

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI FRIDAY 14 MAY 2021



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Plan to hire PR agency to handle Ajit Pawar's social media scrapped after flak



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Ellen calling it quits, decides the upcoming 19th season will be last



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## WINDOWS



Arsenal's Emile Smith Rowe (right) celebrates after a goal during the EPL match with Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in London on Wednesday. — AFP

## UPSC June 27 IAS prelims deferred; to be held Oct. 10

**New Delhi:** The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Thursday postponed the civil services preliminary examination, scheduled to be held in June, to October 10 in view of the alarming Covid situation. "Due to the prevailing conditions caused by the novel coronavirus, the Union Public Service Commission has deferred the civil services (preliminary) examination, 2021, which was scheduled to be held on 27th June, 2021. Now, this examination will be held on October 10," a statement issued by the commission said. — PTI

## Maoists surrender for Covid treatment

**Raipur:** A Maoist couple, who tested positive for Covid, surrendered in Chhattisgarh's north Bastar district on Thursday. Arjun Tatti and his wife Laxmi Padda, members of Medki local operation squad, surrendered before the police in Kamdeta BSF camp. Full report on Page 3

## Maha: Will not arrest Param Bir till May 20

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra government has submitted before the Bombay high court that it would not arrest Param Bir Singh, the former Mumbai police chief, and 32 others till May 20 in connection with the FIR registered against him under the Atrocities Act. Full report on Page 4

## COUNTERPOINT



It won't affect the common man... he is standing in the queue at vaccination centres!

## WEATHER

Max: 36°C  
Min: 26°C  
RH: 39%  
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Mostly sunny

## ASTROGUIDE

**Plava:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Vaishakha Shuddha Tadiya full day  
**Star:** Mrigasira full day  
**Variyam:** 12 noon to 1.48 pm  
**Durmuhurtam:** 8.22 am to 9.13 am; 12.38 pm to 1.29 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 10.30 am to noon  
**SUNSET TODAY 7.04 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.31 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 7.06 AM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 9.27 PM**

■ No change in gap between Covaxin shots ■ Over 200 cr vaccine shots will be available by end of 2021: Govt

## Centre increases gap between two doses of Covishield to 12-16 weeks

VINEETA PANDEY  
NEW DELHI, MAY 13

In a decision that signals the acute shortage of Covid-19 vaccinations, the Centre on Thursday increased the gap between the two doses of Covishield from existing six-eight weeks to 12-16 weeks. There is no change in the gap between the other vaccine, Covaxin. The decision comes amid a huge rush among people to get vaccinated to escape the harsh effects of Covid-19. This is the second time the gap between the two doses of Covishield has been increased after it was earlier permitted with four-eight weeks' of spacing. India on Thursday recorded about 3.63 lakh new cases of Covid-19 and 4,120 deaths due to it.

The decision for higher spacing between two shots comes amid speculation that it has been done in view of shortage of the vaccines. However, the Union health ministry said the decision to increase time was based

on the recommendations of the Covid-19 Working Group and was a "completely science-based decision". This Working group has also said that those who test positive for Covid-19 should not go for vaccination for six months after recovery.

Adar Poonawalla, the CEO of SSI, was quoted in reports as saying that the longer gap between jabs is "beneficial both from the efficacy and the immunogenicity standpoint". "This is a very good move because this is based on data that the government received on the basis of which they made a good scientific decision to increase the gap," Mr Poonawalla said.

"Based on the available real-life new evidences that have come from Oxford, the Covid-19 Working Group agreed to increase the dosing interval to 12-16 weeks between two doses of Covishield vaccine. No change in interval of Covaxin vaccine doses

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### COVID WATCH

3.63L  
ACTIVE CASES IN  
INDIA IN 24 HOURS

4,120  
DEATHS IN A DAY

## Bodies found buried in sand on banks of Ganga in UP's Unnao



Police personnel and administration officers walk past bodies buried under sand on the bank of the river Ganga at Rautapur Ghat in Unnao on Thursday. —PTI

■ Report on Page 3

## 14 docs in UP resign over 'misbehaviour' by admin

**Unnao (UP):** Fourteen doctors working at community and primary health centres in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao have tendered their resignation alleging misbehaviour and mental harassment by administration officers.

The doctors, however, assured that they will not let their Covid-related work be affected till talks are going on with the district magistrate and the chief medical officer over the resignations. The fourteen doctors, who are in-charge of CHCs and PHCs, submitted their resignation letters at the CMO office on Wednesday evening. —PTI

## Rahul: PM missing along with vaccines & oxygen

**New Delhi:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi launched an attack on PM Narendra Modi on Thursday, alleging that he is missing along with vaccines, oxygen and medicines during the Covid-19 pandemic and what remains is the Central Vista Project and the PM's photos. He also said that the government of India has "abdicated" its duty towards citizens during the pandemic and people must come together for those in need.

Mr Gandhi has been attacking the PM over the government's handling of the coronavirus situation

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■ Key construction projects stopped to focus on crisis

## C'garh govt cancels tenders for new Assembly building

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY  
RAIPUR, MAY 13

Amid mounting pressure by the Congress on the Union government to suspend the Central Vista project, Chhattisgarh government on Thursday announced that it was suspending all major projects, including the construction of a new Raj Bhavan, state legislative Assembly and the official residence of chief minister in Nava Raipur.

The tenders for two projects worth ₹363 crore for the construction of a new state legislative Assembly building have been cancelled with immediate effect by the Congress state government led by chief minister Bhupesh Baghel.

To focus the state's resources and manpower



Bhupesh Baghel

in managing the raging Coronavirus pandemic, the state government has also decided to take stringent austerity measures while announcing free education and scholarships for children who lost their parents due to the coronavirus pandemic in Chhattisgarh.

"Our citizens — our priority. Foundation stone for the construction of the new Assembly building, Raj Bhavan, chief minister's residence, res-

idence of ministers and senior officials, and a new circuit house was laid before the start of Corona. Today, all these construction works have been stopped in these times of crisis," Mr Baghel tweeted.

Chhattisgarh has 1,22,798 active Covid-19 cases, while the cumulative number of deaths in the state stands at 11,094, according to the Union health ministry.

"In view of the circumstances arising in the state due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Chhattisgarh government has stopped construction works of all major projects with immediate effect and also decided to take even more stringent measures for austerity," a press release issued by the

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## CJI is 'actively considering' live telecast of hearings in SC

PARMOD KUMAR  
NEW DELHI, MAY 13

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana said on Thursday that he was "actively considering" a proposal to allow the live telecast of Supreme Court proceedings given the court's experience of over a year of hearing cases through video conferencing. However, he added that before going any further and initiating any "concrete steps" on this, he would seek the "general consensus" among his fellow Supreme Court judges.

"I plan to seek general consensus among my colleagues in the court on the live streaming of cases," he said. The CJI also made it clear that the live streaming of proceedings would be limited only to a few courts and that too on a trial basis.

Speaking at the launch of a mobile app to grant access to the media to court proceedings without having to come physically to the Supreme Court, to help in their job of reporting, Justice Ramana said the media faces great challenges and noted its importance in the dissemination of information. The CJI referred to his own, first-hand experience when he, for a brief period, worked as a reporter for a Telugu newspaper before embarking on a legal career.

Recalling his brief association with the media before joining the legal field, CJI Ramana said: The media faces great challenges in reporting. I was a journalist for a brief time. That time we did not have car or bikes. Newspaper managements discouraged

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## Assam's NRC chief goes to SC on re-verification

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, MAY 13

Assam state NRC coordinator Hitesh Dev Sarma has moved the Supreme Court seeking a comprehensive re-verification of the draft National Register of Citizens as well as its supplementary list.

Following the decision of the outgoing and present BJP government, the NRC coordinator in the petition pleaded for an

appropriate direction from the court on the process to be undertaken under Clause 4 (3) of the Schedule of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules 2003. Mr Sarma sought re-verification under the supervision of a monitoring committee, preferably represented by the respective district judge, district magistrate and superintendent of police.

"Major irregularities have been detected in the lists of the NRC in Assam and a comprehensive re-verification should be conducted. Irregularities have been detected in the final draft as well as the supplementary list. While ineligible names were included, many eligible names have also been excluded," he said in his petition.

So far, the verification process has helped in the

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## Hamas, Israel fighting escalates even amid negotiations for truce

**Gaza City, May 13:** Hamas sent a heavy barrage of rockets deep into Israel in a matter of minutes on Thursday and Israel pounded Gaza with more airstrikes.

The relentless escalation of hostilities came even as Egyptian negotiators held in-person talks with the two sides, intensifying efforts at mediation.

Israel's defence minister has approved the mobilisation of 9,000 more reservist troops amid fighting, and Israel's military spokesman says forces are massing on the border with the Gaza Strip.

Previous fighting between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers, including a devastating 2014 war, was largely confined to the impoverished and block-



An Israeli artillery unit fires toward targets in Gaza Strip at the Israeli-Gaza border on Wednesday. — AP

aded Palestinian territory and Israeli communities on the frontier. But this round seems to be rippling farther and wider than at any time since the 2000 Palestinian intifada, or uprising, and is tearing apart the country at its seams.

While some attacks have reached the Tel Aviv area, Arab and Jewish mobs have rampaged through the streets, savagely beating people and torching cars. Flights have been cancelled or diverted away from the country's main airport. —AP



## IN BRIEF

## Man held for duping corona patients' kin

**New Delhi:** A 21-year-old B.Tech student was arrested by a special team of North Delhi's cyber-crime cell for allegedly duping over 47 people from different states in a bid to provide ICU beds and oxygen cylinders at home to Covid-19 positive patients. The arrested, identified as Aryan Singh alias Dhananjay, a resident of Noida, was caught by a special cyber-crime cell team from Jammu. According to the police, the fraud came to light when a call was received on May 8 on a Covid helpline number. The police said the complainant alleged that his relative was suffering from corona. He received a message on a WhatsApp group for setting up an ICU facility at home. Subsequently, he contacted the given mobile number where the receiver introduced himself as Dhananjay and directed him to deposit ₹3,950 as advance rent for setting up the ICU facility at home. Following this inducement, the complainant transferred the amount to an online wallet account on April 30. But the complainant felt something amiss as the alleged person was not responding to the complainant's phone calls.

## Cops seizes heroin worth ₹250cr, 5 held

**New Delhi:** An international drug racket was busted by the Delhi Police with the arrest of five men and seizure of 54.2 kilograms of heroin worth around ₹250 crores, officials said on Thursday. The five arrested members have been identified as Altaf alias Mehrajuddin Darji, Abid Hussain Sultan, Hashmat Mohammadi, Tifal Nau Khez and Abdullah Najibullah, they said. The Delhi Police's Special Cell also claimed to have unearthed a drug factory in Delhi's Batla House area, officials said. DCP (Special Cell) P S Kushwah said, "Our team received information about a Kashmir-based man named Altaf, who is part of the narco-module and used to frequently visit Delhi-NCR under the cover of carpet trade."

## 2 held for robbing Romanian woman

**New Delhi:** A 23-year-old former manager of a dairy product company and his friend were arrested for allegedly robbing a Romanian woman in Lajpat Nagar area, police said on Thursday. The accused have been identified as Hardik Arya, a resident of Vaishali Sector 6 in Ghaziabad, and Sonu Kumar (23), a resident of East of Kailash, they said, adding that three cases have been solved. On Wednesday, police received information regarding robbery with a woman near Defence Colony flyover, Lajpat Nagar-I. Police rushed to the spot and met complainant Simona Elina Chihai, a citizen of Romania, a senior police officer said.

## DELHI COURT DENIES BAIL TO NAVNEET KALRA

**New Delhi:** A Delhi court on Thursday refused to grant anticipatory bail to businessman Navneet Kalra in connection with the seizure of oxygen concentrators, required by Covid patients, from his upscale restaurants including 'Khan Chacha' in the national capital. Application is dismissed, Additional Session Judge Sandeep Garg said. Fearing arrest, the businessman had moved the court earlier this week to seek bail in the case. During a recent raid, 524 oxygen concentrators were recovered from three restaurants owned by Kalra and it is suspected that he has left Delhi along with his family. These concentrators are crucial medical equipment used for Covid management. On Wednesday, the court had reserved the order on the pre-arrest bail after hearing the arguments of both the prosecution and defense at length. During the proceedings, Public Prosecutor Atul Shrivastava had opposed the plea and told the court that Kalra's custodial interrogation is required and that bail should not be granted as he is an influential person. His intention was to cheat the public at large and wrongfully gain. Had Delhi Police not busted the racket, many people would have been cheated, the public prosecutor said.

## Open community kitchens for stranded migrant: SC

Top court orders that stranded workers be provided with dry ration without insisting on identity proof

PARMOD KUMAR  
NEW DELHI, MAY 13

The Supreme Court, on Thursday, ordered the Delhi government and the authorities in the towns forming part of the National Capital Region (NCR) in the neighbouring Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to set up community kitchens for the migrant workers impacted by the second wave of Covid and ensure adequate transport facilities with reasonable fares for those wanting to return home.

A bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan and Justice M.R. Shah directed that Delhi, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh governments (for the districts included in the NCR) "shall open community kitchen at well-advertised places (in the NCR) for stranded migrant labourers so that they and their family members, who are stranded, could get two meals a day."

Besides community kitchens, the court ordered that all stranded migrant workers be provided with dry ration without insisting on their identity proof if they don't possess and accept their self-declaration. "The district administration, in coordination with the police administration, may identify such stranded migrant labourers and



Police try to manage crowd in the view of Covid pandemic on the eve of Id-al-Fitr around Jama Masjid in Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

facilitate their transport either by road transport or train," the court ordered.

The court order came on an application by activists Harsh Mander, Anjali Bhargava, and Jagdeep Chhokar in last year's pending suo motu matter relating to the problems and miseries of the migrant labourers. The three activists have

sought direction so that the migrant labourers stranded due to the second wave of Covid pandemic are not deprived of ration and food security and are able to travel back to their homes at normal cost.

While issuing the three directions on setting up of community kitchen, supply of dry ration, and

availability of adequate transport with reasonable fare, the court issued notice to the Centre, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, Bihar, Odisha, and Maharashtra. Gujarat, Bihar, Odisha, and Maharashtra have been asked to give the details of the measures which they propose to take to ameliorate the miseries

of the migrant workers. In May last year, the top court had taken suo motu cognisance of problems and miseries of migrant labourers amid pandemic and had passed a slew of directions, including asking the states not to charge fare from migrant workers and provide them food for free till they board trains or buses.

## Govt allows walk-in jabs for above 45 years

**New Delhi, May 13:** Amid a shortage of vaccines in the national capital, the Delhi government in Thursday decided to allow walk-ins Covid vaccination for people aged 45 years and above, and shift vaccination centres from hospitals to schools for this age group. The decision was taken after deputy chief Minister Manish Sisodia chaired a review meeting on the ongoing vaccination drive in the city. "Now citizens aged 45 years and above will be able to walk-in to get vaccine jabs without hassle of online registration," said Mr Sisodia, who is also the nodal minister of the Delhi government for Covid management. Presenting the daily vaccination bulletin of the Delhi government, ruling AAP MLA Atishi warned about running out of vaccine stocks for beneficiaries including those in the 45 years and above age group.

"For the healthcare and frontline workers, and those above 45 years, Covaxin stock left only for three days and Covishield stock for two days," she said at a briefing.

The first vaccine shots will be "ineffective" if those above 45 years don't get their second dose due to unavailability of vaccines, she said and appealed to the Centre to rush supplies at the earliest.

## Shortage of jabs leaves people in 18-44 age group anxious

**New Delhi, May 13:** The news of Covaxin stocks running dry in Delhi has left people in the 18-44 age group worried, with many saying on Twitter that they would be "left in a lurch" if their wait for the second dose gets "infinitely delayed".

Delhi Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday announced that people under the age of 45 will not be able to get Covaxin shots from Thursday, saying its manufacturer Bharat Biotech has refused to provide "additional" vaccine doses to the city government.

With covaxin's stock finished, the Delhi government temporarily closed down around 100 centres administering the vaccine on Wednesday.

"I got my first dose of Covaxin day before yesterday now I am concerned how I will get my second dose as you know Covaxin have stopped the

## City records 10,489 Covid cases, +vity rates dips to 14.24%

**New Delhi, May 13:** The national capital recorded 10,489 new cases and 308 more fatalities on Thursday while the positivity rate fell to 14.24 per cent, the lowest in a month, the health department said.

With the fresh infections and fatalities, Delhi's case-load has risen to 13,72,475 and the death toll has climbed 20,618, it said.

The number of new infections is the lowest since April 10 when 7,897 people had tested positive for Covid. The positivity rate is the lowest since April 13, when it stood at 13.1 per cent, according to government data.

Delhi had reported 13,287 cases on Wednesday, 12,481 cases on Tuesday, 12,651 on Monday, 13,336 on Sunday and 17,364 on Saturday.

The positivity rate was 17 per cent on Wednesday, 17.8 per cent on Tuesday, 19.10 per cent on Monday, 21.67 per cent on Sunday and 23.34 per cent on Saturday.

On April 22, Delhi recorded its highest positivity rate of 36.2 per cent.

The national capital recorded 300 deaths on Wednesday, 347 deaths on Tuesday, 319 on Monday, 273 deaths on Sunday and 332 deaths on Saturday.

The highest number of 448 deaths was reported on May 3.

On Wednesday, 73,675 tests, including 58,709 RTPCR/CBNAAT/True Nat tests, were conducted in Delhi, the health department said in a bulletin.

## Covid-19: 16 more deaths in Ghaziabad, 11 in Noida

**Noida/Ghaziabad, May 13:** Ghaziabad recorded 16 more Covid deaths that pushed its toll to 358, while 11 more people succumbed in Gautam Buddha Nagar where the number of such fatalities reached 361 on Thursday, official data showed.

The two neighbouring districts adjoining Delhi in western UP now have a cumulative death toll of 719, according to data released by the state's health department for a 24-hour period.

In terms of new cases, Gautam Buddha Nagar recorded 747 fresh infections during the period and its tally mounted to 57,892. Its active cases reached 7,842, the data showed. — PTI

As many as 15,189 people recovered from the infection in a day, it said.

The number of active cases in the city stands at 77,717, down from 82,725 the previous day, and 48,340 of them are in home isolation, it added.

Over 12.74 lakh people have either recovered, migrated out of Delhi or have been discharged, according to the health bulletin. — PTI

## States fighting for vaccines 'bad for India': CM

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, MAY 13

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, on Thursday, said the fact that the states are left to competing and fighting with one another in the international market for Covid-19 vaccines portrays a "bad" image of India.

The Centre should procure the vaccines on behalf of the states, he said against the backdrop of shortage of vaccine doses in Delhi and many other states.

"Indian states left to compete/fight with each other in the international market. UP fighting Maharashtra fighting



Arvind Kejriwal

Odisha, Odisha fighting Delhi. Where is 'India'? Portrays such a bad image of India. India, as one country, should procure vaccines on behalf of all Indian states (sic)," the Aam Aadmi Party chief said in a tweet.

In another tweet, he said India approaching the vac-

## Divert surplus O2 from Delhi quota to other states: Sisodia

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 13

Heaving a sigh of relief, the national capital, on Thursday, logged 10,489 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, leading to the decrease in the demand of oxygen supply in the city.

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, on Thursday, said the city's requirement of oxygen has gone down from 700 metric tonnes to 582 metric tonnes per day and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has written to the Centre asking it to give the surplus quota to other states.

"We have written a letter to the Central government and have said our work will be done with 582 metric tonnes of oxygen per day and they can give the surplus oxygen from Delhi's quota to other states. As of Thursday, the positivity rate has come down to 14 per cent and around 10,400 new Covid-19 cases were reported.

"Now that the number of cases is reducing, we are seeing a decrease in the demand for beds and medical oxygen. When



Manish Sisodia

daily cases were peaking around 15 days ago, our calculations, factoring in bed occupancy and active cases, showed Delhi required 700 MT of oxygen. But now, after assessment of the Covid-19 situation, Delhi's oxygen need has been revised to 582 MT per day. As a responsible government, we will give the surplus oxygen to the states that need it," Mr Sisodia said in a press briefing on Thursday.

He also thanked the Centre and Delhi high court for coming to the aid of the people of Delhi while they were in distress due to the surge in the number of Covid-19 cases in the deadly second wave of the pandemic.

Sisodia, had earlier said that Delhi will float a global tender for vaccines while accusing the BJP-led Centre of forcing the states to do so.

"Around 100 vaccination centres have been closed down in Delhi as they ran out of their Covaxin stocks," Mr Sisodia had said. He alleged, on Wednesday, that Bharat Biotech, which manufactures Covaxin, has refused to provide "additional" doses of the vaccine to Delhi under instructions from officials of the Central government.

The Delhi government had placed orders for 67 lakh doses of Covishield and Covaxin each on April 26, he said.

## 'Centre should purchase jabs from int'l market'

**New Delhi, May 13:** The Delhi government has urged the Centre to cap the prices of Covid vaccines and buy them from the international market rather than states doing it themselves, health minister Satyendar Jain said on Thursday.

In a meeting with Union health minister Harsh Vardhan via video conference, Mr Jain said he also asserted that the companies preparing the two vaccines — Covishield and Covaxin — should share the formula with other firms to ramp up production.

"The two companies preparing vaccines must share the formula with other companies to prepare the vaccines. "It is widely known that India has the biggest and most prominent manufacturers in the world. Hence, a number of companies are capable of manufacturing and mobilising them into the market for the public," he said. — PTI



An illuminated Jama Masjid on the eve of Id-al-Fitr in Delhi on Thursday. — PTI



Beneficiaries arrive to receive Covid vaccine at a vaccination centre near Jama Masjid in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

supply to Delhi (sic)," tweeted Abdul Basit.

"I got covaxin in Delhi a week ago. I'm worried thinking if there is a plan or data maintained how many covaxin or covishield will be required when we all become eligi-

ble for the second dose. Scared to think we might miss the window due to non availability of the required one then," tweeted Baba T.J..

Senior Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi wrote: "Big issue as Delhi

has already run out of Covaxin. What about people who got their first doses, is their second dose indefinitely delayed? What is the Centre/State's take on it?"

As per the protocols, there should be 28-days

gap between the two doses of Covaxin. Around 90 lakh people are eligible for the inoculation under the 18-44 age group in the national capital.

Twenty eight-year-old Nisha Siaini, who till Wednesday thought of herself and her husband as "extremely lucky" to have successfully found a slot for vaccination, is now worried about the availability of the second dose. She is afraid that the shortage of vaccines will "create doubt among those who want to take Covaxin in the future".

"Those who have taken Covaxin have been left in lurch. There is no surety that we will be able to get the 2nd dose on time. Also, we cannot even take any other vaccine. This will create doubt among those who want to take Covaxin in the future," said Nisha, a professional banker, who got her first jab along with her husband on May 5. — PTI

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
E-SINGLE TENDER NOTICE	
Sr. DEE/EMU/GZB for and on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender under single packet system for the under noted work :	
1 N.I.T No.	232-Elect-EMU-WC-08-20-21
2 Name of the work	Comprehensive Annual Maintenance Contract of Media Electronics fitted 3 Phase EMU (IGBT Technology) rake for 2 Years on Single tender Basis through OEM
3 Tender cost	Rs. 00.00
4 Approximate cost	Rs. 4,03,20,000.00
5 Earnest Money	Rs. 00.00
6 Completion period	24 Months
7 Validity of offer	45 days
8 Date & Time from tender advertised on IREPS website	13.05.2021 (12:42 Hrs.)
9 Date & Time from tender submission start and end	26.05.2021 (00:00 Hrs.) to 09.06.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)
10 Tender closing Date & Time	09.06.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)
11 Date & Time of tender Opening (Immediately when tender submission ends)	09.06.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)
Note 1 : The Tenderer/s will submit their requisite documents along with their tender offer. No post tender correspondence for submission of additional document shall be entertained after opening of the Technical & Commercial offer. Even suo-moto post tender letters of the tenders shall be treated as null & void.	
Note 2 : Duplicate documents should not be enclosed/up loaded.	
Tender Notice is available on website of <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a> No. 232-Elect-EMU-WC-08-20-21 Date : 13.05.2021	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	



## SHORT TAKES

## Lockdown extended in Bihar till May 25

**Patna:** The Bihar government has extended the lockdown till May 25 to stop the surge in Covid-19 cases in the state. The decision was taken during a review meeting chaired by chief minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday. "The impact of lockdown in the state was reviewed during a meeting with ministers and officials. The positive effect of the lockdown is visible. Therefore, it has been decided to extend the lockdown in Bihar for the next ten days from May 16 to 25," tweeted Mr Kumar after the meeting. The lockdown was imposed in Bihar on May 4 after the Patna high court stepped in and slammed the state government over its handling of the Covid-19 crisis. Bihar has been witnessing a surge in Covid cases. According to reports, the death toll went up to 3,503 on Wednesday after 74 people succumbed to the viral infection.

## Odisha seeks 25L doses immediately

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha health minister Naba Kishore Das Thursday urged the Centre to immediately provide 25 lakh doses of Covid vaccines to expedite the inoculation drive that has been seriously hit due to inadequate supply of the life-saving injections. "I urge the Union government to immediately provide at least 25 lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccines so as to regalvanise the immunisation process. As many as 22 lakh people are awaiting the second dose of vaccine. In fact, I have already formally placed the demand before Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan during a discussion on the Covid situation on Wednesday," Mr Das said. Mr also Das demanded oxygen cylinders, rapid antigen test kits, PPE kits and masks. "We have enough oxygen but not cylinders and hence, we need 30,000 cylinders," he said.

## Covid -ve report must to enter Maha

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra government on Thursday announced the extension of Covid induced restrictions till 7am on June 1. Any person coming from anywhere in the country will have to carry a negative RT-PCR report to enter state by any mode of transport. Maharashtra reported 42,582 new positive cases taking the total number of active cases 5, 33,294. While 850 new deaths were reported on Thursday raising a total fatality in state 78,857. Maharashtra is among the states that account for 82.51 per cent of the total active cases in the country, officials said. The state government order said that the restrictions will remain in force till June 1.

## CM YOGI VISITS AMU TO REVIEW COVID SITUATION

**Aligarh, UP:** Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath visited AMU on Thursday to take stock of the coronavirus situation at the university, where at least 35 serving and retired faculty members have died due to Covid or Covid-like symptoms in the recent weeks. Expressing grief over the deaths at Aligarh Muslim University's Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, he said he hoped that the vaccination drive on the campus would pick up soon and help in improving the situation. On his first visit to AMU since he assumed office in 2017, the chief minister also said that the supply of oxygen to the university's medical college is being augmented. The university hospital, however, hasn't reported any deaths due to the shortage of oxygen. Several senior faculty members, retired professors and non-teaching staff have succumbed to Covid-19 or Covid-like symptoms over the past three weeks. Alarmed by the deaths, AMU vice-chancellor Tariq Mansoor had written to the Indian Council of Medical Research on May 9, urging it to study if a particular coronavirus variant is circulating around the campus. The university's medical college had also sent some samples for genome sequencing to the Institute of Genomics and Integrated Biology Laboratory, Delhi. — PTI

## UP: Bodies found buried on banks of Ganga in Unnao

**Unnao (UP), May 13:** The Unnao district administration has ordered a probe after some bodies were found buried on the Ganga riverbank in the Bighapur Patan tehsil area, officials said on Thursday. The district administration swung into action after locals spotted bodies buried on the Baksar ghat of the river with some photographs of the bodies too going viral on social media, they said. "After the matter came to the light, a sub-divisional magistrate was sent to the spot for the probe. He will submit his report," Unnao district magistrate Ravindra Kumar said. He said the Baksar ghat is on the border of many districts including Raebareilly, Fatehpur and Unnao and people go there for the cremation of bodies. "We will take appropriate action after seeing the situation. Directives have been issued that such situation does not arise," the DM said when asked

about the alleged burial of bodies on the ghat.

However, there was no confirmation if these bodies were of Covid patients.

SDM Dayashankar Pathak, who visited the Baksar ghat of the river with the circle officer, said they did not find any dead body out in the open.

On the exact number of bodies buried on the riverbank, the SDM said he was not aware of the number.

People living near the riverbank on Thursday said no dead body was allowed to be buried and all the bodies being brought to the Ghat are being cremated.

There is panic among the locals after it was found that bodies were being buried in sand on the banks of the river.

It may be recalled that on Monday, scores of dead bodies had been washed up on the banks of Ganga in Ghazipur and Ballia districts. Bodies were also found in Buxar in Bihar. — Agencies

## Maoist couple gives up arms for Covid-19 care

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, MAY 13**

A Maoist couple, who tested positive for coronavirus, surrendered in the north Bastar district in Chhattisgarh, the police said on Thursday.

Arjun Tatti and his wife Laxmi Padda, members of Medki Local Operation Squad (LOS) functioning under north Bastar division of Maoists, surrendered before police in Kamdeta BSF camp under Koyelibeda in Kanker district late on Wednesday. "The Naxal

couple deserted their unit owing to illness and approached the police for medical treatment. Both of them tested positive for coronavirus and were admitted to Covid care hospital in Kanker for treatment," Bastar range IGP Sunderraj P said.

According to him, 40-50 Naxals in south Bastar have contracted the virus as per the inputs received by the police. "Due to strict vigilance at interstate and inter-district border areas, Naxals are not getting medicines and other logistic supply," he added.

## Covaxin gets nod for phase 2-3 trials on kids

**New Delhi, May 13:** India's apex drug regulator has granted permission for conducting the Phase 2/3 clinical trial of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin Covid-19 vaccine in the age group of 2 to 18 years, the Union health ministry said on Thursday. The trial will be conducted on 525 healthy volunteers.

"The National Regulator, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), after careful examination, has accepted the recommendation of Subject Expert Committee (SEC) and accorded permission to conduct the Phase II/III

## 50 employees of Biotech test +ve

**Hyderabad:** Bharat Biotech's joint MD Suchitra Ella said that 50 of the employees have tested positive for Covid-19. "Quite disheartening to the teams to hear some states complaining about our intentions. Fifty of our employees are off work due to covid, yet we continue to work under pandemic lockdown 24x7 for U."

clinical trial of Covaxin (Covid vaccine) in the age group 2 to 18 years, to

its manufacturer Bharat Biotech Ltd on May 12," the ministry said.

Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech had proposed to carry out the clinical trial in the age group of 2 to 18 years. In the trial, the vaccine will be given by intramuscular route in two doses at day 0 and day 28. As rapid regulatory response, the proposal was deliberated in SEC on meeting held on May 11. The committee, after detailed deliberation, recommended for grant of permission to conduct proposed Phase 2/3 clinical trial to certain conditions. — PTI

## NCP: French nationals in India given Moderna jab

**BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, MAY 13**

Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik has sought an explanation from the Centre claiming French citizens and their relatives are being given Moderna vaccine despite only three vaccines permitted in India. Why the Centre cannot procure the vaccine for the people of India if the French embassy can, he asked.

"Covishield, Covaxin and Sputnik V are the 3 Vaccines that are permitted in India by our government. According to information received by me, the French Embassy in India has procured the vaccine @moderna.tx and is inoculating their citizens and their relatives at Navi Mumbai with the help of @ApolloHosMumbai," Mr Malik tweeted.

"Question arises, how can a non-permitted vaccine be allowed to be administered? If they can get it, why can't Indian government get it for our citizens too? The government and the Dr Harsh Vardhan must clarify," he added.

## States gear up to tackle Covid in villages

Plan lockdowns, creating database of migrants, free online medical consultation

**New Delhi, May 13:** As the Covid wave gradually shifts to rural areas, several states are gearing up to check its spread through self-proclaimed lockdowns by panchayati raj institutions, creating a database of migrants and providing free online medical consultation to the sick.

The initiatives have been taken by states in consultation with the Centre to stop the virus from spreading further in villages, government sources said.

Among the measures include imposition of self-proclaimed lockdown by panchayati raj institutions in Gujarat and creation of migrant database for capturing the return of

migrants in panchayats both from within and outside in Assam, besides announcing formulation of village defence parties. Himachal Pradesh has started "eSanjeevani OPD" for providing free online medical consultation to sick people and the launch of Kudumbashree Community Network in Kerala.

Kudumbashree implemented through Community Development Societies (CDSs) of poor women, serving as the community wing of local governments. Kerala has started a transportation plan by providing ambulances in each gram panchayat to

**HIMACHAL PRADESH** has started 'eSanjeevani OPD' for providing free online medical consultation to sick people and the launch of Kudumbashree Community Network in Kerala

support the health system besides providing two chambered cars and auto rickshaws for the needy.

Periodic awareness programmes, setting up of village monitoring committee and specific quarantine/isolation centres for migrant labourers have been set up in Haryana.

Door-to-door surveillance using pulse oximeter, temperature guns and antigen

test kits and setting up of gram yoddha samiti in villages for supporting families of patients have also been set up in Gujarat.

States like Andhra Pradesh have announced formulation of Corona Kattadi (monitoring) Committee and gram panchayats in the states have passed resolutions of "No mask no entry", besides initiating proactive sanitation and door-to-door surveillance.

Uttar Pradesh has set up village "nigrani samiti" in all gram panchayats with focus on promoting cleanliness, while Uttarakhand has set up village monitoring committees and formation of block response

team at the block level to ensure and monitor proper deliverables. A 24x7 help desk system has also been set up by the directorate of panchayati raj in the state.

West Bengal is undertaking an awareness programmes in panchayats with the help of NGOs and self help groups and is enabling safe operations of local markets/haats, besides smooth distribution of food grains to the poor under PDS.

Similarly, Maharashtra has initiated 'My Family My Responsibility' awareness campaign; and formed Corona Prevention Committee, besides carrying out door-to-door surveillance. — PTI

## MP: ₹5K/mth, free edu, food for kids orphaned by Covid

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, MAY 13**

In a first of its kind initiative in the country, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday unveiled a package for rehabilitation of children orphaned due to the coronavirus pandemic in the state.

The package has envisaged a provision of a monthly pension of ₹5,000, free education and ration for such kids.

The free ration would be provided to these children irrespective of the financial background of their families, Mr Chouhan announced.

"Many children have been orphaned in the pandemic. They cannot be left in the lurch. They are now the responsibility of the Madhya Pradesh government. They are the children of the state and it will take care of them," the chief minister said in a state-



Inayat Ali, a Muslim, performs last rites of Covid-19 victims in Jabalpur on Thursday.

ment to the media.

The children who lost their parents need not worry about their life, he added.

Madhya Pradesh is the first state in the country to take the initiative to rehabilitate the children orphaned by the pandemic.

He also declared that the government would take care of those who lost their sole bread earners in their family.

The chief minister said the government would stand guarantor for those availing interest

free loans to start their business.

Sources said the chief minister directed the state health department to compile data on such children for implementation of the package.

Meanwhile, the chief minister on Thursday indicated that he would review the pandemic situation in the different districts on May 17 before taking a decision as to if the "janata curfew" or lockdown clamped in 52 districts in the state since April 12 would be extended or phased out.

## PM missing along with doses, O2, drugs: Rahul

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 13**

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi once again launched an attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, alleging that he is missing along with vaccines, oxygen and medicines during the COVID-19 pandemic and what remains is the Central Vista Project and the PM's photos.

He also said that the government of India has "abdicated" its duty towards citizens during the pandemic and people must come together for those in need.

In a tweet in Hindi Congress leader Mr Gandhi said, "The Prime Minister is also missing, along with vaccines, oxygen and medicines. All that remain are the Central Vista project, GST on medicines and the Prime Minister's photos here and there."

In the last few weeks the Congress has been targeting the Prime Minister over the "destruction caused by Covid".

Leaders of 12 Opposition parties, including Congress president Sonia Gandhi, on Wednesday had written to Mr Modi, seeking a free mass vaccination campaign against Covid, and a suspension of the ongoing Central Vista project and divert the money to aid the fight against coronavirus.

Congress general secretary in charge of Uttar Pradesh Priyanka Gandhi said the situation in Uttar Pradesh is "inhuman and criminal" and demanded a judicial probe headed by a high court judge into the several instances of bodies found floating in the Ganga in many parts of the state. "What is happening in UP is inhuman and criminal. The government is busy image building while people are suffering unimaginably..." she tweeted.

## NORTHERN RAILWAY Tender Notice

Tender Notice No. 219-S/1/TMC/04/2021-22 Dated: 12.05.2021  
Chief Engineer/TMC, Northern Railway, Headquarters office, Baroda House, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites 01 No. tenders through E-Procurement system for supply of the following items:

S. No.	E-Tender No.	Description of item	Qty.	Due date Time
1	A20P907MCM2021	ANTIWEAR HYDRAULIC OIL (HLP-68 TYPE) VG-68GRADE FOR TRACK MACHINES.	20160 Ltrs.	07.06.21 at 11:30 hours.

**NOTE:-** 1. The complete information of above E-Procurement tenders is available on website "www.irops.gov.in". The firms, who desire to participate against E-Tenders, are advised to electronically register themselves on the above website for which they would be required to have a class-III digital certificate from certifying agencies authorized under IT Act 2000, by Govt. of India. Manual offers against E-Tenders will not be accepted. 1028/2021

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## SEARCH FOR MISSING

General public is hereby informed that a boy **Raj S/o Bhavesh, R/o Ashiyana Children home for boys -2, Alipur, Delhi** has been missing since 28.02.2017. In this regard, **FIR No. 77/2017 dated 28.02.2017 u/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Alipur, Delhi.** Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the missing boy but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the missing boy is as under:



**Name:** Raj, **Gender:** Male, **Age:** 10 years, **Height:** 3'6", **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Face:** Long, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing:** Pink colour shirt, grey colour Jersey, brown colour pant and grey slipper on his feet. If anyone has any information regarding this missing boy, kindly inform SHO/Alipur, Delhi.

E-mail : c/c@cbi.gov.in  
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641  
Fax : 011-24368639  
DP/1012/ON/2021

SHO P.S. Alipur, Delhi.  
Ph. No. 91-72202265, 72202290

## NORTHERN RAILWAY

**E-TENDER NOTICE No. 196-S/71/2021-22/Tender Notice/TSO-IV/FEMO Dated 12.05.2021**  
On behalf of the President of India, Pr,CE, Northern Railway, Headquarters office, Baroda House, New Delhi-110001 invites the following tenders through E-Procurement system:

SN	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Cost of tender document	Earnest Money (in Rs.)	Tender value (in Rs.)	Date & Time of opening of tender	Completion period
1.	211-2668-2021-22-NR	Manufacturing & Supply of Ferro Molybdenum, as per Northern Railway Thermit Portion Plant Lucknow's Standard Specification TPP/FeMo/2020 as amended up to date.	3.15 MT	NIL	1,14,710/-	57,35,331/-	03.06.2021 at 14.30	8 months

**Note:** The complete information of above E-Procurement tender is available on website [www.irops.gov.in](http://www.irops.gov.in) and [www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in)

1032/21

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## CANCELLATION/REDUCTION IN FREQUENCY OF SPECIAL TRAINS

It is notified for the information of passengers that due to low occupancy and other operational reasons Railways have decided to cancel and reduce the frequency of following special trains, as per the details given below :-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS	
Train No. & Name	Date(s) of Cancellation (from originating station)
02486 Shri Ganganagar - Hazur Sahib Nanded Special Express	15.05.2021 till further advice
02485 Hazur Sahib Nanded - Shri Ganganagar Special Express	17.05.2021 till further advice
02440 Shri Ganganagar - Hazur Sahib Nanded Special Express	14.05.2021 till further advice
02439 Hazur Sahib Nanded - Shri Ganganagar Special Express	16.05.2021 till further advice

REDUCTION IN FREQUENCY OF TRAINS			
Train No. & Name	Existing Frequency	Revised Frequency	Effective From
02065 Ajmer - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Special Express	5 Days/Week	Tri-Weekly (Mon, Wed, Fri)	14.05.2021 till further advice
02066 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Ajmer Special Express	5 Days/Week	Tri-Weekly (Mon, Wed, Fri)	14.05.2021 till further advice
02458 Bikaner Jn. - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Special Express	Daily	Bi-Weekly (Wed, Sat)	15.05.2021 till further advice
02457 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Bikaner Jn. Special Express	Daily	Bi-Weekly (Fri, Mon)	17.05.2021 till further advice
02443 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Jodhpur Jn. Special Express	Daily	Bi-Weekly (Thu, Sun)	16.05.2021 till further advice
02444 Jodhpur Jn. - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Special Express	Daily	Bi-Weekly (Fri, Mon)	17.05.2021 till further advice
02471 Shri Ganganagar - Delhi Jn. Special Express	Daily	Bi-Weekly (Mon, Wed)	17.05.2021 till further advice
02472 Delhi Jn. - Shri Ganganagar Special Express	Daily	Bi-Weekly (Tue, Thu)	18.05.2021 till further advice
04731 Delhi Jn. - Bhatinda Jn. Special Express	Daily	Bi-Weekly (Mon, Wed)	17.05.2021 till further advice
04732 Bhatinda Jn. - Delhi Jn. Special Express	Daily	Bi-Weekly (Tue, Thu)	18.05.2021 till further advice

**Note:-** Presently train no. 02443/02444 Delhi Sarai Rohilla -Jodhpur - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Special Express is running between Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Degana - Delhi Sarai Rohilla and partially cancelled between Degana - Jodhpur - Degana, reduced frequencies shall also run as above.

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

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

1030/21

RailMadad Helpline No. 139

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## SHORT TAKES

## 13-yr-old dies while performing stunt

**Surat:** A 13-year-old boy was strangled to death after a rope got entangled around his neck when he was allegedly performing a stunt at his home in Gujarat's Surat city, police said on Thursday. According to the boy's parents, the Class 8 student was fond of making videos of stunts and uploading them on social media and video sharing platforms such as TikTok, an official said. The death came to light Wednesday evening when the boy was found hanging from a rope attached to a large nail on the wall of the verandah of his house in Sarthana area of the city, the police said. "We assume that the incident took place around 5 pm when others in the family were not at home. When the boy was found hanging from a rope around 6.30 pm, he was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he was declared brought dead," the official said. — PTI

## 18 jumbos killed in lightning strikes

**Guwahati:** Eighteen elephants died in lightning strikes at a forest in Nagaon district of Assam, a senior forest department official said on Thursday. The incident happened on Wednesday night at a hill in the Kundoli proposed reserve forest in the Kathiatoli range, principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife) Amit Sahay said. "The area is very remote and our team could reach there on Thursday afternoon. It was found that carcasses were lying in two groups. Fourteen were lying atop the hill and four were found at the bottom of the hill," he said. The preliminary investigation found that the jumbos were killed due to electrocution caused by lightning last night, but the exact reason will be known only after post-mortem, which will be done on Friday, Mr Sahay said. — PTI

## Boiler blast kills 4 in TN chemical plant

**Cuddalore, TN:** Four workers, including a woman, were killed and 10 injured on Thursday due to release of Ammonia after a boiler exploded in a chemical plant here, the government said. Chief minister M.K. Stalin ordered a solatium of ₹3 lakh to the kin of each of the deceased. He has also directed an assistance of ₹1 lakh to each of the injured. "Ammonia gas got released following boiler explosion," a government release said, adding it led to the death of four people and 10 were injured. At the time of mishap, police said workers were engaged in their usual work this morning at the plant that produces chemical active ingredients and intermediates for crop protection. — PTI

## Heavy rain likely in Kerala on May 14, 15

**Thiruvananthapuram, May 13:** Authorities have sounded red alert in three districts of Kerala on May 14 and five districts on May 15, indicating the possibility of extremely heavy rains under the influence of a low pressure area over the Arabian Sea.

In a tweet, chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan asked authorities and people to follow the guidelines issued by the state disaster management authority.

"Red Alert! 14 May - Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, 15 May - Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur, Kasargod. Follow guidelines issued by @KeralaSDMA", Vijayan tweeted, hours after the IMD issued a warning and said that the low pressure area over the Arabian Sea is likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm by May 16, which may bring heavy rainfall in some parts of Kerala.

The India meteorological department (IMD) said the low pressure is very likely to become well marked over Lakshadweep area by Friday morning, concentrate into a depression over the same region by Saturday morning and intensify into a Cyclonic Storm during the subsequent 24 hours. It is very likely to intensify further and move north-northwestwards towards Gujarat and adjoining Pakistan coasts. It is likely to reach near Gujarat coast around May 18 evening, according to the forecast.

Authorities have banned fishing in the sea till the situation becomes normal. — PTI



The Indian and Pakistan armies exchange sweets on the occasion of Id-ul-Fitr along LoC in Poonch.

— PTI

## After uproar, plan to hire PR team for Ajit Pawar shelved

**BHAGWAN PARAB**  
MUMBAI, MAY 13

The Maharashtra Government's decision to hire a public relations (PR) agency for Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has been mired in controversy as the opposition termed the move as a waste of money.

Facing flak, Mr Pawar finally cancelled the decision saying there was no need to appoint any external agency to handle the social media of his office.

The general administration department Wednesday issued an order for the appointment of an external agency for the office of Dy CM to announce his decisions, initiatives and policies on various social media platforms. The estimated cost of the work was ₹5.98 crore for the year 2021-22. However, the move evoked



Ajit Pawar

a sharp response from all quarters as several raised question mark over splurging nearly ₹6 crore on Mr Pawar's PR activities when the state was facing a coronavirus crisis.

BJP spokesperson Atul Bhatkalkar sought cancellation of this decision, saying expenditure should be avoided. "The state government cites fund crunch when it comes to paying to doctors and nurses, but has money to hire a PR agency. It is a highly shameless behaviour," he added.

Reacting to him, NCP

leader Nawab Malik slammed the BJP saying those who are pointing finger towards the expenditure should recall how much money was spent on the CM and other ministers in the previous government. The expenses are nothing much compared to the huge amount of money spent by the Centre and BJP-ruled state governments for their publicity, he added.

However, taking note of the outcry, Mr Pawar himself directed to cancel the government order with immediate effect. "There is no need to appoint an external agency for handling social media of the deputy CM's office. There is no question of appointing a separate agency when the government's directorate-general of information and public relations can carry out that work," he said.

## Param Bir won't be arrested till May 20: HC told

**SHAHAB ANSARI**  
MUMBAI, MAY 13

The Maharashtra government on Thursday submitted before the Bombay high court that it will not arrest Param Bir Singh, the former Mumbai commissioner, and 32 others till May 20 in connection with the FIR registered against him by Thane police under the Atrocities Act. The court is expected to hear the petition filed by Mr Singh against the FIR on May 20.

It gave the assurance while seeking time to respond to Mr Singh's plea for quashing the FIR against him. The Thane police is probe the case lodged by a subordinate officer for various offences under the SC/ST Act, Civil Rights Protection Act, Maharashtra Police Act and IPC.

## Israel clash: Kin fear for lives of Telugu workers

Around 10,000 people from T'gana, Andhra live in conflict-hit nation

**NARENDER PULLOOR**  
NIZAMABAD, MAY 13

Telugu people in Israel are in the grip of fear as clashes between Israel and Palestinians continued. Around 10,000 people from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh live in Israel.

Among these, around 1,000 people from undivided Nizamabad, Adilabad and Karimnagar districts are in Israel on work visas.

The family members of the affected Telugus in Israel are worried over the safety of their beloved ones during the war-like situation. The kin of Telugus working there get in touch with them over video calls and social media apps. For the last three days, they are constantly contacting these migrants to know of their well-being.

After Gulf countries, the majority of unemployed youths from north Telangana districts have shown an interest to work in Israel. They believe that working conditions and pay packages are more satisfactory in Israel than in the Gulf countries. As a result, for the last 10 years, youths from the two Telugu states thronged Israel for employment.

Speaking to this newspaper from Israel on Thursday night, Telangana-Israel Association working president Bommakanti Maheshwar Goud said they are safe in Israel. Each household has a safety bunker and people rushed in when sirens are

A 30-year-old Indian woman who hailed from Kerala's Idukki district in Israel was killed in a rocket attack by Palestinian militants from Gaza on Wednesday

blown by the Israeli authorities minutes before the rocket attacks, he said.

Maheshwar Goud said food and accommodation are available and they are doing their daily work as usual. "A rocket attack claimed the life of a Keralite nurse, Soumya, near our residence a day ago," he said.

Most Telugus there are working as caregivers. The Israel government takes utmost care for the safety and welfare of all citizens without any discrimination, he said.

A 30-year-old Indian woman in Israel was killed in a rocket attack by Palestinian militants from Gaza on Wednesday.

Soumya Santosh, who hailed from Kerala's Idukki district, worked as a caregiver attending to an old woman at a house in the southern Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon.

Ashkelon, which borders the Gaza Strip, has come under a massive fire from the Palestinian militants.

The Indian woman was said to be living in Israel for the last seven years. She has a nine-year-old son whom she had left with her husband in Kerala. Her 80-year-old elderly charge is said to have survived the direct hit on the house and is hospitalised in a serious condition, reports said.

## Babu cremates Covid victims as family members stay away

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO**  
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 13

Demonstrating an exemplary act of humanity, a sub-collector in Odisha along with some of his office staff members cremated the body of an elderly man as family members of the deceased abandoned the body fearing Covid-19 infection.

According to reports, 65-year-old Kalicharan Sahu of Landeisahi in Gajam district was admitted to Bhanjanagar Hospital three days ago after he complained of breathless-

ness. As his oxygen level dropped, he was shifted to a covid care centre. However, he breathed his last on Wednesday while undergoing treatment.

Fearing Covid-19, his kin refused to receive the body. On being informed about the situation, Bhanjanagar sub-collector Rajendra Minz reached the spot along with sub-division public relations officer Fakir Mohan Majhi, hospital supervisor Bichitra Kumar Panigrahi, revenue assistants of the sub-collector's office Biswajeet Sethy, Fakir Mohan Swain and

Balaram Jani.

The officials wore PPE kits and took the body to the crematorium located on the outskirts of the town in a hearse and cremated it.

Chief minister Naveen Patnaik praised the officials for the act. "Appreciation for the humanitarian gesture of Bhanjanagar Sub-collector Rajendra Minz who along with others performed the last rites of a 65-year-old succumbed at Bhanjanagar dedicated covid care centre. Such a humane gesture will inspire others," he said.

## Bengal facing twin challenges of pandemic, violence: Dhankar Gov visits Sitalkuchi, TMC fumes

**Cooch Behar/Kolkata,**

**May 13:** West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar was on Thursday shown black flags at Sitalkuchi when he went there to visit people allegedly affected in post poll violence. Four persons were killed in a shooting by CISF staff on April 10 during the Assembly polls.

Mr Dhankhar was shown black flags by some people at Golokganj as his convoy travelled from Mathabhanga to Sitalkuchi though a posse of policemen put up a human wall to prevent protesters from coming down on the road.



Jagdeep Dhankhar

During his visit, Mr Dhankhar was accompanied by Cooch Behar Lok Sabha member Nisith Pramanik of the BJP and the president of the party.

Claiming that people, who cast their votes as per their choice, are being subjected to attacks in West Bengal, Mr Dhankhar said while the country is facing the Covid crisis, the state is grappling with the twin challenges of the pandemic and the post-poll violence.

The governor said he was shocked by incidents

of attack following the West Bengal Assembly pollss, and decided to visit various places affected by the post-poll violence in the interest of the people.

"The country is facing the Covid crisis, and West Bengal is facing twin challenges of the pandemic and unprecedented post-poll violence only on the ground that some people decided to vote as per their own choice," he said while embarking on a visit to various places in Cooch Behar district.

He said the Mamata Banerjee government must ensure that everyone who took the law into

their hands must be brought to justice.

The Trinamul Congress alleged that governor Jagdeep Dhankhar violated constitutional provisions. "He (Dhankhar) did not listen to the state government and went to Cooch Behar. He went there in the company of a BJP leader. His conduct is unconstitutional," veteran MP and party spokesperson Sougata Ray said.

"Previously we had written a letter to the president against this governor. If the CM says, we will send another letter against him to the president," Mr Ray told reporters. — PTI

## Assam's NRC chief goes to SC

■ Continued from Page 1

The NRC coordinator also pleaded that in the "Original Inhabitants" category and the "Persons from other States" category, several errors had been detected. Mr Sharma, in his plea before the court, argued that the preparation of a correct and error-free NRC was integral to national security too.

It is significant that Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, at his first press conference after taking office, made it clear his government would seek NRC re-verification. "Our view on NRC is very clear. We want 20 per cent re-verification of the list in districts bordering Bangladesh and 10 per cent re-verification in other districts. If after that, the NRC is found to be correct, the state government would accept it

and take the process forward. But if the NRC is found faulty even after the re-verification, we want the Supreme Court to view this issue critically," the CM told reporters at his first press briefing. "If the NRC data is found correct, then we shall do nothing, but if there are discrepancies we will ask for the Supreme Court's guidance. We have been saying this for a while and we stand by this," he added.

"CAA is a law that was passed by the Parliament and, as it stands, the state government has nothing much to do in this regard, as the rules are yet to be framed. Since, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the exercise to frame the rules is on hold, that is where the matter lies," the CM added.

Covaxin, that was given full permission at a later stage compared to Covishield. Many states have suggested to the government to open up its production to other companies as well as to increase supplies.

Andhra Pradesh CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had earlier urged PM Narendra Modi to direct Bharat Biotech and ICMR-NIV to transfer the Covaxin manufacturing technology and provide the viral strain to all those who are capable of manufacturing the vaccine and ramp up production as the current rate of

vaccines output was slow and did not cater to the country's requirement. "It may take several months to get all vaccinated at this pace. Please explore the possibility of involving all such production firms and enable them with the technology, intellectual property rights to deliver the vaccine as quickly and as affordable as possible. Anyone who can manufacture or is interested in manufacturing the vaccine should be encouraged to do so in the larger public interest," the Andhra CM had said.

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## Telecast of SC hearings...

■ Continued from Page 1

accepting any conveyance from the organisers of events. I too encountered difficulties as a journalist."

The SC had, by an order of September 26, 2018, permitted the live streaming of court proceedings in cases of constitutional and national importance. However, the live streaming of sensitive cases was excluded.

The virtual event for the launch of the app to help the media cover court proceedings without coming there physically following the second wave of Covid-19 was also attended by Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, A.M. Khanwilkar, and Hemant Gupta. Justice Chandrachud heads the court's e-committee credited with putting in place the infrastructure for court hearing via video conferencing since March last

year. Justice Chandrachud attended the virtual event via video conferencing even though he tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, Justice Chandrachud said: "We hope that this facility will keep you all safe. Journalists are exposed so much to the outside world. I hope this is a part of the many steps which will be taken by the Chief Justice of India in the near future." He shared the news that all the six people who had developed the mobile app are down with Covid-19 but continued with their work despite being confined to their homes.

Justice Gupta cautioned the media that the "links given to you are (to be) used in a bona fide manner, and unauthorised persons (should) not use it. It will not be fair to the institution".

## 15 more patients die in Goa

■ Continued from Page 1

onwards, this is the position of casualties in the GMCH," the bench said, referring to the deaths during the dark hours.

"Now today, again, we are assured by the learned Advocate General Davidas Pangam as well as the Health Secretary that there is no dearth as such of oxygen. They have pointed out that the Central government has now increased the (medical oxygen) quota for Goa, having regard to the

overwhelming number of Covid-19 victims in the state of Goa," the court said.

"On our query as to why the deaths have taken place last night, we were explained that there were logistical issues involved in maneuvering the tractor which carries the trolleys of oxygen and in connecting the cylinders to the manifold," the court ruled.

The court asked the government to remove any deficiencies regarding supply of oxygen to patients. — PTI

## Covishield dose gap increased

■ Continued from Page 1

was recommended," ICMR chief Dr Balram Bhargava said, adding that in the coming days more scientific data in this regard will be presented.

NitiAayog member Dr V.K. Paul underlined there was no pressure from any side to increase the gaps. "It was done in good faith without any pressure with the sole purpose of providing protection cover to the people of India. It was felt that otherwise breakthrough infections will increase. Reviewing the vaccine doses is a constant and dynamic process.

Several other countries are doing it. The UK and WHO have already increased space between Covishield and other vaccines like Pfizer, but many countries did not change the vaccination pattern. We have taken a scientific decision," Dr Paul said. He added that there will be no impact on the efficacy of the vaccine due to this extension and a single dose itself is very strong.

Facing criticism over the shortage of vaccines in several states, the Centre tried to clarify its position saying states have been given the flexibility to buy from vac-

cine manufacturers directly and can also take supplies from Centre. He said Delhi has been so far given 75 crore of Covaxin and apart from that the UT government has procured 1 lakh and the private sector has bought 20 lakh doses. The Delhi government has stopped giving Covaxin shots citing shortage of doses.

Dr Paul said in the coming six months more than 200 crore doses of various vaccines will be available in the country to significantly boost the vaccination drive as the Covid-19 virus has started spreading to rural areas now.

## C'garh govt cancels key projects

■ Continued from Page 1

Chhattisgarh government said. Accordingly, ongoing works on construction of new Raj Bhavan, state legislative Assembly, official residences of CM, other ministers and senior officers in Nava Raipur have been suspended, the press release said.

The foundation stone-laying ceremony for these projects was performed on November 25, 2019.

"The chief engineer of the PWD has issued orders to the concerned

contractors to stop the construction work of the new Raj Bhavan, new CM house, new houses of ministers and officers and new circuit house in Nava Raipur," the press release said.

The state government has instructed all the departments that, like the previous year, austerity should be exercised in the financial year 2021. Mr Baghel also announced that his government will provide free education and scholarship to children who lost their parents due to

the coronavirus pandemic in Chhattisgarh.

"The Chhattisgarh government will now bear the entire expenditure of the education of children who have lost their parents due to coronavirus during this financial year.

Also a scholarship of ₹500 per month will be given to such children studying from standard first to eighth and ₹1,000 per month for children from standard ninth to 12th," a separate press release issued by the state government said.



## THE ASIAN AGE

14 MAY 2021

# De-escalate conflict in Gaza, US must step in

There is a burgeoning conflict between Israel and the Hamas-administered Gaza Strip that must stop immediately if the entire Middle East region is not to be embroiled in another full-scale war. The Israeli police intervention restricting the right to freedom of worship during the Muslim holy month of Ramzan outside the historic Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem was the trigger for the events which have led Israel to the brink of an invasion of Gaza, with its combat troops massing on the border and preparing for a possible incursion like in 2008-09 and later in 2014. There are two “wars” on at the moment — the unprovoked firing of rockets by Hamas into Israeli population centres and the retaliatory aerial attacks on the Gaza Strip on the one hand and, on the other, the sectarian violence in Israel between Jews and Israeli Arabs.

Amid an already grim scenario, it does not help that US President Joe Biden declares Israel has a right to defend itself, though of course every nation does have the right to defend itself against external aggression, as illustrated in this instance of hundreds of Hamas rockets testing Israel’s fabled Iron Dome defence system with some streaking through to kill civilians, including an Indian housemaid. The Israelis are also facing a new type of challenge in people of the TikTok generation owing no loyalty except to the social media and spreading stray images of individual Arabs attacking Jews, which situation has now worsened into attacks on synagogues and citizens fighting on the streets. World powers are calling for a cessation of hostilities, while some like Russia and Turkey are egging Hamas on though they may know who will be the likely victor in aggrandising traditional Arab territory. Of

course, there can be no end to arguments about whose land it was and who was evicted 2,000 years ago. Such issues, in which 1948 and 1967 were significant dates, are being revisited now with arguments over seven Palestinian families facing eviction from the Sheikh Jarra neighbourhood of East Jerusalem and a court holding back a ruling only due to the outbreak of violence, starting with stone throwers aiming at policing of their congregating near the confluence of some of the holiest shrines of three religions and excessive police retaliation.

The one person who might not find the situation as incommoding of his power and position is Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who could be replaced if his rival Yair Lapid’s coalition moves bear fruit. These moves have become complicated amid the bloodshed in the raging conflict, with at least 67 Palestinians and seven Israelis dead. If Mr Netanyahu does cling on for now as he presides over operations in tandem with his nemesis Benny Gantz, the United States would have to play a leading role in bringing about a ceasefire. It is not clear where President Biden’s optimism springs from as he said “we will see this coming to a conclusion sooner than later”, but can there be a more effective peacemaker in this conflict than the US President, if he can exert America’s traditional influence on the Jewish state.

## Kerala Left icon’s legacy

The centenarian Communist leader K.R. Gowri Amma who passed away earlier this week was a product of, and represented, the essence of the renaissance values Kerala had nurtured in the early 20th century. Her call was to use those progressive and revolutionary values to the benefit of the working class and the downtrodden, and she did it quite successfully. Kerala’s land reforms are one of the legacies she has left behind.

That Gowri Amma was the first woman law graduate in her community was made possible because of the ideals of social reformer Sree Narayana Guru who emphasised the role of education in the emancipation of the subaltern classes. A successful lawyer, she later embraced the Communist ideology and there was no looking back. The fiery leader was subjected to police brutality during 1948-52 when the Communist Party was banned. She was elected to the Thiru-Kochi Assembly in 1954 and then to the first Kerala Assembly in 1957.

It was Gowri Amma as revenue minister in the first EMS ministry who moved the path-breaking Agrarian Relations Bill, 1957, which began the process of land reforms in the state. The ministry did not survive the combined assault of the reactionary forces but the ideals behind the bill did. True, it took another 13 years for Kerala to initiate land reforms but the egalitarian push that made the bill possible was too strong to be put under the carpet.

Gowri Amma was part of four more ministries in Kerala, thus actively contributing to the evolution of the state to its present form. She held on to her beliefs, political as well as personal, leading to her ouster from her party, the CPI(M), in 1994. She, along with her political outfit, later sided with the Congress-led United Democratic Front. Her spirits had returned to the Communists towards the fag end of her life, and her body has now joined those of the martyrs of Punnappra-Vayalar uprising and her husband and Communist Party leader T.V. Thomas at Valiya Chudukad, Alappuzha. Rest in the right company, comrade!

### THE ASIAN AGE

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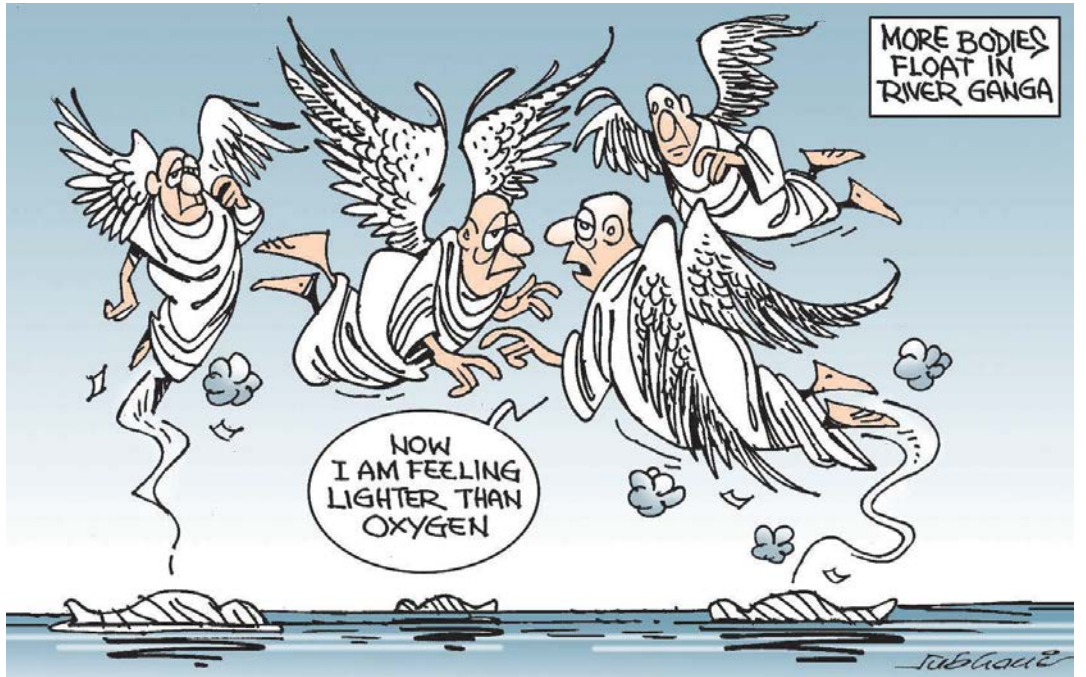
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Subhani



# Why did Centre fail to act despite a surge warning?



Karan Thapar

I want to tell you about a news report that hasn’t got the attention it deserves. With very few exceptions it’s been ignored by our newspapers and television channels. Yet it raises deeply disturbing questions about the government’s handling of the entire coronavirus crisis. Indeed, you could even say it provides “proof” of the government’s irresponsibility. That’s why it’s a story we need to know about so each of us can decide what we make of it. In that spirit I shall proceed.

On May 1, Reuters released a story headlined “Scientists say India government ignored warnings amid coronavirus surge”. It claimed five scientists from the government-appointed consortium of national laboratories tasked with genome sequencing, INSACOG, had “warned Indian officials in early March of a new and more contagious variant of the coronavirus taking hold in the country”. The story added: “Four of the scientists said the federal government did not seek to impose major restrictions to stop the spread of the virus”. So, in a nutshell, the government had been effectively forewarned to expect a possible exponential rise in cases but did virtually nothing.

The story carries a quotation from Shahid Jameel, the head of INSACOG, that suggests corroboration. “As scientists we provide the evidence, policymaking is the job of the government”. That seems to say INSACOG had done its duty, but the government did not.

On May 5, I interviewed a member of INSACOG. Three days earlier he had retired as director of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology. His name is Rakesh Mishra.

He confirmed the Reuters story. “This concern was raised”, he said. “It was a kind of warning that we are heading towards danger”. In fact, Dr Mishra went further. “It was a high concern and there’s no doubt about it ... we were very, very concerned ... dreading something bad would happen”. Dr Mishra said INSACOG’s concerns were conveyed directly to Sujet Kumar Singh, the director of the National Centre for Disease Control, to whom INSACOG reports. He added: “I think it went to the health secretary”. More important, he said it’s impossible to believe the Prime Minister would not have been told.

This means Dr Mishra did a lot more than confirm the Reuters story. He suggested the responsibility for not responding to INSACOG’s warning lay with the Prime Minister. Not surprisingly, a desperate government struggled to defend itself. Renu Swarup, biotech secretary, told a major financial daily that she wasn’t aware of any warning but then, bizarrely, added: “I also don’t understand the word warning at all”. If this was intended to scotch the Reuters story and rubbish Dr Mishra’s confirmation, it failed miserably.

Several INSACOG members confirmed that Dr Mishra spoke the truth. Of course, they didn’t do so in public. When I told them of Renu Swarup’s response, they laughed. “What else could she have done?”, one asked. Meanwhile, Dr Mishra repeated his confirmation to a major newspaper.

This brings me to the government’s response. Remember, the warning from INSACOG came in early March. But on March 7 health minister Harsh Vardhan told the Delhi Medical Association: “We are in the endgame of the Covid-19

pandemic in India”. That was the first sign that the government was paying no heed to INSACOG.

Thereafter, it got worse. Right through March massive political rallies, with tens or hundreds of thousands, took place in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam. In West Bengal they continued well into the second half of April. There were also *shahi snans*, with two or three million taking part, both in March and April. Ask yourself a simple question: after receiving INSACOG’s warning, was it all right to continue with these gatherings?

That’s not all. After INSACOG’s warning, Assam’s health minister (who is now the chief minister) said publicly that there was no need to wear a mask. Uttarakhand’s chief minister said faith in God and the power of Mother Ganga would protect people at the *shahi snans*. In the light of what we now know, was this the right response from health ministers and CMs?

In fact, deliberate disregard, not just of INSACOG but science itself, goes all the way to the top. When questioned, the home minister said political rallies can’t be held responsible for spreading Covid as Covid cases were rising in Maharashtra, where there were no rallies, not in Bengal, where he was present. If only he could see the situation today. Maharashtra is plateauing or declining, West Bengal seems to be shooting for the stars.

Perhaps the most incriminating proof of how our government disregarded science and ignored INSACOG came from the Prime Minister himself. On April 17, when cases were growing by over 260,000 a day, he

applauded the massive turnout at his Asansol rally. Yet the tens of thousands in front of him were doing things he should never have permitted: they weren’t wearing masks and they weren’t maintaining “*do gaj ki doori*”.

However, when INSACOG advised the government cases could rise dramatically it was also, at one remove, telling the authorities serious illness, hospitalisation and deaths would go up sharply. This should have prompted the government to immediately increase hospital beds, ICU facilities, ventilators and, most important, oxygen. It didn’t. Instead, the facilities set up to tackle the first wave were dismantled.

Now, let me ask a critical question. Doesn’t this story suggest — actually prove — the government was forewarned of the looming crisis but chose to ignore scientific advice? Worse, the government did all the wrong things. Doesn’t that amount to irresponsibility?

So that our political divisions don’t prejudice us, I put this question to one of the world’s most highly regarded experts on global health, Prof. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University’s School of Public Health. He said he has no doubt “the government failed to respond in a serious way even though the data was clear”. He also said the Kumbh Mela could end up being “the biggest superspreader in this pandemic’s history”. But he went one critical step further. He said this failure must be explained by “the people in power”. India, he added, is owed “an explanation” by its government.

Now can you see why this story is so important and you should know about it? If the answer is yes, ask why the vast majority of our media kept quiet and failed to tell you? Just as the government owes us an explanation for its irresponsibility, doesn’t the media owe you an explanation for keeping you in the dark?

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

**Remember, the warning from INSACOG came in early March. But on March 7 health minister Harsh Vardhan told the DMA: ‘We are in the endgame of the Covid-19 pandemic in India.’**

### LETTERS

#### HEARTLAND CRISIS

The current spread of Covid in rural areas will have deeper repercussions compared to the urban, which could dip into savings or keep earning. The rural sector, that perennially had uncertain income, is in double jeopardy. The latest figures in NREGA show an alarming dip by half in attendance. This when the current budget for women and child welfare has been cut by 20 per cent. Studies in food consumption in rural areas show a 40 per cent decline. The government would need to show as much concern over food security and enabling financial schemes for our rural cousins. Neglect will take an unprecedented toll on rural health and the national economy.

R. Narayanan  
Navi Mumbai

#### GOVT FLOUNDERING

**THE MOVE BY CERTAIN** states to suspend jabs for ages 18-44, three days after the vaccination drive began for the younger population, exposes the government’s lack of planning and foresight. The announcement comes in the backdrop of a vaccine crunch to administer a second dose to people over 45 years. Many states also ran out of Covaxin for the 45+ age group leaving people in the lurch. The Union government would do well to iron out the chinks and ensure a seamless supply of vaccines and oxygen to the states.

N.J. Ravi Chander  
Bengaluru

#### BLOT ON HUMANITY

**RUMOURS OF BEEF** in a tiffin box can cause riots in India. But over 100 human bodies floating in river leads to positivity. How else is the government silent after reports of bodies washing up in the Ganga makes us hang our heads in shame before other nations? We have truly shown ourselves for the great civilisation that we pride ourselves of being a part of as one based on nothing but false values, greed, cowardice and self-serving hypocrisy.

Priyanka Mathur  
New Delhi

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

Mahir Ali



Resistance to the latest bout of attempted ethnic cleansing in the Old City has fed into spiralling violence in Jerusalem in the days leading up to Eid. Sheikh Jarrah — the Old City neighbourhood where the legally sanctioned evictions of long-standing Palestinian residents at the behest of Jewish settler organisations predictably sparked a response — serves as a reminder that the Nakba is much more than a historical event.

It is an ongoing catastrophe, perhaps best exemplified by the creeping annexation of the West Bank.

Amid the confrontation centred around Al Aqsa mosque — with stones and fireworks on one side, and stun grenades, tear gas and rubber bullets on the other, causing hundreds of injuries — Hamas opted for its usual tactic of lobbing a bunch of missiles towards Jerusalem. They caused little damage and no casualties, whereas the Israeli response claimed the lives of at least 24 people, many of them children, in the Gaza Strip, according to reports.

That’s par for the course in that part of the world. Likewise the swift Western condemnation of Hamas’s futile attacks. More broadly there have been the usual calls for a “de-escalation on both sides” from the US and EU. Moral equivalence between the brutality of the oppressor and the resistance of the oppressed remains a problematic hurdle for Western “diplomacy”.

This is reflected in efforts across Europe and the US, legally or legislatively sanctioned in some cases, to effectively outlaw most criticism of Israel, and specifically the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. It’s worth recalling that there was also opposition to pressure for sanctions against the South African apartheid state. It took a few decades for sufficient momentum to build up to make a difference.

It may take even longer in the case of Israel. After all, the Afrikaners who dominated South Africa lacked the leverage of a historical holocaust. Mind you, this is not to suggest that Europeans, or anyone else, ought to

overlook one of the 20th century’s most atrocious crimes against humanity. On the contrary, the horrific Nazi extermination campaign against European Jews should forever serve as a particularly sordid reminder of the depths of hatred to which human beings can descend.

One can only wonder whether historical memories play any role when, for instance, German legislators effectively criminalise solidarity with Palestine amid a rising tide of neo-Nazism in their nation, when French politicians and retired generals promote Islamophobia, or when Israeli fascists mobilise to chant “death to Arabs” in Palestinian neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding bipartisan opposition to a congressional effort to legislate some leverage over how generous US subsidies to Israel, mostly in the form of military aid, are used, there are persistent reports from the US suggesting that the mood over unquestioning backing for Israel is shifting, not least among younger American Jews.

It may be so, although there’s scope

for scepticism. It was nonetheless intriguing to encounter an opinion column in *The New York Times* recently in which former CIA chief John Brennan advised Joe Biden to watch Palestinian film-maker Farah Nabulsi’s Academy Award-nominated short film *The Present*, which depicts the ordeals Palestinians routinely face in crossing checkpoints not between the occupied territories and Israel, but within the West Bank.

Who knows whether Mr Biden will bother, but either way chances of a substantial policy shift in the US — perhaps the only country capable of single-handedly compelling Israel to reconsider the status quo — remain infinitesimal. It won’t matter that Human Rights Watch has at last acknowledged that Israel is guilty of the crimes of apartheid and persecution.

It will matter even less that Israel remains in a political mess, with its fourth election in two years predictably yielding no clear mandate, and its caretaker Prime Minister facing corruption charges and the prospect of imprisonment.

Benjamin Netanyahu was once more afforded the opportunity of forming a government after his Likud party won 30 Knesset seats in March, falling short of a majority by 31 seats. He failed, and last week Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid, which won 17 seats, was invited to have a go. That effectively means either a (probably temporary) government led by Naftali Bennett (who is even nastier than Netanyahu in some respects), or a fifth election. Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, has lamely put off indefinitely elections scheduled for this month. One could argue that under the circumstances, Palestinian elections, like the aspirations of young Palestinians who have never had a chance to vote, hardly matter. But how exactly do young Israelis see their future? Are they comfortable with the idea of living in, and fighting for, a proto-fascist state? Would they be willing to confide as much the next time they commune with their grandparents?

By arrangement with Dawn



## SHORT TAKES

## LANKA: INDIAN FAMILY HELD FOR FLOUTING LAWS

**Colombo:** Four members of an Indian family, including two children, have been arrested for allegedly entering Sri Lanka's Jaffna peninsula illegally and violating the local immigration and the quarantine laws, police said on Thursday.

The family, which consists of a 61-year old woman, her 34-year-old daughter and her two children, said they had entered Sri Lanka on May 6 with the help of fishermen.

Ajith Rohana, the deputy inspector general of police, said the members of the family were arrested at Gurunagar area in Jaffna for their illegal stay in the country and violating the immigration and quarantine laws.

They had arrived from India on May 6 on an Indian boat halfway and had travelled the rest of the way aboard a Sri Lankan fishing boat, Rohana said.

## DEATH OF STUDENT IN CHINA TRIGGERS PROTEST

**Taipei:** It was a call no parent wants to receive. On Mother's Day, around 9 pm, a woman in Chengdu in southwestern China was told that her son, who she had dropped off at school just hours ago, had died. Distraught, she went to Chengdu No. 49 Middle School immediately, but could not even enter the school grounds, she wrote in a series of Twitter-like Weibo posts on Monday that were shared hundreds of thousands of times this week.

Her account disputing both the police and local government's account of her 16-year-old son's death has touched a nerve, becoming one of the most discussed topics on Chinese social media this week. One related hashtag #ChengduNo.49Middle racked up more than 1.5 billion views alone on Weibo.

People online called for justice for the mother and questioned the actions of the school, police and local authorities. On Tuesday night, videos of a protest in front of the school circulated. People clutching white flowers shouted "the truth!"

## S.TAIWAN LOSES POWER AFTER PLANT FAILURE

**Taipei:** An equipment failure caused an outage at a power plant in southern Taiwan on Thursday, triggering rolling blackouts across the island affecting millions of people.

The outage in Kaohsiung trapped at least one person in an elevator and disrupted a daily briefing being given by government officials on the island's pandemic situation. Taipower, the government-run electric company, launched the rolling blackouts at 3 pm and said emergency repairs were underway. The outages affected 8.46 million households, Taipower said.

In Yilan county, one person was trapped in an elevator, the government-backed Central News Agency said. In Hsinchu, 150,000 households lost power. In the southern city of Tainan, 14 districts were affected. President Tsai Ing-wen issued a statement saying that "everyone can rest assured" and that the government was handling the situation. She said an investigation would be conducted into the cause of the outage.

## UK: ROYAL MAIL TO ISSUE STAMPS FOR PRINCE PHILIP

**London:** The UK's Royal Mail will issue a set of special stamps in memory of Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh, the husband of Queen Elizabeth II who passed away aged 99 last month.

A sheet of four black and white stamps, which are now available to pre-order, show Britain's longest serving consort to a British monarch in different stages of his life.

The first design features a portrait of the duke as a young man, taken by photographer Baron. The second depicts Prince Philip at the passing out parade of his son, Prince Andrew, at Dartmouth Naval College in Devon. Another stamp shows the duke at the Royal Windsor Horse Show. The final and most recent image is a portrait snapped by photographer Terry O'Neill.

"Throughout adulthood, the Duke of Edinburgh dedicated himself to the service of this country, the Commonwealth and to the many causes he was involved with," said Simon Thompson, chief executive of Royal Mail.

The stamps, officially on sale from June 24.

## US vax beat strain found in India

Observation based on latest data about variant and three major vaccines approved in the US

**Washington, May 13:** Covid-19 vaccines approved by the United States like Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson have effectiveness against the B1617 variant of the virus that is predominant in India, which is experiencing one of the worst outbreaks of the pandemic, a top American health official said.

The observation is based on the latest data about the variant and the three major vaccines approved by the United States, said Dr Francis Collins, Director of National Institute of Science. "The data is coming in, and it looks very encouraging that the US-approved vaccines, the Pfizer, the Moderna, the J&J, do have effectiveness against this variant called B1617," Collins told the media.

"It's a little less effective in that case than some of the others, but it looks like it ought to be good enough to make Americans protected. And that's really a good thing to hear," he said in response to a question.

Early this week, the World Health Organisation classified the B1617 SARS-CoV-2 variant, which was first detected in India, as a variant of concern. The WHO said that evidence showed B1617 was more transmissible.

—PTI

## INDIAN COVID-19 STRAIN REACHES LAS VEGAS

**Las Vegas (US), May 13:** The Las Vegas area has been added to places in Nevada where authorities have detected cases of a potentially worrisome strain of the Coronavirus first detected in India.

The Southern Nevada Health District reported on Tuesday that a woman in her 20s who had not travelled recently and was not vaccinated against Covid-19 tested positive for the variant subtype. She didn't require hospitalisation. A district spokeswoman said on Wednesday that there were no additional cases to report.

Eight other cases of the variant were previously identified in northern Nevada, including four confirmed last week in the Reno area.

—AP



Joe Biden

## BIDEN TO BEEF UP FEDERAL CYBERSECURITY

**Richmond, May 13:** President Joe Biden has signed an executive order meant to strengthen US cybersecurity defences in response to a series of headline-grabbing hacking incidents that highlight how vulnerable the country's public and private sectors are to high-tech spies and criminals operating from half a world away.

The order signed on Wednesday will require all federal agencies to use basic cybersecurity measures, like multi-factor authentication, and require new security standards for software makers that contract with the federal government. Officials are hoping to leverage the federal government's massive spending power to improve security across all types of software.

The order comes as the administration has been grappling with its response to a massive breach by Russia of federal agencies and ransomware attacks on private corporations. Hit by a cyberattack, the operator of a major US fuel pipeline was forced to shut down service.

—AP



Worshippers stand on circles marked on the ground to help people maintain social distancing during religious ceremonies at the Catholic shrine in Fatima, Portugal on Thursday. Due to Covid-19, the shrine has limited to 7,500 pilgrims that can be present during the celebrations of May 12 and 13.

—AP

## US Cong. urges to boost aid to India

**Washington, May 13:** Fifty-seven US Congressmen have written to President Joe Biden, urging him to bolster America's Covid-19 assistance to India.

The sharp increase in cases has overwhelmed India's healthcare system. We must do our part to quell the virus everywhere it persists, the lawmakers said in a letter to

Biden on Wednesday.

We are extremely concerned with regards to India's deadly Covid-19 second wave. India is now the epicenter of the Covid-19. Today, marked India's deadliest day, with 4,205 deaths reported, carrying the total number of confirmed deaths to more than 250,000, said the letter initiated by Congressman

Brad Sherman, the Democratic Chair of the Congressional India Caucus.

In the letter, the Congressmen relayed to the administration that India remains in need of additional medical equipment, supplies and other vital resources to emerge from this crisis.

They requested the administration to provide

oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators, oxygen generator plants, cryogenic oxygen tanker/container, Remdesivir, Tocilizumab and ventilators/BIPAP to India.

It is also in the US interest that everyone in India be vaccinated, the Congressmen wrote.

—PTI

## Oz signs deal for 25mn Moderna vax

**Canberra, May 13:** Australia has reached a supply agreement for 25 million doses of Moderna Covid-19 vaccines, the US-based biotechnology company and the prime minister said on Thursday.

The deal included 10 million doses of the vaccine against the ancestral strain to be delivered in

2021 and 15 million doses of an updated variant booster to be delivered in 2022, Moderna said in a statement.

The vaccines have yet to be approved by the Australian regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Pfizer and AstraZeneca are the only other Covid vaccines approved for use

in Australia. All three vaccines require two doses.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that he expected the first Moderna vaccines to arrive in Australia in the last three months of 2021. The 15 million booster doses would deal with possible future variants of the virus, he said.

We're now well into the

phase of dealing with what's coming next because the pandemic's not going anywhere, Morrison told *Perth Radio 6PR*.

Moderna vaccines would help Australia achieve its aim of inoculating all willing Australian adults within a population of 26 million by the end of 2021.

—AP

## Italy fines Google 100 million euros

**Rome, May 13:** Italy's anti-trust authority said Thursday it had fined Google more than 100 million euros (\$120mn) for shutting out a rival's smartphone app offering recharging of electric vehicles.

The authority said Google, whose Android operating system and Google Play app store dominate the Italian market, had abused its market position by blocking an Enel X app for users of electric vehicles.

The regulator added it would require Google to make Enel X's app avail-

able on Android Auto, which mirrors features of an Android device, such as a smartphone, on a car dashboard screen.

The fine of 102,084,433.91 euros is for a violation of article 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which regulates monopolies and issues involving restriction of competition.

Italy found Google did not allow Enel X Italia to develop an Android Auto-compatible version of its JuicePass app. JuicePass offers services relating to recharging electric vehicles.

—AFP

## Nepal: Oli set to reclaim PM's post

**Kathmandu, May 13:** K.P. Sharma Oli was set to be reappointed as Nepal Prime Minister as the Opposition alliance of Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) on Thursday failed to muster majority support to form the next government.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari had asked the Opposition parties to come up with the support of majority lawmakers to form a new government by 9 PM on Thursday after Oli lost a crucial trust vote in the House of Representatives on Monday.

However, as the deadline which ended at 9.00 pm on



K.P. Sharma Oli

Thursday, the NC-Maoist Centre alliance has its hopes crashing down as disgruntled Nepal-Khanal faction of the ruling CPN-UML did not forward their resignation, which they had been claiming to do for long as a bargaining chip with embattled former prime minister Oli.

As the time accorded by the President gradually runs out and the deadline approaches, it can well be assumed that Oli is all set to make a comeback, emerging victorious in this Game of Thrones, as the country grapples with unprecedented rise in Covid-19 cases and corresponding fatalities as the second wave of the pandemic rages on, *The Himalayan Times* newspaper commented.

Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" held a meeting on Thursday at the former's residence at Budhanilkantha in the

outskirts of Kathmandu to discuss the formation of the new government.

Similarly, Prime Minister and chairman of ruling CPN-UML Oli and dissident leader of the party Madhav Kumar Nepal held a meeting in an attempt to make the last effort to patch up their differences.

After Prime Minister Oli withdrew action taken against four dissident leaders for working against the party, 28 lawmakers close to the dissident leader withdrew their decision to resign en masse from the House of Representatives, that would pave way for Deuba to stake a claim for the prime minister's post.

—PTI

## COSMOS | DRAMA

Pre-flight training to be documented by Channel One of Russia

## Russia to send crew to ISS for first space movie

**Moscow, May 13:** Russia's space agency said on Thursday it was sending an actress and a director to the International Space Station in October to make the first feature film in space.

"Filming will take place at the International Space Station. The start of the expedition is scheduled for October 5, 2021 from the Baikonur cosmodrome on the Soyuz MS-19 manned transport spacecraft," Roscosmos said in a statement.

Actress Yulia Peresild, 36, and director Klim Shipenko, 37, will undergo special training, including tests on a centrifuge and flights in zero gravity, starting no later than 1 June.

Their pre-flight training will be documented by one of Russia's main TV channels, Channel One, which will also be involved in producing the film.

The film's working title is "Challenge" and will be in the genre of a "space drama", Roscosmos said, without providing details about the plot of the film or Peresild's role.

Roscosmos said in September the movie will aim to "popularise Russia's space activities, as well as glorify cosmonaut profession".

The film will be co-produced by Dmitry Rogozin, the head of Russia's space agency, with the ambition of making Russia the first country to shoot a film in space.

—AFP

## Japanese billionaire to travel to ISS

**Moscow, May 13:** Japanese billionaire entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa and his assistant Yozo Hirano will be the next tourists to travel to the International Space Station (ISS), Russia's space agency Roscosmos said Thursday. Maezawa and Hirano will travel aboard a Russian "Soyuz MS-20 spacecraft that is scheduled for launch on December 8, 2021 from the Baikonur cosmodrome" in Kazakhstan, the agency said in a statement.

Maezawa, 45, who made his fortune in online retail, also plans to participate in a 2023 mission



Yusaku Maezawa

around the moon aboard a Starship spacecraft of SpaceX, the Roscosmos rival of US billionaire

Elon Musk. Maezawa and film producer Hirano, who will be documenting the mission, will begin pre-flight training in June at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre in Star City, a closed town outside of Moscow, Roscosmos added.

It said that the flight will last 12 days and the crew will be led by Cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin.

"I'm so curious 'what's life like in space?' So, I am planning to find out on my own and share with the world on my YouTube channel," Maezawa said,

as quoted by Roscosmos.

It will be the first time that two of the three spots on a Soyuz space rocket will be occupied by tourists.

The last time Roscosmos took a tourist to the ISS was in 2009, with the flight of Canadian Guy Laliberte, co-founder of Cirque du Soleil.

The resumption of these tourist flights comes as Roscosmos lost its monopoly for ferrying crews to the ISS after a reusable SpaceX rocket last year successfully delivered NASA astronauts to space.

—AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48690.80	-0.96
Nifty 50	14696.50	-1.04
S&P 500*	4,112.51	1.22
Dollar (₹)	73.42	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.78	-0.12
Euro (₹)	89.10	0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,468▼14	0.03
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.28	-2.94
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.010	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.674	-0.029

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Builders hope for recovery in 2nd half of 2021

The demand for luxury homes has slowed down during the last one-and-a-half months due to the second wave of Covid-19 but real estate developers and consultants are hopeful that sales will pick up once the situation normalises as it happened last year. Despite Covid wave, prices of luxury residential properties are likely to remain stable and may even rise slightly due to limited supply, they said.

Airtel fixed line, enterprise users to get quick service



Airtel fixed line and enterprise subscribers will soon be migrated to Amdocs' system for more rapid delivery of new digital customer experiences, according to a statement. The telecom company said seamless migration of Airtel wireless postpaid customers to Amdocs modern digital-business system, which enables the telco to quickly create and launch new digital services for customers.

Embassy invests in Pi Labs fund for proptech cos

Realty firm Embassy Group on Thursday said it has invested in venture capital firm Pi Labs' new fund that puts money in proptech startups. Founded in 2014, Pi Labs was the first venture capital firm in Europe to exclusively invest in proptech companies. Embassy has joined Pi Labs as a limited partner in its current Fund 3, the Bengaluru-based firm said. The company did not disclose the amount it has invested in the fund.

TVS picks Robert as CEO of Norton Motorcycle

TVS Motor Company on Thursday said it has appointed Robert Hentschel as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of iconic British brand Norton Motorcycle, which it acquired last year. Hentschel replaces John Russell who steps down from his role as an interim CEO. Besides, Vittorio Urciuoli has been named as the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) of the Solihull-based motorcycle brand.

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Interest shows a better demand scenario for gas 14 bidders slug it out for KG-D6 gas supply

New Delhi, May 13: As many as 14 users across sectors slugged it on a third-party electronic platform for seven-and-half hours to secure natural gas supplies from the eastern offshore KG-D6 block before the oil-to-chemical (O2C) unit of Reliance Industries Ltd bagged most of the supplies, sources said.

Reliance Industries Ltd and its partner BP Plc of the United Kingdom, who are bringing a second set of gas discoveries in their Bay of Bengal KG-D6 block, had offered 5.5 million standard cubic metres per day (mmscmd) of additional gas in the auction for a flexible tenure of between three and five years.

Gas users companies like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Reliance O2C, GAIL Gas, Adani Total Gas Ltd, Torrent Gas, Torrent Power and gas trading companies like GAIL, Shell and IGS were locked in the intense bidding war on the e-auction that happened on May 5, sources in the Reliance-BP consortium said.

At the end of the intense bidding war, Reliance O2C walked away with three mmscmd of supplies, offering better prices than competitors, they said.

India Gas Solutions (IGS) - a gas sourcing and marketing joint venture of Reliance and BP - bagged another 1 mmscmd, while IOC got a similar volume.

The remaining volume was picked by Adani Gas



ONGC WAIVES MARKETING MARGIN BUT REFUSES TO LOWER GAS PRICE

New Delhi, May 13: ONGC has agreed to do away with charging users a marketing margin on the gas it plans to produce from its KG basin field but refused to lower the minimum rate, according to tender documents.

ONGC, India's top oil and gas producer, last month sought bids for the sale of initial 2 million standard cubic meters per day of gas from its KG-DWN-98/2 block (KG-D5).

The company asked bidders to quote a rate linked to prevailing Brent crude oil prices. It fixed the floor or minimum rate at 10.5 per cent of the three-month aver-

age Brent crude oil price. On top of it, the firm sought \$0.20 per million British thermal unit.

Potential bidders however opposed the levy of the marketing margin as well as the "high" floor price.

Responding to queries raised by bidders, ONGC said the floor price cannot be changed but the marketing margin is being dropped.

"Change in Reserve Gas Price (floor rate) is not agreed. However, considering requests from various bidders, the levy of marketing margin of \$0.20 per mmbtu over and above contract price is removed," the company said. — PTI

(0.15 mmscmd), IRM Energy (0.10 mmscmd), GAIL (30,000 cubic meters per day) and Torrent Gas (20,000 cubic metres per day). This is the third auc-

tion that Reliance-BP conducted on a third party independent platform approved by the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH). The online

web-based electronic bidding platform of CRISIL Risk and Infrastructure Solutions Ltd (CRIS) was also used for e-auction in February this year as well as in 2019.

In the three auctions, Reliance-BP has sold around 18 mmscmd of domestic gas from new fields in the KG-D6 block, which would help substantially reduce reliance on imported LNG, the sources said.

In the May 5 auction, Reliance-BP had asked bidders to quote a price linked to Platts JKM (Japan Korea marker), the liquefied natural gas (LNG) benchmark price assessment for spot physical cargoes.

The intense competition indicates a preference for domestic gas vis a vis LNG for Indian consumers.

At current prices, the discovered price translates into a price of about \$9 per mmbtu, but the buyers will be required to pay only the cap or ceiling price that the government has set for such fields. The government sets a cap or ceiling rate at which natural gas from difficult fields like deepsea can be sold.

This cap for the period April 1, 2021, to September 30 2021 is \$3.62 per mmbtu.

With the return of demand, international rates have rebounded, which will reflect in the prices in the second revision due on October 1. — PTI

Eli Lilly allows 3 Indian cos to make Covid drug DRL, MSN Labs, Torrent to make Baricitinib

New Delhi, May 13: Drug firm Eli Lilly and Company on Thursday said it has inked voluntary licensing agreements with three Indian drug firms — Torrent Pharmaceuticals, Dr Reddy's and MSN Laboratories — to expedite the availability of Baricitinib for treatment of Covid patients in India. The company has issued additional royalty-free, non-exclusive voluntary licences to Dr Reddy's, MSN Laboratories and Torrent Pharmaceuticals, who will be collaborating

Covid fails to dampen PE, VC interest in India

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 13

The second wave of the pandemic has not been able to affect the enthusiasm of private equity and venture capital funds as investments continued to grow for four straight months of 2021.

PE/VC investments in April 2021 stood at \$7.5 billion, which were 6.5 times the value recorded in the lock-down hit April 2020 at \$1.1 billion. The April 2021 investments were also 37 per cent higher compared to \$5.5 billion in the previous month of March.

In the past four months of 2021, there has been a sequential increase in investments from \$1.6 billion in January to \$7.5 billion in April.

Technology was the top sector to grab \$3.1 billion, followed by e-commerce with \$1.5 billion. E-commerce also saw the highest monthly investment value in the past 31 months. The financial services sector received \$614 million and media and entertainment \$515 million.

"The revival in PE/VC investments has been driven by an increase in large deals valued over \$100 million. Of the 41 large deals recorded in the first four months of 2021, 32 were in the past two months. While Covid resilient sectors like pharma, healthcare, edutech, online media, SaaS, Technology and IT/ITeS continue to see good traction in both value and volume of PE/VC deals, there has been a significant uptick in the value and volume of investments in the e-commerce sector,"

FPI INVESTMENT IN EQUITY RISES 7% TO \$552B IN MARCH QUARTER

New Delhi, May 13: The value of foreign portfolio investor (FPI) holdings in domestic equities reached \$552 billion in three months to March 2021, a surge of 7 per cent from the preceding quarter, according to a Morningstar report.

This was largely on the back of robust net inflows from FPIs, coupled with a strong performance of the Indian equity markets. "As of the quarter ended March 2021, the value of FPI investments in Indian equities stood at \$552 billion, which was considerably higher than the \$518 billion recorded in the previous quarter," the report noted.

As of March 2020 quarter, the value of FPI investments in Indian equities was \$281 billion. However, the contribution of overseas investors to domestic equity market capitalisation

dropped marginally during the period under review to 19.9 per cent from 20.1 per cent in the December quarter.

Offshore mutual funds form an important component of total foreign portfolio investment, apart from other large FPIs, such as offshore insurance companies, hedge funds, and sovereign wealth funds.

During January-March 2021, FPIs invested a robust \$7.64 billion in Indian equities. In relative terms, it was much lower than the net inflows of \$19.21 billion recorded in the previous quarter, but in absolute terms, it is a significant amount, nonetheless, the report pointed out.

According to the report, positive domestic and global factors ensured that the interest of foreign investors in the Indian equity markets remains intact. — PTI

Exits also were quite active in April. April 2021 recorded 13 exits worth \$2.7 billion, almost 23 times the value of exits in April 2020 at \$117 million and 25 per cent higher than the value recorded in March 2021 at \$2.1 billion. Secondary exits in April 2021 were highest at \$2.1 billion across three deals. Exits worth \$7 billion in the first four months were 17 per cent higher than the total value recorded last year.

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LABOUR FORCE SHRANK IN INDIA, SAYS CMIE



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 13

The number of employed people fell by 7.35 million in April over March as the labour force shrank and the unemployment rate went up due to the second wave of the pandemic, finds CMIE.

The number of employed people in India fell from 398 million in March to 390.79 million in April — a decline of 7.35 million within a month.

Shrinkage of the labour force and rise in unemployment among those looking for jobs contributed to the decline. The labour force shrank by 1.1 million in April 2021 to 424.6 million compared to 425.8 million in March.

Labour Participation Rate fell for a third consecutive month in April and was the lowest since the nation-wide lockdown month of May 2020. The lockdowns imposed in some of the states to curb the second wave could have denied people from seeking employment and caused a fall in labour participation, finds Mahesh Vyas, CEO, CMIE.

However, despite this smaller labour force looking for employment, a greater proportion failed to find jobs. As a result, the unemployment rate shot up from 6.5 per cent in March to 8 per cent in April. Count of the unemployed who was willing to work and was actively looking for work but unable to find any expanded by 6.2 million from 27.7 million in March to 33.9 million in April.

Most of the job losses are from the agricultural sector, which is not impacted by the lockdowns. Of the 7.35 million people who lost employment in April, six million losses were from the agricultural sector.

Member nations to begin dialogue on issue Brics moots wider social security net

New Delhi, May 13: The representatives of BricsS nations have expressed willingness to have a multilateral social security framework in order to safeguard workers' rights.

The Social Security Agreement will help the international workers to port their benefit to their home countries and are exempted from contributing towards social security schemes both in home and host countries.

The views were expressed by member nations' representatives at the first Brics Employment Working Group (EWG) meeting held on May 11 and 12, 2021 at New Delhi in a virtual format, a statement said.

Indian labour secretary Apurva Chandra, chaired the meeting as the country has assumed the Brics

Presidency this year. The prime agenda for the discussions were Promoting Social Security Agreements amongst Brics nations, formalisation of labour markets, participation of women in the labour force and Gig and Platform workers' role in the labour market.

Apart from representatives of member nations, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Social Security Agency (ISSA) also made valuable interventions and suggestions on the agenda issues.

"On the issue of Social Security Agreement

(SSA), the member nations resolved to enter into dialogue and discussion with each other and take it forward towards the signing of the agreements, while the ISSA and ILO on their part, expressed willingness to provide technical support in facilitating the conclusion of such agreements," it said.

The member nations also converged on devising a multilateral framework for the same (social security agreement) at a later stage, it said.

The member nations also discussed various initiatives taken by them towards the formalization of jobs and how Covid-19 has enhanced informalisation risk. — PTI

Nasscom seeks waiver from FCRA regulations

New Delhi, May 13: IT industry body Nasscom on Thursday said that it has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a temporary relaxation in the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) norms and further liberalisation of vaccine import to navigate through the deadly second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Terming data as strategic ammunition available for managing the pandemic, the IT industry body said insights and analytics from Covid tracking and vaccination data could play a key role in decision making and early warning signals.

All these steps, Nasscom said, will enable the industry to "do more and act

faster to help the country navigate the second wave and be better prepared to deal with future waves".

Nasscom said while the vaccination regime has been liberalised, the availability of vaccines — particularly for the private sector — continues to be "very challenging".

"While we are attempting to source available vaccines in India, we request the government to provide emergency use authorisation for all WHO-approved vaccines Pfizer, Moderna, J&J, and others that have gone through stringent approval process globally, to ensure there is no vaccine divide in the country," the industry body said in a statement. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Lukaku fined for birthday party

**Milan:** Romelu Lukaku has been fined along with three Inter Milan teammates after a party in the early hours of Thursday morning to celebrate the Belgium forward's birthday which broke Covid-19 restrictions. Lukaku, Achraf Hakimi, Ivan Perisic and Ashley Young were among a group of 24 people celebrating his 28th birthday in a Milan hotel after the Inter's 3-1 league win over Roma, *Gazzetta Dello Sport* reported.

Police were called with all present receiving fines for breaking coronavirus rules, *Gazzetta* said. According to Lukaku's entourage, the former Manchester United forward went out with friends, but had not organised the party. Lukaku scored the final goal against Roma to bring his tally to 22 in the league this season, six behind Cristiano Ronaldo.

— AFP

## Serena beaten in 1,000th match

**Rome:** Serena Williams' 1,000th tour-level singles match ended in defeat as she marked her return to action with a 7-6 (6), 7-5 loss to Nadia Podoroska in the second round of the Italian Open. The eighth-seeded Williams, who hadn't played since the Australian Open, rallied from a break down twice in the opening set on Wednesday and saved the first three set points she faced in the tiebreaker before Podoroska converted her fourth. "It's tough to have a first match on clay. It was definitely kind of good to go the distance and to try to be out there, but clearly I can do legions better," said Williams.

Defending champion Simona Halep was forced to retire with a left calf injury in the second set of her match against fellow former No. 1 Angelique Kerber. Halep was leading 6-1, 3-3 before her injury. — AP

## Djokovic sweeps into Italian last 8

**Rome:** World number one Novak Djokovic swept into the Italian Open quarter-finals on Thursday with a straight sets wins over Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in front of spectators who were allowed to watch in the Foro Italico for the first time.

The five-time Rome champion won through 6-2, 6-1 in 1hr 10min against the 48th-ranked Spaniard with the venue filled to 25 per cent of capacity. "It was not good, it was great. I missed the crowd," said the 33-year-old Serb. "It was nice to see them back." After losing his opening service game, Djokovic powered back with five breaks of serve, outclassing his rival, despite a late fightback, to seal the win on his sixth match point. — AFP

## Oz players may return home soon

**Male, Maldives:** A group of Australian cricketers, coaches and players-turned-commentators, currently stranded in Maldives, may return home in a chartered flight on Sunday, though they are still waiting confirmation from their government, according to a report. A group of 38 Australians, including 14 players, left for Maldives on May 6 after the suspension of IPL 2021 as their government had banned flights from India till May 15 due to surge in Covid-19 cases there. "Under plans currently being thrashed out..., the group of 38 would be able to take a charter flight out of the Maldives via Malaysia to Sydney on May 16, where they would then serve their mandatory 14-day quarantine period," a report in *ESPNcricinfo* said. — PTI

## Hockey legends kin to get ₹5 lac

**New Delhi:** Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday announced financial support of ₹5 lakh each for the bereaved families of former hockey players M.K. Kaushik and Ravinder Pal Singh, who recently lost their lives to Covid-19. Both Kaushik and Singh were a part of India's 1980 Olympic gold-winning team. — PTI

## Atletico on in Spain

## Atletico on the cusp of La Liga glory after Sociedad win

**Madrid, May 13:** Atletico Madrid held their nerve to beat Real Sociedad 2-1 on Wednesday and move within touching distance of winning La Liga.

Yannick Carrasco and Angel Correa made a dominant first half count for Atletico, who retreated in the second and were left hanging on after Igor Zubeldia blasted in for La Real with seven minutes left.

When the final whistle blew, Diego Simeone jogged up the tunnel at the Wanda Metropolitano, punching the air as he went, fully aware how important this result could prove.

"We were excellent in the first half but the suffering was unnecessary when we had so many chances," Simeone said.

Outside, Atleti fans had gathered to cheer and sing throughout a nervy contest and when victory was confirmed, fireworks filled the sky. "We thank all those who are outside tonight and all those who can't come because of everything that is happening," said Atletico captain Koke. "We could hear them outside when we needed them in the last 10 minutes."

Victory puts Atletico four points clear of Barcelona in the table and five ahead of Real Madrid, with Zinedine Zidane's side playing their game in hand away at Granada on Thursday.

It also raises the possibility of Atletico winning the title in the penultimate round on Sunday when they play at home to Osasuna.

Another victory this weekend would knock Barca out of the race regardless of what the Catalans do against Celta Vigo while Real Madrid would also concede if they had not taken six points from Granada and Sunday's trip to Athletic Bilbao.

Sevilla, in fourth, had earlier edged past Valencia 1-0 but they can no longer overtake Atleti, given their six-point deficit and a losing head-to-head record with the leaders. Youssef En-Nesyri scored his 26th goal of the season at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan.

The four-horse race is reduced to three and after weeks of various twists and turns, Atletico suddenly appear to have a route to the trophy.

In terms of the table at least, this game against fifth-placed Real Sociedad was their toughest remaining fixture, although Real Valladolid could well be fighting for survival on the final day. — AFP



Atletico Madrid's Angel Correa (left) vies for the ball with Martin Zubimendi of Real Sociedad in their Spanish League match in Madrid on Wednesday. — AFP

## Rowe exploits Jorginho blunder as Arsenal win

**London, May 13:** Thomas Tuchel admitted Chelsea's 1-0 defeat against Arsenal was a "wake-up call" after Emile Smith Rowe punished Jorginho's blunder to dent the Blues' bid to finish in the Premier League's top four.

Midfielder Jorginho was guilty of a woefully misplaced back-pass that ended with Gunners youngster Smith Rowe slotting home early in the first half at Stamford Bridge.

Tuchel's side were bereft of quality in the final third as they succumbed to only a third defeat in their 26 matches in all competitions.

Chelsea remain in fourth place, but their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish is now on a knife edge.

They sit six points clear of fifth placed West Ham, who have a game in hand, and seven ahead of sixth placed Liverpool, who could be the biggest threat with two games in hand. "I don't know how

## MILAN RUN RIOT TO KEEP THEIR CL CHANCES ALIVE

**Milan, May 13:** Ante Rebic scored a hat-trick and Theo Hernandez a double as AC Milan thrashed Torino 7-0 on Wednesday to keep their push for a return to the Champions League for the first time since 2014 on track.

The battle for elite European football remains tight with just three points separating second-placed Atalanta and Juventus in fifth.

Atalanta moved back second ahead of Napoli with a 2-0 win over relegation candidates Benevento.

The Bergamo side are equal on points with Milan, with Napoli a further two points adrift in fourth.

"Until you cross the finish line, you can't give up on anything," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli whose final two games are home against Cagliari and away to Atalanta. — AFP

Arsenal would have scored if we didn't give it to them. We scored more or less an own goal, a total gift," Tuchel said.

## PSG MAKE IT TO FRENCH CUP FINAL

Paris Saint-Germain squeaked past Montpellier 6-5 on penalties in Wednesday's

French Cup semi-final to keep alive their hopes of ending the season with silverware.

Spot kicks were required after the two sides were all square at 2-2 after normal time in Montpellier.

"It was a real cup tie, they're never easy," said PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino. — AFP

## CL FINAL MOVED FROM TURKEY TO PORTUGAL

**Paris, May 13:** UEFA announced on Thursday that the Champions League final between Manchester City and Chelsea had been moved from Istanbul to Porto, Portugal.

The match on May 29 has been switched to the Estadio do Dragao to allow English spectators to attend as travel between the UK and Turkey is suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier, European football's governing body announced up to 6,000 supporters from each club will be able to attend.

"We accept that the decision of the British Government to place Turkey on the red list for travel was taken in good faith and in the best interests of protecting its citizens from the spread of the virus but it also presented us with a major challenge in staging a final featuring two English teams," UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said.

UK citizens returning from red list countries are required to quarantine for 10 days. — AFP

## India remain No.1 in Test rankings

**Dubai, May 13:** India remained the number one Test side after the annual update of the ICC team rankings, released on Thursday.

India head the table after gaining one rating point for an aggregate of 121, having accumulated 2,914 points from 24 matches.

Virat Kohli's men are closely followed by their World Test Championship final opponents, New Zealand, with a rating of 120. The Kiwis have garnered 2166 points from 18 Tests and gained two rating points.

India's 2-1 win over Australia and 3-1 win over England over the past year and New Zealand's 2-0 series wins over the West Indies and Pakistan have helped them keep ahead of the pack.

According to an ICC statement, the latest annual update eliminates results of 2017-18.

The latest update rates all matches played since May 2020 at 100 per cent and those of the previous two years at 50 per cent.

England (109 rating) have climbed a place to third at the expense of Australia (108 rating), down to fourth now.

England's jump came

● **India's 2-1 win over Australia and 3-1 win over England over the past year and New Zealand's 2-0 series wins over the West Indies and Pakistan have helped them keep ahead of the pack.**

after their 0-4 defeat to Australia in 2017-18 was dropped from the rankings.

Pakistan (94) have gained three points but remained at fifth spot, while West Indies (84), who beat Bangladesh 2-0 and drew 0-0 with Sri Lanka in series played this year, have jumped two places to sixth, their best position since 2013.

South Africa (80) and Sri Lanka (78) have dropped a rung each to seventh and eighth positions respectively, followed by Bangladesh (46), who have lost five points and Zimbabwe (35), who gained eight points.

India and New Zealand will square off in the inaugural World Test Championship final at Southampton's Ageas Bowl from June 18 to 22.

— PTI

## PAINE HINTS AT GIVING UP CAPTAINCY AFTER ASHES

**Melbourne, May 13:** Australian Test captain Tim Paine has hinted at stepping down from the position if his team manages to defeat England in the Ashes series this year and backed former skipper Steve Smith to succeed him.

The 36-year-old Paine has been under intense scrutiny after Australia were beaten 1-2 by an injury-ravaged India in a home Test series earlier this season. Paine said that debacle was partly because his team got distracted by India's "nig-gling".

Smith was Australia's captain before being forced to step down in 2018 owing to his role in the ball-tampering scandal. "He's probably a bit like me when I was at the start of my captaincy journey in Tasmania — he was thrown into a very big role at a very, very young age and he proba-



Tim Paine

bly wasn't quite ready for it," Paine was quoted as saying by *news.com.au*.

"But by the time I came in he was growing into that role and getting better and better. Then obviously (in) South Africa events happened and he's not doing it anymore. But yeah I would support him getting that job again," he added.

Paine also hinted that he might step down from captaincy if Australia can beat England in the Ashes later this year.

— PTI

## WOMEN'S | CRICKET

## Powar replaces Raman as coach

**New Delhi, May 13:** Former spinner Ramesh Powar on Thursday replaced W.V. Raman as the Indian women's cricket team's head coach, regaining the position more than two years after he was sacked following a bitter fallout with ODI captain Mithali Raj.

The 42-year-old was recommended by the Madan Lal-led Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) after interviewing eight candidates, including Raman.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announces the appointment of Mr Ramesh Powar as the Head Coach of Team India (Senior Women)," a BCCI statement read.

The others in fray were former India wicketkeeper Ajay Ratna and four female candidates.

It remains to be seen how Powar works alongside Mithali, who had accused him of bias after the Harmanpreet Kaur-led T20 team dropped the veteran batter for the all-important World Cup semifinal against England.

Mithali, in a letter to the BCCI after the event, had alleged that Powar "was out to destroy and humiliate" her. Powar had hit back asserting that Mithali "threw a lot of tantrums and created chaos in the team".

After being removed from his position in the women's team, Powar proved himself as a coach and earlier this year, led Mumbai to the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

— PTI

## SHAFALI, RADHA READY TO MAKE WBBL DEBUTS

**New Delhi, May 13:** Indian batting sensation Shafali Verma is set to make her Women's Big Bash League debut with two-time champions Sydney Sixers later this year.

The 17-year-old is expected to be joined by left-arm spinner Radha Yadav, who is currently in talks with the Sydney Sixers franchise.

"Shafali's deal is done, it will be announced when the Women's Big Bash schedule is released," a BCCI source said.

"Radha is also in talks with the Sydney Sixers," the source added.

The teenager's father was also required to sign a consent form as Shafali is still a minor.

Shafali joins the trio of T20 skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (Sydney Thunder), opener Smriti Mandhana (Brisbane Heat) and all-rounder Veda Krishnamurthy (Hobart Hurricanes), which has featured in the WBBL.

The world number one batter in ICC women's T20I rankings will also be turning up for Birmingham Phoenix in the inaugural edition of The Hundred — the 100-ball domestic competition of the England and Wales Cricket Board later this year. — PTI

## Srikanth holds on to slim Oly hopes

**New Delhi, May 13:** Left stranded after the final three Olympic qualifiers were cancelled, Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth still harbours "some hope" of making it to the Tokyo Games, his faint optimism resting on the world body's assurance of a statement on the qualification process.

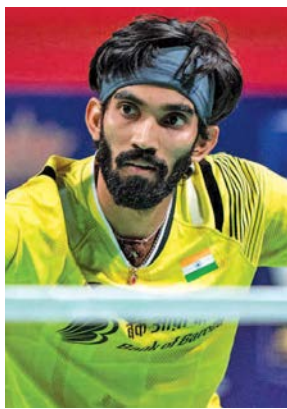
Former world No. 1 Srikanth and Saina Nehwal were all but out of contention after the Badminton World Federation on Wednesday cancelled the last qualifying event in Singapore due to coronavirus-related travel restrictions.

The cancellation of the Singapore event (June 1-6) was after Malaysia Open and India Open had to be shelved due to the health crisis.

The BWF, however, said it "will issue a further statement on Tokyo Olympics qualifying at a later date." "I could have qualified if I had participated in the qualifiers but there is nothing much I can do about it now. Just waiting to see what BWF says about this whole qualification things, so yeah holding on to some hope," Srikanth said.

There is no tournament scheduled till August and Telangana too has gone into a lockdown. Srikanth said he would now take a break from training.

Asked if BWF could have



Kidambi Srikanth

done anything differently, Srikanth said: "Now we can say a lot of things because the tournament is not happening but we really don't know what is happening between the organisers and BWF.

"So, I don't know what else can be done, may be BWF can communicate things better to players."

With no events lined-up, Olympic-bound shuttlers such as P.V. Sindhu, B. Sai Praneeth and men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, too have decided to take some time off.

"Definitely disappointed that all the three events got cancelled. I have been training for 7 weeks but now just training without purpose makes no sense," world No. 15 Praneeth said.

— PTI

## Negative public opinion is no threat to Olympics

**Geneva, May 13:** The IOC has downplayed concerns over Japanese public opinion calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be cancelled, before its virtual news conference was interrupted by an activist protesting the Games.

The news conference on Wednesday followed a monthly meeting of the International Olympic Committee's executive board held amid a state of emergency in Tokyo to curb surging Covid-19 cases. Polling in Japan also persistently suggests people want the July 23-August 8 Olympics to be called off, having already been postponed by one year.

"We listen but won't be guided by public opinion," IOC spokesman Mark Adams said, adding "everything is telling us ... that the Games can go ahead and will go ahead."

Adams stood in for his boss, IOC president Thomas Bach, whose planned visit to Japan next week was called off Monday after states of emergency in Tokyo and other regions were extended through May.

The final question of the news conference, held by video call, was offered to a reporter from Yahoo Sports.

## TOKYO-BOUND RACE WALKER IRFAN +VE

**New Delhi, May 13:** Olympic-bound race walker K.T. Irfan is among five elite track-and-field athletes who have tested positive for Covid-19 at the Sports Authority of India's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

The tests were conducted last Friday and those who returned positive have been kept under quarantine.

"At least five elite athletes have tested positive for Covid-19 when tests were conducted on Friday. They have been kept isolated from others," a source at the SAI Centre said.

The source said another race walker could also have tested positive but this could



K. T. Irfan

not be confirmed.

"4 male players and 1 female player and 4 support staff tested positive for Covid-19," a SAI source stated.

Irfan had qualified for the Tokyo Olympics way back in 2019 after finishing fourth in the 20 km event of the Asian Race Walking Championships in Nomi, Japan. — PTI

Instead, an activist appeared on the screen holding up a black and white banner opposing the Tokyo Olympics.

"No Olympics anywhere, No Olympics anywhere," he said, before using a profanity and adding "No Olympics in LA., No Olympics in

Tokyo," before the line was cut. The 2028 Olympics will be held in Los Angeles.

Adams made light of the interruption noting if Bach had been present it "probably would have made that stunt a little bit more interesting."

— AP