

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 4 MAY 2021



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SII CEO Adar Poonawalla's threat claim triggers political slugfest in Maha



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Biden recalls bin Laden raid; vows to prevent another terror hit on US

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We stand with India, vaccines should be given to everyone, everywhere, says Prince Harry



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WINDOWS



Barcelona's Lionel Messi stands during the Spanish League match with Valencia at the Mestalla Stadium in Valencia on Sunday. — AFP

Forces on poll duty to be deployed for massive Naxal ops

New Delhi: Now that the Assembly elections in five states are over, the home ministry has decided to deploy most of the one lakh security forces that were deployed for the polls in launching massive operations against Naxal outfits in Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. More than 20 CRPF commandos were killed last month by Naxals in the Bastar region following which a fresh offensive against Maoists was started and is now being further intensified. **Full report on Page 3**

Nepal PM Oli to seek trust vote on May 10

Kathmandu: Nepal's embattled PM K.P. Sharma Oli will seek a vote of confidence from Parliament on May 10 in his bid to stay in power. Mr Oli requires at least 136 votes in the 275-member House of Representatives to win the confidence motion as four members are under suspension. — PTI

Boat overturns in Bangladesh, 26 die

Dhaka: An overcrowded speedboat ferrying over 30 passengers and defying the Covid-19 restrictions capsized after hitting a stationary sand-laden cargo vessel in the Padma river on Monday, leaving at least 26 people dead, a senior Bangladesh police officer said. **Full report on Page 6**

COUNTERPOINT



We demand EC's resignation for our poll debacle!

WEATHER

Max: 39°C
Min: 27°C
RH: 21%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula
Ashtami till 1.14 pm
Star: Sravanam till 8.27 am
Variyam: 12.35 pm To 2.14 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.24 am To 9.15 am; 11.04 to 11.49 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm To 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.58 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.38 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.33 AM
MOONSET TODAY 12.20 PM

■ Officer feared for life, forced at gunpoint to refuse recount: CM

Didi to take oath tomorrow, sees foul play in Nandigram

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 3

Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, undeterred by her controversial defeat by a narrow margin to protege-turned-adversary Suvendu Adhikari of the BJP in Nandigram, is all set to take the oath as chief minister for the third consecutive time on the morning of Wednesday, May 5, after the TMC won a record two-thirds majority in the Assembly once again, with 213 MLAs, against 77 of the BJP, that will sit in Opposition.

This is, however, a rare instance in the history of the state when a two-time CM is on her way to take the oath to head a government despite losing in the Assembly polls as her party was elected by a landslide. On Monday evening, Ms Banerjee met governor Jagdeep Dhankhar at Raj Bhavan and pledged to form her government after she was unanimously chosen as



Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee meets West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar at Raj Bhavan in Kolkata on Monday. — ASIAN AGE

the TMC's legislature party leader. Mr Dhankhar tweeted: "Hon'ble CM @MamataOfficial called on me and submitted her resignation as CM and the same has been accepted. She has been requested to continue till alternative arrangements are made. Congratulations @MamataOfficial for victory in the Assembly polls and wished her a fruitful

third term in office to serve the people of the state with dedication and commitment so that state regains past glory."

He added: "Taking note of communication @AITCofficial electing @MamataOfficial as leader of 17th WB Legislative Assembly have invited her to take oath of office of chief minister on May 5 at 10.45 am at Raj Bhavan. In view of

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► Six BJP cadres killed in post-poll clash in Bengal; Centre seeks report

current Covid situation, function will be with limited audience."

A day after Ms Banerjee's oath-taking, all the newly-elected TMC MLAs will be sworn in by Biman Banerjee, who has been selected as pro-tem speaker, before he assumes the office of Speaker, said party secretary-general Partha Chatterjee. He added that the CM would decide on the Cabinet's portfolio allocations later.

Asked about the seat the TMC chief would contest from to enter the West Bengal Assembly, following her defeat, Mr Chatterjee said: "The matter is pending before the Election Commission. Ms Banerjee will be the CM as per the Constitution." Mr Mukherjee pointed

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Bengal BJP says Modi, Shah to blame

Accuse Delhi netas of failing to heed local sentiments, call to change Dilip Ghosh as state chief

SANJAY BASAK
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

As the dust settled, a covert blame game has begun in the West Bengal BJP. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the party's central leadership have emerged as the main target of the West Bengal BJP leaders. Fingers are now being pointed at the Prime Minister's style of campaigning.

Nerves appeared to be frayed over the apparent "maginalisation" of the local leaders by the heavyweights from Delhi and north India. It was also

► A SENIOR BJP leader felt that the first 'strategic error' was the failure to bring forth an 'effective Bengali leadership' in the state

claimed that both the central and local leadership failed to attract the state's intelligentsia and Bengali bhadralok in the urban areas following a "sectarian and low level" style of campaigning.

Speaking to this correspondent from Kolkata, a senior BJP leader felt that the first "strategic error" was the failure to bring

forth an "effective Bengali leadership" in the state. "Identity crisis" hit the BJP hard as the majority of the rallies, which included that of the Prime Minister and home minister Amit Shah were addressed in Hindi. This helped strengthen Ms Banerjee's narrative of the "BJP is an outsider".

The local leaders also questioned the regular visits of the Prime Minister and the camping of the home minister in the state during the elections. "They behaved like a daily passenger. This gave an impression that if

the BJP won, the state government would be run by remote control from Delhi." Some senior state leaders claimed that this particular impression damaged the BJP among the local intelligentsia and that is "why Mamata Banerjee swept Kolkata, Howrah and North and South 24 Parganas".

The Prime Minister's "Didi O Didi" jibe has also come under severe criticism by local leaders. The Prime Minister has a "stature", a local leader said, and added: "Stooping to this level to mock a

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Himanta Sarma or Sonowal: Who'll be next CM of Assam?

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 3

Bogged down by the media debate over the leadership issue, the Assam BJP on Monday pushed the ball into the court of the parliamentary board of the party and advised the newly-elected legislators through their leaders to maintain restraint on the issue by avoiding giving comments in the media.

The problem started as some newly-elected legislators started expressing their views openly before some television channels and advocated the name of senior minister Himanta Biswa Sarma as the new chief minister.

However, Assam BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Dass took the lead and announced: "That decision will be taken by the parliamentary board. The party is sending an observer. He will talk to all stakeholders and a decision will be taken based on his report."

In between, more than a dozen newly-elected legislators were seen visiting Mr Sarma at his official residence in Dispur. However, most of them were tightlipped. Newly-elected legislator Jayanta Malla Baruah told reporters that he came to felicitate Mr Sarma. "This is not new, I have



been a regular visitor to Mr Sarma. As far as leadership issues are concerned, party leaders and the parliamentary board of the party will take a call," said Mr Baruah, a staunch supporter of Mr Sarma since his Congress days.

With the party asking legislators to be restrained, some BJP MLAs said: "Mr Sarma deserves to be the next CM as he has not only performed well as minister but also leading the party to victory in all the entire northeastern states since 2016. He has also proved himself as an efficient crisis manager for the governments and the party as well in the Northeast."

Meanwhile, Assam CM Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday invited the newly-elected legislators of the party and alliance partners at his official residence. Though it was not known if all legislators could attend the meeting, party sources said most legislators who were in Guwahati attended the meeting.

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Media can't be stopped from reporting oral observations from courts, says SC

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

The Supreme Court said on Monday that the media cannot be restrained from reporting oral observations made by judges in the course of hearing of matters as they were also of "public interest".

A Supreme Court bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said that what judges observe in the course of hearings of matters was in the public interest and the media should be able to report everything to create accountability.

The court's observation

that the media can't be stopped from reporting oral observations by judges came on an appeal by the Election Commission that complained about the harsh observations by the Madras high court against it in a matter related to the recent Assembly elections. The EC said it was "castigated" without any evidence by the Madras high court over political rallies during the recent Assembly elections.

Observing that they can't tell high court judges to confine themselves only to the pleadings, the Supreme Court said: "They (high court



Jennifer Lopez performs with her mother Guadalupe Rodriguez at 'Vax Live: The Concert to Reunite the World' at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, on Sunday. — AP



People above the age of 18 stand in a queue to receive the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination centre in a government school in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

■ SC orders Centre to overhaul vaccination strategy

24 die in K'taka hospital; SOS for oxygen in Delhi

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

Twenty-four patients died at a government hospital in Karnataka Sunday night due to a shortage of oxygen, as the Union health minister and senior Central officials continue to insist that there is "no shortage of oxygen in the country". Of the 24 patients, 23 were undergoing treatment for Covid-19.

The deaths at the Chamarajanagar hospital comes soon after several deaths in Delhi hospitals due to the short supply of medical oxygen. Several Covid patients have also died in other parts of the country as they gasped for medical oxygen that is not easily available till date despite the government claiming it is sending so much to the States. Delhi, that has been constantly raising the demand for more oxygen supplies, again on Monday wrote to finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman

Oxygen, essential medical items arrive form Doha, UK

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

Gulf airline Qatar Airways on Monday began a gigantic three-flight Boeing-777 cargo aircraft convoy directly from Doha to destinations in India carrying a whopping 300 tonnes of Covid-related aid that Qatar had procured from across its global network. The cargo shipment "includes PPE

equipment, oxygen canisters and other essential medical items, and consists of donations by individuals and companies around the world in addition to existing cargo orders", the airline said.

On Monday, 60 ventilators were received from Britain in the fourth consignment of aid so far from that country.

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► Tanzanian defence attache posted in New Delhi dies due to coronavirus

seeking a waiver on GST for oxygen concentrators for six months so that the equipment is affordable

for people. Desperate people, state governments and anguished Opposition leaders are asking where the Covid relief aid — that include ventilators and oxygen concentrators — coming from different countries are being deployed. Upset by the handling of things, **■ Turn to Page 4**

Firing by Pak in Samba; first violation of truce at IB

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MAY 3

Pakistan's border guards on Monday violated the ceasefire agreement between the two sides by resorting to "unprovoked" cross-border firing in J&K's Samba district, the BSF, which acts as the "first line of defence" along the stretch of the International Border (IB), said.

It said that its men retaliated to the ceasefire violation "in a big way", adding that no one was killed or injured in the exchange of fire on the Indian side. Pakistan had not reacted to the charge till filing of this report.

BSF DIG S.P.S. Sandhu claimed that Pakistan's Punjab Rangers targeted a patrolling team of the BSF in Ramgarh sector of the IB in Samba at around 6.15 am. "We quickly retaliated in a big way," he said. The reported Pakistani firing is the first such incident that has taken place after the military leaderships of the two countries had on February 25 announced a ceasefire along the borders. **■ More on Page 4**

SHORT TAKES

2 Delhi civic bodies approve use of cow dung for cremation

New Delhi: Amid a surge in the number of Covid-19 fatalities and a shortage of wood, two civic bodies in the national capital have given its nod to the use of cow dung and stubble mixture for cremation of bodies.

North Delhi Municipal Corporation Mayor, Jai Prakash said cow sheds under NDMC's jurisdiction have been asked to install machines that will convert cow dung into dung cakes.

The money for these machines may be allocated under the CSR funds, he said. The decision has been taken in view of the rising number of deaths due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A circular said North Delhi Municipal Corporation had approved a resolution for using fuel manufactured from cultivation refuse and cow dung (parali fuelcakes/bricks/upla) in the supplementation to fuel wood for cremation of dead bodies in various cremation grounds under its jurisdiction.

"The Public Health Department has been getting suggestion through various public representatives and members of Deliberative Wing for use of fuel manufactured from cultivation refuse that will reduce the consumption of wood resulting into lesser cutting of trees and finally will protect environment. — PTI

HC seeks NDMC stand on hoardings promoting beer

New Delhi: A PIL in the Delhi High Court on Monday sought direction to the Delhi government and the NDMC to remove the hoardings put up by a Bengaluru-based beer manufacturer advertising its product. A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh issued notice to the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and the beer manufacturer - Pegasi Spirits - seeking their stand on the plea by a lawyer. Advocate Dhruv Chawla, in his plea, has said that the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) in September last year put out an advisory for private satellite TV channels to ensure that liquor, tobacco and other intoxicants are not advertised directly or indirectly on their channels in violation of existing law. In March this year he came across several hoardings across Delhi advertising the alcoholic beverage of Pegasi and filed a complaint with the Advertising Standard Council of India (ASCI) regarding the same. — PTI

Lives dependent on 'thin thread' of oxygen, Centre, Delhi recriminations no solace: SC

New Delhi, May 3: The recriminations between the Centre and Delhi government give no solace to citizens whose lives depend on a "thin thread" of oxygen being made available, the Supreme Court has said.

The top court directed the Centre to create a buffer stock of oxygen for emergencies in collaboration with states and decentralise the location of the stocks so that it is immediately available if the normal supply chain is disrupted.

It asked the Centre to create the emergency stocks of medical grade oxygen within four days.

A bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, L. Nageswara Rao, and S. Ravindra Bhat

said the deficit oxygen supply to Delhi must be remedied "forthwith" as "the situation on the ground in Delhi is heart rending."

The top court said that despite the claims of the Centre, Delhi is being allocated 490 MT/day of oxygen as against the increased demand of 700 MT/day, which was admitted by the Union government in its affidavit that the projected demand for Delhi as of April 20, 2021, had increased by 133 per cent from 300 MT/day to 700 MT/day.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta stated that he has instructions to the effect that Delhi's demand of medical oxygen will be met and that the national capital will not

suffer due to lack of oxygen.

It also noted the assurance given by senior advocate Rahul Mehra, appearing for Delhi after taking instruction from the "highest" level, that the issue will be resolved completely in a spirit of cooperation.

The bench said Mr Mehta has also assured that henceforth he will ensure that the deficit of oxygen is rectified and supply is made to Delhi government according to their projected demand (which may be revised in the future) on a day by day basis.

"We have also seen the situation that has developed in the last 24 hours in Delhi where patients, including medical professionals, died because of the disruption of

supplies and the time lag in the arrival of tankers. This deficit shall be rectified immediately by the Central government by creating buffer stocks and collaborating with the states through the virtual control room on a 24x7 basis," it said.

The top court said that in view of the deaths, which are being caused daily by the disruption of supplies of oxygen, its direction is more crucial than ever.

"We, therefore, direct the Central government in collaboration with the states to prepare a buffer stock of oxygen to be used for emergency purposes to ensure supply lines continue to function even in unforeseen circumstances," it said. — PTI

Ambulance driver charges ₹9K to ferry Covid patient, arrested

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

A 40-year-old ambulance driver was arrested for allegedly over-charging to shift Covid patient from Govindpur to AIIMS hospital, police said on Monday. The accused has been identified as Faizan, a resident of Sangam Vihar, they said.

Police said that complainant Sonu Tiwari on Sunday lodged a report where he alleged that an ambulance driver charged ₹9,000 from him to shift his

elder brother, who was having fever, from Transit Camp, Govindpur to Apollo Hospital which is around 7 km. Thereafter, a dummy client called the driver for ambulance service from Majida hospital to

Apollo hospital. After reaching the Majida hospital, the customer contacted the ambulance driver to shift his patient, a senior police officer said. The driver demanded ₹9,000 to shift the patient within a range of 10 km and ₹5,000 extra for waiting in hospital parking. After bargaining, he agreed for ₹8,500, the officer said.

When the dummy customer gave him ₹8,500 cash, police nabbed the accused person. One ambulance was seized from his possession, police said.

301 centres established in 76 schools in city All slots booked for next 2 days
Delhi begins inoculation drive for 18-44 group

New Delhi, May 3: The Delhi government on Monday launched a mega Covid-19 inoculation exercise for people in the 18-44 age group, who comprise more than half of the city's population, with all the 301 vaccination centres witnessing "100 per cent turnout".

These 301 centres have been established in 76 schools in the city. Around 92 lakh people are eligible for the jobs in the 18-44 age group. According to the 2011 census, Delhi's population is 1.68 crore.

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said all the centres witnessed "100 per cent turnout" on the first day. "All slots are booked for the next two days," an official said.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted: "I am glad that the vaccine process for 18+ has started smoothly. It's heartening to see that youngsters are coming out in large nos to

get vaccinated. Get your elders vaccinated too. Encourage ur friends and relatives also to get vaccinated."

Sisodia, who visited a vaccination centre in west Vinod Nagar, said people informed him that they did not face any trouble getting vaccinated at the centres. However, they faced difficulties getting an appointment. "This is because we have only 4.5 lakh vaccines now, but we will resolve these challenges as we continue to expand our centres," he said.

Sisodia, who is also the nodal minister for Covid-19 management in Delhi, said the city government wants to increase the number of vaccination centres per location to 10. "Our target is to establish 3,000 such centres in 300 schools, subjected (sic) to the availability of vaccine," he said in a tweet. "We are in constant touch with companies and will continue to receive more doses," he added.

More than 45,000 beneficiaries in this category can get jobs at the 301 centres in a day, the official said. The government set up the vaccination centres in schools to accommodate the large number of beneficiaries in this phase, another official said.

Till now, vaccines were being given to those aged above 45 at around 500 centres in the national capital. Around 60,000 people aged above 45 can be inoculated in the capital every day, officials said.

Pre-registration is mandatory for vaccination

in the 18-44 age group, and there are no walk-ins under this category for now, the official said.

While the city's Max Hospital started vaccinating people in the 18-44 age group at limited centres from Saturday, Fortis Healthcare began the exercise on Sunday.

The Delhi government has placed orders for 1.34 crore vaccine doses, which will be delivered over the next three months. Of these, 67 lakh doses are of Covishield vaccine, which are being procured from the Pune-based Serum Institute of India, officials said.

Kejriwal had on Thursday said a plan has been formulated to vaccinate all adults against the coronavirus within the next three months. He had then said that everybody aged above 18 would be administered Covid-19 vaccines free of cost in Delhi.

— PTI



A long queue of people aged between 18-44 years to receive first dose of Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination centre in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Delhi records 18,043 Covid cases, lowest since Apr. 15

New Delhi, May 3: The national capital logged a record 448 Covid-19 deaths in a day and 18,043 cases, the lowest since April 15, with a positivity rate of 29.56 percent, according to a bulletin issued by the Delhi health department on Monday.

This is the third day on the trot that the capital has recorded over 400 fatalities due to the deadly virus.

The 18,043 fresh cases is the lowest since April 15 when 16,699 people were diagnosed with the disease. The low number of cases can be attributed to less tests (61,045) conducted on Sunday.

According to the bul-

letin, only 1,611 vaccine doses were administered a day ago, the lowest so far. This included 1,260 people who received the first dose.

The Delhi government has developed a portal for proper distribution and supply of Remdesivir injection to stockists, distributors and hospitals for needy patients, according to an order. The city government's drug control department has asked all stockists and distributors dealing in Remdesivir injection to update their data on the portal - cfwc-delhi.gov.in/DHB/Login.aspx — daily.

— PTI

City to receive 205 tonnes of oxygen today: Railways

New Delhi, May 3: The railways will deliver its biggest consignment of 205 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) to Delhi by Tuesday morning, the national transporter said. While 120 tonnes of LMO in an 'Oxygen Express' with six tankers will be delivered to Delhi from Durgapur in West Bengal, 85 tonnes in four tankers will be delivered to the national capital from Hapa in Gujarat, it said on Monday.

The train from Hapa will halt at Gurgaon. The LMO will be transferred to trucks of the Delhi government and taken to the city.

The railways had earlier said an 'Oxygen Express',

carrying 30.86 tonnes of LMO, from Angul in Odisha will arrive in Delhi by Monday evening. But this lot is meant for supply in Haryana, it later said.

"The railways is set to deliver its biggest single day load of nearly 205 tonnes to Delhi by tomorrow morning. This includes 120 tonnes from Durgapur and 85 tonnes from Hapa," a statement from the railway ministry said.

"Oxygen Express to Delhi carrying 120 tonnes of Liquid Medical Oxygen is on its way from Durgapur and is expected to reach Delhi on Tuesday," the ministry said. — PTI

Delhi received 440 MT of oxygen, much less than allocated 590 MT quota: Sisodia

New Delhi, May 3: The Delhi government is asking for help for beds and oxygen supply from several entities, including those in the private sector, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said on Monday.

He also said that as of Sunday, the national capital "received 440 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen, which was lesser than the allocated quota of 590 MT and much lesser than Delhi's requirement of 976 MT". The Centre on Saturday had raised the city's daily quota to 590 MT

from 490 MT, amid an acute shortage of oxygen, which is needed to treat critical Covid-19 patients.

The Delhi government has been demanding 976 MT of oxygen from the Centre in view of a high rate of admission of Covid-19 patients.

"It is imperative that we receive adequate oxygen and increase our capacity of beds," Sisodia said.

"The Delhi government is asking for help from various stakeholders in terms of oxygen supply, which includes asking the Army to provide trucks or

DRDO's facility with 500 beds," he said.

Several hospitals in Delhi continue to grapple with a shortage of oxygen amid spike in the coronavirus cases by every passing day.

Authorities at several private hospitals in the national capital on Monday scamped to refill their oxygen stocks as the lives of many Covid patients hung by a thin thread amid an acute shortage of the life-saving gas. Dr Pankaj Solanki, head of 50-bed Dharamveer Solanki Hospital in Rohini, said he

is tired of making SOS calls and "feels dejected". "Most of the times, there is a crisis (of oxygen). It has become difficult to manage even 10 patients now," he said.

Sudhanshu Bankata, executive director of Batra Hospital, which had stopped patient admissions on Sunday, said they are planning to further cut down the number of beds. "We have reduced the number of beds from 307 to 276. We will further bring it down to 220 to match the oxygen consumption," he said. — PTI

AIIMS chief warns against CT scan in mild Covid cases

New Delhi, May 3: AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria on Monday warned against rushing for CT scan in cases of mild Covid-19, saying it has side effects and can end up doing more harm than good.

Stressing that there is no need for doing CT scans in mild Covid cases, Guleria at a press conference said that many people are opting for the test the moment they find out they are positive for COVID-19 and added that misuse of CT scans and biomarkers may cause damage.

"One CT scan is equivalent to 300 to 400 chest x-rays. According to data, repeated CT scans in

younger age groups increase the risk of cancer in later life. Exposing yourself to radiation again and again may cause damage. So, there is no point in doing CT scan in mild Covid-19 if the oxygen saturation is normal," Guleria said.

Even in mild illness and according to a study, even in asymptomatic cases, a CT scan may show patches which go away on their own without treatment, he said.

He advised that CT scans should be done in cases of moderate disease, when hospitalised. "And if there is a doubt, one should opt for a chest x-ray," he said. Guleria further said that

several blood tests for biomarkers are also not needed in mild illness or in home isolation if the oxygen saturation is fine, fever is not high and there are no other symptoms.

"As this will cause panic. These biomarkers are acute phase reactants and they increase even when there is some normal injury and toothache, it does not show that the COVID-19 disease has become severe. This causes more damage. Reliance on these tests can lead to over treatment," he said.

He said that clinical management guidelines are clear that people with mild illness need no medicine. — PTI

75-yr-old man, son rescued from fire in south Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

The Delhi Police on Monday rescued a 75-year-old man and his son from a fire in south Delhi's CR Park area, officials said.

On Monday at 3.03 am, a PCR call was received at CR Park police station regarding a house fire, they said.

Police reached the spot where house owner Kalyani Chatterjee said that her son Agnibha (31) is a psychiatric patient and he has allegedly lit fire in her house. Her husband Someer, a diabetic patient, and son were inside the house, a senior police officer said.

Someer was rescued from the front bedroom by breaking the door. Police heard a cry for help from inside the room, but due to heavy fire and smoke, the exact location was not traceable, the officer said.

Later, police broke open the wooden door of inner bedroom and Agnibha was rescued safely. As he was under the influence of heavy smoke for long period, Agnibha was sent to AIIMS Trauma Centre as a precautionary measure, police said, adding that the fire tenders doused the blaze.



A temporary Covid care centre being prepared at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

IN BRIEF

R. Balakrishna Pillai passes away at 86

Kollam (Kerala): R. Balakrishna Pillai, former minister and one of the founders of the Kerala Congress in 1964, died at a private hospital in his hometown of Kottarakkara on Monday due to age-related ailments, his family said. He was 86. Pillai was cremated with full state honours on the premises of his residence Valakom near Kottarakkara in the evening. Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala, BJP state president K Surendran, NSS general secretary G Sukuran Nair and Syro Malabar Church head Cardinal George Alencherry condoled the death of the veteran leader.

No action to debar candidates: EC to HC

New Delhi: The ECI on Monday told the Delhi high court that since the Assembly polls were over, the plea to debar campaigners and candidates from campaigning for repeatedly violating the mandatory guidelines, including wearing of masks, has become infructuous. Without making any observation on poll panel's contention, a bench of chief justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh, asked the ECI to file its reply to the petition and listed the matter for hearing on June 3. The Centre, in its reply to the petition, has said that it had in March this year asked all state governments and UTs to ensure compliance of Covid-appropriate behaviour in all gatherings. The petition by Vikram Singh, the former DGP of UP and also the chairman of think tank Centre for Accountability and Systemic Change (CASC), was filed prior to the commencement of the polls and had contended that despite the orders and guidelines, "election campaigning was going on in full swing, without any regard to the Covid-19 regulations". — PTI

'1ST TIME DOUBLE DIGITS': 11 WOMEN MLAs IN KERALA

Thiruvananthapuram: For the first time since 2001, there will be double digit representation of women MLAs in the Kerala Assembly as 11 of them have been elected to the 140 member house in the April 6 polls. A total of 103 women contested in the elections, but only 11 made it into the assembly, as per the Election Commission figures. The number of women representatives in the Assembly was just eight in the 2016 elections. There were 13 women MLAs in Kerala in 1996, as per the figures. This time, there will be 10 ruling LDF women MLAs and a lone woman representative of the UDF opposition camp—the front-backed RMP leader K.K. Rema, who won from Vadakara in Kozhikode. As the widow of slain RMP leader T P Chandrasekharan, this victory was also sweet personal revenge for Rema against the ruling CPI(M). A firebrand local leader who broke away from the Marxist party, Chandrasekharan was hacked to death, allegedly by the CPI(M) workers on May 4, 2012. Health Minister K.K. Shailaja will enter the House with a record majority of over 60,000 votes from Mattannur constituency. — PTI

DMK CELEBRATES AT PARTY OFFICE

Catering professionals create the face of DMK patriarch late M. Karunanidhi on a 70kg Idli at Anna Arivalayam Party Headquarters in Chennai on Monday.

— PTI

Before oath, Stalin meets babus to lead Covid fight

Leaders of alliance parties call on DMK chief at party headquarters

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR and D. SEKAR
CHENNAI, MAY 3

Chief minister designate M. K. Stalin began discussions with top bureaucrats on ways to tackle the pandemic in the state on Monday even as preparations were on for his installation, which could be on Friday (May 7) at the Raj Bhavan.



M. K. Stalin

The first day after the election results were declared, the DMK, as a clear winner in the April 6 elections to the state Assembly, saw government officials, including chief secretary Rajeev Ranjan, health secretary J. Radhakrishnan, revenue administration commissioner K. Phanindra Reddy, and disaster management commissioner Jaganathan, calling on Mr Stalin at his house in the morning.

Chittaranjan Road, where his house is located, has been barricaded and a huge posse of police personnel has been posted there to screen those entering the posh road in Alwarpet that has houses of big industrialists and diplomats.

The officials are said to have advised Mr Stalin to keep the swearing-in function a simple one with not many guests invited for it in view of the coronavirus threat. The Raj Bhavan has been suggested as the ideal venue for the event.

Later, Mr Stalin visited his mother's house in Gopalapuram and paid homage to his father at his portrait and then sought his mother's blessings before turning up at Anna Arivalayam, where most of the top party leaders welcomed him.

Leaders of alliance parties like Vaiko, Thol

K. Palaniswami's good fight slows down DMK juggernaut

Chennai, May 3: Undoubtedly, top AIADMK leader and outgoing chief minister K. Palaniswami put up an epic fight against the DMK which fetched his party steered alliance 75 seats, nearly one third of the 234 seats in the Tamil Nadu Assembly and despite a decade of anti-incumbency. Beseet by a resurgent DMK that was firing on all cylinders to capture power and a renewed challenge from TTV Dhinakaran's camp, Palaniswami kept his poise and focused on polls and governance matters in view of the Covid.

If not for Mr Palaniswami, it is hard to guess if the AIADMK would have been able to garner 33.3 per cent vote share as against the DMK's 37.7 per cent. AIADMK won 66 seats, its allies PMK and BJP five and four seats respectively and proved yet again that the western region was its fortress.

Thirumavalavan, chief minister O. Panneerselvam conveyed their congratulations to Mr Stalin, who too thanked them for the gesture.

Also, former chief secretary K. Shanmugam tendered his resignation as advisor to the state government. He was appointed for a period of one year after his retirement from service on January 31. He cited personal reasons for his decision.

Mr Stalin is expected to meet his newly elected MLAs at the Kalaignar Arangan in the party headquarters on Tuesday evening, when he is expected to be elected as the leader of



K. Palaniswami

He faced when his aunt V.K. Sasikala was released from prison just ahead of polls in January and it was another matter that she eventually announced staying away from politics.

Several of Mr Palaniswami's decisions like the 7.5 per cent reservation for government school students in medical admissions who clear NEET, the ₹12,000 crore plus farm loan waiver benefitting 16.43 lakh farmers and declaring the Cauvery delta region as protected agricultural zone were seen as politically astute and measures that helped slow down the DMK juggernaut.

Beginning December last,

The DMK crossed the state, taking on DMK and questioning its track record while in seat of power.

Betting on populism, a shared value of Dravidian politics, Palaniswami assured three phase power (24x7) for farmers and took pride in rejuvenation of over 5,500 waterbodies under 'Kudimaramathu scheme' across the state.

Carefully, he focused on his identity as a farmer and put his best foot forward to convince them that their interests would be best protected by him, one of them. He tagged projects including the Cauvery-Godavari link proposal, Athikadavu Avinashi Scheme, new check dams and accused DMK chief M K Stalin of "entering into an MoU for hydrocarbon exploration" in Cauvery delta region whereas his government banned such initiatives by declaring it a protected zone. — PTI

the DMK Legislative Party. Subsequent to that, he would approach the governor formally to stake claim to form the next government in the state.

In the meantime, speculative lists of ministers were circulated through social media with unknown people naming top MLAs of the party to the various ministerial berths. Also, some activists and others have come up with their wish-lists for the new government giving suggestions on what should be done and how certain issues should be tackled by the in-coming chief minister and his Cabinet.

Poll-duty security forces deployed to fight Naxals

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

Now that the Assembly elections in the five states are over, the home ministry has decided to deploy most of the 1 lakh security forces, which were deployed for the polls, in launching massive operations against naxal outfits in Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.

More than 20 CRPF commandos were killed last month by naxals in the Bastar region following which a fresh offensive operation against Maoists was started and is now being further intensified.

Home ministry sources said that with the long election process now over, the Central forces deployed there had become free for being used in anti-naxal and counter insurgency operations. Though, officials clarified, there was no shortage of security forces for deployment in naxal infested areas, availability of additional or extra forces will be like a shot in the arm to launch specific operations to target top naxal commanders.

Security forces have already launched a

► MORE THAN 20 CRPF commandos were killed last month by naxals in the Bastar region following which a fresh offensive operation against Maoists was started and is now being further intensified.

► MHA SOURCES said that with the long election process now over, the Central forces deployed there had become free for being used in anti-naxal and counter insurgency operations

► THERE IS a greater sense of urgency among the MHA top brass to ensure that naxal commanders like Hidma are either arrested or eliminated before the onset of the monsoon season.

massive hunt for a senior naxal commander, Hidma, who is said to be the mastermind behind the April 5 naxal attack in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh in which 23 CRPF and DRG commandos were killed. It is suspected that following the attack, Hidma escaped to the dense jungles of Andhra close to the

Chhattisgarh border. Top security sources said that at least 20,000 additional troops, who are being released from election duty, will now be used in launching a fresh offensive against naxal groups active in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.

There is a greater sense of urgency among the home ministry top brass to ensure that naxal commanders like Hidma are either arrested or eliminated before the onset of the monsoon season.

In view of the heavy rains during the monsoons, security operations have to be suspended in the thick jungle areas.

Primarily, the CRPF and BSF are among the two main forces whose commandos will now be sent to the jungles of Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. Security officials are hopeful that in view of the fresh offensive being planned with additional deployment, they will be able to eliminate some of the important naxal leaders who have been active in parts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Andhra.

Vijayan says BJP helped UDF win 10 seats in Kerala

GILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 3

A day after scripting historic victory, Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan came up with serious allegations against the Congress led UDF of accusing it of winning at least 10 constituencies by trading votes with the BJP.

At the first meet the press programme after his re-election, the chief minister said the BJP votes came down by 4.28 lakh while the votes secured by Congress-led UDF registered an increase of 4 lakh votes. He said right through the campaign and after elections, the UDF leaders were sure of their victory based calculations of votes trade.

The vote trade happened at the behest of top leaders of UDF and BJP, he alleged.



Pinarayi Vijayan

How did the BJP lose 4,28,500 votes in 90 constituencies? Mr Vijayan asked.

While the votes of all parties had increased because of the addition of new voters this time, how come the BJP did not register such an increase? The chief minister asked.

Mr Vijayan alleged that the vote-trading had taken place on a much higher scale than what is visible on the ground. The chief minister attributed the victory of UDF in the following ten constituencies account of votes trading: K u n d a r a , Thrippunithura, Chal akudy, Kovalam, K a d u t h u r u t h y , Pala, Kuttiadi, Quilandy.

EC defers polls in 2 Assembly seats in Bengal & 1 in Odisha

New Delhi, May 3: Citing Covid restrictions, the EC Monday deferred elections for two Assembly seats in West Bengal and the by-election for a seat in Odisha, all of which were scheduled for May 16. The Assembly polls in Jangipur and Samserganj constituencies of West Bengal and the bypoll for Odisha's Pipri seat were adjourned due to death of contesting candidates of recognised political parties.

The polling was then slated for May 16. "Commission after taking all material facts and inputs of CEO of Bengal and CEO Odisha in consideration and taking note of lockdown and restrictions under Disaster Management Act, 2005...has decided to defer the scheduled poll...Fresh notification will be issued after assessing the pandemic situation," the EC said. — PTI

BJP claims 6 cadres killed in 24 hrs in Bengal

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 3

The BJP, which has become the one and only opposition in West Bengal by winning 77 seats in the Assembly Election, on Monday claimed that six of its party workers including a woman were killed while two of its female agents were gang-raped in various attacks by the ruling Trinamul Congress in the last 24 hours after the announcement of the poll results in the state.

Concerned about the large-scale post-poll violence, Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar condemned the loss of lives, summoned state home secretary H.K. Dwiwedi, state director general of police P. Nirajayan and Kolkata Police commissioner Soumen Mitra to Raj Bhavan. He also flagged the issue with the TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee when

BJP ISSUES HELPLINE NUMBERS FOR WORKERS, SUPPORTERS

YOJNA GUSAI
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

A day after Mamata Banerjee led TMC retained power in West Bengal by registering a hat-trick, the BJP on Monday issued helpline numbers for its workers and supporters after some of the party workers and family members had to face violent attack and even burning of houses and shops allegedly by the TMC supporters. The BJP claimed that five of its party workers and

she met him in the evening. The union home ministry has also sought a report from the Mamata Banerjee government with BJP president J.P. Nadda flying to the state on a two-day visit from Tuesday. The victims are Shova

one family member of a party worker, were "murdered" by TMC supporters and its offices vandalized in several areas, since Sunday when the result of Assembly polls were declared. Senior BJP leaders in the state approached governor Jagdish Dhankar and the Union home ministry also sought a report from the governor on "the post-election violence targeting opposition political workers in the state." Many BJP workers and supporters used social

Rani Mondal of Jagaddal in North 24 Parganas, Uttam Ghosh at Ranaghat in Nadia, Abhijit Sarkar at Beliaghata in North Kolkata, Haran Adhikari at Sonarpur South in South 24 Parganas, Manik Moitra at Shitalkuchi in Coochbehar

media platforms to highlight the "political violence unleashed by TMC supporters" and sought immediate intervention of the central leadership and also Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah. BJP president JP Nadda is expected to reach West Bengal on Tuesday for two days and will meet party workers and family members of party cadre and supporters, who were "victims of political violence unleashed by the TMC."

and Gourab Sarkar at Bolpur in Birbhum. State BJP president Dilip Ghosh accused the TMC workers of killing the six persons in retribution. The Midnapore MP also wondered why the police has not been taking any action

to stop the countless attacks statewide. Worried over the rising incidents of violence the state BJP informed their central leadership. At Nanoor in Birbhum, where strongman Anubrata Mondal is the TMC district president, the BJP alleged that two female polling agents of its candidate Tarak Saha were gang-raped by the TMC-backed miscreants. One of them is missing.

Also, many female BJP workers were molested at 12 villages of Nanoor, according to the party. Besides, many party offices in the districts were attacked and vandalised. In Kolkata, the ABVP state head office was ransacked also. In the evening a union home ministry spokesperson tweeted, "MHA has asked West Bengal Government for a report on the post-election violence targeting opposition political workers in the state."

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
Tender Notice (Through e-tendering)	
Name of work with its location	Comprehensive Annual Maintenance Contract for TPWS equipment both On board and Trackside equipment for section NDLS-PWL for three years.
Approx. cost of the work (₹)	₹28,59,616/- only
Address of the Office	Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3rd Floor, Annex-1, DRM Office, New Delhi-110055
Date & Time for upload the tender/Closing of tender	Tender uploading/closing date & time 02.06.2021 upto 15.00 hrs
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.	See the Northern Railway website www.iraps.gov.in & Notice board at S&T branch, 3rd Floor, DRM office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055
Tender No. 558-Sig-16-M-Tender-AMC-048-2021-22 Dated : 03.05.2021 859/2021	
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EXTENSION OF CANCELLATION OF UNRESERVED MAIL/EXPRESS EMU SPECIAL TRAINS

It is notified for the information of passengers that the cancellation period of following earlier announced cancelled trains has been extended as per the details given below:-

Train No. & Name	Extended Up to
04184/04183 Delhi Jn. - Tundla Jn. - Delhi Jn. Unreserved Mail/ Express EMU Special	04.05.2021 & 05.05.2021
04418/04417 Delhi Jn. - Hathras Killa - Delhi Jn. Unreserved Mail/ Express EMU Special	04.05.2021 & 05.05.2021
04414/04415 New Delhi - Aligarh Jn. - New Delhi Unreserved Mail/ Express EMU Special	04.05.2021 & 05.05.2021
04420/04419 Ghaziabad - Mathura Jn. - Ghaziabad Unreserved Mail/ Express EMU Special	04.05.2021 & 05.05.2021

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

Maha: Ex-intel head moves HC against FIR

Mumbai: Senior IPS officer Rashmi Shukla on Monday moved the Bombay High Court seeking protection from any coercive action against her in connection with an FIR registered against her by Mumbai police in connection with alleged illegal phone tapping and leaking of sensitive documents related to police postings. An FIR was registered under the Official Secrets Act at the BKC cyber police station in Mumbai against unidentified persons on the complaint filed by the Maharashtra Intelligence Department. The alleged phone tapping had taken place when Ms Shukla headed the state intelligence department. She is currently serving as Additional Director-General of the Central Reserve Police Force's (CRPF) South Zone and is posted in Hyderabad.

Doctors demands lockdown in Bihar

Patna: Amid the surge in Covid-19 cases, the Bihar chapter of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has urged the government to impose a lockdown for 15 days in the state. Along with the IMA, heads of four government hospitals in Patna All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS), Patna Medical College and Hospital Nalanda Medical College and Hospital have also urged the government to consider imposing a lockdown in the state to stop the surge in Covid-19 cases. Talking to this newspaper IMA state secretary Dr. Sunil Kumar said that "Imposing a complete lockdown for at least three weeks would break the chain of coronavirus in the state. We have also discussed the issue with heads of government hospitals. We believe that lockdown would bring the situation under control".

J&K: 'Anti-national' govt official fired

Srinagar: Days after dismissing a schoolteacher from services for his being allegedly involved in anti-national activities, Jammu and Kashmir government on Monday fired a senior revenue official on the same charges. The official sources said J&K's Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, has, after considering the facts and circumstances of the case, observed that on the basis of the information available, the activities of revenue official Nazir Ahmad Wani who is currently posted as Naib (deputy) Tehsildar in southern Pulwama district, warrant his dismissal from service in the 'interest of the security of the state'. Subsequently, an order issued by the government reads, "Accordingly, the lieutenant governor hereby dismisses Nazir Ahmad Wani from service with immediate effect".

Himanta Sarma or Sonowal: Who'll be next CM of Assam?

■ **Continued from Page 1**
The remarks of the new legislators in the media asking for a change in the leadership in Assam has alerted the central party leaders in New Delhi too. Having retained power in Assam, the BJP will now need to take a call on whether to keep chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal at the helm or elevate Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam's health and finance minister, who has steadily gained strength within the party since defecting from the Congress in the run-up to the 2016 Lok Sabha elections. There has been speculation all through the campaign season of Mr Sonowal possibly getting a role in the Union government and Mr Sarma taking his place as CM, particularly since the BJP did not name a CM candidate before the elections. BJP vice-president and Assam in-charge Jay Panda, who met Mr Sonowal and Mr Sarma separately at their residences Monday, said: "Any decision that will be taken will be after a call is taken at the parliamentary board." It is significant that the leader of the United Peoples Party Liberal (UPPL), Mr Pramod Boro, has already said: "Selecting the chief minister is an internal BJP matter but we as an alliance partner would like to request them to select a dynamic leader to lead the party in Assam."

Foreign aid pours into India as Covid-19 crisis worsens

Arriving items include PPE kits, O2 cylinders, medical equipment

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

Gulf airline Qatar Airways on Monday began a gigantic three-flight Boeing-777 cargo aircraft convoy directly from Doha to destinations in India carrying a whopping 300 tonnes of Covid-related aid that Qatar had procured from across its global network. The cargo shipment "includes PPE equipment, oxygen canisters and other essential medical items, and consists of donations by individuals and companies around the world in addition to existing cargo orders", the airline said.

On Monday, 60 Ventilators were received from Britain in the fourth consignment of aid so far from that country which is already sending a total of 1,000 ventilators to India that was announced by the British High Commission late on Sunday night. From

Tanzanian defence attache dies

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 3

The Tanzanian defence attache, identified as Col. Mlula who was posted at the Tanzanian High Commission in New Delhi, has passed away due to Covid, sources said on Monday. The death took place a few days ago, sources added. The death of the diplomat has created ripples in the diplo-

matic community in New Delhi. 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".

Italy, one Oxygen generating plant and 20 ventilators (with an installation team onboard) arrived.

During the weekend earlier on Sunday, eight oxygen generators (six of which will be deployed at hospitals in Delhi), 28 ventilators, 200 electric syringe pumps, 28 AFNOR/BS Flexible tubes, 500 anti-bacterial filters, 500 machine

filters, 500 related Patient Circuits arrived from France. Also, 1.25 lakh vials of Remdesivir arrived from the US along with 9,000 vials of Remdesivir from Belgium on Sunday.

On Saturday, 100 oxygen concentrators, 2000 pieces of Remdesivir and 51 oxygen concentrators arrived from central Asian nation Uzbekistan.



Police and Administration Officer during a flag march spreading awareness on the second wave of Covid-19, Bikaner, Rajasthan, on Monday.

— PTI

Pak troops violate truce, fire at BSF patrol party

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MAY 3

Pakistan's border guards on Monday violated the ceasefire agreement between the two sides by resorting to "unprovoked" cross-border firing in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district, the Border Security Force (BSF) which acts as the 'first line of defence' along the stretch of the International Border (IB), alleged.

It said that its men retaliated to the ceasefire violation "in a big way", adding that no one was killed or injured in the exchange of fire on the Indian side. Pakistan had not reacted to the charge till filing of this report.

BSF Deputy Inspector General (DIG), SPS Sandhu, claimed that Pakistan's Punjab Rangers targeted a patrolling team of the BSF in Ramgarh sector of the IB in Samba at around 6.15 am. "We quickly retaliated in a big way," he said. This 198-km stretch of the international border

■ **THE REPORTED**
Pakistani firing in Ramgarh sector is the first such incident that has taken place after the military leaderships of the two countries had on February 25 this year announced that the two armies had begun observing a ceasefire.

between India and Pakistan is called "Working Boundary" in Pakistan but often referred to as "Sialkot-Jammu border" in public parlance on both sides of the divide line.

The reported Pakistani firing in Ramgarh sector is the first such incident that has taken place after the military leaderships of the two countries had on February 25 this year announced that the two armies had begun observing a ceasefire along the borders in J&K from the midnight of February 24.

India's Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) Lt. Gen. Paramjit Singh Sangha and his Pakistani

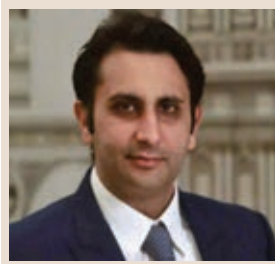
■ **State Cong chief says party will protect SII CEO against threats**

Poonawalla's threat claim triggers political slugfest in Maharashtra

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, MAY 3

A war of words has erupted in Maharashtra politics over Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla's claims that he received threats from big leaders demanding supply of Covid vaccines. Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole said that his party will take responsibility of Mr Poonawalla's security and he must disclose the names of people who threatened him. Minister of state for home Shambhuraje Desai said that SSI CEO must give all details to the police so that they can take action.

"Mr Poonawalla should lodge a complaint giving details of threat and the phone number from where he got the call. We will conduct an in-depth probe into it," the minister said.



■ **In a newspaper interview, Poonawalla claimed that he is facing immense pressure from 'some of the most powerful people in India' including chief ministers, heads of business conglomerates and others demanding supplies of Covishield**

"No one will do any harm to him in this country. The Congress will be with him. But it must come to light who are the big leaders who he says are threatening him," Mr Patole said.

In an interview with a London newspaper, Mr Poonawalla had claimed that he is facing immense pressure from 'some of the most powerful people in India' including chief ministers, heads of business conglomerates and others demanding sup-

plies of Covishield that the SII is producing.

Mr Patole raised question on the security provided by the Centre to Mr Poonawalla.

"In a statement, he has said big leaders from the country... They can't be people from Maharashtra (who will threaten). The Centre has given him Y+ security. If he needs more security, it will be given. Congress will take full responsibility for his security," said Mr Patole. "A person who is not in

India is being provided with Y category security by the Central Government, which raises suspicion. This time is not of engaging in politics. Therefore, I urge him to reveal the names of those who are threatening him," he added.

However, senior BJP leader Ashish Shelar claimed that his party has the details about the people, who threatened Mr Poonawalla.

"What's wrong in the Centre providing security to Mr Poonawalla? The BJP will expose those who are involved in threatening Mr Poonawala. We have details about him," said Mr Shelar.

NCP leader and state minority affairs minister Nawab Malik claimed that Mr Poonawalla was responsible for the present situation he is in and that no one was defaming him.

PM okays key moves to boost Covid fight, NEET postponed

Final year MBBS students may be asked for Covid duty

New Delhi, May 3: Seeking to augment human resources deployed in fighting Covid-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved a slew of measures, including postponing the NEET-PG for at least four months to make a large number of qualified doctors available for pandemic duty and pressing into service medical interns.

All such professionals who complete 100 days of duty will be given priority in the forthcoming regular government recruitment and also honoured with the Prime Minister's Distinguished Covid National Service Samman, the PMO said in a statement on Monday.

It said the services of final year MBBS students can also be utilised for providing services like teleconsultation and monitoring of mild Covid cases after due orientation under the faculty's supervision.

Medical interns will work under the supervi-

■ **THOSE PROVIDING SERVICES** in Covid management will be given priority in forthcoming regular government recruitments after they complete a minimum of 100 days of duty, the Prime Minister's Office said on Monday.

sion of their faculty. This will reduce the workload on the existing doctors engaged in Covid duty and boost the efforts of triaging, it said.

It added that B.Sc. or GNM qualified nurses may be utilised in full-time Covid nursing duties under the supervision of senior doctors and nurses.

Those providing services in Covid management will be given priority in forthcoming regular government recruitments after they complete a minimum of 100 days of duty, the PMO said.

The medical students and professionals to be engaged in Covid-related work will be suitably vac-

inated, it said.

"All such professionals who sign up for a minimum of 100 days of duty and complete it successfully will also be given the Prime Minister's Distinguished Covid National Service Samman from the government of India," it said.

States and UTs have been urged to consider the incentives suggested to maximise manpower availability, the PMO said, adding that they can make available additional health professionals engaged through this process to private Covid hospitals as well in surge areas.

These professionals will also be covered under the government's insurance scheme for health workers engaged in fighting Covid-19.

The statement said the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for Post-Graduation (NEET-PG) will be postponed for at least four months, and the exam will not be held before August 31. — PTI

Maha DGP writes to CM for removal from Param probe

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MAY 3

Maharashtra DGP Sanjay Pandey has written a letter to Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray

someone else.

According to the sources, DGP Pandey and chief minister Uddhav Thackeray are going to have a meeting after which a decision will be made in the matter.

On April 29, Singh had approached the Bombay high court and had claimed that Mr Pandey confided in him that he had himself fought the system his entire life but to no avail. Mr Pandey had then allegedly advised Mr Singh to not fight the system and asked him to take back the case against Mr Deshmukh and in return, inquiries against him ordered by the state government would be closed.



Sanjay Pandey

Pandey had offered a settlement and asked him to withdraw his allegations against NCP leader Anil Singh.

Following the allegations by Mr Singh against him, Mr Pandey has asked the case to be reassigned to

Bengal BJP says Modi, Shah to blame for debacle

■ **Continued from Page 1**
woman leader does not work for a PM's image. This should not have been done at his level."

The local leaders also argued that instead of talking about governance and development, the PM and the central leaders harped on corruption and scams during TMC rule. It was further claimed that the party "could not provide a vision for Bengal". A senior party leader said that the "narrow, sectarian style of campaigning" was rejected by people of West Bengal.

The central leadership was also accused of ruining the party's chances by "overplaying" the religion and Hindutva cards. "The central leaders refused to believe that the chants of Jai Shri Ram does not work in the land of 'Tagore and Durga,'" a party leader said.

They claimed that even on Hindutva and religious issues, Ms Banerjee "stole the thunder". She not only identified herself as a "Hindu Brahmin girl", but also spouted out names of Durga's nine avatars and challenged the home minister to do the same.

It was claimed that "none of the local or central BJP leaders could match Mamata Banerjee's connectivity with the local people".

A senior Bengal BJP leader argued that the party "failed to read" the Muslim votebank. Adhering to the traditional line, the BJP strategists in West Bengal thought that the Muslim votes would be divided between the TMC and the Left-led Sanjukta Morcha.

Media can't be stopped from reporting oral observations...

■ **Continued from Page 1**
everything said by High Court can be made a cause of grievance, the court said that often things are said on the basis of past experience or after a series of orders not being complied with.

"Sometimes we are harsh because we want to see something done in the larger public interest. After a series of orders, the high court may be anguished. Look at Gujarat, 18 people died due to a fire in a Covid ward and this in spite of a series of orders" on obtaining no-objection certificates from the fire department, the court said, pointing to the things that happen on the ground despite high court orders.

24 die...

■ **Continued from Page 1**
the Supreme Court directed the Centre to ensure Delhi gets its required supply of oxygen by midnight.

However, the Centre claimed states are given enough oxygen but have to use them judiciously. "Oxygen is available in adequate quantity, and efforts are being made to transport it to hospitals in the shortest possible time," said home ministry additional secretary Piyush Goyal on Monday, urging citizens not to get "jitters about the lack of oxygen in the country".

India on Monday recorded 3.68 lakh new Covid-19 cases and 3,417 deaths. Union health ministry officials said while the rising number of daily cases in some states was a cause of concern, in Delhi and Maharashtra there are "very early signals" of a "plateauing" of daily cases. Both Maharashtra and Delhi have an aggressive lockdown as a containment measure to break the chain of transmis-

sion. Officials said 13 states — including Delhi, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh — are showing early signs of plateauing, or decrease, in daily new Covid-19 cases, while Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and West Bengal are still showing an increase in daily infections.

Concerned at the high number of cases, the SC said the Centre and state governments may consider imposing a lockdown to curb a further spread of virus. It urged the Central and state governments to consider imposing a ban on mass gatherings and super-spreader events. As several of the 18-plus population started taking jabs, the court also questioned the rationale behind different vaccine prices and asked the Centre to consider revisiting its vaccine procurement and pricing policy, saying it would prima facie be a detriment to the right to public health. The court felt differences in pricing will impact vaccine distribution and coverage. "The manner in which the current

policy was framed will prima facie result in a detriment to the right to public health, which is an integral element of Article 21 of the Constitution," said a bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud.

The court said once the vaccination was opened up for persons other than the 45-plus group, "it will not be logical to impose the obligation to source vaccinations for the 18-44 age group on state governments." The court felt that compelling states to negotiate with manufacturers directly will lead to a serious detriment to those in the 18-44 group, who will be vaccinated by the state governments. The order said the Centre "must take responsibility of providing guidance to every state on the quantities to be supplied to each state, the vaccines being allocated, the period of delivery and the number of persons who can be covered for vaccination, among other details". It added: "Leaving state governments to negotiate directly with manufacturers will produce chaos and uncertainty."

THE ASIAN AGE

4 MAY 2021

Heed SC's directions on Covid course correction

The series of directions on facilitating the treatment of Covid-19 patients, issued by a special bench of the Supreme Court in an April 30 order that was released late on Sunday, points to a visible lack of understanding on the part of the government in tackling the pandemic and requires it to launch an immediate process of course correction. The most important of the directions is to revisit the vaccine policy, which this newspaper has been demanding ever since the government placed it in the public domain. While reiterating that the court "does not attempt to delve into the role of the executive in designing policy choices" and "it is ultimately up to the executive to frame and implement policies that it deems appropriate, with the topmost regard to public interest", the court has reminded the government that such a policy must be consistent with the right to life, which includes the right to health, guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Invoking Article 14, the court said such a policy should not discriminate between two classes of people who have been circumstanced similarly, disapproving of the policy which excludes people aged between 18 and 44 from the free vaccination programme. The court told the government that there would be people who are unable to pay for the vaccines, which leaves them at the mercy of the state government who may or may not pay for their jabs. This will create a disparity, the court has noted. It has also sought to know whether there are options available for people who do not have access to digital resources to get vaccinated as registration on the CoWin portal has been made mandatory. The court has said that it would not be logical to impose the obligation to source vaccinations for the 18-44 age group on the state governments, as it will leave them to negotiate with the manufacturers which will produce chaos and uncertainty.

After listing the potential for discrimination within the policy, the court has also advanced a rational method for the Union government with respect to vaccines: to negotiate the price with manufacturers, procure all doses and allocate it to the states. The court has also directed the government to form a uniform policy for admission of Covid-19 patients in hospitals, explore the possibilities available under the Patents Act 1970 and the Disaster Management Act 2005 and the institution of the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority to ensure an adequate supply of oxygen and life-saving drugs such as Remdesivir and Tocilizumab.

Vaccination is one of the best and most reliable tools to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and anyone who does not have access to it is a potential victim, unable to enjoy the right to life which the Constitution guarantees. Proper treatment also falls under this category. There is only so much that a court can advise a popular government on policy and its execution, but it has left strong enough clues that a policy which is inconsistent with the constitutional provisions will be subjected to judicial review. The court's intervention has given the government an opportunity to cover lost ground in the fight against the pandemic and take solid steps to prevent any further loss of lives and to reduce the trouble that citizens face in these harrowing times.

Well-run race helped DMK

The DMK's electoral triumph was very much on the expected lines so no one was surprised that M.K. Stalin, the party's president and son of its late patriarch M. Karunanidhi, is getting ready to take over as Tamil Nadu's next chief minister. But the results did throw up a few surprises, such as the way Seeman's Naam Tamizhar Katchi surged in popularity with over six per cent votes and the BJP clinching four of the 20 seats it had contested.

In the electoral sweepstakes, the dice was loaded in favour of the DMK once the BJP tied up with the AIADMK. There is still the perception that the AIADMK may have done better, if not romped home, if it shrugged off the albatross around its neck. In a supreme irony, a coalition that pulled down the leader, stripping it of several seats, helped the ally make electoral gains.

It's a different matter that the DMK took pole position way back in 2019. The Lok Sabha elections, where the state bucked the national trend, had set the mode for these Assembly elections. The DMK was seen as the lone formidable force that could stop the Hindutva juggernaut running roughshod over Tamil Nadu's socio-cultural landscape.

cultural landscape. However, there were hiccups in cementing the old alliance of 2019, with the AIADMK endearing itself to people by effectively managing the first wave of Covid-19. But the DMK overcame the setbacks, and eventually prevailed.

Whether it was the planning or the formulation of strategy (Prashant Kishor and his I-PAC were firmly behind it) or the campaign itself, the DMK started much before the Election Commission blew the poll bugle. Above all, the DMK, by falling back on its traditional ideology, emerged as a worthy combatant to forces inimical to local aspirations and played its part effectively, the BJP and NTK pulling off feats out of sync with the popular mood notwithstanding.

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Subhani



Bengal's thinking is clear: Will rest of India follow?



Mohan Guruswamy

The second wave of Covid-19 began on February 10 when India reported 11,000 new cases. In the next 50 days, the daily average was 22,000 cases. In the following 10 days the daily average touched 89,800. We are now adding over 400,000 a day. India has never been engulfed by a crisis of this order. We are woefully short of hospital beds, oxygen, Remdesivir and Tocilizumab, vaccines, ambulances and sadly even space in our crematoria. The growth and spread are expected to scale to almost a million a day. In two months, India has become the world's basket case. Yet, on January 28 this year, speaking to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Prime Minister Narendra Modi showed a blissful and disturbing ignorance of the perfect storm looming. The committee of scientists monitoring the virus warned the PMO of the gathering storm. He was not interested. He was crowing about his perceived "achievement" of beating back the mutated "Chinese virus". He was so wrong, and the country is paying a huge price. There is no Modi image of competence left.

The elections to the four states and Puducherry, which he was so focused on, have been his undoing. He began campaigning on February 5 and 7 in Assam and West Bengal. After that he addressed 20 more rallies in West Bengal and six more in Assam. He also addressed 10 rallies in Tamil Nadu, three in Kerala and one in Puducherry, in all around 40 giant rallies criss-crossing across in IAF Boeings. I wouldn't even hazard the true cost of the exchequer, but I have heard it said the PM himself is liable to a charge of ₹6 per air km. Other costs

are borne by the PMO. But the cost is not important. The time spent on huckstering is important. He lost almost a month campaigning, instead of managing the engulfing crisis. I always had a low opinion of his intellect, but even he could have surmised the risks posed to the nation by the renewed pandemic. Clearly, he factored winning West Bengal was more important and worth the cost. Mr Modi himself cheerfully paraphrased what Gopal Krishna Gokhale said almost 100 years ago: "What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow".

West Bengal has unambiguously expressed what it is thinking. It has rejected Mr Modi and his message and campaign style, lock, stock and barrel. A subversive Election Commission helpfully broke up West Bengal's polls into eight phases starting March 27 and closing April 29. During this period the daily Covid-19 cases rose in West Bengal from 812 to 17,403. Breaking it into eight phases didn't help the BJP either. It lost in every phase and got double digits only in four. West Bengal has a sizable Muslim electorate and Mr Modi didn't mince words in targeting them by making it appear they were Mamata Banerjee's personal votebank. He didn't bother to even conceal what he thought of them. His electoral style touched a new low, even by his standards and most certainly by the standards expected of a PM, when he jibed her by calling "Didi-O-Didi". Urban Bengal responded to this by defeating the BJP soundly in all urban constituencies. There is a message here. All over the country the BJP and RSS have strong urban bases, but urban and urbane Bengal adminis-

tered a resounding slap to gutter politics. With no record to show, Mr Modi's politics are nothing but that now.

There was no surprise in Assam. The BJP was returned by almost the same margin as in 2016, getting a majority with the ACP's nine seats. The Congress lacked a visible local leadership who could match wits with the BJP's Hemanta Biswa Sarma. Tamil Nadu was as expected. The two so-called national parties were clinging to crumbs thrown by the two so-called Dravidian parties. In Kerala, Pinrayi Vijayan showed why he's India's topmost and only surviving commissar. The DMK's Stalin made no bones about what he thinks of Mr Modi's Hindu and Hindi-centric politics. The Modi government used every means, including ED raids, to slow down Stalin. The ED even raided Stalin's daughter.

So where does our politics go from here? One clear conclusion is that both the BJP and Congress were dealt severe blows. It's interesting the BJP's campaigns were entirely shouldered by Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. None of the other top BJP leaders even bothered to show up anywhere. What shouldn't be missed is that the Raksha Mantri, a former BJP president, was the first from the party to congratulate Mamata Banerjee. In Assam, Mr Sarma's supporters have gone public crediting the victory to their leader. Mr Sarma has already fired a shot across Sarbananda Sonowal's bow, saying he was no longer interested in being just a minister in someone's Cabinet. The

Prime Minister Modi's inability to defend India against the second Covid-19 wave, and his inability to cajole the Chinese from withdrawing from areas they occupied in Ladakh now make him an easy target.

numbers might work for him, as he needs just a dozen MLAs to cross over and give Assam a new government. Mr Sarma was a Congress satrap till Rahul Gandhi insulted him by playing with his dog rather than listening to him. Rahul will be all ears now.

Mamata Banerjee's stunning victory puts her squarely on the centre stage of Opposition politics. Joining her there will be Lalu Prasad Yadav, released on bail by the Supreme Court despite the government's strenuous objections. Tejashwi Yadav has shown he's capable of leading a party when the RJD came so close to upstaging the BJP-JDU alliance in Bihar. Rajasthan's Ashok Gehlot and Punjab's Amarinder Singh have emerged as fairly independent Congress straws. Uddhav Thackeray has shrugged off the Shiv Sena's *pariah* status by providing Maharashtra with good leadership and a penchant for making politics the art of the possible. In Telangana, KCR has put the BJP in its place by a resounding win in Nagarjunasagar after its surprise showing in the Dubbaka and GHMC polls. YSRC scored a resounding win in Tirupati with the BJP candidate, a retired chief secretary, losing her deposit. The anti-BJP lineup now has seven chief ministers, excluding Naveen Patnaik. Seven CMs will mean the election and propaganda machines can be kept well-greased and the powder kegs dry and replenished. Prime Minister Modi's inability to defend India against the second Covid-19 wave, and his inability to cajole the Chinese from withdrawing from areas they occupied in Ladakh now make him an easy target. The Gujarat model has been long exposed as bogus. There is light seen at the end of the tunnel.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

NOW FIGHT COVID

In West Bengal, chief minister Mamata Banerjee has secured a third term with her party, the TMC, winning over 200 seats. In Kerala, the Pinarayi Vijayan-led LDF created history by becoming the first government in the state to beat anti-incumbency. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK is set to form the government after 10 years even though its performance has not been as good as the exit polls had predicted. The BJP has retained power in Assam. Now that the vote war has ended, the political parties should go all out to fight against the deadly second wave of Covid-19 that has ravaged India.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

MUZZLED MEDIA

IT HAS been reported that about 700 educational staff have died while doing panchayat election duty in Uttar Pradesh. It is significant that no reporter has broken this story. It is the teachers' union that complained to the state government about it, demanding the postponement of the elections. Not one newspaper carried this news on the front page. It is also doubtful that any TV channel held any debate on this issue. The case of Siddique Kappan may have been highlighted by the media, but it has also served the purpose of intimidating journalists.

Anil Bagarka
Mumbai

TIMELESS RAY

THIS IS in response to Shikha Mukerjee's article titled "Revisiting the legend @100" (May 2). In his children's film, Hiran Rajar Deshe (*In the Land of the Diamond King*), it is shown that ordinary people are literally covering before the king while languishing in poverty and hunger. Yet far from taking the minimum initiative to uplift them, the administration barbarically exploits them. The resources of the kingdom get squandered on building a gigantic statue of the megalomaniac ruler. No prizes for guessing why the film remains relevant even to this day.

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



Constitution is just forgotten: No 'fraternity' exists in India!

A "preamble" is a short preparatory statement and an introduction to a Constitution. The preamble tells us what the purpose of the constitution is and what the laws are meant to achieve. India's Constitution says the people of India (not the government) have resolved to make India a democracy, which will ensure for all its citizens social justice, economic justice and political justice. We will ensure we have freedom of thought, religion, and expression. We will have equality of status and opportunity. We have ignored all these, of course, and never in our history have we enjoyed fully any of these freedoms. But it is the last line of the preamble that we should look at today. It says that the people of India will give themselves fraternity.

What is "fraternity"? The word means "bandhuta" in Hindi. It is feeling empathy for someone who is not like you. We do not require the government to feel empathy for our own. Indians are especially community minded. We marry among our own, we are comfortable among our own and for the most part we vote

for our own community. Fraternity is to reach out and touch and feel for someone who is not like you. Whether the person is from a different community or different economic background. Are we living up to this word in our preamble? The answer is no. We are not promoting fraternity of any sort.

Our recent history tells us that not only do we not promote fraternity, we promote its opposite. When, before the lockdown, and before the guidelines were in place, when daily new cases of Covid-19 were only 100 around the country and one community organises a religious gathering, they are called Covid terrorists. When another community organises the largest gathering in human history while cases are over one lakh per day, this doesn't just not only not attract criticism, but the event is happening at the invitation of the Prime Minister. We are not promoting social fraternity.

Our country has hundreds of deaths annually from a system called manual scavenging where workers, who are mostly dalit women, have to clean toilets by

their hand. The government has banned this practice, but it still continues. Septic tanks and drains are cleaned manually mostly by dalit men, many of whom die of the poison these spaces contain. This is also not supposed to happen, but because most of the rest of us don't care, it continues despite innumerable court orders. We are simply not promoting caste fraternity.

The Government of India has, as of the day that I am writing this piece, opened up vaccinations to those who can afford it in private hospitals. They charge over ₹1,200 for one shot of Covaxin. You need another shot after six weeks, so that is ₹2,400 per individual. How many families of five in India can afford to pay ₹12,000 for vaccines which will last one year? The poor have been left to their own devices. The Centre has told the states to vaccinate them but has given the states neither money nor vaccines. Those who observed the proceedings at the Supreme Court on Friday were struck by how the court pointed out something that the government has not explained: why are different Indians

paying different prices to protect themselves from Covid-19? Shouldn't it be the responsibility of the Centre to do this? It is, but it does not believe in economic fraternity. If you have money in India, you can be vaccinated, and this difference will just have to be accepted. We are not promoting economic fraternity.

Since 2014, more than 28,000 "dollar millionaires" (meaning those who have more than ₹7.5 crore) have left India to become citizens of other nations. This should not surprise us. We have gone down a path which has left optimism. We are today demanding votes on laws which exclude and target people on the basis of their religion. We are today celebrating the destruction of monuments and the building of temples on them. We are today at this moment carrying out the reconstruction of New Delhi which will cost us ₹20,000 crore and give the Prime Minister a new house, while crores of people have no means and no money to buy vaccines for their children. We are going through a national crisis of unprecedented

proportions. We have not been affected in Independent India on this scale over a virus that has picked on all of us equally but has killed fewer of those who have had access to a bed, ventilator and oxygen. In Bengaluru, I have a colleague who lost his job and had to pay ₹22,000 a day with his wife and child also infected. But he was one of the lucky ones. For most Indians, this is not possible. They will die in their homes, as the difference in the official Covid-19 deaths versus the numbers reported by the press and the number of funeral pyres show. They will die without treatment and no possibility of treatment.

Not only is this not fraternity, it's contempt of the word "fraternity". We have lost our empathy for those who are unlike us and we do not even recognise that we have lost it. Our Constitution told us that we have to try and understand and support those who are unlike us. The fact is that we do not even know that we are supposed to do that.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES

16 SOLDIERS IN NIGER KILLED IN ATTACK, 6 HURT

Niamey (Niger): An ambush on a military patrol near Niger's border with Mali killed 16 Niger soldiers and left one missing, the government said.

The patrol was returning from a security mission near the border with Mali in Tillia in the northern part of Niger's Tahoua region when it was attacked by a band of men riding motorcycles on Saturday evening, the Ministry of Interior said in a statement late Sunday. Six other soldiers were wounded in the ambush.

Niger's military also intercepted a group of suspected extremists Friday night, killing at least 24 who were preparing to attack Baibangou, a village about 100 kilometers (62 miles) north of the capital, Niamey, according to a statement from the ministry of defence.

TORNADOES HIT MISSISSIPPI; TUPELO AT RISK

Mississippi: Multiple tornadoes were reported across Mississippi on Sunday, causing some damage but no immediate word of injuries.

A line of severe storms rolled through the state on Sunday afternoon and into the nighttime hours. Late Sunday, a "tornado emergency" was declared for Tupelo and surrounding areas. Meteorologists urged residents to take cover.

"Damage has been reported in the City of Tupelo," the mayor's office said in a Facebook post just before 11 pm. "Emergency crews are currently assessing the degree of damage. Please do not get out and drive." Photos retweeted by the National Weather Service in Memphis showed several downed trees and power lines.

Tupelo Middle School sustained some damage, as well as houses and businesses.

ISRAELI SETTLERS ATTACK VILLAGE OF PALESTINIANS

Jerusalem: Israeli settlers attacked a Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank overnight, setting brush fires and hurling stones, Palestinian officials and an Israeli rights group said on Monday.

It appeared to be a revenge attack after three Israelis were wounded in a drive-by shooting at a nearby traffic junction on Sunday. The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem said dozens of settlers attacked the village of Jaloud. It circulated videos showing the fires, with people shouting in the background. Israeli security forces arrested 11 Palestinians and four people were wounded by rubber bullets, B'Tselem said.

Ghassan Daghlis, a Palestinian Authority official who monitors settlement activity in the northern West Bank, provided a similar account, saying the villagers had come out to defend the village after the settlers attacked.

The Israeli military said Israeli civilians and Palestinians hurled rocks at each other outside the village and that a number of locations were ignited.

3 KILLED IN BOAT CAPSIZE OFF SAN DIEGO COAST

San Diego: Three people were killed and more than two dozen others were hospitalised after a wooden boat capsized on Sunday during a possible human smuggling operation just off the San Diego coast, authorities said.

Local lifeguards, the US Coast Guard and other agencies responded around 10.30 am following reports of an overturned vessel near the peninsula of Point Loma, according to the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department. Three people died at the scene and 27 people were transported to hospitals with "varying degrees of injuries," department spokesman Jose Ysea said.

Ysea said when he arrived on scene near the Cabrillo National Monument there was a "large debris field" of broken wood and other items in the choppy waters.

"In that area of Point Loma it's very rocky. It's likely the waves just kept pounding the boat, breaking it apart," Ysea said. He said it was possible, but not confirmed, that the group had been packed in a low-slung panga boat, a type of motorised vessel often made of wood used by smugglers to bring people illegally into the US from Mexico.

EU to allow vaccinated travellers

Urges 27-member countries to lift restrictions on non-essential travel for people with vax

Brussels, May 3: The European Union's executive on Monday proposed that travellers who are fully vaccinated with EU-approved jabs be able to enter the bloc, a statement said.

The European Commission urged the EU's 27 member countries — which make their own decisions on health matters — to "lift restrictions on non-essential travel for vaccinated persons travelling to the EU".

It also wants to see travellers from countries that have done a good job in keeping Covid-19 at bay to be able to enter, based on how many infections they register per 100,000 people averaged over a two-week period.

The proposal would see that infection threshold raised from the "very severe" bar of 25 cases per 100,000 decided nearly a year ago to 100 cases, an EU official involved with drafting the proposal told journalists on condition of not being identified.

"So we will no longer have the choice among, let's say, 10 to 15 countries around the world, but member states will be able to pick up countries, international countries in a list of up to 100 countries, if the situation continues to develop in a positive way," he said.

Proof that an individual was fully vaccinated — at least two weeks before arriving in the EU, for full immunity to kick in — would not exclude member states also requiring Covid tests either before or after arrival, or quarantine if authorities deemed them warranted, he added.

The proposal also says an "emergency brake" option should be kept in reserve to allow member states to quickly close travel from countries where a "variant of concern or interest is detected".

The EU currently has four vaccines currently authorised by its European Medicines Agency: from BioNTech/Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson.

Others may be added later. The EMA is beginning to look at Russia's Sputnik V vaccine. So far, however, no assessment is being made of China's jabs, which are used in several countries.

The statement said other vaccines may later be added to the list for approved EU travel if they feature on a World Health Organisation emergency use list of jabs.

The EU at the momen-



Fans watch Blossom perform at a live music concert hosted by Festival Republic in Sefton Park in Liverpool, north-west England. A crowd of 5,000 people attended the trial gig.

— AFP

Public gather maskless at UK gig trial

UNITED KINGDOM

Liverpool, May 3: Thousands danced without face coverings at a music festival in northern England as the UK government permitted the country's first post-lockdown gig.

A crowd of 5,000 people cheered, danced and sang along to performances from bands including English indie pop act Blossoms at the sold-out event on Sunday at Liverpool's Sefton Park.

"The festival was part of a pilot project by the UK gov-

ernment called the Events Research Programme (ERP) to test crowd safety at live events ahead of planned lifting of restrictions on June 21.

Hugging a group of friends outside the concert tent, Matt Berry said they were "getting back to doing normal things that normal people do... finally."

"I think it is good to get it all started again to test if it can all work for summer, and if it will all go ahead in the summer as well," said another concert-goer, Freya Begley.

The government has previously allowed limited numbers of supporters to attend sports events such as the FA Cup semifinal at Wembley. Researchers are monitoring how well different approaches to social distancing and ventilation work.

All those attending the

two-day concert had to take lateral flow Covid tests before entering the venue and will also have to take another test afterwards.

They have to give their contact details to the state-funded health service so they can be traced if they test positive.

The bands performed in a tent. At the entrance to the venue, audience members had to show QR codes and Covid test results.

— AFP

France opens high schools, Oktoberfest put on hold

Paris/Berlin, May 3:

France's secondary and high schools have reopened and a ban on domestic travel has been lifted as part of the government's plan to gradually reopen the country.

The French are now allowed to go further than the 10-kilometre (six-mile) from home limit that has been applied for four weeks in efforts to slow down the spreading of the virus. A curfew from 7 pm until 6 am is still in place.

Last week, President Emmanuel Macron has presented the key dates of the plan to move out of the country's partial lockdown, as numbers of

infections and hospitalisations have started decreasing.

Restaurants and cafes will be able to serve customers outdoors at tables seating a maximum of six people starting May 19, when the nightly curfew will be pushed back to 9 pm. Non-essential shops also reopen, as well as cultural sites and sport facilities, which will have occupancy limits of 800 people indoors and 1,000 outdoors.

On June 9, tourists from abroad will be allowed to come to France on the condition they are vaccinated or can show a negative test.

Meanwhile, Bavarian officials on Monday cancelled Oktoberfest festivities for a second year in a row due to concerns over the spread of the Covid, saying that there are too many risks in hosting the celebrations, which traditionally bring in visitors from around the world, during a global pandemic.

Bavarian Governor Markus Soeder said it was with heavy hearts that they decided to call off the festival for which the state is known globally, but that with Coronavirus numbers still stubbornly high and hospitals already struggling, it had to be done.

— Agencies

26 killed as speedboat ferry overturns in Bangladesh

● **THE ACCIDENT** occurred at the old Kanthalbari ferry terminal in Shibchar upazila of Madaripur at around 8 am. The boat, driven by an inexperienced driver, overturned in the Padma River in central Bangladesh while heading for Madaripur district from Munshiganj district.

retrieved at least 26 bodies, police said.

"We have retrieved 26 bodies, rescued alive five others... but searches are underway for more as several speedboat passengers are feared missing," said

Ashiqur Rahman, the police inspector of a nearby ferry terminal. He said that they were informed the driver of the speedboat was an inexperienced underage boy.

"Witnesses and survivors said the boat was carrying over 30 passengers and the vessel was transporting sand in the Padma River near the town of Shibchar of Madaripur," he said. Divers from the local fire service station and river police rushed to the spot and joined the rescue operation, he added. All the deceased — one female and 25 males — were passengers of the speedboat,

the *Daily Star* newspaper reported.

The speedboat was carrying excess passengers, violating the restriction imposed by the government amid the pandemic situation, the report quoted Madaripur Deputy Commissioner Rahima Khatun as saying. Bangladesh is under lockdown until Wednesday to stem the spread of coronavirus.

The accident occurred as there was not sufficient light in the morning and also the driver was not skilled enough, Khatun said. A six-member inquiry committee has been formed to investigate the accident.

— PTI

POWERFUL | MEETING The meet would be attended by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

Britain organises first face-to-face G7 summit

London, May 3: Britain this week hosts the first face-to-face meeting of G7 foreign ministers in two years, joined by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, as world powers tackle pandemic recovery plus growing tensions with Russia and China.

The Covid-secure gathering in London will prepare the ground for a G7 summit in southwest England next month, which will mark

Joe Biden's inaugural visit to Europe as US president. Both events will also be joined by Indian leaders.

Many of the G7 nations have rallied to India's aid as the world's most populous democracy confronts a terrifying surge of coronavirus cases, although the pandemic is ebbing elsewhere in the West thanks to mass vaccination drives.

After its Brexit withdrawal from the European

Union, Britain is reorienting its foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific region, and British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab will also play host this week to ministers from Australia, South Korea and the ASEAN bloc.

In the face of Russian "lies and propaganda" over Ukraine and other fronts, Raab said he wants the G7 "to come together with a rapid rebuttal mech-

anism" against disinformation.

Blinken is en route to Ukraine this week pledging "unwavering" US support after Russian troops had massed on its border.

In bilateral talks on Monday before the G7 ministers sit down to a working dinner, Raab and Blinken will discuss Afghanistan, China, Iran and trade, according to the British Foreign Office.

— AFP



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) speaks with South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong (right) during a bilateral meeting in London on Monday. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,718.52	-0.13
Nifty 50	14,634.20	0.02
S&P 500*	4,197.28	0.39
Dollar (₹)	73.91	0.21
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.41	0.58
Euro (₹)	89.10	0.55
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,580.310	0.66
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.33	0.85
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.001	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.608	-0.023

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Godrej Properties posts ₹192-cr loss in Q4, income dips

Godrej Properties reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 191.62 crore for the March quarter on lower income, even as it achieved record sales bookings of Rs 2,632 crore. The realtor had posted a net profit of Rs 102.39 crore in the year-ago period. Total income fell to Rs 576.08 crore in Q4 from Rs 1,288.17 crore in the year-ago quarter. For financial year 2020-21, the firm reported a net loss of Rs 189.43 crore.

M&M advances maintenance shutdown



Mahindra & Mahindra said it has advanced the annual maintenance plant shutdown of its automotive division to this month in the wake of the second wave of the pandemic. The maintenance of four working days was originally scheduled for June 2021, M&M said in a regulatory filing. M&M's automotive division has manufacturing units at Chakan, Nashik, Kandivali, Zaheerabad and Haridwar.

Motherson takes Bombardier's wiring biz in fold

Auto components major Motherson Sumi Systems Ltd said it has completed the acquisition of Bombardier's electrical wiring interconnection systems (EWIS) business in Huehuetoca, Mexico. In October last year, the company had announced the acquisition of Bombardier's Mexico-based EWIS business for around \$10 million through its Mexican subsidiary, Motherson Rolling Stocks.

Tata Chemicals Q4 consolidated PAT down 85%

Tata Chemicals reported an 85 per cent decline in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) at Rs 29 crore for the fourth quarter against Rs 198 crore a year ago. Consolidated income from operations rose by 11 per cent to Rs 2,636 crore from Rs 2,378 crore. "During the year, we witnessed a sequential improvement in demand and this quarter saw continuation of the same trend," the company's MD & CEO R. Mukundan said.

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Developed countries need to share technology No room for vaccine nationalism, says FM

New Delhi, May 3: Cautioning the global community against vaccine nationalism at this critical hour of the spreading pandemic, India on Monday asked the developed nations to share technology and allow free movement of critical components and raw material needed for production of vaccines.

Speaking at the Asian Development Bank's annual meet, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman also underlined the need for a re-look at the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (Trips) agreement in the context of the pandemic. "Countries will have to be open about sharing vaccine-based technologies. The Trips agreement will have to be looked at in the context of the pandemic. There cannot be any more vaccine nationalism, countries will have to be flexible about it," she said.

The Trips agreement is a legal pact between all the member nations of the World Trade Organization (WTO). It establishes minimum standards for regulation by national governments of different forms of intellectual property as applied to nationals of other WTO member nations. The agreement has been in force from January 1995.

Participating in a virtual governors' seminar, Sitharaman said there is a need to have a global multilateral approach to deal with the Covid pandemic. One critical point in



POONAWALLA SAYS CAN'T RAMP UP VACCINE PRODUCTION OVERNIGHT

New Delhi, May 3: With states scrambling to secure vaccines, Adar Poonawalla—whose firm is the main supplier of Covid vaccine in India—on Monday said his firm cannot ramp up production overnight as vaccine making is a specialised process.

Serum Institute of India (SII) has orders from the Government of India to supply 11 crore more doses over the next few months on top of 15 crore already supplied, he said in a statement. Another 11 crore doses will be supplied to states and private hospitals in the next few months, he said.

He, however, did not give a timeline for supplying the vaccines. Pune-based SII can pro-

duce 6-7 crore doses a month and is reportedly planning to ramp up production to 10 crore by July. Poonawalla, who had last week cited unprecedented "pressure and aggression" for him and his family temporarily leaving the country for the UK, said "everyone wants the vaccine to be available in the quickest possible time."

Earlier in the day, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in a statement said 11 crore doses of Covishield are to come from SII during May, June and July.

The health ministry also said 100 per cent advance of Rs 1,732.50 crore was released to SII on April 28 for 11 crore doses. SII endorsed this. —PTI

ramping up the production (of vaccine) capacity is access to critical raw materials, she said. "Although we speak

about global value chain and the need for countries to open up trade and also facilitate free movement of raw materials, critical

components, critical APIs and so on, we find that the movement of critical raw materials for production of vaccines is finding certain hiccups. We would love that to be sorted out at the earliest so that India can produce," she said.

It is important that critical raw materials are available and made to flow freely, she said, adding, two more vaccines, including a nasal spray are in the offing to treat Covid.

Indian vaccine manufacturers, including Serum Institute of India (SII), faced problems in production last month as Europe and the US banned export of critical raw materials.

Tagging the Twitter handle of the President of the United States, SII CEO Adar Poonawalla had tweeted, "Respected @POTUS, if we are to truly unite in beating this virus, on behalf of the vaccine industry outside the US, I humbly request you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the US so that vaccine production can ramp up. Your administration has the details."

The ban was lifted after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the US President Joe Biden held discussions on issues related to the Covid crisis in India last week. Modi had also discussed India's initiative at the WTO for a relaxation in the norms of the agreement on Trips to ensure quick and affordable access to vaccines and medicines for developing countries. —PTI

IDBI Bank in black in FY21

New Delhi, May 3: In a remarkable turnaround LIC-controlled IDBI Bank turned profitable in 2020-21 after a five-year gap, posting a net profit of Rs 1,359 crore for the financial year. In 2019-20, the lender had posted a net loss of Rs 12,887 crore.

In the last quarter of 2020-21, the bank reported a nearly four-fold jump in its net profit to Rs 512 crore from Rs 135 crore in the year-ago quarter.

The bank, which came out of the RBI's prompt corrective action (PCA) framework earlier in March this year, said its turnaround strategies led to the transformation. Total income during Q4FY21 rose to Rs 6,969.59 crore from Rs 6,924.94 crore in the same period of 2019-20. The full year income, however, was down at Rs 24,557 crore against Rs 25,295 crore.

Gross NPA (non-per-

forming asset) ratio improved to 22.37 per cent as on March 31, 2021 as against 27.53 per cent in the year-ago period. Net NPA improved to 1.97 per cent from 4.19 per cent, IDBI Bank said.

The bank said its recovery from technically written off accounts improved to Rs 269 crore in Q4FY21 as against Rs 105 crore in the third quarter FY21.

Provisions were up at Rs 2,457 crore in Q4. —PTI

Kotak Bank disappoints street, bad loans jump

RAHUL SATIJA & SUVASHREE GHOSH MAY 3

Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd posted a fourth-quarter profit that missed analysts' estimates as it set aside a higher amount of money to boost bad loan buffers.

The private lender's net income was Rs 1,680 crore (\$227 million) in the three months to March compared with Rs 1,270 crore a year ago. That lagged a Rs 1,870-crore estimate by eleven analysts at a Bloomberg survey.

The bank saw bad loans rise last year as the economic fallout of the pandemic eroded borrowers' repayment ability.

Shares of the Mumbai-based lender dropped as much as 3.7 per cent after the earnings were reported, before paring the losses to 1.4 per cent.

Kotak Bank's gross bad-loan ratio was 3.25 per cent at the end of March compared with 2.26 per cent in the previous quarter. Banks had to mark their

UDAY FAULTS CHEST THUMPING OVER COVID

Mumbai, May 3: In a veiled criticism of the government, veteran banker Uday Kotak on Monday said everyone in India erred in declaring triumph over Covid-19 very early. Taking a contra line, he also suggested curtailing all non-essential economic activities to protect lives.

Asked at a virtual press meet if he was advocating a national lockdown, which the central government is keen to avoid, Kotak, who is also the CII president, said the views of national and international experts should be taken on board.

Many experts have said India announced victory over the pandemic early,

and blamed that attitude for the mishandling of the Covid second wave.

"All of us in India made the mistake of underestimating the challenge of Covid 2.0. We declared victory as a country, as people, and as a financial sector by January-February. (We said) 'Covid is behind us' and we were almost triumphant about victory, and then we got hit by this (second wave)," Kotak told reporters.

Kotak said he will continue as Kotak Mahindra Bank's MD & CEO till his term ends in December 2023. The RBI last week capped MD and CEOs' terms at private banks at 15 years. —Agencies

delinquent loans after the top court reversed its relaxation that had barred lenders from classifying debt as soured. The bank's

provisions were at Rs 1,180 crore in the March quarter compared with Rs 420 crore in the previous quarter. —Bloomberg

Earnings downgrade on cards post-second wave

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 3

An earnings downgrade looms over Indian companies in the first quarter of FY22 given the second Covid-19 wave disrupting economic activity, according to brokerages.

April automobile sales data are already indicating the pandemic impact, analysts said.

"The market has largely ignored the short-term negatives of the pandemic but may want to look deeper into the longer-term implications of and lessons from the pandemic," Kotak Institutional Equities (KIE) said in its market strategy report.

The second wave has shown signs of slowing down in the last few days and infection numbers have started falling but it's too early to calculate its impact on the GDP and earnings.

"The impact on the economy and earnings will be clearer over the next one-two months depending on the duration and nature of lockdowns. There is little

scope for earnings upgrades barring global commodity sectors and in fact, we could see earnings downgrades," KIE analysts said.

"Q4FY21 results have hardly shown any positive surprises and a combination of lower-than-expected economic activity in 1QFY22 and margin pressures across sectors will likely result in earnings downgrades," it said.

So far the market has overlooked the second wave's impact but it was now time to go much deeper, according to analysts. "The market has largely looked through the second wave given a consensus view of the limited economic and earnings impact of this wave. However, we believe the market may want to look deeper into three issues—(1) potential upward pressure on domestic bond yields given increased pressure on government revenues; the RBI may struggle to control bond yields, (2) India's long-term structural challenges due to under-investment in edu-

cation and healthcare and (3) governments' (central and states) post-pandemic stance on economic and social issues," KIE said.

"April 2021 auto numbers have started showing the impact of lockdowns which has put brakes on the recovery. Two-wheeler sales are higher in this period and hence channels had stocked up. But, lockdowns happened in states which contributed 25-30 per cent of the sales.

"Commercial vehicles were the worst hit, tractor sales have also declined sequentially, indicating the pandemic impact in the hinterlands," said Centrum Research.

"We expect May to be subdued with more states taking lockdowns and as original equipment manufacturers(OEM's) take maintenance shutdowns. "Exports have done well with positive outlook," Centrum analyst said.

Only metal stocks may have brighter outlook given the global demand and rising steel prices, according to KIE.

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MAY 3

India's manufacturing activities remained favourable in April, as companies scaled up production in line with a further improvement in demand. While output and sales increased at the slowest rates since last August due to an intensification of the Covid-19 crisis, there was a faster upturn in international orders, a monthly private survey said on Monday.

Data released by analytics firm IHS Markit showed the Purchasing Managers' Index, or PMI, for April marginally rose to 55.5 after declining to a seven-month low in March at 55.4. A figure above 50 indicates expansion, while sub-50 signals contraction. The survey, however, said the new export orders increased for the eighth consecutive month in April. "The rise was associated with a pick-up in international demand for Indian goods, with all three monitored sub-sectors registering expansion," it said.

Commenting on the latest survey, Pollyanna De Lima,

economics associate director at IHS Markit, said, "The PMI results for April showed a further slowdown in rates of growth for new orders and output, both of which eased to eight-month lows amid the intensification of the Covid-19 crisis. Still, the increases were strong by historical standards and the survey revealed other positive news. New export orders surged to the fastest since last October and buying levels expanded at one of the sharpest rates seen for nine years. Also, the downturn in employment eased and business confidence towards the one-year outlook strengthened."

"The headwinds facing manufacturers cannot be ignored, however. The surge in Covid-19 cases could dampen demand further when firms' financials are already susceptible to the hurdle of rising global prices. April saw the steepest increase in input costs for nearly seven years drive the sharpest upturn in output charges since October 2013. Data for the coming months will be important at verifying whether client demand is resilient, added De Lima.

GUIDELINES FOR FOOD PROCESSING PLI SCHEME ISSUED



New Delhi, May 3: The food processing ministry on Monday said it has issued detailed guidelines of the Rs 10,900-crore production linked incentive (PLI) scheme that has recently been announced for the growth of the sector.

The government has approved a new central sector scheme for implementation during FY22 to FY27 with an outlay of Rs 10,900 crore to support creation of global food manufacturing champions and support Indian brands of food products in the international markets.

The ministry is inviting applications for availing of sales-based incentives and grants for undertaking branding and marketing activities abroad under the scheme from three categories of applicants.

Under the first category, the applicants are large entities which can apply for incentive based on sales and investment criteria.

Applicants under this category could undertake branding and marketing activities abroad also and apply for grant under the scheme with a common application.

Under the Category-II, SMEs applicants manufacturing innovative/organic products can apply for PLI Incentive based on sales.

In the third category, applicants can apply solely for grant for undertaking branding and marketing activities abroad.

The sales based incentive under the scheme would be paid for six years from 2021-22 to 2026-27 on incremental sales. —PTI

CURBING | SUBSIDIES About 34% of global fish populations are overexploited

Global effort to save ocean fish may pay off

VIRGINIA GEWIN MAY 3

After 20 years of negotiations, the World Trade Organization is accelerating an effort to end \$22 billion in government subsidies that prop up fishing industries—a key driver of plummeting fish stocks all over the world.

Currently, some 34 per cent of global fish populations are overexploited, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. In the least developed countries, fish make up over 25 per cent of protein consumption; in coastal communities, it can be up to 80 per cent.



Yet, the wealthiest countries subsidise industrial fleets that outcompete small-scale fishermen in poorer nations.

Unless something is done, environmentalists warn that the pace of overfishing threatens an unprecedented global hunger crisis and ecological disaster.

This year, new WTO

director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a Nigerian economist who is both the first woman and African to hold the position, made the issue her top priority—with a conference set for July that could help seal an international accord. Isabel Jarrett, manager of the Reducing Harmful Fisheries Subsidies programme at The Pew Charitable Trusts, said of the negotiations: "We are closer than ever before to an agreement."

But bids by several nations for exemptions and loopholes could jeopardise its effectiveness at a critical moment for the planet's oceans.

Nations intent on protecting food access and local economies have been pouring money into fishing for decades, encouraging the continued depletion of resources by enabling struggling fisheries to expand.

In the 1970s, only 10 per cent of the world's known fish resources were overfished, a figure that has since more than tripled. Nevertheless, the industry continues to catch the same amount of fish as it did decades ago: The global marine catch has been about 81 million tonnes a year since the 1990s. Much of that is driven by subsidies.

Ironically, reducing fish-

ing pressure will allow stocks to rebound, improving global food security—a critical consideration given the global population has climbed by more than 2.4 billion since 1990. If governments ended subsidies, more than 35 million tonnes of fish—or 12.5 per cent of all the fish in the sea—could be restored by 2050, according to researchers.

The top five biggest providers of subsidies are China, the United States, the European Union, Japan and South Korea, which combine to dole out more than 50 per cent of fisheries subsidies.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Cricket Australia to donate \$50K

Melbourne: Cricket Australia on Monday pledged \$50,000 (Australian dollars) to support India's fight against the devastating second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and will also raise more funds in partnership with its players' association and UNICEF. India's daily cases have been upwards of 3 lakh on most days for the past couple of weeks and have also breached the 4 lakh mark. The death toll has been rising by over 3,000 everyday, according to official figures. "Australian Cricket has been deeply saddened by the devastation caused by this second coronavirus wave to hit India, a country with which Australians share a strong friendship and connection. CA will also encourage Australians everywhere to give generously at this crucial time." — PTI

Lanka's Perera calls it a day

Colombo: Former Sri Lanka skipper Thisara Perera announced his retirement from international cricket on Monday, ahead of a white-ball tournament against Bangladesh. The 32-year-old all-rounder, who captained his country in the limited-over formats, told Sri Lanka Cricket, the governing body of the sport in the country, that he was stepping down to clear the way for youngsters. The body said in a statement that Perera "feels the time is right for him to step aside and pave the way for younger and more talented players" to take his place. The announcement came two weeks ahead of Sri Lanka's tour of Bangladesh, where they are due to play three one-day internationals. — PTI

Ronaldo brace rescues Juventus

Milan: Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice late to rescue a 2-1 win for Juventus at Udinese on Sunday hours after the Turin giants lost their Serie A crown to Inter Milan. Inter broke Juve's nine-year streak of domestic dominance by clinching their 19th 'Scudetto' after nearest rivals Atalanta drew 1-1 at Sassuolo to leave the 'Nerazzurri' 13 points clear with four games remaining. Antonio Conte's side had needed just one point to take the title regardless of how Atalanta fared after their 2-0 win at Crotone on Saturday, and have denied Juve a 10th consecutive league triumph. Juve's win moves them up to third as they target a Champions League spot, but are equal on 69 points with second-placed Atalanta and AC Milan in fourth. Napoli are two points behind in fifth after a 1-1 draw against Cagliari while Lazio are still in the running, five points off a top-four finish with a game in hand after an exciting 4-3 win over Genoa. "The nine years are over, we will no longer have the Scudetto attached to the shirt, but we will start again with the same desire as before," said Juve coach Andrea Pirlo. — AFP

Giannis in solid form, Bucks win

Los Angeles: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored a season-high 49 points in his return from an injury as the Milwaukee Bucks overcame Kevin Durant's 42-point performance to beat the Brooklyn Nets 117-114 on Sunday. Two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Antetokounmpo, who had been dealing with a sprained right ankle, outduelled Durant in the Eastern Conference clash between the two highest-scoring teams in the league. Antetokounmpo finished just three points short of his career high, which he set two years ago against Philadelphia. Antetokounmpo shot 21-of-36 from the floor and added eight rebounds while teammate Khris Middleton finished with a double-double of 26 points and 11 rebounds. Durant equaled a season-high 42 and grabbed 10 rebounds for the Eastern Conference-leading Nets, who are trying to hang onto first place during the final stretch of the regular season. — AFP

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BUBBLE BREACHED

IPL on tenterhooks as KKR-RCB match postponed after 2 players test positive

New Delhi, May 3: A COVID-19 outbreak left the star-sprinkled IPL on tenterhooks as Kolkata Knight Riders' Varun Chakravarty and Sandeep Warrier tested positive for the dreaded virus, forcing postponement of their game against Royal Challengers Bangalore, while cases also came to light in the Chennai Super Kings camp.

The match, which was to be held in Ahmedabad on Monday night, will be rescheduled some time later during the tournament, which will conclude on May 30.

"Varun and Sandeep were found to be positive in the third round of testing in the last four days. All other team members have tested negative for COVID-19," the league, which features the biggest names in international cricket, said in a press release.

CSK bowling coach Balaji tests positive

Apart from this, Chennai Super Kings CEO Kasi Viswanathan, bowling coach L. Balaji and a bus cleaner with the contingent tested positive on Sunday. A top BCCI official, after declaring all three cases to be "false positives", later clarified that Balaji along with the unnamed cleaner had come out positive even in the repeat test.

"Three members of CSK contingent, CEO Kasi, bowling coach L. Balaji and a bus driver had tested positive in the morning followed by negative Rapid Antigen test report," the source said.

"However second RT-PCR report found Balaji and bus driver positive again. The others in the



A file photo of KKR spinner Varun Chakravarty boarding a charter flight. — KKR

team especially playing members have tested negative," he added.

CSK, currently based in Delhi, suspended their training for the day and are scheduled to face Rajasthan Royals on May 5. The team had been hit by COVID cases even in the 2020 edition which was held in the UAE.

Delhi groundsmen add to the count

There was cause of concern in Delhi too as a few groundsmen at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium, which is due to host

Mumbai Indians vs Sunrisers Hyderabad on Tuesday, have also tested positive for the virus.

However, Delhi and Districts Cricket Association (DDCA) chief Rohan Jaitley asserted that "none of the groundsmen on duty" are among them.

The BCCI continued to insist that the league will go on but Monday's developments have definitely cast a shadow on how the COVID-19 threat would be managed for an event being staged across six venues, two at one time.

Spinner Chakravarty and pacer Warrier, both 30, have been isolated and the rest of the KKR contingent has returned negative reports for now. Of the two, Warrier has not yet made the playing XI in any of the seven matches KKR have played.

"The Medical Team is in continuous touch with the duo and are monitoring their health. Meanwhile, the Kolkata Knight Riders have now moved towards a daily testing routine to identify any other possible cases and treat them at the earliest," the state-

ment from IPL said.

"The Medical Team is also determining the close and casual contacts of the two positive cases during the 48 hours prior to collection of the sample that returned the positive test results," it added.

KKR last played on April 29 against Delhi Capitals in Ahmedabad and the development is bound to trigger anxiety in the league, which had been going along smoothly so far in a bio-secure bubble in front of empty stands. "Now, the DC players (currently in Ahmedabad) will also have to be tested and every member of the team contingents that came in contact with Chakravarty and Warrier will also be contact traced through the app watch that has been given to everyone," a BCCI source said.

According to IPL's Standard Operating Procedure for COVID-19 management, any close contact of an infected person has to isolate for six days and return three negative tests on days 1, 3 and 6.

It is learnt that KKR's pace spearhead Pat Cummins revealed the latest development to all the Australian players in the IPL after Chakravarty, while undergoing some shoulder scans for a niggle after Thursday's game, tested positive for the virus.

Chakravarty has appeared in all of KKR's matches so far and been one of their most successful players with seven wickets under his belt.

IPL had dealt with positive cases before the tournament started, including some high-profile names like Axar Patel and Devdutt Padikkal. — PTI



Chennai Super Kings players Faf du Plessis (left) and Suresh Raina. — CSK

Games in Delhi could be put off

New Delhi, May 3: Chennai Super Kings bowling coach L. Balaji testing positive for COVID-19 has left the BCCI in a fix about the next few IPL games in Delhi after postponement of Monday's evening match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bangalore in Ahmedabad.

"Balaji's positive report is certainly a cause of concern although the CSK players have tested negative. But normally, a lot of people start showing symptoms from the fifth or sixth day. There are discussions whether it is safe to go ahead with the next two matches in Delhi," a senior BCCI source said.

While DDCA president Rohan Jaitley said that he hasn't been informed about any re-scheduling the problem is CSK having played Mumbai Indians

last Saturday.

"Balaji was in the dug-out and also before and after the match, he interacted with Mumbai Indians players which is natural. Now you can test everyday but just like KKR's match has been postponed, it's prudent if MI's match against SunRisers Hyderabad on Tuesday and CSK's game against Rajasthan Royals on Wednesday is rescheduled," the influential official said.

Since KKR team is doing everyday testing with six days of hard quarantine, many believe that the same rule should be applicable for CSK also before they play their next match.

But rescheduling always becomes a nightmare as the Delhi leg ends on May 8 after which the 'Cluster Caravan' is supposed to move to Bengaluru and Kolkata. — PTI

CA chief says no to charter flight

Melbourne, May 3: Cricket Australia currently has no plans to arrange a charter flight to bring its players back home from COVID-19-ravaged India once the IPL gets over, its chief Nick Hockley said on Monday.

Hockley insisted that Australian players are feeling safe and secure in the IPL bio-bubble but his comments came before it emerged that two KKR players have tested positive for the dreaded virus, leading to the postponement of the franchise's

game against RCB on Monday.

Mumbai Indians batsman Chris Lynn had recently requested Cricket Australia to arrange for a charter flight for Australia players after the tournament concludes on May 30.

"There's no suggestion at the moment of any charter flight," Hockley told Melbourne radio station SEN.

"We're working closely and talking closely with the Australian Cricketers' Association, with the

● **The Cricket Australia boss said they are monitoring the situation and a decision will be made but not immediately.**

players and with the BCCI to make sure everyone's okay and the people have got full information.

"We've been in touch with the players there and they are generally in good spirits. The work the BCCI has done around the (bio-secure) bubble means they are feeling safe and secure, and those we've talked to are generally planning to complete

their playing commitments."

The Cricket Australia boss said they are monitoring the situation and a decision will be made but not immediately.

"The BCCI have come out and said they understand and want to support the players in making sure they get home safely at the end.

"The tournament does-

n't finish until the 30th of May, so for the moment it's monitor the situation and as we get closer to the end of the tournament we'll need to see where the situation is at," he said.

The Australian government recently banned its citizens from travelling back from India, which is battling a severe second wave of the pandemic that causing thousands of daily deaths. Australia still have lot of current and former players in the League, performing different roles. — PTI

Desperate SRH run into Mumbai

New Delhi, May 3: Back in the groove after two consecutive wins, defending champions Mumbai Indians will be firm favourites to put it past the turbulence-hit and bottom-placed Sunrisers Hyderabad in an IPL game here on Tuesday. Mumbai will enter the game after their four-wicket win over in-form Chennai Super Kings courtesy Kieron Pollard's blitzkrieg.

SunRisers, in contrast, suffered a humiliating 55-run loss to Rajasthan Royals, their sixth in seven games this season. They are also battling a transitional phase in which Kane Williamson has taken over captaincy from an out of form David Warner, leaving him disappointed.

Mumbai openers Rohit Sharma (250 runs) and Quinton De Kock (155 runs) would be itching to give the five-time champions another strong platform and also convert their starts into big scores.

Mumbai's hard-hitting middle-order has clicked in the last two games, which would be quite pleasing for the team management. Pollard (168 runs), who blazed his way to a match-winning 87 off 34 balls in the last game, would be keen to continue from where he left.

The likes of Krunal Pandya (100 runs), Hardik

HEAD to HEAD

Matches	17
MI	9 SRH 8

FOR THE RECORD

● Jonny Bairstow with 248 runs at an average of 41.33 in seven innings is the highest run-getter for Sunrisers Hyderabad in this edition.

● Jasprit Bumrah will become the sixth player to complete a century of matches for Mumbai Indians. He has played 99 matches since making his debut in 2013.

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

● Mumbai beat Sunrisers by 34 runs at Sharjah.

● Sunrisers beat Mumbai by 10 wickets at Sharjah

STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER

Pandya (52 runs) and the flamboyant Suryakumar Yadav (173 runs) can be destructive on their day and the trio would be aiming to fire in union.

Also, it remains to be seen if Mumbai plays Ishan Kishan or Jayant Yadav in place of all-rounder James Neesham, who neither scored big nor was able to pick up wickets. However, the Mumbai bowlers would need to forget the hammering received at the hands of the CSK batsmen and start afresh. The pace duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Trent Boult would pose a big threat. — PTI

Can City outshine PSG stars?

Manchester, May 3: "We don't have a specific player to win games," Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said earlier this season to explain his side's consistency in a more congested season than ever before. "We have to do it together."

City's strength as a collective was evidenced in Saturday's 2-0 win at Crystal Palace that took them to the brink of a third Premier League title in four years.

Guardiola could afford the luxury of making eight changes from the side that beat Paris Saint-Germain 2-1 in the first leg of their Champions League semi-final and still roll out a starting XI that cost over 350 million (\$483 million) to recruit.

Sergio Aguero, Raheem Sterling, Gabriel Jesus, Fernandinho, Ferran Torres and Aymeric Laporte were among those to return against the Eagles having spent the full 90 minutes watching from the bench at the Parc des Princes four days earlier.

Backed by Abu Dhabi ownership, City and Qatar-owned PSG have often been compared for the manner in which they have changed the face of European football over the past decade.

The failed European Super League (ESL) proposals that sought to create guaranteed income and limit costs came as a result of some of the con-



PSG players are en route to Manchester for their Champions League second leg match against City. — PSG

continent's more established powers such as Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United struggling to compete with City and PSG's ability to spend freely on transfers.

However, the manner in which they have used that wealth has been very different. The French champions sparked hyper-inflation in the transfer market with the 222 million euro (\$267 million) capture of Neymar from Barcelona and Kylian Mbappe's 180 million euro move from Monaco in 2017.

PSG's run to the final of last year's Champions League for the first time in the club's history and route past Barca and Bayern Munich to reach the last four this season has been built around the

two most expensive players in history.

City, by contrast, have so far resisted the temptation to try and smash transfer records by assembling arguably the deepest squad in Europe.

The signing of Ruben Dias for 62 million in September is a club record, but Kevin De Bruyne, Riyad Mahrez, Joao Cancelo, Laporte, Sterling, Rodrigo, Benjamin Mendy, John Stones, Kyle Walker, Bernardo Silva and Nathan Ake are among those also in Guardiola's squad that cost over 40 million.

City's depth won out over PSG's stardust in the first leg.

After a bright first 45 minutes, Neymar and Mbappe were reduced to

frustrated spectators as the visitors dominated possession and got their vital away goals from De Bruyne and Mahrez.

Keeping the ball will key to Guardiola's plan for the second leg on Tuesday to minimise PSG's threat on the counter-attack.

"We are good playing in a certain way, we cannot do it another way," said the Catalan coach on how his side cut off the supply to Neymar and Mbappe in the second-half a week ago. Mbappe alone has scored five goals in PSG's last two away Champions League trips to Guardiola's former clubs Barcelona and Bayern.

But with the French World Cup winner is an injury doubt due to a calf strain. — AFP

MESSI STRIKES TWICE AS BARCA EDGE VALENCIA

Madrid, May 3: Lionel Messi came through for Barcelona again, keeping the Spanish league's title race wide open.

Messi scored two second-half goals on Sunday — including his 50th from a free kick — as Barcelona came from behind to beat Valencia 3-2 and get within two points of leader Atletico Madrid ahead of their key match at the Camp Nou Stadium next weekend.

A win will give Ronald Koeman's team the league lead for the first time this season.

Antoine Griezmann also scored for Barcelona, which is tied on points with second-place Madrid with four rounds to go. Madrid has a better head-to-head tiebreaker against both rivals at the top. Sevilla also remains in the title race. It can move within three points of the lead if it beats Athletic Bilbao at home on Monday. Sevilla visits Madrid next weekend.

Barcelona made the trip to Valencia under pressure after both Atletico and Madrid won their matches on Saturday. Atletico edged Elche 1-0 and Madrid defeated Osasuna 2-0. The Catalan club was coming off a shock 2-1 home loss to Granada, when it could have grabbed sole possession of the lead. — AP