been saved in India if the doses were given to people in the country first.

"It's a heinous crime committed by the Central government. It sold vaccines to other countries only for its image management at a time when people are dying in our own country," he told at an online briefing.

Citing a newspaper report, Mr Sisodia said the Centre sold coronavirus vaccines to 93 countries, of which 60 per cent had Covid-19 under control and also where there was no threat of loss of life due to the virus.

A large number of youths in the country perished due to coronavirus in the second wave of the pandemic, he said, adding that their lives could have been saved if the vaccines were given to them instead of exporting the doses.

He said the Centre should now ensure that the vaccines manufactured in the country are provided to the states that are facing a shortage.

He reiterated that the Delhi government can vaccinate everyone in the city within three months if adequate doses are made

available to it.

Mr Sisodia has ordered an inquiry into the incident of 23 Covid-19 patients going "missing" from the North Delhi Municipal Corporation-run Hindu Rao Hospital, official sources said on Sunday. He asked the health department to conduct an inquiry into the matter and submit a report by Monday evening, they said.

The corporation's mayor,

cases, including 52,263 in home isolation. More than 14,500 people recuperated, taking the number of recoveries to 12.17 lakh, the bulletin stated.

The number of cases stands at 13,23,567 and the death toll at 19,344. A total of 61,552 tests, including 4,97,87 RTPCR/CBNAAT/True Nat, were conducted on Saturday.

At 21.67 per cent, the positivity rate is the lowest since April 16 when it stood at 19.7 per cent, according to government data. Of the 22,545 hospital beds for coronavirus patients in the city, only 2,633 are vacant, it said.

— PTI



It's a heinous crime committed by the Central government. It sold vaccines to other countries only for its image management at a time when people are dying in our own country

— **Manish Sisodia,**
Delhi Dy CM

the government, which has imposed a lockdown to check the spread of the disease, they said.

Hindu Rao, run by the North Delhi Municipal Corporation, is the largest civic hospital in the national capital.

The hospital has 250 beds reserved for coronavirus patients and according to the Delhi Corona app, all beds are currently occupied. — PTI

Hailstorm, rain give Delhiites respite from hot weather

New Delhi, May 9: A short spell of rain and hailstorm lashed parts of Delhi on Sunday, providing much-needed respite from the hot weather to residents.

The city recorded a maximum temperature of 39.4 degrees Celsius. The precipitation and gusty winds brought the mercury down to 32 degrees Celsius by 5.30 pm, according to the India Meteorological Department's weather app.

The minimum temperature settled at 23.2 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average. People also shared videos of hailstorm on social media.

The air quality in the city was recorded in the 'moderate' category. The 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) was 166 at 4 pm, real-time data of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) showed.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor' and 401 and 500 'severe'. — PTI



A relative mourns the death of family member due to Covid-19 at LNJP Hospital in New Delhi on Sunday. (left) Family members carry a Covid-19 victim at Seemapuri cremation ground in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

1st meeting of SC-appointed panel on oxygen crisis held

Increase production, suggest task force members

New Delhi, May 9: The first meeting of the 12-member National Task Force set up by the Supreme Court to ensure the delivery of medical oxygen throughout the country in a streamlined manner, was held on Sunday, sources said.

The National Task Force members include Bhabatosh Biswas, former vice-chancellor of West Bengal University of Health Sciences, Kolkata; Devender Singh Rana, chairperson of Board of Management, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Delhi; Devi Prasad Shetty, chairperson and executive director of Narayana Healthcare in Bengaluru; Gagandeep Kang, professor, Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore in Tamil Nadu, among others.

Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan and Union Secretary (MORTH) Giridhar Aramane were also present in the meeting, sources said. According to the directions of the Supreme Court, few experts can be co-opted in the team.

Accordingly, V K Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog; Randeep Guleria, Director AIIMS, New Delhi; Balram Bhargava, DG ICMR and Secretary (DHR); and Sunil Kumar, DGHS, Ministry of Health, were present as



Attendees load an oxygen cylinder for a Covid patient at a filling center in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

■ **THE SUPREME Court** had constituted the 12-member National Task Force of top medical experts to formulate a methodology for allocation of oxygen to states and Union territories for saving lives of Covid-19 patients and to facilitate a public health response to the pandemic

special invitees in the meeting.

All members of the National Task Force commended the significant amount of work done by various ministries and departments of the Government of India in augmenting the oxygen production capacities as well as in ensuring its efficient distribution, sources said.

The members also pro-

vided specific suggestions for further increasing oxygen production and availability, managing the demand side of medical oxygen, and parameters on which individual health facilities could ensure economy in the use of medical oxygen, they said.

The National Task Force decided to continue its deliberations to arrive at specific recommendations.

The Supreme Court had constituted the 12-member National Task Force of top medical experts to formulate a methodology for allocation of oxygen to states and Union territories for saving lives of Covid-19 patients and to facilitate a public health response to the pandemic. — PTI

Civic body to manufacture fuel blocks from stubble, cow dung for use in crematoriums

New Delhi, May 9: North Delhi mayor Jai Prakash on Sunday launched a project for manufacturing fuel blocks from cultivation refuse and cow dung for use in crematoriums.

Prakash said the corporation will use these fuel blocks in place of firewood, according to an official statement.

"He said that approximately 300-400 kg goparali (cow dung) per day will be manufactured here," the corpora-

tion's statement noted. Prakash said the North

Delhi Municipal Corporation has set up the fuel block manufacturing plant in collaboration with an NGO — The Family of Shirdi Sai Baba.

"He said that we will ask other NGOs running our crematoriums to reduce reliability on wood and help in keeping the environment clean," the corporation's statement said.

The move came at a time crematoriums in the national capital were stretched to

their limit following a large number of deaths due to COVID-19.

Delhi recorded 273 more coronavirus deaths on Sunday, the lowest since April 21, and 13,336 new infections with a positivity rate of 21.67 per cent, the Health Department said.

"The number of new cases, the lowest since April 12, can be attributed to a smaller number of tests — 61,552 — conducted on Saturday. — PTI



Sadar Bazar wears a deserted look during the Covid-induced lockdown in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

Netizens laud Delhi govt for smooth execution of Covid vaccination drive

New Delhi, May 9: Netizens flooded social media platforms with 'thank you' messages for Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and his government, praising them for "orderly arrangements" and "smooth execution" of the ongoing third phase of the Covid-19 vaccination drive.

Many took to Twitter to share their experiences of getting vaccinated in the mega drive, which they said was done by "calm professionals" in a seamless manner while maintaining all coronavirus protocols.

Laxmi Kant Dubey, who heads the vaccination centre RSBV at West Vinod Nagar, said what has impressed most people is that they are not made to wait much, due process is being followed in

the vaccination drive, and attention is being paid to the minutest details.

"The centre, which has five sites and is vaccinating almost 750 people every day since May 3, is fully ventilated and sanitised twice a day, he said.

"People are very happy. My visitors' register is filled with good remarks. We have a medical room, wheelchairs are available on the gates for the disabled, and we follow all guidelines to the tee. For each site, we have allotted three rooms. While the first room is the waiting area, the second and third are for vaccination and observation," Mr Dubey told a news agency.

The sentiments are echoed by other heads of vaccination centres as well, like

Renu and Jayanti Gupta from Government Girls Senior Secondary School (Chhatarpur) and Shaheed Captain Sanjeev Dahiya from Sarvodaya Vidyalaya at Sector 9 in Rohini respectively.

"My teachers tell me that many people come to them and give a thumbs-up for the facilities provided in the vaccination centre. I guess much of its credit goes to the administration. We, on our part, are following all the guidelines and make the process as smooth as possible," said Ms Gupta.

Mr Kejriwal, on Saturday, said the number of Covid-19 vaccination centres will be increased three times in Delhi and demanded that the Centre supply around 2.6 crore vaccine doses for inoc-

ulation of all the people in the national capital in the next three months.

Currently, vaccination is going on at 100 centres in Delhi. The number of centres will be increased to 250-300 by the Delhi government, he said in an online briefing.

Delhi has been vaccinating more than 1 lakh people every day. This includes around 50,000 people in the age group of 18-44 years and 50,000 aged 45 years and above, he added.

Since several of the vaccination centres are Delhi government schools, Delhiites — especially those who visited these schools for the first time — applauded the government for its work in developing school infrastructure and education reforms. — PTI

2-time Olympic medal winner named in the FIR Hunt on for Sushil Kumar after wrestler dies in Chhatrasal brawl

New Delhi, May 9: The Delhi police recorded the statements of the victims of the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler here, officials said on Sunday.

The police said the clash took place over vacating a flat in Model Town area.

Two-time Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar, who has been named in the FIR in this case, is absconding and efforts are on to trace him. Raids are being conducted in Delhi/NCR and neighbouring states, a police officer said.

The victims alleged that Kumar was present at the spot when the incident took place, he said.

A 23-year-old wrestler

died and his two friends got injured after they were allegedly brutally assaulted by other wrestlers inside Chhatrasal Stadium in the northern part of the city on the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday.

According to the police, the brawl took place between Kumar, Ajay, Prince, Sonu, Sagar, Amit, and others in the parking area. Thereafter, the police registered the case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Arms Act at the Model Town police station.

"The crime scene and all the five vehicles were inspected. During the inspection, a double bar-



Sushil Kumar

rel loaded gun with five live cartridges was found in one Scorpio and two wooden sticks were also recovered from the spot.

"All the five vehicles and weapons of offence were seized. The crime scene was further inspected by

forensic experts of FSL, Rohini," additional deputy commissioner of police (Northwest) Guriqbal Singh Sidhu said.

The police had apprehended one Prince Dalal (24), a resident of Jhajjar in Haryana, and seized one double barrel gun from his possession.

"It was not a case of trespassing. The accused took the victims inside the stadium where they assaulted them in the parking area. Kumar was present at the spot when the incident took place. However, the police is investigating his role in the assault," an official source said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Slight decline in Odisha Covid cases

Bhubaneswar: The number of daily Covid 19 cases which continued to spiral for the past few days, witnessed a slight decline in the last two days in Odisha. The daily figure, which had stood at 11,807 on Saturday, came down to 10,635 on Sunday. Cumulatively, the total case-load in the state mounted to 5,34,842 following the fresh figure. As many as 19 patients succumbed to the deadly virus during the period taking the death toll to 2,180. Khurda recorded maximum three deaths out of which one was from Bhubaneswar. Kalahandi districts also reported three fatalities. One patient each died in Angul, Bolangir, Bhadrak, Dhenkanal, Ganjam, Gajapati, Jajpur, Jharsuguda, Puri, Rayagada, Sambalpur, Sonepur, and Sundergarh districts. Of the new positive cases, 6,012 have been detected from quarantine while the remaining infections were local contacts.

NOTED SCULPTOR AND RS MEMBER DIES OF COVID-19

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 9

Eminent sculptor and Rajya Sabha member Padma Vibhushan Raghunath Mohapatra passed away on Sunday afternoon. He was 78. Mohapatra is survived by his wife and two sons. Both of his sons have also tested positive for Covid-19 and are undergoing treatment in Bhubaneswar. On April 22, Mohapatra had tested positive for coronavirus following which was admitted to AIIMS, Bhubaneswar. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik, Odisha governor Ganesh Lal, Andhra Pradesh governor B.B. Harichandan and Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan were among several eminent persons who condoled the death of Raghunath Mohapatra. Born on March 24, 1943, Mohapatra was awarded Padma Shri in 1976 and received the Padma Bhushan in 2001. Later in 2013, he was awarded Padma Vibhushan. In July, 2018, Raghunath Mohapatra was nominated as RS member. Hailing from the family of sculptors, the Mohapatra had built several temples across the globe. His sculptural splendours decorate many government buildings and private establishments.

■ Many states impose lockdown ■ Early signs 2nd wave could be nearing peak

Over 4L Covid-19 cases, 4,092 deaths reported in last 24 hrs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 9

India recorded 4,03,738 fresh cases on Sunday. This was the fifth straight day of 4 lakh-plus daily infections in the country. However, the numbers have declined marginally over the past three days after hitting a peak of 4,14,554 on Thursday. Deaths continued to surge with 4,092 fatalities reported on Sunday. However there were early signs in the data that the second wave in the country could be reaching its peak. Several states too imposed lockdown or strict curbs as Covid catastrophe continues.

Maharashtra reported 56,578 cases while Karnataka had 47,563.

Congress asks PM to convene an all-party on Covid situation

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 9

The Congress on Sunday demanded that the PM Narendra Modi should call an all-party meeting on the prevailing Covid situation in the country.

In a letter to the PM, Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge offered six suggestions to help combat the second Covid wave, which he said had forced "ordinary Indians (into) selling land, jewellery and expending savings to ensure treatment for loved ones".

In his letter Mr Kharge called on the Centre to convene an all-party meeting to "collectively forge a holistic blueprint to tackle the pandemic" and utilise the ₹35,000 crore allocated for Covid vaccines to ensure all Indians are inoculated. He also asked the centre to "leverage compulsory licensing" to increase vaccine production, waive taxes on critical medical equipment - vaccines (5%), PPE kits (between 5-12%), ambulances (28%) and oxygen concentrators (12%).

Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh were the other top contributors.

Rajasthan recorded 159 deaths and 17,921 coronavirus cases on Sunday, taking the death toll to 5,665 and the infection tally to 7,56,707.

Haryana reported 13,548 new coronavirus cases, taking the case tally to 6,15,897 while 12,639 recoveries brought the active number of cases in the state to 1,16,867. Haryana recorded 151 Covid-19 deaths in the last 24 hours, according to the health bulletin.

In UP the number of new cases of Covid-19 continued to decline while recoveries went up in the state on Saturday, health officials said. At least 26,847 fresh cases were reported

■ CENTRE ISSUES advisory on management of Mucormycosis. Mucormycosis is a fungal infection being found in patients with uncontrolled diabetes and prolonged ICU stay.

while 34,721 people were declared free of coronavirus infection in the last 24 hours. During this period, total 2,23,656 Covid tests were conducted in the state.

In a first of its kind data released by the government, on Covid patients requiring critical care, shows that nearly 50,000 people are currently in ICUs, while over 14,000 on ventilator support.

Meanwhile, the Centre

issued advisory on management of Mucormycosis fungal infection in Covid-19 patients.

Mucormycosis, a fungal infection being found in Covid-19 patients with uncontrolled diabetes and prolonged intensive care unit (ICU) stay, may turn fatal if uncared.

Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana extended their ongoing lockdowns till May 17 to curb the unprecedented surge of Covid-19 cases and deaths.

Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Puducherry will also have a two-week shutdown starting Monday, while in Karnataka's stringent lockdown will come into effect on Monday till May 24. On Saturday, Kerala came under a nine-day complete lockdown.



People flout Covid-19 norms as they stand at a ticket counter to board buses for their native place after authorities announced lockdown in Jaipur on Sunday. — PTI

Waive tax on med items: Didi to PM

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 9

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi in yet another letter not to levy the Central taxes and duties on a list of emergency medical equipments and drugs for Covid-19 treatment.

The TMC chief called for the waiver as the statewide daily spike in Covid-19 cases rose to 19,441 with 124 fresh deaths in the last 24 hours.

Ms Banerjee wrote, "I am writing to you regarding a critical issue on facilitating augmentation of medical system including infrastructure, equipment, medicine and oxygen, necessitated due to sudden spike in the number of Covid cases in the country in general and also in West Bengal. We all are trying our best to face new challenges and making all efforts to channelise resources from different sources, including ensuring availability of life saving drugs and oxy-

gen for Covid treatment." She pointed out, "A large number of organisations, individuals and benevolent agencies have come forward to donate oxygen concentrators, cylinders, cryogenic storage tanks, tankers and tank containers and Covid-related drugs. Donations from these organisations will greatly supplement the efforts of the state government in meeting the huge gap in demand and supply."

Ms Banerjee added, "However, many of the donors and agencies have

Sitharaman rules out GST waiver on corona vaccines

Move will make them costlier, says finance minister

New Delhi, May 9: Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday virtually ruled out exempting Covid vaccines, medicines and oxygen concentrators from GST, saying such an exemption will make the lifesaving items costlier for consumers as manufacturers will not be able to offset the taxes paid on inputs.

Currently, domestic supplies and commercial imports of vaccines attract a 5 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST), while Covid drugs and oxygen concentrators attract a 12 per cent levy.

Congress working president Sonia Gandhi had last month demanded that all life-saving drugs, equipment and instruments required to treat Covid-19 patients must be exempted from GST.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has also made a similar demand.

"If full exemption from GST is given, vaccine manufacturers would not be able to offset their input taxes and would pass them on to the end consumer/citizen by increasing the price," Ms Sitharaman said in a series of tweets.

"A 5 per cent GST rate ensures that the manufacturer is able to utilise ITC and in case of overflow of ITC, claim refund. Hence exemption to the vaccine from GST would be counterproductive without benefiting the consumer."

The tweets, 16 of them in all, were in response to Ms Banerjee's letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India is facing the

NCP demands waiver on oxygen equipment

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, MAY 9

After urging Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray to grant concessions in electricity bills and waiver in property tax to the hospitality sector, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has now asked the Centre to waive off the GST on oxygen equipment and other drugs.

The NCP has sought waiver of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on all oxygen equipment

and other drugs being procured to tackle the Covid surge, claiming that such levies were "choking" the health care system.

Maharashtra NCP chief Jayant Patil in a tweet tagged a letter written by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Assocham) to the Union finance minister on May 6, requesting that the GST, customs and any other levies on drugs and oxygen products be waived off until March 31, 2022.

world's worst outbreak of Covid-19 cases with more than 4 lakh new daily Covid-19 cases being reported over the weekend. More than 2.42 lakh people in India have died from the virus infection.

Public health system is buckling under the weight of surging infections and deaths with several parts of the country reporting a shortage of hospital beds, medical oxygen, medicines and vaccines.

To buttress her point on levy of GST on imported goods, Sitharaman said the Centre and states equally split collections made from levy of Integrated GST (IGST).

Further 41 per cent of the Central GST revenue is devolved to States. So out of a collection of ₹100, as much as ₹70.50 is the

share of the states.

From the GST collected on vaccines, half is earned by the Centre and the other half by the states. Further, 41 per cent of the Centre's collections also get devolved to the states. So states end up receiving almost 70 per cent of the total revenue collected from vaccines.

"In fact, a nominal 5 per cent GST is in the interest of the domestic manufacturer of vaccines and in the interest of the citizens," Ms Sitharaman said.

Ms Banerjee earlier in the day wrote to Mr Modi seeking exemption from GST and customs duty any donations of oxygen concentrators, cylinders, cryogenic storage tanks and Covid-related drugs from organisations or agencies. — PTI

C'garh's new vaccine policy proposes key share for BPL

AGE CORRESPONDENT
RAIPUR, MAY 9

The revised adult vaccination policy set to be announced by the Chhattisgarh government very soon has proposed to give a major share to members of below poverty line (BPL) families in the third phase of inoculation launched in the state on May one, sources said on Sunday.

The proposed policy has divided people in the age

group of 18-44 to be inoculated in the third phase of vaccination into four categories and quotas for each category of these people have been fixed, a senior officer in the Chhattisgarh health department said on condition of anonymity.

The four categories of people created in the proposed revised vaccination policy are BPL, above poverty line (APL), Antyodaya and frontline workforce, sources said.

3L Remdesivir vials received as Canada, UK, others rush aid

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 9

The Union government on Sunday said a whopping 6,738 oxygen concentrators, 3,856 oxygen cylinders, 16 oxygen generation plants, 4,668 ventilators and about three lakh vials of anti-Covid drug Remdesivir have been delivered to the country so far from abroad, adding that it was promptly allocating and distributing the supplies. This comes even as foreign aid continued to pour in from Britain, Japan, Canada, South Korea, Kuwait, China and other nations.

Chinese ambassador Sun Weidong tweeted on Sunday evening, "The first batch of 100 Oxygen concentrators, 40 ventilators, and other anti-epidemic supplies donated by the Red Cross Society of China (RCS) arrived in India today by a Chinese cargo flight from Chengdu. RCS also decided to provide \$1 million in cash assistance to the Indian Red Cross Society through the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to help India fight against Covid-19."

The Chinese envoy added, "Nothing in the world is more precious than people's lives. Actions of RCS shine the humanitarian spirit..."


Meanwhile, SpiceXpress, the air cargo arm of airline SpiceJet, said it had airlifted 9,600 oxygen concentrators from Beijing, Wuhan, Nanjing and Hong Kong to Kolkata and Delhi on Sunday. The airline said it has airlifted more than 27,000 oxygen concentrators from the USA, Hong Kong, Singapore and

■ SPICEXPRESS SAID it had airlifted 9,600 oxygen concentrators from Beijing, Wuhan, Nanjing and Hong Kong to Kolkata and Delhi

China so far. On British support, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted, "Taking forward our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Consignment of 3 O2 generators & 1,000 ventilators arrives from UK. Each generator has capacity to produce 500 litres of O2/min, enough to treat 50 people at a time. Deeply value the contribution from our close friend."

Earlier on Saturday, 100 oxygen concentrators were sent by Japan as a part of the first batch of the emergency assistance to India. Japan is providing India with 300 oxygen concentrators and 300 ventilators and announced it will continue to extend further support.

Canada also announced that it is sending up to 25,000 vials of the antiviral drug remdesivir (brand name Veklury) and up to 350 ventilators from its National Emergency Strategic Stockpile to help respond to the critical situation across India. Canada is also providing support through UNICEF's response to the pandemic in India with the urgent provision of 1,450 oxygen concentrators. This support is in "addition to Canada's \$10-million support to the Canadian Red Cross Society, which is supporting the Indian Red Cross Society's procurement of essential supplies and medicines".



Govt. of Haryana

Government of Haryana Prescribed Maximum Rates* for Covid-19 Treatment in Private Hospitals & Medical Colleges

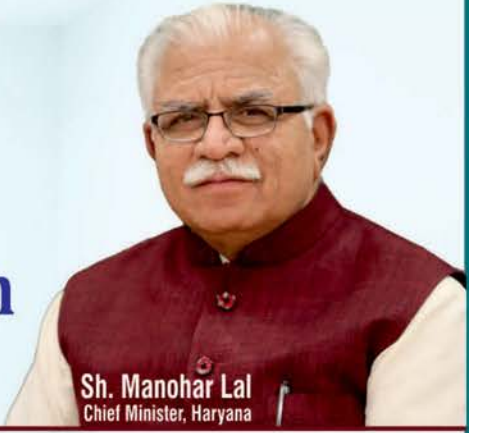
The maximum amount* prescribed for treatment of Covid-19 in private hospitals and medical colleges of Haryana for the patients of the State as per the below table

Per Patient Per Day admitted in Hospital (In Rs.)			
Hospital	Moderate Sickness	Severe Sickness	Very Severe Sickness
	Isolation beds (Including supportive care and oxygen)	ICU without Ventilator care	ICU with Ventilator care (Non-invasive/ invasive)
Non-NABH accredited Hospitals	8000/-	13,000/-	15,000/-
JCI/NABH accredited (including Entry level NABH) Hospitals	10,000/-	15,000/-	18,000/-

NOTE : These rates will not be applicable on the beneficiaries of PM-JAY Ayushman Bharat Scheme


Rates Mentioned in the Below Table are Applicable on The Beneficiaries of PM-JAY Ayushman Bharat Scheme (In Rs.)


Health Facilities	Approved rates/day	
	Non NABH	NABH
General Ward	2160/-	2400/-
HDU	3240/-	3600/-
ICU (without ventilator)	4320/-	4800/-
ICU (with ventilator)	5400/-	6000/-




Sh. Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana

This facility is completely FREE at all the Government Hospitals/Medical Colleges

 **Sanitization**

 **Mask**

 **Social Distancing**

Helpline Number Regarding Complaint

8558893911 (For Entire State) | **1075** (Except Gurugram & Faridabad)

* Terms & Conditions Applied, please visit <http://haryanahealth.nic.in/AdditionalCovid.html>

SHORT TAKES

Uranium case: NIA takes over inquiry

Mumbai: Following the order of the Union home ministry, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday took over the investigation into the seizure of natural uranium worth over ₹21 crore in Mumbai. An NIA spokesperson on Sunday stated that after taking over the case, the agency has re-registered the case under section 24(1)(a) of the Atomic Energy Act, 1962. The Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) had arrested two persons — Jigar Jayesh Pandya and Abu Tahir Afzal Choudhary — on May 5 night and seized 71-kg uranium worth about Rs 21.30 crore from them. After the arrest, the ATS lodged an FIR. The NIA on Thursday had already collected the FIR and other information about the seizure from Maharashtra's ATS. Soon after the recovery of uranium like-substance from Pandya, the Maharashtra ATS first sent it for scientific analysis to the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). The report was received on May 5.

Mantri suffers minor injuries in accident

Balasore, Odisha: Union minister Pratap Chandra Sarangi on Sunday suffered minor injuries when his car collided head-on with a tractor in Odisha's Balasore district, police said. An assistant of the minister and the driver of the car were also injured due to the accident, a senior officer said. The incident happened on Nilagiri-Kaptipada road near Podasul area when the minister was going to Badheipala village in his Balasore Lok Sabha constituency, he said. Mr Sarangi, the minister of state for fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying, suffered nose and leg injuries and was taken to Nilagiri Sub-Divisional Hospital, where he received first aid. He was later referred to Balasore District Hospital as he complained of pain in his legs, the officer added. — PTI

4 kids die as truck cabin catches fire

Jaipur: Four children died after a cabin of a truck, in which they were playing, caught fire in Rajasthan's Alwar district, the police said on Sunday. The incident happened in Chauma village on Saturday and it seems that a short circuit caused the fire, Ramgarh station house officer (SHO) Ramniwas Meena said. Three of the children died during treatment on Saturday night, while one passed away on Sunday, he said. Amaan (8), Shahrukh (8), Aiji (5) and Faizan (6) died in the incident and their bodies have been handed over to their family members, the police said. The families have not lodged a police complaint and on their request, post-mortem was not conducted, they said. — PTI

Delhi lockdown to be on till May 17

■ **Continued from Page 1**
health minister, urging him to direct the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech to increase their monthly supplies to Delhi to 60 lakh doses from May to July. While the positivity rate, which stood at 35 per cent in mid-April, has dropped to 23 per cent, doctors say even this is very high and there is a need to completely break the chain of transmission. Delhi's cumulative Covid-19 vaccination coverage exceeded 38 lakh doses, the Delhi government said on Sunday. The Delhi health department says it has vaccinated 2,75,540 people of the 18-44 age group so far and has a stock of 2,74,460 vaccine doses for this age group. Deputy CM Manish Sisodia has, meanwhile, ordered an inquiry into reports that 23 Covid-19 patients had gone missing from Hindu Rao Hospital; and has instructed the health department to submit its report by Monday. AAP MLA Atishi said, meanwhile, that Delhi has so far received 5.5 lakh doses for 1th 8-44 category, over 43 lakh for the 45-plus, and healthcare and frontline workers. "We have now 4.65 lakh doses available for 45-plus people, and healthcare and frontline workers; and 2.74 lakh doses for the 18-44

group," she said. The total number of cases in Delhi has reached 13,10,231 — of which 87,907 are active cases. The total number of fatalities is 19,071. The city recorded a positivity rate of 23.34 per cent and a case fatality rate of 1.46 per cent. This will be the fourth week of the lockdown imposed as the Covid-19 numbers in the national capital skyrocketed, bringing hospitals to their knees and pushing patients and doctors to look to the social media for help amid a huge crisis of oxygen, beds and drugs. "During the lockdown we utilised the time to enhance our healthcare infrastructure. The main issue in Delhi was oxygen shortage. With the Centre's help, the condition is better now," the chief minister said. "We received just 499 metric tonnes of oxygen on May 8, against the average supply of 700 MT as ordered by the Supreme Court," AAP MLA Raghav Chadha claimed. Amid a bitter fight with the Centre over oxygen availability in the Delhi high court, the Supreme Court, which had taken up the issue, ordered the formation of a 12-member National Task Force to assess availability and distribution of medical oxygen.

BJP trouble-shooter Himanta has come a long way

Journey from youth leader to Assam CM has been of a crusader ■ Was once Tarun Gogoi's most trusted lieutenant before joining BJP in Aug. 2015

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 9

For 52-year-old Himanta Biswa Sarma, a journey from youth leader to Assam chief minister has been of a crusader who fought his battle against all odds and succeeded in achieving his goal. Mr Sarma joined the BJP in August, 2015. Once Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi's most trusted lieutenant, Mr Sarma joined hands with BJP, creating ripples through the rank and file of the then ruling Congress Party. His

move came ahead of the state Assembly elections in April, 2016, in which he fought on BJP ticket and won by a margin of 85,935 votes. Regarded as a big factor in the party's wins in 2016 polls and 2019 Lok Sabha polls as well as the handling of the challenges of the anti-CAA agitation and the pandemic, the former Congress leader is also the spearhead of the party's effort to increase its presence in the northeast. Apart from handling almost all the important

departments except home which was under Mr Sonowal, the former Congress leader also served as the convener of North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), BJP's special purpose vehicle for expanding its influence in the Northeast. As NEDA convenor Sarma emerged as trouble-shooter for the BJP in the Northeast — be it the political crisis of Manipur or Nagaland, he was rushed by the BJP leadership to overcome the situation. Sarma not only rescued the Manipur government

PROFILE



from the political crisis but also succeeded in strengthening the stake of the saffron party in the

Christian states like Nagaland and Meghalaya as well. Mr Sarma started his political career very early with All Assam Students' Union (AASU). He was elected to the body of Kamrup Academy as the assistant general secretary for the first time in 1982-83. This was the first election he ever won. In 1987-88, Himanta became AGS in the Cotton College Students' Union and went on to become the General Secretary thrice in 1988-89, 89-90 and 91-92.

His first electoral victory was registered in 2001 from Jalukbari on a Congress ticket. He later contested from the same seat in the next two consecutive elections in 2006 and 2011 and won. In 2002, Sarma was made the minister of state (MoS) in the Agriculture Department. Later on in 2006, he became the health minister and was given the portfolios of health and education in 2011. An ambitious Sarma had first made his dream of becoming the chief minister public in 2011 and later

began openly revolting when the chief minister launched his son Gaurav Gogoi. In July 2014, Sarma claimed support of 52 of the Congress Party's 78 legislators and staked claim to become the CLP leader, which was soon turned down by AICC vice-president Rahul Gandhi. Some senior Congress legislators who had earlier backed Sarma did not join his cavalcade to the Raj Bhavan. Later, Himanta and 28 other Congress MLAs went to the governor and tendered their resignation.

Govt to appoint CBI chief by May 14, Asthana front-runner

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 9

The Central government is all set to appoint a regular CBI director by May 14. While several names are doing the rounds, Gujarat cadre IPS officer and present director general (DG) of the Border Security Force (BSF) Rakesh Asthana is the front-runner for the post of the next CBI chief. The CBI director is chosen by a high-powered committee of the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and Chief Justice of India (CJI) or any judge of the Supreme Court nominated by the CJI. "The meeting of the



selection committee is expected to be held either on Tuesday or Wednesday. The new CBI director will be appointed by May 14," sources said. The government on February 3 appointed Praveen Sinha, a 1988-batch Gujarat cadre IPS officer, as the acting chief of the CBI. Mr Sinha is currently posted as additional director in the CBI. According to sources, several other senior IPS officers of the 1984, 1985 and 1986 batch are also in the running for the top post, including Y.C. Modi, who is currently heading the

National Investigation Agency (NIA), Arun Kumar, director general (DG) of the Railway Protection Force, Kerala cadre IPS officer Loknath Behra and H.C. Awasthi, DG (Uttar Pradesh). The Supreme Court recently asked the Centre to consider convening the meeting of a high-powered committee for appointment of CBI director at the earliest observing that in-charge arrangements for the post cannot go on. A bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Vineet Saran was informed by the Centre that meeting of the committee "will be convened after May 2".



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee during an event to mark the birth anniversary of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore at Rabindra Sadan in Kolkata on Sunday. Rabindranath

Tagore was born on May 7 but his birthday is celebrated in West Bengal, where he was born and is revered, according to the traditional Bengali calendar, and this year it falls on Sunday. — PTI

Bengal gov allows CBI to chargesheet 4 ex-mantris

■ **Continued from Page 1**
return to that post and become finance minister for the third time despite the fact that had not contested the Assembly polls this time. There will also be 16 new faces like Manas Bhuniya, cricketer Manoj Tiwari, retired IPS officer Humayun Kabir and Seuli Saha. In 2011, Mr Bhuniya became a minister when he was in the Congress, which was an ally of the TMC then. Ten MLAs will be ministers of state (independent charge) while nine others will be ministers of state working under a Cabinet minister. On Sunday afternoon Raj Bhavan said: "Hon'ble Governor of the State of West Bengal Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar accorded sanction for prosecution in respect of (1) Shri Firhad Hakim, (2) Shri Subrata Mukherjee, (3) Shri Madan Mitra and (4) Shri Sovan Chatterjee, for the reason that all of them at the relevant time of commission of crime were holding the position of Ministers in the Government of West Bengal." It said: "Hon'ble Governor is the competent authority to accord sanction in terms of law as he happens to be the appointing authority for such Ministers in terms of Article 164 of the Constitution..." According to Raj Bhavan: "The impression generated in some quarters of the media that sanction has come to be accorded because these persons at the relevant time were Members of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly is factually untenable. The premise of the sanction as indicated is that these persons at the relevant point of time of commission of crime were holding the position of Ministers in the Government of West Bengal."

India condemns Afghan terror hit

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 9

India on Sunday strongly condemned the terror attack on the Sayed al-Shuhada Girls school in the Afghan capital on Saturday that killed more than 50 girl students, with New Delhi making a veiled attack on Islamabad and saying "this incident demonstrates, once again, the urgent need for dismantling terrorist sanctuaries". New Delhi added that "the perpetrators clearly seek to destroy the painstaking and hard-won achievements that the Afghans have put in place over the last two decades". Pakistan-backed radical organisations mainly the Taliban which oppose education for girls have been carrying out terror attacks in the strife-torn nation ahead of US troop pullout in September this year. The MEA said, "We strongly condemn the terrorist attack on Sayed al-

Shuhada Girls school in Kabul yesterday, which killed more than 50 innocent girl students during the holy month of Ramadan. ... Targeting young girl students, makes this an attack on the future of Afghanistan. The perpetrators clearly seek to destroy the painstaking and hard-won achievements that the Afghans have put in place over the last two decades." The MEA added, "This incident demonstrates, once again, the urgent need for dismantling terrorist sanctuaries and the immediate need for a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire to make the peace process meaningful and sustainable. India has always supported the education of Afghan youth and remains committed to the progress and development of Afghanistan... Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of the young girls who lost their lives in this barbarous attack."

■ 'Congress needs to improve strength in country'

Raut: Cong must be part of a unified front against BJP

BHAGWAN PARAB
with agency inputs
MUMBAI, MAY 9

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday said that a united front against the BJP cannot be formed without the Congress. He said that the Congress will remain central to any such initiative at the national level. "The Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) is an ideal alliance in the country and there is a need for such an alliance on the national level. A discussion has been held with NCP chief Sharad Pawar on this matter. But no alliance can be made without taking into account the Congress," Mr Raut said. However, he said that the Congress needs to improve its strength in the country. "The Congress performed well in Assam assembly polls, but it could not come to power. They also received

The Maha Vikas Aghadi is an ideal alliance in the country and there is a need for such an alliance on the national level... But no alliance can be made without taking into account the Congress. — Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena leader



some success in Kerala and Tamil Nadu," he added. "The pain over the downfall of the Congress is equally intense. If the situation is like this today, where will the Congress be in the 2024 electoral scenario? If the Opposition tries to form an alliance together, who will represent it? It should be unanimously decided and the Congress should also agree to it," said the Sena Rajya Sabha MP. Mr Raut has been insisting that Mr Pawar should lead the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Mr Raut had earlier

said that the UPA is "paralysed" now and hence a non-Congress leader like Mr Pawar should lead it at the national level. His statement has invoked an angry reaction from the Congress leaders, which asked whether the Sena leader was a spokesperson of Mr Pawar. Meanwhile, replying to questions on Leader of the Opposition Devendra Fadnavis criticising the Maharashtra government on its handling of Covid-19 pandemic, Mr Raut said PM Narendra Modi has responded to Mr Fadnavis' allegations by saying that the state was doing well.

Shadow of communal politics looms large

■ **Continued from Page 1**

problem is not with the mode of worship or followers of a particular religion, but when people vote as a religious community, it defeats the very basic principle of democracy. Is it not happening in Indian democracy?" On the West Bengal results, Mr Sinha said: "Wake up call: Minority veto in electoral politics will be devastating for our secular democracy." Some felt that to neutralise the "threat", TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee may have to continue with her "Chandi Paths" and identity as a "Hindu Brahmin woman". However, the CPI(M-L)'s Dipankar Bhattacharya felt the only way to counter the politics of "bigotry" is to govern properly. He said: "Mamata has got a

huge mandate, she should not indulge in any sectarian optics but counter the BJP's communal agenda with her governance." Mr Bhattacharya also noted that what worked well against the BJP was her call for "Bengali identity", adding that the TMC's "Joi Bangla" slogan had prevailed over the communal calls. The post-poll clashes in West Bengal were a glimpse of the political route that lay ahead. RSS mouthpiece Organiser, reporting on the Bengal violence, stated: "Here is a first-person account from a Hindu resident of the New Town area who has now fled West Bengal. She says Muslims are breaking down and looting Hindu shops, dragging Hindus out of their

homes to beat them up. No news channel will show this in the name of secularism. Even Covid-19 patients who are thought to have voted for the BJP have to fall at their feet and pay hafta to save dying patients in the hospitals." BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya tweeted: "TMC Muslim goons are beating up women workers in Kendamari village, Nandigram." Senior RSS leader Bidyut Mukherjee's remark in the RSS mouthpiece clearly indicated the agenda the saffron brigade intends to pursue. Mr Mukherjee asked swayamsevak to protect victims and stay by the side of Hindu society. "At this time, it is our greatest duty to calmly stay by the side of Hindu society..."

We shall have to prepare to protect Hindu society," he declared. "Make no mistake, from three to 77 seats is a huge growth, despite the two per cent loss in voteshare. The RSS, which came to Bengal in the late 1930s, have spread all over. The RSS' contribution to this staggering growth of the party cannot be undermined," a senior BJP leader said. Some reports say the RSS has nearly 1,000 shakhas in the state and is still growing. Another senior saffron leader took umbrage when asked about the communal agenda West Bengal could witness following the rise of the BJP. "This I don't understand. Why isn't minority appeasement seen as communal?" he asked.

Two new BJP MLAs avoid oath, want to remain MPs

■ **Continued from Page 1**

and Swapna Dasgupta — by their party in the Assembly polls, Mr Pramanik won from Dinhat in the district and Mr Sarkar was elected at Ranaghat while the other three lost. They were, however, conspicuous by their absence at the oath-taking ceremony for MLAs in the Assembly on May 7, unlike most of the 77 winning candidates of their party. This immediately fuelled speculation about their intentions. Sources said the two have requested the party's leadership to allow them to continue as Lok Sabha

MPs than as MLAs. The party has not taken a final decision on them yet, as both have six months' time to choose one of the two posts. If Mr Pramanik and Mr Sarkar opt to stay as MPs, the BJP's tally of MLAs will go down to 75 from 77, with byelections being held for their Assembly seats. Similarly, if they choose to take the oath as MLAs later, the BJP's tally of MPs in the state will decrease from 18 to 16, with their Lok Sabha seats up for byelections too. Mr Suvendu Adhikari, meanwhile, appears to be the BJP's

favourite face as Leader of the Opposition to take on the TMC supremo in the Assembly. The biggest advantage that has put Mr Adhikari ahead of Mr Roy in the competition for the post is his success as a "giant killer" in defeating the TMC chief at Nandigram, although by a narrow margin. Known for his fierce speech, Mr Adhikari also has been credited with more years of experience in serving as an MLA, at least twice, than Mr Roy, who has become an MLA for the first time in his life by winning from Krishnanagar North in Nadia.

Besides, his past links with the RSS in school life and the support of at least 50 BJP MLAs for him are seen as his plus points, according to sources. On the other hand, Mr Roy, who was initially considered a suitable face for the post with the support of a section of BJP central leaders, met a senior TMC leader in the Assembly on May 7 but skipped the first meeting of the newly elected MLAs in the Assembly and claimed that he would make his stand clear later. This instantly triggered speculation about his possible return to the TMC.

THE ASIAN AGE

10 MAY 2021

No more bickering, enable new anti-Covid task force

The Supreme Court order constituting a National Task Force (NTF) for, among others, making an assessment and recommendations on the availability and distribution of medical oxygen and essential drugs and medicines for the entire country gives the Union government an opportunity to make quick amends to the lapses it committed in preparing the nation for the second wave of the pandemic Covid-19.

The cabinet secretary is the convenor of the NTF which has 12 members drawn from the bureaucracy, academics and the healthcare industry. The court would want the NTF to commence its work immediately and determine the modalities for oxygen supply within a week, reflecting the desperation of thousands of people suffering from the lack of healthcare facilities felt across the country. The court has also tasked them with anticipating the requirements of the nation to face a third wave of the pandemic, which the principal scientific adviser to the government has already warned is on its way. The Union and state governments and their agencies have been told to provide

The government must take the court's intervention as a call to assume the power and responsibility in a decisive manner and act. It must ensure that the NTF gets the best help from all concerned...

complete and real time data for facilitating the NTF's work while all private hospitals and other healthcare institutions have been asked to co-operate with it.

While repeatedly assuring all stakeholders that it has no plans to enter into the executive domain of the government, the apex court has said the constitution of the NTF will facilitate a public health response to the pandemic based on scientific and specialised domain knowledge and "enable the decision makers to have inputs which go beyond finding ad-hoc solutions to the present problems".

The ball is now in the government's court, contrary to a section of the cheerleaders of the NDA dispensation screaming themselves hoarse, saying the court's directive goes against the constitutional scheme of things. True, the court has stepped in to fill a vacuum people have felt but it has made it clear that it is for the government to take "appropriate decisions" on the task force's recommendations though it said the body shall submit its recommendations to the court also. True also that the Constitution vests all the executive power with the Union council of ministers headed by the Prime Minister, who also heads the National Disaster Management Authority, constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

The court must, however, have been disappointed with the response of the government when it asked for a plan to address the pressing issues people face during the pandemic, and hence the decision. That several high courts were also forced to intervene to ensure supply of oxygen and life-saving drugs may have also prompted the Supreme Court into taking a pro-active position.

The government must take the court's intervention as a call to assume the power and responsibility in a decisive manner and act. It must ensure that the NTF gets the best help from all concerned so that it comes up with readily actionable plan which will help address the mess the nation finds itself in now. Quibbling over constitutional niceties can wait till the pandemic is over.

Israel mars own peace gains

In a series of severe policing moves, Israel did not endear itself to its new allies in the region like the UAE and Bahrain, both signatories to normalisation agreements with Israel last year, besides old enemy Hamas, which rules in the Gaza Strip. Israeli police appeared to block the right to worship for Muslims in the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, their religion's third holiest site. The Israel police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades at stone-throwing Palestinian youth on Friday injuring about 205 Palestinians and 18 policemen and also clashed with protesters outside Jerusalem's Old City on Saturday which, as the "Night of Destiny", is also the holiest night in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Weeks of unrest followed by two days of high tension from police action described as "security moves" by the police chief may be traced back not only to competing historic claims to east Jerusalem, which houses holy shrines of Judaism, Islam and Christianity but also to rising anger over the possible eviction of Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarra as their land is being claimed by Jewish settlers. This relates to an old phenomenon in Israel's planned demographic change of territories occupied since the 1967 war. Israel's supreme court is to hold a hearing on the case pertaining to East Jerusalem on Monday.

There were also claims of a rocket from Hamas falling in an open area on Sunday and a retaliatory aerial Israeli strike at a Hamas military post. The incidents does no credit to Israel even as Benjamin Netanyahu's government is still in place though Yair Lapid of the centrist Yesh Atid party has been asked to explore forming a new coalition government. The US, Europe and UN are calling for calm even as Israel's Arab allies are condemning the latest moves which, naturally enough, are seen as obstructing Muslims when they are going for Ramadan prayers. In oppressive policing action, Israel may be blithely blowing away the gains made in its peace moves that helped alleviate old enmities in the region.

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Kishwar Desai
London Diary



Indian summer on UK's red list; royal duchesses in duel of creativity

April may be a cruel month but May heralds the beginning of the holiday season. For some reason, the English prefer to go abroad at the only time the weather is tolerable — in the summer months. It was in the late nineteenth century that Parliament decided to have a summer break. The issue was the pollution of Thames. It stank. Members wanted the windows open due to the heat but that brought in the stink. So they decided to abandon the Westminster Palace for the summer. That brought summer holidays all around.

And now the traffic lights are back again — to guide you whether you can travel to a particular country or not. Australia and New Zealand have made it to the "green" traffic lights, including others like Iceland, along with very few other countries. Which means that the Brits can travel there without having to quarantine for 10 days at a hotel chosen by the government when they return. But countries like India — and some of its neighbours like Nepal and Pakistan fall into the "red" list. Thus while we

know that right now there is a travel ban between the two countries — if any British citizen wants to travel to India they need to quarantine for ten days in a hotel upon their return, plus all the tests they have to undergo. Some people are deeply unhappy that these restrictions are still in place, despite the vaccine. But that is our "Brave New World" — perfect only for armchair travellers!

So we still have rules of how many others you can meet and how closely they must be related. For instance, six members of two families can meet, etc. But it is only around the third week of June that many of these restrictions are going to be removed — we hope that we can last that long! But of course getting back to "normal" will come with fresh caution as undoubtedly a life free of Covid and its many mutations is still far away. So while the "traffic lights" may turn green, many of us will still hang on to our masks.

Even so, it is not all pleasure and no work. May is also the month when local elections take place. Plus this year, vote to the Scottish Parliament. Municipal

elections in England were cancelled last year due to our first (of many but we did not know it then) lockdowns.

Mind you, despite all the difficulties the country has been through, the Prime Minister is still riding high. Perhaps it is the optimism that he exudes — with the tousel hair and Houdini-like escape mechanisms. Throughout his career, he has got away with much, much more than any one else, and he carries no guilt for any wrong or fault he has committed. He apologises and carries on, a formula that has worked wonderfully.

Normally, the government party does not do well in the four yearly local elections as they are out of sync with general elections. But "lucky" Boris is emerging triumphant all over the English regions. The Labour Party under its leader Sir Keir Starmer (a rare Knighted MP) was hoping to reverse their losses in the North where they were supposed to have a "Red Wall". It had crumbled in the last general election. Alas, it cannot be rebuilt by Sir Keir, and Boris has once again managed to convince voters that he is

their best good news guy.

In London though things are different, the mayor of London has a four-year term. Boris was twice the mayor of London. But in 2016, Sadiq Khan, the Labour candidate, captured London. He has already had a bonus extra year due to the postponement of the election. Now he has won, and extended his stay for three more years. Thus he becomes not only the first minority ethnic candidate to continue to head one of the biggest cities in the world but now will establish the enviable distinction of having been mayor for a eight years. So come 2025 - prepare for Sadiq to turn his mind to leadership of the Labour Party and take a gamble on becoming the first minority ethnic Prime Minister of UK. Of course he may be running against Rishi Sunak or Priti Patel as the Conservatives' prime ministerial candidate. Who could have thought even 10 years ago, such a thing could happen?

And meanwhile a quick note on the publicity outreach of the two duchesses. Both Kate and

Meghan are doing their best to stay in the limelight. Who would have thought the ever productive Meghan Markle even had a book in her, and this time it seems to be a cute little children's book. She has come up with one called *The Bench*, dedicated to her husband Harry — but written for her son. Undoubtedly a money spinner — good or bad — it means that now we all know what gift to buy a toddler.

One person who may not buy it will be the Duchess of Cambridge for reasons which are far too well known, especially after Oprah. But the competition is heating up — as William and Kate have their own "YouTube" channel now. While the two duchesses continue their duel at dawn, from safely across the pond... one wonders, what next?

Kishwar Desai's latest book, The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani, has just been published and she is the Chair of the Trust that set up the world's first Partition Museum in Amritsar

Subhani

NAMES OF THE PEOPLE WHO DIED DUE TO COVID

India, world in middle of a 'Third World War'



Abhijit Bhattacharya

It's now a "Third World War". In the nineteenth century, Prussia's Maj. Gen. Carl von Clausewitz had said: "War is a mere continuation of policy by other means". That is what the People's Republic of China is now engaged in — waging war in order to dominate the world.

We have now entered the third year of this epic campaign, which began in 2019 on a low key. The Chinese strategy was simple — to subdue without shooting — and to bring India to its knees. This has now turned into a conflagration. New Delhi was totally unprepared and last year, as the threat of the pandemic rose, it got caught up in health issues and couldn't put adequate infrastructure in place. This monumental misjudgment led to vast numbers of Indians shivering down their spine, failing as usual to read Chinese malice.

It's not just India. The world is in the midst of a long-drawn, protracted "Third World War", the first salvo of which was fired by Beijing's dictator-for-life Xi Jinping from Wuhan in 2019, to fulfil the Communist Party of China's twenty-first century ambition of becoming the planet's numero uno power.

The seeds were sown at Wuhan, President Xi's favourite venue to showcase his country's new global ambitions. Remember the "Wuhan spirit" of 2018 — when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the Chinese strongman in the aftermath of the Dokalam standoff earlier that year? The prime target was, of the West, and specifically the United States; but Beijing then changed course towards the secondary target, India; decimating Delhi's health and resources through a second-wave warhead that pene-

trated through the fragile firewall of Lutyens' Delhi's diplomatic gullibility, political vulnerability and strategic inability to retaliate against the CPC's malice. This not only brought Delhi down, forcing it to kowtow to the world for aid and help, but now threatens the very existence of India's demography.

As fatalities rise across the land and corpses pile up, the killer epicentre of the war has ferociously revived across the whole of India, wreaking havoc of the kind not seen by Indians before. Without a bullet fire or a bomb dropped, the flames of war are about to send India's economy and its health systems into the ICU. India's defence and diplomacy are on a psychological ventilator, with the polity embarrassed and bruised for going into an avoidable and premature celebration to declare victory over the China-origin virus pandemic.

New Delhi's enormous misjudgment in assessing the incendiary punch of the conflagration has sunk a nation of 1.3 billion into an unprecedented state of pessimism and panic, dejection and depression. India also miscalculated the swift course change of the "Third World War", because unlike all belligerents in previous conflicts in human history, its mass killing spree without military mobilisation doesn't have any visible or definite contours.

The deadly blow of the Chinese-origin virus (Covid-19) is far worse than the physical devastation and destruction that India faced in either the First or the Second World War. The outreach of this virus has been more devastating than the poison gas in the First World War (used by Britain, Germany and Austria-Hungary in the trenches adjacent to the Franco-

German border and beyond) and the subsequent reduced use by combatants in the Second World War following the public revulsion caused after the 1914-1918 war.

In the twenty-first century, however, the Chinese-origin virus has already affected around 320 million people globally and is now on an uncontrollable overdrive. Having afflicted 20 million-plus Indians and killing over 200,000 of them, this silent chemical-biological killer is infecting around 400,000 people in India every single day, with around 3,500-4,000 succumbing every day. The funeral pyres are everywhere, not just in crematoria: ambulances, alleys, parks, car parks, riversides are seeing corpses lit before the last rites.

Compared to the two world wars of the twentieth century, which were largely fought in Europe and other parts of the planet, this is the first "world war" in which India is one of the principal battlegrounds. Make no mistake. Even at the height of the bloodshed between the belligerents, the First World War was a European war, leading to 30 million deaths. It happened mostly on the European heartland, Russia, Turkey, Mesopotamia and East Asia, in which a maximum of 40 nations were directly involved or affected.

The 1939-1945 Second World War, however, killed 60 million people, double that of the First World War, with the devastation centred mostly in Europe, the Soviet Union, North Africa, Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific islands. Mainland India survived a direct assault, along with most

Compared to the two world wars of the twentieth century, which were largely fought in Europe and other parts of the planet, this is the first 'world war' in which India is one of the principal battlegrounds

of the African continent, Australia, plus North and South America.

Compare these with the Chinese-virus killer of the Third World War! It has spared no one, except perhaps the country of its origin, as is being claimed by the CPC in its centenary year. Hence, of the 223 countries (sovereign, semi-independent, autonomous, dependents) in the world, all are under attack except one! Isn't it a World War of one (among 223) against 222?

In the midst of this calamity comes the "offer" of proposed assistance to India from Mr Xi, who is also the CPC's general secretary! Should India accept it? As far as Beijing is concerned, we can emulate what then PM Manmohan Singh had done in 2004, in the aftermath of the tsunami, to politely refuse any assistance, at least from the CPC. India can seek or accept aid or help from any of the remaining 222, but not from the one that is actively trying to turn this country into a vassal state at a time of its distress. China has already proved that it is an existential threat to a large number of countries. Now the "Third World War" looms large, with the threat of the airborne "Made in China" germ/virus hovering over the planet.

You don't have to look very far for evidence of the Hans' mischievous thought and intent. On Weibo, see the image of a Chinese rocket launch positioned next to a photo of Covid-19 victims being cremated in India. The text read: "Lighting a fire in China versus lighting a fire in India". This nasty, nefarious image was published by an account of the official Chinese law enforcement agency — CPC Central Political, Legal Affairs Commission — that has millions of Weibo followers. It shows the Chinese rejoicing at the sight of funeral pyres of Indian victims of the "Third World War". Will nemesis catch up one day?

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College. The views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

OBVIOUS CHOICE

The suspense over who will be chief minister of Assam ends with Himanta Biswa Sarma winning the crown pipping incumbent Sarbananda Sonowal. Since the campaign, the clouds were hovering over Mr Sonowal's continuance as the BJP didn't announce the CM face. But the party can't afford to lose its go-to man in the state. Mr Sarma is not only the BJP's Channakya in Assam but he's handling the NDA in the North-East. Now, with his experience as health minister under his belt, he should be well-placed to tackle the coronavirus crisis and work for the development of the state.

Rahul Chouhan
Ujjain

WORLD-CLASS CARE

THERE IS A RACE among states to procure as many doses of the coronavirus vaccine as possible. However, reports from Kerala state that against a total receipt of 73.39 lakhs doses of the vaccine, it could vaccinate 74.26 lakh people means that the state has squeezed out even the last drop in each vial. While the full credit for this should go to the nurses of Kerala, one must salute these warriors, for, even when they are stretched beyond the breaking point, their resolve to serve the humanity stands out. No wonder, they are everywhere — in India and abroad — serving patients with a smile.

V.S. Jayaraman
Chennai

ILLEGAL FEE HIKE

WE, THE INTERNATIONAL students at Kyrgyz State Medical Academy, are requesting the government of Kyrgyzstan, and the embassies of India, Pakistan, Turkey and South Korea, to intervene in an illegal hike in fee by the administration in the middle of the 2020-2021 session. The academy has stopped online classes for foreign students since February. The dean of the academy has threatened students with bad grades if anybody speaks up.

Jaya Jha
Bishkek

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Anil Bagarka (May 4). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.



IN BRIEF

SLAIN JUDGE GETS CLOSER TO SAINTHOOD

Rome, May 9: An Italian judge murdered by the mafia in Sicily takes a step towards sainthood Sunday, almost three decades after being declared a martyr by pope John Paul II. The beatification of Rosario Livatino will take place in the cathedral in Agrigento, the Sicilian town near where he was gunned down aged 38 on September 21, 1990.

In a preface to a new book about the judge, Pope Francis hailed him as a “righteous man who knew he did not deserve that unjust death”.

Livatino, who prayed in church every day before going to court, had been involved in a mass trial against mafioso and was about to launch a new case when he died.

He was found in a ditch by the roadside a few miles from his home. He had refused armed protection.

Many of his notes were later found to be marked STD, for “sub tutela Dei”, a Latin invocation meaning “under the protection of God” which judges of the Middle Ages used before taking official decisions. The notes also showed he asked God’s forgiveness for the risks his work exposed his parents to, once he learned that the bosses of the Cosa Nostra had him in their sights. When John Paul II visited Livatino’s parents in 1993, he said the judge was “a martyr for justice and indirectly for the faith”.

PAK POLICEMAN KILLED IN KP MILITANT ATTACK

Peshawar: A Pakistani police official was killed when some unidentified terrorists opened fire on a patrol vehicle in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday.

The terrorists attacked the police mobile van while it was doing a routine patrolling on Indus highway in Lakki Marwat district, Station House Officer of local police station Naveed Nawaz said.

While Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) Muhammad Shah was killed in the attack, two terrorists were gunned down in the retaliatory firing, he said. In another incident, Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) police arrested three wanted terrorists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Bannu district. The members of the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan outfit were wanted in several cases, including suicide attacks on police stations, extortions and target killings, police said.

Attacks on Pakistan government installations by militia in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province are quite common, in January, a police man was killed in Karak district for escorting a team of health care workers, who were supposed to administer polio vaccine to children in the highly-conservative and Pashtun-dominated area which borders Afghanistan. — *Agencies*

FIRE AT SYRIAN OIL REFINERY EXTINGUISHED

Damascus, May 9: Firefighters extinguished a blaze Sunday in a distillation unit at one of Syria’s two oil refineries, Syrian state TV reported.

No one was hurt, but the fire caused some damage to the facility, a refinery official said. The TV named the cause of the fire as crude oil leakage from one of the pumping stations at the Homs Oil Refinery in the central province of Homs. The fire came amid a series of mysterious attacks on vessels and oil facilities in Syria over the past months. The war-torn country has been suffering from fuel shortage in recent months.

Head of Homs Oil Refinery Suleiman Mohammed told state TV that the distillation unit that caught fire is one of four at the refinery.

In addition to the refinery in Homs, Syria has another one near the coastal town of Banias. Both are government-run and operating.

Syria’s oil resources are mostly outside of government controlled areas. Syria controls some small oil and gas fields but most of the large fields in the east are controlled by US-backed Kurdish-led fighters. This has made Damascus reliant on Iran for fuel.

The US sanctions have targeted a network that spanned Syria, Iran and Russia responsible for shipping oil to the Syrian government. — *AP*

Death toll soars to 50 in Kabul school bombing

Kabul, May 9: The death toll in a horrific bombing at a girls’ school in the Afghan capital has soared to 50, many of them pupils between 11 and 15 years old, the Interior Ministry said on Sunday.

The number of wounded in Saturday’s attack has also climbed to more than 100, said Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian.

Three explosions outside the school entrance struck as students were leaving for the day, he said. The blasts occurred in a mostly Shiite neighborhood in the west of the capital. The Taliban denied responsibility, condemning the attack.

The first explosion came from a vehicle packed with explosives, followed by two others, said Arian, adding that the casualty figures could still rise.

In the capital rattled by relentless bombings, Saturday’s attack was among the worst. Criticism has mounted over lack of security and growing fears of even more violence as the US and Nato complete their final military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The attack targeted Afghanistan’s ethnic Hazaras who dominate the western Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood, where the bombings occurred. Most Hazaras are Shiite Muslims.

The area has been hit by violence against minority Shiites and most often claimed by the Islamic State affiliate operating in the country. No one has yet claimed Saturday’s bombings.

● Three explosions outside the school entrance struck as students were leaving for the day on Saturday.

● The blasts occurred in a mostly Shiite neighborhood in the west of the capital. The Taliban denied responsibility, condemning the attack.

The radical Sunni Muslim group has declared war on Afghanistan’s Shiites. Washington blamed IS for a vicious attack last year in a maternity hospital in the same area that killed pregnant women and newborn babies.

Soon after the bombing, angry crowds attacked ambulances and even beat health workers as they tried to evacuate the wounded, health ministry spokesman Ghulam Dastigar Nazari said.

He had implored residents to cooperate and allow ambulances free access to the site.

Bloodied backpacks and school books lay strewn outside the Syed Al-Shahda school. In the morning, boys attend classes in the sprawling school compound and in the afternoon, it’s girls’ turn.

Residents in the area said the explosion was deafening.

Naser Rahimi said he heard three separate explosions, and immediately thought that the sheer power of the blasts meant the death toll would almost certainly climb. — *AP*

3 hurt in Times Square shooting

New York, May 9: A shooting in New York’s bustling Times Square on Saturday injured a four-year-old girl and two women, in the latest incident of gun violence in the city, police said.

The shooting took place just before 5 pm local time (9 pm GMT), at the intersection of 7th Avenue and 44th Street, a NYPD spokesperson told AFP.

The three victims were a four-year-old child in a stroller, who was hit in the leg while her family was buying toys, a 46-year-old woman hit in the foot, and a 23-year-old

tourist from Rhode Island hit in the leg.

They were hospitalized in Manhattan, and their lives were not in danger, said New York police commissioner Dermot Shea, at a press briefing.

Shea said the three bystanders — who did not appear to know each other — stumbled into an argument between two to four men, at least one of whom fired a gun. No arrests had been made by early evening. Police issued an appeal for witnesses and released surveillance camera footage of a wanted man. — *AFP*

Variant fuelling Covid explosion: WHO

Geneva, May 9: A Covid-19 variant spreading in India is more contagious and may be dodging vaccine protections, contributing to the country’s explosive outbreak, the World Health Organisation’s chief scientist said Saturday.

In an interview, Soumya Swaminathan warned that “the epidemiological features that we see in India today do indicate that it’s an extremely rapidly spreading variant”.

India on Saturday for the

first time registered more than 4,000 Covid-19 deaths in just 24 hours, and more than 4,00,000 new infections.

New Delhi has struggled to contain the outbreak, which has overwhelmed its healthcare system, and many experts suspect the official death and case numbers are a gross underestimate.

Swaminathan, an Indian paediatrician and clinical scientist, said the B.1.617 variant of Covid-19, which was first detected in India

Scotland renews bid to part ways with England yet again

Scottish National Party wins polls, pushes for 2nd plebiscite for independence

London, May 9: The Scottish National Party won its fourth straight parliamentary election on Saturday and insisted it will push on with another referendum on Scotland’s independence from the United Kingdom even though it failed by one seat to secure a majority.

Final results of Thursday’s election showed the SNP winning 64 of the 129 seats in the Edinburgh-based Scottish Parliament. The result extends the party’s dominance of Scottish politics since it first won power in 2007.

Other results from Super Thursday’s array of elections across Britain emerged Saturday, including the Labour Party’s victory in the Welsh parliamentary election.

The election with the biggest implications was the Scottish election, as it could pave the way to the



break-up of the United Kingdom.

SNP leader and Scotland’s first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said her immediate priority would be steering Scotland through the coronavirus pandemic and that the legitimacy of an independence referendum

BACK STORY

● England and Scotland became one kingdom after Scottish Parliament ratified the Treaty of Union in 1706 to merge both the kingdoms, which were ruled by one king for 100 years.

● Scottish King James VI became the English monarch in 1603 as England’s Queen Elizabeth I died without any children.

● The East India Company, which colonised India, also played a role in the integration of Britain and Scotland by harming the interests of Scottish traders, who were opposing the union.

remains, SNP majority or not.

This is now a matter of fundamental democratic principle, Sturgeon said. It is the will of the country.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the leader of the Conservative Party, would have the ultimate authority whether or not to per-

mit another referendum on Scotland gaining independence. Johnson appears intent on resisting another vote, setting up the possibility of renewed tensions between his government and Sturgeon’s devolved administration.

Johnson wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* newspa-

Sadiq wins London Mayor post again

London, May 9: Sadiq Khan has been re-elected as Mayor of London for a second term after beating his closest rival with a vote share of 55.2 per cent versus 44.8 per cent in an election that was closer than expected.

Labour Party candidate Khan, 51, defeated his Conservative Party rival, Shaun Bailey, after winning a total of 1,206,034 votes as against 977,601 when both first and second preference votes from Thursday’s mayoral election were fully counted overnight on Saturday.

The Pakistani-origin former Labour member of Parliament was the first Muslim mayor of a European capital city when he was first elected in 2016. The mayoral poll was due last year but was postponed by a year at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

“I am deeply humbled by the trust Londoners have placed in me to continue leading the greatest city on earth,” said Khan.

“I promise to strain every sinew, help build a better and brighter future for London, after the dark days of the pandemic and to create a greener, fairer and safer city for all Londoners, to get the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential. I am proud to have won an overwhelming mandate today,” he said, speaking at his City Hall office.

● Labour Party candidate Khan, 51, defeated his Conservative Party rival, Shaun Bailey, after winning a total of 1,206,034 votes as against 977,601 when both first and second preference votes from Thursday’s mayoral election were fully counted overnight on Saturday.

● The mayoral poll was due last year but was postponed by a year at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Khan reiterated his previous pledge to be a mayor for all Londoners and work to improve the lives of every single person in this city.

Rival Bailey said he had been “written off” by pollsters, journalists and other politicians but Londoners didn’t write me off”.

His victory is one of the few positives for the Labour Party as the party held on to its dominance in the London Assembly as well.

However, overall the local election performance has been largely dismal for the Opposition party as it lost many of its strongholds. The Conservatives have gained control of around 12 councils. — *PTI*



Re-elected Mayor of London Sadiq Khan hugs his wife Saadiya after the result declaration at City Hall, in London, on Saturday. — *AP*

Nirav Modi’s appeal against extradition stuck in UK HC

London, May 9: Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, whose extradition to India was ordered last month by UK Home Secretary Priti Patel in the estimated USD 2-billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case, has filed an application for permission to appeal against the order in the High Court in London.

The Crown Prosecution

Service (CPS) confirmed an appeal has been lodged but a High Court judge who will make a decision on the matter is yet to be assigned.

The matter has not been sent to a judge for consideration on the papers, the Administrative Division of the Royal Courts of Justice in London said this week.

In the first instance, a

High Court judge will make a decision on the papers submitted for the appeal and determine if there are any grounds for an appeal against the Home Secretary’s decision or the Westminster Magistrates Court February ruling in favour of Modi’s extradition to India to face charges of fraud and money laundering. — *PTI*

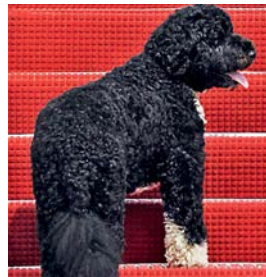
Putin sees Nazi ideas in Europe

Moscow, May 9: Russian President Vladimir Putin marked the anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe with a speech warning that Nazi beliefs remain strong.

Speaking to the annual military parade here, Putin on Sunday decried attempts to rewrite history, to justify traitors and criminals, on whose hands lies the blood of

people. “Unfortunately, many of the ideologies of the Nazis, those who were obsessed with the delusional theory of their exclusiveness, are again trying to be put into service,” he said.

The anniversary of Nazi Germany’s defeat, which Russia calls Victory Day, is the country’s most significant secular holiday. — *AP*



A file photo shows former US President Barack Obama’s pet Bo climbing the stairs of Air Force One at Andrews Air Force Base, Md. for a flight to Chicago. — *AP*

OBAMA DOG BO, ONCE WH STAR, DIES OF CANCER

Washington, May 9: Former US President Barack Obama’s dog Bo died Saturday after a battle with cancer, the Obamas said on social media.

Bo, a Portuguese water dog, was a gift to the Obamas from the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., a key supporter of Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign who became close to the family. Bo helped Obama keep a promise to daughters Malia and Sasha that they could get a dog after the election. A companion dog, Sunny, joined the family in August 2013. Both were constant presences around the White House and popular among visitors, often joining the Obamas for public events. — *AP*

SPACE | ALERT

Remnants of rocket burned up as they reentered atmosphere near the Maldives

China’s rocket debris falls into Indian Ocean

Beijing, May 9: The remnants of an out of control and China’s biggest rocket re-entered the Earth’s atmosphere with most of its parts burned up and disintegrated over the Indian Ocean near the Maldives, the country’s space agency said on Sunday, ending days of fevered speculation over where the debris would hit.

The remnants of China’s Long March 5B rocket re-entered the Earth’s atmosphere at 10.24 am Beijing time and fell into an open sea area at 72.47 degrees east longitude and 2.65 degrees north latitude, China’s Manned Space Engineering Office said.

The coordinates put the

splash down in the Indian Ocean, close to the Maldives, Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* reported, adding that most of the remnants burned up during the re-entry.

US and European tracking sites had been monitoring the uncontrolled fall of the rocket.

Monitoring service Space-Track, which uses US military data, also confirmed the re-entry.

“Everyone else following the LongMarch5B re-entry can relax. The rocket is down,” it said.

“@18SPCS confirms that CZ-5B (LongMarch5B) (48275 / 2021-035B) reentered atmosphere 9 May at 0214Z and fell into the

NASA DENOUNCES CHINA OVER ‘IRRESPONSIBLE STANDARDS’

Washington, May 9: US space agency Nasa on Sunday slammed China for failing to meet responsible standards regarding their space debris. “Space-faring nations must minimize the risks to people and property on Earth of re-entries of space objects and maximize transparency regarding those operations,” he said in a statement.

Indian ocean north of the Maldives at lat 22.2, long 50.0. That’s all we have on

administrator Bill Nelson said: “It is clear that China is failing to meet responsible standards regarding their space debris. “Space-faring nations must minimize the risks to people and property on Earth of re-entries of space objects and maximize transparency regarding those operations,” he said in a statement. — *AP*

This re-entry, thanks for the wild ride,” it said. The US Space command

confirmed the re-entry into the atmosphere of the rocket over the Arabian peninsula, but said it was unknown if the debris had hit land or water.

“The exact location of the impact and the span of debris, both of which are unknown at this time, will not be released by US Space Command,” it said.

Harvard astrophysicist Jonathan McDowell, who tracked the tumbling rocket part, wrote on Twitter, “An ocean reentry was always statistically the most likely. It appears China won its gamble. But it was still reckless. The rocket, carrying the core module for China’s Tiangong Space Station, blasted

off from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site on the southern island province of Hainan on April 29.

The large rocket stage that deorbited was more than 33 metres (108 feet) tall and weighed more than 20 tonnes, making it the sixth largest object to re-enter the Earth’s atmosphere, according to the Aerospace Corporation, a federally funded research organisation based in California. Very little of the rocket stage’s mass survived re-entry, however, with the majority having burned up as it entered the Earth’s dense atmosphere at a speed of about 8 km per second, the *Post* report said. — *PTI*

quick BITES

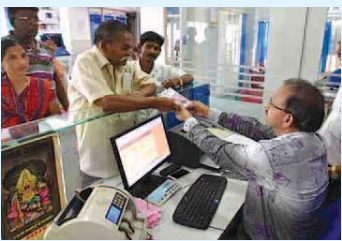
INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49206.47	0.52
Nifty 50	14823.20	0.67
S&P 500*	4,232.60	0.74
Dollar (₹)	73.51	0.36
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.30	0.33
Euro (₹)	88.76	0.11
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,185.474	1.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.29	0.29
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.015	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.545	-0.016

* As of Friday/Saturday

Hero MotoCorp extends plants' shutdown to 16th

Hero MotoCorp said it is extending the shutdown of its plants across India by another week till May 16 in view of the prevailing Covid-19 situation. The shutdown also includes the Global Parts Center in Neemrana and R&D facility the Centre of Innovation and Technology in Jaipur, Hero MotoCorp said. Last month, the company had announced temporary stopping of operations at all its six manufacturing units in India.

Over 2,100 PSB branches closed or merged in FY21



As many as 2,118 branches of 10 public sector banks have either been closed or merged with other banks in the last fiscal, according to an RTI reply. The highest number of 1,283 branches of Bank of Baroda were either closed or merged, according to information provided to an RTI query filed by Neemuch-based activist Chandrashekhar Gaud. No branch of Bank of India and Uco Bank was closed last fiscal.

Amara Raja resumes ops at Andhra plants

Amara Raja Batteries Ltd said it has resumed operations at its plants at Nunegundlapalli and Karkambadi in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh on Saturday. The resumption of production was done after the Andhra Pradesh High Court suspended the orders passed by the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board. The firm said the recent temporary disruption will not have any material impact on its operations or order book.

FPIs pull out over ₹5,900 crore from equities last week

Foreign portfolio investors have pulled out Rs 5,936 crore from equities in the first week of May amid worries over the Covid second wave and its fall-out on the economy. FPIs had pulled out Rs 9,659 crore in April after infusing money in the preceding six months. If fears of Covid-19 persist among investors, then further redemptions cannot be ruled out, Himanshu Srivastava of Morningstar India, stated.

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NCLT starts proceedings on creditor plea Ahluwalia Contracts in insolvency soup

New Delhi, May 9: The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has initiated insolvency proceedings against construction firm Ahluwalia Contracts India Ltd for defaulting on payments to an operational creditor. The New Delhi-based NCLT bench allowed the insolvency plea filed by A2 Interiors Products Pvt Ltd against Ahluwalia Contracts, claiming default of Rs 14.10 crore, and appointed an interim resolution professional.

Ahluwalia Contracts had engaged A2 Interiors Products for interior, furnishing and allied civil and electrical works at various project sites. It had supplied materials to Ahluwalia Contracts as part of various work orders issued for six projects at different locations in the country, according to the NCLT order.

It had raised invoices against each work order, which were duly received by Ahluwalia Contracts, however, it failed to release the full payment.

Later, in May 2019, A2 Interiors had issued a notice to Ahluwalia Contracts under the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC) demanding Rs 12.54 crore along with interest, which was rejected by Ahluwalia Contracts in its reply and raised disputes.

Following this, A2 Interiors approached the NCLT under section 9 of IBC, which allows operational creditors to file an insolvency plea, claiming



a total outstanding debt of Rs 14.10 crore against Ahluwalia Contracts.

This was opposed by Ahluwalia Contracts, contending it as not maintainable, on the grounds that it is arising out of different work orders, which cannot be claimed under one single application and of different service in nature and each contract gives rise to separate alleged debt.

It also alleged that the applicant has concealed certain facts and documents and not disclosed all work orders executed between the parties.

However, the operational creditor said that though it was for work order for six different projects but the corporate debtor is a Principal Contractor. It also submitted that no notice of dispute was raised by Ahluwalia Contracts prior to the notice of demand issued by it.

An NCLT bench comprising members

Sumitapurkayastha and Deepti Mukesh said: "Considering the documents on records and submissions made, it is observed that there exists an operational debt which is due and payable by the corporate debtor."

It further observed that once the work is complete and the final bill is raised, the retention money becomes due and payable.

Though the corporate debtor has raised dispute prior to the issue of the demand notice with regards to non-completion of work on time, defective work and invoices raised but has itself admitted that retention money is payable.

While admitting A2 Interiors' plea, the NCLT observed that the corporate debtor had admitted to the debt and the said has become due as per their own statement in their email, leaving no scope for any further adjudication.

—PTI

GOVT RELEASES ₹8,900 CR FOR PANCHAYATS

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MAY 9

Amid the rampant spread of Covid19, the finance ministry, on Sunday, released over Rs 8,900 crore as grants a month in advance for panchayats. Though the payment was scheduled for June, the ministry decided to release it in May in view of the prevailing Covid19 situation. The amount s will be distributed among 25 states, in which the highest share of over Rs 1,441 crore has been granted to Uttar Pradesh, followed by over Rs 861 crore to Maharashtra.

"The Department of Expenditure in finance ministry released an amount of Rs 8,923.8 crore to 25 states for providing grants to the Rural Local Bodies. The grants of Rs 8,923.8 crore are meant for all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions - village, block and district," a finance ministry statement said.

Cadila eyes nod for Covid vaccine by June

RAHUL SATIJA MAY 9

Cadila Healthcare Ltd plans to submit trial data for its Covid-19 vaccine by end of May and is looking for an approval in June, a newspaper reported citing Sharvil Patel, managing director of Cadila.

The Phase-III clinical trials of the ZyCoV-D vaccine will be representative of its efficacy against

Jewellers get HC reprieve on hallmarking

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 9

The Bombay High Court has directed the government not to take any coercive action against jewellers till June 14, 2021 for storing or selling non-hallmarked gold jewellery. The government had made hallmarking mandatory from June 1.

The Nagpur bench of Bombay High Court was hearing the appeal filed by the All-India Gems and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) and others. The court stayed "coercive action" till it further heard the matter on June 14.

The GJC had contended that the new regulation with effect from June 1 is likely to result in great hardships to around 5 lakh jewellers in India. There are at least 488 districts which do not have hallmarking centres and the Covid restrictions prevent a person from travelling from one dis-



trict to another for hallmarking purposes.

Further, there are 6,000 crore jewellery pieces which need to be hallmarked. Within the time available it is not possible to get all these pieces hallmarked. Any breach of the regulation is punishable with maximum imprisonment of one year.

"The court has in the meanwhile, directed that no coercive action shall be taken against the jewellers under Section 29(2) of the BIS Act, 2016, till the next date of hearing on 14th June 2021. This is

a big relief to the jewellers who shall now be fully protected from any actions from BIS even though they may wish to still go ahead with mandatory hallmarking," said Saiyam Mehra, vice-chairman, GJC.

According to Ashish Pethe, chairman, GJC, court has seen the hardship of jewellers and has taken note of the contention that in proportion to the large number of jewellers in India, the percentage of hallmarking centres available in India is just about 34 per cent.

ByteDance aims to challenge Alibaba

COCO LIU & ZHEPING HUANG MAY 9

Zhang Yiming built ByteDance Ltd into the world's most valuable private company via a string of blockbuster apps like TikTok that challenged Facebook and other incumbents on their own turf. His latest target: Alibaba.

The 38-year-old AI coding genius, searching for ByteDance's next big act, has set his sights on China's \$1.7 trillion e-commerce arena. The co-founder has hired thousands of staff and roped in big-name sponsors like Xiaomi Corp impresario Lei Jun to drive what he calls his next "major breakthrough" into global business—selling stuff to consumers via its addictive short videos and livestreams. That endeavor will test not just Zhang's magic touch with app creation and ByteDance's AI wizardry, but also investor reception ahead of one of the tech world's most hotly anticipated IPOs.

His startup is already starting to make waves in an industry long controlled by Jack Ma's



Alibaba Group Holding Ltd and JD.com Inc. It sold about \$26 billion worth of make-up, clothing and other merchandise in 2020, achieving in its maiden year what Alibaba's Taobao took six years to accomplish. It's shooting for more than \$185 billion by 2022. Douyin, TikTok's Chinese twin, is expected to contribute more than half of the firm's \$40 billion domestic ad sales this year, driven in part by e-commerce.

"Short video platforms have so much traffic that they can basically do any business," said Shawn Yang, managing director of Blue Lotus Capital Advisors. "Douyin is not only in ads, but also live-streaming, e-commerce, local life services and

search. This has a lot of room for imagination."

A burgeoning e-commerce business could help the firm surpass its \$250 billion valuation when it goes public, countering concerns around Beijing's crackdown on the country's internet behemoths. Preparations are said to be underway for a listing that would be one of the world's most anticipated debuts. While ByteDance won't handle sales or merchandise itself, it hopes to sell more ads to merchants, boost traffic and take a cut of business.

The internet giant is a late entrant to China's social commerce scene, where influencers tout products to fans like a Gen-Z version of the Home Shopping Network.

The format, pioneered by Alibaba as a marketing tool in 2016, developed a life of its own last year when Covid-19 spurred demand for at-home entertainment. Last year, Alibaba's Taobao Live generated over 400 billion yuan (\$62 billion) of gross merchandise value.

ByteDance is counting on its artificial intelligence-driven, interest-based recommendations to help its e-commerce business catch up.

ByteDance's ambitions aren't limited to Alibaba. The firm has also started to let users book hotels and restaurants through Douyin, offering lifestyle services similar to super-apps like Meituan and Tencent's WeChat.

Douyin's e-commerce foray in China may offer a road map for TikTok, which has begun testing the waters in online shopping through tie-ups with Walmart Inc and Canadian e-commerce firm Shopify Inc. In December, Zhang told global employees that e-commerce, when combined with live-streaming and short videos, offers an even bigger opportunity outside China. —Bloomberg

Industry backs up efforts to contain second wave

New Delhi, May 9: As India suffers the world's worst outbreak of Covid-19 cases, global and domestic corporate giants are pitching in resources, from airlifting medical equipment, making medical oxygen and setting up hospitals to supplement a public health system buckling under the weight of surging infections and deaths.

Amazon and Google as well as Indian firms Tata Sons, Reliance Industries Ltd and Adani Group have set up Covid hospitals, airlifted cryogenic tankers from abroad for transporting medical oxygen and contributed funds to aid the Covid battle, going by company announcements and industry sources.

While Google CEO Sundar Pichai last month announced \$18 million donation, Amazon said 1,000 Medtronic ventilators will be delivered to India. Microsoft said it would work to provide India with 1,000 ventilators and 25,000 oxygen concentration devices. Mukesh Ambani-led

Reliance Industries tweaked manufacturing at its oil refineries to produce over 1,000 tonnes of medical grade liquid oxygen per day. It has also set up 1,875 hospital beds for free treatment of Covid patients in Jamnagar in Gujarat and in Mumbai.

India's largest steel maker JSW has stopped making some steel products to produce hundreds of tonnes of oxygen for hard-hit areas. It said it was building large Covid care centres around its plants, so that they can be serviced via a pipeline.

While Wipro and Azim Premji Foundation converted one IT facility in Pune into a 430-bed intermediary care Covid hospital, Infosys has set up a 100-room Covid hospital in Bengaluru in association with Narayana Health, providing free care to the poor.

Cipla supported Maharashtra government in setting up Covid isolation ward. Vedanta is setting up a field hospital in Delhi NCR and Adani Foundation set up hospi-

itals in Gujarat and even converted the Adani Vidya Mandir school in Ahmedabad into an emergency Covid Care Centre with oxygen support and catered food.

Tata Group made about 5,000 beds available to Covid patients through its group companies and ITC set up a 200-bed makeshift hospital in Kishore Bharati Stadium for Covid patients in a record 72 hours.

State Bank of India set up 1,000-bed makeshift hospitals, 250-bed ICU facilities and 1,000-bed isolation facilities across the country, while Coal India Ltd set up the largest number of Covid beds totalling 2,000, including 750 oxygen and 70 ICU beds.

Tata Group also imported 1,000 cryogenic containers to transport liquid oxygen, supplying 900 tonnes of oxygen per day to state hospitals.

Tech Mahindra supplied medical equipment to over 20 hospitals and L&T Group committed 22 oxygen generators to needy hospitals. —PTI

Copper just smashed past a record. Here's what you need to know

MARK BURTON MAY 9

Copper soared last week to an all-time high, continuing a sizzling rally that's seen prices double in the past year.

The previous copper record was set in 2011, around the peak of the commodities supercycle sparked by China's rise. This time, investors are betting that copper's vital role in the world's shift to green energy will mean surging demand and even higher prices. Copper futures rose as high as \$10,440 a tonne in London on Friday.

What's the big deal about copper?

Through human history, copper has played a critical role in many of civilization's greatest advan-

ces: from early monetary systems to municipal plumbing, from the rise of trains, planes and cars to the devices and networks that underpin the information age.

The reddish brown metal is mostly unrivalled as an electrical and thermal conductor, while also being durable and easy to work with. Today, a vast array of uses in all corners of heavy industry, construction and manufacturing mean it's a famously reliable indicator for trends in the global economy.

The copper market was one of the first to react as the Covid-19 coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, with prices slumping by more than a quarter between January and March last year. Then as China's unprecedented steps to control the domestic

spread of the virus started to yield results, copper rapidly rebounded—and it hasn't looked back since.

But it's not just China driving the rally. While the country accounts for half of the world's copper consumption and has played an integral part in copper's surge, demand there has actually softened this year. Yet prices continue to drive higher.

Why is copper surging?

It's partly due to evidence of recoveries in other major industrial economies, with manufacturing output surging in places like the US, Germany and Japan.

But investors have also been piling into copper on a bet that global efforts to cut carbon emissions are going to mean the world needs a lot more of the



Explainer

metal, putting a strain on supply. New mine production may be slow to arrive, as mines are hard to find and expensive to develop.

Electric vehicles contain about four times as much copper as a conventional car, and vast amounts of copper wiring will be need-

ed in roadside chargers to keep them running. Bringing electricity from offshore wind farms to national power grids is also a copper-intensive exercise.

What does it mean for the economy?

There are mounting concerns that the broad rally in everything from lumber to steel will force central bankers to step in to stop inflation in raw-materials markets spiralling out of control.

In turn, the stellar economic rebound that's driving the commodities rally may start to stall as businesses are hit by higher interest rates, compressed margins, and waning demand from consumers.

Could the rally fizzle out?

In the case of copper, there

are some signs that spot demand is starting to cool, particularly in China, and some analysts and traders say the record prices aren't justified by today's fundamentals.

The view among policy-makers is that the rise in commodities prices will prove short-lived, as consumers will focus their spending on services and experiences as economies open up, easing the strain on demand for commodities-intensive items such as second homes, electronics and appliances seen during lockdown.

For copper though, it's not just about strong demand today. In fact, a lot of expected spending on renewables and electric-vehicle infrastructure is yet to really materialise. When it does, it could transform the outlook for

copper usage in developed countries.

How high could copper go?

Trafigura Group, the world's top copper trader, and Goldman Sachs Group both say prices could hit \$15,000 a tonne in the coming years, on the back of a global surge in demand due to the shift to green energy. Bank of America says \$20,000 could even be possible if drastic issues arise on the supply side.

The copper market itself may also be facing a big shift. Trafigura predicts that demand growth in China will be eclipsed by rising consumption in the rest of the world over the coming decade, in a dramatic reversal of the recent trend. That could help underpin a new "supercycle" in the copper market. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Pakistan on verge of second victory

Harare: Pakistan were on the brink of a second successive innings win against Zimbabwe despite a fighting performance by Regis Chakabva on the third day of the of the second and final on Sunday.

Bad light ended play with Zimbabwe on 220/9 in their follow-on innings, 158 runs short of making Pakistan bat again.

Chakabva made 80 as Zimbabwe made their highest total of a series in which they have been outclassed.

Chakabva followed up his top score of 33 in the first innings by making his team's only half-century in the two matches.

Pakistan fast bowler Hasan Ali took a career-best 5/27 as the host nation were bowled out for 132 in the first innings.

Brief scores: Pakistan 510/8 decl. vs Zimbabwe 132 (Chakabva 33, Hasan Ali 5/27) & **220/9** (Chakabva 80, Shaheen 4-45, Nauman 5-86).

Sakariya loses father to Covid

Rajkot: Young Saurashtra pacer Chetan Sakariya's father Kanjibhai Sakariya died due to Covid-19 at a hospital in Bhavnagar on Sunday.

He was 42 and was battling the infection for the past few days.

The Saurashtra Cricket Association condoled the demise, saying "Everyone at Saurashtra Cricket Association is deeply saddened on the sad demise of cricketer Chetan Sakariya's father."

"...Saurashtra Cricket Association conveys heartfelt condolences to Chetan and prays to the Almighty to give enough strength to everyone in his family to bear the loss and grant eternal peace to the departed noble soul," the cricket body said in a statement.

The 22-year-old Chetan played for the Rajasthan Royals in this year's IPL. — PTI

Maiden pro bout win for Manpreet

New Delhi: Commonwealth Games silver medal-winning Indian boxer Mandeep Jangra made a positive start in the professional circuit, beating Argentina's Luciano Ramos in his debut bout in Florida, USA.

Jangra travelled to USA two months back for training.

The boxer won his first professional bout against Ramos in a four round unanimous decision in the super welterweight category on Saturday. Jangra has signed up with Florida-based Pro Box Promotions.

The 27-year-old, who is also a silver medalist from the 2013 Asian Championships, was supposed to fight on March 19 but that bout was put off.

"I'm so excited for a great run in the pro ranks and hopefully win a world championship with my team," said the boxer, who is training with American coaches Asa Beard and Marc Farrait. — PTI

Sabalenka lifts Madrid Open title

Madrid: Aryna Sabalenka is glad she changed her mind about playing at the Madrid Open.

Two weeks after nearly withdrawing from the tournament because of a muscle injury, Sabalenka was standing on center court with the winner's trophy in her hands on Saturday.

Sabalenka defeated top-ranked Ash Barty 6-0, 3-6, 6-4 for her 10th WTA title and first on clay.

In the men's final, 2018 champion Alexander Zverev will face eighth-seeded Matteo Berrettini. — AP

Westbrook wins it for Wizards

Los Angeles: Another historic night from Russell Westbrook helped the Washington Wizards to a 133-132 overtime victory over the Indiana Pacers on Saturday.

Westbrook notched the 181st triple-double of his career on Saturday, tying Oscar Robertson for the most in NBA history.

He finished with 33 points, 19 rebounds and 15 assists, draining the go-ahead free-throws with one second left in overtime then blocking a potential game-winning shot from Indiana's Caris LeVert as time expired. — AFP

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Maldives mayhem

Bengaluru FC told to leave Male for violating Covid protocols

Male/New Delhi, May 9: It was a chaotic Sunday for Indian football as Bengaluru FC's AFC Cup play-off against Eagles FC was postponed and the team asked to leave Male for violating Covid-19 protocols, while all Group D fixtures in the same event were also put off after ATK Mohun Bagan reported two positive cases.

The Asian Football Confederation did not give any reason for postponing the matches but it is understood that the deadly resurgence of Covid-19 in many Asian countries is behind the decision.

It all started with Bengaluru FC's play-off match against Eagles FC, scheduled here on May 11, being left in doubt after the host country's sports minister asked the ISL side to leave citing breach of Covid-19 protocols.

"Bengaluru FC's 2021 AFC Cup playoff stage clash against Eagles FC has been postponed until further notice, as confirmed by the Asian Football Confederation on Sunday. The club is making all arrangements to get all its players and staff home at the earliest," BFC said in a statement.

"Bengaluru FC would like to place on record an unconditional apology for a health and safety breach, involving one member of staff and two players, in the Maldives, on Saturday," it added.

The exact nature of the violation by BFC, which is captained by India skipper Sunil Chhetri, was not specified but



Bengaluru FC's Sunil Chhetri during a training session in Male. BFC are in the Maldives for the AFC Cup.

— BFC

sports minister Ahmed Mahloof termed it as "unacceptable".

The sentiment was echoed by BFC owner Parth Jindal, who apologized and promised strict action against the errant players and support staff.

"Unacceptable behavior from @bengaluruFC breaching the strict guidelines from HPA (Health Protection Agency) & @theafcdot-com. The club should leave Flag of Maldives immediately as we can't entertain this act,"

Mahloof tweeted from his official handle.

"We have informed FAM that we cannot hold the match, and asked them to make arrangements for @bengaluruFC's departure. We will be in further correspondence with AFC through @MaldivesFA to postpone the group stage."

The minister's tweets came after reports emerged that some players of the side were seen roaming Male's streets in violation of the quarantine protocol.

Also, two ATK Mohun Bagan players — Prabir Das and SK Sahil — tested positive for Covid-19, hours before their group matches in Maldives were postponed by the continental football governing body.

"Participating clubs who have travelled to Maldives will be required to arrange for their return home while adhering to the Covid-19 health and travel protocols put in place by the country," the AFC said in a statement.

— PTI

Red Devils delay City's title party

London, May 9: Manchester City's Premier League title celebrations were put on hold again as Manchester United fought back to win 3-1 at Aston Villa on Sunday.

Pep Guardiola's side missed a chance to seal the title when they lost 2-1 to Chelsea on Saturday.

City could have started the party if second-placed United lost at Villa Park, but their arch-rivals kept the leaders' champagne on ice with a second-half escape act.

Trailing to Bertrand Traore's first half rocket, United equalised through Bruno Fernandes' penalty before Mason Greenwood and Edinson Cavani netted to leave City frustrated.

City, with three matches to play, are now 10 points clear of United, who have four games left.

United host Leicester on Tuesday and Liverpool on Thursday, with a defeat in either of those matches guaranteeing the title for City, who are next in action at Newcastle on Friday.

The Europa League finalists would love to keep City waiting as long as possible as they bid to



Manchester United's Edinson Cavani celebrates after scoring against Aston Villa in an EPL match at Villa Park in Birmingham on Sunday.

— AFP

earn a runners-up finish, which would be their highest end-of-season position since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer took charge in December 2018.

But treble-chasing City's blistering form has turned the title race into

a procession since the new year and it is only a matter of time before their coronation is confirmed.

They will have to wait another 48 hours at least due to the latest display of United's fortitude.

— AFP

Mercedes masterstroke helps Hami deny Max

Barcelona, May 9: Lewis Hamilton claimed his fifth successive Spanish Grand Prix on Sunday ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen after a Mercedes pit-stop masterstroke.

Hamilton moved on to 98 career wins after a surprise second change of tyres hoodwinked Red Bull to lift him 14 points clear of Verstappen in the drivers' standings.

Valtteri Bottas took third with Charles Leclerc's Ferrari in fourth.

Hamilton had set off from pole for the 100th time but was beaten to the first corner by Verstappen, with Leclerc dishing out the same treatment on Bottas on turn two.

On lap eight Yuki Verstappen held off



Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning the Spanish GP on Sunday.

— AP

Tsunoda's Sunday drive in Catalonia came to a premature end when his Alpha Tauri came to a grinding halt.

Verstappen held off

Villa took the lead in the 24th minute through Traore, who turned sharply in the penalty area and shrugged off Victor Lindelof before smashing a superb strike into the top corner from an acute angle.

But Solskjaer's team have been experts at second-half comebacks this season and Paul Pogba won a 52nd minute penalty when Douglas Luiz needlessly bundled over the United midfielder.

City's Sergio Aguerro had missed a penalty against Chelsea with a risky 'Panenka' chipped effort, but Fernandes was far more clinical as he sent Villa keeper Emiliano Martinez the wrong way from the spot.

Greenwood put United ahead four minutes later as he swivelled past Tyrone Mings on the edge of the area and drove a low finish past Martinez's weak attempted save.

United suffered a blow when their captain Harry Maguire limped off after colliding with Anwar El Ghazi.

But Cavani wrapped up the points with a glancing header from Marcus Rashford's cross in the 87th minute.

— AFP

T20 Cup could be delayed: Chappell

New Delhi, May 9: Australian great Ian Chappell feels the suspension of IPL is a reminder of cricket's vulnerability and does not rule out the Covid-19 pandemic forcing a postponement or shifting of the upcoming T20 World Cup from India.

The 2021 edition of the lucrative T20 league was suspended earlier this week after four players — Sunrisers Hyderabad batsman Wriddhiman Saha, Delhi Capitals spinner Amit Mishra and KKR's Varun Chakravathy and Sandeep Warrier — tested positive for Covid-19 in the bio-bubble.

"The suspension of the 2021 IPL tournament because of surging Covid infections and deaths among the public, and a number of participants testing positive, was a reminder of the game's vulnerability," Chappell wrote in his column for *ESPNcricinfo*.

India, which is grappling with a devastating second wave of the pandemic with cases rising by over 4 lakh everyday, is scheduled to host the T20 World Cup in October-November.

"In the current disastrous climate, the suspension of the IPL could also produce a precedent. It may lead to the World T20 event, programmed for India later in the year, either being postponed or moved."

Chappell recalled a few incidents that led to the disruption of the game in the past.

In the current disastrous climate, the suspension of the IPL could also produce a precedent. It may lead to the World T20 event, programmed for India later in the year, either being postponed or moved.

— IAN CHAPPELL
Australian legend

"In the past, tours have been aborted and matches abandoned for a variety of reasons. Many of these involved back stories, some of which were tragic and others amusing."

The 77-year-old recollected how poor weather during the 1970-71 Boxing Day Test between hosts Australia and England led to the first ever One-Day International.

"In 1970-71 the MCG Boxing Day Test between Australia and England was abandoned without a ball being bowled after heavy rain ruined any chance of a competitive match."

"That led to the first ever ODI being played in lieu of the Test in an effort to recoup some of the lost revenue. The match was agreed between officials of both countries without the players being consulted, and this angered many in the England camp," Chappell said.

The former Australia skipper also wrote about the time when Pakistan players forfeited a Test in 2006 against England over ball-tampering allegations.

— PTI

NZ PLAYERS REACH HOME AFTER IPL'S SUSPENSION

Auckland, May 9: All New Zealand cricketers and coaches, who were involved in IPL 2021, have arrived home safely by private jets in two groups after the indefinite suspension of the T20 league midway into the season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

They arrived on board a Bombardier Global Express private jet via Tokyo in the first of two chartered flights repatriating the Kiwis after the league was suspended.

On Sunday, former Black Caps captains Brendon McCullum and Stephen Fleming were among the second group of cricketers to touch down here.

Meanwhile, five-time champions Mumbai Indians on Sunday said that all their foreign players and support staff have reached their respective destinations safely.

A total of 14 foreign players and support of MI have left India after the cash-rich tournament had come to a halt on May 4.

PBKS DOMESTIC PLAYERS ARE HOME

All the Indian members of the Punjab Kings team have reached home safely after the suspension of the IPL, the franchise said on Sunday.

"Following the suspension of the IPL 2021, all PBKS team members have reached home safely while a few are quarantining outside India before they head back to their respective countries," the club said in a statement on twitter.

— PTI

'Bumrah can take 400 Test wickets'

New Delhi, May 9: West Indies fast bowling great Curtly Ambrose says Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is "so different" from all other bowlers he has seen and has the potential to reach the 400 wicket milestone in Tests if he manages to stay fit.

Ambrose, who took 405 wickets in 98 Tests at an outstanding average of 20.99, said from the current Indian lot, Bumrah has impressed him the most.

"India's got a few good fast bowlers. I'm a big fan of Jasprit Bumrah. He's so different than any bowler I have seen. He's so effective and I'm looking forward to him doing really well," Ambrose said on *'The Curtly & Karishma Show'* on YouTube.

Asked if the 27-year old can scalp 400 wickets in the longest format of the game, Ambrose said, "He is as long as he can remain healthy, fit and play long enough. He can seam the ball, swing the ball and bowl great yorkers."

"He's got a lot in his arsenal. So as long as he can remain on the park for a long period of time, I'm sure he can get up there," Ambrose added.

Bumrah, who made his Test debut in 2018, has snapped 83 wickets in just 19 Tests at an impressive average of 22.10, quickly becoming a vital cog in the Indian team's scheme of things.

Ambrose, who along with

compatriot Courtney Walsh made the most lethal opening bowling pairs of all time, feels the Indian speedster, with his short run up, puts a little more strain on his body.

"You know in terms of fast bowling, it's generally about rhythm. So, you need to build a good rhythm before you can deliver."

"Bumrah has got a very short run up. He walks most of the way and maybe one or two or three little jogs before delivery. So, it simply means he may be putting a little more strain on his body but if he can remain strong enough, I think he'll be ok."

"It's just about him staying strong to accompany that short run up. If he can do that, he'll go the distance," Ambrose added.

India is set to take on New Zealand in the inaugural World Test Championship final from June 18 to 22 in Southampton next month and Ambrose feels a good opening partnership will be crucial for Virat Kohli's men.

"It will be very important that the opening batsman lay the foundation because if you lose 1-2 wickets pretty early you exposes captain (Virat) Kohli and the others guys in the middle order."

"So if you get a solid platform from the openers I am sure it will make life a lot easier for the middle order and the team can put up a good total."

— PTI