

SHORT TAKES

Wrestler dies in N. Delhi after fight with colleagues

New Delhi: A wrestler died after he was allegedly assaulted by other wrestlers in northern part of the national capital, police said on Wednesday. According to police, they received information regarding a fight between wrestlers at Chhatrasal Stadium around 12 pm on Tuesday. An injured wrestler was taken to BJRM hospital and later shifted to Trauma Centre where he died on Wednesday morning, they added. The deceased was identified as Sagar, police said. A senior police officer said that as of now, it seems there was a fight between the wrestlers. Some were injured and one died. The reason for the fight is yet to be ascertained, police said, adding the matter is being investigated. — PTI

Nigerian arrested with drugs in underwear at IGI

New Delhi: A Nigerian man has been apprehended by CISF personnel from the Delhi airport for allegedly smuggling narcotics that were hidden in his underwear, officials said on Wednesday. They said 200 grams of methaqualone, a sedative, was recovered from Nonso Ekwelior Base as he was undergoing security checks at terminal two of the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport on Tuesday just before he was scheduled to board an Indigo airlines flight to Bengaluru. The foreigner was handed over to the Narcotics Control Bureau authorities along with the seized narcotics that is estimated to be worth ₹40,000, a senior CISF officer said. — PTI

MyGate & I2Cure collaborate to break Covid chain

New Delhi: MyGate has collaborated with I2Cure to secure its 15,000 gated societies across Bengaluru, Pune, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Noida, Ahmedabad, Gurugram, Kolkata and Chennai against the pandemic spread. I2Cure's patented BioShield antiseptic lotion, a single-use broad-spectrum anti-microbial, offers protection of iodine against Covid-19 for six hours at a stretch. Abhishek Kumar, COO & co-founder, MyGate, says: "With the collaboration, gated communities can now get direct access to I2Cure BioShield. This movement has the potential to dramatically slow down the spread of the virus in urban India."

NSG senior commander dies, 1st Covid death in commando force

New Delhi, May 5: Country's federal counter-terrorist commando force National Security Guard (NSG) reported its first coronavirus linked death on Wednesday when a senior commander succumbed to the infection, officials said.

Group Commander (coordination) B.K. Jha was admitted to the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF's) Hospital in Greater Noida after he contracted Covid-19 and breathed his last early morning, they said.

This is the first death from coronavirus in the NSG. The officer was working with one

of the administrative units of the force and was not in the combat wing, they added. He was 53. Jha, originally a 1993-batch officer of the BSF cadre, hailed from Bihar. The officer joined the NSG on deputation from the Border Security Force in 2018. He had earlier served as the principal staff officer and commandant to the BSF director general.

Both the forces that function under the command of the Union Home Ministry controlled his death on their respective Twitter handles.

"DG and all ranks of NSG mourn his death and remem-

ber his distinguished service to the Nation. May Almighty rest his noble soul in eternal peace and give strength to his family to bear the loss," the NSG said in its Twitter message.

The NSG, as per official data updated till Monday, has had over 430 Covid-19 infection cases till now, out of which only about 59 are active. The CAPF's like the CRPF, BSF, ITBP, CISF and SSB and two other forces under the Union home ministry, NSG and NDRF, had over 66,000 Covid-19 cases among them, out of which over 7,900 are active, as per the data. — PTI



Auto-ambulances, meant to carry Covid-19 patients, during their launch by AAP MP Sanjay Singh in New Delhi on Wednesday. The auto-ambulances have been started with an objective to ensure that patients with mild symptoms and having oxygen levels between 85 to 90 can reach nearby hospitals in time. The auto-ambulance services can be booked through two numbers -- 9818430043 and 011-41236614. — PTI

Water supply to be affected for 3 days from today: DJB

'Haryana releasing less raw water into Yamuna'

New Delhi, May 5: Drinking water supply will remain affected in parts of Delhi for the next three days as a result of Haryana releasing less raw water into the Yamuna, the Delhi Jal Board said on Wednesday. The supply from Wazirabad, Chandrawal and Okhla water treatment plants has been "adversely" hit due to the reduction in release of raw water into the river and depletion of water level at Wazirabad pond, a statement said.

Water supply in parts of Central Delhi, North Delhi, South Delhi, West Delhi and cantonment

areas will remain affected in "the morning and the evening" for the next three days. The situation is likely to persist till the pond level improves to normal, the utility said. At present, the pond level at Wazirabad pond is 667.2 feet against the normal of 674.5 feet.

Delhi Jal Board vice chairman Raghav Chadha had on Saturday said the depleting water levels in the Yamuna is leading to a shortage of drinking water in several parts of Delhi and may also affect hospitals in the city in the coming days.

He had urged Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar to release more raw water into the Yamuna so that sufficient drinking water is available for the national capital. The water from Wazirabad pond is drawn for treatment at Wazirabad, Okhla and Chandrawal treatment plants. — PTI

He said Delhi has put in place infrastructure for vaccination which can be used to scale-up inoculation drive massively within 24 hours.

■ 'Citizens of Delhi want the lockdown to continue' Delhi not receiving enough Covid-19 vaccines: Kejriwal

New Delhi, May 5: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said the city is not getting enough vaccines, and reiterated if doses are made available in time his government could vaccinate everyone here within three months. He also said the Delhi government will decide about extending the ongoing lockdown in the city depending on the number of Covid-19 cases.

"Right now the citizens of Delhi themselves want this lockdown to continue to stop the spread of this virus," he said after visiting a vaccination centre at Radha Soami Satsang Beas in Rajendra Nagar.

He said Delhi has put in place infrastructure for vaccination which can be used to scale-up inoculation drive massively within 24 hours.

"Supply of more vaccine is the fundamental requirement right now. If vaccine is provided in sufficient quantity, we can achieve our target of vaccinating entire Delhi in three months," he said.

The Delhi government has already ordered 67 lakh doses each of Covishield and Covaxin vaccines. "The process of vaccination has started successfully. We have received a very less quantity of vaccines. Now the kind of infrastructure we have developed based on that we can ramp up the vaccination drive within 24 hours," he said.

Full-fledged vaccination of people in the age group 18-44 years began in Delhi



Supply of more vaccine is the fundamental requirement right now. If vaccine is provided in sufficient quantity, we can achieve our target of vaccinating entire Delhi in three months

— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi CM

on May 2, after the city government received 4.5 lakh doses of vaccine.

The vaccination drive in the city has begun at both private and government facilities, and a large number of youth are turning up for taking jabs, the chief minister said.

"As I earlier said that we want to vaccinate every citizen here within three months but to do that we need proper supply of vaccines. I am very hopeful that we can reach that target but for that sufficient supply of vaccine should be ensured."

Kejriwal also said his government is working with the Centre on the issue of oxygen supply. "We completely understand that the Central gov-

Delhi records 311 deaths, 20,960 coronavirus cases

New Delhi, May 5: The national capital recorded 311 Covid-19 deaths in a day, and 20,960 cases with a positivity rate of 26.37 per cent, according to the health bulletin issued by the Delhi health department on Wednesday afternoon. This is the fourth day on the trot that the positivity rate has remained below 30 per cent.

The city government said in a statement that all-round efforts and aggressive Covid management have resulted in a dramatic decrease in the city's Covid positivity rate. "Within just 10 days, Delhi's Covid positivity rate has reduced by 9 per cent. On April 26, Delhi reported a positivity rate of 35 per cent and on May

5, it came down to around 26 per cent," it said.

A day after lieutenant governor (L-G) Anil Bajjal directed for a survey of the Covid super-spreader spots in Delhi, teams were deployed in several districts for listing the crowded areas of the national capital, officials said on Wednesday. In view of a rapid surge in coronavirus cases in Delhi, Bajjal directed the district magistrates (DMs) and deputy commissioners of police (DCPs) to conduct an intensive survey in their areas and identify the potential "super-spreader" sites.

Some district officials said the survey will pick up pace in the coming days since people are at home due to the lockdown. — PTI

ernment is responsible for ensuring oxygen to the entire country. But we hope that Central government will provide Delhi with its quota of required oxygen," he said.

The Centre has allocated 590 MT of oxygen per day to Delhi. The city government has complained of getting less oxygen than the fixed quota and demanded it to be raised further to 976 MT.

"For the past several days, we are battling with the scarcity of oxygen. During this tough time,

we have also received massive support from the Supreme Court and the High Court. I am hopeful that in the coming days the situation will improve."

The oxygen supply is being constantly monitored, he said.

A total 43 SOS calls for oxygen were received from hospitals on Tuesday, Kejriwal said, and added the Delhi government is working round the clock to ensure there is no fatality due to lack of it. — PTI

Cap of ₹10K help to workers, dependents for Covid treatment not justified, says HC

New Delhi, May 5: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday told the Delhi government that it may not be justified to put a cap at ₹10,000 on financial assistance provided to a construction worker and his dependents towards treatment of Covid-19 as it may not be sufficient if more than one person in the family was infected.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said that Covid-19 was a highly contagious disease and if one person in a family gets infected, others may too and each of them would require a course of medication.

The court asked advocate Urvi Mohan, appearing for the Delhi government's Building and Other

Construction Workers Welfare Board, to take instructions with regard to the concerns raised by it on the quantum of financial assistance.

The direction came after Mohan told the court that the Board has issued an order to provide financial assistance of ₹5,000 to every Covid positive worker registered with it and to any of his dependents who are also infected, for treatment, subject to a maximum of ₹10,000.

The court also said that the Board's insistence on a RTPCR test report for disbursement of the amount would defeat the purpose of the scheme as an RTPCR test may not be affordable for a construction worker and the same is not always

accurate either. The bench said that a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) report or a prescription by a doctor certifying that the person has Covid may also be considered as alternatives to an RTPCR test report.

On the issue of bank details of the workers being sought again under the latest financial assistance scheme, the court said the bank account details would have been submitted by a worker at the time of registration and, therefore, asking for it again may cause confusion if the person gives details of another account.

The lawyer said that the bank details were sought again as recently there were mergers and acquisitions of various banks and

as a result the payments made to some workers had not been credited to their accounts due to change of IFSC code.

She said that the Board has informed her that bank account details would be sought only if the payment fails.

The bench noted the submission and further stated that the scheme should be communicated to all workers via SMS and its benefits would be available to even those whose applications for renewal of registration with the Board were pending.

The court said that the scheme in fact should be applicable to all workers and their dependents who got infected from April 1 onwards. — PTI

Delhi govt seeks more time to compile Class 10 results

New Delhi, May 5: The Delhi government on Wednesday urged the CBSE to review the timeline for compiling Class 10 board exam results since many of its teachers are involved in Covid-19 duties and schools are being used as vaccination centres. In a letter to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the government also cited the high positivity rate, the rising number of Covid-19 cases in the national capital and the lockdown imposed in the city till May 10.

The CBSE has said that the marks for Class 10 students will have to be submitted by schools by June 11 and the result will be declared by June 20.

"Keeping in view the ongoing situation, including its emotional ramifications, enforcement of lockdown and deployment of teachers for various

duties, the competent authority of CBSE is requested to kindly review the Time Schedule... regarding Policy for Tabulation of Marks for Class X Board Exams 2021," the Delhi government said.

"Further, to assist the district administration, most of the teachers and other staff, including data entry operators and IT assistants of Delhi Government schools, are at the forefront of Covid-19 related duties," it said.

According to the letter, teachers are involved in conducting door-to-door surveys in Covid-19 hotspots and vulnerable areas. — PTI

Jaishankar in UK isolation after 2 of his team positive

■ Continued from Page 1 protocols, including daily testing of all delegates," a British official was quoted as saying in media reports. Mr Jaishankar tweeted, "Was made aware yesterday evening of exposure to possible Covid positive cases.

As a measure of abundant caution and also out of consideration for others, I decided to conduct

my engagements in the virtual mode.

That will be the case with the G7 Meeting today as well."

Sources said all members of the Indian delegation had tested negative before their departure from New Delhi and that Mr Jaishankar's health condition and that of other members was normal.



A family member of a Covid-19 patient outside an oxygen-filling center in New Delhi on Wednesday. The national capital received 555 tonnes of oxygen on Tuesday, the highest till now, said AAP MLA Raghav Chadha as the city hospitals struggled with a shortage in the supply of the life-saving gas amid a spurt in coronavirus cases. — PTI

3 arrested for selling painted fire extinguishers as oxygen cylinders

New Delhi, May 5: The Delhi Police has arrested three persons who allegedly used to paint fire extinguishers as oxygen cylinders and sell them to needy people, officials said on Wednesday. The accused have been identified as Ravi Sharma (40), Mohammad Abdul (38) and Shambhu Shah (30), all residents of Alipur, they said.

Police said the matter came to light Tuesday after a person named Mukesh Khanna, who runs Radha Vallabh Sewa Sangh NGO which serves free oxygen cylinders to Covid patients, filed a complaint

at the Farsh Bazar police station.

Khanna alleged that one oxygen cylinder distributor, Varsha Engineering at Apni Colony, Alipur, had sold him oxygen cylinders at ₹5,500 per for 4.5 liters.

When he contacted the same distributor again and asked for more cylinders, the distributor demanded ₹13,000 for per 4.5 liters cylinder, a senior police officer said.

On the complaint, a raiding team reached the location at Alipur where three people were found engaged in painting some gas cylinders in black color, the offi-

cer said. Police seized 532 fire extinguisher iron gas cylinders of different sizes, 26 oxygen gas cylinder nozzles, two electric grinders used to remove the red paint of the cylinders, three silver color spray-paint cans, one black paint box, one paint-brush, one pipe-wrench and ₹49,500 cash were recovered from their possession, police said.

The accused used to collect the empty or expired fire extinguisher cylinders and sell it either as scrap or refill the CO2 for fire-fighting, police said. — PTI

SC stays Delhi HC contempt order, asks Centre to submit plan by today

■ Continued from Page 1 Mumbai. The top court, in nearly two-hour hearing, said that putting officers in jail is not going to bring oxygen to Delhi and questioned the Centre about the supply it has made to the national capital since May 3.

The bench said, "Let us ensure lives are saved and by enhancing supply of around 150MT per day the quantity will come up to 700MT and number of lives will be saved."

It was hearing the Centre's appeal against the Delhi high court's Tuesday order of issuing contempt notice and seeking personal appearance of its officials for non-compliance with the directions on supply of oxygen to treat Covid-19 patients.

The bench said that it had ordered supply of 700 MT oxygen to Delhi daily from May 3 as the pandemic in Delhi is at a very critical stage. "Putting officers in jail is not going

to bring oxygen to the city, let us ensure lives are saved," said the bench, which also comprised Justice M.R. Shah.

"This is not adversarial litigation. The Centre, Delhi governments are elected and doing their best to serve Covid-19 patients," solicitor-general Tushar Mehta said.

"Tell us how much oxygen you have allocated to Delhi in the last three days," the bench said. — PTI



Passengers wait for a vehicle as most of the commercial vehicles were off the road during the lockdown at Nizamuddin railway station in New Delhi on Wednesday. — G.N. JHA

SHORT TAKES

41,953 new cases of Covid found in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala chief minister Mr Pinarayi Vijayan has urged the centre to provide 1000 tonnes of Liquid Medical Oxygen besides 50 lakh doses of Covaxin in the wake of huge spike in Covid 19 cases in the state. The chief minister wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting him to accept the state's demand at the earliest. The state reported 41,953 new case of Covid-19 with active cases crossing 3.75 lakh mark. The test positivity rate continued to be on the higher side at 25.69 percent. The state also reported 58 deaths on Wednesday taking the death toll to 5565. The chief minister described the situation as grave as TPR was on the rise. He said in view of the huge increase in active cases, hostels and lodges would be converted to Covid First Line Treatment Centres. — PTI

Odisha allows home delivery of liquor

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha government on Wednesday decided to allow home delivery of foreign liquor during the lockdown. A decision to this effect was taken as all the all non-essential shops, including liquor outlets, have remained closed during the 14-day state-wide lockdown that began with effect from Wednesday morning. In a letter to the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) P.K. Mohapatra, the excise department principal secretary S.K. Lohani stated the home delivery of liquor is proposed to be permitted during lockdown. "Home delivery of liquor Indian-made Foreign Liquor and beer (IMFL/beer) by duly authorised food aggregators/technology platforms/delivery service providers as well as by IMFL OFF/ON shop licensees following the extant guidelines of Excise Department dated 23.05.2020," the letter read.

Woman jumps on funeral pyre of dad

Barmer (Rajasthan): In a tragic incident, a 34-year-old woman sustained severe burns here after she jumped on the funeral pyre of her father, who died after contracting Covid-19, police said on Wednesday. Damodardas Sharda (73) passed away at a hospital here on Tuesday after suffering from the viral disease, they said. While Sharda was being cremated, the youngest of his three daughters, Chandra Sharda, suddenly jumped on the pyre, the police said, adding that although she was pulled out of it by people, she sustained around 70 per cent burn injuries. She was rushed to a nearby hospital and from there, referred to Jodhpur for treatment, they said. — PTI

EC POSTPONES BYPOLLS TO 3 LS, 8 ASSEMBLY SEATS

New Delhi: The Election Commission on Wednesday decided to defer proposed by-polls to three Lok Sabha and eight Assembly seats in view of the prevailing coronavirus situation in the country. The poll panel said it would not be appropriate to hold the electoral exercise till the pandemic situation improves significantly. The Commission said vacancies have been notified in three parliamentary constituencies of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Khandwa (Madhya Pradesh) and Mandi (Himachal Pradesh). Also, there are eight vacancies in state assemblies — Kalka and Ellenabad in Haryana; Vallabh Nagar in Rajasthan; Sindgi in Karnataka; Rajabala and Mawryngkneng in Meghalaya, Fatehpur in Himachal Pradesh and Badvel in Andhra Pradesh. The poll panel had so far not announced schedule of the proposed bypolls. There are few more vacancies for which reports and notifications are awaited, the panel said. "The Commission has reviewed the matter today (Wednesday) and has decided that due to outbreak of the second wave of Covid-19 in the country it would not be appropriate to hold by-elections till the pandemic situation significantly improves and conditions become conducive to hold these by-elections," it said. — PTI

'Polls sacrosanct': Jaishankar defends rallies at G7

MEA however concedes that healthcare system in country stands 'exposed'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

Elections are "sacrosanct" in India and "we are a deeply political society", external affairs minister S. Jaishankar said, defending the government from criticism that the election process including rallies led to the spread of Covid in the country. In an interaction as part of the "Global Dialogue Series", the minister — who is currently on a visit to London — however conceded that the healthcare system in the country stood "exposed" in the country and blamed it on inadequate spending on health in the past 75 years, adding that this was why Prime Minister Narendra Modi had emphasised the Ayushman Bharat health scheme.

Mr Jaishankar also conceded that everyone in the country had let their guard down after the number of



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar in a virtual meeting with Canadian foreign affairs minister Marc Garneau on the sidelines of G7 meeting.

— PTI

cases came down drastically in February this year, adding that while the focus was on reviving the economy after the lockdown last year, the "attempt to instil confidence had created a societal complacency that all of us are part of".

Describing the current pandemic crisis in the country as "difficult and painful" as the current

strain of the Covid virus ravaging the country was "much more virulent", the EAM however said that the government was tackling it by "giving it everything we have and more". He made it clear that all people of the country need to "put the blame game aside" and look at "what we can do" to tackle the situation.

Mr Jaishankar also said

that after the first wave of Covid, the government had authorised 1,200 oxygen plants and that money had been given to states since Health was a state subject in the Indian federal devolution of powers.

"You can't not have elections in a democratic country like India. We are a deeply political country. ... Elections are sacrosanct ... We are a deeply political society," the EAM said. Responding to criticism on the government allowing the Kumbh mela, the EAM shot back saying that one cannot argue that while religious crowds are a risk, (farmer) protest crowds are not. He pointed out that the government had been accused in some quarters of imposing lockdown last year to quell the CAA protests when in fact, the government had declared the lockdown to save the country from the first wave of the Covid virus.

MHA asks UTs, states to make hospitals 'safe'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

The home ministry has asked all states and Union Territories to check rising incidents of fire in hospitals and nursing homes in view of the increased load of corona patients. Home ministry has advised the states to conduct a detailed review with officials from the health, power and fire departments, and prepare a detailed plan of action to ensure that fire safety measures are in place in all hospitals.

There has been a tremendous increase in the load on the health infrastructure due to the rapid rise in corona cases and this was one of the reasons why hospitals and nursing homes were facing more incidents of fire and other malfunctioning of their equipment. As a result the ministry has advised that states should assist both government as well as private hospitals in strengthening fire safety measures.

■ If proved illegal, India will take back migrants

India inks pact to sort issue of illegal migration with UK

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

An "irritant" in India-UK ties in the form of the illegal immigration issue has been removed with the inking of the Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement between the two countries, government sources in New Delhi indicated on Wednesday, adding that India "does not support illegal immigration" and that if the Indian nationality of an illegal immigrant in the UK is proved, then India has to take him or her back.

The developments came even as British high commissioner Alex Ellis indicated during an online press conference on Wednesday that there would be timelines for India as per the pact to take back such illegal immigrants.

The Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement inked between

THE MIGRATION AND Mobility Partnership Agreement inked between the two nations earlier on Tuesday will facilitate legal movement of students and professionals wherein upto 3000 young Indian professionals can avail employment opportunities in UK for a period of two years without being subject to a labour market test

the two nations earlier on Tuesday will facilitate legal movement of students and professionals wherein upto 3000 young Indian professionals can avail employment opportunities in UK for a period of two years without being subject to a labour market test, as well as enhance bilateral cooperation in combating illegal migration.

Speaking about the outcomes of the Summit that was held in virtual mode between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and

arrangements for treatment of their staff within their embassy premises itself.

Just on Sunday, the MEA had said that "the Chief of Protocol and Heads of Divisions are in continuous touch with all high commissions/embassies and MEA is responding to their medical demands, especially those related to Covid".

The MEA had added that "this includes facilitating their hospital treatment". This had followed a controversy over supply of an oxygen cylinder by an Opposition party-member to the New Zealand high commission that had requested for it to treat a Covid positive patient. It may also be recalled that Tanzanian defence attache,

identified as Col. Mlula who was posted at the Tanzanian high commission in New Delhi, has passed away due to Covid recently.

Meanwhile, sources also said foreign covid-related material landing in India such as oxygen generator plants and concentrators were being rushed promptly to hospitals across India including in New Delhi. For instance, 20 large oxygen concentrators from Russia were sent to the Lady Hardinge Medical College in the Capital. Oxygen generator plants from France were sent to various hospitals in Delhi and one to Telangana. Oxygen-related equipment from Italy was sent to a hospital in UP's Greater Noida near Delhi.

Covid check: Didi halts local trains, slows down banking

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 5

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday announced the suspension of local suburban train services for the next two weeks, operation of road transport and metro railway with 50 per cent capacity and restricted banking hours from 10 am to 2 pm from Thursday to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic in the state.

In a major reshuffle to restore the law and order situation, the Trinamul Congress supreme shunted Election Commission-appointed state director general of police P. Nirajayan to the post of DGP of the fire and emergency services department while reinstating Virendra as the state top cop.

Virendra was transferred by the central poll panel to the West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd as it's advisor (security and vigilance). Ms Banerjee also shifted out another EC-appointed IPS officer Jag Mohan as additional director general of police (law and order) and brought back Jawed Shamim in his place.

Ms Banerjee meanwhile wrote another letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who congratulated her for her third term as the CM, for Covid-19 vaccines, emergency medicines and oxygen supply to the state.

"You may kindly recall my letter of 24th February, 2021, wherein I had requested you to allow Government of West Bengal to procure vaccines from designated points for providing vaccination to people of the state free of cost. This has not yet been addressed," she complained.

MENCAE OF COVID PANDEMIC

3,780 new deaths in India amid 3rd wave warning

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

India reported a record 3,780 deaths in the last 24 hours, the highest daily toll since the pandemic began. Over 900 deaths were from Maharashtra, while Delhi and UP reported 338 and 351, respectively. Meanwhile, the government on Wednesday said that a third wave of coronavirus pandemic was "inevitable", although a time-frame for it could not be predicted. "A phase three is inevitable, given the higher levels of circulating virus but it is not clear on what time scale this phase three will occur. Vaccines are effective against current variants. New variants will arise all over the world and in India too but variants that increase transmission will likely plateau. Immune evasive variants and those which lower or increase disease severity will arise going ahead," said K. Vijay Raghavan, principal scientific advisor to Centre.

At least 13 states are reporting more than 100 deaths a day. These included previously uncounted

deaths from earlier days. The country reported 3.82 lakh cases of the novel coronavirus in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Wednesday. Of these, Maharashtra recorded 51,880 cases, while Karnataka reported 44,631. Active cases are now more than 34.87 lakh.

Maharashtra reported 57,640 fresh Covid-19 positive cases, 57,006 discharges, and 920 deaths. Karnataka reports 56,112 new positive cases, 26,841 recoveries and 346 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Twelve states have more than 1 lakh active cases, 7 states have 50,000 to 1 lakh active cases, & 17 states have less than 50,000 active cases.

Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, UP & AP have around 1.5 lakh active cases, said Lav Agarwal, Union health ministry, joint secretary. Meanwhile, India has given emergency use authorisation for a Covid-19 antibody drug cocktail developed by Roche (ROG.S) and Regeneron (REGN.O), expanding its arsenal of drugs to battle a massive second wave of infections.



An inconsolable family member while performing the last rites of a Covid-19 victim in Jammu on Wednesday.

— PTI

Himachal declares 10-day corona curfew from May 7

Shimla, May 5: The Himachal Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to impose a lockdown in the state from May 7 to May 16 to check the spread of Covid-19, an official said here.

The decision to impose the "corona curfew" in the state was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by chief minister Jai Ram Thakur, the spokesperson added.

While government and private offices and establishments will remain closed during the lockdown period, essential services such as those related to health, electricity, telecommunication, water supply and sanitation will be exempted, the official said.

The Cabinet decided that work would continue at civil work sites and horticultural, agricultural and other projects, while educational institutions would remain closed till May 31, he said. Government and pri-

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▶ **THE WORK** would continue at civil work sites and horticultural, agricultural and other projects, while educational institutions would remain closed till May 31

vate transport vehicles will be allowed to ply with 50 per cent occupancy, and inter-state transportation will continue, the official added.

Industrial establishments will work as per guidelines issued by the state government, he said.

The Cabinet also decided to cancel the Class 10 board exams of the

Himachal Pradesh Board of School Education. All students will be promoted to Class 11 as per norms suggested by the CBSE for its students of the same class, the official said.

The board exams of Class 12 and the annual examinations of colleges will remain suspended until further orders, he said. Meanwhile, Himachal Pradesh on Tuesday recorded the highest single-day spike of 3,824 fresh Covid-19 cases and 48 deaths, a senior official said, citing data updated till 7 pm.

The Covid-19 death toll in the state now stands at 1,647 and tally at 1,10,945.

Of the state's new casualties, 15 were reported in the worst-hit district of Kangra, following 11 in Solan, six in Sirmour, four each in Shimla and Hamirpur, three in Una, two each in Chamba and Kullu and one in Mandi, special health secretary Nipun Jindal said.

— PTI

Maha govt moves HC against flaws in Deshmukh FIR

Mumbai, May 5: The Maharashtra government has filed a petition before the Bombay High Court alleging that some portions of the First Information Report registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation against former home minister Anil Deshmukh were intended to "destabilise" the Shiv Sena-led ruling coalition in the State. The state has sought that the CBI be directed to remove the said portions from its FIR.

In its plea filed in the HC on April 30, the government claimed that the CBI, in the FIR, had included the issue of last year's reinstatement of now suspended Mumbai police officer Sachin Waze, and transfers of some other police officers. These issues were not part of the complaint registered against Mr Deshmukh and former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh, the state government said.

— PTI

O2 supply stops, 13 die in Chennai hospital

Patients, aged 40-85 years, gasped to death as 'tech glitch' stopped O2 supply

SINDHIYA SAMUEL
& P.A. JEBARAJ
CHENNAI, MAY 5

As many as 13 patients died at the Chengalpattu Government Medical College Hospital on Tuesday night due to alleged oxygen shortage though the district collector, A. John Louis, ruled out shortage of oxygen in the hospital. There could have been a "technical glitch" in the supply of oxygen, John Louis told the media on Wednesday, adding that the director of medical education would probe into it.

Narrating the harrowing incident, the relatives of the deceased patients said that the deaths were caused due to insufficient oxygen supply. The 13 patients, aged between 40 and 85, who were in critical care passed away one after the other at around 10.30 pm, they said. They also claimed that hospital staff took oxygen cylinders from ambulances and tried to save a few patients who needed oxygen the most when the situation went out of control. But it was in vain.

The situation was brought under control

▶ **OF THE DECEASED**, only one patient was Covid positive while others tested negative but had viral pneumonia and comorbidities. Relatives of the deceased said that the deaths were caused due to insufficient oxygen supply

around midnight by transporting cylinders from SRM and Karpaga Vinayaga medical colleges to the hospital GH and the situation was brought under control. Yet 13 persons lost their lives.

John Louis said that he received a call at 11 pm that

there were some issues in the hospital and he rushed there. The hospital had 10 kilolitre oxygen as against the total capacity of 23 kilolitre, he said, adding that there were also two external 3 kilolitre oxygen set-ups. "We also had cylinders that were refilled and when the pressure dropped we continued this. There is no question of oxygen shortage," he said. The collector further said that those who required oxygen at high pressures survived and that the patients who died were already critical with other comorbidities and issues.

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CANCELLATION OF SPECIAL TRAINS	
Train No. & Name	Date from Cancellation
04712/04711 Shri Ganganagar-Haridwar Jn.- Shri Ganganagar Special	06.05.2021 to till further advice
02994 Udaipur-Delhi Sarai Rohilla Special	07.05.2021 to till further advice
02993 Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Udaipur Special	08.05.2021 to till further advice
02033/02034 Kanpur Central-New Delhi-Kanpur Central Spl.	07.05.2021 to 31.05.2021
04444/04443 New Delhi-Ghaziabad-New Delhi Express Spl.	06.05.2021 to 09.05.2021

EXTENSION OF CANCELLATION OF UNRESERVED MAIL/EXPRESS EMU TRAINS	
Train No. & Name	Extended Upto
04184/04183 Delhi Jn.-Tundla Jn.-Delhi Jn. Special	06, 07, 08 & 09.05.2021
04417/04418 Hathras Killah-Delhi Jn.-Hathras Killah Special	06, 07, 08 & 09.05.2021
04415/04414 Aligarh Jn.-New Delhi-Aligarh Jn. Express Special	06, 07, 08 & 09.05.2021
04420/04419 Ghaziabad-Mathura Jn.-Ghaziabad Express Special	06, 07, 08 & 09.05.2021

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SHORT TAKES

Villagers spend night in caves as rain hits U'khand

Dehradun: Heavy rains in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand caused a surge in the Rishiganga river as panic-stricken people in nearby villages left their houses and took refuge in caves to spend the night. With the horrifying images of the February 7 flashfloods in Rishiganga following an avalanche still playing in their minds, residents of Raini and Jugju villages downstream of the river rushed to nearby forests to take refuge in caves where they spent the night with the help of lanterns on Tuesday. Chamoli's district disaster management officer N.K. Joshi said NDRF teams have been sent to the villages to help residents. An alert has also been sounded for people living in the river valley, he said. The official, however, said the water level in Rishiganga came down and became normal later on Tuesday night itself as it stopped raining. An avalanche on February 7 had caused a flashflood in the Rishiganga and Dhauliganga rivers of Chamoli district, demolishing the Rishiganga hydel project at Raini completely and causing heavy damage to NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project. More than 200 people had gone missing after the avalanche. Eighty bodies and 35 human body parts of people killed in the avalanche have been recovered during a massive search and rescue operation which continues in the affected areas, officials said. — PTI

PIL in HC over new WhatsApp rules

New Delhi: The Delhi high court Wednesday asked the Centre and social media platforms Facebook and WhatsApp to reply to a PIL challenging the new privacy policy of the instant messaging app on the grounds that it violates "informational privacy" of users. A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh issued notice to the Centre, Facebook and WhatsApp and sought their stand on the petition by May 13. WhatsApp told the bench during the hearing that private conversations of individuals are protected by end to end encryption. The petitioner, Harsha Gupta, urged the court for some interim orders as the Facebook-owned WhatsApp intends to bring its policy into effect from May 15. The court then listed the matter for hearing on May 13. Senior advocate Vivek Sood, appearing for Gupta, told the bench that under the new privacy policy of WhatsApp the information it collects from users and the way it is proposed to be used, violates their "informational privacy". — PTI

SC strikes down Maratha quota

■ Continued from Page 1

verdict which had upheld the grant of reservation to Marathas in admissions and government jobs in the state.

The 102nd Constitution Amendment Act of 2018 inserted Articles 338B, which deals with the structure, duties and powers of the National Commission for Backward Class, and 342A which deals with power of the President to notify a particular caste as SEBC and power of Parliament to change the list.

The top court had on March 8 framed six questions for adjudication while terming the issue of interpretation of the 102nd constitutional amendment as of seminal importance.

While issuing notices to all states, the top court had said that it proposes to consider whether the landmark verdict in the Indra Sawhney case, also known as the Mandal verdict, which caps the quota at 50 per cent, require a relook by a larger bench in the light of later constitutional amendments, judgments and the changed social dynamics of society.

The six questions, including as to whether Article 342A abrogates states' power to legislate or classify in respect of any backward class of citizens, and thereby affects the federal policy or structure of the Constitution, which it proposes to consider.

Whether the Constitution's 102nd Amendment deprives the state legislature of its power to enact legislation determining the socially and economically backward classes and conferring the benefits on the said community under its enabling power, the bench had said.

Whether, states power to legislate in relation to any backward class under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) is in any way abridged by Article 342(A), read with Article 366(26c), of the Constitution — was one of the ques-

■ Maha govt on sticky wicket, CM terms SC decision unfortunate After SC strikes down Maratha quota, Uddhav urges PM to make it possible

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, MAY 5

The ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra has found itself on a sticky wicket over the Supreme Court's decision to deny reservation to the Maratha community in the state. The government is likely to face the ire of the community, which dominates state politics.

All eyes of the state were on the SC judgement, which on Wednesday dismissed the reservation to the Maratha community in educational institutes and government jobs in the state. Terming the state law on Maratha quota as 'unconstitutional,' the SC said there were no exceptional circumstances to breach 50 per cent reservation.

The SC decision has left the youths of the Maratha community disappointed,

as several of them staged protests across the state. Maratha Kranti Morcha convener Vinod Patil blamed the Maharashtra government saying it did not plan its strategy well. "As the apex court said that the state government has no right to give such reservation, the Centre should now make it clear what the state's jurisdiction is," he said.

Terming the top court verdict as 'unexpected,' another Maratha leader Sanjeev Bhor said, "The reservation details were prepared by carefully studying all legal aspects. But it did not stand in the court. It will lead to frustration among the Maratha youths and they will lose faith in the system."

Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray said that the SC judgment cannot be welcomed and requested the Centre to act urgently



People wait in a queue to get vaccinated against Covid-19 in Goregaon, Mumbai, on Wednesday. — PTI

on the Maratha reservation issue.

"With folded hands, we request the Prime Minister and the President to take an immediate decision on Maratha quota like the Centre did in other matters like the Article 370, Shabbano case and Atrocities Act. For

them, they had even amended the Constitution and similar alacrity should be shown to give reservation to the Maratha community," he said.

In an attempt to placate the Maratha community, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar said that the state

government will act in every possible way to compensate them. We will not mete out injustice to any part of the society, he added.

Meanwhile, the BJP has blamed it on the "lack of coordination" on part of the State Government 'failing' to convince the SC over the issue of Maratha reservation.

Senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnis said, "The state government could not convince the court that the M.C. Gaikwad Commission report, which was the basis for the Maratha quota, was not one-sided and that views of all sides were included in it. The Gaikwad Commission report had explained in its report why reservation above 50 per cent should be given. Many other states have exceeded the reservation cap of 50 per cent."

■ BJP chief put cadres' death toll at 14, rejects Prez Rule cry Didi has blood on her hands: Nadda

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 5

Indicting Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee of her direct role in the merciless killings of his party cadres in post-poll violence in West Bengal, BJP president J.P. Nadda on Wednesday ridiculed Ms Banerjee for beginning her third term as chief minister with "blood on her hands".

Mr Nadda, who undertook a two-day state visit from Tuesday to meet the victims' families, put the saffron party workers' death toll at 14.

He, however, rejected the demand by a section of his party leaders, including Rajya Sabha MP Roopa Ganguly, for the imposition of Article 356 by the Centre in the state.

The BJP chief alleged, "The way brutal killings of our party workers were carried and Mamataji remained silent for 36 hours despite being as a caretaker CM, it shows her role. Her silence speaks about her involvement. And she starts her third term with blood on her hands."

"We will fight it till the conclusive end," he said.

"The TMC targeted the grassroots level BJP workers and their families also. They also aimed at the women. Cases of molestation and rape have come to light. When I used to say during my poll campaign here that the women are the most unsafe, I was true. We respect a mandate. But a mandate can not hide the truth," the BJP president added.

Mr Nadda was referring to the wild claims of his party about the gangrape of two of female polling agents and random molestation of many others at Nanor in Birbhum.

But IPS officer Nagendra Nath Tripathi, who was appointed by the Election Commission as the superintendent of police of the district after he confronted the TMC chief at Nandigram during the Assembly polls, punctured the allegations of gangrape, calling it fake.



BJP president J.P. Nadda addresses party workers during a protest meeting in Kolkata against the incidents of post-poll violence in the state on Wednesday. — PTI

'Unanimous' there shouldn't be curbs on media reporting: EC

New Delhi, May 5: The Election Commission Wednesday said it was unanimous that there should not be any prayer before the Supreme Court for restriction on media reporting over oral observations made by judges.

The commission was responding to a news report that the poll panel's plea in the Madras high court to gag the media from reporting oral observations of judges and its subsequent special leave petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court against the high court's "murder charges" remark were not unanimously approved by the poll panel.

A senior functionary said the EC had moved the top court against the oral observations made by the Madras high court. He said based on the oral observations, which were

not part of the written order, people could seek action against EC officials. The functionary pointed out that a case was filed against senior EC officials in West Bengal following the observations made by the high court.

When asked whether there was unanimity in the commission when it asked the Madras HC to restrain the media from reporting oral observations by the bench, another functionary referred to a portion of the press statement which said that "The commission always has appropriate deliberations before any decisions are taken."

This indicates a difference of opinion on the issue. "The Election Commission of India has taken note of recent narrative relating to its position in relation to media. The

after his death, local news agency GNS reported quoting official sources.

His family claimed that despite repeated requests to release him or, at least, shift him to a good hospital in view of his poor health he was left untended in jail. "His health has only deteriorated in jail but he was left untended by the authorities till his condition worsened on Tuesday," it said.

Sehrai was considered to be a strong contender to take over as chief of the Hurriyat Conference (Geelani) faction.

His son Junaid Ashraf, a divisional commander of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, was among two militants killed in a gunfight with security forces in Srinagar on May 19 last year.

Sehrai's death has been widely condoned by Kashmir's mainstream and separatist parties and leaders alike, all urging the government to release all political leaders languishing in jails in and outside J&K in view of the alarming pandemic situation.

Himanta: Tyrant has taken oath as Bengal CM

Dhubri (Assam), May 5: Senior Assam BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma said a "tyrant" has taken oath as chief minister of West Bengal "with the blood of innocents on her hands" referring to the post poll violence in the neighbouring state.

His comments follow the swearing-in of TMC chief Mamata Banerjee as West Bengal CM for the third successive term.

"Once the land of Rabindranath Tagore where he taught his fellow countrymen about the spirit of peace and brotherhood, the destiny of Bengal has taken such a painful turn. Today, a tyrant has taken oath as the chief minister with blood of innocents on her hands," he said in a tweet.

— PTI

400+ Bengal's BJP workers flee to Assam

■ Continued from Page 1

party has claimed that nine people have died in violence across six districts so far.

The exodus of BJP workers along with their families from West Bengal continued even on Wednesday due to post-election violence unleashed allegedly by TMC goons. Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who regretted the incident on Tuesday claimed that around 300-400 people had entered Dhubri district in Assam from north Bengal.

Mr Dass, accompanied by Assam MP Rajdeep Roy, visited the camps where the refugees have been kept and distributed relief material. Mr Roy informed that around 600 people from Bengal have been given shelter at a camp at Agamoni in Dhubri. He added that most of the people in the camp are children and women, and that more such camps have been set up at other places in the district.

Mr Roy also said that all the people who have entered Assam are from Cooch Behar district in West Bengal, where BJP won 7 out of 9 Assembly seats. "Can only imagine the condition of the districts where TMC has majority seats. This is what Mamata has reduced Bengal to. Really deplorable," he added.

The victims of Bengal violence who have fled to Assam told reporters that they were forced to flee after they were attacked by TMC workers. They said that they were beaten by the TMC goons, their women molested, the houses demolished, and their properties and livestock were looted.

Meanwhile, the district administration of Dhubri has informed the Cooch Behar district administration about the development. They have said that when someone fears for their life, they will flee to a place where they feel safe, and therefore the district administration is providing them shelter to stay in Assam for the time being.

Mamata says top priority is Covid

■ Continued from Page 1 so that no violence erupts anywhere. Post-poll, some sporadic incidents occurred. I will tackle law and order from today. I will deal with it with an iron hand. I will undertake some postings in law and order to avoid unrest. But I will not hold back myself from taking strong steps against anyone indulging in violence."

She added: "I just took the oath. You know the police personnel of this government worked under the Election Commission for the last three months. A political party unleashed atrocities in the seats that it won. We will ensure that no one is spared. I will create a new set up today itself because this was not mine in the last three months. Moreover, a lot of ineffectiveness and inefficiencies were there. I call upon all



Newly-elected BJP MLA from Nandigram Suwendu Adhikari addresses party MLAs and leaders in Kolkata on Wednesday during a protest against the alleged killings of BJP cadres. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

not to mete out retribution to anyone."

Congratulating Ms Banerjee on winning a third term, Mr Dhankhar told her: "I hope that governance will be according to the Constitution and the rule of law. India is a great democracy, where power emanates from the process of law. We are at the

moment in a very difficult crisis. I am getting reports from within and outside the country. People are worried. I have been in touch with the honourable CM. She has taken steps when I indicated to her. Our first priority is that we must bring an end to this senseless and horrendous violence that has affected

society at large. Post-poll violence, if it is retributive, is antithetical to democracy. I have every hope that the CM will take steps on an urgent basis to restore the rule of law. I will expect from the new government a new approach and cooperative federalism."

Referring to Ms Banerjee's excuses over the EC exercising authority, he angrily said later: "What have you seen from May 2 till date? If your eyes and ears are shut, I cannot help you. Look at the videos and reports. All on political considerations? What steps have you taken? Words are no substitute for action. Examine who is in the chair. She is in the chair. When was the Model Code of Conduct lifted? It has ended officially. Still, if someone says 'I am not in authority', what does that mean?"

THE ASIAN AGE

6 MAY 2021

In the end, IPL proved to be a bridge too far

Normal cricket is possible in the face of an abnormal health crisis. That is the message for the Indian Premier League (IPL), which was a bridge too far to normality when the nation has been overwhelmed by the catastrophic coronavirus pandemic. A dystopian scenario is playing out as Covid-19 patients, gasping for oxygen, die due to gross inefficiencies in reaching the life-giving elixir and funeral pyres are lighting up the night skies over the nation's capital and several major cities across the country. There was no guarantee that one of the world's richest sports boards could run an inviolable bio-bubble at a time when a minuscule organism is playing havoc with lives, snatching loved ones and sending millions into poverty. Was cricket necessary on Indian soil at such a time?

Partners in the cash-rich cricket league may have to take a ₹2,000-crore hit as the league is suspended after 29 of 60 games were played in a bubble for close to a month before it burst. There will be little sympathy for those assumed losses, not among the millions of migrant workers whose lives have been thrown into turmoil once again even as severe restrictions incommode the lives of over a billion people. There is no one that the pandemic has not touched in some way, though it must be said that for about 97 per cent of 1.4 billion people not infected, the cricket on view every evening did provide some entertainment. The brutal power of the willow, as exemplified in Kieron Pollard's match-turning blitz, was the epitome of aggression at the crease but even that pales in front of an insidious organism that slips in to destroy lives.

The franchises weren't too forthcoming on the Covid-19 trouble that had touched the IPL even before a ball was bowled, as in Devdutt Padikkal testing positive. To keep

the show going, they had to hide far too much and if not for the Union home minister's son marshalling the cricket caboodle, the IPL would have had shutters drawn on it long before this virtual cancellation of the season came about in early May. In hindsight, the league would have been better off in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) venues, which hosted the 2020 season without too much ado. The talk then of running the Indian Premier League for "the sake of humanity" was simply pretentious and aimed at staving off criticism that was building up for blithely playing cricket in juxtaposition with death amid chaos.

The attempts to start the IPL as any other economic activity in the time of the pandemic could not be faulted. A full series of matches against the visiting England team was played without stress, but that seems a long time ago now. Timing is the essence of any enterprise and in that the IPL proved a failure because a safe bubble was impossible to maintain when mutating strains are cleverly sidestepping the protection of the vaccine too and infecting people.

And it was when the Indian Premier League began to move as a travelling circus across cities that it invited trouble. Once players were infected, the IPL had to stop, not for any moralistic reason but because it had joined the list of Covid-19 spreaders. A return to an atmosphere of good health for the nation would be a prerequisite for cricket to resume in India. Greed cannot be the engine driving sport.

Action on hate speech welcome

The decision by microblogging site Twitter to permanently suspend the account of actor Kangana Ranaut for her tweet calling for violence in West Bengal is most welcome. The social media platform has found her tweet to be in gross violation of its Twitter Rules, which do not allow the "targeted harassment of someone or incite other people to do so". Stopping people from airing their opinion is not without consequences in a democracy which guarantees the right to speech and expression, and any response to it needs to be measured against a template

If Kangana Ranaut was referring to the planned loot, arson, rapes and murders that Gujarat witnessed in those horrific times, then she breaches all the limits of acceptable behaviour.

formed by far too many factors. But the present case offers little defence for the blatant call to violence, which has triggered strong reactions across all the social media platforms.

The actor has responded to Twitter's action by playing the victim card, saying that "a white person feels entitled to enslave a brown person, they want to tell you what to think, speak or do". That, however, hardly washes. The mayhem that West Bengal has witnessed after the Assembly election results were declared may have infuriated the actor, and she has every right to protest against it. In fact, every right-thinking human being must share her angst, but the fact that she can recollect only what happened in Gujarat in "early 2000" as the solution to it is troublesome, whether she is brown or white.

Her request to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to show his "virat roop" of those times could baffle even the most ardent followers of both Ms Ranaut and Mr Modi. If she was referring to the planned loot, arson, rapes and murders that the state witnessed in those horrific times, then she breaches all the limits of acceptable behaviour. Taking recourse to racism to justify her blatant criminal intent is unlikely to convince the defenders of the right to free speech.

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Subhani



Inequity & privilege in the time of a pandemic



Patralekha Chatterjee
Dev 360

As India reels under a devastating second wave of Covid-19 infections, I hear people say that "we are all in this together, we are all equally affected". But I wonder.

Are we? We may be all trying to survive in a lifeboat on the same viral sea, but some of the lifeboats are just more seaworthy than others, as someone pointed out. Even as we grieve and try to navigate our way through these terrifying times, it is important to recognise that some of us are more privileged than others.

I am alive. My family is with me. We are under the same roof. We have food on our table. I have had both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. I can work from home. These are huge privileges when so many friends, colleagues and people one has loved and cared for have been felled by the coronavirus.

The infection tally has zoomed past the 20-million mark; more than 222,408 people are dead across the country, says the health ministry; the actual number of those who died is likely to be much higher.

It's true that the virus doesn't discriminate; it doesn't care if you are posh or poor. But Covid-19 will bludgeon the poor and marginalised unless urgent remedial steps are taken. Those of us who are not that old, not that poor, do not have co-morbidities or a compromised immune system have a responsibility to protect those who don't have our advantages.

The first step is to acknowledge our privilege.

New Delhi, where I live, continues to be under lockdown, and continues to gasp as friends and families of critical patients run helter-skelter trying to

organise medical oxygen. Hospitals have taken their battle to the courts. The Delhi high court has become the last hope for so many hospitals scrambling to get oxygen for their Covid-19 patients as supplies become precariously short and government officials engage in verbal jousts over who is responsible.

This week, the high court issued a show cause notice to the Central government over the "non-compliance" of its order from last week to provide 700 metric tonnes (MT) of medical oxygen for the treatment of Covid-19 patients in the in Delhi. "You can put your head in sand like an ostrich, we will not," the high court said.

Even from my vantage position, it is easy to relate to that. How does one reconcile the rage and helplessness of people on the street with the Centre's claim that there is no shortage of oxygen? Or the grotesquely grandiose Central Vista redevelopment project continuing in the heart of the nation's capital as part of "essential services" despite a petition in the courts arguing that the project was not an "essential service" and that it posed "a threat to the lives of the citizens of Delhi and beyond, including the lives of the workforce/labour engaged in the project", and that the project construction could prove to be a

Those of us who know someone who knows someone else who is resourceful and whose voice is amplified in the social media have a far better chance of saving our loved ones...

It's true that the virus doesn't discriminate; it doesn't care if you are posh or poor. But Covid-19 will bludgeon the poor and marginalised unless urgent remedial steps are taken.

Covid-19 "super-spreader".

How does one recognise privilege at a time like this wherever we are?

I found a pandemic privilege checklist on the website of Arizona State University's initiative, Project Humanities.

Some privileges it flagged were: If you have health insurance, if your racial group has not been disproportionately affected by Covid-19, if you have easy access to private outdoor space, if you do not live alone, if you have not been quarantined from someone you live with, if you are below the age of 65, if you have not experienced an income/wage loss in the past two months, if you do not have a compromised immune system, if you have home access to high speed Wi-Fi, if you have not felt unsafe because of your job in the past two months, if you have received professional counselling in the past two months, if no one you know personally has contracted and died from Covid-19, if you have not received food assistance in the past two months, if you have exercise equipment in your home, if you do not have someone in your home that needs adult supervision, if you have a pet.

This is a list for people living in the US. But some of it could apply in this country too.

Even in these traumatic times, those of us who can work from home, for instance, are massively better positioned than those whose nature of work does not offer them that luxury or those who have no work right now.

The first wave of the pandemic took a heavy toll of those working in the service industry,

especially in the lower rungs. People survived by tapping into their meagre savings. Many people went into debt, were forced to cut down on nutritious food. I wonder what is happening to the young spa attendant who shared her dreams with me few months ago, the tailor down the street, the man selling flowers in my neighbourhood market.

Knowing people who matter have always been part of privilege. It continues during the pandemic. At a time when money can't necessarily buy you medical oxygen or an intensive care bed, being on top of the food chain, having connections do help. Those of us who know someone who knows someone else who is resourceful and whose voice is amplified in the social media have a far better chance of saving our loved ones than those with no connections.

Of course, even that does not always work. A former Indian diplomat lost his life while waiting for a ICU bed in the parking lot of a top hospital in the national capital region.

We all live in fear of the virus, of losing our loved ones at a time when citizens appear to have been left to their own devices. Lack of privilege is when one copes with the fear of slipping into destitution.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has promised help to auto rickshaw and cab drivers in the city whose incomes have taken a huge hit due to the coronavirus. The Delhi government also says it will give free rations to 72 lakh ration card holders. These are baby steps but in the right direction.

However, there needs to be a strong nationwide social safety net for people who are likely to fall through the cracks in the coming days.

We must not let them fall. We must speak out. Privilege brings greater responsibilities.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and the emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

BJP IT CELL AT WORK

The BJP IT cell is at it again. Within 24 hours of the Assembly election results, there has been a spate of fake news in which photographs of violence in Odisha and Raniganj, West Bengal, that were perpetrated in 2018 were passed off as fresh incidents. The hashtag, "President's Rule in Bengal", trended on Twitter. Thankfully, the SP in Birbhum district came forward to dispel rumours of rape that BJP workers had spread in order to foment violence. Websites like AltNews did their part to expose this dangerous false propaganda. The people of West Bengal are peace-loving and must continue to remain calm.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

POONAWALA'S MISTAKE

ADAR POONAWALA, CEO of the Serum Institute of India, has demonstrated that he is out of his depth when it comes to supplying vaccines to the millions. But the question to ask is: why are Covishield and the Serum Institute hogging all the headlines, while Bharat Biotech and Covaxin is rarely heard of? When Mr Poonawala revised his price, he exposed his margin, which led to his receiving extortion calls and his subsequent departure to the UK. He should have put his cards on the table and asked the government to fix a remunerative single price.

Srinivas Kamat
Alto St. Cruz, Goa

'STRATEGIC' VOTING

COMING FROM a freedom fighter's family, I have a lot of high regard for the Congress. Yet the party failed to win even a single seat in the just-concluded West Bengal Assembly polls. But, if what Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury has recently claimed is true, that happened because its supporters, many of them Muslims, voted for Trinamul Congress candidates in order to keep the communal BJP out of West Bengal. That was perhaps a sensible move, which resulted in a clear winner. It also entailed a certain kind of sacrifice by the Congress supporters.

Bidyut K. Chatterjee
Faridabad

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Tripura DM who cracked whip at a wedding faces storm of protest

While the administration has been widely rebuked for complacency in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, a district magistrate in Tripura is under fire for being overly enthusiastic in enforcing night curfew rules during a marriage in Agartala, the state capital. A video that recorded the incident went viral on the social media and political parties are gunning for him.

West Tripura DMM Shailesh Kumar Yadav is in the dock for his arrogant behaviour with a bride and groom in the middle of a wedding. Angry citizens and politicians have written to Tripura CM Biplab Kumar Deb seeking strict action against Mr Yadav. Some have even demanded an FIR against the official and sought his removal from service.

In the viral video, Mr Yadav is seen shoving attendees and arresting everyone for flouting Covid-19

norms and tearing up the permission certificate for the wedding that he himself had signed! Sources say the CM has formed a committee of two IAS officers to investigate the incident and submit a report to chief secretary Manoj Kumar for further action. Watch this space for updates.

AD HOCISM IN J&K

If Jammu and Kashmir's change of status was meant to have a positive impact on governance in the Union territory, those hopes have been belied, many say. Ad hocism has become an integral part of governance in J&K, as evident from the list of top bureaucrats and officials who are holding more than one post. Just two examples: Shaleen Kabra, the principal secretary (home), is also the principal secretary (revenue) and financial commissioner. Similarly, Dheeraj Gupta, principal secretary (housing and urban development), is also

J&K's principal resident commissioner in New Delhi.

Sources say as many as 10 IAS officers in the Union Territory are holding additional charge of different departments and institutions due to a shortage of manpower in the higher echelons of the administration. J&K has a stipulated strength of 137 IAS officers, but only 58 are serving in the cadre, of which at least nine officers are on Central deputation. The Centre is apparently aware of the situation, and it recently moved to depute IAS and Group A service officers to the new UT. But this seems to have done little to solve the problem which has afflicted governance for decades in J&K.

PROBE INTO HARYANA COPS

Former Haryana home secretary and retired IAS officer Navraj Sandhu has been appointed chairperson of the Haryana State Police Complaints Authority (PCA). In

addition, retired IPS officer Kamleshwar Kumar Mishra and retired IAS officer Ramesh Chand Verma have been named as members of the authority.

Haryana is one of 17 states that set up a PCA to protect citizens against the abuse of police powers. It adjudicates allegations of improper or shoddy investigations, refusal to register FIRs, allegations of custodial torture and police high-handedness. However, it should be noted that the recommendations of the PCA aren't binding on the state government — which makes the PCA merely a paper tiger.

For five years, the government did not appoint a chairman even as the the complaints piled up. Apparently, until 2019, the authority received 681 complaints, but it is not known how many were investigated and forwarded to the government for action. Hopefully, Mr Sandhu's appointment will make up for the lost time.

TAILPIECE

A significant recent non-babu event was Dr Karan Singh's ninetyeth birthday, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi released a unique edition of the Bhagavad Gita, in 11 volumes with 20 commentaries on each verse in facsimile. The function held at the Prime Minister's residence was attended mainly by family members and a few bureaucrats involved in evolving Kashmir policy. Dr Singh opened the proceedings with a talk on the Gita and steered away from current political matters. The Prime Minister spoke, as expected, on the Gita, and closed his speech by paying fulsome compliments to Dr Karan Singh, the elder statesman of the Kashmir region. What the babus were left wondering was how the tea leaves of this event needed to be read.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

SHORT TAKES

COPS NAB 31
NDRANGHETA
SUSPECTS

Rome: A joint Italian-German police investigation into the ndrangheta organised crime group led to the arrests of 31 people accused of drug trafficking, money laundering and “systematic” tax evasion on the part of Italian pizzerias and restaurants in Germany, authorities said on Wednesday.

Europol and Eurojust, which coordinate law enforcement activities in Europe, said more than 800 police officers and tax officials were involved in the operation in Italy and Germany.

Italian officials hailed what they described as a new model of cooperation and said experts from both countries formed a joint team to investigate the case, a job complicated by the encrypted phone systems the suspects used to communicate.

4 PAK SOLDIERS
KILLED IN
ULTRAS ATTACK

Karachi: Four Pakistani soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack from Afghanistan while they were working on fencing the Pakistan-Afghan border in the restive Balochistan province on Wednesday, the Army said.

A team of paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) was targeted in Manzakai Sector located in the Zhob district of Balochistan province in the south-west of the country, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) of the military said in a statement. Four soldiers were killed and six others were injured in the incident, it said.

“Terrorists from across Afghanistan ambushed FC troops moving for fencing... FC troops responded promptly,” the statement said. It did not confirm whether there were casualties on the Afghan side.

BOMB TARGETS
HEALTH STAFF IN
KABUL, 1 DEAD

Kabul: A bomb targeted a minibus carrying medical workers in the Afghan capital Wednesday morning, killing one person, a Kabul police official said.

Three medics were wounded and taken to hospitals by police, said Ferdaws Faramarz, spokesman for the Kabul police chief.

The bus was taking the doctors, nurses and other health workers from Kabul toward northern Panjshir province when it was attacked in the northern district of Kalakan in Kabul province, he added. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, and Faramarz said police were investigating.

The attack comes a few days after the remaining 2,500 to 3,500 American troops officially began leaving the country. They will be out by September 11 at the latest. The pullout comes amid a resurgence of Taliban, who control or hold sway over half of Afghanistan. The top US military officer said Sunday that Afghan government forces face an uncertain future and possibly some “bad possible outcomes” against Taliban insurgents as the withdrawal accelerates in the coming weeks.

STORMS SPAWN
TWISTERS IN
MISSISSIPPI

Birmingham: Much of the South faced more severe weather Tuesday that has killed at least three people, spawned tornadoes Sunday night and Monday and damaged homes and uprooted trees from Mississippi to West Virginia.

Parts of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee, as well as corners of Arkansas and Georgia were at enhanced risk for the worst weather, according to the national Storm Prediction Center. That zone is home to more than 11 million people and includes the cities of Nashville, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Jackson, Mississippi, forecasters said. “We’ll see all three threats as far as hail, wind and tornadoes on Tuesday,” said Mike Edmonston, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Mississippi.

With warnings about possible tornadoes stretching from Louisiana eastward, dozens of school systems in Mississippi and Alabama dismissed students early so buses and cars would not have to be on the road during potentially violent weather.

Biden aims to vaccinate 70%
of American adults by July 4

US is administering first doses at a rate of about 9,65,000 per day

Washington, May 5: US President Joe Biden has set a new vaccination goal to deliver at least one shot to 70 per cent of adult Americans by July 4 as he tackles the vexing problem of winning over the “doubters” and those unmotivated to get inoculated. Demand for vaccines has dropped off markedly nationwide, with some states leaving more than half their available doses unordered. Aiming to make it easier to get shots, Biden called for states to make vaccines available on a walk-in basis and he will direct many pharmacies to do likewise.

His administration for the first time also is moving to shift doses from states with weaker demand to areas with stronger interest in the shots. “You do need to get vaccinated,” Biden said from the White House on Tuesday. “Even if your chance of getting seriously ill is low, why take the risk? It could save your life or the lives of somebody you love,” he said.

Biden’s goal equates to delivering at least the first shot to 181 million adults and fully vaccinating 160 million. It’s a tacit acknowledgment of the declining interest in shots. Already more than 56 per cent of American adults have received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine and nearly 105 million are fully vaccinated.

The US is currently administering first doses at a rate of about 9,65,000 per day — half the rate of three weeks ago, but almost twice as fast as needed to meet Biden’s target. “I’d like to get it 100%, but I think realistically we can get to that place between now and July Fourth,” Biden said of his new goal. He said the administration would focus on three areas as it tries to ramp up the pace of vaccinations: Adults who need more convincing to take the vaccine.

Those who have struggled or are in no hurry to obtain a shot. — Adolescents aged 12-15, once federal authorities approve vaccination for that age group. Acknowledging that “the pace of vaccination is slowing,” Biden predicted the inoculation effort is “going to be harder” when it comes to convincing “doubters” of the need to get their shots.

He said the most effective argument to those people would be to protect those they love. “This is your choice: It’s life and death, he said. Biden’s push comes as his administration has shifted away from setting a target for the US to reach “herd immunity,” instead focusing on delivering as many



Workers wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) suits extend the crematorium area next to funeral pyres of people who died due to Covid-19 coronavirus disease, at a cremation ground in Kathmandu on Wednesday. — AFP

G7 WORKS ON
GLOBAL COVID
VACCINE PLAN

London, May5: The Group of Seven wealthy democracies on Wednesday worked on plans to scale up global Covid-19 vaccinations, as calls mounted for a drastic increase in funding to help developing nations virtually shut out of early efforts.

Underscoring the challenges faced, the foreign minister of India — where Covid cases have soared in recent weeks — said he decided to participate in the London meeting virtually after potential exposure to the virus.

India was one of several nations invited by Britain for the first in-person G7 meeting since the pandemic began last year, in an effort to rally democracies in the face of a rising China and assertive Russia. The G7 opened its final day with a session focused on open societies before taking up Covid-19. — AFP

shots into arms as possible. Officials said Biden’s vaccination target would result in a significant reduction in Covid-19 cases heading into the summer.

To that end, the Biden administration is shifting the government’s focus toward expanding smaller and mobile vaccination clinics to deliver doses to harder-to-reach communities. — AP

WTO mulls IP
waivers for vax

Geneva, May 5: Ambassadors from World Trade Organisation countries on Wednesday resumed discussions on trade rules protecting the technological know-how behind Covid-19 vaccines amid growing pressure on rich nations to relax them — as a way to help poorer countries fight the pandemic. The WTO’s General Council was taking up a temporary waiver for intellectual property protections that South Africa and India first proposed in October.

The idea has gained support in the developing world and among some progressive lawmakers in the West. Authors of the proposal, which has faced resistance from many countries with influential pharmaceutical and biotech industries, have been revising it in hopes of making it more palatable. No consensus — which is required under WTO rules — was expected to emerge from the ambassadors’ two-day meeting on Wednesday and Thursday. — AP

NEPAL EXTENDS
LOCKDOWN IN
KATHMANDU

Kathmandu, May 5: Authorities in the Nepalese capital on Wednesday extended the lockdown in Kathmandu and surrounding districts till May 12 due to the spike in Covid-19 cases. Nepal on Tuesday recorded yet another high-est single-day rise of 7,660 new cases of the Covid. The health ministry also confirmed 55 new deaths in the past 24 hours, which is so far the highest number of fatalities recorded in a single day. The local authorities have extended the ongoing prohibitory orders in the Kathmandu Valley till May 12. — PTI

India’s US envoy meets Fauci,
discusses on Covid-19 crisis

Washington, May 5: India’s Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu held a virtual meeting with America’s top public health expert Dr Anthony Fauci and discussed the current Covid-19 crisis in India, the efficacy of vaccines against the new strains and variants of the virus.

The meeting was part of the Ambassador’s intensified and focused outreach to key stakeholders of healthcare and pandemic response in the US. This was for the first time that

a top Indian government official had a meeting with Fauci, who is the top advisor to President Joe Biden on the pandemic.

During the meeting, Fauci expressed his solidarity and support with India in this hour of crisis. The meeting came a day after he termed the situation in India “very desperate” and suggested that the government marshal all its resources, including the armed forces, to immediately build makeshift field hospitals, and urged other countries to help

with not only materials but also personnel.

During his talks with Ambassador Sandhu, the virus strains and variants in India, and the efficacy of vaccines against these came up for discussion. Fauci, who is also the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institute of Health, offered American assistance, including in research and development. Discussed virus variants, vaccines, response mechanisms. —PTI

India, UK deal to
begin in autumn

London, May 5: India and the UK will begin negotiations for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) from autumn this year after the Enhanced Trade Partnership (ETP) was formally signed between the trade ministers on both sides on Wednesday. Following a virtual summit with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, UK International Trade Secretary Liz Truss confirmed that the ETP agreed between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson at a virtual summit on Tuesday has been officially signed off.

The trade and investment agreement worth around 1 billion pounds has been pegged as aiming for a “quantum leap” in the UK-India relationship, with India elevating the status of its relationship with the UK to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership”. “Today I signed the UK-India Enhanced Trade Partnership with my friend Piyush Goyal,” Truss said on Twitter soon after her virtual

meeting with the Indian Cabinet minister.

“Together, we have committed to: negotiating a comprehensive free trade deal, starting this autumn; more than doubling trade by 2030; and reducing barriers to trade in key industries,” she said.

The sign off follows talks between Modi and Johnson, which culminated in the two leaders agreeing on a “2030 Roadmap” as a framework for strengthening ties across health, climate, trade, education, science and technology, and defence. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who is in London for the G7 Summit, said he joined those discussions and declared there was a “new energy and thinking” for UK-India relations visible at the virtual summit.

“We are at an inflection point in our contemporary relations. We have two Prime Ministers very determined to take the relationship to a high level,” the minister said, during a virtual Global Dialogue Series. — PTI

Despite warning, GOP moves on voting bills

Austin, May 5: Republican lawmakers around the country are pressing ahead with efforts to tighten voting laws, despite growing warnings from business leaders that the measures could harm democracy and the economic climate. More than 50 companies and business organizations, including some in Texas, released an open

letter on Tuesday expressing opposition to “any changes” that would make it harder to vote in that state. The letter — signed by American Airlines, Microsoft Corp., HP Inc., Patagonia, Levi Strauss & Co. and others — comes amid votes on legislation that critics say would place disproportionate burdens on minority and disabled voters.

“We believe the right to vote is sacred. When more people participate in our democratic process, we will all prosper,” the letter said. “The growth of free enterprise is directly related to the freedom of its citizens.” The statement stopped short of stating opposition to the specific legislation proposed in Texas.

Nonetheless, it amounts

to a cautious rebuke of lawmakers using former President Donald Trump’s false claims about a stolen election to make it harder to vote. Texas is emerging as the next major battleground in the fight over voting laws.

The Texas House could vote, as soon as this week, on a bill that effectively targets Harris County, home of Houston and a

Democratic hub, after officials there dramatically expanded voting options in 2020 amid pandemic.

The Texas Senate has advanced its own package, with the two chambers likely headed to a compromise committee that would fashion a final version. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has expressed broad support for the effort. — AP

EXPENSIVE | WINE

A bottle of Bordeaux spent 14 months in space station

Wine aged aboard ISS to sell for \$1mn

New York YORK, May 5: If a bottle of Petrus 2000 that Christie’s is selling tastes out of this world it might be because it aged for 14 months aboard the International Space Station.

Christie’s hopes the bottle, now up for grabs in a private sale, will fetch \$1 million, which would make it the most expensive wine ever sold.

The bottle is one of a batch of 12 that European startup Space Cargo Unlimited sent into orbit as part of research into how food and drink

matures in space. The wine spent almost 440 days in space, or the equivalent of 300 trips to the Moon. Space Cargo Unlimited Nicolas Gaume said in a press release.

It left for the ISS on November 2, 2019 in a spacecraft known as a Cygnus capsule and returned on January 14, 2021 aboard a Dragon capsule manufactured by Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

Tests carried out in March by a wine science institute in Bordeaux found that the bottles “positively endured all the



constraints of preparation, travel, and storage on the ISS,” Christie’s said in its press release.

At the end of a blind tast-

ing, the researchers noted “remarkable differences in the colour, aroma and taste components” between the celestial bottles and equivalents which had remained on earth.

“The wines sampled were commended for their complexity and considered to be great wines,” Christie’s added.

The sale is expected to smash the record price for a standard 750 ml bottle of wine.

The most expensive was a 1945 Romanee-Conti Burgundy which sold at Sotheby’s in New York for

\$558,000 in 2018.

The private sale means the buyer and price will remain confidential unless the buyer chooses to identify themselves publicly.

Proceeds will go towards funding future space missions focused on agricultural research.

Petrus, from the Pomerol region near Bordeaux, is considered one of the world’s finest wines. A classic bottle of Petrus 2000, considered a great vintage, currently sells for around 4,500 euros (\$5,400). — AFP

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,677.55	0.88
Nifty 50	14,617.90	0.84
S&P 500*	4,186.67	0.53
Dollar (₹)	73.91	-0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.70	-0.19
Euro (₹)	88.72	-0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,382*317	0.68
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.32	0.64
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.978	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.600	0.008

* As of 8:30 PM IST

S&P pegs GDP growth at 9.8% for this fiscal

S&P Global Ratings slashed India's GDP growth forecast for the current financial year to 9.8 per cent saying the second Covid wave may derail the budding recovery in the economy and credit conditions. The US-based rating agency in March had a 11 per cent GDP growth forecast for India for the April 2021-March 2022 fiscal on account of a fast economic reopening and fiscal stimulus.

Services sector PMI at 54 in April amid Covid crisis



India's services sector activities eased to a three-month low in April, as the rise in business activity was constrained by the pandemic and sentiment towards growth prospects faded. The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index fell to 54 in April from 54.6 in March, the slowest increase in output in three months. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion and a score below 50 is contraction.

Finance majors rush with aid; Citi to donate ₹200 cr

Multinational financiers pitched in with relief efforts, led by a Rs 200-crore commitment by Citibank. The efforts of the financial sector MNCs—a majority of whom depend on Indian personnel to handle back-office work—were focused on providing immediate medical relief. Other financiers which offered support included Citi's US peer Wells Fargo (\$3 million), Swiss bank UBS (\$1.5 mn) and Apollo Global Management (\$1 mn).

Infosys doubles Covid relief pledge to ₹200 cr

IT services major Infosys has doubled its commitment towards Covid relief efforts to Rs 200 crore that will be used to add hospital beds and augment the supply of oxygen concentrators and ventilators among other activities. In an email to employees, Infosys CEO hief Saiil Parekh said, "We had committed Rs 100 crore last year...and have expanded our original commitment to Rs 200 crore for Covid relief efforts."

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■ Personal loans, business borrowings also eligible
RBI unveils loan recast plan for individuals, biz

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Responding to the second Covid wave, the RBI announced a slew of measures on Wednesday, providing relief and liquidity to a large section of customers. It provided loan recast for certain individuals and small businesses. A liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore has been opened for healthcare companies and patients, while small businesses can avail of Rs 10,000 crore credit from small finance banks.

As far as loan recast is concerned, individual borrowers, small businesses and MSMEs having aggregate exposure of up to Rs 25 crore and who have not availed of restructuring under any of the earlier restructuring frameworks are eligible for loan restructuring under Resolution Framework 2.0.

This is the second restructuring scheme announced by the central bank in less than one year, with the first unveiled in August last year.

Loan recast under Resolution Framework 2.0 can be invoked up to September 30, 2021 and has to be implemented within 90 days after invocation. The beneficiaries had to be classified as standard accounts as on March 31, 2021.

In the case of individual borrowers and small businesses which have availed of loan restructuring under last year's loan recast, their plans can be modified by increasing the

GOVERNOR'S OBSERVATIONS



Shaktikanta Das

■ The situation has reversed from being on the foothills of strong economic recovery to facing a fresh crisis.

■ RBI will continue to monitor the situation, deploy tools at command to support businesses impacted by Covid.

■ Covid-19 situation has altered drastically since March, India has been fighting a sharp rise in Covid cases in last few weeks.

■ RBI is committed to using unconventional tools to tackle any Covid-triggered stress.

■ To work with the government to ease stress faced by citizens. Will take big, small steps to tackle

stress through the year.

■ RBI stands ready to keep financial conditions congenial, markets continue to work efficiently.

■ Global growth outlook highly uncertain, clouded with downside risk.

■ Data shows persistence of input price pressures, normal monsoon forecast should help contain food price inflation.

■ Small borrowers, MSMEs, individuals most vulnerable.

■ India mounted a valiant defence, domestically and globally, to ramp up vaccines and medical support, and save lives.

■ Immediate objective is to save lives, restore livelihoods.

period of moratorium or extending the residual tenure up to two years. Small businesses and MSMEs which have restructured their loans earlier also can get their sanctioned working capital limits reviewed as a one-time measure based

on a reassessment of the working capital cycle, margins and the like.

Later in a notification, the RBI said individuals who have availed of personal loans, loans for business purposes and small businesses, including those engaged in retail and

wholesale trade, other than those classified as MSME, are eligible for the loan recast.

However, compared to the blanket loan moratorium given last year, the proportion of restructured loans will be lower under Resolution Framework 2.0.

In order to provide further support to MSMEs and other unorganised sector entities, a special three-year long-term repo operations (SLTRO) of Rs 10,000 crore at repo rate will be conducted for the small finance banks (SFBs). Under this, fresh lending of up to Rs 10 lakh will be provided per borrower. This facility will be available till October 31, 2021. SFBs are also permitted to lend to smaller microfinance institutions under priority sector lending. This facility will be available up to March 31, 2022.

"As in the recent past, the RBI will continue to monitor the emerging situation and deploy all resources and instruments..." said governor Shaktikanta Das.

Taking the country's healthcare infrastructure into consideration, RBI also announced an on-tap liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore at the repo rate for healthcare infrastructure and services companies till March 31, 2022.

The RBI has also decided on a second purchase of government securities for an aggregate amount of Rs 35,000 crore under G-SAP 1.0 on May 20. It had bought government bonds worth Rs 25,000 crore on April 15.

Financials, pharma stocks gain

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 5

The specific liquidity enhancing measures unveiled by the Reserve Bank for microfinance institutions and healthcare sector companies boosted market sentiments and led to sharp gains in financials and pharmaceutical stocks on Wednesday.

The Sensex gained 424 points, or 0.88 per cent, to close at 48,677 while the Nifty-50 gained 121.35 points, or 0.84 per cent, closing at 14,617.85.

"Pharma gained the most as relief measures announced by the RBI included provision of term liquidity facility of Rs 50,000 crore on priority basis for the healthcare

KYC UPDATION
EXTENDED TILL
DECEMBER END

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Considering the Covid situation, the RBI on Wednesday provided some relief to the customers by asking banks and other financial institutions not to impose punitive action against those who fail to update KYC. This relief is being provided till December end.

"Keeping in view the Covid related restrictions in various parts of the country, regulated entities are being advised that for the customer accounts where periodic KYC updating is due/pending, no punitive restriction on operations of customer accounts shall be imposed till December 31, 2021" the RBI said.

Customers can update their Know Your Customer details during this period. This facility is, however, not applicable if the customer is bound to update it due to any other reason or under instructions of any regulator/enforcement agency/court of law.

The central bank also extended the scope of video-based customer identification process, or V-CIP, for new categories of customers such as proprietorship firms, authorised signatories and beneficial owners of legal entities and for periodic update of KYC.

Limited KYC accounts opened on the basis of Aadhaar e-KYC authentication in non-face-to-face mode can be converted to fully KYC-compliant accounts.

Cabinet nod
for privatisation
of IDBI Bank



FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), on Wednesday, gave its in-principle approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank Ltd. However, the CCEA led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi further said in a statement that the extent of respective shareholding to be divested by the Centre and LIC would be decided at the time of structuring the transaction in consultation with the Reserved Bank of India.

The Government of India and the Life Insurance Corporation of India together own more than 94 per cent equity of IDBI Bank, with GoI holding 45.48per cent and LIC 49.24 per cent stake. The LIC is currently the promoter of IDBI Bank with management control and the government of India is the co-promoter.

The LIC board has passed a resolution to the effect that LIC may reduce its shareholding in IDBI Bank Ltd by divesting its stake along

side strategic stake sale envisaged by the government with an intent to relinquish management control and by taking into consideration price, market outlook, statutory stipulation and interest of policy holders.

The decision of LIC's board is consistent with the regulatory mandate to it to reduce its stake in the bank. "It is expected that the strategic buyer will infuse funds, new technology and best management practices for optimal development of business potential and growth of IDBI Bank Ltd and shall generate more business without any dependence on LIC and government assistance/funds," the government statement said, adding that resources through strategic disinvestment of government equity from the transaction would be used to finance developmental programmes of the government benefitting the citizens.

The RBI, in March this year removed IDBI Bank from the Prompt Corrective Action framework after a gap of nearly four years on improved financial performance.

₹50K-cr on-tap loans
for healthcare firms

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Considering the massive healthcare infrastructure gap, which got exposed by the pandemic, the Reserve Bank will enable banks to lend Rs 50,000 crore to healthcare infrastructure and services companies.

This on-tap liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore at the repo rate will be available till March 31, 2022 for a tenure of up to three years. Under the scheme, banks can provide fresh lending support to vaccine manufacturers, importers or suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices, hospitals and dispensaries, pathology labs, manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators, importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs, logistics firms and also patients for treatment.

In order to incentivise banks for quick delivery, the credit under the scheme has been classified as priority sector lending. These loans will continue to be classified under priority sector till

Under the scheme, banks can provide fresh lending support to vaccine manufacturers, importers or suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices, hospitals and dispensaries, pathology labs, manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators, importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs, logistics firms and also patients for treatment

repayment or maturity, whichever is earlier. Banks may deliver these loans to borrowers directly or through intermediary financial entities regulated by the RBI.

Banks are expected to create a Covid loan book under the scheme. Such banks will be eligible to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of the Covid loan book with the RBI under the reverse repo window at a rate which is 25 bps lower than the repo rate or 40 bps higher than the reverse repo rate.

"The RBI is now focusing on increasingly channelising its liquidity operations, especially at the

grassroots level," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said.

"A new term liquidity facility for the healthcare sector at the repo rate will aid in ramping up Covid-related healthcare infrastructure and production and supply of essential healthcare products such as vaccines, oxygen and ventilators. It will also benefit patients burdened by unaffordable medical bills," said Aashit Shah, Partner, J. Sagar Associates.

"The RBI has incentivised banks to offer these facilities by including them within the PSL targets of banks, and also permitting them to deposit the surplus liquidity up to an amount equal to their "Covid Loan" book with RBI at a rate which is 40 basis points higher than the normal reverse repo rate. This will ensure that banks accelerate the provision of liquidity for emergency healthcare services so that India is better equipped financially to deal with the pandemic," he added.

CIPLA TO SELL ROCHE'S
ANTIBODY COCKTAIL

New Delhi, May 5: Drug firm Roche India on Wednesday said it has received Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) from the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation for Roche's investigational antibody cocktail used in the treatment of Covid-19.

The approval of antibody cocktail of Casirivimab and Imdevimab in India was based on the data filed for the EUA in the US, and the scientific opinion of the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) in the European Union, Roche India said in a statement.

"This Emergency Use Authorisation will now

enable Roche to import the globally manufactured product batches to India and will be marketed as well as distributed in India through a strategic partnership with Cipla Limited," it added.

The antibody cocktail is to be administered for the treatment of mild to moderate coronavirus disease in adults and pediatric patients (12 years of age or older, weighing at least 40 kg) who are confirmed to be infected with Sars-Cov2 and who are at high risk of developing severe Covid-19 disease, the statement said. It could significantly help these high-risk patients before their condition worsens, it added. —PTI

Amazon work rules govern tweets,
body odour of contract drivers

JOSH EIDELSON &
MATT DAY
MAY 5

The thousands of people driving those ubiquitous Amazon-branded blue vans aren't employed by the Seattle leviathan. They work for small, independent businesses with contracts to transport packages for Amazon. But that hasn't stopped the company from dictating the state of their fingernails and a whole lot more.

"Personal grooming must be maintained at an acceptable level, including but not limited to prevention of unpleasant breath

or body odour, modest perfume/cologne, and clean teeth, face/ears, fingernails and hair," Amazon.com Inc says in a recent version of its policies governing these small delivery companies, or what the company calls Delivery Service Partners. The document, reviewed by Bloomberg, also requires that drivers refrain from "obscene" social-media posts, undergo training programmes approved by Amazon, follow instructions from Amazon's delivery app and be drug tested whenever Amazon representatives ask.

The DSPs are required to

adhere to Amazon's policies, which the company can unilaterally change whenever it wants, according to a recent contract also seen by Bloomberg. They also have to provide Amazon physical access to their premises and all sorts of data the retailer wants, such as geo-locations, speed and movement of drivers-information the company says it has the power to use however it wants.

For several years, Amazon has sought to bring order to its farflung delivery operations, which were plagued by accidents, complaints about thrown

packages and infamous incidents such as the time a contract driver relieved herself in a customer's driveway. But in exerting more control over these workers, legal experts say, the company has created legal risks for itself. Amazon has chosen not to directly employ DSP drivers, an arrangement that shields it from costs and liabilities the work incurs. Amazon's growing sway over its delivery partners, however, could convince courts and government agencies that the company is actually a "joint employer" or "vicariously liable" party. —Bloomberg

EMIRATES FITS
A380S WITH
UPSCALE
COACH CLASS



LAYAN ODEH
MAY 5

Emirates will install premium-economy cabins in three of its existing Airbus SE A380 super-jumbos as it prepares for an anticipated shift in demand once the airline industry emerges from the coronavirus crisis.

The world's biggest long-haul airline will retrofit the seats-which offer more room than coach at a cheaper price than business class-into planes supplied by Amedeo Air Four Plus Ltd, the leasing firm said in a statement on Wednesday.

The change should help adapt the Emirates fleet to a post-Covid travel market in which well-heeled leisure passengers may be prepared to pay more for extra personal space amid continuing health concerns, even as demand for business trips remains subdued or switches to less costly options. Though Emirates, the largest A380 operator, had begun requesting premium economy for its last few new double-deckers, President Tim Clark only revealed last month that it would convert older ones amid strong demand.

Sill, the Dubai-based carrier has been a late convert to the class, which was first introduced at Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd and Taiwan's EVA Air in the early 1990s. Superjumbo operators, including British Airways, Singapore Airlines Ltd and Qantas Airways Ltd, have long offered the product on their planes, while Deutsche Lufthansa AG introduced it in 2015.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

MacGill kidnapped and then released

Sydney: Former Australia leg-spinner Stuart MacGill was allegedly kidnapped from his home in Sydney and then released after an hour-long ordeal last month, New South Wales police said on Wednesday. Quoting Australian police, the country's media reported that four men were detained in connection with the alleged kidnapping following a raid. The incident took place on April 14 when he was bundled into a car and driven to a remote location, after which he was assaulted and threatened with a firearm. "I know it was only an hour that he was held but it would have been a horribly frightful hour to endure," NSW Police superintendent Anthony Holton was quoted as saying by the local media. New South Wales state police said an incident was reported to them on April 20. — PTI

Hockey coach Kaushik tests +ve

New Delhi: Former India hockey player and coach MK Kaushik has tested positive for COVID-19 and admitted to a nursing home here. The oxygen saturation level of the 66-year-old, a member of the 1980 Moscow Olympics gold-medal winning Indian team, keeps fluctuating, according to his family. "He is suffering from COVID-19 and is hospitalized in a city nursing home here," his son Ehsan said. "He first developed symptoms on April 17 but RTPCR and RAT tests came negative. Then we did his CT scan on chest on April 24 and pneumonia due to Covid was detected. Since then he has been hospitalized and his condition is between, neither stable nor serious. His oxygen level drops drastically at night which is a major issue," he added. — PTI

Mary Kom to begin Games preparation

New Delhi: Six-time world champion MC Mary Kom, along with two other Olympic-bound boxers, will train at the Army Sports Institute in Pune leading up to the Tokyo Games after the national camp for women in Delhi had to be disbanded owing to COVID-19 cases among pugilists and support staff. Mary Kom (51kg) will join another Olympic-bound boxer Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), who is already at the facility. Simranjit Kaur (60kg), also bound for Tokyo, will train there too but after completing the COVID-19 post-recovery isolation. The boxers will be placed in three separate groups with two sparring partners each to ensure that the risk of infection is minimal. — PTI

Sailors want Oz coach retained

New Delhi: Olympic-bound Indian sailors Varun Thakkar and KC Ganapathy want to continue training under experienced Australian coach Ian Stuart Warren, who helped the duo qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. The duo said it will be "difficult" to push themselves to the next level and perform well at the quadrennial event if the Australian is not around in the next three months. — PTI

Bucks move into NBA playoffs

Los Angeles: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 36 points as the Milwaukee Bucks punched their playoff ticket with a 124-118 win over the Brooklyn Nets on Tuesday. The heavyweight showdown between the Eastern Conference rivals did not disappoint, with the two sides matching each other shot-for-shot before the Bucks pulled away in the final quarter. — AFP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL
Europa League (SF, second leg): Roma vs Manchester United from 12.30am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2
Arsenal vs Villarreal from 12.30am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1

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MAD SCRAMBLE

Left in lurch Aussie cricketers await flight to Maldives

New Delhi, May 5: The Englishmen were the first ones out with eight of them landing in London, while the Australians awaited an escape to Maldives as the now-suspended IPL's foreign recruits charted their way back home assisted by the BCCI on Wednesday.

Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Chris Woakes, Moeen Ali and Jason Roy landed in London to begin a 10-day quarantine before heading to their respective homes. The league was suspended indefinitely on Tuesday after multiple COVID-19 cases in its bio-bubble.

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

England players to quarantine in London

"I can confirm that 8 of the 11 England players in India managed to get on a flight to Heathrow last night and have landed this morning," an England and Wales Cricket Board spokesperson said.

"They will now quarantine in government approved hotels. The remaining three — Jordan, Malan, Morgan — should leave India within the next 48 hours," he added.

The Australians, on the other hand, were still waiting to know when they can fly out to Maldives, where they will stay for a few days before flying home. The detour has been forced by the Australian government's travel ban on India till May 15 because of the explosion of COVID-19 cases here.

Their Prime Minister



(From left) Australia's David Warner, Tom Moody and Trevor Bayliss.

— IPL

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

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

CA acknowledges BCCI help

CA's interim chief Nick Hockley said the BCCI is helping in every possible way to ensure a smooth return for the 14 players,

members of the coaching staff and commentators, who are in India right now.

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

"The BCCI has been working on a range of options. That's now narrowed down to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. The BCCI is committed not only to the first move but also to putting on a

charter to bring them back to Australia," he added.

IPL also featured cricketers from South Africa (11), New Zealand (10), West Indies (9), Afghanistan (3) and Bangladesh (2).

Kiwis to fly to UK after May 10

New Zealand's players association head Heath Mills told *ESPNCricinfo* that one group of Kiwis will head to the UK for an upcoming series but that would be after May 10,

when the travel ban on flights from India is reconsidered there.

"Due to the UK border restrictions, that group cannot get into England until May 11. It is obviously challenging for them to wait for another few days," Mills said.

The ones headed for UK include Kane Williamson, Trent Boult, and Kyle Jamieson among others.

The ones who have to get back to New Zealand are Stephen Fleming, Brendon McCullum, Kyle Mills, Shane Bond, and Mike Hesson among others.

"The group going home to New Zealand is a real challenge. Might be one or two of the franchises might put them on a charter plane, which will be fantastic," Mills said.

"We'll have that confirmed in the next 24 hours," he added.

Hussey to complete quarantine in Delhi

CSK batting coach Mike Hussey will stay in India to serve out his quarantine while others head back in the next few days.

The 52-day 60-match tournament would have concluded in Ahmedabad on May 30. However, only 24 days of cricket was possible with 29 completed games before the virus halted proceedings.

India is currently recording over 3 lakh cases everyday and more than 3,000 daily deaths.

The unprecedented number of cases has severely burdened the country's health-care facilities causing an acute shortage of oxygen, hospital beds and crucial medicines. The gut-wrenching scenes at hospitals and funeral places have had an impact on the participating players as well. — PTI

IPL could have tweaked a few things: Pat

Melbourne, May 5: Australia pacer Pat Cummins feels the IPL organisers, in hindsight, could have "tweaked a few things" after deciding to host the league in India amidst a raging COVID-19 pandemic.

Cummins, a key part of the Kolkata Knight Riders team, said previous edition held in UAE was incredibly "well-run" and the organisers pushed it "little step further" by organising it at home this year.

The IPL was "indefinitely suspended" on Tuesday,

following multiple COVID-19 cases inside the bio-bubble.

Last year, IPL was first postponed and then shifted to the UAE with India being in the grips of the first wave of virus.

"Last year we had the IPL held over in the UAE and that was an incredibly well-run tournament," Cummins told *Foxsports*.

"This year, they tried to push it that little step further and have it over here in multiple cities in India. I'm sure looking back they might have tweaked a few things."



Pat Cummins

Cummins, however, didn't specify what exactly could have been done differently in his comments which were made before the postponement of the league on Tuesday.

There were a lot of criticism for conducting the T20 league at a time when India was facing such a devastating health crisis.

"It's two different worlds. We're lucky, we're safe, we're comfortable and there's people just trying to get basic medical treatment," the Australian vice-captain said.

"First thing was to find out whether us playing the IPL was the right thing and basically everyone said, we would be lost without the IPL for three or four hours every night.

I'm just trying to do my bit. India's been such a good country to me and cricketers."

With the T20 event being postponed, the Australian IPL players and support staff might fly off to Maldives in a bid to get home.

The Australian government had last week banned travellers from COVID-ravaged India till May 15 with the country's Prime Minister Scott Morrison making it clear that the IPL players will have to make their own arrangements. — PTI

Smart City storm into final

Manchester, May 5: After a decade of disappointment, Pep Guardiola is back in a Champions League final and just one game away from delivering on his task to make Manchester City champions of Europe for the first time.

In the battle between two clubs with seemingly endless resources but no Champions League titles to their name, City kept their cool to beat Paris Saint-Germain 4-1 on aggregate as the French champions paid for losing their heads in both legs of the semi-final tie.

Riyad Mahrez, born and raised in Paris, scored twice to secure a 2-0 win for City in Tuesday's second leg before Angel di Maria's red card for lashing out at Fernandinho rounded off another miserable European exit for the French champions.

A first Champions League final for City, against Real Madrid or Chelsea in Istanbul, is the culmination of the club's rise since an Abu Dhabi takeover in 2008 transformed their fortunes.

In the coming days, they will seal a fifth Premier League title in the past 10 years.

Once dubbed the "noisy neighbours" by legendary former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson, City are now not just the dominant force in Manchester but also in English football.

By the end of the month, the mix of Emirati wealth



Manchester City's Algerian midfielder Riyad Mahrez (left) vies with Paris Saint-Germain's Neymar during their UEFA Champions League second leg match in Manchester on Tuesday.

— AFP

and Guardiola's coaching may have also conquered Europe.

"Of course we invest a lot of money since Sheikh Mansour took over, but it is not just this," said Guardiola. "It is a lot of incredible things behind the scenes."

"Reaching the final of the Champions League, helps us realise in the bigger picture what we have done in the last four years. What we have done these four years is incredible."

'Remarkable' consistency Since a difficult first year

in England, Guardiola has led City to four League Cups, an FA Cup and the brink of a third Premier League title in four seasons.

However, until now, that domestic success always came with the caveat of Champions League collapses.

Guardiola has won the competition twice before as a coach during his time at Barcelona, but not since 2011.

City did not even progress beyond the last eight in his first four seasons in charge. It was a similar story for



Delhi hosted four IPL matches this season.

— IPL

Bookies hired a cleaner at Kotla

New Delhi, May 5: The recently-suspended IPL witnessed potential corruptors plugging an accredited cleaner at Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla ground for doing "pitch-siding" which helps ball-to-ball betting, BCCI Anti-Corruption Unit chief Shabbir Hussain Shekhadam Khandawala has revealed.

The new modus operandi was observed during one of the IPL games at New Delhi where a designated cleaner was using the time lag between actual match action and live TV coverage to help in ball-by-ball betting, which is also known as court-siding or pitch siding.

Pitch-siding is the practice of transmitting information from sporting events for the purpose of gambling, or directly placing bets.

"One of my ACU officers caught a person and handed over the details to Delhi Police. While that particular offender managed to flee leaving behind his two mobile phones, ACU lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police," Hussain, a former DG of Gujarat Police, said.

"We are thankful to Delhi Police that in a separate incident they caught two other persons from the Kotla on ACU tip-off."

The Delhi Police arrested two people with fake

One of my ACU officers caught a person and handed over the details to Delhi Police. While that particular offender managed to flee leaving behind his two mobile phones, ACU lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police.

— SHABBIR

HUSSAIN

BCCI ACU chief

accreditation cards during the IPL match between Rajasthan Royals and SunRisers Hyderabad on May 2.

So how did cleaning staff come under the ACU radar? "He was standing (inside Feroz Shah Kotla premises) in a secluded area all by himself and so one of our officers approached and asked him 'What are you doing here?'"

"He said, 'Main apne girlfriend se baat kar raha hoon. (I am talking to my girlfriend).'"

"My officer then asked him to dial the number he was talking to and then asked him to hand over the phones. Just when he was going through the contents of his phone, the guy fled from the spot," Hussain revealed but did not divulge during which match the incident took place. — PTI

ACA CHIEF SAYS PLAYERS UNDER ENORMOUS STRESS

Melbourne, May 5: Australian Cricketers Association chief executive Todd Greenberg has asked its players to do their "homework" and consider the risks involved before signing overseas T20 deals in the near future as the world grapples with an evolving pandemic. "I'm not sure it will create reticence (in the future) but it will ensure players do their due diligence before they sign agreements," Greenberg was quoted as saying *ESPNCricinfo*.

Greenberg acknowledged the Aussie contingent may be dealing with anxiety and stress at the moment, but promised help once they return to their country. "I was at pains to point it out during the week, the public will see our best Australian cricketers as almost superheroes, they're brilliant athletes, great cricketers, but they're human beings, some of them are fathers and husbands and they're under enormous amounts of stress," Greenberg, said. — PTI

ARSENAL LOOK TO SET UP DATE WITH UNITED

London, May 5: Arsenal's season appeared to be ending with a whimper when they were reduced to 10 men after falling 2-0 behind against Villarreal in last week's first leg of their Europa League semi-final.

Instead, a precious away goal gave them hope they can finish an inconsistent campaign on a high by setting up a showdown in the Polish city of Gdansk against Manchester United. Arsenal are ninth in the Premier League table and are unlikely to qualify for Europe next year via that route but winning the Europa League would give them a ticket back to the Champions League.

Mikel Arteta's side won the FA Cup last season but have failed to build on that triumph and are on course for a fifth consecutive finish outside the top four in EPL. Standing in Arsenal's way is their former boss Unai Emery, who won the trophy three years in a row from 2014 when he was in charge of Sevilla and also took Arsenal to the 2019 final.

Villarreal have never reached the final of the Champions League or Europa League. They have put out a promotional video, with the message: "Let's flip the script... It's our time."

— AFP