



HC raps Railways
for dismissing RPSF
constables from service
page 2



12 Opposition parties
back national protest
by farmers on May 26
page 9

NEARBY



Lockdown in Delhi
extended till May 31

NEW DELHI
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday announced the extension of the ongoing lockdown in Delhi by another week, saying the process of unlock will start from May 31 in a phased manner if the number of COVID-19 cases continued to decline.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

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EDUCATION PLUS ▶ PAGE 5

Centre, majority of States opt to hold Class 12 board exams

States given three days for feedback; fewer subjects, shorter papers likely

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

NEW DELHI

A broad consensus has been reached among the Centre and most States that Class 12 board examinations must be held this year despite the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to senior officials who attended Sunday's online consultation on the issue. However, the exams are likely to be shorter in duration, exam centres may be expanded, and schedules may be staggered.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who chaired the meeting, has given State governments three more days to offer feedback, asking them to respond in writing by Tuesday, after which a fi-



Upset schedules: Class 12 students at a Chennai school ahead of the examinations last year. ■ K. PICHUMANI

nal decision will be announced. With regard to the Central Board of Secondary Education, students will be informed by June 1.

A vocal section of parents

and students have been demanding that the exams be cancelled, and a plea has been filed at the Supreme Court seeking cancellation. However, speaking at the

meeting, Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' pointed out "the importance of the Class 12 board exams and the All India Entrance exams in shaping the future and defining the careers of students", a statement said. An "informed, collaborative decision" will be taken soon, he said.

The Centre recommended that exams be only held in about 20 major subjects. It also proposed the duration be halved to 90 minutes with only multiple choice or short answer questions.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

SAFETY OF STUDENTS MATTERS, SAYS PRIYANKA ▶ PAGE 9



Brewing worry: The Indian Coast Guard guiding fishermen in view of cyclone Yaas. ■ PTI

Very severe cyclone Yaas to hit north Odisha coast

PM reviews preparations; landfall likely on May 26 evening

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA

The depression over east-central Bay of Bengal is very likely to move in a north-northwest direction and intensify into a cyclonic storm. The system Yaas is expected to cross the coast in north Odisha-West Bengal between Paradip and the Sagar islands by the evening of May 26 as a very severe cyclonic storm.

Officials at the Regional Meteorological Centre in Kolkata on Sunday issued warnings that squally winds of 40-50 kmph gusting to 60 kmph are very likely to prevail over North Bay of Bengal and along and off Odisha-West Bengal-Bangladesh

coasts from the evening of May 24. "It would gradually increase further becoming 90-100 gusting to 110 kmph from 26th morning and increase thereafter becoming 155-165 kmph gusting to 185 kmph at the time of landfall till 26th afternoon," a special bulletin issued by the IMD late on Sunday evening said.

PM holds review meet

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday directed senior officers to work in close coordination with the States to ensure safe evacuation of people from high-risk areas.

"The Prime Minister instructed all concerned departments to ensure timely evacuation of those involved

in offshore activities. He spoke about the need to ensure that time duration of outages of power supply and communication network are minimum and are restored swiftly," the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement after a review meeting to oversee the preparedness with senior officials.

The weather office has issued an orange warning of extremely heavy rainfall at isolated places over Jhargram, Medinipur, North & south 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Kolkata in West Bengal and Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Bhadrak and Balasore in Odisha.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

India to push for WHO, EU approval for Covaxin

Concern over travel hurdles for Covaxin recipients

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Faced with concern that Indians receiving the Covaxin vaccine may not get relaxation in travel restrictions, the government has decided to

help ensure that Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech receives clearances from both the World Health Organisation (WHO) and subsequently, the EU's European Medicines Agency (EMA).

According to sources, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has been tasked with studying the matter, given both the need for recognition for the Indian-made vac-

cine, as well as the desire to push for more export orders in the future, and a team led by Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla and officials from the Health Ministry are expected to meet with Bharat Biotech representatives on Monday.

"There is certainly an interest in getting Covaxin on WHO's Emergency Use List (EUL)," said an official familiar with the matter, adding that the European regulatory procedures are likely to take longer but are also being pursued.

The decision comes as 27 EU member countries on Thursday approved a proposal to allow "fully vaccinated" tourists from countries outside Europe under certain

criteria. While the travellers getting AstraZeneca's Covishield would be included on the WHO and EU's listings, if travel from India is accepted, those who have taken Covaxin would not.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and members of the Cabinet are amongst those who have taken Covaxin.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

SHOCK & DISBELIEF ▶ PAGE 13

+ Olympian Sushil Kumar arrested in murder case

Court sends him to 6-day custody

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medalist wrestler Sushil Kumar was on Sunday arrested in connection with the murder of 23-

year-old wrestler Sagar Dhanchar at the Chhatrasal Stadium here.

A Delhi court sent Mr. Kumar to six-day police custody.

The police had announced a reward of ₹1 lakh on Mr. Kumar and ₹50,000 on his associate and co-accused Ajay.

The Delhi police sought a

cell arrested Mr. Kumar and Mr. Ajay from Delhi on Sunday morning.

Mr. Kumar was physically produced before Metropolitan Magistrate Divya Malhotra who said the allegations against the accused were "grave in nature."

The Delhi police sought a

12-day custody to interrogate him. The police said the scene of the crime needed to be recreated. Two others were injured in the brawl that took place at the stadium over an alleged property dispute.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

SHOCK & DISBELIEF ▶ PAGE 13

Cumulative fatalities cross three lakh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

India's cumulative COVID-19 fatalities crossed the three lakh mark on Sunday. With 3,897 deaths till 9.50 p.m. on Sunday, the country has recorded 3,03,196 overall deaths. Only the United States and Brazil have registered more cumulative fatalities than India.

India also recorded 2,09,168 new cases on Sunday. Tamil Nadu reported 35,483 infections, followed by Karnataka (25,979) and Kerala (25,820).

Maharashtra recorded 894 casualties on the day, followed by Karnataka (624) and Tamil Nadu (422). Maharashtra's fatalities include backlog deaths which were missed in the previous reports. The figures do not include cases and deaths from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Ladakh. The data are sourced from the respective States' health bulletins.

As many as 21,23,782 samples were tested on Saturday (the results for which were made available on Sunday), the highest-ever number of tests carried out in a single day in the country. This is the fourth instance when the daily tests have crossed the 20-lakh mark. India's average daily test positivity rate continues to decline. It was 22.7% on May 9 and reduced to 13.4% as on May 22.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

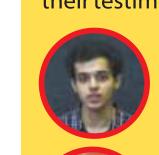
CALLERS COMPLAIN OF ANXIETY
AND DEPRESSION ▶ PAGE 10

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HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

In Bamnoli village, about five km from Dwarka Sector 23 police station, just one government health centre caters to nearly 10,000 residents. It is the go-to place for all COVID-related problems.

Inside the dispensary, roughly the size of a two-bedroom house, a room on the left is for COVID testing, and on the right is the observation area for the vaccinated. It is also where those getting tested wait. A few civil defence volunteers are trying unsuccessfully to separate the two sets of people.

Though it has been a fortnight after vaccination opened for the 18-45 age group, the dispensary is only vaccinating those above 45. There are two government schools in the village, but those have not been converted into vaccination centres.

The Medical Officer and in-charge of the dispensary, Lakshmi, says it is tough to maintain social distancing inside the premises. "Those who come for testing and vaccination stay in the same area because there is no space. People also come in to take medicines as well. It poses a huge threat to their safety," she says, adding that she herself got infected and recovered only a few days ago.

"Policymakers should see the reality on the ground before making decisions. I have shared this problem with a local politician also," says Dr. Lakshmi.

Not so serious

Another problem in the villages, she claims, is a lack of awareness and seriousness about the infection. "A day before, a positive patient himself came here to take medicines. When we told him that he should have sent someone else, he said that if his family members come, then they might get infected. There needs to be a mass awareness programme in villages to educate people about not spreading the virus," she observes.

The dispensary doesn't vac-



The villages that border the city are crippled by lack of testing and vaccine centres

Beyond their reach

cinate people on Wednesdays and Fridays because infants are immunised on those days. However, the COVID-19 testing continues. "We are scared to come here because of testing. But we can't afford to go to private hospitals," says a one-year-old boy's mother, who didn't

wish to be named.

Vaccine shortage

Another healthcare worker, on the condition of anonymity, says that for the last few days, they have not been getting enough vaccines and are turning down people. "About four

days ago, we were getting 150-160 vaccines and were entertaining people who were coming without booking slots because a majority of the population here doesn't know how to use the Internet and have to depend on others to book their slots. But since then,

we have been asked to stop at 50 vaccines for those who come without registration and 50 slots are opened online," the official says.

It is very difficult to counsel the elderly that they can't be vaccinated because the rules have changed, she adds.

Shakunatala, a 60-year-old resident of the village who had covered her face with a dupatta, came to the dispensary asking the officials if she can get her second dose on Thursday as she would complete two months. But was asked to come

(Clockwise from top right) Civil defence volunteers and health workers at the Government Health Centre in Bamnoli village in the Capital; a health worker giving polio drop to a baby; a woman and her children sit outside their residence; Baljeet Singh (left) and Ram Narayan (centre) at the village.

• SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

a month later. "I got my first dose on March 20 and I came here on April 20 for the second but they turned me away and said that I should come a month later. Will they vaccinate me once I get COVID?" she asks.

Living in fear

Living right opposite the dispensary is 35-year-old Satpal Singh with his wife, a three-year-old daughter, a two-month-old son and an elderly mother. He has stopped using his front gate because people who come for COVID testing queue up right outside his residence. "They sit on our porch. They also blow their nose and spit. It is so dangerous. We had also written to the district administration to shift the testing to school but nothing happened," he says.

Mr. Satpal and his wife haven't been able to get vaccinated because slots are unavailable. He has tried several times

but to no avail. "For us, the nearest centres are two in Bijwasan and one in Shahbad Mhammadpur, which are 5 km and 7 km away respectively. Another is inside Dwarka city, which is farther," he says.

Sonu (24), the only person in his family who knows how to use a smartphone, says he has to book slots for three family members but there is no availability.

Ram Narayan, a government employee, who has three children in the 18-45 age group, is furious at the non-availability of slots in the category. "There is only one dispensary in the village and they are not vaccinating people in that age group. There is no other facility here. What should we do? Where should we go?" fumes the 54-year-old.

"On phone, when we call someone, the caller tune asks people to get vaccinated. But how do we do that when it is not available? Here at the dispensary also, vaccine wasn't available for a few days in between," says Baljeet Singh, a retired government employee and friend of Mr. Narayan.

About a km away from Bamnoli is the Dhoolsiras village, which has over 5,000 residents, but has no health centre providing vaccination or testing facility. "We have to go to

Bamnoli for all COVID-related issues," says Jai Singh (46), a villager.

Five km ahead, at the Bijwasan centre, mentioned by Bamnoli residents as their closest centre for vaccination of 18-45 age group, an official of South Delhi Municipal Corporation (Boys) School is idling in a room surveying the empty premises. "The school was shut on Tuesday and Wednesday as there is no vaccine available. Vaccination in the school started on May 10 and no one came after May 17," he says.



Thousands from Karnal reach Singhu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Thousands of farmers from Punjab's Karnal and nearby areas reached the Singhu border here on Sunday to join the ongoing protest against the Centre's three farm laws, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) said.

Farmers are "constantly returning" to Delhi borders after the harvesting season, the umbrella body of over 40 farmer unions that is spearheading the protest said in a statement.

The SKM also announced that its members will gherao the Haryana commissioner's office on Monday to demand registration of a case against Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal and police personnel who "attacked" farmers earlier this month in the district.

The case stems from an incident that took place on February 25, 2018 when an Assistant Commandant of the Force, who was deployed for election duty at Meghalaya, was shot dead by one constable of the same company with his service weapon.

After the incident, the RPSF went on a crackdown spree against constables who had posted comments related to the incident on so-

HC raps Railways for dismissing RPSF constables from service

Court seeks details of punishments meted out to others who made contributions

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has called out the Indian Railways for "acting vindictively" at constables of Railways Protection Special Force (RPSF) who had made "minuscule" monetary contributions for the family of another constable accused of killing an Assistant Commandant of the Force.

A Bench of Justice Rajiv Sahai Endlaw and Justice Amit Bansal said the decision of the Indian Railways "reflect a class divide between the officers and non-officers, with the officers having ganged up to punish a non-officer".

The case stems from an incident that took place on Febru-



rial media platforms. Many constables had posted comments on Facebook allegedly supporting the violent action but later disowned it. They were given varying punishments, ranging from reduction in pay scale to stoppage of annual increments.

Dismissal from service

Before the High Court, two constables – Ravi Kumar and Dharmpal – have challenged a more severe decision of the RPSF to dismiss them from service.

Both Mr. Kumar and Mr. Dharmpal had pursued a message on a WhatsApp group of constables of RPSF for rendering help or assis-

tance to the constable accused of killing the Assistant Commandant, contributed ₹100 and ₹10 respectively for the cause.

"Prima facie it appears that the punishment inflicted on the petitioners [Mr. Kumar and Mr. Dharmpal], of dismissal from service, is without any basis and uncalled for, and in any case disproportionate to the act," the court said.

The High Court said: "The respondent Indian Railways seems to be blind to the fact that even if the colleague of the petitioners had committed a wrong, he had a family behind him, and if the petitioners, as colleagues made a minuscule monetary contribution to aid the family or even the colleague in distress, the same cannot be a ground for inflicting harsh punishment of dismissal from service."

"The act of the petitioners of giving such minuscule financial aid to a colleague, even if guilty of a heinous offence, cannot convert petitioners as abettors in the said offence and does not show

the petitioners as supporting any illegality," the High Court said.

The court has asked the Indian Railways if it was "willing to reconsider its decision of dismissal of the petitioners from service".

"The respondent Indian Railways, by acting in such a manner, appears to be acting vindictively and trying to prevent the constable accused of killing an officer, a fair chance of defending the proceedings initiated against himself," the court added.

Other contributors

Advocate Sachin Chauhan, representing the two constables, contended that besides his clients, some other constables also made financial contributions to the same cause but have been meted with different punishments.

Taking note of this, the High Court directed the Indian Railways to inform how many persons made such financial contributions and what punishments have been meted out to them by the next date of hearing on May 31.

Man held for cheating patient's kin with promise of medicine

Accused took ₹3,000 from victim but didn't deliver drug

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 28-year-old man was arrested for allegedly cheating the relative of a patient who is suffering from black fungus infection by promising to home deliver the drug required for the treatment at ₹3,000, police said on Sunday.

Prasant Kumar Sharma, who hails from Ghaziabad, worked as a part-time driver and was arrested on Saturday after a resident of Shahdara reported to the police, they said.

In his complaint, the man alleged that his brother-in-law was admitted at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, where he was being treated for black fungus infection. On Friday, his doctor prescribed him a medicine named Lipsomal Amphopercin-B. Since the medicine was not available in the market, they contacted a number, which was being circulated on WhatsApp groups, for help.

When contacted, Sharma assured that he would provide them the prescribed medicine and demanded ₹3,000. After the money was transferred to his Paytm account, neither had he provided the required medicine nor did he return the money, he stated.



The accused in police custody. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Commissioner of Police (Shahdara)

When Sharma was interrogated, he revealed that he did not have any source of income during the pandemic and hence decided to cheat people with this modus operandi. He also disclosed that he had earlier posted his contact number on Facebook as well for plasma donation, the DCP said.

Two mobile phones were recovered from him. Further investigation is under way to assess the total number of victims and total amount received by him by fraudulent means.

AIIMS told to constitute medical board to look into pregnancy termination

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has asked the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here to constitute a Medical Board of Doctors to examine the advisability of aborting a 22-week-plus pregnancy of a woman whose twin foetus suffer from 'Dandy Walker Malformation', a rare congenital brain abnormality.

Justice Rekha Palli asked AIIMS Medical Board to formulate a report on the feasibility

of the woman undergoing a medical termination of her pregnancy keeping in view of the fact that the pregnancy has already completed more than 22 weeks.

In India, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act stipulates a ceiling of 20 weeks, for termination of pregnancy, beyond which abortion of a foetus is statutorily impermissible.

The woman, along with her husband, had informed the High Court that on a med-

Police constable among four held for robbery attempt

They tried to steal ₹2 lakh from a businessman; another policeman posted in Shahdara district on the run

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two men, including a Delhi Police constable, have been arrested while two juveniles apprehended in connection with a robbery attempt with a businessman in north Delhi's Wazirabad, police said on Sunday.

The accused, Jatin who is posted as a constable in Timarpur police station, was arrested while his associate, constable Amit posted in Vivek Vihar police station of

Shahdara district is absconding, they said.

The police said that constable Jatin was arrested following a raid after arrested accused Naresh and the two juveniles disclosed about the involvement of the two policemen in the incident.

The incident took place on May 12, when the man was returning home on his four-wheeler after closing his shop. He was also carrying ₹2 lakh with him. When he reached near Wazirabad, the group. As he approached to check on them, fearing police, the suspects fled the

spot on their respective vehicles leaving a scooter at the spot, a senior police officer said.

When the victim was asked to give a complaint, he was reluctant but after taking the scooter into custody, police took sou moto cognizance and registered an FIR and an investigation was undertaken, he said.

Using the registration number of the seized scooter and technical surveillance, one of the accused, identi-

fied as Naresh (38), was arrested from Majnu ka Tila and two juveniles were also apprehended in the case.

Accused Naresh was previously involved in several cases including that of theft and robbery. "The accused disclosed names of the two policemen who were also involved in the incident and said the constables were part of the conspiracy and had shared information about the victim with them," the officer said.

Timings DELHI		
MONDAY, MAY 24	RISE 05:27	SET 19:11
	RISE 16:52	SET 03:45
TUESDAY, MAY 25		
	RISE 05:26	SET 19:11
	RISE 18:02	SET 04:24
WEDNESDAY, MAY 26		
	RISE 05:26	SET 19:12
	RISE 19:15	SET 05:08

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	34	22
Safdarjung	34	22
Palam	34	23

Delhi Palam Today
38°C Rise in day temperature. Dry weather with mainly sunny sky expected. Day would turn hot.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
39°C Dry weather would continue. Moderate warm winds during day with mainly sunny sky likely.

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Lok Nayak records 15 new cases of black fungus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI
The Delhi government-run Lok Nayak Hospital reported 15 more cases of black fungus in a day, taking its tally to 36, an official said on Sunday.

Of the 36 cases, 30 people are COVID positive, LNJP Hospital's medical director Suresh Kumar said. Mucormycosis or black fungus is more common among people whose immunity has weakened due to COVID, diabetes, kidney disease, liver or cardiac disorders, age-related issues, or those on medication for auto-immune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis.

CM Kejriwal extends lockdown till May 31

He says govt. may consider phased unlock if cases remain low, preparations on to combat possible 3rd wave

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday announced the extension lockdown in the Capital till May 31. He said the government would consider a phased unlock from May 31 if the number of cases continues to remain low as they have been over the past week.

This is the fifth extension of the lockdown that began in the Capital on April 19.

"We are extending the lockdown by one more week and have taken the opinions of several sections of society into consideration. We may lose the gains we have achieved in the past one month if we unlock right now and it needs to continue for another week. If the cases continue to decline at the same speed in the following week, then we will start the



A woman sells fruits while shops remain closed at Azadpur Mandi in the city on Sunday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

unlock process from May 31," Mr. Kejriwal said.

He added that Delhi was the first State to announce a lockdown on April 19 at the start of the second wave. He said at that time, the government did not know how long the new wave would last as the positivity rate reached 36% in April.

However, in the last 24 hours, the infection rate has

fallen below 2.5%, the Chief Minister said, adding: "We have seen an improvement in the COVID-19 situation. I will not say that we have won the battle. There is still a lot left to be won over. But now it seems that we are gaining control over the situation and the spread of the virus has decreased rapidly." Thanking people for fighting the virus together, Mr. Kejriwal said:

We are preparing for a large vaccination programme but we need supplies. We are willing to spend any amount on buying vaccines from companies to protect Delhiites... ■ ARVIND KEJRIWAL
Chief Minister

"We have fought this together – the Central Government, the Supreme Court, Delhi High Court – all of them came together and the problem of oxygen was resolved. We now have a problem – shortage of vaccine – and we will come together and overcome this difficulty as well."

The Chief Minister said the top priority of the Delhi government right now is to vaccinate Delhiites.

"We are preparing for a

large vaccination programme but need supplies. We are willing to spend any amount on buying vaccines from companies to protect Delhiites. We are in touch with the Centre as well as vaccine companies in India and abroad to ensure that the Capital gets a steady supply at the earliest," Mr. Kejriwal said.

For combating the third wave, he said, the government is also deciding on the required number of beds, including the ones in ICU, and oxygen supply. He said the government is also checking the viability of either buying oxygen tankers or creating oxygen storage tanks.

The Chief Minister appealed to people to continue to adhere to the lockdown rules, maintaining strict discipline and other COVID-19 protocols.

Lockdown in Haryana extended till May end

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GURUGRAM

The Haryana government on Sunday extended lockdown for the third straight week till May 31.

Restrictions in shops

The standalone shops and the ones in marketplaces are now allowed to open with certain restrictions, but shopping malls will be allowed to open as per the odd-even formula.

In a sharp decline in daily fresh cases during the lockdown, the State recorded 5,021 new cases on May 22 against 13,588 on May 2 when the government first announced a week-long lockdown from May 3-10.

The recovery rate has also improved from 79% to 92.45%. However, there is a slight increase in the death rate which has gone up from 0.87% on May 2 to 1.01% on May 22. As per the latest report, the positivity rate in the state is 9.06%.

New cases below 2,000 mark for first time since March 31

Deaths recorded below 200; currently 27,610 active cases in city

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

For the first time since March 31, the number of new COVID cases in the Capital came down below the 2,000 mark with 1,649 cases being recorded on Sunday.

It was also for the second day in a row that the number of deaths stayed below the 200 mark with the city witnessing 189 deaths in 24 hours. The health bulletin said 68,043 tests had been conducted with a positivity rate of 2.42%. There are cur-

rently 27,610 active cases, of which 15,844 are in home isolation.

On Saturday, there were 31,308 active cases, of which 18,060 were under home isolation.

The decrease in the number of cases happened gradually over the past week with Delhi recording 2,260 cases on Saturday, 3,009 on Friday, 3,231 on Thursday and 3,846 on Wednesday.

The number of deaths has also been falling steadily with 182 on Saturday, 252 on

Friday, 232 on Thursday and 235 on Wednesday.

The number of cumulative cases now stands at 14,16,868 with 23,202 deaths and 13,66,065 recoveries.

The health bulletin added in 24 hours, 64,319 beneficiaries were vaccinated, of which 44,752 had received their first dose.

The government on Friday had announced that due to shortage of vaccines, the drive for those in the 18-44 age group would stop temporarily from May 24.

Not in plain sight



Motorists drive in hazy weather conditions in north Delhi's Jahangirpuri on Sunday morning. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



Health workers attending to patients at the CWG Covid Care Centre in Delhi; (below) COVID-19 testing in progress. ■ R.V. MOORTHY AND SHIV KUMAR PUSHKARAKAR

The storm and the aftermath

Fatigue, brain fog and vision issues... post-COVID-19 recovery has been traumatic for several patients

an important part in her recovery path.

"Doctors were very helpful and available 24x7 on-call despite being overly stressed themselves. They were clear about the medication and care. As both my husband and daughter were infected during the same time, we were able to take care of each other. Our local medical shop was extremely helpful and ensured the availability of medicines that were not easily available at that time," said Ms. Prasad.

Ms. Prasad further added: "My experience during this period regarding supplies was positive as there was no shortage of

any essential item. Also, the surge largely diminished the stigma that was associated with COVID-19 and people around are helpful and empathetic."

Fruits-rich diet

D.K. Das, a senior consultant orthopaedic and joint replacement surgeon, empathised with the patients. "The recovery process is painful and once the recovery has been made many patients have complained of problems like fatigue, neurological and respiratory symptoms. Other symptoms are residual loss of smell and taste, dizziness, lack of concentration, chest pain, and shortness of breath."

He advises a balanced diet. "Patients should follow a healthy and balanced diet at regular intervals, consuming fruits, vegetables, wholegrain, nuts and animal source food to ensure maximum intake of amino acids, vitamin C, vitamin D, vitamin A and vitamin E to boost up their immune system. Patients are advised to maintain an adequate intake of water, sufficient sleep, meditation and diversion of mind towards some constructive or recreational work that causes the health hormones to activate the physiological system, thereby boosting the immune system and fighting against the residual virus in the body," explained Dr. Das.

For East Delhi resident Shalini Prasad, however, the recovery was a quick one, as the infection was



COVID patients forced to fend for themselves: HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Absence of medical resources forced COVID-19 patients to fend for themselves and look for oxygen concentrator as an alternative to liquid medical oxygen (LMO) and even procure the device from overseas amid short supply, the Delhi High Court

said.

The court made the observation while declaring as "unconstitutional" the Centre's decision to impose Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) on oxygen concentrators which are imported by individuals or received as gifts for personal use.

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REGIONAL APPOINTMENTS

KALAM INSTITUTE OF HEALTH TECHNOLOGY (KIHT)
IMPORTANT UPDATE
KIHT will be conducting Online interviews for various positions of consultants in KIHT and its associate organizations. Corresponding job descriptions are available on website www.kiht.in

KERALA INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT FUND BOARD (KIIFB)
(A Statutory Body under Finance Department, Government of Kerala)
GM-ESG/1050/2021/KIIFB, Dated: 04/05/2021
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For further details please visit: www.etenders.kerala.gov.in
Tender ID number: 2021_KIIFB_422385_1
Anje Julia Thomas
Joint Fund Manager

Tension grips Hisar ahead of demonstration by farmers

They are protesting against the police action on them during CM's visit last week

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

Tension gripped Hisar ahead of the call for demonstration by the farm unions on Monday in protest against the police action on the agitating farmers a week ago.

The unions claimed that hundreds of farmers from across the State were likely to assemble at Krantimati Park in the district seeking withdrawal of the case against the farmers.

All-India Kisan Sabha (Haryana) president, Phool Singh Sheokand said that farmers from four districts falling under the Hisar police range - Hisar, Jind, Sirsa and Fatehabad - were primarily expected to assemble in large numbers along with those from other districts as

C Administration held talks with farmer leaders to call it off but they refused

PRIYANKA SONI
Deputy Commissioner, Hisar

well.

"Despite reaching an understanding with the farmer leaders to not to register a case in connection with the clash between the farmers and the police during Chief Minister Manohar Lal visit to Hisar on May 16, the district administration went back on its words to book around 350 farmers, including 50 named, for attempt to murder. The farmers have now decided to assemble at Hisar with the demand to withdraw the case and seek action against the erring police

officers," said Mr. Sheokand. Deputy Commissioner, Hisar, Priyanka Soni told *The Hindu* that the administration held talks with the farmer leaders immediately after they received their representation on May 21 regarding the demonstration and requested them to call it off. "We held talks with 15-20 leaders and assured to look into their demands. We requested them to withdraw the agitation in view of the Covid situation and lockdown, but they refused," said Ms. Soni.

She said the Divisional Commissioner office also tried to engage with Bharatiya Kisan Union (Charuni) president Gurnam Singh Charuni, but no one turned up for the meeting yesterday (May 22).

BKU (Charuni) spokesperson Rakesh Bains said the administration must book Chief Minister Manohar Lal and others for violating the Covid norms at the inauguration of the hospital and the policemen for pelting stones at the farmers.

"We are firm on holding the demonstration tomorrow (on Monday). All prominent farmer leaders from Haryana will be present," said Mr. Bains.

'Non-cooperation'

Comrade Suresh Kumar, Haryana vice-president, Centre of Indian Trade Unions, said more than a dozen villages in the district had launched "non-cooperation" movement with the call to boycott the lockdown in the aftermath of the police action.

Ready for probe, says U.P. Education Minister

Controversy over his brother's recruitment as assistant professor under EWS quota

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

A controversy broke out in Uttar Pradesh after the State's Education Minister's brother was appointed as an assistant professor in a university in Siddhartnagar district under the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quota.

While the university maintained that the recruitment was based on merit, the Minister said he was ready for a probe in the matter.

Arun Kumar, the brother of Satish Chandra Dwivedi, Minister of State (independent charge) Basic Education, was appointed by the Siddharth University, a State university.

In a State where caste politics reigns supreme, the Minister was left wanting for a clarification after it came to light that his brother had been appointed under the EWS quota.

Vice-Chancellor (V-C) Su-

rendra Dubey said the recruitment was valid and done through an objective process.

After advertisement was published for the post of assistant professor under the EWS category in the Psychology department, Arun Kumar was among the ten candidates who cleared the screening on the basis of their academic performance, said Mr. Dubey. Mr. Kumar secured a API score of 80 out of 100 and stood at second rank, added Mr. Dubey.

Following an interview by a panel of experts, Mr. Kumar was adjudged number one on the merit list, said the V-C. "Video recording of the interview was conducted," he told *The Hindu*. Asked about the EWS quota, Mr. Dubey said as per the rules it was issued by the district administration but if a "competent authority asks for it, we will get it probed."

"If found to be wrong, the appointment will be cancelled," he said.

Before applying at Siddharth University, Mr. Kumar had last July resigned after serving two years in the Banasthali Vidyapeeth in Jaipur.

Responding to the questions over his brother's appointment, Mr. Dwivedi said it was a matter of a candidate applying for a job and a university appointing him through a laid down procedure.

'No intervention'

"There is no intervention by me in this matter. Nor do I want to say anything. It is misfortune that he is my brother. If anyone has an objection, he can get it probed," Mr. Dwivedi told reporters in Sonbhadra.

He stressed that his "brother has a separate identity."

"Now if you are wondering, I am an MLA and Minis-

ter, how come my brother is an EWS. If there is a state head or national head of a (television news) channel with a package of ₹35 crore, does his brother also get rights over the income," the Minister asked to push his point.

Mr. Dubey said Arun Kumar did not mention the surname Dwivedi in any of his documents.

The Minister did not make any recommendation, directly or indirectly, at any stage for the appointment, the V-C said.

Akhilesh Yadav, then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, laid the foundation stone of the university on October 30, 2013 and it was formally notified in June 17, 2015.

Social activist Nutan Thakur wrote to Governor Anandiben Patel demanding a probe into the matter claiming the appointment was suspicious.

Two die while cleaning tank in Tripura

SYED SAJJAD ALI
AGARTALA

In a shocking incident, two labourers died due to suffocation after inhaling toxic gases at a house in Udaipur town of Gomati district in south Tripura on Sunday. The house owner had engaged them to clean the water tank and a mishap occurred when they entered deep below the reservoir.

Fire brigade called

The fire brigade was called in when house members did not hear from cleaning labourers for a considerable time. They were found unconscious and were rushed to the hospital where doctors declared them brought dead.

The deceased labourers have been identified as Haradhan Chakraborty and Jahangir Hussein. Both were residents of the area.

Virus fear



Empty streets during the lockdown in Srinagar on Sunday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Five of family murdered in U.P.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AYODHYA

All five members of a family, including three children, all below 10 years of age, were killed in a village near here with the murderers slitting open their throats in their sleep, police said on Sunday. The gruesome murders,

in which a girl child too was done to death, were carried out in Khanpur village under the Inayatnagar police station of the district on Saturday night over a property dispute, Ayodhya's Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Shailesh Pandey said.

The police managed to arrest all four of them within 15 hours of the killings, he added.

The SSP identified the vic-

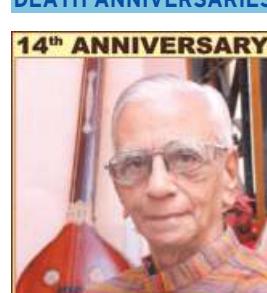
OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

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Healing touch through melody

Assam folk singer helps lift spirits of COVID-19 patients

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

A folk singer based in southern Assam's Silchar has literally become music to the ears of those who have caught the novel coronavirus.

No one responded initially when Bikramjit Kar, who prefers to be called Bikramjit Baulia because of his obsession with the songs of the Bauls or the mystic minstrels of Bengal, took to social media six days ago offering COVID-19 patients uplifting songs on call.

Some friends and acquaintances mocked his "publicity stunt". But a call on the fourth day for a popular folk number made him feel he was on the right track.

"I have since sung a variety of songs to about 250 people recovering from the infection. I have also had to deviate from an array of Bengali folk songs to Hindi songs for some people in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Pune

Bikramjit Baulia. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and elsewhere in India," Mr. Baulia told *The Hindu* on Sunday.

Request from non-Bengali people has made him brush up on his Hindi with most callers asking for Bollywood film songs of Kishore Kumar and Mohammed Rafi.

Mental health

Mr. Baulia, 33, believes mental health is as important as medicines in the fight against COVID-19.

"I have come across people who lost the battle in the mind. So, I decided to offer musical therapy to keep the infected people in high spirits," he said.

The songs-on-call service is a musical spin to his 2020 initiative to encourage people to call each other up to maintain psychological intimacy while practising physical distancing.

"I have been performing on the stage since 2004, have participated in music reality shows, received awards and even performed in Bangladesh. But I have never felt as happy as I am now," Mr. Baulia said.

Virtually out of work due to the lockdown in 2020, he opened a small pharmacy six months ago. Unlike most others, he has been delivering medicines home to people infected with the virus. Last year, his NGO Aabeg (Emotion) had provided free food for 3,000 people.

He has earned praise from Forest Minister Parimal Suklabaidya, who tweeted: "Such healing touch through melody is an amazing experience and support towards the mental strength of COVID-19 positive patients."

FIR against Kamal Nath

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHOPAL (M.P.)

An FIR was registered against Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Kamal Nath on Sunday for allegedly creating panic over the pandemic through his remarks, a police officer said.

The case against him was registered based on a complaint lodged by Bhopal BJP district chief Sumeet Pachouri and two BJP MLA - Vishwas Sarang and Rameshwar Sharma - among others, he said.

In Arunachal, warlord eyes 'friendly' rival's space

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

The Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland or NSCN (I-M) is arguably the most organised and disciplined of the extremist groups - active or disbanded - in the Northeast.

But a maverick top gun of the outfit, known to offer his services for political kills, has been operating independently in sync with the NSCN (Khaplang-Yung Aung) to gain ground in southern Arunachal Pradesh, officials said.

Two years after the NSCN split into the Isak-Muivah and Khaplang groups in 1988, the latter ventured into the Changlang, Longding and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The NSCN (Khaplang) capitalised on the geographical proximity of these districts - they adjoin the Nagaland and Sagaing areas of Myanmar where the outfit is based - as well as tribal affinity to entrenched itself.

The Nocte and Wancho communities of Arunachal Pradesh share a cultural affinity with the Konyaks of Nagaland's Mon and Tuensang districts, once comprising the main fighting force of NSCN (K). The Tangsas, on the other hand, live on either side of the border separating Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar.

The NSCN (I-M) began penetrating southern Arunachal Pradesh about two decades ago as the NSCN (K) kept splitting into factions such as NSCN (Unification), NSCN (Reformation). These became bit players after Yung Aung (YA) took over the NSCN (I-M) following the death of its patriarch Shangnu Shangwang Khaplang died in June 2017.

The NSCN (K) factions and the southern Arunachal unit of NSCN (I-M) led by the self-styled major-general Rockwong Absalom Tangkhol had been fighting for territorial control. But the NSCN (K-YA) and Absalom struck a deal for peaceful co-existence, although they have not gone for joint operations," a security force officer said on condition of anonymity.

The factional clashes in Arunachal Pradesh ended by 2014 and both the I-M and K-YA have been taxying every village, house and shop in areas under their respective control.

Mutually beneficial

The understanding between the two groups has been mutually beneficial. While K-YA has dominance in Longding and has yielded some space to I-M in Changlang, the I-M enjoys more territorial control in Tirap.

According to Armed Forces officials, the NSCN (K-YA)'s activities on the Indian side have suffered after key leaders such as Khango Konyak, Nyemlang Konyak and Niki Sumi crossed over with at least 90 loyalists and joined the peace process with New Delhi.

Absalom and his band of 180-200 fighters have reportedly been taking advantage of the unwritten agreement as well as a weakening NSCN (K-YA) to cover more ground. Much of his activities do not have the sanction of the NSCN (I-M) leadership based at Hebron near Nagaland's commercial hub Dimapur, officials say.

"The NSCN (I-M) has been maintaining distance from him because of the NIA case against him," an official said.

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For & on behalf of President of India

IN BRIEF



Congress rebel Lathika Subash to join the NCP

KOTTAYAM After her unsuccessful bid to represent the Ettumanur Assembly segment as a Congress rebel, Lathika Subash, former president of the Kerala Mahila Congress, has decided to join the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). Confirming the move, Ms. Subash said a formal announcement would be made soon. She had announced her resignation from the Congress after she was denied a party ticket in the Ettumanur seat in the Assembly election.

Mangaluru doctor files complaint on video clip

MANGALURU A doctor, who went to a supermarket here without a mask and was booked by the police for violating COVID-19 norms, has filed a complaint against the shop owner for circulating the CCTV footage of his argument with the staff there. The video clip had gone viral. In the complaint, Dr. B. Srinivas Kakkilaya said the shop owner had illegally circulated the footage on social media, which led to defamatory statements and articles against him. PTI

'Tuber Man' wins India Biodiversity Award

THIRISUR Shaji N.M., fondly called 'Tuber Man of Kerala' has been awarded the India Biodiversity Award 2021 in the individual category of 'Conservation of domesticated species'. Mr. Shaji, who conserves a wide array of around 200 tuber crops, including greater yam, lesser yam, elephant foot yam, arrow root, colocasia, sweet potato, cassava and Chinese potato, at his farm in Wayanad, has received State awards seven times for his efforts.

No politics during pandemic: Sathesan

UDF to extend all support to Kerala govt. in its fight against COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader V.D. Sathesan on Sunday said politics would temporarily take a back seat in Kerala's arduous fight against the pandemic. The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) would throw its weight behind the struggle against the rising tide of infections, swelling hospitalisations and worrying death rate, Mr. Sathesan said. The Opposition would support the administration's efforts to fight the pandemic, he added.

The UDF would not oppose the government blindly. Instead, the Opposition would scrutinise the government's actions in minute detail and highlight anomalies, if any, he said, adding that it would serve as a corrective force. Mr. Sathesan held forth the concept of "creative opposition".

Political parties should cooperate for the common good. Mere politicking amid the raging pandemic would

only prompt the public to view politicians with cynicism and contempt, Mr. Sathesan said.

The Opposition would point out gaps in the government's pandemic response. The UDF would rally its supporters to bolster the community's efforts to fight the pandemic, he added.

The UDF would not oppose the government blindly. Instead, the Opposition would scrutinise the government's actions in minute detail and highlight anomalies, if any, he said, adding that it would serve as a corrective force. Mr. Sathesan held forth the concept of "creative opposition".

A UDF insider said the Op-



Coming together: V.D. Sathesan with KPCC chief Mullappally Ramachandran on Sunday. ■ S. MAHISHA

position was likely to entrust individual legislators with the close tracking of actions of respective departments. Its legal and political response to flawed policies, maladministration, instances of nepotism and fallacious actions would be immediate

and robust. The UDF would engage the government and the public in policy debates and flag official corruption, if any. The Opposition legislators would actively participate in various Assembly oversight committees and

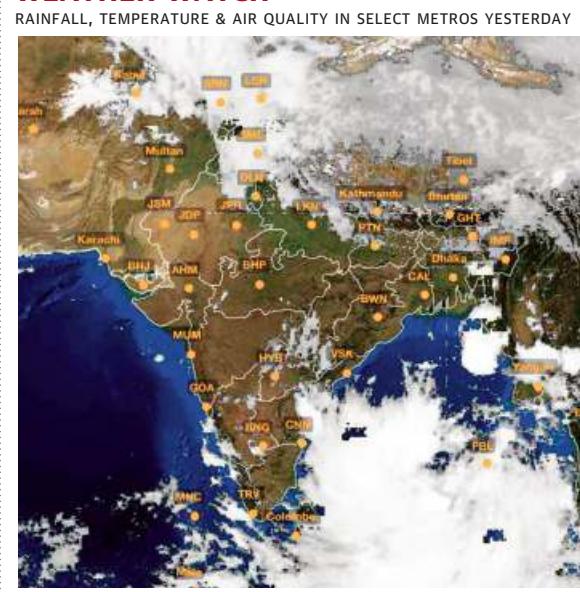
use the Right to Information (RTI) Act and other sources to mine for information relevant to the public, he said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sathesan was also in consultation with UDF MLAs to outline a floor strategy for the 15th Legislative Assembly, which will be convening for its inaugural session on Monday.

Mr. Sathesan called on All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary K.C. Venugopal at his residence. He also called on UDF convener M.M. Hassan, Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president Mullappally Ramachandran and former KPCC president V.M. Sudheeran, and sought their support.

Former Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala urged Congress workers to rally behind Mr. Sathesan.

WEATHER WATCH



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

Forecast for Monday: Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty wind very likely at isolated places over Jharkhand and Kerala and with lightning at isolated places over Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	38.1	28	Kozhikode	—	33...	25.4
Ahmedabad	—	36.3	26.9	Kurnool	0.8	37...	24.6
Aizawl	—	32.3	18.4	Lucknow	—	37...	25.2
Allahabad	—	36.3	26.9	Madurai	—	37...	25.4
Bengaluru	7.4	30.2	20.5	Mangaluru	0.3	32...	23.8
Bhopal	—	38.6	24.8	Mumbai	0.3	33...	27.8
Bhubaneswar	—	36.8	24.4	Mysuru	—	33...	21.3
Chandigarh	—	33.8	23.6	New Delhi	—	33.4	22.6
Chennai	—	34.6	27.9	Patna	—	37.8	26.4
Coimbatore	2	33	24.1	Port Blair	—	23...	24.7
Dehradun	—	34	20.7	Puducherry	—	34.6...	24.3
Gangtok	—	25.4	17.3	Pune	1.4	37...	24.2
Goa	—	33.6	27.2	Raipur	—	38.7...	28
Guwahati	—	37	26.8	Ranchi	—	34.7...	23.6
Hubballi	—	31	22	Shillong	—	26	17.1
Hyderabad	39.6	26.7	17	Shimla	—	23.7...	14.7
Imphal	—	34.7	20.5	Srinagar	2.8	17.3...	11.7
Jaipur	—	30.2	20.5	Thiruvananthapuram	74	30...	23.6
Kochi	23	31.8	24.6	Tiruchi	—	37.7...	25.8
Kohima	—	26.5	14.8	Vijayawada	—	—	—
Kolkata	—	36.4	29.2	Visakhapatnam	—	37.8...	22.8

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	16	43	23	—	62	80
Bengaluru	16	59	36	—	31	49
Chennai	16	13	30	333	—	—
Delhi	.8	26	43	321	—	—
Hyderabad	.9	19	17	56	89	—
Kolkata	10	18	21	69	67	—
Lucknow	.8	112	44	68	88	—
Mumbai	.7	12	18	58	131	—
Pune	.7	16	42	—	92	—
Visakhapatnam	13	.51	31	64	.79	—

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Bhawali, Rajasthan recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 342 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Ernakulam, Kerala recorded a healthy AQI score of 27

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

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

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

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

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

Film on Auroville's afforestation project to be screened in Paris

Ever Slow Green will be screened at the ChangeNow summit

S. PRASAD
VILLUPURAM

Aurovillian Christoph Pohl's documentary *Ever Slow Green*, which tells the story of Auroville's unique afforestation project that took root on an eroded desert plateau at Villupuram district in Tamil Nadu, has been officially selected for screening at the prestigious ChangeNow summit in Paris.

It will be screened along with four specially selected films, including David Attenborough's *Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet*, at the ChangeNow film festival in the summit from May 27 to 29.

"I am excited and proud that my film will be screening alongside Sir David At-

tenborough's new documentary, *Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet*. The documentary tells the story of Auroville's 50-year-old forest through some of the diverse characters who have dedicated their lives to bringing it to fruition," Mr. Pohl said.

The project was supported by Auroville and funded by the 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2018. The documentary premiered at the Auroville Film Festival 2020.

The documentary is available online on streaming platforms like iTunes/Apple TV, Google Play and Cinemarepreneur (a new platform for independent Indian films).

Chaos again at entry points in Telangana

Police reject e-passes issued by A.P.

ABHINAY DESHPANDE
HYDERABAD

As the Telangana police refused to honour the e-passes issued by their Andhra Pradesh counterparts, hundreds of vehicles were queued up near the Pullur toll gate on the border in Jogulambha-Gadwal district here on Sunday.

Similar scenes were witnessed in Suryapet district. Two other checkposts were also closed, but traffic into the State was allowed from Kodad. Suryapet Superintendent of Police R. Bhaskaran said they were allowing only vehicles with valid e-passes to enter Telangana.

The police said e-passes issued by the A.P. police were not valid in Telangana. As a result, several ambulances carrying COVID-19

patients were also stuck in the traffic jam. A few metres towards Kurnool, things were normal as the A.P. police allowed vehicles with e-passes issued by the Telangana police.

As the learning landscape in India evolves, we must keep in mind that our goal is to prepare students for life and its challenges

■ TARA SINGH VACHANI

In my 20s, I remember thinking – and hearing from my peers – about how we would utilise our learnings from the university in real life. Or rather, are we learning things that can be used in the real world? Fast forward to today, and the thought process does not seem to have changed much. But the world has.

Today's 20 year olds are entering a world that is evolving digitally every second and is also plagued by controversial issues such as climate change, terrorism, political volatility, and discrimination, to name a few. What are we doing to prepare our youth to thrive in such times? How can we do so?

Face real-word problems
A foundation in holistic learning can be useful in higher education when individuals are beginning to carve their career and contemplate a path for themselves. Such a learning model emphasises learning practical values to solve and survive complex pro-



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blems, along with academic knowledge.

A holistic learning model emphasises learning practical values to solve and survive complex problems, along with academic knowledge

A curriculum on a par with global standards, along with the right amount of hands-on practical training as well as social learning projects, is the need of the hour.

The Indian government has addressed one component of such progressive education through the New Education Policy 2020.

Some key reforms that affect the way education is viewed are: the introduction of a 5+3+3+4 format, instead of the 10+2 system;

the merging of Science, Commerce and Arts into multidisciplinary subjects, giving students fluidity to study what interests them; focusing on soft skills development and the integration of vocational education.

Early start
Soft skills development needs a comprehensive lens and the inculcation should start at school by partnering with non-government organisations that are doing some sterling work in these areas.

Youngsters need to be taught humanistic skills and values such as respect, patience, and kindness, among others.

It is vital to develop foundational practices that

cultivate compassion, build resilience, and address the issues of our time through a systematic values-based approach.

As the learning landscape in India evolves, we must keep in mind our goal: to prepare students for life and its challenges. To do so, our education must look and feel more like the outside world – full of divergent voices, and complexities but with the tools to untangle them. If we foresee our youth as global leaders and citizens of tomorrow, we must begin the groundwork today. What better place to start than their classrooms?

The writer is Managing Trustee, Max India Foundation and SEE Learning India

SCHOLARSHIPS

COVID Crisis Support Scholarship Programme

This programme aims to support children with little/no financial support for further education, owing to a COVID-19-led crisis in their family.

ELIGIBILITY: Open to Indian students from Class I to Graduation. Those who have been through the loss of parent(s) since January



Guarantor beware

Entrepreneurs signing guarantee will have to be certain that the business will not flounder

The Supreme Court judgment upholding creditors' right to proceed against personal guarantors to loans provided by them to a corporate borrower helps lift the uncertainty over the extent to which banks and other financial lenders can pursue not only the corporate debtor but also the individuals who had furnished personal guarantees to enable the flow of credit to the company they had stood surety for. This ought to be of significant consequence to the financial system, already under a mountain of bad loans, by helping expedite the resolution of such stressed assets. The two-judge Bench was considering a clutch of petitions challenging the government's 2019 notification that made personal guarantors a separate category of individuals who could be proceeded against under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code as part of the insolvency proceedings initiated by lenders against defaulting corporate entities. In dismissing the petitions, the judges made clear that the government was right in "carving out personal guarantors as a separate species of individuals", given the "intimate connection between such individuals and corporate entities to whom they stood guarantee". Banks now stand a real chance of recovering substantially more from the resolution of a stressed corporate entity, as in most cases it has been the relatively affluent promoters who have been standing as individual personal guarantors for the loans extended to the companies they promoted.

Several corporate leaders are set to be impacted. The promoters of many defaulting corporates, which are facing action under the IBC, had furnished guarantees for thousands of crores in loans availed by the companies they ran. The State Bank of India alone had submitted in the apex court that it had served demand notices aggregating to more than ₹39,000 crore to individuals who had signed as guarantors for credit provided to corporate entities. The judges also cleared the air over another issue that is bound to strengthen the creditors' positions in all ongoing, future and even completed insolvency proceedings. The Bench ruled that the approval of a resolution plan for the corporate debtor does not extinguish the personal guarantor's liability, which it said "arises out of an independent contract". Lenders can now proceed against the guarantors to enhance recovery given that most banks agree to 'haircuts' when negotiating a resolution plan with a new promoter for the defaulting company. The only wrinkle here is that once the resolution plan becomes legally binding, the guarantor loses the recourse to remedy from the borrower when the creditor invokes the personal guarantee. Entrepreneurs will now have to think twice before signing a personal guarantee unless they can be very certain that the business they found will not flounder.

Another challenge

The rise in mucormycosis cases underlines the need for diabetics to get vaccination

The second wave of the pandemic has thrown up another serious challenge. Besides, in just about three months, the number of daily cases touching 4.14 lakh on May 6 and cumulative cases crossing 15 million, mortality reaching an all-time peak of 4,529 on May 18 and the total number of deaths reaching nearly 1.5 lakh, there is now a growing number of mucormycosis cases being reported in COVID-19 patients. A concerned Health Ministry has now asked all States to classify mucormycosis, a fungal infection, as a notifiable disease under the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897; a few States have complied. As a notifiable disease, every suspected and confirmed case is to be reported to the State Health Department. While the infection is caused by a group of moulds called mucormycetes, which are commonly found in the environment, the fungi are largely harmless under normal circumstances. But COVID-19 patients with uncontrolled diabetes who are on steroid therapy face a higher infection risk. Breathing in the fungi spores can cause an infection in the lungs or sinuses which can spread. Even when blood sugar is under control, indiscriminate steroid use can cause an increase in blood sugar levels, making such patients more susceptible to mucormycosis infection.

Patients with severe COVID-19 disease tend to develop a systemic inflammatory response leading to lung injury and multisystem organ dysfunction. While WHO "strongly recommends" that corticosteroids such as dexamethasone be used in treating patients with severe and critical COVID-19, they should not be used in non-severe COVID-19 patients. The absence of any new or repurposed drugs to effectively treat COVID-19 patients and the lack of clear guidelines in using certain drugs have led to indiscriminate drug use, including steroids. The rise in mucormycosis infection cases should be a wake-up call for COVID-19 patients and medical practitioners to use steroids judiciously for a limited period and in the right dosage, especially in diabetic patients; self-medication with steroids should be avoided at any cost. Most importantly, in COVID-19 patients with diabetes, controlling blood sugar levels using insulin can help prevent mucormycosis infection. While the availability of Amphotericin-B to treat mucormycosis was limited till recently, five manufacturers in India are in the process of ramping up production. Five more companies have also been licensed to augment supplies. Since the infection presents itself with typical symptoms, timely diagnosis is easy. The infection can be cured without even surgery if detected early. This is one more reason why people, particularly those with diabetes, should get vaccinated soon. Since complete vaccination prevents severe disease, diabetics will not need steroids, and hence will not suffer from mucormycosis.

Recalibrate growth, reprioritise expenditures

Protecting total expenditures at the budgeted level and mass vaccination are important in India's pandemic situation



C. RANGARAJAN &
D.K. SRIVASTAVA

The second wave of COVID-19 currently sweeping India is forcing States into successive lockdowns, in turn eroding economic activities. The growth projections of different national and international agencies and the fiscal projections of Centre's 2021-22 Budget require recalibration.

COVID-19-induced erosion

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and the Ministry of Finance's Economic Survey had forecast real GDP growth for 2021-22 at 12.5%, 10.5%, and 11.0%, respectively. Moody's has recently projected India's GDP growth in 2021-22 at 9.3% (<https://bit.ly/3flkW8s>). This is close to the benchmark growth rate of 8.7% which would keep India's GDP at 2011-12 prices at the same level as in 2019-20. This level of growth may be achieved based on the assumption that the economy normalises in the second half of the fiscal year. If the lockdowns come to an end earlier, the growth rate may be higher, but that is perhaps unlikely.

The 2019-20 real GDP was ₹145.7-lakh crore at 2011-12 prices. It fell to ₹134.1-lakh crore in 2020-21, implying a contraction of minus 8.0%. If even the growth rate of 8.7% for 2021-22 comes under challenge because of a prolonged lockdown, not only will India see a fall in the real GDP in the current year as compared to 2019-20 level

but the nominal GDP numbers assumed in the Budget will also be belied adversely affecting the fiscal aggregates in the Centre's 2021-22 Budget. At 8.7% real growth, the nominal GDP growth would be close to 13.5%, assuming an inflation rate of 4.5%. This would be lower than the nominal growth of 14.4% assumed in the Union Budget. At 13.5% growth, the estimated GDP for 2021-22 is ₹222.4-lakh crore at current prices. This will lead to a lowering of tax and non-tax revenues and an increase in the fiscal deficit as compared to the budgeted magnitudes.

Budget magnitudes

The budgeted gross and net tax revenues for 2021-22 were ₹22.2-lakh crore and ₹15.4-lakh crore, respectively. The assumed buoyancy for the Centre's gross tax revenues (GTR) was 1.2. Even if this buoyancy is achieved, the lower nominal GDP growth would imply a GTR growth of 15.7% as compared to the budgeted growth of 16.7%. If, however, the buoyancy of 1.2 proves optimistic and instead a buoyancy of 0.9, which is the average buoyancy of the five years preceding the COVID-19 year, is applied, the nominal growth of GTR would be 12.2%. This would lead to the Centre's GTR of about ₹21.3-lakh crore. The corresponding shortfall in the Centre's net tax revenues is estimated to be about ₹0.6 lakh crore.

The budgeted magnitudes for non-tax revenues and non-debt capital receipts at ₹2.4-lakh crore and ₹1.9-lakh crore, respectively, may also prove to be optimistic. In these cases, the budgeted growth rates were 15.4% and 304.3%, respectively. The excessively high growth for the non-debt capital receipts was premised on imple-



menting an ambitious asset monetisation and disinvestment programme. The COVID-19 disturbed year may not permit any of this. The budgeted growth in non-tax revenues is largely dependent on an assumed growth of 60% in revenues from communication services and of 44.1% in dividends and profits from non-departmental undertakings. We consider that a shortfall of ₹1.5-lakh crore in non-tax revenues and non-debt capital receipts together may not be ruled out. Together with the tax revenue shortfall of nearly 0.6 lakh crore, the total shortfall on the receipts side may be about ₹2.1-lakh crore.

Two factors will affect the fiscal deficit estimate of 6.76% of GDP in 2021-22. First, there would be a change in the budgeted nominal GDP growth. Second, there would be a shortfall in the receipts from tax, non-tax and non-debt sources. The budgeted magnitude of fiscal deficit is ₹15.06-lakh crore. Together, these two factors may lead to a slippage in fiscal deficit which may be close to 7.7% of GDP in 2021-22 if total expenditures are kept at the budgeted levels. This would call for revising the fiscal road map again. Protecting total expenditures at the budgeted level

is, however, important given the need to support the economy in these challenging times. There is a case for reprioritising these expenditures.

Other steps, vaccination

The second wave of the novel coronavirus has put a spotlight on India's serious under-capacity in health infrastructure. Given the likelihood of a third COVID-19 wave, there is an urgent need to ramp up health and related infrastructure by enhancing the number of hospitals and hospital beds, sources of oxygen supplies, and the manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines and drugs. The Centre's 2021-22 Budget has provided for ₹71,269 crore for the Department of Health and Family Welfare. This included a budgeted capital expenditure of ₹2,508.7 crore. In contrast, in 2020-21, the total health and family welfare expenditure (RE) was ₹78,866 crore, implying a fall of ₹7,597 crore in 2021-22. In the budgeted capital expenditure for health also, there was a fall of ₹1,724.8 crore as compared to the RE of 2020-21 at ₹4,233.5 crore. Clearly, these magnitudes are quite inadequate for an economy challenged by COVID-19 for two successive years. The allocation for the health sector should be increased substantially by re-prioritising expenditures.

Construction activities within the health sector will have high multipliers. There may also be higher expenditure on inducting a larger workforce of doctors, nurses and paramedics and other hospital-related administrative staff. Furthermore, strong support is needed for the vulnerable groups of the society including migrant labour and the rural and urban unemployed population.

Speedy and larger vaccination coverage of the vulnerable population is key to minimising economic damage.

The Centre's Budget had allocated ₹35,000 crore for vaccination as shown in the Budget for the Department of Finance (demand for grant number 40) as an amount to be transferred to the States. India's population aged 12 years and above is 109 crore. Total vaccination doses (at two doses per person) adds to 218 crore. At an average price of ₹300 per dose, this would require an amount of ₹65,108 crore. This is a rough estimate.

The cost to the government would be less if the coverage is less than full. COVID-19 vaccination is characterised by strong inter-State positive externalities, making it primarily the responsibility of the central government. The entire vaccination bill should be borne by the central government. Rather than having individual State governments floating global tenders for vaccines, if the central government is the single agency for vaccine procurement, the economies of scale and the Centre's bargaining power would keep the average vaccine price low. The total vaccination cost would go up if the unit cost goes up. The central government may transfer the vaccines rather than the money that it has budgeted for transfer. Some of the smaller States may find procuring vaccines through a global tender to be quite challenging.

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Deflating India's COVID black market boom

An independent vigilance system and an administrative machinery capable of affirmative outputs are solutions



JAYESH RANJAN & AMULYA ANIL

In the gloomy battle against the novel coronavirus pandemic, what has emerged as most reprehensible is the brazen attempt by profiteers in filling the gap following the desperation of many patients and families. With the second wave of infections and the rise in COVID-19 positive cases in India, the necessity for integral medicines, hospital beds and oxygen supplies has gone up incrementally. For example, we come across information about government helpline numbers being circulated widely. The Twitter handles of politicians and administrative executives often reiterate the dependability of these helplines. These helpline numbers ought to be not just 'ray of hope' delivery systems but also a clear demarcation between what is legal and officially authorised, and what is not.

Flourishing market
Remdesivir and tocilizumab have been the most sought after drugs ever since the pandemic set in. In July 2020 a racket of selling fake and spurious tocilizumab injections in Surat and Ahmedabad was

unearthed by the Gujarat Food and Drugs Control Administration. Almost a year later, things do not seem to have improved. Recently, the police in Ahmedabad arrested a few people for preparing fake remdesivir vials for sale using a mixture of glucose and salt and affixing them with fake brand labels. In Mumbai's drug black market, citizens have had to pay huge amounts ranging from ₹35,000 and ₹50,000 for remdesivir vials. In Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, a racket to market oxygen cylinders in the black market was uncovered after raids on a godown. The Haryana police have registered at least 21 FIRs in connection with the blackmarketing of many of these medical essentials.

The desperate need for vital medical supplies has forced many hapless citizens to pay more than the market price to procure these medicines. There are reports of many having been tricked into believing fire extinguishers to be oxygen cylinders and saline water bottles to be remdesivir vials after parting with huge sums of money. However, clamping down on these cases and the culprits is dependent on having an efficient multidimensional preventive model rather than a control mechanism that functions much after the damage has been already done.

India is in the middle of its second year in the battle against the COVID-19 virus and the persistent challenges many citizens face in



medical aid is a wake-up call to revisit the administrative mechanism and map its limitations. In India, the distribution of remdesivir in the States is mostly controlled by the local governments, while decisions about oxygen supplies to the States are predominantly decided by Union bodies. Yet, citizens have been approaching alien sources to procure medical supplies.

The pressures

A major reason behind why many are in the situation they are facing is because administrative organisations are being overwhelmed and helpline numbers inundated with calls and difficult to connect to. Even if citizens are fortunate enough to have their requests entered in records, they may not be able to procure the products they need due to the inadequacy of resources or probably not receiving a closure communication from helplines, which keeps them at a loose end without knowing where else to go and what else to do. This

inaccessibility, a redundant and long communication process flow, and a delay in rendering responses are what have affected the reliability of these helplines as far as people are concerned.

Any market, black or otherwise, is dynamic hemisphere which is consumer-driven. There is public demand for what the products these black markets or rackets have to offer and which is why they thrive. A patient and their attendants face challenges of resource availability and significant constraints of time within which they need a solution, resulting in tremendous mental pressures. Alleged hospital bed-booking scams, the unnecessary hoarding of COVID-19 essentials by the elite, and possible VIP culture practices have contributed to the erosion of trust. These elements have all combined to force the public to look elsewhere for sources beyond the probability of the government rendering them assistance.

Volunteers as a resource

Therefore, administrative mechanisms need to be expanded qualitatively and quantitatively. India is blessed with numerous volunteer organisations trying to tackle the various challenges of the pandemic. Unfortunately, in many instances, they do not enjoy governmental support. The state machinery needs to identify such groups, train them, optimise them and deploy them on a priority ba-

sis and ensure that there is no concentration of human resources in a single vertical. We need to operationalise technological knowledge in order to ease the communication processes which could reduce the burden on data entry operators and the management information systems to induce better responsive behaviour. We need an expert planning model which not only allocates the resources judiciously but also allows a follow-up of the entire process flow to ensure that there are no illegal deviations. In oversight, we need a strong, decentralised and independent vigilance system which promotes transparency in this desperate situation to ensure quality in the performance of administrative set-ups.

At the end of the day, what has been listed above ought to be matched with confidence-building mechanisms. It is only when the government's performance is high and the administrative machinery is capable of large-scale affirmative outputs that the public will not have to look for third party resources. And with no dependency subsisting on them, profiteering would not have a dimension and play its game.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

The COVID fight

No matter what we learn about COVID-19 transmission, said or done about it – touch, droplets, now aerosols, lockdowns, no lockouts, everything in between – the virus seems to be spreading effortlessly. Gaining whatever protection we can by masking, double masking now, is a given. Many western countries, now being clearly saved by rapid vaccination, will have no immediate interest in unravelling the missing science, if any. They have their priorities now. The guideline that the virus-laden aerosol can travel some 10 metres is not very useful. It gives the impression that there is no safety anywhere. Researching this can give us more protection options.

M. BALAKRISHNAN,
Bengaluru

'Variant' politics

Recently, Singapore is said to have summoned the Indian Ambassador over comments made in India that linked a variant of the COVID-19 virus with that nation. The Indian government has asked digital media to remove content promoting the tag 'Indian variant' from their platforms. Slowly, this is becoming a prestige issue. The probability of mutation increases with a rise in the number of cases. It also reflects the failure of countries in curbing the spread of pandemic. Lives can be saved when governments show this sort of proactiveness in the fight against the pandemic rather than focusing on 'naming' issues. Anyway, this can be legitimised if new variants are named the way cyclones are named.

M. KRANTHI KUMAR,
Warangal, Telangana

Sunderal Bahuguna

One of the definitive histories of the Chipko movement and its chief originators was eloquently penned by the distinguished historian, Ramachandra Guha, in his book, *The Unquiet Woods*. The success this tree-hugging movement achieved, although limited, was due to its communitarian orientation and inclusivity. However, the forces that were advocating mega projects such as Tehri dam eventually triumphed despite the best efforts of selfless activists like Sunderal Bahuguna, because our political leaders, irrespective of party affiliation, listened only to the forces that backed them. Leaders such as Bahuguna are often ignored while they live, praised when they achieve some fame and stature, but

their ideas on environmental protection are pointedly ignored by the political establishment. A case in point, which is also of contemporary relevance, is the article written by Pankaj Sekhsaria in *The Hindu* recently about the Great Nicobar development project. This undertaking, estimated to run into several hundred crores, is guaranteed to cause environmental destruction to the pristine marine ecosystem. In addition, it is highly likely that it will also seriously affect the nesting beaches of turtles. The "green panel", fully cognisant of these matters, nevertheless recommends the project be allowed to proceed by limiting the scope of the environmental assessment.

What transpired in Uttarakhand during the height of the "Chipko Andolan" was also similar to what is now projected to happen in the Great Nicobar. It is the same corrupt environmental destruction in a different locale brought forth by ignoring the severe consequences of such actions.

G. PARAMESWARAN,
Coimbatore

If there is one environmental movement since Independence which brought communities together at the grass-root level, there can be no doubt that it is the Chipko movement. Sunderal Bahuguna's passing has undoubtedly marked the end.

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
In the story titled "6 UNESCO heritage sites added in India" (May 20, 2021), the reference to Hiru Bengal megalithic site in Karnataka should be corrected to Hiru Benkal.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552663; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com



of idealism and inspiring activism. His message that the true worth of nature does not lie in the profits that accrued from its exploitation but that it is a life itself will continue to inspire.

The many benefits of an eco tax

Environmental fiscal reforms will reduce pollution and generate resources for financing the health sector



EDUARDO ARARAL & SURJITH KARTHIKEYAN

The Indian government announced a pandemic-related stimulus package in FY 2020-21 though there was large decline in tax revenue. The fiscal deficit for FY 2020-21 (revised estimates) is projected to be 9.5% of the GDP; for 2021-22, it is pegged at 6.8%. The focus is on maintaining fiscal discipline. In this peculiar scenario, sustained health financing in India remains a challenge.

Household spending on health
The World Health Organization (WHO) provides data on the percentage of the total population where the household expenditure on health was greater than 10% and 25% of the total household expenditure or income in India in 2011. This provides a clear picture of the status of spending on health by the rural and urban populations. As far as health expenditure above 10% is concerned, 17.33% of the population in India made out-of-pocket payments on health. The percentage was higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. Globally, the average was 12.67%, which means that 12.67% of the population spent more than 10% of their income (out of their pocket) on health. In Southeast Asia, 16% spent more than 10% of their household income on health. The Western Pacific region came second in the list of regions that saw a rate higher than the global average. Similarly, 3.9% of the population in India made more than 25% of out-of-pocket payments on health, with 4.34% in the rural areas.

The Economic Survey of India 2019-20 has outlined the fact that an increase in public spending from 1% to 2.5-3% of GDP, as envisaged in the National Health Policy of 2017, can decrease out-of-pocket expenditure from 65% to 30% of overall healthcare expenses. This is where the importance of alternate sources of health financing in India needs to be stressed. The COVID-19 pandemic has also forced countries all over the world to rethink climate change and



Men row a boat in the polluted waters of the Yamuna river in New Delhi. ■ AFP

the need for preservation of the environment. Fiscal reforms for managing the environment are important, and India has great potential for revenue generation in this aspect.

Fixing the eco tax rate

Environment regulation, in turn, may take several forms: command and control; economic planning/urban planning; environmental tax (eco tax)/subsidies; and cap and trade. India currently focuses majorly on the command-and-control approach in tackling pollution. The success of an eco tax in India would depend on its architecture, that is, how well it is planned and designed. It should be credible, transparent and predictable. Ideally, the eco tax rate ought to be equal to the marginal social cost arising from the negative externalities associated with the production, consumption or disposal of goods and services. This requires an evaluation of the damage to the environment based on scientific

assessments. This would include the adverse impacts on the health of people, climate change, etc. The eco tax rate may, thus, be fixed commensurate to the marginal social cost so evaluated. The Madras School of Economics had already undertaken extensive studies in this regard.

Environmental tax reforms generally involve three complementary activities: (a) eliminating existing subsidies and taxes that have a harmful impact on the environment; (b) restructuring existing taxes in an environmentally supportive manner; and (c) initiating new environmental taxes. Taxes can be designed either as revenue neutral or revenue augmenting. In case of revenue augmenting, the additional revenue can either be targeted towards the provision of environmental public goods or directed towards the overall revenue pool. In developing countries like India, the revenue can be used to a greater extent for the provision of environmental public goods and addressing envi-

ronmental health issues.

In India, eco taxes can target three main areas: one, differential taxation on vehicles in the transport sector purely oriented towards fuel efficiency and GPS-based congestion charges; two, in the energy sector by taxing fuels which feed into energy generation; and three, waste generation and use of natural resources. Tax revenues can be generated through eco taxes. There is also a need to integrate environmental taxes in the Goods and Service Tax framework as highlighted by the Madras School of Economics in its studies.

Negligible impact on the GDP

The implementation of an environmental tax in India will have three broad benefits: fiscal, environmental and poverty reduction. Environmental tax reforms can mobilise revenues to finance basic public services when raising revenue through other sources proves to be difficult or burdensome. Revenue from environmental tax reforms can also be used to reduce other distorting taxes such as fiscal dividend. Environmental tax reforms help internalise the externalities, and the said revenue can finance research and the development of new technologies.

Environmental regulations may have significant costs on the private sector in the form of slow productivity growth and high cost of compliance, resulting in the possible increase in the prices of goods and services. However, the European experience shows that most of the taxes also generate substantial revenue and there is no evidence on green taxes with sustainable development goals leading to a 'no growth' economy. Most countries' experiences suggest negligible impact on the GDP, though such revenues have not necessarily been used for environmental considerations. Thus, the negligible impact on the GDP may be a temporary phenomenon.

Hence, this is the right time for India to adopt environmental fiscal reforms as they will reduce environmental pollution and also generate resources for financing the health sector.

Eduardo Araral is Associate Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and Surjith Karthikeyan is an Indian Economic Service officer. Views are personal

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Confronting bad faith campaigns

Journalism provides the space to articulate diverse ideas and this space cannot be surrendered to bad faith campaigns



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

In less than three weeks since she started her journalistic career at The Associated Press (AP), Emily Wilder, a graduate of Stanford University, was fired for her social media posts on the Israel-Palestine conflict. The AP took this drastic decision following a campaign by conservatives against her for her activism as a student. Ms. Wilder, who is Jewish, was an active member of the pro-Palestinian groups 'Jewish Voice for Peace' and 'Students for Justice in Palestine' at Stanford University. *The Guardian* revealed that she was "terminated for violating the company's social media policies" during her brief stint. She wrote a tweet about objectivity, which read: "Objectivity" feels fickle when the basic terms we use to report news implicitly stake a claim. Using 'Israel' but never 'Palestine', or 'war' but not 'siege and occupation' are political choices – yet [the] media makes those exact choices all the time without being flagged as biased."

Social media policies of newsrooms

This raises many questions about the professional space for journalists, where one has to negotiate many contending and often conflicting interests. Where does one's right as a citizen end? Can institutions veto someone's considered positions? I have been arguing for long that journalists should express themselves in their journalism rather than in their social media posts. The reservations about the social media policies of news organisations are not over the sections that deal with professional conduct but over the sections that fail to grant space for ethical choices concerning major developments, whether the Israel-Palestine issue or the mismanagement of the pandemic in India.

Interest groups often stigmatise journalists for their viewpoints through organised bad faith campaigns. Emily Bell, Director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School, feels that newsrooms are clueless in confronting this malaise. She tweeted: "If news organisations cave in to pressure from bad faith campaigns, if they cancel workplace contracts on the basis of student activism or errors of judgment, then the field will miss out on

some great reporters. Newsrooms are too often unprepared for this predictable onslaught."

Diversity in the newsroom

Every media scholar acknowledges that a diverse newsroom serves the community well. The American Press Institute (API) has argued that diversity is both a business imperative and a journalistic imperative. On it being a journalistic imperative, the API said: "Without accounting for the range of lived experiences, we fail to serve parts of our communities. Journalism, in its truest form, should be produced for the benefit of all, not only those who wield a particular power, class or authority." It is important to note that diversity is not restricted to known categories such as race, gender, caste and class. It also includes a range of viewpoints. People who advocate peace and justice instead of the cold geopolitical calculations of strategic establishments create space for humanity. At a time when the deep state spreads its octopus-like tentacles and glosses over human suffering, people who believe in peace dividends are central to the public good.

Let's remember that young men and women come to journalism because they are idealistic and despite many limitations: they earn less money in journalism than they would in the corporate world and wield less power than they would in bureaucracy or diplomacy. The fact that there is space to articulate diverse ideas is what acts as a magnet for them. This space cannot be surrendered to the relentless bad faith campaigns orchestrated by powerful vested interests.

I have often been asked about the relationship between objective journalism and the personal political views of individual journalists. If journalists do not stray from journalistic principles, especially the act of verification, their personal viewpoints as citizens are not in conflict with the public good. I have often cited the example of one of the most respected political journalists, Walter Lippmann. The journalism programme at Harvard University is housed in a building called Lippmann House. Lippmann is known not only for his outstanding journalism but also for his role in advising President Woodrow Wilson on defining developments such as the creation of the League of Nations and granting voting rights to women.

In order to preserve their independence and vibrancy, newsrooms need to take motivated campaigns to task.

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WhatsApp and its dubious claims

The claim that the new privacy policy is applicable to only the business version of the app is not comforting

VIKRAM VINCENT

The learned senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Arvind Datar submitted to the Delhi High Court that WhatsApp's contentious new privacy policy came into effect from May 15, 2021. Mr. Sibal raised the central question of national importance, "The question is, does India have a public policy for privacy? If a public policy of privacy is there in India, does it apply to WhatsApp policy?" This question acquires relevance due to the dominant market status of WhatsApp-Facebook-Instagram. In its affidavit to the Delhi High Court, WhatsApp defended its privacy policy and explicitly named Google, Microsoft, Zoom, Zomato, Republic World, Ola Cabs, Truecaller, Big Basket, Koo, and public companies such as Aarogya Setu, Bhim, Air India, Sandes, Government e-Marketplace, and the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation of having similar policies, of relying on collecting user data.

Data protection

We would have to understand that a WhatsApp exception, as suggested by Mr. Sibal, would only open the floodgates to further privacy violations by both the state and private entities dealing with user data. There is the issue of potential violation of privacy of children through Ed-Tech apps due to the lack of both a comprehensive ethics policy and a data privacy law akin to the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In the context of services provided by the above-mentioned companies, the Personal Data Protection Bill of 2019 does not even attempt to provide a fig leaf of protection to users of services.

To ensure that the privacy of the Indian citizen is protected in the digital sphere, the data protection Bill needs to be reformulated to ensure that it focuses on user rights with an emphasis on user privacy. A privacy commission would have to be established to enforce these rights. The government would also have to respect the privacy of the citizens while strengthening the right to information. There is an overarching need for a strong data protection Bill.

Vikram Vincent holds a PhD from IIT Bombay

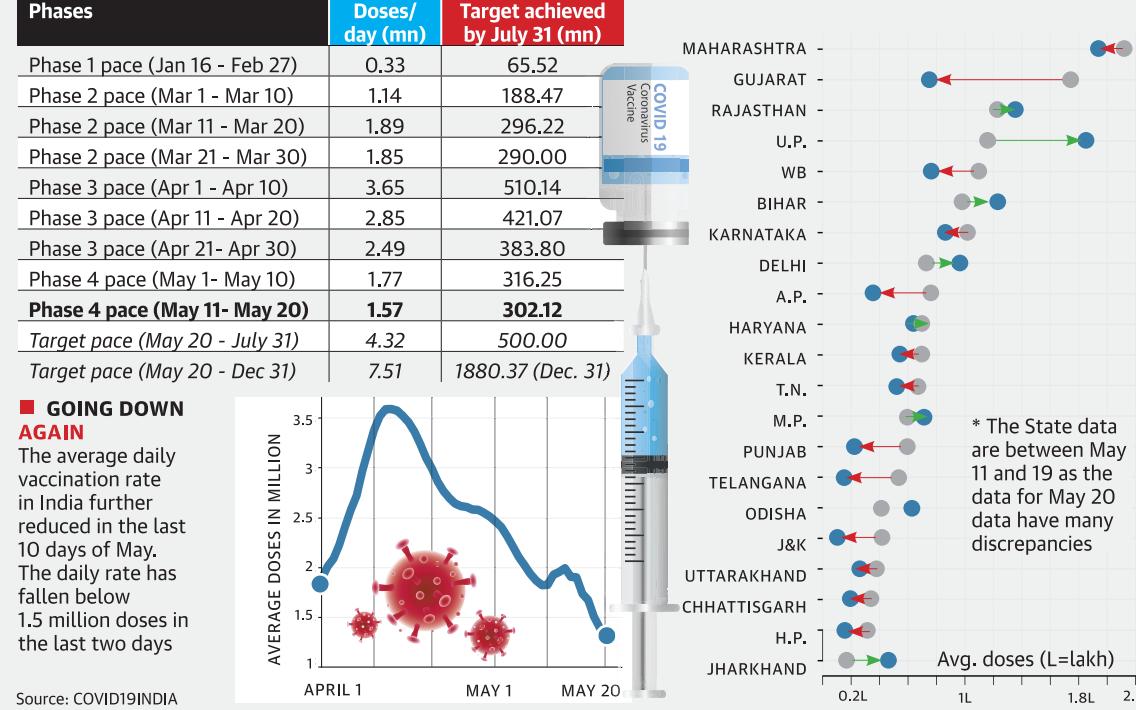


DATA POINT

Shots off target | Despite India allowing COVID-19 vaccination for all adults, the number of doses administered dropped significantly in May. In the last 10 days of this month, only 1.57 million doses have been administered per day on average, lower than the 1.77 million administered in the previous 10-day period. If India has to vaccinate its adult population by the end of 2021, the average daily dose has to increase to at least 7.5 million. Reduction in the daily doses in Gujarat, A.P., Punjab, Telangana and J&K led to the drop in India's pace in the latest period. **By Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

■ DEGREE OF DROP | From May 11 to 20, 1.57 million doses were administered daily on average. At this pace, India will be able to administer 302 million doses by July 31, around 198 million doses lower than the target (upper bound) of 500 million.

■ STATE OF PLAY | The chart shows average daily doses administered in May 1-10 (P1 ●) and May 11-19 (P2 ●*) in major States. An increase in the average daily dose in P2 compared to P1 is indicated by ➤ and a decrease is shown as ➡.



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 24, 1971

Hindi terms

New Delhi, May 23: The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, is believed to be reconsidering the decision taken already that members of Parliament should use Hindi expressions to denote the names of Ministries and Government departments as circulated by a Presidential notification early this month. While it was explained by officials of the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha that members were under no compulsion to use only Hindi expressions when putting questions and giving notice of call attention motions, a formal request was made to members that as far as possible they should use Hindi designations of Ministers and Hindi nomenclature of Ministries and departments. But contrary to the spirit of this request, papers circulated to members yesterday by the Parliament Secretariat have revealed that all English expressions have been completely eliminated and only Hindi expressions have been used to denote the designations of ministers and ministries. The normal practice all along has been to print members' questions both in English and in Hindi separately. Mr. Era Sezhan, D.M.K. member of Parliament, has made a strong representation to the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Lok Sabha protesting against this "imposition of Hindi" on members to the exclusion of English.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 24, 1921

Psychology of unrest
(From an editorial)

The leopard can never change its spots – neither can the average white man his outlook towards his coloured brethren. It does not much matter even if he is an Englishman or American, two of the foremost nationalities priding themselves in their inborn love of Liberty. The colour obsession persists. National freedom and self-determination when applied to white races and European nationalities are inviolable principles of an exalted system of political philosophy based upon divine birth-right and natural justice. But the same principles, in the case of subject nations and non-white races becomes merely matters of empty sentiment or mental aberration. National honour and self-respect have, according to him, no abiding political value and significance for coloured peoples, who have merely to content themselves with the phenomena of Peace and Plenty – the one unnatural, because enforced and the other fictitious because existing only in the works of Western economists.

FROM PAGE ONE

Centre, most States to hold Class 12 exams

The Centre also suggested that students could be allowed to write the examination in their own school premises, officials said.

The State governments of Delhi and Maharashtra have called for alternatives to examinations.

"Keeping in mind the ongoing pandemic situation and the projection that children are vulnerable to new

strains of coronavirus, option of a "NON-EXAMINATION ROUTE" for class 12th students should be actively examined," tweeted Maharashtra Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad.

She suggested evaluation through retroactive grading, and urged a uniform assessment policy.

However, the State is yet to take a final decision.

Very severe cyclone Yaas to hit north Odisha coast

Heavy to very heavy rainfall is predicted at a few places over Nadia, Bardhaman, Bankura, Purulia, Bhirbhum and heavy falls at isolated places over Murshidabad, Malda and Dakshin Dinajpur Districts on May 26.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has airlifted 950 NDRF personnel and 70 tonnes of load from Jamnagar, Varanasi, Patna and Arakanon to Kolkata, Bhubaneswar and Port Blair in 15 transport aircraft, the Defence Ministry said. IAF has also kept 16 transport aircraft and 26 helicopters on standby.

Navy and Coast Guard have deployed ships and helicopters for relief, search and rescue operations while Engineer task force units of Army, with boats and rescue equipment, are on standby for deployment.

Navy has also pre-positioned diving and flood relief columns at Kolkata, Bhubaneswar and Chilika to aid

the civil administration at short notice.

Gearing up
Chastened by the experience of cyclone Amphan which battered West Bengal almost exactly a year ago, killing more than 100 people, the Kolkata Police convened a joint co-ordination meeting with representatives of the Civil Defence, Army, Kolkata Municipal Corporation and National Disaster Response Force to gear up for cyclone Yaas.

Keeping the predicted path in mind, Odisha's Special Relief Commissioner P. K. Jena, too, rushed to Balasore to fine-tune preparedness. With the districts of Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Bhadrak and Balasore likely to be impacted most, district administrations have been asked to make evacuation process foolproof.

(With inputs from Dinakar Peri and Satyasundar Barik)

India to push for WHO approval for Covaxin

In addition, explained officials, getting Covaxin on the WHO's EUL would be a big boost, and a first for an Indian-developed and produced vaccine.

Officials stressed that the EUL processes are "technical" in nature, and the MEA and the government were only interested in facilitating any enquiries on the Covaxin application already made with the World Health Organisation.

Sources also pointed out that the WHO's processes don't allow for "diplomatic" or "political" inputs, and are based entirely on the vaccine manufacturer's ability to provide the documentation required by the inter-

national agency and to validate its claims. Bharat Biotech did not respond to *The Hindu's* query on the planned meeting.

According to the WHO's latest status report, published on May 18, Covaxin is one of 19 vaccines for which applications have been submitted. Seven other applicants including vaccines made by Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson's 'Janssen' vaccine, Chinese Sinopharm, and three versions of the AstraZeneca vaccine, including Indian-made Covishield from the Serum Institute of India, have all received the green-light for the Emergency Use Listing.

A Hindu outfit, Vishwa Hindu Organisation, later said members of the minori-

ty community were "carrying out atrocities towards Dalits with the tacit support of local administration".

Land grab bid

The incident is said to have happened for a land grab bid by the dominant members of the minority community in the area. The Mahadalits had been residing on the land for long, which they claimed, belongs to the government but they have been refusing to vacate the place for the members of minority community.

Volcano eruption in Congo: Army lends hand

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

As the active volcano in Congo, Mount Nyaragongo, erupted again, the Indian Army contingent under the United Nations peace keeping mission (MONUSCO) assisted in protecting civilians and U.N. officials as well as assets during the evacuation, the Army said on Sunday.

Mount Nyaragongo which overlooks Goma town, erupted spewing lava, gases and sediments around 6.30 p.m. on Saturday resulting in panic among the civilians, the Army said. Most of the lava, however, has flowed towards Rwanda and only a small stream is trickling towards Goma, it said.

While the U.N.'s internal security system calculated that evacuation will not be required and asked various country contingents to be on alert, a majority of them including aviation contingents evacuated immediately, the statement said.

"The Indian Brigade headquarters held their ground and thinned out 70% of the strength of the camp and sent them to the Himbi company operating base for safety. A minimum strength continued to hold onto the camp ensuring no threat to U.N. and national assets as also providing security to empty aviation base." An observation point was also established which is giving real time updates of the lava flow to the Brigade headquarters, enabling them to pass it to the U.N.

Last month, the RBI introduced new norms for auditor appointments, requiring immediate rotation of audit firms if they had completed

Two who strayed in from Pakistan sent back: BSF

They were handed over to the Pakistani Army



On alert: A file photo of a point near the Zero Line on the India-Pakistan border in Ferozepur, Punjab. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

recovered from them. "During questioning, it came to notice that they had crossed over to Indian territory inadvertently, they were subsequently apprehended," a BSF spokesman said.

The spokesman said nothing objectionable was

protest with Pakistan rangers over the incident. "On humanitarian grounds, the two Pakistan nationals were handed over to Pakistan rangers around 7.30 p.m.," the BSF said.

The BSF said it lodged a

Webinar on importance of cloud computing

Part of SRMIST-The Hindu series

JENNY VARGHESE
CHENNAI

As part of the SRM Virtual Conclave for Career Guidance 2021, held in association with *The Hindu*, the SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST) hosted a webinar on 'Future World with Cloud Computing Technology' on Saturday.

Dr. Meenakshi S. Arya, Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, SRMIST, opened the session by tracing the evolution of data storage.

Abishek Gupta, Founder and CEO of Hex N Bit, also discussed the need for cloud computing and the important parameters in this domain. He also highlighted the practical aspects of the industry in the future.

Pointing out that "the

[hardware] essentials are the same, whether it is traditional servers or computer-based servers and storage in a cloud," Narayanan Subramanian, Senior Director of Engineering & Principal Architect Hybrid Cloud Management, Nutanix, said they provide computing, storage and connectivity. He also touched upon the crucial dimension of ethical behaviour – taking into account humanity, social sciences, the environment and so on – when developing future products. The webinar can be watched at <https://youtu.be/DLcS66EP7K8>.

The process involves the identification and evaluation of three or four firms, for each vacancy, by the audit committee, followed by an approval of the shortlisted firms by the board and a final approval by the shareholders, besides an okay from the central bank itself.

The three-year tenure

Concern over new norms for appointment of auditors

Such significant policy measures are not applied retrospectively, say banks and NBFCs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) have red-flagged a 'retrospective' central bank dictat on the appointment of statutory auditors as it requires many of them to get rid of auditors already appointed for this year and replace them with new firms, posing implementation challenges amid the pandemic.

Last month, the RBI introduced new norms for auditor appointments, requiring immediate rotation of audit firms if they had completed

three years at a particular entity. Joint auditors have been mandated in banks and NBFCs with assets of ₹15,000 crore or more, and the eligibility criteria for auditors have been tightened.

"The circular, while issued on April 27, 2021, has been made applicable for the financial year 2021-22 itself, except that the NBFCs may implement it in the second half of the financial year. It is a widely accepted principle that, to reduce uncertainty and implementation challenges, such significant policy measures are not

applied retrospectively and allow a reasonable transition period for a better understanding, planning and compliance," the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said in a statement on Sunday.

In its current form, the RBI directive may require mid-term resignation of auditors, breaking the previously contracted terms in a large number of cases and creating disruption in the sector, the CII said.

"Change in auditors in the middle of the year will not be looked at favourably by the investors including FPIs,

specified by the RBI is relatively short and inconsistent with the Companies Act, which specifies a minimum engagement term of five years, the CII said, urging the central bank to rethink several components of the circular's provisions.

"The RBI may consider deferment of implementation of the circular by at least two years for the industry to assess and prepare for its implementation," the industry body suggested, adding that a phased operationalisation will help "avoid immediate disruption".

CMK

INS Jalashwa brings oxygen to Vizag

Consignment from Singapore, Brunei

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In the largest consignment of liquid medical oxygen, the Indian Navy's *INS Jalashwa* arrived in Visakhapatnam with 300 metric tonne of oxygen and more than 3,600 oxygen cylinders from Singapore and Brunei under the ongoing Operation Samudra Setu II, the Navy said on Sunday.

"The consignment includes 300 metric tonne of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) and more than 3,600 oxygen cylinders from Singapore and Brunei. The COVID-19 medical equipment also includes ventilators and empty cryogenic containers." The *INS Trikand* brought 40 MT LMO from Qatar, it said.

The *INS Trikand* with two LMO containers of 20

MT each and 100 oxygen cylinders arrived at Mumbai. In the first week of May, the Navy had diverted nine warships deployed on the high seas to various ports in the region extending from Kuwait in the west to Singapore in the east to pick up emergency medical oxygen and other supplies.

6 extremists killed in Assam encounter

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Six members of the outlawed Dimasa National Liberation Army (DNLA) were killed in an encounter with security forces near the Assam-Nagaland border early on Sunday, officials said.

A large number of arms and ammunition was recovered from the militants after the gunfight with a joint team of the paramilitary and State police. "In an early morning operation by @assampolic and Assam Rifles, six DNLA terrorists were neutralised in Dhangiripar area of Karbi Anglong district," tweeted State's Special Director General of Police G.P. Singh.

Counter-insurgency operations in the Dhangiripar area of the district were intensified after suspected DNLA extremists killed one Sanjoy Ronghang of Daojinghang village on May 19. Organisations such as the Dimasa Students' Union condemned the killing.

Webinar on importance of cloud computing

Part of SRMIST-The Hindu series

SRM
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Promoted by THE HINDU

[hardware] essentials are the same, whether it is traditional servers or computer-based servers and storage in a cloud," Narayanan Subramanian, Senior Director of Engineering & Principal Architect Hybrid Cloud Management, Nutanix, said they provide computing, storage and connectivity. He also touched upon the crucial dimension of ethical behaviour – taking into account humanity, social sciences, the environment and so on – when developing future products. The webinar can be watched at <https://youtu.be/DLcS66EP7K8>.

The process involves the identification and evaluation of three or four firms, for each vacancy, by the audit committee, followed by an approval of the shortlisted firms by the board and a final approval by the shareholders, besides an okay from the central bank itself.

Pointing out that "the

Raipur police serve notice to Patra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

RAIPUR

The Raipur police asked BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra to appear before it in person or through video-conferencing on Sunday in connection with an FIR lodged against him and colleague Raman Singh over an alleged fake "toolkit", officials said.

The FIR was filed on the complaint of an NSUI functionary.

Gujarat BJP MLA draws flak over video

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SURAT

A Gujarat BJP MLA, V.D. Zalavadiya, was flayed by Congress after a video showed him filling a syringe with Remdesivir and transferring it to a drip bottle, for a patient at a COVID care centre in Surat.

Congress spokesperson Jayraj Singh Parmar said the State Health Minister should train BJP workers in administering injections, which would also address the issue of acute shortage of medical staff.

Minor 'face-off' in Galwan Valley

Army denies it, says reports inspired by those trying to derail resolution process

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

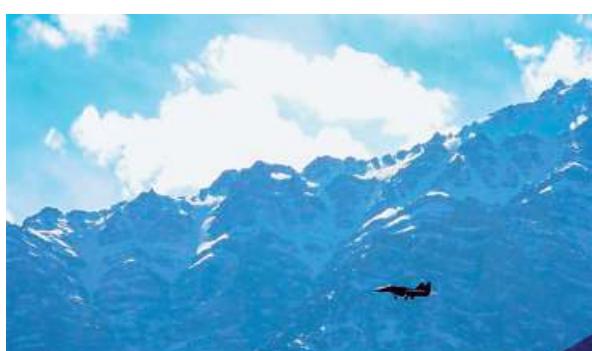
There was a minor face-off between Indian and Chinese troops in the no-patrolling zone at Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh in the first week of May, a senior government official told *The Hindu*. However, no clash occurred and the two sides disengaged quickly.

A no-patrolling zone extending to around 3 km, around 1.5 km each on either side of the clash site near the Y-junction of the Galwan Valley, was created after June 15, 2020, when 20 Indian Army personnel were killed in clashes with Chinese troops. A 30-day moratorium was also applied on foot-patrolling then. It was not known if it had been extended.

The Army, however, said no such "minor face-off" took place. "The article seems to be inspired by sources who may be trying to derail the ongoing process for early resolution of issues in eastern Ladakh," it said in a statement.

Regular patrols

"After the no-patrolling zones were created last year, the two sides occasionally conduct reconnaissance to see if the other side has



On the frontiers: An Air Force fighter jet flying over the Ladakh region in Leh in January. • PTI

crossed the line. The patrols are sent at different times. On the particular day, the Indian and Chinese patrols reached the area at the same time, a minor face-off happened, but they returned quickly," the senior official said, adding that China still had camps beyond the no-patrolling zone and there had not been any reduction in troop deployment since last year.

The official said that both sides sent periodic patrols "out of suspicion".

Prior to April-May 2020, when China massed troops at the particular location in Galwan, claiming it to be Chinese territory, Indian troops regularly patrolled the area that is said to be within India's perception of the Line

of Actual Control (LAC). Earlier, the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) used to patrol the area and leave, but since April-May 2020, it made a permanent presence within 600-800 metres of India's perception of the LAC.

On February 11, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh informed the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha that India and China had reached an agreement for disengagement in the Pangong Lake area to cease their forward deployments in a "phased, coordinated and verified manner", which would "substantially" restore the pre-April 2020 status.

Since April 2020, Chinese troops blocked Indian troops from reaching at least

10 patrolling points, running from the Depsang plains in the north to Pangong Tso (lake) in the south in eastern Ladakh.

In all, there are more than 65 patrolling points from the base of Karakoram to Chumar.

India and China have held 11 rounds of talks so far after the clashes last year. While the troops partially disengaged on the north and south banks of Pangong Tso, phased disengagement is yet to take place at the other friction areas in eastern Ladakh — Gogra, Hot Springs, Depsang and Demchok.

No pullback

"There has been no reduction in the number of troops on either side. China is currently doing some exercise so they have enhanced their presence along the LAC.

There was some talk to pull back Indian troops to deploy them on COVID-19 duty. However, that was later ruled out," the official said.

On April 2, the Ministry of Defence in a communication to Konchok Stanzin, councilor, Chushul, said that "due to the present operational situation in Ladakh, grazers have been asked to restrict their cattle movements".

'Small businesses need more time for GST compliances'

Relaxations offered by the Central government under the tax regime are inadequate, notes survey

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

The compliance relaxations offered by the government under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime are inadequate, according to a survey of small and medium businesses affected by the lockdown and mobility restrictions in most States.

Around 89% of small businesses have demanded that the government waive the penalty on late payments and defer GST return filings for the March to May period till June 30, as per a survey conducted over the past week by LocalCircles of 2,456 such enterprises located in 122 districts.

On May 1, the government had notified some relief measures for businesses to cope with the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing delayed filing of some returns, waiving penalties for 15 to 30 days, and reducing the interest on delayed tax payments in a graded manner.

While returns related to

computing input tax credits were granted 15 more days, the due date for filing the GST-3B and remitting taxes was not extended. The interest levied on delayed tax payments was not waived, prompting accountants to advise firms to comply without waiting for the input tax credits to firm up.

"Small businesses from across the country have been raising the issue of their inability to meet the GST payment deadline as most have been shut due to

local lockdowns and curfew restrictions. A visit by the accountant or a visit to them is not an option for most businesses since early April and hence the majority are unable to make their GST payment. Similarly, most have been unable to file the return for quarter ending March 31," LocalCircles said in a note on the rationale for the survey.

"Overall, 73% small businesses want no penalty and interest on March GST payment and return filing till June 30, while 78% want no penalty and interest on April and May GST payments till June 30. Overall, 89% small businesses want no penalty and interest relaxations on GST late payments and return filing till June 30," said the survey.

June 30, while 78% want no penalty and interest on April and May GST payments till June 30. Overall, 89% small businesses want no penalty and interest relaxations on GST late payments and return filing till June 30," said the survey.

The platform had escalated the need for relaxation of the March 21 GST payment and return to the Finance Ministry on April 23, but the relaxations granted by the Ministry on May 1 were not enough, the survey noted.

2 more defectors seek Trinamool return

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA



Earlier, Sonali Guha had written to Mamata Banerjee.

A day after four-time MLA Sonali Guha, who had joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), wrote to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urging that she be allowed to return to the Trinamool Congress, two other former Trinamool leaders, Sarala Murmu and Amal Acharya, expressed their wish to leave the BJP and rejoin the State's ruling party.

Sarala Murmu was given

out of anger or hurt that they can return to her party. I am responding to that call. If she accepts us back then, most certainly, we will stay with *Didi* and work with *Didi*, Ms. Murmu told journalists on Sunday.

Two-time MLA Amal Acharya had also quit and joined the BJP just two weeks before the elections after being denied a ticket by the Trinamool. "I joined the BJP and worked for them for a few days out of anger and frustration after being de-

nied a ticket; it was not out of any ideological shift," he said.

The Trinamool leadership on Sunday reacted to the developments. Senior party leader and MP Saugata Roy said that there should be a moratorium for at least six months for leaders from the BJP to return to the party.

Spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said at present, the party was busy tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and no decision on their return had been taken as yet.

Car-maker, union spar over COVID-19 safety

Workers say norms are being flouted

REUTERS
CHENNAI

Renault-Nissan told an Indian court that it needs to continue production at its car plant to meet orders, rejecting claims from an employee union that COVID-19 safety protocols were being ignored at the factory, legal filings show.

Renault-Nissan India and workers at its plant in Tamil Nadu have been locked in a legal tussle after workers petitioned a court to halt operations alleging that physical distancing norms were being flouted and company-provided health benefits were outweighed by the risk to their lives.

In response, Renault-Nissan said in a court filing, which is not public, that there was a "compelling need" to continue operations despite the legal challenges. It said all COVID-19 norms were being followed.

The case will next be heard on Monday at the Madras High Court, when the State government, which is also party to the case, is ex-

pected to file its response.

A State official told *Reuters* that automobile companies will be allowed to continue operations, but action will be taken against violations of safety protocols by any company.

"It is a question of life versus livelihood," M. Moorthy, general secretary of Renault Nissan India workers union, which represents all 3,500 permanent factory workers, told *Reuters*.

"We just want physical distancing protocols to be followed and the management to be responsible for any risks to the workers or their family members." The factory employs 3,000 contract workers, 2,500 staff members and 700 apprentices.

Nissan, which has a majority stake in the Renault-Nissan India plant, declined to comment.

Renault-Nissan's May 16 court filing shows it has pending export orders of about 35,000 vehicles for the May-October period, which, if not fulfilled, could lead to penalties and loss of business.

Recorded COVID-19 cases continue to drop in U.P.

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

The number of COVID-19 cases in Uttar Pradesh continued to drop as the State recorded 4,844 new cases on Sunday. But the number of recorded deaths were 234.

U.P. now has 48,880 active cases, of which 54,646 patients are in home isolation, said Amit Mohan Prasad, Additional Chief Secretary (Health). This was the 23rd consecutive day of a

drop in active cases, said Mr. Prasad, and a fall of over 72% from 3.10 lakh, the number of peak active cases recorded on April 30. The State tested over 3.17 lakh samples in 24 hours, its highest count.

Amid reports that people in some rural areas were hesitant to get vaccinated, Mr. Prasad appealed to them to not fall for any propaganda.

"Vaccine is fully safe and effective," he said

A day after four-time MLA Sonali Guha, who had joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), wrote to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urging that she be allowed to return to the Trinamool Congress, two other former Trinamool leaders, Sarala Murmu and Amal Acharya, expressed their wish to leave the BJP and rejoin the State's ruling party.

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Rahul overrules veterans to hand Sathesha the baton

Many functionaries, even the supporters of Chennithala and Chandy, want a 'generational shift' in the leadership

VARGHESE K. GEORGE
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi stood firm on appointing V.D. Sathesha as the party's legislature party leader in Kerala, in the face of stiff resistance against the move from the incumbent Ramesh Chennithala and former Chief Minister Oommen Chandy.

Rivals-turned-allies, Mr. Chennithala and Mr. Chandy have been in control of the Congress in Kerala for more than five years now. As the defeat of the party in the recent Assembly elections is being attributed to a series of steps taken by the duo, many of their own supporters now want a "generational shift" in the leadership. Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president Mullappally Ramachandran will also be replaced soon, according to party functionaries familiar with the developments.

Mr. Chandy has proposed 74-year-old K.C. Joseph for the post, who is not finding favour with several MLAs, MPs and other party workers who are functionaries familiar with the developments.

"Sentiments of the workers will be the determining factor. Mr. Gandhi is clear that the current level of factional favouritism cannot be allowed in the party," said an AICC functionary. "The message is clear. At all levels, people who are willing to work, who have the merit and public acceptance must be given leadership. That is the only way the party can rebuild in Kerala," the functionary said.

Mr. Gandhi is, however, eager to hold both leaders close. Mr. Chandy, at 78, is frail; Mr. Chennithala, 64,

will likely be given a responsibility at the national level. As a former president of the National Students' Union of India and Indian Youth Congress, he has a national network. Mr. Sathesha has been asked to work closely with these leaders and build a new unity of purpose in the Congress.

Many signs

"The party used to work on the premise that we don't need to do anything to return to power after a five-year hiatus," said a Congress MLA. The Congress had no Hin-

"The danger was visible as early as 2011, when the United Democratic Front (UDF) barely won the election. The CPI(M) did not want a second consecutive term for V.S. Achuthanandan and but for that factor, we would have lost that election."

NEWS ANALYSIS

Mr. Chandy became Chief Minister in 2011, and mid-term, Mr. Chennithala's demand to be inducted as Home Minister strained the relations between the two. But they soon closed ranks. They began to watch out for each other, and promoted their loyalists, as more and more leaders and social groups were alienated from the party and younger and meritorious hopefuls found their paths blocked.

Collapse in Travancore
A Congress leader pointed out the collapse of the party in the central Travancore region, which was once a stronghold, to illustrate the point.

du Ezhava candidate in Pathanamthitta district, pushing the community, entirely, to the Left Democratic Front that won all five seats. "At one point, the UDF used to win all. The candidates that we fielded offered little more than their factional loyalties," the leader said.

Gifting berths

The Congress also established a practice of gifting seats to allies in order to cut out internal rivals of the leadership. In the last six years, it gave two Rajya Sabha seats to UDF constituents, who crossed over to the LDF soon after. Kerala Congress (Mani) leader Jose K. Mani was fielded as a Rajya Sabha candidate, blocking the path for another term for P.J. Kurien, who had finished three terms in the Upper House, were stunned by the gifting of the berth to Mr. Mani. "Mr. Mani had not even asked for it," a Congress

"The danger was visible as early as 2011, when the United Democratic Front (UDF) barely won the election. The CPI(M) did not want a second consecutive term for V.S. Achuthanandan and but for that factor, we would have lost that election."

NEWS ANALYSIS

MP said. Within months after gifting a Rajya Sabha berth to the Kerala Congress (M), the Congress leadership began to push for its exit from the UDF. "This time, factional leaders began to calculate that they could contest more seats and more convenient ones, and the Mani faction was expelled. The impressive performance of the party in the 2019 Lok Sabha election gave a false sense of invincibility," the leader said. Several senior leaders, such as K.V. Thomas, called for efforts to keep the Mani faction within the UDF, but to no avail. This time, the party high command has decided to keep allies out of the internal party deliberations.

KPCC president Mullappally Ramachandran is facing the wrath of the party workers who are populating social media sites with emotive outbursts. "Once it so happened that he locked his front door and stayed inside the house to avoid meeting party workers," said a party MLA. He refused to resign after the defeat but has changed tack now and has offered to quit.

Opposition parties back farmers' protest on May 26

They call upon Centre to repeal the three farm laws

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Twelve Opposition parties on Sunday issued a statement backing the Samyukt Kisan Morcha's (SKM) call for a national protest on May 26 to mark six months of the farmers' protest against the Centre's farm laws.

"We demand the immediate repeal of the farm laws and the legal entitlement to the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of C2+50 per cent as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission. The Central government must stop being obd

Single dose only 33% effective against B.1.617.2: U.K.

The finding is significant for India which is relying heavily on Covishield

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

A single dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine, in the United Kingdom, was only 33% effective in protecting against symptomatic COVID-19 coronavirus involving the B.1.617.2 variant, first identified in India, as compared to a 59% efficacy from two doses of the vaccine, a study by scientists at Public Health England (PHE) and multiple institutions in the U.K. has found.

The finding is significant for India, which is not only heavily reliant on Covishield – the AstraZeneca vaccine – for about 90% of vaccination but also because the scientists who analyse genome variants in India report that the B.1.617.2 is increasingly becoming the dominant variant in India. The variant has

multiple mutations on the spike protein region, a portion on the coronavirus that helps it to infiltrate the human body. Laboratory studies testing the potency of Covishield and Covaxin have shown that fewer antibodies are produced against the B.1.617 variant (related to the 617.2) though the numbers are sizeable to trigger immunity. No similar studies, however, have been publicly reported on the B.1.617.2.

Anurag Agrawal, Director, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, said that while the dominance of the 617.2 strain was concerning and required investigation to improve future versions of available vaccines, the study's import for India was that all the groups at greatest



Safety first: A healthworker displaying a Covishield vial.

risk – healthcare workers, frontline workers and those over 60 years – must be given two shots.

"The Centre's current guidelines are to continue masking up even after getting vaccinated. These numbers from the PHE only reinforce that.

The vaccines' protection against severe disease continues to be fairly high and so after two doses to those most at risk, we should ensure a single dose for as many as possible," he told

The Hindu. India, while posting over 350,000 new cases a day, battles a vaccine shortage with demand exceeding supply across age groups and some increase in supply expected only around August.

Health authorities in the U.K. have been reporting a rise in infections involving the 617.2 strain. Two vaccines predominantly – the Pfizer (BNT162b2) mRNA vaccine and the AstraZeneca vaccine – are being administered in the country, and

from increasing the length between doses, from the original 4 weeks to 12 weeks, the U.K. has now reduced the gap between doses – to four weeks – for those above 60 years, given the rise in cases fuelled by the India variant. Before the second wave hit India, the policy here was to administer doses 4-6 weeks apart and has now – for Covishield – been extended to a 12-16 week interval.

The latest U.K. study sought to analyse if being infected with the 617.2 variant in the vaccinated reduced the vaccine's effectiveness at protecting against symptomatic disease compared to the B.1.1.7, or the variant first identified in the U.K. The scientists reported that effectiveness (which in vaccine terminology refers to real-world efficacy) was "notably lower" after one dose of vaccine with B.1.617.2 compared to B.1.1.7 cases at 51%. One dose of the Pfizer vaccine al-

so saw similar reduction in efficacy when the two variants were compared. However, two doses of the Pfizer vaccines saw effectiveness reduced from 93.4% with B.1.1.7 to 87.9% with B.1.617.2. In the case of AstraZeneca, it was a seven percentage point drop from 66% to 59%.

The analysis included data for all age groups from April 5 to cover the period since the B.1.617.2 variant emerged in the U.K. It included 1,054 people confirmed as having the B.1.617.2 variant through genomic sequencing. The PHE said that the difference in effectiveness between the vaccines after two doses could be explained by the fact that the roll-out of second doses of AstraZeneca was later than for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and other data on antibody profiles showed that it took longer to reach maximum effectiveness with the AstraZeneca vaccine.

'Children at limited risk for severe COVID-19'

Monitor mutant strains: paediatricians

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Children are at limited risk for severe COVID-19 though they will continue to be susceptible to the infection as well as transmitters, say the latest guidelines from the Indian Academy of Pediatrics, a 32,000-member association of paediatricians in India.



A swab being collected from a child in Hyderabad. • AFP

about how mutant strains are likely to behave."

Other experts too have opined that children are not more susceptible but steps must be taken to get them vaccinated. "I have no reason to think that infections in children in absolute numbers or in the form of a severe disease will rise. We need to prepare but try to avoid any unnecessary concern or alarm. One of the discourses which is largely missing is the vaccination of children. Aspects such as which will be the most appropriate vaccine for children? What will be the purpose of vaccination in children? In my opinion, while selecting a vaccine for children, preference should be given to one which shows role in preventing transmission. Maybe, nasal COVID-19 vaccines could be the best option for children, as those will have an advantage in quick scale up as administration of those vaccines will be easy," Chandrakant Lahariya, epidemiologist and public health analyst, told *The Hindu* in a recent interview.

Moderna refused to send shots: Punjab

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab government on Sunday said vaccine manufacturer Moderna had refused to send vaccines directly to the State government as according to its policy, the company can only deal with the Government of India and not with any State or private parties. The State had approached Moderna for direct purchase of vaccine.

Explain dip in vaccination: Chidambaram

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Sunday said the Centre should explain to the people why the number of daily vaccinations was going down if the States had adequate vaccine stocks.

In a series of tweets, he took on the Centre for claiming that States had been provided with vaccine doses.

"The Centre says that there are 1.6 crore doses of Corona vaccines available with the States. Several



P. Chidambaram
States, including Karnataka and Delhi, have stopped vaccinating the 18-44 age group citing shortage of vaccines," he said.

"What is the distance between the residences of the Union Health Minister and

the Delhi Chief Minister? Why can't the two meet and any one convince the other that his data is correct? Why are they talking across each other?" he asked.

Mr. Chidambaram said that the fact the number of daily vaccinations was declining could "only be attributed to the shortage of vaccines".

"If that is not the cause, then the Union Health Minister has a responsibility to tell the people why is the number of vaccinations administered daily declining," added

the senior Congress leader. He pointed out that no shots had been administered in 29 out of 33 districts of Telangana.

Mr. Chidambaram demanded that the Health Ministry should put out a daily statement of the number of vaccinations administered district-wise every day as data for the entire State "hides many alarming facts".

"Will the 'no shortage' Union Health Minister please answer the facts emerging from Delhi and Telangana," he asked.

Four doctors stopped from meeting Yogi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Four junior doctors who had gone to hand over a letter of demands to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during his visit to Jhansi were allegedly briefly detained by police.

Jhansi District Magistrate Andra Vamsi said the doctors were stopped to ensure that law and order was not disrupted at the programme.

Vaccination for 18-44 age group will pick up in June: Uddhav

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

With Maharashtra compelled to suspend the third phase of COVID-19 inoculation owing to a paucity of vaccines, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday exuded confidence that the drive for the 18-44 age group would pick up pace from June once the State received an adequate number of doses.

Mr. Thackeray, during a videoconference with paediatricians and members of the COVID-19 task force, said his government was relentlessly pursuing the issue of vaccine supply.

"The State government is ready to make a one-time payment for the 12 crore doses required by beneficiaries in the group. They account for six crore of the Maharashtra's total population... I am confident the vaccination drive will pick



A May 21 photo of a health worker administering vaccine to a woman at a drive-in vaccination centre in Mumbai. • AFP

up after June once we get more supplies."

Cautioning about a possible third wave, Mr. Thackeray said the State would be well-equipped in terms of oxygen supply and that steps had been mooted to redress the problems encountered during the ongoing second wave.

"There is speculation about whether the third wave will infect children

Anxiety, depression top concerns

26,047 calls received at Social Justice Ministry's mental health call centres

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

Anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress have been among the most common problems reported by callers to the Social Justice Ministry's mental health helpline, with many States seeing an increase in calls during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to officials.

A senior official from one of the regional centres of the helpline said the increase in number of calls could be partially because the helpline is being promoted as a COVID-19-related mental health resource during the second wave.

The official, who wished not to be named, said most of the callers in the past month had raised concerns regarding the second wave of the pandemic after being diagnosed with COVID-19. Some also enquired about vaccination and emergency

services, the official said.

According to the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities data, a total of 26,047 calls were received by the KIRAN helpline till April 30 from September 16, 2020. The helpline 1800-599-0019 – was launched by the Ministry on September 7, 2020 as a mental health reh-

March (3,617) to April (3,371), there was an increase in some States, including Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Haryana, where the number more than doubled from 73 in March to 170 in April.

The helpline 1800-599-0019 – was launched by the Ministry on September 7, 2020 as a mental health reh-

abilitation service. Callers are counselled first and are connected with psychiatrists and other experts depending on the need.

The majority of the callers had been men and in the age-group of 15 to 40, the Ministry's report on its functioning from September 16, 2020 to January 15, 2021 had said.

SII distances itself from staffer's remark

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Serum Institute of India (SII) has disassociated itself from its executive director's remark that the Central government began the vaccination of multiple age groups against COVID-19 without taking into consideration the available stock.

In a letter to the Union Health Ministry on May 22, Prakash Kumar Singh, director of government and regulatory affairs at the Pune-based SII, said the statement by its executive director, Suresh Jadhav, at a recent event was not the view of the company.

"On behalf of our CEO Adar C. Poonawalla, I want to inform you that this statement is not issued on behalf of SIPL and the Company completely dissociates itself from this statement," he said in a communique.



Call of duty: Medical workers working inside an isolation centre in Noida on Sunday. • GETTY IMAGES

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13254

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M	L	E	I	E	C	R	B				
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Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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ELSEWHERE



Bashir apologises over Diana interview

LONDON
Martin Bashir, the BBC journalist who tricked princess Diana into giving an explosive interview, on Sunday apologised to Princes William and Harry but said claims linking his actions to her death were "unreasonable". "I never wanted to harm Diana in any way and I don't believe we did," he told the *Sunday Times*. But Prince William said Mr. Bashir's actions had made "a major contribution" to the demise of his parents' relationship and "contributed significantly to her fear, paranoia and isolation" in her final years. AFP

Cable car accident in Italy kills at least 13

ROME
A cable car taking visitors to a mountaintop view of some of northern Italy's picturesque lakes plummeted to the ground Sunday and then tumbled down the slope, killing at least 13 people and sending two children to the hospital in serious condition, authorities said. Stresa Mayor Marcella Severini said it appeared that a cable broke, sending the car careening until it hit a pylon and then fell to the ground. AFP

Russian police break up opposition meeting

MOSCOW
Police on Saturday broke up a meeting of independent, elected Russian opposition figures, saying they breached health restrictions, participants said. The May 22-23 forum was organised to coordinate their campaign for the September legislative polls. The authorities have cranked up pressure on the opposition, and particularly on supporters of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. AFP

Israeli police allow Jews to visit flashpoint Jerusalem site

Young Palestinians were cleared out of Al-Aqsa Mosque compound: Islamic Waqf

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM

Israeli police escorted more than 250 Jewish visitors on Sunday to a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem where clashes between police and Palestinian protesters helped trigger a war in Gaza, according to the Islamic authority overseeing the site.

The 11-day conflict between Israel and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers came to a fragile halt on Friday, but left behind immense ruin in Gaza, including hundreds of homes in that have been completely destroyed and many more that were badly damaged, according to the UN.

With tensions still high, police cleared young Palestinians out of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and barred entry to Muslims under the age of 45, according to the Islamic Waqf, which oversees the site. Muslims who entered were required to leave their IDs with police at the entrance. It said six Palesti-



Help pours in: A Palestinian labourer unloads boxes of aid from an Egyptian aid truck at the Rafah border crossing. • AFP

nians were detained, with four later released.

Israeli police denied there was any age restriction and said they arrested five people who "violated the public order." Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said the site was open for "regular visits" and that police had secured the area. The visits later ended without any further incident.

Israeli police had briefly clashed with Palestinian protesters after Friday prayers in an early test for the truce, which had taken effect hours earlier. The cea-

sefire in Gaza has held, but violence in Jerusalem could set off another cycle of escalation.

The Waqf said on Sunday was the first time Jews had been allowed to visit the site since May 4, a week before the war broke out.

The Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam. It sits on a sprawling hilltop in Jerusalem's Old City that is revered by Jews as their holiest site because it was the location of the biblical temples. The site has often been the scene of Israeli-Palestinian violence over the years

and was the epicentre of the 2000 Palestinian intifada, or uprising.

Blinken visit

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken leaves this week for West Asia. He told ABC on Sunday that the ceasefire offers a chance to "make a pivot to building something more positive."

Mr. Blinken said the priorities include addressing the immediate humanitarian situation in Gaza, reconstructing what was lost in the violence and "engaging both sides in trying to start to make real improvements in the lives of people so that Israelis and Palestinians can live with equal measures of security, of peace and of dignity."

Lynn Hastings, the UN humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, said some 300 buildings in Gaza – including an estimated 1,000 homes – had been completely destroyed. She said hundreds more had been heavily damaged.

Authorities said at least five people had died in a



Trail of destruction: Debris engulfing houses in Bushara village near Goma. • AFP

Congo volcano spares Goma city; 5 die in crash while trying to leave

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GOMA

Congo's Mount Nyiragongo unleashed lava that destroyed homes on the outskirts of Goma, but witnesses said on Sunday that the city of 2 million had been mostly spared after the volcano erupted at night and sent thousands fleeing in panic.

Residents said there was little warning before the dark sky turned a fiery red, leading to fears that the eruption could cause the

road crash while trying to leave Goma, but cautioned it was too early to give a death toll in the hardest hit communities.

More than 500 homes had been destroyed, according to Constant Ndiema, military Governor for the affected region.

Thousands set off fearing the worst. Some boarded boats onto Lake Kivu while others attempted to reach Mount Goma, the highest elevation point. At least 3,000 fled across the nearby border into Rwanda.

On Sunday, residents ventured out to assess the damage after a night of panic.

No access to images of our nuclear sites: Iran

IAEA won't get surveillance pictures

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEHRAN

Iran's Parliament speaker said on Sunday that international inspectors may no longer access surveillance images of the Islamic Republic's nuclear sites, escalating tensions amid diplomatic efforts in Vienna to save Tehran's atomic accord with world powers.

The comments by Iran's Parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, aired by state TV, further underscored the narrowing window for the U.S. and others to reach terms with Iran. The Islamic Republic is already enriching and stockpiling uranium at levels far beyond those allowed by its 2015 nuclear deal.

"Regarding this, and based on the expiration of the three-month deadline, definitely the International Atomic Energy Agency will not have the right to access images from May 22," Mr. Qalibaf said.

Hours later, however, a website called Nournews that's believed to be close to Iran's Supreme National Security Council quoted an anonymous official suggesting Tehran's deal with the IAEA could be extended "another month."

The International Atomic Energy Agency had said its director-general would brief reporters later Sunday in Vienna. The UN agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Under what is called an

"Additional Protocol" with Iran, the IAEA collects and analyzes hundreds of thousands of images captured daily by its sophisticated surveillance cameras, the agency said in 2017. The agency also said that it had placed 2,000 tamper-proof seals on nuclear material and equipment.

Iran's hard-line parliament in December approved a bill that would suspend part of U.N. inspections of its nuclear facilities if European signatories did not provide relief from oil and banking sanctions by February. The IAEA struck a three-month deal with Iran to have it hold the surveillance images, with Tehran threatening to delete them afterward if no deal had been reached.

It wasn't immediately clear if the images from February had been deleted. Before Qalibaf's remarks, lawmaker Ali Reza Salimi urged an open session of parliament to ensure Iran's civilian nuclear arm "erased" the images. The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran did not immediately comment on the decision.

"Order the head of the Atomic Energy Organization to avoid delay," said Mr. Salimi, a cleric from Iran's central city of Delijan. The "recorded images in the cameras should be eliminated."

It also wasn't clear what this meant for in-person inspections by the IAEA.

Anti-junta rebels 'seize police post, kill 13 officials'

Upsurge of conflict in parts of Myanmar as various rebel groups are launching attacks on the military

REUTERS
YANGON

Fighters opposed to Myanmar's military junta seized a police station in the eastern town of Mobyne on Sunday and claimed to have killed at least 13 members of the security forces and captured four, local media said.

Videos shared on social media showed what appeared to be the dead bodies of security forces in the latest

attack of a general upsurge of conflict in parts of Myanmar since the February 1 coup that overthrew elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

A gun battle also erupted near the Chinese border early on Sunday, while on Saturday an armed ethnic group opposed to the coup launched an attack on a jade mining town on the other side of Myanmar, near India.

Video from Mobyne showed bodies in the uniforms of the security forces, while other pictures showed four men who were said to be police with their hands behind their backs and blindfolded with surgical masks.

A police vehicle was shown in flames as dozens of fighters milled at the scene.

The Irrawaddy news outlet quoted a fighter from the People's Defence Force as

saying the police station had been set on fire and that two civilians had been wounded in the fighting. Reports from other media said up to 15 members of the security forces had been killed.

Mobyne is around 100 km east of the capital Naypyidaw, but lies near territory held by some of the ethnic armed groups that have fought for greater autonomy for decades.

An alliance of four ethnic groups opposing the coup battled early on Sunday with security forces in Muse, one of the main border crossings to China, media said.

Since the Army took power, People's Defence Forces have sprung up to oppose the junta – often armed with shotguns and homemade weapons. The video from Mobyne showed at least one fighter firing an assault rifle.

In Bangladesh, anti-graft scribe freed after outcry

She was held under Official Secrets Act

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DHAKA

A Bangladeshi journalist, who is known for her strong reporting on official corruption, was released from jail on Sunday, hours after a court in the nation's capital awarded conditional bail amid protests at home and abroad calling for her release. Rozina Islam, a senior reporter for the leading *Prothom Alo* newspaper, had been held in detention since her arrest on Monday.

"I will most certainly continue working as a journalist," Ms. Islam told a small crowd of supporters and journalists after leaving the jail outside Dhaka. Her family said she would go to a hospital for a health checkup.

Ms. Islam was arrested after she allegedly used her cellphone without permission

to photograph documents related to government negotiations to buy COVID-19 vaccines, while she waited in the room of an official involved in the process, according to case documents seen by The Associated Press.

She faces charges of violating the colonial-era Official Secrets Act, which carries a possible death penalty.

Bangladesh's Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen on Thursday said he regretted the arrest and said Ms. Islam would receive fair justice.

Several of Ms. Islam's hard-hitting reports on corruption involving the Health Ministry and others have drawn attention to the millions of dollars spent on procuring health equipment to deal with the pandemic.

U.K. to unveil plans for 'digital border'

People coming to Britain without a visa or immigration status will need an ETA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Britain is to announce plans for a "fully digital border", including the introduction of U.S.-style electronic travel authorisation to pre-check travellers to the U.K., Interior Minister Priti Patel said on Sunday.

The Minister will announce the plans in Parliament on Monday as part of a wider overhaul of the country's immigration system, which will also include the introduction of a points-based migration system.

Ms. Patel unveiled elements of her "New Plan for Immigration" in March, calling it "the most significant overhaul of our asylum system in decades."

Tightening immigration rules and securing borders were key promises of those like Ms. Patel and Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who argued for leaving the EU in Britain's 2016 Brexit referendum.

Under the new plans to be unveiled on Monday, Ms. Patel is set to announce that pe-

ople coming to the U.K. without a visa or immigration status will have to apply for an American-style Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA).

The Home Office expects that around 30 million ETA applications will be processed each year.

"What I'm unveiling and proposing tomorrow is a

new legal migration and border strategy..., which is based upon digitalisation of our borders, but also the simplification of our immigration laws," Ms. Patel told Sky News on Sunday.

"I am introducing the new borders bill, which will come to Parliament next month, where we will specifically clamp down and tackle the problems around illegal migration," she added. "We will have not just greater checks, we've already got very, very significant law enforcement operations taking place in France, in Belgium... and we're really prosecuting and arresting the people smugglers."

Last year, roughly 8,500 people arrived in Britain having made the perilous crossing across the Channel, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, in boats.

Under what is called an

Belarus diverts flight to arrest blogger

Lukashenko orders warplane to escort Vilnius-bound Boeing to Minsk, angering EU

REUTERS
MOSCOW

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko ordered a Ryanair flight headed for Lithuania and carrying a young opposition blogger to land in Belarus on Sunday and detained him on arrival, prompting Lithuania to call for a NATO response.

Law enforcers detained activist Roman Protasevich, 26, who had been put on a wanted list after last year's mass street protests following an election in which Mr. Lukashenko claimed a landslide victory.

The aircraft, flying from Athens to Vilnius, had almost reached Lithuania when it changed direction and was escorted to the Belarusian capital of Minsk amid reports that it had explosives on board, according to an online flight tracker and



A file photo of blogger Roman Protasevich. • REUTERS

rules must bear consequences," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

No explosives were found, it said.

The European Union said

on Sunday that all passengers on board the Ryanair plane must be allowed to resume their journeys immediately. "Any violation of international air transport

rules to immediately react to the threat posed to international civil aviation by the Belarus regime. The international community must take immediate steps that this does not repeat," Mr. Nauseika said.

Lithuanian presidential adviser Asta Skaisgiryte said the operation to force-land the plane carrying around 170 people from 12 countries seemed to be pre-planned.

She said Belarus intelligence services knew who was onboard the plane, which was forced to land with the help of MIG-29 fighter jet. Mr. Protasevich had lived in Vilnius since November, she said.

Lithuania and traditional Russian ally Belarus are neighbours and former members of the Soviet Union. Lithuania is now a member of the EU, Belarus is not.

"I call on NATO and EU al-

group said.

CDC monitoring systems had not found more cases than would be expected in the population, but members of the committee on vaccinations felt that healthcare providers should be made aware of the reports of the "potential adverse event," the committee said in the statement.

It did not say how many people had been affected and recommended further investigation.

The CDC said the cases typically occurred within four days after receiving the mRNA vaccines. It did not specify which vaccines. The United States has given emergency authorisation to two mRNA vaccines, from Moderna Inc and Pfizer/BioNTech.

The condition often goes away without complications and can be caused by a variety of viruses, the CDC

Israel's Health Ministry in April said it was examining a small number of cases of heart inflammation in people who had received Pfizer's vaccine, though it had not yet drawn any conclusions.

Most of the cases in Israel were reported among people up to age 30.

Pfizer at the time said it had not observed a higher rate of the condition than would normally be the case in the general population and that a causal link to the vaccine had not been established.

Pfizer and Moderna did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Saturday.

The CDC in late April, after news of the Israeli investigation, said it did not see a link between the two.

Lithuania quits 'divisive' China group

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
VILNIUS

Lithuania said on Saturday it was quitting China's 17+1 cooperation forum with central and eastern European states that includes other EU members, calling it "divisive".

The Baltic country urged fellow EU members to pursue "a much more effective 27+1 approach and communication with China."

"Lithuania no longer considers itself a 17+1 format member and does not participate in this initiative," Foreign Minister Gabriele Landsbergis said.

ASK US



Q. I am a 20-year-old bachelor. I am a government employee (part-time, but permanent). My monthly income is about ₹15,000. Please help me in sketching drawing up a holistic financial plan.

TAMIRE PRASANTH

Aarati Krishnan answers

A. You are right to start with a financial plan. To have a really personalised plan that you can go with for life, it would be best to take the help of a qualified financial adviser. But, if you are keen to make a start by yourself, you need to list down the financial and life goals that you may have today, along with the timelines you have in mind for achieving them. If your goal, within 3 years, is to take a holiday or buy a vehicle, that would be a financial goal. If you want to pursue higher studies, that would be a goal too. If you would like to purchase a house or marry, those would constitute goals too. This is apart from certain common goals such as retirement that we all have. If you have a family whose needs you plan to meet, do list their goals too.

Once you are able to list your goals, try and arrive at the targeted amount you will need to fulfil those goals. This will require you to add inflation to the current money value of those goals. There are many online calculators that allow you to arrive at the inflation-adjusted value of a goal 3 years, 5 years, 7 years and 10 years from today.

Once you have the timelines and the value of each goal, you can begin to create portfolios towards each. For less than 3-year goals, invest in bank recurring or fixed deposits. For 3-5 year goals, consider the NSC, post office 5-year deposits, corporate bond funds and PSU and banking funds. For 7-year-plus goals, consider SIPs in equity funds. Index funds will be your easiest option. For really long-term goals, open a Public Provident Fund (PPF) account and start investing in it. You can also open an NPS account and start saving towards retirement.

Along with planning for future goals, you need to make a plan to protect your existing assets too. For this, get a health cover of at least ₹5 lakh to meet your medical expenses in case of emergency. If you have parents or other dependents, get a pure term cover so that your nominees get a lump sum in the event an unfortunate event happens to you. Also, have 6 months' worth of your living expenses in an emergency fund in a bank deposit to take care of other emergencies or contingencies for you and your family.

Q. I am 27 and an Indian Railways employee. My mother is 52 and father, a cardiac patient, 62 years old. They are not covered under any health insurance policy. Can you suggest the best policy for my parents and can I claim income tax benefits on the premium?

SWARAJ S.

K. Nitya Kalyani answers

A. A group insurance scheme offered by your employer is always the first option to consider for family members.

Especially when your employer has a network of hospitals and medical facilities as yours does. Your formalities for getting them into the scheme and availing benefits would be minimal.

You can study the coverage offered under the scheme and supplement it carefully with a hospitalisation policy to enhance benefits or a critical illness policy that gives lump sum benefits.

You can choose a policy that covers your father for cardiac care, though there will be a waiting period, so that you have additional coverage and options for treatment in different hospitals.

The premium you pay for your parents for any commercial health policy brings you benefits under Section 80D of the Income-tax Act, 1961 under certain terms and conditions.

(K. Nitya Kalyani is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history)

Readers can send in queries on personal finance and investing to moneywise@thehindu.co.in. Our experts who write on personal finance will answer these queries. Moneywise will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund scheme, share or fixed deposit.

LOOSE CHANGE

RAVIKANTH



"Office accounts were long done, but this worksheet will take a while. It's our financial plan for the coming months."

SMALL SAVINGS may be rewarding

JOYDEEP SEN

terest on Small Savings Schemes are aligned with the Government Security (G-Sec) rates of similar maturity with a spread of 25 basis points (bps), with certain exceptions.

As an example, the spread on Senior Citizens Savings Scheme will be 100 basis points (bps) over comparable maturity G-Secs (100 bps equal to 1 percentage point).

The rationale for linking it with G-Sec yields in the secondary market is that it is in line with interest rate movements; G-Sec yield movements reflect the actual and anticipated events in the economy pertaining to rate movement. So, if the benchmark G-Sec rate is X% and the mark-up as per formula is Y%. Hence the rate should be X% plus Y%.

However, if the rate is higher, say X% plus Y% plus Z%, then Z represents the generosity of the government for the benefit of citizens. The rates on Small Savings Schemes are reviewed every quarter. However, the rates are not revised downward every quarter even when G-Sec rates come down. We will look at the current rates one by one.

The Post Office Savings Deposit rate is at 4%.

Public Provident Fund (PPF), which is a 15-year scheme (though it can be extended), is supposed to have a mark-up spread of 25 basis points. The relevant G-Sec rate, which is the average of G-Sec of corresponding maturity from December 2020 to February 2021, relevant for the quarter April to June 2021, was 6.16%. By that logic, the PPF rate should have been 6.41% (6.16% + 0.25%) whe-

reas the rate of 7.1% has been maintained. This represents an additional return of 69 bps (7.1% - 6.41%). This 0.69% is the extra or 'Z%' mentioned earlier.

To be noted, in the withdrawn notification, it was reduced to 6.4%, which was in line with the formula.

Post Office Term deposits of 1, 2 and 3-year maturities are to be maintained at the corresponding G-Sec rate, without any mark-up spread.

The relevant G-Sec yield for the quarter April to June 2021, was 3.52% for 1-year, 4.02% for 2-year and 4.51% for 3-years. As against this, the erstwhile rates, maintained for the quarter April to June 2021, are as high as 5.5% for all these tenures. That is, additional interest rate (Z%) offered is 198 bps (almost 2%) for 1-year, 148 bps for 2-year (approximately 1.5%) and 99 bps (approximately 1%) for 3-year.

For the 5-year term deposit, the mark-up spread is 25 bps. Against the reference G-Sec yield of 5.51%, it should have been 5.76%. The rate for 5-year TD is 6.7% and the excess interest is 0.94%. For the Recurring

Deposit Account, the reference point is 4.51% with zero mark-up and the rate is 5.8%. Hence, the additional interest is quite high at 1.29%.

The Monthly Income Scheme (MIS) has a mark-up of 25 bps; the reference G-Sec yield is 5.49% and the formula rate is 5.74%. The actual rate is 6.6% and the extra interest (Z%) is 0.86%.

The Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP) is at zero spread; given that the reference point is at 6.16% and the rate is at 6.9%, the additional interest over and above the formula rate is 0.74%.

For the NSC VIII Issue, with a mark-up of 25 bps, the formula rate is 5.88%. At 6.8%, the additional interest is 0.92%.

Senior Citizen Savings Scheme (SCSS), as mentioned earlier, has the highest mark-up spread of 1% over the reference G-Sec yield, as a social benevolence to take care of seniors, who may not have active income. At the reference 5-year G-Sec yield of 5.51%, the formula rate is 6.51%. The rate on offer is 7.4%, implying an additional interest (Z%) of 0.89%. The last one is the Sukanya Samridhi Account

Scheme, which has the longest tenure of 21 years. The formula mark-up is 75 bps. The reference G-Sec yield is 6.16%. Against the formula rate of 6.91%, the rate is 7.6%. The additional interest the girl child would get this quarter is 0.69%.

Conclusion

Historically, the government has allowed a higher interest rate than the formula rate, as a social good.

The currently available rates are significantly on the higher side and it is advisable that people take advantage of these rates.

The next review is due on June 30. In case the rates are revised downwards, it is advisable to lock in at the currently available rates, where applicable, by June 30.

In certain instances, like the Public Provident Fund, when the rate is revised downwards, it is on the entire amount, including your earlier deposits. Hence, there is no opportunity to lock in here.

In contrast, there are certain contractual return avenues e.g. National Savings Certificate (NSC), Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP), Term Deposits, etc. where you can lock in at the current rates.

As and when the rates are revised downwards, only the new investments will be at the lower rates.

(Data source: RBI Monetary Policy report)

(The writer is a corporate trainer and author)

THINK INVESTOR: RISKY APPROACH

Beware, your risk attitude could be changing!

With markets generating high returns, investors could be turning a Nelson's eye to the pitfalls of using this trend as benchmark

VENKATESH BANGARUSWAMY

If you have been making merry in the stock market in recent times, beware! You may be vulnerable to a shift in your risk attitude. In this article, we discuss how the market movements since March 2020 could change your expectations of return, causing harm to your financial well-being, and what you can do about it.

Happiness is relative
Your happiness is relative, not absolute. A 15% increase in your salary would make you happy only if your colleagues do not get more than you did. Likewise, a 10% cut in your salary will not make you very unhappy if your colleagues take a larger pay cut.

Most of the products offered by the investment industry are also built on this relative principle. It is not enough if we get index returns; we want returns higher than the benchmark index. Small wonder than that

the number of active funds far outweigh that of index products available in the market.

Now, extend this argument to direct equity investment. The market has been on an up-trend since March last. Valuations of most of the stocks have more than doubled since then. It is moot if these stocks can offer similar returns from the current levels. This could pose a problem.

Your experience of returns could lead to a shift in your risk attitude, if not controlled. Here is why: Suppose your trading portfolio generated 25% returns since last March. Your expectations are now set at that level, even if such returns may not be possible every year.

If your investments do not generate similar returns, your brain will drive you to take more risk in an attempt to generate higher returns. But that is only one part of the problem!

Blame your risk attitude on dopamine, a neurotransmitter

in your brain that responds to rewards. Or, more precisely, when actual rewards differ from expected rewards. So, if you expect 15% return on your investment and your actual return is 20%, your dopamine neurons increase its firing rate.

On the other hand, if your return is only 10%, the firing rate slows down. And, of course, if the actual returns are equal to the expected return, the firing rate does not change. Therefore, the dopamine reacts to error in reward prediction.



Stars in your eyes: Because you need a dopamine rush, your brain creates a desire for greater returns. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

This is important because dopamine drives desire or wanting. Last March, when you bought shares with a hope of making some money, you would have hardly expected to earn phenomenal returns. But you did. And now that you are used to earning such returns, you do not feel the dopamine rush any more because your actual and expected returns are similar.

Because dopamine typically reacts to error in prediction and because you need a dopamine rush, your brain creates a wanting for greater returns.

Fewer choices

But with the stock market continually trending up, such higher-return-generating assets may be few in number. So, you may be prompted to take greater risk to achieve higher returns. For instance, buying less-liquid mid-cap stocks or more-risky small-cap stocks. What should you do to control this wanting?

First, protect your goal-based portfolio from your trading portfolio. That is, create a rule that money can flow from your trading portfolio to your goal-based portfolios but not the other way.

Next, as you take profit on your trading portfolio, gradually reduce your risk capital. For instance, trade with your initial capital and do not reinvest your trading profit. Why?

You would be more cautious with your initial capital, being hard-earned money, than with your trading profit, which comes from the market. Of course, this is only till the time you are able to control your wanting state.

Lastly, embrace your trading losses! For that indicates that your trading returns are as much about luck as they are about skill.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals for managing their personal investments)

Life insurance term plan premium

Male: 30 Years, Sum Insured - ₹1 crore, Cover up to - 70 Years

Insurance company	Plan name	Maximum cover up to (Years)	Annual premium ₹
Aditya Birla Capital	Life Shield Plan	85	12,998
Aegon Life	iTerm Insurance Plan	100	9,114
Bajaj Allianz	Smart Protect Goal	85	10,911
Bharti AXA	Premier Protect Plan	75	11092**
Canara HSBC OBC	iSelect Star Term Plan	99	11,605
HDFC Life	Click2Protect Plus	85	12,601
ICICI Prudential	iProtect Smart	99	15,628
India First Life	e-Term Plan	80	8,260
Kotak Life Insurance	Kotak e-Term Plan	75	9,558
Max Life insurance	Smart Term Plan	85	11,800***
PNB Met Life	Mera Term Plan Plus	99	12,272
Reliance Nippon Life	Digi Term	80	11,012
SBI Life	eShield	80	15,070
TATA AIA Life	Maha Raksha Supreme	100	12,980

Bharti AXA coverage upto 65 years for age 30 years | *Max Life offers additional 5% discount for First year

Health insurance premium

Insurer name	Key features	Plan names	Premium ₹
Care Health	Day Care Treatments Family Floater option Health Checkups Pre and Post Hospitalisation Coverage	NCB Super Premium Care Care with unlimited recharge NCB Super Premium with UAR	9,092 8,265 8,885 9,712
Max Bupa Health	Day Care Treatments Hospitalisation at Home Family Floater option Alternate Medicine	Health ReAssure Health Pulse Enhanced Health Companion Go Active	9,590 10,696 9,862 11,747
Star Health	Family Floater option Restoration of cover Wellness Benefits	Medi Classic Star Comprehensive Young Star Gold Plan Young Star Silver Plan	9,661 11,476 8,389 7,133
Aditya Birla Health	Day Care Treatments Day 1 coverage Day 1 coverage Day 1 coverage	Activ assure Diamond Activ Health Platinum Enhanced Activ Health Enhance (Diabetes) Activ Health Enhance (Asthma) Activ Health Enhance (Hypertension) Activ Health Platinum Essential	7,919 9,074 17,912 13,170 19,889 7,474
Kotak General	Hospital Room Eligibility Pre and Post Hospitalisation Coverage	Activ Health Essential (Diabetes) Activ Health Enhance (Asthma) Activ Health Enhance (Hypertension) Activ Health Enhance (Diabetes) Activ Health Enhance (Asthma) Activ Health Enhance (Hypertension)	15,072 11,240 16,587
Chola MS General	Day Care Treatments Hospital Room Eligibility Hospitalisation at Home Alternate Medicine	Kotak Health Care-Premium (incl optional pack 1) Flexi Health	8,738 7,807
Liberty General	Day Care Treatments Hospitalisation at Home Hospital Room Eligibility		
Oriental Insurance	Day Care Treatments Hospitalisation at Home		

Max Verstappen takes the championship lead

Sainz Jr. and Norris complete the podium; pole-sitter Leclerc withdraws before the start with a drive-shaft problem

MONACO GP

REUTERS

MONTE CARLO

Red Bull's Max Verstappen won Formula One's showcase Monaco Grand Prix on Sunday to lead the World championship for the first time in his career.

The 23-year-old Dutch driver started the day 14 points behind Mercedes' seven times World champion Lewis Hamilton and ended it four clear. Hamilton finished seventh, with an extra point for the fastest lap.

Amazing race
"It's so special around here to win and, also for me, the first time on the podium here. An amazing race," said Verstappen, who had everything under control from start to finish for his second win of the season.

"You always want to win this grand prix. I remember when I was very little, already watching this grand prix,

so standing here I'm very proud."

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr. finished second after teammate Charles Leclerc, who had secured pole position after crashing in qualifying, was ruled out before the start with a drive-shaft problem.

The podium was the Spaniard's first since he joined Ferrari this year. Britain's Lando Norris, Sainz's team mate last year at McLaren, held off Sergio Perez to complete the top three.

He now has 105 points to Hamilton's 101, with Norris moving up to third on 56.

Red Bull goes top

As Red Bull celebrated a breakthrough weekend, going top of the constructors' standings by a single point, champions Mercedes dropped the ball.

Hamilton fumed after an early pitstop strategy backfired while Finnish team mate Valtteri Bottas retired



Rewarding excellence: Verstappen receives his reward from Monaco's Prince Albert II ■ AFP

from second place when mechanics were unable to remove the right front wheel.

"I don't understand guys. I saved the tyres to go longer and you made me stop before," said Hamilton over the team radio.

Earlier, Leclerc's Monaco jinx struck again as the Ferrari's pole-sitter retired from his home race before the start.

The driveshaft problem was unexpected, raising questions of how Ferrari had

failed to detect it earlier and whether they had taken a gamble to protect pole.

Still winless
Leclerc has yet to finish a home GP, with the showcase harbour-side race not held

last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He retired after collisions in 2018 and 2019.

The results: 1. Max Verstappen (Red Bull), 1:38:56.820, 2. Carlos Sainz Jr (Ferrari) +8.968s, 3.

Lando Norris (McLaren) +19.427, 4. Sergio Perez (Red Bull) +20.490, 5. Sebastian Vettel (Aston Martin) +52.591, 6.

Pierre Gasly (AlphaTauri) +53.896, 7. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) +1:08.231; 1 lap: 8.

Lance Stroll (Aston Martin), 9.

Esteban Ocon (Alpine) 10.

Antonio Giovinazzi (Alfa Romeo), 11. Kimi Raikkonen (Alfa Romeo), 12. Daniel Ricciardo (McLaren), 13. Fernando Alonso (Alpine), 14. George Russell (Williams), 15. Nicholas Latifi (Williams), 16. Yuki Tsunoda (AlphaTauri); 3 laps: 17. Nikita Mazepin (Haas), 18. Mick Schumacher (Haas); DNF: 19. Valtteri Bottas (Mercedes); DNS: 20. (1) Charles Leclerc (Ferrari).

Standings (Top-5): Drivers: 1.

Verstappen 105 pts, 2. Hamilton 101, 3. Norris 56, 4. Bottas 47, 5. Perez 44. **Constructors:** 1.

Red Bull 149 pts, 2. Mercedes 148, 3. McLaren 80, 4. Ferrari 78, 5. Aston Martin 19.

Tsitsipas wins with ease

LYON OPEN

REUTERS

LYON

Second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas claimed his seventh ATP title after beating Britain's Cameron Norrie 6-3, 6-3 in the final of the Lyon Open on Sunday.

Tsitsipas, who dropped only one set in the tournament, wrapped up the match in 69 minutes to add a second title in the clay-court swing after winning last month's Monte Carlo Masters.

"I feel like things were going my way, I'm proud of

this performance against Cameron since he's been winning against big players and showing what left-handers can do on clay," Tsitsipas said in a post-match interview on court.

Readyng for Paris
Speaking of his plans ahead of the French Open later this month, the 22-year-old Greek said: "It's about getting there as early as possible, starting practice and getting in shape for the big Parisian Grand Slam which I adore and love. Hopefully something good can come out of it."

Nagal draws Marcora

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PARIS

Sumit Nagal, currently ranked 142, on Sunday drew lower-ranked Italian Roberto Marcora (191) while Prajesh Gunnswaran and Ramkumar Ramanathan got matching rivals for their first-round clashes at the French Open Qualifiers.

Prajesh, ranked 149, will take on Germany's Oscar Otte, ranked 152, while Ramkumar, now ranked 215, will open his campaign against 168th-ranked Michael Mmoh of USA.

In the women's singles, Ankita Raina will open her campaign against Australian veteran Arina Rodionova.

Bangladesh draws first blood

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DHAKA

Off-spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz claimed four wickets as Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka by 33 runs in the first ODI here on Sunday. Mehidy returned four for 30 to help bowl out Sri Lanka for 224 in the tourists' chase of 258. Wanindu Hasaranga hit a valiant 74.

Earlier, Mushfiqur Rahim (84) and Mahmudullah (54) put on 109 runs for the fifth wicket to guide Bangladesh to 257 for six.

The scores: Bangladesh 257/6 in 50 overs (Tamim Iqbal 52, Mushfiqur Rahim 84, Mahmudullah 54, Dhananjaya de Silva 3/45) bt Sri Lanka 224 in 48.1 overs (Kusal Perera 30, Wanindu Hasaranga 74, Mustafizur Rahman 3/34, Mehdy Hasin 4/30). **Toss:** Bangladesh.

Bangladesh won by 33 runs to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

India women to get long-pending reward

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Indian women cricketers, who made the final of last year's World T20 in Australia, will receive their share from the \$500,000 prize money by the end of this week, a senior BCCI official said on Sunday after it came to light that they are yet to be paid.

A report in the UK's *Telegraph* quoted an official from the Federation of International Cricketers Association

Asia Cup postponed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

the rescheduled edition will be played in 2023.

The ACC had postponed the 2020 edition to June 2021, allotting it to Sri Lanka in June. However, the COVID-19 surge has forced the ACC to virtually call the edition off.



Jaydev Unadkat... staying focused. ■ FILE PHOTO: VIJAY SONEJI

Tragedy strikes ultramarathon

21 runners killed because of extreme cold weather conditions

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING

Twenty-one runners in a mountain ultramarathon have died in northwestern China after hail, freezing rain and gale-force winds hit the high-altitude race, state media reported on Sunday.

After an all-night rescue operation in freezing temperatures involving more than 700 personnel, rescuers were able to confirm that 151 people were safe, out of a total of 172 participants. Twenty-one had died, according to the official Xinhua News Agency, which said the runners suffered from physical discomfort and the sudden drop in temperature.

The runners were racing on an extremely narrow mountain path at an altitude

reaching 2,000-3,000 metres. The 100km race was held on Saturday in the Yellow River Stone Forest tourist site in Baiyin city in Gansu province.

Participants were not rookies. One of the deceased was a well-known runner

Liang Jing, who had won a 100km event in Ningbo. A woman who worked for the race organiser said there were no predictions of extreme weather for the day of the race, according to Beijing News, a paper owned by the Beijing city government.

Providing aid: Rescue workers assisting runners who were affected badly when extreme weather hit the area where the ultramarathon was being run. ■ AFP



Providing aid: Rescue workers assisting runners who were affected badly when extreme weather hit the area where the ultramarathon was being run. ■ AFP

PREMIER LEAGUE

AGENCIES

LONDON

Liverpool and Chelsea secured the final two Champions League qualification spots on a thrilling last day of the Premier League season, with Leicester missing out in the three-way fight for a top-four finish on Sunday.

Chelsea's 2-1 defeat at Aston Villa didn't prove critical because Leicester conceded three late goals to lose 4-2 at home to Tottenham and stay in fifth place.

Liverpool beat Crystal Palace 2-0 and jumped into third place, two points above fourth-place Chelsea.

Leicester also missed out on Champions League qualification by losing on the final day of last season.

West Ham beat Southampton 3-0 to finish in sixth place to qualify for the Europa League and Tottenham's win at Leicester ensured the team got into the new Europa Conference League.

Sergio Aguero marked his final Premier League game for Manchester City by scoring twice as a substitute in the champions' 5-0 win against Everton.

Harry Kane finished as top scorer on 23 goals – one ahead of Liverpool's Mohamed Salah – after scoring at Leicester.

The results: Arsenal 2 (Pepe 49, 60) bt Brighton 0; Aston Villa 2 (Traore 43, El Ghazi 52-pen) bt

Chelsea 1 (Chilwell 70); Fulham 0 lost to Newcastle 2 (Wilcock 23, Schaer 88-pen); Leeds 3 (Rodriguez 17, Phillips 42, Bamford 79-pen) bt West Brom 1 (Robson-Kanu 90).

Leicester 2 (Vardy 18-pen, 52-pen) lost to Tottenham 4 (Kane 41, Schmeichel 76-og, Bale 87, 90+6); Liverpool 2 (Mane 36, 74) bt Crystal Palace 0; Manchester City 5 (De Bruyne 11, Jesus 14, Foden 53, Aguero 71, 76) bt Everton 0; Sheffield United 1 (McGoldrick 24) bt Burnley 0.

West Ham 3 (Fornals 30, 33, Rice 86) bt Southampton 0; Wolves 1 (Semedo 39) lost to Manchester Utd 2 (Elanga 13, Mata 45+4-pen).

Sushil Kumar arrest: Sports fraternity in shock and disbelief

who won a bronze medal alongside Sushil in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, did not prefer to react to the development at this point in time.

International wrestler Kripa Shankar Patel, an Arjuna award winner, was shocked.

"I cannot believe this. I have trained with Sushil for a long time in different camps and can say that he cannot kill anyone. Maybe it is an accident. The law should take its own course and the victim should get justice," said Patel.

PTI adds

Seasoned table tennis player A. Sharath Kamal, who is gearing up for his fourth Olympic appearance, said, "If this has actually happened, it is unfortunate

and reflects badly on Indian sport, not just wrestling," Sharad said.

"He is one of the best athletes we have had. People look up to him."

Unfortunate

Former hockey captain Ajitpal Singh, who was an Indian Olympic Association observer at the 2008 Olympics, said he still could not understand what exactly went wrong with the "polite" man.

"It is very shameful and unfortunate. Being a role model Sushil should have led by example and never indulged in such a brawl. He has got everything in life, the sport gave him everything, money, fame," said Ajitpal.

Honing their skills



Working out: The Indian football team members at a practice session in Doha ahead of the qualifiers for the 2022 FIFA World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup. ■ TWITTER/INDIANFOOTBALL

Liverpool, Chelsea ensure top-four finish on a thrilling last day

Leicester blows its Champions League chances yet again conceding late goals to Tottenham; West Ham in Europa League



Bullet header: Aguero made his last appearance for Man City count with a brace. ■ REUTERS

Indian boxers will hope to pack a punch

SPORTS BUREAU
DUBAI

A star-studded Indian contingent, including six-time World champion M.C. Mary Kom and World championships medallists Lovlina Borgohain, Amit Panghal, Vikas Krishan and Shiva Thapa, will look to make an impact in the Asian boxing championships starting here on Monday.

After a seven-year wait – and a dramatic final round – Atletico Madrid had won the Spanish league title.

The event assumes significance as it gives the boxers a fine platform to ply their trade in the run-up to the Tokyo Olympic Games. As per the draws for the different weight categories on Sunday, Commonwealth Games bronze medalist Mohammad Husamuddin (56kg) is set to begin the proceedings for India on the opening day of the event carrying a prize money of \$4,000,000.

Thapa (64kg) and Sumit Sangwan (81kg) will also begin their campaign on day one.

Defending champion Panghal (52kg), who received a bye in the first round, is among the six Indian men (also including Vikas) who will start their journey from the quarterfinals. Another Olympics-qualified boxer Ashish Kumar (75kg) also has a first round bye.

In the women's section, Mary (51kg), Lalbuatsaihi (64kg), Lovlina (69kg), Pooja Rani (75kg), Monika (48kg), Saweety (81kg) and Anupama (+81kg) will begin their campaign from the semifinal stage.

Indians' chance to assess themselves

SHOOTING

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian air rifle and pistol shooters will have the first taste of competition in the ongoing European shooting championship on Monday.

The first three days being devoted for the junior events, the Indian team focused on its training after travelling to Osijek, from its training base in Zagreb, Croatia.

The Indian shooters will not be eligible to contest the medals, but the qualification series would give them a hint about their level of preparation against world-class shooters.

"We have all settled down well. We felt good after completing the seven-day quarantine period. The team is looking forward to the championship," rifle coach Deepali Deshpande was quoted in a release from the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI).

After the air events in both rifle and pistol on Monday, the rest of the Indian shooters will get to shoot their events in rifle 3-position and women's sports pistol.

Sreeshankar targets 8.35m at Tokyo

Only concern is being unable to go abroad for training or competitions

ATHLETICS

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Murali Sreeshankar is lucky, having qualified for Tokyo Olympics and being able to stay home and train in familiar surroundings. But, like everyone else, he desperately needs competitions.

The 22-year-old long jumper, though, is staying positive. "My preparations are going really fine. It's been much like pre-season training for me; the only concern, as for all Indian athletes, is being unable to go abroad for training or competitions due to the travel restrictions," he said during an in-

Tears and smiles for Atletico Madrid

Barcelona-discard Suarez fires it to LaLiga glory; Real Madrid comes up short

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MADRID

When the final whistle blew, Diego Simeone broke out into a broad smile, laughed and breathed a sigh of relief. A few moments later, Luis Suarez was sitting on the field weeping profusely while on a video call.

After a seven-year wait – and a dramatic final round – Atletico Madrid had won the Spanish league title.

Atletico outlasted second-place Real Madrid after coming from behind to defeat Valladolid 2-1 on Saturday and finish two points ahead of its city rival after almost losing a lead that it had held since the ninth round.

Suarez, who was let go by Barcelona against his wishes last season, scored the winner for Atletico which won its first league title since 2014 in a wild finish that had plen-



That winning feeling! Atletico Madrid players are a joyous lot after a dramatic final round. ■ AFP

ty of twists with the two remaining title contenders playing at the same time.

Madrid couldn't repeat as champion despite rallying to defeat Villarreal 2-1 at home.

Suarez's goal came as redemption in what he called his "toughest year." He was key for Atletico throughout the season after practically being handed to the team by

Barcelona.

The Uruguay striker was deeply moved after the match and broke down while apparently talking to his family on the phone.

Bajrang Punia begins mat training

Plans to go to Russia or US to get quality sparring partners

WRESTLING

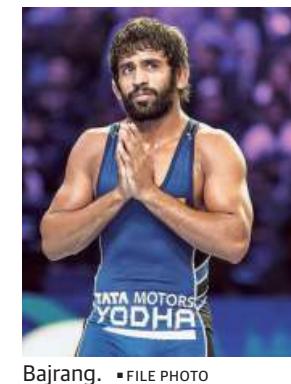
Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

gory – in Almaty, Kazakhstan, last month and has resumed his training at the Inspire Institute of Sports (IIS), Vijayanagara, where the weather is 'similar' to that in Japan.

Knee feels better
"I started mat training a few days back. The knee is much better and I am preparing for the (ranking series) tournament in Poland (June 8-13). I am facing a minor issue when it comes to sparring.

"I was trying to get sparring partners from abroad but they could not get visas due to the COVID-19 situation in India," Bajrang told *The Hindu*.

"I train with the 70kg and 74kg wrestlers. The National camp is not functional at the



Bajrang. ■ FILE PHOTO

moment due to COVID-19 and I came to the IIS with a partner.

"I went through quarantine and trained with my coach for the first two days. Now I have started training with my partner. The whole of last year, during the lockdown, I did physical train-

ing. Since the Olympics is drawing closer, it is important to train on the mat," said Bajrang.

To train in Europe

"The federation has made a schedule for two months of training in Europe. It looks good for me. After the event in Poland, we may get to train in Turkey and Hungary.

"The current strain (of COVID-19) is spreading faster in India and the partner issue is there. I don't want to come back (after the events).

"I may go to Russia or United States where I can get good training partners. If I can go directly to the Olympics from there, I will do that. Or else, I will come back to India and go to Tokyo," said Bajrang.

Sharmada Balu looks back, for a better future

TENNIS

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI



Sharmada Balu.
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

team to support you," she observed.

Pat for Ankita and team

Sharmada was all praise for Ankita Raina and the team for elevating Indian women's tennis to the World Group play-off level and for such a good tie against Latvia, in the Billie Jean King Cup. It was great "motivation" for her to regain her game, and reach better standards.

When asked about advice for juniors, Sharmada said, "there is zero short cut. If you are not doing the work, the one next to you is doing twice as hard."

Appreciating the value of basics, and not cluttering the mind with thoughts while playing, Sharmada said that she was grateful to Rohan Bopanna, the Spots School for the opportunity to coach even as she trains for her professional tennis.

"You need to pick what is useful to you. It does not matter where you train.

"You need to know what you are doing and why you are doing it. And a good

"Am hungry to keep learning more," signed off Sharmada, beaming.

sure to different facets.

"It taught me to keep my eyes open," Sharmada said – she quickly learnt to read people and understand the world when travelling alone.

She also trained in tennis academies in Germany, Spain and Thailand, apart from home.

"You need to pick what is useful to you. It does not matter where you train.

"You need to know what you are doing and why you are doing it. And a good

"Am hungry to keep learning more," signed off Sharmada, beaming.

listed all the areas I might be lacking in and we have been working hard on them for the past 6-8 weeks. It's a big challenge but the life of an athlete is all about challenges and let's see how I overcome it," he added.

The youngster is targeting 8.35-8.40m at Tokyo. "Actually at Patiala itself I was very close to it. Also, the track there is not as fast as Tokyo, which has Mondo track, the best in the world and quite fast.

"Also, my improvement from 8.20 (in 2018) to 8.26m has been because of improved capabilities, strength and speed, not assisted by conditions or atmosphere."

Once those aspects also come into play it will get even better," he explained.

While the upcoming Indian Grand Prix 4 and the Inter-State Championships remain on the radar, Sreeshankar is keen on international outings. "I am ideally looking forward to competition in Europe but if not then at least on the Asian circuit, in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan because competing on the international circuit is a different level. However, if that doesn't happen, then definitely I will be there at IGP 4 and Inter-State because to stimulate a competitive atmosphere, domestic meets will also help."

Award will motivate me, says Pandian

K. KEERTHIVASAN
CHENNAI

Bureaucrat V. Karthikeya Pandian, who was conferred with the FIH (International Hockey Federation) President's Award at the FIH Congress on Sunday, has been a sports buff right from his school days.

"I feel really happy. It was our team that made it all possible. Actually the award will motivate me to contribute more to Indian sports," said Pandian, who has been private secretary to Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik since 2011, to *The Hindu*.

"The award I believe was due to the work we did for the men's World Cup held in Bhubaneswar in 2018. Of course without the encouragement from our CM, the award would not have been possible."

Detailing Odisha's contribution to sports, Pan-



V.K. Pandian.
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

dian said it is the only State that has a High Performance Centre for weightlifting, athletics, badminton, swimming and hockey, all with corporate sponsors.

"His discipline, hard work, clarity of vision and never-say-die attitude is pushing Odisha towards greater heights in the field of sports," read a note from the Chief Minister's Office.

Durant leads Nets to a facile win

NBA

REUTERS
NEW YORK

Kevin Durant recorded 32 points and 12 rebounds to help Brooklyn Nets notch a 104-93 victory over visiting Boston Celtics in the opening game of the Eastern Conference first-round playoff series on Saturday.

Kyrie Irving scored 29 points and James Harden added 21 points, nine rebounds, eight assists and four steals for the second-seeded Nets. The contest was just the ninth in which Durant, Harden and Irving played together.

Middleton pulls it off
Khris Middleton's pull-up jumper with 0.5 seconds left



broke a tie and propelled visiting Dallas Mavericks to a 113-103 win over fourth-seeded Los Angeles Clippers.

The results: EC: Bucks 109 bt Heat 107 (OT). Bucks lead 1-0; Nets 104 bt Boston 93. Nets lead 1-0.

WC: Mavericks 113 bt Clippers 103. Mavericks lead 1-0; Trail Blazers 123 bt Nuggets 109. Trail Blazers lead 1-0.

ATHLETICS

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Murali Sreeshankar is lucky, having qualified for Tokyo Olympics and being able to stay home and train in familiar surroundings. But, like everyone else, he desperately needs competitions.

The 22-year-old long jumper, though, is staying positive. "My preparations are going really fine. It's been much like pre-season training for me; the only concern, as for all Indian athletes, is being unable to go abroad for training or competitions due to the travel restrictions," he said during an in-

teraction from Palakkad.

"Soon after the Federation Cup (in March, where he qualified with a new national record of 8.26m) we

listed all the areas I might be lacking in and we have been working hard on them for the past 6-8 weeks. It's a big challenge but the life of an athlete is all about challenges and let's see how I overcome it," he added.

"Also, my improvement from 8.20 (in 2018) to 8.26m has been because of improved capabilities, strength and speed, not assisted by conditions or atmosphere."

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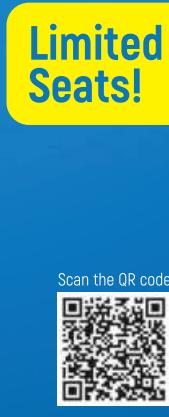
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