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NEARBY



Punjab CM urges villagers to keep away outsiders

CHANDIGARH

With rural areas of Punjab showing a spike in COVID-19 cases, Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Friday urged villagers to restrict movement to only those free of the virus. In a live Facebook telecast, Capt. Amarinder called for strict measures in rural areas over the next two months, which he described as extremely crucial. "Rural areas are seeing a surge in cases, so we need to be very careful," he said, urging villagers to keep outsiders away.

NORTH & EAST ► PAGE 4

Sputnik V vaccine rolled out in India at ₹995 per dose

Local production likely from July, may lower cost

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

India on Friday began using Sputnik V in its battle against COVID-19, with the first dose of the vaccine from Russia administered in Hyderabad.

The vaccine is being sold at a maximum retail price of ₹995 per dose.

"As part of a limited pilot, the soft launch has commenced and the first dose was administered in Hyderabad," announced Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, the marketing partner for the Russian vaccine. Earlier this month, it received a consign-



The first jab of Sputnik V being administered in Hyderabad on Friday. ■ANI

ment of 1.5 lakh doses.

The use of the vaccine follows clearance for imported doses from the Central Drugs Laboratory in Kasauli on Thursday. The Drugs Controller General of India

had last month accorded emergency use authorisation to the vaccine.

It joins Covishield and the indigenous Covaxin in the immunisation programme that in recent weeks has been hamstrung by an acute shortage of vaccines.

Senior officials at Dr. Reddy's said the vaccine would be supplied at the same price – ₹948 plus 5% GST – to both the government and the private sector. For consumers, there would also be administering charges levied by hospitals.

The doses of the vaccine that will be made in India are likely to hit the market in July and could be cheaper.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

Goa hospital reports 75 deaths in 4 days

Governor Koshayari reviews situation with CM in video call

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

Thirteen more COVID-19 patients died at the Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) in the early hours of Friday, taking to 75 the number of people who have succumbed at the government-run facility here in the last four days.

The horror at the GMCH is continuing even as the Goa Bench of the Bombay High Court is hearing petitions related to deaths at the premier hospital.

While the State government has not revealed the exact cause of recent deaths at the GMCH, it has told the HC that there were "logistic issues" related to supply of medical oxygen to patients.

Meanwhile, Goa Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari on Friday reviewed the novel coronavirus situation in the coastal State through an online meeting with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and Health Minister Vishwajit Rane, officials said.

Mr. Koshyari, who is also the Maharashtra Governor, enquired about vaccination planning, oxygen supply, awareness, testing, involvement of university students and volunteers and other relevant issues, his office said in a tweet.

The Goa government had told the HC that during the process of attaching the oxygen manifold there was some interruption which resulted in low pressure in the supply lines of oxygen to patients.

Ensure that bodies are not dumped in rivers: U.P. CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW

In a bid to stop people from disposing of bodies in rivers, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday ordered patrolling by the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC).

The directions came after a number of bodies, believed to be of COVID-19 patients, were found floating

in the Ganga. Officials should ensure that no bodies were disposed of in rivers, Mr. Adityanath ordered.

Deserve cremation'

"All those who died deserve cremation with respect. The State government has already sanctioned funds for performing the last rites," the Chief Minister said, according to a statement.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

Police question Youth Congress chief over COVID-19 assistance

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday attacked the Narendra Modi government after the Crime Branch of the Delhi Police questioned Indian Youth Congress chief B.V. Srinivas about the assistance being provided by him to COVID-19 patients.

The party asked if providing oxygen cylinders and life-saving drugs to patients

mostly the international variants of concern B.1.1.7 (the U.K. variant), the B.1.351 (the South African variant), the P2 (the Brazil variant) and B.1.617 (the Indian variant).

arranging beds or providing food to ambulance drivers is a crime. It seems to be a crime according to Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said.

"They [Delhi Police] wanted to know the details of how we are helping people. We answered all their questions," Mr. Srinivas said.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

Praying at home



Exceptional times: Jama Masjid wears a deserted look on the occasion of Id-ul-Fitr, marking the end of the fasting month of Ramzan, during the ongoing lockdown in Delhi on Friday. ■SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

U.S. slider turtles pose a threat in Northeast

Herpetologists have warned that the 'cute' pet could turn nasty for 29 native species of turtles, tortoises

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

A 'cute' American turtle popular as pet is threatening to invade the natural water bodies across the Northeast, which is home to 21 of the 29 vulnerable native Indian species of freshwater turtles and tortoises.

Between August 2018 and June 2019, a team of herpetologists from the NGO 'Help Earth' found red-eared sliders in the Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary and the Ugratara temple pond – both in Guwahati. They published the "grim" finding in Reptiles & Amphibians, journal of the U.S.-based International Reptile Conservation Foundation, in August 2020. But the alarm



Growing concerns: The red-eared sliders grow fast and leave nothing for the native species to eat. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

was raised after H.T. Lalremsanga and eight others from Mizoram University's Department of Zoology published another report in the same journal in April this year. Their report said a red-eared slider was collected from an unnamed stream, connected to the

Tlawn River, on a farm near Mizoram capital Aizawl.

The red-eared slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) derives its name from red stripes around the part where its ears would be and from its ability to slide quickly off any surface into

the water.

"Native to the U.S. and northern Mexico, this turtle is an extremely popular pet ... But on the flip side they grow fast and virtually leave nothing for the native species to eat," Mr. Lalremsanga told *The Hindu* on Friday.

"Much like the Burmese python that went to the U.S. as a pet to damage the South Florida Everglades ecosystem, the red-eared slider has already affected States such as Karnataka and Gujarat, where it has been found in 33 natural water bodies," said Jayaditya Purkayastha of the Purkayastha-based NGO.

"But more than elsewhere in India,

preventing this invasive species from overtaking the Brahmaputra and other river ecosystems in the Northeast is crucial because the Northeast is home to more than 72% of the turtle and tortoise species in the country, all of them very rare," he said.

Catch-22 situation

Mr. Purkayastha said the red-eared slider presents a Catch-22 situation. People who keep it as pets become sensitive about turtle conservation but endanger the local ecosystem, probably unknowingly, by releasing them in natural water bodies after they outgrow an aquarium, tank or pool at home.

Three prisoners shot dead in U.P.

Inmate guns down two others before being shot by police

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

A prisoner lodged in the high security barrack in Chitrakoot Jail in Uttar Pradesh on Friday allegedly shot dead two other inmates, including western U.P. gangster Mukim Kala, before being shot dead himself by the police after he held five other inmates hostage and threatened to kill them, officers said.

Kala had been shifted to the district jail in Chitrakoot from Saharanpur on May 7, while Meraj Ali, the inmate shot dead along with him, was moved to the jail on March 20 from Varanasi due to administrative reasons.

The incident happened at around 10 a.m. when inmate Anshu Dikshit, who has been lodged in the jail since December 2019, shot dead Kala

and Ali with a firearm, said a U.P. Prison Department spokesperson.

Five held hostage

Dikshit then allegedly held five other inmates hostage and threatened to shoot them dead, said the official, adding that the district police chief and District Magistrate reached the spot but failed to bring him under control as he continued to threaten the hostages.

"Considering his aggression and stubbornness, police did not find any other option and fired at him in which he was killed," said the spokesperson.

A search operation has been launched in the prison.

The Deputy Inspector General, Prison, Prayagraj Range, has left for the jail to

conduct a probe into the incident.

Kala's mother Meena had earlier this year approached the Allahabad High Court seeking protection for him when he had been detained in a jail at Saharanpur, alleging that the police was harassing her elder son by trying to build pressure on her to withdraw a complaint filed by her against them after her younger son was killed.

A Division Bench of Justices Munishwar Nath Bhambhani and Shamim Ahmed on March 22 noted that the response from the government did not show any harassment of her son but directed the State to see that no harm was caused to Kala and conduct was as per the jail manual.

CM NK

'100 policemen getting infected with COVID-19 every 24 hours'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

On an average, around 100 policemen in Delhi are getting infected every 24 hours in the second wave of the pandemic, said a senior officer on Friday.

On Wednesday, a total of 98 policemen tested COVID positive. The officer said four policemen have succumbed to COVID-19 even after taking both the doses of the vaccine over a month ago.

He said 17 police personnel, who had received only the first vaccine shot, succumbed to COVID-19 during the second wave. "A report was ordered into the death of policemen after taking second dose of vaccine. It was found that they all had co-morbidities and were undergoing treatment. The recovery rate in policemen is good – they are recovering fast and resuming their duties," said the officer.

During the first wave, 33 policemen had died when there was no vaccine.

31 died in second wave
During the second wave, 31 policemen have died so far. The vaccination process of around 92% of police personnel stands complete.

Till date, 13,065 policemen have tested positive for the virus and 10,551 have resumed duties. The remaining police personnel is undergoing treatment.

"Most of the infected policemen are under home quarantine. Only 32 policemen are admitted at hospitals," the officer added.

On Friday, senior officers interacted with police personnel and their family members and also provided experts' advice on prevention and cure. They also took questions to bust myths.

During the webinar, the police officers urged everyone to keep on following COVID-appropriate behaviour as advised through instructions issued by the Commissioner of Delhi Police.

Crowds coming back to Singhu protest site after harvest season

Some farmers stuck in Haryana due to lockdown, others plan to continue agitation

HEMAMI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Farmers at the Singhu border said the protest is going strong amidst the raging pandemic as crowds are coming back to the site following the harvesting season.

Sukhwinder Singh Barwa from Ropar said the crowd became half of the initial strength during the harvest season, but people are starting to come back.

"A group with over 250 tractors and trucks reached on May 10 while another group arrived on May 12," he said.

Guramrit Mehma from Ferozabad, who was at the protest site till recently, is at home now. He hasn't been able to come to the site as there's a lockdown in Haryana. "The COVID situation in Delhi is bad. Even if we want to go, we can't because of the lockdown," he said.

Mr. Barwa added that if people come in groups, they are not being stopped. "The COVID situation is bad, but for some reason, people at the protest are not getting infected."

Mr. Singh added that there is "no question" of protest



The Singhu border saw Muslim protesters offering Id prayers on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tions, the older generation still doesn't believe in it. They don't keep washing hands and use sanitisers. Some of them wrap their head scarfs around their nose and mouth," he said.

While the main langars continue to be organised, the speeches at the main stage now stop at 3 p.m. "After that, there is a break for two hours before religious chanting of all faiths continue," said Parminder Singh from Ludhiana. The stir site on Friday also saw Muslim protesters offering Eid prayers.

Mr. Singh added that there is "no question" of protest

coming to a stop at any point unless a solution in their favour is reached. "The BJP's rule can end but not this protest till the demands are met," he said.

For next few years'
People at the protest sites continue to make concrete structures for their lodging. "It looks like they won't leave for the next few years," he said.

Kamaljeet Singh from Patiala said: "About 450 farmers have died and a pandemic is going on. But the government doesn't wish to start a dialogue with us. We will

soon be completing six months here."

Referring to Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khatar's appeal to farmers to end the protest and saying that a few villages have become COVID hotspots due to the protesting farmers, Samyukta Kisan Morcha on Friday, said:

"Instead of introspecting about his administration's failure in setting up adequate healthcare facilities and services in the state, he chose to blame farmers. The SKM condemns his statement and points out that the protests have remained largely free of the pandemic."

'Haryana CM's comment on virus spread baseless'

Kisan Sabha leaders blame governments

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

Haryana State committee of All-India Kisan Sabha on Friday strongly condemned the remarks of Chief Minister Manohar Lal attributing the spread of the virus in rural Haryana to the ongoing farmers' struggle.

In a press release, State AIKS Haryana president Phool Singh Sheokand and working secretary Sumit described the utterances of the CM as "baseless" and "ridiculous". The Kisan Sabha leaders instead blamed that both Central and State governments for their total failure to control the second wave of COVID spread and provide any relief to the people losing their loved ones.

They asked if it was so then why COVID was rampant in the regions of the State where the farmers

movement was negligible.

Kisan leaders claimed that farmers are returning on borders after harvesting and they would come out winners against both COVID and the three "black" laws.

Had the government been little bit sensitive and responsible, it would have already withdrawn the three laws and guaranteed MSP to facilitate the return of farmers to their homes, said the press statement.

The leaders added that farmers were observing all necessary precautions and there were no reports of any outbreak so far at the border sites.

Mr. Lal, in a press conference, on Thursday said the ongoing farmers agitation at the Delhi borders had led to spread of COVID in Haryana villages. He also made an appeal to the farmers to suspend it.

DMRC halts services due to lockdown extension

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro services were halted this week with the lockdown being extended in the city. Last year too, the train services remained suspended for over five months owing to the lockdown.

A senior DMRC official said: "Two trains are being run daily from every terminal station in the morning and evening hours since operations got suspended due to the lockdown. This exercise is aimed at ensuring good health and functionality of all the systems like track, traction, signaling, telecommunication and so on, which are required for the smooth running of metro services," a senior DMRC official said.

The DMRC's revenue had taken a hit as services became operational only in September last with the necessary COVID protocol in place.

Loss of ₹10cr./day

As compared to 2019 data, the DMRC suffers a revenue loss of ₹10 crore per day during lockdown periods.

Police collected over ₹1 crore from COVID-19 violators

More than 4,500 arrested from April 19 to May 13 for not adhering to DDMA guidelines on virus

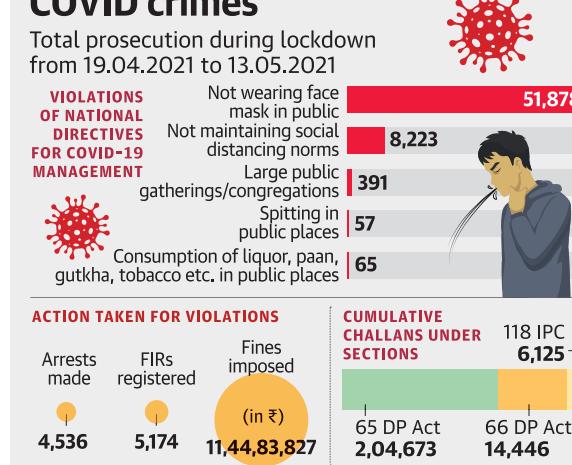
STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi police collected ₹1.14 crore as fine and registered 5,174 FIRs as they continued to crackdown on violators of COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions, including curfew, during the second wave of the pandemic, said officers on Friday.

The police said they have arrested more than 4,500 people from April 19 to May 13 for not adhering to DDMA guidelines on COVID-19.

They said 51,878 people were challaned for not wearing face masks in the public place, 8,223 for not maintaining social distancing norms, 391 for large public gathering or congregations, 57 for spitting and 65 for consumption of liquor, paan, tobacco etc. in public

COVID crimes



place from April 19 to May 13. A total of ₹11,44,83,827 fine has been imposed to the violators during the period, the data showed.

They also issued 2,04,673 challans under Section 65 of Delhi Police Act (persons bound to comply with the reasonable directions of pol-

There are many exempted categories in this curfew as compared to last year. People with genuine reasons have not been fined

SENIOR DELHI POLICE OFFICER

compare to last year. People are out on the streets for medical reasons. People with genuine reasons have not been fined. Also, the Inter-State movement is also not restricted so people from NCR having medical reasons are also visiting Delhi," said a senior police officer.

COVID helpline queries
Delhi Police said it received many calls on its COVID-19 helpline number, most of them call on queries related to the curfews and issue of e-passes.

Unlike the previous lockdown, the situation is different this time, the police said. The city is under medical crisis and people are running pillar to post to arrange or refill oxygen cylinders and for other medical facilities. "There are many exempted categories in this curfew as

Cabinet approves ₹5,000 assistance to PSV drivers

Move comes in the wake of second wave

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Cabinet on Friday approved financial assistance of ₹5,000 to all individuals holding Public Service Badge (Drivers) of para-transit vehicles and permit holders of para-transit public service vehicles in the wake of the second wave of COVID and the curfew announced by the Delhi government to contain it.

The beneficiaries will include those who drive autorickshaws, e-rickshaws, taxis, phatpat seva, eco-friendly seva, gram seva and maxi cabs among other such vehicles.

In 2020, the government stated, ₹78 crores were given as financial assistance to

more than 1.56 auto and taxi drivers and the beneficiaries of the 2020 scheme need not reapply. According to the government, they will get the payment of ₹5,000 directly transferred to their Aadhaar linked bank accounts subject to verification of deaths from local bodies.

The Delhi government said it has written to the Urban Development dept., seeking data of deaths registered with local bodies from Feb. 1 till date. Those who could not get this financial assistance last year due to various reasons, the government said, can apply for it through Delhi Transport Department website where a link for the purpose will be made available soon.

DTC union seeks ₹1 crore compensation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The DTC Karamchari Ekta Union, which represents the interests of contractual employees engaged by the public transporter, on Friday appealed to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to designate Delhi Transport Corporation employees as 'Corona Warriors' entitled to compensation of ₹1 crore if they died due to the virus in the line of duty.

50 employees died
According to the union, as many as 50 employees engaged by the DTC had succumbed to the virus since the pandemic hit the city while performing duties ranging from the transportation of migrant workers last year to ensuring the timely delivery of oxygen cylinders this time around.

Board of hope



An electronic display board shows that there are no ICU beds vacant and 677 oxygen beds available at the Lok Nayak Hospital in Delhi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

No interim protection from arrest for Kalra till May 18: HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Friday declined to grant interim protection from arrest for Navneet Kalra, seeking anticipatory bail in connection with alleged black marketing of oxygen concentrators, agreeing with the reasons given by the trial court while denying him the relief.

A sessions court had on Thursday dismissed Mr. Kalra's anticipatory bail plea, saying the allegations against him were serious and his custodial interrogation was required to "unearth the entire conspiracy".

"I am persuaded by the

Subramoni Prasad said while listing the matter for hearing on May 18.

The observation came after Mr. Kalra's lawyers – senior advocates Abhishek M. Singhvi and Vikas Pahwa – urged the court to grant some interim protection if the matter was going to be adjourned till May 18 on the request of Additional Solicitor General (ASG) S.V. Raju.

Mr. Singhvi told the court that the police was actively searching for Mr. Kalra and visiting the homes of his relatives and close friends and it ought not to be done when it was hearing his plea for anticipatory bail.

He said he was not in a "begging game" with the authorities and was relying on the court to protect his client's rights as the police

was out looking for him with a "fanaticism" as if he were a "trophy".

When the hearing commenced on Friday afternoon, ASG Raju urged the court to hear it on Tuesday (May 18) as he had a lot of material, like information with regard to shell companies, which he needed to place before it and would require some time.

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Timings
DELHI

SATURDAY, MAY 15
RISE 05:31 SET 19:05
RISE 07:53 SET 22:20
SUNDAY, MAY 16
RISE 05:31 SET 19:06
RISE 08:42 SET 23:11
MONDAY, MAY 17
RISE 05:30 SET 19:07
RISE 09:37 SET 23:58

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	38	23
Safdarjung	38	23
Palam	38	23

Delhi Palam Today
39°C A comfortable morning and hot day. A spell of rain and thunderstorm may occur around Delhi and NCR.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
40°C Mainly dry weather and rise in temperature likely. Day would turn hot and warm evening likely.

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IN BRIEF

Delhi govt. must conduct oxygen audit: Gupta

NEW DELHI State BJP president Adesh Gupta on Friday said the Delhi government needed to learn from the second wave of COVID, especially its "critical phase" from April 20 to May 5, and conduct an oxygen audit to assess future demand as it prepares for the expected third wave of the pandemic, likely to hit the city later this year. Though new COVID cases were going down, he said, ICU beds were still full at city hospitals.

Constant complaints, but authorities in denial

Relatives of COVID-19 patients admitted in govt. hospitals have complained of lack of timely treatment, unhygienic surroundings

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

Many relatives of COVID-19 patients who are admitted at Delhi government-run Lok Nayak Hospital and GTB Hospital have complained of patients not getting adequate care, lack of facilities in government hospitals and bodies lying on wards for hours.

On Thursday, an IPS officer posted a distress message from her Twitter account that her cousin, who was admitted to GTB Hospital was not given proper care and has lost hope. The officer said he "feels like jumping from the 6th floor".

Namrata Saini, whose mother died at Lok Nayak Hospital on May 7, said the treatment was "pathetic" and her mother used to complain about unhygienic conditions in the ward. Meghna Sharma, who was admitted at the hospital for 25 days, complained that bodies were not removed on time, some remained for "four to five hours".

False allegations
However, Dr. Suresh Kumar, Medical Director of Lok Nayak Hospital, refuted both allegations, saying those were false. On the complaints made by Ms. Saini, he said: "We had conducted an internal inquiry on her com-



Relatives of COVID-19 patients outside the Lok Nayak Hospital in the Capital. • SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

plaints and found that there was no problem. We treat thousands of patients and people are happy with the treatment. We try our level best, but some still complain."

About complaints of bodies lying in the wards for hours, he explained: "Once a death occurs, we have to inform the family first. It takes five to ten minutes to explain to the family what happened. Once that is done, we ask staff to shift the body to the mortuary. The body is packed as per COVID guidelines and labelled, and the area is disinfected. This takes 45 minutes to one hour and for this time, the body will be

in the ward. It takes this much time anywhere in the world."

Time consuming
Ms. Saini's 60-year-old mother was admitted on the night of April 29, but she alleged her scan was done only on May 5. "A steroid injection was administered to her on May 5. They should have done it on the first day itself, but they didn't. After giving the injection, my mother was better and she talked to us on video call for about two hours. She complained that the ward was very unclean and there was urine and stool," she said.

There were problems at the time of death too. "At 11:45 p.m. on May 6, I was outside the ward to get my mother's phone and I saw two people in PPE kit carrying my mother's body in a stretcher. But the hospital did not tell us at that time that she had died. On May 7, we got a call from the hospital around 8 a.m. that she had died. The time of death on the death certificate is 12:35 a.m. on May 7. They do this as if they do not have staff at night," Ms. Saini said, fuming.

When the family approached Dr. Suresh, he replied in a WhatsApp message to Ms. Saini: "We are analysing all deaths. Most deaths

are due to bad and severe disease. Most patients come to LNH with 70% to 85% O2 level. With DM or any long underlying disease this virus strain is difficult to treat. Nothing works. Even Remdes or steroids don't work madam. Even in UK and USA deaths are there. They are fully developed nations [sic]."

Dr. Suresh said that the hospital has outsourced cleaning and more than 400 people are deployed for sanitization and cleaning is done five times a day in all wards. He said that COVID-19 patients stay alone at the hospital and are frustrated, in many cases depressed too. So under this duress, they blame government facilities.

Little care

Aslam Khan, an IPS officer, posted a distress message from her Twitter account about her cousin in a Delhi government hospital on Thursday. "My cousin admitted in GTB Hospital for more than week. 102-3 fever. No medication. CT done yesterday, but no medi started. He is 6th floor new building, bed no 35. Calm up just now to say that he has lost hope & feel like jumping from 6th floor.

No care. Whom should I tag here [sic]?" the post read. She deleted the tweet about five hours later saying

Australian fliers fail to turn up at IGI Airport

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

More than half the number of passengers who are supposed to board a flight to Australia didn't turn up at a hotel prior to their departure, said an official at Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) on Friday.

The official said that a flight carrying medical aid is scheduled to land at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport on Friday and around 150 passengers (Australian citizens) are to board the same flight returning to Australia on Saturday early morning.

Half the passengers

"Prior to the boarding, as per the protocol, all passengers were tested for COVID-19 and after their negative report they were to be quarantined at a hotel before they board the flight to Australia. But on Thursday, only half of the passengers reported at the hotel," said the official.

He added that it appears that the passengers who didn't turn up at the hotel have tested COVID positive. The flight has yet to land at IGIA till Friday evening.

Kumbh Mela cited as reason behind COVID surge, says Jain

Virus spreading to rural areas bolsters the belief: Minister

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Friday said that Kumbh Mela is being widely cited as the reason behind the spread of COVID-19 to rural areas.

"In the previous three waves that Delhi faced, we hardly saw any COVID cases coming from the villages in the countryside. But in this wave, we have seen a number of cases. The entire nation is in fact tackling the spread in rural areas. It is being widely said that the reason behind this spread in villages and rural areas has been Kumbh Mela where people went in large numbers," Mr. Jain said.

Commenting on the shortage of many drugs, the Minister said that for Remdesivir and Tocilizumab, all the management and control is being done by the Central government and the drugs are



Satyendar Jain •

Meanwhile, AAP leader Atishi said that for vaccination of people above 45 years, healthcare and front-line workers, Covaxin's stock is left only for three days and Covishield's stock only for two days.

For the 18-44 age group, Covaxin's stock is over and Covishield's is available for eight days, she said.

supplied to the hospitals through a website managed by the Centre.

Appeal to supply vaccine
The State wise distribution is also being controlled by the Centre. The Centre has mandated hardly 1,000 units of Tocilizumab injection in one month, which means hardly 30 units per day, while the demand is much more than this. Thus, we have passed the order and formed the expert committee to streamline the supply effectively and mobilise it," he said.

She said that Delhi has administered a total of 43,67,243 doses of vaccine and 10,00,000 people have been fully vaccinated.

250 ICU beds attached to Lok Nayak to become functional today: CM

He says 250 more to be available soon

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday visited the makeshift COVID treatment facility coming up at the Ramlila Maidan attached to the Lok Nayak Hospital here. He thanked doctors, engineers and workers who worked round the clock on a war footing to construct the facility, which has 500 ICU beds in just 15 days.

According to Mr. Kejriwal, 250 ICU beds at the facility would become available on May 15 and 250 more would be available over the next two days. Health Minister Satyendar Jain also accompanied Mr. Kejriwal to oversee the preparations.

'Situation improving'
"I visited the GTB Hospital on Wednesday where another 500 ICU beds have been set up. This makes the total count to 1,000 ICU beds. Another 200 ICU beds are being prepared at the Radha Soami COVID facility



Arvind Kejriwal •

Give free jabs to all, demands Delhi Cong.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Friday demanded that all Delhites should be given free vaccination, both in government and private hospitals. It said that instead of delivering on its promise of providing free vaccination, the Delhi government, on the contrary, shut down over 100 vaccination centres citing vaccine shortage while private hospitals continued to charge a high sum for the vaccine.

The party alleged that due to vaccine shortage in government centres, poor people are being compelled to get vaccine shots at exorbitant rates from private hospitals, ranging from ₹950-₹1,250 for a jab.

"Private hospitals have been fleecing people for a vaccine shot, charging many times more than the actual price. It was to help private hospitals earn profit that the Delhi govt. did not place timely orders for buying the vaccine, nor did it float global tenders to stock up vaccines," Delhi Congress Chief Ch. Anil Kumar alleged.

Punjab Government
led by
Chief Minister
Capt. Amarinder Singh
remembers
the iconic revolutionary
Shaheed Sukhdev Ji
on his
115th Birth Anniversary

Department of Information & Public Relations, Punjab



Bharat Nirman through Rural Roads
Chief Engineer (Shimla Zone) HPPWD Nirman Bhawan Nigam Vihar
Shimla H.P., 171002
BHARAT NIRMAN
UNDER PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA (PMGSY)

e-Procurement Notice

The Government of India has received a loan/credit instrument number "Ln 7995-NICr4848-IN/Cr4849-IN" from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/International Development Association towards the cost of Rural Roads Project (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) Batch-II and intends to apply a part of the funds to cover eligible payments under the contracts for construction of works as detailed in the Table below. Bidding is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the bidding document.

Sr. No	Name of Distt.	Package No.	Name of work	Period of construction in Days	Estimated Cost Construction part Rs.	Bid security Maintenance part Rs.	Cost of form
1.	Kinnar	HP-05-27	C/O link road Chaura to Rupi (Majhaon Km 0/00 to 27/050 (SH: C/O Missing bridge valley over Rupi Nallah at RD 8/660 and RD 16/645)	510	34950270	0.00	699000 5000
2.	Kinnar	HP-05-40	C/O Balance work of link road from Kafioo to Yangpa Km 0/000 to 5/000 (SH: MT, V-shape drain, R/wall, B/wall, Parapets culverts logo etc.)	510	20226183	3903930	483000 5000

The Superintending Engineer 11th Circle HPPWD Rampur Distt Kinnar on behalf of Governor Himachal Pradesh invites the item rate bids in electronic tendering system for construction of roads under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana in the district of Kinnar 2 number of package with estimated cost totaling to Rs. 590.80 lacs including their maintenance for five years from the eligible contractors registered with HPPWD/ CPWD/P&T, Railways/ other State Govt./ Central Govt. agencies. On-registered bidders may submit bids; however, the successful bidders must be registered in appropriate class with appropriate authorities before signing the contract.

Date of release of Invitation for Bids through e-procurement: 21st May, 2021.

Availability of Bid Documents and mode of submissions: The bid document is available online and should be submitted online in [www.pmgsytenders.gov.in](http://pmgsytenders.gov.in). The bidder would be required to register in the web-site which is free of cost. For submission of the bids, the bidder would be to have Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities.

The technical bid shall be opened in the office of Superintending Engineer, 11th Circle, HPPWD, Rampur Bushahr on 19.06.2021. The bidders are required to submit (a) original demand draft towards the cost of bid document and (b) original bid security in approved form and (c) original affidavit regarding correctness of information furnished with bid document as per provisions of Clause 4.4.B (ii) of ITB with Concerned Executive Engineer, HPPWD, on a date not later than two working days after the opening of technical qualification part of the Bid, either by registered post or by hand, failing which the technical bids shall be declared non-responsive.

Last Date/ Time for receipt of bids through e-procurement: Date 17th June 2021 upto 1700 Hours and will be opened on 19th June, 2021 at 1100 hours.

The Financial bids shall be opened in the office of Chief Engineer (Shimla Zone) HPPWD Shimla (Date and Time will be intimated).

For further details please log on to <http://pmgsytenders.gov.in>.

The Government has enhanced the tendering limit of Class-B contractors from Rs. 2.00 crore (Two crore) to Rs. 5.00 crore (Five crore) only for PMGSY works.

The undersigned has right to extend or cancel the tender without declaring any reason.

Superintending Engineer

11th Circle HPPWD,

Rampur Bushahr

Distt. Shimla (HP)

01782-233167, Tel: 01782-233044

HP/0738/21-22

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PUBLIC NOTICE

FORM NO. CAA. 2
 [Pursuant to Section 230(3) of the Companies Act, 2013 and Rules 6 and 7 of the Companies (Compromises, Arrangements and Amalgamations) Rules, 2016]

BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMPANY LAW TRIBUNAL

CHENNAI BENCH

CA(CAA)/14/2021

In the matter of Sections 230 to 232 of the Companies Act, 2013

And

In the matter of Composite Scheme of Amalgamation and Arrangement (Demerger)

Between

Sundaram Industries Private Limited, T.S. RajamTyres Private Limited, TVS Mobility Private Limited (Formerly known as T.S. Rajam Distribution Services Private Limited), Southern Roadways Private Limited, Southern Roadways (Madurai) Private Limited, T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons Private Limited, Trichur Sundaram Santhanam and Family Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, SB TVS Industrial Ventures Private Limited (Formerly known as SB Industrial Ventures Private Limited), Cheema Industrial Ventures Private Limited, TVS Holdings Private Limited (Formerly known as TVS Investments and Holdings Private Limited), TVS Investments Private Limited and Geeyes Family Holdings Private Limited

And

Their Respective Shareholders and Creditors

Sundaram Industries Private Limited

Holding its Registered Office at

TVS Building, 7B, West Veli Street, Madurai - 625001.

...Demerged Company 1/ Transferor Company 1 First Applicant Company

Advertisement of Notice of Meeting of the Secured Creditors of

Sundaram Industries Private Limited

Notice is hereby given that by an Order dated 05/05/2021, the National Company Law Tribunal, Chennai Bench has directed a Meeting to be held of the Secured Creditors of Sundaram Industries Private Limited ("the Company") for the purpose of considering, and if thought fit, approving with or without modification, the Composite Scheme of Amalgamation and Arrangement (Demerger) ("Scheme") proposed to be made between Sundaram Industries Private Limited, T.S. RajamTyres Private Limited, TVS Mobility Private Limited (Formerly known as T.S. Rajam Distribution Services Private Limited), Southern Roadways Private Limited, Southern Roadways (Madurai) Private Limited, T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons Private Limited, Trichur Sundaram Santhanam and Family Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, SB TVS Industrial Ventures Private Limited (Formerly known as SB Industrial Ventures Private Limited), Cheema Industrial Ventures Private Limited, TVS Holdings Private Limited (Formerly known as TVS Investments and Holdings Private Limited), TVS Investments Private Limited and Geeyes Family Holdings Private Limited and their respective Shareholders and Creditors ("Scheme").

In pursuance of the said order and as directed therein, further notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Secured Creditors of Sundaram Industries Private Limited, the Company, will be held on Monday, 14/06/2021 at 2.30 P.M. at TVS Building, 7B, West Veli Street, Madurai - 625001 at which time and place, the Secured Creditors are requested to attend.

Copies of the said Scheme, and of the statement under Section 230 can be obtained free of charge at the registered office of the Company at the office of its authorized representative, Shri T.K. Bhaskar at HSB Partners, 9th Floor, 'Capitale', No. 554/555, Anna Salai, Teynampet, Chennai - 600018, Persons entitled to attend and vote at the meeting, may vote in person or by proxy, provided that all proxies in the prescribed form are deposited at the registered office of the Company at No. 81, First Main Road, R.A. Puram, Chennai - 600028, not later than 48 hours before the meeting.

Forms of proxy can be had at the registered office of the Company.

The Tribunal has appointed Mr. K.S. Viswanathan, Company Secretary of the Company as the Chairperson of the said meeting. The above mentioned Scheme, if approved at the meeting, will be subject to the subsequent approval of the Tribunal.

Dated this the 15th day of May, 2021

K.S.Viswanathan

Chairman appointed for the Meeting

PUBLIC NOTICE

FORM NO. CAA. 2
 [Pursuant to Section 230(3) of the Companies Act, 2013 and Rules 6 and 7 of the Companies (Compromises, Arrangements and Amalgamations) Rules, 2016]

BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMPANY LAW TRIBUNAL

CHENNAI BENCH

CA(CAA)/14/2021

In the matter of Sections 230 to 232 of the Companies Act, 2013

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Between

Sundaram Industries Private Limited, T.S. Rajam Tyres Private Limited, TVS Mobility Private Limited (Formerly known as T.S. Rajam Distribution Services Private Limited), Southern Roadways Private Limited, Southern Roadways (Madurai) Private Limited, T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons Private Limited, Trichur Sundaram Santhanam and Family Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, SB TVS Industrial Ventures Private Limited (Formerly known as SB Industrial Ventures Private Limited), Cheema Industrial Ventures Private Limited, TVS Holdings Private Limited (Formerly known as TVS Investments and Holdings Private Limited), TVS Investments Private Limited and Geeyes Family Holdings Private Limited

And

Their Respective Shareholders and Creditors

Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited

Having its Registered Office at

No. 81, First Main Road,

R.A. Puram, Chennai - 600028

...Resulting Company 6/ Ninth Applicant Company

Advertisement of Notice of Meeting of the Equity Shareholders of

Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited

Notice is hereby given that by an Order dated 05/05/2021, the National Company Law Tribunal, Chennai Bench has directed a Meeting to be held of the Equity Shareholders of Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited ("the Company") for the purpose of considering, and if thought fit, approving with or without modification, the Composite Scheme of Amalgamation and Arrangement (Demerger) ("Scheme") proposed to be made between Sundaram Industries Private Limited, T.S. RajamTyres Private Limited, TVS Mobility Private Limited (Formerly known as T.S. Rajam Distribution Services Private Limited), Southern Roadways Private Limited, Southern Roadways (Madurai) Private Limited, T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons Private Limited, Trichur Sundaram Santhanam and Family Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, SB TVS Industrial Ventures Private Limited (Formerly known as SB Industrial Ventures Private Limited), Cheema Industrial Ventures Private Limited, TVS Holdings Private Limited (Formerly known as TVS Investments and Holdings Private Limited), TVS Investments Private Limited and Geeyes Family Holdings Private Limited

And

Their Respective Shareholders and Creditors

T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons Private Limited

Having its Registered Office at

TVS Building, 7B, West Veli Street, Madurai - 625001

...Transferee Company/ Demerged Company 3/ Sixth Applicant Company

Advertisement of Notice of Meeting of the Secured Creditors of

T.V. Sundram Iyengar Sons Private Limited

Notice is hereby given that by an Order dated 05/05/2021, the National Company Law Tribunal, Chennai Bench has directed a Meeting to be held of the Secured Creditors of T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons Private Limited ("the Company") for the purpose of considering, and if thought fit, approving with or without modification, the Composite Scheme of Amalgamation and Arrangement (Demerger) ("Scheme") proposed to be made between Sundaram Industries Private Limited, T.S. Rajam Tyres Private Limited, TVS Mobility Private Limited (Formerly known as T.S. Rajam Distribution Services Private Limited), Southern Roadways Private Limited, Southern Roadways (Madurai) Private Limited, T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons Private Limited, Trichur Sundaram Santhanam and Family Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, SB TVS Industrial Ventures Private Limited (Formerly known as SB Industrial Ventures Private Limited), Cheema Industrial Ventures Private Limited, TVS Holdings Private Limited (Formerly known as TVS Investments and Holdings Private Limited), TVS Investments Private Limited and Geeyes Family Holdings Private Limited

And

Their Respective Shareholders and Creditors

PUBLIC NOTICE

FORM NO. CAA. 2
 [Pursuant to Section 230(3) of the Companies Act, 2013 and Rules 6 and 7 of the Companies (Compromises, Arrangements and Amalgamations) Rules, 2016]

BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMPANY LAW TRIBUNAL

CHENNAI BENCH

CA(CAA)/14/2021

In the matter of Sections 230 to 232 of the Companies Act, 2013

And

In the matter of Composite Scheme of Amalgamation and Arrangement (Demerger)

Between

Sundaram Industries Private Limited, T.S. Rajam Tyres Private Limited, TVS Mobility Private Limited (Formerly known as T.S. Rajam Distribution Services Private Limited), Southern Roadways Private Limited, Southern Roadways (Madurai) Private Limited, T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons Private Limited, Trichur Sundaram Santhanam and Family Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, Madurai Alagar Enterprises Private Limited, SB TVS Industrial Ventures Private Limited (Formerly known as SB Industrial Ventures Private Limited), Cheema Industrial Ventures Private Limited, TVS Holdings Private Limited (Formerly known as TVS Investments and Holdings Private Limited), TVS Investments Private Limited and Geeyes Family Holdings Private Limited

And

Their Respective Shareholders and Creditors

T.V. Sundram Iyengar Sons Private Limited

Having its Registered Office at

TVS Building, 7B, West Veli Street, Madurai - 625001

...Transferee Company/ Demerged Company 3/ Sixth Applicant Company

Advertisement of Notice of Meeting of the Secured Creditors of

T.V. Sundram Iyengar Sons Private Limited

Notice is hereby given that by an Order dated 05/05/2021, the National Company Law Tribunal, Chennai Bench has directed a Meeting to be held of the Secured Creditors of T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons

IN BRIEF



Actor P.C. George passes away in Kochi

KOCHI
Actor P.C. George, 74, who earned appreciation for his villain characters, died in Kochi on Friday. He was being treated for kidney ailments. His notable works include *Dweepu, Chanakyan, Inmae, Adharvam, and Peruvannapurathu Visheshangal*. He was a police officer and retired as Superintendent of Police.

Karnataka Cong. to pool ₹100 crore for vaccines

BENGALURU
The Karnataka Congress on Friday announced that it has prepared a ₹100 crore plan to procure COVID-19 vaccines directly from manufacturers. KPCC chief D.N. Shivakumar said they would use the Local Area Development Funds of MLAs and MLCs. The KPCC would contribute ₹10 crore.

2 A.P. patients die as Telangana bars entry

Telangana turns away more than 60 ambulances

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT



Tension on border: Telangana police personnel turning away ambulances at the Panchalingala checkpost on the border with Andhra Pradesh on Friday. ■ U. SUBRAMANYAM

Two patients from Andhra Pradesh reportedly died when the Telangana police did not allow the ambulances carrying them to enter the State at the Panchalingala-Pullur inter-State border on the National Highway No.44. More than 60 ambulances with patients were turned away by the Telangana police at the check-post from Thursday midnight to 7 p.m. on Friday. While the details of the two victims could not be ascertained, it is learnt that they hailed from Nandiyal and Kadapa and were proceeding to Hyderabad for treatment.

By the time Kurnool Superintendent of Police K. Fakkeerappa was alerted about the tense situation, there were 18 ambulances waiting

to enter Telangana at the checkpost. "As the situation turned grave for four patients, we shifted them to the Government General Hospital at Kurnool, and sent back the remaining ambulances to various other hospitals," the SP said.

"I spoke to them in view of the Telangana High Court order, but they said they had not received a copy and

hence did not have the permission to allow the patients in ambulances without e-permission," Mr. Fakkeerappa said.

Shortage of beds
Owing to severe shortage of oxygen-supported beds in Hyderabad and other towns of Telangana, patients from other States were not being allowed in, based on an executive order of the Telangana government. But that order was stayed by the Telangana HC on Friday.

District BJP leaders led by their president P. Ramaswamy staged a dharna at the Panchalingala check-post on Friday.

The BJP leaders hit out at Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for remaining silent on the issue.

Prior approval is mandatory, says official

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Saturday: Heavy/heavy rainfall likely at a few isolated places over central Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karikal, Kerala and Lakshadweep. Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty wind likely at isolated places over Ladakh, west Madhya Pradesh, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Telangana, Rayalseema, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Lakshadweep

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	65.1	33.8	22.4	Kozhikode	42	28.4	23.7
Ahmedabad	42.0	28.0	20	Kurnool	20	38.8	26.7
Aizawl	2.6	24.6	14.9	Lucknow	—	35.6	22.6
Altahabad	—	39.6	23.3	Madurai	0.1	38.6	26.2
Bengaluru	—	32.6	21.4	Mangaluru	0.1	32.5	25.0
Bhopal	0.2	40.7	25.5	Mumbai	—	34.5	26.4
Bhubaneswar	—	34.7	22.5	Mysuru	—	34.9	21.0
Chandigarh	1.2	36.1	19.1	New Delhi	0.3	37.9	23.2
Chennai	—	36.6	28.8	Patna	—	37.2	22.0
Coimbatore	—	33.3	25.4	Port Blair	—	35.2	26.8
Dehradun	—	33.1	16.1	Puducherry	—	36.0	27.2
Gangtok	2	17.5	13.2	Pune	—	39.0	23.2
Goa	—	35.5	27.7	Raipur	—	38.3	24.0
Guwahati	2	32.6	22.8	Ranchi	0.8	35.2	21.8
Hubballi	—	33.0	23.0	Shillong	—	23.4	14.1
Hyderabad	0.1	36.8	26.8	Shimla	5	22.4	10.4
Imphal	0.3	25.8	17.8	Srinagar	—	24.0	10.9
Jaipur	—	40.2	27.7	Thiruvananthapuram	58	29.2	23.5
Kochi	53	26.4	24.0	Tiruchi	—	39.5	26.5
Kohima	10.2	24.0	14.0	Vijayawada	2	38.4	27.6
Kolkata	—	36.5	24.2	Visakhapatnam	—	36.6	28.2

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	21	25	28	64	...93	■■■
Bengaluru	...6	60	34	24	...45	■■■
Chennai	15	4.4	11	...39	■■■	■■■
Delhi	10	26	86	166	116	■■■■■
Hyderabad	5	41	31	44	60	■■■■■
Kolkata	12	34	28	42	58	■■■■■
Lucknow	6	40	62	67	76	■■■■■
Mumbai	45	15	10	41	108	■■■■■
Pune	—	37	78	75	65	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	14	42	15	30	49	■■■■■

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Thane, Maharashtra recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 200, indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Shillong, Meghalaya recorded a healthy AQI score of 10.

NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The monsoon is likely to arrive on the Kerala coast on May 31, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) announced on Friday. The normal monsoon onset date over Kerala is June 1 with an error window of four days.

The monsoon arrival comes as an emerging cyclone brews over the Arabian Sea. Forecasters say the cyclone is currently a 'depression' or a pre-cyclone located about 30 km off Lakshadweep. Current weather models say the depression will become a cyclonic storm by Saturday evening and Tauktae – as the



Unsafe coast: Waves battering houses at Kochuthope in Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram on Friday. ■ MAHINSHA

ka and Goa and this is expected to continue for the next few days.

Normal monsoon

The IMD has forecast a normal monsoon during June-

September, largely premised on relatively cool temperatures in the Central Pacific and ruling out the possibility of an El Niño. "Normal" rainfall refers to a range: 96%-104% of the Long Period Av-

erage (LPA) of 88 cm. Last year, the IMD announced a monsoon onset date over Kerala of June 1 whereas the monsoon actually arrived on June 5. There is no correlation between the date of onset of the monsoon and the actual quantum of rain that is received during these months.

To herald the monsoon onset, initial monsoon rains first occur over south Andaman and the monsoon winds then advance across the Bay of Bengal. The emerging storm, according to the IMD's press note on Friday, has strengthened the monsoon winds.

The cross equatorial south westerlies have temporarily strengthened over the Arabian Sea and is expected to deepen over the Bay of Bengal from May 20 and a sustained rainfall activity is likely over the south Bay of Bengal and Andaman and Nicobar Islands from May 21.

Hence the monsoon advance over Andaman and Nicobar Islands is very likely around May 21 2021," it says.

While various meteorological factors – including a minimum amount of rain over Kerala and certain wind flow speeds – determine the IMD's decision to officially declare the onset of the monsoon, a rule of thumb says that it takes about 10 days from the monsoon's arrival over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for it to reach Kerala.

Since 2005, the monsoon has arrived within the error margin of the IMD's weather models except for 2015.

Maharashtra again registers over 50,000 recoveries; 695 deaths

39,923 new cases; active cases dip below 5.20 lakh; spike of 6,000 cases in Pune

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PUNE

In its lowest single-day case surge in nearly a fortnight, Maharashtra reported 39,923 new COVID-19 cases as opposed to 53,249 recoveries as the State's active case tally dipped to 5,19,254.

The fatality surge continued to remain high, with as many as 695 deaths, of which 311 occurred over the last 48 hours, pushing the total death toll to 79,552. As per the State Health Department, 142 of these deaths occurred during the last week and the remaining 242 from an earlier period.

The total cases reached 53,09,215, while cumulative recoveries rose to 47,07,980 with the recovery rate rising to 88.68%. Of 3,06,02,140 laboratory samples tested thus far, 53,09,215 (with the average case positivity falling incrementally to 17.35%) have returned positive, with over 2.49 lakh samples being



Solemn occasion: Muslims offer prayers at their home to mark Id amid restrictions in Mumbai on Friday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

tested in the last 24 hours," said State Surveillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate, adding that the State's case fatality rate stood at 1.5%.

1,660 cases in Mumbai

Mumbai reported 1,660 new cases to take its total case tally to 9,63,093. As per State Health Department figures, 30 deaths were reported as the total death toll rose to 14,102. As per dis-

trict authorities, the active case tally has reached 89,000 while the total death toll has crossed 15,000.

Beed in Marathwada reported 37 deaths and 1,102 new cases, taking its total cases to 73,495, of whom 18,806 are active, while its total death toll has risen to 1,337. Nashik in north Maharashtra reported more than 2,500 new cases, taking its total tally to 3,60,573, of whom 28,862 are active, while 35 deaths pushed its total death toll to 3,946.

He said the 50% cap must be addressed along with the 102nd Constitutional Amendment.

"The State had presented the stand that its

Centre should seek review of 50% cap on quota: MVA govt.

State BJP seeks ₹3,000 crore package for Maratha community

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

After the Centre filed a review petition on Thursday challenging the Supreme Court's interpretation of the 102nd Constitutional Amendment in the Maratha reservation case, the Maharashtra government has said it should also seek a review of the 50% reservation cap in the Indra Sawhney case.

"To continue reservations for all communities in different States, it is important to revisit the 50% reservation cap," said Ashok Chavan, chairman of the State Cabinet sub-committee on Maratha reservation. "The government had put all its efforts to draw the Central government's attention to this issue even before the Maratha reservation case began in the apex court."

He said the 50% cap must be addressed along with the 102nd Constitutional Amendment.

"The State had presented the stand that its



Out of line

Governor Dhankhar's visit to violence-hit areas is a breach of constitutional propriety

There is little doubt that West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar's visit to areas hit by post-poll violence in Cooch Behar constitutes a grave transgression of the bounds of constitutional propriety. A habitual critic of the Mamata Banerjee regime, he has been given to ignoring the principle that constitutional heads should not air their differences with the elected regimes in public. As recently as December 2020, Ms. Banerjee had appealed to the President to recall the Governor for political statements that she believed were being made by him at the behest of the BJP-led Union government. One would have thought that a fresh election, in which Ms. Banerjee's TMC has won a resounding victory, would be a reminder, if one was needed at all, that the norms of representative government ought to be a natural restraint on Mr. Dhankhar's gubernatorial propensity to speak out of turn and step out of line.

There was a time when another West Bengal Governor, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, came in for some criticism for setting aside the restraints of constitutional office by expressing "cold horror" at the police firing that left 14 protesters dead at Nandigram in 2007. Some may believe that the gubernatorial office ought not to be an impediment to the incumbent yielding to the moral urge to condemn incidents of rare enormity. Yet, the larger principle that the Governor should not offer public comment on situations best handled by the representative regime ought to hold good in all circumstances. In the case of Mr. Dhankhar, what worsens his persistent criticism of the TMC regime is the unfortunate congruency between his words and the interests of the BJP. His visit to Cooch Behar can be seen as an action louder even than his words in derogation of the elected regime. A visit to a scene of violence by the Governor cannot be justified as a gesture to show solidarity with victims. M. Channa Reddy, as Tamil Nadu Governor, shocked the AIADMK regime in 1993 by visiting the RSS headquarters in Chennai after a bomb exploded there. It may be argued that the present situation in West Bengal is different from those in which other Governors had shed the restraints of their office. Post-election violence is something that should not be witnessed at all in an electoral democracy. West Bengal is certainly out of step with the rest of the country in allowing post-poll celebrations to degenerate into triumphalism and attacks on the losing side. Yet, the onus is on Ms. Banerjee to restore order and end the violence, even if she believed that the extent of the violence was being exaggerated by the Opposition. Regardless of one's view of a regime's inaction, there should be no departure from the principle that any advice or warning the Governor wants to give to the elected government ought to be in private and in confidence.

Cease the fire

Israel's right to defend itself does not extend to indiscriminate bombing of civilians in Gaza

From Israeli armed forces storming Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque on Monday morning to Israel pounding Gaza with air strikes and artillery on Thursday night in response to the rocket firing by Hamas, the Israel-Palestine conflict has escalated dangerously within days. At least 119 Palestinians, including 31 children, have been killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza since May 10, while nine people were killed in Israel in the rocket attacks, including an Indian national and a child. For now, both sides have refused to stand down from the fighting despite international appeal. Israel cannot evade responsibility for the crisis engulfing the region. There was already resentment and frustration among the Palestinians in the occupied territories as Israel has expanded Jewish settlements and deepened occupation. Besides, Israel's high-handedness in East Jerusalem and the move to evict Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah for Jewish settlers added to the anger, leading to clashes. Hamas, which claims to be the main national resistance force against the occupation, seized on the opportunity and escalated the crisis with rocket attacks. Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas's militant infrastructure. But Israel knows that it is easier said than done. In 2014, Israel carried out a seven-week-long operation with the same objective. Seven years later, there is Hamas, firing over 1,800 rockets into Israel within five days.

Beyond the rhetoric by both sides, this is a loss-loss situation in which the civilians are taken hostages. Hamas's rockets do not distinguish between Israeli civilians and soldiers. While the Iron Dome defence system neutralised most of the rockets, some actually hit Israel's population centres, killing civilians and raising concerns for the country's rulers. Israel is in fact witnessing a twin crisis. While the conflict with Hamas is escalating into a land attack, Israeli cities are gripped by riots between Jewish vigilantes and Arab mobs. The riots prompted President Reuven Rivlin to evoke fears of a civil war and the government to declare a state of emergency in some locations, including the central city of Lod. This is the most serious law and order crisis Israel is facing internally since the second intifada of 2000. In return, Israel has pulverised Gaza, inflicting a heavy casualty on the impoverished region's population. The high casualty of children points to the collective punishment approach of the Israeli military. Israel's right to defend itself, which the U.S. and Germany have endorsed, cannot be the right to launch an indiscriminate bombing on the civilians of Gaza. The international community, especially the U.S. which is a close ally of Israel, should put pressure on both sides to cease the fire. They should do it sooner rather than later as every day, dozens are being killed in the bombings.

In COVID storm, the key principles driven home

Adherence to them would have mitigated the traumatic fallout of the pandemic in India



SEEMA CHISHTI

Dead men do tell tales and history bears witness that pandemics leave their imprint among those they leave behind. In India, a full reckoning would take place when the pandemic is fully behind us. But even from deep inside the storm there are some first principles that have been driven home. Adherence to them would have undoubtedly mitigated the ghastly fallout of the virus.

Health care, not coverage

The first is the debate between universal health care and universal health coverage. That stands settled now, in the spirit of the landmark Aneurin Bevan's-led National Health Service Act in 1946, which revolutionised health care in the United Kingdom by delinking it from a person's income. It became a benchmark for the recognition that it could not be left to market forces to deal with public health.

The most comprehensive document prepared so far in India, by the high-level expert group appointed by the Planning Commission, submitted in November 2011 (<https://bit.ly/3tNmGfx>), concluded that "progressive strengthening of public facilities" is the only way to reach medical services to the population as a whole. While finance was a concern to be dealt with, the centrepiece of health care was not insurance. After 2014, insurance has instead been a focus – good health to be somehow secured via insurance, as with Ayushman Bharat. But for all the hype, there is no getting away from strengthening public health facilities and making that the fundamental way of ensuring a healthy life for its people. India, already spending woefully limited

amounts on health, for all the hoopla and hype, ended up reducing allocations in the February 2021 budget. The results are there to see.

Kerala, when it started investing heavily in public health care in the 1950s, was told it was too expensive for a poor State like it was then. But as it went on to demonstrate, primary health care was labour-intensive, generating its own virtuous cycle of trained personnel and a well-looked after populace. It enhanced the people's ability to produce, to be economic assets and enriched the State much more than could be imagined.

Reason, not mumbo-jumbo

The second principle of so-called 'New India', of faith over science and the silencing of rationalists as 'western' and 'alien' to the 'Indian ethos', must be kicked very hard if India has to start breathing again. In the past seven years and even when the novel coronavirus pandemic was looming, top Ministers, including the Health Minister, were seen flanking the sides of a yoga guru proclaiming that he had found a cure for COVID-19. The World Health Organization had to step in and make it clear that it had not endorsed it (<https://bit.ly/3feMkOU>). The Prime Minister has himself privileged myth over reason, most visibly at a hospital inauguration in Mumbai, in 2014, where he spoke of "plastic surgery" as an Indian invention, citing Lord Ganesh's trunk. This set India back by centuries. The message downwards was clear; science, rationalism or expertise was 'Nehruvian' and not to be encouraged.

Public allocations for science have fallen and Indian scientists criticised two speakers at the Indian Science Congress "for making bizarre, unscientific claims, including that ancient Hindus invented stem-cell science". Scientists held protests against the unscientific statements in Bengaluru, Kochi, Kolkata and Thiruvananthapuram on January 6, 2019.



With the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) coming under fire frequently for peddling non-cures with the weight of the Government of India behind it, it appears as if science itself was perceived as a threat to the ruling party's ecosystem.

All through last year, no public health expert – and India has many – was empowered enough to be seen advising, directing, taking questions or giving out advice that the public could trust, and on occasion question policy. The *thali* banging, candle lighting, abrupt lockdowns, were all done via public addresses to the nation by the Prime Minister. There was no group with respected scientists or public health experts who could challenge government dictats or test decisions taken by the Narendra Modi government against scientific principles. The Prime Minister took to declaring victory over the pandemic on January 28. The Home Minister authoritatively announced to the media that rallies were not causing the surge in the middle of a crowded Bengal campaign. On if the Kumbh Mela should be allowed a year earlier, it was the Akhil Bhartiya Akhada Parishad that had the last word, not epidemiologists. It took hundreds of anguished scientists to write a letter urging that genomic data be collected and shared, like other civilised democracies, on the virus for the protocol to be altered. The wholesale junking of science even deep into the pandemic worsened the situation.

Data integrity, not hesitancy

Third, comes data integrity, which is shorthand for the credibility of any government, at any time. Data-hesitancy has been a feature of

this government, whether it was about economic data, on making the GDP look good or on recording employment statistics. So changing baselines, withholding periodic labour force surveys or consumption survey data, set the path for continued data denial over testing last year and this year, over COVID-19 deaths. Other than the moral and human imperative of owing it to each Indian who dies, the basic courtesy of recording her existence and departure, not recording deaths faithfully, has deep practical implications. If you do not track it honestly and accurately, you do not understand the disease, and if you do not do that then you cannot handle it and lesser still, rescue the future by accurate predictions. In the case of COVID-19, India's mortality data are many times lower than what is officially acknowledged, as discussed in detail by the latest assessments of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, and experts such as Dr. Bhramar Mukherjee, Dr. Ashish K. Jha and Dr. Murad Banaji. The discrepancy is above the regular margin of error seen in many countries. This is deeply damaging to India's international standing as a reliable recorder of information. Not recording or diligently sharing data has consequences, for India and the world.

Our economics and the poor

The fourth and final principle that the pandemic has driven home is the importance of centring good economics around improving the lives of those worst-off. Recently, India has been anxious about turning into a '5 trillion' economy. But there is no Security Council seat or grand entry into the big rich clubs of the world if India's overwhelming majority, those who live under \$1.90 a day, cannot be lifted out of the morass. Numerous surveys and reports have consistently hammered at the slide into poverty. The latest report by the Azim Premji University talks of 230 million Indians slipping below the breadline during the pandemic (<https://bit.ly/2RPIp2o>). India's

obsession with being Vishwaguru, egged on by misleading analysts deriding "Povertarianism", talking of "freebies" cannot be a replacement to sound welfarism which must prioritise the majority of Indians who need a social security net. It is stunning disregard for global reverence, whether it is Joe Biden's big spending, Boris Johnson ending the age of austerity, Germany launching the biggest state spend since the war or China's historic drive to end absolute poverty, and India's own, when the International Monetary Fund acknowledged the fastest decline in poverty globally occurring in India between 2005-06 and 2015-16. Understanding "good economics" as what helps its majority, the most poor and vulnerable, must be a principle rather than a matter of embarrassment.

The virus is no sociologist but it responds to how society and human beings behave with it. Allowing gargles of cow urine to double as cures, giving it a free run to travel and diversify amongst large unprotected crowds or in a desperation to win elections such as in West Bengal, actively courting and boasting about mass gatherings till just days ago were all invitations to disaster, providing the virus with what it wanted – a chance to multiply, diversify, jump hosts and regions rapidly, adding as accelerators to the second wave.

This was contrary to what India did with smallpox and polio, with far fewer resources. There, its adherence to basic scientific and rational principles, helped its people, and the world beat back the disease.

The least good that might be hoped for, at an unimaginably high cost, is for COVID-19 to cure us of the basic distortion in our public and political culture which has been on a speed pill for the last seven years. Else, it would be hard to stop analysts from terming this the man-made, Indian, or worse still, Modi variant.

Seema Chishti is a journalist/writer based in New Delhi

Lend a helping hand to children the right way

Following the COVID surge, the laws and procedures for the care and protection of orphaned children must be noted



R.K. VIJ

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic now sweeping India has left many children orphaned and vulnerable. Social media is flooded with requests to adopt children who have lost their parents in the pandemic. And a few non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have come forward to help such children.

However, before handing over an orphan child to any agency, family or person, however well intended the move may be, it is important to be aware of the laws that are prevalent and procedures with regard to the care and the protection of orphan children rather than face legal action for violations later.

Many options to help

Any individual who finds an orphan child or even any child who needs care and protection under the circumstances, should immediately call the toll free Childline number 1098, an emergency phone outreach service (managed by the Women and Child Development department's nodal agency, the Childline India Foundation; <https://bit.ly/3uN9mCw>) which operates round the day and on all days across the country. After tak-

ing note of the whereabouts of the child, the helpline reaches out immediately and takes charge of the child. These Childline units are nothing but civil society organisations duly approved by the government.

The second option is to intimate the district protection officer concerned whose contact details can be found on the National Tracking System for Missing and Vulnerable Children portal (<https://bit.ly/3eLb2a5>) maintained by the Women and Child Development department of the Government of India.

The third alternative is to approach the nearest police station or its child welfare police officer who is specially trained to exclusively deal with children either as victims or juvenile delinquents. Nonetheless, one can always dial the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) which is a pan-India single number (I12) based emergency response system for citizens in emergencies (<https://I12.gov.in/>) and seek the necessary help. The non-reporting of such children is also a punishable offence under the JJA or the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (<https://bit.ly/3hX4wD>).

Established process

Once an orphan child is recovered by the outreach agency, it is the duty of the said agency to produce the child within 24 hours before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) of the district. The CWC, after an inquiry, decides whether to



send the child to a children's home or a fit facility or fit person; if the child is below six years, he or she shall be placed in a specialised adoption agency. The State thus takes care of all such children who are in need of care and protection, till they turn 18 years. In *Sampurna Behrua vs Union of India* (2018), the Supreme Court of India directed States and Union Territories to ensure that all child care institutions are registered. Thus, any voluntary or NGO which is not registered as per the requirement of the JJA cannot house children in need of care and protection.

Once a child is declared legally free for adoption by the CWC, adoption can be done either by Indian prospective adoptive parents or non-resident Indians or foreigners.

Nonetheless, one can always dial the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) which is a pan-India single number (I12) based emergency response system for citizens in emergencies (<https://I12.gov.in/>) and seek the necessary help. The non-reporting of such children is also a punishable offence under the JJA or the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (<https://bit.ly/3hX4wD>).

Similarly, each district is supposed to have its special juvenile police unit, headed by an officer not below the rank of a Deputy Superintendent of Police. The Supreme Court in *Re: Exploitation of children in Orphanages in the State of Tamil Nadu (2017) inter alia*, specifically asked the National Police Academy, Hyderabad and police training academies in every State to prepare training courses

on the JJA and provide regular training to police officers in terms of sensitisation.

Children are an important national asset, and the well-being of the nation, and its future, depend on how its children grow and develop. The primary purpose of giving a child in adoption is his welfare and restoring his or her right to family. Article 39 of the Constitution prohibits the tender age of the children from being abused. Therefore, orphaned children who have lost both their parents or abandoned or surrendered due to the COVID-19 pandemic must not be neglected and left to face an uncertain future. They must be taken care of by the authorities entrusted with responsibilities under the JJA.

Recent order

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) recently wrote to the Chief Secretaries of all States and Union Territories on the issue of children orphaned due to COVID-19. It said that that if any such information about an abandoned or orphaned child is received by any entity, organisation, or NGO, then the NCPCR has to be informed by email (cp.ncpcr@nic.in) or over the telephone (011-23478200/23478250) for assistance and help to children). This directive needs to be implemented in the most humane manner.

R.K. Vij is a senior IPS officer in Chhattisgarh. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Governor's day out

It is unfortunate that in West Bengal, the Governor and Chief Minister have been at loggerheads for long, and in the middle of a raging pandemic. Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar's visit to Cooch Behar, in the aftermath of post-poll violence, was avoidable (Page 1, "Dhankhar ignores Mamata view, visits riot-hit areas", May 14). Raj Bhavan needs to show restraint and not resort to actions which may give rise to the perception that Mr. Dhankhar is acting at the

behest of the BJP high command. A cordial relationship is imperative for a healthy democracy and peaceful political atmosphere.

P.K. VARADARAJAN,
Chennai

■ The Governor's visit follows from reports that Opposition BJP MLAs in West Bengal are to get central security cover. Voters in the State, who were caught in the middle of the vicious electoral battle which has only ended with increased exposure to COVID-19 due to

the shenanigans of the political class during the elections, will now end up paying for the security cover of the very people some of them voted for. And that does not seem right.

PRABHAKAR S.,
Chennai

■ The Governor and the Chief Minister locking horns is not new. The objection of the Chief Minister to Mr. Dhankhar's visit gives rise to the suspicion that she does have something to hide.

K.V. SEETHARAMAIAH,
Hassan, Karnataka

Congress downslide

Had the Grand Old Party, the Indian National Congress, woken up as soon as the ground began to slip beneath its feet it might not have found itself in the predicament that it has landed in today ("Congress needs to put house in order: Sonia", May 11). The results of the Assembly elections have left no one in doubt that the Congress is a mere shadow of its once formidable self. The most stinging blow is from the poll result in West Bengal. With the election of the new

Congress Working
Committee and party

President being deferred 'due to the COVID-19 onslaught', the party is all set to go into hibernation all over again. The urge to cling to the Gandhis and the unwillingness to look beyond them is certain to handicap the Congress.

C.V. ARAVIND,
Bengaluru

Congress Working Committee and party

President being deferred 'due to the COVID-19 onslaught', the party is all set to go into hibernation all over again. The urge to cling to the Gandhis and the unwillingness to look beyond them is certain to handicap the Congress.

Beating back the pandemic in Mumbai

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has been meeting the second wave of the COVID-19 challenge on a war footing. **Sonam Saigal** reports on how the civic body learnt lessons from the first wave and adopted a decentralised approach which is showing results slowly but surely

For six years, 42-year-old Surekha Mane spent most of her days teaching history and geography to students from Classes 5 to 8. Her run-of-the-mill routine was suddenly upended in January this year. Now, she is part of the Maharashtra government's large team of COVID-19 fighters.

Mane works at a disaster control room, or ward 'war room', in Mumbai, where she answers distress calls from those showing symptoms of COVID-19 or from their families and diligently notes down their details.

The job is hectic. On May 13, Mane answered 23 phone calls on one of the 15 lines in the 'war room' at 'E' ward. "The first thing I do when I answer a call is to take down the contact number of the person calling in case the line gets disconnected," she says.

Mane says the nature of calls has changed over time. "Earlier, we used to get a lot of queries on the availability of beds and ambulances. Now, most of the people calling are in isolation at home. They ask about garbage disposal because the society does not collect their garbage. I take down their name, number, address and enter all this into a register. Then I contact the waste management department. The next day, I follow up to check if the garbage has been picked up," she says.

Mane sometimes gets unusual requests. "The other day, I got this call asking for a banner for a society. The BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) puts up banners at buildings after it declares them as 'containment zones'. [When five people test positive for COVID-19 in a building, it is labelled a containment zone.] The secretary of the building called saying a stray dog tore off the banner. So, we arranged for the banner to be put up again," she says.

Mane is one of the over thousand staff members working at Mumbai's 'war rooms'. The financial capital struggled during the initial phase of the first COVID-19 wave with only one central BMC helpline. It quickly learnt that decentralisation was the best way to tackle the unfolding challenge. With the help of private hospitals, the police, educational institutions, industry and others, the BMC, the richest civic body in the country, has been meeting the new wave of the COVID-19 challenge on a war footing. And the results are slowly but surely showing, with many praising what it now being referred to as the 'Mumbai model'. After a record number of daily cases on April 3 (11,163), Mumbai has been recording a steady dip since then, with 1,657 daily cases on May 14.

Mumbai, the hotspot

Soon after Mumbai recorded its first COVID-19 case in March 2020, and cases climbed to 17, the Maha Vikas Aghadi government, a coalition of the Shiv Sena, Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party, declared COVID-19 an epidemic and invoked the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897. On March 13, 2020, the State government shut down theatres, gyms, swimming pools and public parks; barred social, religious and political events; requested private employers to ensure that employees work from home wherever possible; and advised people against visiting malls, hotels, restaurants and other crowded places. On March 20, when cases reached 52, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray announced that all workplaces, excluding essential services and public transport, in certain pockets of Maharashtra would be shut till March 31. He then imposed a complete lockdown as cases continued to increase. Despite these measures, Mumbai soon became a hotspot for COVID-19 cases. By May 8, it had recorded 12,142 COVID-19 cases. The BMC looked like it was losing the battle against the virus.

Mahesh Narvekar, chief officer of the BMC's disaster management cell, recalls how stressful the job was back then. He says the central control room (number 1916) buckled under the pressure of calls during the first wave of COVID-19. "As 75% of the staff tested positive, there were very few people to take the calls, let alone address the queries of those desperate people who were calling," he says. "I appointed some contractual call operators but they were new and didn't have any domain knowledge." Staggering under the weight of cases and deaths, the city looked like it was on the brink of a disaster.

Back then, there were only 40 ambulances for COVID-19 patients and four hearses to carry dead bodies, Narvekar says. "The backlog of dead bodies was 100-150. These bodies were just lying in morgues. We didn't have any vehicles to carry the bodies," he recalls.

Today, the BMC has 675 ambulances and 400 hearses.

Chasing the virus

With its back to the wall, the BMC began to fight back during the first wave. A new BMC Commissioner, Iqbal Singh Chahal, who was Principal Secretary in the Urban Development department, was appointed to lead the fight on May



A health worker vaccinates a woman at a drive-in vaccination facility at the National Sports Club of India in Mumbai. (Below): Long queues outside the BKC Jumbo Vaccination Centre in Mumbai. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI



8, 2020. Chahal was chosen despite having had no experience in municipal administration. He recalls the day he received the order as being "very scary". "That day there were reports of a body found on the road near Dadar, another body found in an autorickshaw in Parel, and another on the divider at Dharavi," he says.

Chahal immediately called all the 120 heads of departments of the BMC, 24 ward officers, 24 wards in-charge of health, deputy commissioners, additional commissioners and joint commissioners for a physical meeting. "We have to chase the virus," he told them. The BMC soon launched the 'Chase the Virus' campaign and began to aggressively test, trace and isolate. As part of this campaign, 15 close associates of every COVID-19 positive patient were compulsorily institutionally quarantined. In addition, community leaders were appointed to provide information to people about co-morbidities, facilities being provided at institutional quarantine facilities, clinic timings, and so on.

Chahal led from the front. He conducted a 5.5 km march at Mukund Nagar in Dharavi along with 50 BMC officers. The officials checked the hygiene conditions in the slums and distributed packets of food. "The BMC planned to visit all the containment zones across various slums in Mumbai because 95% of the cases were in the slums," says Chahal. The civic body's aim was to go from house to house, test, quarantine those who were found positive, and move their family members and neighbours to the 47,000 rooms that were made available through 187 hotels in Mumbai.

It was an onerous task. "We started shifting close to 30,000 people a week," says Chahal. At the same time, BMC officials started sanitising the homes of those who had tested positive and kept constant checks on those who had been quarantined to see if they had developed any symptoms. "Those who developed symptoms were taken to hospitals. Else, they were sent back to their sanitised homes," says Chahal. The BMC moved over 1.5 lakh people in this way in Mumbai through the first wave.

At first no one wanted to be whisked away to these facilities. "But by word of mouth, people came to know about these facilities. They understood that people were being looked after well. And that broke the initial reluctance among people; they voluntarily agreed to move," he says.

Chahal says he visited 55 slums in Mumbai. Thousands of health workers, who feared visiting containment zones earlier, visited the slums too. "This was in the second week of May. We quickly arrested the spread of the virus. In July, the World Health Organization praised our efforts in Dharavi," says Chahal.

Getting the largest slum of Asia in or-

der was never going to be an easy task. Sanitation and hygiene are the first casualty in a slum of Dharavi's size. "We entered public toilets in Dharavi and found that 200 people were sharing one toilet. Each public toilet had 20-25 seats. We ordered that the toilets be sanitised every two hours. That is being done even today. This is how we destroyed the virus in public toilets," Chahal says.

Role of community leaders

These initiatives were not foolproof. To ensure that instructions were being followed by BMC employees, community leaders were roped in to keep frequent checks on them. Each of the community leaders was given a mobile phone and was connected to the control rooms. These leaders were asked to check whether BMC health workers were going door to door checking people's temperatures, conducting tests, and checking for co-morbidities, or whether they were just filling up documents at the exit gates of the containment zones. They were asked to report to the BMC if the toilets were not sanitised. They were asked to check whether personal protective equipment kits were being used by healthcare workers and whether people in the neighbourhood had developed symptoms like diarrhoea or eye problems. In addition to this, they monitored the quality of the food packets being distributed by the BMC. This was micro-management and yet a decentralised operation that was put in place by the Mumbai civic authority.

It was also important to take care of the BMC employees, says Chahal. "More than 100 BMC employees had died between March and April 2020, and they did not come under the Government of India's insurance scheme for frontline healthcare workers. For example, safai karamcharis and bus drivers of BEST buses who were ferrying doctors were not in the category of frontline workers," he says. In mid-May, the families of all BMC employees who died of COVID-19 became entitled to receive ₹50 lakh as compensation. The announcement galvanised the staff. The BMC has paid ₹150 crore as compensation to the families of the bereaved employees.

Inside the 'war rooms'

The BMC also launched another campaign called 'Chase the Patient' where it asked people to get tested and admitted in hospitals if they had symptoms of COVID-19. Each of the 24 wards in Mumbai got a 'war room', its own dedicated line, and a COVID-19 dashboard that was

uploaded on a daily basis. The dashboard gives information on the number of positive cases, active cases (symptomatic and asymptomatic) and number of patients discharged. The 'war rooms' are active 24X7 with staff working in three shifts. Each shift has at least one doctor on duty to advise patients. These 'war rooms' have been especially useful during the second wave.

The 'war room' of K (West) ward is associated with 12 hospitals and two COVID-19 Care Centres for asymptomatic patients. Dr. Hameen Yadnyeshwari, the in-charge there, says the 'war room' has eight doctors who work in three shifts, along with five BMC employees who take queries and make arrangements to sanitise the homes of COVID-19 patients. "We also have 10 teachers who receive calls and five teachers who make calls after they receive the final list of COVID-19 patients," says Yadnyeshwari. "When the second wave started around mid-February this year, the number of cases started rising to 50, 60 even 80 in a ward as opposed to 20, 30 that we saw last year. That is when we knew the second wave was here. We began to increase the number of beds in private hospitals and non-COVID-19 hospitals. We also added oxygen beds to COVID-19 care centres."

Today, calls are largely about vaccination. In K(West) ward, Deepa Raut, who teaches science to students of Class 8 at a BMC-run school in Juhu, has been attending to several of these anxious calls. "On May 13, I received 12 calls and all of them were vaccination-related. We assure them that we are there to help them. We tell them that the BMC is coming up with more vaccination centres and vaccines, and that the problem will be resolved soon," she says.

Involving private hospitals

An operation of this scale could not have been possible without the involvement of private hospitals. The chief operating officers of 35 private hospitals including Breach Candy Hospital, Lilavati Hospital, Nanavati Hospital, Wockhardt Hospitals and Hiranandani were brought in. A BMC order stated that 80% of the total beds and 100% of ICU beds in private hospitals shall be kept reserved only for COVID-19 patients referred by ward 'war rooms'. In order to augment ambulance capacity, 800 Tata Sumo and Toyota Innova cars available with the BMC were converted into ambulances. Fifty mini buses were converted into ambulances with stretchers and Uber was roped in to make available

its fleet of cars and buses.

Institutions were also roped in. IIT Bombay developed a web page called covid19india.in. This gives information to COVID-19 patients about slots available for dialysis. Aggressive measures were put in place for those not observing COVID-19 protocols. The BMC has collected ₹50 crore as fines from people so far.

Giant COVID-19 Care Centres were created at the Bandra Kurla Complex, NESCO in Goregaon and the National Sports Club of India at Worli. These have a total capacity of 78,000 beds and are centrally air conditioned. The BMC also ensured that patients could keep in touch with their families through iPads.

Preparing for the worst

Eight jumbo isolation centres were set up across the city last year. Except one which did not have a single patient, all of them were kept intact, says Chahal. "We kept the beds, equipment and oxygen support which were not used in the first wave. All that is now being utilised at the new centre which we are building right opposite the Mahalaxmi Racecourse," he says.

As expected, Mumbai was badly hit by the second wave. Maharashtra is the worst-affected State this year too, accounting for more than a quarter of the cases in the country. Fatalities too have been high. And despite efforts, there have been alarms about shortage of oxygen. Chahal recalls one particularly difficult night: "On April 16 midnight, I learnt about shortage of oxygen. In the morning, I texted Cabinet Secretary Ravinder Gauba and told him that we need to import oxygen. He put me in touch with Dr. Guruprasad Mohapatra, Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. I said it would take eight days for oxygen to reach Mumbai from Haldia, West Bengal, and asked if oxygen tankers could come from Jamnagar, just 16 hours away. He arranged for it. A disaster was averted."

But as a result of this combined and sustained effort over months, there have been no SOS calls for beds in Mumbai during the second wave. Dr. Mangala Gomare, executive health officer of BMC, in her affidavit before the Bombay High Court said, "The BMC's COVID-19 Response War Room Dashboard uploaded every day at 5 pm contains all the essential information about total active cases – symptomatic as well as asymptomatic active cases."

"In all the dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, healthcare centres and 'jumbo' COVID facilities, a nodal officer has been appointed to update the data at regular intervals. The same information is available to the disaster management cell as well as the 'war rooms' and the administrators of each ward. Therefore, for effective bed management, real-time information is available with the 'war rooms' of each ward," said Dr. Gomare.

"Each ward war room has a mobile medical team which is deployed in case there is a serious emergency. The team provides temporary medical care while shifting the patient to the nearest hospital. The patients who are advised home isolation are regularly called on their mobile phones on the third, fifth, seventh and 10th day. The ward 'war rooms' in coordination with health officers follow up with patients and allot beds on the same day," said Gomare. Dr. Manoj Joshi, Dean of BYL Nair

Hospital, says it was very difficult to put the plan in place. "Following the lockdown, the challenge was to provide transport for healthcare workers coming from outside Mumbai like Vasai-Virar, Nala Sopara, Panvel, Badlapur and Kalyan. We managed this for thousands of healthcare workers. We looked after their needs. As canteens were not open, food was provided either by corporates or by hotels," says Joshi. More than 50% of healthcare workers including doctors, resident doctors, nurses and support staff stayed at hotels, says Joshi.

At the same time, strict action was taken against those who did not come. "We served them notices, handed out punishment. We tried to remove some, threaten some. But that is how they all resumed work. It was through reward and punishment," says Joshi.

Going beyond duty

The 'Mumbai model' would be incomplete without the mention of the Mumbai Police which has lost 115 of its personnel to COVID-19 till date. "The first wave was tough. People did not understand the gravity of the problem, and were not willing to listen. So, tough measures had to be taken in some areas and this put a lot of policemen at risk," says a police officer who worked in Dadar and Worli Koliwada, which were among the worst affected areas in Mumbai when COVID-19 was at its peak. "But people have been much more cooperative since then," he says.

Hemant Nagrare, the Mumbai Police Commissioner, says the role of the police is multifaceted during a pandemic. "We need to maintain the lockdown, deploy our officers on the road and in busy areas like markets. We need to issue e-passes to facilitate travel in cases of death, marriage or any medical emergency after permission is granted by the local authority." The Mumbai Police have also had to man buildings where people have been quarantined to ensure that nobody leaves or enters the building. "We have deployed officers at vaccination centres and COVID-19 wards so that the vaccination process goes on smoothly and there are no stampedes," he says.

The police are also required at crematoriums for unclaimed bodies. "A head constable, Gyandeo Ware, has cremated 50 bodies. All of them had COVID-19. The police have to take the bodies from the hospitals or morgues and cremate them. It is not their duty, but they have done this as a humane gesture," he says.

The 'Mumbai Model' is being replicated in other districts. "This model is being implemented with local variations in rural areas. Cases are coming down in Nagpur and Pune. We have increased testing in many rural areas. We are also trying to increase the availability of beds and oxygen according to the needs," says Maharashtra Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte.

Despite the fact that Mumbai's daily positivity rate was as low as 7% on May 10 as compared to around 25% in the first week of April, it cannot afford to relax. "As we anticipate a third wave, there are two challenges that we envisage: cases may originate from the rural areas of Maharashtra and that wave may affect the younger population more," says Kunte. The challenges keep piling on, but "we are preparing for them," he says.



FROM PAGE ONE

Vaccines less effective against B.1.617 strain

Like their global counterparts, the two vaccines authorised in India, Covaxin and Covishield, while made differently, were designed on the blueprint of the virus variant, called B1, that became the dominant strain in India by last April.

With reports emerging from vaccine trials, across the globe, of certain mutations in the virus helping it evade immune systems and antibodies, several labs have been working to check the potency of vaccines against emerging variants.

When the NIV scientists tested the virus, bearing the B.1.617 signature mutations, on antibodies that were extracted from the blood serum of those with two doses of Covaxin, they found roughly 55% fewer antibodies than the antibodies generated against B1.

Similar study
When a similar study was done with those inoculated with Covishield, the Geometric Mean Titer (a proxy for the number of antibodies) with B1 was 42.92 whereas with the B.1.617 it was 21.9, again roughly half.

On the other hand, when antibody levels were com-

pared against the B.1.1.7 (UK strain), there was only a 6% reduction whereas against Brazilian strain (P2) there was again a 50% reduction. Dr. Samiran Panda, who heads the Epidemiology Division at the ICMR, Delhi, and was a co-author of the papers, said while the reductions were roughly on these lines, they showed that both Covishield and Covaxin were "almost similarly" protective against the B.1.617.

In those vaccinated, protection against a future infection isn't solely determined by the number of antibodies and the extent to which they wax and wane over time, but also by the mobilisation of a class of defensive bodies called T cells, which it is believed direct a more specific kind of attack against the virus and destroys it unlike antibodies, which only block replicating virus cells. "The antibody tests don't account for the T-cell response. Moreover these tests were done on a very small number of individuals. The average level of antibodies don't always capture the true range of antibody production," he told *The Hindu*.

Sputnik V rolled out in India at ₹995 per dose

Given that the vaccine must be stored at minus 18 degrees C and the lack of availability of such cold chain infrastructure, the company said, "We will begin with metros and tier 1 cities and scale up to the rest of India."

In the run up to the launch, the company's leadership had said the cost of imported Sputnik V, which is a two-dose vaccine, in India would be around the \$10 a dose at which it was priced in other global markets by the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF).

Co-chairman and managing director G.V. Prasad said, "We are prioritising

our efforts to launch Sputnik V vaccine across India."

Dr. Reddy's was also in discussion with a couple of State governments for vaccine offtake. The vaccine price has been set taking into account the import, logistics and distribution cost, but it may come down once domestic manufacturing commences.

The RDIF, which is bank-rolling the vaccine developed by the Gamaleya National Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology, has tied up with six firms to manufacture an estimated 850 million doses of Sputnik V.

Ensure bodies are not dumped in rivers: U.P. CM

He said in areas on the banks of rivers, committees should be formed, including Village Development Officers and village heads, to ensure no one dumped bodies in rivers.

"No one should be allowed to dispose of bodies in rivers due to religious traditions," the CM added, stressing that if need be, a fine may be imposed at the local level to prevent it.

"Rivers get polluted due to bodies of human beings and animals. The government is also running a special campaign for the cleaning of rivers. Home, Urban and Rural Development Departments should make a policy to prevent it," he added.

The government has been under fire from the Opposition over the issue recently.

Police question Youth Congress chief

"Today, Modiji and [Home Minister] Amit Shahji sent Delhi Police to the office of the IYC to question Srinivasi. Can there be a more despicable act than this? Is it a sin committed by the Youth Congress and the Congress to provide help that the Modi government has been unable to do," Mr. Surjewala asked.

The government should be "ashamed" of itself, he said, asserting that Youth Congress would continue to provide oxygen and other life-saving drugs to patients.

Using the hash tag #StandWithIYC to express solidarity, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi tweeted, "The one who saves is always greater than the one who destroys."

While former Union Minister Jairam Ramesh tweeted to call the Delhi Police's move as "atrocious", party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra too reacted on Twitter when former Rajya Sabha member Shahid

Siddiqui informed that a police officer had also visited his residence to question how Ms. Vadra managed to help him with Remdesivir injections for his wife.

At an online press conference, All India Congress Committee in charge of Delhi Shaktisinh Ghosh said Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee chief Anil Chaudhary and former MLA Mukesh Sharma also received notice for such questioning.

A Delhi Police officer claimed that the questioning followed a direction from the Delhi High Court on a writ petition filed by Dr. Deepak Singh about politicians involved in illegal distribution of COVID-19 medicines.

Several persons, including ruling Aam Aadmi Party lawmaker Dilip Pandey, would also be questioned, he added.

Mr. Surjewala said the explanation by the police was "an after thought after getting exposed".

Working on a 'war footing' to tackle crisis: PM

Efforts are on to get people vaccinated at a fast pace; supply of medicines being ramped up; oxygen plants being set up

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday expressed concern that the COVID-19 pandemic was spreading to rural areas but asserted that the government was working on a "war footing" to tackle the crisis. Striking an emotional note, he said people had lost their near and dear ones to the "invisible enemy" of coronavirus. "The pain that the countrymen have endured for some time, the pain that many people have gone through, I want to say that I feel your pain," he said.

Mr. Modi was speaking to

a select group of farmers over video conference while releasing the eighth instalment of more than ₹19,000 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nihi Yojana (PMKSNY). Over 9.5 crore farmers are supposed to benefit from the income support scheme for farmers.

Invisible enemy

"After 100 years, such a terrible pandemic is testing the world at every step, we have an invisible enemy in front of us, which is in multi form...We are overcoming obstacles in resources in the fight against the second wave of coronavirus rapidly and

efforts are being made to work on war footing mode," he observed. Eighteen crore doses of vaccines had been given so far and the government "is making efforts that people get vaccinated at a fast pace."

He said, "India is not a

country that loses courage and resolve, we will fight and win. This pandemic is now spreading in our rural areas too. Every government in the country is trying its best to deal with the situation. Our panchayati raj institutions and systems attached to them are key to fighting the pandemic"

NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER



they are key to fighting the pandemic. Our farmers have never let down the country in times of need, and I am sure that in these challenging times you will continue this. Please follow and ask communities to follow all precautions related to coronavirus, report symptoms early, get yourself tested, isolate and start treatment even while waiting for results of the tests," he said.

"The one main way of fighting against the pandemic is to get vaccinated and I urge all of you to get yourself vaccinated when your turn comes."

Medical professionals,

scientists and armed forces were working day and night to fight against the pandemic and that supply of medicines was being increased by ramping up domestic manufacture and imports. "The government is setting up oxygen plants." He asked the State governments to crack down on black-marketing of medicines and oxygen cylinders.

In the video conference, six farmers from various parts of the country interacted with the Prime Minister. West Bengal, for the first time, received the first instalment of the PMKSNY for seven lakh farmers.

Uphold dignity of the dead, NHRC tells Centre and States

It issues advisory after bodies found floating in the Ganga

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Friday issued an advisory to the Centre and States on "upholding the dignity and protecting the rights of the dead" in view of the "large number of deaths during this second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges in management of the bodies."

The advisory comes after several bodies, suspected to be of those who died of COVID-19, have been found floating in the Ganga in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the past few days.

The NHRC wrote to the Secretaries of the Union Home Affairs and Health and Family Welfare Ministries and Chief Secretaries of States to implement the recommendations.

Challenging process
"As of May 9, 2021, globally 32,96,841 people have died on account of COVID-19 pandemic whereas in India 2,42,398 people have lost their lives due to this deadly virus. Due to this record number of deaths, the process of management of dead

bodies while adhering to the COVID safety protocol, transportation of bodies and their burial or cremation, etc., has become challenging," the advisory said.

Despite various international and national guidelines, the "mismanagement" of COVID-19 affected bodies, thereby "lowering their dignity," has been reported, it said.

The NHRC recommended that the government enact legislation to protect the rights of the dead and set up temporary crematoriums to reduce the delay in performing last rites being seen today.

Sensitise staff
The advisory also said staff of crematoriums and burial grounds should be sensitised to ensure dignity while handling bodies.

"Further, they need to be provided necessary safety equipment and facilities so that they may perform their duty efficiently without any fear or risk... In cases where family members or relatives are not there to perform last rites as they themselves may be infected or are not willing being afraid of getting infected

ed, etc., or where the repatriation of the body to the family may not be possible, the State/local administration may perform the last rites of the body, taking into account the religious/ cultural factors," the advisory said.

The NHRC said bodies should not be piled up during transportation or at any other point and mass burials or cremations should not be allowed as it was a violation of the right to dignity of the dead.

Regulate services
The advisory said the State authorities must handle information about the dead and missing persons properly.

It added that the prices of hearse or ambulance services should be regulated.

"Since the staff at crematoriums, burial grounds, mortuaries, etc., are working round the clock during this wave of pandemic, they may be paid fair wages to compensate their hard work. Further, they should be vaccinated on a priority basis keeping in view the risk they are exposed to," the NHRC said.

Plea seeks SC probe into bodies floating in Ganga

'Do autopsies to know cause of death'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A Supreme Court lawyer has moved the apex court seeking a probe by a special investigation agency into separate incidents of bodies washing up on the banks of the Ganga river in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Advocate Pradeep Kumar Yadav said the court should intervene and direct the authorities to conduct autopsies to determine the cause of death.

Mr. Yadav said about 100 bodies were found "floating" in the river at Buxar in Bihar and Ghazipur and Unnao in Uttar Pradesh.

"The petitioner, therefore, seeks the intervention of this court to investigate the suspicious death of 100 citizens whose bodies are flushed out into the river Ganga inhumanly. No FIR has been registered by the authorities. Even to the best of knowledge of the petitioner, no post-mortem was conducted," Mr. Yadav submitted.

He alleged that the "administration/police have buried the bodies by preparing verbatim false post-mortem reports, which was eye-wash to show that investigation was conducted".

The SC should appoint a sitting or retired judge to head the probe, the plea said.

"It is therefore, requested that each body be removed and proper post-mortem be conducted in order to verify the cause of death," the petition sought.

The plea said the court should appoint either a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme Court to head the special investigation agency.

"The State governments of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have failed to provide the adequate resources to cremate the bodies of COVID-19 patients and also had not taken any action against the authorities responsible for this... No one knows or have checked that the bodies are really that of COVID-19 patients or whether they are murder victims," Mr. Yadav said.

'No virtual meetings of House panels'

SOBHANA K NAIR
NEW DELHI

The parliamentary panels cannot meet virtually till the necessary rules are amended by both Houses of Parliament, the Raja Sabha secretariat said in reply to a letter written by Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday. The standing committees of Parliament, which are non-partisan platforms to analyse the functioning of the government, have not met since the onset of the second wave of the pandemic.

More than a year after the demands were first raised by the panels' chairpersons, the changes in the rules have not been amended since their physical meetings were held for a few months when it was believed that COVID-19 was on the wane.

Last week, in a letter to Raja Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu, Mr. Kharge asked to allow online meetings.

Mr. Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla last year held a series of meetings where it was argued that the "confidentiality clause" dictated that only physical meetings of the panels can be held.

21 members of vulnerable tribes infected

Activists warn of rapid spread among isolated communities in rural Odisha

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR



A big crowd at a vegetable market on the eve of the weekend lockdown in Bhubaneswar. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

positive in Parasali panchayat of Kalyansinghpur block in Rayagada district.

Diverse tribes

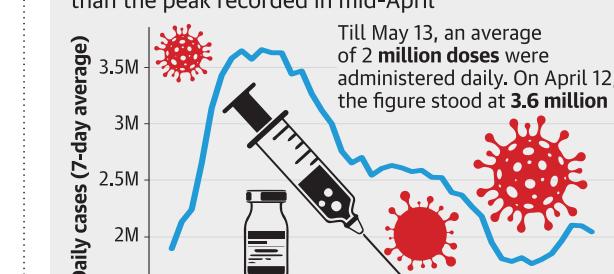
Odisha has among the largest and most diverse tribal populations in the country. Of the 62 tribal groups residing in Odisha, 13 are recognised as PVTGs. According to the 2011 Census, Odisha's share of the country's total tribal population was 9%. Tribals constitute 22.85% of State's population.

The PVTGs such as Bonda, Birhor, Chukta Bhunja, Didayi, Dongaria Kandha, Hill Kharia, Juang, Kutia Kondh, Lanja Saora, Lodha, Mankirdia, Paudi Bhuyan and Saora have been identified on the basis of stagnant or diminishing populations, subsistence level of economy associated with pre-agricultural stages of hunting, food gathering and shifting cultivation, and relative physical isolation.

According to reports, four members of Dongria Kondh, another PVTG, have tested

Prolonged slump

Average daily COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in India in May continued to be significantly lower than the peak recorded in mid-April



3.05 lakh new cases, 3,438 deaths recorded

Karnataka reports 41,779 infections

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

India recorded 3,05,372 new COVID-19 cases and 3,438 deaths till 9.30 p.m. on Friday. The country has so far reported a total of 2,43,51,601 cases and 2,65,791 deaths.

Karnataka reported 41,779 infections, followed by Maharashtra (39,923) and Kerala (34,694). Maharashtra also recorded 695 casualties, followed by Karnataka (373) and Uttar Pradesh (312).

As many as 3,21,693 recoveries were recorded on the day, taking the total recoveries to 2,00,73,473.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab, Tripura, Nagaland, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh. The data are sourced from the respective States' health bulletins.

Around 18.75 lakh samples were tested on Thursday (the results for which

BSF recovers arms dropped by drone

Drone crossed over from Pakistan into Samba sector

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

BSF said it launched a search operation and around 11.30 a.m. and recovered a wrapped packet.

"The yellow colour polythene bag was spotted in a field. It contained 1 AK-47, 1 pistol, 1 magazine 15 round of 9 mm, 1 wooden frame (used to attach payload with drone) and wrapping material," a BSF spokesman said.

Asha workers struggle with pandemic surveillance in rural Uttar Pradesh

They lack adequate protective gear and monitoring kits for door-to-door visits

OMAR RASHID
UNNAO

"People don't take us seriously. Why would they, when I cannot even record their temperature and oxygen level for them," says Veermati Singh, standing at her door in Nindemau, a village in Unnao.

An Asha worker, among the thousands of frontline workers tasked with surveillance and monitoring of COVID-19 in rural Uttar Pradesh, Ms. Singh speaks of the obstacles faced by her in the absence of proper protective gear and equipment.

In addition to its ongoing routine surveillance, the State government from May 5 to May 9 reportedly carried out a special drive for identifying symptomatic patients and testing them through village-level over 60,000 *nigrani samiti* or surveil-



Daily ordeal: Asha workers say they need more support to carry out their work in the villages of Uttar Pradesh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

lance committees. Ms. Singh has neither a thermal scanner nor a pulse oximeter nor has she been provided with sanitizers. All she was provided was a medicine kit with some strips of tablets, mainly for fever, a face mask and a pair of gloves for the surveillance work. Her task requires her to go door-to-door and record the temperature and oxygen levels of residents, and send those with symptoms for self-isolation or testing to the local community health centre. She checks on 20-25 households in a day.

"How do I save myself with one mask? I can't wear the same gloves daily when I go door-to-door. If I do, I would be bringing COVID to my house," she says. Ms. Singh is particularly worried about her infant grandson.

Besides the personal risk of coming in contact with a lot of

untested people, Ms. Singh says the Asha workers do not get much cooperation from villagers as they lack the authority and resources, and also because many in rural U.P. are hesitant to reveal their symptoms. "Due to some fear, they say they are all normal even if they have cough, cold and chest infection," Ms. Singh says.

In Khopura Bhatt village, an anganwadi worker Suman Sharma and Asha worker Manorama also lack thermal scanners and pulse oximeters. The one they used last year was taken back by the former village *pradhan* (village headmen) after a couple of days this year and they do not have replacement, they say.

Rama Kanti, a 'Super Asha' who has 20 Asha workers under her in Hasanganj block, says that last July, COVID-19 kits were provided to the workers but some *pradhans* took the equipment back and did not provide anything this year.

While a village may have 3-4 Asha workers – one for every 1,000 residents – only one of them gets the thermal scanner and oximeter, said Ms Kanti, admitting that if each Asha worker was provided a kit, the surveillance work would be more efficient and quicker.

Ms. Kanti also claims that Asha workers are yet to get paid for last year's surveillance work. "We are working with a lot of risks. What will happen to our families if something happens to us," she asked.

Geetanjali Maurya, State head of the Anganwadi Karmachari Association Uttar Pradesh, also says her workers were not provided any kit or equipment dur-

ing the second wave. The Additional Development Officer (Industry, service and business) of Hasanganj, Lal Madhav Singh, a district block official, said all villages had already been provided one thermal scanner and oximeter each last year. But he pointed out that not all Ashas in the village are given the tools. "Only one of them gets it," he said.

SPECIAL

The equipment from some villages was borrowed for the recently-concluded panchayat polls but were soon returned, he added.

Mr. Singh said there were control rooms at the block and district levels to educate the Asha and anganwadi workers about spreading awareness.

The government on May 11 informed the Allahabad High Court that under the special drive since May 5, a survey was

done of 2.92 crore houses in the whole State, out of which 4.24 lakh persons were found with certain symptoms and considered as "suspected" cases and provided with medicine kits.

The World Health Organization, which is supporting the State government in training and micro planning for the drive, said the State has deployed 141,610 teams and 21,242 supervisors from the Health Department to ensure all rural areas are covered.

Swatanshu, a WHO official working in Unnao, said they had 17 members in Unnao. The WHO teams train the *nigrani samiti* members on how to cover the containment zones and also monitor their work, he said.

Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said apart from the special drive, under the routine surveillance in the State, they had contacted over 16.8 crore people in over 3 crore households.

Congress flays Centre's vaccine policy

Purchase should be centralised and distribution decentralised, says Rahul Gandhi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and P. Chidambaram on Friday slammed the Union government on the vaccination policy.

Mr. Gandhi said on Twitter, "GOI's vaccine policy is compounding the problem. Vaccine purchase should be centralised and distribution decentralised. India cannot afford this". The former party chief pitched for centralised purchase and decentral-



Rahul Gandhi

ised distribution of vaccines.

In a series of tweets, Mr. Chidambaram pointed out the Narendra Modi government's "flip-flops" on the issue of compulsory licensing to allow other manufacturers to produce the approved vaccines. The former Union Finance Minister tweeted to ask if people could trust "this government to protect one's life and livelihood".

"We have heard of double-faced, but this government has three faces. Face 1: India

joins South Africa and tells the world that IPR (patent rights) for Covid vaccines must be suspended. Face 2:

On May 9, the government files an affidavit in the SC claiming that bringing vaccine patents under the statutory regime (that is compulsory licensing) will be "counter productive". Face 3: On May 13, NITI Aayog member, Dr. V.K. Paul supports the manufacture of Covaxin by other private manufacturers (through compulsory licensing)," he said.

In another set of tweets, he targeted the government

on the Central Vista project that includes the construction of a new Parliament building and new homes for the Prime Minister and the Vice-President.

"Cost of vaccines to vaccinate all people over 18 years (about 102 crores) is ₹35,000 crore. Cost of Central Vista is ₹20,000 – may be more. Cost of one person's vanity = 60 per cent of the value of lives of the adult population of India. This is 'sabka saath, sabka vikas,'" he tweeted.

Pappu Yadav's wife threatens to go on fast

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

Ranjit Ranjan, wife of imprisoned former MP from Madhepura and president of the Jan Adhikar Party (Loktantrik) Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, has said that if he is not released from jail within two days she "would sit on a fast-un-to-death".

Mr. Pappu Yadav's arrest, first for violation of lockdown norms and then under a 32-year-old kidnapping case from Madhepura on May 11, has also created fissures among the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) allies and opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

"Pappu Yadav's fight for exposing lack of medical facilities in hospitals for COVID-19 patients will continue in the State", Ms. Ranjan told *The Hindu*.



Patient wait: A long queue at a vaccination centre in Ahmedabad. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

Nearly 2 cr. vaccine doses to be given free to States

Wastage should be minimised: Centre

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Central government would supply 191.99 lakh doses of vaccines (162.5 lakh Covishield and 29.49 lakh Covaxin) free of cost to the States and Union Territories (UT) during May 16-31, said a release issued by the Union Health Ministry on Friday.

"The delivery schedule for this allocation will be shared in advance. States have been requested to direct the concerned officials to ensure rational and judicious utilization of allocated doses and minimise the waste," said the Ministry.

India was the fastest country globally to reach the 17 crore target in 114 days. The U.S. took 115 days and China 119 days to administer the same amount of doses, it pointed out.

India was implementing the 'Liberalized Pricing and Accelerated National COV-19 Vaccination Strategy' from May beginning, wherein 50% of the available doses were earmarked for supply to the States/UTs, as free of cost supply from the Government of India channel, while the remaining 50% was available for direct procurement from the vaccine manufacturers by the States/UTs and private hospitals.

and beneficiary load of second doses in the coming fortnight. The cumulative number of doses administered in the country was nearly 18 crore (17.93 crore, as per a 7 a.m. provisional report). "COVID-19 vaccination drive has successfully completed 118 days wherein 17.89 crore doses have been administered to the identified beneficiaries through collaborative efforts of all States/UTs," said the Ministry.

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LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court to make public the segregated data of clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines administered under the Emergency Use Authorisation granted by the Drugs Controller General of India.

Former member of National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation Dr. Jacob Puliyel, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, asked the court to direct the government, its bodies and the vaccine manufacturers – the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech – to transparently put out clinical trial and vaccination data, including the recording and reporting of adverse events.

"Non-disclosure of this important data violates the basic ethics of clinical research that requires results of clinical research studies to be published and brought to the knowledge of the medical community, participants in the research and the general population," the petition said.

Further, the petition urged the court to direct the government to not issue any "coercive mandates" for use of "these inadequately tested vaccines".

Mr. Bhushan argued that courts should "reiterate that vaccine mandates are repugnant to the right of humans to autonomy and right to self-determine what may be injected into their bodies".

Reaching out



Getting protected: Vaccine being administered to a person from the transgender community in Guwahati on Friday. Forty of them received the shots, and the initiative would be expanded to other parts of Assam, officials said. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

Plea seeks fewer curbs for tea workers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

An association of tea planters has requested the Assam government to relax the COVID-19 restrictions for workers and vehicles of tea estates within a 5 km radius of urban and semi-urban areas.

The government had issued an order on May 12 shutting down government and private offices, religious places and weekly markets in urban and semi-urban areas for 15 days.

Agricultural and tea garden activities were allowed to continue with strict observance of COVID-19 appropriate behaviour. But some tea factories and plantations are within the 5 km radius of urban and semi-urban areas, the North Eastern Tea Association (NETA) pointed out in a letter to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) on Friday. The association has requested the ASDMA to treat tea as an essential commodity.

Protect human rights of the marginalised, urge academics

Provisions, medicines should be made free for the poor'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The scale of lives and livelihoods lost now in India is overwhelming

SHILPI SRIVASTAVA
Institute of Development Studies, U.K.

the academics said in a statement.

Reviewing the impact of the first wave, the academics said the crisis was the most acute for marginalised and minority groups such as Dalits and informal workers.

"Although the current outbreak appears far more pervasive with high infection and mortality rates across the population, including the middle-class and elites, researchers warn that so far, reporting has centred on India's cities and the full scale of the impact on rural areas is so far unknown," it said.

Professor Lyla Mehta, Professorial Fellow at the U.K.-based Institute of Development Studies and co-

author of the SSHAP briefing, said: "In India's first COVID-19 wave we saw how the pandemic was politicised to target minority groups, suppress dissent and undermine constitutional values. It's essential that discriminatory practises are halted, and that basic provisions, medicines and vaccines are made freely available to all."

A research fellow at the institute and co-author of the briefing, Dr. Shilpi Srivastava said: "The scale of lives and livelihoods lost now in India is overwhelming. For the most marginalised groups we know that the pandemic exacerbates existing inequalities and vulnerabilities and without support their futures will be in peril. They must be placed at the centre of future recovery plans and their voices, experiences and needs be put at the forefront of policymaking and preparedness plans."

THE MARINE PRODUCTS EXPORT DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India) PANAMPILLY NAGAR, KOCHI, KERALA

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST NOTICE

MPEDA invites EOI from reputed solution providers for Automation of Farm enrollment programme and Pre Harvest Test programme and integration of both programmes.

Detailed EOI document can be downloaded from the website <https://mpeda.gov.in/>

Interested solution providers who meet the eligibility criteria specified in the EOI document may submit their technical proposal with all the necessary enclosures duly signed by authorized signatory before the closing hours.

The proposal shall be submitted online through email to Director, MPEDA [karthikeyan@mpeda.gov.in](mailto:kartikeyan@mpeda.gov.in) upto 17.00 Hrs.

Queries if any, may be raised to Director, MPEDA (Email: [karthikeyan@mpeda.gov.in](mailto:kartikeyan@mpeda.gov.in); Mobile: 9445267196)

Tender No. RGCB/PUR/21/21

May 10, 2021

RAJIV GANDHI CENTRE FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY

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Tender No. RGCB/PUR/21/21

May 10, 2021

TENDER NOTICE INVITING ONLINE BIDS

Item: SUPPLY, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF MICRO RAMAN SPECTROMETER & ACCESSORIES.

Last Date and Time of Submission of Bids (Technical and Price Bids): JUNE 14, 2021, 15.00 Hrs. Date and Time of Opening of Technical Bids: JUNE 14, 2021, 15.30 Hrs.

Tender forms can be downloaded from our e-Tendering Portal (<https://rgcb.euniwizare.com>). Interested Bidders shall enrol on the e-Procurement module of the portal

<https://rgcb.euniwizare.com> by clicking on the link "Bidder Enrolment". Enrolment Charges and Tender Processing Fee as applicable shall be payable to the Application Service Provider (ASP), M/S. ITI Ltd., Bangalore.

Sd/-,

Controller of Administration



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT & PANCHAYATI RAJ

(An Organisation of the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India) Rajendranagar, Hyderabad – 500 030.

The National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR), Hyderabad, an autonomous national institution under the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India, proposes to engage the following project positions for the RGS-A National Project Management Unit (NPMU) at Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), New Delhi, for a period of one year on contractual basis –

1. Consultant (Women and Child Development)

– 1 No.

2. Consultant (Agriculture and Allied Sectors)

– 1 No.

3. Consultant (Education)

– 1 No.

4. Consultant (Livelihood, Poverty Alleviation and Income Generation)

<p

186 elephants killed on rail tracks in over 10 years

At 62, Assam accounted for the highest number of casualties

WILSON THOMAS
COIMBATORE

A total of 186 elephants were killed after being hit by trains across India between 2009-10 and 2020-21, according to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

According to the data furnished by the Project Elephant Division of the Ministry, Assam accounted for the highest number of elephant casualties on railway tracks (62), followed by West Bengal (57), and Odisha (27). Uttar Pradesh saw just one death.

Trains claimed the highest number of pachyderms in 2012-13, when 27 elephants were killed in 10 States as per the data accessed by activist R. Pandiyaraja from Tenkasi district in Tamil Nadu through the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

K. Muthamizh Selvan, Scientist 'D' and Central Public Information Officer (Project Elephant), said in the RTI reply that various measures had been taken to avoid elephant casualties on railway lines.

According to the Ministry,

Elephant deaths in India due to train hits from 2009-10 to 2020-21

STATE	NO. OF DEATHS
Assam	62
West Bengal	57
Odisha	27
Uttarakhand	14
Kerala	9
Jharkhand	7
Tamil Nadu	5
Karnataka	3
Tripura	1
U.P.	1
Total	186

Source: MoEFCC. Data up to December 31, 2020

A Permanent Coordination Committee was constituted between the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) and the MoEFCC for preventing elephant deaths in train accidents.

Key measures

The formation of coordination committees of officers of Indian Railways and State Forest Departments, clearing of vegetation along rail-

way tracks to enable clear view for loco pilots, using signage boards at suitable points to alert loco pilots about elephant presence, moderating slopes of elevated sections of railway tracks, setting up underpass/overpass for safe passage of elephants, regulation of train speed from sunset to sunrise in vulnerable stretches, and regular patrolling of vulnerable stretches of railway tracks by frontline staff of the Forest Department and wildlife watchers are among other initiatives the Ministry has undertaken.

The MoEFCC also stated that it released ₹212.49 crore to elephant range States under Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) of Project Elephant to protect elephants, their habitat and corridors, to address man-elephant conflicts, and for the welfare of captive elephants, between 2011-12 and 2020-21.

Kerala stood at the top in getting CSS funds of ₹35.39 crore during the period. Punjab received the lowest of the funds – ₹1.82 lakh, according to the RTI document.



Jumbo tragedy: A team of veterinarians checking on Friday the carcasses of the elephants killed in Nagaon district of Assam two days ago. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

Deaths in Assam to be probed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Assam's Minister for Environment and Forest, Parimal Suklabaidya, ordered an enquiry into the death of 18 elephants on a hillock in central Assam's Nagaon district on Wednesday night.

The probe was ordered after Mr. Suklabaidya and a team of senior officials, veterinarians and wildlife specialists inspected the site of the incident on Friday. The seven-member enquiry

committee has been asked to submit a detailed investigation report within 15 days.

"Preliminary investigation reveals the elephants probably died due to lightning ... But the exact cause for their tragic death will be known after the post mortem and inquiry report," said Mr. Suklabaidya.

Locals said the hillock where the elephants died is close to Mikir Bamuni Grant, where Adivasi and Karbi tribal people have been prot-

esting the takeover of 276 bighas of farmland for a solar plant allegedly through doctored documents.

"Assam forest officials were evasive when we went to the solar plant site for a fact-finding report. The death of the elephants indicates that the land where the private company is setting up the solar power project is part of an active elephant corridor," said Leo Saldanha of the Delhi Solidarity Group.

HC dismisses live-in couple's petition

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab and Haryana High Court dismissed a petition seeking protection to a live-in couple, saying, "if such protection as claimed is granted, the entire social fabric of society would get disturbed".

The petitioners, a 21-year-old boy and an 18-year-old girl from Jind district in Haryana, had approached the court for protection of their "life and liberty" as they allegedly faced intimidation from her family since their elopement.

The single Bench of Justice Anil Kshetarpal, in the order on May 13, said: "Petitioner no.1 is barely 18 years old whereas petitioner no.2 is 21 years old. They claim to be residing together in a live-in relationship and claim protection for their life and liberty from the relatives of petitioner no.1. In the considered view of this Bench, if such protection as claimed is granted, the entire social fabric of the society will get disturbed."

The Trinamool Congress leadership on Friday continued to target the Governor, stating that he is transgressing his "Constitutional limitations".

Meanwhile, Mr. Dhankar said on social media that he will be visiting post-poll violence affected areas in Nandigram on Saturday.

In another development, a team of National Commission of Scheduled Caste led by its chairperson Vijay Sampala visited violence affected areas in Bardhaman and South 24 Parganas.



Spot study: Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar meeting Sitalkuchi violence victims in Cooch Behar on Thursday. ■ PTI ■

Dhankhar visits Assam areas bordering Bengal

Nandigram visit today, says Governor

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday visited areas of Assam bordering the State and said it was a matter of shame that the people of West Bengal had to take shelter in adjoining States to escape violence.

"Nothing can be more shameful for us than people of West Bengal taking shelter in other States," he told journalists in Siliguri.

The Governor, who visited Cooch Behar district on Thursday against the advice of the State government, said the government had not done anything to contain the post-election violence.

"Even the media did not do anything. It is an open secret who the perpetrators were," said the Governor.

Mr. Dhankhar said on

Twitter, "Would urge @MamataOfficial to take a cooperative and constitutional stance and give up confrontation approach as this alone can blossom democracy, promote rule of law and serve the people. Would take initiative to so accomplish by deliberating with CM."

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Defence production policy to be issued soon

The second negative import list is delayed due to the pandemic, says official

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

The second negative import list, which has been now rechristened as the positive list, has been delayed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and will be issued soon by the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), said Sanjay Jaju, Additional Secretary Defence Production.

The final version of the 'Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) 2020' will also be put out very soon, said Mr. Jaju, speaking at a webinar on "defence testing and certification for speedy procurement" by PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The draft DPEPP 2020 was released last August for public feedback. Once it comes into effect, it will serve as the overarching guiding document of the Defence Ministry for boosting domestic defence manufacturing as well as exports. The first negative import list is

sued last year had listed 101 military items that cannot be imported from abroad.

Industry consultations

As part of efforts to promote the role of private sector in defence manufacturing testing facilities of DPSUs and DRDO are being opened up for use by private sector, while new ones are planned to be set up under the Defence testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS).

On this, Mr. Jaju said that

Malerkotla is Punjab's 23rd district

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister, Captain Amarinder Singh, on Friday declared Malerkotla as the 23rd district of the State.

The Chief Minister made these announcements during the State-level celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr, held virtually in view of the second wave of COVID-19 infections. He underscored India's secular character, which he said was manifested in the defeat of communal forces in the recent Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Capt. Singh said the conversion of Malerkotla into a district, which was a long-standing demand of the locals, would ease their hardships and enable them to resolve their administrative problems seamlessly.

Initially, the CM said, the sub-divisions of Malerkotla and Ahmedgarh, as well as the sub-tehsil of Amargarh, would be included in the newly created district. The process of bringing villages under the jurisdiction of Malerkotla district would begin later, after the conclusion of census operations, he added.

The Chief Minister directed the Deputy Commissioner, Sangrur, to find a suitable building to immediately commence the functioning of the District Administration office.

Bengal farmers get benefits of PM Kisan scheme

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee says Centre was delaying the transfer

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The farmers in West Bengal on Friday got the benefits of PM Samman Kisan Nidhi even as Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accused of the Centre of delaying the transfer.

About 7 lakh farmers in the State got benefits of the Central scheme where ₹2,000 were transferred to their bank accounts. During the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi released the eighth instalment of over ₹20,000 crore to more than 9.5 crore farmer beneficiaries under the scheme.

The PM Kisan Samman Nidhi has been a matter of confrontation between the Centre and the West Bengal government for almost three

years. The non-implementation of the scheme has dominated the discourse during the recently concluded State Assembly election. Mr. Modi in his election speeches had claimed that ₹18,000 will be transferred to the bank accounts of 70 lakh farmers from the first Cabinet meeting of the BJP government.

The Trinamool Congress government had initially opposed the implementation of the scheme. It had said that the money should be disbursed through the State government. The TMC government had stated that the 'Krishak Bandhu' scheme of providing cash incentives to the farmers of the State is better than the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi.

Open letter

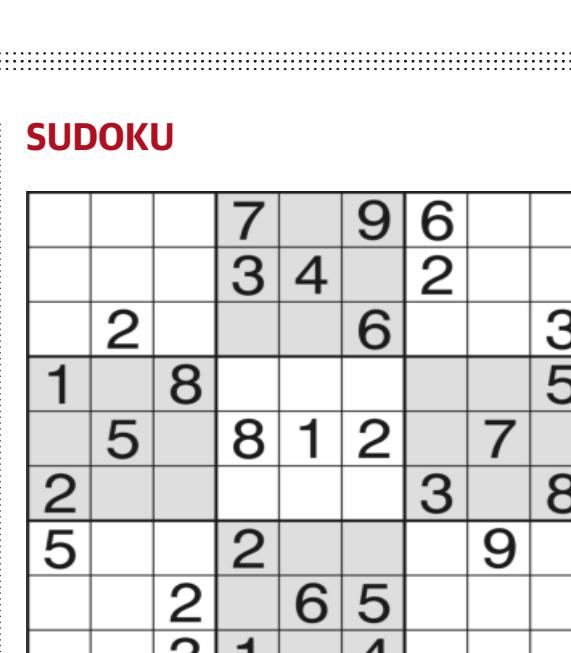
In an open letter dated May 13, Ms. Banerjee accused the Centre of delaying the disbursement of money under the scheme and said she had first started the 'Krishak Bandhu' scheme in 2018 which was a "model for entire country".

"You all were supposed to get ₹18,000 but have received

a very small amount. Even this sum would not have been transferred had we not fought for it. We will continue this fight till you get the entire allocation," Ms. Banerjee said in her letter.

Meanwhile, the State Home Department in a tweet stated that West Bengal did not receive any invitation for the PM Kisan fund release programme. "Due to demand and actions of the CM and the GOWB, 7 lakh farmers of West Bengal got their due entitlement, the first instalment of Kisan Samman Nidhi today by direct transfer as per data submitted by the State. The State will fight for its farmers. It is clarified that West Bengal did not receive any invitation for the PM Kisan fund release programme."

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13247

C	O	W	S	L	I	P	C	A	S	S	A	V	A
A	I	E	O	E	D	N							
N	A	S	A	L	N								
A	S	A	N	S	A								
N	A	S	A	N	S								
S	O	R	C	L	A	E	H						
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R	O	P	E	L	A	T							
O	P	E	L	A	T								
P	E	L	A	T									

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

FAITH

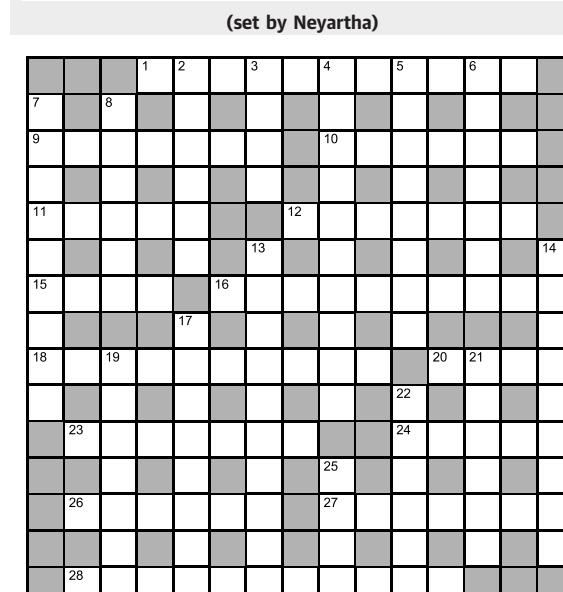
Custodians of the tradition

The term 'Sanatana dharma' refers to the moral and ethical way of life that governs the overall individual and social development of people through the ages. The credit should go to the acharyas in the spiritual tradition who have imbibed the sacred teaching of the scriptures and handed it down without distortion to posterity, pointed out Asuri Sri Madhavachariar in a discourse. The Mundaka Upanishad captures the essence of the acharya or teacher as one who is well versed in the scriptures and is aware of the truth of Brahman; he follows the teachings impeccably even as he imparts it to his disciples. The disciples thus take in the salient aspects of disciplined learning and gradually qualify themselves to the role of the acharya for the next generation. So the lineage continues in a seamless manner.

Vedanta Desika has described the lineage of acharyas in the Vaishnava tradition which venerates the divine couple Goddess Sri and Lord Narayana together as the foremost acharya. The line continues with Nammazhwar, Nathamuni and his disciples. Though Nathamuni came much later and was not contemporaneous with Azhwars, he became his direct disciple through divine grace. It is through his efforts that the break in the timeless tradition has been restored in its pristine state. Known for his multi faceted accomplishments in the areas of Vedic scholarship, yoga, etc and also as a devout bhakta, he propitiated Nammazhwar and inherited the teaching directly from him. Nathamuni entrusted this tradition to his grandson Alavar who handed it down to Ramanuja through his immediate disciples. It was then left to Ramanuja to consolidate and propagate this valuable inheritance to posterity through his disciples.

It is customary to pay obeisance to acharya parampara.

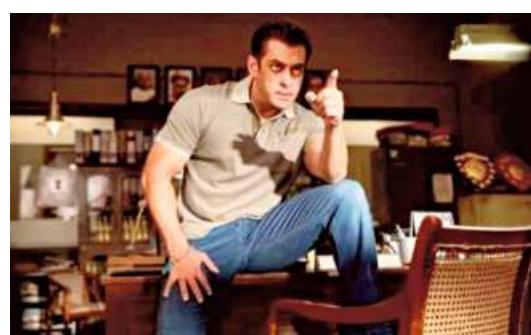
TH CROSSWORD (set by Neyartha)





Instapick

The Ultimate AI Masterpiece: While renowned artists like Andy Warhol have designed BMW Art Cars in the past, AI was used to create 'The Ultimate AI Masterpiece', a virtual art installation at Frieze New York 2021. An AI software cross-referenced over 50,000 art images, and then generated entirely new works of art that were projected on to the 8 Series Gran Coupe. bmw.com.



Talking point

Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai While critics have dissed the movie, calling it everything from mindless to cringeworthy while adding that Salman Khan is seen in the same mould once again, fans of Bhai presumably want exactly that! On May 13, over 1.25 million people tried to stream the Eid release, directed by Prabhu Deva, on ZEE5, causing the servers to crash around noon.

Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and other announcements to track.



Up close with Halston

Ryan Murphy's new five-part series on Netflix, *Halston*, starring Ewan McGregor, follows the legendary and openly gay 1970s fashion designer's life – from his designs that defined the look of the Studio 54 era, to his friendship with entertainer Liza Minnelli, and the rise and fall of his fashion empire. Meanwhile, Prince Harry and Oprah Winfrey's documentary series on mental health, *The Me You Can't See*, featuring stories from high-profile guests like Lady Gaga and Glenn Close will premiere on Apple TV+. May 21.



Macca on a stamp

Music icon Sir Paul McCartney is being honoured by *The Royal Mail* in a set of 12 special stamps (to be released on May 28), eight of which will feature artwork from his solo albums – from his 1970 debut to last year's *McCartney III*. Preorder on shop.royalmail.com. Early next week, *The Berklee College of Music* will present the second edition of *INO CON*, a globally-streamed music and technology conference that will host networking opportunities between startups, experts, artists. May 18-21. inocon2021.heysummit.com



Motherhood memoirs

Actor Kalki Koechlin, who became a first-time mum last year, takes an honest look at motherhood in the form of personal essays, journal entries, and anecdotes in her book, *The Elephant in the Womb*. Featuring illustrations by Valeriya Polyanchnik, it will be published later in the year. Speaking of pachyderms, British author Paul Pickering's new novel, *Elephant*, to be released today, is a love story that spans two historical periods. Pickering has said there is an Indian connection as "the [titular] elephant has her roots in India".



The virtual stage

Catch a live reading of actor Ila Arun's play focussing on the loneliness of old age, *Yeh Raste Hain Pyar Ke*, presented by Surnai Theatre and Folk Arts Foundation in collaboration with Mumbai Theatre Guide. May 15, 7 pm. No entry fee. insider.in. Watch Chennai-based Theatre Nisha's productions of two short plays by playwright, author and comic strip artist Manjula Padmanabhan – *The Dhoobi's Wife* and *Famous Last Words*. The plays, directed by V Balakrishnan, have been pre-recorded. May 15, 16. ₹200 in.bookmyshow.com.



For the artists

Design platform Baro Market and brand agency Peepul have come together to help 10 artists. As part of *Chitrakar Relief Sale*, works by these artists can be purchased at baromarket.in. *9892213907. Surat-based Indian womenswear label *Saundh*, through its CSR arm *Ikjot*, has set up a helpline for those who have lost a loved one and need financial aid to perform the last rites. The initiative has a budget of ₹75 lakh and a maximum amount of ₹10,000 will be given to each family. *9924019434



Modern Love returns

Modern Love, based on the eponymous NYT column, has returned with a new season. From a meet-cute to open marriages, hear all the stories. New episodes every Wednesday on Spotify. Look beyond clothes and trends in a new podcast, *Shop Talk*, by radio network RED FM and digital magazine *The Voice of Fashion*. Hosted by the magazine's editor, Shefalee Vasudev, the podcast will feature conversations with India's leading designers, stylists, and crafts practitioners. On the RED FM India app.



One for the museums

With *International Museum Day* on May 18, museums around the world are marking the occasion under the theme, *The Future of Museums: Recover and Reimagine*. In China, a special exhibition featuring more than 50 rarely-exhibited artefacts from 23 museums and cultural heritage institutions will be launched at the Capital Museum in Beijing. May 17, 18. Farther away in Central America, the Museum of Belize is calling on high school students to create "clever and creative" memes on this year's theme.

APARNA NARRAIN

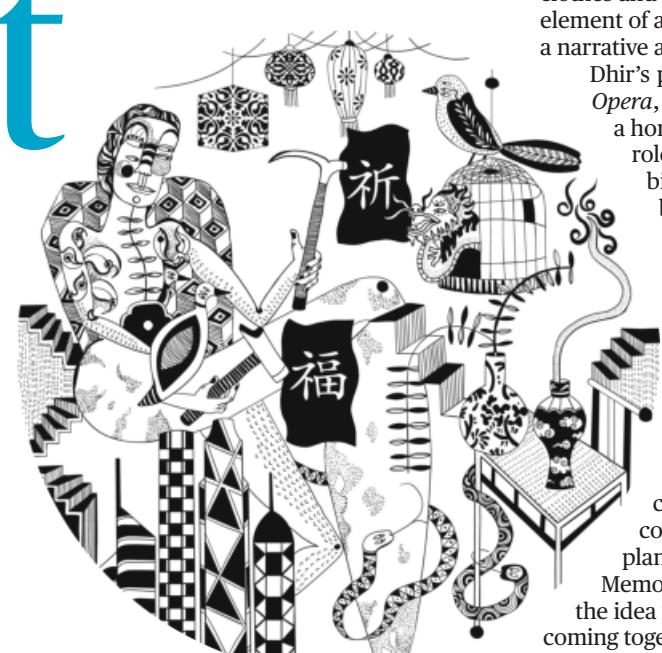
Neon signs and *mah-jongg* tiles, surreal three-eyed birds, and foxes wielding movie cameras. You'll spot these and more on four art plates designed by fashion designer Suket Dhir, Pakistani-American contemporary artist Anila Agha, architect and illustrator Sahiba Madan, and mural artist INSANE 51 respectively. The designers have brought their unique perspectives to 'A Memory of the Future', a series of artworks to be showcased at the hybrid Art Basel Hong Kong 2021.

Marriont Bonvoy, the travel programme of hotel chain Marriott International, is spearheading the project to spotlight the country as an arts and culture destination. It is being done in collaboration with The Plated Project, a charitable organisation that works with artists to create limited-edition plates (proceeds of sales are used for charity).

"[Art Basel] Hong Kong is

Plate of the art

Designer Suket Dhir and others explore the plate as canvas for Art Basel Hong Kong 2021



working on promoting traditions, specifically Cantonese Opera [which involves music, singing, martial arts, acrobatics and acting]," says Dhir, adding that his clothes and prints feature a huge element of art because "they have a narrative and a story to tell".

Dhir's plate, titled *Cantonese Opera*, features a warrior on a horse (a quintessential role in the opera) with a bionic leg, surrounded by different wild animals, each documenting the scene. A squirrel holds a boom mike, a panther operates the spotlight. "I was thinking about playfulness, and experiencing life through these creatures who are our co-inhabitants on the planet. The concept was 'A Memory of the Future', so the idea was to do a sort of coming together of the past and the future – looking at a beautiful



(From left to right) Artworks by INSANE 51, Sahiba Madan, Suket Dhir, (below) Anila Agha

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

world where animals and humans coexist."

Explaining how he watched a lot of theatre to research the traditional art form, he says, "The warrior is a quintessential role, but usually played by a man in Cantonese Opera. Here, I've given role to a woman. That's also looking at how the future is, how [traditional] roles are now kind of dissolving; there aren't men's roles or women's roles, but people's roles."

A Memory of the Future will be available to view at Art Basel VIP Online Preview from May 19 to 21, after which it will be open to the public. Madan's plate focusses on hand-carved mah-jongg tiles, while Agha's is on handmade stencils, and INSANE 51's, titled *Neon Signs*, reflects the city at night. Details: artbasel.com



YARN IT!

Lockdown's super babies

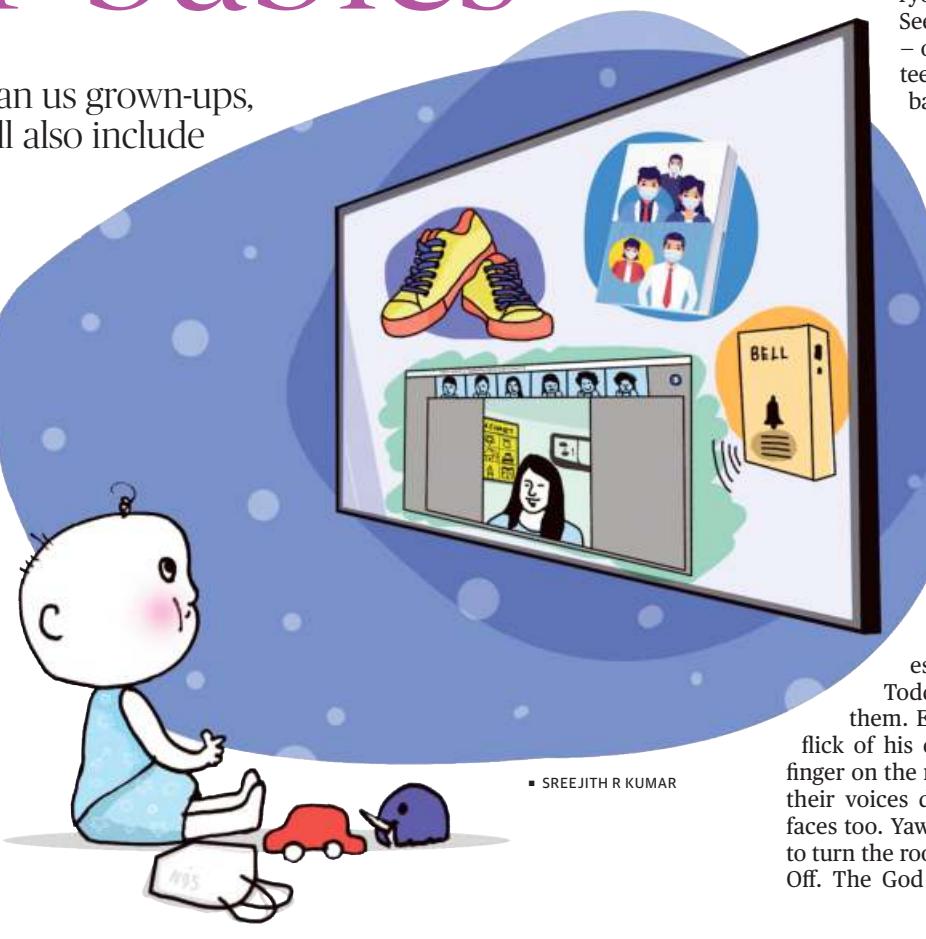
Stronger and braver than us grown-ups, this new generation will also include shoe-burning activists

JANE DE SUZA

A generous outflow of babies appeared during the pandemic – suggesting that Netflix probably came in second in the entertainment stakes while locked down. And no, Amazon Prime wasn't the first. Now growing up, these babies have demonstrated inexplicable syndromes that have psychologists scratching their heads. Recognise these?

Multiple Shoe Disorder

Lockdown Baby has no idea why a shoe exists, definitely not why many shoes do. She will refuse to wear any. She will grow up to single-footedly destroy the shoe industry which will accuse her of toe-much footscrimation. Worldwide, she will be feted for feats of feet-freeing. She will become a shoe-burning activist, and pad around



■ SREEJITH R KUMAR

barefoot, ankling for justice, baring her sole.

Lip-o-phobia

Lockdown Baby breaks down when shown people in a book. She is convinced that faces consist of eyes, eyebrows, and a large cloth patch. The only noses and mouths she sees are of her own parents. Everyone else is masked.

Seeing a stranger's nose – or God forbid, lips or teeth – is red alert! Big-bad-wolf equivalent in baby terms. Cover the faces in your book – and Baby will transform into a higher-order bookaholic instantly.

God Complex

Lockdown Toddler harbours the conspiracy theory that his school is a screen. Teachers and classmates are an inch tall, and in little cages on a laptop. The Toddler towers over them. Even better, with the flick of his chubby jam-covered finger on the mouse, he can make their voices disappear, and their faces too. Yawn! He decides when to turn the room of people off. On. Off. The God Complex will fade,

thank God (the one upstairs).

Bell Curve

No other sound will carve Lockdown Baby's growth as much as the doorbell. It rings and brings tidings of great joy. Nappies. Toys. Groceries and Mommy smiles. Baby's hearing evolves to better than an owl's. (Yes, owls have ears, one is up on their heads, and since your baby is in competition, go check this out now!) Baby can tell from the ring of the doorbell whether it is ice-cream or medicine for tummy-ache from that ice-cream.

Rubber-ball-ism

Contrary to what it suggests, this is not the shape that Baby will become, despite Mommy's complaints that all-eat-and-no-gym is rapidly turning her spherical. No. Lockdown Baby is a knockdown baby with an innate ability to bounce back. Having rolled through the toughest times, with no play and no playmates, with worry lines and whispers from those she loves, with the future as impenetrable as fog – Lockdown Baby will emerge fighting. The chubby legs will grow stocky enough to withstand any rocking of the boat, the sparkling eyes far-sighted, able to spot the faintest glimmer of a silver lining. Lockdown Baby will grow stronger and braver than we grown-ups give her credit for, and more, honestly, than we ourselves are.

Where Jane De Suza, author of *Flyaway Boy*, pokes her nose into our perfect lives.



APARNA NARRAIN

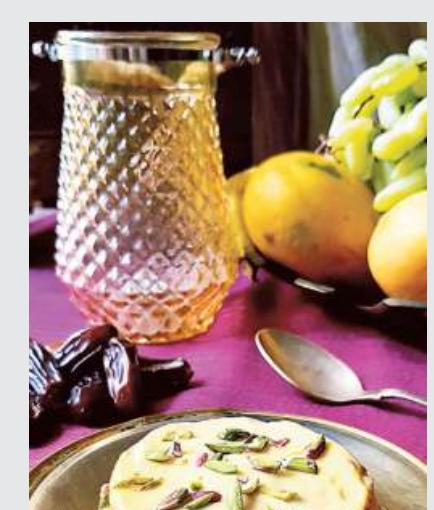
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"[Art Basel] Hong Kong is

TO DO

Belated Eid



Pitaara in South Delhi has an extended Eid celebration on until May 16, with chef Udit Maheshwari having put together delicacies from across India. There's *khoya keema samosas*, stuffed with *moong dal* and *mutton keema*; *Bohri hara masala chicken*, served with *tawa malai paratha*; *Moplah kozhi biryani* and more. At pitaarakitchen.in

Children and anxiety



Not-for-profit Routes 2 Roots is organising a series of digital workshops for children, to help overcome anxiety due to the lockdown and COVID-19. They have developed Virsa, a platform that children can log onto, to attend the interactive sessions, free of cost. Tools will include mindfulness and other ways of managing stress. At r2rvirsa.com; daily 8:30 am to 11 am; 11:30 am to 2 pm

Ahead of the launch of *Army of the Dead*, director Zack Snyder and actor Dave Bautista chat about taking zombie films to the next level and the global support for the SnyderVerse

DIVYA KALA BHAVAN

It's not every day you see Zack Snyder relaxed in his office in a hoodie. Someone rushes into the room and hands him a drink. Even over a video call with *The Hindu Weekend*, the filmmaker who delighted millions of fans with *Justice League: The Snyder Cut* is fine to comment a bit on "anti-Snyder Warner Brothers". After all, many fans still blame the latter not just for the decline of the DC Comics Extended Universe (DCEU) but also for snubbing the initial production of *Army of the Dead* (AOTD), which Netflix later adopted and is releasing on May 21.

"Netflix said, 'you want to make a crazy zombie movie, go do it!'" recalls Snyder. "The only downside was that I wanted to do more storylines and other things with this, and [laughs] it really had me thinking, 'I have to get my shit together.' I had been wallowing with Warner Brothers and the whole DCEU is just crazy." *Army of the Dead* is also the symbolic launch film of Snyder's rebranding of his production company, Stone Quarry Productions, with wife Deborah Snyder.

A zombie heist movie, AOTD – a prequel to Snyder's 2004 *Dawn of the Dead* – pulls together an odd rag-tag team of characters including strong and silent war veteran Scott Ward played by Dave Bautista, also present for the interview. In the film, Ward is commissioned by a Japanese billionaire to extract \$600 million from an underground safe underneath a zombie-raging Las Vegas. Now who would turn that down? For those



The resurrection of Zack Snyder

wondering if it would be riddled with clichés, Snyder points out, "We were not afraid of the clichés because we were going to play with them anyway; the film is not truly a parody."

Action with emotion
A big supporter of Snyder's vision in filmmaking, Bautista says he put his complete trust in the filmmaker. "It was not the easiest decision for me to make," he recalls, "One of the concerns was it is a big ensemble cast – where you're always together and geared up, and it takes time to reset when you take breaks – so you never know what you're going to get; like people who may not get along with one another which is a nightmare. But we were lucky and I have to give credit to Zack."

With a wealthy background in wrestling, Bautista – who says Hulk



(Clockwise from top) A scene from the sets, Zack Snyder, a snapshot of Snyder filming, and Dave Bautista ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Humming for Huma
While Snyder considers Huma Qureshi, who plays Geeta in the film, "the best" and a hard-worker, Bautista is regretful he did not share as many scenes with the *Leila* actor. "She's one of my favourite people in the film...we are constantly in touch for me to do a Bollywood film. A lot of people wouldn't expect this but I love to dance – can't sing – and drama. Huma is also really funny and, from what I hear, one hell of a cook."



would probably be the best ally in a zombie heist – points out Marvel did not truly show how battle-ready he, as an actor, is. "I used to look around the set of the Marvel films and I thought 'I'm the guy who looks most like an action hero,'" he laughs, "But at the end of the day Drax gets his ass kicked more than any other Marvel character I've ever seen."

With AOTD, the film's stunt choreographer Damon Caro ensured Bautista harnessed his martial arts skills. Bautista recalls the scene where Ward has to put his wife down when she turns into a zombie. "It was choreographed to be very matter-of-fact and very violent, and I stopped the whole stunt team and said, 'this is wrong, put yourself in this guy's place.' The world stops for Scott here, so it needed to be more emotional. So the film let me have that freedom."

Bautista is a living testament that grandfathers, too, are up for some zombie action (he became a grandfather

even before he turned 40). At this, he laughs and responds, "I started kind of late in life but I've always needed to train and I rely on it. If I'm not training or venting that way, I'm not the happiest person."

Up close and personal
Snyder's role as AOTD's cinematographer, in addition to director, made for an immersive experience. Talking about how he reached out to Red Digital Cinema – the holy grail of film tech – to get custom-made cameras just for this project, he says, "The lensing was really particular and we did a lot of testing to achieve this specific look in the film."

Bautista says he has never worked with a director who also had a camera on his shoulder. Through the film there are tight shots of Ward's struggles, which placed Snyder and Bautista in an intimate space of collaboration. "I took this role in the hopes of getting to show a different side of myself as a full-range actor and of an action hero. Zack got excited about these moments of emotion that weren't written on the page [of guilt, fear, shame, anger], and I just leaped up in my respect for him."

The Vegas effect
The film, taking place in Las Vegas – a city of sin and excess – serves as a remarkable metaphor for both Snyder and Bautista, with the latter observing that if you take the story out of Vegas, it would not work as well. He elaborates, "If you are to live in excess of any form, there's not a bright future – history has shown that." Bautista, who fell in love with the set design, shares he feels guilty about not taking home a souvenir – a rite of passage for many actors. "There are things I wish I'd taken [laughs]. But Zack made me the first-ever *Army of the Dead* watch-box which is proudly displayed in my collection."

Snyder's take on Vegas is a little more dynamic, naturally. "Vegas is a weirdo adult amusement park and haunted house where the scale of investment is so high and it does draw the entire world to it. The city becomes singular, where other gambling meccas around the world have to do something else – they just can't compete. It was fun to explore the iconology. When you take it apart in its elements, it really shouldn't exist in the way and size it does; it's got that 'ghosts of the past' feel to it."

Meanwhile, Bautista is not done with the 'Of the Dead' universe; he is confirmed to appear in *Army of Thieves*, which details Ward's story, and he is looking forward to more bonding time with Snyder.

FOOD SPOT



RAHUL VERMA

A friend sent us a food package that gave us enormous joy. The parcel consisted of various kinds of powders in sealed packets for making *dosas* and *idlis*, along with smaller packs of *podi* or 'gun powder'. Sold by a Bengaluru group, FarmVeda's mixes are superb. Organic and healthy – yet sublimely tasty – it has powders for millet or mixed grain *dosas*, semolina and ragi *idlis* and so on. For several days in a row, we had delicious breakfasts and teatime snacks.

All good things come to an end, and these did, too. But the dosa mixes left this great yearning in me for good southern Indian vegetarian fare. I thought of ordering some food from Naivedyam, which has been selling southern Indian dishes largely from Karnataka. It has several outlets in Delhi-NCR, including in Hauz Khas, Gurugram and Noida.

I placed my order: Udupi masala *dosa* (₹155), Naivedyam Maharaja Thali (₹345), Naivedyam Tiffin Thali (₹285) and something called *chow chow bhath* (₹155) because I liked the name.

The food came at the dot of 1 pm – my lunch hour – in clean white cloth bags that somehow promised hygiene. The *thalis* – disposable trays with slots for the various dishes – were tightly secured with crisscrossing rubber bands, and the *dosa* and other items came in



Bhath HOUSE

South Indian food from a packet and a restaurant – both equally good



Comfort food (Top) Udupi masala dosa; (above) tiffin thali ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

brown paper packets.

The *dosa* was whisked away by a *dosa* lover at home, and my wife and I focused on the Maharaja *thali*, which was enough to feed two. It consisted of parathas, *puri*, lemon rice, a dry vegetable preparation, vegetable in gravy, sambar, *rasam*, *papad*, pickle and dessert.

I started with the *puri* and a capsicum-potato vegetable – which was mildly hot, but delicious. The other vegetable preparation was of diced beetroot and dal. I tried that with the paratha, which, unfortunately, was so rubbery that my teeth protested vehemently.

I enjoyed the lemon

rice and curd-rice. Over the latter I broke a hot and fried chilly. The somewhat sweet *sambhar* was well flavoured, too. The *rasam* looked good, but, alas, it disappeared before I could say Haradanahalli.

Of course, what took the cake was the sweet and savoury *chow chow bhath* – a dollop of sweet *kesari*, served with *upma*, chutney on the side. This was delightful, and reminded me of the *nagori halwa* that I used to eat in Old Delhi once upon a time when Corona was merely a shoe brand. The *nagori halwa*, as you may remember, is a small piece of crisp *puri* that you eat stuffed with *suji halwa*.

Teatime was memorable. The tiffin *thali* consisted of an *idli*, a *vada*, a small *dosa*, one small *pakora*, some *upma*, curd rice, lemon rice, *kesari bhath*, *sambhar*, and chutney.

The rice dishes were kept for dinner, and the family of three shared the snacks. The *vada* was crisp and golden on the outside and smooth and soft within, and the rice *idli* soft.

This was bliss. Till the friend sends us some more FarmVeda packets, Naivedyam it shall be.

The writer is a seasoned food critic



KARISHMA UPADHYAY

Filmmaker Nikhil Pherwani met 45-year-old Abuli Mamaji, one of the leads of his debut film *Ahaan*, in a care facility for individuals with autism, Down syndrome (DS), and other learning disabilities. "The first thing he said to me was that he loves acting and Salman Khan," Pherwani recalls. *Ahaan*, which had its theatrical release earlier this year and just dropped on Netflix, is a film about a young man with DS who finds a friend in an older neighbour struggling with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), played by Arif Zakaria. The film, which Pherwani and his brother Abhishek have produced under their banner, Will Find Way Films, also stars Plabita Borthakur, Niharika Singh, and Rajit Kapoor.

It wasn't enough for Pherwani to tell a story about an under-represented section of our society, he also wanted them to be seen on screen. "We talk about inclusion but I don't think we see enough of it. When you watch world cinema, filmmakers there go the extra step. I didn't want to hire an actor, put prosthetics on him, and try to replicate behaviour. In Abuli, I found someone with Down syndrome who wanted to act. He was really passionate about it and wanted to give it his all," he says.

On the sets with Mamaji
Before he started filming, Pherwani did multiple rounds of workshops with just Mamaji to get him acclimated

Not satisfied with how developmental disabilities were portrayed in Indian cinema, director Nikhil Pherwani cast an actor with Down syndrome in his debut film, *Ahaan*

tised to the camera. "I started with giving him simple instructions like walking towards the camera. I just wanted to see if he'd get nervous in front of it and how he'd react to instructions." The second stage involved getting him to 'act'. "Obviously he had never done anything like this before. So, we had to figure out a way for him to deliver various expressions. For example, I would tell him to imagine how he felt when his mother scolded him. He is very smart so he'd follow instructions quite well," he adds.

It was during the second set of workshops that the director



looks at people with developmental disabilities with either fear or sympathy, but we don't treat them 'normally'. There have been other films about people with disabilities but I always felt the gaze wasn't right. I wanted to make a film where the audience experiences their zest for life and optimism."

Ahaan is now streaming on Netflix

As conflict intensifies, Israel pounds Gaza

Army says its overnight operation involved jets, tanks hitting a Hamas tunnel; denies ground invasion

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

GAZA CITY

Israel bombarded Gaza with artillery and air strikes on Friday following a new barrage of rocket fire from the Hamas-run enclave, intensifying a conflict that has claimed more than 120 lives.

The most intense fighting between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza since 2014 has been accompanied by an unprecedented outbreak of mob violence between Jews and Arabs inside Israel.

The Israeli Army said its overnight operation in Gaza involved fighter jets and tanks hitting a Hamas tunnel network dug under civilian areas. The bombardment saw huge fireballs turn the night sky orange. Towers and homes were levelled while rockets tore through the skies towards Israel.

Muhammad Najib, a 16-year-old resident of Gaza City's Rimal neighbourhood, compared the bombing to a video game. "It's like a horror film," he said. Umm Raed al-Baghdadi, one of scores of people who fled her home amid the shelling, said that Gazans "who have been in war since childhood... can-



Heavy firing: Rockets, right, being fired towards Israel from the northern Gaza Strip on Friday and Iron Dome interceptors rising to stop them. • AFP

not bear it anymore."

Israeli soldiers massed on the edge of the blockaded territory on Friday, and Army spokesman Jonathan Conricus took responsibility for an erroneous overnight report that ground forces had entered Gaza.

Meanwhile, clashes in the West Bank, described as among the most intense since the second intifada that began in 2000, left seven people dead from Israeli fire, the Palestinian Health Ministry said, as overall fatalities from strikes on Gaza

rose to 122. A woman in her 50s died on Thursday after she fell while seeking shelter from rockets, according to the Sheba Medical Center, bringing the death toll on the Israeli side to nine, including a child and a soldier.

Several airlines – including KLM, British Airways, Virgin, Lufthansa and Iberia – cancelled flights in the face of the aerial onslaught. There were few signs of the conflict abating. Since Monday, Palestinian militant groups have fired more than

1,800 rockets towards Israel, mostly towards southern cities, but also at Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Hundreds have been intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defence system.

Israel has hit 750 sites it described as military targets such as Hamas bomb-making facilities and the homes of senior militant commanders. Air strikes levelled three high-rise buildings.

Israel estimates that more than 30 leaders of Hamas and its ally Islamic Jihad have been killed.

UNSC to hold virtual meet tomorrow

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

The UN Security Council will hold a virtual public meeting on Sunday to address the soaring violence between Israel and the Palestinians, diplomats said on Thursday.

The U.S., which had blocked a session originally scheduled for Friday and proposed a meeting early next week, agreed to move the session – requested by Tunisia, Norway and China – to Sunday, sources said.

The U.S. said earlier on Thursday it wanted to give time for diplomacy.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters the U.S. had single-handedly obstructed the Security Council from speaking out on the crisis, adding that it was "ignoring the suffering of the Palestinian people".



The Iron Dome system intercepting rockets fired from the Gaza Strip. • AFP

whelmed with a barrage of projectiles. "The system has a 'saturation point'. It is capable of engaging a certain (unpublished) number of targets at the same time, and no more. Additional rockets fired in a crowded salvo could succeed in breaching defences and cause damage," Mr. Shapur says in the paper.

Mitigating strategies

Several assessments suggest that Hamas is developing mitigating strategies including lowering the trajectories of the projectiles while also continuing to accumulate thousands of rockets with improved precision. According to Mr. Shapur, one of the possible limitations is the system's inability to cope with very short range threats.

According to a 2013 research paper by Yiftah S. Shapur titled 'Lessons from the Iron Dome' in *Military*

EXPLAINER

and Strategic Affairs, one of the system's important advantages is its ability to identify the anticipated point of impact of the threatening rocket, to calculate whether it will fall in a built-up area or not, and to decide on this basis whether or not to engage it.

This prevents unnecessary interception of rockets that will fall in open areas and thus not cause damage, the paper states.

The system has intercepted thousands of rockets so far and, according to Rafael, its success rate is over 90%. The I-DOME is the mobile variant with all components on a single truck and C-DOME is the naval version of the system was taken up.

How does it work?
An Iron Dome battery consists of a battle management control unit, a detection and

engagement unit, a tracking radar and a firing unit of three vertical launchers, with 20 interceptor missiles each. The interceptor missile uses a proximity fuse to detonate the target warhead in the air. The Iron Dome is deployed in a layered defence along with David's Sling and Arrow missile defence system which are designed for medium and long-range threats.

According to a November 2017 commentary on RAND Corporation blog by Elizabeth M. Bartels, the system is built to intercept a certain

of projectiles and can be overwhelmed by a more capable adversary. According to Ms. Bartels, the planning scenario for a war with "Hezbollah involves 1,000-1,500 rockets per day fired at Israeli population centres."

Taking North Korea as a context, the study puts estimates of forward-deployed conventional artillery of

North Korea would be "capable of firing 500,000 shells

on a single truck and C-

DOME is the naval version

for deployment on ships.

The system has performed very well so far. However, the system can see

limitations when it is over-

U.S. forces pull out from Kandahar

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

KANDAHAR

The U.S. has completed its withdrawal from Kandahar Airfield in southern Afghanistan, officials said on Friday.

"They have not officially handed over the base to us but I can confirm they left the base on Wednesday," said Khoja Yaya Alawi, an Afghan Army spokesman.

Kabul mosque bombing kills 12 devotees

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL

A bomb ripped through a mosque in northern Kabul during Friday prayers, killing 12 worshippers, and wounding 15, Afghan police said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing, the latest in a surge in violence as U.S. and NATO troops have begun their final withdrawal from the country, after 20 years of war.

According to Afghan police spokesman, Ferdaws Farhamarz, the bomb exploded as prayers had begun. The mosque's Imam, Mofti Noor, was among the dead, the spokesman said and added that the initial police investigation suggests the Imam may have been the target.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid denied any insurgent connection to the mosque attack, condemning it and accusing Afghanistan's

intelligence agency of being behind the explosion.

Both the Taliban and government routinely blame each other for attacks. The attackers are rarely identified, and the public is seldom informed of the results of investigations into the many attacks in the capital.

One worshipper, Muhibullah Sahebzada, said he had just stepped into the building when the explosion went off. Stunned, he heard the sound of screams, including

those of children, as smoke filled the mosque.

The explosion comes on the second day of a three-day ceasefire announced by the Taliban for Id-ul-Fitr, which follows the fasting month of Ramzan. The Afghan government has said it would abide by a truce.

So far, many of the attacks in Kabul have been claimed by the Islamic State group's local affiliate, though the Taliban and government routinely trade blame.

Raw materials shortage, demand driving up prices of supplies: China

Indian envoy had raised concerns over soaring prices of critical medical provisions

ANANTH KRISHNAN

A day after India expressed concerns about rising prices of critical medical supplies from China, the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Beijing said soaring demand from India and a shortage of raw materials was driving costs up.

The Chinese government said on Friday companies there had received orders for more than 70,000 oxygen concentrators from Indian companies. Chinese media reports have said firms were adding production lines and hiring workers to meet the surge in orders.

On Thursday, India's Consul General in Hong Kong, Priyanka Chauhan, expressed concerns about rising prices to the *South China Morning Post*. "Our expectation at this point is that the supply chain should remain open and product prices should remain stable," she said. "Even if there is a little bit of supply demand pressure, there has to be some stability and predictability to product prices. And there



Hua Chunying

chains are stable and open. No one should intentionally disrupt and undermine the openness and stability of the global supply chains out of political agenda."

The spokesperson said the price issue was "a market factor determined by supply and demand." "We asked relevant enterprises about the rising price. Taking oxygen concentrators as an example, one reason is that the increase in demand affected global supply chains. Besides, due to shortage of raw materials which need to be imported from Europe, production capacity is affected. What's more, Indian buyers usually make the same demand through various channels and sometimes buy products through different channels. This has overly inflated demand, which has to some extent affected market order and pushed up prices. In early 2020... we had the same problems. Therefore, we hope all sides can work together to ensure that supply chains are kept open and stable."

Vaccinated in U.S.? You can ditch masks

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

In a major step toward returning to pre-pandemic life, the U.S. eased mask-wearing guidance for fully vaccinated people on Thursday, allowing them to stop wearing masks outdoors in crowds and in most indoor settings.

"Today is a great day for America," President Joe Biden said during an address heralding the new CDC guidance.

Oli reappointed Nepal PM

He will have to take a vote of confidence within 30 days

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KATHMANDU

K.P. Sharma Oli, heading a minority government, was sworn in as Nepal's Prime Minister on Friday, four days after the embattled leader lost a crucial vote of confidence in Parliament.

The 69-year-old Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) was reappointed as Prime Minister by President Bidya Devi Bhandari in his capacity as leader of the lar-

gest political party in Nepal's House of Representatives.

Mr. Oli will head a minority government as he does not enjoy a majority in Parliament after losing the vote of confidence on Monday.

He was reappointed to the post on Thursday night as the Opposition parties failed to secure majority seats in Parliament.

Mr. Oli will now have to take a vote of confidence at the House within 30 days, failing which, an attempt to

form a government under Article 76 (5) of the Constitution would be initiated by the President.

The Ministers of Mr. Oli's Cabinet were also sworn in during the ceremony.

All the Ministers from the old Cabinet have been included in the new Cabinet.

Pradeep Gyawali has been reappointed as Foreign Minister while Ram Bahadur Thapa and Bishnu Poudyal were appointed as Ministers for Home and Finance.

LEND A HAND, BUT SANITISE IT TOO.



When the pandemic hit us

first, we braved it together.

Sadly, the times are once

again challenging. While we

do our best to support one another, we need to stay cautious too.

Let us bring back all the habits we practised religiously last year.

The virus has not gone anywhere. Neither should our precautions.

THE HINDU

#KeepTheHabit

MARKET WATCH

	14-05-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	48,733	0.09
US Dollar	73.29	0.18
Gold	47,110	0.08
Brent oil	68.39	-1.34

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	733.55	-18.05
Asian Paints	2774.50	+218.30
Axis Bank	685.00	-6.30
Bajaj Auto	3848.80	-26.45
Bajaj Finserv	10971.50	-116.45
Bajaj Finance	5230.35	-28.05
Bharti Airtel	560.40	-1.35
BPCL	442.25	-7.00
Britannia Ind	3501.45	61.90
Cipla	904.05	5.45
Coal India	146.80	-6.70
Divis Lab	4020.55	-40.90
Dr Reddys Lab	5196.85	-104.60
Eicher Motors	2415.20	-41.25
Grasim Ind	1367.00	-45.35
HCL Tech	910.35	4.25
HDFC	2422.00	-16.70
HDFC Bank	1386.85	-12.65
HDFC Life	670.60	-1.80
Hero MotoCorp	2812.35	-27.80
Hindalco	382.80	-16.00
Hind Unilever	2376.85	-47.90
ICICI Bank	597.30	2.55
IndusInd Bank	890.85	-25.80
Infosys	1316.40	-10.60
Indian Oil Corp	101.05	-1.75
ITC	212.25	9.00
JSW Steel	707.10	-0.80
Kotak Bank	1706.65	-12.20
L&T	1415.50	30.20
M&M	741.50	-18.20
Maruti Suzuki	6736.40	-81.15
Nestle India Ltd.	17224.15	506.25
NTPC	111.40	-1.90
ONGC	112.95	-2.15
PowerGrid Corp	228.85	2.90
Reliance Ind	1937.30	24.15
SBI Life	978.40	5.50
State Bank	360.45	-7.25
Shree Cement	26713.60	-119.65
Sun Pharma	691.45	-11.40
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	645.15	5.10
Tata Motors	312.25	-13.75
Tata Steel	1132.10	-47.05
TCS	3051.50	-36.10
Tech Mahindra	952.20	-10.15
Titan	1455.85	0.90
UltraTech Cement	6368.10	-20.75
UPL	743.30	51.65
Wipro	498.45	-9.15

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	73.09	73.41
Euro	88.46	88.85
British Pound	102.75	103.20
Japanese Yen (100)	66.81	67.11
Chinese Yuan	11.35	11.40
Swiss Franc	80.74	81.11
Singapore Dollar	54.76	55.00
Canadian Dollar	60.22	60.48
Malaysian Ringgit	17.71	17.81

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Go Airlines files DRHP to raise ₹3,600 cr. via IPO

MUMBAI
Go Airlines (India) Ltd. (GoAir) has filed a Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to raise up to ₹3,600 crore through fresh issue of shares. The net proceeds would be used for repayment of debt and general corporate purposes. GoAir had already placed orders for the delivery of 144 Airbus A320neo aircraft.

LEAF to aid farmers via tie-ups with NBFCs

COIMBATORE
Lawrencedale Agro Processing India Pvt. Ltd. (LEAF), an integrated agriculture services provider, is organising financial support for marginalised farmers by tying up with non-banking financial companies (NBFCs). Palat Vijayaramgavan, founder-CEO, told *The Hindu* farmers will be given ₹20,000-₹2 lakh credit with a six-month repayment schedule.

'Hard to set up body to regulate cryptocurrency'

BENGALURU
Setting up an appropriate regulatory framework for cryptocurrencies and crypto assets in India continues to be a challenge with other countries taking differing approaches to find a solution, the Internet and Mobile Association of India and Blockchain and Crypto Assets Council have said. The Centre had earlier indicated that it would formulate a Bill on cryptocurrencies.

CBIC to hold special drive to clear refunds

NEW DELHI
The CBIC has asked field offices to clear all pending refunds of customs and drawback claims by the month-end. The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) instructed all customs principal chief commissioners to conduct a 'Special Refund and Drawback Disposal Drive' for priority processing and disposal of pending refund and drawback claims. PTI

L&T Q4 net profit rises 3% on improved order execution

CFO projects FY22 revenue growth in 'low to mid teens' with pandemic as caveat

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Larsen & Toubro Ltd (L&T) reported that its fourth quarter consolidated net profit grew 3% to ₹3,293 crore from a year earlier, due to improved execution of orders and better working capital management.

Consolidated revenue increased 8.68% to ₹48,088 crore, evidencing return to pre-COVID levels of activity, the company said.

"Last year, we had not given any guidance but in FY22 we are looking forward to growth in low-to-mid teens in order book and revenue if the second wave passes without further damage beyond one or two



Building on hope: The rise in Q4 revenue is evidence of 'return to pre-COVID levels of activity', the firm says. ■ P.V. SIVAKUMAR

months [of the financial year]," said R. Shankar Ramam, who became director and CFO. "Margins are hence expected to remain stable." Consolidated net profit included a charge of ₹3,620 crore towards excep-

tional items and profit from discontinued operations ₹8,238 crore, mainly comprising of gain on disinvestment. Annual revenue declined to ₹135,979 crore, from ₹145,452 crore in the previous year, due to the impact of lockdowns starting March 2021.

The company said execution activities had normalised in FY21 on easing of COVID-related restrictions, prior to the onset of the second wave of the pandemic.

The board recommended a final dividend of ₹18 per equity share. It had earlier declared ₹18 apiece as an interim dividend, following the divestment of the Electrical & Automation business.

Govt. may notify export refund rates by May end: DGFT Yadav

Delay has affected exporters' pricing strategies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The government may finally notify the refund rates for taxes paid on exported goods by May end, a senior official said.

It had been almost five months since the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme was introduced and delays in setting the refund rates had been affecting exporters' pricing strategies.

Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Amit Yadav told exporters the RoDTEP rates would be announced in 15 days, though Commerce Secretary Anup Wadhawan was non-



Anup Wadhawan

committal on the exact time-frame with reporters, only stating the rates may be notified 'very soon.'

Meanwhile, exporters reiterated their demand that the government bring to an end the suspense over the

RoDTEP scheme urgently to forge new contracts with foreign buyers amidst a minor recovery in global trade.

Sharad Kumar Saraf, president of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) said apart from notifying the rates, the government must release the necessary funds for RoDTEP's implementation as well as to pay outstanding dues on earlier incentive schemes.

"Once the issues pertaining to RoDTEP and the older Merchandise Exports from India Scheme are resolved, it will provide a further impetus to the export sector," said Mahesh Desai, chairman, EEPCL.

Shriram City Union invests ₹200 cr. in arm

Crisis to hit output of 3.9 mn cars: Alix

REUTERS

The global semiconductor chip shortage will cost automakers \$110 billion in lost revenue this year, up from a prior estimate of \$61 billion, consulting firm Alix Partners said, as it forecast the crisis will hit the production of 3.9 million vehicles.

The chip crunch has driven home the need for automakers to be 'proactive' right now, and create 'supply-chain resiliency' in the longer term to avoid disruptions in the future, the firm said on Friday.

Automakers have in the past had direct supply agreements with producers of certain raw materials, including precious metals such as palladium and platinum, used in exhaust scrubbing systems.

Automakers are now looking at developing direct

relationships with semiconductor makers, said Mark Wakefield, co-leader of Alix Partners' global automotive practice. "These things are shocked into existence."

Automakers have been

reluctant in the past to make long-term commitments to buy semiconductors or other raw materials and take on the financial liabilities for such agreements, he said.

Now, "the risk is real. It's not a potential" risk of losing production to semiconductor shortages, he added.

Saint-Gobain to proceed with ₹2,500-cr. investment in India

Company looking for start-ups and acquisitions, says CMD

LALATENDU MISHRA

MUMBAI

French multinational company Saint-Gobain said it will continue its planned investment of more than ₹2,500 crore in greenfield and brownfield expansion in India in two years.

The company is also looking to invest in start-ups and strategically-fit acquisitions to capitalise on the growth opportunities.

"We are ahead of the curve on the investment front," said Santhanam B., chairman and managing director, Saint-Gobain India Pvt. Ltd. "Based on the long-range plan, as a group, we will be completing investments of ₹2,500 crore in

each in capacity expansion and an investment of ₹1,000 crore in a greenfield plant to manufacture building materials for which the location is yet to be finalised. He said the company had cash of more than ₹2,000 crore in its balance sheet, which would be used for capex.

The investments in start-ups and inorganic growth would be over and above the committed investment.

Stating that business in the April-June '21 quarter would be severely impacted because of the second wave of COVID-19, he said while this quarter would not be as bad as the same period last year, it would still be a challenging one.



Santhanam B.

The plan includes two investments of ₹500 crore in

Dr. Reddy's Q4 net slips 29%

Drugmaker reports profit of ₹557.3 cr. as revenue rises 7%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

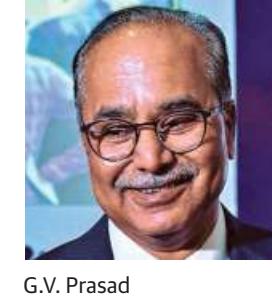
HYDERABAD

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories on Friday reported fourth-quarter consolidated net profit fell 29% to ₹557.3 crore, while operational revenue rose 7% to ₹4,768.2 crore.

Chief Financial Officer Pragya Agarwal said profit was lower as the company had recognised a deferred tax asset in the March '20 quarter, resulting in a lower tax outgo in the year-earlier period. He added that profit before tax had in fact risen 10% last quarter to ₹815.2 crore.

The company said execution activities had normalised in FY21 on easing of COVID-related restrictions, prior to the onset of the second wave of the pandemic.

The board recommended a final dividend of ₹18 per equity share. It had earlier declared ₹18 apiece as an interim dividend, following the divestment of the Electrical & Automation business.



G.V. Prasad

Prasad said, "In FY21, we continued to grow across all our businesses, enhance productivity and strengthen our development pipeline."

COVID portfolio

Besides prioritising efforts to introduce the Sputnik V vaccine in India as well as market it in other countries, the company is also working on development and commercialisation of several drugs for the treatment of

mild-to-severe COVID-19 infections.

One of them, 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG) has been developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) lab INMAS (Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences) in collaboration with the company.

In sachets

India women's squads for England tour announced

Mithali retained captain of the Test and ODI sides

CRICKET

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Mithali Raj has been retained captain of the Test and ODI squads while Shikha Pandey and Taniya Bhattacharya have been recalled for India women's tour to England. The team is set to play a Test, three ODIs and three T20Is from June 16 to July 15.

The squads:

Test & ODIs: Mithali Raj (Capt.), Harmanpreet Kaur (Vice-capt.), Smriti Mandhana, Punam Raut, Priya Punia, Deepi Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Sneh Rana, Taniya Bhattacharya (w.k.), Indrani Roy (w.k.), Shikha Pandey, Pooja Vastrakar, Arundhati Reddy, Poonam Yadav, Ekta Bisht and Radha Yadav.

T20Is: Harmanpreet Kaur (Capt.), Smriti Mandhana (Vice-capt.), Deepi Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Simran Dil Bahadur.



Mithali Raj. ■ FILE PHOTO



Harmanpreet. ■ FILE PHOTO

Pooja Vastrakar, Arundhati Reddy, Poonam Yadav, Ekta Bisht and Radha Yadav.

Smriti Mandhana (Vice-capt.), Deepi Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Sneh Rana, Taniya Bhattacharya (w.k.), Indrani Roy (w.k.), Shikha Pandey, Pooja Vastrakar, Arundhati Reddy, Poonam Yadav, Ekta Bisht, Radha Yadav and Simran Dil Bahadur.

TV PICKS

One Championship: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 3.30 p.m. onwards

Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., 7.30 p.m. & 12.30 a.m. (Sunday)

Serie A: Sony Ten 1, 2 & Sony Six (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m., 9.30 p.m. & 12.15 a.m. (Sunday)

FA Cup: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 9.45 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Jofra Archer returns to action

LONDON
England pacer Jofra Archer made a successful return to cricket from an injury lay-off, scalping two wickets in his first competitive match in more than 45 days. Turning out for Sussex in a County Championship game against Kent on Thursday, Archer returned 2/29.



Sky is the limit, says Brathwaite on WI rise

ST. JOHN'S (ANTIGUA)
West Indies Test skipper Kraigg Brathwaite praised his players and support staff following his team's good show in the latest ICC Test rankings. "I'm very proud of the team to jump two places in the Test rankings. I think this is just the beginning of good things to come. The sky is the limit," said Brathwaite while speaking to Cricket West Indies (CWI). ANI

'Bond played a major role in my career'

I keep learning something new from him, says Bumrah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

India's star pacer Jasprit Bumrah has said that former New Zealand speedster Shane Bond, who is currently the bowling coach of Mumbai Indians, has played a major role in shaping his career.

The Mumbai Indians fast bowler expressed his views in a video shared by his IPL franchise.

Good journey
"I always try to talk to him even when I am not here and with the Indian team. So, it's been a good journey, and hopefully, every year I keep learning something new and

try to add new things to my bowling.

"He has played a major role in that. It's been a great relationship so far, and hopefully, this continues for many years to come," Bumrah said.

He said he was always fascinated by how Bond bowled in his playing days and tries speaking to the MI bowling coach even when he is on India duty.

"I met him (Bond) for the first time in 2015. As a child, I had seen him bowl and was always very fascinated by how he used to bowl for New Zealand, and how he used to operate," the India pacer said.



Admiration: Jasprit Bumrah says he was always fascinated by how Shane Bond bowled in his playing days. ■ FILE PHOTO

Hussey tests negative, but Saha positive again

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey has recovered from COVID-19 and has tested negative, paving the way for his return to Australia on Sunday but Sunrisers Hyderabad's Wriddhiman Saha has received conflicting results in two coronavirus tests, prolonging his isolation.

Saha, who has been named in India's squad for the World Test Championship final and the subsequent Test series against England, is hoping to join the squad's bio-bubble in Mumbai on May 25 subject to fitness. He will continue to be



Wriddhiman Saha. ■ SPORTZPICS/IPL

in quarantine after one of his two tests came positive.

"My quarantine period is still not over. Out of the two tests done, 1 was negative



Michael Hussey. ■ SPORTZPICS/IPL

and other one came as positive. Otherwise I am doing much better," the wicket-keeper-batsman posted on Twitter.

Turkish GP called off

To be replaced by a second race in Austria

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PARIS

The Turkish Grand Prix scheduled for next month was called off on Friday because of coronavirus travel restrictions and will be replaced by a second Formula One race in Austria.

Travel restrictions in several countries where teams are based forced F1 organisers to take the June 13 race out of Istanbul.

Instead, the French GP will move forward by one week to June 20 and Austria will get a second race – just like it did last year. The Styrian GP on June 27 will be followed by the Austrian

GP on July 4, with both races at the Red Bull Ring track in Spielberg.

"I want to thank the promoter and authorities in Turkey for all of their efforts in recent weeks and want to thank the promoters in France and Austria for their speed, flexibility and enthusiasm," F1 president Stefano Domenicali said.

French GP spectators can use their original tickets or get a refund.

"We understand that this modification has an impact on our fans and our (commercial) partners and we're sorry for that," race director Eric Boullier said.

Good response to GMs' moves

COVID fund-raiser led by Anand, Humpy fetches ₹37 lakh

P.K. AJITH KUMAR

Viswanathan Anand was stretched a bit. So was Koneru Humpy.

And they had to be in front of their computers for well over a couple of hours, dividing their attention to some 20 games. It proved time well spent though, as the COVID-19 fund-raiser by India's top chess players proved a resounding success.

More than ₹37 lakh (\$50,555) was collected by the simultaneous online games featuring five of India's brightest minds on Thursday night. D. Harika, Nihal Sarin and R. Praggnanandhaa were the others.

Anand played 25 games – he won 22 and drew three – while the rest played 20 each. Humpy and Harika won 17 of their games and drew the rest, while Praggnanandhaa won all his 20. Nihal also seemed on course for a 100% record, but had to settle for a draw in his last game.

Huge response
The event was organised by chess.com, which was pleasantly surprised by the mag-



Viswanathan Anand.



Koneru Humpy. ■ FILE PHOTOS

nitude of its success. "Our target was \$15,000 but people from around the world contributed generously, besides the entry fee (one had to pay \$150 to take on Anand and \$25 to play the other Grandmasters)," chess.com India director Rakesh Kulkarni, told The Hindu. "The response was truly overwhelming."

The money would go to Redcross India and the All India Chess Federation's Checkmate Covid initiative, which will lend a helping hand to chess players affected by the pandemic.

"I was delighted to find that such a big amount was

raised by our games," said Humpy.

"And it wasn't easy for me, as I came across some really good players. At least two of my games were pretty tough; and I found Anand too faced some strong opposition."

Anand and Humpy were also part of chess.com's COVID fund-raiser a year ago. The amount collected then was ₹4.5 lakh.

The nine-fold increase reflects not just the graver situation India is finding itself in now, but the massive increase in popularity that chess has seen during the pandemic.

"I was delighted to find that such a big amount was

Nadal marches pasts Zverev

Gauff in semifinals after Barty retires injured

ITALIAN OPEN

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ROME

Nine-time champion Rafael Nadal dispatched his Madrid Masters slayer Alexander Zverev 6-3, 6-4 to reach the Italian Open semifinals on Friday.

Second-seed Nadal had lost to Zverev in the Madrid last-eight last week.

But the 34-year-old Spaniard shook off his marathon 3hr 30min quarterfinal battle past Denis Shapovalov where he needed to save two match points.

Nadal powered to 4-0 before sixth seed Zverev held serve with the 20-time Grand Slam winner saving break point to take the first set.

The German rallied in the second set but Nadal saved eight break points to seal victory on his first match point after two hours.

Nadal plays American Reilly Opelka for a place in the final for an 11th time as he warms up for the French Open starting on May 30.

Opelka, ranked 47, reached his first Masters semifinal with a 7-5, 7-6(2) win over Argentine qualifier Federico Delbonis.



Tough luck: Barty was leading 6-4, 2-1 when she pulled up to receive treatment. ■ GETTY IMAGES

World No. 1 Ashleigh Barty retired injured in the quarterfinals, just two weeks before Roland Garros.

Top seed Barty, the 2019 French Open champion, was leading 6-4, 2-1 when she pulled up to receive treatment during her match against American Cori Gauff.

The Australian suffered a right arm injury, the WTA said.

The results: Quarterfinals: Reilly Opelka bt Federico Delbonis 7-5, 7-6(2); Rafael Nadal bt Alexander Zverev 6-3, 6-4.



Third round: Lorenzo Sonego bt Dominic Thiem 6-4, 6-7(5), 7-6(5); Andrey Rublev bt Roberto Bautista Agut 6-4, 6-4; Federico Delbonis bt Felix Auger-Aliassime 7-6(3), 6-1; Alexander Zverev bt Kei Nishikori 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Women: Quarterfinals: Petra Martic bt Jessica Pegula 7-5, 6-4; Karolina Pliskova bt Jelena Ostapenko 6-4, 7-5, 7-6(1); Cori Gauff bt Ashleigh Barty 4-6, 1-2, ret.

Third round: Elina Svitolina bt Garbine Muguruza 6-4, 6-2; Jelena Ostapenko bt Angelique Kerber 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

AIFF said in a statement. Manipur-based club Neroa FC had finished at the bottom of the table in the last I-League. The federation's all-powerful executive committee will take a final decision on the matter soon.

Doru drew examples from 23 countries, including the Netherlands (Eredivisie), Argentina (Liga Profesional de Futbol), Mexico (Liga MX), Romania (Liga 1), Japan (J-League and J2-League), on how they have "frozen relegation" and help the teams in difficult times.

"I have been in conversation with all club coaches during the pandemic and everyone mentioned the challenges faced – which included short duration for preparation, reduced training hours, difficulties in organising friendly matches, transfer problems among others," Doru said in the meeting.

W.V. Raman writes to Ganguly, seeks to clarify stand

AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI

A day after being replaced as the India women's team head coach, WV. Raman has written to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) president Sourav Ganguly, expressing the desire to explain his perspective on his unceremonious ouster.

Raman, the former India opening batsman who has more than two decades of experience as coach, had been in charge of the national women's cricket team for two and a half years.

On Thursday, after being one of the eight candidates to have been interviewed by the Cricket Advisory Committee, Raman was replaced with Ramesh Powar.

Mud-slinging
Ever since the baton has been passed on to Powar, a



Not having his way? It seems squad selection for the South Africa series created a controversy when W.V. Raman was in charge. ■ FILE PHOTO

section of women's cricket

Raman. As a result, The Hindu understands that Raman has preferred to approach

the BCCI offering his availability should the Board desire to seek details from him.

Both Raman and Ganguly remained unavailable for comment.

While a section of veterans in Indian women's cricket fraternity has been against appointment of male coaches, Raman is understood to have been involved in a dispute with newly-appointed selection committee headed by Neetu David.

Controversial

The squad selection for the recent series against South Africa, India's first since the last year's T20 World Cup final, was controversial to say the least, leading to murmurs of bias towards and against certain individuals.

Interestingly, Raman had taken over from Powar in December 2018 since the latter's tenure was cut short after his public fall-out with veteran batter Mithali Raj.

tension after the 2019 ICC World Cup.

India heads the table

IN BRIEF



Dortmund beats Leipzig in German Cup final

BERLIN Erling Haaland and Jadon Sancho both scored twice as Borussia Dortmund withstood a second-half fightback in teeming rain to beat Leipzig 4-1 in the German Cup final. Captain Marco Reus was involved in all four goals on Thursday as Dortmund won the cup for the fifth time and denied bitter rival Leipzig a first title.

The result: RB Leipzig 1 (Olmo 71) lost to Borussia Dortmund 4 (Sancho 5, 45, Haaland 28, 87). AP



Laporte to switch from France to Spain

ZURICH Manchester City defender Aymeric Laporte is switching from France to Spain ahead of the European Championship. FIFA said on Friday it approved the switch of eligibility after the French soccer federation consented to the Spanish federation's request. The Spanish government said on Tuesday it had given Laporte citizenship. AP



Ferguson 'grateful' for the extra years

LONDON Former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson says he is "grateful for the three years extra" he has had after suffering a brain haemorrhage in 2018, revealing he had been "terrified" of losing his memory. "Probably not taking things too seriously in terms of knowing that you're vulnerable... if I go tomorrow I'll be grateful for three years extra I had," he said. "That's a feeling I've had for quite a while now." AFP

Irfan tests negative in second check

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI Olympic-bound race walker K.T. Irfan and four other elite track-and-field athletes have returned negative for COVID-19 in a confirmatory second test conducted at Sports Authority of India's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, the nodal body said on Friday.

Irfan was among five athletes who tested positive for COVID-19 at the centre in a weekly test conducted on May 7.

But the SAI on Friday confirmed that all these athletes have returned negative in the second test conducted on Thursday.

Divij & Arends in semifinals

INDIANS ABROAD

SPORTS BUREAU
HEILBRONN (GERMANY) Divij Sharan and Sander Arends of the Netherlands bounced back from being down 5-8 in the super tie-break to beat Marc Polmans and Artem Sitam 6-2, 3-6, [10-8] in the doubles quarterfinals of the €88,520 Challenger tennis tournament here on Friday.

Other results:
\$25,000 ITF men, Prague, Czech Republic: Second round: Chun Hsin Tseng (Tpe) bt Sasikumar Mukund 6-3, 6-3.

\$60,000 ITF women, La Bisbal D'Emporda, Spain: Quarterfinals: Viktoria Kuzmova (Svk) & Arantxa Rus (Ned) bt Na-Lae Han (Kor) & Riya Bhattacharya 6-3, 7-6(8).

CMYK

Reds stay in top-four hunt

Klopp finally manages a win at United's home Old Trafford

EURO LEAGUES

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MANCHESTER

Jurgen Klopp won at Old Trafford for the first time as Liverpool breathed new life into its top-four push with a 4-2 win in the rearranged Premier League fixture against Manchester United.

Stand-in captain Bruno Fernandes' deflected effort got Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side off to a good start, only for Diogo Jota to level with a smart flick after a penalty decision was overturned.

The equaliser came from a corner and United's weaknesses from set pieces were again exposed in first-half stoppage time, with Roberto Firmino heading home Trent Alexander-Arnold's free kick.

Errors at the back
Liverpool pulled further ahead 72 seconds after half-time as errors at the back ended with Firmino turning home his second of the evening.

Marcus Rashford reduced the deficit, before Nat Phillips, who had deflected



Heading it home: Roberto Firmino ghosted in behind the United defence to score Liverpool's second goal. ■ REUTERS

home Fernandes' opener, cleared Mason Greenwood's attempt off the line.

Mohamed Salah ensured United lost its sixth home league game of the season, racing through to score the fourth in the 90th minute as Liverpool moved into fifth place, four points behind Chelsea with a game in hand.

In LaLiga, Real Madrid won 4-1 at Granada to stay within range of Atletico Madrid. Luka Modric and Rodriguez scored in the first half on Thursday and Alvaro Odriozola and Karim Benzema added goals in the second to

Serie A: Crotone 2 (Ounas 2, Messias 75) bt Hellas Verona 1 (Molina 87-og).

Suns keep Trail Blazers waiting for playoff spot

NBA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LOS ANGELES

Devin Booker drained two free throws with 2.4 seconds remaining to lift Phoenix to a 118-117 victory over Portland that kept the Suns in the hunt for the top seed in the NBA Western Conference playoffs.

The narrow victory in a tense duel that saw 25 lead changes along with 18 ties prevented the Trail Blazers from officially locking up their playoff spot.

Veteran point guard Chris Paul paced the Suns with 26 points, one of seven Phoenix players to score in double figures.

Elsewhere, The Miami Heat dominated the Philadelphia 76ers 106-94, denying the Sixers a chance to secure the top seed in the Eastern Conference.

The defending Eastern



Devin Booker. ■ AP

Conference champion Heat notched a fourth straight victory with the post-season approaching.

The results:

New York 102 bt San Antonio 98; Atlanta 116 bt Orlando 93; Miami 106 bt Philadelphia 94; Phoenix 118 bt Portland 117; Memphis 116 bt Sacramento 110; Chicago 114 bt Toronto 102; Minnesota 103 lost to Denver 114; Charlotte 90 lost to Clippers 113; Indiana 133 lost to Milwaukee 142.

Ajeetesh Sandhu, who got into the field late, missed by one shot after cards of 74 and 72, while S.S.P. Chawrasia (75, 76) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (77, 76) had a rough week.

Robert MacIntyre finished with two birdies to fire a 66 and join Richard Bland and Calum Hill at the top of the leaderboard after day two.

Shubhankar makes the cut

BRITISH MASTERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

WISHLAW (UK)

Shubhankar Sharma helped avert an Indian wipe-out as he made up for a disappointing first round with one-under 71 in the second round to make the cut at the Betfred British Masters here.

Shubhankar, who shot 73 added 71 to get to even par as the cut fell at even par for 36 holes.

The other three Indians, however, exited early.

Ajeetesh Sandhu, who got into the field late, missed by one shot after cards of 74 and 72, while S.S.P. Chawrasia (75, 76) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (77, 76) had a rough week.

Robert MacIntyre finished with two birdies to fire a 66 and join Richard Bland and Calum Hill at the top of the leaderboard after day two.

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A colleague, close friend, business partner, go-to person for all our needs, well-wisher and above all an energetic motivator of e-con's top management team who has been a constant persuader for all of us to think big!

Not an easy task to describe our friend Bhupi by words, however, a single word to describe him will be "self-less soul"! Let that soul rest in peace!

With Deep Regrets

Management Team

e-con Systems India Pvt Ltd, Chennai.

Indian footballers to train in Qatar

ANI
NEW DELHI

qualifiers to be held there in June.

With the second COVID-19 wave rampant in India, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) has decided to send the footballers to Qatar for the preparatory camp ahead of the June Qualifiers. The final

departure date will be announced soon once official confirmation from the health authorities is received."

India is out of reckoning for a 2022 FIFA World Cup spot, but the matches

against Qatar, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are crucial with an eye on the 2023 Asian Cup.

Earlier, the Indian team played two friendly matches against Oman and UAE in March.

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