



MODI GOVT HAS FAILED PEOPLE OF INDIA: SONIA

P5



'THERE WILL BE POLITICAL CHURNING'

P7



OZ TO LIFT BAN ON RETURNEES FROM INDIA

HORROR STORY IN CRICKET'S INDIAN BUBBLE

P12



PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION

WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 39 and 23 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 77% Min: 35%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 36.7°C (-2) Min: 21.7°C (-3)  
SUN RISES 05:35 hrs MOON RISES 04:18 hrs

SUN SETS 19:01 hrs MOON SETS 16:05 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Muslims offer prayers at the Charminar on the last Friday of Ramadan, in Hyderabad. IANS

**Soren's barb at PM triggers war of words:** Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren's jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over their telephonic talks on Covid situation triggered political slugfest with the BJP on Friday accusing Soren of lacking the basic courtesies expected of a person holding his office and lowering its dignity. Soren had on Thursday described Modi's phone call to him on the Covid situation in the country as the PM's "Mann Ki Baat", instead of business.

**Petrol at Rs 102-mark in Rajasthan, MP:** Petrol price on Friday scaled to Rs 102 per litre in some parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh after rates were raised for the fourth straight day after ending of more than two-week-long hiatus during Assembly elections in 5 states. On Friday, petrol price was hiked by a steep 29 paise per litre and diesel by 31 paise a litre.

Go back to HC for speed hearing to halt Central Vista construction: SC



NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

The Supreme Court on Friday told petitioners to go back to the Delhi High Court if they want a speedy hearing on the PIL seeking a stay on the construction of the Central Vista amidst the raging Covid pandemic, but agreed that the situation is indeed grim.

"We would not like to make any further comments on the Covid situation as other benches are seized of the matter," Justice Vineet Saran observed.

The bench comprising Justices Saran and Dinesh Maheshwari refused to entertain a plea by senior advocate Siddarth Luthra who had wanted the apex court to force the Delhi High Court to hear immediately the PIL against the Central Vista construction on the ground that it is not an essential activity.

The top court was hearing the appeal against the 4 May order of the high court adjourning the PIL for consideration after 13 days.

The High Court said it wanted to first go through what the Supreme Court has deliberated in its 5 Jan judgement, giving a go ahead to the Vista project. The apex court today asked Luthra to mention the matter before the High Court for urgent listing on 10 May.

# The Statesman

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## 'Third wave preventable'

Govt for strong measures to combat 3rd Covid wave; 2nd wave showing decline in some areas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY



A Covid patient waits in an ambulance outside the LNJP hospital in New Delhi on Friday.

**T**here may not be a third wave of coronavirus in the country if strong measures are taken and effectively implemented at the state, district and city-level, the country's top scientific officer said on Friday, two days after he warned that this wave was inevitable.

KVijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser,

said the "insidious asymptomatic transmission" can be stopped if the guidance about precautions, surveillance, containment, treatment and testing is followed.

"If we take strong measures, the third wave may not happen in all places or indeed anywhere at all. It depends on much how effectively guidance is implemented at the local level in the states, districts and cities everywhere," he

said.

As India reported another record 4,14,188 new coronavirus infections, along with 3,915 fresh fatalities, on Friday morning, Vijay Raghavan said that the ongoing second wave of the pandemic has already started declining in some places.

On 5 May, Vijay Raghavan said that as the virus mutates further, a third

wave of Covid infection is inevitable and it is necessary to be prepared for new waves.

Asked when the second wave which has already infected lakhs and killed thousands, will ebb, Vijay Raghavan said it has already started declining in some places, though he cautioned that "there are other places of great concern all

over the country.

Additional secretary in the health ministry Arti Ahuja said Covid-19 case positivity is more than 15 per cent in more than 24 states and Union territories, with case positivity being as high as 48.5 per cent in Goa, West Bengal's current case positivity is 33.1 per cent she added.

Ahuja said Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand are showing continued plateauing or decrease in daily new Covid-19 cases.

But Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Bihar, Punjab, Assam and Odisha are showing an upward trend in daily new cases, she added.

Ahuja also said that over 3,000 tonnes of approximately 11,000 items received as Covid aid from other countries have been dis-

patched across the country since April 27, asserting noteven one consignment has remained at the airport or seaport. Ahuja said 4,468 oxygen concentrators, 3,417 oxygen cylinders, 13 oxygen generation plants, 3,921 ventilator/ Bi PAP/ C PAP and over 3 lakh Remdesivir vials besides PPE kits and accessories received as aid from abroad have been delivered or dispatched to various states and union territories till May 5.

Bengal sees highest tally: West Bengal registered its highest ever tally of daily Covid cases, logging 19,216 cases while there were 112 deaths linked to the infection.

Kolkata recorded 3,915 cases and 28 deaths while North 24-Parganas recorded 3,957 fresh cases and 33 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The total Covid case count has reached 9,54,282 with the death toll standing at 12,076 in the state, while there are 1,24,098 active cases.



## 50L doses meant for UK to be used in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

53L Remdesivir allotted to states

NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

Fifty lakh doses of Covishield vaccine earmarked by the Serum Institute for export to the United Kingdom have now been made available for the inoculation of 18-44 age group in 21 states/UTs in India, amidst a surge in Covid-19 cases, official sources said.

The Centre's decision to allocate these doses to 21 states and UTs came after Prakash Kumar Singh, director, Government and Regulatory Affairs at Pune-based Serum Institute of India, recently wrote to the Union health ministry

doses to Karnataka, 4.95 lakh to Uttar Pradesh, and 4.19 lakh to Gujarat.

The allocation list was issued by the Union Chemical and Fertilisers Minister DV Sadananda Gowda on Friday. (P4)

seeking permission for the same.

The Serum Institute had on 23 March sought permission from the ministry to supply 50 lakh doses of Covishield to the UK, citing an agreement with AstraZeneca in this regard, while assuring India that its own anti-

coronavirus vaccination programme will not be disturbed due to this supply.

"The stock of 50 lakh doses of Covishield vaccine is now available for inoculation of 18-44 age group people in 21 states and UTs," an official source said. The Ministry has asked the states to contact

the company and initiate procurement activity promptly.

While some states have been allocated 3,50,000 doses each, others got 1,00,000 doses each and two others have been assigned 50,000 doses each based on the Covid-19 caseload, official sources said.

The jabs are labelled as Covid-19 Vaccine Astra Zeneca injections and not Covishield.

Developed by Oxford University and Swedish-British pharma major AstraZeneca, Covishield is being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII).

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## PROPER DISPOSAL



Workers wearing PPE suits dump Covid related waste at a hospital in Kolkata on Friday. AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

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## Two Gandhis, a Nehru and a Stalin in TN House

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
CHENNAI, 7 MAY

War rooms, field hospitals key in Mumbai model for Covid fight

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI, 7 MAY

again as the 16th Tamil Nadu Assembly has two 'Gandhis' one of them a Minister, a 'Nehru' who is also a Minister and a 'Stalin' who is the chief minister. As is well known, late DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi named his son Stalin (Born 1 March, 1953) after Soviet ruler Joseph Stalin out of his admiration for the Communist ideology. R Gandhi and K N Nehru, as ministers for Handlooms- Textiles and Municipal Administration respectively would report to Stalin! Nehru, a party heavyweight in the Cauvery region won from Tiruchirappalli West and Gandhi from Ranipet segment and BJP's M R Gandhi, a veteran party leader emerged victorious in Nagercoil in Kanyakumari.

Also, pure Tamil names and those in memory of leaders of the Dravidian and Left movement are common. The subject of names is in focus

cases recorded on 7 October during the first wave last year. But there is no shortage of hospital beds and oxygen for patients, civic officials claimed.

On Wednesday, the Supreme Court lauded the efforts of authorities to ensure adequate oxygen supply in Mumbai. "Bombay Municipal Corporation is doing some great work, with no disrespect to Delhi. What they are doing, how they are managing, we can learn from them."

"I also understand that Maharashtra also produces oxygen which Delhi cannot do," said a bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud.

As the second wave began, the Brihamumbai Municipal Corporation focused on testing, contact tracing and treatment besides ensuring that people followed guidelines.

India's financial capital is still reporting more cases daily than the peak of 2,848

put in place during the first

wave proved to be more crucial.

"There would have been chaos if we hadn't kept jumbo Covid centres (field hospitals), oxygen beds, ICU beds ready before the start of the second wave," said Mayor Kishori Pednekar.

It sought directions to the

state to place a single bulk

order for Covid-19 vaccines on a war footing basis on both domestic and foreign manufacturers to ensure universal coverage at the shortest possible time frame.

ready for a new surge.

"The whole system ~ oxygen, catering, house keeping, doctors and nurses ~ was in place at jumbo centres," he said. The civic body continued to augment availability of oxygen and ICU beds and medicine stocks, he said.

"This is why the BMC had sufficient stock of Remdesivir when everywhere there was a shortage," Kakani said. The number of beds was

## Bengal govt moves SC for uniform vaccine policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

# Delhi logs 341 fresh Covid deaths, 19,832 infections

Positivity rate remains below 25 pc; 1.84L in 18-44 age group got jabs so far: Sisodia

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

In the midst of a raging coronavirus tsunami that continues to batter its healthcare facilities and infrastructure, the national capital today recorded 341 fresh Covid-related deaths and 19,832 infections, while the positivity rate remained below 25 per cent for the second consecutive day, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

This is the fourth time in the last five days that the number of new cases remained below 20,000.

There were currently 91,035 active Covid cases in the city and over 11.83 lakh people have recovered from it so far, the health bulletin said. Delhi's Covid caseload rose to 12,92,867, the bulletin stated.

The fresh cases were detected out of 79,593 tests, with the positivity rate standing at 24.92 per cent. It was 24.29 per cent yesterday.

The city's Covid toll rose to 18,739, the bulletin said.



Of the 22,097 hospital beds for coronavirus patients in the city, only 2,175 were vacant. As many as 50,425 patients were under home isolation and the number of containment zones stood at 50785, the bulletin added.

Delhi had yesterday recorded 19,133 coronavirus infections and 335 fatalities.

The city had last Wednesday logged 311 coronavirus-related deaths and 20,960 infections. Its positivity rate was then 26.37 per cent.

According to official data, Delhi had registered a positivity rate of 26.73 per cent last Tuesday, 29.56 per cent on Monday and 28.33 per cent on Sunday. On 22 April, positivity rate of 36.2 percent, the highest so far, was recorded.

The city had reported 19,953 Covid cases last Tuesday, 18,043 cases on Monday, the lowest since April 15, and 20,394 cases on Sunday.

Delhi had as per official figures logged 338 Covid deaths last Tuesday, 448 on

Monday, the highest so far, and 407 on Sunday.

The city has been under a Covid-induced lockdown since 19 April, which has been extended till 10 May.

As many as 1.84 lakh people in the 18-44 age group have received the first dose of the Covid vaccine since the inoculation of this category started in Delhi on 3 May, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said today.

According to the health bulletin, 1,14,657 beneficiaries were vaccinated in the city over the last 24 hours, of which 80,306 received their first dose.

"In Delhi 1.84 lakh youth have got the 1st dose of vaccine, in first 4 days of 18-45 yrs age group opening. In total 38.88 lakh people have got the vaccine in all age groups till yesterday evening," Sisodia tweeted.

The Delhi government had earlier said the entire population of the city could be vaccinated in three months if adequate vaccine doses are made available to it.

The Delhi High Court Friday said there was no use of making a waiting list for hospitals beds on the Delhi government's website as person goes there in emergency and nobody is going to wait in these COVID-19 pandemic days.

The high court also suggested that patients from lower strata could be given basic medicines like paracetamol along with steamers and thermometers as immediate COVID help.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said it will be a counter-productive thing to have waiting list for hospital beds while rejecting a submission by an advocate that waiting list should be updated on the bed portal of the government.

If someone needs an oxygen bed, it is only in emergency, let's be very clear about it. Nobody goes to a hospital unless there is an emergency... It is not that if you register today, your number will come in the evening. It is a redundant exercise... Nobody is going to keep waiting in these times, the bench said, adding that there can be a wait list for vaccination.

The bench, which heard the matter relating to various COVID-19 issues for several hours, opined that if the Delhi government was providing oxygen to COVID positive



Advocate Praveen Sharma

said people do not know the details so if waiting list can be uploaded on the portal, it would increase transparency and suggested a token system.

He said people are also facing genuine problems and there is no mechanism to tell a person if there is a vacant bed. Another advocate said these things are best left to doctors as a person may be number 1 on the waiting list but if there is a more emergent patient, he may have to be given priority and claimed that hospitals do get back if there is a bed available.

The bench, which heard the matter relating to various COVID-19 issues for several hours, opined that if the Delhi government was providing oxygen to COVID positive

person, as claimed by its counsel, it could also consider giving basic medicines along with a steamer and thermometer to the patient which could be returned later.

When you send an oximeter, you can also send basic medicines like a strip of paracetamol. You distribute ration that is the strata we are looking at. You can also give a steamer and thermometer to strata availing PDS or is BPL and then take it back later on. In that you can also include senior citizens living alone, physically handicapped, the bench said.

Delhi government counsel Rahul Mehra said it could be given to lower strata of the society because others can afford to buy these things. He said the government

would ensure that the person gets an authentic and working oximeter.

The counsel informed the court that tele consultation with doctors for COVID-19 have begun and it is for home isolated, mild and asymptomatic patients.

The court opined that the Delhi government should make a public appeal and doctors who are confined to home and have the qualification and are willing to offer services, can contact the authorities which would be flooded then.

The court said no need to create a payment gateway for it as this is not the time for monetary considerations and that is the spirit with which people should work and if they are willing to assist doctors in hospitals, then the government can pay them.

Meanwhile, Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma, representing the Centre, informed the court that a nodal officer has been appointed by the armed forces for coordination with the Delhi government on COVID-19 assistance such as installation of cryogenic tankers for storage and transportation.

The high court termed it as a good development.

## Classified



certified that I have compiled with other legal requirements in this connection.

**UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA**  
Applications are invited to appear in online interview on 10th May, 2021 for selection of SRF in the LSRB DRDO sponsored project "Detection of brain activity by Neuromodulation". For details please visit University of Calcutta website.

**C** **CHANGE OF NAME**

I, RAM Gurung, resident of MIM Tea Garden has changed my son's name from Deepak Gurung and date of birth from 26.12.1990 to 12.09.1990 and changed my daughter name from Deepa Gurung to Dipika Gurung and date of birth from 23.02.1990 to 26.11.1992 at Siliguri Court Date 5.5.2021 Affidavit No. 54AB 670071

**PUBLIC NOTIFICATIONS**

**I**, HITHERTO known as Biplob Das, S/o, Parimal Das, employed as Helper in South Eastern Railway, Santragachi, residing at 15AD/14/3, BNR North Colony, Garden Reach, P.O. Garden Reach, Kolkata-700043 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Kelli Biplob, vide Affidavit No. 18392, sworn before Lt. Judicial Magistrate 1st Class, Alipore on 24.03.2021. It is

**OUR CLIENTS** M/s. Debrup Vanjya Pvt. Ltd., M/s. Rising Vanjya Pvt. Ltd., M/s. Style Tracora Private Limited, M/s. Risabh Dev Private Limited, M/s. Sun Club Vyapar Private Limited & M/s. Aakooti Vinimay Private Limited, situated at 135, Foreside Road, P.S.: Shibpur, P.O.: Shibpur, Howrah-711102, being owners of land measuring 18 cottahs & 3 chittacks under R.S. Dag No. 393, Mouza: Date: 04.05.2021

## HC seeks AAP govt reply over alleged hoarding of O2 by Minister Hussain

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

A plea alleging hoarding of oxygen by Delhi Cabinet Minister Imran Hussain came up for hearing before the Delhi High Court which on Friday asked him to reply to the claim of arbitrarily distributing oxygen to public for COVID-19 patients.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli issued notice on the plea to the Delhi government and the AAP MLA who has been directed to be present at the hearing on Monday.

The court was hearing the application by Vedansh Sharma alleging that Hussain was hoarding oxygen cylinders at a time when the entire city was in the midst of crisis due to the short supply of life saving gas.

The plea said such distribution of oxygen was illegal and unlawful and sought directions to stop the unauthorized/unlawful/non-judicious/arbitrary distribution of oxygen cylinders by the AAP sitting MLA and cab-

inet minister of Delhi government, Imran Hussain in order to ensure judicious and uninterrupted supply of the oxygen to the needy people.

The plea, filed through advocate Amit Tiwari, has also sought an order for immediate arrest, investigation and prosecution against the alleged hoarding of medical oxygen by Hussain.

It further urged the court for a special investigation to find out officials behind the supply of the liquid medical oxygen (LMO) to Hussain.

The petitioner's counsel urged the court to see social media pictures and claimed that hoarding of cylinders was visible and action be initiated against the AAP leader.

The court observed however that the pictures do not show hoarding and people are standing in line and some are taking oxygen from there.

The high court said it will have to be seen from where the MLA was getting oxygen as even gurdwaras are distributing it.

He may be getting it from Faridabad, you can't really

have a problem if he is not eating away from the allocated source and he has arranged his own cylinders, the court said.

It added that contempt proceedings will be initiated against violators in terms of its previous order against hoarding and black marketing.

Delhi government counsel said whether it is BJP leader Gautam Gambhir or AAP MLA Imran Hussain, strictest possible action will be taken if any violation is found.

The counsel said names and party do not matter and if there was any veracity in the allegations, his instructions from the highest authority was that strictest possible action be taken.

Gambhir had earlier tweeted that some of the crucial medicines for COVID-19 patients were available at his offices and those in need, can take it from there.

He had also tweeted he has arranged oxygen concentrators and those in need can take it.

## Delhi Police recovers over 100 O2 concentrators from 2 restaurants

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

Delhi Police conducted raids at two restaurants in the national capital and recovered over 100 oxygen concentrators used for treatment of Covid patients, officials said.

Earlier, the police had said that Nege Ju Restaurant and Bar in central market Lodhi Colony was found open on Wednesday.

A man was found working on a laptop at the restaurant who was later found taking online orders for oxygen concentrators, police had said.

Police had searched the restaurant premises and recovered 32 boxes of oxygen concentrators, one box of thermal scanner and one box containing N 95 masks, the officer had said.

"A case was registered and four accused persons were arrested," DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur had said.

During interrogation, the accused disclosed about their warehouse in Chhatarpur, following which a search was conducted and 387 more units of oxygen concentrators were recovered, which were being sold at exorbitant prices in black market.

Police said during interrogation, Hitesh disclosed that they were hoarding oxygen concentrators in these restaurants following which raids were conducted at the joints at Khan Market and these medical equipment were recovered.

The owner of these two restaurants is a man named Navneet Kalra, police said, adding that his

involvement is being investigated.

Kalra also owns another restaurant where police had conducted raids and recovered oxygen concentrators on Wednesday.

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around 9,000-9,500 more oxygen beds in their districts so that no deaths happen due to lack of oxygen in Delhi," Kejriwal said.

He also stressed that there should be no wastage of the life-saving gas.

"Now that Delhi is getting adequate oxygen, the hampering of oxygen distribution has to be corrected so that there is no disruption in the supply of oxygen... Oxygen is very important so it should be used efficiently," the chief minister said.

"We have to try to prevent oxygen wastage and save as much oxygen as we can. If we can, we should save oxygen and return it to the Central government so that it can be used somewhere else," he said.

During the meeting, Kejriwal also expressed displeasure over all home isolation patients not being given oximeters.

On Thursday, Kejriwal had said that if 700 metric tonnes of daily oxygen supply is ensured by the Centre, the Delhi government can set up

the poor are not facing any problem with food, and all facilities and treatment are being provided in shelter homes, old-age homes, and orphanages.

"We will be able to stop the third wave of coronavirus from coming to Delhi, only by being able to administer vaccines to everyone in Delhi as soon as possible in the next three months. We need to recruit retired doctors, nurses, and medical staff on a large scale. Whoever wants to help the society should join the government and contribute to helping in this difficult situation," he said.

As many as 1.84 lakh people in the 18-44 age group have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine since the inoculation of this category started on May 3, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Friday.

According to Delhi government's health bulletin, 1,14,657 beneficiaries were vaccinated in the last 24 hours, of which 80,306 received their first dose.

Kejriwal has also directed DMs to visit relief centres everyday to ensure

O2 supply has improved, ensure no patients suffers from shortage: Kejriwal

PTI

NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

Now that there has been an improvement in the supply of oxygen, no coronavirus patients should suffer a shortage of the life-saving gas, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal told officials on Friday.





*My mother weathered many a storm, washed dishes, sold cow dung cakes to eke out a living...she happens to be my inspiration*

BJP'S SALTORA MLA CHANDANA BAURI

CLAIMS 'ATROCITIES PERPETRATED BY TMC ACTIVISTS' PROMPTED HER TO PLUNGE INTO POLITICS

## THUMBNAILS



Krishnagar north BJP MLA Mukul Roy takes oath at the Assembly in Kolkata on Friday.

**Train services:** After cancellation of local trains following a state government directive, Eastern Railway has decided to suspend all MEMU train services between Asansol-Burdwan-Asansol and all MEMU passenger services between Andal-Sainthia-Andal from 9 May. Similarly, South Eastern Railway has decided to cancel the services of Bangrampuri-Bhubaneswar special train between 8 May to 17 May on various dates.

**Iisco employees succumb to Covid-19:** Two employees of Iisco Steel Plant (ISP) of SAIL in Burnpur have succumbed to Covid-19. Dr Satyajit Jena, General Manager (I/C) of HRD of ISP and another employee, Ravi Kant Kumar have died due to Covid-19. SAIL sources said two hospitals will be set up in Burnpur and Durgapur.

SNS

## Post-poll violence: MHA team meets Guy, to seek report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KOLKATA, 7 MAY

A four-member team of the Union Home Ministry, tasked with looking into reasons for the post-poll violence in West Bengal, met Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar at the Raj Bhawan on Friday.

The team, led by an additional secretary of the ministry, had arrived in the state on Thursday and held meetings with the chief secretary, home secretary and the DGP at Nabanna, officials said.

The ministry has sought a report from Dhankhar on the law and order situation in Bengal, particularly the post-poll violence that erupted following the announcement of the assembly election results on 2 May.

## Allocate 550 MT of O2 per day: Mamata urges PM

Miss Banerjee said demand for oxygen has gone up to 470 MT a day in the last 24 hrs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, 7 MAY

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee today wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to issue instructions for an immediate allocation of at least 550 MT of medical oxygen per day to the state so as to ensure smooth supply to all health facilities.

Miss Banerjee apprehended that any lesser allocation of medical oxygen will not only adversely affect its supply but may also result in loss of lives of the patients in the state.

"Considering the critical situation, I would request you to kindly have the allocation of medical oxygen reviewed and instructions issued for an immediate allocation of at least 550 MT per day of medical oxygen preferably out of the total produced medical oxygen in West Bengal. It will help us in making necessary logistics arrangements and to ensure smooth supply of medical oxygen to all health facilities of the state," she wrote.

Stressing on the critical situation that has risen following the rapid surge in fresh Covid cases, Miss Banerjee said that the demand for oxygen has gone up to 470 MT per day in the last 24 hours and is expected to increase to 550 MT in the next seven to eight



A Covid-19 patient with her relative arrives at a government-run hospital for admission, in Kolkata on Friday.

AGENCIES

days.

"However, instead of allotting the same as per the requirement of West Bengal, Government of India has increased allocation of MO (medical oxygen) to other states from the total production in West Bengal, during the last 10 days, from 230 MT to 360 MT, keeping the allocation for West Bengal constant at 308 MT per day, despite its requirement of at least 550 MT per

day," she wrote while stating that chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay has already taken up the matter with Union health secretary and other officials on numerous occasions for an urgent allocation of 550 MT per day for Bengal.

She said that the daily production of medical oxygen in the state is 560 MT per day and requested an immediate allocation of at least 550 MT,

preferably out of the total produced medical oxygen that is produced by the state.

Earlier on Wednesday, Miss Banerjee wrote to Modi requesting an adequate supply of vaccines, oxygen and essential drugs like Remdesivir and Tocilizumab.

Her earlier letter read: "Consumption of medical oxygen has increased rapidly from 220 MT per day to 400 MT per day now, which is likely to rise to 500 MT per day in the next 7 days. Concerned authorities may kindly be advised to allocate at least 500 MT of medical oxygen per day out of total oxygen produced in Bengal on an urgent basis to prevent any shortage."

Miss Banerjee further slammed the BJP-led Central government on Thursday for non-provision of funds for vaccines and instead constructing a new Parliament building with a huge budget amidst the national health crisis.

She had also said that the four-member MHA team that had reached the state yesterday to take stock of post poll violence should have instead visited the hospitals to assess Covid situation.

Meanwhile, Bandopadhyay today held a meeting with senior officials at Nabanna to assess the current Covid-19 management system to ensure treatment for all Covid-19 patients in hospitals.

## Will boycott Assembly session till violence ends, says Ghosh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, 7 MAY

Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh said today that BJP MLAs won't attend Assembly session unless the state government restores law and order.

After attending newly elected BJP MLAs' meeting at the Assembly, Ghosh said saffron party legislators won't participate in the oath-taking ceremony of the Assembly Speaker tomorrow.

"The state is burning. TMC-backed hooligans are indiscriminately burning shops, houses and business establishments leaving people helpless and distraught. TMC miscreants are killing BJP workers. Around 21 such killings have taken place till date. Even two school students were killed and hacked from trees last night by TMC miscreants at Mothabari in Malda. Women party workers are being raped. So our party MLAs won't attend the Assembly unless the state puts an end to this violence," he said.

BJP MLA Mukul Roy took oath at the Assembly. Roy however didn't attend the meeting of BJP MLAs and said he will give his statement on this issue to Press later.

Ghosh said there is no security of the MLAs as the "state sponsored the violence" itself.

"Police are acting like mute spectators and hooligans are on a looting spree. More than 100 women BJP workers were either molested or raped. In many places, the TMC goons are giving women party lead-

ers and workers indecent proposals. What kind of a society are we living in? There is a complete breakdown and failure of a democratically elected state machinery," he said.

Ghosh said they have cache of evidence to prove their claims, adding that the party has already handed over the videos and written complaint to Union ministry of home affairs, and Justice Subrata Talukdar directed the state home secretary to file a report in the form of an affidavit on the places where such violence has occurred and the steps to control and prevent such incidents.

Thematter will come up for next hearing on 10 May. The petition alleged widespread post-poll violence in which so far 11 persons have died, many grievously injured and forced to flee their homes as the police personnel have allegedly not taken any action.

The petitioner sought formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe and urged for adequate compensation for the families of those deceased in violence. SNS

File affidavit on steps to curb violence, HC asks govt

KOLKATA, 7 MAY

Hearing a petition today on post-poll violence filed by Anindya Sundar Das, a Special Bench of five judges of Calcutta High Court comprising acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal, Justice IP Mukerji, Justice Harish Tandon, Justice Soumen Sen and Justice Subrata Talukdar

directed the state home secretary to file a report in the form of an affidavit on the places where such violence has occurred and the steps to control and prevent such incidents.

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## Mukul may join TMC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, 7 MAY

BJP's Krishnagar (north) MLA Mukul Roy who won by more than 30,000 votes refused to utter anything today after taking oath.

The BJP's legislative party was to decide their Leader of the Opposition, but Roy after taking oath left the Assembly.

Asked whether he will become the Leader of the Opposition as he is the party's vice president, he said he has no idea.

He also skipped the meeting of BJP's Legislative party's

meeting which was slated to be held today in the presence of BJP's state president Dilip Ghosh.

Roy told reporters, "after a few days I'll call a Press Conference and disclose what I've to say."

It is learnt that Roy called Trinamul supremo Mamata Banerjee after Trinamul's landslide victory and reportedly expressed his desire to join his former party again.

Today, while taking oath in the House, he also exchanged greetings with Trinamul's state president Subrata Bakshi.

## FIR against Dilip over 'bermudas' remark



Newly elected BJP MLAs during a meeting with Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh at Assembly in Kolkata on Friday.

SNS

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
PURULIA, 7 MAY

The Manbazar block two president of Trinamul Congress has lodged an FIR against Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh allegedly for his comments of 'wear bermudas' to chief minister Mamata Banerjee at Boro police station of Purulia.

Pawan Singh won from the Bhatpara constituency in North 24 Parganas had switched over to the BJP from TMC.

TMC turncoats who won on a BJP ticket this time also includes Biswajit Das from Bagda, Subrata Moitra from Berhampur, and Partha Sarathi Chatterjee from Ranaghat North-West.

Apart from these, Bamkim Ghosh-a former CPM legislator and a minister in the Left Front government switched over to the BJP and won from Chakdah in Hooghly.

Similarly, Narahari Maha-to-a-major Forward Bloc leader in the tribal belt and a minister in the Left Front government-won from the Joypur Assembly constituency in Purulia.

Former Bloc members Biswanth Karak won from Goghat, Tapas Mondal from Haldia, ex-RSP man Monoi Orao from Kumarganj. Interestingly, Ashoke Lahiri, former CEO won from Balurghat.

Lahiri never had any political background.

Similarly, actor-turned-politician Hiran, who won from Kharagpur Sadar, also didn't have any political allegiance before.

"The people of Bandwan could not accept his comments and that's why TMC has won by such a large margin in Bandwan," claimed Sujit Mahato, block president.

He further added that the video footage of that election meeting has also been handed over to the police and based on which the investigations has already begun.

The TMC, which has been trailing by a margin of over 3,338 votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in Bandwan, which falls under the Jhargram Lok Sabha constituency won by a margin of over 18,831 votes in the Assembly poll.

S Murugan has been appointed as the new SP, Purulia.

## Rangasamy Puducherry's new Chief Minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PUDUCHERRY, 7 MAY

AINRC leader N Rangasamy was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Puducherry at a brief ceremony held at the Raj Niwas here on Friday and will lead a coalition government of BJP members in his cabinet.

While Karnataka is the lone southern state with the BJP in the ruling saddle, its induction in the UT cabinet allows the saffron party to expand its footprint, vis-a-vis

power in the region. Incidentally, it fared well in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, where it won four Assembly seats in the Dravidian heartland.

Union minister of state for Home and BJP leader Kishan Reddy, said that BJP and AINRC would have three ministers each and they would be sworn in over the next few days. BJP's ANRASivayam, who was elected unanimously as the leader of the BJP legislature wing, is tipped to be deputy chief minister.

## Criminal offence to abandon Covid-19 patient: Serampore MP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

HOOGHLY, 7 MAY

A Covid-19 positive housewife was thrown out of the house by her family members and found wandering the streets.

Rishra municipality Covid nodal officer Ashitabo Ganguly upon learning about the terrible incident arranged a safe

stay for the Covid-19 patient at Rishra Seva Sadhan following instructions from the Rishra civic body administrator Vijay Sugor Mishra.

Serampore MP Kalyan Banerjee called it a criminal offence to force Covid-19 patients to leave their home by kin. It is the basic duty of the family members to

promptly approach the nearest Covid center for assistance and treatment, he added.

Criminal cases should be lodged against such family members, he said.

The Rishra Seva Sadhan Covid safe home authority has immediately started treating the patient.

The Rishra municipality

Covid nodal officer said that the housewife affected with Covid was thrown out by her in-laws at Dankuni. However, medical reports were collected promptly and admitted in the Rishra Seva Sadhan safe home.

She is stable as her oxygen saturation level is satisfactory, the officer said.

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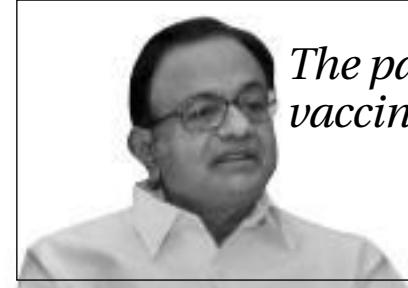
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The pandemic situation is going from bad to worse. The insufficient supply of vaccines is a hard, bitter truth, but the government is in denial

SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER P CHIDAMBARAM

ALLEGING THAT PM NARENDRA MODI AND HEALTH MINISTER HARSH VARDHAN ARE REFUSING TO OWN RESPONSIBILITY

The Statesman  
NEW DELHI, SATURDAY 08 MAY 2021

05

## THUMBNAILS



Police provide green channel to a tanker carrying oxygen from Odisha for Covid-19 patients, in Vijayawada on Friday.

PTI

**Accident:** Three people died in a car accident on the Lucknow Expressway here in the early hours of Friday, police said. The victims were coming from Kanpur Dehat to visit a private hospital here when their car collided with another vehicle around 1.30 a.m. in the Fatehabad police station area.

PTI

**Ambadas Joshi sworn in as new Goa Lokayukta:** Retired judge of the Bombay High Court Justice Ambadas Joshi was on Friday sworn in as the new Lokayukta for Goa. Joshi was administered the oath of office in the presence of CM Pramod Sawant at Raj Bhavan.

PTI

**Four killed, two injured in lightning strike:** Four members of a family were killed, while two others injured after being struck by lightning in Chhattisgarh's Kora district, police said on Friday. The incident took place on Thursday evening, when the victims, including three sisters, were at their paddy field.

PTI

**Terrorists hurled grenade at CRPF:** Two policemen and a civilian were injured on Friday when terrorists tossed a grenade at them in the crowded Nawab Bazar area of Srinagar. Terrorists hurled the grenade at the CRPF 36 BN in Nawab Bazar leaving three including a civilian injured. The injured persons have been identified as Constable Fayaz Ahmed, CRPF jawan Harish Kumar and civilian Hazik Ali. Condition of the injured persons is stable. Whole area has been cordoned off.

SNS

**Caste system has not spared even the dead in Gujarat**

**Such a practice has come to light following Covid deaths, forcing people to take the deceased to the outskirts for cremation**

AHMEDABAD, 7 MAY

Just like 'dog bites man' was never news, that certain lower caste people are not allowed to buy or rent a house in some areas is also not news in many towns of Gujarat.

But this sordid discrimination that ceased to be in news long back has now been extended to the dead too - at least in two villages in the western outskirts of Ahmedabad city. Crematoria in Bopal and Ghumla villages, now part of the extended Ahmedabad municipal jurisdiction, do not allow cremations of any dead other than the Patels and Thakores, the higher caste predominant in the area. Though there are no written orders or notice about this discrimination against the dead from other caste people, this prohibition is practiced by the villagers by either locking up the gates or declaring that the facility is under repairs.

Such a practice has come to light following increase in Covid deaths causing long queues in the city's crematoria, forcing people to take the bodies of the deceased to the outskirts. The reason cited for denial of cremations is the villagers' belief that the bodies would spread infection.

A lawyer whose dead relative was not allowed to be cremated in one such crematorium has vowed to take up the matter in the High Court soon.

SNS

# Modi govt has failed people of India: Sonia

The Congress leader demands that an all-party meeting be convened immediately on the Covid-19 situation in the country

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

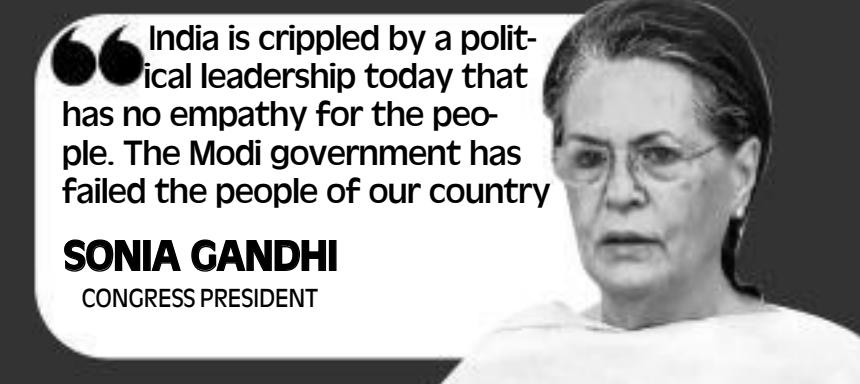
**C**ongress president Sonia Gandhi on Friday attacked the Centre over its handling of the pandemic, saying the system has not failed but the Modi government failed the people of the country and demanded that an all-party meeting be convened immediately on the Covid-19 situation.

She also said the party's performance in the just-concluded Assembly elections was very disappointing and party MPs must draw appropriate lessons from this setback in the spirit of humility and honesty. Addressing the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) meeting virtually, she said the battle against the pandemic transcends political differences and everyone has to fight it together as a nation.

Launching a fierce attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Gandhi charged that India is crippled by political leadership that has no empathy for the people.

She also demanded that a meeting of the standing committees must be convened to ensure collective action and accountability to combat the pandemic better.

Gandhi told the Leader of



“India is crippled by a political leadership today that has no empathy for the people. The Modi government has failed the people of our country

SONIA GANDHI  
CONGRESS PRESIDENT

the system hasn't failed. The Modi government has been unable to constructively channelise India's many strengths and resources. I say this categorically - India is crippled by a political leadership for today that has no empathy for the people. The Modi government has failed the people of our country," she told the MPs. She said the Congress firmly believes that fighting the pandemic is not a 'Government versus Us' battle but a 'Us versus Corona' battle.

"This battle transcends political differences. We have to fight this battle together as a nation. In that spirit, as a first step, I believe that the Modi government must urgently call an all-party meeting on the Covid-19 situation," she said.

"The Congress Party also demands that standing committees must be convened to ensure collective action and accountability to combat the pandemic better," she said.

Gandhi told the Leader of

Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge to bring to the notice of the Presiding Officer the Report of Standing Committee on Health presented in October 2020 and demand that he take action on the recommendations of the report.

"The situation brooks no delay. Tackling this crisis requires able, calm and visionary leadership," she said.

The nation, she charged, is sinking under the weight of the Modi government's indifference and incompetence and told party MPs that this is the time to rededicate themselves in the service of our people.

India saw a record number of 4.14 lakh fresh cases and around 4,000 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Dwelling on the Congress' poor performance in the Assembly polls, she said, "Most unfortunately, our own performance in all the states was very disappointing and if I may say, unexpectedly so."

"The CWC is meeting shortly to review the results but it goes without saying that we as a party collective must draw appropriate lessons from this setback in a spirit of humility and honesty," she also said.

The Congress chief said the meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Committee was being held in extraordinary circumstances, with India being in the grip of a deadly health disaster. She said thousands have died and millions are scrambling to access basic healthcare, life-saving medicines, oxygen, and vaccines.

It is heartbreaking to see people battling for their lives in hospitals, on roads, waiting in vehicles, far too many for want of any medical help at all, she said.

"And what is the Modi government doing? Instead of alleviating their suffering and pain, it has abdicated its fundamental responsibilities and duties towards the people," she charged. She also alleged that the government's vaccination policy is inequitable and will exclude millions of Dalits, Adivasis, Other Backwards Classes, as well as the poor and the marginalised.

"It is utterly shocking to see the Modi government abdicate its moral obligation and its sworn duty towards the people," she said.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the government's alleged failures have made another devastating national lockdown almost inevitable, and called for providing financial and food support to the most vulnerable.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he suggested that the government should not be concerned about the economic impact of the lockdown as the human cost of the spread of the virus would have tragic consequences for the people.

"Your government's lack of a clear and coherent Covid and vaccination strategy, as well as its hubris in declaring premature victory as the virus was exponentially spreading, has placed India in a highly dangerous position: today the disease is growing explosively. It is currently on the verge of overwhelming all of our systems. GOI's failures have made another devastating

national lockdown almost inevitable," he told the prime minister.

Gandhi said it is critical that our people are prepared for such an eventuality of a lockdown. He has been demanding that the government provides Rs 6,000 in the accounts to each poor family to tide over the crisis.

"To prevent a repeat of the manifold suffering caused by last year's lockdown, the government must act with compassion and provide critical financial and food support to our most vulnerable people," he said, adding that it must be also ready with a transportation strategy for those who will require it.

The former Congress

chief said that when the Covid-19 tsunami continues to ravage our country unabated, the people of India must be your foremost priority in such an unprecedented crisis.

Gandhi also called for rapidly vaccinating the entire population and dynamically assess the efficacy of all vaccines against all new mutations as they are identified.

He also called for scientifically tracking the virus and its mutations across the country using genome sequencing as well as its disease patterns. Gandhi also urged the government to be transparent and keep the rest of the world informed about our findings.

"I am aware that you are concerned about the economic impact of a lockdown. Inside and outside India, the human cost of allowing this virus to continue its march unimpeded will result in many more tragic consequences for our people than any purely economic calculations your advisors are suggesting," he wrote to PM.

## Modi speaks with Aus PM on equitable access to vaccines, medicines discussed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY



Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison on Friday as the two leaders agreed on the importance of ensuring equitable access to vaccines and medicines, and discussed possible initiatives for it.

Modi and Morrison also reiterated the importance of working together for a rules-based international order and a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

During his telephonic conversation with Morrison, the prime minister conveyed his appreciation for the prompt and generous support extended by the government and the people of Australia for India's

fight against the second wave of Covid-19, according to a Prime Minister's Office (PMO) statement.

The two leaders agreed on the need to ensure an affordable and equitable access to vaccines and medicines for containing Covid-19 globally, it said.

"Spoke with my friend @ScottMorrisonMP to thank him for Australia's solidarity and support for India's fight against the pandemic," Modi tweeted. "We agree on the importance of ensuring affordable and equitable access to vaccines and medicines, and discussed possible initiatives in this regard," he said.

During the call, the prime minister sought Australia's support for the initiative taken at the World Trade Organization by India and South Africa to seek a temporary waiver under TRIPS in this context, according to the PMO.

In October 2020, India and South Africa submitted a proposal suggesting a waiver for all WTO members on the implementation of certain

provisions of the TRIPS Agreement in relation to the prevention, containment or treatment of Covid-19.

The agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights or TRIPS came into effect in January 1995. It is a multilateral agreement on intellectual property (IP) rights such as copyright, industrial designs, patents and protection of undisclosed information or trade secrets.

In their telephonic conversation, Modi and Morrison also took note of the progress made in the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership since the virtual summit held on 4 June, 2020 and discussed ways to further strengthen cooperation and foster people-to-people ties.

## Air ambulance belly-landing: DGCA to audit operator

NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

### FIRST JAB



Prayagraj: People over 18 years of age pose for photographs after receiving their first doses of Covid-19 vaccine, at Moti Lal Nehru Medical College, in Prayagraj on Friday.

AGENCIES

## Stalin keeps his manifesto vow

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
CHENNAI, 7 MAY



Tamil Nadu chief minister M K Stalin on Friday announced a covid pandemic time relief of Rs 2,000 for the people of the state, a cut in Aavin milk rate and free travel for women in state-run buses, all promises made by his DMK ahead of the 6 April Assembly elections. An imminent reshuffle in state police force is also expected. Earlier in the morning Stalin along with 34 of his cabinet colleagues took the oath at Raj Bhavan in a simple ceremony considering the covid situations.

Immediately after assuming charge, he issued five important orders, including providing Rs 4,000 as Covid relief to 2,07,67,000 rice ration card holders and reducing the price of state-owned Aavin milk by three rupees as promised in the manifesto.

Of this, Rs 2,000 will be given as first instalment this month itself, involving an outlay of Rs 4,153.39 crore. This will come into effect from 16 May.

Women can travel free of cost in all ordinary fare city buses operated by State Transport Corporation from Saturday onwards and the government has allocated a sum of Rs 1,200 crore as subsidy for this purpose, the release said about another poll promise.

Further, he approved constituting an IAS officer-headed department to implement the 'Chief Minister' in Your Constituency' scheme, to fulfil another assurance of redressing people's issues within 100 days of taking over, on petitions received by him ahead of the polls as DMK chief.

He had then promised to solve the issues within 100 days of taking over as chief minister of the state if his party was given the mandate. Stalin also ordered that the government will bear the covid treatment expenses of the people in private hospitals under the Chief Minister's insurance scheme. This will cover all facets of Covid treatment, the release said.

Meanwhile, Stalin appointed senior IAS officer V Irai Anbu, as the new chief secretary of Tamil Nadu in place of Rajeev Ranjan. He also appointed senior IAS officers Udhayachandran, Umanath, Anu George and M S Shanmugam as his secretaries. Rajeev Ranjan is transferred and posted as Chairman and Managing Director of Tamil Nadu Newsprint and Papers Limited in place of S Shivashanmugaraja. The swearing-in of the chief minister today saw the participation of leaders by cutting across party lines. Only exception was former chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami.

Prominent leaders, who were in attendance at the swearing in ceremony included AIADMK coordinator and Former deputy CM O Panneerselvam, Congress leader P Chidambaram, actor-politician Kamal Hasan, MDMK general secretary MP Vaiko and BJP leader L Ganesan.

After taking oath, Stalin, accompanied by party leaders, paid tributes at the memorial of his father and former DMK chief M Karunanidhi and C N Annadurai on the Marina beach front and at the memorial of Rationalist leader Periyar. He also visited the Gopalapuram residence of Karunanidhi and sought blessings from his mother.

Later, he proceeded to the State Secretariat and assumed charge by signing important files as part of fulfilling his party's poll promises.

## 14-day Covid lockdown in K'taka from 10 May

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BENGALURU, 7 MAY

a lockdown, instead of merely imposing a curfew, as it was prone to do till now.

As per the guidelines, only flights and scheduled trains would continue to operate during the period. Schools, colleges, educational and coaching institutions would remain closed though online and distance learning would be permitted. Hotels, restaurants, and hospitality services, except those meant for housing police, government officials, healthcare workers, stranded persons including tourists, quarantine facilities, would remain shut. All social, political, sports, entertainment, academic, cultural, religious, and allied gatherings have been prohibited.

Government offices and their allied bodies would continue to operate while all facilities relating to the supply chain of essential goods, would be allowed.

According to police, those who have been arrested in the 'bed blocking scam' are Nethravathi, Rohith, Venkata

## Hospital bed scam: No one mentioned by BJP MP Surya have been arrested

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BENGALURU, 7 MAY

Subba Rao, Manjunath and Punith. Investigation so far has not revealed the involvement of those Muslims whose names were mentioned by Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya on Tuesday in a live programme, police sources said. Police said searches were carried out in the Covid war room on Thursday and technical data was obtained to check irregularity.

In addition to this, doctors, who are in charge of each zone war rooms, are being questioned. CCTV footage of all war rooms has already been collected and identification is being done regarding any unauthorised person in the war room, they said.

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya had earlier alleged that hospitals here 'blocked' beds in fake names to make money, at a time when Covid-19 cases were rising in Karnataka.

Karnataka government has ordered reserving 80 per

cent of the beds in the private hospitals for Covid patients.

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike was assigned to allot beds for Covid patients seeking treatment in private hospitals. However, due to the alarming rise in Covid cases, most of the beds are fully occupied. To deal with the demand, the BBMP has set up nine Covid War Rooms at its zonal level and entrusted an employment firm to deploy its workforce on a contract basis. A BBMP official said the War Rooms have 214 people and not just 16 as has been presented by the BJP MP.

Hitting out at Surya, Chamarajpet Congress MLA B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan said: "There were over 205 employees of Crystal Company, who were deployed in the War Room on contract basis but you singled out only 16 Muslims. How fair is this?"

Reports from almost all the districts said thousands of weddings have either been cancelled or postponed.

Not more than two cars are allowed in a wedding and that also after furnishing an affidavit in favour of obeying all the Covid protocols

## Losing face

Prima facie, it has been a critical setback for Donald Trump with Facebook's Oversight Board upholding a ban on the former US President, at any rate for now. The panel has faulted the social network for making a hasty decision without clear criteria and has even told the company to re-evaluate the decision within six months. The defeat or setback for Trump is thus a matter of subjective reflection. The ultimate decision now rests with the company and brings into focus the regulatory vacuum around social media. Nonetheless, Wednesday's ruling charts a new chapter in the global debate over the largely unchecked power of social media giants, whose platforms have become what it are often called the "default political megaphones" for many world leaders not the least because misinformation and hate have been fomented on the sites. Regulatory action may also be on the anvil, with lawmakers promising that by the end of the year new legislation will hold companies to account for their failure to police disinformation during the pandemic and the 2020 presidential election. It bears recall that Facebook first suspended Trump for encouraging violence during the Capitol riot on January 6, before saying the next day that the ban was "indefinite." Two weeks later, it referred the case to its 20-member Oversight Board, which is said to be largely independent but is funded by the social network. But the board has now handed the decision back to Facebook, recommending that it either permanently ban or reinstate the former President within six months, and spell out rules to explain the rationale. It will be hard not to wonder whether it was a half-baked initiative on the part of Facebook. "They cannot invent new unwritten rules when it suits them," said the board co-chair and former Danish Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt. The board agreed that Trump's comments on the day of the insurrection "created an environment where a serious risk of violence was possible." It mentioned the President's references to the mob as "patriots" and "special," and his instructions to them to "Remember this day forever." Whether or not 6 January 2021 is thus remembered, historians will recall the day as a blot on Mr Trump's presidency in its twilight phase. Critics have already called into question the legitimacy and value of the Oversight Board, an experimental entity set up by Facebook to help hold it accountable in making such calls. The board is only able to offer Facebook recommendations on its policies, which the social network can take or leave, and Facebook has a hand in selecting members. Because of the board's limited powers, some critics see the body as a distraction from developing new laws or government oversight of social media companies. The practical effect of this decision will be that Facebook ~ and possibly other platforms that might have been watching the Oversight Board for unofficial guidance ~ will have to continue to grapple with the problem of what to do about political leaders who abuse social media to express inaccuracies and incite violence.

## History unmade

Ever wondered how Sourav Ganguly's presidential innings has been shaping itself in the midst of so much turmoil and high-pitch drama? Any chance that we shall need a modern-day Edward Gibbon, or any cut-price pretender, to record it in its minutest detail for posterity? What's been cooking? It's a longish story. Within days of taking over as president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India in 2019, Ganguly made quite a splash taking the initiative to organise India's first day-and-night Test, personally persuading both captain Virat Kohli and Bangladesh high-ups to give it a go though the original schedule hadn't stipulated a pink-ball match. Parts of the media whooped, playing the customary cheerleading role, but the experiment fell flat essentially because it was a hopeless mismatch. But there were those who thought, and said, that the new leader of Indian cricket's supreme administrative body, in a morning-shows-the-day example, had left no one in any doubt about his cerebral capacity ~ implying the switch from the red ball to the pink ~ and his drive, by getting what he'd wanted done by those who were around. Admittedly, Covid-19 altered cricket's domestic as well as global scenario subsequently in a way that hadn't been possible for anyone to imagine. And Ganguly, aside from his somewhat comic, initial assessment of the 2020 threat ~ that the Indian Premier League would go ahead as originally scheduled ~ didn't really call attention to himself with anything that sparkled like the Eden Gardens floodlights, though the prospect of a political faray fuelled a lot of speculation for some time. This year, as the second surge of the scourge began to threaten the IPL with a premature closure, he, of course, aired his conviction that the competition would go on all right. When its suspension ~ under quite shocking circumstances ~ was announced earlier this week, he wasn't there explaining why. It's no secret that not every Indian today believes that he's the de facto as well as de jure leader of the set-up he is supposed to be spearheading. On the contrary, word is he carries on since he doesn't really mind how things pan out. Or, Ahmedabad, without its team in the tournament, wouldn't have become so central to the 2021 IPL. Those who made him the king are now said to be cracking the whip behind the scenes. Maybe Camelot pre-empted revolts when the favour of leadership was allegedly requested. A YouTube platform whose videos get going by showing his smiling presence and minimally expressed endorsement has recently put it out that the IPL's governing council wanted it taken to West Asia again but the BCCI said no. "A home show it will be" was the decision taken up top. The pole is always greasy and to make it to its summit is not to have one's stay there guaranteed. Life's like that.

# Delivery, not process

Panic measures provide only temporary relief, a permanent solution lies in better planning, better allocation of resources and most importantly, better implementation. Our bureaucracy needs to focus on implementation, rather than on constituting committees and sub-committees and moving files and papers. In emergent circumstances, men of action who would not hesitate to dirty their hands, are required, rather than caucuses of wise old men



**H**eartrending stories of over-full hospitals turning away seriously ill patients, endless queues of ambulances waiting outside hospitals, patients dying for lack of oxygen, doctors themselves succumbing to Covid-19 infections and devastating accidents in ICUs are the flavour of current newspaper headlines. Despite having some excellent hospitals and some of the best doctors and nurses in the world, the rampaging coronavirus pandemic has fully overwhelmed our healthcare system. The second wave of Covid-19 infections was not unexpected; all countries including the US and UK had seen a second wave of infections that was much deadlier than the first wave. The incessant rise in infections, from 8,587 daily infections on 1 February 2021 to 15,616 on 28 February and an even faster growth in March should have set the alarm bells ringing. Yet, the Government woke up only when the infections started increasing at rocket speed in April, touching a world record of 3.5 lakh daily infections on 25 April.

The number of active cases also went up proportionately; from a low of 1,37,578 on 11 February to 5,85,215 on 31 March to 29,79,768 on 27 April putting unbearable strain on the healthcare system. According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation of the Washington University, India needs 21,41,546 hospital beds, 4,10,792 invasive ventilators and 1,97,470 ICU beds to treat Covid patients; but with an availability of around 2,60,000 beds and 20,000 ICU beds, resources are woefully short of requirements. The National Disaster Management Authority, headed by the Prime Minister, is the apex body tackling the Covid-19 pandemic. On 28 March 2020, eleven Empowered Groups were constituted under the Disaster Management Act, to control the Covid-19 pandemic. Later on, in September 2020, after retirement/transfer of some officials, the number of Empowered Groups was pared down to six ~ four of them headed by departmental secretaries and two by NITI Aayog members. The continuous drop in Covid-19 cases since September 2020 appears to have lulled the Empowered Groups into complacency; no concrete action by any Empowered Group has been reported so far.

The list of what should have been done to mitigate the effect of the second wave of Covid-19 infections is long; probably, the

time period between the first and second waves could have been utilised to ramp up medical infrastructure. More hospital beds, more medical oxygen, more ICU beds, more vaccine shots, better mask and social distancing discipline, would have enabled us to counter the pandemic effectively. However, our planners prepared only for the best case scenario viz. Covid-19 infections would fall to near zero, celebrations would be organised to laud our victory over the pandemic. Needless to say, this boundlessly optimistic philosophy flies in the face of the raison d'être of the creation of the high-powered bodies tasked to tackle disasters ~ which is to foresee and prepare for the worst which could possibly happen.

We had sufficient resources to face the second wave of the pandemic because India is the world's biggest producer of vaccines and an exporter of medical grade oxygen. However, in a cruel irony, we are facing huge shortages of both vaccine shots and oxygen. Lack of planning and initiative alone are responsible for our predicament; with a population of 140 crores, we placed our first order for 1.6 crore doses of the Covid-19 vaccine in January 2021, by which time the US with a population of 33 crores had signed contracts with six companies, with options for purchase of a total of 300 crore vaccine doses. Notably, thirty-one countries around the globe have reserved more Covid-19 vaccines per capita than the US. While we waffled, other countries pulled out all stops to tackle the pandemic. For example, the US set-up 'Operation Warp Speed' in May 2020, with an allocation of \$10 billion to fund vaccine developers for the combined costs of R&D and pre-approval manufacturing of vaccine doses. By mid-December, \$12.4 billion had been spent on Operation Warp Speed. In marked contrast, we advanced a sum of Rs.4,500 crores to our two vaccine manufacturers only recently.

The roll-out of our vaccination programme was equally unambitious. Initially, we had 3,000 vaccination centres, which were to administer 100 doses each, only on weekdays, with a provision to increase the number of centres to 5,000. At this pace, it would have taken 10 years to vaccinate the target population of 90

crore people. Probably, the Government assumed that Covid-19 being on the wane, few people needed to be vaccinated. Thankfully, the vaccination programme gathered momentum on its own with 14.78 crore doses being administered till 27 April. But, as of now, the Indian vaccination programme has run short of vaccine doses, the shortage being exacerbated by the ill-advised exodus of 6.5 crore doses.

The medical oxygen shortage, which has claimed hundreds of lives in the past few days, is a study in mismanagement and negligence. India produces about 7,500 metric tonnes of medical grade oxygen daily, which is sufficient even for our enhanced requirements. Proper logistical planning would certainly have prevented the present shortage. Significantly, the Empowered Group-6 had flagged the shortage of oxygen as early as April 2020. As a follow-up of the Empowered

Group deliberations, a nine-member committee was set up under the chairmanship of DPIIT Secretary to "ensure adequate availability of medical oxygen in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic." Also as a follow-up of the concerns of the Parliamentary Committee over oxygen management, the Health Ministry requested the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority to fix the price of medical oxygen. Parallelly, 162 oxygen plants costing Rs.202 crore, were sanctioned under PM CARES fund, for district hospitals across the country. However, the Central government took eight months to float the tender, and presently, only 33 of the 162 oxygen plants have become operational. Endless discussions and tardy implementation are squarely responsible for the current oxygen shortage. The Government established Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG), a grouping of 10 National Laboratories in December 2020, for carrying out genomic sequencing and analysis of circulating Covid-19 viruses. Earlier many of the participating labs, like Hyderabad's Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, were sequencing SARS-CoV-2 genomes on a stand-alone basis, without much success because of bureaucratic constraints like a Finance Ministry order prohibiting import of

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VINATI SUKHEV

A recent article in The Atlantic on the nature of friendship in the western world got me thinking. In a rare quantitative analysis of the nature of friendships, it concluded that an average American has 16 people they call friends of which three are friends for life and five are people they really like. The rest (eight) are people they have transactional relationships with. These were people who could provide help in career advancement or be helpful because they lived in the neighbourhood. It goes on to differentiate between 'real' friends and 'deal' friends and concludes that 'deal' friends are expedient relationships and are therefore not the source of joy or satisfaction through life. Sure, so what's new? We know a borrowed cup of sugar is useful but will it sweeten the long journey of life – heck, no!

So, what makes Indians different? My theory is that we have far more real friends – some more loosely aligned through life than others – and they bring us a lot more lasting joy, satisfaction and comfort. The first is the purely pragmatic aspect – a large network leads to more opportunities in a society built on hierarchy and closed off to free and fair competition. Jobs, marriages and these days sadly, even medicines and hospital beds are procured through a large network of friends. And while these friends are certainly useful and expedient and therefore fit The Atlantic's definition of 'deal' friends, they are actually much more than that.

These are relationships that are lovingly invested in for many decades through school and college and beyond. Some start off as colleagues in a first job, others as the children of our parents' friends, yet others as our children's friends' parents. Yet once they become real friends, their value is intrinsic in themselves – not in what they can get us. Sure, they can theoretically get us a lot of favours. I can count a high court judge, several ambassadors, India's leading lawyer, a self-made tech billionaire, an award-winning author and a serving minister amongst friends I have acquired through one of the categories mentioned above.

Being highly intelligent and

# Why everyone needs an Indian friend

interesting people, they have brought colour and richness to my life wherever I have lived. Through the years and with increasing global interconnectedness, their emails, their WhatsApp messages, and even their social media accounts have been the source of pleasure and pride. I have seen their children grow up and get married. I have attended some of the weddings or seen photos on Facebook if I have not. I have blessed the children and felt blessed that I could share the family's joy. It has been a journey of parallel lives.

However, the story would not be complete without other friends I have had and held onto for decades, who are totally different from me. They have lived unconventional lives, on their own terms. And I have no hesitation in saying they have given me equal joy. Just seeing life from another perspective is so rewarding. I met one such friend from my first job a few weeks ago. We were meeting after 36 years, he had reminded me on the phone. 'Do you have decent internet?' were my first words to him. 'You have become fat' were his to me and then with one Covid-defying hug we resumed our interrupted relationship with affection, mutual respect and lots of joy.

While my daughter carried on with her business zoom calls to London on his excellent WiFi, David and I had tea and caught up on three decades of life. The informality, the right even, with which I could walk into his home, after such a long time and no contact, was not accidental. The seeds had been sown long ago when we used to meet almost every evening after work and had once spent the night stuck in a ferris wheel that broke down – staring at the night sky and thinking about the future.

What makes us treasure our friendships more than the Americans sampled in The Atlantic? I believe it is our multi-nodal view of ourselves. We Indians see ourselves at the centre of a



constantly orbiting set of relationships that jostle for attention. We are mami to one set of children, chachi to another set. We are daughters and sons but also nieces and nephews. We are also parents (for life, no matter how old the children are) but also grandchildren in a long, unbroken family line. We see ourselves as part of the jungle gym of criss-crossing relationships that make up Indian family life. And friends are family we choose to have. They are awarded the same privileges and more. The ultimate compliment given to a friend is 'he/she is like family to us'. Again, a commonly used phrase, but it reveals a lot about us as a people. We give unconditional love and support to our friends, just as we do to our families, and put them at the centre of our lives.

And while Indian mythology is replete with tales of sibling rivalry and internecine war such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana – friendship is almost always deified and eulogised. Whether it is the mythical Sudama-Krishna friendship, or a Bollywood 'dosti' it is founded in love and meant to last forever. It has no purpose or goal except that of caring for the

friend.

Contrast this world view with that of a western person as described by The Atlantic. The centre of the western person's life is the unit they build with their romantic partner. All other relationships, including parents and children are meant to wither away during the course of life. Parents recede in importance as they grow older, children become less pivotal as they leave the nest. Cousins are complete strangers and aunts and uncles come once a year – like Christmas. What chance do friends have in this scheme of things? A romantic pairing at the centre of the world leaves little room for any other kind of rewarding relationship. Yes, there are social 'other couple' friends but the talk is of vacations and golf. Skimming the surface rather than diving deep into what they really think or feel.

However, friendship has been shown to impact happiness time and again and accounts for almost 60 per cent of the difference in happiness amongst people. Little wonder then that the Atlantic article seeks to help people feeling dissatisfied with their

friendships with a to-do list.

"Make a list of the people in your life with whom you feel comfortable discussing personal details"

While most Americans surveyed struggled to come up with a few names, most Indians would struggle to limit the number. We are an open and emotional lot after all!

"The American men surveyed seem to base their relationships around shared interests or work while the women base their friendships on emotional and social support and the women's model was considered more satisfying in the long run."

In the case of Indians, both men and women seek and give emotional support to friends. Male friendships are often strong in the Indian context in fact, as men have traditionally had more financial muscle and more independence with regard to actions. I have several friends whose husbands take golfing holidays or trekking trips with their male buddies without taking their wives along. The Indian sisterhood is catching on slowly as Indian girls earn and exert themselves.

The article encourages people to make friends through turning up at places like churches or charities – in other words, relationships founded on giving rather than receiving.

I am not suggesting we Indians are perfect but we do have an innate understanding of investing in relationships. So, when we hum along to the immortal Sholay song 'yeh dosti hum nahin todenge' we are not seeing Dharmendra and Amitabh on a rickety motorcycle with a sidecar, we are remembering our own youthful, windswept faces as we had fun with friends and swore undying loyalty to each other. And in our own way, without any accompanying Bollywood drama, we have mostly kept our promises!

The writer lives in London and is the author of *East or West: An NRI mother's manual on how to bring up desi children overseas*.

100 YEARS AGO

## OCCASIONAL NOTE

One incidental effect of the coal strike in Great Britain must be to direct renewed attention to alternative sources of power. An expert committee has been making further investigations into the use of oil fuel, and has experimented successfully with such fuel in railway locomotives, engines of all kinds, bakers' ovens, and cotton mills. That the experiments have not been barren of practical results is indicated by the statement that they have led to the re-starting of two cotton mills in Lancashire which had closed down when their coal supplies were exhausted; while ten vessels with oil-driven engines have left Sunderland to bring coal from the continent. A wholesale conversion of locomotives or engines for the consumption of oil fuel would be outside the pale of practical politics, so long as coal can be obtained at anything approaching a reasonable cost. What is, however, extremely likely to happen is that in the construction of new lines, new engines, and new vessels, the present experience of the coal stoppage will furnish additional reasons for the adoption of oil-fuel apparatus or electrification, as the case may be; while, as regards electrification, a stimulus will be given to the idea of utilising the water-power resources of Great Britain. Although these are not contingencies to be reckoned with immediately on any large scale, they should not be overlooked by those concerned in the future of the coal-mining industry.

## NEWS ITEMS

### CROWD ATTACKS RANGOON LIQUOR SHOPS

A crowd of undesirables, incited by the leaders of the anti-liquor and morality movement now operating in Rangoon, made an attack on the liquor shop of Li Kan Shoo, in Fraser Street, at 9-40 last night. The Chinese heard the crowd approaching and closed the doors, but some of the crowd rushed up to the doors and tried to force them open. Mr. Colquhoun, District Superintendent of Police, and other police officers hurried to the scene and were quickly followed by the Inspector-General of Police, the Commissioner of Police and other officials. The crowd was very turbulent and one man, shouting "Maro, maro," attempted to assault an inspector of police with a heavy club, but was prevented and arrested. Police reinforcements arrived and dispersed the crowds.

### CALCUTTA TRAMWAYMEN'S BRIEF STRIKE

A partial strike of the Calcutta tram drivers and conductors, which only lasted a few hours, occurred yesterday afternoon. The conductors and drivers on the Shambazar and Chitpore sections ceased work at 2 PM, owing to an alleged assault on one of the drivers by a European assistant. All cars on these two lines had stopped running by 2-30. This caused great inconvenience to a large number of Indians living on the outskirts of the city, who were compelled either to walk home or pay exorbitant fares demanded by ghati drivers. Inquiries were made by the Tramway authorities and the men were informed that the assistant referred to would be suspended, pending further investigation. The men then returned to work and the tram service was resumed at 5-30 PM.

### AKALIS' CLAIM TO SHRINE AT NAURANGABAD

The Akalis, who had taken possession of the shrine at Naurangabad, in the Amritsar district, evacuated the shrine of their own accord and the Mahant returned to the shrine and took possession peacefully. Subsequently on April 30 the Akalis assembled in order to retake possession. The Mahant took steps to prevent the entry of the Akalis, and at one time there was danger that the situation might develop seriously. The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar sent police to Naurangabad he himself followed a few hours later. He interviewed the Akalis and pointed out to them the illegality of their action in attempting to take possession of the shrine against the wishes of the Mahant, and after a short parley the Akalis left Naurangabad.

### PEARY CHARAN GIRLS' SCHOOL

In presenting his report at the prize distribution of the Peary Charan Girls' School, which was held last evening at the Indian Sangit Samaj in Cornwallis Street, the Hon. Secretary mentioned that besides their ordinary studies the girls were taught to use the charkha. The improvement had been so marked that the pupils of the sixth and second standards could spin up to half a chakkat of yarn in an hour and half. Another useful art the girls were taught was needlework in which also they had made good progress. The Secretary complained that there was lack of public support for the institution, which was doing useful work for Hindu girls.

SATURDAY INTERVIEW

## There will be political churning'



of major concern for the entire Left and the Congress. There should be serious introspection within the Congress and the Left.

**Q. Could such a situation develop by the time of the next Lok Sabha elections?**

A. It is too early to say anything. It is hypothetical at this time. After this election, there will be huge political churning at national level and in the states. How this churning is going to take place, how things are going to emerge, one has to wait and see.

**Q. The Left gets it wrong every time in West Bengal elections?**

A. The Left not getting any seat in the present election is a serious matter. What is really happening, and what is happening to the assessment of the Bengal situation, the Left will have to seriously review its assessment of the Bengal situation, its political line, strategy, tactics.

**Q. The non-BJP alliance could have supported Trinamul Congress to force another type of polarisation?**

A. This is a serious political issue.

The Left will have to introspect on this issue. The Congress will also have to introspect. Does the Trinamul Congress have any responsibility for such a situation to develop in Bengal, let

us see. We need to discuss.

**Q. Will strong states like West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu strengthen federalism?**

A. The question of federalism will become a crucial, critical question in the coming days. India is a diverse country. States have elected governments. The Constitution is there. The BJP does not respect the Constitution, Constitutional values and morality. That is why the question of federalism becomes very crucial. The recent elections in Kerala and Tamil Nadu show people will not succumb to the pressure of Central government and they cannot be taken for granted as appendages. Centre-state relations will have to be reviewed and strengthened.

The Centre cannot override the state governments. Even for that matter, the Governor's offices cannot be used to promote the Centre's policies.

**Q. Kerala voted for good governance, but there was fear of BJP and its Central government also?**

A. People voted for the LDF for its performance and committed service to the people. At the same time, the LDF has been fighting the BJP. There was no fear of BJP, but people did want that BJP should not have any foothold in Kerala. That is to be taken note of. BJP tried all its tricks, but people of Kerala rejected. There also Modi and Amit Shah campaigned. They brought Metro Man. People could not be hoodwinked. These elections have exposed how the BJP rule has become a misrule, and it has undermined the federal system of governance. The BJP rule at the Centre has been centralising all powers in its hands, encroaching upon the rights of the state governments, and snatching away the rights of the state governments and denying

what is due to them.

**Q. Will strong states like West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu strengthen federalism?**

A. The question of federalism will become a crucial, critical question in the coming days. India is a diverse country. States have elected governments. The Constitution is there. The BJP does not respect the Constitution, Constitutional values and morality. That is why the question of federalism becomes very crucial. The recent elections in Kerala and Tamil Nadu show people will not succumb to the pressure of Central government and they cannot be taken for granted as appendages. Centre-state relations will have to be reviewed and strengthened.

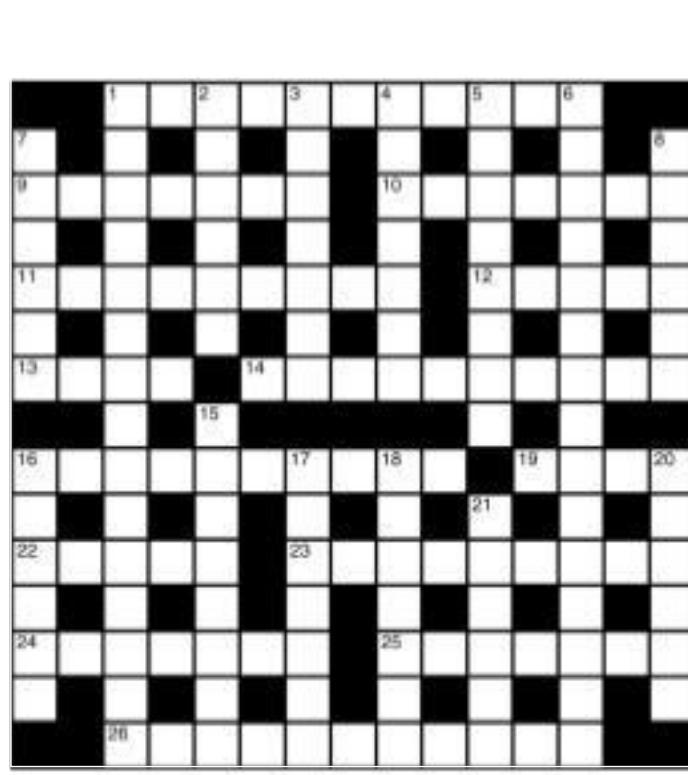
The Centre cannot override the state governments. Even for that matter, the Governor's offices cannot be used to promote the Centre's policies.

**Q. Next year, Uttar Pradesh goes to polls, you will have to face polarisation again?**

A. The Uttar Pradesh government has become a failure. There is no law and order. Crimes against women, against Dalits, minorities, particularly Muslims, are on the rise. In the name of conversion, in the name of "Love-jihad", the Adityanath government has unleashed an attack on people. Even democratic rights of journalists and activists are under attack. Uttar Pradesh will be a big challenge for BJP next year. Even Punjab is going to polls next year. The secular-democratic forces would have to rise to the occasion. Uttar Pradesh is a crucial state. The BJP cannot get back to power, if you analyse the situation in the state. The BJP cannot have the support of the people. All secular democratic parties have learnt lessons.

NO 28906

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

SOLUTION FOR 01 MAY

CRIACK	GAMMARAYIS
OLON	DAFFY
CHARIOT	CAFARDS
KNSH	KFL
SCHEME	COYOTE
HEDEN	SDNR
EDEN	ALLURINGLY
ROADRUNNER	SAGA
TVAK	RARRR
TWITCH	CUBITS
RATHOLE	RONDDEAU
OOU	GNCG
BIRDS	ANONYMOUS

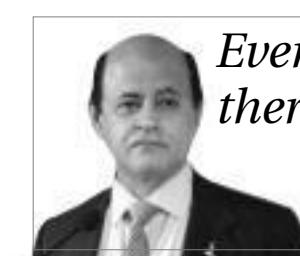
ACROSS

- 1 Low part of track coming to round lake with fish (7,4)
- 9 Pole holding female's jacket in an emergency (3,4)
- 10 Kind of wine relative knocked back, bagging university degrees (7)
- 11 One sporting yellow bloomers caught in pub – is she sozzled? (9)
- 12 Bucolic couple of rivers (5)
- 13 Club but no ball for a round (4)
- 14 Gauge still a distance across the Atlantic (10)
- 16 Hardiner saw stars (10)
- 19 Heading for insolency again, one has a large bill (4)
- 22 Order is completely uncommunicative? (3-2)
- 23 Around entrance, holding sparkly white dress down (9)
- 24 Pavilion is earmarked to host fete (7)
- 25 Imitating reggae with Norway's head of state (7)
- 26 Recalling car that's broken on trail (11)
- 1 A number fancy gathering in French square (4,2,5)
- 2 The Führer picked up the pieces in Berlin (6)
- 3 Time stops where Naomi appears to be Frank (2,5)
- 4 Comfortable about stifling report (7)

DOWN

- 5 Like to keep jade stuff in changed forms (8)
- 6 A sickly brunette's out for reassurance (8,7)
- 7 Bill's about to think, unlike Queen Victoria? (6)
- 8 Stable employee stole pants put on queen (6)
- 15 Result of clot and me limbo dancing round south (8)
- 16 It's a pity American needs return fare from Asia (6)
- 17 Hannibal leading Carthaginian's last stand (7)
- 18 Struts of wood always aboard ship (7)
- 20 Back outspoken comic writer (6)
- 21 Irrational former official of Rome (6)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



Even World Health Organization (WHO) has clarified that there is no correlation between 5G technology and Covid-19

S P KOCHHAR, DIRECTOR-GENERAL, COAI

ON RUMOURS LINKING 5G TECHNOLOGY WITH THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

## THUMBNAILS

**Euro 100 million for SMEs:** The European Investment Bank and the country's largest lender SBI on Friday entered into a pact to jointly pump euro 100 million in equity financing into Indian small businesses focused on climate change and sustainability. An agreement got signed on the margins of the European Union-India leaders meeting in Portugal, where both the financial institutions agreed to back the initiative, as per a statement. SBI already invests in a vehicle called Neef Funds for its impact investing objectives, and the two entities have created "Neef Fund II" for taking ahead this partnership. This is one of the EIB's first private equity investments in India. PTI

**Listing of start-ups:** With an aim to boost listing of start-ups, markets regulator the Securities and Exchange Board of India has notified a slew of relaxations to norms, including reducing holding period for pre-issue capital and allowing discretionary allotment to eligible investors. The changes have been made to the framework for listing on the Innovators Growth Platform (IGP), according to two separate notifications issued by the regulator. This comes after the board of Sebi approved a proposal in March in this regard. PTI

**JSW Steel pact:** JSW Steel on Friday said it has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to conduct a feasibility study with JFE Steel Corporation to establish a grain oriented electrical steel sheet manufacturing and sales joint venture company in India. The plan is to complete the study within 2021 and take appropriate steps to set up this JV company subject to requisite approvals, JSW Steel said in a regulatory filing to stock exchanges. PTI

**VLCC programme:** VLCC on Friday announced the launch of a restorative wellness programme ~ VCare ~ specifically targeted at addressing lingering after-effects of the Covid-19 virus infection. Specifically designed to help patients receive proper follow-up care in the weeks and months after their being declared infection free, VCare aids a healthier recovery, both of the body and mind, according to a Press release. SNS

**Dabur profit:** Homegrown FMCG major Dabur India Ltd on Friday reported an increase of 33.98 per cent in consolidated net profit at Rs 377.29 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2021. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 281.60 crore in the January-March quarter a year ago, Dabur India said in a BSE filing. The company's revenue from operations during January-March 2021 jumped by 25.27 per cent to Rs 2,336.79 crore, compared with Rs 1,865.36 crore in the year-ago period. PTI

# Impact of Covid 2nd wave on economy to be muted: Report

Fiscal position of Centre has witnessed improvement in recent months: Finance ministry report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

## SILVER LINING

The impact of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy is likely to remain muted as compared to the first wave, the finance ministry said in its monthly economic report.

Admitting that the second wave of the pandemic has posed a downside risk to economic activity in the first quarter of financial year 2021-22, the report said: "There are reasons to expect a muted economic impact as compared to the first wave. Learning to operate with Covid-19, as borne by international experience, provides a silver lining of economic resilience amidst the second wave".

► The fiscal position of the



Central government, it said, has witnessed an improvement in the recent months with a revival in the economic activities during the second half of financial year 2020-21.

per cent higher than revised estimates (RE) and 5 per cent higher than collections in fiscal 2019-20 - the significant growth compared to 2019-20 provides an indication of economic recovery since the first wave.

GST mop-up registered a good growth and collections exceeded Rs 1 lakh crore in each of the last six months owing

to economic recovery, it said, adding, GST revenue registered another record high of Rs 1.41 lakh crore in April, indicative of continual economic recovery.

However, the report noted that the second wave of the pandemic hit the market sentiment as the Nifty 50 and the S&P BSE Sensex recorded losses of 0.4 per cent and 1.5

per cent, respectively, in April, and the rupee depreciated by 2.3 per cent to reach 74.51 INR/USD in April. This was mirrored by net FPI (foreign portfolio investors) outflows of \$1.18 billion in April.

Domestic financial conditions, nevertheless, continue to remain comfortable with RBI's support to liquidity, with open market operations worth Rs 3.17 lakh crore carried out in fiscal 2020-21, the report said.

Launch of G-SAP 1.0 towards stable and orderly management of the yield curve is a significant tool for forward guidance.

While overall financial conditions remained accommodative, the report said, credit growth continued to be muted at 5.3 per cent as on 9 April 2021.

Sectorally, the report said, agriculture, medium industry and trade services led the credit offtake in March, while credit to small and large industry and NBFC services remained subdued.

Easy financing conditions enabled the corporate sector

to raise substantial funds from financial markets, it added.

Latest data on corporate earnings signal a manufacturing turnaround in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2020-21, with 12.5 per cent growth in net sales and 9.5 per cent rise in income for a sample of 213 companies, the finance ministry report noted.

Digital payments continued to gain momentum in April with UPI transactions volume and amount more than doubling previous year levels.

CPI-combined inflation rose to 5.52 per cent, mainly on account of high food inflation. WPI inflation increased to an 8-year high of 7.39 per cent, led by oil and metal prices as well as base-effect, exceeding its CPI counterpart after nearly two years, it said.

Softening food and fuel prices, with normal monsoon and expected supply easing of food products, may provide succour to a potent risk of rise in input prices surfacing as retail inflation, the report said.

## HDFC consolidated profit up 31% at ₹5,669 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI, 7 MAY



Mortgage lender HDFC Ltd reported a 31 per cent jump in consolidated profit after tax at Rs 5,669 crore for the quarter ended March 2021. The company had posted a consolidated profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 4,342 crore in the same quarter of the previous year.

On a standalone basis, PAT witnessed a growth of 42 per cent at Rs 3,180 crore in January-March 2021 compared to Rs 2,233 crore in the same period of the previous year.

After providing for tax of Rs 2,788 crore, the standalone PAT for the year ended March 2021 stood at Rs 12,027 crore as against Rs 17,770 crore in financial year 2019-20.

"There was an extremely

strong recovery in the second half which was significantly faster and greater than what we had envisaged at the start of the year (FY2021). Our individual loan disbursements grew by 42 per cent in October 2020 to March 2021 compared to the corresponding period of the previous year," Mistry said.

During the quarter ended 31 March 2021, individual loan disbursements grew by 60 per cent over the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

## Rahi Systems logs revenue of \$300 million

BENGALURU, 7 MAY

Rahi Systems, an IT enterprise solutions provider, registered a 20 per cent increase in demand for audio, video conferencing facilities and products during 2020-2021 while reporting a global revenue of \$300 million. According to a company release, as businesses moved towards a hybrid workplace model, combining offline with onsite work models, offerings to corporates were ramped up in collaboration with Logitech and Zoom.

Sushil Goyal, co-founder and managing director of the company, said that industry leaders from healthcare, education, and technology sectors were recognising the importance of a state-of-the-art IT infrastructure to resume productive and efficient business operations.

## RBI directive to banks on lending to healthcare cos

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI, 7 MAY

The RBI today asked the banks seeking funding from the special Rs 50,000-crore on-tap liquidity window to lend money to the healthcare service providers within 30 days of availing the credit facility.

Earlier this week, the RBI had decided to open an on-tap liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore with tenures of up to three years at the repo rate till 31 March 2022, to boost liquidity for ramping up Covid-19-related healthcare infrastructure and services.

Under the scheme, banks can provide fresh lending support to a wide range of entities including vaccine manufacturers; importers/suppliers of vaccine and priori-

ty medical devices; hospitals and dispensaries; and pathology labs and diagnostic centres.

They will also provide finance to manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators; importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs; Covid-related logistics firms; and also patients for treatment.

The RBI said requests from banks desirous of availing funds from the central bank will be subject to availability of funds as on the date of application. Funds cannot be guaranteed in case the total amount of Rs 50,000 crore is already availed.

"Furthermore, banks should endeavour to lend within a reasonable period, i.e., not later than 30 days from the date of availing the funds from the RBI," it said in a state-

ment, adding that there is no tenure restriction regarding lending by banks under the scheme. However, the banks will have to ensure that the amount borrowed from the RBI should at all times be backed by lending to the specified segments till maturity of the scheme.

Banks are being incentivised for quick delivery of credit under the scheme through extension of priority sector lending (PSL) classification to such lending up to 31 March, 2022. These loans will continue to be classified under PSL till repayment/maturity, whichever is earlier.

Banks can deliver these loans to borrowers directly or through intermediary financial entities regulated by the Reserve Bank of India.

## Petrol at ₹102/litre in some states

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY



► In Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan, petrol touched Rs 102.15 a litre, prices from oil companies showed.

► In Anuppur of Madhya Pradesh, petrol now costs Rs 101.86, while it is priced at Rs 99.95 a litre in Parbhani, Maharashtra.

► On Friday, petrol price was hiked by a steep 29 paise per litre and diesel

This is the second time this year that rates in some parts have crossed the Rs 100 mark - they had breached the physiological mark for the first time in mid-February.

Fuel prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes such as VAT and freight charges. Rajasthan levies the highest value-added tax (VAT) on

petrol in the country, followed by Madhya Pradesh.

Friday was the fourth straight day when prices of petrol and diesel were hiked since state-owned fuel retailers ended an 18-day hiatus in rate revision during assembly elections.

In four days, petrol price has increased by 88 paise per litre and diesel by Re 1 - neu-

tralising all of the reduction that came between 24 March and 15 April.

After raising petrol price by a record Rs 21.58 per litre and diesel by Rs 19.18 since the government raised excise duty to an all-time high in March last year, state-owned fuel retailers - IOC, BPCL and HPCL - had reduced petrol price by 67 paise a litre and diesel by 74 paise per litre effected between 24 March and 15 April.

Oil companies, who have in recent months resorted to unexplained freeze in rate revision, had hit a pause button after cutting prices marginally on 15 April. This coincided with electioneering hitting peak to elect new governments in five states including West Bengal.

As soon as the voting ended, oil companies indicated an impending increase in retail prices in view of firming trends in international oil markets.

## Tata Motors increases PV prices from today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

Tata Motors today said it will increase prices of its passenger vehicles by an average of 1.8 per cent depending upon the model and variant from 8 May, in order to partially offset the rise in input costs. The auto major noted that it would offer protection from the price increase to customers who have booked vehicles on or before 7 May.

With effect from 8 May, the company will increase prices of its passenger vehicles, averaging 1.8 per cent, depending on the variant and model, Tata Motors said in a statement.

"Increase in prices of commodities, such as steel and precious metals, necessitates us to pass on a part of it through increase in

price of our products," Tata Motors president, passenger vehicles business, Shailesh Chandra, said.

Keeping in mind the interest of customers who have booked cars already, the automaker which sells models like Safari, Harrrier and Nexon, is offering price protection for all bookings done till 7 May, he added.

Tata Motors sells a range of vehicles starting from entry hatchback Tiago to newly introduced Safari SUV, priced between Rs 4.85 to Rs 21.4 lakh (ex-showroom, Delhi).

For the well-being of its business and supporting ecosystem, the company recently announced that it had set in motion a comprehensive "Business Agility Plan" to protect and serve the interests of its customers, dealers and suppliers.

## Rupee rises by 27 paise vs US dollar

MUMBAI, 7 MAY

The rupee gained for the second straight day and closed 27 paise higher at 73.51 against the US dollar today, supported by positive domestic equities and weak American currency. At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened at 73.62 and hit an intra-day high of 73.50 and closed at 73.76.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.19 per cent to 90.78.

During the week, the rupee gained 58 paise against the US dollar. This is the second straight week of gain for the rupee.

"Indian rupee logged second weekly gain and closed at one-month high following weaker dollar and risk-on sentiments. Even after stronger than USEconomic data, Fed's dovish stance pushed greenback and US 10-year real yields lower," said Dilip Parmar, research analyst, HDFC Securities.

According to Kaynat Chainwala, fundamental research analyst currencies, Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers, the Indian rupee appreciated today owing to a weaker dollar ahead of key US jobs report and positive domestic equities. "Rupee is likely to depreciate towards 74.25-74.5 as investors cautiously await release of domestic inflation, industrial production and trade balance figures due next week and second purchase for Rs 35,000 crore under the G-SAP scheduled on 20 May," Chainwala said.

On the domestic equity market front, the BSE Sensex ended 256.71 points or 0.52 per cent higher at 49,206.47 points, while the broader NSE Nifty advanced 98.35 points or 0.67 per cent to 14,823.15 points.

## Fiscal deficit likely to rise to 8.3% in FY 2021-22

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

India is likely to breach its fiscal deficit target in the financial year to March 2022, mainly due to revenue shortfall, Fitch Solutions said today.

The government is targeting a deficit between revenue it earns and what it spends at 6.8 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in FY'22 (April 2021 to March 2022). "We at Fitch Solutions forecast the Indian Central government deficit to come in at 8.3 per cent of GDP in FY'22," it said.

Central government expenditure is likely to be around Rs 34.8 lakh crore as it looks to maintain its high pandemic-period spending so as to bolster pace of economic recovery.

Against this, revenues are likely to come in at Rs 16.5 lakh crore, down from govern-



Based on the FY'22 Union Budget, key spending areas planned for were infrastructure (transport, urban development and power), healthcare, agriculture, and rural development.

"However, given the flare-up in Covid-19 infections in India, which has since overwhelmed the Indian healthcare system, we expect there to be reallocation of spending in favour of healthcare spending this fiscal year," Fitch Solutions said, adding healthcare spending is projected to be Rs 74,600 crore, 2.1 per cent of total planned FY'22 expenditures, and this will likely come in higher than projected.

Another area expected to see increased spending is on

the rural employment scheme - Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA) scheme.

"During the Union Budget announcement in February, it had appeared as though India had managed to contain its domestic Covid-19 outbreak and that economic activity was turning a corner on to higher growth. We believe that this was what prompted the government to slash funding for the MGNREGA scheme from Rs 1.1 lakh crore in FY'21 to Rs 73,000 crore in FY'22."

"However, given the severity of India's ongoing health crisis, it is likely that more funds will have to be channelled to this scheme to support the rural economy, especially given reports of lockdowns in

# Scramble for beds sets in amid record Covid-19 surge in Odisha

Record spike of 12,238 new Covid cases, 19 deaths

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BHUBANESWAR, 7 MAY

**W**ith the rapidly deteriorating COVID situation beginning to have its debilitating impact on the state's health infrastructure, Odisha on Friday surpassed the 12,000-mark in fresh Coronavirus infections with a steep spike of 12,238 virus infections - a jump of 16.31 per cent in the past 24 hours, sending ominous signs to State's COVID managers.

Aggravating the situation further, the test positivity rate has shot up to 24.09% as the 50,799 samples were tested in the past 24 hours.

As the total active cases have swelled to 86,950 with today's steep spike, the scramble

for beds to get the COVID patients admitted in the hospital of choice (best available facility) has set in.

What compounds the scenario is the steady rise in the fatality graph with the State recording the highest single-day death toll of 19 on Friday.

As the State crossed the 12,000 daily infection mark, public health experts opine that the worst is yet to come.

The State is likely to witness the virus peak in the next week before possible flattening of the curve.

"But everything lies in the realms of speculation. Getting vaccinated and adherence to safety protocol are the sole options to keep the infections at bay", said a health expert.

"We have 1,100 general beds of which 200 are remaining unoccupied. But 300 ICU beds are all occupied. Keep-

ing in view the steady surge in infection, all the beds in our hospitals are likely to be filled up in a day or two", said an official SUM COVID hospital in Bhubaneswar.

Alarming, the test positivity rate has jumped to 24.09% after the State tested 50,799 persons in the past 24 hours.

The search for hospital beds is yet to assume disturbing proportions as it is the case in States like Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat or Chhattisgarh. A premier COVID hospital run by a private medical college is now on the verge of shortage of beds.

"We have 1,100 general beds of which 200 are remaining unoccupied. But 300 ICU beds are all occupied. Keep-

ing in view the steady surge in infection, all the beds in our hospitals are likely to be filled up in a day or two", said an official SUM COVID hospital in Bhubaneswar.

The 110-bedded COVID hospital run by us in Kendrapara is also on the verge of being fully occupied, the official added.

The health authorities in the State, however, claimed there was neither shortage of hospital beds nor oxygen.

The State has 9,008 numbers of general beds, 2,018 total beds in ICUs, 782 ventilators. War footing measures are underway to make a four to five-fold increase in bed strength in the coming days, said a senior official of the health and welfare department.

# Odisha govt issues SOP for requisition of Tocillizumab

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BHUBANESWAR, 7 MAY

The Odisha government has issued a standard operating procedure for the requisition of Tocilizumab drug used in the treatment of COVID-19 patients even as the State on Friday recorded 12,238 fresh cases - the highest so far in a single day - with almost 25% positivity rate pushing the tally to 51,240, while 19 fresh fatalities, the steepest single day death toll - raised the toll to 2,140.

Tocilizumab may be considered in patients with moderate disease with progressively increasing oxygen requirement and in mechanically ventilated patients not improving despite the use of steroids," the government instructed district collectors and chief district medical officers in an official circular.

Sundergarh and Khordha districts have emerged as COVID hotspots of the State recording 2,073 and 1,828 cases respectively. Besides, six more districts recorded above 400 cases. The breakup is Cuttack (916), Kalahandi (580), Sambalpur (544), Angul (480), Jajpur (437) and Bargarh (475).

Odisha currently has 86,950 active cases, while 4,23,257 patients have so far recovered from the highly infectious disease. The coastal state's positivity rate stands at 4.92 percent, the official said.

A total of 1,04,18,217 samples have been tested in the state thus far, including 50,779 on Thursday.

The State's recovery rate currently stands at 82.60% with active cases accounting for 15.79% of total positive cases registered in the State.

Marticulation marks based on half-yearly and tests

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BHUBANESWAR, 7 MAY

The Odisha Board of Secondary Education (BSE) today approved an evaluation method based on half-yearly and annual exams of the student in Class IX and marks secured in the practice tests for Class X students to award marks to Class X students following the cancellation of the Matrix Exam-2021.

To prepare the results, BSE has identified 2,766 schools as mentor schools. The headmaster of such schools will upload the highest marks secured by students in different subjects between 24 to 31 May. Students who are not satisfied with the marking can appear at offline examinations which will be held after the pandemic situation improves, stated the BSE.

## Odisha's vaccination count higher than the allocated doses

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BHUBANESWAR, 7 MAY:

The Odisha government today claimed to have vaccinated more people against the contagion than the number of doses allocated by the Centre by prudently using the extra dose available in each vial by cutting down wastage.

The state has achieved a negative wastage of -2.2 percent.

"Odisha has vaccinated more people than the number of doses allocated by GoI, by prudently using the extra dose available in each vial as wastage. Appreciate the health-

## Fake Covid testing lab sealed, man arrested

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BHUBANESWAR, 7 MAY

care professionals & nurses for their efficiency in administering vaccines to save precious lives", Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik stated in the Twitter handle. The total number of doses allocated by the Centre to Odisha for the population above 45 years to date is 61,44,140. However, the total doses administered are higher.

Meanwhile, the state on Friday received 2 lakh more doses of Covishield vaccine. The vaccines are being dispatched to the vaccination centres across the state for inoculation of beneficiaries above the age of 45, added the officials.

## Naveen waives rental of ₹2.16 cr against Maharashtra govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BHUBANESWAR, 7 MAY

issued by the CMO said.

The Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) had taken the Odisha Bhawan on rent from the Odisha government and converted it to a quarantine centre.

In the times of dire crisis, Odisha continues to lend a helping hand in supplying medical oxygen to Maharashtra for the past fortnight for treatment of COVID patients gasping for air.

Police on Friday sealed an unregistered diagnostic clinic and arrested its operator on the charge of carrying out fake RT-PCR test and issuing false COVID-19 certificate in Kakatpura area of Puri district.

The accused Prakash Das was arrested after the police were tipped off regarding the unauthorized operation of the clinic. The people who were issued RT-PCR test after false testing had been taken for a ride, police said.

The unlicensed laboratory was sealed and the accused was arrested under clinical establishment act and section-420 (cheating), Indian Penal Code provisions.

Earlier in September last year, a man was arrested in Odisha's Bargarh district on charges of manufacturing a dubious vaccine for Covid-19.

VIMSAR, which has a 225 bed Covid-19 hospital, depends on the three plants at Sambalpur and Jharsuguda

## Pradhan opens 100 bed ICU facility in Bargarh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BHUBANESWAR, 7 MAY

Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan inaugurated a 100 bed ICU ventilator facility at the Vikash Multi-Specialty Hospital in Bargarh district of Odisha.

The facility is funded by the Indian Oil Corporation.

Pradhan, inaugurated it virtually and said it will be helpful to patients across western Odisha districts which have been worst affected by the coronavirus.

Corporates are working earnestly to meet the nation's Liquid Medical Oxygen require-

ments in this hour of need. PSUs of MoPNG are stepping up to serve the national priority of strengthening providing such medical equipment and facilities to increase the Testing, Vaccinating ventilators, availability of oxygen, bed with ICU etc, noted Pradhan.

The Test Positivity Rate (TPR) in some districts of Western Odisha is alarmingly high. The number of patients requiring ICU ventilators is rising sharply, which has strained existing critical care facilities. This CSR intervention by IndianOil will further supplement

## Man held with pangolin in Mayurbhanj district

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BARIPADA, 7 MAY

The Mayurbhanj district police arrested one Singhu Baskey, 40, and rescued a pangolin from his house in Gohirapal village.

Acting on specific information, a special team of the police raided the house and found the pangolin in a room.

Divisional Forest Officer of Baripada Santosh Kumar Joshi said that the animal will be released in Simlipal National Park after two days of observation.

It may be noted that pangolin smuggling has been a major issue in the state with the crime branch police targeting pangolin smugglers across the state, particularly in and around Cuttack district.

## Kangaroo court order drives man to end life

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BALASORE, 7 MAY

tions made against her husband were baseless, availed court-punished him and directed him to pay Rs 5 lakh. He was also asked to provide 10 decimal of land for the victim. Das managed to pay Rs 3 lakh.

He was repeatedly asked to pay the rest of the amount. Failing to do so he committed suicide, alleged his wife.

The victim girl's family, on the other hand, alleged that Das had committed the crime and that the penalty amount never reached them.

The police have started investigating the charges levelled by the widow.

## Fifteen million baby turtles emerge at Gahirmatha

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BHUBANESWAR, 7 MAY

The unmanned Gahirmatha island is face to face with a unique natural heritage witnessing the birth of nearly 15 million baby turtles sans mothers.

A total of 1.48 crore of baby turtles have broken out of eggshells to mingle in the Gahirmatha seawaters till yesterday as the emergence of baby turtles marked the grand culmination of the annual sojourn of Olive ridley sea turtles to this unmaned Gahirmatha Island", said Divisional Forest Officer, Bhitarkanika Man-

grove (wildlife) Forest Division, Bikash Ranjan Dash.

The birth of baby turtles had begun on 25 April. The annual natural heritage has now reached the final phase.

The babies have emerged from as many as 2.98 lakh nests dug out by female turtles to lay

eggs at the Nasi-ii Island, close to defence installation at the wheelers' Island, he said adding that round-the-clock watch is being maintained to ensure the safety of newborns.

The baby turtles after

emerging from the nests loiter around the beach for an

hour or so and later make the seaward journey to mingle in the seawaters,

Gahirmatha beach is widely regarded as the World's largest nesting ground for these endangered marine animals and around this year 3.49 lakh female turtles had turned up at the beach for mass nesting, a phenomenon otherwise called arribada.

Each female lays 100 to 120 eggs. Hatchlings emerge out of the eggshells after 45 to 50 days of incubation period.

The mortality rate of hatchlings is exceedingly high as one out of a thousand survives the life cycle to grow into an adult.

## ULBs asked to feed stray animals in Odisha

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
BHUBANESWAR, 7 MAY

Odisha government has directed urban local bodies to make necessary provisions to feed stray animals during the lockdown period.

The ULBs are advised to meet the expenditures out of the funds available with them from various sources including their own revenue or subject to recuperation from SRC/CMRF sources.

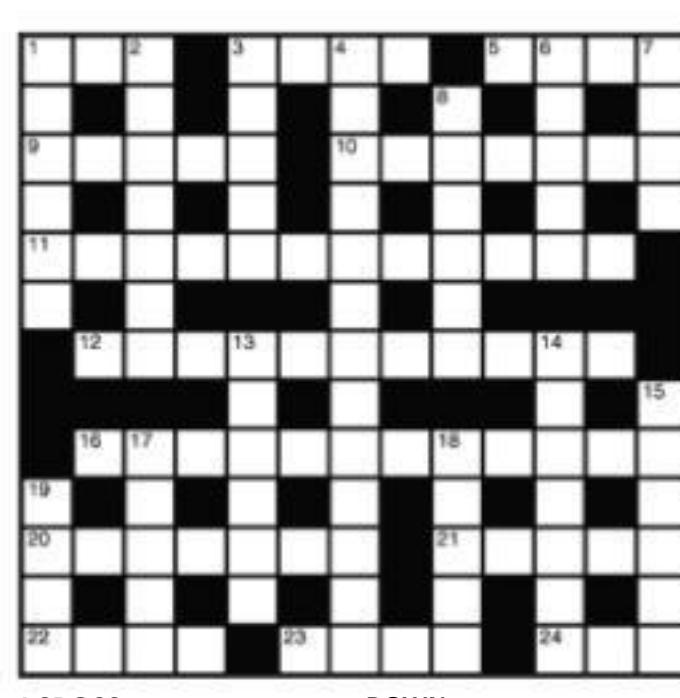
The aim is to provide feed stray dogs/animals and prevent starvation and minimize aggressive behavior of animals.

ULBs may co-opt and partner with organizations working for animal welfare in their area. In case of non-availability of such an organization, the ULBs can do it with in-house resources or Mission Shakti Groups/Federations.

The Urban Development department, in its notification, has said that the per day expenditure admissible in this regard would be Rs 20,000 in Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation area, Rs 10,000 for Berhampur, Cuttack, Rourkela and Sambalpur, other municipalities Rs 5000 per day and NACs Rs 2000 per day.

## LEISURE

### 10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



### SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS  
1 Tavern (3)  
3 Fine, dry powder (4)  
5 Woody plant (4)  
9 Brazilian dance (5)  
10 Exact (7)  
11 Lacking (12)  
12 Vulgar display (11)  
16 High fashion (5,7)  
20 Illness (7)  
21 Thic pancake (5)  
22 Obscene (4)  
23 Inactive (4)  
24 Dram (3)

DOWN  
1 Inculcate (6)  
2 Agency of retribution (7)  
3 Stunt the growth of (5)  
4 Urbane (13)  
6 Period of rule (5)  
7 Regular (4)  
8 Cease (6)  
13 High regard (6)  
14 Luxurious (7)  
15 Flaw (6)  
17 Permit (5)  
18 Male relative (5)  
19 Surety (4)  
20 Sovereignty (5)

By arrangement with The Independent  
Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

### BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



### RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



### DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



### NEED TO KNOW

#### HOSPITALS

22586262, 22585007

#### RAILWAY INQUIRY

General Inquiry 139

Toll Free Nos. 1800112511

U.P. Railways 238



*Situation in India is dire...people are tragically dying before they can even get to a doctor..US has moral responsibility to help India fight pandemic.*

US INDIAN-AMERICAN CONGRESSWOMAN PRAMILA JAYPAL

ON INDIA'S COVID SITUATION

## WEATHER

CITY	MAX	MIN
SINGAPORE	29°C	25°C
HONG KONG	24°C	20°C
TOKYO	15°C	12°C
LONDON	14°C	9°C
DUBAI	30°C	25°C
SAN FRANCISCO	13°C	9°C
NEW YORK	16°C	9°C
MOSCOW	15°C	9°C

S=sunny, CL=clear, H=hazy, R=rainy...

## THUMBNAILS



Nepalese veteran Sherpa guide, Kami Rita (51), an ace Sherpa guide scaled Mt Everest on Friday for the 25th time breaking his own record for the most successful ascents of the world's highest peak **AP**

**Indian-origin men arrested:** Three Indian-origin men have been arrested in Canada for allegedly trying to extort money from an 80-year-old in the name of the country's revenue agency. All the money was recovered and returned to the woman, police said. **AP**

**S'pore scam:** The Singapore Police Force alerted the public that a new type of scam is being perpetrated where compromised WhatsApp accounts are being used to solicit donations for the purchase of oxygen concentrator machines to aid India. **PTI**

**WHO on Sinopharm:** A key WHO panel was set to decide Friday whether to authorize emergency of a Chinese-made vaccine Sinopharm, a WHO spokesperson said, potentially paving the way for millions of doses to reach needy countries through a U.N.-backed program. **AP**

**UK: Accused arms dealer Bhandari's bail extended**

LONDON, 7 MAY

A UK court presiding over the extradition case of Sanjay Bhandari, an accused arms dealer and "proclaimed offender" wanted in India on money laundering charges, extended his bail until May 13.

Bhandari, who was arrested on an extradition warrant in July 2020 and is contesting his extradition to India, was due for a hearing on Friday but District Judge Michael Snow adjourned the case to next week to allow more time for the Indian government to provide further information. A full hearing in the case has been scheduled between June 7 and 11, but those dates are likely to change during next week's case management hearing due to scheduling issues.

Back in February, Bhandari, wearing a facemask in compliance with the COVID-19 lockdown requirements in court, was accompanied by his wife and spoke only to confirm his name and date of birth. The 59-year-olds lawyer, Robert Berg, informed the court that he had taken over the case only recently and therefore required additional time to serve evidence in the case.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), appearing on behalf of the Indian authorities, submitted a rejigged timetable for the case and CPS counsel Ben Lloyd informed the court that both sides hope to be able to keep to the June hearing dates unless there are big surprises thrown up in the defence evidence.

The hearing next week will be another case management hearing before the full extradition hearing in the case.

Bhandari is sought by the Indian authorities for prosecution for money laundering contrary to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002. He faces cases against him in India filed by the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). **PTI**

## Asian American health workers fight virus and racist attacks

## ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK, 7 MAY

Medical student Natty Jumreornvong has a vaccine and protective gear to shield her from the coronavirus. But she couldn't avoid exposure to the anti-Asian bigotry that pulsed to the surface after the pathogen was first identified in China.

Psychiatry patients have called her by a racist slur for the disease, she said. A bystander spat at the Thai-born student to "go back to China" as she left a New York City hospital where she's training.

And as she walked there in scrubs Feb. 15, a man came up to her, snarled "Chinese virus," took her cellphone and dragged

her on a sidewalk, said Jumreornvong, who reported the attack to police. The investigation is ongoing.

For health care workers of Asian and Pacific Islander descent, "it seems like we're fighting multiple battles at the same time — not just Covid, but also racism," says Jumreornvong, a student at the Icahn School of Medicine.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have faced a tide of harassment and attacks in many settings during the pandemic.

But those in health care are feeling the particular, jarring anguish of being racially targeted because of the virus while toiling to keep people from dying of it.

During the pandemic, studies found that 31% to 50% of doctors of

Asian heritage experienced on-the-job discrimination ranging from patients refusing their care to difficulty finding mentors. That's a lower proportion than Black physicians, but higher than Hispanic and white doctors, according to a 2020 study that reviewed existing research. In a separate 2020 study of medical residents, all those of Asian heritage said patients had quizzed them about their ethnicity.

People of Asian and Pacific Islander descent make up about 6% to 8% of the U.S. population but a greater share of some health care professions, including around 20% of non-surgeon physicians and pharmacists and 12% to 15% of surgeons, physical therapists and physician assistants, according to federal statistics. Before the pandemic, studies found

that 146% last year, while hate crimes overall rose 2 percent, according to California State

University, San Bernardino's Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism.

## SF: Man charged with stabbing Asian women

## ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO, 7 MAY

A man who allegedly stabbed two elderly women without warning at a San Francisco bus stop was charged with attempted murder in an attack that follows a number of others against Asian Americans nationwide, authorities announced.

Patrick Thompson, 54, of San Francisco also was charged with assault with a

deadly weapon and elder abuse for Tuesday's attack, with sentencing enhancements for great bodily injury, great bodily injury on elders and personal use of a deadly weapon, the district attorney's office said in a statement.

Thompson, who has a history of mental illness, could face a potential life sentence if convicted. He was scheduled to be arraigned on the charges Friday.

CO2 emissions from energy dropped 10% in the EU last year

**Carbon dioxide emissions from energy consumption account for about 75% of all man-made greenhouse gases in the EU.**

BRUSSELS, 7 MAY

Carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion dropped 10 per cent in the European Union last year amid the coronavirus pandemic, according to estimates from the EU's statistical office.

Eurostat said in a statement Friday that emissions fell in all of the EU's 27 member nations compared to 2019 as governments imposed lockdown measures to slow the spread of the virus.

Greece recorded the largest decrease (-18.7 per cent), followed by Estonia (-18.1 per cent), Luxembourg (-17.9 per cent), Spain (-16.2 per cent) and Denmark (-14.8 per cent). The countries with the smallest reductions were Malta (-1 per cent), Hungary (-1.7 per cent), Ireland (-2.6 per cent) and Lithuania (-2.6 per cent). Eurostat said the sources of the cutbacks varied.

The largest decreases were seen for all types of coals. The consumption of oil and oil products also decreased in almost all member states, while natural gas consumption decreased only in 15 member states and increased or stayed at the same level in the 12 others, the office said.

CO2 emissions from energy consumption account for about 75 per cent of all man-made greenhouse gases in the EU. The amounts produced are influenced by many factors, including economic growth, transportation and industrial activities.

As part of the European Green Deal, the EU has committed itself to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Brussels is also aiming to become climate-neutral by midcentury. Scientists say this goal needs to be achieved to keep average global temperatures from rising above 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 F) by the year 2100. **AP**

## Australia to lift ban on citizens returning from India: PM

The government's order on the matter is set to expire on 15 May

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MELBOURNE, 7 MAY

**A**ustralia will lift a ban on its citizens returning from Covid-hit India from next Saturday and the first repatriation flight will land in the city of Darwin the same day, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Friday.

The Australian government, for the first time in history, recently imposed a temporary ban on its citizens from returning home, if they have spent time in India up to 14 days before flying back.

The government threatened to prosecute them with a possibility of five years of jail term or a penalty of \$6,000 Australian dollars (USD 50,899). The move triggered a backlash with several lawmakers, doctors, civil societies and business leaders criticising the government for "abandoning" Australians in India and threatening the travellers with a hefty penalty and a jail term.

The government's order on the matter is set to expire on 15 May.

Following the National Security Committee on Friday, Morrison agreed it saw "no need to extend it beyond that date". Australia will charter three repatriation flights between May 15 and May 31. The first flight into Darwin will touch down on May 15. Direct commercial flights from India are still banned.

Morrison said flights being organised to repatriate stranded Australians will be "focused on bringing those Australian citizens, residents and families who have been registered with our high commission and consular offices within India."

"It will also be targeted (at) those 900 most vulnerable of the group," he said after the latest national Cabinet meeting. "I have asked the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to do a review of those registrations those who have been registered in India to ensure they are current. And that will assist a proper prioritisation of placing people on those flights," Morrison said.

The charters will be undertaken by the Australian crews, and they will require rapid antigen testing prior to departure," he said. He said that three flights will land in Darwin by

## US urges citizens to return home from India on available flights



## ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, 7 MAY

The US, which has urged its citizens not to travel to India due to an unprecedented surge in the COVID-19 cases there, on Friday encouraged those in the country to book their tickets to return home through currently available flights.

The US this week reissued its travel advisory on India, urging its citizens not to travel to the country due to an unprecedented surge in the COVID-19 cases there.

Additional flight options remain available on Air France, Lufthansa, and Qatar Airways via transfers in Paris, Frankfurt, and Doha. US citizens who wish to depart India are encouraged to book tickets through the airlines, the health alert said.

It is mandatory for anyone travelling to the US (2 years and older) to take a COVID-19 test no more than 3 days before travel and show a negative result to the airline before boarding the flight, it said.

The passengers should be prepared to show documentation of recovery from COVID-19 (proof of a recent positive viral test and a letter from a healthcare provider or a public health official stating clearance for travel). Travellers are encouraged to follow post-travel guidance once in the US, it said.

The US this week reissued its travel advisory on India, urging its citizens not to travel to the country due to an unprecedented surge in the COVID-19 cases there.

"We have already facilitated the return of around 20,000 Australians from India, and this has been a big task. And that task will commence again on May 15, he said. "All of this is about sensibly preventing a

third wave of Covid here in Australia, and doing that responsibly, while at the same time doing everything we can to sustainably bring Australians home from what is currently the most significant hot spot for those travelling into Australia or anywhere in the world right now," Morrison said.

"The biosecurity order is doing its job. It is doing what we intended it to do. It will run for the term we intended for it to run, and then that will be replaced by arrangements made beyond that point to ensure we can prevent the third wave," he said.

"We have already facilitated the return of around 20,000 Australians from India, and this has been a big task. And that task will commence again on May 15, he said. "All of this is about sensibly preventing a

## UK concerned about Covid's one version of Indian variant

LONDON, 7 MAY

Health authorities in England are believed to be especially concerned about one strain out of three Indian variants they have been tracking since last month.

According to a report based on leaked data by the BBC, Public Health England (PHE) is said to have recommended the B.1.617.2 version of the Indian variant to be classed as Variant of Concern (VOC) as it appears to spread more quickly than two other identified subtypes of the Indian variant.

The version, along with B.1.617 and B.1.617.3, have so far been classed as Variant Under Investigation (VUI). Latest surveillance data released by PHE indicates 61 more cases of the B.1.617 variant from India with the other two versions still under review, taking the total number of cases to around 500. Experts believe the variant B.1.617.2 is at least as transmissible as the so-called Kent variant, which had been detected in England at the end of last year and led to the UK's second wave surge in coronavirus infections earlier this year.

**Under-40s to get Oxford/AstraZeneca alternative:** The UK's medicine regulators updated their advice on Friday to recommend all adults under 40 years of age should be offered an alternative to the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine as a precautionary measure.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) update extends its previous advice for all under-30s to be given an alternative jab, amid reports of extremely rare cases of blood clots associated with the vaccine, which is being produced in India as Covidshield.

While the JCVI reiterates that the benefits from the vaccine continue to outweigh the risks, younger age groups are believed at a higher risk from the rare blood clots. **AP**

## EU leaders attend summit in person for first time this year

## ASSOCIATED PRESS

LISBON, 7 MAY

On the list of things not to do during a pandemic, holding big international gatherings is close to the top.

But European Union leaders and their large following of diplomats and advisers are meeting in Portugal on Friday for two days of talks, sending a signal that they see the threat from Covid-19 on their continent as waning, amid a quickening vaccine rollout.

Their talks hope to repair some of the damage the coronavirus has caused in the bloc, in such areas as welfare and employment. In a late addition to their agenda, EU leaders will also discuss Thursday's US proposal to share the technology behind COVID-19 vaccines to help speed the end of the pandemic.

The leaders will also take part in an unprecedent meeting, via videoconference, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose country needs more help with a devastating virus surge and who can smooth the path to an elusive bilateral trade deal.

Like across much of the world, Covid forced high-level political talks to move online over the past year in Europe. This is the 27-nation bloc's

first face-to-face summit in five months, after an exceptional meeting in Brussels last December to discuss post-pandemic spending. Another in-person summit, in Brussels, is planned for later this month.

EU leaders appear keen to try and convey a sense of normalcy, of slowly returning to normal, says Antonio Barroso, a political analyst at Teneo, a global advisory firm.

That is a key consideration for southern EU countries like Portugal, Spain and Greece, where tourism is an economic mainstay.

Despite a slow start to its inoculation drive, the EU this week passed the milestone of 150 million vaccinations and reckons it can reach what it calls sufficient community immunity in two months' time. The European Commission proposes relaxing restrictions on travel to the bloc this summer.

Who can move around, when and where remains a sensitive question for Europeans, however. Pandemic improvements have been uneven across the continent, and many Europeans remain subject to irksome restrictions. In a political nod to those concerns, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte won't travel to Portugal.

## PREP ON



People watch a rehearsal for the Victory Day military parade which will take place at Dvortsovaya (Palace) Square on 9 May to celebrate 76 years after the victory in World War II, in St. Petersburg, Russia on Friday. **IANS**

## Britain's Conservative Party strikes early blow in elections

## ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON, 7 MAY

**The victory proves that the Conservatives are making ground in parts of the country that have been Labour strongholds for decades.**



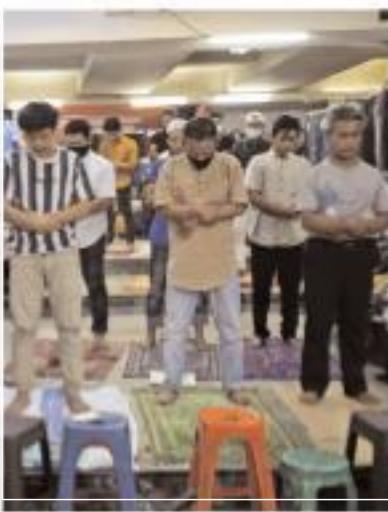
*We are trying to get a message across how important not only pangolins but other species are in Pakistan. We have lost a lot of species and we are losing more.*

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND SENIOR DIRECTOR RAB NAWAZ  
COMMENTING ON THE DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF PANGOLINS IN PAKISTAN

The Statesman  
NEW DELHI, SATURDAY 08 MAY 2021

11

## THUMBNAILS



Men perform Friday prayer at the Tanah Abang market during the last week of Ramadan in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Friday. People gearing up for the Eid-al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of the holiest month of Ramadan.

AP  
Taiwan rations water, drills extra wells: Some households in Taiwan are going without running water two days a week after a months-long drought dried up the island's reservoirs and a popular tourist lake. Authorities are drilling extra wells and using military planes to dump cloud-seeding chemicals in hopes of triggering rain.

Chinese in Iraq blocked from flying home: Employees of two Chinese state-owned companies in Iraq are blocked from returning to China for two months after 14 coworkers flew home with the coronavirus, Beijing's embassy in Baghdad said on Friday.

China to send COVID supplies to Nepal: China on Friday said it will send medical supplies and relief materials to Nepal to help the country combat the surge in coronavirus cases. "Nepal is a friendly neighbour and strategic cooperative partner of China," Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Wang Wenbin said

Kabul hit by blackout: Kabul was hit by a blackout as two power pylons were destroyed in explosions on Friday, Afghanistan's Breshna Sherkat, the national power company, confirmed. The incident took place at 4.45 a.m. in Kalakan district, the company, adding that power pylon was partially damaged in the attack

IANS

## Afghanistan forces launch counter-offensive in Baghlan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE  
KABUL, 7 MAY

Scores of militants have been killed in Afghanistan's Baghlan province as government forces launched a counter-offensive to repel Taliban attacks, a police official said on Friday.

"Scores of the armed insurgents have been killed over the past 48 hours and the Taliban attacks on Nahrin, Baghlan-e-Markza and Dahn-e-Ghori districts have been repulsed," the official said.

He also added that reinforcement had been reached and the situation would be soon brought under control.

Taliban militants in have seized parts of the restive Baghlan province over the past few days.

# Talks 'intensify' on bringing US back to Iran nuclear deal

US President Joe Biden says he wants to rejoin the deal but that Iran needs to return to compliance

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
VIENNA, 7 MAY

World powers held a fourth round of high-level talks Friday in Austria aimed at bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran, with both sides signalling a willingness to work out the major stumbling blocks.

The talks began in early April and Russian delegate Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted following Friday's meeting that the participants agreed on the need to intensify the process.

The delegations seem to be ready to stay in Vienna as long as necessary to achieve the goal, he wrote.

The US pulled out of the landmark 2015 deal in 2018 after then-President Donald Trump said the pact needed to be renegotiated.

The deal had promised Iran economic incentives in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, and the Trump administration reim-



AGENCIES

posed heavy sanctions on the Islamic republic in an unsuccessful attempt to bring Tehran into new talks.

Iran reacted by steadily increasing its violations of the deal, which is intended to prevent the country from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Iran began enriching uranium to a greater purity, stockpiling more than allowed and beginning to use more advanced centrifuges in an attempt to pressure the world

powers remaining in the deal - Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China for economic relief.

US President Joe Biden says he wants to rejoin the deal, as is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, but that Iran needs to return to compliance.

Iran, which insists it does not want to produce a nuclear bomb, has said it is prepared to reverse all of its violations but that Washington must

remove all sanctions imposed under Trump.

On the other side is the question of what Iran's return to compliance would look like.

Delegates to the Vienna talks concede, for example, that Iranian nuclear scientists cannot unlearn the knowledge they acquired in the last three years, but it is not clear whether Iran's new centrifuges would need to be destroyed, mothballed and locked away, or simply taken offline.

Because the US is currently out of the deal, there was no American representation at the talks.

Diplomats involved are shuttling between the Iranian side and a delegation from Washington elsewhere in Vienna. Between the high-level meetings, expert groups have been meeting to try and come up with solutions to the outstanding issues.

Ahead of the talks, a senior US official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the US position, said Wash-

ington has laid out the concessions it's prepared to make and that success or failure now depends on Iran making the political decision to accept those concessions and to return to compliance with the accord.

The official said it remains possible to reach an agreement before Iran's June presidential election, which some believe are a complicating factor in the discussions.

Iran's delegate to the talks, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, told his country's state-run IRNA news agency on late Thursday that his team was trying to reach an agreement as soon as possible but would not act in haste and would act in Iran's national interests.

We are on a specified path about which there are, fortunately, agreements, but there are serious obstacles in the way as well," Araghchi said. Heading into the talks, Ulyanov tweeted that he saw positive signs from the Iranian minister's statements.

## Myanmar's Karen insurgents burn another govt outpost



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
BANGKOK, 7 MAY

Took power in Myanmar after the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February.

The role of the ethnic fighting groups has become more important as the number of people joining street protests in Myanmar's cities and towns has declined, in large part due to deadly violence increasingly used by security forces to suppress them. Hundreds of demonstrators and bystanders have died.

There is now daily fighting between the government and the military forces of the Karen and the Kachin.

A shadow National Unity Government formed by the junta's foes announced this week the formation of a People's Defense Force intended to serve as a precursor to a Federal Union Army of democratic minorities, underlining the major rule they may play.

Video showed KNLA soldiers on Friday inside the U Thu Hta base - a group of wooden buildings and trenches cut into a forest - inspecting mortar shells left behind by the government military. The camp is close to the Salween River, which marks the border with Thailand.

## Top Hefazat militant arrested in Bangladesh



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
DHAKA, 7 MAY

However, the police have not disclosed the charges against Chowdhury, who has earlier served as the Member of Parliament from Sunamganj III.

Dozens of Hefazat leaders and activists have been arrested in recent weeks after the hardline Islamist group waged anti-government protests.

Some Hefazat leaders have been charged for instigating violence during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bangladesh visit in March and orchestrating the violent demonstrations in 2013 when several people were killed as the group demanded the enactment of a blasphemy law.

Chowdhury was elected the Member of Parliament in the Sunamganj III by-election in 2005, after the death of sitting MP Abdus Samad Azad.

Chowdhury has also served as the vice president of Islamist political party, Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh.

The legal affairs expert of Hefazat-e-Islam, Advocate Maulana Shahinur Pasha Chowdhury, was apprehended by the Criminal Investigation Department officials at Subidbazar in Sylhet, the Dhaka Tribune reported.

## Blast that hurt Nasheed act of terrorism: Maldives police

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MALE, 7 MAY

The Maldives police said Friday an explosion that wounded former President Mohamed Nasheed was an act of terrorism but no suspects were identified.

Australian police said they are ready to assist the investigation.

Nasheed, 53, was wounded in the blast Thursday night outside his home and was being treated in a hospital in the capital, Male, police said. Home Minister Imran Abdulla told a local television that his injuries were not life-threatening.

He is the current Parliament speaker and was the first democratically elected president of the Indian Ocean archipelago, from 2008 to 2012. Maldives police said in a text message they treat the explosion as an act of terrorism but did not give details on possible suspects or the bomb device. No one has claimed responsibility for the blast.

The Maldives is known for its luxury resorts but has

seen rare violent attacks. In 2007, a blast in a park in the capital wounded 12 foreign tourists.

Violence has been blamed on a rise in religious extremism. The Maldives has one of the highest per capita numbers of militants who fought in Syria and Iraq.

Arrests have been made from time to time. Maldives authorities announced in January that a group of eight arrested last November were found to have been planning to attack a school and were in the process of building bombs in a boat at sea. Police said they also conducted military training on uninhabited islands and had recruited children.

## China rebukes bomb attack

BEIJING, 7 MAY

China on Friday strongly condemned the bomb attack in Maldives which injured Parliament Speaker Mohamed Nasheed and wished him a speedy recovery.

Nasheed, 53, was wounded in the blast on Thursday night outside his home and was being treated in a hospital in the capital, Male, police said.

We strongly condemn this attack, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing.

We express sincere condolences to the Parliament Speaker Nasheed. We wish him an early recovery, the spokesman said on the attack on the former president of Maldives.

## Imran faces criticism over foreign service officers remark

ISLAMABAD, 7 MAY

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has come under criticism for accusing the country's foreign service officers of harbouring "colonial mindset" and "callousness" while appreciating their Chinese counterparts.

Addressing the envoys virtually on Wednesday, Khan showed anger at what he called shocking callousness of Pakistani diplomats abroad towards fellow Pakistanis.

We strongly condemn this attack, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing.

We express sincere condolences to the Parliament Speaker Nasheed. We wish him an early recovery, the spokesman said on the attack on the former president of Maldives.

## Japanese impatient over virus steps

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
TOKYO, 7 MAY

Trains packed with commuters returning to work after a weeklong national holiday.

Frustrated young people drinking in the streets because bars are closed. Protests planned over a possible visit by the Olympics chief.

As the coronavirus spreads in Japan ahead of the Tokyo Olympics starting in 11 weeks, one of the world's least vaccinated nations is showing signs of strain, both societal and political.

The government desperate to show a worried public it is in control of virus efforts even as it pushes a massive sporting event that a growing number of Japanese oppose hosting in a pandemic is set

Friday to expand and extend a state of emergency in Tokyo and other areas through 31 May.

For Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, the emergency declaration is both a health measure and a political tightrope walk as domestic criticism rises of Japan's seeming determination to hold the Olympics, at any cost.

Japan has avoided implementing a hard lockdown to curb infections, and past states of emergency have had little teeth, with people and businesses free to ignore the provisions.

These measures will be stronger, but they come as citizens show increased impatience and less desire to cooperate, making it possible that the emergency declaration will be less effective.

The current state of emergency in Tokyo and Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo prefectures in the west is scheduled to end

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## Troops kill two Palestinian attackers in West Bank: Cops

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
JERUSALEM, 7 MAY

Israeli troops shot and killed two Palestinians and wounded a third after the men opened fire on a Border Police base in the occupied West Bank on Friday, police said.

They said the three attackers opened fire on the base near the northern West Bank town of Jenin. The Border Police and an Israeli soldier opened fire in response, killing two of the men and wounding a third, who was evacuated to a hospital.

The violence comes at a time of heightened tensions over east Jerusalem, where dozens of Palestinians are at risk of being evicted following a long legal battle with Israeli settlers. Palestinian

protesters have clashed with police there on a nightly basis in recent weeks.

On Thursday, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian suspect of carrying out a drive-by shooting earlier this week in the West Bank that killed an Israeli and wounded two others.

Late Wednesday, Israeli troops shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian during a confrontation near the West Bank city of Nablus. The military said several Palestinians had thrown firebombs toward soldiers. The deaths came amid an uptick in violence coinciding with the Muslim holy month of Ramzan. Protesters have scuffled with police over the eviction of Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in east Jerusalem.

As we understand the rocket has adopted some special technical designing. Most of the part of the rocket will be burnt during its re-entry into the atmosphere. It is highly unlikely to cause any danger and harm to the aero activities or the Earth. The relevant competent authority will give an update in due course," he said.

Asked whether China knows where the debris is likely to fall and the concerned countries have been alerted to take preventive measures, Wang reiterated that the competent authority on the Chinese side will give updates in due course and in a timely manner.

Official media here quoted Chinese experts as saying that the parts of the disintegrated rocket will fall in international waters.

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## NEW ORDER

New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard (photo, left) is poised to become the first transgender athlete to compete at the Olympic Games, in a move that will reignite the often vitriolic debate over the ethics of trans sport. The 43-year-old, who was born male but transitioned to female in her 30s, is on the verge of reaching the Tokyo Olympics under coronavirus-enforced new qualifying rules.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

## THUMBNAILS

**Villa joins Odisha FC:** Indian Super League side Odisha FC have roped in David Villa to advise the club's coaching staff and guide the players. A statement from the club said, "Odisha FC is glad to announce its association with Villa, who has joined the club's Football Committee, and will head the global football operations of the club."

**Spain GP:** Mercedes driver Valtteri Bottas clocked the fastest time during the first practice session for the Spanish Grand Prix on Friday. Red Bull driver Max Verstappen was next, followed by Formula One leader Lewis Hamilton in his Mercedes. Only eight points separate Hamilton from Verstappen at the top of the standings after they finished 1-2 in the first three races.

**Virat donation:** India captain Virat Kohli and his actor wife Anushka Sharma have donated Rs 2 crore to a fund-raising project, which will raise a total of Rs 7 crore to support the country's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The two are raising money through crowd-funding platform Ketto.

## Hardik not considered; Kuldeep, Saini dropped for England tour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

Hardik Pandya (in photo) was not considered for selection as "he is still not in a position to bowl", while a fit-again Ravindra Jadeja made his way back to a 20-strong Indian squad announced on Friday for next month's World Test Championship final against New Zealand and a five-match series against England.

Along with Jadeja, batsman Hanuma Vihari and senior pacer Mohammed Shami also walked back into the side after missing the home series against England due to injuries.

All three had endured injuries during the away series against Australia earlier this year when India recorded one of their best triumphs.

Hardik, who was with team during the home series against England but did not play, has not been picked because he is not fit enough to do the job with the ball. He can play as a specialist batsman in the shorter formats but has to bowl for a place in the Test team.

"Hardik Pandya is still not in a position to bowl. The experiment of selectors to keep him during England and prepare him with bowling workload has failed miserably. He will henceforth not be considered for Test cricket," a BCCI source told PTI.

The selectors also picked four standby players -- Abhi-

many Easwaran, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, and Arzan Nagwaswalla, the BCCI stated in a press release.

Opener Easwaran and pacer Avesh Khan were also with the team during the England series while the extra pace did it for IPL regular Prasidh Krishna and Gujarat left-arm fast bowler Arzan Nagwaswalla, who had a stellar 2019-20 season. He is the only Parsi cricketer currently playing at the first-class level in India.

The 23-year-old left-arm pacer has 62 first-class wickets to his credit in 16 matches that he has played since his debut in 2018.

K L Rahul, who underwent a surgery after being diagnosed with acute appendicitis, and Wriddhiman Saha, infected with COVID-19 during the recently-suspended IPL, have been included subject to fitness.

Out-of-form spinner Kuldeep Yadav and pacer Navdeep Saini have been left out of the squad, which is expected to depart for England for the twin assignments in the third week of this

month.

Axar Patel has expectedly retained his place as the third spinner after a successful debut series against England.

Batting star Prithvi Shaw has not managed to impress the selectors with his white-ball form and has been overlooked. Also ignored was Bhuvneshwar Kumar, whose fitness woes continue to come in the way of a consistent run.

The WTC final against the Black Caps will be held from June 18 in Southampton followed by the Tests against England from August 4.

The Test series against England will start in Nottingham, followed by matches at the Lord's (August 12 to 16), Leeds (August 25 to 29), The Oval (September 2 to 6) and Manchester (September 10 to 14).

**India's squad:**

Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (Captain), Ajinkya Rahane (vice-captain), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Shardul Thakur, Umesh Yadav, KL Rahul (subject to fitness clearance), Wriddhiman Saha (wicket-keeper; subject to fitness clearance).

Standby players: Abhimanyu Easwaran, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, Arzan Nagwaswalla.

## Olympic hockey gold ultimate goal, says Pal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BANGALORE, 7 MAY

Young Indian hockey midfielder Rajkumar Pal (in photo) says winning the gold medal in this year's Olympics is the ultimate goal for the side. He and his teammates are working relentlessly on ending a 41-year-old story of failures, aiming at the highest honours in the Tokyo Games.

Erstwhile powerhouse of the game, India won last of their eight Olympic gold medals in the 1980 Moscow Games. The Tokyo Games are scheduled to be held from 23 July to 8 August.

The Olympic gold is the ultimate goal for all of us and we have been putting in a tremendous amount of hard work to achieve our target in this year's Olympics," said Pal. He made his debut against world champions Belgium in the Pro League last year.

The 23-year-old is delighted with his progress so far with the national team and aspires to achieve more for the country in the near future.

"The way you start anything is very crucial and, therefore, I really wanted to get off to a good start in my international career. It was a dream come true for me when I got the chance to walk on to the field with the Indian team for the match against Belgium in the Hockey Pro League last year and I am really happy with the way things have panned out for me so far.

"Then the two goals I scored against Australia in

the Pro League gave me a lot of confidence and I have just looked to retain the momentum," said the midfielder.

Pal added that he was looking forward to making many more contributions to the Indian team's victories in the future. "It felt great to contribute to the team's victory with a goal against Argentina in our first match of the tour last month. My main objective is to help the team win in any way I can, and I was happy with the way I performed on our recent tour of Argentina."

"Even though I haven't played too many matches for the Indian senior team, I have already started to feel very comfortable at the highest level."

## Rowing success

Rowers Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh qualified for the Olympics in the men's lightweight double sculls event after finishing second in the final race of the Asia-Oceania Continental Qualifying Regatta Championships in Tokyo on Friday. Another Indian, Jakar Khan, finished fourth in the men's singles sculls final.

## Nehwal and Srikanth suffer major Olympic setbacks

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, 7 MAY

The Malaysia Open Super 750 tournament, one of badminton's last two Olympic qualifying events, was on Friday postponed owing to a recent Covid-19 surge in the host country, dealing a severe blow to the Tokyo hopes of Indian stars like Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth.

The \$600,000 event was scheduled to be held in Kuala Lumpur from 25 May to 30 May.

"All attempts were made by the organisers and the Badminton World Federation to provide a safe tournament environment for all participants, but the recent surge in infections left no choice but to postpone the tournament," the BWF said in a statement.

"The BWF can confirm the rescheduled tournament will no longer take place in the Olympic qualifying window. New tournament dates will be confirmed at a later date."

The decision came as a huge setback for London Olympics bronze medallist Nehwal and men's star Srikanth's last hopes of Olympic qualification.

Following the postponement of the India Open, Nehwal and Srikanth's qualification for the Tokyo Games hinged on the Kuala Lumpur event followed by the Singapore Open (1 June - 6 June).

It is highly unlikely that the Indian duo will be able to travel to Singapore as the country has suspended all flights from Covid-19-ravaged

India.

The Badminton Association of India earlier said, going by the guidelines, for any Indian to enter Singapore, she or he has either to be in quarantine in a country other than India for 14 days to be allowed in.

"Alternatively, all players have to be in a 21-day quarantine in Singapore."

Malaysia too has banned all flights from India and the BAI had been exploring alternative routes to get there - via Doha or Sri Lanka - but with the suspension of the Kuala Lumpur event, efforts could now be directed towards Singapore.

Indian badminton players who have already made the cut for the Olympics include PV Sindhu, B Sai Praneeth and the men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwikairaj Rankireddy.

Besides the quartet, Srikanth, Nehwal and the women's doubles pair of N Sikki Reddy and Ashwini Ponnapappa were supposed to participate in the two Olympic qualifiers.

International Olympic Committee head Thomas Bach's visit to Japan might be "difficult" given the expected extension of a state of emergency due to high numbers of coronavirus patients, Tokyo 2020 president Seiko Hashimoto said.

"I suspect that coming to Japan in the midst of this very severe situation would also be an emotional burden for president Bach," she said at a Press conference held on Friday.

Japanese media reports have said the 67-year-old German would attend a torch relay ceremony in the western city of Hiroshima on 17 May, but Hashimoto said his visit had not been confirmed.

The Tokyo 2020 organisers will keep a close eye on the coronavirus situation and make a decision on Olympic spectators in June based on that, she also said.

Japan is set to extend a state of emergency in Tokyo and four other areas until the end of May, meaning the measures would endless than two months before the Olympics starts.

## Villarreal reach Europa League final as Gunners foofle it

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
LONDON, 7 MAY

Unai Emery is heading back to the Europa League final at the expense of the club that fired him last season.

Emery's Villarreal held Arsenal to a 0-0 draw in the second leg of their semi-final on Thursday, which was enough to secure a 2-1 aggregate win and set up a final against Manchester United on 26 May in Poland.

Emery will be looking for his fourth Europa League title after winning three straight with Sevilla and then taking Arsenal to the final two years ago.

"Satisfaction, pride, happiness." Emery said when asked how he was feeling after the match. "We have to go to the final and beat Manchester United."

On his first return to the Emirates since being fired in November 2019, Emery calmed

ly walked out of the tunnel so late that he nearly missed the kickoff.

He quickly shook his replacement Mikel Arteta's hand and then watched as his new team held a toothless Arsenal at bay without ever looking seriously threatened.

For Arsenal, the failure to overturn the deficit means the team are facing the likelihood of being shut out of European competition for the first time in 25 years.

Villarreal controlled the first half, nearly scoring an early goal when Samu Chukwueze fired a curling shot in the fifth minute. But Arsenal goalkeeper Bernd Leno was alert and palmed the ball out for a corner.

The visitors were nearly gifted a goal in the 14th, when Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey's wild backpass from longrange nearly foaled Leno, who had to backpedal quick-



ly to get the ball under control. A free-kick from Daniel Parejo curled over Arsenal's wall but didn't dip, sailing just over the crossbar in the 23rd. Arse-

nal lacked spark in the first half, but nearly went ahead in the 26th when captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's shot hit the outside of the post.

The forward nearly scored again in the 39th through a goal-keeping error when his shot was spilled by Geronimo Rulli and the ball squeezed between

his legs. But the keeper was able to claim it before the ball could trickle over the line.

Aubameyang hit the post again in the second half, this time on the inside. And Arsenal defender Rob Holding had two headers that went close, but Villarreal's defence saw the match out.

Emery is already the most successful coach in the history of the Europa League, winning it three times in a row with Sevilla from 2014 to 2016. But he failed on his fourth attempt in 2019, when Arsenal lost 4-1 to Chelsea in the final.

On Thursday, Emery pumped his fists and screamed in joy at the final whistle before going to shake Arteta's hand. Villarreal players were ecstatic, celebrating on the field by unfurling and holding a big banner in Spanish that said "Nos vemos en Polonia," or "We'll see you in Poland."

Two of Ral Albiol's team-

mates tackled him to the ground while he was giving a post-match television interview and sprayed him with water.

In the dressing room, the celebrations continued with players dancing and singing along to "Dale Don Dale."

Arsenal's elimination will anger fans further as the team sit mid-table in the Premier League and have little chance of qualifying for even the Europa League next season.

"We are devastated, really disappointed," Arteta said. "We tried everything up until the last minute."

It's a situation Arsenal hasn't been in since the 1995-96 season, a year that fell between the illustrious managerial eras of George Graham and Arsene Wenger.

A few dozen Arsenal fans gathered outside Emirates Stadium before the match, some of them protesting against Stan Kroenke's ownership and

the club's doomed bid to join the Super League a few weeks ago.

It was a much smaller group compared to the hundreds who held a noisy demonstration before the Premier League match against Everton on 23 April.

Arteta was forced to make a change before a ball was even kicked on Thursday when left back Granit Xhaka was forced to be taken out of the starting lineup after he pulled up with a tight muscle in the warmup.

"It changed our game plan completely. We could see in the first half we were struggling with the ball," Arteta said. Kieran Tierney, who himself just came back from a knee injury and only started training again a few days ago, was Xhaka's replacement. Arteta lamented that he didn't have a fully fit squad, also mentioning Aubameyang's recent bout of malaria.