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WINDOWS

RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR (FRI)	06:36 PM
SAHER (SAT)	04:35 AM

Ex-PM Manmohan Singh discharged from AIIMS

NEW DELHI: Former prime minister Manmohan Singh was on Thursday discharged from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. He was admitted to the facility after testing positive for Covid-19. Sources close to the Congress leader said he was doing fine. Singh was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) on April 19 after he had fever and tested positive for the novel coronavirus infection.

Tight race in WB; BJP ahead in Assam: Exit polls

NEW DELHI: Exit polls on Thursday forecast a tight contest between the incumbent Trinamool Congress and the BJP in the high-profile West Bengal assembly polls, while the ruling Left combine was projected to retain power in Kerala and so was the case for the saffron party in Assam. However, exit polls projected DMK-led opposition alliance as a winner in Tamil Nadu, while the Congress-led alliance was seen losing the neighbouring Puducherry by some pollsters. ▶P7

Italy to quarantine flight from India

ROME: A flight from New Delhi arrived on Wednesday evening in Rome carrying 210 passengers, who will be placed in mandatory quarantine. Officials said that a new ordinance signed earlier in the day by Health Minister Roberto Speranza requires that passengers arriving from India are quarantined for 10 days at a site indicated by Italian health officials, due to concerns about the deadly spike in that country. The passengers were being tested upon arrival and anyone testing positive will be taken instead to a Covid hotel near Rome's main Leonardo da Vinci International Airport. The 210 passengers include children. Officials indicated that they were primarily Indian nationals who are residents in Italy.



Facebook makes 'mistake' in blocking #ResignModi posts

NEW DELHI

FACEBOOK blocked posts tagged #ResignModi amid raging criticism of the government's handling of the Covid crisis, but restored it hours later calling it a mistake.

The blocking on Wednesday, Facebook said, wasn't at the behest of the government. Facebook isn't the first social media company to censor posts critical of government handling of the Covid-19 crisis. Twitter had removed or restricted access to several critical posts on orders from the government, which called it fake news.

"We temporarily blocked this hashtag by mistake, not

because the Indian government asked us to, and have since restored it," a Facebook spokesperson said in a statement on Thursday. It however did not elaborate. In a tweet, the Ministry of Electronics and IT said: "Govt has not issued any direction to remove this hashtag. Facebook has also clarified that it was removed by mistake. Media has a very important role to play in acting as a force multiplier to the efforts of our front-line workers and medical professionals. At a sensitive time like this, we would urge the media to partner with crores of ordinary Indians as we collectively fight the pandemic," the Ministry tweeted. According to reports,

a hashtag calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was blocked on Facebook for hours on Wednesday. Users searching the hashtag were given a message that said such posts were "temporarily hidden here" because "some content in those posts goes against our Community Standards". Facebook periodically blocks hashtags and posts for a variety of reasons. Some of the blocks are done manually and some are automated. The blocking of posts tagged #ResignModi came ahead of polling in the last phase of West Bengal assembly elections.

Continued on Page 5



Union Cabinet meet on Covid today

NEW DELHI: Amid the Covid-19 crisis, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair a meeting of the Union Council of Ministers on Friday to discuss the prevailing situation in the country, sources said.

The meeting, to be held virtually on Friday morning, could also be attended by some top government officials besides Union ministers, they said. This will be the first meeting of the Council of Ministers in the aftermath of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the sources said. They said during the meeting the ongoing vaccination drive, which has now been opened for those in the 18-45 age group, could be discussed along with a presentation. In the meeting, ministers could be asked reach out to people to look into their issues, the sources said. Prime Minister Modi has held several rounds of meetings with chief ministers and top government officials to deliberate on the Covid-19 situation. He has also been holding meetings with pharma industry leaders, oxygen suppliers, heads of the three armed forces and other dignitaries to discuss how to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chardham Yatra postponed amid Covid surge

DEHRADUN

THE Chardham Yatra to the four famous Himalayan shrines in Uttarakhand, which was scheduled to begin next month, has been postponed in view of the massive surge in Covid-19 cases.

However, the portals of the four Himalayan temples known as Chardham will open as scheduled. Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri are the four famous shrines.

Continued on Page 5

Release Remdesivir seized by police for use in hospitals: HC

NEW DELHI

THE Delhi High Court on Thursday directed the deputy commissioner (DC) of the AAP government's revenue department to issue orders for the release of Remdesivir, used in the treatment of Covid-19, as soon as the medicine is seized by the police from hoarders and black-marketeers. A bench of justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli issued the direction to ensure that the seized medicine does not remain as case property, does not lose its effectiveness and can be administered to the patients in need. The court said once a



A relative of COVID-19 patient carries an oxygen cylinder outside the LNJP Hospital, in New Delhi on Thursday

seizure was made, the investigating officer (IO) shall immediately inform the DC of the same. The

IO shall also ascertain that the seized medicine is genuine and ensure that it is kept in a refrigerated environment to maintain its effectiveness till it is released to a hospital or a Covid health centre, the bench said.

A similar direction was issued by the court with regard to the use of oxygen cylinders seized by the police during raids. The order came after Kanwal Jeet Arora, the member-secretary of the Delhi State Legal Services Authority (DSLISA), told the bench that such seized medicines and oxygen cylinders ought to be put to use, instead of being kept as case property, in the present situation when there is a dearth of the same. The Delhi government told

the court that as on April 27, around 279 vials of Remdesivir were seized by the Delhi Police. The bench, in its order, also made it clear that Remdesivir or oxygen cylinders ought not to be seized from patients or their attendants, who may have procured it on the black market, as they may have taken such a step "out of sheer desperation and need".

The submission by Arora was made during the hearing of several pleas on the oxygen crisis and other issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which the national capital is grappling with.

3,79,257 FRESH CASES

Army opening hospitals possible, Army chief informs PM

NEW DELHI

INDIAN Army chief General MM Naravane said on Thursday that the force is opening hospitals for the local people wherever possible seeing the surge in the number of Covid-19 cases across the country.

After visiting the forward locations in Siachen and eastern Ladakh on Wednesday, Naravane met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday to brief him on the various initiatives taken by the Army to help in Covid management. The Army chief informed the Prime Minister that medical staff

of the force are being made available to various state governments. He also told Modi that the Army is setting up temporary hospitals in various parts of the country. Naravane also apprised the Prime Minister that the Army is opening its hospitals for civilians wherever possible and the citizens can approach their nearest Army hospitals.

He informed the Prime Minister that the Army is helping with its manpower for imported oxygen tankers and vehicles where specialised skills are required to manage them.

Continued on Page 5

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US advises its citizens in India to leave as soon as it is safe

WASHINGTON

THE US has advised its citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so and authorised the voluntary departure of family members of its employees in the Indian missions, saying the access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in the country amid a massive surge in Covid-19 cases.

The US has put India on

Level 4 Travel Advisory, the highest level issued by the Department of State. The current Level 4 Travel Advisory asks US citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so due to the current health situation in the country. The Department of State also authorised the voluntary departure of family members of US government employees in Mission India.

US Embassy New Delhi

and Consulates General Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai will remain open and continue to provide emergency consular services. "#India: Access to medical care is severely limited due to COVID-19 cases. US citizens wishing to depart should use available commercial options now. Daily direct flights to the US and flights via Paris and Frankfurt are available," the State Department tweeted.

In a health alert, the US Embassy in New Delhi said: "Access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in India due to the surge in Covid-19 cases."

"We urge US citizens to enrol in STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Programme) at step.state.gov in order to receive critical information from the Embassy related to health and safety in India," it said.

Womenia

Beauty behaviours during Pandemic



SHAHNAZ HUSAIN

As women look for ways to spend their time stuck at home during the pandemic, beauty routines have been a focus for some. From advancing their skincare routine to giving themselves a haircut, women have taken their beauty and personal care into their own hands.

From the personal to the professional, the role of beauty – how we express and access it – has changed since the second wave of the pandemic broke out in this country.

As the second wave of coronavirus devastates India, we are living in a time like no other, with the pandemic affecting every aspect of our lives and not least our beauty regimes.

Thanks to the 'Zoom boom,' we've also become a lot more comfortable and accepting of seeing each other wearing less make-up.

This might sound like a long, boring and stressful time, but it is also the perfect opportunity to detox, or upgrade your beauty routine to make working from home a transformative period by exploring new makeup trends and improve your skincare routine in extra time.

With limited exposure to the sun, pollution, dust and grime this is the perfect time to whip up some home remedies and concoctions for your skin even if you cannot go to parlour.

It's a great time to for yourself, to catch up with your beauty needs. We are going to share with you the herbal beauty tips which



can be used for daily beauty routine while you are in Lockdown.

Make an avocado face mask

Homemade Avocado Face Masks are amongst the best natural face masks that nourish your face with non-greasy moisture and revitalize the skin. This fruit is packed with skin-friendly minerals such as iron, calcium, potassium, copper, magnesium, etc., vitamins A, E, B, and K and unsaturated fats.

Always use a ripe avocado for making face masks. To make the avocado mask cool and refreshing, keep it in your fridge for a couple of minutes before applying it.

Your skin is constantly exposed to pollutants and environmental aggressors even if you aren't going outside, indoor pollution can be up to five times more concentrated than outside. You need to essentially protect your skin with sunscreen while at home.

Apply sunscreen

Sunscreen should be applied every day to exposed skin, and not just if you are going to be in the sun. During Lockdown, when

you are going to be indoors, apply sunscreen on the areas not covered by clothing, such as the face and hands. Sunscreens can be applied under makeup. Sun protection is the principal means of preventing premature aging.

Avoid heat hair tools

Another thing that you can avoid for the next few weeks during Lockdown is using heated hair tools, such as blow dryers, curling irons, tongs, straighteners etc and allow the hairs to dry naturally as you have sufficient time with you. The heat styling tools can cause breakage, damage and drying.

Moisturise your hands

We're all washing our hands much more often which leads to a lot more hand eczema cases. All that washing and hand sanitiser dries out the skin. Many people are experiencing cracked and chapped hands due to excessive washing of hands time and again as a matter of precaution or tension. If your hands are cracking, coconut oil is one of the best things you can use. You can also use the regular, original petroleum jelly if you want. You can,

however, use castor oil on your face.

Have a luxury bath

You can try one of the following bath additives. Some of these can remove fatigue, while others replace oils, or relieve itching. Select one according to your needs. A bath that leaves your body soft, smooth and perfumed can make you feel really good.

Honey Bath: Add two tablespoons of honey to a bucket of bathwater. It is said to induce relaxation and leave your skin soft and moist.

Vinegar: Add two tablespoons of vinegar. This helps to relieve itching.

Eau de Cologne: Adding a few drops of cologne makes you feel cool and leaves the body fragrant.

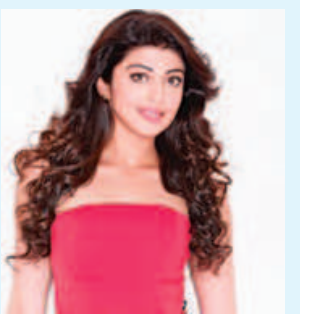
Almond Oil: Add one tablespoon almond oil to your bath water if you have dry skin. After drying the body, apply a moisturizing lotion, while the skin is still damp. This helps to seal in moisture. Apply the face mask and while it is drying, soak cotton wool pads in chilled rose water and apply over the eyelids. Lie down and relax for 20 minutes. Wash off the face mask.

TWEET PATROL



PRANITHA SUBHASH
@PRANITASUBHASH

Just like last year, we at @pranithafounda1 are starting a fundraiser to help daily wage workers as migrants during the lockdown. I'll be contributing the initial Rs 1 L. Requesting all those of you who can to come join hands.



Shilpa Tulaskar: "It was an honour to play the role that Reema Lagoo had essayed so beautifully"

Marathi actor Shilpa Tulaskar is looking forward to Zee Theatre's teleplay 'Savita Damodar Paranjape' where she plays Kusum, an iconic character played by late Reema Lagoo. The idea of reprising the role in the teleplay on Dish TV & D2h Rangmanch Active, initially intimidated Shilpa. She says, "The fact that Reema Lagoo had already played Kusum so memorably made me really nervous. I needed to know if I would be able to do justice to the character. I then called Reema ji to seek her blessings. She was so warm and encouraging and asked me to not get stressed or try too hard. The fact that she said, "I know you will do well," reassured me immensely. She is no more but I was, am, and always be one of her greatest fans and this role is my tribute to her."

'Savita Damodar Paranjape' is a psychological thriller that chronicles the story of Sharad and Kusum who have been happily married for eight years. However, their seemingly happy existence is marred by one nagging problem — Kusum's health. Their life changes when their neighbour's nephew, Ashok enters their lives and hidden secrets start to unravel.

Shilpa hopes that the play's unexpected pilot twists will now



be enjoyed by a new generation of theatre lovers. She says, "The play has been written so beautifully by Shekhar Tamhane that it doesn't seem dated even now. My mother remembers watching the play live a long time ago and now I am part of the digitised version that will bring Kusum to life for audiences who may not even be aware of her story. 'Savita Damodar Paranjape' has been an un-

believably amazing journey and I hope everyone watches it."

The play also stars Vinay Jain, Aroh Welankar and Pooja Welling.

Sunny Leone: It's time to get vaccinated

Sunny Leone has urged everyone to fight Covid-19, saying it is time to get vaccinated. Sunny posted a picture on Instagram where she is seen in a blue lace leotard paired with a tan jacket, smiling at the camera. "Let's take the fight to #covid_19. It's time to get Vaccinated!! Vaccinate yourself and your loved ones to give everyone especially the Frontline warriors a fighting chance against the pandemic!!" Sunny wrote alongside the image. Sunny is currently in Kerala to shoot her upcoming film, the psychological thriller "Shero". It is directed by Sreejith Vijayan and will be released in Tamil, Hindi, Telugu and Malayalam. She had recently shot for the reality TV show "MTV Splitsvilla" in the state.



NEWS ROUNDUP

International Jazz Day

International Jazz Day is a beautiful time to celebrate the gift of music and to come together as a community. It's a chance to listen to a variety of musicians and hear their talents live all around the world.

Learning more about the day will help any musical enthusiast to appreciate all the benefits of listening to jazz. Music lovers from around the world will gather to attend jazz festivals, parties, and events to help celebrate the day and this specific type of music. Now is the perfect opportunity to take up a musical instrument such as the trumpet, saxophone, piano or clarinet and start to make music so one can understand what all the hype is about.

International Jazz Day highlights the ability for jazz to unite people from all walks of life and draw together folks from around the globe.

It all began in 2011 when the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation declared International Jazz Day as an opportunity to give recognition to jazz music and state its role to unite people all around the globe. It's been going strong ever since and people look forward to this day each year when music lovers from around the world can share in the experience of listening to and making jazz music.



Breaking myths around oily skin

N LOTHUNGBENI HUMTSOE

Skin needs hydration, but we tend to connect hydration with dry skin only. When you have oily skin, you may think that using a moisturiser is the last thing you should do. But, as the body's largest organ—and the one that is arguably most influenced environmental conditions—skin often needs a moisturiser to mitigate the loss of hydration even with it is oily or acne prone. The key with oily skin is to make sure you're hydrating it without adding extra oil from other products. With no moisture at all your skin would become dehydrated and begin to over-compensate by producing more oil.

Plabita Sharma, National Training Manager, The Body Shop India talks of a very basic yet very effective step for oily skin care.

Oily skin and its causes: If your skin has large pores and you can see a greasy or shiny appearance, you know you have oily skin. There are multiple reason that triggers the oily skin like overactive sebaceous gland, genetics, environment, hormonal changes and lifestyle factors.

Role of moisturiser: When one have oily skin, they tend to skip this step thinking it is not required. But, a suitable moisturiser helps to soothe and protect the skin thereby improving the elasticity and preventing water loss. A well hydrated skin is a game changer for achieving healthy supple skin.

Skin difference: There are some notable differences between men and women skin. Men's skin tends to be oilier, rough, thicker and more prone to environmental and shaving damage. On the other hand, women skin is thinner and signs of ageing is more prominent than in male skin. Just like women, men's skin too deserves some attention and care. While there is nothing wrong to use a moisturiser that is suitable for both the genders, one needs to understand & choose moisturiser based its own skin type, concern, need, ingredients and benefits

Moisturiser on oily skin: The greasy substance on the upper layer of the skin also known as sebum is produced by the sebaceous gland. This oil acts a barrier and retains the water loss. Moisturisers not only helps the skin to regulate the natural sebum but also helps to treat the skin effectively.

Type of moisturisers: Now a day's newer generation multi masking moisturisers are available with added ingredients in the form of plant extracts, vitamins and anti-oxidant that keeps inflammation at the bay and helps the skin to rejuvenate as well. For oily skin choose a gel based texture that is light weight, fast absorbing and non-greasy.



FASHION

Make your attire comfortable yet stylish during lockdown

As the second wave of Corona virus is spreading, some of the states have announced lockdown again. During this lockdown, your self-expression through clothing doesn't have to be lost to the monotony of pyjamas. You can be comfortable yet stylish with some simple tips and maintain a sense of normalcy. It can be something as simple as styling an oversized tee with a pair of shorts or a t-shirt dress to feel your best; to dressing up and sharing your looks online as a stress buster.

Matching complimentary colours will look good if you're going for something simple. If it feels too dull, you can always add a pop of colour to take your outfits to another level. If you're working from home, a shirt or a kurta can always be your go-to outfit for video calls as they are comfortable and formal enough. Adding a neckpiece will give extra flare. A simple accessory or two can make your outfit come together perfectly. Putting in some effort into how you dress can help you maintain personal identity and boost your self-esteem.

Over 1.55 cr register for third phase of vaccination

NEW DELHI

OVER 1.55 crore people have registered themselves on CoWin portal till now for the third phase of Covid vaccination starting May 1.

In the third phase of Covid vaccination, everyone above the age of 18 will be eligible to get vaccinated against Covid-19.

As per the CoWin dash board, over 23 lakh people registered for the third phase of vaccination on Thursday.

Around 10.30 am, 23,82,756 people have registered themselves for the Covid vaccination on Thursday. On

Wednesday, registration for the third phase inoculation started at 4 pm and in eight hours till midnight more than one crore people got themselves registered for vaccination.

R.S. Sharma, CEO, National Health Authority, tweeted: "We closed the day with 1.33 crore registrations on Co-Win and delivered 2.78 crore SMSes."

Till now, over 1.55 crore people have registered since the registration process started on Wednesday evening. As the registration process started, people complained about glitches which were denied by the

Union Health Ministry. "Co-WIN digital platform continues to work without any technical glitch on the first day of registration of the expanded eligible population groups," Union Health Ministry had said in a statement.

But at 4.35 pm, Aarogya Setu, government mobile application for contact tracing and dissemination of medical advisories to contain the spread of Covid, tweeted, "Cowin Portal is working. There was a minor glitch at 4 PM that was fixed. 18 plus can register."

The government had claimed that

the Co-WIN software is a robust, dependable and agile technology and it offers anytime anywhere registration for Covid vaccination.

"The capacity of the servers and other parameters have been ramped up to match the unprecedented scale of immunization so that the CoWIN system provide citizen-centric services. Inclusivity, speed and scalability have been kept in mind while designing the unique digital platform with all components being portable, synchronous without excessive and unnecessary dependencies," the Ministry said. (IANS)



BJP MLA drives off with O2 cylinders amidst crisis in UP

BARABANKI (UP)

BHARATIYA Janata Party (BJP) MLA Sharad Awasthi is among those who use their power to get favours while the common man battles for life.

According to reports, the MLA's vehicle (UP 41 AE 0111), on Wednesday, drove into the Sarang Oxygen plant in Safedabad kotwali circle in Barabanki and a short while later, drove out packed with refilled oxygen cylinders.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has categorically stated that oxygen cylinders will be given only to Covid hospitals but the rule apparently does not apply to the BJP MLA.

When some reporters who had reached the Sarang oxygen plant and took photographs, the MLA's driver and aides threatened then with dire consequences.

None of the district officials were willing to comment on the incident. (IANS)

Largest O2 consignment reaches UP

LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh has received its biggest consignment of oxygen -- 600 tonne of lifesaving gas, up from an average of 100-150 tonne -- ending the oxygen emergency for the time being.

Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Avanish Awasthi said, "This includes 321 tons of medical oxygen supplied by the Food and Drug Administration. We also have an allocation of 850 tons of oxygen from the Centre, which is the highest allotment among all states."

"However, to pick up our quota from other states like Bihar, we need more tankers. Earlier, we had only 30-35 tankers, but there are 84 in the fleet now." The state has also activated its oxygen monitoring system, which is a first-of-its-kind 24x7 oxygen-tracking module which enables real-time monitoring of GPS-fitted tankers by district magistrates.

"We will provide police escort to tankers where possible and open a green corridor for quick transport," said the official.

The monitoring system was set up by Rodic Consultants Pvt Ltd in collaboration with Food and Drug Administration, de-

partment of medical education, department of medical health and family welfare and department of transport and home affairs. The oxygen control room will provide minute-by-minute information on oxygen demand in hospitals in various districts, allotment and loading of oxygen in vehicles, live location of vehicles, supply and utilization of oxygen.



Pressure-swing absorption medical oxygen generation plants are being installed in more than 13 medical colleges and institutes across the state.

Oxygen producing plants are also being installed at private medical colleges and institutes. Some of the state-run medical colleges, where these plants are being set up, are in Banda, Azamgarh, Bahraich, Basti, Jalaun and Ayodhya.

Under the PM CARES Fund, plants are also being set up in Ambedkar Nagar, Saharanpur, Badaun and Firozabad.

To further boost oxygen supply in the state, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has given directions to set up generator plants in nine state-run medical colleges and institutes, for which funds have been released from State Disaster Relief Fund. (IANS)

All citizens must get free Covid vax: Rahul Gandhi

NEW DELHI

A day after the Center opened registration for May 1-phase of Covid vaccination, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday demanded that all the citizen should get free vaccines.

"India must get free COVID vaccine. All citizens must receive the inoculation free of charge. Let's hope they get it this time,#vaccine," Rahul Gandhi tweeted.

More than 1.55 crore people have registered themselves on the first day of registration for the third phase of Covid vaccination starting Saturday. In the third phase, everyone above the age of 18 will be eligible to get a vaccine against Covid-19.

As per the CoWin dash board over 23 lakh people registered

for the third phase of vaccination on Thursday. Around 10.30 a.m., 23,82,756 people have registered themselves for vaccination on Thursday.

Registration for third phase started at 4 p.m. on thursday and in eight hours till midnight more than one crore people got themselves registered for vaccination.

Post midnight, CEO, National Health Authority, RS Sharma tweeted, "We closed the day with 1.33 crore registrations on Co-Win and delivered 2.78 crore SMSes."

As the registration process started, people complained about glitches which were denied by the Union Health Ministry. (IANS)



UP medical college principal suspended

SAHARANPUR (UTTAR PRADESH)

THE Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh has suspended Dinesh Kumar Singh Mataolia, principal of Saharanpur's Shaikh-ul Hind Maulana Mahmood Hasan Medical College, for laxity.

He has been replaced by Dr Arvind Trivedi of National Medical College, Meerut.

Around 40 cylinders with faulty nozzles were found lying untended at the medical college at a time when the state is facing an acute oxygen shortage.

The medical college has in its possession 300 cylinders out of which 40 were in the state of disrepair.

According to the government spokesman, "There were allegations that despite strict directions from the government over smooth supply of oxygen to the hospital, it was found that valve of 40 cylinders out of 300 was not working, rendering them useless. During the inquiry, oxygen supply in-charge Nawab Singh and gas supplier company informed the district administration that they have been regularly reminding Dinesh Singh to get the valves repaired but he did not act on it."

It was also alleged that Dinesh Singh used to switch off his cell phone in the night, delaying decisions in urgent matters, said the spokesman, and adding that a probe found that there was not much coordination between the principal and different departments of the college.

The spokesman said, the RT-PCR test reports of around 5,000 cases were pending with the college laboratory despite the administration's strict order of ramping up tests. Taking cognizance, the UP health department, in its order, observed, "The principal has been found to be of lackadaisical attitude not only in the repair of oxygen cylinders but also too much delay in the RT-PCR (Covid test) reports.

UP PANCHAYAT POLLS

About 50 pc voter turnout was recorded till 3 pm

LUCKNOW

ABOUT 50 per cent voter turnout was recorded till 3 pm for the fourth and final phase of the Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls, which is being held on Thursday amid an unprecedented surge in COVID-19 cases in the state.

Over 5.27 lakh candidates are in the fray for more than 2.10 lakh seats in 17 districts in this round of the election. "Polling started in the fourth phase at 7 am and will continue till 6 pm. Till 3 pm about 50 per cent votes were cast. Polling is going on peacefully," a State Election Commission (SEC) official said. While Hapur had the highest polling percentage at 54.60, Banda had the lowest 42.99 per cent till 3 pm, the official said.

There are over 2.98 crore voters in this phase of the polls. Uttar Pradesh is among the 10 worst-hit states in



terms coronavirus deaths and cases. The state had on Wednesday recorded its highest single-day rise in COVID-19 deaths with 266 people succumbing to the disease, while 29,824 new cases pushed the tally to 11,82,848.

The overall COVID-19 death toll in the state stands at 11,943. Polling is taking place in Ambedkar Nagar, Aligarh, Kushinagar, Kaushambi, Ghazipur, Farrukhabad, Bulandshahr,

Basti, Bahraich, Banda, Mau, Mathura, Shahjahanpur, Sambhal, Sitapur, Sonbhadra and Hapur districts.

According to the poll body, there are 10,679 candidates in the fray for 738 posts of zila panchayat members in the final phase. A total of 55,408 candidates are contesting for 18,356 posts of kshetra panchayat members. While 1,14,400 candidates are in the fray for posts of gram panchayat members, 3,47,436 are fighting for

1,77,648 posts in gram panchayat wards. The candidates are contesting on 'free symbols' given by the SEC. In the first phase of the polls held on April 15, an average polling percentage of 71 was recorded.

The second phase of the polls on April 19 also saw over 71 per cent turnout. In the third phase of the polls held on April 26, polling percentage of 73.5 was recorded, State Election Commission officials had said. In view of the coronavirus situation, the SEC had last month announced that not more than five people would be allowed to accompany a candidate during door-to-door campaigning for the panchayat elections. The Allahabad High Court had asked the Uttar Pradesh government to conclude the panchayat election process by May 25. The counting of votes will take place on May 2. (PTI)

Sikhs in Kanpur organise 'mask langar' for the needy

KANPUR

IN a novel gesture, the Sikh community in Kanpur has launched a 'mask langar' under which they are distributing free double-layered masks to the needy persons.

The masks are being made from thousands of turbans that were donated in the 'turban bank' by the members of the community. Kawaljeet Singh Manu, President, Yuwa Sikh Morcha, said the 'mask langar' has been set up near the Sangeet Talkies crossing in the city, where free masks are distributed from 10 am to 12 noon every day.

So far, more than 10,000 masks have been distributed to healthcare professionals and



people in need.

"We have come across people who cannot afford to buy masks for themselves and their family members. Therefore, we have launched a mask langar for them," he said.

The community members also give masks to those who have forgotten to wear one.

Manu said that in the second wave of the pandemic, the prices of masks have doubled. "When we went to buy a mask, we noticed that the prices had hit the roof. We thought how would a poor man protect himself. Then we decided to make masks at the gurdwaras and hired tailors for the purpose," he said. Manu added that most of the masks are being made using turban cloth. The Sikh community has already been organising food langars for the needy, and in some districts, the community members have even organised 'oxygen langar' where free cylinders were given to the needy patients. (IANS)

577 teachers on panchayat poll duty died: Unions



LUCKNOW

THE various teachers' unions in Uttar Pradesh have claimed that 577 teachers and support staff died while on panchayat poll duty in the state.

The unions have given a list of the 577 deceased persons to the Uttar Pradesh State Election Commission (UPSEC). The list sent by Dinesh Chandra Sharma, president of UP Shikshak Mahasangh (UPSM), has names and addresses of the 577 teachers and shiksha mitras.

The unions have now asked teachers to stay away on counting day, May 2.

On Tuesday, the Allahabad High Court had sent a notice to the SEC seeking explanation on Covid preparedness and the alleged deaths.

"The court's issuance of the notice has not benefited teachers because the next date of hearing in this case is May 3, which is a day after counting day. What was needed was postponement of counting at least, if not the fourth phase of elections on April 29," said a teacher leader.

Special work officer, SEC, S.K. Singh had issued a letter to all the district magistrates and district police chiefs, asking them to check the veracity of the reported deaths.

Sharma said they are yet to receive information on the health of teachers on election duties from several districts like Fatehpur, Balrampur, Shamli, Aligarh and Hamirpur.

"I am afraid about the numbers. Their families are also affected. The situation is extremely critical," he said.

He further said, "We had requested the SEC, after there was a surge in cases on April 12, to postpone the polls but our request was ignored. We may be forced to boycott counting duty," added Sharma.

District presidents of another union, Rashtriya Shikshak Mahasangh, have also given a memorandum to the SEC's office in all the districts of the state.

Senior vice-president of UP Primary Teacher association, Rajendra Singh, said, "Polls have already done the damage. Now counting may wreak more havoc. We are living in fear."

Officials have gone ahead and organised a training session for the staff on counting duty on Wednesday. (IANS)

Provide ₹50 lakh aid to kin of those who died: Akhilesh to govt

LUCKNOW

SAMAJWADI Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday demanded the BJP government to provide Rs 50 lakh financial aid to families of officers and teachers who allegedly died due to COVID-19 while performing their duty in the Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls.

He said the Yogi Adityanath dispensation should provide them assistance otherwise government employees and teachers will be forced to boycott the counting duty. "The government should provide Rs 50 lakh financial assistance to families of officers, teachers and employees who died due to coronavirus while performing their election duty in the panchayat polls," Yadav said in a tweet in Hindi.

Uttar Pradesh is among the 10 worst-hit states in terms of coronavirus deaths and cases. A record single-day rise of 298 COVID-19 fatalities in the state pushed the death toll to 12,241 on Thursday, while the infection tally mounted to 12,17,955 with 35,156 fresh cases. The Allahabad High Court had asked the Uttar Pradesh government to conclude the panchayat election process by May 25. The counting of votes will take place on May 2. (PTI)

Covid positive youth commits suicide in Lucknow PGI

LUCKNOW: The scare of corona drove a young patient to end his life by suicide at the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS) here on Thursday. Kamal Kishore, who was suffering from chronic kidney disease and was undergoing dialysis, had tested positive for coronavirus on April 16 and was admitted to Rajdhani Corona Hospital in the SGPGIMS on April 18. Around noon on Friday, when washrooms were empty on the fourth floor, he jumped out through a window. He was taken immediately to the emergency and a trauma team was rushed to revive him, but he had died by then. A statement from the SGPGIMS said that the body had been handed over to police. (IANS)

Yogi govt extends UP lockdown by a day

LUCKNOW: Amid surging coronavirus cases, the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh, on Thursday, announced the extension of weekend lockdown in the state by one day. Weekend lockdowns were earlier imposed from Friday 8 p.m. to Monday 7 a.m. to curb the spread of the virus. The state government has extended the weekend lockdown to include Monday. The lockdown will now remain in force in the state from Friday 8 p.m. to Tuesday 7 a.m., said a government spokesman. Night curfew will also continue in all districts of the state.

Senior IAS officer in UP succumbs to Covid

LUCKNOW: Senior IAS officer and chairman of the Uttar Pradesh IAS Association, Deepak Trivedi, succumbed to Covid on Thursday. He has been hospitalized since the past several days after testing positive for the virus. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has expressed his grief over the officer's demise and has conveyed his condolences to the bereaved family. Trivedi was posted as the chairman of the Board of Revenue and had been elected as president of the UP IAS Association in March last year. A 1985 batch IAS officer, Deepak Trivedi was a popular officer, known for his amiable nature.

42-yr-old COVID patient jumps to death

CHANDIGARH: A 42-year-old COVID-19 patient who was undergoing treatment at the PGIMER here allegedly jumped to his death from the fourth floor of the hospital on Thursday. While police said they are investigating the matter, the Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), in a statement, said the Panchkula resident was admitted to the institute on April 11. "He was COVID-19 positive and under treatment for post-COVID fungal pneumonia. He was adequately treated in RICU (Respiratory Intensive Care Unit) and shifted to a private ward on April 28," the statement said. The patient jumped out of the window of his room on Thursday afternoon, it said. "Immediately after that he was taken to (PGIMER) emergency, where he was declared dead. The patient was under treatment for anxiety by the psychiatry department," the statement said. (PTI)

5 of UP family killed in roof collapse

MIRZAPUR (UTTAR PRADESH): Five members of a family were killed when the roof of their rented accommodation in Mirzapur collapsed. The incident took place in Chhoti Gudkari locality under the limits of City Kotwali police circle. The deceased included a couple and their two sons and a daughter. District magistrate Mirzapur Praveen Kumar Laxar and SP Ajay Kumar Singh, who camped at the incident site to monitor the rescue operation said, "The rescuers including the police and fire fighters initially recovered the bodies of Shubham, 22, Saurabh, 18, Sandhya, 20 and their mother Gudia, 48. Hours later, the body of the husband, Uma Shankar, 50, was also taken out from the debris and all bodies have been sent for post mortem."

Afghanistan assumes centrestage

UNITED States President Joe Biden will leave US troops in Afghanistan past the current May 1 deadline but will withdraw them by September 11, US officials said. This move to extend the Afghan stay followed a rigorous policy review. The new withdrawal date is the 20th anniversary of al-Qaeda's attacks on the United States, which triggered the war in Afghanistan. Biden has been signalling that he would likely miss the May 1 deadline negotiated by the Donald Trump administration and the Taliban as it became clear that withdrawing the remaining 2,500 troops would be difficult and potentially unsafe.

US officials have also blamed the Taliban for failing to live up to commitments to reduce violence and some have warned about persistent Taliban links to al-Qaeda. In a statement last month, the Taliban threatened to resume hostilities against foreign troops in Afghanistan if they did not meet the

May 1 deadline. But Biden will still set a near-term date for withdrawal, potentially allaying Taliban concerns that he would drag out the process. The senior Biden administration official stressed that the pull out would not be subject to further conditions. The ultimate withdrawal would be based on certain security and human rights guarantees.

The President's approach and his decision that he made was done through close consultation with military leaders, with his national security team, with partners and allies around the world, and with his objective in mind of ensuring focus on the threats. The Taliban declined to comment about Biden's decision, saying the group has not been notified of the US decision. Meanwhile, officials in Afghanistan are bracing for the withdrawal. It remains unclear how the Taliban leadership as well as the group's rank-and-file members feel about the reported delay of the US

troop withdrawal. There are not any enough details as to what the thinking is both at the leadership level and within the rank and file.

The Taliban have shown that they are usually unified with their final decisions. Turkey had announced it would host an Afghan meeting till May 4 to jumpstart efforts to end the war and put together a possible political settlement. The United Nations and Qatar are included in the event, and Turkey's foreign ministry said the Afghan government and the Taliban will attend, but the Taliban said it had not committed to those dates. A draft peace plan proposed by the United States for Afghanistan last month had called for the current government to be replaced with an interim administration until a new constitution is agreed and elections held, while a joint commission monitors a ceasefire.

The Afghan warring parties, however,

have long harboured deep objections to key ideas in the proposal, reviewed by the Reuters and The Associated Press (AP) news agencies. The US special envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, shared the eight-page Transitional Peace Government proposal last month with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, opposition and civil society leaders and Taliban negotiators. Under the interim government, the national parliament could either be expanded to include Taliban members or suspended until after the election, the plan suggests.

It also says Afghanistan could "not host terrorists or permit terrorist-related activity on its soil" that threatens other countries and that the Taliban would have to abandon safe havens and military ties "in neighbouring countries". The document outlines the terms of a ceasefire and its enforcement, calls for the protection of the rights of women, children and minorities and envisions a truth and reconciliation commission aimed at healing 42 years of conflict.



The problem is perhaps democracy

DR PINGALI GOPAL

POLITICAL parties eagerly conduct elections (from state level to municipal) in the deadly pandemic throwing all precautions to the wind. This shows how illogical it is on the part of the voters to trust the governments they form to protect its citizens. Elections during a pandemic is simply a complete disregard for its citizens. Hospital beds are not available even for the most powerful and the rich; doctors and nurses are losing their sanity; many families are losing their near and dear ones; and yet, there remains a pressing need to conduct not even state but municipal elections! Most citizens are also aware that these elections will achieve nothing and will maintain a status quo with respect to development.

The power of the vote is a myth as Indian democracy amply shows. Plato (4th century BCE) thought that, like all forms of governance, even democracy ruins itself by excess of its basic principle of an equal right of all to hold office and determine public policy. Democracy becomes disastrous because people are deficient by education to select the best and wisest rulers even as the most educated and capable choose to stay away from the process of elections. Oratory skills, nepotism, money, corruption, and general incompetence take over with the single purpose to garner votes and gain power. There is a complete disconnect with good administration. Aristotle thought that democracy bases on a false assumption that those who are equal in one respect (like the law) are equal in all respects, including governing. He says that in a democracy, ability sacrifices itself to number, while trickery manipulates numbers.

Yet, over the centuries, through revolutions, through public opinion, through emotions, democracy has become the norm - an 'ought to', all over the world. The major issue is the balance between individual rights and the government rights. As one increases, the other correspondingly decreases. The golden mean is apparently democracy today.

The search in western traditions was always present in the ideal for maximal individual liberty under the umbrella of minimal state interference and maximal state security. Seeking that harmony remains a distant dream even as a bewildering array of 'isms' generate. The political philosophies of right, left, centre permeating into Indian thinking do not simply make sense in the light of our thousands of years of cultural traditions and lived experiences. And yet, we think liberal secularism as the best form of political philosophy. Indian traditions had evolved a way with an enlightened monarchy and free citizens ages back. Important treatises, texts, and wisdoms of ancient and medieval India focussed on the qualities and duties at all levels from the king to the ordinary citizen unlike western intellectual rights-based traditions. The king's rule was to ensure peace, prosperity, and happiness to its people. The wars of the kind fought in Europe in the medieval times were perhaps unusual in the Indian context. Indian wars, by principle, mostly left the agricultural lands and the temples intact.

A bond linking rulers and people across kingdoms allowed free movement for pilgrimages and access to knowledge. Shankaracharya surely would have moved across various kingdoms to set up the four maths in four corners of the country. Hence, alternatives to democracy did thrive without affecting trade, agriculture, literature, and sciences across the country. Indian civilization, at least five thousand years old, apart from a high quotient of personal happiness, had a thriving economy with highly-evolved arts, literature, education, sciences, spirituality, architecture, and so on. Our indigenous systems had some worth as its outcomes did certainly attract thousands from Central Asia, Middle East, and Europe. And then came the western political philosophies which persistently ill-fit with our experiences.

Thousands of years of lived experience and culture has also moulded a special Indic philosophy which we knowingly or unknowingly subscribe to. Most Indians are 'Indic Liberals' by a natural inclination combining principles of both the so-called leftist and conservative thoughts. Politico-economically, Indic Liberal is a unique form of 'Religious Left' aspiring to become a 'Liberal Right'. As 'Liberal Right', we always had the principles of limited government, free markets, individual liberty, equality of opportunity, and an assertive defence policy. While the Left is normally non-religious it need not be so for us. At the same time, the necessity to provide equal opportunity to the poor warrants an understanding of the need for welfare measures. Diversity, multiculturalism, and pluralism is an inbuilt lived experience in our society. Democracy with its principles of 'liberal secularism' seems to be thriving on these to win power by dividing and thus destroying this pluralism. Hence, if a pandemic comes in the way, the response is, so what?

New study shows spike in digital fraud attempts from India

TRANSUNION'S latest quarterly analysis of global online fraud trends has found that since the COVID-19 pandemic began, fraudsters are increasing their digital schemes against businesses.

The agency came to its conclusions about fraud against businesses based on intelligence from billions of transactions and more than 40,000 global websites and apps contained in its flagship identity proofing, risk-based authentication and fraud analytics solution suite - TransUnion TruValidate. These websites and apps have traffic coming from all the countries across the globe including India.

It found the percent of suspected fraudulent digital transaction attempts against businesses originating from India increased 28.32 per cent when comparing the following two periods: (March 11, 2019 and March 10, 2020) and (March 11, 2020 - when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic - and March 10, 2021).

"Fraudsters are always looking to take advantage of significant world events. The COVID-19 pandemic and its corresponding rapid digital acceleration brought about by stay at home orders is a global event unrivalled in the online age," said Shaleen Srivastava, executive vice president and head of Fraud Solutions at TransUnion in India.

"By analysing billions of transactions globally we screened for fraud indicators over the past year, it has become clear that the war against the virus has also brought about a war against digital fraud."

In India across industries, TransUnion found that highest percent of suspected digital fraudulent transactions originated from Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai. TransUnion analysed industries for a change in the percent of suspected digital fraud attempts against them coming from across the globe, comparing the periods of March 11, 2019-March 10, 2020 and March 11, 2020-March 10, 2021. Results showed a significant increase in attempted digital fraud originating from India against logistics companies. The level more than trebled (up 224%) and has been a significant development during COVID-19 times.

With more people shopping online during the pandemic, goods are having to be shipped. Fraudsters know this and are targeting either redirecting genuine orders or alternatively placing fraudulent orders with compromised consumer accounts to genuine customer addresses, and then redirecting them once shipped.

Separately at a global level, through the TruValidate solution, TransUnion documented a 19% growth in transactions among its global iGaming customers from 2019 to 2020, and recently researched its fraud impact in a special report. (ANS)

VISHNU MAKHIJANI

DO you remember an Indian Army recruitment campaign that went along the lines of "Do you have it in you"? Then, during the Kargil War of 1999, the late Captain Vikram Batra raised this to a new peak with his oft repeated quote: "Yeh dil maange more".

In a world filled with cynicism, few stand tall to carve their own path to success with courage, determination and grit. In the case of Supriya Paul, 26, the CEO and co-founder of the hugely successful "Josh Talks" show on YouTube, her father's dictum when she was 13 that there is no place for mediocrity in this world has kept her going and overcoming disappointments like not being able to enter a Delhi University college of choice.

"He told me irrespective of whatever I choose to do in life, if I am not the best person to do it, then I will be replaced. After hearing those words, my life's mission was to become irreplaceable. My father's advice stayed with me throughout my entrepreneurial journey as well. Every time we pilot a new project or build a new product, that is the spirit that I approach it with. Even though it took me some time to convince my parents that I wanted to work on building 'Josh Talks' full-time, I am grateful to have such a strong support system in them who always have my back," Paul told IANS in an interview.

She has more than justified the faith reposed in her.

"While we started with one YouTube Hindi channel in October 2017, we have expanded to 10 languages including Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Marathi, Punjabi, Odia, Kannada and English. We recently crossed one billion total views across all our channels and have a dedicated community of 11.5-plus million subscribers. In the last six years, we have released over 2,500 Talks online and conducted 1,500-plus events (including workshops) offline," Paul said.

She has now taken the show to the next level with "All You Need Is Josh" (Bloomsbury), a book that relates the stories of 30 unique individuals across India who have it in them: the aspiring astrophysicist who wanted to walk on the moon; the first person with a disability to top the civil services examinations; the domestic help who is now a published author; the army officer who amputated his own leg; the transgender woman who was expelled from her house; the Dalit child bride who now runs a business worth Rs 1,000 crores, and many more.

Filled with anecdotes and life-changing missives, these stories are a reminder that it does not matter the circumstances into which one is born -- what matters most is having the josh to overcome all odds and chase your dreams.

Little wonder then that Paul has been named one of Forbes' 30 Under 30 in Asia in 2018, and "Josh Talks" has been awarded the National Media Award by President Ramnath Kovind along with being named one of 2018's Top 100 startups by Economic Times and Sutra HR.

How did she select the 30 individuals whose stories have been featured in the book?

"We (Paul and co-founder Shobit Banga) have been bringing inspiring stories to our audience for the past six years. So far, we have recorded over 4,000 stories from across India. Our in-house research team picks individuals whose life journeys are extraordinary and can offer impactful takeaways to our audience so that they can become do and be more in their lives as well. The book contains stories that stood out the most amongst them. These individuals come from diverse backgrounds, and their Talks are some of the highest viewed on our channels. We wanted these stories to reach every household in India and decided to curate them in this book," Paul explained.

Following the dictum that stories "have the power to create phenomenal social change", Paul said the "Josh" stories "are



Filled with anecdotes and life-changing missives, these stories are a reminder that it does not matter the circumstances into which one is born -- what matters most is having the josh to overcome all odds and chase your dreams

different from the usual inspiring stories that are online because we make an effort to identify speakers that our audience can relate to. More importantly, we don't just focus on their achievements but also their failures. We also try to include actionable tips and clear pathways for our audience to adopt and learn from".

The common theme of the individuals in the book is that they have overcome incredible failures to make something of their lives. Does she remember her first failure? What role does she think failures play in life?

"I remember my first failure; it was when I was 17 years old. I couldn't make the cut for my dream college, Shri Ram College of Commerce. In my desperate attempt to be the best at everything, this is the place where I thought I had lost. Even though I did get into Sri Venkateswara College, which was also among the top colleges, I couldn't help but be thoroughly immersed in what I thought was my failure.

"However, after several months of feeling sorry for myself, I realized that fixating on

my failure was the worst thing I could ever do to myself. So, I pushed hard towards what I wanted to achieve. I don't believe that failures are the opposite of success; they are just a part of it. And, in order to fully appreciate your success, it is important to have the same attitude towards your struggles as well," Paul elaborated.

"Josh Talks" has also expanded from being a content-first platform to a product-focused organisation with the Josh Skills app. How did this happen?

"As the viewership for our Talks grew, we realized it was important for us to build more tools and products that would create not only social but also economic value for our audience. We wanted to address the more pressing challenges faced by the youth in India today, such as limited access to career information, lack of relevant skill sets, and unemploymentability.

"In 2020, we launched the Josh Skills app, which offers short-term and affordable technical courses and important soft skills to upskill the youth in Tier

II and III cities in India. Keeping our mission of unlocking human potential as the guiding light, we are committed to developing more such tools and products to serve Bharat. Through Josh Skills we want to be the bade bhaiya (elder brother) that our audience needs and help people improve their lives by building an ecosystem that stays with them through the entire journey from inspiration to action," Paul said.

The Josh Skills app has 1.5 million downloads and over 150,000 paid users learning critical soft skills from Tier-II cities and beyond.

The timing of the book's release -- in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic -- couldn't be more appropriate.

"When we decided on the launch date of our book, we had, of course, never anticipated the crisis that we as a country would be grappling with today. However, we decided not to push (back) the release date because we believe that in current times, the need for us to have faith and josh is crucial. I would also like to share that 'Josh' Talks will be donating the royalty that it receives from the book towards COVID relief efforts in India. So I would like to urge all readers to go and order their copy of the book right away and help us spread some josh when India really needs it the most," Paul concluded.

LETTERS

Timely support

AS the rising demand for oxygen, accommodation and vaccine in particular push India to get help from overseas, the Big brother's nod to stand by India has boost trust up among corona patients. In response to the government's call to register for vaccine, scores of eighteen-year-olds knocked official portal in futile. In that case, the Government set itself to get quality vaccine from the overseas as the vaccine available isn't enough to tackle the issue. Raw materials that are needed to manufacture vaccines, rapid test kits with quality be reached India soon as Big brother had promised dawn a big relief for national health department. Supply of Astra Zeneca that left a name in checking pandemic is a big boon. Also getting quality oxygen from Bhutan make us to address pandemic effectively.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

Courts and the pandemic

STATE after State faces indictment in the courts and an anguished HC says that perhaps Election Commission should face murder charges for conducting the elections without following the protocols of Covid. Whereas Election Commission passes the buck by saying enforcing the

thehansreader@gmail.com

Enforce appropriate behaviour

NIGHT curfew is always a better alternative to total lockdown, provided all people follow Covid protocols strictly in the daytime. (Night curfew likely to be extended April 29) Since the arrival of second wave of Covid, all States in the country are really worried as how to make people to follow the preventive measures without laxity. Hence, the government should enforce people, if required punish, and ensure that all people adhere to Covid appropriate behaviour to combat the present Covid pandemic.

G V N Murthy, Hyderabad

Faulty helpline

1075 a dedicated CoWIN helpline number isn't really helpful. Nine out of ten times, none appear to answer queries. What is the point in allotting a number helpline to answer queries when it doesn't work at all. It's really frustrating. A lot of time, energy and effort goes in vain trying to seek help thru this dedicated helpline. Call centre executives should be made available round the clock.

Instead of having a single number, for the entire country, every State has to have its own dedicated helpline number. This would to some extent, reduce the heavy rush and jamming of lines and enable citizens to get their doubts and grievances redressed in a hassle free manner. The union

health Ministry has to advise every state on this need.

NR Raghuram, Hyderabad

Waiting for the second dose

IT is a fact that in Hyderabad many of the people, including we, the senior citizens have not yet received our second dose of Covishield vaccine as on date and our unfulfilling everyday contacts with the private hospitals where we have taken our first dose of Covishield in March second week got a same reply of 'vaccine shortage - we will inform you 'which seldom happens. There is no further communication regarding our fate of getting a second vaccine from the private hospitals.

Now the central government has started registrations for the first vaccine to persons aged above 18 years. This will add up more problems and more waiting to the people who are yet to take their 2nd dose of vaccine. It is in these circumstances that the respective State governments should first seek confirmation from all the govt / private hospitals that there are no cases pending with them as regards vaccinating 2nd dose and then only proceed for vaccination of 18 years over aged people. Not only this, the authorities should also ensure that vaccination of the first dose to people who have missed their first shot for different reasons should also be undertaken by all vaccination centres on priority basis.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao, Hyderabad

Govardhan R Jilla, Mumbai

AP CM orders increase in beds at Covid hospitals

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

FOLLOWING reports of shortage of beds, Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy directed the officials to increase beds in Covid hospitals and arrange 3,000 beds in Covid care centres in every district, set up oxygen manufacturing plants and arrange oxygen tankers at hospitals.

During the review meeting held at camp office here on Thursday, the Chief Minister directed increasing the number of beds in Covid hospitals and arranging of 1,000 oxygen beds and 2,000 non oxygen beds in Covid care centres in every district.

He also ordered increase in the rates being paid to empanelled private hospitals for Covid treatment and make these rates appli-

- Says 1,000 oxygen beds and 2,000 non-oxygen beds should be set up in Covid care centres in each district
- Also directs setting up of oxygen manufacturing plants and arranging oxygen tankers at hospitals

cable for Aarogyasri hospitals also. He said it should be ensured that no hospital denies treatment for Covid and added that salaries of FNOs and MNOs working in Covid hospitals be increased. The Chief Minister directed the officials to recruit required doctors, nurses and para medical staff in all Covid hospitals in the state.

He asked the officials to set up 42 PSA (Pressure Swing Absorption) plants to ensure required oxygen for Covid hospitals. Oxy-

gen tankers should be procured and 10KL capacity tankers should be made available at teaching hospitals and 1 KL tankers at other hospitals.

The officials informed the Chief Minister that there are 35,644 beds in 422 Covid hospitals (public and private) in the state, of which 21,590 are occupied. About 79,000 patients are in home isolation and another 6,348 are in Covid care centres and 14,862 patients are being treated on oxygen beds, with 14,000 new cases in the last 24 hours, officials said.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas, Covid Command Control Special Officer Dr K S Jawahar Reddy, health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal, health commissioner Katakamaneni Bhaskar and other officials were present.

Swaccha Sankalpam from July 8

- During a review, CM directs officials to lay stress on sanitation in rural, urban areas and safe disposal of sewage
- 100-day sanitation drive will start from May 1 in the State
- 2 lakh borewells will be dug, 1.5 lakh pumpsets will be distributed to benefit 3 lakh small and medium farmers

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

THE state government will launch CLAP (Clean Andhra Pradesh) Jagananna Swaccha Sankalpam programme on July 8 marking the birth anniversary of former chief minister Y S Rajasekhara Reddy.

During a review on Swaccha Sankalpam, YSR Jala Kala, Jal Jeevan Mission, Jagananna Palu Velugu and construction of roads in villages at camp office here on Thursday, the Chief Minister said sanitation in rural and urban areas is very important and directed the officials to ensure no sewage in the villages and added that focus should be laid on slums. He also stressed the need of sewage pumping and disposing of the water safely. Sewage water must be sent to treatment plants, he said and added that an SOP be prepared on how to dispose of solid waste. He asked them to administer vaccination to sanitary



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy reviewing Jagananna Swaccha Sankalpam, YSR Jala Kala and other related programmes at his camp office on Thursday

workers in village panchayats and municipalities and provide additional uniforms, gloves, masks and coats. The cleanliness programmes should be conducted with the motto 'We shall make our village clean'.

The Chief Minister said maintenance of e-vehicles being procured to collect garbage should not be a burden to the government and added that priority be given to sanitation, drinking water and street lights in villages and more funds should be spent on these aspects. He said municipal department should work along with panchayat raj for sanitation in villages and towns as a part of Clean Andhra Pradesh. The officials said 100 days sanitation drive will start from May 1 in the state.

It has been decided to lay two lakh borewells and distribute 1.5 lakh pumpsets benefitting 3 lakh small and medium farmers and

irrigating an estimated area of 5 lakh acre under YSR Jala Kala scheme.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to prepare an SOP to fix a date for laying borewell after the farmer has applied for it. Borewell should be laid at any cost on the fixed date, he said and added that electricity connection and pumpset should be fixed within one month of drilling the borewell. He instructed that pump sets should be provided to the farmers who have laid borewells on their own. Rules should be relaxed on depth of borewells and geologists should test the soil and dig deep till water is found. He has set a target of laying at least 20 borewells per month in each constituency.

He ordered inclusion of Jagananna colonies and give priority in rural drinking water supply scheme. He directed the officials to focus on source, storage and

supply of water. He said to prepare an accurate action plan as water usage will be more in summer. He said tanks should be cleaned periodically and added that a protocol be prepared for cleaning tanks.

He said usage of LED street lights will benefit around Rs 160 crore annually and added that four lakh lights are required for the state.

The Chief Minister said 30,000 km BT roads were available for the last 30 years and construction of 10,000 km highways has started after YSRCP formed government.

Panchayat raj minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy, energy minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy, panchayat raj commissioner Girija Shankar, energy secretary Nagulapalli Srikanth, municipal administration special chief secretary Y Sri Lakshmi and other officials were present.

Intermediate exams as per schedule, asserts Minister



Minister for Education Audimulapu Suresh addressing a press conference at R&B Building in Vijayawada on Thursday

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIJAYAWADA

EDUCATION minister Audimulapu Suresh made it clear that there will be no change in the schedule of Intermediate examinations, which will be held from May 5, duly following the Covid protocol ensuring safety for every student.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, the minister said that the examinations will take place from May 5 to 19, for which 1,452 examination centres have been arranged across the state and the students can down-

load their hall tickets from 6 pm on Thursday (April 29). The minister said that Inter examinations were very important for the future of the students, as these certificates are quite essential in future. He assured that students and their parents need not worry about the conduct of the exams, as strict preventive measures will be taken at every centre.

He stated that East Godavari district has the highest number of 146 examination centres while Guntur district has 60 examination centres. A Covid special officer has been appointed for each district and all the test centres would

- Education Minister reiterates that all Covid protocols will be followed
- A special officer is appointed for each district and all the exam centres will be sanitised daily
- Says students will suffer in future if they are given pass certificate without holding exams
- Special supplementary exams will be conducted for students who tested positive

be sanitised every day.

Besides, even thermal scanning was set up at each test centre, ensuring student safety.

The minister clarified that the state government is responsible for the future and safety of the students and stated that If only the pass is given in the certificates without conducting the examinations, students will suffer in future.

He also said the government will conduct special supplementary examinations for students suffering from Covid-19 and added that the students would have to submit coronavirus positive certificate.

He assured that the BIE will give their results on par with regular students. He urged the students who tested positive not to attend the exams.

Inter Board all set for exams

Students with Covid symptoms will write exams in a separate room

10,32,469 students will appear for the examinations at 1,452 centres

HANS NEWS SERVICE
GUNTUR

BOARD of Intermediate Education made all the arrangements to conduct Intermediate Public Examinations-2021 from May 5 to 23 at 1,452 examination centres in the state.

The examinations will be held from 9 am to 12 pm. The exam centres have been increased by 41 examination this year compared to last year.

According to BIE secretary V Rama Krishna, 10,32,469 students, including 5,12,959 first year stu-

dents and 5,19,510 second year students will appear for the examinations.

One Covid-19 special officer has been appointed for each district. Arrangements have been made for the students having Covid-19 symptoms at the examination centre. Thermal screening will be done to the students at the entrance of the examination centre. Invigilators will be supplied with masks, PPE kits, sanitiser to discharge their duties at separate Covid room where students with symptoms will write their exams.

No physical hall tickets will be issued this year. Hall tickets for theory examination can be downloaded by all colleges from 'bie.ap.gov.in' website from 8 pm on April 29. Hall tickets will be issued with QR codes which contain information of the candidate. For the convenience of the students, IPE examination centre locator app was developed which will work in Android mobile phones. Precautions are taken to avoid malpractices like copying, keeping forbidden material out side and inside, etc., Cell phones and electronic gadgets will not be allowed into the examination centre. The examination functionaries, students whoever found responsible for any sort of malpractice in the examination, will be liable for punishment. .

AP sees over 14K fresh cases, 57 fatalities

AMARAVATI

THE state logged 14,792 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours ending 9 am on Thursday, taking the tally to 10,84,336, while 57 fatalities pushed the toll to 7928, the state government said.

The state has 1, 14,158 active cases and over 86,000 samples were tested during the last 24 hrs. As many as 8,188 people recovered from the disease, pushing the total recoveries to 9,62,250, an official bulletin said. Anapatur, Vizianagaram and West Godavari topped the toll chart with seven casualties each followed by East Godavari with six.

Hospital booked for diverting Remdesivir

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIZIANAGARAM

The vigilance and enforcement officials booked a private hospital for diverting Remdesivir injections. The vigilance officials raided Queens NRI hospital on Wednesday night and found that Remdesivir, used in Covid treatment, was diverted and sold for higher prices. I Town inspector K Murali said they had received many complaints from patients on the misuse of the Remdesivir and black marketing. Hospital director A Ramesh and a practising physician Dr A Vivek were questioned and a case was registered, he said.

Facebook makes 'mistake' in blocking #ResignModi posts

Continued from P1

The Modi government has drawn a lot of flak in domestic and international media for handling of the second wave of Covid infections, which on Thursday crossed the 1.8-crore mark. India reported 3,79,257 new Covid-19 cases and 3,645 new deaths - the deadliest day so far for any country hit by the pandemic.

The US government has told its citizens to leave India as soon as possible. Social media timelines are filled with SOS calls with people looking for oxygen cylinders, medicines, hospital beds, plasma donors and ventilators. Organisations across the spectrum have come forward to support the fight against the Covid pandemic. Just a few days back, Twitter and other social media platforms removed about 100 posts and URLs after the government asked them to remove content that was critical of the handling of the current medical crisis or spreading fake news around the pandemic.

Reports citing Lumen database, an independent research project studying cease and desist letters concerning online content, suggested that more than 50 posts - including those by a Member of Parliament, MLA and filmmakers - were removed by Twitter on government request. Government sources had said the social media platforms were asked to remove the posts and URLs (uniform resource locators) to "prevent obstructions in the fight against the pandemic" and "disruption of public order due to the said posts. They had added that the order was issued in view of the misuse of social media platforms by certain users to spread fake or misleading information and create panic about the pandemic in the society "by using unrelated, old and out of the context images or visuals, communally sensitive posts and misinformation about Covid-19 protocols".

Army opening hospitals possible, Army chief informs PM

Continued from P1

On April 27 in Ranchi, in response to the requisition for medical assistance sought by the state government, the Military Hospital in Namkum opened a 50-bed Covid care facility for the local people. The modalities of setting up the facility were discussed by a team of Army officers led by the GOC, Cockerel Division, with Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren.

On April 29, the Indian Army established a dedicated Covid facility at the Old Command Hospital complex in Pune where substantial capacity

has been created for treating the local people referred by the district medical officer.

The facility has a dedicated team of Army doctors and paramedical staff to take care of Covid patients. This is in addition to the assistance provided by the Army for opening a 900-bed hospital in Ahmedabad, and a 100-bed isolation facility in Barmer, Rajasthan. The force is making similar efforts at multiple locations in Madhya Pradesh, under which a 150-bed facility in Bhopal and two 40-bed facilities in Gwalior and Saugor have been established.

Chardham Yatra postponed amid Covid surge

Continued from P1

Kedarnath is slated to open at 5 am on May 17, Badrinath at 4:15 am on May 18, Yamunotri at 12:15 pm on May 14 and Gangotri on 7:30 am on May 15.

Only priests will be allowed to perform daily prayers at the shrines and not devotees. Though opening on schedule, no pilgrim neither from inside the state nor from outside will be allowed to visit the temples," said Uttarakhanda Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat.

Covid-19 cases have been rising drastically in Uttarakhanda as in various other states. They hit a new high in the State on Wednesday with 6,054 people testing positive and 108 succumbing to the virus.

Cabinet meet deferred, why not exams, questions Lokesh

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

TDP national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Thursday asked why the Jagan Mohan Reddy government was not postponing the examinations when it had deferred the Cabinet meeting in view of the Covid second wave threat.

Lokesh demanded the Chief Minister to explain whether the lives of lakhs of students were not as important as the lives of the 30 ministers in his Cabinet. There would be scope for holding Cabinet with physical distance between the ministers but it would be difficult to do so for lakhs of students at thousands of examination centres, he said.

In a statement here, the TDP MLC termed it as unjustifiable on the part of the government to stick to its decision despite widespread appeals from the students



- Says CM postponed Cabinet meet and Tirupati public meet earlier in view of Covid situation but is adamant in going ahead with SSC and Inter exams
- Atchanna demands Secretariat employees be allowed to work from home as already 8 members have fallen prey to pandemic

and the parents for the postponement of exams. The ministers should explain why their govern-

ment 'inhuman', he alleged that the government was stifling the voice of opposition leaders by foisting false cases. He said he attended the CID questioning following the orders of AP High Court.



Former Minister and TDP senior leader Devineni Uma Meshawarao arriving at CID office in Mangalagiri on Thursday

former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday expressed shock over the death of former MLA and TTD ex Chairman Kagita Venkatrao after a brief illness. Party president N Chandrababu Naidu conveyed his condolences to the bereaved family members and recalled how Venkata Rao always made himself available for resolving the problems of the people in his constituency. As the former MLA of Pedana constituency, late Venkata Rao has made memorable contributions for its overall development, he said in a statement.

Tight race in WB, BJP ahead in Assam: Exit polls

NEW DELHI

EXIT polls on Thursday forecast a tight contest between the incumbent Trinamool Congress and the BJP in the high-profile West Bengal assembly polls, while the ruling Left combine was projected to retain power in Kerala and so was the case for the saffron party in Assam.

However, exit polls projected DMK-led opposition alliance as a winner in Tamil Nadu, while

the Congress-led alliance was seen losing the neighbouring Puducherry by some pollsters.

As the first exit polls began getting telecast soon after the eight-phase elections ended in West Bengal, the ruling TMC was seen in a tight contest with the BJP in assembly polls for the politically important state, while projections for the neighbouring Assam gave a clear edge to the BJP-led alliance over the Congress-led opposition.

In West Bengal, the Republic-CNX polls gave the BJP a slight edge by projecting 138-148 seats for the party in the 294-seat assembly and 128-138 to the TMC. However, Times Now-C Voter predicted a clear majority for the TMC by projecting 162 seats for the party and 115 for the BJP.

In Assam, India Today-Axis My India predicted 75-85 seats in the 126-member assembly and 40-50 to the Congress-led opposition. Today's Chanakya

predicted 70 seats for the saffron alliance and 56 for the Congress-led opposition. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the ruling Left combine and the DMK-led opposition alliance respectively were projected ahead of their respective rivals. Jan Ki Baat exit polls, however, predicted a strong majority for the BJP in West Bengal, giving it 162-185 seats, against 104-121 to the ruling TMC. (PTI)



People spend sleepless night as 20 aftershocks jolt Assam

GUWAHATI

PEOPLE of central and northern Assam spent a sleepless night on Wednesday as 20 aftershocks continued till Thursday afternoon after the powerful earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale jolted the state, causing damages to many buildings and injuring 10 persons.

According to the National Centre for Seismology (NCS), the powerful quake which first shook Sonitpur in northern Assam at 7.51 a.m. on Wednesday, were also felt in North Bengal, other northeastern states including Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, neighbouring Bhutan and Bangladesh.

The NCS data said that after the main quake at a depth of 17 km from the surface, 20 aftershocks of magnitude 2.3 to 4.7 on the Richter scale were recorded on Wednesday and Thursday (until 4.17 p.m. on Thursday) in the vicinity of Sonitpur, Nagaon, Morigaon districts.

The disaster management officials in Guwahati said that there are reports of damage to buildings, roads and some other infrastructure in different parts of Sonitpur, Tezpur, Nagaon, Morigaon and adjoining areas.

At least 10 persons were in-



jured in Darrang, Kamrup Metro, Nagaon and Sonitpur districts.

The official said that several apartments, buildings and hotels developed cracks. Electricity and gas supply were disrupted in some places.

An official statement of the Assam State Disaster Management

Authority said that detailed damage assessment is going on in coordination with various agencies including Fire and Essential Services, state and national disaster response forces and the experts from Assam Engineering College led by Professor Jayanta Pathak.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and DoNER (Development of North Eastern Region) Minister Jitendra Singh spoke to Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and assured all possible help.

Immediately after the tremors were felt, Sonowal rushed to Dhekiajuli, 140 km north of Guwahati, to assess the situation and announced financial assistance for those injured in the tremor.

Successive earthquakes in the mountainous northeastern states, especially in Assam, Mizoram and Manipur, have made the authorities worried.

The northeastern states, especially Mizoram, frequently witness mild to moderate earthquakes that force the public and private builders to construct quake resistant houses.

Seismologists consider the mountainous northeastern region as the sixth most earthquake-prone belt in the world. In 1950, an earthquake measuring 8.7 on the Richter scale had altered the course of the mighty Brahmaputra river, which passes by the Guwahati city. (IANS)

Pak's Khewra rock salt to be registered with international trade bodies

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD

PAKISTAN could take the lead in the global salt trade as the local rock salt of Khewra in Punjab province is set to be registered with international trade bodies that will prevent Indian traders to market Pakistani rock salt as Himalayan Pink Salt, according to a media report on Thursday. Pakistan Minerals Development Corporation (PMDC), designated by the Cabinet as the registrant agency for rock salt produced in the country, has finalised requirements for registration of rock salt with the Geographical Indications (GI) registry, under the management and control of Intellectual Property Organisation of Pakistan (IPO-Pakistan).

After the registration with IPO-Pakistan, the country will file for registration at foreign markets which will prevent Indian traders to market Pakistani rock salt as Himalayan Pink Salt, the Dawn News reported. The GI rules were formulated in January this year in the country that had been pending for around two decades, but traders from India took advantage of the vacuum and applied for GI tagging of Basmati rice in the European Union, claiming that it was an agricultural produce of India, the report said.

The PMDC Managing Director (retired Brig.) M Iqbal Malik said Pakistan has branded the Khewra salt as "Pink Rock Salt" and its specifications were being finalised. "Currently, rock salt was neither a lucrative commodity for exports nor was Pakistan selling the rock salt as a commercial and industrial product," he said, adding, "soon after the GI tagging



at international markets, Pakistan will be in a position to sign long term sale contracts with buyers abroad."

Incidentally the term, Himalayan Pink Salt has been used by Indian traders for global marketing of rock salt mined from Khewra, however, after trade of non-essential items with India was suspended around two years back, salt exports to India were also suspended.

Since, there is no sale policy regarding rock salt, most of the rock salt was exported in rock form to the Middle East. A Karachi-based salt trader Ahmed Khan said there is a very high global demand for rock salt, not only as table salt but even as a healing agent by massage centres of Korea and Thailand to other industrial usages. He claimed that salt bought by Indian traders in the UAE was re-exported in small and attractive packs at a very high price to the European Union, the US and even the far East, with labels showing that this salt was a product of the Indian Himalayas. (PTI)

Farmer unions ready to discuss agri laws: Tikait

CHANDIGARH

BHARATIYA Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait on Thursday said the farmer unions are ready to discuss the three contentious agri laws with the Centre whenever it wants to resume talks but asserted the discussion would have to be about repealing the legislation.

Addressing a farmers' panchayat in Prem Nagar village in Haryana's Bhiwani district, he said the farmers have to carry on with their agitating for long, but they would "certainly not return to their homes without a victory". Haryana BKU chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni accused the government of failing to deal with the COVID-19 situation and said, "Those patients who do not get oxygen or beds in hospitals should be taken to the homes

of the BJP MPs and MLAs."

Tikait, who has in recent months addressed a series of farmers' gatherings across Haryana, said the tillers have been agitating for more than five months near various borders of the national capital. "The fight will go on for long, for how many months one doesn't know. But one thing is confirmed that farmers won't return without winning it," he said.

Tikait also said the agitation has got support from people around the country, that includes traders, youth and other sections. Tikait told the gathering that the protesting farmers will continue the agitation peacefully till the time their demands are met. He urged the villagers to form small committees to strengthen the agitation. Cautioning them about the coronavirus pandemic, he asked the vil-



lagers to follow all COVID-related protocols like wearing masks, following social distancing norms and maintaining hygiene.

Slamming the government on the pres-

ent COVID situation, Chaduni said, "What has the government been doing for the last one year? People are dying due to shortage of oxygen and beds." About the ongoing farmers' agitation, he alleged that more than 300 farmers have died but the government is adopting an adamant attitude. "We will not return to our homes, whether it takes five months or five years."

He also attacked the ruling dispensation in the state, saying the Manohar Lal Khattar government has failed to build a medical college even when the Prem Nagar village panchayat had given their land for setting up the institute. "Had the medical college been built it would have helped in corona times. But they do not have a budget for such things," Chaduni said. (PTI)

NCW launches 24/7 WhatsApp helpline for pregnant women

NEW DELHI

THE National Commission for Women (NCW) has launched a WhatsApp helpline number for providing medical assistance to expectant mothers from across the country.

In a statement on Thursday, the NCW said it has noticed that pregnant women have been facing difficulty in accessing medical aid, therefore, it has decided to launch a message-only helpline service in addition to the already-operational email ID. "Expectant mothers from across the country can reach out to the Commission through its helpline number-- 9354954224-- which will be functional round-the-clock. "A dedicated team at the Commission is looking after speedy redressal of grievances received from pregnant women regarding procuring of emergency medical help. The Commission can also be reached out on the email ID helpatncw@gmail.com," it said. (PTI)

Domestic travel bans can spike Covid-19 cases: Researchers

A new study using data from India and five other countries finds that using domestic travel bans to control Covid-19 infections may be inadvisable.

Depending on their duration, these restrictions can lead to more rather than fewer infections overall, especially when there is a large urban-rural migrant population, it indicated.

As India battles a severe second wave of Covid-19, state governments are once again faced with the question: Should they use travel bans to control disease transmission?

In the first wave of Covid-19, most states chose this option. The hardships faced by migrant workers prevented from returning home to their villages were seen as a necessary sacrifice to reduce the spread of disease into rural India.

In the second wave, the Delhi government has urged migrants not to leave. Other cities may follow suit.

A new research paper by academics at the University of Chicago suggests that imposing travel bans can counter-intuitively increase the total spread of the disease, creating a lose-lose situation.



This outcome occurs when a country has a large migrant population that is prevented from leaving an urban hotspot and returning to rural areas. The researchers show that if the net effect of a travel ban is to delay the movement of these people, rather than prevent it entirely, the policy can lead to more cases overall.

The paper uses detailed data on rural-urban migration, travel ban policies, and Covid-19 cases to show that this lose-lose outcome occurred in India during the first wave, due to travel bans imposed

on migrants wishing to leave Mumbai.

Elaborating on the findings, Anant Sudarshan, South Asia Director of The Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago and one of the study authors, said: "The national lockdown in the first wave trapped millions of migrants inside big cities like Mumbai that were fast-growing coronavirus hotspots."

"Eventually people were able to leave, but variations in government policy meant that the length of time they were detained depended on where they wanted

to go. In the case of rural districts where people could return quicker -- using the Shramik Special Trains for example -- cases rose modestly at the destination.

"But for those areas where bans were in effect longer, there was a much more intensive increase in coronavirus, likely because the returning population was now more likely to be infected, having been trapped in the hotspot longer."

Apart from Mumbai, the paper further analyses data from five other countries where migration is prevalent -- China, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa, and Kenya.

Together these countries comprise roughly 40 per cent of the global population and all of them had initial outbreaks in a few hotspot locations.

The researchers used epidemiological data, migration data, and information on travel bans from all these countries to show that although exceptionally long bans may work to reduce total cases, moderate durations are associated with significant increases in disease spread.

Fiona Burlig, Assistant Professor at the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of

Urban Indians endorse introduction of 'vaccine passports'

NEW DELHI

MOST urban Indians and global citizens endorse the introduction of Covid-19 vaccine passports for citizens for travel and other purposes, including visiting events and commercial places, showed a WEF-Ipsos survey.

A "Vaccine Passport" is a record or health data certificate that would carry information about whether a person has been inoculated or has tested negative for Covid-19. The information would be accessible electromagnetically, on mobile apps, or as printed documents or cards.

An Ipsos statement said that an overwhelming majority of urban Indians and global citizens favour Covid-19 Vaccine Passports for citizens to aid in different ways. Around 78 per cent global citizens and 84 per cent Indians support the use of the vaccine passports for entering any country. Around 73 per cent global citizens and 82 per cent urban Indians agree that the passports would be important for making travel & large events safe.

As many as 67 per cent global citizens and 82 per cent

urban Indians agree that the passports should be used for entry at large public places, like concert halls and stadiums. Further 1 in 2 global citizens agree and 78 per cent urban Indians want that such documents should be needed for visiting shops, restaurants & offices.

In fact, at least 81 per cent of urban Indians polled foresee vaccine passports becoming a reality by the end of the year. Two third of global citizens (66 per cent) too expect positive outcomes with the vaccine passport decree.

"Covid-19 Vaccine Passports or Health Certificates will provide the best safety measure to citizens, to usher in normalcy. Majority of urban Indians advocate its implementation and global citizens too," said Amit Adarkar, CEO of Ipsos India.

"After mass vaccination and testing, certification should be the next logical step. Such resounding popular support suggests an overwhelming desire of people to return to a sense of normalcy. Vaccine passports could be a good enabler to overcome vaccine hesitancy," he added. (IANS)

Chicago, one of the co-authors of the study, adds: "The evidence indicates that if the duration of a travel ban is not long enough, we may end up imposing hardship on people while perversely

seeing more spread of infection. "Getting the duration wrong is easy because it is not possible to predict in advance what the optimal length should be, and in a democracy, such restrictions

cannot be easily sustained. There may be merit in letting people go home early, and indeed encouraging them to do so, rather than forcing them to stay." (IANS)

TODAY'S QUOTE

Private sector key driver of country's growth

“The private sector of the country has to be the key driver of growth. Earlier, the public sector used to drive the growth engine, but not now. India needs to speed up growth rates to at least eight per cent to address the issues of reduction of poverty.

— **Rajiv Kumar, Vice-chairman, Niti Aayog**



GDP

US sees 6.4% annualised growth rate

The US economy grew at a brisk 6.4 per cent annual rate last quarter - a show of strength fuelled by government aid and declining viral cases that could drive further gains as the nation rebounds with unusual speed from the pandemic recession, a report from US Commerce Department

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	74.78	South	
Euro	90.68	African Rand	5.99
UAE Dirham	20.76	Hong Kong Dollar	10.97
Thai Baht	2.61	Japanese Yen	0.78
British Pound	104.31	New Zealand Dollar	54.29
Australian Dollar	58.28	Saudi Riyal	21.71
Canadian Dollar	60.79	Swedish Krona	10.2
Swiss Franc	82.29	Singapore Dollar	56.98

DELHI FRIDAY 30 APRIL 2021

BIZ BRIEFS

Axis launches new fund

Axis Mutual Fund has announced the launch of their new fund Axis Healthcare ETF. The new fund offers (NFO), which will open on Friday (April 30), will allow access to investors in the healthcare sector and suitable for investors who are seeking, long-term wealth creation solution through targeted sectoral exposure to the healthcare sector and seeks to track returns by investing in a basket of Nifty Healthcare Index stocks with an aim to achieve returns. Chandresh Kumar Nigam, MD, CEO, Axis AMC, said: "Our ETF strategy relies on offering highly innovative yet reliable products to our target investors and the launch of Axis Healthcare ETF continues to take forward our endeavour to build up our passive product suite."

ZEE5's new offer

ZEE5 with ZEEplex has announced a special radhe combo offer to make Salman Khan's Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai movie accessible to the masses. The special one-year offer is available at an attractive price of Rs 499. The viewers can watch the film of 2021 on ZEE5 with ZEEplex, starting May 13. The combo offer will allow consumers to watch ZEE5 originals, movies, TV shows, live TV, ALTBalaji shows, Zindagi TV shows, kids content for one year. Manish Kalra, Chief Business Officer, ZEE5 India, said: "Salman Khan's films are thorough family entertainers which appeal to audiences across demographics. Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai is one of the biggest releases of the year and we are proud to launch this on ZEE5 in a multi-format model."

Vivo expands V series

Vivo has expanded V series with the launch of all new Vivo V21 in India. The smartphone features a 44MP front camera with OIS which is combined with Electronic Image Stabilization (EIS), AI extreme night, autofocus and a ground-breaking dual LED light sensor, creating a software-hardware synergy to capture clearer selfies and high-quality videos anytime. The V21 will be available in three colours. The product is priced from Rs 29,990 and will go on sale starting May 6. Nipun Marya, Director Brand Strategy, vivo India, said: "The Vivo V-Series has received a tremendous response from the consumers, Taking the legacy forward, we are proud to introduce vivo V21 which features the world's first 44MP OIS front camera!"

UFO's new initiative

UFO Moviez India Ltd. (UFO) and The Collective Artists Network Pvt. Ltd have entered into a partnership to offer influencer marketing, branded content, and social media solutions to brands across the country. As a part of this association, the companies will offer end-to-end social media and branded content solutions to a wide base of local and global brands across India. The optimum use of their networks will mean a steady growth trajectory for both the companies to withstand slump. Vijay Subramaniam, Group CEO, Co-Founder, The Collective Artists Network, said: "We have been frontline advisors to corporate India for over a decade. With Big Bang Social, we will also be introducing content marketing and influencer management to industries that did not have access to the required resources."

RAMPING UP COVAXIN PRODUCTION THROUGH BSL-3

BHARAT BIOTECH SET TO ACHIEVE 700 MN DOSES

At present, the company has four BSL-3 facilities - two in Hyderabad and two in Bengaluru

ROHIT VAID
NEW DELHI

BIOTECHNOLOGY major Bharat Biotech's BSL-3 (Biosafety Level-3) facilities will play a pivotal role in empowering the company's plans to ramp-up production of India's first indigenously developed Covid-19 vaccine.

Accordingly, the biotechnology major plans to produce 700 million doses of Covaxin per annum. The vaccine is regarded as one of the safest in the world and highly efficient against the UK, SA, Brazilian and the new Indian double mutant strain of Covid-19 virus. In a conversation with IANS, Krishna Ella, Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Biotech International said the capacity expansion process has been initiated across multiple facilities since early 2021.

Presently, the company manufactures 20 million doses per month of Covaxin which are supplied to the Ministry of Health for the national vaccine rollout. "Manufacturing scale up has been carried out in a stepwise manner across multiple facilities at Hyderabad, and Bangalore," he said.



Manufacturing scale up has been carried out in a stepwise manner across multiple facilities



"Inactivated vaccines, while highly safe, are extremely complex and expensive to manufacture, resulting in lower yields when compared to live virus vaccines." Notably, Bharat Biotech is able to expand Covaxin manufacturing capacity mainly due to the availability of four new specially designed BSL-3 facilities.

In industry parlance, a BSL-3 facility is equipped to safely handle infectious biological pathogens in the highest stringent environmentally controlled manufacturing facility.

At present, the company has four BSL-3 facilities - two in Hyderabad

and two in Bengaluru. "These facilities have been repurposed due to a strong pre-existing expertise in development of viral vaccines and know-how applied to manufacture, test and release the highly purified inactivated viral vaccine." The company has recently entered into a 'Master Collaborative Agreement' (MCA) with CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (CSIR-IICT), to collaborate on the development of novel platform technologies in developing a synthetic process route for adjuvant molecule 'TLR 7/8' for Covaxin.

Bharat Biotech uses a proprietary

adjuvant Algel-IMDG, that has now proven to be a safe and effective adjuvant, especially to stimulate memory T cell responses. The synthesis and manufacture of the IMDG component has been successfully indigenised and will be manufactured at commercial scale within the country. This is the first instance where a novel adjuvant has been commercialised in India. Besides, the company has secured long term components, packing materials and single use consumables supplies for the manufacturing ramp-up. To further increase bulk capacity Bharat Biotech has entered into agreements with Indian Immunologicals (IIL) to manufacture the drug substance for Covaxin. "The technology transfer process is well underway and IIL has adequate capabilities to manufacture inactivated viral vaccines at commercial scale and under required 'GMP' standard."

"We are also looking forward to getting into manufacturing partnerships in other countries." Currently, Covaxin has received 'Emergency Use Authorisations' in several countries across the globe with another 60 in process.

Mkts rise for 4th day, end higher on the F&O expiry

MUMBAI

THE Sensex and Nifty notched up gains for the fourth consecutive session on Thursday as monthly derivatives expired amid a largely positive trend in global equities after the US Fed reiterated its dovish stance.

A strengthening rupee also bolstered investors' sentiment, analysts said. After touching the 50,000-mark in opening trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex pared some gains before ending at 49,765.94, up 32.10 points or 0.06 per cent. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty advanced 30.35 points or 0.20 per cent to 14,894.90.

Bajaj Finserv was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying 6.60 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, Reliance Industries, IndusInd Bank, Dr Reddy's and Sun Pharma. On the other hand, HDFC, HCL Tech, Bajaj Auto, L&T, SBI and M&M were among the major laggards, dropping up to 1.76 per cent. "The domestic market was torn between negatives and positives on volatile trade owing to the monthly F&O expiry. The Fed in its meeting sealed economic confidence by keeping its monetary policy loose and reaffirming aggressive support through bond buying. "Metal stocks continue to outshine



A strengthening rupee bolsters investors' sentiment

other sectors on strong outlook," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. Sector-wise, BSE metal, basic materials, energy, oil and gas and healthcare indices ended up to 5.23 per cent higher, while auto, telecom, capital goods and consumer durables finished in the red.

In the broader markets, the BSE midcap index slipped 0.18 per cent, while the smallcap gauge inched up 0.13 per cent up. Meanwhile, India saw a record single-day rise of 3,79,257 new coronavirus infections, pushing the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 1,83,76,524, while active cases crossed the 30-lakh mark, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday. Global markets extended their gains after the US Federal Reserve maintained rates at near zero and continued its bond-buying programme, with Fed Chair Jerome Powell saying it was too early to consider rolling back support measures to boost economic recovery.

MSN LABS LAUNCHES FAVILOW TO FIGHT COVID

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

HYDERABAD-BASED MSN Laboratories Pvt. Ltd. (MSN Labs) has announced the launch of its branded generic, Favilow 800 mg to address the shortage of the antiviral drug, Favipiravir to treat mild and moderate Covid-19 cases. The stronger Favilow 800 mg is priced at Rs 144 per tablet and will be available across pharmacies. The field team of MSN Labs is also helping out with free home delivery in over 170 cities in coordination with local retail chemists for patient convenience.

Dr MSN Reddy, CMD, MSN Group said, "In the light of increasing Covid-19 cases in India, affordable treatment options are the need of the hour to flatten the curve. We are sure that our product Favilow 800 would help support the nation's efforts in overcoming the Covid crisis." MSN had launched the world's most affordable branded generic of Favipiravir, Favilow, in August last year, in the strengths of 200 and 400 mg. MSN claims the higher strength will improve patient compliance and experience by effectively reducing the number of tablets a patient requires per day.

Hyderabad crowdfunds Covid victims ₹2 cr

Covid-19 fundraising on ImpactGuru.com has started again in full swing amidst the pandemic

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD



THE second Covid wave has been more devastating than the former and it is only together that we can beat this crisis. During the month of April 2021, ImpactGuru.com has been able to raise over Rs 2 crore for several patients diagnosed with coronavirus and hospitalised across Hyderabad.

Covid-19 fundraising efforts on ImpactGuru.com, have started again in full swing amidst the pandemic. Amongst the crowdfunding cases on ImpactGuru, is that of a patient suffering from Covid, currently undergoing treatment at a multi-specialty hospital in Hyderabad.

The patient is in a very critical condition and the doctors have advised for an ECMO treatment, Rs

2 lakh per day, in addition to other hospital expenses.

The patient's 3-year-old twin babies are also awaiting their Covid test reports. Further, the patient's extended family are also getting hospitalised as even they have been tested positive for Covid. In 3 days, 700+ donors have come forward and contributed over Rs 15 lakh on ImpactGuru, for this case. Crowdfunding has been a pillar in raising funds for the Covid affected. It is an alternative method of raising funds online for medical expenses, with the patient primarily relying on social media networks to mobilize donors to finance the relevant medical bills.

Financial Results: Sebi eases norms, gives time to cos

NEW DELHI

EASING compliance requirements amid the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, Sebi on Thursday gave a 45-day relaxation for companies to file their fourth-quarter results as well as an additional one-month time to submit their annual results. The move comes after the regulator received representations from listed entities, industry associations and market participants requesting extension of timelines for various filings and relaxation from certain compliance obligations due to the second Covid wave and restrictions

imposed by various states. With respect to quarterly financial results, companies have been given 45 days till June 30, 2021 to file their March quarter results, Sebi said in a circular. Under the rules, firms are required to file their financial results within 45 days from the end of a quarter.

Rikarica launches EV charging platform

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD



RIKARICA, a Hyderabad-based startup, has launched its operations in the country with GenNext electric vehicle charging solutions. The startup provided its cutting-edge solutions via more than 50 charging stations across different parts of Maharashtra and will be starting its operations in Telangana. The company tested its Open Charge Point Protocol (OCCP)-compliant system with numerous vendors as part of the OCCP Plugfest 2021 and delivered 100 per cent success rate with regard to the customer satisfaction. "By 2025 we can see nearly 800 per cent jump in EVs in India and to meet the need already over 2,600 stations have been sanctioned under FAME- II.

Gold demand bounces back, up 37% in Jan-Mar

MUMBAI

INDIA'S gold demand recovered during the January-March period to witness a growth of 37 per cent at 140 tonne compared to the same quarter of 2020, due to ease of Covid-related restrictions, pent up demand and softening of prices of the yellow metal, according to the World Gold Council (WGC).

The overall gold demand stood at 102 tonne during the first quarter of 2020, as per WGC data. Gold demand in value terms increased by 57 per cent during the first quarter of this calendar year to Rs 58,800 crore compared to Rs 37,580 crore in the corresponding period of 2020. Total jewellery demand was up by 39 per cent at 102.5 tonne compared to 73.9 tonnes during January-March 2020. In terms of value,

jewellery demand grew by 58 per cent to Rs 43,100 crore from Rs 27,230 crore in the same quarter of last year. Investment demand for the quarter under review increased by 34 per cent to 37.5 tonne in comparison with 28.1 tonne in the same period of 2020, while in value terms it was up by 53 per cent at Rs 15,780 crore from Rs 10,350 crore during January-March of last year. Total gold recycled in the country witnessed a drop of 20 per cent during the first quarter of this calendar year at 14.8 tonne compared to 18.5 tonne in the same quarter of 2020.

Net bullion imports in India during January-March 2021 stood at 301 tonne compared to 83.1 tonne in the corresponding period of last year, an increase of 262 per cent. "India's first quarter of CY 2021 gold demand rose



37 per cent to 140 tonne on the back of Covid containment and positive sentiment following the start of the vaccination programme. "A combination of softening gold prices to around Rs 47,000 per 10 grams, buoying consumer sentiment following sharp pick-up in economic activity and return of social activities

Gold demand in value terms increased by 57 per cent during the first quarter of this calendar year to Rs 58,800 crore compared to Rs 37,580 crore in the corresponding period of 2020

like weddings supported a 39 per cent growth year-on-year (YoY) in gold jewellery demand at 102.5 tonne," WGC Managing Director, India, Somasundaram PR told PTI here. The average domestic gold price of Rs 47,131 per 10 gram was 14 per cent higher YoY but 6 per cent lower quarter-on-quarter and 16 per cent lower

than the August 2020 peak of Rs 56,000, he noted. "Slide in gold prices below Rs 50,000 removed a psychological barrier for the consumers and spurred bargain buying and wedding-related accumulation, releasing pent-up demand. Indian retail gold investment demand also improved for a third consecutive quarter. Bar and coin demand grew 34 per cent YoY, the strongest first quarter in India since 2015," he pointed out.

Further, he said, a reduction in customs duty on gold, together with an appreciating rupee throughout much of the quarter, also helped lower prices and presented significant buying opportunities for retail investors. Robust consumer demand, combined with stock building among the trade ahead of key festivals, including Akshaya Tritiya

in May, were the primary drivers of the strong rise in imports, Somasundaram said. "The outlook for the coming quarter is, however, cautious. As lockdowns are re-imposed in various regions of the country in response to rising Covid-19 cases, consumer confidence has dipped. This is likely to impact wedding demand in the second quarter," he said. Digital and omni-channel retail strategies developed over the last year by many players may cushion the drop unlike the second quarter of 2020, but the current crisis is beyond just economics and logistics, therefore, sentiment may be affected till large scale vaccination is achieved, he opined. "We are unable to quantify the impact on full year gold demand as we do not have sight of several critical factors currently at play," he added.

De Kock guides Mumbai to 7-wkt win over Rajasthan

NEW DELHI

OPENER Quinton de Kock roared back to form with a blistering 50-ball 70 as Mumbai Indians beat Rajasthan Royals by seven wickets in their IPL game here on Thursday.

Put in to bat, Rajasthan rode on 42 by skipper Sanju Samson and Jos Buttler's 41 to post a competitive 171 for four but their efforts were overshadowed by de Kock, who struck six fours and two maximums to complete the task in 18.3 overs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

Krunal Pandya also played a useful cameo, smashing 39 off 26 balls with the help of two fours and as many sixes. Mumbai openers Rohit Sharma (14) and de Kock put up 49 for the first wicket.

The South African fetched his first boundary, a cover drive, and then launched into left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman (1/37) for a four and a maximum. While Rohit played his trademark pull-shot to get a six in the fifth over.

De Kock hammered Chris Morris (2/33) for another maximum but Rohit perished in the sixth over, giving a dolly to Chetan Sakariya at mid-on. Leg-spinner Rahul Tewatia (0/30) conceded three boundaries in the seventh over, two by Suryakumar Yadav (16; 3x4) and one by de Kock, as Mumbai got 14 runs. However, Morris brought back Rajasthan by removing Surya, as Mumbai slipped to 83/2.

Krunal joined de Kock, who completed his half-century in 35 balls and then got a life. Krunal smashed a six over the sight-screen off Tewatia, in the 15th over, which fetched Mumbai 12 runs as they needed 41 runs from the last five overs.

De Kock and Krunal added 63 runs for the third wicket and brought the side closer to a win. A profligate Morris conceded 16 runs in the 18th over, as Kieron Pollard (16 not out) and de Kock took them on the cusp of a win.

Earlier, Samson blazed his way to 42 off 27 balls as Rajasthan Royals posted a competitive 171 for four. Put in to bat, Rajasthan openers Buttler (41 off 32) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (32 off 20) laid the foundation with their 66-run stand in 74 overs.

Buttler started with a first-ball boundary, a flick to the fine-leg fence. The Eng-

lishman then fetched his second four, off Jasprit Bumrah (1/15), a cheeky hit to the third man boundary. Jaiswal picked his first boundary in the third over off Trent Boult (1/37), a pull to the backward square-leg boundary.

Buttler, who got a life, then upped the ante. He took on off-spinner Jayant Yadav (0/37), hammering a four and then a maximum, in the fifth over.

Jaiswal too changed gears, as he struck a four and a maximum, his trademark pull-shot, off successive deliveries off pacer Nathan Coulter-Nile (0/35), as his team amassed 14 runs in the sixth over and raced to 47/0 after power-play. Buttler, who was in his elements, smashed Jayant for another six in the seventh over.

Buttler hit yet another maximum, this time off Rahul Chahar (2/33), but the leggie dismissed him the very next ball, stumped by de Kock.

Samson started with a boundary, a cut-shot and then

SCOREBOARD

Rajasthan Royals	
J Buttler st de Kock b R Chahar	.....41
Y Jaiswal c and b R Chahar	.....32
Sanju Samson b Boult	.....42
Shivam Dube c and b Bumrah	.....35
David Miller batting	.....7
Ryan Parag not out	.....8
Extras: (LB-2, W-3, NB-1)	.....6
Total: (For 4 wkts in 20 overs)	.....171
Fall of wkts: 66-1, 91-2, 148-3, 158-4	
Bowling: Trent Boult 4-0-37-1, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-15-1, Jayant Yadav 3-0-37-0, Nathan Coulter-Nile 4-0-35-0, Rahul Chahar 4-0-33-2, Krunal Pandya 1-0-12-0.	
Mumbai Indians	
R Sharma c C Sakariya b C Morris	.....14
Quinton de Kock not out	.....70
Suryakumar c J Buttler b C Morris	.....16
Krunal Pandya b Mustafizur	.....39
Kieron Pollard not out	.....16
Extras: (LB-15, W-2)	.....17
Total: (For 3 wkts in 18.3 overs)	.....172
Fall of Wickets: 49-1, 83-2, 146-3 Bowler: Chetan Sakariya 3-0-18-0, Jaydev Unadkat 4-0-33-0, Mustafizur Rahman 3-3-0-37-1, Chris Morris 4-0-33-2, Rahul Tewatia 3-0-30-0, Shivam Dube 1-0-6-0.	

hit two boundaries off Krunal Pandya in ninth over, in which RR got 12 runs. But Chahar struck again, this time removing Jaiswal, as he lobbed off a return catch. Shivam Dube (35 off 31 balls; 2x4, 2x6) and Samson, who hit five boundaries, added 57 runs for the third wicket, with the Mumbaikar playing some aggressive shots.

Samson also kept playing shots at will, as he hit two successive boundaries, in the 16th over off Boult, which fetched his team 14 runs. However, Boult cleaned up Samson in the 18th over and then Bumrah dismissed Dube in the penultimate over, as the Mumbai bowlers kept things tight in the last four overs. RR got 45 runs in the last five overs. (PTI)

Quinton de Kock of Mumbai Indians plays a shot during the IPL match against the Rajasthan Royals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi on Thursday



Shuttlers likely to travel to Malaysia for Oly qualifier via Qatar: BAI

NEW DELHI

TOP shuttlers, including Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth, are likely to leave for Malaysia and Singapore via Doha to participate in the last two Olympic qualifiers next month due to travel bans imposed by the two countries in the wake of unprecedented spike in COVID-19 cases in India, the BAI said on Thursday.

Former world number one Saina and Srikanth are racing against time to qualify for the Tokyo Games, especially after the India Open Super 500 (May 11-16) tournament was postponed due to the unprecedented second wave of the pandemic currently sweeping the national capital and the country.

Just two more Olympic qualifiers are remaining -- Malaysia Open (May 25-30) and Singapore Open (June 1-6) -- before the

fore the June 15 deadline and things look grim for Saina and Srikanth with Malaysia and Singapore deciding to temporarily impose travel bans from COVID-ravaged India.

However, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) said it is trying to work out a solution as direct travel to Malaysia and Singapore will not be possible. "With the current travel restrictions,

Indian players will not be able to take direct flights. We have checked for via routes and the alternatives are ei-

ther from Sri Lanka or from Doha and Indian shuttlers are most likely to travel via Qatar," the BAI said in a statement.

"We have already submitted the travel documents of our Olympic bound players and officials for visa processing. Though there is a ban on the issue of visa for Indians except for sports related travel activities, visa is available on certain terms and conditions.

"We are in touch with the Member Associations of Malaysia & Singapore for the necessary documentations," Indian shuttlers who have already made the cut for the Olympics include PV Sindhu, B Sai Praneeth and men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy.

Besides the quartet, Srikanth, Saina and the women's doubles pair of N Sikki Reddy and Ashwini Ponnappa are likely to participate in the two Olympic qualifiers. BAI said it has "written to the respective Associations of Malaysia and Singapore for a clarity on what will be the exact regulations



Match referee Manu Nayyar bereaved, leaves IPL bio-bubble

NEW DELHI

MATCH referee Manu Nayyar left the Indian Premier League (IPL) bio-bubble in Ahmedabad on Thursday following the death of his mother.

Nayyar had last officiated in Tuesday's match between Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Bangalore which the latter won by a slender margin of one run at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Motera.

The former Delhi Ranji Trophy player, who had officiated in the Mumbai leg of IPL matches before being assigned for the Ahmedabad leg, reached Delhi on Thursday to be with

his family.

As per the rules of the IPL bio-bubble, anyone going out of it will have to quarantine again before re-entering it again. It is believed Nayyar's mother died in her sleep since she couldn't wake up in the morning.

Earlier, umpire Nitin Menon left the IPL to return home in Indore as his immediately family members are down with Covid-19. Menon's mother and wife are unwell and have tested positive. His mother has been admitted to a hospital in Indore.

"His mother, wife are down with Covid-19. His mother has been admitted to a hospital in Indore. His father



is unwell too and is also suspected to have Covid-19. He has a small child, around four or five years of age, so it was important for him to return and tend to family," an official told IANS. It has been learnt that Menon, who has reached Indore, could return to IPL after his family makes progress. Australian umpire Paul Reiffel too had decided to pull out. However, he was 10 minutes away from leaving the IPL bio-bubble before he learnt that flights to Australia via Doha too have been cancelled. He may now have to leave the country after the IPL.

My batting was really slow, take full responsibility, says Warner

NEW DELHI

SUNRISERS Hyderabad (SRH) captain David Warner blamed his batting for his side's loss to Chennai Super Kings (CSK) in an Indian Premier League match at the Arun Jaitley Stadium on Wednesday night.

Warner consumed 55 deliveries for his 57 on a good batting surface. It was only an unbeaten 10-ball 26 from Kane Williamson that saw SRH get to 171/3 which eventually turned out to be low for the franchise in the end as CSK romped home to a seven-wicket win.

"I take full responsibility for the way I batted, it was really slow. Found a lot of fielders and I got frustrated. The way Manish batted was exceptional. Kane got us to a respectable total, but I take full responsibility as it was a total below par," said Warner after the match.

"I probably hit 15 good shots to the fielders, I couldn't do much about it. They are the ones that make or break your innings. It gets frustrating as a batsman when you find the fielders," added the opener.

Warner justified Williamson batting at No. 4 even though he has batted at No. 3 in the last two games that he played. The Kiwi performed well batting at the position.

"He (Kane) was going to bat four no matter what. That is where he bats, that is his job. Just that I soaked up too many balls. It's about being positive, it's a good batting surface. We have a day game here as well," added Warner. The Aussie also lamented his side's failure to get wickets in the power-play stage. CSK made 50 in the first six overs and the opening partnership between Ruturaj Gaikwad and Faf du Plessis realised 129.

"We had 170 on the board but we couldn't take power-play wickets and it's always tough (to come back) on a good surface like this. Their two openers batted really well, but we fought well in the end." (IANS)



Punjab Kings have task cut out against RCB

AHMEDABAD

PUNJAB Kings will have to play out of their skins to get their stuttering campaign back on track when they face a high-flying Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League here on Friday.

Smarting from a five-wicket defeat at the hands of Kolkata Knight Riders, it will not be an easy task for a struggling Punjab side to stand up to the challenge thrown by a RCB team, which has been firing on all cylinders.

Following four losses and two wins, Punjab are currently placed sixth in the league table with four points, whereas RCB are second with 10 points from five wins, only behind Chennai Super Kings on net run rate.

Apart from the sole loss against CSK, RCB have emerged as strong contenders for a maiden IPL title, with many of their players striking form as the tournament progresses. Punjab's inconsistent batting has been a letdown so far. In their six games, the KL Rahul-led side have gone on to make the three low totals batting first -- 106, 120 and 123. While Rahul, who has scored 91, 5, 61, 4, 60 not out and 19 so far, has been their most successful batsman this season. He will once again be expected to provide his side with a solid start with the willow.

Mayank Agrawal has been guilty of wasting his starts barring one game while Chris Gayle has made only two good scores in six outings. The dynamic Nicholas Pooran is having a woeful season to say the least. The swashbuckling West Indian has managed just 28 runs in the five innings which includes three ducks. His highest was 19 against KKR.

The team could replace him with the premier T20 batsman in the world, England's

SQUADS

Punjab Kings
KL Rahul (c & wk), Mayank Agarwal, Chris Gayle, Mandeep Singh, Prabhsimran Singh, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Sarfaraz Khan, Deepak Hooda, Murugan Ashwin, Ravi Bishnoi, Harpreet Brar, Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Ishan Porel, Darshan Nalkande, Chris Jordan, Darshan Malan, Jhye Richardson, Shahrukh Khan, Riley Meredith, Moises Henriques, Jalaj Saxena, Harshal Patel, Glenn Allen, Saurabh Kumar.
Royal Challengers Bangalore
Virat Kohli (C), AB de Villiers (W), Devdutt Padikkal, Mohammed Siraj, Navdeep Saini, Pavan Deshpande, Shahbaz Ahmed, MS Washington Sundar, Yuzvendra Chahal, Daniel Sams, Harshal Patel, Glenn Maxwell, Sachin Baby, Rajat Patidar, Mohammed Azharuddeen, Kyle Jamieson, Dan Christian, Suyash Prabhudessai, K S Bharat, Finn Allen.

Match starts at 7.30pm

Dawid Malan. With not enough runs on the board against KKR, the Punjab bowlers could not do much. But the bowling unit has lacked aggression.

It was unable to defend 195 against Delhi Capitals and almost conceded the game to Rajasthan Royals while defending 221, pulling out a four-run victory in the end.

On the other hand, RCB will be high on confidence after they held their nerves to pip Delhi Capitals by one-run. While it was Ab de Villiers who delivered once again with the bat, the bowlers put up a collective effort to give RCB their fifth win of the season.

The RCB batting is top heavy and reliant on the performances of Virat Kohli, Devdutt Padikkal, de Villiers and Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell.

IPL POINTS TABLE

Team	Played	Won	Lost	NetRR	Pts
1 CSK	6	5	1	+1.475	10
2 RCB	6	5	1	+0.089	10
3 DC	6	4	2	+0.269	8
4 MI	6	3	3	+0.071	6
5 KKR	6	2	4	-0.305	4
6 PBKS	6	2	4	-0.608	4
7 RR	6	2	4	-0.690	4
8 SRH	6	1	5	-0.264	2

City emerges from hole to close in on Champions League final

PARIS

NEYMAR was delving deep into his box of tricks, the marauding Kylian Mbappe had that glint in his eye, and Manchester City's players had been struck by a rare case of timidity.

Thirty minutes into the Champions League semi-final and the scenario Pep Guardiola had feared before the match was unfolding right before his eyes against Paris Saint-Germain at Parc des Princes. "Everyone was playing safe, not having the personality to go and play," Guardiola said.

"That is why we were so shy." Indeed, with City trailing 1-0 and on the ropes early in the first leg, the one instruction Guardiola had particularly wanted to get through to his players -- "Be ourselves" -- was being ignored.

The fullbacks, so key to City's fluid system, were sitting back, unusually. The passes in midfield were safe. There was little ambition in an attack again featuring no recognised striker. That City managed to turn the situation around on the biggest European night of most of its players' careers was why Guardiola looked so proud after his team's 2-1 win on Wednesday.

A Champions League final has never been so close for the blue half of Manchester, having looked so far away at one stage. Ahead of Tuesday's second leg at Etihad Stadium, Guardiola again doesn't want his players to lose sight of one overarching principle.

"It's simple," he said. "If we play shy and not who we are, everything can happen and PSG have the quality to turn it on. But if we play the way we played the second half, who we are, maybe we will have the chance to reach the final."

Despite its dominant second-half display, when the team played with more courage and purpose and the fullbacks finally got themselves in attacking positions, City still relied on two pieces of fortune for the goals.

Kevin De Bruyne's cross evaded everyone and found the corner of the net, while Riyad Mahrez surely could not have purposely picked a small hole in PSG's defensive wall for his winning goal from a free kick.

A third goal for City after PSG midfielder Idrissa Gueye was sent off for a foul on Ilkay Gundogan would have left the French team with perhaps too big a mountain to climb. As it is, City will have to be wary of an opponent that scored four goals at Barcelona's Camp Nou and three at Bayern Munich's Allianz Arena previously in the knockout stage.

"We know there are going to be moments where we suffer," De Bruyne said. "The quality at this stage, we know how good they are. You have to run hard for the team. (But) we also have quality."

Other factors give City a bigger edge in light of the six-day turnaround to the second leg, too. While Guardiola can afford to play a virtual reserve team against Crystal Palace in the Premier League on Saturday, with the title close to being wrapped up, PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino is likely to field a strong lineup against Lens on the same day because the French league's title race is so finely poised.

PSG is in second place, a point behind Lille and a point ahead of Monaco, with four games left and has already lost to Lens this season. City, on the contrary, holds a 10-point lead over Manchester United. Then there's the backbone City has developed under Guardiola, especially now that the defense is more solid following the early season arrival of center back Ruben Dias. (AP)



FC Goa coach, foreign staff leave India before final ACL match

PANAJI: Indian Super League (ISL) club FC Goa said on Thursday that they have allowed their foreign staffers, including head coach Juan Ferrando, to leave India ahead of their last AFC Champions League (ACL) match against Abu Dhabi-based club Al Wahda, to be played in Margao on Thursday night.

The club termed the move as a pre-emptive measure in view of the restrictions that many countries are imposing on travel from India due to the raging Covid-19 pandemic in the country. (IANS)