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Media a natural ally, there should be no curbs on reporting; EC
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Eight England players from IPL reach London, three others will fly soon
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NEARBY



Delhi records 311 deaths, over 20,000 new cases

NEW DELHI
The national capital recorded 311 COVID-19 deaths in a day, pushing the toll to 18,063 on Wednesday. A total of 20,960 new cases were also reported in a 24-hour period, taking the case tally to 12,53,902. The test positivity rate was 26.37%, and there are currently 91,859 active cases in the city.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Tehreek-e-Hurriyat chairman dies in jail

Srinagar
Jailed Tehreek-e-Hurriyat chairman Ashraf Sehrai, a close aide of senior separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, died in a Jammu hospital on Wednesday. Hospital sources said Sehrai developed pneumonia in the Udhampur Jail and was shifted to the Government Medical College Hospital in Jammu on Tuesday. "His Rapid Antigen Test was negative but the RT-PCR result later showed him as positive," an official said.

NORTH & WEST ▶ PAGE 5



Maratha quota unconstitutional, violates right to equality, says SC

No 'exceptional circumstances' in Maharashtra to break 50% ceiling limit: Bench

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on Wednesday unanimously declared a Maharashtra law, which provides reservation benefits to the Maratha community taking the quota limit in the State in excess of 50%, unconstitutional.

The Bench, led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, found there was no "exceptional circumstances" or "extraordinary situation" in Maharashtra, which required the State government to break the 50% ceiling limit to bestow quota benefits on the Maratha community.

"We have found that no extraordinary circumstances were made out in granting separate reservation for Maratha community by exceeding the 50% ceiling limit of reservation... The Marathas are in the mainstream of the national life. It is not even disputed that Marathas are a politically dominant caste," Justice Bhushan, who authored the lead opinion on the point of the validity of the Maratha law, noted.

Sets aside HC verdict

The Supreme Court struck down the findings of the Justice M.G. Gaikwad Commission, which led to the enactment of the Maratha quota law, and set aside the Bombay High Court judgment which validated the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act of 2018.

The High Court, in June 2019, reduced the quantum of reservation for Marathas from the 16% recommended by the Gaikwad Commission to 12% in education and 13% in employment.

The Supreme Court concluded that even the reduced percentages were *ultra vires*.

In fact, the Supreme Court held that a separate reservation for the Maratha community violated Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (due process of law).

The Marathas are in the mainstream of the national life. It is not even disputed that Marathas are politically dominant caste

The judgment of Indra Sawhney has stood the test of time and has never been doubted by any judgment of this court

To change the 50% limit is to have a society which is not founded on equality but based on caste rule

JUSTICE ASHOK BHUSHAN
DELIVERING THE LEAD AND UNANIMOUS OPINION FOR THE CONSTITUTION BENCH

law, and set aside the 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment, which fixed the reservation limit at 50%. "The judgment of Indra Sawhney has stood the test of time and has never been doubted by any judgment of this court," Justice Bhushan wrote.

"The ceiling of 50% with the 'extraordinary circumstances' exception, is the just balance – what is termed as the 'Goldilocks solution' – i.e. the solution containing the right balance that allows the State sufficient latitude to ensure meaningful affirmative action to those who deserve it and at the same time ensures that the essential content of equality," Justice S. Ravindra Bhat on the Bench agreed.

Most important, the top court declined to revisit its

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 9

Only Centre can identify SEBC court

The Centre alone is empowered to identify socially and educationally backward classes (SEBC) and include them in the Central List for claiming reservation benefits, according to Justice S. Ravindra Bhat, whose opinion was concurred by Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Hemant Gupta on the five-judge Bench. The States can only make suggestions. ▶ PAGE 9

Uddhav asks Modi to show 'courage'

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to show similar "courage" in ensuring reservation for the Maratha community as he had shown in the case of Article 370 in J&K. The top court's verdict striking down Maratha reservation was disappointing, Mr. Thackeray said. ▶ PAGE 9

Viral load high, third wave is inevitable: govt. adviser

Vaccines need update to deal with mutants: VijayRaghavan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A third wave of COVID-19 is inevitable, given the amount of virus in circulation, K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, said on Wednesday.

"There is, however, no clear timeline on when this third phase will occur. We should be prepared for new waves and COVID-appropriate behaviour, and vaccine upgrades is the way forward," he said at a press conference.

Professor VijayRaghavan said there was a need to update the COVID-19 vaccines to deal with new strains and mutations. He pointed out that while the nature of the virus was to mutate, the basic precautions against it to break the transmission did not change. "We have to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour and get vaccinated. The scientific community is working at mapping the possible changes that can occur in the virus to ensure that our preparedness and response remains robust," he said.

The warning comes along with an indication by the Health Ministry that Bengaluru Urban, Chennai, Kozhikode, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Malappuram in Kerala; Gurugram and Patna districts have been among those now registering an increasing trend of the virus for the past two weeks.

"States including Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, and Haryana," Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Health Ministry, said.



Close contact: People at a market in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday ahead of curfew in the city. ▶ K.R. DEEPAK

'Govt. had been updated on mutants'

The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genome Sequencing Consortia (INSACOG), which studies coronavirus samples of various States, had been giving regular updates on the threat from new strains to the government, said a senior member. ▶ PAGE 10

Present surge will taper by May-end: Kang

The current COVID-19 surge may peak to start tapering between the middle and end of May, virologist Gagandeep Kang has said. She attributed the second surge to the virus spreading among two segments – the middle class and the rural population. ▶ PAGE 10

in daily COVID-19 cases, and an increase in deaths has been noticed in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, and Haryana.

"States including Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Bihar are showing an increasing trend

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

RBI steps in to ease COVID-19 burden

Aid for health sector, small borrowers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

With India's economic recovery threatened by the second COVID-19 wave, the Reserve Bank of India stepped in on Wednesday with measures aimed at alleviating any financing constraints for healthcare infrastructure and services, as well as small borrowers who may be facing distress due to a sudden spike in health expenditure.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das used an unscheduled address to announce a Term Liquidity Facility of ₹50,000 crore with tenor of up to three years, at the repo rate, to ease access to credit for providers of emergency health services.

Under the scheme, banks will provide fresh lending support to a wide range of entities, including vaccine

manufacturers, importers/suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices, hospitals/dispensaries, pathology labs, manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators, and logistics firms. "These loans will continue to be classified under priority sector till repayment or maturity, whichever is earlier," Mr. Das said, adding that banks were expected to create a COVID loan book under the scheme.

As part of a "comprehensive targeted policy response", the RBI also unveiled schemes to provide credit relief to individual and MSME borrowers impacted by the pandemic. "Restoring livelihoods has become an imperative," Mr. Das said.

FULL REPORT ▶ PAGE 14

Relief train



Ready for patients: Workers cleaning railway coaches converted into COVID-19 isolation wards at the Sabarmati station in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. ▶ VIJAY SONEJI

Mamata takes oath, appeals for peace

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee was on Wednesday sworn in as West Bengal Chief Minister for the third successive term.

Soon after the function, she appealed to all parties to maintain peace and stop post-election violence.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, who administered the oath of office, expressed the hope that the governance in the State "will be according to the Constitution and as per rule of law".

BJP State president Dilip Ghosh kept away in protest against the violence.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

13 COVID-19 patients die in T.N. hospital

Oxygen supply was disrupted due to low pressure

R. SRIKANTH
CHENNAI

Thirteen COVID-19 patients died after oxygen supply was disrupted due to low pressure in the oxygen tank at the Chengalpattu Government Hospital in Tamil Nadu late on Tuesday.

Confirming the deaths on Wednesday, J. Muthukumaran, Dean of the hospital, said oxygen was available in the tank from which it was supplied to more than 300 patients admitted to the COVID-19 ward, but it did not have sufficient pressure. He said the hospital had a total capacity of 23 kilolitres (kl), comprising two 10 kl and a 3 kl oxygen tanks.

"Previously, when there



Time of distress: People waiting outside the hospital in Chengalpattu, Tamil Nadu, on Wednesday. ▶ M. KARUNAKARAN

were not too many COVID-19 patients, we did not face any oxygen shortage. Now with a large number of COVID-19 patients getting admitted during the past fortnight, it has become tough. Today, 309 patients in the COVID-19 ward [of the total 580] were provided with oxygen support," he said.

"The COVID-19 ward is supplied with oxygen from

the 10 kl tank. As several government and private hospitals are also in need of oxygen supply, our hospital has been receiving only around 4 kl to 5 kl to fill the three oxygen tanks, which will be enough to treat patients on regular days."

Doctors stage protest

The incident triggered a strike by postgraduate physi-

cians and assistant doctors on Wednesday morning, demanding the immediate filling of the oxygen tanks.

Chengalpattu Collector A. John Louis, who reached the hospital, pacified the protesting doctors and assured them that all their demands would be met. He ordered an inquiry by the Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO).

The hospital authorities handed over the bodies to the relatives for cremation.

A postgraduate doctor who participated in the protest said the hospital had been facing oxygen shortage despite having 23 kl capacity tanks. Since COVID-19 patients had been getting admitted in large numbers, the hospital had been facing oxygen shortage for more than a week, he claimed.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

What will I tell my kids, asks distraught husband sitting next to body of spouse

Only 7.1% of beds for COVID-19 patients vacant in Delhi

NIKHIL M BABU

Outside the emergency ward of Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital on Wednesday, Ashish Khare broke down next to the body of his wife who had succumbed to COVID-19.

The hospital authorities handed over the bodies to the relatives for cremation.

A postgraduate doctor who participated in the protest said the hospital had been facing oxygen shortage despite having 23 kl capacity tanks. Since COVID-19 patients had been getting admitted in large numbers, the hospital had been facing oxygen shortage for more than a week, he claimed.

"I could not save Meenu. I couldn't do anything. Rajiv Gandhi (Hospital) said they don't have any beds and asked us to go to GTB (Hospital). She was fine in the morning," Mr. Khare cried.

The couple has two children: a 15-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl. "What will I tell them happened to their mother?" he said.

"Just this morning, my



Ashish Khare outside GTB Hospital on Wednesday. ▶ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

daughter was saying how she had not hugged her mother in a while. How will I take her (body) home?"

Delhiites have been struggling to find beds, oxygen and medical supplies since the latest COVID surge hit the city early last month.

Raju Saha, 25, said he got

his neighbour admitted to GTB Hospital after three other hospitals turned them away saying they had no beds for COVID patients.

Only 7.1% of the 21,805 beds set aside for COVID-19 patients in Delhi were vacant at 8 p.m. on Wednesday. There were also only 45 ICU beds available.

Ignoring the signs

The number of active COVID cases in the city jumped 529.4% between March 1 and March 31, while daily cases rose by 939.4%. The number of beds for patients during the same period, however, increased by just 1.6%.

The government started increasing beds on a war footing only in April.

'Will call for trial court records on Ramani case'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday said it will call for the trial court records in connection with the defamation case filed by former Union Minister M.J. Akbar against journalist Priya Ramani who had accused him of sexual harassment.

The trial court had acquitted Ms. Ramani by dismissing Mr. Akbar's defamation complaint.

Justice Mukta Gupta said she will call for the trial court records and listed Mr. Akbar's appeal against Ms. Ramani's acquittal for hearing on August 11.

During the brief hearing, Mr. Akbar's lawyer said the trial court judgment was "pervasive". Mr. Akbar has challenged the trial court's February 17 order acquitting Ms. Ramani in the case on grounds that a woman has the right to put grievances before any platform of her choice even after decades. The trial court had dismissed Mr. Akbar's complaint.

Minor technical glitches aside, smooth sailing at vaccine centres

Some of them found their names missing from the list, rest returned satisfied

HEMAMI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Outside a government school in Shahdara, people queued up to take their first shot of COVID-19 vaccine. While most of them went home satisfied, a handful returned without a jab as their names didn't find a mention in the list at the centre.

A 36-year-old, who did not wish to be named, said that he had registered on Monday and got an appointment for Wednesday 9am-11am slot but when he got his details verified, the Civil Defence Volunteers couldn't find his name in the register. "I have been asked to reschedule and come back. I have stepped out today [Wednesday] and it was scary enough. What is my fault if their system is not working properly?" he said.

Recurring incident

A senior nursing staffer monitoring at the school, on condition of anonymity, said that at least eight to ten such cases have been coming every



People in the age group of 18-44 waiting for vaccination at BLK Hospital in Delhi on Wednesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

day since 18-44 age group started getting vaccinated. "They are then asked to reschedule. We have flagged it but it is not getting solved. If they allow over the counter registration then people won't face this problem," he said.

At the school, those who had opted for 9am-11am slot and had reached around 8.15 a.m. to prevent a long queue had to wait for over an hour till the vaccination arrived around 9.20 a.m. Subsequently, the waiting period

reduced to 15-20 minutes before a set of 20 people at a time was called inside the school to start the process. First, their identities were verified with the names on the list. Afterwards, they were given a chit and asked to proceed towards the vaccination room.

Inside the vaccination room where a Civil Defence Volunteer confirmed if the person has had breakfast and updated information in the system. A few were sent back to eat as they said they didn't

have breakfast.

After the vaccination, people were asked to sit on classroom chairs, which were laid out in the open. However, no one checked whether people were completing half an hour observation time.

Satisfied with process

Talking about the process, Gauri Sharma (19) said she was "extremely satisfied" and that everyone should get vaccinated. "It is so important right now. No one should wait or hesitate," she said.

Rubiya Khan (29), who was also happy with the process, said that people shouldn't compare the two vaccines. "There should be no doubt on getting vaccinated. Even I've read up on the two vaccines before getting the jab but we should all get the vaccine that is available," she said.

Raman Arora (39) said that the situation is so dangerous that "vaccination seems to be the only good thing that is going for us".

250-bed facility at Rakabganj Gurdwara to open soon

It will be linked to the facility in Ramlila Maidan for ICU beds

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

The COVID care facility at the Rakabganj Gurdwara, with a capacity of 250 beds, is likely to become functional on May 10, according to the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC).

The 250-bed facility will also be linked to the facility in Ramlila Maidan for ICU beds, according to officials.

DSGMC president Manjinder Singh Sirsa said: "Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain has said that this facility can be linked to the facility which is coming up at Ramlila Maidan. That way, patients who require emergency services and ICU beds can be shifted to the facility at Ramlila Maidan from Rakabganj Gurdwara."

Mr. Sirsa said that while DSGMC ambulances will be deployed, the Delhi government will appoint a nodal officer and provide medical staff.

Inside the facility, several rows of beds with oxygen concentrators have been



A volunteer installing medical equipment at the COVID care facility at Rakabganj Gurdwara on Wednesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Rakabganj Gurdwara facility.

People turning up

With information about the facility being made public, Mr. Singh said that over the past few days, several patients have turned up looking for beds, even though it is not operational yet. "We have already received several queries. We get calls throughout the day asking if beds are available. Over the last two days, we have also had instances when the patients arrived in ambulances looking for a bed. We hope we can soon throw open the facility," he said.

2 ambulance drivers held for fleecing

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In separate incidents on Wednesday, the police arrested two ambulance drivers for allegedly charging exorbitant rates to shift COVID patients from home to hospitals.

In the first incident, Chirag Goyal (42), who charged ₹10,000 for 20 km, was arrested from south-east Delhi, said the police.

In another incident, the police nabbed a 31-year-old ambulance driv-

er in north-west Delhi for charging exorbitant rates. "On May 3, when a police patrolling team was near Deep Chand Bhandari Hospital, an information was received that an ambulance driver was involved in overcharging COVID patients by demanding exorbitant fare," said Gurjeet Singh Sidhu, Additional DCP, (North-West)

"The facts of the information was verified when the driver gave a receipt of ₹6,000 for transporting COVID patient," said the additional DCP.

Govt. ties up with firm to provide e-vehicles for patients

The service is free of cost and available round the clock

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A company providing e-mobility services has partnered with the Delhi government to provide sanitised electric vehicles for safe commute of patients to healthcare facilities across the Capital round the clock. The service is free.

This came a day after Aam Aadmi Party Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh flagged off a fleet of auto ambulances to provide transportation services to mild COVID patients to city hospi-

tals. Mr. Singh, on Wednesday, said the service would be extended to Uttar Pradesh over the coming days.

The 'Jeevan Seva App', created by Praktiri E-Mobility and available on both the Google Play Store and on the iOS App Store, provides a dedicated EV cab service to help patients commute for treatment from any point in Delhi and without any charges.

Click away
"The patients, with a click on this app can book a hassle-free ride and curtail the spread of the virus and is environment friendly. They can download the 'Jeevan Seva App' through the Google Play Store and iOS

The patients, with a click on this app can book a hassle-free ride and curtail the spread of the virus and is environment friendly. They can download the "Jeevan Seva App" through the Google Play Store and iOS App Store

COMPANY PROVIDING THE SERVICE

service is available 24 hours," the company also stated.

Autorickshaw fleet

Meanwhile, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, on Tuesday, launched a fleet of autorickshaws as part of the 'Auto Ambulance' programme providing transportation to mild COVID-19 patients in the city.

"Hands of help in this difficult time, salute the service of Tasia Association and the Auto brothers of Delhi, Delhi needs Oxygen cylinder, Oxygen plant, Oxygen concentrator, come forward for whatever help you can [sic]," Mr. Singh tweeted along with pictures of the fleet. The services can be reached via the helpline number 011-4123614.

Service in U.P. soon

Mr. Singh said a similar service would soon be launched in Lucknow in addition to other Uttar Pradesh districts because people were facing difficulties in reaching hospitals and long waiting times had been witnessed from many locations.

"During the pandemic, visuals of the situation in Uttar Pradesh have come forward that will make your heart tremble. A son pleads in front of the police officers, begging for an oxygen cylinder to save his mother but the policemen snatched the cylinder from him," he said.

Govt. asks CBSE for time for Class 10 results

It stated that many teachers are involved in COVID-19 duties

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Wednesday wrote to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) asking it to review the timeline it has set for tabulation of marks by schools for Class 10 board examination results, due to the current wave of the pandemic.

It said that many of its teachers are currently involved in COVID-19

duties like conducting door-to-door surveys in hotspots and vulnerable areas, providing assistance with testing and contact tracing, monitoring the movement of bodies and ensuring timely disposal of calls for hearses vans.

The CBSE, after cancelling the Class 10 board examination, has said that the marks for Class 10 students will have to be submitted by June 11 and the result will be de-

clared by June 20.

In its letter, the Delhi government said: "Keeping in view the ongoing situation, including its emotional ramifications, enforcement of the lockdown and deployment of teachers for various duties, the competent authority of CBSE is requested to kindly review the Time Schedule... regarding Policy for Tabulation of Marks for Class 10 Board Exams 2021 [sic]."

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE

| SR. NO. | NAME OF BOARD/CORP./AUTH. | NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER | OPENING DATE | CLOSING DATE | AMOUNT (APPROX.) IN RUPEES | WEBSITE OF THE BOARD | NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL ID |
|---------|---------------------------|--|--------------|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 1 | UHBN | 3 PHASE 11KV/3-250V, 50 KVA CIL IMPREGNATED, NATURALLY COOLED ALUMINUM WOUND OUTDOOR TYPE DISTRIBUTION TRANSFORMERS AS PER ISHAN TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION NO. CSC-172/R-U DHAN PU 2020-21 | 27.04.2021 | 18.05.2021 | END 2 LACS | uhbn.org.in | conne@uhbn.org.in |
| 2 | UHBN | 3 PHASE 11KV/3-250V, 50 KVA CIL IMPREGNATED, NATURALLY COOLED ALUMINUM WOUND OUTDOOR TYPE DISTRIBUTION TRANSFORMERS AS PER ISHAN TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION NO. CSC-172/R-U DHAN PU 2020-21 | 30.04.2021 | 31.05.2021 | END 2 LACS | uhbn.org.in | conne@uhbn.org.in |

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SAMVAD 13/2022/40/2841/H/1993

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

The Executive Engineer, Palampur Division, HPPWD, Palampur on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh, invites the item rate bids, in electronic tendering system from the eligible class of contractors registered with HPPWD for the works as detailed in the table:-

| Sr. No. | Name of work | Estimated Cost | Starting Date for downloading Bid | Earnest Money | Deadline for submission of Bid |
|---------|--|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | C/O link road CHC Gopalpur to Dhanota KM. 0/000 to 0/400. (SW- PL G-HII, CC Pavement on RD 0/000 to 0/380) Under MMGSY | Rs. 5,79,807/- | 12.5.2021 | Rs. 11,800/- | 27.5.2021 |

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website WWW.HPTENDERS.GOV.IN

Executive Engineer, HPPWD, Division, Palampur PIN-176061, Tel. 01894-230561, e-mail-ee-pal-hp@nic.in On behalf of Governor of H.P.

Himachal Pradesh, Public Works Department

Executive Engineer, Kalpa Division, HPPWD Kalpa.

(Name of Authority Inviting Bids)

NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)

1. The Executive Engineer, HPPWD Division Kalpa on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh invites the percentage rate/item rate bids, in electronic tendering system, for construction of roads under National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development for each of the following works from the eligible and approved contractors registered with HPPWD and HP Jal Shakti Vibhag (Contractors of HP Jal Shakti Vibhag are eligible to participate for the works having amount put to tender above Rs. 100 Lacs). Non registered contractors may submit the bids; however successful bidder has to register in appropriate class with appropriate authority in HPPWD*.

District RIDF Name of work Estimated cost (Rs. Lakh) Total cost (Rs lakh) Period of completion Bid Security (Rs. Lakh). The bid security is two percent of the total cost, rounded to the nearest thousand

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8)

Kinnar XXII Construction of 30.84 mtr. Span Bailey Bridge on Taitty Khad at Lippa in District Kinnar (HP) (SH:- Construction of both side abutment) Under NABARD RIDF- XXVI

2 Date of release of Invitation for Bids through e-procurement: 13-05-2021.

3 Cost of Bid Form: Rs. 5000 per package/job (non-refundable) only in form of Demand Draft in favour of Executive Engineer, Kalpa Division ,HPPWD, Kalpa.

4 Availability of Bid Document and mode of submission: The bid document is available online and bid should be submitted online on website www.hptenders.gov.in. The bidder will be required to register in the web-site which is free of cost. For submission of bids, the bidder is required to have valid Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities (CA). Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and password for participating in e-tendering in NABARD may obtain the same from the website: www.hptenders.gov.in. Digital signature is mandatory to participate in the e-tendering. Bidders already possessing the valid digital signature issued from authorized CAs can use the same in this tender.

* Non-registered bidders may submit bids; however, the successful bidders must get registered in appropriate class with appropriate authorities before signing the contract.

5 Submission of Original Documents: The bidders are required to submit (a) original Demand Draft towards the cost of bid document and (b) original bid security in approved form and (c) original affidavit regarding correctness of information furnished with bid document as per provisions of Clause 4.4B(a) (ii) of ITB with Executive Engineer, Kalpa Division, HPPWD, Kalpa (address and details of office where to be submitted) , on a date not later than three working days after the opening of technical qualification part of the Bid, either by registered post or by hand.

6 Last Date/ Time for receipt of bids through e-tendering: 25-05-2021 up to 17.30 Hours (time)

7 The site for the work is available.

8 Only online submission of bids is permitted; therefore, bids must be submitted online on website www.hptenders.gov.in. The technical qualification part of the bids will be opened online 11.30 Hours (time) on 27-05-2021 (date) in the office of Executive Engineer, HPPWD Division Kalpa by the authorized officers. If the office happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened online on the next working day at the same time.

9 The bidder is not required to quote his rate for routine maintenance. The rates to be paid for routine maintenance are indicated in the Bill of Quantities. Further, the payment for routine maintenance to the contractor shall be regulated based on his performance of maintenance activities.

10 The bids for the work shall remain valid for acceptance for a period not less than Seventy Five (75) days after the deadline date for bid submission.

11 Bidders may bid for any one or more of the works mentioned in the Table above. To qualify for a package of contracts made up of this and other contracts for which bids are invited in the same NIT, the bidder must demonstrate having experience and resources sufficient to meet the aggregate of the qualifying criteria for the individual contracts.

12 Other details can be seen in the bidding documents. The Employer shall not be liable for any delays due to system failure beyond its control. Even though the system will attempt to notify the bidders of any bid updates, the Employer shall not be liable for any information not received by the bidder. It is the bidders' responsibility to verify the website for the latest information related to the tender.

13 The bids for the work shall remain valid for acceptance for a period not less than Seventy Five (75) days after the deadline date for bid submission.

14 Bidders may bid for any one or more of the works mentioned in the Table above. To qualify for a package of contracts made up of this and other contracts for which bids are invited in the same NIT, the bidder must demonstrate having experience and resources sufficient to meet the aggregate of the qualifying criteria for the individual contracts.

15 The bidder is not required to quote his rate for routine maintenance. The rates to be paid for routine maintenance are indicated in the Bill of Quantities. Further, the payment for routine maintenance to the contractor shall be regulated based on his performance of maintenance activities.

Cong. appeals to CM to set up oxygen bank

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Wednesday appealed to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to set up an oxygen bank so that empty oxygen cylinders can be collected from the public and be filled and rushed to people in need.

Delhi Congress chief Ch. Anil Kumar said that despite Delhi getting ample share of oxygen quota, many hospitals and COVID care centers are running out of oxygen supply as the Delhi government has failed to ensure proper and efficient distribution of oxygen tankers and cylinders.

"According to Delhi government data, over 50,000 people are in home isolation, though sources admit that this number is far higher. While rich patients can afford to pay inflated hospital bills, the poor and the marginalised have been left to the mercy of the people," Mr. Kumar said.

BJP protests against seizure of oxygen cylinders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday sat in a protest outside a gas agency in north-east Delhi against the Delhi government for the alleged closure of small businesses and the seizure of small oxygen gas cylinders which they deal in.

BJP Rohtas Nagar MLA Jitendra Mahajan alleged that the Delhi government had been taking action against such establishments, badly inconveniencing patients in home isolation. "It is regrettable that the Kejriwal government is forcibly closing small gas agencies and free oxygen sewa counters which were a source of oxygen supply for patients in home isolation and small nursing homes," he said.

CM reviews vaccination drive at Rajendra Nagar

The youth are coming out in large numbers to get vaccinated, notes Kejriwal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday visited the Radha Soami Satsang Beas in Rajendra Nagar to review the vaccination drive, following which he said that the youth were coming out in large numbers to get vaccinated.

Mr. Kejriwal reiterated that if the vaccine was provided to it in sufficient quantities, the Delhi government could achieve its target of vaccinating the entire population of Delhi in three months.

The process of vaccination, the Chief Minister said, had started successfully, but more supply of vaccine was the fundamental requirement right now.

He said that the Delhi government was working hand-in-hand with the Central government on the issue of oxygen supply. He said he was hopeful that the situation related to oxygen supply would improve soon.

"In Delhi, the vaccination drive has begun in both the private sector and in the go-

Delhi reports 20,960 new virus cases and 311 deaths

11,43,980 have recovered; there are 91,859 active cases now

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 311 COVID-19-related deaths in 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 18,063, according to a health bulletin released by the State government on Wednesday.

Also, 20,960 new cases were reported, taking the total cases to 12,53,902.

A total of 79,491 tests were done in a day, the bulletin said.

Of the total cases, 11,43,980 people have recovered and there are 91,859 active cases.

Out of the total 21,805 beds for COVID-19 treatment here, only 7.1% of beds were vacant at 8 p.m. Also, only 45 ICU beds were vacant.

There was a sharp rise in positivity rate from 3.5% on April 1 to 36.2% on April 22. But



A government bulletin said a total of 79,491 tests were conducted. •PTI

Tuesday. This means that about 26 out of 100 people taking COVID-19 test are now testing positive. The positivity rate, which is the percentage of people testing positive out of the total tests done, has fallen below 30% after almost two weeks.

It has happened at least twice in the past.

As per Tuesday's bulletin, Delhi reported 338 more COVID-19-related deaths and 19,953 new cases in 24 hours.

since then, it has stayed below it. Lower positivity is a good sign, as per experts.

The Delhi government spokesperson said that the positivity rate is currently "under control" after a "timely" lockdown was imposed by Delhi government.

The positivity rate should ideally be below 5%.

The Delhi government did not release the daily bulletin on Tuesday, and it was released around 9 a.m. on Wednesday. The government did not give any reason for not releasing the same on Tuesday.

It has happened at least twice in the past.

As per Tuesday's bulletin, Delhi reported 338 more COVID-19-related deaths and 19,953 new cases in 24 hours.

Delhi gets 555 MT oxygen against demand of 976 MT

Supply has not been done via regular sources, but on ad hoc basis: Raghav Chadha

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

AAP MLA Raghav Chadha on Wednesday said that the Capital had been supplied 555 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen on Tuesday - the highest amount of oxygen received in the past 10-12 days - but it still fell short of the demand of 976 MT.

On Monday, the Capital had received 433 MT.

He alleged that the supply had not been done via regular sources, but on ad hoc basis after the Delhi High Court came down strongly on the Centre for not supplying the required amount of oxygen.

"It was a result of 'jugad' done by the Centre. It was not supplied to us via our identified sources, but trucks, which were supposed to go to another State were diverted to the national capital.

We really hope that we receive the oxygen with full certainty, and the plants which are designated to sup-



Workers loading oxygen cylinders at Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital in Delhi on Wednesday. •R.V. MOORTHY

ply to us must do so on a regular basis," Mr. Chadha said.

Releasing the oxygen bulletin on the Delhi government, Mr. Chadha said that 48 SOS calls for oxygen were received on Tuesday and the government responded to all by providing 36.40 MT of oxygen from emergency reserves.

"The total number of oxygen-support beds in these 48 hospitals, which made SOS appeals was 4,036. This means, 4,036 lives were saved by the Kejri-

government designate Delhi 187 cryogenic tankers for 976 MT of oxygen demanded by Delhi. "There is no shortage of cryogenic tankers in India. The Central government should control and distribute cryogenic tankers the way it is controlling and distributing oxygen," he said. He added that States like Delhi, which are not industrial ones, do not own cryogenic tankers and that the Central government must designate such tankers for use in Delhi and declare them as national assets.

"These 1,631 tankers have been illegally captured and monopolised by all the other States of the country. There has been no proper and equitable distribution of these tankers to States. We believe that these tankers are national assets, the Centre should supply and facilitate oxygen cryogenic tankers the way it is doing with oxygen," Mr. Chadha said.

Steady dip in funerals of COVID patients in Delhi's crematoriums

BJP accuses Delhi govt. of hiding the real number of deaths

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

The number of funerals of COVID-19 patients across Delhi's crematoriums and burial grounds has been dipping consistently, especially compared to the peak in late April, when over 700 last rites were performed for three consecutive days.

He claimed that his team

carried out a maximum of 27 cremations in a single day so far. The group, called "Hamara Bhaichara", has people who lost their lives to COVID-19, were laid to rest at 29 funeral venues spread across the 11 municipal zones in the city between April 25 and May 4. More than 27 funerals were performed every hour over the ten-day period.

The Delhi government, however, registered 3,854 COVID deaths during the same interval with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which runs the city's civic bodies, accusing it of "hiding the real number" of

deaths "as usual".

It also attributed the reduction in the number of last rites in Delhi to people passing away at medical establishments in the National Capital Region (NCR) after being "forced" to seek admission in them, given the paucity of hospital beds in three consecutive days.

Civic body records show that 666 funerals were performed on April 25, compared to 553 on May 4, registering a decline of around 17%. The number of last rites gradually increased - 653 were performed on April 26 and 696 on April 27 - before the beginning of the peak on April 28, when 702 were performed followed by the peak of 717 on April 29 and slight decrease to 711 on April 30.

The number of funerals has consistently decreased since then: slipping to 697 on May 1, 620 on May 2, 594 on May 3 and to 553 till 6

p.m. on May 4, according to civic body records. The capacity dedicated to the last rites of COVID patients was increased by over 43% during this time - from 773 to 1,113 - and it continues to be ramped up.

"Hospitals across the NCR are full of seriously ill COVID patients from Delhi who have not been able to find hospital beds in the city and willing to spend any amount to save the life of their loved ones. They are referred to the closest funeral facility in those cities where the last rites are performed," said a senior Delhi BJP leader.

"We have come across innumerable cases of requests of help from Delhi's people in getting the death certificates of their kin issued from the State governments of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. The party will compile these numbers and make them public soon," the leader also said.

JNUTA emphasises need for on-campus COVID care facility

Centre where infected students are lodged is unhygienic

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The JNU Teachers' Association on Wednesday reiterated its demand for setting up COVID care facilities on campus by converting the existing guest houses into isolation centres for residents that would include providing oxygen support.

"We are continuously monitoring the situation related to the demand for oxygen. Yesterday, we received 43 SOS calls regarding oxygen. I know that there were some unfortunate incidents, but right now, we are working round-the-clock to ensure that no fatality in Delhi happens due to lack of oxygen," he also said.

The Chief Minister said his government would continue the lockdown based on the situation of the COVID-19 cases here and that at the moment, people were in favour of the lockdown to stop the spread of the virus.

The Delhi government, he also said, was also working on increasing the number of oxygen beds across the Capital and arranging more and more oxygen concentrators and oxygen cylinders to run these.

"We completely understand that the Central go-



isolation facilities had been constructed in JNU, in guest houses or makeshift arrangements in the stadium, not just students but other residents would have been spared the trouble of living in such unhygienic places outside the campus," the teachers said.

The teachers said the students who test positive on the JNU campus are taken to an isolation centre in Sultanpur which does not have proper facilities. "JNTUA has received pictures sent by students of dirty toilets,

open garbage cans, unchanged sheets and bedding that show how unhygienic and unsafe the facilities are.

Starting yesterday [Tuesday], JNTUA has been providing packets of fruits and dry food to our students housed there. If only such

had stated that with the small health centre available in the university and with only a few doctors and part-time specialists meant for medical advice to normal people, the university is not equipped to handle COVID-19 related cases. Therefore, a COVID-19 Response Team (CRT) was mobilised to work round the clock in establishing contact with the hospitals for beds, doctors for medical advice on telephone or online, and arranging food for those who are in no position to prepare food at their houses.

At hostels, the administration said a few rooms with dedicated washrooms were provided as quasi-isolation corners, where the students with mild symptoms are shifted until their COVID-19 testing is done. The administration had added that this system had been working well because the occupancy in the hostels is much less than it was in normal times.

Sewa Bharti performs cremations of 65 virus victims

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Sewa Bharti, a social work organisation run by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has over the last fortnight performed the cremations of an estimated 65 people who could not afford traditional last rites or did not have medically able family members to do so.

"We are providing the service through our helpline number, 8010066066, to those who cannot either afford or are unavailable for the cremations of their family members because they too are down with COVID-19 as well. The service will continue as long as required," said Ramesh Agarwal, the Delhi chapter head of Sewa Bharti.

Three held for selling fire extinguishers as oxygen cylinders

Accused painted cylinders black, sold them at ₹5,500 per 4.5 litre to those in need, say police

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Police have arrested three persons who allegedly used to paint fire extinguishers as oxygen cylinders and sell them to needy, officials said on Wednesday.

The accused have been identified as Ravi Sharma (40), Mohammad Abdul (38),

and Shambhu Shah (30), all residents of Alipur, they said.

A complaint from one Mukesh Khanna was received at Farsh Bazar police station on Tuesday where he stated that he runs an NGO Radha Vallabh Sewa Sangh serving free oxygen cylinders to COVID-19 patients, police said.

Mr. Khanna alleged that

one oxygen cylinder distributor, Varsha Engineering at Apni Colony, Alipur, had sold him oxygen cylinders at ₹5,500 per 4.5 litre. When he contacted the same distributor again and asked for more cylinders, the distributor demanded ₹13,000 per 4.5 litre, a senior police officer said.

"During enquiry, it was found that distributor Ravi Sharma was removing the red paint of fire cylinders which

were used for filling of CO2 and was converting them into oxygen cylinders by painting them black with the help of Abdul and Shah," DCP (Shahdara) R. Sathiyasundaram said. Sharma and his associates have cheated the complainant by selling fire extinguishers as oxygen cylinders, the DCP said.

An HC Bench said it is for

Govt. not taking steps to create oxygen buffer: HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday said it appears that the Delhi government has not taken steps for creation of a buffer of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) and for streamlining its distribution in the national capital.

An HC Bench said it is for

the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) to explore the various possibilities to create storage facilities for LMO and oxygen cylinders in the city. The court said that the GNCTD may take help of the Delhi Technological University to prepare a blueprint for storage and distribution.

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Name & Address of the Hospital
Max Smart Super Specialty Hospital
(A unit of Gujarat Modi Hospital & Research Centre For Medical Sciences)
Mandir Marg, Press Enclosure Road Saket
New Delhi-110017
Contact Person's Detail
Ms. Poonam
Email:poonam@maxhealthcare.com
Mob-9717349231
Office-011-712121-227(extn.)
For Max Smart Super Specialty Hospital, Saket
(A unit of Gujarat Modi Hospital & Research Centre For Medical Sciences)
Sd/-
Authorised Signatory
Date: 06.05.2021

| Timings | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| DELHI | |
| THURSDAY, MAY. 06 | |
| RISE 05:37 | SET 19:00 |
| RISE 02:49 | SET 14:17 |
| FRIDAY, MAY. 07 | |
| RISE 05:36 | SET 19:00 |
| RISE 03:21 | SET 15:15 |
| SATURDAY, MAY. 08 | |
| RISE 05:36 | SET 19:01 |
| RISE 03:50 | SET 16:05 |

| Delhi Weather | max min |
|---------------|---------|
| Delhi City | 41 24 |
| Safdarjung | 41 24 |
| Palam | 41 25 |

| Delhi Palam Today | 39°C |
|--|------|
| Easy morning and hot day with light surface winds. Thunderstorm with rain may occur at some places with gusty winds. | |

| Delhi Palam Tomorrow | 37°C |
|---|------|
| A hot day with partly cloudy to cloudy sky. Chances of thunderstorm and rain with gusty winds at some places. | |

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Four BPF members join BJP ally

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A constituent of the Congress-led 'Mahajot' has suffered a setback in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) two days after the grand alliance failed to dislodge the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies from power in Assam.

Four BTC members of the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) switched over to United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), an ally of the BJP, on Tuesday evening. This has stripped the BPF of its status as the single largest party in the council.

The BPF, a former ally of the BJP, had contested the Assam Assembly elections as a part of the 10-party 'Mahajot'. It won four Assembly seats, down from the 12 it bagged in 2016. The big losers included three Ministers in the outgoing government.

THE HINDU
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Spiralling COVID-19 cases put heavy load on Jaipur hospitals

Patients being rushed from one hospital to another in search of emergency facilities

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

The spiralling cases of COVID-19 infection have put an unprecedented load on both the government and private hospitals in Jaipur and created a shortage of beds with oxygen support and ventilators. Patients are being rushed from one hospital to another by their relatives in search of emergency facilities.

The Rajasthan University of Health Sciences (RUHS) Hospital, which is the State government's biggest COVID-19 treatment centre, is full with patients for whom the hospital administration was forced to lay beds in corridors from the ground to the eighth floors of the ward buildings.

The hospital's 442 oxygen beds and 153 ICU beds with

ventilators were fully occupied on Wednesday.

While the Medical & Health Department has asked the RUHS Hospital to shift its less serious patients to Sawai Man Singh (SMS) Government Hospital, where the beds were being reserved, the latter has expressed its inability to admit the patients in the absence of sufficient medical oxygen. The SMS Hospital offers multi-speciality treatment as the State government's biggest health facility.

With the SMS Hospital refusing to take in the patients without being referred from the RUHS, several virus-infected persons have gone back disappointed. Yashpal Singh, who brought his mother Meera Devi, 45, from the nearby Chaksu town, told *The Hindu* that the para-

medical staff gave her oxygen briefly in the emergency ward, but she could not survive.

Oxygen cylinders sought

SMS Hospital Superintendent Rajesh Sharma has informed the Medical & Health Department of the need for 3,000 oxygen cylinders before the patients were shifted there. As many as 650 patients of other diseases in the hospital are already on oxygen support, according to a letter of Dr. Sharma, who has raised the demand for 2,000 oxygen cylinders everyday for treatment of COVID-19 patients.

Most of the private hospitals do not have any beds free for critically ill patients. Neeraj Purohit, Operations Manager at Apex Hospital in Malviya Nagar, told *The Hin-*

du that the hospital was barely managing to treat the COVID-19 patients with the oxygen quota allocated to it. The hospital's 54 oxygen beds, nine ICU beds with ventilators and 19 without ventilators were all fully occupied, he said.

The family members of four patients who died created a ruckus at a private hospital on Kalwar Road last week with the allegation that there was no staff to change the oxygen cylinder during night.

Another hospital in Jagatpura asked the relatives of patients admitted there to shift them elsewhere because of shortage of oxygen. The district administration brought the situation under control by arranging 43 cylinders as an emergency measure.

'Corona curfew' from May 7 to 16 in Himachal

Essential services to remain open

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

Amid a sharp surge in the number of COVID-19 cases, the Himachal Pradesh government on Wednesday imposed 'corona curfew' from May 7 to 16.

The decision was taken at the Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur in Shimla. Reviewing the situation, the Chief Minister expressed concern over the sharp surge in the number of COVID-19 cases. "To break the virus chain, the Cabinet decided to impose 'corona curfew' in the State. All government and private offices will remain closed from May 7 to 16," said an official

The family members of four patients who died created a ruckus at a private hospital on Kalwar Road last week with the allegation that there was no staff to change the oxygen cylinder during night.

Another hospital in Jagatpura asked the relatives of patients admitted there to shift them elsewhere because of shortage of oxygen. The district administration brought the situation under control by arranging 43 cylinders as an emergency measure.

The Cabinet decided that

work would continue at civil work sites, horticultural, agricultural and other project sites. "Educational institutions will remain closed till May 31. All government and private transport will ply at 50% of occupancy and inter-State transport will continue. Industrial establishments will work as per the guidelines," the statement added.

Exams cancelled

It was also decided at the meeting that the Class X annual examinations of the Himachal Pradesh Board of School Education would stand cancelled. All the students would be promoted to Class XI by the Board as per the norms suggested by the CBSE for its students. It was also decided that Class XII examinations and the annual examinations of colleges would also remain suspended till further orders, said the statement.

Haryana govt. issues guidelines on Tocilizumab distribution

No doctor to issue prescription for purchase from anywhere

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Haryana government has issued guidelines surrounding the distribution of Tocilizumab doses to individual COVID patients in public or private health institutions.

The government guidelines state that no doctor or hospital shall issue prescription for Tocilizumab for purchase of the same from anywhere, as distribution of the drug is controlled by government. The government statement added that it shall be the personal responsibility of the hospital administrator of the institute requisitioning Tocilizumab to ensure appropriate use of prescription medicine, coordination with health authorities and keeping records for audit.

"If Tocilizumab is issued and the patient dies before use, then the hospital shall reimburse the cost to the kin and keep the drug in stock



A woman gets a dose of vaccine in Gurugram. ■ PTI

for use in future," it said.

Curbs on black market

The Haryana Police has since April 23 registered as many as 21 FIRs in connection with black-marketeering of oxygen, oxygen cylinders and anti-viral drug Remdesivir across the State.

A total of 45 persons have been arrested in these cases, while 77 oxygen cylinders and 101 vials of Remdesivir have been recovered.

Director General of Police (DGP) Manoj Yadava on Wednesday said that the demand for oxygen and Remdesivir

had gone up after a massive outbreak of COVID-19. "Taking advantage of the situation, many unscrupulous persons and some employees of private hospitals indulged in the black-marketing of oxygen and Remdesivir."

Mr. Yadava said since April 23, 2021, a total of 8 FIRs had been registered in six districts of Haryana and 12 persons arrested.

"Similarly, 33 accused have been arrested by lodging 13 FIRs against them in eight districts after the recovery of 101 vials of Remdesivir from their possession," he said.

"In addition, a total of 1,249 cylinders have been collected by the police as a voluntary contribution from factory owners, welding shop owners, gas balloons sellers and ordinary citizens which have been made available to district administrations," he added.

The former Chief Minister said the pandemic continues to grow as it has now spread to the villages, after the cities. "The situation is extremely dangerous as this can be gauged from the fact that 32 people have lost

'Healthcare system has collapsed in Haryana'

Set up temporary infrastructure: Hooda

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Leader of Opposition in Haryana Assembly Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Wednesday said the healthcare system in the State has collapsed and it was crucial for the government to immediately set-up temporary medical infrastructure.

Mr. Hooda said the Haryana government should immediately start working to identify places for treatment and they should seek help from social service organisations. "The way in which the reports of shortage of beds, oxygen and medicines from hospitals are coming in, this temporary system could prove to be extremely helpful," he said.

The former Chief Minister said the pandemic continues to grow as it has now spread to the villages, after the cities. "The situation is extremely dangerous as this can be gauged from the fact that 32 people have lost

their lives within a few days at Titoli village in the Rohtak district. In such a situation, the government will have to show much more readiness and seriousness than before because any negligence can cause major casualties," he said.

Work on war footing

"In the coming days, the burden on the health system is going to increase. The government will have to work on a war footing to increase resources. Corona is very dangerous, but it can be beaten if you get the right treatment in time. It is therefore important that appropriate medical services are available to every COVID patient, at the right time," he said.

Haryana Congress president Kumari Selja expressed concern over rising number of cases in rural areas and demanded that State government should increase testing across villages.

Ensure supply of medicines: Rajasthan HC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

The availability of essential medicines, injections and liquid medical oxygen in Rajasthan is set to improve after the High Court issued directions for ensuring their supply in order to treat the COVID-19 patients "on a war footing". The Remdesivir injection had to be issued to a patient within two hours of requisition, the court directed.

High Court notices

A Division Bench of the High Court, headed by Chief Justice Indrajit Matanya, issued notices on Tuesday to the Union government, Indian Council of Medical Research and the State government on a public interest writ petition seeking directions for managing the second wave of pandemic.

The court issued a slew of directions while asking the respondents to file their replies.

Unfamiliar lineament among Assam earthquake factors

Mechanism to understand strain localisation of future tremors under progress: Geological Survey of India

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

An unfamiliar lineament is among four factors behind frequent earthquakes in northern Assam's Sonitpur area.

A lineament is a linear feature in a landscape dictated by an underlying geological structure such as a fault.

According to the Geological Survey of India (GSI), Sonitpur district lies within a tectonically complex triangular area bounded by the east-west-trending Atherkhet Fault, the northwest-south-east-trending Kopili Fault and a north-south-trending lineament.

Two faults

The two faults and the lineament, along with the oblique convergence of the Indian plate, have caused frequent earthquakes. The National Centre of Seismology record-



A collapsed wall of an apartment building in Guwahati after a major earthquake struck Assam on April 28. ■ AFP

ed 29 earthquakes of magnitude varying from 2.6 to 4.7 in Sonitpur after the 6.4 tremor on April 28 that damaged several buildings, bridges and a river embankment.

The last of these 29 earthquakes with Sonitpur as the epicentre was recorded early Wednesday morning. Five more of magnitudes 2.6-3.2 were also recorded in neighbouring districts during this period.

"Sonitpur was the epicentre of this huge 6.4 earthquake after 33 years because of the tectonic complexity. The Atherkhet and Kopili faults, the north-south lineament and the oblique convergence of the Indian plate is causing repetitive earth-

quakes

IN BRIEF



Tirumala hundi income hits an all-time low

TIRUMALA
The temple of Lord Venkateswara on Tuesday registered an income of ₹39 lakh on Tuesday, the lowest ever during the current calendar year. The income from the temple hundi, which was ₹105 crore in March, fell to ₹62.62 crore in April. The hundi has recorded ₹46 lakh, ₹78 lakh, ₹55 lakh and ₹39 lakh on the first four days of this month.

Deputy Mayor in A.P. succumbs to COVID-19

VIZIANAGARAM
Deputy Mayor of Vizianagaram M. Nagalakshmi succumbed to COVID-19 in the early hours of Wednesday. She was 45. She was elected from the first division of the Vizianagaram Municipal Corporation in the recent municipal elections.

'KCR will write to PM for adequate vaccine supply'

HYDERABAD
Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao will soon write a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking enhancement of vaccine supply to the State as the current supply was not matching the requirements. Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar said the State government was corresponding with the Centre as well as vaccine manufacturing firms.

Karnataka planning to increase rapid tests

BENGALURU
With an unprecedented surge in the number of COVID-19 cases, Karnataka is now planning to increase Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT) from the existing less than 10% to over 30%. This follows an advisory from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to all the States to increase rapid tests.

Why is testing low, asks Telangana HC

Ensure one lakh tests are conducted every day, court tells State govt.

MARRI RAMU
HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Wednesday directed the State government to evolve a strategy to restrain those entering the State from Andhra Pradesh as a new strain of the virus called 'L-440' was reportedly spreading.

A Bench of Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijay sen Reddy said the government should take all measures to prevent people from getting infected with the strain.

Hearing a batch of public interest litigation petitions on COVID-19, the Bench sought to know from Advocate-General B.S. Prasad if all the zoos in the State were closed, citing media reports about lions getting affected with the virus in the Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad.

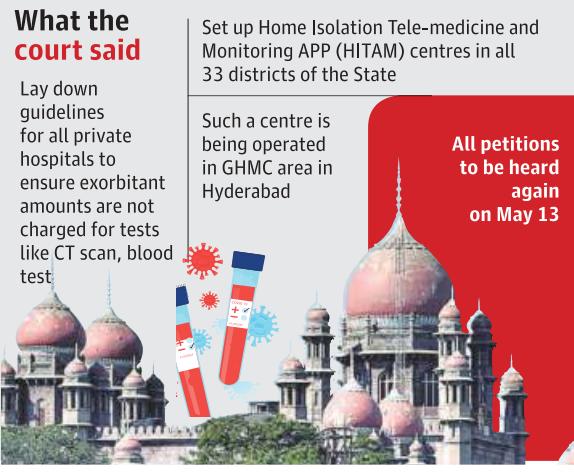
Observing that COVID-19 tests in the State had dwindled, the Bench instructed the government to conduct

one lakh tests daily. It said the testing figures were abysmally low. It sought to know from Director of Public Health G. Srinivasa Rao why the State was unable to step up the number of tests.

Dr. Srinivasa Rao, appearing for the hearing through videoconference, said people were not coming to the 1,110 testing centres set up across the State.

Not agreeing with his contention, the CJ said people were thronging the testing centres after having learnt about the piling up of bodies at crematoriums and burial grounds. Many people were being sent back since sufficient number of testing kits were not available, the CJ said.

She instructed the government to ensure one lakh tests were conducted every day. Mobile testing vans should be pressed into service in all the 186 micro containment zones.



Kerala CM writes to PM for medical oxygen

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has made an urgent appeal to the Centre to resupply Kerala's fast diminishing supplemental medical oxygen stocks.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, Mr. Vijayan said Kerala was creating the second wave of COVID-19. The State required 1,000 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen.

Mr. Vijayan sought 500 metric tonnes of liquid medical oxygen immediately.

ter Narendra Modi on Wednesday, Mr. Vijayan said Kerala was creating the second wave of COVID-19. The State required 1,000 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen.

Mr. Vijayan sought 500 metric tonnes of liquid medical oxygen immediately.

New cases in Karnataka shoot past 50,000

State records 346 deaths; Kerala adds 41,953 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Karnataka on Wednesday logged the biggest single-day spike of 50,112 new cases of COVID-19, with Bengaluru Urban accounting for 23,106 cases. The State also recorded 346 deaths and had 4,87,288 active patients.

The test positivity rate (TPR) for the day stood at 32.28%.

Karnataka carried out 1,55,224 tests including 145,397 RT-PCR tests. Now under partial lockdown, the State was awaiting instructions from the Centre to plan further restrictions. Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said that though curfew was imposed, the State awaited further instructions from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In Kerala, the incidence on Wednesday was 41,953 cases from 1,63,321 samples.

The increased testing brought average TPR slightly down, to 25.69%. The active case pool grew to 3,75,658. A record number of 58 deaths from the past few days were added to the COVID-19 toll.

These included 18 deaths



A COVID-19 test being conducted on Wednesday in Bengaluru. ■ MURALI KUMAR K.

in Thiruvananthapuram (between May 2-3), 14 from Thrissur, 11 from Kollam, six from Kozhikode, four from Kannur, three from Malappuram, while one death

each was reported from Wayanad and Ernakulam.

On Wednesday, 3,868 more patients were admitted to hospital.

Andhra Pradesh reported 85 new deaths and 22,204 new infections on Wednesday. Active cases rose to 1,70,588. In the past day, 1,16,367 samples showed a TPR of 19.08%.

Telangana recorded 6,361 cases on Tuesday, testing 77,435 samples. The death toll touched 2,527 with 51 more fatalities.

Among new cases, the highest of 1,225 were in Greater Hyderabad.

The State government in-

dicated that there was no proposal to impose a total or partial lockdown at present.

Tamil Nadu's COVID-19 daily tally hit a new high with 23,310 persons testing positive on Wednesday.

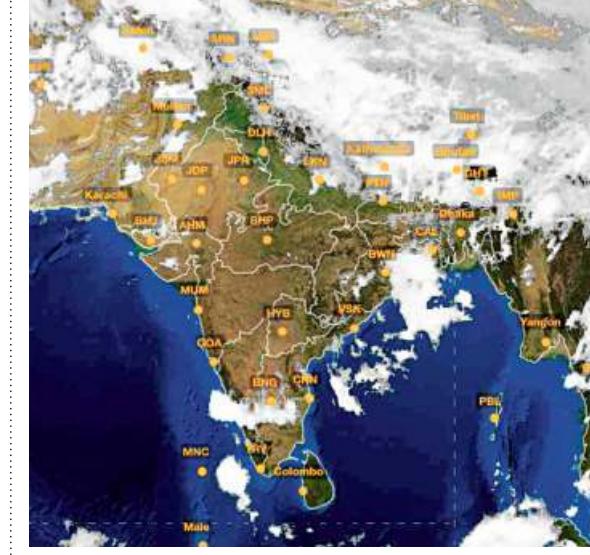
The State reported 167 deaths (73 in private and 94 in government hospitals), the highest number on a single day since the start of the pandemic.

The State's toll rose to 14,779. The fresh cases pushed the State's overall tally to 12,72,602.

(With inputs from Thiruvananthapuram, Vijayawada, Hyderabad, and Chennai bureaus)

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Thursday: Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, Sikkim, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, coastal & south interior Karnataka and Kerala. Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty wind likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Punjab, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Lakshadweep

| CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN | CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN |
|-------------|--------------|---------|------|--------------------|------|---------|------|
| Agartala | 22...33.8... | 22.3 | 22.3 | Kozhikode | - | 34.5 | 25.8 |
| Ahmedabad | - | 41.5 | 27.3 | Kurnool | - | 40.5 | 28.6 |
| Aizawl | 4... | 26.0 | 17.4 | Lucknow | - | 35.6 | 23.7 |
| Altahabad | - | 37.6 | 26.0 | Madurai | - | 37.2 | 25.2 |
| Bengaluru | 0.8... | 33.7... | 23.0 | Mangaluru | - | 33.2 | 26.8 |
| Bhopal | - | 41.1... | 24.4 | Mumbai | - | 34.2 | 26.8 |
| Bhubaneswar | - | 37.2... | 24.0 | Myssuru | - | 34.7 | 21.5 |
| Chandigarh | 0.2... | 32.0... | 24.1 | New Delhi | - | 40.5 | 24.0 |
| Chennai | - | 35.4... | 27.4 | Patna | - | 33.6 | 21.8 |
| Coimbatore | - | 37.6... | 24.4 | Port Blair | - | 33.7 | 26.4 |
| Hyderabad | 0.2... | 32.3... | 20.7 | Puducherry | - | 34.6 | 25.1 |
| Heradran | 1.5... | 18.9... | 13.5 | Pune | - | 39.7 | 23.3 |
| Gangtok | - | 34.6... | 26.8 | Raipur | - | 39.5 | 24.0 |
| Goa | - | 31.5... | 21.9 | Ranchi | - | 31.7 | 20.1 |
| Guwahati | 0.9... | 32.0... | 24.0 | Shillong | - | 20.2 | 14.0 |
| Hubballi | - | 32.0... | 24.0 | Shimla | - | 20.9 | 13.9 |
| Hyderabad | 2... | 37.6... | 25.6 | Srinagar | - | 22.5 | 10.2 |
| Imphal | - | 29.1... | 17.1 | Thiruvananthapuram | 8... | 33.2 | 23.8 |
| Jaipur | - | 40.0... | 26.0 | Tiruchi | - | 38.2 | 27.1 |
| Kochi | - | 32.4... | 25.6 | Vijayawada | 2... | 38.8 | 26.6 |
| Kohima | 16... | 21.2... | 14.8 | Kolkata | 4... | 27.8... | 23.9 |
| Kovalam | - | 34.6... | 24.0 | Visakhapatnam | 3... | 35.2... | 25.4 |

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

| CITIES | SO ₂ | NO ₂ | CO | PM _{2.5} | PM ₁₀ | CODE |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----|-------------------|------------------|------|
| Ahmedabad | 38 | 42 | 25 | .71 | .88 | ■■■ |
| Bengaluru | 10 | 16 | .67 | .60 | .51 | ■■■ |
| Chennai | 56 | 46 | .35 | .26 | .31 | ■■■ |
| Delhi | .4 | .31 | .31 | .88 | .364 | ■■■ |
| Hyderabad | .5 | .46 | .35 | .53 | .86 | ■■■ |
| Kolkata | 11 | 19 | .14 | .91 | .76 | ■■■ |
| Lucknow | .8 | .31 | .47 | .188 | .141 | ■■■ |
| Mumbai | 20 | 23 | .4 | .98 | .106 | ■■■ |
| Pune | .6 | .24 | .55 | .73 | .73 | ■■■ |
| Visakhapatnam | 16 | 33 | .24 | .25 | .63 | ■■■ |

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m. - Thane, Maharashtra recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 389 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 19

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.
NO₂: 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.

NORTH & WEST

Explore all options for supply of vaccines: Punjab CM to Health dept.

State fails to kick-start 18-44 age group vaccination

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

With the government hospitals in Punjab failing to kick-start the COVID-19 inoculation programme for the 18-44 age group due to non-availability of vaccine doses,

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Wednesday directed the Health Department to explore all options to augment supply of vaccines to the State.

Though the State government had made a payment of ₹10.37 crore to the Serum Institute of India (SII) for the procurement of around 30 lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine on April 26, it was yet to receive any supply schedule from the company.

Health Secretary Husan Lal informed the Cabinet during a virtual meeting.

Mr. Lal said the company

had only indicated that the availability of the vaccine could be known after at least four weeks.

Only some private hospitals in the State, which had placed direct orders for vaccines, have begun vaccinating people in the 18-44 age group.

'No lockdown'

The Chief Minister again ruled out a complete lockdown in the State, noting that the restrictions currently in place in the State were more stringent than the lockdown conditions in many other States such as Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala. He announced a series of relaxations and relief measures to alleviate the woes of various sections of people.



Against excess

In Maratha case, SC holds fast to quota ceiling and requires special reasons to exceed it

In striking down the separate reservation given to Maharashtra's Maratha community, the Supreme Court has underscored the importance of adhering to the 50% limit on total reservation, as well as the need to justify any excess by showing the existence of exceptional circumstances. In a decision that will be quite unpalatable to mainstream parties, the Court has not only found no merit in the Maratha claim to backwardness but also said the community is adequately represented in public services. It is no surprise that the Maratha quota, given by Maharashtra through a 2018 law, did not survive judicial scrutiny by a Constitution Bench. The 16% quota in admissions to educational institutions and jobs in public services – later brought down to 12% in admissions and 13% in jobs through a 2019 amendment – took the total reservation in the State beyond the 50% ceiling imposed by earlier verdicts. The five-Judge Bench has held that the State has not shown any exceptional circumstance to justify exceeding the limit. The Bombay High Court had upheld the validity of the Maratha reservation in principle, but ruled that the law could not have fixed the percentage above what was recommended by the State Backward Classes Commission headed by M.G. Gaikwad. The Court has now set aside this ruling, rejecting the HC's reasoning that the denial of backward class status to the Marathas had pushed them deeper into social and educational backwardness, and that this constituted a special circumstance in support of their claim to separate reservation.

The second limb of the judgment, however, may cause political concern. The Court's categorical refusal to reconsider the 50% limit set down by a verdict in *Indra Sawhney* (1992) may threaten the continuance of different kinds of reservation in States. The Court's interpretation of the 102nd Constitution Amendment, by which a National Commission for Backward Classes was created, has proved right fears that the national body's role and power may impact the rights of States. The Court has ruled that, henceforth, there will only be a single list of socially and educationally backward classes with respect to each State and Union Territory notified by the President of India, and that States can only make recommendations for inclusion or exclusion, with any subsequent change to be made only by Parliament. Several MPs had argued that the Amendment would denude the States of their power, but the Centre had assured them that it was not so. The Court has now ruled that Parliament's intent was to create a scheme to identify SEBCs in the same manner as SCs and STs. The President alone, to the exclusion of all other authorities, is now empowered to identify SEBCs. A clamour for yet another constitutional amendment to undo the effect of this verdict may be in the offing.

Sudden death

The IPL this year was a risky proposition, and a breach of the bio-bubble was always possible

The Indian Premier League's suspension effective from Tuesday was an inevitable full stop considering India's continuing trauma with COVID-19 and the breach of the tournament's much-vaunted bio-bubble. Until the emergence of the COVID-positive results of Kolkata Knight Riders' Sandeep Warrier and Varun Chakravarthy; Sunrisers Hyderabad's Wriddhiman Saha; Delhi Capitals' Amit Mishra, Chennai Super Kings' bowling coach L. Balaji and a member of the squad's logistics staff, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) was in denial-mode, firmly believing that its bio-bubble protocols cannot be breached. BCCI officials also insisted that the league is not a super-spreader like election rallies or other permitted activities where crowds were allowed to assemble. That both fans and the media were kept away from the venues was cited as an example of how strict the IPL management was with regard to social-distancing. Besides this, the constant testing of everyone in the bubble was seen as another fail-safe method to ensure that the league did not turn into a coronavirus hotspot. But before the final denouement, what jarred was the tone-deafness of having matches in Delhi while beyond the ground, the accompanying note was that of ambulances blaring their sirens while patients gasped for oxygen. Even if the league has its share of a massive television audience and offers a diversion to the viewers, having Delhi as a host was extremely insensitive.

The IPL's 14th edition is at the crossroads, a reality which it had avoided since its launch in 2008. The cash-rich league always found a way to sidestep obstacles. During three general elections, the championship either fully or partially leaned on neutral venues. There was also the incident of low intensity blasts just outside Bengaluru's M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on April 17, 2010, ahead of a match featuring Royal Challengers Bangalore and Mumbai Indians. It is an event that has faded from public memory but on that ominous day, two bombs went off, injuring a few and a third was found, which was immediately defused. The contest started an hour late and the IPL continued unhindered. But the latest crisis due to a pandemic is something that humankind has never faced since the Spanish Flu in 1918. Meanwhile, the board officials are hinting about resuming the league later this year in the United Arab Emirates, which also hosted the 13th leg. But for that the virus should wane and most countries have suspended flights from India, with the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison not even permitting a chartered flight with the IPL's Aussie players. To find a window in a packed international cricket schedule will be arduous even if the last word on the IPL's tenuous resumption is yet to be spoken.

New dawn in Dravidian politics

It is reasonable to expect Dravidian ideology to continue its transformational journey under DMK rule



NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has emerged victorious in the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, a win that falls short of earlier projections of a landslide but one that can be considered a resounding vindication of its high-voltage Dravidian-values campaign. What do the tumultuous events of the past few months, culminating in the election results, mean for the State and its politics?

There are two broad issues to consider: first, what the DMK's victory at the hustings means for governance in Tamil Nadu, a State that has prided itself for delivering at a high level on human development and mass welfare policies; and second, what the change of leadership wrought by this election tells us about recent tectonic shifts in Dravidian politics and its prognosis.

Quality of leadership

In handing a clear mandate for governance to the DMK, led by its President M.K. Stalin, the Tamil Nadu electorate has expressed its well-known preference for strong leadership. Leadership in this context extends beyond single person, and rather connotes a leadership system. A leadership system includes not only external-facing attributes of the leader in question, such as their personal charisma and broad popularity in the eyes of supporters, but also social networks and power relationships within the party that bind the leader to the cadre, help maintain discipline, negotiate agreements between party bosses, plan resource allocation for policies, and propagate the values of the party or movement.

In these attributes, Mr. Stalin comes out ahead of outgoing Chief

Minister and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) Joint Coordinator, Edappadi K. Palaniswami. Mr. Stalin's late father, five-time Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and Dravidian movement stalwart M. Karunanidhi, ensured that the DMK had an orderly succession planning process leading to Mr. Stalin inheriting the mantle of the party leadership after Karunanidhi's passing. Even more, Karunanidhi's clarity of message ensured that the party heavyweights neatly aligned themselves behind the anointed successor, seeing off all challenges including from Mr. Stalin's estranged older brother M.K. Alagiri. The coalescence of political power within the DMK around a central vector has important consequences for governance. First, the absence of intra-party conflict will lead to smoother agenda setting and resource allocation to meet policy needs. Second, it is likely to lend strength to the party's ideological chassis.

The AIADMK contrarily suffered the consequences of Jayalalithaa degrading multiple rungs of leadership beneath her, likely a strategy to consolidate her position as the perpetual head of the party. Consequently, it was not surprising to witness the factional infighting that characterised the early years of the outgoing government. Indeed, it is likely that despite surmounting these internal wobbles and providing several years of stable governance, Mr. Palaniswami faced a setback in the election owing to a lack of confidence of the electorate in his ability to hold his flock together over the longer term and resist pressure to enter into an alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party and its brand of Hindutva.

Mass welfare or rent-seeking? Looking beyond leadership to the broad question of agenda setting that it implies, there is a deeper imperative for effective policy implementation in this State – the invisible hand of competitive populism. Ever since the dawn of



"benevolent populism" under former Chief Minister and AIADMK supremo M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), an irresistible commitment to policy competition in the realm of mass welfare schemes has become deeply entrenched in the ethos of successive Tamil Nadu governments.

Yet, there is little doubt that in this regard, strong leadership cuts two ways, and the history of governance in Tamil Nadu supplies the sturkst illustration of this. In parallel to the redistribution of resources to lower castes and classes for the best part of half a century, the highest rungs of leadership built up an unassailable machine for illicit resource extraction for private gain. This institutionalised system of extortion and loot obscenely enriched the leadership and provided a reliable bonanza to party loyalists and external contractors lining up for kickbacks. While supporters of the DMK may thus rejoice at having put into power a leader they believe will deliver on party manifesto promises, there may be many in Tamil Nadu who wonder whether Mr. Stalin and his colleagues will break with this ignoble past and forge a new path toward accountable and transparent governance.

Inflection point

This brings us to the second broad question that bears consideration in the aftermath of the 2021 State Assembly election – whether the rare window of opportunity for fundamental change that opened up after the passing of Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi, to reimagine the

long-term vision for Tamil Nadu, can be capitalised upon. The absence from the landscape of these two politically centralising leaders offered two new possibilities: first, of party organisations based on more democratic decision-making processes and focused on delivering good governance; and second, of Dravidianism transmuting into a new ethos to answer the challenge of homogenising ideologies such as Hindutva.

In the case of the DMK, decisions on allocation of party posts, election tickets, alliance formulas and resource allocation have over the decades become narrowly focused on the family of Karunanidhi. While "Kalaigal" himself came from a more everyman ethos and was, as a major leader of his party, integrated deeply into the values of Dravidian mobilisation, the rise to prominence of his progeny and broader family including the Maran clan, led to a centralisation of control of all party matters in the hands of a few individuals. Now that the party is back in power, will Mr. Stalin be able to restrain the "first family" of the DMK from self-defeating overreach?

The AIADMK occupies the opposite end of the spectrum in this regard – it has historically been ruled by autocratic leaders such as MGR and Jayalalithaa, yet, under Mr. Palaniswami, it appeared to pivot to a relatively more diffused balance of power internally. Indeed, Mr. Palaniswami had no choice but to focus on delivering good governance as he lacked the political heft to hold on to the top job in the State by any other means. The vital question for Tamil Nadu now is whether his approach created sufficient competitive pressure to keep the DMK on the straight and narrow and not once again get enmeshed in allegations of land-grabbing or other actions associated with kleptocracy.

Reinventing an ideology
On the subject of political ideology, Dravidianism has already gone

through a dramatic transformation over decades from the early days of "assertive populism" under Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, C.N. Annadurai and Karunanidhi – a phase during which anti-Brahminism, anti-Hindi and anti-North Indian politics were the locus of mass mobilisation. Today, it is far more accommodationist in its leaning and eschews caste antagonisms in favour of pressing claims of state autonomy toward realising the goal of Tamil exceptionalism within a variegated Indian cultural milieu.

Many assumed that the growing footprint of Hindutva politics across the nation would be the greatest challenge to the hegemonic influence of Dravidianism. Indeed, the BJP has re-entered the State Assembly this time after being absent there for 20 years. Yet, if there is one lesson from the 2021 State Assembly election, it is that the imperviousness of Tamil Nadu to Hindutva speaks less to the aversion of its people to religious politics than it does to the fact that, for a majority of them, the sheer adaptability of the Dravidian ethos makes it a more comfortable, less alien vehicle to transport them to a promising future.

In that sense, it would be reasonable to expect Dravidian ideology to continue its transformational journey over the coming five years under DMK rule to further shed whatever remains of its anti-religious edge and thereby win over even more caste Hindus to its fold.

Simultaneously, if Mr. Stalin is astute enough to recognise what his mandate to govern truly encompasses – the people's hope that he will keep the State on the path of broad-based economic growth, sustained industrial development, and a continued commitment to pro-poor policies – he will expeditiously ring-fence the economy from predatory rent-seeking behaviour by political elites.

narayan@thehindu.co.in

A CT scan for COVID merits a word of caution

Going by data and the risk factors, its widespread use in diagnosing the infectious disease needs to be questioned



LANCELOT PINTO

There are broadly three reasons why we perform tests in clinical medicine: diagnosis (what is the disease?), etiagnosis (what caused a disease?), and prognosis (how will the disease evolve?). It is also important that the outcome of a test should guide treatment in some way, especially when it is being touted as being a monitoring test that provides unique information that cannot be obtained by easier means. Considering how widespread the use of computerised tomography (CT) scans of the thorax during the novel coronavirus pandemic has been, one would assume that the test would satisfy one, if not all the above criteria, for an accurate diagnostic test.

Data from studies

The Cochrane (previously known as the Cochrane Collaboration) pooled together all the available data from studies conducted over the last year (<https://bit.ly/33fVtV>) to try and test the accuracy of CT scans in diagnosing COVID-19. It included 41 studies with a total of 16,133 participants. It was found that a CT scan accurately diag-

nosed COVID-19 in about 88% of individuals with a positive RT-PCR. Since an RT-PCR itself misses 30% of people who have COVID-19, a chest CT is likely to diagnose only 62% of all individuals having COVID-19, making it a relatively inaccurate test for diagnosis. In these difficult times in obtaining RT-PCRs due to overworked laboratory services, the use of a CT chest as a surrogate needs to come with a caveat: a normal CT chest does not exclude COVID-19, and, therefore, should not be a reason to come out of isolation, especially when the CT is done very early in the disease.

Mislabelling the cause

An accurate test for etiagnosis would be one in which a result would make the cause almost certain. The same Cochrane review mentioned above found that when radiologists convincingly labelled a CT pattern as being consistent with COVID-19 disease, they mislabelled 20% of those who did not have the disease as having COVID-19, getting the etiagnosis wrong in a significant proportion of individuals. Telling someone who does not have COVID-19 that they do have the disease has serious implications, leaving the real diagnosis undetected, and subjecting the individual to the psychosocial consequences of the knowledge that she/he has the disease.

The third reason that is often cited as being a reason to do a CT

scan is for prognostication: a CT that appears worse is likely to lead to worse outcomes than a CT that appears better. Two comments need to be made in this context: the severity of lung involvement as seen on a CT is reflective of the status of the lungs at that point of time, and we know that this is a dynamic process, i.e., a limited involvement at an early stage could progress with time to a severe involvement; and a CT scan revealing severely affected lungs while oxygen levels remain high and unchanged is an extremely improbable event, suggesting that a CT is unlikely to give a treating physician more information than a simple tool such as an oximeter. It needs to be mentioned that in research settings, certain patterns of lung involvement (and not the mere quantum as reported by a score) have been associated with worse outcomes (<https://bit.ly/3xNy15>), but unfortunately, these have not been widely validated, and are not the reason why CT

scans are presently being performed.

The risks

"What is the harm in getting a CT of the chest done?" is another argument one hears often. A study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 2007 (<https://bit.ly/3eSulru>) postulated that "0.4% of all cancers in the United States may be attributable to the radiation from CT studies", and further speculated that the current estimate could be in the range of 1.5%-2%. This potential harm would have been clearly acceptable had this been a highly accurate and useful test. In addition to this risk to the individual undergoing the scan, there are risks to radiology technicians, staff and doctors that need to be accounted for. Moreover, considering the fact that CT scanners need to be kept in closed air-conditioned spaces, the risk of transmission of the virus at such centres cannot be ruled out.

As a physician treating COVID-19 disease over the past year, I have ordered CT scans for less than 1% of the patients whom I have treated. I have ordered them to evaluate the possibility of other lung diseases when two RT-PCR swabs were negative in patients whose symptoms were consistent with COVID-19 disease, in patients in whom there was a possibility of blood clots in the lungs when hospitalised, and to look for secon-

dary infections in individuals who have been in hospital for a long time and can sometimes have new infections after being admitted for COVID-19. Intensivists have on occasion used CT scans to optimise ventilator strategies for individuals with severe COVID-19 disease. Indications outside of these should be the exception, not the norm.

Raise queries

So, if a physician asks that a CT scan be done, ask her/him a few questions. If it is being done for diagnosis, why not do an RT-PCR instead (or two RT-PCRs), considering the higher accuracy of the test? If it is being done despite COVID-19 being proven, ask whether a minimal involvement on the scan guarantees an uneventful clinical course, or whether a more than minimal involvement (when the oxygen levels are high, and the patient seems to be getting better) is a sign of impending deterioration. Ask whether treatment strategies have been proven to work better when guided by chest CTs (rather than clinical findings such as oxygen levels). If the answer to none of these satisfies you, consider the potential risks involved in getting that CT done, and feel free to make an informed decision.

Lancelot Pinto is Consultant Respirologist, P.D. Hinduja National Hospital and Medical Research Centre, Mumbai

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and its effectiveness.

**SANATH KUMAR T.S.,
Thrissur, Kerala**

■ The column, "Millions of reasons why the IPL needs to rethink priorities" ('Sport' page, April 28), reflected the collective moral obligation felt by (Indian) audiences watching the IPL at this time. The IPL has more to do with business than sport. I believe taxing IPL team owners and using these funds for pandemic relief could mitigate the absurdity of profiting out of sports in a time of deep suffering.

*DIVYA VENKATTU,
Chennai*

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.

For continuity
There is now a change of government in Tamil Nadu, the result of the beauty of democracy. No government can be complacent or fail to perform if it wants to be in the seat of power. While wishing the new Chief Minister-elect all luck, my anxiety is that he should not fall prey to the temptation of making sweeping changes in the bureaucracy immediately, unless there is credible evidence against any officer of partisanship or a lack of integrity. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam is taking over the reins of the State at a time when Tamil Nadu and the

rest of the country are facing an acute crisis in public health. The present Chief Secretary, the Director General of Police and the Chennai Police Commissioner are experienced professionals; the previous government chose them on merit. To ensure continuity, the Chief Minister-elect would do well to retain them and give them a free hand in handling the situation. He can monitor their performance. All the three officers mentioned are outsiders to the State as well. I am sure that the Chief Minister-elect is aware of lobbying now by a certain

section of Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service officers, canvassing for a change in portfolios. It is important and critical, therefore, that the choice for key posts should be solely on the basis of past record for efficiency and integrity. I do hope these factors are given the importance they deserve.

**R.K. RAGHAVAN,
Chennai**

IPL on hold
The deferment of the 2021 edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) was only to be expected amid the alarming surge in COVID-19 cases across the

country. It remains a mystery how the novel coronavirus breached the bio-bubble given the secure environment for the players. With the international calendar of events crowded, it would be prudent on the part of the Board of Control for Cricket in India to abandon the current edition once and for all. The safety of the players is more important than the game and there should be no compromise on this crucial aspect.

**P.K. VARADARAJAN,
Chennai**

■ Frankly speaking, even die-hard fans of cricket were not at all in favour of IPL

matches being played at this juncture. Even though cricket is a cash cow, there has to be an element of sensitivity and discipline.

**MANI NATARAJAN,
Chennai**

■ The BCCI's decision is appropriate though delayed.

The launch of the IPL edition this time in the midst of the savage pandemic elicited scorn from even the most passionate cricket lovers. The absence of spectators was another issue. Even when the matches were on, there were rumours of some players wanting to call it quits. The much talked about bio-bubble has been breached both in its concept

The limits to polarisation in Bengal

Despite a fierce Hindutva push, the BJP failed to retain the level of Hindu support it garnered in 2019

SUPRIOS BASU, JYOTI PRASAD CHATTERJEE, SHREYAS SARDESAI AND SUHAS PALSHIKAR

There is no denying that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has massively increased its vote and seat share in West Bengal compared to the 2016 Assembly election, and this has largely been on the back of a strong Hindu consolidation behind it (50%), as per the Lokniti-CSDS's post-poll survey. But the party failed to retain the level of Hindu support (57%, or nearly three-fifths) it had secured in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, thus ending up faring way below its own expectations and its performance in the last general election.

The Trinamool Congress was a direct beneficiary of this erosion of votes, with the party registering an increase in Hindu support from 32% in 2019 to 39% this time. This seven-percentage-point shift from the BJP to the Trinamool happened despite the former running a high-pitched Hindutva campaign that was aimed at exciting Hindus through *Jai Shri Ram* slogans, talk of illegal migration, allegations of 'Muslim appeasement' against the ruling party, and anti-Muslim dog whistles, such as raising the spectre of West Bengal becoming a 'mini-Pakistan' and calling Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee 'begum' and 'khala'.

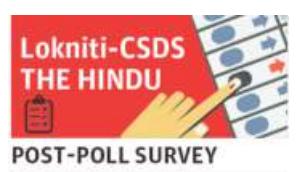
The post-poll survey conducted by Lokniti-CSDS and data from our study after the 2019 Lok Sabha election together point to the story of limited Hindu consolidation. This has also to do with the way the Hindu mind in West Bengal seems to be working at the moment.

In our 2019 survey, we asked respondents in West Bengal (and the rest of the country) a set of questions to gauge their views on secularism, the temple-mosque dispute and minority rights. Surprisingly, despite political polarisation, full-fledged communalisation had not occurred in the State, as it was found that many Hindus, including those who voted for the BJP, gave highly

secular and pluralistic answers to most of these questions, and far more so than their counterparts in other regions of the country.

For instance, on a question on the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition, only one in every five Hindus in Bengal had said that demolition was justified, as opposed to two-fifths in the rest of the country. Similarly, a huge majority of Hindus in Bengal (81%) held that India is a country of all religions, and not just Hindus. The same figure among Hindus in the rest of the country was 74%.

On the issue of protecting minority rights, 38% of Hindus in West Bengal agreed with the proposition that



even if it is not liked by the majority community, the government must protect the interests of minorities. This sentiment, in fact, strengthened further to 58% this time, when we repeated this question in our survey.

What these responses indicate is that even as average Bengali Hindus may have supported the BJP in large numbers in 2019, the reasons for doing so were different and not necessarily an endorsement of the BJP's Hindutva agenda. This perhaps explains why the BJP's support among Hindu voters declined this time instead of increasing. Heavily polarising rhetoric by the BJP in the recent election may well have alienated the liberal tolerant section of the Bengali Hindus from the BJP, particularly the traditional Left voters, who had shown interest in the party in 2019. It also seems to have had the effect of scaring Muslims who consolidated in even larger proportions (75%) behind the Trinamool Congress than they had in 2019. The Trinamool, thus, ended up benefiting both ways.

The story, of course, has

another side. There is some traction to the idea that the government accorded undue favours to minorities. While a majority of the Hindus in the rest of the country had no problem with it, in West Bengal, the support for the idea was lukewarm, with many being ambivalent on the issue. In fact, in the 2021 survey, most Hindus, even the ones who ended up voting for the Trinamool Congress, agreed with the proposition that the party had given undue favours to Muslims during its tenure, an issue that the BJP had raised. It is nonetheless interesting that many of them continued to vote for the Trinamool despite holding this view.

None of this is to say that there was no polarisation on religious lines in this election. But the divide was mostly restricted to seats where the Muslim population was higher in proportion. It is also important to note that the Hindu share in the Trinamool's votes was 57% this time and the Muslim share was 42%; in 2019, it had been 50% for each.

In sum, the BJP, which prides itself on knowing the Hindu mind, may have failed spectacularly in deciphering the Bengali Hindu psyche. It has been unable to transform the majority community into a minority-hating mobolith.

Moreover, the majority community was also divided on the basis of caste, class, gender and other social identities, and the Hindutva campaign clearly fell short in catering to everyday concerns around development and livelihood. In the cultural rubric of Bengal's politics, there was limited room for uni-dimensional religious polarisation, a fact that the BJP took very lightly.

Suprio Basu is with the Department of Sociology, University of Kalyani; Jyotiprasad Chatterjee is Associate Professor of Sociology at Barrackpore Rastaguru Surendranath College; Shreyas Sardeasai is a Research Associate at Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi; Suhas Palshikar is the Co-Director of the Lokniti programme

1. Compared to 2019, Hindus moved away from the BJP and Muslims' consolidation behind Trinamool strengthened further

| | Voted for Trinamool | | | Voted for BJP | | |
|--------|---------------------|------|------|---------------|------|------|
| | 2016 | 2019 | 2021 | 2016 | 2019 | 2021 |
| Hindu | 43 | 32 | 39 | 12 | 57 | 50 |
| Muslim | 51 | 70 | 75 | 6 | 4 | 7 |

Note: Figures are percentages, the rest of the voters voted for other parties and candidates

2. Did the BJP misjudge the Bengali Hindu mind? Evidence from 2019

| "1992 Babri Masjid demolition was..." | Hindus (West Bengal) | Hindus (All India) |
|---|----------------------|--------------------|
| Justified | 21 | 39 |
| Not Justified | 42 | 32 |
| No response | 37 | 29 |
| "India belongs to..." | | |
| Only Hindus | 8 | 17 |
| To all religions equally, not only Hindus | 81 | 74 |
| No response | 11 | 9 |
| "Minorities should get..." | | |
| Special Treatment | 32 | 50 |
| Equal and not special treatment | 29 | 29 |
| No response | 39 | 21 |

Note: Figures are percentages and may not add up to 100 due to rounding

3. Even as most Hindus agreed that the Mamata Banerjee government had favored Muslims unduly, many of them still voted for the Trinamool Congress, particularly those who agreed only partially

| "The Mamata Banerjee government gives undue favour to Muslims" | Should the State government get another chance? | |
|--|---|----------------|
| | % | HOW THEY VOTED |
| | | Trinamool BJP |
| Hindus who fully agreed with the statement | 36 | 18 72 |
| Hindus who somewhat agreed | 32 | 45 41 |
| Hindus who somewhat disagreed | 4 | 68 25 |
| Hindus who fully disagreed | 11 | 70 19 |
| No response | 17 | 45 42 |

Note: Figures are percentages, the rest of the voters voted for other parties and candidates

4. Hindus tended to vote more for the BJP in seats with higher proportion of Muslims, but the battle for the Hindu vote was neck and neck elsewhere

| | Voted for Trinamool | Voted for BJP |
|--|---------------------|---------------|
| Hindu vote choice in seats with... | | |
| Muslims <10% population | 43 | 42 |
| Muslim 10-19% | 42 | 46 |
| Muslims 20-29% | 26 | 68 |
| Muslims 30-39% | 40 | 53 |
| Muslim 40%+ | 24 | 65 |
| Muslim vote choice in seats with... | | |
| Muslims <10% population | 74 | 20 |
| Muslim 10-19% | 87 | 3 |
| Muslims 20-29% | 70 | 13 |
| Muslims 30-39% | 84 | 5 |
| Muslim 40%+ | 72 | 6 |

Note: Figures are percentages, the rest of the voters voted for other parties

Contrary to expectations, the BJP's appeal among backward classes and the rural poor has petered out

SHREYAS SARDESAI

The phrase 'subaltern Hindutva' was bandied about quite a lot in academic and journalistic circles during the recently concluded West Bengal Assembly election. Many journalists and scholars covering stories from the field had a common account, that a large section of rural poor, backward classes, Dalits and Adivasis had firmly shifted towards the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the influence of the Hindutva ideology, and that the Trinamool Congress, which owed its rise to the backward classes in 2011, had become extremely unpopular among them. Some described the movement of these subaltern classes towards the BJP as cultural and political solidarity among Hindus and also a reflection of the dominance of 'anti-Bhadralok' (anti-upper caste/class) sentiments in rural areas that the Trinamool Congress had once benefited from.

The post-poll survey data, however, suggest that both the subaltern and *bhadralok* shift that had taken place towards the BJP on a massive scale in the 2019 Lok Sabha election waned this time and the Trinamool Congress managed to retain much of its lost support among these sections.

Data show that the decline in support for the BJP com-

pared to the Lok Sabha election was the steepest among OBC communities (Yadavs, Kurmis, Kumhars, Lohars, Telis, etc., taken together), falling from over two-thirds (68%) to just half (49%) this time around. Like OBC voters, Adivasi voters, too, were far less enthused by the

BJP, and their support fell drastically from 62% to 46%. Most of them made their way back to the Trinamool, which also explains why the ruling party regained lost ground in some of the State's tribal areas and Scheduled Tribes-reserved seats.

Erosion of Dalit support Among Dalit communities, too, on whom the BJP invested considerable time and energy this year, the party was simply unable to retain the huge level of support it had garnered two years ago, and much of this was due to the erosion of the Rajbanshi

Women rally behind Trinamool

Election after election, women voters have continued to ally themselves with Mamata Banerjee's party

SANJAY KUMAR

Of the various factors that contributed to the Trinamool Congress's victory in the Assembly election, the support of women voters for Mamata Banerjee is significant. And this is not new for this election – even in polls held during the last decade, women have always come out in support of Mamata Banerjee. Not only have women voters managed to bridge the turnout deficit vis-à-vis men, but their voting preferences have also been different. For the fourth straight election in the State (counting both Assembly and Lok Sabha elections), women voted for the Trinamool in higher proportions than men.

According to the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey, the gender gap this time was to the tune of four percentage points, slightly lower than in the past, but still significantly large. While 46% of men voted for the Trinamool Congress, two points lower than the party's average vote share, among women voters, support for the Trinamool Congress touched 50%.

This higher-than-average voting for the Trinamool among women also meant that the ruling party got a far bigger advantage over its principal opponent, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), among women than men. For men, the Trinamool Congress was ahead of the BJP by six percentage points, and among women, the Trinamool's lead over the BJP was twice as high at a massive 13 percentage points.

Women voters seem to have been instrumental in driving up the Trinamool Congress's seat numbers. A somewhat similar trend was witnessed in the 2016 Assembly election, when the Left Front-Congress alliance had trailed behind the Trinamool Congress by just two percentage points among men voters but by 12 percentage points among women.

The question that arises is, what has attracted women voters towards Mamata

those from the general category and ₹1,000 for those from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and OBC families. The Trinamool's vote share among Dalit women was five percentage points more than it was among Dalit men, seven points more among upper-caste women, and 13 points more among Adivasi women.

Another category of women that particularly stood out in its support for the Trinamool this time was that of elderly women aged 45 years and above. Over half of them voted for the Trinamool and only some, about a third, opted for the BJP. Women from the poorest backgrounds also emerged as Trinamool's strong supporters. Interestingly, the only category of women that ended up siding more with the BJP than the Trinamool in this election was that of upper-class women.

The author is co-director of the Lokniti programme at CSDS

Mamata stands tall

Mamata Banerjee was far more popular than Prime Minister Narendra Modi in West Bengal. She was also the most preferred choice for the position of Chief Minister in comparison to leaders from the Trinamool Congress itself and also the rival parties

| Leader | CM choice (%) | Voted for BJP |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Mamata Banerjee | 42 | 36 (41) |
| Dilip Ghosh | 5 | 35 (41) |
| Suvendu Adhikari | 3 | 40 (38) |
| Other Trinamool leaders | 6 | 43 (34) |
| Other BJP leaders | 11 | |
| Left-Cong-ISF leaders | 4 | 45 (62) |
| Others | 2 | 50 (59) |
| Non-committal | 27 | 52 (46) |
| Hindu Rich | 35 (47) | 48 (41) |

Note: Figures are percentages and may not add up to 100 due to rounding

2019 2021

| | 2019 | 2021 |
|----------------------------|------|------|
| Like Mamata more than Modi | 43 | 45 |
| Like Modi more than Mamata | 37 | 29 |
| Dislike both | 6 | 7 |
| Like Both | | |

FROM PAGE ONE

Maratha quota is unconstitutional: SC

In 1992, a nine-judge Bench of the court had drawn the "Lakshman rekha" for reservation in jobs and education at 50%, except in "extraordinary circumstances." However, over the years, several States like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have crossed the rubicon and passed laws, which allow reservation shooting over 60%. The judgment would have an impact on the reservation dynamics in these States which have crossed the 50% ceiling limit.

The Indira Sawhney judgment had categorically said "50% shall be the rule, only

in certain exceptional and extraordinary situations for bringing far-flung and remote areas population into mainstream said 50% rule can be relaxed."

Justice Bhushan, in the lead opinion on the Maratha law, said that appointments made under it following the Bombay High Court judgment endorsing the State law would hold, but they would get no further benefits. Students already admitted under the Maratha quota law would continue. Students admitted to post-graduate courses would not be affected since they were not given reservation.

Viral load high, third wave inevitable: govt. adviser

Refuting claims that the virus was spreading from animals into humans, member, NITI Aayog, V.K. Paul, said the virus had so far seen human to human transmission only.

"What we do know is that mutations will go on but we need to keep a scientific

watch on these changes. The response to these changing viruses, however, remains the same and it starts with our personal behaviour," said Dr. Paul. He appealed to physicians to come forward to provide teleconsultation for those at home.

SC demands oxygen supply plan for Delhi

"Hauling officers up for contempt will not bring oxygen to Delhi," Justice Chandrachud reasoned.

"Contempt is when something is done absolutely wilfully," Justice Shah said. "This is a national crisis, nobody can dispute that the Centre has not done anything... But still what is your plan for distribution and assessment of requirement of oxygen," he asked Mr. Mehta.

Justice Chandrachud said the "current situation of pandemic in Delhi was critical... Tell us about the logistics so that we can help... How much is being allocated and supplied in real time? Lack of oxygen is causing tremendous anxiety. People are unable to get cylinders."

"We have stopped industrial use of oxygen, philanthropists have come forward. There is 9,000 MT of liquid medical oxygen for use now... Question is how to divide this among States?" Mr. Mehta submitted.

Going on, Mr. Mehta said the Centre had formed an expert panel of Dr. V.K. Paul, Member of the NITI Aayog; Dr. Randeep Guleria, AIIMS Director; the Director-General, ICMR, and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) for computing oxygen requirement on a pan-India basis.

But the court found the "formula" suggested by the panel "unscientific".

Mamata takes oath as CM, appeals for peace

"I will appeal to all political parties to maintain peace. Take proper care that there is no violence. West Bengal does not like violence, and I do not support it," Ms. Banerjee said.

For three months, the administration was working as per the instructions of the Election Commission of India.

dia and some inefficiency had crept in. The Trinamool Congress won 213 seats in the 294-member Assembly in the recent polls.

The party's vote share was at an all-time high of 47.9 %. The elected Trinamool legislators unanimously elected Ms. Banerjee as their leader on May 3.

13 COVID-19 patients die in T.N. hospital

The tragedy started to unravel when O2 supply in the tank for more than 300 patients was available for only a few hours on Tuesday noon. Though cylinders were used for providing oxygen to the patients, five COVID-19 patients had died by Tuesday evening.

In the meanwhile, the district administration

made arrangements for filling the oxygen tankers on Tuesday but the supply was not quite enough, leading to the death of 13 COVID-19 patients about 3 a.m. on Wednesday, doctors at the hospital said. At a press conference on Wednesday, the Collector denied there was any shortage of oxygen in the hospital.

INTERVIEW | WALTER J. LINDNER

'Need to be patient over foreign aid distribution'

For the moment, we have to find a solution to this crisis, get people out of the emergency situation: German Ambassador

SUHASINI HAIDAR

Germany is sending a massive oxygen plant on loan to Delhi on Thursday, capable of generating 4,00,000 litres of oxygen. The plant will service the DRDO-run Sardar Patel COVID-19 Hospital, and will help refill oxygen supplies for others. German Ambassador Walter J. Lindner says calls for transparency in where all the foreign aid is going may be premature.

Germany has sent 120 ventilators to India. What else is expected?

■ Over Thursday and Friday, we will see a big oxygen plant come in on two A-400 transport airliners, which will then be set up here.

They will be good for covering the oxygen needs for hundreds of people every day. So this is a big one. And it will remain here until it is needed. Our government is also working on improving the cold chains for the vaccinations, together with UNICEF. There is a massive private effort, with German companies working with Indian companies in different cities, and we have cooperation of the European Union, the civil protection mechanism that is bringing equipment on military planes.

We have seen questions being asked in the U.S. and other countries about the need for more transparency from the government on the 300 tonnes of equipment and foreign aid that has flown in. Are you concerned about the fact that the aid is not visible on the ground yet?

■ I understand the impatience, because I see the images as well. I also tell this to German television audiences – that this is a heart-wrenching situation, you see that people are suffocating in front of hospitals. But you know, if you have international aid coming, there is always a kind of a time lag before you see results. You have to get clearances, then you have to sometimes unpackage and then repack the equip-

ment for use. This does take a few days. I would say the officials we are dealing with in the Red Cross and MEA [Ministry of External Affairs] know that every hour counts, every hour can save lives.

How has the German Embassy itself been affected, and have you received adequate help and access to healthcare from the government?

■ Well, we have about 150 people in the embassy at the moment and 30 people are dealing with COVID at present, including Indians and German nationals, of which two people are in hospitals. It was difficult to get hospital beds, because we are not specially privileged, and I think that is okay, because every life counts the same. In one case, we had to fly out a patient in an emergency flight, because there was a boy, he was just in such a bad condition.

You worked as the crisis director in the German Foreign Ministry dealing



■ If you have international aid coming, there is always a kind of a time lag before you see results. You have to get clearances... This does take a few days

with the Ebola crisis. How do you assess the government's preparation for this kind of a second wave?

■ Well, I'm no one to assess government's crisis management. We are here as foreign observers, not auditors. In many countries, where the numbers go down, people tend to get easy on the measures. In a country like India

too we saw that, and all of us did that, diplomats and the journalists, the Opposition and the government. I personally think the image I saw in mass events be they political, religious, sporting event, the sense was that in India things were getting better. The mutations may be one of the reasons nobody expected this kind of wave. Later, we can draw out the lessons learned, what could have done better, and others in the world and WHO could have done, but for the moment, we have to find a solution to this crisis, get people out of the emergency situation.

Where do you see the possibilities of India and Germany collaborating in the future, particularly when it comes to the vaccine initiative?

■ Indians are very important part of the so called COVAX initiative for distributing vaccines worldwide, paid for by a global fund. For the moment this has slowed, because Indians need the vaccinations for themselves, which is totally understandable. But soon we hope to see Indian manufacturers step up production and there will be discussions at the biannual virtual meeting between PM Narendra Modi and Chancellor Merkel at the end of this month, their last such meeting as she will soon step down. We also hope to see cooperation on cold chains and on research into the sequencing of the COVID virus.

Workers' income fell by 17%, says report

Households coped with the loss of income by reducing food intake, selling assets, and borrowing

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI



Huge loss: According to the report, 100 million jobs were lost during the April-May 2020 lockdown. ■ GETTY IMAGES

its level in Jan 2020 (₹5,989), the report noted.

The study found that post-lockdown, nearly half of salaried workers had moved into informal work, either as self-employed (30%), casual wage (10%) or informal salaried (9%). The fallback option varied by caste and religion. "General category workers and Hindus were more likely to move into self-employment while marginalised caste workers and Muslims moved into daily wage work," noted the report.

Education, health and professional services saw the highest exodus of workers into other sectors, with agri-

culture, construction and petty trade emerging as the top fallback options.

Due to the employment and income losses, the labour share of the GDP fell by 5 percentage points, from 32.5% in the second quarter of 2019-20 to 27% in the second quarter of 2020-21. "Of the decline in income, 90% was due to reduction in earnings, while 10% was due to loss of employment. This means that even though most workers were able to go back to work, they had to settle for lower earnings," observed the report.

Monthly earnings of workers fell on an average by 17% during the pandemic, with self-employed and informal salaried workers facing the highest loss of earnings.

not returning to work even by the end of 2020".

With 230 million falling below the national minimum wage threshold of ₹375 per day during the pandemic, poverty rate has "increased by 15 percentage points in rural and nearly 20 percentage points in urban areas," the report said. Households coped with the loss of income by decreasing their food intake, selling assets and borrowing informally from friends, relatives and money-lenders. The report notes that 20% of those surveyed said that their food intake had not improved even six months after the lockdown.

Significantly, the study has found a clear correlation between job losses and the COVID-19 case load, with States showing higher case load, such as Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Delhi, "contributing disproportionately to the job losses".

Women and younger workers were more affected by the pandemic-related measures. During the lockdown and in the post-lockdown months, 61% of working men remained employed while 7% lost their job and did not return to work. But in the case of women, only 19% remained employed while 47% suffered a permanent job loss, "not returning to work even by the end of 2020".

While the poorest 20% of households lost their entire incomes in April-May 2020, "the richer households suffered losses of less than a quarter of their pre-pandemic incomes." During the period from March to October 2020, an average household in the bottom 10% lost ₹15,700, or just over two months' income.

Women and younger workers were more affected by the pandemic-related measures. During the lockdown and in the post-lockdown months, 61% of working men remained employed while 7% lost their job and did not return to work. But in the case of women, only 19% remained employed while 47% suffered a permanent job loss, "not returning to work even by the end of 2020".

These findings are a serious cause for concern in the absence of an inclusive social welfare architecture.

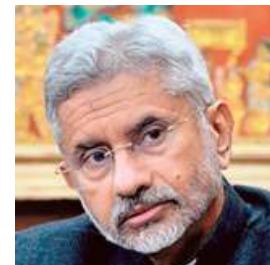
Among other ameliorative policy measures, the report calls for extending free rations under the Public Distribution System till the end of 2021, expansion of MGNREGA entitlement to 150 days,

and a "Covid hardship allowance" for the 2.5 million Anganwadi and ASHA workers.

5G: China expresses 'concern, regret'

Can't have bloodshed on border; good relationship in other domains: Jaishankar

ANANTH KRISHNAN



S. Jaishankar

said, adding they had "tied up with original equipment manufacturers and technology providers which are Ericsson, Nokia, Samsung and C-DOT" while Reliance Jio Infocomm will conduct trials using its own indigenous technology.

Reacting to the move, the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi said in a statement it "expresses concern and regret that Chinese telecommunications companies have not been permitted to conduct 5G trials with Indian Telecom Service Providers in India".

Relevant Chinese companies have been operating in India for years, providing mass job opportunities and making contribution to India's infrastructure construction in telecommunications," spokesperson Wang

Xiaojian said.

He said moves to "exclude Chinese telecommunications companies from the trials" would "harm their legitimate rights and interests". "The Chinese side hopes that India could do more to enhance mutual trust and cooperation, and provide an open, fair, just, and non-discriminatory investment and business environment for market entities from all countries, including China, to operate and invest in India."

At Wednesday's dialogue, Mr. Jaishankar said the relationship was "going through a very difficult phase, because in violation of agreements and understandings of many, many years, the Chinese have deployed a very large part of their military on, and close to, the Line of Actual Control, without explanation, and they continue to be there".

Mr. Jaishankar noted it had been one year since the LAC crisis began, on May 5, 2020 with reports of tensions then starting in the Galwan Valley and Pangong Lake.

He said China's "actions have disturbed peace and tranquillity", including lead-

ing to bloodshed in Galwan last June, and India "has been very clear that peace and tranquillity on the border areas is essential for the development of our relations".

The disengagement process was completed in some areas but one year on is still ongoing in others, and both sides had not yet come to the de-escalation part.

On Friday's phone call with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, the External Affairs Minister said both sides had discussed their mutual interest in cooperating on tackling COVID-19 at a time when Indian companies have placed many orders to source supplies from China amid the current crisis.

Very laudable'
He told Mr. Wang that "many of our companies are ordering stuff from China and we are encountering difficulties in logistics, so please take a look at it which is something which we would appreciate".

"After our conversation things did move," he said.

"Some of our airlines got quicker approvals, the logistics chain is flowing, and that is something which is very laudable."

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"Some of our airlines got quicker approvals, the logistics chain is flowing, and that is something which is very laudable."

Let off with warning'
Coast Guard officials said that due to the pandemic, the fishermen were let off with a warning by the Sri Lankan authorities. The offi-

We have been repeatedly educating the fishermen not to cross the IMBL.
Moreover, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sri Lankan Navy personnel, too, had intensified surveillance

ials urged the fishermen not to violate the maritime boundaries.

Meanwhile, fishermen association leader Rayappan claimed that the fishermen were well within the Indian waters. However, he thanked the Indian authorities for the safe return of the fishermen.

A senior official in the Fisheries Department here said 300 fishermen had ventured into the sea on Monday.

"We have been repeatedly educating the fishermen not to cross the IMBL. Moreover, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sri Lankan Navy personnel, too, had intensified surveillance," the official said.

After 10 hours, Sri Lanka frees 86 Indian fishermen

'Held for violating maritime boundaries'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

RAMESWARAM

Eighty-six Indian fishermen, detained for about 10 hours by Sri Lankan Navy personnel on charges of crossing the Indian waters while fishing in the Palk Strait, were later let off and they returned home early on Wednesday.

According to reports reaching here, 86 fishermen from Pamban and other hamlets had ventured into the sea on May 3 in 11 boats. The Sri Lankan Navy personnel, on surveillance, secured the fishermen and took them to a camp, where they were detained for 10 hours.

After recording their names and other details, police and Fisheries department officials in Sri Lanka warned the Indian fishermen and let them off.

Around Monday night, they were all handed over to Indian authorities.

Let off with warning'
Coast Guard officials said that due to the pandemic, the fishermen were let off with a warning by the Sri Lankan authorities, The offi-

13 COVID-19 patients die in T.N. hospital

The tragedy started to unravel when O2 supply in the tank for more than 300 patients was available for only a few hours on Tuesday noon. Though cylinders were used for providing oxygen to the patients, five COVID-19 patients had died by Tuesday evening.

In the meanwhile, the district administration

Longest elections did not help BJP

It did not allow the party micro-management, says survey

SHREYAS SARDESAI

The eight-phase elections in West Bengal that went on for four-and-a-half weeks have been described as the longest State elections India has ever seen. The post-poll survey data suggest that this probably did not help the BJP in what is known as micro-management.

In overall terms, 24% or one in every four voters of West Bengal decided who they are going to vote for at the very last minute or a day or two before voting day, and among such voters, it was the Trinamool Congress and not the BJP that did exceedingly well. While the ruling party secured 54% of its vote, the BJP was way behind at 33% (Table 1). Any attempt by the BJP to turn things around at the last mi-



nute through targeted campaigning did not seem to have worked.

It was not just among the late deciders, but even among the campaign-time deciders (those who decided their vote choice during the campaign or after the announcement of candidates) Trinamool enjoyed a sizeable advantage over the BJP.

The ruling party secured 49% votes of such voters whereas the BJP was a good 12 percentage points behind at 37%. This finding is particularly significant when compared with the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Back then, the

BJP had stolen a march over Trinamool precisely among this segment of campaign-time deciders, enjoying a two percentage point vote lead. The only category of voters among whom the BJP managed to put up some what of a fight this time were the before campaign deciders. Forty six per cent respondents had actually made up their mind early. Among them, 42% said they voted for the BJP as against 44% for Trinamool. Significantly, the overall pattern of late and campaign-time deciders giving Trinamool an advantage over the BJP does not change when we break down the voting preferences data of late and campaign-time deciders by phases (Table 2).

(The author is a Research Associate at Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi)

Table 1: AITC stole a march over the BJP among late deciders. Was it due to Mamata injury, BJP's 'campaign', Sitalkuchi, Covid - the jury is out

| When did you finally make up your mind about whom to vote for? | How they voted | |
|--|----------------|-----|
| | AITC | BJP |
| Decided last minute/eve of polls (24%) | 54 | 33 |
| During campaign/after candidates declared (25%) | 49 | 37 |
| Before campaign (46%) | 44 | 42 |
| No response (5%) | 50 | 36 |
| Overall | 48 | 38 |

Note: Figures are percentages, the rest of the voters voted for other parties and candidates.

Table 2: Trinamool had a consistent advantage over the BJP among late and campaign time deciders across all phases

| Phase | Late & campaign time deciders (%) | How they voted | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----|
| | | AITC | BJP |
| Phase 1 | 52 | 47 | 39 |
| Phase 2 | 40 | 50 | 43 |
| Phase 3 | 45 | 45 | 43 |
| Phase 4 | 56 | 56 | 27 |
| Phase 5 | 43 | 53 | 39 |
| Phase 6 | 45 | 51 | 32 |
| Phase 7 | 51 | 47 | 35 |
| Phase 8 | 63 | 58 | 31 |

Note: Figures are percentages and may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

SHREYAS SARDESAI

A common account given by journalists and scholars who travelled far and wide in West Bengal during the elections was about corruption and cut money. So what happened then that the ruling party still comfortably won the election? Was corruption not an issue? Or is it the case that it was an issue but not on the scale at which was being reported, and that other more bread and butter issues mattered far more? The post-poll data indicate that the case is the latter.

When we asked voters in the survey what the single most important issue had been for them while voting, corruption figured way down in the list of issues at the seventh spot – only 2% of our 4,200+ respondents said it had been a consideration for them while deciding whom to vote for (Table 1). What mattered most instead to voters was the larger issue of development. One-third (33%) said development or the desire for more of it is what determined their vote.

Data further indicate that those who voted on the basis of development and related issues such as government performance, water and electricity, roads and welfare schemes voted overwhelmingly for the Trinamool Congress. The BJP secured most of the votes of those for whom unemployment, *poriborton* (change) and corruption were issues. The problem for the BJP, however, was that there were not enough people basing their vote on these issues.

We must stress here that it is not that corruption was not a concern for voters. It was. It is just that it was not a major one. Most voters opened up about the issue only when we asked them specifically about it. For instance, on being asked about how corrupt the Trinamool government was in their opinion, one-fourth (23%) described it as being very cor-

rupt, one-third (33%) as somewhat corrupt and one-fourth (26%) as not at all corrupt with the rest being ambivalent (Table 2). Similarly, a little over half (51%) agreed with the statement that there was a lot of corruption in Trinamool as a party.

(The author is a Research Associate at Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi)

Committed to free media, says Election Commission

'States can only make suggestions to the President or the statutory commissions'

PM must ensure quota'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to show similar

"courage" in ensuring reservation for the Maratha community as he had shown in the case of Article 370.

Mr. Thackeray said the Supreme Court verdict

striking down reservation for the Marathas was "disappointing".

"Court has said that it is Centre's right [in deciding reservation] and I am sure that neither PM nor President will disappoint the Maratha community. I will be writing to Prime Minister on Thursday for the same. We want him to show the courage shown while dealing with Article 370."

law enacted by Parliament, by virtue of Article 342A (2)," Justice Bhat said. "In the task of identification of SEBCs, the President shall be guided by the Commission (National Commission for Backward Classes) set up under Article 338B; its advice shall also be sought by the State in regard

to policies that might be framed by it," the court said.

"If the commission prepares a report concerning matters of identification, such a report has to be shared with the State government, which is bound to deal with it, in accordance with provisions of Article 338B. However, the final determination culminates in the exercise undertaken by the President (i.e. the Central Government, under Article 342A (1)," the court clarified.

However, "the President's prerogative as far as the identification and inclusion of SEBCs in the List would not affect the States' power

to make reservations in favour of particular communities or castes, the quantum of reservations, the nature of benefits and the kind of reservations, and all other matters falling within the ambit of Articles 15 and 16".

The Central List is to be the "only list" for the SEBC.

"Once published, under Article 342A (1), the list can only be amended through a

process of consultation with the concerned

communities concerned for inclusion, exclusion or modification of castes and communities to be included in the List.

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IN BRIEF



54 tonnes of oxygen brought from Bahrain

NEW DELHI Navy ship INS Talwar entered the New Mangalore port with 54 tonnes of liquid oxygen from Bahrain, while more ships are on their way with emergency supplies from friendly countries, the Navy said. "Nine warships have been diverted to various ports in the region extending from Kuwait in the West to Singapore in the East," said Deputy Chief of Naval Staff Vice Admiral M.S. Pawar.

Be transparent in foreign aid distribution: Rahul

NEW DELHI Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday asked the Centre to be transparent about the foreign aid received to fight the pandemic. "What all supplies has India received? Where are they? Who is benefiting from them? How are they allocated to States? Why no transparency?" he tweeted.

'Surge may go down by end of May'

Virologist Gagandeep Kang stresses the protection that vaccines offer

SUDHA VEMURI

NEW DELHI

The current COVID-19 surge in India may begin to start tapering between the middle and end of May, virologist Gagandeep Kang said on Wednesday.

At a virtual interaction with members of the Indian Women Press Corps, Dr. Kang said, "Best guess estimates from a number of models put this somewhere between the middle and end of the month. Some models have it [second wave] going out in early June. Based on what we are seeing now, middle to end of May would be a reasonable estimate."



Gagandeep Kang

The first Indian woman scientist to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society also dispelled doubts over the efficacy of the two vaccines – Covishield and Covaxin – currently available in India

and said more options would be available soon.

"The vaccines offer lot of protection against disease, severe disease; good protection against disease and some protection against infection. If you are protected against infection, you also don't transmit to the next person. So the vaccines are working very well against severe disease and death," said Dr. Kang, adding that they may not prevent infection but definitely decrease infection.

Dr. Kang attributed the second surge to the virus spreading among two segments which escaped the

COVID-19 wrath last year – the middle class and the rural population.

Sharing data from Our World in Data, she said the size of the peak that is seen now is three-and-a-half to four times seen earlier. "The likelihood is that when we begin to see a decline, it will also be reasonably rapid as the virus would have had the opportunity to burn through the population," she said.

Dr. Kang said, "Despite a decline in testing, we are pretty close to the limit that we could potentially reach, somewhere around four to four-and-a half lakh cases per day."

MHA advisory on fire safety at hospitals

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) wrote to the States on Wednesday to put in place a plan of action and ensure that no fire accidents occur in any of the health facilities, particularly COVID-19 dedicated centres both in the government and the private sector.

The States and UTs have been requested to conduct a detailed review with officials from the Health, Power and Fire Departments, and prepare a detailed plan to ensure that safety measures are in place.

their counterparts in Mumbai. However, investigators from the Mumbai Crime Branch found that the mobile phones of the suspect, which were switched off, were never active in Maharashtra but were used in Noida and Delhi.

The Mumbai Police are also looking for the suspect, who used the GST number of a reputed textiles firm in the invoices that he issued to fool people.

Since the contact address he gave was in Maharashtra, the Chennai police alerted

Businessman who paid ₹1 lakh for 2 devices files complaint

S. VIJAY KUMAR

CHENNAI

A person, believed to be operating from Delhi, allegedly cheated dozens of people ordering oxygen concentrators through a popular e-commerce platform.

The scam was exposed after a city-based businessman N. Kannan of Periyar Nagar lodged a complaint with the Chennai police that the suspect took ₹1 lakh via bank transfer and failed to deliver two oxygen concentrators that he had ordered for an old age home here.

Acting on specific inputs, the Delhi Police froze the suspect's bank account, though he had already withdrawn the entire money transferred by unsuspecting people who placed orders for oxygen concentrators or other life-saving gadgets.

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Comfort in reading old favourites

Mallik Thatipalli, content writer

The only driving forces that kept me strong were my mother, wife and sister. Every day as I felt weak and fatigued, I'd tell myself, I have to be strong for them and fight it out. I wasn't in a frame of mind to read a new book, so I started re-reading the Harry Potter series, followed by Ayn Rand and the Inheritance series. I also re-watched *The Lord Of The Rings* and *The Hobbit*. All this even though I knew that Sauron and Voldemort would be defeated, I just wanted to go back to those familiar scenes.

The other most important thing my family did was to be on video most of the time; it was our way of being connected. Since my wife and I both tested positive, it was my mother who kept a watch on us. She would keep the video on in the kitchen while she worked, so that was like our window to the world outside.

**Same hospital,
different rooms**

Venugopal N, journalist

When I was hospitalised, I kept myself focussed and positive to recover for my wife. COVID-19 hit her severely and I was only focussing on her recovery. For a week, we couldn't see each other even though we were in the same hospital. That was very frustrating. To distract myself, I read *Bahula* by Appala Naidu, a 500-page socio-historical fiction based in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh.

Nothing beats Telugu music, not even COVID-19

Vanaja C, journalist

I spent many days in three different ICUs. Right now, I am home and recovering, but with limited limb function. While in the hospital my friends advised me to practise *Vipasana*, they sent me chants, verses from the *Gita*, and suggested meditative music. I tried them all and honestly, I found them depressing. Instead, I found my mojo in popular Telugu film songs; their upbeat music made me feel alive – I wanted to break into a dance even in my bed. I insisted on doing some basic exercise. Calming music and meditation didn't work for me. Everybody is different, so one should be allowed to listen and watch whatever gives them joy.



*I needed to feel like
myself again*
Shilpa Nainani, emcee

Cal Newport's book *Deep Work* was my companion at night when I couldn't sleep. During the day when I was not coughing, I was on call with my parents and niece. My husband and I both tested positive, so I had company in isolation. I am also part of an NLP group that shared motivational speeches and conducted virtual community meetings. It gave me the push to get dressed, do my hair and wear my earrings, so I could feel like myself again. By the 12th day, I got onto social media to see how I could be of help to others.

mels to distribute books in this desolate terrain with little Internet access.

The sisters reached out to the Alif Laila Book Bus Society (ALBBS) and Female Education Trust, two NGOs working for female literacy. Judith's Reading Room was the first donor and the project was launched in October 2020 across Mand, Gwadar and Tharpakar, Sindh. Murad Ali, Roshan's herder, had him togged out in colourful bunting and brought him around to help.

Basarat Kazim, president of ALBBS that donated the books for the project and an author of children's books, speaks on the Socie-

ty's journey, and giving children a sense of the 'normal' in these difficult times. Excerpts from an email interview:

How did ALBBS begin?

It was started in 1978 by Dr Juanita Baker, an American living in Pakistan at the time. Till then, there were no children's libraries in the country, and this stationary double-decker bus won everyone's hearts. It is symbolic of the children's library movement in Pakistan. The outreach is through libraries and mobile libraries in schools, distribution of 100-book box libraries to celebrate IBBY's [International Board on Books for Young People] work in Pakistan and bus, rickshaw, camel and bike libraries.

How do you ensure that children from disadvantaged sections understand the books they are reading? Are there guides?

Read right (Clockwise from top) Roshan's herder, Murad, looks on as Rahima Jalal hands out books to the children; Basarat Kazim; and girls reading at a mobile library ■ REUTERS AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



It's easier for a camel...

In Pakistan's arid province of Balochistan, mobile libraries on camelback bring the world and some cheer to children missing school due to the COVID-19 pandemic

DEEPA ALEXANDER

Roshan's even toes sink into the sand, dodging scree as he plods along the expansive plains towards Mand, a small town in southern Balochistan bordering Iran. The camel passes sights that belong to a medieval play – small houses, their doorways covered in hessian sacks, pepper the hillside; lone trees stand scattered; and the only colour in the dun landscape is from intricately painted Bedford trucks on the highway and the children dressed in bright *salwar kameezes* racing to meet him.

Roshan's saddle panniers hang low with books that bring both cheer and a peek into the world outside to these children living in Pakistan's most impoverished province, which has low literacy rates and has been battling insurgency for over 20 years.

COVID-19 is the latest deterrent but that has not stopped the cud-chewing Roshan from making weekly visits to villages carrying English, Urdu and Balochi books for children aged three to 15, as part of the Camel Library Project.

When the pandemic closed schools, Zubaida Jalal, a federal minister and Rahima Jalal, a school head-mistress, thought of using ca-

It's a long road to recovery for people testing positive in this second wave of COVID-19. Trusty transistors, well-thumbed *Harry Potter* books, and family on constant video calls is what got them by

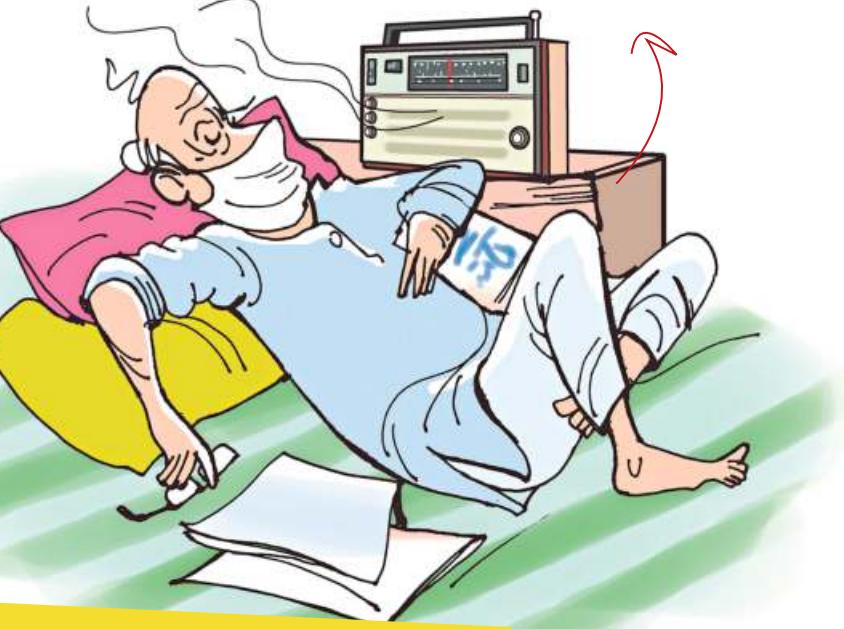
WHEN THE GOING GOT TOUGH, SO DID THEY

PRABALIKA M BORAH
ILLUSTRATIONS: SATHEESH VELLINEZHJI

Transistor by my side

Dharma Kanta Sharma, retired teacher

I am 81 years old and am not a big fan of music, but I do have a transistor by my bedside right now just to listen to the political discussions. News is depressing. But since I like reading, I finished Ashwin Sanghi's *Chanakya's Chant*. That book was gripping and made me forget my lethargy. I read Sanghi's *The Rozabal Line* too. I also call my daughters and friends to check on their well-being and also use the opportunity to ask them if I sound feeble.



**Leading change from a
hospital bed**

Sai Ram, marketing professional

As I work with a hospital, I was busy even while I was admitted there after testing positive. I was constantly on the phone, replying to various queries on beds, vaccine and medication. When I was not able to talk, I was messaging. Being on a hospital bed and battling the virus made me understand the plight of the people seeking help and I couldn't turn my back. This also helped me feel stronger and diverted my attention.

**Vadivelu memes
will save us**

Bakiya Sri, analyst

When my mother, brother and I tested positive we preferred home quarantine. We stayed in our respective rooms and decided to stay away from news bulletins. We also spoke to each other from our rooms instead of communicating through phone. I sailed through my isolation days with Vadivelu memes and jokes. Seven days after we were allowed to mingle with each other, we played a lot of board games. As a household that survived COVID-19, my request to others is, be kind to those who are sick. That really lifts up their spirits. I am actively talking to my friends who have the virus now. I want to keep them motivated and do whatever cheers them up.

We're in this together, on video call

Sajan Pookkodan, communication professional

After testing positive, I assured myself that I will be fine. I reminded myself of having the privilege of a safety net in the form of supportive friends even though I was away from my family. Staying connected with my wife and daughter through video calls kept me happy. We also made a pact that as a family we would be honest with each other about our feelings and well-being. My friends kept me engaged with jokes and chats, jumping in to help with whatever I needed. A strong support system is very important to keep you in the right frame of mind.



THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13411

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Across

1 Inability to discharge one's debts as they come due (10)

7 Toiletry used on the head (4,3)

8 Mountainous state of western Austria (5)

10 Shed tears (4)

11 Secure position from which progress can be made (8)

13 Break in continuity (6)

15 Embellish with adornments (6)

17 Chafing – disharmony (8)

18 Fool – bird (4)

21 Pupil (5)

22 Most direct route (7)

23 Wear clothing typical of the opposite sex (5-5)

■ Down

1 Airship – barrage balloon (5)

2 Recess (4)

3 Trust (4,2)

4 Murphies (8)

5 Cause to rust (7)

6 Shoot the breeze? (4,3,3)

9 Philanderer (10)

To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

12 Structure providing support (8)

14 Flyer (7)

16 Prohibit (6)

19 Single undivided wholes (5)

20 Selection of small dishes served in Greek or Turkish cuisine (4)

Solution will appear on May 13, 2021

Solution No. 13410

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Given the sub-continental culture, do more girls drop out from the reading habit, especially in rural areas?

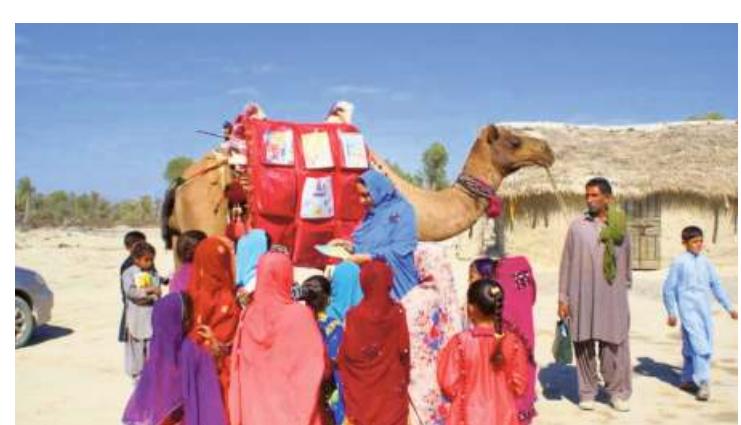
● If they read less it's only because they don't have the opportunity. Within our projects we notice a great leaning of girls to read and excel.

Tell us about your rickshaw and camel projects

● Rickshaw libraries are very exciting. These colourful three-wheelers can reach children and schools in narrow alleys. Running them is cost effective too.

Camels are such gracious, eco-friendly animals. Through the Camel Library Project, we wanted children to value them for the fantastic service they provide. The ALBBS remains responsible for designing the library and supplementary material that goes with it like puppets, games and Tech Bag.

We also give each camel a name. Chirag and Raunaq are the other camels.



DEEPA ALEXANDER

Roshan's even toes sink into the sand, dodging scree as he plods along the expansive plains towards Mand, a small town in southern Balochistan bordering Iran. The camel passes sights that belong to a medieval play – small houses, their doorways covered in hessian sacks, pepper the hillside; lone trees stand scattered; and the only colour in the dun landscape is from intricately painted Bedford trucks on the highway and the children dressed in bright *salwar kameezes* racing to meet him.

Roshan's saddle panniers hang



Armed with just phones, strangers come together online to find beds, oxygen cylinders and plasma. You can join the movement

GOWRI S

Social media in the COVID-19 world is a command centre.

As 20-something-year-olds across the country assemble – sharing screenshots, forming verification models and networking across States – relatives of patients find hospital beds, oxygen concentrators and hope.

Through the day and night (sometimes in shifts), strangers work together, armed with phones, laptops and an Internet connection, to help people through the current crisis.

If there is a word that characterises the past few weeks, it would be 'relentless', says 28-year-old Pooja Pradeep. Bengaluru-based Pooja (@pooja.pradeep) starts her day by posting a format for those who send in requests from across the country, while her team of eight gets ready to carry out the back-end work. The format that is shared

Build your own volunteer squad

reads: Patient name; Age; Oxygen Saturation; Other Health Status...

"I am not trained for this," says Pooja, who is an educator. "What I do for a living is far from getting blood, figuring out what ICU bed is required for a particular oxygen saturation level...especially with no resources or backing," she continues.

It all started when a friend asked her if she had any leads for an ICU bed for her mother. Her own parents being dental surgeons and hence vulnerable, aided the trigger. "It comes from a point of having the platform, power and privilege to do it."

From a process standpoint, mobilisation forms the core of this exercise: what she needed were COVID Squads. "The squad is made up of three different teams: one is the request sourcing team, the second is the data streamlining team and the third is the verification team."

Requests and their details are entered into a simple tracker (an Excel sheet). The data streamlining team scouts through relevant data via Twitter searches and other social media data bases that are updated frequently.

This is then shot out to the verification team. "They pick up the phone, and call, call, call. Call until they get verified leads and once they get at least two verified leads, the request

sourcing team is informed. I, then, close the loop."

Verify, verify, verify

Every single person in the verification team of 21-year-old Gautam Monangi's COVID Squad, makes at least 500 calls a day. They are turned away many times, but soldier on.

Formed only a week ago, Gautam's (@gautam_monangi) is a larger squad of 25 to 30 people working across teams. They have been "thoroughly inspired

#COVIDSQUADS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

Covid War Room by Sriharsha Karamchati (@sriharshakaramchati)

COVIDSquad by Kartthika Siv (@kartthikasiv)

COVIDSquad by Swathi CM (@swatz_swatkat)

by Pooja" who helped them come up with their own processes. In fact, days into forming her own team, Pooja had put up templates for anyone who wants to form their own crews.

"We formed one more squad a few days back, called the BBMP squad, comprising 10 members who can speak Kan-

Assemble! Mobilisation forms the core of making a COVID Squad • IMAGING: M ARIVARASU

nada and directly reach out to the BBMP helpline," says Gautam, a freelance filmmaker, who is coordinating from Kuwait. He adds, "I have never taken this kind of responsibility before in my life."

Most squads have volunteers from across the world, who can work on different time zones.

Twenty seven-year-old Saroj Attal, a volunteer in Pooja's squad, is recovering from COVID-19. She joined the squad on returning from the hospital, where she was admitted for five days. A data scientist with JP Morgan Chase based in Mumbai, Saroj has been streamlining data and building a platform for the squad between her many fatigue-induced naps.

"This work keeps me focused. You need something to keep yourself engaged and busy. And it helps me have a purpose at the end of the day even if I am up for only a few hours in the day," she says.

The highs and lows

The hardest part of the job is when someone gets back saying they wish to close the request, because the patient did not make it. "Even when they get the resources, it might not work in the best way. That hits hard," says Gautam, adding, "Most of us are also dealing with our personal losses during this time and some in the group involve themselves in this work to make up for that," says Gautam.

And so, keeping a check on the mental health of the team members then becomes important. "Some team members are not seasoned volunteers and they wouldn't know how to balance or draw a line," says Pooja. Occasional breaks and Zoom get-togethers are definitely a relief. Gautam's team also has a psychology therapist on board who helps them recognise and record the importance of their work, on a daily basis.

As more groups mushroom across the country, a mass movement is taking form. "[A few days back], we were able to help an old couple with vision impairments reach a hospital and we keep getting updates on their recovery," says Gautam adding, "At the end of the day, if there is at least one person we could help, it makes all the difference."

The big Olympics dream

Eyeing for glory, table tennis veteran Sharath Kamal next hopes to take the sport he dearly loves to the masses

SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM

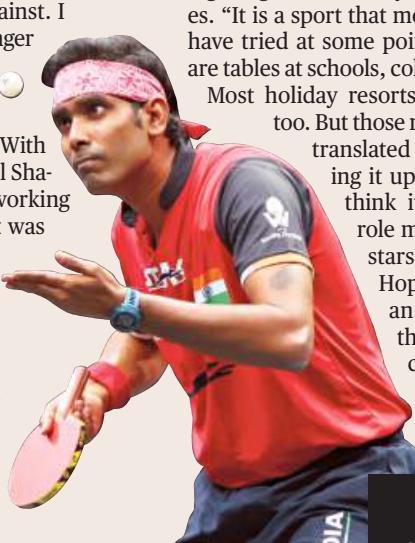
The year 2011 was one of the worst in paddler Sharath Kamal's career. His world rankings plummeted to 94, the lowest ever in his career. He started losing Indian national tournaments, a rarity for a veteran player like him. "It was the lowest of lows," he recalls, "But I believe that you can appreciate the high only if you see the low."

Exactly a decade later, Sharath will represent the country at the upcoming Tokyo Olympics, scheduled to kickstart on July 23. He firmly believes that this year he will realise his dream of bagging the prestigious medal. "I'm as close as can be this time," says the Chennai-resident.

This will be Sharath's fourth trip to the Olympics, considered the holy grail for all sportspersons. "It [the Olympics] is what the whole world is talking about. The stress levels go higher here as there are a lot of expectations from you. This time, it is a lot different because interaction with other sportspersons is going to be minimal [due to COVID-19 protocols]."

Lockdown and later

Despite the pandemic squashing his longing to go out and play, Sharath is thankful he at least has a table at home. "Sathyian (Gnanasekaran) also has a table at home, but has no one to play against. I was lucky to have my younger brother (Rajath Kamal) and father (Srinivasa Rao) around to help me during practice sessions." With no specific goal in sight, all Sharath could do was keep working on his game. "Mentally, it was hard...because I was



I'D LIKE TO MEET...

PRAKASH PADUKONE
He has been a pioneer in badminton and has contributed a lot to India, as a player, coach and administrator. With him, I would like to interact about how I can give back to my sport in the coming years.

practising without knowing exactly for what. All I could tell was to work in a generic manner on my skills."

That was the time when he also got back to yoga, which he used to practise when he was in school and during his training days. "Flexibility is not my forte as I am used to playing a power game. Yoga helped me work on that," he says. "It helped me become more aware of my body. Since the last year, I know exactly where I feel stiff and how to work on it. Also, just waking up in the morning and having that time and space for yourself was great."

At 38, Sharath isn't growing any younger but he is still as active as the new players. His family has been wanting him to call it quits for a while now. He recently posted a picture with his mother, captioning it: "Ever since 2007, till date, my mom has been asking me when I'll stop playing and spend more time with family." Draw his attention to that, and Sharath breaks into a big smile, "I'll just win another medal for them, and then they cannot say much. The families of sportspersons sacrifice a lot to help us focus on the sport."

His sights are set on an Olympic medal but he also has a vision for the future: taking the game he dearly loves to the masses. "It is a sport that most people would have tried at some point of time; there are tables at schools, colleges and offices.

Most holiday resorts have TT tables too. But those numbers have not translated into people taking it up professionally. I think it's about having role models and superstars in the sport. Hopefully, if we get an Olympic medal, things will change."

Watch the Olympics on Sony Sports

Topspin tales Sharath Kamal • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Help arrives on a bicycle

A cycling community in Bengaluru started helping vulnerable groups with delivery of medicines and essentials. Now, they are kicking off in Chennai

PRAVEEN SUDEVAN

Divi K wanted to take some home-cooked food for her elderly aunt, who was unwell, on May 1 in Bengaluru. She stays in Halasuru which is about 20 kilometres from her aunt's house in Yelahanka.

Due to the lockdown in Karnataka, she was unable to drive there herself. She could not find a delivery service either. That is when she came across a helpline number for Relief Riders, a group of cyclists who are volunteering to deliver medicines and other essentials, including food, to vulnerable people in the city. Within minutes of dialling the number, a volunteer – Kunal Bohra, a second-year BCom student – reached her doorstep. The food was delivered within an hour.

Relief Riders is headed by Bengaluru's 'bicycle mayor' Sathya Sankaran, who is a part of BYCS, a Dutch social enterprise that heads a worldwide network of international cycle mayors. Along with the Bengaluru cycling community, he formed Relief Riders during the first wave of the pandemic. With the city in the midst of a two-week lockdown, the cyclists returned to volunteer again. Now, more cities have joined the programme.

The programme kicked off in Chennai from May 3. Felix John, Chennai's bicycle mayor, says, "We are aware the situation is much worse than last year. Hence, it's probably riskier for us to move around. But the people in need of essentials and medicines



Service on wheels Relief Riders' in Chennai (above) and Gurugram (below)

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

have also grown which is why we decided to volunteer."

In Bengaluru, the team serves from 6 am to 10 am (on other times as well, in case of emergencies) every day. Once a person in need contacts a helpline number, the request is shared on a WhatsApp group. Then, whoever is available to help, takes it up. Volunteers have made

RELIEF RIDERS HELPLINES

Bengaluru: 9886491982, 9731905685, 9591975791, 9535554071

Chennai: 8939233053, 9840059830, 9840728071

Gurugram: 8383940349, 9643002469

Hyderabad: 9566170334

Mumbai: 8591441671, 9820063141, 9619316254, 9820994495

about 90 deliveries so far. They also check on people with physical and mental disabilities. The Bengaluru team has tied up with the elders helpline (1090) as well.

"There are about 190 volunteers in Bangalore and 29 in Hubli-Dharwad," says Sathya. Five more cities – Mumbai, Chennai, Gurugram, Hyderabad, and Belagavi – have

joined the programme.

The Hyderabad edition of Relief Riders, which started on May 1, has done about 10 deliveries so far. "I think the number of requests we get will increase as the helpline numbers are just beginning to reach more people," says Santhana Selvan, Hyderabad's bicycle mayor.

In Gurugram, Vineet Chopra and his local cycling group, the Rock Riders, formed a couple of years ago with a bunch of people in his apartment complex, are volunteering under the Relief Riders banner. "We have been getting about 40 to 50 calls a day, most asking for oxygen cylinders or Remdesivir. Sometimes, whole families are COVID positive, and even the chemist won't go to these houses," he says.

Payments are usually cashless. But, occasionally, volunteers help with cash transactions if an elderly person is unfamiliar with digital payments. Santhana Selvan says a volunteer in Hyderabad even paid for medicines as the person in need of it could not afford them.

Most of these volunteers who are used to riding long distances operate within neighbourhoods. "We used to cycle long distances for our own health. We don't get to ride long distances now. But we ride for the health and safety of others," says Sathya.

(With inputs from Sunalini Mathew)

Tech geeks to the JAB RESCUE

Having trouble finding vaccination centres on CoWIN or Aarogya Setu? These vaccine hacks, started by technologists across the country, are being lapped up by the public – and understandably so

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

This time last year, India was queuing outside supermarkets and banks. Now the queues have also moved to the digital space, as the vaccination drive for all adults has opened up across the country. It has not been easy; the wait has been ridged with anxiety owing to vaccine shortages.

But the past year has been a lesson in the power of online community, with people taking to social media for help, SOS calls and enquiries about registrations on CoWIN and Aarogya Setu apps.

Websites such as GetJab.in, FindSlot.in and Under45.in have helped people get appointments at verified vaccine centres. These platforms were possible in the first place because CoWIN's API (application programming interface) has now been opened to the public. This means developers are free to access the framework of the app and integrate it into their own platform, like how Google Maps is used in food delivery apps.

GetJab.in was co-created by four Mumbai-based software developers: Azhar Hussain, Shyam Sunder, Anurag Kishore and Akshay Nautiyal, to smoothen the process. Azhar, who is also a product manager at Microsoft, says, "We are continually updating it (like an SMS feature to come), as we get more feedback."

The founders of FindSlot.in are Bengaluru-based Shubhendu Sharma and Jeroz Nishanth. According to Shubhendu, FindSlot.in "by May 2, saw more than 10,000 successful COVID-19 vaccine slot searches completed from 259 cities in India in the last 48 hours," and he says the numbers keep rising.



Avoid crowding Get quick updates using these platforms • RITU RAJ KONWAR

OTHER HELPFUL AVENUES

On WhatsApp, an Artificial Intelligence-powered chatbot **Introbot AI**, created by Utkarsh Roy and Divyaansh Anuj, has been providing verified updates on availability of hospital beds and oxygen cylinders.

On Instagram, **Vizag Volunteers** and **Chennai Volunteers** have been working seamlessly on Instagram to give real-time and fast-paced updates to those looking for hospital beds and oxygen cylinders.

On Twitter, verified handle **Blood Donors India** is actively encouraging people to share their urgent needs for plasma donations.

Krish Kothipalli, 32, in Hyderabad used FindSlot.in for himself and his wife as he finds the interface faster than CoWIN. Krish points out, "It is just more responsive and it works in real-time. I was also not surrendering personal data such as my Aadhar number. When I got to my vaccine centre, I just had to file some paperwork and I got the jab."



Relief Riders' in Chennai (above) and Gurugram (below)

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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(With inputs from Sunalini Mathew)

Facebook board upholds Trump ban

The network has six months to review the 'arbitrary penalty' it imposed on former President on Jan. 7

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SAN FRANCISCO

Former U.S. President Donald Trump won't return to Facebook – at least not yet.

The social network's quasi-independent Oversight Board voted to uphold his ban from the platform after his account was suspended four months ago for inciting violence that led to the deadly January 6 Capitol riot.

While upholding the suspension, the board faulted Facebook in a statement for the way it made the decision.

The board said the ongoing risk of serious violence justified Facebook's suspension at the time, but said it "was not appropriate for Facebook to impose an 'indefinite' suspension".

The board said Facebook was seeking to avoid its responsibilities by applying "a vague, standardless penalty" and then referring the case to the board to resolve.

"Indefinite penalties of this sort do not pass the international smell test," oversight board co-chair Michael McConnell said in a conference call with reporters.



No relief: Donald Trump's account was suspended for inciting violence that led to the deadly January 6 Capitol riot. ■ AFP

"We are not cops, reigning over the realm of social media."

Content standards

The board agreed with Facebook that that two of Mr. Trump's January 6 posts "severely violated" the content standards of both Facebook and Instagram.

"We love you. You're very special," he said to the rioters in the first post. In the second, he called them "great patriots" and told them to "remember this day forever" in the second.

Those violated Facebook's rules against praising or supporting people engaged in violence, the board said.

Helle Thorning-Schmidt, a former Danish Prime Minister who sits on the board, said in the call that Facebook shirked its responsibility to enforce its own rules. "Facebook should either permanently disable Mr. Trump's account or propose a suspension for a specific period of time," she said.

The board says Facebook has six months to reexamine the "arbitrary penalty" it im-

posed on January 7 and decide on another penalty that reflects the "gravity of the violation and the prospect of future harm."

It didn't say exactly how Facebook should do this, but offered a number of recommendations. One advised against drawing a firm distinction between political leaders and other influential users because anyone with a big audience can potentially cause serious risks of harm.

Ms. Thorning-Schmidt said considerations of newsworthiness should "never" take priority over the risk of harm.

The board also says Facebook should publicly explain the rules that it uses to sanction influential users, and emphasized the need for time-bound suspensions and clear rules on how they can be lifted.

The board says the new penalty must be "clear, necessary and proportionate" and consistent with Facebook's rules for severe violations.

The board says if Facebook decides to restore

Trump's accounts, the company must be able to promptly address further violations.

No response

A Trump spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The board, which has 20 members and will eventually grow to 40, did not reveal how it voted. It said a minority of members emphasised that Facebook should require users who seek reinstatement after being suspended to "recognise their wrongdoing and commit to observing the rules in the future."

Mr. Trump has also been permanently banned from Twitter.

After years of handling Mr. Trump's inflammatory rhetoric with a light touch, Facebook and Instagram took the drastic step of silencing his accounts in January. In announcing the unprecedented move, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said the risk of allowing Mr. Trump to continue using the platform was too great.



Help on the way: Joe Biden delivering remarks on COVID-19 vaccinations in Washington D.C. on Tuesday. ■ REUTERS

doing a lot for India," Mr. Biden said in response to a question on what criteria were being used to decide which countries (India, Brazil) were specifically cited in the question) got the vaccine.

Six shipments

"With regard to the AstraZeneca vaccine ... we have sent that vaccine to Canada and to Mexico and to other countries we are talking to now," Mr. Biden said, adding he had spoken to a head of state on Tuesday and was not prepared to announce which other countries would be getting the vaccine.

"We're sending a lot of the precursors. So we are

fourth of July, have sent about 10% of what we have to other nations, including some of the ones you mentioned."

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said five of six shipments of assistance had already reached India and that "more flights are on the way," with a total of over \$100 million in assistance, including rapid tests, oxygen cylinders and concentrators and masks.

"We've also sent 2.5 million N-95 masks and we have an additional 12.5 million N-95 masks available, should that request come from the Indian government," Ms. Psaki said.

Biden undecided on COVID-related TRIPS waiver

A group of Senators has called on the President to support a temporary IP waiver

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he had not made a decision on whether the U.S. would support an Indian and South African initiative at the World Trade Organization (WTO) to waive Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to facilitate the production of COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics around the world.

"Well, we're going to decide that as we go along, I haven't made that decision yet," Mr. Biden said on Tuesday afternoon at the White House, after he delivered remarks on the U.S.'s vaccination

campaign. His administration would move as quickly as possible to get as many doses of Pfizer and Moderna's vaccines to export to the rest of the world, Mr. Biden said. The U.S. government has already ordered 100 million additional doses of these vaccines through July 31.

A group of nine Democratic Senators and Bernie Sanders (an independent) had called on Mr. Biden last month to support a temporary IP waiver. U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai had discussed the issue with the U.S. heads of vaccine makers Pfizer and

AstraZeneca last week.

On Tuesday, however, a group of 12 Republican lawmakers wrote a seven-page letter to Ms. Tai asking her not to support the IP waiver initiative, calling it "extraordinarily broad and unnecessary" to give the maximum number of people possible access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments and that it would undermine the "record-breaking rapid innovation" of vaccines.

"The justification for the waiver rests on an incorrect assumption that IP rights are a significant bottleneck to the widespread availability of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments," the letter says. The letter cites logistical challenges like lack of cold

treatments." The letter says COVID-19 treatment access can be expanded globally without weakening IP, and weakening IP would hamper American innovation and technology.

"This danger is particularly acute considering that many of the crucial technological advances made by American businesses and institutions in the fight against COVID-19 were made on the backs of billions of dollars of investment by American companies as well as billions more in American taxpayer money," the letter says.

The letter cites logistical challenges like lack of cold

storage and syringes as well as regulatory hurdles in developing countries as bottlenecks to access. The lawmakers suggest that the focus be on COVAX and Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, i.e., existing international efforts to improve vaccine access. The lawmakers also note that IP rights have been "successfully licensed" while "maintaining IP protections"

, citing, among other examples, Serum Institute of India's arrangements with AstraZeneca and Novavax and pharmaceutical company Gilead's licenses to Indian manufacturers of anti-viral remdesivir.

'U.S. to send vaccines to other countries by July 4'

We will send 10% of what we have to others, says Biden

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden said countries that receive U.S. vaccines will receive them by July 4 – India and Brazil are likely on this list.

His comments were made during remarks he delivered on Tuesday afternoon, updating the public on his administration's vaccination programme and achievements.

The U.S., which entered into an agreement with Canada and Mexico in March to share 4 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, said last week that another 10 million doses would become available in the coming weeks, followed by a further 50 million by the end of June. India expects to receive the largest share of the 60 million doses, Reuters had reported last week.

"We are helping India significantly. I spoke to Prime Minister Modi. What he needs most is he needs the material and the parts to be able to have his machines that can make the vaccine work. We are sending that, sending oxygen."

"We're sending a lot of the precursors. So we are

"We are going to, by the

Canada authorises Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for adolescents

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TORONTO

Canada's health regulator has authorised Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for ages 12 and older.

Dr. Supriya Sharma, chief medical adviser at Health Canada, on Wednesday confirmed the decision for the ages to 12 to 15 and said it will help children return to a normal life. The vaccine was

previously authorised for anyone 16 or older.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is also expected to authorise Pfizer's vaccine for young by next week, setting up shots for many before the beginning of the next school year.

The announcement comes barely a month after the company found that its vaccine, which is already

authorised for those age 16 and older, also provided protection for the younger group.

Pfizer in late March released preliminary results from a vaccine study of 2,260 U.S. volunteers ages 12 to 15 showing there were no cases of COVID-19 among fully vaccinated adolescents compared with 18 among those given dummy shots.

EU unveils plan to cut dependency on China

6 other foreign suppliers to be cut off

REUTERS
BRUSSELS

The European Union (EU) unveiled on Wednesday a plan to cut its dependency on Chinese and other foreign suppliers in six strategic areas like raw materials, pharmaceutical ingredients and semiconductors after the pandemic-induced economic slump.

317 products

The 27-nation bloc outlined the urgency of the task citing Europe's reliance on China for about half of 137 products used in sensitive ecosystems, mainly raw materials, pharmaceuticals and other products key to its green and digital goals.

The updated industrial strategy plan was devised af-

ter the COVID-19 pandemic showed bottlenecks in supply chain and the executive European Commission plans to conduct in-depth reviews of supply chains in raw materials, batteries, active pharmaceutical ingredients, hydrogen, semiconductors and cloud and edge technologies, to decide how to deal with them.

"Today's updated Industrial Strategy is about making sure our industries are equipped to drive the digital and green transformations of our economy while ensuring the competitiveness of our industries, also in the context of the recovery from the coronavirus crisis," European Commission Vice-President Margrethe Vestager told a news conference.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRUSSELS

An Iranian diplomat's 20-year sentence in Belgium for plotting to bomb an Opposition rally outside Paris was confirmed on Wednesday after he failed to appeal, his lawyer and prosecutors said.

Assadollah Assadi, 49, was convicted in February by an Antwerp court for supplying explosives for the planned June 30, 2018 attack on the exiled Opposition group the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI).

"I confirmed today that Mr. Assadi does not wish to appeal," his lawyer, Dimitri de Beco, told AFP, adding that his client contested the right of the Belgian justice system to judge him and put him behind bars.

The updated industrial strategy plan was devised af-

Iran diplomat gets 20-year sentence for bomb plot

He did not wish to appeal: lawyer

A spokesman for Belgium's federal prosecutor's office confirmed that "Mr. Assadi's lawyer has failed to lodge an appeal" to the conviction. Three individuals sentenced to between 15 and 18 years in prison as accomplices are maintaining their appeals against their convictions, he said.

Iran has strongly protested Mr. Assadi's conviction. Days after the February verdict, Iran's foreign ministry summoned Belgium's ambassador in Tehran to convey its fury. On Wednesday, the Iranian embassy in Belgium issued a statement calling Assadi's conviction "a stark contravention of customary international law and established diplomatic practices".

The updated industrial strategy plan was devised af-

Ousted Myanmar leaders set up force to protect civilians

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BANGKOK

A shadow government of ousted Myanmar lawmakers said on Wednesday that it has set up a "people's defence force" to protect civilians, as the police and military deploy deadly arms against anti-coup protesters.

The country has been in turmoil since the military deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, triggering a mass uprising of daily protests and a nationwide boycott from civil servants. So far, nearly 770 people have been killed in deadly crackdowns, according to a local monitoring group – though the junta has a far lower death toll which it blames on "rioters".

A group of ousted lawmakers who call themselves the "National Unity Government" (NUG) and are working underground to oppose the junta announced their own "people's defence force" to "stop the use of violence against people". It is intended as a precursor to a "Federal Union Army".

OBITUARY



S. RAJAGOPALAN ('Raj')

Chief Operating Officer

We deeply mourn the sad demise of

Mr. S. Rajagopalan on Tuesday 04th May 2021

SF | SUNDARAM HOME FINANCE LIMITED

"Sundaram Towers", 46, Whites Road, Chennai - 600 014.

SALEM CITY MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

2020-21 TAMIL NADU URBAN ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT - Phase - II

ROAD, STORM WATER DRAIN AND CULVERT WORK

Re - E-TENDER NOTICE (3rd Call)

Date : 04.05.2021

Roc.No.E4/12320/2020

1 Restoration of BT Roads, Storm Water Drain and Culvert Damaged work in Division No. 9, 11, 33, 37 and 42 in Ammapet Zone. Est. Rs. 550.00 Lakhs

Bid document and other information available at (free of cost)

www.tntenders.gov.in, www.tenders.tn.gov.in, www.salemcorporation.gov.in "e-submission" is also permitted.

Date, time and Venue for Tender Procedures.

3 Submission of bids - 06.05.2021 up to 09.06.2021 - 3.00 P.M.

Opening of bids - 09.06.2021 at 03.30 P.M.

DIPRI/1477/TENDER/2021

Commissioner, Salem Corporation

WATCO

OFFICE OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR, WATCO

Ground Floor, Unnati Bhawan,

H.B.Colony, Satyanagar, Bhubaneswar-751007, Odisha, India

Telefax: +91-674-239144; E-mail - mail@watcoodisha.in; md@watcoodisha.in

INVITATION FOR BID (IFB)

Bid Identification No. WATCO(W)-01/2021-22, Dtd.04.05.2021

WATCO No.4624, Date: 04.05.2021</

MARKET WATCH

| | PRICE | CHANGE |
|-----------|--------|--------|
| Sensex | 48,677 | 0.88 |
| US Dollar | 73.91 | -0.08 |
| Gold | 46382 | -0.80 |
| Brent oil | 69.49 | 1.37 |

NIFTY 50

| | PRICE | CHANGE |
|-----------------------------|----------|---------|
| Adani Ports | 738.10 | -30.65 |
| Asian Paints | 2567.65 | -19.50 |
| Axis Bank | 717.20 | 16.85 |
| Bajaj Auto | 3843.80 | 13.45 |
| Bajaj Finserv | 11114.45 | 128.00 |
| Bajaj Finance | 5515.15 | -100.60 |
| Bharti Airtel | 559.95 | 7.50 |
| BPCL | 424.80 | 3.35 |
| Britannia Ind | 3451.60 | 15.75 |
| Cipla | 888.65 | 10.20 |
| Coal India | 133.15 | 0.35 |
| Divis Labs | 4035.45 | 50.10 |
| D Dr Reddy's Lab | 5160.95 | 93.70 |
| Eicher Motors | 2372.40 | 4.40 |
| Grafin Ind | 1420.90 | 4.95 |
| HCL Tech. | 909.40 | 8.45 |
| HDFC | 2377.60 | 0.40 |
| HDFC Bank | 1402.60 | 14.25 |
| HDFC Life | 674.40 | 6.55 |
| Hero MotoCorp | 2788.20 | 11.45 |
| Hindalco | 367.10 | -4.55 |
| Hind Unilever | 2394.65 | -13.00 |
| ICICI Bank | 602.80 | 11.25 |
| IndusInd Bank | 931.15 | 21.00 |
| Infosys | 1341.50 | 12.10 |
| Indian Oil Corp | 92.20 | 0.80 |
| ITC | 201.40 | 1.80 |
| JSW Steel | 717.70 | 2.30 |
| Kotak Bank | 1770.75 | 38.10 |
| L&T | 1338.65 | 1.05 |
| M&M | 747.55 | 6.40 |
| Maruti Suzuki | 6590.10 | 81.85 |
| Nestle India Ltd. | 16549.25 | 2.65 |
| NTPC | 103.90 | 0.15 |
| ONGC | 111.10 | 1.45 |
| PowerGrid Corp | 218.20 | 1.00 |
| Reliance Ind | 1920.10 | 3.50 |
| SBI Life | 973.10 | -9.80 |
| State Bank | 355.40 | 3.90 |
| Shree Cement | 27844.20 | 90.90 |
| Sun Pharma | 683.40 | 38.25 |
| Tata Consumer Products Ltd. | 649.05 | 3.80 |
| Tata Motors | 291.50 | 2.05 |
| Tata Steel | 1070.15 | 6.30 |
| TCS | 3095.70 | 45.95 |
| Tech Mahindra | 960.40 | 0.00 |
| Titan | 1428.40 | 25.50 |
| UltraTech Cement | 6380.35 | 83.90 |
| UPL | 640.70 | 29.45 |
| Wipro | 490.60 | 8.65 |

EXCHANGE RATES

| CURRENCY | TT BUY | TT SELL |
|--------------------|--------|---------|
| US Dollar | 73.71 | 74.03 |
| Euro | 88.51 | 88.92 |
| British Pound | 102.60 | 103.09 |
| Japanese Yen (100) | 67.44 | 67.74 |
| Chinese Yuan | 11.39 | 11.44 |
| Swiss Franc | 80.57 | 80.97 |
| Singapore Dollar | 55.20 | 55.45 |
| Canadian Dollar | 60.02 | 60.30 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 17.88 | 17.99 |

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



L&T starts assembling oxygen generating units

Larsen & Toubro Ltd. said it has started working towards assembling medical grade oxygen generation units to meet the demand in the country. The company said it is sourcing the components from various parts of the world and the units are being assembled at the Hazira Manufacturing Complex.

Maruti production dips 7% in April

Country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Wednesday said its total production in April 2021 stood at 1,59,955 units, down 7% from March this year. The company had produced a total of 1,72,433 units in the year-earlier period. Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) said in a regulatory filing. Production of mini cars comprising Alto and S-Presso models stood at 29,056 units last month as against 28,519 units in March. PTI

Small businesses, MSMEs to get relief

RBI asks lenders to allow individual and small borrowers more time to repay debt, cites second wave

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday announced measures to protect small and medium businesses and individual borrowers from the adverse impact of the intense second wave of COVID-19 buffeting the country.

In an unscheduled address, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das unveiled a Resolution Framework 2.0 for COVID-related stressed assets of individuals, small businesses and MSMEs and also expressed the central bank's resolve to do everything at its command to 'save human lives and restore livelihoods through all means possible'.

Eligibility criteria
Considering that the resurgence of the pandemic had made these categories of borrowers most vulnerable, the RBI said those with ag-



Top priority: RBI will do 'everything at its command to save lives and restore livelihoods', says Mr. Das. ■ MUSTAFAH K.K.

gregate exposure of up to ₹25 crore, who had not availed restructuring under any of the earlier restructuring frameworks (including under last year's resolution framework), and whose loans were classified as 'standard' as on March 31, 2021, were eligible for restructuring under the proposed framework.

In respect of individual borrowers and small busi-

nesses who had already availed restructuring under Resolution Framework 1.0, lenders have been permitted to use this window to modify such plans to the extent of increasing the period of moratorium and/or extending the residual tenor up to a total of two years.

In respect of small businesses and MSMEs restructured earlier, lending institu-

tions have been permitted as a one-time measure, to review the working capital sanctioned limits, based on a reassessment of the working capital cycle and margins.

Credit support

To provide further support to small business units, micro and small industries, and other unorganised sector entities adversely affected during the current wave of the pandemic, the RBI decided to conduct special three-year long-term repo operations (SLTRO) of ₹10,000 crore at the repo rate for Small Finance Banks. The SFBs would be able to deploy these funds for fresh lending of up to ₹10 lakh per borrower. This facility would be available till October 31.

In view of the fresh challenges brought on by the pandemic and to address the emergent liquidity position

of smaller MFIs, SFBs are now being permitted to reckon fresh lending to smaller MFIs (with asset size of up to ₹500 crore) for onlending to individual borrowers as priority sector lending. This facility will be available up to March 31, 2022.

State governments

To enable the State governments to better manage their fiscal situation in terms of their cash flows and market borrowings, maximum number of days of overdraft (OD) in a quarter is being increased from 36 to 50 days and the number of consecutive days of OD from 14 to 21 days, the RBI said.

Separately, Mr. Das asserted that though the impact of the second wave was 'debilitating', it was 'not insurmountable'. "We do not expect any broad deviations in our projections," he added.

Separately, Mr. Das asserted that though the impact of the second wave was 'debilitating', it was 'not insurmountable'. "We do not expect any broad deviations in our projections," he added.

Cabinet clears IDBI Bank strategic disinvestment

Nod paves way for transfer of control

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave in-principle approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank in line with the Budget announcement earlier this year.

The central government and LIC together own more than 94% equity of IDBI Bank. LIC, currently the promoter of IDBI Bank with management control, has a 49.2% stake.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the strategic sale of IDBI Bank, the government said in a statement on Wednesday.

The extent of respective shareholding to be divested by the central government and LIC shall be decided at

The Centre expects the strategic buyer will infuse funds and new technology for development of the bank's business potential.

Bank stocks rise on RBI move, industry welcomes measures

Steps to expand RBI balance sheet needed, welcome: Kotak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Bank stocks gained on Wednesday after the RBI unveiled measures to support the economy facing headwinds due to the second wave of the pandemic.

Kotak Mahindra Bank jumped 2.42%, Axis Bank 2.41%, IndusInd Bank 2.33%, ICICI Bank 1.88%, State Bank of India 1.07% and HDFC Bank 1% on the BSE.

The BSE Bank index gained 1.67%. The 30-share BSE index also gained 424.04 points or 0.88 per cent to close at 48,677.55.

On RBI's measures, Uday Kotak, president, Confederation



of Indian Industry said Governor Shaktikanta Das had taken the financial sector battle against Covid 2.0 'head-on' with a clear focus on protecting lives and livelihoods'.

"The steps taken to expand the RBI balance sheet are needed and welcome,"

(With inputs from Lalitendu Mishra in Mumbai)

Tata Steel is back in black, nets ₹7,162 cr.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Tata Steel on Wednesday posted a consolidated net profit of ₹7,161.91 crore for the quarter ended March, mainly on account of higher income.

The company had reported a net loss of ₹1,615.35 crore a year earlier, Tata Steel said in a BSE filing.

In the January-March 2021 quarter, the company's total income jumped to ₹50,249.59 crore from ₹37,322.68 crore a year earlier. Total expenses rose to ₹40,052 crore from ₹35,432.42 crore.

Shares of the company rose 0.46% to ₹1,068.95 per share on the BSE.

'Services activity eased to three-month low in April'

Worry damps sentiment: PMI survey

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

India's services sector activities eased to a three-month low in April, as the rise in business activity was constrained by the pandemic and sentiment towards growth prospects faded, a monthly survey said on Wednesday.

In the January-March 2021 quarter, the company's total income jumped to ₹50,249.59 crore from ₹37,322.68 crore a year earlier. Total expenses rose to ₹40,052 crore from ₹35,432.42 crore.

The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index fell to 54 in April from 54.6 in March, the slowest rise in output in 3 months. In PMI (Purchasing Manager's Index) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while that below 50 means contraction.

PMI results for April showed a more resilient

Air passenger traffic slid 29% in April: ICRA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Domestic airline passenger traffic is estimated to have declined 29% in April as compared with March, according to ICRA.

All domestic airlines together registered close to 56 lakh passengers last month, compared with almost 78.2 lakh in March, the ratings agency said in its estimate. Passenger numbers have fallen to a level last witnessed in October, it added.

The fall in demand as a result of the second wave of COVID-19 in the country has also forced airlines to cut capacity deployment, which was lower by almost 15% in April.

Textile exports fell 13% in FY21 on COVID-19 impact

Ready-made garments declined 20.78%

M. SOUNDARIYARAJA
COIMBATORE

Textile and apparel exports in 2020-2021 are almost 13% less (in dollar terms) than the previous year, provisional data available with the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council shows.

The exports were worth \$29 billion last year as against \$34 billion in 2019-2020.

Exports of ready-made garments declined 20.78% last financial year compared with the previous year, while exports of man-made textile items fell 21.20%.

The final data, expected later this month, may be better even for overall textile exports in 2020-2021. Textile and clothing exports are expected to do well at least till June since countries such as the U.S. and U.K. are looking up and China has also started buying. "We expect this year to be better than last year," he added.

The final data, expected later this month, may be better even for overall textile exports in 2020-2021. Textile and clothing exports are expected to do well at least till June since countries such as the U.S. and U.K. are looking up and China has also started

Finding a new window is the toughest challenge

Options available are to organise the event before or after the T20 World Cup

IPL 2021

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

While the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is ensuring a safe return of all the participants in the suspended Indian Premier League (IPL) edition due to COVID-19 inroads into the biosecure bubbles, the fans are wondering whether the suspension will lead to abandonment.

Despite stakes riding high on the IPL, finding an opportune window is going to be the toughest challenge for the BCCI to ensure the remaining 31 games of the IPL are played later this year.

Only options

The only available options for the BCCI are to organise the IPL before or after the T20 World Cup in October-November. If the T20 World Cup and IPL both are scheduled in the United Arab Emirates, the BCCI can save on quarantine time in multiple countries.

However, it is highly unlikely that other boards will make players available just before a global event at the cost of preparing as a group. It would leave the BCCI to explore the option of playing the IPL just after the T20 World Cup.

At the moment, India is scheduled to host New Zea-



Tough luck: Fans will be disappointed that the IPL – which showcased top performances from the likes of Harshal, du Plessis and Dhawan – had to be suspended. ■ SPORTZPICS FOR IPL

land for two Tests (as part of World Test Championship) and three T20Is in November-December before departing for South Africa for three Tests (WTC) and three T20Is.

If the BCCI convinces New Zealand and South Africa boards of doing away with the T20I series, it can create a three-week window immediately after the IPL. However, with England and Australia players set to be involved in the Ashes Down Under, they will be unavailable in November-December.

"In that case, the sole option available is to play a fresh tournament by allowing teams to rejig squads and letting teams play each other only once before the knock-out," says an IPL insider.

He points out that a round-robin format, followed by semifinals and the final, would mean exactly 31 matches – the ones that have had to be suspended – can be played and the broadcaster and sponsors' commitments can be respected.

Big question

The big question then would be whether the franchises will agree to play without Australians and English

players. In 2020, when a similar possibility was informally discussed during lockdown, half the teams had shot down the proposal.

While it would help recover most of the BCCI revenue that's at stake, it may end up being an operational nightmare with regard to rejigging squads without an auction only for a three-week window.

"It is way too early to discuss such a possibility. Let's first ensure everyone reaches home safely and then we can start taking a stock about all these things," says a franchise executive.

Eight Englishmen arrive in London

Other three players set to follow suit; Aussies await Maldives flight first

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Englishmen were the first ones out with eight of them landing in London, while the Australians awaited an escape to Maldives as IPL's foreign recruits charted their way back home, assisted by the BCCI on Wednesday.

Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Chris Woakes, Moeen Ali and Jason Roy landed in London to begin a 10-day quarantine before heading to their respective homes.

England skipper Eoin Morgan, Dawid Malan and Chris Jordan are expected to board a flight to London within the next 48 hours.

"I can confirm that eight of the 11 England players in India managed to get on a flight to Heathrow last night and have landed this morning," an England and Wales Cricket Board spokesperson said.

"They will now quarantine in government-approved hotels. The remaining three – Jordan, Malan, Morgan – should leave India within the next 48 hours," he added. IPL also featured cricketers from Australia (14), South Africa (11) and New Zealand (10). West Indians (9), Afghanistan (3) and Bangladesh (2).

The Australians were still waiting to know when they can fly out to Maldives where they will stay for a few days before flying home. The



Homecoming: Jos Buttler and Jonny Bairstow are among those who have reached England. ■ FILE PHOTOS: PTI



detour has been forced by the Australian government's travel ban on India till May 15 because of the explosion of COVID-19 cases here.

The Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has refused to consider an exemption and Cricket Australia has also ruled out seeking one from the government.

"All Australians are assembling in Delhi and from there they will head to Maldives by a charter flight," a franchise official said.

CA's interim chief Nick Hockley told reporters in Sydney.

helping in every possible way to ensure a smooth return for the 14 players, members of the coaching staff and commentators, who are in India right now.

"What the BCCI is working to do is to move the entire cohort out of India where they will wait until it's possible to return to Australia," Hockley told reporters in Sydney.

"The BCCI has been working on a range of options. That's now narrowed down to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. The BCCI is committed

not only to the first move but also to putting on a charter to bring them back to Australia," he added.

Kiwis to stay till May 10

Meanwhile, New Zealand cricketers, including captain Kane Williamson, are likely to remain in India at least till May 10 before flying to England for national duty, their players' union chief said.

The remaining players as well as the support staff in various IPL teams and commentators could return home by charter flights.

IN BRIEF



Kohli stays fifth in ICC Test rankings

DUBAI
India captain Virat Kohli has held on to his fifth spot in the latest ICC Test rankings for batsmen. In the list which got updated on Wednesday, Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne, who struck 118 and 66 in the second Test against Bangladesh, moved up four slots to 11th in the list led by New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson. ANI



Getting acquainted: Romain Grosjean has a feel of the Mercedes machine. ■ TWITTER.COM/MERCEDESAMGFI

would not let the accident mark the end of Grosjean's Formula One career.

"I am so excited to jump back in an F1 car! It will be a special opportunity for me and to drive a World Championship-winning Mercedes will be a unique experience," said the 35-year-old Frenchman on the Mercedes website.

Grosjean's Haas car

broke in two and burst into flames after it crashed into a barrier at 220km/h on the first lap at the Bahrain GP. He escaped the fireball with burns to his hands, a sprained left ankle and bruising.

Immediately after the crash, Toto Wolff, the Mercedes team principal said he

Circuit and then on June 29 in private testing on the same track.

Grosjean has already said he is switching to Indycar in the United States. "A last ride in front of my home crowd at the gpfranceif in a fl car, what could be better?" he tweeted on Wednesday.

In ten seasons in Formula One, including the last five with the American team Haas, Grosjean has not won a Grand Prix.

"I'm looking forward to seeing him in France and welcoming him to the team for the weekend, although he better watch out for my 2019 W10," said seven-time champion Hamilton.

Babar, Fakhar nominated for ICC award

DUBAI
Pakistan batsmen Babar Azam and Fakhar Zaman were on Wednesday nominated for the ICC 'Player of the Month' award for April following their stupendous performance in the limited-overs series against South Africa. For the first time, the list didn't feature any Indian. Besides the Pakistan duo, Nepal batsman Khushal Bhurteil was the other player to be nominated in the men's category. The nominees among the women's cricketers comprised the Australian duo of Alyssa Healy and Megan Schutt and New Zealand's Leigh Kasperek. PTI

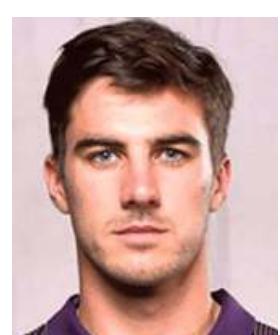
A few things could have been tweaked: Cummins

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE

Australia pacer Pat Cummins feels the IPL organisers, in hindsight, could have "tweaked a few things" after deciding to host the league in India amidst a raging COVID-19 pandemic.

Cummins, a key part of the Kolkata Knight Riders team, said previous edition held in UAE was incredibly "well-run" and the organisers pushed it "little step further" by organising it at home this year.

"I'm sure looking back they might have tweaked a few things," Cummins, however, didn't specify what exactly could have been done differently.



Pat Cummins. ■ FILE PHOTO

Cleaner used to do 'pitch-siding' in IPL game: BCCI ACU chief

It is the practice of transmitting information for gambling or betting

caught a person and handed over the details to Delhi Police. While that particular offender managed to flee leaving behind his two mobile phones, ACU lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police," Hussain, a former DG of Gujarat Police, said on Wednesday.

"We are thankful to Delhi Police that in a separate incident they caught two other persons from the Kotla on ACU tip-off."

The Delhi Police arrested two people with fake accreditation cards during the IPL match between RR and SRH on May 2.

"So on two separate days, these people managed to get access to Kotla. The one who fled came in the garb of a cleaner. However, we have all his details as he was employed for the tournament. His Aadhar Card details have been handed over to Delhi Police," Hussain said.

"I am confident that he will be nabbed in a day or two. He is a small fry working for a couple of hundred or some thousand bucks may be," the ACU supremo said.

Pitch-siding is the practice of transmitting information from sporting events for the purpose of gambling, or directly placing bets.

"One of my ACU officers

CWI hands all-format contract to Holder



Jason Holder. ■ AFP

ANI

ST JOHN'S [ANTIGUA]

Cricket West Indies (CWI) on Wednesday confirmed the international retainer contracts for the West Indies men's team for the 2021-2022 season. "Contracts offered for the 2021-22 period sees 18 players being retained."

Jason Holder is the only player to retain his all-format contract due to his strong Test and T20I performances during the evaluation period," West Indies men's team lead selector, Roger Harper, said in an official statement.

Test captain Kraigg Brathwaite and Darren Bravo receive international contracts for red ball and white ball cricket respectively.

Immediately after the crash, Toto Wolff, the Mercedes team principal said he

The Frenchman had suffered injuries after a crash at the Bahrain GP last season

FORMULA ONE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON

Romain Grosjean, who suffered a terrifying crash in November 2020, will be back at the wheel of a Formula One car for a test with Mercedes at the end of June in France, the team said on Wednesday.

"I am so excited to jump back in an F1 car! It will be a special opportunity for me and to drive a World Championship-winning Mercedes will be a unique experience," said the 35-year-old Frenchman on the Mercedes website.

Grosjean's Haas car broke in two and burst into flames after it crashed into a barrier at 220km/h on the first lap at the Bahrain GP. He escaped the fireball with burns to his hands, a sprained left ankle and bruising.

Immediately after the crash, Toto Wolff, the Mercedes team principal said he

would not let the accident

mark the end of Grosjean's

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Grosjean's Haas car

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TV PICKS

Europa League: Sony Ten 1, Ten 2 & Ten 3 (SD & HD), 12.30 a.m. (Friday)

IN BRIEF



Messi's lunch for teammates under scanner

BARCELONA The Spanish league said on Tuesday it will investigate a gathering of Barcelona players at Lionel Messi's home. Local authorities are also expected to check if any COVID-19 protocols were broken during the gathering on Monday. AP



Referee verbally abused player: Herrera

MANCHESTER PSG's Leandro Paredes was verbally abused by Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers during Tuesday's Champions League semifinal, his teammate Ander Herrera has claimed. "We talk about respect towards referees," Herrera told French multimedia outlet RMC Sport, while revealing that the official had sworn at Paredes. "If we say that, we get a three or four-match ban." REUTERS

Only home fans for final two rounds of PL

LONDON Only home fans will be allowed into games when the Premier League welcomes back spectators to stadiums for the final two rounds of the season. Supporters will return in a reduced capacity from May 17, subject to the British government easing lockdown restrictions as planned. AP

Karman advances

PRAGUE Karman Kaur Thandi missed three match points in the second set tie-break but controlled the decider better to beat Johana Markova 7-5, 6-7(6), 6-3 in the first round of the \$25,000 ITF women's tennis tournament here.

Other result: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): En Shuo Liang (Tpe) & Shalimar Talbi (Blr) bt Mariam Bolkvadze (Geo) &

Karman 6-0, 4-1 retd.



Barbara Strycova hangs up her racquet

PRAGUE Czech doubles specialist Barbara Strycova, who announced her pregnancy in March, said on Tuesday she was retiring from tennis, hoping for one last game after she gives birth. Currently ranked second in doubles and 52nd in singles, Strycova, 35, won the Wimbledon doubles title with Hsieh Su-wei in 2019 and reached the singles semifinals there the same year, her best Grand Slam results ever. AFP

Delhi billiards champ Amit Sharma passes away

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI The reigning Delhi State billiards champion Amit Sharma succumbed to COVID-19.

The president of the Delhi Billiards and Snooker Association (DBSA), Vijay Goel, expressed shock, "losing a friend, a great administrator and a champion".

DBSA secretary Ravi Tandon said Amit was in the business of cue sports and the tables used for the National championships were made by him.

"He has left a great void. It was at his initiative that the North Zone school boys tournament was started in 2014. He also started coaching camps for budding talent," said Tandon.

CM YK

Manchester City strolls to its first CL final

Mahrez's well-taken brace puts it through as Neymar proves ineffective for PSG

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESS

MANCHESTER Manchester City reached the Champions League final for the first time in the club's history as Riyad Mahrez's double saw off Paris Saint-Germain 2-0 on Tuesday to seal a 4-1 aggregate win.

Mahrez's goal also decided the first leg and the Algerian, who grew up in the Parisian suburbs, haunted his home town team again with two clinical finishes early in each half.

The final in Istanbul on May 29 is the culmination of City's rise since an Abu Dhabi takeover in 2008.

Meanwhile, four years on from making Neymar and Kylian Mbappe the world's two most expensive players, PSG's wait for a first Cham-



Clutch performance: Riyad Mahrez peels off in celebration after scoring City's second. AP

pions League title goes on.

Implosion Mbappe could only watch on from the stands due to a calf

injury as, just like in last week's first leg, his side imploded after an excellent first-half performance.

The visitors were left to

rue huge missed chances by Marquinhos and Angel Di Maria in between Mahrez's strikes before Di Maria lashed out at Fernandinho to

leave PSG down to 10 men for the final 20 minutes.

City had to withstand a barrage from PSG before the break. The French champion thought it had had an early penalty to get back in the tie when Oleksandr Zinchenko was penalised for handball.

However, Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers rightly reversed his initial decision on seeing a replay of the ball bouncing off the shoulder.

Neymar only ever showed flashes of his brilliance with City's impressive defence led by Ruben Dias able to focus on stopping the Brazilian without Mbappe to worry about.

The result: Semifinal, second leg: Manchester City 2 (Mahrez 11, 63) bt PSG 0. City wins 4-1 on aggregate.

A defensive masterclass

Manchester City's progress to the UEFA Champions League final has as much to do with the stupendous performance of its centre - backs - Ruben Dias and John Stones - as its forwards. Dias had a 100% tackle win rate with three clearances, three blocks (the most), three ball recoveries, one tackle and one interception. Stones, meanwhile, had four clearances (the most), three ball recoveries, two blocks and one interception



John Stones



Ruben Dias

Hitzfeld, Louis van Gaal, Jose Mourinho, Jupp Heynckes, Carlo Ancelotti & Jurgen Klopp

7 City has won its last seven matches; the longest ever run by an English team in European Cup/Champions League history

11 City is the first English side to win 11 games in a single campaign

21 City is the 21st different club to reach a UCL final

FC Goa 'keeper Dheeraj tops chart

Made 26 saves in five AFC Champions League matches

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

FC Goa's Moirangthem Dheeraj Singh has emerged as the best goalkeeper in the group league round of the AFC Champions League even though his side failed to advance to the knockouts in its maiden appearance.

Dheeraj, who had excelled during the 2017 FIFA Under-17 World Cup at home, made a whopping 26 saves in five matches to top the goalkeeping chart of the West Zone group league stage.

"Dheeraj Singh certainly made a name for himself on his continental debut, pulling off a tournament-leading 26 saves in just five games, among them a number of



Dheeraj Singh. ■ PICTURE COURTESY: THE-AFC.COM

memorable efforts that earned high praise from impressed observers," the AFC said on its website.

Mohammed Al Owais of Al Ahli Saudi FC made 24 saves to stand second, followed by Ahmed Basil of Al Shorta (19 saves).

Mary Kom to train at ASI in Pune

Six-time world champ to join two other Tokyo-bound boxers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Six-time world champion M.C. Mary Kom, along with two other Olympic-bound boxers, will train at the Army Sports Institute in Pune leading up to the Tokyo Games after the national camp for women in Delhi had to be disbanded owing to COVID-19 cases among boxists and support staff.

Mary Kom (51kg) will join Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), who is already at the facility. Simranjit Kaur (60kg) will train there too but after completing the COVID-19 post-recovery isolation.

The boxers will be placed in three separate groups with two sparring partners each to ensure that the risk of infection is minimal.



Mary Kom. ■ FILE PHOTO

However, Pooja Rani (75kg), who has qualified for the Games too, will continue to train at Bellary's Inspire Institute of Sports, which is her current base.

Mary Kom will not have immediate company of her coach and former boxer Chhote Lal Yadav, who con-

tinues to be in isolation after testing positive last month.

"I am leaving today, looking forward to it. Chhote will come in a while so it will be fine. I hope to get vaccinated also during my time there," Mary Kom said.

"The training was thrown haywire after the suspension of Delhi camp but, hopefully, it will now get back on track. I might even train with the men boxers who are there at ASI. I routinely train like that to be in good shape," she said.

The next big assignment for them is the Asian Championship, which had to be shifted from Delhi to Dubai because of the COVID-19 surge here. The tournament is scheduled to start on May 21.

Coe's nod for Olympic test event

Half-marathon held by following all the safety protocols

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAPPORO

Sebastian Coe, the head of the World Athletics, said a half-marathon test event run here on Wednesday made him confident that the Olympic marathon can be held successfully in the city when the Tokyo Games opens in just under three months.

Spectators were encouraged to stay off the streets and not watch the race in person. Security officials held signs on the roads that read: "Please refrain from watching the event from here."

The smattering of competitors from abroad were largely restricted to their hotel rooms while not competing or training. Coe said strict protocols measures against COVID-19 were followed.

Coé said "today Sapporo demonstrated the highest level of capability to organise successful" marathon and race walk events. Those

events are being held outside of Tokyo because of the city's hot summers.

Coe will be on hand on Sunday when Tokyo organisers hold another test event at the new \$1.4 billion National Stadium in Tokyo.

Organisers have held a series of test events in the last several days and have reported few problems. The largest problem is convinc-



World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe. ■ AFP

Hardaway Jr. dazzles with 10 treys

Suns move to joint-top in the Western Conference

NBA

REUTERS

MIAMI

Tim Hardaway Jr. matched the franchise record with a career-high 10 3-pointers as part of a 36-point effort to help Dallas Mavericks rally for a 127-113 victory over the host Miami Heat on Tuesday night.

Luka Doncic registered 23 points as the Mavericks won for the seventh time in the past nine games.

Devin Booker's 31 points helped Phoenix hold off host Cleveland 134-118 in overtime. The Suns have moved back into a tie with Utah Jazz for the top spot in the Western Conference with their fifth consecutive victory.

Paul George scored 22 points and grabbed nine rebounds, helping Los Angeles rally late to defeat visiting



Shooting away! Tim Hardaway Jr.'s 36-point effort for Dallas had some superb baskets from behind the arc. AP

Toronto. Marcus Morris Sr. also had 22 points as the Clippers ended a three-game losing streak.

Giannis excels again Giannis Antetokounmpo scored a team-high 36 points and grabbed 12 rebounds as host Milwaukee scored its se-

cond win over Brooklyn in as many games.

The results: Phoenix 134 bt Cleveland 118 (OT); Charlotte 102 bt Detroit 99; Milwaukee 124 bt Brooklyn 118; Dallas 127 bt Miami 113.

New Orleans 108 bt Golden State 103; Sacramento 103 bt Oklahoma City 99; LA Clippers 105 bt Toronto 100.

Grappler Amit Dhankar eyes a Tokyo berth

11 others Indians in the fray at World Olympic Qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SOFIA

Handed an opportunity to qualify for Tokyo, veteran wrestler Amit Dhankar will go all out when he takes the mat along with 11 other Indians at the World Olympic Qualifiers, starting on Thursday.

The 32-year-old Dhankar is a three-time Commonwealth champion but he missed the big-ticket events because he struggled to go past Yogeshwar Dutt in 66kg category for most of his career.

His last big performance was a silver in 74kg at the 2019 Asian Championships in Xian, China.

Dhankar's hopes to make the cut for the Tokyo Games were dashed when he lost the trials but since National

champion Sandeep Singh Mann came a cropper in the Asian Qualifiers in Almaty, the national federation gave him a chance to compete in Sofia.

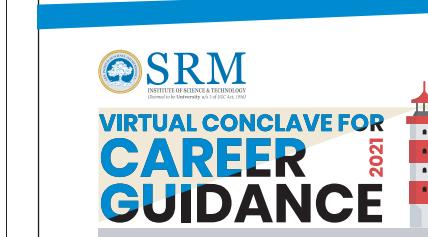
Last chance

Dhankar had finished second in the trials. It is the last chance for all the wrestlers in the world to qualify for the Games.

Dhankar will be desperate to make the most of the chance but his journey will be hard as the 74kg is packed with 36 wrestlers, including Rio Olympics bronze medallist Soner Demirtas from Turkey, World champion Hetik Cabolov of Serbia and Slovakia's European champion Tajmuraz Salkazanov.

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