



Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister



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Nodal Agency - Rajasthan State Health Assurance Agency (Department of Medical, Health & Family Welfare)

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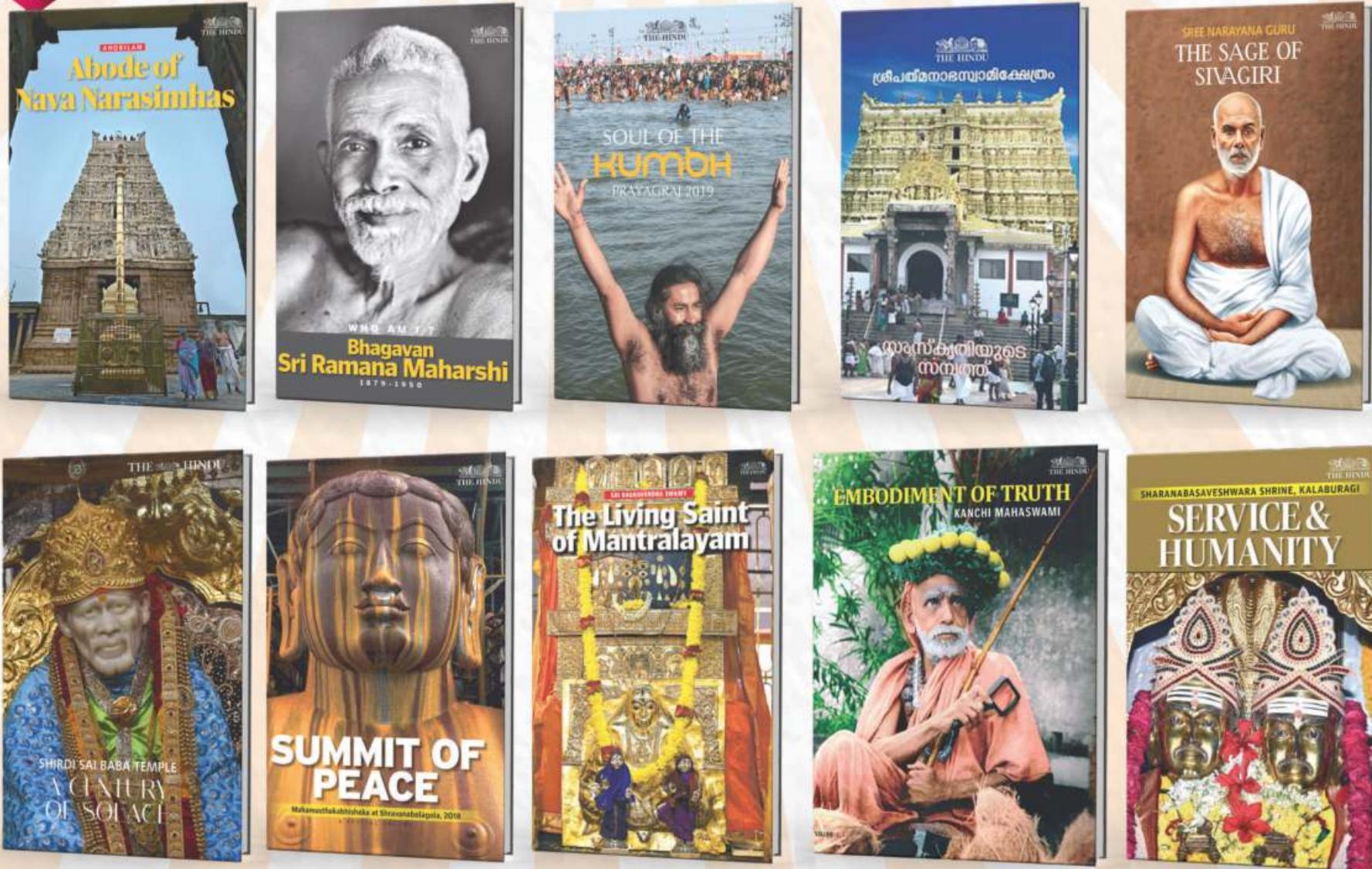


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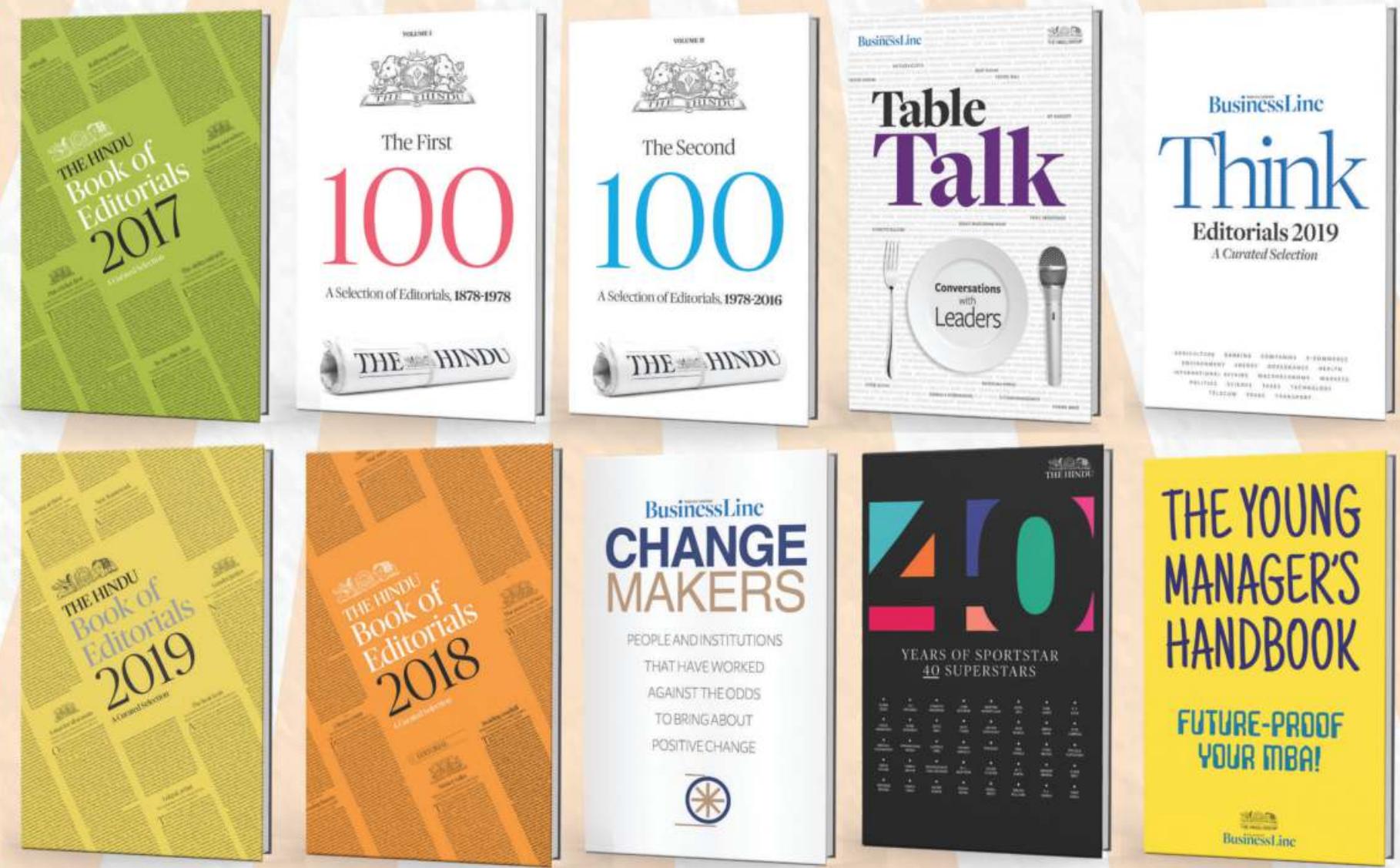
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Xi sends message to
Modi, offers China's
support and assistance

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Modi govt. must either
deliver or quit, says
Sitaram Yechury

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Stampede at pilgrimage
site in Israel kills at
least 45 people

Page 11



Harpreet, Rahul star
in PBKS' win against
RCB; MI vs CSK today

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NEARBY



Nearly 1 lakh active
COVID cases in Delhi

NEW DELHI
Delhi recorded 375 deaths due to COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, pushing the toll to 16,147 on Friday. A total of 27,047 fresh cases were also reported in the city, taking the tally to 11,49,333. Of the total cases, 10,33,825 people have recovered and there are 99,361 active cases. The test positivity rate is 32.69%.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Weekend lockdown in nine Haryana districts

GURUGRAM
The Haryana government on Friday imposed a weekend lockdown in nine districts. The lockdown will remain in force from 10 p.m. on April 30 till 5 a.m. on May 3. The movement of all essential goods will be allowed during this period. The lockdown will come into force in Gurugram, Faridabad, Sonipat, Rohtak, Karnal, Panchkula, Hisar, Sirsa and Fatehabad.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3



Amid vaccine shortage, States put off rollout for 18-45 group

Chief Ministers flag uncertain supplies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Amid a lack of vaccine supplies and uncertainty over availability in the next few weeks, several States have postponed the scheduled May 1 rollout of phase III of the COVID-19 immunisation for those between 18-44 years. Maharashtra said the rollout would begin as scheduled but would depend on supplies. Several States, including Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Punjab, have written to the Centre seeking urgent replenishing of vaccine supplies.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said the Capital would not join the wider vaccination drive as the required doses had not been received yet. He requested people in the newly added age group not to queue up at vaccination centres on May 1 as this might lead to violation of social distancing and create a law-and-order situation.

"In the next one-two days, around three lakh Covishield vaccines will be received and the drive for vaccinating people in the age group 18-44 will commence," Mr. Kejriwal said. He added that the Centre has not given information



Awaiting their turn: Hundreds of people turned up at the Jimmy George Indoor Stadium in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday to get vaccinated. ■ MAHINSHA S.

placed an order for 67 lakh doses each of Covishield and Covaxin from manufacturers and once received, the entire population of Delhi would be able to get vaccinated within three months.

T.N. awaits supplies
The Tamil Nadu government also deferred the rollout as it had not yet received the required vaccines from the Central government. Health Secretary J. Radhakrishnan told mediapersons in Chennai that the Chief Minister had written to the Centre, seeking 1.5 crore doses of Covishield and Covaxin.

"But till date, the Centre has not given information

about the number of doses the State will receive," he said.

"We have sufficient vaccines for those over 45. The same problem is being faced by other States as well," he explained.

The State was in touch with the Serum Institute of India, Pune, and Bharat Biotech, Hyderabad, he said. Apollo Hospitals, meanwhile, said it would launch the third drive of vaccination on Saturday, having procured vaccines directly from the manufacturers as per the Central government's directive.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Address local issues, PM tells Ministers

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asked Ministers to reach out to people in their respective regions to help them and gather feedback regarding the ongoing second wave of COVID-19 in the country. The Council of Ministers met via videoconferencing to discuss the second wave, terming it "a once in a century crisis," a government statement said. ■ PAGE 9

Do not clamp down on citizens' SOS calls via social media: SC

Court warns States of contempt action

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday warned the State governments and the police against clamping down on the spread of information or calls for help through social media from citizens affected by COVID-19.

A Special Bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, L. Narasimha Rao and S. Ravinder Bhushan said any move by any State to punish citizens who take to social media to seek help for oxygen cylinders, COVID-19 drugs, beds and hospitals amid a rampaging second wave would attract contempt of court action.

"We don't want any clampdown of information. We will treat it as a contempt of court if such grievances are considered for action.

Let a strong message go to all the States and DGPs of States. Clampdown of information is contrary to basic precepts." Justice Chandrachud made a categorical statement in court.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the litigation was non-adversarial. "As an officer of the court, I fully agree with what Your Lordships have said," Mr. Mehta agreed.



D.Y. CHANDRACHUD,
SUPREME COURT
JUDGE

Justice Chandrachud said free flow of information in the 1970 famine enabled the government to tackle problems effectively as compared to the clampdown during the 1918 pandemic.

Justice Rao reminded the States that this was a time of great crisis. The Bench said empathy and action should be the rule of the day.

At one point, Justice Chandrachud questioned how the Centre intended to ensure registration for vaccines for illiterate people, considering the fact that registration on the CoWIN app was mandatory.

The Bench also asked how the Centre expected a sense of equity from the vaccine manufacturers.

CONCERN OVER PRICING ▶ PAGE 8

EDITORIAL ▶ PAGE 6

Centre to train doctors in remote areas

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With the pandemic spreading to tier-2 and tier-3 cities and towns, the Centre will set up regional training centres, in assistance with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), to organise training programmes for doctors on appropriate COVID-19 management practices, Randeep Guleria, Director, AIIMS, said on Friday.

"It is possible that doctors in many towns and villages don't have access to the right information regarding management. We are preparing a protocol and training module that will be used to conduct sessions via the network of AIIMS hospitals across the country," said Dr. Guleria at a press briefing.

At the event, the second this week and a departure from a practice for most of this year when the Health Ministry would only have a single meeting every week, Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Health Ministry, said that in assessments by the government of public perception of the coronavirus there were three categories of people – one were those with "misplaced bravery" who believed that the COVID-19 pandemic was a hoax and that there was no need to mask up.

The Bench also asked how the Centre expected a sense of equity from the vaccine manufacturers.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Former Attorney General Soli Sorabjee passes away

He had received the Padma Vibhushan



Soli Sorabjee

the 1984 riots. He was appointed an Honorary Member of the Order of Australia. He was twice appointed Attorney General of India.

In his autobiography *Before Memory Fades*, senior advocate Falil S. Nariman, remembers Mr. Sorabjee's entry into the chambers of the then doyen of the Bombay Bar, Sir Jamshedji Kanga, as a young lawyer.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 4 & 8

Demand for MGNREGA work spikes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
The demand for MGNREGA work so far in the month of April has increased to 2.57 crore households, 92% higher than a year ago, and a record high for April since 2013, as per State Bank of India (SBI) Research.

"This indicates the extent of reverse migration from the lockdown States to their native States," SBI group chief economic adviser Soumya Kanti Ghosh said.

The government had allocated ₹73,000 crore in this year's Budget for the MGNREGA, nearly 34.5% lower than last year's revised estimates of ₹1.11 lakh crore, on the assumption that the economic recovery would alleviate the need for such spending.

He worked for the Sikh community *pro bono* after

Bidding goodbye



Last glimpse: A relative of a COVID-19 victim taking children to let them look at a loved one who passed away due to COVID-19 on the premises of the Government General Hospital in Vijayawada on Friday. ■ V. RAJU

BJP leaders flag rising cases in U.P.

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

As the virulent second wave of COVID-19 cuts a widening swathe across Uttar Pradesh, not just Opposition leaders but also lawmakers of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party are flagging the shortage in oxygen supplies and the rise in cases due to the panchayat polls in the State.

A number of legislators from the party have written to local officials and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath raising concerns about COVID-19 facilities in their constituencies. The State maintains that there is no shortage of oxygen in any hospital.

The BJP MLA from Gola Gokarnath in Lakhimpur Kheri, Arvind Giri, on Thursday wrote to the District Magistrate.

POINTING FINGERS ▶ PAGE 8

Centre owes 'special responsibility' to Delhi: SC

Bench asks city government to desist from 'political bickering' at this time

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Friday said the Centre owes a "special responsibility" to Delhi, which represents the "microcosm of citizens of the entire nation".

Haunted by images of people crying for oxygen and medical help in Delhi, the court said the hearings before it should make a change and help citizens gain access to medical care and essentials during the devastating second wave of COVID-19 infections.

The Special Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said the Delhi government should not engage in any "political bickering".

The remarks came when Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre, sub-



In dire straits: People waiting in a queue at an oxygen plant in New Delhi on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

mitted that Delhi may not be lifting its supply of oxygen.

"Delhi represents the nation and there is hardly anyone ethnically Delhiite. Forget about someone not lifting oxygen. You have to push through since you

have to save lives, Mr. Solicitor. You have a special responsibility as the Centre," said Justice Chandrachud.

The court noted that the Centre allocated only 490 MT of oxygen to Delhi compared with the 700 MT re-

quired. It said that as many as 500 lives had been lost in merely five days and immediate steps must be taken to ameliorate the situation.

'Keep politics for polls'

"Politics is at the time of elections. There has to be a sense of cooperation," Justice Chandrachud noted.

"Centre is providing more tankers. Some philanthropic industries are being involved to get tankers and oxygen on war footing... If there is a 200 MT deficit, then you should give that straight away to Delhi. Centre has an important responsibility as far as citizens of Delhi are concerned. You have said surplus is there in steel sector, then use that and supply to Delhi," the Bench noted.

The state has failed to protect right to life'

Delhi High Court records helplessness, orders release of oxygen concentrators

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday said "the state has failed... to protect the right to life of citizens", while expressing anguish over the death of a COVID-19 patient whose family had been pleading for an ICU bed for the last three days.

"We may record our complete helplessness at the situation. We can only say that the state has failed to protect the right to life of people guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution," a Bench of Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Rekha Palli said.

During the hearing, the patient's relative had urged the court to request authorities to arrange for an ICU bed as his vitals were low and he was in that emergency ward.



Family members of COVID-19 patients outside Lok Nayak Hospital in Delhi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Minutes later, the relative informed the Bench that the patient had died. "I have failed, my brother-in-law has expired, so no more efforts are needed," said the family member, who is a lawyer.

"No, the state has failed.

We all have failed," the Bench replied.

Earlier in the day, Bar Council of Delhi chief Ramchandra Gupta pleaded with the Bench to help secure medical facilities for advocates suffering from COVID.

Countless SOS calls

Mr. Gupta broke down in tears as he informed the Bench of the hundreds of SOS calls he and other lawyers had been getting daily from desperate relatives unable to get COVID-19 treatment for their loved ones.

He narrated a call he had received from a close acquaintance on Thursday seeking help in getting a bed.

"The man's father died. His wife and daughter are in quarantine. I arranged two ambulances for four hours

each at ₹35,000, then sourced an oxygen cylinder for ₹70,000. Then, at around midnight, we could get him a bed," he said.

"We do not want to criticise anyone or any government. We want the courts to come to our rescue. We have around ₹5 crore in our funds and will arrange more from lawyers," said Mr. Gupta.

"It is a problem of infrastructure not being there. We do not have enough doctors, nurses, attendants, oxygen and medicines," the High Court remarked.

Earlier in the hearing, the court directed the authorities to immediately release oxygen concentrators that have been seized by Delhi Police from the black market, as they are required for the treatment of patients.

M ND-NDE

IN BRIEF

Chief Minister's wife admitted to Max Hospital

NEW DELHI
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal, who had tested positive for COVID-19, has been admitted to Max Hospital, Saket, sources said on Friday. Last year, all three Ministers of the AAP government — Satyendar Jain, Manish Sisodia, and Gopal Rai — who had tested positive were also admitted to the hospital.

Cong. wants display outside hospitals on bed availability

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Friday alleged that incorrect figures were being shown on the State government's Delhi Corona app on availability of beds and demanded that digital displays be put up outside hospitals to show the actual figures.

Delhi Congress chief Ch. Anil Kumar said that last year, when incorrect data was shown on the app, he had demanded a digital display outside hospitals in an all-party meeting called by the L-G and the order was implemented, but now it is not followed strictly.

SDMC arranges 3,500 quintals of wood for cremation of virus victims

Delhi's civic bodies seek assistance from NHAI, U.P.

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

Having received no reply from the Delhi government regarding arrangement of firewood to ensure uninterrupted funerals of hundreds of COVID bodies ending up at the city's crematoria every day, the three municipal bodies have sought outside assistance.

The South Delhi Municipal Corporation has arranged as many as 3,500 quintals of wood from Haryana Van Nigam for cremations as an exigency measure even as it is engaged in increasing the capacity of funeral venues in its jurisdiction by 50% on a daily basis. The other two civic bodies have made similar arrangements too.

"We have taken the decision to arrange 3,500 quintals of firewood given the dynamic situation at hand and given the daily number of COVID bodies," said a senior SDMC official.

"Temporary funeral platforms are being created on a parcel of land in Dwarka Sector 29 where the SDMC has

Hospital says it won't be responsible for 'mishap'

Jaipur Golden Hospital hangs disclaimer after recent deaths

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

A week after 20 critically ill patients died over one night, which was "linked" to an oxygen crisis in Jaipur Golden Hospital, a notice was put outside the hospital's emergency department that it won't be responsible for "any mishap" due to "supply of oxygen".

The notice stuck on a barricade outside the emergency read: "This is to inform you that due to erratic supply of oxygen you are kindly advised to make alternative arrangements for the safety of patients/your patients. In case of any mishap due to supply of oxygen hospitals, doctors and management will not be held responsible for any consequences [sic]."

However, the hospital claimed that there was no oxygen shortage as on Friday.

"The oxygen situation is slightly better. Our current oxygen stock would last for 24 hours," said D.K. Baluja, Medical Director of the hospital. But the hospital is not currently admitting new patients. Relatives of patients also said that they were not facing any issues related to oxygen.



Notice stuck outside Jaipur Golden Hospital.
■ NIKHIL M BABU

Arun Kumar, 46, whose relative is admitted to the hospital, said there were no major problems at present. "We needed ICU, but we didn't get an ICU. Currently, they have not told us to get oxygen or informed us that there is any problem with the oxygen supply. But no new admission is happening due to the ongoing oxygen shortage in Delhi," he said.

Not hospital's blame

Abhishek Jain, 35, lost his mother and father to COVID-19 while being admitted at the hospital, but he said he won't blame the hospital. "We won't blame anyone, the hospital or the doctor. The work they are doing, even if they are doing 50%, at a time

when others are not stepping out, they are putting their lives on the line," said Mr. Jain, whose mother died on April 22 and father on Friday.

Two oxygen cylinders were also found at the parking of the hospital and one of them had the name "Beena" written at several places on it.

"We are not taking new patients. After taking new patients and if there is no oxygen and someone dies, then who will we blame?" one of the security guards said.

There was no rush or queues at the hospital on Friday. A 24-year-old woman got emergency care for her COVID-19 positive mother at the hospital after multiple requests, but the hospital said they don't have vacant beds to admit her.

Multiple hospitals are still running at a reduced bed capacity due to the oxygen crisis and many are waiting for oxygen refill, as the stock left would last only for a couple of hours. Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, which had reduced the bed capacity from 650 to 350, due to oxygen shortage has stopped admissions on Thursday night, said officials.

'All above 18 will be vaccinated in 3 months'

CM appeals to people not to queue up outside centres, says jabs will arrive soon

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Terming it a humongous task which the Delhi government needed the cooperation of many to accomplish, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said all the people of Delhi aged above 18 would be vaccinated against COVID over the coming three months, if things went according to plan.

He also appealed to people not to queue up outside vaccination centres in the Capital from Saturday. The universal administration of COVID vaccination to people aged between 18 and 44 begins across the country on May 1.

The Chief Minister stated that the Delhi government had not yet received vaccine doses from companies manufacturing them, which are to arrive in a day or two, following which the government will begin the drive.

"Beginning May 1, the vaccination drive for those aged between 18 and 44 is set to begin. The vaccination drive for those aged 45 and above is already in motion. The procedure for those between 18 and 44 has garnered an overwhelming response and many people have registered," he told a digital briefing.



People waiting for COVID-19 test at a centre in the Capital on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

"I request everyone not to rush. Everyone is to be inoculated and preparations have been made for the same. We have two vaccines - Covishield and Covaxin - and both the manufacturers have been urged to render 67 lakh doses each," he said.

"We have also requested them to provide these 67 lakh doses within three months, and the Delhi government is prepared to bear the financial costs. The people of Delhi will be provided with the vaccines free of cost and we have also demanded a schedule from both the companies specifying the days when they supply the vaccines within these three months," he also said.

The Delhi government, he said, had formulated a plan

and even the infrastructure needed for it was in place and things now depended on the two manufacturers as to how swiftly they could provide the vaccine doses. If they were able to provide sufficient quantities of the vaccine, the Delhi government would try to vaccinate the people of Delhi within three months, he said.

It had been observed, he said, that those who had been inoculated were comparatively better off than those who had not. It was not that they did not catch COVID, but even if they did, it was not fatal and did not turn into something serious.

"The vaccine acts as a protective shield. Therefore, I urge everyone to get vaccinated as these are completely safe and entail no danger. Do request everyone around and your relatives to get inoculated," he stated.

"We need everyone's support. Only if we are able to garner the support of the people of Delhi, can we complete the process within the next three months. This is a humongous exercise and to execute this herculean task is a massive challenge. This can only be completed with everyone's support," he also stated.

Delhi reports 375 COVID deaths, 27,047 new cases

There are 99,361 active cases at present

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 375 COVID-19-related deaths in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 16,147, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Friday.

Also, 27,047 new cases were reported, taking the total cases to 11,49,333.

COVID-19

A total of 82,745 tests were done in a day, the bulletin said.

Of the total cases, 10,33,825 people have recovered and there are 99,361 active cases.

The positivity of new cases was 32.69%. This means more than 32 out of 100 people taking the test are testing positive for COVID-19.

Virus spread

| Total number of COVID-19 cases | Total deaths |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| 11,49,333 | 16,147 |
| New cases in the past 24 hours | New deaths |
| 27,047 | 375 |

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

The positivity, which is the percentage of people testing positive out of the total tests done, has been almost on the same level for the past one week.

There was a sharp rise in positivity from 3.5% on April 1 to 36.2% on April 22. But since then, it has stayed below it.

Out of the total 21,156 beds for COVID-19 treatment in the city, only 6.4% were vacant at 11 p.m. on Friday. Also, only 44 ICU beds were vacant.

10 more deaths, 1,310 new cases in G.B. Nagar

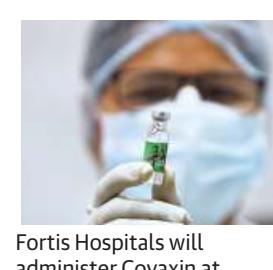
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NOIDA

With 10 more fatalities, the death toll due to COVID-19 reached 212 in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar on Friday while the infection count climbed to 41,312 with 13,10 new cases, official data showed.

The number of active cases in the district rose to 8,267 from 8,130 the previous day, according to the figures released by the U.P. Health Department for a 24-hour period.

On the bright side, 1,163 patients got discharged, with total recoveries reaching 32,833 in the district, the fifth highest in the State.

Gautam Buddha Nagar now has a death toll of 212 with a mortality rate of 0.51%. The recovery rate has reached 79.47%.



Fortis Hospitals will administer Covaxin at ₹1,250 per dose. ■ FILE PHOTO

sal vaccination drive from select hospitals in the network in the NCR. Presently, vaccines will be available at Max Healthcare facilities at Panchsheel Park, Patparganj, Shalimar Bagh, Rajinder Place (BLK-Max Hospital), Noida and Vaishali in the NCR," Max Healthcare said.

Citizens will have to register on the CoWin app (www.cowin.gov.in) and book an appointment slot.

When there is no Plan B

SUNALINI MATHEW
NEW DELHI

On a moonlit night, under an orange and maroon shaadi-wala shamiana, about 12 cars wait. Next to them are jumbo, 25-litre medical oxygen cylinders battered from use. At the Hemkunt Foundation, just off Gurugram's Golf Course Road, is a dusty parking lot, where COVID-19 patients and their families queue up for oxygen, now in short supply in Delhi-NCR. It is a 24x7 service, offered free when the cylinders are filled.

"The filling process can take up to three days, and depending on the vendor's capacity, we can do from 300 to 800 in a day," says Harneet Ahluwalia, the community development director. They source oxygen from three States, and a truck is escorted by a vehicle, currently provided by Mahindra. "I am directly in touch with the CEO," he says, adding that there has been an outpouring of both individual and CSR donations, with companies postponing paperwork to transfer funds or goods quickly.

Under wraps

He, though, doesn't disclose numbers of people coming in, funds raised, or the amount spent daily, except that there are 4,000 cylinders in circulation, with 3,000 at the head office in Gurugram and 1,000 in Maharashtra, mainly

People turned away from hospitals seek oxygen support from Hemkunt Foundation



Mumbai and Pune. They deliver at home and offer cylinders against a deposit of ₹10,000, though he says a filled cylinder costs them ₹12,500 with another ₹2,000 or so for accessories (mask, humidifier). In circulation daily on site are 10-15 cylinders.

People with oxygen levels as low as 35% have travelled from Greater Noida, Ghaziabad, driving 60 kilometres one way; some have taken an auto or cab from Delhi. There are families with three COVID-positive members: a son with diabetes and breathlessness has brought his father and weak mother for oxygen. He hasn't eaten since the

(Clockwise from top) Cars with patients parked outside Hemkunt Foundation in Gurugram; people on oxygen support; oxygen cylinders being unloaded from a vehicle. ■ SUNALINI MATHEW

al hospitals. They symbolise the isolation of city life made more ironical with strangers bearing flashing kirpans and untamed beards offering help.

Mr. Ahluwalia, who is a management student and has volunteered with the foundation for four years, says he's been in several disaster situations, but this has been the worst. It is because, he says: "We can't predict anything." However, what's different from last year is mental health. "The efficiency of the volunteers has gone down," he says, signalling burnout of people working from last year to provide relief. "Also, 50% of us are down with COVID."

On ground, it's not the ideal situation. There are no doctors or nurses here, few volunteers at night, mosquitoes breed, and dogs frolic in between cars.

But a taxi driver, who has driven his neighbour for the second time in the day here, says, "These people are doing excellent work. Please don't write anything bad about them." And a man whose pregnant wife is getting oxygen asks where he can make donation.

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU KASHMIR

Office of The Executive Engineer P.H.E Division Budgam

H.Q: Budgam

NOTICE INVITING E – TENDERS:

Short Term e– NIT No: 10/PHE/Bud/Civil of 2021–22.

For and on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir U.T., e– tenders are invited in One Cover System) on "item rate basis" from Registered/Approved and valid Civil class of contractors/agencies registered with J&K Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Governments and whose registrations are renewed for current financial year for the following works:

| S. No | Name of Work | Estimated Cost (₹ in Lacs) | Cost of tender doc. (in ₹) | Amount of Earnest Money (in ₹) | Time of completion (in Days) | Class of Contractor | Major Head of Account | Tender Call |
|-------|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 01 | Providing of distribution lines from 150mm dia including construction chamber box near Govt. High School for village Watawani under WSS Shaloot Sukhnag (NRDWP-Revaluated JMM) | 5.44 | 500/- | 10,880/- | 7 Days | C, D | NRDWP-Revaluated JMM | 2nd (Refer to NIT 01 of 2021-22) |
| 01 | Balance work for laying and fitting of G.I. pipes as Distribution system in various villages of Khansahib Constituency (Under CDF Grants). | 2.49 | 200/- | 4,980/- | 12 Days | D | CDF | 2nd (Refer to NIT 36 of 2021-22) |

Position of AA-Corded; Position of funds:- Available; Position of TS:- Submitted; The Bidding Documents and other details can be downloaded from the website: <http://jktders.gov.in> From 29.04.2021 (10:00 a.m) 07.05.2021 (04:00 p.m). The Bidding documents consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Drawings (if any), Book of quantities (B.O.Q.), Set of terms, conditions of contract and other details can be seen / downloaded from the website: www.jktders.gov.in

As per schedule of dates given below.

TABLE (I)

| | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 01 | Date of Publishing of Tender Notice | 28.04.2021 |

<tbl_r cells="3

**Timings
DELHI**

| |
|----------------------|
| SATURDAY, MAY. 01 |
| RISE 05:41 SET 18:57 |
| RISE 23:52 SET 09:14 |
| SUNDAY, MAY. 02 |
| RISE 05:40 SET 18:57 |
| RISE 00:00 SET 10:16 |
| MONDAY, MAY. 03 |
| RISE 05:40 SET 18:58 |
| RISE 00:46 SET 11:20 |

| | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|
| Delhi Weather | max | min |
| Delhi City | 40 | 23 |
| Safdarjung | 40 | 23 |
| Palam | 41 | 25 |

Delhi Palam Today
39°C Hot day with partly cloudy to cloudy sky. Chances of light thunderstorm and dust storm with rain at some places.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
38°C Drop in day temperature. Duststorm and thunderstorm with rain may occur at some places with gusty winds.

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THE HINDU
DISCLAIMER: Readers are requested to verify and make appropriate enquiries to satisfy themselves about the veracity of an advertisement before responding to any query or making any arrangement. THG PUBLISHING PVT LTD, the Publisher & Owner of this newspaper, does not vouch for the authenticity of any advertisement or any claim made by the advertiser or its products and/or services. In no event can the Owner, Publisher, Printer, Editor, Directors, Employees of the newspaper/ company be held responsible in any manner whatsoever for any claims and/or damages for advertisements in this newspaper.

Weekend lockdown in nine Haryana districts

Delivery of essential goods exempted

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

The Haryana government on Friday imposed a weekend lockdown in nine districts. The lockdown will remain in force from 10 p.m. on April 30 till 5 a.m. on May 3. The movement of all essential goods will be allowed during this period.

The lockdown will come into force in Gurugram, Faridabad, Sonipat, Rohtak, Karnal, Panchkula, Hisar, Sirsa and Fatehabad. The order said no person should leave their homes or move on foot or by vehicle or travel or stand or roam around on any road or public place during the lockdown.

However, there will be no curbs on inter-State and intra-State movement of essential and non-essential goods. The vehicles and persons in bona fide transit will be allowed to pass after verification. Similarly, those

tasked with law and order, emergency and municipal services, including media persons with accreditation, are exempted on the production of identity card. The restaurants, hotels and food courts in shopping malls can remain open for home delivery.

Besides, the delivery of all essential goods, including food, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment etc. through e-commerce, private security services, farming operations by farmers, petrol pumps, petroleum and gas retail and storage outlets are also exempted.

Hospitals, veterinary hospitals and all medical establishments, including pharmacies, dispensaries etc., are outside the ambit of the lockdown order. The passengers going to or returning from airport or railway and bus stations are also exempted.

Tough time for all-infected households

Being caregiver and patient at the same time is taking a toll; many dependent on home-delivered food

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

From reaching out on social media for help to turning to neighbours and relatives for help, families where all members have tested positive are facing a difficult time in managing essentials.

While several are now dependent on home-delivered food and medicines, many others are anxious about the continuing shortage of beds, injections and oxygen and wary of the steps to be taken in case of an emergency, requiring hospitalisation.

For many others, being a caregiver to a family member while taking care of themselves at the same time, are also taking a toll.

Bhavya D.N. (26), who tested positive recently, said: "It was initially my father who was infected and in the process of taking care of him, my mother and I caught it as well. When my mother developed symptoms, I was the one having to manage all



A patient at a COVID ward at Shehnai Banquet Hall in Delhi on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

domestic chores apart from office work. We are getting most of the medicines delivered at home."

Constant fear

"As of now, we are managing well, but there is a constant fear that the health of one of us might deteriorate and with limited resources, it is a very scary thought," the east

Delhi resident said.

Procuring medicines, which are out of stock, have also posed a major issue for the families where all the members are affected and isolated.

Deepika Sethi, a resident of Kailash Colony, said: "It all started when our cook developed symptoms and although he isolated himself im-

mediately, my elderly parents-in-law started showing symptoms the next day and I started showing symptoms the day after. Everyone at home was affected so there was nobody who could visit from one shop to another. I had to finally reach out to a colleague of mine as we had no other option.

Ms. Sethi added that keeping her children safe was turning out to be a tough job as they have to get food from outside and are unable to deal with the loneliness.

For 32-year-old Reema, arranging for an injection for her father, who had to be hospitalised, proved to be big a hurdle with all other members being affected as well.

"We had to reach out on social media and even there we did not get volunteers who could stand in queues and get the injection. Everyone at home was affected so there was nobody who could visit from one shop to another. I had to finally reach out to a colleague of mine as we had no other option," said Ms. Reema.

Oxygen 'langar' with 15 cylinders lands in a soup – no supply

Organisers say plants denying oxygen refill while some cylinders were stopped on the way from Haryana as patients wait

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Outside a park near a mall in west Delhi's Subhash Nagar, 60-year-old Rama lay on a bench as her daughter-in-law Indu cried for help. They were waiting at an oxygen service provider, which was yet to open its doors for the day.

The 'Drive-thru oxygen langar' was started by Alak Purohit Ki Fouj on Tuesday with 15 oxygen cylinders of 50-litre capacity. It hit the first road-block on Wednesday night when they ran out of oxygen.

"Oxygen filling plants deny giving us oxygen as we take 15 cylinders them at a time. They are either giving oxygen to hospitals or filling one at a time for people who have cylinders. We haven't been able to get oxygen since Wednesday night," said Amreek Singh Rekhi (61), a member of the organisation.

Mr. Singh added that some of the oxygen cylinders were stopped on the way from Haryana. "We have tried all possible avenues to get those cylinders released. We also got a

letter from the local MLA, but nothing has happened so far," Mr. Singh said on Friday afternoon.

Mr. Singh has to be around COVID patients to continue the services. On this, he said: "The almighty is making us do this."

Ever since the refilling of cylinders stopped, the service

and faced people who helplessly reached out for oxygen. He informed them that the service will open only around 3 p.m. "Are there oxygen cylinders available here?", "Can you refill my cylinder?", "You'll take the patients after 3 p.m. for sure?" were some of the questions the member had to field.

He told them that they don't provide oxygen cylinders and that if they have cylinders, they should visit Mayapuri to get them refilled. He also said they will be tak-

ing patients on a first-come-first-serve basis after handing out tokens.

p.m., he said.

'Oxygen level 30-70'

"We are also only taking patients whose oxygen levels have dropped substantially – between 30 and 70 – and we are not taking people with 85-90 oxygen levels. We have energy drinks for them."

Meanwhile, Ms. Rama's oxygen continued to drop, and her daughter-in-law continued to weep. A 70-year-old Bhupinder Kaur sat in an auto, waiting for the machines all night and were giving them rest on Friday morning till 3



A COVID patient lies on a bench in west Delhi's Subhash Nagar, waiting for oxygen on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

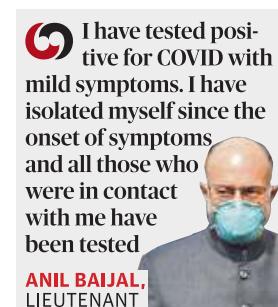
Bajjal tests COVID positive

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal said on Friday he has tested positive for the virus and has mild symptoms. Mr. Baijal had taken both doses of the vaccine.

"I have tested positive for COVID with mild symptoms. I have isolated myself since the onset of symptoms and all those who were in contact with me have been tested," he tweeted.

The L-G He said he would continue to work and monitor the situation in Delhi.



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia and Health Minister Satyendar Jain wished for Mr. Baijal's speedy recovery.

AAP MLA demands President's Rule in Delhi

'Saving lives should be our only priority'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

AAP MLA Shoaib Iqbal on Friday demanded imposition of President's Rule in Delhi in view of the massive surge in COVID-19 cases.

The Matia Mahal MLA, who left the Congress and contested the Delhi Assembly polls last year on an AAP ticket, said neither him nor the government is able to offer any help to the people affected by the second wave of COVID-19.

No immediate reaction was available from AAP on Mr. Iqbal's demand.

"I feel embarrassed being

an MLA since I cannot be of use to anyone... our government is unable to stand with the people. Despite being a six-time MLA, there is no one to listen to [me] and I cannot contact anyone," Mr. Iqbal said in a video message.

He urged the Delhi High Court to impose President's Rule in the national capital with immediate effect. "Delhi is in a very bad situation. I request the Delhi High Court for imposition of President's Rule in Delhi with immediate effect. Otherwise there will be bodies across the city," the AAP MLA said.

Total collapse of Delhi's health system likely: BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

BJP State president Adesh Gupta on Friday said that shortage of hospital beds, COVID medicines and oxygen was overwhelming and the peak of the pandemic, anticipated around May 8 by experts, may lead to the total collapse of the health system in the Capital.

Mr. Gupta said AAP MLA Shoaib Iqbal's statement to the effect that President's Rule needed to be imposed had substantiated the BJP's stand.

"Shoaib Iqbal's statement is not a normal statement; it is a result of his hearing and accepting his inner soul's voice," he said.

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT observes

LABOUR DAY

with commitment to safeguard the interests of workers

"Let us salute, on this historic day, the determination and hardwork of countless workers who play a pivotal role in Punjab's overall progress and prosperity especially during the difficult phase of unprecedented Covid pandemic."

Capt. Amarinder Singh
Chief Minister, Punjab



DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION & PUBLIC RELATIONS, PUNJAB

Punjab to revive closed oxygen units

Govt. working to ensure adequate supplies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

To ensure adequate supply of oxygen as the COVID-19 cases continue to rise, the Punjab government has directed officials of the Industries and Commerce Department to identify closed oxygen generating units and explore possibilities of production.

Industries and Commerce Minister Sunder Sham Arora said the government was working to ensure uninter-

rupted medical supplies, especially medical oxygen and vaccines.

"I have already instructed the authorities to identify the industries that have the capacity to produce medical oxygen but don't have the licence to produce. The government will act swiftly and issue the licence as soon as possible. The supply of oxygen to industries was stopped and now 98% oxygen is going towards the medical requirements," Mr. Arora said.

He said there was a need to make available adequate oxygen because of a high

number of oxygen-dependent cases and also urged the Centre to ensure adequate supply.

All help assured

Mr. Arora said the Industries Department would extend all help to identify land and get consent to establish a plant if anyone wanted to set one up. He urged the State-run oil firms to establish Pressure Swing Adsorption medical oxygen generation plants and procure cryogenic containers for transporting liquid medical oxygen to meet the acute shortage in the country.

NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER

Ref.No: F.03(5-2987)FWPMS/HFWS/2015 Date- 27/04/2021
e-Tender is hereby invited on behalf of the State Health and Family Welfare Society, Tripura from resourceful, experienced Manufacturer/ Dealer/Agency for: "Medical Gas Pipeline System at Different Hospitals of Tripura", State Health & Family Welfare Society, Tripura.

The details of tender, list of items with indicative quantity and Tender Documents are made available on website (<http://tripuratenders.gov.in>). The last date/time of submission of the tender documents by online upto 11/05/2021 at 3.00pm. All future modification/corrigendum shall be made available in the e-procurement portal, So bidders are requested to get the update themselves from the e procurement web portal only.

(Dr. Sidharth Shiv Jaiswal, IAS)
Mission Director, NHM
Govt. Of Tripura

UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

General Public is hereby informed that an one male person was found dead at Footpath of Bhajanpura Bus Stand Near Subway, Towards Hanuman Mandir dated 18.04.2021. In this regard a vide DD No. 30A, dated 18.04.2021 has been registered at P.S. Bhajanpura, Delhi. The dead body has been preserved for identification at GTB Hospital Mortuary for 72 hrs. The description of the dead body is given as under Name: Unknwn, S/o: Unknwn, R/o: Unknwn, Age: About 50-52 years, Height: 5'6", Complexion: Sallow, Built: Medium, Face: Long, Wearing: Nothing. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the dead person but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about this dead person please inform undersigned.

SHO
P.S. Bhajanpura, Delhi
DP/767/NE/2021
Ph. : 011-22561071, 8750870730

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER
JKPCC LTD. MECH. UNIT
Brick & Tile Factory premises, Opposite SRTC Yard, Pampore, Kashmir-192121
Fax No..... Email :- dgmmechsrinagar@jkpc.com

Gist of e-NIT No: JKPCC/MU/K/ 10 of 2021-22 Dated: - 28-04-2021
Issued under endorsement No: - Mech/K/388-93 Dated: 28-04-2021

For and on behalf of the Managing Director of J&KPCC, e-tenders pledged valid for 180 days, are invited from the Registered/ reputed and experienced firms having expertise as detailed in the tender document for the following works:-

| Name of work | Est. Cost (Rs.in lacs) | Cost of T/Doc. (In rupees) | Earnest Money (Lacs of Rs) | Time of Competition (in Months) | Position of AAA / funds |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Supply, installation, testing & commissioning of Fire Fighting System GMC Baramulla | 168.32 | 5000/- | Not applicable as per Govt No. A/Misc (2018)-iii-895J, dt 22-12-2020 | 120 days | Available |

1. **Downloading of Bids:** - The NIT Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Bill of quantities (B.O.Q). Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen from 29-04-2021(1800hrs) downloaded from the departmental website www.ktenders.gov.in from 29-04-2021 (1800 hrs)
2. **Uploading:** The bidders shall deposit their bids in electronic format on the above web site from 29-04-2021-2021 (18.00 hrs) to 21-05-2021(1300 hrs) in two (02) covers.
3. **Opening of Bids:** - The bids received up to due date and time shall be opened on 21-05-2021 at 1400 hrs or any other date convenient to the department in the office Executive Director JKPCC Ltd Jammu

Sd/-
DyGeneral Manager,
Mech Unit JKPCC Ltd
Srinagar

DIPK-NB-544/21

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

OBITUARY



R.N.Ramani B.Sc., F.I.C
Chairman & Managing Director
SGR (777) Foods Pvt. Ltd.

With profound grief, we announce the sudden demise of our beloved Shri R.N.Ramani on 24.04.2021 @ 9.10 A.M.

A doyen in Processed Food Industry, Pillar of Sri Rama Bhavan Family and an always smiling human being. You are usually slow and steady, but what made you leave us so urgently???

Deeply mourned by: Family, Relatives, Friends and Employees of SGR (777) Foods Pvt. Ltd., Chennai.

Contact Phone: +91 80560 40066



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IN BRIEF



'Complete Nadu-Nedu works in schools by May'

GUNTUR
Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed officials of the School Education Department to ensure that the works taken up under the Nadu-Nedu programme in 15,715 schools across the State are completed by the end of May.

Rethink about SSC, Inter exams, says A.P. HC

VIJAYAWADA
The High Court on Friday advised the government to rethink about conducting Class X and Intermediate examinations during the height of COVID-19 pandemic. The matter has been posted for May 3.

Probe charges against Minister, says KCR

He asks Chief Secretary to order inquiry into complaints of land grabbing in Medak district

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao on Friday asked the Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar to order a full-fledged probe against the complaints of land grabbing in Achapuram of Masajpet mandal of Medak district received from the assignees.

A group of assignees complained that Senior TRS leader and Health Minister Eatala Rajender and his followers threatened them to part with their lands, which were taken over for expansion of a poultry and hatchery unit allegedly owned by the Minister.

Mr. Eatala said he was known for his struggle against exploitation of weaker sections and was prepared to face any inquiry even if it was by a sitting



I am ready to face any inquiry, be it by a sitting judge or by the reputed agencies in the country. Let a full scale probe be conducted so as to bring out the facts

EATALA RAJENDER,
TELANGANA HEALTH MINISTER

judge. He asked the State government to institute inquiries by the highest agencies in the country or a sitting judge to prove land grabbing charges against him.

'Not availed benefits'

"The government is extending hundreds of crores of incentives to industry, but I never thought of availing of such benefits. I asked the CMO secretary about the modalities for acquisition of lands for expansion without seeking any concessions

even though they were offered to me," he said.

"I am ready to face any inquiry, be it by a sitting judge or by the reputed agencies in the country. Let a full scale probe be conducted so as to bring out the facts," the Minister said at a late evening press conference here on Friday.

Stating that he had won six times from the constituency because of the credibility he enjoys among the people, he asserted that he was ready to take "sanyas" if

the allegations against him were proved. The Minister said he was prepared for any kind of probe as people know his character since the commencement of the Telangana agitation.

"People know Rajender cannot be lured by posts or properties. A section of people are indulging in character assassination and maligning my image," he said adding that people would not believe this concocted stories as they were aware of his integrity.

Mr. Rajender explained that the lands in question were the ones which were barren and the owners requested him to show a way out from these properties.

Lands pertaining to the hatcheries were purchased at ₹6 lakh an acre and the promoters had later ap-

proached the banks for ₹100 crore loan for expansion after the hatchery turned profitable.

Since there were assignment lands involved, the promoters sought the cooperation of the Industries department and then approached the Chief Minister's Office.

"The owners signed agreements voluntarily. We had more than 120 acres land before 2004," he said.

Mr. Eatala said he had purchased and sold lands including those in the Chief Minister's constituency Gajwel properties.

Mr. Eatala wondered why people who garnered hundreds of crores in a single generation were not being questioned, and said he had never spoken against the government or its policies.

Karnataka's toll up by 217, new cases cross 48,000

Power outage hits hospital near Yadgir; fatalities in Kerala touch 49; Telangana extends night curfew till May 8

In life and beyond | The wait is getting longer not only for vaccinations and for admission to hospitals but also at crematoriums. The graph shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States.



Waiting continues: A long line of ambulances, with bodies of COVID patients, at a crematorium in Visakhapatnam on Friday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

Karnataka on Friday reported 48,296 new cases of COVID-19 and recorded 217 deaths. A 30-year old COVID-19 patient in the ICU of a government hospital at Mudnal near Yadgir died during a power outage on Friday. The

rate (TPR) for the day stood at 25.44%. Testing was done for 1,89,793 samples, including 1,75,513 RT-PCR tests.

Kerala added 37,199 new cases on Friday, testing 1,49,487 samples. The average TPR was 24.88% on Friday. The State added 49 new deaths.

Night curfew was extended till May 8 in Telangana. The State's TPR on Thursday was 9.92% with 7,646 positive cases. A total of 77,091 samples were tested, and 53 deaths were reported.

District Surgeon S.B. Hiremath dismissed the charge, claiming that the death was not caused by power outage, and oxygen supply was not disrupted.

Karnataka's test positivity

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A timely warning

SC's caution against harassing those needing help will deter ill-advised action

The Supreme Court has issued a timely warning to the States against any attempt to clamp down on the dissemination of information about the serious health crisis besetting the country, or calls for help through social media from citizens affected by COVID-19. The comment, obviously in response to the utterly despotic threat issued by U.P. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath that those "spreading misinformation" or "rumour" would be detained under the National Security Act (NSA) and their property seized, will surely help prevent ill-advised action by the police and the administration to treat appeals concerning shortage of hospital beds, medical oxygen and vital drugs as attempts to bring the government into disrepute. The police in Amethi registered an FIR against a man who appealed on Twitter for an oxygen cylinder for a family member for allegedly circulating a rumour and seeking to cause fear and alarm. Mr. Adityanath appears quite convinced that complaints about oxygen shortage in his State are either imaginary or, worse, malicious, and wants to treat them as attempts to "spoil the atmosphere". While it is entirely in order that the government has directed the police to crack down on the profiteering on medicines in the black market, it is quite a different matter if the administration starts seeing all appeals for help in a grave crisis as nothing more than activities aimed at tarnishing the government's image.

Given the propensity of such leaders to treat the voicing of grievances by citizens as a personal affront to their administrative capabilities, the Court's warning that any attempt to stifle the people's voices would attract action for contempt of court is quite timely and necessary. As Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, who heads the Bench, remarked, any clampdown on information is contrary to basic precepts. He underscored the significance and necessity for the free flow of information during a grave crisis by recalling the role it played in containing a famine in 1970. The Court was apparently drawing inspiration from the theory, articulated by economist Amartya Sen, that the fundamental attributes of democracy – such as a free press and the need to face the people at elections and respond to political criticism – help prevent famines. However, how far the present regime feels itself accountable to the people at large is now unclear. It faces criticism both within the country and from the international media that a major cause of the crisis is its reluctance to acknowledge its own failure to prepare for a calamitous second wave. Questions fired at it by High Courts are also on these lines. Any move to stifle such criticism or believe that this is a problem of managing perceptions will be of no avail if the infections and body count keep rising alarmingly and the health system draws close to a collapse.

Facts and figures

India must be transparent about COVID-19 deaths to be able to deal better with the crisis

With India's official death toll from the coronavirus crossing 200,000, it is now placed fourth, after the United States, Mexico and Brazil. This is just another of the grim milestones in India's wrenching journey through the pandemic, but it dents the government's year-long endeavour to obfuscate and dodge unpleasant reality. At Health Ministry press briefings, officials have long sought to convey that India's death toll as a fraction of its population was lower than that of several countries. This is fact and continues to be so. The three countries with a higher death toll have, per million, 1,600-1,800 deaths between them. India's is only about 150. This low count is meant to impress that India has done a better job in protecting its people. These numbers and the slackening of the coronavirus curve in winter even prompted respected scientists to hypothesise if genetic or peculiar social circumstances had combined to confer a certain broad immunity to the vast heterogeneous population.

On the other hand, a spectrum of independent experts have pointed out the problems in the system of death-reporting in India. Though undercounting deaths in a pandemic is expected, the concern in India has been that of deliberate omission. As this paper pointed out, on April 16, as per Gujarat's health bulletin, there were 78 official deaths. But 689 bodies were either cremated or buried following COVID-19 protocol. Last year, Tamil Nadu, Delhi and West Bengal did not count deaths in those who had co-morbidities as COVID-19 deaths. However, these backlogs were corrected over time. Two in three deaths in India occur at home and 14% of deaths are not registered. There are wide discrepancies within States on how many deaths are actually recorded and among these, how many are attributable to COVID-19. However, the ferocity of the second wave has brought COVID-19 deaths into renewed focus. Visuals of bodies and of people on the threshold of death from a lack of access to basic medical facilities such as oxygen have made it harder for the government to convince people that the coronavirus is better controlled in India than anywhere else. The aged continue to be the most vulnerable to the infection but that India on average being younger than the West is less vulnerable to death is a specious argument. The absolute number of the aged – coupled with the fact that they lack the kind of access to health care their counterparts in developed countries have, means that the coronavirus, left unchecked, would wreak havoc. Even now, less than 4% Indians above 60 have been fully vaccinated. This when over 15 crore vaccine doses have been administered so far. India must redouble its efforts at being honest and transparent with its numbers, however unpalatable they may be.

Felled by insensitivity, incompetence

A catastrophe has hit India and there is no sign that the ferocious second wave is being dealt with competently



C. RAMMANOHAR REDDY

Earlier this week, a young woman in Uttar Pradesh tweeted a cry for help. Her grandmother's oxygen level had fallen to 40. "Pls help us in getting one bed in hospital in Bareilly," she wrote in desperation. Soon a handle that called itself "Team Hindu Unlimted" was on her: "Stop trying to defame UP government and Yogi Ji. Delete this tweet or you will face consequences." This ugly tweet has since been deleted, but the plaintive response of the young woman is still there. "I'm just asking for help," she had to say.

The storm troopers were the advance guard. Now, the State itself has decided it will step in. The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh has threatened hospitals with punitive action if they dare to publicly speak about low supplies of oxygen. How could they when there is no shortage? *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has arrived four decades late, the Ministry of Truth has at last been established in India.

This is where we are today.

India floundering

A catastrophe has hit India, caused in the main by a combination of arrogance and incompetence at the highest levels of the government and political leadership. Yet, the hubris has not ebbed and there is no sign that the competent have replaced the incompetent in dealing with the ferocious second wave of the pandemic.

Since public health services cannot deal with the catastrophe, citizens have been left to their devices to, literally, survive. When they seek each other's help to care for the sick in their families, the vigilantes who now prowl our virtual and physical streets, threaten violence as they defend the reputation of their political heroes.

Power in one office

We may claim otherwise, but with all its extreme economic and caste-driven inequalities, Indian society was never known for its compassion. What we have become today though is something else. We have a government that has no moral compass to guide it; its only compass is to remake India into one where all are not equal and where it must be "mukt" of all diversity. In carrying out this agenda over more than five years, it has transformed the purpose and capacity of the state. To govern is not the main purpose; to create a Hindu Rashtra is the aim. To do so, it has bribed, threatened, or browbeaten all independent institutions and deprived them of an independent voice. It has made a mockery of federalism and reduced State governments to near vassals. It has centralised power in one office, the ominous sounding "PMO". It has weakened the bureaucracy to an extent that civil servants are too terrified to do anything other than what their political masters want. To achieve its objective, it is focused entirely on winning every single election, from the municipal to the national, or failing that, engineering defections by hook or by crook so that it can wield untrammeled power.

Is it any wonder then that when



the storm clouds gather, there is no one to tell the Emperor he is not wearing any clothes? There was no institution, no group and no individual in the circles of power to say that India was no Vishwaguru, that India was not special and that the pandemic was not in retreat. There was no one to tell a Chief Minister that holy as the Ganga's waters are, this round at least will be won by the evil of SARS-CoV-2 if devotees gather every day in tens of thousands on the banks of the river.

The Election Commission of India has become such a shell of its former self that it dare not do anything that will reduce huge "road shows", that new hallmark of Indian democracy that the ruling party specialises in. And there is no one to tell the Prime Minister that to say with pride (without wearing a mask), "I have never seen such a large crowd" at an election meeting, as he did in Asansol in mid-April when daily new cases of COVID-19 were over 200,000, is an invitation to create a public health disaster. The hubris of our political leadership has indeed turned the Government of India into a "Vishwaguru" of a certain kind – one that catalyses, not

prevents, a humanitarian disaster.

A government that has lost its sense of purpose in governance will not have a machinery that can cope with a public health catastrophe. Its incompetence has descended to such levels that it cannot match numbers on supply with demand when it draws up a vaccination drive. It is so eager to shirk responsibility that it abandons a decades-long policy of free universal vaccination and then places half the burden of vaccination on the financially crippled States. It does not seek cooperation and support from the Opposition. It instead thinks it is more important to abuse former Prime Ministers who offer suggestions. And it is so obsessed with managing the narrative that it sends anonymous WhatsApp messages to the media with talking points about how to criticise the Opposition. It has created such an immoral universe that as people lie on pavements outside hospitals seeking medical help, the market feels free to engage in price gouging of the desperate.

No compassion

This is a government that is incapable of showing any compassion for those who are suffering. The DNA of the state has changed so much that it does not even think it should reach out with messages of comfort to those who are bewildered with what has overwhelmed them. The political leadership is so much in love with showing its 'strength' that it thinks compassion is another word for weakness. A strong government is not one that uses every occasion to ask its citizens to demonstrate their sense of nationalism. It is instead one that can admit it is wrong,

seek forgiveness for its actions that have created harm and show compassion for those who are struggling to stay alive.

When it does so, it can surely draw everyone into a collective effort to deal with this catastrophe. It is not just a question of competence, this is a mammoth crisis that no government can handle on its own. The Government of India needs the support of citizen groups, of the Opposition, of the courts, of the medical profession, of industry – of everyone who is willing to help get the better of this nightmare. It was in a similar situation this time last year that it had the opportunity to form a national government (<https://bit.ly/3h3B6Yt>). It instead chose the first wave of the pandemic to further centralise power, push State governments aside, use the infamous Delhi police to throw young people into jail on false charges, issue a slew of ordinances and then railroad unpopular legislation through Parliament. It used the pandemic in 2020 not to build a healthier society but for short-term political gain to further centralise power in one office.

It may be against the nature of this government to accommodate differences of opinion and seek everyone's help. But Indians are now struggling for something as basic as oxygen as this vast country finds itself felled not by the virus but by a government's insensitivity and incompetence. There is much more at stake than the self-interest of one political party and one individual. Hubris and compassion sit on two mountains. Which one are we going to climb?

C. Rammanohar Reddy is Editor of the digital publication, 'The India Forum'

The rising sun in India-Japan relations

New Delhi should be confident that Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is willing to accord primacy to bilateral ties



HARSH V. PANT &
SHASHANK MATTOO

Contrary to the expectations of many, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has turned out to be a true successor of his predecessor, Shinzo Abe, on the foreign policy front. His visit to the United States last month has set the agenda for the wider Indo-Pacific engagement of Tokyo and its evolving priorities.

Focus on China

Right at the outset, it was clear that the crux of the discussions during this first in-person meeting between the newly anointed President of the United States, Joe Biden, and Mr. Suga would revolve around China. To begin with, Tokyo and Washington drilled down to brass tacks on their joint security partnership given the need to address China's recent belligerence in territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas as well as in the Taiwan Strait. Both sides affirmed the centrality of their treaty alliance, for long a source of stability in East Asia, and pledged to stand up to China in key regional flashpoints such as the disputed Senkaku Islands and Taiwan. Reflecting the changed nature of conflict, both sides acknowledged the importance of extended deterrence *vis-à-vis* China through cooperation on cybersecurity and space technology.

Discussions also touched upon

Chinese ambitions to dominate the development of new age technologies such as 5G and quantum computing. Given China's recent pledge to invest a mammoth \$1.4 trillion in emerging technologies, Washington and Tokyo scrambled to close the gap by announcing a Competitiveness and Resilience Partnership, or CoRe (<https://bit.ly/3eN6DT>). The two allies earmarked billions in funding for the deployment of secure 5G networks, committed to building digital infrastructure in developing countries and promised to collaborate on setting global digital standards. Both sides have also signalled their intent to continue the Trump-era policy of pressure on China to reform economic practices such as "violations of intellectual property rights, forced technology transfer, excess capacity issues, and the use of trade distorting industrial subsidies" (<https://bit.ly/2Sbb8IH>).

Tokyo and Washington also rallied around the standard of shared values. Both powers repeatedly emphasised their vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific that respects the rule of law, freedom of navigation, democratic norms and the use of peaceful means to settle disputes. In the aftermath of the successful Quad Summit (<https://bit.ly/2RfcP7n>), both parties expressed their continued support for the four-nation grouping of the United States, India, Australia and Japan. China's human rights violations in Xinjiang, its heavy-handed suppression of protests in Hong Kong and military aggression towards Taiwan came in for heavy criticism.

Given that the Japanese premier plans to visit India as soon as the



situation permits following the COVID-19 pandemic, his dealings with the U.S. are a preview of what New Delhi can expect from Tokyo.

A preview

First, one can expect a continuation of the balancing security policy against China that began with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe in 2014. During a phone call with the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Suga expressed concern over China's "unilateral" actions in the East and South China Seas, Xinjiang and Hong Kong. Crucially, India's clashes with China in Galwan have turned public opinion in favour of a more confrontational China policy. In just a decade, New Delhi and Tokyo have expanded high-level ministerial contacts, conducted joint military exercises and concluded military pacts such as the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) logistics agreement. Further, no meeting would be complete without an affirmation of New Delhi and Tokyo's support for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and continued willingness to work with the Quad, which is fast emerging as a central pillar of the security strategies of both nations. A Modi-Suga meeting, accompanied by the planned 2+2 Ministerial meetings, will like-

ly aim to take stock of the state of play in the security relationship while also pushing the envelope on the still nascent cooperation on defence technology and exports.

Technology partnership

Second, the two powers will look to expand cooperation in sectors such as cybersecurity and emerging technologies. During the Shinzo Abe years, New Delhi and Tokyo put together a digital research and innovation partnership that ran the gamut of technologies from AI and 5G to the Internet of Things and space research. As with the U.S.-Japan summit, Mr. Suga and Mr. Modi may look to deepen cooperation between research institutes and expand funding in light of China's aforementioned technology investment programme. It is yet unclear whether Mr. Suga will attempt to stir the pot and bring up the disagreements over India's insistence on data localisation and continued reluctance to accede to global cybersecurity agreements such as the Budapest Convention.

Third, economic ties and infrastructure development are likely to be top drawer items on the agendas of New Delhi and Tokyo. While Japan has poured in around \$34 billion in investments into the Indian economy over the course of the last two decades, Japan is only India's 12th largest trading partner (<https://bit.ly/3xENISD>), and trade volumes between the two stand at just a fifth of the value of India-China bilateral trade. A Modi-Suga summit will likely reaffirm Japan's support for key manufacturing initiatives such as 'Make in India' and the Japan Industrial Townships. Further, India will be keen

to secure continued infrastructure investments in the strategically vital connectivity projects currently under way in the Northeast and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Third country outlook

Finally, a Suga-Modi Summit would undoubtedly devote much attention to evolving a joint strategy towards key third countries and multilateral bodies. In years past, New Delhi and Tokyo have collaborated to build infrastructure in Iran and Africa, provide vital aid to Myanmar and Sri Lanka and hammer out a common Association of Southeast Asian Nations outreach policy in an attempt to counter China's growing influence in these corners of the globe. However, unlike previous summits, the time has come for India and Japan to take a hard look at reports suggesting that joint infrastructure projects in Africa and Iran have stalled with substantial cost overruns. Tokyo will also likely continue its charm offensive on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in an attempt to get New Delhi to reverse its decision not to join the massive trade compact.

Writing in 2006, Shinzo Abe, in his book, *Utsukushii Kuni E* (Toward a Beautiful Country), expressed his hope that "it would not be a surprise if in another 10 years, Japan-India relations overtake Japan-U.S. and Japan-China relations". Thus far, New Delhi has every reason to believe that Japan's Yoshihide Suga is willing to make that dream a reality.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Congress on crisis

Congress president Sonia Gandhi, in her expansive interview (Inside pages, "We need to work together and mobilise all help for the millions," April 30), has said, "the Union government declared a premature victory... The facts staring us in the face were ignored." Were there really any signs of abatement in the efforts of the Prime Minister to do his best to contain the spread of the virus? On the contrary, he has been working hard to stem the forest fire. Second, when she says, "it is a reflection of his government's incompetence, insensitivity and completely distorted

sense of priorities", it indicates that the Congress party is always determined to perceive things with jaundiced eyes alone.

The gist of the replies by Mrs Gandhi give a clear picture of the unalloyed hostility and animosity of the Congress to find fault with the BJP.

MANI NATARAJAN,
Chennai

grave crisis. Politics has no room in this national disaster.

V.S. GANESHAN,
Bengaluru

Vaccination drive
Even a person with an elementary knowledge of the law of demand and supply theory of economics would have known that given the availability of vaccines and the likely inflow, it would be an impossible task to commence vaccination for those aged above 18 from May 1. There has been little time for the States to get the logistics in place in addition to the job of the procurement of vaccines at affordable prices. Moreover, in the four States where elections were held, we

could be looking at a situation of having care-taker governments. It would take at least a week from now for the new governments to be sworn in. During this interregnum, no outgoing government, unless

confident of a comeback, would negotiate on prices for fear of a backlash later. Health workers, already battered and bruised, should not be put to any inconvenience due to tempers rising in vaccination centres over the unavailability of vaccines. States financially not well off may not be able to obtain vaccines at affordable prices which may be cornered by more affluent States.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

ECI's conduct

While we admit that the Election Commission of India was a mute spectator to the huge rallies conducted by political parties, the chiding by the honourable judges should also be taken as a knock on the heads of all the tall leaders of the political parties who led such huge rallies and even expressed jubilation over the congregation of huge crowds, keeping only electoral victory in mind. The common man is not surprised by the soft pedalling of the ECI of late in the violation of rules and regulations by political parties, more so by the ruling dispensation.

THARCIUS S. FERNANDO,
Chennai

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Accountability, and now
It is with a deep sense of anguish, pain and mistrust that I write this letter. It is 74 years since we attained Independence from the British, but how far has the common man of India made any progress? The Indian citizen is still in the clutches of greedy, irresponsible and insensitive power mongers. The Indian politician needs us only during election time. In the traumatic experience of the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis, we need to wake up and start questioning our politicians. Otherwise, there is no hope for us.

V.V. RAJA RAO,
Visakhapatnam



Calamity in the capital

The COVID-19 wave in New Delhi has led to a spike in cases and deaths and put the healthcare system under severe strain. **Nikhil M. Babu, Hemani Bhandari** and **Jatin Anand** report on the negligence of the Central and Delhi governments which has led to a mad scramble for beds, oxygen, and space in cremation grounds

At 3 p.m. on April 24, a woman walks out of the main building of Jaipur Golden Hospital, Delhi, her eyes red from crying. She is in her thirties. Three family members have their arms around her. The woman is silent and keeps her head down. Her relative, though, snaps out of her shock and cries, "He has been murdered!" The woman crosses the hospital gate, sits on the pavement and starts wailing. Her 37-year-old husband, Dinesh, a cabin crew member in an airline, was among the 20 critically ill COVID-19 patients at the hospital who had died the previous night over an "oxygen crisis", according to the hospital authorities.

"These people killed him. They didn't give him oxygen. They didn't tell us anything about an oxygen shortage," says a family member. The woman has two children aged three and five years.

It is a summer of fear and grief in the national capital. This wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has hit Delhi with tremendous force. The number of daily new cases and deaths is as high as 28,000 and 300, respectively, every day. There is sickness in the air and death too. The health system is being stretched to its limits, often cracking under the burden of cases. Many people with symptoms of COVID-19 are lining up outside testing centres as early as 4 a.m. Every day, the sick travel to about five-six hospitals in search of a bed. Many of them die outside hospitals just waiting for admission. Inside the hospitals, apart from deaths due to the infection and related complications, some lives have been lost due to oxygen shortages. The queues are long outside hospitals and they are long outside cremation grounds too. Pyres burn through the night.

Letting down its guard

How did it come to this? The Delhi government says the disaster is due to an unexpected spike in cases due to the spread of a variant of the virus, but medical experts say the government let its guard down too early. Believing that the worst was behind us, the government did not increase beds or build capacity at oxygen plants, they say.

"Not just Delhi, but nationally too the assumption was that there won't be a second wave. Many experts in Delhi had announced on TV that we have achieved herd immunity and the pandemic has ended," says Dr. K. Srinath Reddy, epidemiologist and president of the Public Health Foundation of India. He says people gave up social distancing and stopped wearing masks properly.

The picture was different just a few months ago. January 27 was a good day for the Delhi government. The number of new COVID-19 cases had dropped to 96, the lowest in nine months in the capital. On February 16, it dropped to 94. Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain took note of it. "I feel now that all the three waves of the coronavirus have hit the city. It'll die down eventually. Now it is no more a pandemic but an endemic. The infection will not be eradicated much like other diseases, but the surge is on the wane. I hope we won't see 8,600 cases a day. I feel we are out of the danger zone but we still need to take proper precautions. Masks and social distancing need to be maintained," he said in a statement on February 19.

A few days later, on February 24, the number of new cases hit 200. Despite this, that month, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal addressed crowded election rallies for by-elections to five seats in municipal corporations. There was no social distancing at these rallies and several did not wear masks.

On March 7, Jain again stated that COVID-19 was nearing an "endemic" phase in the capital. "Experts say some cases will continue to occur in the endemic phase over the next few years, but it will not spread like it was in the pandemic phase. Delhi witnessed a swine flu outbreak around 10 years ago but still some cases are reported every year. COVID-19 is not going to end completely. We will have to learn to live with it," he said. Jain provided encouraging data: the positivity rate had been lower than 1% for two months, he said. Nearly two months since that reassurance, the positivity rate stands at over 32%.

Before the cases began spiking, the Delhi government lifted most of the COVID-19 restrictions. The number of beds for COVID-19 patients was reduced in hospitals as cases were low.

"See, politicians are not technical experts. They get opinions from experts. They may project it in an over-enthusiastic way. So, don't point a finger at the Minister alone, but also at the experts who advise him," Dr. Reddy says.

Given that many other countries have experienced a second and even third wave, India should have taken note, Dr. Reddy says. "Even as early as January and February, there was an increase in cases in Maharashtra and other States. Not just Delhi, but other States should have also taken note," he says.



COVID-19 victims being cremated in Ghaziabad, Delhi. (Below): A COVID-19 patient being wheeled into the emergency ward of Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital in Delhi.

SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA; SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



The Delhi government spokesperson and the Health Minister did not respond to questions sent by *The Hindu*.

Unable to keep up with demand

The "unexpected spike" has spiralled into an unimaginable crisis today with people running around to find beds, drugs and oxygen.

Around 11:30 a.m. on a hot April day, a woman in her early thirties walks with the help of her husband outside the emergency ward of Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, commonly known as GTB Hospital, the second largest government hospital in Delhi. She is suspected of having COVID-19. Her condition slowly worsens. Unable to sit, she lies down at the entrance to the emergency ward. The ward is overwhelmed: stretchers are used as beds, with one touching the other, and people share beds. A long queue of hopeful people wait outside.

About half an hour later, the husband, Surender Kumar, 35, struggles alone with her body. With no one to help, he drags it from the stretcher into an ambulance. "She breathed her last while we were waiting," says Kumar, a daily wage labourer from Bihar. Within just an hour, two people are declared dead outside the emergency ward.

Finding a bed is one of the biggest challenges today. "This is the fifth hospital I'm coming to with my mother. I called GTB Hospital. The government website showed that it had 292 vacant beds, but the hospital said it doesn't have any. Her oxygen level is 80%. What will we do now?" asks an anxious 17-year-old standing outside the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan (LNJP) Hospital, the largest Delhi government hospital.

Though the number of new cases started rising from February 24, the Central and Delhi governments did not increase the city's healthcare infrastructure through March. On March 1, the number of new cases was 175 and the number of active cases was 1,404. This quickly rose to 1,819 new cases and 8,838 active cases by March 31 – an increase of 939.4% and 529.4%, respectively. However, during the same period, the number of hospital beds for COVID-19 increased only by 1.6% – from 5,721 to 5,815, as per official data. Also, the number of beds in COVID Care Centres stayed stagnant at 5,525 throughout March. By April 28, the government increased the beds by

259.8%, to 20,926, compared to March 1, but this too fell terribly short of demand.

Dr. Girish Tyagi, Secretary of the Delhi Medical Council, says there is a huge gap between the demand and supply of beds, oxygen, medicines and ICU beds in Delhi. "The system has practically collapsed. The government didn't anticipate such a spike. But there was an increase in Mumbai in February and March and we should have been better prepared," he says.

Dr. Reddy says whatever happened in Delhi from December to April cannot be seen in isolation. "During this period, the U.K. variant of the virus, B.1.1.7, came into Delhi and Punjab and was in circulation. But people became careless. We went back to the routine practices of 2019 and we started non-COVID-19 treatment in hospitals. To convert hospitals to treat COVID-19 patients takes time," he says. But the government should have added more beds, especially in COVID-19 Care Centres, he adds.

"The government cannot say it did not expect this situation. It has epidemiologists and experts advising it. They should have made predictions. Having said that, we do not know whether experts had advised the government and were ignored," Dr. Tyagi says.

A senior official says there was no prediction on how the rise would be this time. "Last year, the V.K. Paul Committee had predicted that cases could go up to 15,000 a day. But this time no one knew how the rise would be. There were so many other factors in play," he official says.

In May and June last year too, as cases started to rise, people were forced to travel from one hospital to another in search of beds. Many were unable to find a bed in a hospital, even when beds were available according to official data.

On June 27, 2020, in a video statement, Kejriwal accepted that there was a shortage of beds. "In the first week of June, there was a shortage of beds in Delhi and there were fewer tests [being conducted]. Due to a shortage of beds, some people did not get beds, and the number of deaths also started to increase," he said. Kejriwal added that he used to get calls at nights about the shor-

age of beds and it was fixed later.

The situation is far worse this year as the vacancy of beds has been as low as 5% on many days and the number of vacant ICU beds has been lower than 20 for the whole of Delhi over the past one week. Last year, too, the government increased the number of beds only after the spike. Now, the government is trying to make available 1,500 more ICU beds and says these will be ready by May 10. On April 29, there were only 17 ICU beds vacant in the whole city.

Gasping for air

On April 18, Kejriwal tweeted that Delhi is facing an "acute shortage of oxygen" and it was becoming an "emergency". On April 23, a day before the deaths at Jaipur Golden Hospital, 25 of the "sickest" patients died at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital due to an oxygen crisis. Several other hospitals also sent out distress statements reporting dwindling supplies even as the number of COVID-19 patients mounted. Many said oxygen was available at dangerously low levels. Often, oxygen supplies had reached just in time to save people, they said. Many hospitals stopped admitting patients and two major Delhi government hospitals – GTB Hospital and Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital – reduced the total number of beds by a total of 1,100.

There has been a shortage of liquid medical oxygen in the city for over 10 days, but this urgent need is yet to be resolved. It has now turned into a political blame game. On April 21, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia blamed the Haryana and Uttar Pradesh governments for not allowing a smooth supply of oxygen from private oxygen plants in those States to Delhi. The Delhi government has submitted data before the Delhi High Court suggesting that while oxygen provided to the national capital by the Centre was well short of target, some States were getting more than what they had asked for. Since April 19, the Delhi High Court has been monitoring the situation in the capital and has castigated both the Centre and the Delhi government for the lack of availability of medical oxygen and its distribution.

Ideally, there should be a buffer stock of oxygen to last at least 48 hours in hospitals, say doctors. But since the record

surge in cases, hospitals have been working with smaller stocks and are filling oxygen almost on a daily basis.

People too are scrambling for oxygen. On April 28, Jitender Kumar, a resident of Paschim Puri, stands in the queue outside an oxygen-filling plant in Naraian. He has been there since 4 a.m. "I have already lost two relatives to COVID-19 because we couldn't get a bed in a hospital. I am standing here trying to save the third person," he says.

The struggle to cremate the dead

However, even if there are beds and oxygen, the capital's problems would be far from over. On April 19, Ved Prakash, 40, died inside his car while waiting outside the Sardar Patel COVID Care Centre. The centre had more than 350 vacant beds, but did not allow him admission as he had not followed the procedure, which was not in place that day. Around 9:30 p.m., Megh Singh, 60, who was waiting in queue at a crematorium to do Prakash's last rites said, "He was critical, but he was still responding to us when we reached the centre. Now he is gone. No hospital attended to him."

Delhi's municipal corporations are struggling to cope with the daily pile of bodies at crematoriums and burial grounds administered by them across the city which have, over the last 11 days, witnessed the last rites of over 5,800 citizens who died of COVID-19.

Funeral pyres, according to the Mayors of the three Municipal Corporations, burn round the clock – sometimes even on the ground for want of space – at 29 funeral venues spread across the 11 municipal zones in Delhi. This is despite the enhancement of capacity dedicated for the last rites of COVID-19 patients at these venues by over 93% between April 19 and April 29.

Temporary platforms have been created hurriedly at crematoriums and extra space has been allotted at burial sites to deal with the sudden surge in the numbers of the dead. The Mayors say they hope to ensure that no citizen is turned away and denied the right to cremate their kin.

The sheer magnitude of the daily death toll has forced the Bharatiya Janata Party-run civic bodies to reach out to Kejriwal for help requesting resources ranging from more hearses to an uninterrupted supply of firewood to keep the pyres lit.

According to records of the Delhi Municipal Corporation, 5,808 cremations and burials with COVID-19 protocols were performed between April 19 and April 29 (6 p.m.). The Delhi government, however, recorded 3,271 COVID-19 deaths in this period. The capacity at crematoria and burial grounds on April 19 was 505; by April 29 this had increased to accommodate 978 bodies.

North Delhi Municipal Corporation (DMC) had the capacity to cremate 230 bodies till April 15 but within 10-12 days, the total capacity has been increased to 570. Three new cremation grounds have been developed besides increasing

the capacity of existing ones," North DMC Mayor Jai Prakash said in a letter to Kejriwal on April 28.

"Out of a total of 570, 304 wooden and 54 CNG pyres are fixed for COVID-19 deaths and the rest are for non-COVID-19 deaths. We are transforming ourselves as per the need of the hour," he said. South DMC Mayor Anamika Mithlesh Singh said 20 funeral platforms recently created at two adjacent public parks in Sarai Kale Khan will be increased five-fold to 100 and beyond that if required in the coming days. East DMC Mayor Nirmal Jain said funerals at the facilities in his jurisdiction are undertaken from dawn till dusk and though waiting times have been getting longer, the corporation was trying its best to ensure that the last rites of as many citizens as possible were performed.

The North DMC Mayor has asked Kejriwal to provide at least 100 ambulances to the municipal corporations to transport patients to available healthcare facilities which could also be utilised as hearse vans in those cases of citizens losing their battle with COVID-19. He also demanded that the Delhi government direct the forest department to provide firewood from damaged or ailing trees for final rites given the increasing number of funerals.

The Mayors accused the Delhi government of giving incorrect figures related to COVID-19 deaths to hide its alleged failure at taming the pandemic. BJP spokesperson Harish Khurana alleged that the Delhi government was "politicking on deaths".

A Delhi government source says a significant reason for the mismatch is the deaths of COVID-19 patients either on their way to hospital or at other places as they could not get admitted to a hospital on time. The discrepancy in funeral and COVID-19 deaths data maintained by the government could also be related to the fact that some are dying at home or are dying of critical illnesses aggravated by the virus, the source says.

Responding to reports on the mismatch between cremation figures and the COVID-19 death toll recorded by the Delhi government, the Health Minister told reporters on April 29 that the government has kept everything "transparent". "This is not the time to politicise things. Six months ago, the same concern was seen, but it was proved that the numbers were accurate," he said.

For the relatives of the dead, these measures and explanations mean little. Outside the CNG cremation chamber at Nigambodh Ghat, Dinesh Singh waits for his turn to perform the last rites of his father, Abhay Singh, 65, a retired municipal officer who was "suspected" to have died of COVID-19. Singh's body had been lying in an ambulance for over two hours. His turn will come after four-five hours, Dinesh is told. "His body has begun to putrefy. He had retired as an inspector-rank officer. How could they treat him like this after death," he grieves. No one has an answer.



FROM PAGE ONE

States postpone vaccine rollout for 18-45 group

The vaccines would be priced as per the Central government guidelines, Shobana Kamineni, executive vice chairperson, Apollo Hospitals Group said.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said the inoculation will start from Saturday "as per the availability" of vaccine doses. Mr. Thackeray said the State has the capacity to vaccinate each and every person but the problem is of vaccine supply.

"We will be receiving 18 lakh doses in May. I again urge the Central government to increase the supply," he added. The State has received three lakh doses from the Centre on Friday.

Deferred in Punjab

In Punjab and the Union Territory of Chandigarh the rollout has been put on hold. The UT administration said it had not received vaccines – an issue echoed by the Punjab government.

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh announced deferring of the roll out, adding that vaccination at private health facilities by Friday evening, these facilities would have no vaccines to administer from tomorrow for 45 plus population, while they could not vaccinate 18-45 age group as they had no supplies for the same," said the Chief Minister.

The State had received 2 lakh doses but that was not sufficient even to meet the two days' requirement of the 45 plus age group, said Captain Singh, while reviewing the Covid vaccine situation at a virtual meeting.

An order for procurement of 30 lakh doses of Covishield for the age group of 18-45 years was placed

with Serum Institute of India on April 26, but the response received was that availability of vaccine will be known only in 4 weeks' time. Further, SII had asked the State government to indicate demand for the next 3-4 months, with advance payments to be made. They had informed the government that supplies would be delivered in a phased manner, every month.

Uncertainty in Odisha
The vaccination drive in Odisha faces uncertainty with State government not able to secure concrete commitment for required amount of vaccine.

In the phase 3, 1.93 crore people (43% of the population) in the age group of 18-44, are eligible for getting vaccinated. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had already announced free vaccination for this group of population.

"We had not lost anytime to contact two companies for supply of vaccine. In Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation area, five lakh people in the age group have been estimated for which order of 10.34 lakh doses has been placed. The SII has also been contacted for 377 lakh doses of vaccine.

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China's President Xi Jinping on Friday sent a message to Prime Minister Narendra Modi offering China's support in dealing with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Mr. Xi's message, the first such known communication between the two leaders following the pandemic and last year's border crisis, was followed by a telephone call on Friday from China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi to his counterpart S. Jaishankar. Mr. Wang also sent a message to Mr. Jaishankar on Thursday offering China's support.

"I am very concerned about the recent situation of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. On behalf of the Chinese government and people, as well as in my own name, I would like to express sincere sympathies to the Indian Government and people," Mr. Xi said in the message, shared by China's Ambassador to India Sun Weidong on Twitter.

"Humanity is a commun-

ty with a shared future. Only through solidarity and cooperation can countries around the world ultimately defeat the pandemic," he added. "The Chinese side stands ready to strengthen cooperation with the Indian side in fighting the pandemic and provide support and help in this regard. I believe that under the leadership of the Indian Government, the Indian people will surely prevail over the pandemic."

Mr. Jaishankar said he had received a call from his Chinese counterpart "conveying China's sympathies at the COVID challenge now faced by India". "Discussed the international cooperation aspects of the public health response to this difficult situation," he said on Twitter, adding that he had "highlighted the importance of supply chains and air flights being kept open in these circumstances" and "welcomed his assurances in that regard, as also more openness to Indian chartered flights".



Only through solidarity and cooperation can countries around the world ultimately defeat the pandemic. The Chinese side stands ready to strengthen cooperation with the Indian side in fighting the pandemic

XI JINPING,
CHINESE PRESIDENT

Both sides also "discussed the issue of full and sincere implementation of the Moscow Agreement of complete disengagement at all friction points along the LAC and full restoration of peace and tranquility in Eastern Ladakh" and "agreed to continue discussions in this respect". Talks between military commanders are ongoing and have made slow progress since February following the first phase of disengagement at Pangong Lake, with the Chinese military dragging its heels on pulling back in other areas.

Mr. Wang said on Thursday that "anti-pandemic materials produced in China are entering India at a faster

pace to help India fight the epidemic".

A large number of orders for oxygen concentrators, ventilators and other medical supplies are in the process of being sourced from China. A first batch of 800 oxygen concentrators was flown in from Hong Kong earlier this week and Mr. Sun, the Chinese envoy, said on Thursday China had, since April, "supplied more than 5000 ventilators, 21,569 oxygen generators, over 21.48 million masks & around 3,800 tons of medicines to India" according to Chinese customs data. These were acquired on a commercial basis.

China's Foreign Ministry

spokesperson Wang Wenbin said on Friday "all social sectors in China are busy taking actions" to aid India.

More supplies

"The Red Cross Society of China, local governments, many non-governmental organisations and Chinese enterprises are trying their best to collect anti-epidemic supplies urgently needed by India, and deliver them to the Indian people as soon as possible," he said. "Chinese manufacturers of anti-epidemic supplies and medical equipment are racing against the clock in full speed to ensure production. In the next few days, more anti-epidemic materials will be sent."

Last week, the Embassy in Delhi imposed new curbs by barring transit through some countries, including Nepal, as there are no direct flights between India and China. Now, the issuance of health codes on the only allowed transit routes through Germany and Oman has also been temporarily suspended. Indians and foreigners based in India have been barred from travelling to China since November 2020.

sport liquid oxygen tanks, oxygen concentrators and other materials from many cities in China," he added. "China will continue to ensure the smooth functioning of the export channel of materials to India."

On Friday, China joined Australia in effectively barring its nationals in India from returning. While there was no formal announcement, Chinese nationals in India have been told they would no longer be issued "health codes" by the Embassy in New Delhi that are needed to travel to China.

He said "freight air routes from China to India are operating normally" and "in the past two weeks, a number of freight flights from China to India remain in operation". "Relevant Chinese authorities have provided and are providing convenience in customs clearance and transportation for India to trans-

We lost an icon of India's legal system: President

Sorabjee was at the forefront in helping the poor, says PM

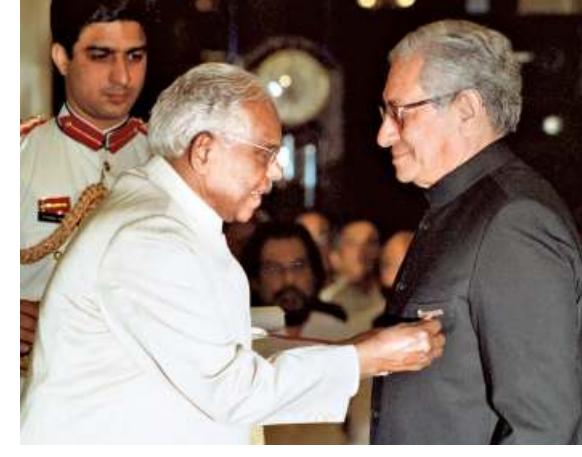
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Condolences poured in from all quarters on the demise of the former Attorney General of India Soli Sorabjee on Friday.

President Ram Nath Kovind mourned the passing of the renowned jurist. "In the passing of Soli Sorabjee, we lost an icon of India's legal system. He was among the select few who deeply influenced evolution of constitutional law & justice system. Awarded with Padma Vibhushan, he was among most eminent jurists. My condolences to his family & associates," he tweeted.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted: "Shri Soli Sorabjee was an outstanding lawyer and intellectual. Through law, he was at the forefront of helping the poor and downtrodden. He will be remembered for his noteworthy tenure as India's Attorney General. Saddened by his demise. Condolences to his family and admirers."

Humane approach: CJI
Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana said Mr. Sorabjee's humane and compassionate approach defined his legal work. He served the office of Attorney General of India twice with great distinction. His body of work, spread over nearly seven decades, in defending the fundamental rights and human rights was of international repute. He



Nation's honour: President K.R. Narayanan conferring the Padma Vibhushan on Soli Sorabjee in 2002. ■ V. SUDESHAN

would be remembered as a legend who added strength to the pillars of democracy, said the Chief Justice.

Union Ministers, including Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, also condoled the death of Mr. Sorabjee. "Sorabjee was a doyen of the legal fraternity, who will always be remembered for his contribution in the field of constitutional law," tweeted Mr. Shah.

Mr. Singh tweeted: "He was an exceptional legal mind and a great scholar of our constitution. His services to the nation will always be remembered."

The passing of Mr. Sorabjee is a big loss to the world of law and justice, tweeted former Union Minister P. Chidambaram. "He will be remembered along with many illustrious judges who

gave content and meaning to the promise of the Constitution of India to build a just, fair and equal society..."

Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar in a tweet said Mr. Sorabjee's "long career as a senior advocate is an example of commitment to the sovereignty and spirit of the Constitution of India."

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao conveyed his condolences to the bereaved family. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said Mr. Sorabjee's "advocacy had a profound impact on protection of human rights."

He recalled that Mr. Sorabjee had served as Special Rapporteur to the UN Human Rights Commission besides serving at PCA (Permanent Court of Arbitration), The Hague.

His going is a great personal loss for he was much more than a neighbour to my parents and me. He was family. The grandfather that one otherwise missed seeing. He will be sorely missed.

As I write, three things come to mind. First, Mr. Sorabjee loved everything surrounding his birthday. Planning for the annual celebration on March 9 started several months in advance. Everything from the caricature on his invitation card to the menu was personally fine-tuned. Ev-

He was a lover of jazz, court craft and good food

Sorabjee's neighbour, who is also an advocate, pays tribute

SATVIK VARMA

For someone whose love for jazz sometimes outweighed his passion and commitment to the law, it can't just be a coincidence that Soli J. Sorabjee departed on International Jazz Day. With his passing, not just has his immediate family lost its patriarch but it has left the legal community in India and abroad with a void. One that no one will ever be able to fill. They just don't come like him any more.

While his extraordinary brilliance, legal skills, court craft and commitment to human rights make him a legend, he is also noted for his compassion, empathy, generosity, wit, curiosity and mischievousness, often times almost naughtiness. But above all, he was a human being par excellence. His going is a great personal loss for he was much more than a neighbour to my parents and me. He was family. The grandfather that one otherwise missed seeing. He will be sorely missed.

As I write, three things come to mind. First, Mr. Sorabjee loved his annual pilgrimage to London, something he was unable to do for the past two years. His trips followed a pattern – place of stay at Barbican, meetings under the Selfridges clock at noon and evenings at his favourite bar in Mayfair. I spent dozens of evenings last year during the lockdown discussing his next trip to London and the plays he wanted to watch.

His life is to be celebrated. So let's tune in for the virtual all-star 10th anniversary global concert to mark International Jazz Day, which can now also be christened Soli Sorabjee farewell day. The tipple for my parents and me will be Mr. Sorabjee's favourite Old Parr whiskey and I hope they play his favourite Benny Goodman song *Farewell Blues*: "Sadness just makes me sigh, I've come to say goodbye, Altho' I go, I've got those farewell blues. Those farewell blues make me yearn... someday I will return... Dreaming of you is sweet, Someday again we'll meet."

(Satvik Varma is a senior advocate in New Delhi. He tweets @satvikvarma)



Another passion: A 2005 photo of Soli Sorabjee listening to jazz at his residence in New Delhi. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

Ex-Attorney General Soli Sorabjee passes away

"For a long while we were rivals, later un-friendly rivals, but now, in the evening of our lives, we are friends," Mr. Nariman wrote.

The book referred to Mr. Sorabjee's distinguished career, going on to become India's Attorney General (first in 1989 for a year and again in 1998 for five years).

Jazz aficionado

But Mr. Sorabjee was much more than a lawyer. He wore many hats. He was a jazz aficionado: his Neeti Bagh residence has rows and rows of vinyl records of jazz.

Ban on foreign flights to continue

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI/ NEW DELHI

The Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday extended the suspension of international flights from/to India till May 31.

Scheduled international flights have been banned in the country since March 23, 2020, though flights to foreign destinations are permitted under special bilateral air bubbles India has entered into with 27 countries.

Cargo exempted

The restriction would not apply to international all-cargo operations and other flights specially approved by the DGCA. The suspension comes in the backdrop of a spike in COVID-19 cases across the country, and also the ban or restrictions imposed on flights/travellers from/to India by at least 21 countries.

SC raises concerns over vaccine pricing

'Why can't Centre buy 100% of doses?'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday asked why the government could not follow a national immunisation programme policy with respect to COVID-19 vaccines.

Flagging the issue of vaccine equity, a Special Bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, L. Nageswara Rao and S. Ravindra Bhat asked whether, now, one State would get priority access to the vaccines.

The court asked why the Centre had not procured 100% of the vaccines and equitably distributed them across the country, but instead leaving it to manufacturers. The court said the Centre could not possibly enforce equity in vaccine distribution when it was itself buying only 50% doses.

Vaccine manufacturing was publicly funded and

vaccines were public property, the court noted. "Why cannot the government buy the entire doses of vaccines?" the court asked.

Justice Bhat said manufacturers were charging ₹150 from the Centre while vaccines to the States were priced at ₹300. "Why should we as a nation pay this? The price difference becomes ₹30,000 to ₹40,000 crore... AstraZeneca is providing vaccines at far lower price to the U.S. citizens, then why should we be paying so much?" he asked. The Bench also asked why the Centre had not considered using powers under Section 92 of Patents Act for compulsory licensing of the vaccines. On the plight of medical staff, the SC said it was not enough to declare them 'COVID Warriors, and asked what was being done for them on the ground.

Vaccinate journalists on priority: Guild

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Editors Guild of India on Friday condoled the death of journalists due to COVID-19 and again called on the government to give them priority in vaccination along with frontline workers.

In April 2021 itself, more than 52 journalists died because of the virus. Further, according to the Delhi-based Institute of Perception Studies, more than 100 journalists have died since April 1, 2020. Many of these were brave journalists who had been reporting on the worsening pandemic and bringing to fore stories on the great human tragedy that has been unfolding before us," the EGI said in a statement.

The Guild said it was distressed that the Centre had not done anything to speed up journalists' vaccination.

U.P. MLAs point fingers at panchayat elections

They urge SEC to defer counting

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

As the second wave of the pandemic wreaks havoc across several States, the BJP MLA from the Sawaipur seat in Hardoi district of Uttar Pradesh, Madhavrao Pratap Singh, has written to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the State Election Commission demanding that counting for the panchayat elections – scheduled on May 2 – be deferred by at least a month fearing that the event could lead to a "super explosion" of cases, especially in the rural areas.

Mr. Singh said the large number of cases came about as a result of the negligence during the elections. He said that during the counting, which could last 36-48 hours, supporters of every candidate would assemble outside the counting

centres. "People in the villages are not as cautious as they need to be. Deferring the counting would provide some relief. The situation is really bad in my district," Mr. Singh told *The Hindu*.

The RSS-affiliated Khand Shiksha Adhikari Sangh also demanded that the counting be deferred. The BJP MP from Mohanlalganj had earlier demanded that the panchayat polls be deferred owing to the pandemic.

No change in schedule

The State Election Commission has, however, indicated that the counting would go on as per schedule. While the Allahabad High Court recently took note of the deaths of 135 teachers and others deployed on polling duty, the teachers' unions estimate the figure could be much higher at around 550-1,000 fatalities.

Demand for MGNREGA work spikes in April

The original budgeted spending for the scheme for 2020-21 was around ₹60,000 crore but was enhanced over the year as the national lockdown and large-scale reverse migration from urban employment centres to the hinterland triggered greater

demand under the scheme. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said in Parliament that the government would allocate more funds for the rural jobs scheme for 2021-22 if needed, over and above the ₹73,000 crore outlay proposed in the Budget.

Govt. reworks Remdesivir allocation

Claims of more doses for States not borne out

VIKAS DHOUT
NEW DELHI

The government on Friday announced an "enhanced" allocation of the drug Remdesivir to States battling the second wave of COVID-19 infections, though it has failed to meet its existing commitment to States in the ten-day period till April 30 due to "issues" with the placement of orders and transporting the drug across the country.

"After in-depth review of enhanced availability of Remdesivir due to ramped up production, its allocation plan to all States has been revised. It's increased supply will help in fighting pandemic with deeper resolve," Union Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister D.V. Sadanand Gowda said on Twitter.

Between April 21 and April 30, the Centre promised to supply 16 lakh vials to State governments from the seven authorised Remdesivir producers, as per a plan jointly firm up by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Department of Phar-



Anxious wait: People outside a government dispensary in Chennai on Friday for Remdesivir. • PTI

maceuticals in the Chemicals and Fertiliser Ministry.

Extended period

As per the revised supply plan shared by the Ministry, the States will now get 18 lakh vials of Remdesivir by May 2. Effectively, this means that instead of an average allocation of 1.6 lakh Remdesivir doses a day in the ten-day period from April 21 to 30, States will now be allocated an average of 1.5 lakh doses a day over a 12-day period. When asked whether this meant that allocations were being reduced,

the Ministry said the initial allocation for States during the ten-day period was 11 lakh doses which was revised to 16 lakh and has now been further enhanced to 18 lakh, albeit over two more days.

"It's not a per day calculation. The entire allocation from April 21 to May 2 has been revised to 18 lakh and the validity also increased for 2 more days," said an official in the Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister's office, adding that the demand and supply is for a specified period and the supply quota

has been increased. Later, however, the official explained that the revised allocation constituted an enhancement in supplies to States as the supply commitment of 16 lakh vials had not yet been met.

"Due to some reasons like order placing, transportation, etc., 16 lakh vials could not be distributed to the States by the seven companies. However, by May 2, all 18 lakh vials will be distributed," the official assured.

For some States, this will mean a slight reduction in the average daily allocation.

Uneasy silence grips Kolkata as COVID-19 cases mount

Election results no longer uppermost on people's minds

BISHWANATH GHOSH
KOLKATA

An uneasy silence has gripped the city of Kolkata, whose streets were witnessing dizzying political activity until recently but where arterial roads are now ruled by the sound of hurrying ambulances.

The question uppermost on the minds of its people is no longer 'Who will come to power?', but 'What if we need hospitalisation due to COVID-19?' Hospitals in the city are already refusing admission citing lack of beds and the situation expected to unfold in the coming days is unlikely to be vastly different from what's playing on in many other parts of the country, where patients are gasping for timely attention.

"It hardly matters to me now who is forming the next government (in West Bengal), I just want my family to recover soon," Suparna Basu, a homemaker and an ardent supporter of the Left

parties, told *The Hindu*. Last Wednesday, she and her family members tested positive for COVID-19, and she is hoping that her elderly in-laws do not need hospitalisation.

"Such is the fear now that people seem to be in denial. My in-laws kept on insisting they had common cold, and that they might contract COVID-19 if they got tested. Now that both are positive, we are constantly monitoring their oxygen levels," Ms. Basu said.

On Friday morning, Pragamoy Dasgupta, another Kolkata resident, was looking for a bed with ventilator for his 67-year-old father, a COVID-19 patient with multiple co-morbidities and currently admitted in a smaller hospital.

"All the big hospitals have refused. One hospital, CMRI, told me they have patients staying there as long as for a month," Mr. Dasgupta said.

Doctors, on the personal level, are doing what they can. The West Bengal Doctors' Forum (WBDF) has started what it calls a philanthropic service for those asymptomatic or showing mild symptoms: as many as 107 doctors are taking turns to offer telemedicine support to such patients.

Set up war room

"This is the time to set up a War Room at Swasthya Bhawan (Health Ministry). Every call needs to be attended to. Numerous organisations are doing it on their own. Bring all of them under one umbrella – all hands on board! Quick triaging holds the key. Those in positions of power need to act and act fast. We simply cannot afford to wait till May 2 (when counting of votes will begin for the recently-concluded Assembly elections in West Bengal)," said Dr. Koushik Chaki, founding secretary of WBDF.

Vaccine for all'
"We are conscious of the fact that all prisoners have the right to life. We [the Jammu and Kashmir administration] are in a process

of prisoners too have the right to life'

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir administration is alive to the fact that jail inmates too have the right to life and the Union Territory is in the process of vaccinating all eligible people, State Advocate General D.C. Raina told the Jammu and Kashmir High Court on Friday.

Mr. Raina made these remarks before the Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Pankaj Mithal and Justice Rajneesh Oswal, which heard a Public Interest Litigation petition on making vaccines available to all prisoners.

Vaccine for all'

"We are conscious of the fact that all prisoners have the right to life. We [the Jammu and Kashmir administration] are in a process

Group sells around 2,000 fake injections

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police arrested seven persons from Delhi and Uttarakhand for allegedly manufacturing fake Remdesivir injections. They have already sold around 2,000 fake injections. The company Nector Herbs and Drugs at Kotdwara is being sealed.

2 more held for selling fake Remdesivir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD

A day after nabbing five persons with 90 vials of Remdesivir, the police in Vadodara city caught two more people allegedly involved in repackaging an antibiotic medicine as Remdesivir, an official said on Friday.

Address local issues, PM tells Ministers

Cabinet meet discusses second wave of infections

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asked Ministers to reach out to people in their respective regions to help them and gather feedback regarding the ongoing second wave of COVID-19 in the country.

The Council of Ministers also stressed the importance of COVID-appropriate behaviour – wearing a mask, keeping physical distance of 6 feet and washing hands frequently. The Council reiterated that the participation of society is a key aspect to accomplish the gigantic task ahead and expressed confidence that the country will rise to the occasion and defeat the virus," the government said.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi said all arms of the government are working unitedly and rapidly to deal with the situation. He also urged the Ministers to stay in touch with people of their respective regions, help them and keep getting their feedback. He stressed the need to ensure that issues at the local level are promptly identified and addressed," the statement said.

The Ministers reviewed the efforts made by the Central and State governments over the past 14 months, it said. Support measures for the vulnerable population in the form of free foodgrains and financial support to Jan Dhan account holders were



Narendra Modi addressing Ministers on Friday.

also discussed at the meeting, the statement said.

"The Council of Ministers

Rope in NGOs, ex-servicemen, says Modi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, while reviewing the work of empowered groups on COVID-19, suggested that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and volunteer groups, including ex-servicemen, be roped in to carry out non-specialised tasks to reduce the burden on medical care professionals.

A statement released after the meeting by the government said, "The Prime Minister asked the officials to explore how volunteers from civil society can be utilised to lessen the pressure on the healthcare sector by invoking them in non-specialised tasks. It was discussed that NGOs could help to establish and maintain lines of communication between the patients, their dependents and health care personnel.

Ex-servicemen could be encouraged to handle call centres for communicating with people under home quarantine."

The meeting also went into supply issues with regard to medical resources, with Prime Minister Modi emphasising that there should be a seamless movement of supplies across geographies.

Memorial sends wood for cremation

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

Officials at the national memorial to Mahatma Gandhi sent dry wood from the Rajghat premises to cremation grounds in Delhi that are running short of wood due to the spike in COVID-19 deaths.

The Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti (GSDS), which is in-charge of Gandhi Darshan at Rajghat and Gandhi Smriti at 5, Tees Jannuary Marg, on Friday sent two truckloads of dry wood from its premises at Rajghat, GSDS Director Dipankar Shri Gyan told *The Hindu*.

He said the South Delhi Municipal Corporation had sought help to overcome the shortage of dry wood at various cremation grounds. Permission had been sought to cut an additional 20 dried trees and send them as well, he said. "We are working with the SDMC Mayor so that the Forest Department gives permission on a priority basis. We will be able to send up to five truckloads of wood," he said.

Further, the GSDS also launched a WhatsApp helpline, at 97112 28032, for verified information on oxygen cylinders, hospital beds, food for patients, vaccination and medicines for COVID-19.

Rahul flays Centre over 'zero accountability'

Cong. welcomes SC remark on vaccines

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi on Friday said that though the second wave of COVID-19 had entered the fourth week and has claimed over two lakh lives so far, there is "zero accountability" and every person is on his own.

"Fourth week of the second wave of corona and more than two lakh dead. Accountability zero. The system has made one *atma nirbhar* (self-reliant)," Mr. Gandhi said on Twitter. "My condolences to fellow citizens losing their loved ones due to lack of treatment. You are not alone in this tragedy – prayers and sympathies are with you from every State of the country. There is hope if we are together."

Compulsory licensing
Separately, Congress leaders, including former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, welcomed the Supreme Court's observation on the government's vaccine policy. Commenting on the top court's observation that the Centre should look at invoking Section 92 of the Patent Act and issue compulsory licenses to manufacture COVID-19 drugs by generic manufacturers, the party's Rajya Sabha



Rahul Gandhi

chief whip, Jairam Ramesh, said on Twitter, "Not only for drugs, but compulsory licensing for vaccines as well. This is exactly what Dr. Manmohan Singh had suggested to the Prime Minister on 18.04.2021, and what the Congress President has reiterated in her interview to *The Hindu* this morning."

"Grateful that the Supreme Court has raised the two issues that the Congress had first raised 15 days ago: vaccine prices and compulsory licensing to manufacture vaccines. The government brushed aside the Congress. The PM did not even acknowledge the letter of the former PM. The Health Minister was rude in addition to being incompetent," Mr. Chidambaram said on Twitter.

Lok Sabha member Manish Tewari also lashed out at the Centre over reports that the government had asked Indian envoys to counter the foreign media's reportage of the government's "poor handling" of the COVID-19 crisis.

Five held for fake COVID-19 reports

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police arrested five employees of the Genestrings lab in south Delhi for generating fake COVID-19 reports. The arrested wanted to earn quick money by testing more COVID-19 samples, said police on Friday.

Atul Thakur, Deputy Commissioner of Police (South), said on April 29, a Police Control Room call was received at the Malviya Nagar Police Station about the fake reports. The caller, Vipul Saini, said a week ago, he, along with around 45 relatives, had given their samples for testing. On April 25, one Rishab Shukla gave his sample to them and on the next day he tested positive for COVID-19 but did not have any symptoms. On April 28, he again gave a sample to one Spice Health Laboratory, where he tested negative.

Chetan Kohli, COO of Genestrings Diagnostic Centre, Malviya Nagar said, "On being approached by a few patients to authenticate reports bearing our lab's name, we found out that they were not issued by us nor tested at our lab. We immediately called the local police station in charge for the investigation of what seemed to be a fake report issue."

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Armed forces get powers for relief work

Defence Minister invokes special provisions to speed up efforts to tackle second wave of COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has invoked special provisions and granted emergency financial powers to the armed forces to empower them and speed up their efforts to tide over the current COVID-19 situation.

The emergency financial powers will help formation commanders to establish and operate quarantine facilities, hospitals and undertake procurement, repair of equipment, items, material and stores, besides provisioning of various services and works required to support the ongoing effort against the pandemic, the Defence Ministry said.

Under these powers, Vice Chiefs of the armed forces, including the Chief Of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman Chiefs Of Staff Committee (CISCOM) and General Officer Commanding-in-Chiefs (GOC-in-Cs) and equivalents of all three Services have been given full powers, whereas Corps Commanders and Area Commanders have been delegat-



Sea route: A vessel of the Indian Navy at the Manama port in Bahrain to transport 40MT of liquid oxygen to Mumbai. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ed powers up to ₹50 lakh per case and Division Commanders, Sub Area Commanders and equivalents have been delegated powers up to ₹20 lakh per case. "These powers have been devolved initially for three months from May 1 to July 31, 2021. These are in addition to the emergency powers delegated to the medical officers of the

armed forces last week," the Ministry said.

To meet the urgent requirement of oxygen in various parts of the country, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is arranging big size oxygen cylinders for fulfilling requirements of different hospitals. "In this regard, the DRDO has handed over 75

such cylinders to the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of NCT of Delhi on Thursday," a DRDO statement said. Forty cylinders of same capacity were handed over to Cabinet Secretariat officials on Friday for utilisation at the Sardar Patel COVID Care Centre at Radha Soami Satsang Beas at Chhatarpur in New Delhi.

These cylinders are of 80 litres water capacity each and can be pressurised up to the 130 bar because of which each of these cylinders can store 10,000 litres of oxygen, the statement said.

Navy contingent

The Navy has sent a 76-member medical contingent from five Naval hospitals around the country to bolster availability of trained manpower in the 900-bed COVID hospital in Ahmedabad.

The Cantonment Boards have extended support to civil administration in various parts of the country to tide over the surge in cases. "Presently, 39 Cantonment Boards (CB) are maintaining 40 general hospitals with 1,240 beds. CB hospitals at Pune, Kirkee and Deolali with 304 beds have been designated as dedicated COVID hospitals," a Defence Ministry statement said.

Cantonment General Hospitals of Kirkee, Deolali, Dehurao, Jhansi and Ahmednagar have been designated as COVID care centres with 418 beds.

India first country to report 4 lakh cases in single day

Over 3,400 fatalities were recorded on Friday

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

With 4,08,323 new COVID-19 cases recorded till 11 p.m. on Friday, India became the first country in the world to register over 4 lakh infections in a single day. The day also saw 3,464 deaths.

Maharashtra reported 62,919 infections, followed by Karnataka (48,296), and Kerala (37,199).

Maharashtra also recorded 828 casualties, followed by Delhi (375) and Uttar Pradesh (332). The country has so far reported a total of 1,91,63,488 cases and 2,11,778 deaths.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Ladakh. The data are sourced from covid19india.org, an independent aggregator of daily figures from State health departments.

As many as 2,97,488 recoveries were recorded on Friday, taking the total to 1,56,71,536.

As many as 19,20,107 samples were tested on Thursday (24 hours ending 7 a.m. on Friday, which is only 31,267



Order of the day: A senior citizen leaving after taking a vaccine shot in Visakhapatnam on Friday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

made available on Friday). This is the first instance when the daily tests have crossed the 19-lakh mark. On April 28, 17,68 lakh samples were tested.

A total of 28.64 crore tests have been conducted in the country till April 29, since the beginning of the pandemic.

22.24 lakh doses given

Around 22.24 lakh vaccination shots were given in the 24 hours ending 7 a.m. on Friday, which is only 31,267

doses more than what was recorded in the previous 24 hours.

The daily vaccination rate has decreased significantly in the second half of April compared to the first. Between April 1-14, India administered 35.26 lakh doses on an average every day. However, between April 15-29, the average daily doses given fell to just 25.16 lakh.

Cumulatively, 15,00,20,648 vaccine doses had been administered till 7 a.m. on Friday.

Police counsel siblings who lost parents

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police rescued two youth in the city who were planning to end their lives after their parents died of COVID-19, officials said on Friday.

Police counselled the 20-year-old girl and 18-year-old boy and put them in touch with relatives.

Police said that on Friday they received information regarding the death of a couple from COVID-19 complications. Their son and daughter were in a flat in south Delhi and they were reportedly planning to end their lives.

Those in distress may reach out to Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, OII-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday (10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.)

Centre says curve flattened in Dec.

Surge in Maharashtra and Kerala came suddenly, Union govt. tells Madras HC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Responding to a query raised by the Madras High Court on Thursday on what it was doing in the last 12 to 14 months without anticipating the second wave of COVID-19 and making preparations to face it, the Centre said the disease curve was flattening till December 2020 and that everything was fine by January this year. It was only thereafter, a surge was noticed in Maharashtra and Kerala, the Centre told the court on Friday.

The daily allocation to States of the Tocilizumab drug was more than doubled on Friday, but shortages are likely to persist in some States.

On April 27, the Centre had kicked off an interim arrangement to allocate the drug to States from limited imports as Tocilizumab supplies in the country had run out a few weeks ago.



On the frontline: Health workers are struggling to cope with a surge in cases in New Delhi as well. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Customs clearance will be granted for such imports by treating them on par with 'gifts'. So far, such an exemption was only allowed for life saving drugs and Rakhis.

The daily allocation to

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pplies in the country had run

out a few weeks ago.

Appearing before the first

Division Bench of Chief Ju-

tice Sanjib Banerjee and Ju-

tice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy.

Additional Solicitor General R. Sankaranarayanan said the Centre

was now taking all steps to

augment the supply of vac-

cines, drugs and oxygen to

the States and Union Territo-

ries. The submissions were

made during the hearing of a

suo motu public interest litig-

ation petition taken up by

the court to monitor CO-

VID-19 related activities.

Later, passing interim or-
ders in the case, the judges wrote: "Two aspects cannot be missed. The first is the Union's endeavour to indicate that the surge in numbers may have been unexpected and that preparatory measures had been taken for

quite some time. The second aspect is the Election Com-
mission of India's concern at sensationalism [by the media]. The post mortem on either count may have to wait particularly in the light of immediate measures that may have to be put in place."

The court also clarified

that it did not regard itself to

possess the expertise neces-

sary to suggest measures to

be adopted to fight the sec-

ond wave of COVID-19.

"The object of the exer-

cise is to ensure that the

authorities tasked with such

obligation devote their com-

plete attention in such re-

gard and to monitor the

measures," the Bench said.

Later, deciding to hear the

suo motu PIL during sum-

mer vacation too, the judges

adjourned the case to Wed-

nnesday for further hearing.

Exemption for oxygen concentrator imports

Device can be bought for personal use

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

To boost the testing apparatus for COVID-19 across the country and ease the availability of oxygen concentrators, the government on Friday notified a customs duty exemption for diagnostic kits imports and altered the foreign trade policy.

The Department of Revenue exempted imports of inflammatory diagnostic (marker) kits, namely IL6, D-Dimer, CRP, LDH, Ferritin, Pro Calcitonin (PCT) and blood gas reagents, from customs duty till October 31, 2021 to supplement testing efforts, the Finance Ministry said in a statement.

Separately, the foreign trade policy for 2015-20 (in force till a new policy is for-

malised) was tweaked to allow the import of oxygen concentrators for personal use through e-commerce portals, post or courier till July 31, 2021.

Customs clearance will be granted for such imports by treating them on par with 'gifts'. So far, such an exemption was only allowed for life saving drugs and Rakhis.

The daily allocation to States of the Tocilizumab drug was more than doubled on Friday, but shortages are likely to persist in some States.

On April 27, the Centre had kicked off an interim arrangement to allocate the drug to States from limited imports as Tocilizumab supplies in the country had run out a few weeks ago.



The consignment of aid sent by Romania.

N-95 face masks. The second flight brought 17 large oxygen cylinders, and 7,00,000 Abbott rapid diagnostic test

kits. The third flight from U.K. arrived in India carrying 280 oxygen concentrators, 75 oxygen cylinders and 20 high flow humidify oxygen therapy devices.

Amassador of Romania Daniela Sezonov Tane said the medical supplies from Bucharest will be followed by "additional medical devices and equipment shipped by the other EU Member States".

The medical supplies from Romania are among the first

foreign assistance to arrive here which will be followed by relief from Ireland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden among other EU countries. The support from these countries is being channelled through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

Two C-17 aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) airlifted eight oxygen tankers from Singapore to Panagarh in West Bengal.

According to the Defence

Ministry, as on April 29, IAF carried out 23 sorties from abroad, airlifting 39 oxygen containers with 670 MT capacity, while from within the country, it carried out 124 sorties, airlifting 87 containers with 1,798 MT capacity.

Japan is expected to provide 300 oxygen concentrators and 300 ventilators.

"Japan stands with India in her greatest time of need," Japanese Ambassador Satoshi Suzuki said on social media.

Masks, oximeters, rapid diagnostic kits, drugs arrive

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

DINAKAR PERI

NEW DELHI

The United States, Romania, Ireland, and the United Kingdom on Friday flew in a large quantity of oxygen-related items and medicines to deal with the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India.

SUDOKU

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INDIA'S NEW SPICE merchants

:: ANOOTHI VISHAL

It is estimated that a spice changes hands almost 10 times (in trade) once it leaves the farm. Inevitably, freshness is lost, and valuable essential oils are sometimes extracted before it lands on retail shelves. For something that forms the underpinning of most Indian cuisines, it is ironical that the way spices are sourced and used gets such little attention in the modern Indian kitchen.

Fortunately, a few small farmers and entrepreneurs are trying to fix this by putting high quality, cleanly-sourced spices into the spice box. It is an approach which can eventually make our pantries more fragrant and discerning, even as small growers benefit.

Aruku's green gold

When industrialist Anand Mahindra recently tweeted that "Aruku could be the new Shangri-La", he was not just giving a thumbs up to a sustainable agriculture project in Andhra Pradesh known for its coffee. He was heralding a new approach that the social enterprise project is ushering into the growth and trade of a commodity that is in need of a major overhaul in India: pepper.

Part of the Naandi Foundation, a public charitable trust, the Aruku project has helped 1,00,000 *adivasi* farmers who grow coffee in the region. But this year, some of these small farmers forayed into exporting pepper, whose price globally has been zipping up. Though Malabar pepper is the gold standard, the collective found that the vines curling up their shade trees for coffee were bearing enough green gold to kick-start a pepper vertical.

The farmers managed to hand-pick 23 metric tonnes – a tedious task involving climbing tall trees, and standing upright for hours while picking the green pepper from vines. This bulk was exported to Denmark. "All are farmers with just two to three acre plots. They climbed 200 trees each, and hand-picked the pepper," says Manoj Kumar,

The focus is clearly shifting to small farmers, fair trade, traceability and provenance. Meet a few people who are leading the change

**Going back to the source**

Our grandparents may have bought whole spices from trusted wholesalers, dried or roasted them at home, and freshly ground them, but this painstaking approach has now been replaced by packaged mixes, which while convenient, often lead to generic tasting dishes. "I kept thinking why we can't get the same taste and quality of food in our homes that I've tasted on various farms while accompanying my husband on his ingredients-sourcing trips," says Aashina Kaul, wife of Masque chef Prateek Sadhu. To address this, Kaul, a media professional, recently floated an online retail platform, Paushtik, along with friend and colleague Zainab Burnawalla, for organic spices and spice mixes. Customers can buy spices sourced from three organic farms, and aggregator Agronic Food, a Rajasthan-based private company, as of now. For mixes such as the Maharashtrian *goda masala*, or even the Punjabi *chole masala*, there is a tie up with a Pune "aunty", who employs eight local women, and makes them according to her own secret recipes. *Spices from ₹48 (whole Guntur chillies) onwards, on paushtikstore.com*



In the US, Indian origin Sana Javeri Kadri set up the now hugely popular Diaspora Co in 2017 for online retail of direct-from-farm spices. Kadri works closely with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research to identify and support 12 farmers and 320 farms in the country. Her aim is to "decolonise a commodity back into a seasonal crop", and pay farmers fairly (the website mentions they get paid up to six times more than regular commodity prices).

Origin story

Finally, the fact that provenance is important is seen from the new awareness around Lakadong turmeric. Despite having a GI tag and the reputation for the "purest turmeric in the world" – with 7% curcumin (instead of the 3%-4% found in regular turmeric) – the Meghalaya village was virtually unknown outside the Northeast till a few years ago, when local brand Zizira began sourcing it from farmers and putting their brand on platforms like Amazon.

Others are following suit. Young restaurateur professional and pop-up chef Tarisha Phanub buys from village farmers known to her family and brings it to Delhi for use by fellow chefs. Through the pandemic, she was using the spice to make simple but nutritious Khasi meals that were home delivered. Other North-eastern spices such as Khasi ginger and pepper, are also distinct, and she says she hopes "to create a market for these".

When it comes to spices, hyperlocal will be an interesting way forward, as customers enlist more curators and take that extra step (and pay a premium) for a spice box that is direct from source.

FOOD SPOT

A triple take of Bengali food

What three Bengali food orders in a week do to this writer – besides leaving him revelling in the flavours



Egg and alu Bengali mutton biryani • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

When most parts of India were celebrating the start of a new year some days ago, we thought we'd mark the occasion with Bengali food. As you may recall, I was introduced to Bengali food rather late in life, but have quite taken to it. In recent years, quite a few small Bengali food outlets have come up, too. This time, I found one in Noida, called Tok Jhal Mishti, which translates to sour, hot and sweet.

Nice name, I thought, and looked at the menu. We asked for a plate of chicken curry (four pieces, ₹304), mutton biryani (₹240), *chhanar* (paneer) *kofta* curry (₹200), *dhokar dalna* (₹180), tomato chutney (₹136), and five pieces of *beguni* (₹100).

Sometimes, ordering food on the Internet can be a bit of a gamble. But I think we hit the jackpot with Tok Jhal Mishti (Sector 51, Noida, phone no: 9740533771). The chicken curry was excellent: it was light and mildly spiced, but carried all the flavours that a home-cooked curry is known for. The meat was tender, and I enjoyed the gravy, which had a runny consistency that went well with the rice we'd cooked at home.

I liked the *dhokar dalna* – steamed lentils cakes cooked in gravy. The *dhoka* was soft, almost melt in the mouth. But what I really liked was the *paneer kofta* – soft pieces of *paneer* that had been shaped into

oblong *koftas* in a mildly sweet and well flavoured curry.

Everyone loved the biryani, which had been cooked in the Kolkata style and came with some juicy potatoes and a boiled egg. I thought the meat in the biryani was just a bit too tough, but the rice itself was delicious, light, yet well flavoured, a combination that's hard to perfect.

The only problem with TJM is that despite having the word *mishiti* (sweet) in its name, it had no desserts on the menu. So, I finished my meal with the tomato chutney – which was simply yummy, thickened as it had been with jaggery and raisins. Then I had my second piece of *beguni* – a thin and crispy slice of brinjal, batter fried. All in all, a very satisfying meal, indeed.

Now I think I have had my share of Bengali food. Or are those famous last words?

The writer is a seasoned food critic



(Clockwise from left) Farmer Tamala Ramulu from the Araku project; Aranya pepper collected for Diaspora Co; turmeric from Tijara Farm; Sneh Yadav, Sana Javeri Kadri, and Manoj Kumar of the Naandi Foundation • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Kripa Iyer and Neelambari Prasad, and (below) London-based contemporary dancer, Belinda Roy, who will be performing at Aprajita • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Dance for 'resilience'

Aprajita, the virtual festival, is connecting dancers across the globe and redefining what it means to be a community

threw a spanner in their plans.

Following that disappointment, the two stayed home, watching and sometimes participating in virtual dance festivals, while always taking notes. "Where is the gap? What doesn't work?" Prasad recalls them asking each other. "It's hard to engage with the audiences when it's an online event, and we have sat through discussions that ran on for two hours," says Iyer.

Mindful of these points, they designed Aprajita such that each segment doesn't exceed 5 minutes and the line-up has variety – punctuating dance sequences with talks on dance science and history, and scheduling performances that are both Indian classical and fusion.

Rhythms cross borders

The most challenging part was to set the mood, says Prasad. "As artistes, you feed off each others' energy. That's not happening because you are not together," adds Iyer. So they had to find other ways to bring in the festival spirit. Artistes who hadn't worked with each other before were paired together in the hope that they would "inspire and motivate each other", says Iyer.

For example, the event features a collaboration between Phil Scarff, who plays Hindustani classical music on saxophone, and Bharatanatyam dancer Neha Bhatnagar. If not for the online format, Iyer says, "we wouldn't have naturally thought about an artiste in the US collaborating with an artiste in Australia".

The online format has also helped them

feature dancers from India. While they always had plans to do so, it never materialised, until now. Aprajita will include performances by Guru Debi Basu and Sanyuktam Arts, Mumbai; Rakesh Sai Babu and Trikayaa Dance Company, New Delhi; and Kapila Venkatesh, Kerala.

The way forward

"The advantage of being a dancer who is now trying to curate is that you have seen the other side," says Iyer, adding that when she first did a record, she was terrified – finding the experience of dancing in front of a camera quite strange.

Though both Iyer and Prasad can't wait to perform in front of a live audience again, they believe that virtual events are here to stay. Going forward, they believe that any big live event will have an online angle, the target audience won't be restricted by their location, and there will be greater possibilities of collaborations across oceans. Aprajita is their way of initiating people into this new face of culture.

Aprajita is on till May 2, 7.30 pm to 9 pm IST, on Facebook Live @nehrucentreldn



Oblong koftas in a mildly sweet and well flavoured curry.

TJM was no longer delivering food to east Delhi. Will check on them again after a few days.

A few days later, to mark another happy occasion, we ordered food from Bijoli Grill (Hailey Road; Phone no: 8506070452). The bell rang at 8 pm with the food, and then it rang again at 8.05 pm, with food once again. It turned out that I had ordered twice by mistake! We kept the second lot in the fridge.

That was quite a feast: We had asked for prawn malai curry, chicken rezala, pulao, hing kachoris with dum alu. In the second lot, there was mutton dak bungalow instead of the rezala. Each one of the dishes was excellent.

Now I think I have had my share of Bengali food. Or are those famous last words?

NAVEENA VIJAYAN

Around this time last year, the entertainment world was just starting to learn to adapt to lockdowns and going digital. Fans caught Norah Jones and Aventura's livestreams while lounging in their beds; large-scale music festivals, including NH7 and Sunburn, went wholly online; and as the pandemic dissolved the concept of ticket kiosks, people built their digital avatars for concerts such as the Zero Music Festival. The competition soon grew fierce: it wasn't enough to cast events online, they had to be short, impactful, and engaging.

It was a learning curve, admit London-based Odissi dancers Kripa Iyer and Neelambari Prasad, organisers of the ongoing international dance festival, Aprajita. The three-day event – hosted by Nehru Centre, the cultural wing of the High Commission of India in the UK – has nine dancers from around the globe performing on the theme 'resilience'.

Taking notes in 2020

Iyer and Prasad co-founded Madhuriya Art House, a dance company that works towards embedding Indian classical dance within London's cultural scene, in 2018. The company was on the verge of organising a workshop with Indian classical dancers and ballet dancers early last year, when the pandemic

45 dead in Israel pilgrimage stampede

PM Benjamin Netanyahu promises an investigation into one of the nation's 'worst disasters'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MERON

A massive stampede at a densely packed Jewish pilgrimage site killed at least 45 people in Israel on Friday, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised an investigation into one of the nation's "worst disasters".

The nighttime carnage struck after pilgrims thronged to Meron at the site of the reputed tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a second-century Talmudic sage, where mainly ultra-Orthodox Jews, or haredim, mark the Lag BaOmer holiday.

The Health Ministry put the death toll at 45. The Magen David Adom rescue agency said an estimated 150 had been injured.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was helicopteried into the scene in Israel's far north, said the "Mount Meron disaster" was "one of the worst to befall" the country since its foundation seven decades ago.

"What happened here is heartbreaking. There were



Festivities turn tragic: Jewish mourners attending the funeral of a victim of the stampede in Petah Tikva on Friday. ■ AFP

people crushed to death, including children," he said in a tweet.

He promised a "thorough, serious and in-depth investigation in order to ensure that such a disaster does not recur."

This year's pilgrimage drew tens of thousands of people who were seen packed together joyfully singing, dancing and lighting bonfires before the deadly crush.

Police blamed

"This year, as we continue to inch closer to the end of a modern-day plague, I encourage everyone to find meaning and joy in celebrating the end of a different plague that occurred many

years ago," a rabbi wrote in the *Jerusalem Post* before Friday's tragedy.

Some witnesses blamed police for not allowing people to exit through a ramp that could have allowed them to escape the crush.

The police "closed it (the ramp). Then, more people arrived, and more and more... and police wouldn't let them exit, so people started to fall on top of each other," Shmuel, 18, said.

There were also indications that pilgrims sought to burst through iron sheet barricades as the choke-point formed.

They "didn't open it (the passageway) until it crashed and all the crowd was blown away to the sides. Tens of people were crushed".

Northern Israel's police chief Shimon Lavi told AFP his officers had done all they could to save lives on a "tragic night", helping to ferry those injured to hospital.

The pilgrimage was the largest public gathering in Israel and possibly the world

since the COVID-19 pandemic erupted early last year.

'Overcrowded' festival

Ten thousand people had been authorised to attend the tomb compound, but Israeli media outlets said 90,000 milled at the site, a figure that could not be immediately confirmed from official sources.

With the launch of an inquiry into the disaster, the regional police chief told reporters: "I, Shimon Lavi... take upon myself the overall responsibility, for good and for bad, and I am ready for every inspection".

The Army and emergency services deployed helicopters to evacuate the wounded.

Scenes from Meron hours after the accident showed an ultra-Orthodox Jewish crowd in distress, the men in long black coats and wearing black hats, and debris scattered across the ground.

Britain, France and the European Union offered their condolences.

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan seek to ease cross-border tensions

39 dead in latest clashes over land, water and pastures

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOSCOW

A ceasefire on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan largely held on Friday following a day of intense fighting between the two ex-Soviet Central Asian neighbours that killed 39 people and wounded more than 175.

More than 7,000 Kyrgyz residents have been evacuated from the area engulfed by the fighting as troops from the two countries exchanged gunfire around a water supply facility near the village of Kok-Tash, located in western Kyrgyzstan on the border with Tajikistan.

Both nations have claimed the area around the water supply facility in Kok-Tash, a dispute dating back decades to when they were both part of the Soviet Union.

Kyrgyz officials reported firing on the border early on Friday but later said the



Dispute turns violent: A Kyrgyzstan official helping people in evacuating from districts bordering Tajikistan on Friday. ■ AFP

A large part of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border remains unmarked, fuelling fierce disputes over water, land and pastures.

The latest conflict erupted on Wednesday when Tajik officials attempted to mount surveillance cameras to monitor the water supply facility amid the tensions over water distribution, and Kyrgyz residents opposed the move. Both sides began hurling stones at each other and troops quickly entered the fray.

Navalny network added to extremist list, lawyer held

Group tagged along with terror groups like IS and al-Qaeda

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MOSCOW

Russia on Friday added Alexei Navalny's political network to its database of terrorist and extremist organisations, as Moscow moves closer to shutting down the jailed opposition politician's movement against President Vladimir Putin.

The network appeared on a list maintained by Russia's financial monitoring service after Rosfinmonitoring said Friday it had updated the list. The network of Mr. Navalny's regional offices had disbanded on Thursday in anticipation of the move.

Organisations on the list include the Islamic State group and al-Qaeda, and bans them in Russia, with members and supporters facing lengthy jail terms.

It was not immediately clear whether the move was



Ivan Pavlov

want? After all, the decision of the 'court' is already known in advance: fighting corruption in Putin's Russia is 'extremism,'" he wrote.

"They don't even try to create the appearance of legality."

The FBK did not appear on the list.

The court hearings in the case are expected to resume on May 17.

Meanwhile, Russian police on Friday detained prominent rights lawyer Ivan Pavlov - who is representing jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny - on criminal charges, his organisation said.

Team 29 said on its website that Mr. Pavlov is facing charges of disclosing information about a preliminary investigation in the case of former journalist Ivan Safronov.

The offence is punishable by up to three months in jail.

Pope lets Vatican courts to try cardinals, bishops

Pontiff's consent needed for probe

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ROME

Pope Francis has sent another message to Vatican-based cardinals and bishops about his intent to hold them accountable for criminal misconduct with the removal of the procedural obstacles that had spared them from being prosecuted by the Vatican's criminal tribunal.

A new law published on Friday makes clear that Vatican city-state prosecutors have jurisdiction over Holy See cardinals and bishops and need only the Pope's consent to proceed with investigations against them.

The law abrogated a regulation, upheld as recently as last year, that said only the tribunal's highest appeals court, which is composed of three cardinal judges, could assess the actions of cardinals and bishops accused of criminal offences.

The reform is the latest sign that after eight years of preaching about ending corruption and other criminal activity in the Holy See, Pope Francis is taking concrete steps to make it easier to hold his own cardinals and bishops accountable while emboldening Vatican prosecutors to go after them.

Cap on gifts

On Thursday, he passed a different law forcing Vatican superiors to declare their finances are clean, and set a \$40 (\$48) cap on work-relat-



ed personal gifts received by any Vatican employee. The gift cap was seen as a way to cut down on the rampant practice of financial gift-giving to Holy See clerics and the chance that such money could grease favours.

Friday's reform follows the Pontiff's decision last year to strip a senior Vatican official, Cardinal Angelo Becciu, of his rights and privileges as a cardinal in a move seen as laying the groundwork for him to possibly be put on trial. The allegations against him aren't clear, however, and he hasn't been charged with any crime.

Cardinal Becciu, who had said the Pope cited a €100,000 donation he made using Holy See funds to a charity run by his brother, has denied wrongdoing, noting that he had full authority to disburse the funds, the money was destined for the charity, not his brother, and the money never left the diocesan bank account into which it was sent.

ORISSA HYDRO POWER CORPORATION LTD.

O/O THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PODAGADA DAM DIVISION
UPPER INDRARAVATI HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT
AT/PO-KHATIGUDA, DIST. NABARANGPUR, ODISHA, PIN - 754085

Tel. No. 06858 224255, E-mail -eepodagadadam@gmail.com

Dated: 29.04.2021

e-PROCUREMENT - NOTICE INVITATION FOR BIDS (NIFB)

BID IDENTIFICATION NO. EEPDD- 02 / 2021-22

| Sl. No. | Bid Identification No. | Name of the Work | Value of Work (in Rs.) | Cost of Participation in online Bid including GST @18% (non-refundable) (in Rs.) | EMD (Bid Security in Rs.) | Period of Completion | Eligible Class of Contractor | Name & address of the Division under which the work will be executed |
|---------|------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 1. | EFPDD/02/2021-22 | Construction of Compound Wall at D/s of Kapur Earth Dam, UIHEP, Khatiguda | 1088032/- (Excluding GST) | Rs.10000+GST@18% Rs.1800- Rs.11800/- | 108900/- | 11 (Eleven) Calendar months | B' & 'A' class contractor | Executive Engineer, Podagada Dam Division, UIHEP, A/Po: Khatiguda, Dist: Nabarangpur, Odisha |

The Bid documents will be available in the Govt. website <http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in> & in the OHPC Website: www.ohpcldt.com from 11.00 AM of dt. 05.05.2021 to 5.00 PM of dt. 21.05.2021.

The details of the Tender Documents terms and conditions please refer our Website <http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in & www.ohpcldt.com>

CAD-211: EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PODAGADA DAM DIVISION OPR-04027/11/0002/2122

Amid U.S. exit, Taliban protected foreign bases

It covered Western facilities from attacks under a secret pact but kept targeting Afghans: sources

REUTERS
KABUL

Taliban fighters have protected western military bases in Afghanistan from attacks by rival, or rogue Islamist groups for over a year under a secret annex to a pact for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces by May 1, three Western officials with knowledge of the agreement told Reuters.

The U.S. State Department gave no immediate response to Reuters over the existence of any such document. Nor did it have any immediate comment on what the three officials described as a "Taliban ring of protection".

Since United States struck a deal with the Taliban in February 2020, paving the way for America to end its longest war, there have been no U.S. combat deaths, and there have been only isolated attacks on U.S. bases.

Instead, the Taliban intensified attacks on Afghan government forces, and civilian

casualties have spiralled.

Peace talks between the militants and the government, which started in September, have made no significant progress, and a UN report said civilian casualties were up 45% in the last three months of 2020 from a year earlier.

Testing Taliban patience, U.S. President Joe Biden served notice that the U.S. withdrawal would overshoot the May 1 deadline agreed to by the previous U.S. adminis-

tration, while giving an assurance that it would be completed by September 11 – the 20th anniversary of the al-Qaeda attacks on the U.S.

When the deadline passes on Saturday, around 2,000 U.S. troops will still be in Afghanistan, according to a western security official in Kabul.

The commander of foreign forces in Afghanistan, U.S. Army General Scott Miller earlier this week said an orderly withdrawal and the handing over of military

bases and equipment to Afghan forces had begun.

Afghan soldiers left managing those bases could need plenty of firepower to resist any offensive by Taliban fighters, who have been occupying strategic positions in surrounding areas.

Mounting attacks

In the past two weeks alone, the militants have killed more than 100 Afghan security personnel in a surge of attacks that followed Mr. Biden's announcement that a U.S. withdrawal would take a few months more.

Two of the Western officials said Washington had accepted the Taliban's offer to shield the western military bases from attacks by the likes of Islamic State.

The officials said the Taliban had wanted to demonstrate good faith by meeting a commitment to ensure Afghan soil was not used for attacks on U.S. interests – a key U.S. demand in the Fe-

bruary agreement. "They provided a layer of cover, almost like a buffer and ordered their fighters to not injure or kill any foreign soldier in this period," said one western diplomat involved in the process.

The western officials said it was also important for the Taliban to show its ability to control the more recalcitrant factions in its movement, like the Haqqani network, which has often followed its own agenda, though its leader Sirajuddin Haqqani is the second-highest ranking commander in the Taliban.

A western security official said that militants had kept their side of the bargain. "The Taliban swiftly responded to even minor attacks by the Haqqani network and IS fighters around the bases," he said.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid declined to comment on the so-called "ring of protection" agreement.



Ring of protection: Afghan National Army personnel conducting a search on the outskirts of Kabul on Thursday. ■ AFP

Bhubaneswar Smart City Limited

BMC Bhawani Mall, Block-1, 5th Floor, Sahastra Nagar, Bhubaneswar-751007.

E-mail Id : bbsr.bscsl@gmail.com, CIN : U74990OR2016PLC020016

Dated: 30.04.2021

Invitation for Bids - Bid Identification No.2088/BCSL-28620/7 Dated 30.04.2021

Chief Executive Officer, BSCL on behalf of Bhubaneswar Smart City Limited, Bhubaneswar (hereinafter also referred to as the "Employer" or as the "Authority") invites proposal from reputed and experienced firms, to be received on online mode for "Development of Lake Zone III Including Lake Front Road, Water body, Public Realm, Streetscapes, Beautification, Landscaping and Infrastructure & Utilities in Bhubaneswar's Town Centre District (ADB) Bhubaneswar, Odisha" as per the details below on Engineering, procurement, Construction (EPC) basis.

NAME OF WORK : "Development of Lake Zone III Including Lake Front Road, Water body, Public Realm, Streetscapes, Beautification, Landscaping and Infrastructure & Utilities in Bhubaneswar's Town Centre District (ADB) Bhubaneswar, Odisha" under Smart Cities Mission on Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode-CEN Standard including Comprehensive operation and maintenance for period of Five (05) years.

MARKET WATCH

| | 30-04-2021 | % CHANGE |
|-----------|------------|----------|
| Sensex | 48,782 | -1.98 |
| US Dollar | 74.09 | -0.03 |
| Gold | 46,283 | -0.41 |
| Brent oil | 67.21 | -1.31 |

NIFTY 50

| | PRICE | CHANGE | |
|-------------------|---------------|---------|-------|
| Adani Ports | 730.05 | -16.70 | |
| Asian Paints | 2536.40 | -77.05 | |
| Axis Bank | 714.90 | -4.50 | |
| Bajaj Auto | 3833.75 | -2.70 | |
| Bajaj Finserv | 11041.65 | -134.90 | |
| Bajaj Finance | 5451.90 | -32.95 | |
| Bharti Airtel | 536.75 | -4.10 | |
| BPCL | 421.80 | 2.25 | |
| Britannia Ind | 3449.00 | -19.90 | |
| Cipla | 910.35 | 3.85 | |
| Coal India | 133.05 | 5.00 | |
| Divis Lab | 4062.35 | 151.50 | |
| Drd Reddys Lab | 5163.10 | 60.80 | |
| Eicher Motors | 2421.65 | -41.25 | |
| Grasim Ind | 1401.75 | 51.05 | |
| HCL Tech. | 898.95 | -10.60 | |
| HDPC | 2420.10 | -18.75 | |
| HFDC Bank | 1412.30 | -60.20 | |
| HDPC Life | 665.10 | -9.55 | |
| Hero MotoCorp | 2819.15 | -40.95 | |
| Hindustan | 364.40 | -7.75 | |
| Hind Unilever | 2353.75 | -53.85 | |
| ICICI Bank | 600.50 | -20.95 | |
| IndusInd Bank | 934.95 | -4.50 | |
| Infosys | 1354.35 | -2.00 | |
| Indian Oil Corp. | 90.85 | 1.95 | |
| ITC | 202.60 | -1.70 | |
| JSW Steel | 717.85 | -8.65 | |
| Kotak Bank | 1748.80 | -56.20 | |
| L&T | 1340.45 | -18.20 | |
| M&M | 752.55 | -22.05 | |
| Maruti Suzuki | 6455.65 | -110.00 | |
| Nestle India Ltd. | 16309.25 | -193.30 | |
| NTPC | 102.45 | -0.60 | |
| ONGC | 108.15 | 4.10 | |
| PowerGrid Corp | 220.05 | -0.10 | |
| Reliance Ind | 1994.50 | -29.55 | |
| SBI Life | 928.70 | 0.50 | |
| State Bank | 353.50 | -5.90 | |
| Shree Cement | 27910.50 | -533.85 | |
| Sun Pharma | 654.45 | 9.95 | |
| Tata Consumer | Products Ltd. | 669.50 | -2.35 |
| Tata Motors | 293.85 | -8.05 | |
| Tata Steel | 1034.00 | 2.65 | |
| TCS | 3035.65 | -79.60 | |
| Tech Mahindra | 960.40 | -16.50 | |
| Titan | 1491.65 | -15.15 | |
| UltraTech Cement | 6278.95 | -103.50 | |
| UPL | 606.90 | -8.90 | |
| Wipro | 492.75 | 2.90 | |

EXCHANGE RATES

| CURRENCY | TT BUY | TT SELL |
|--------------------|--------|---------|
| US Dollar | 73.86 | 74.18 |
| Euro | 89.32 | 89.71 |
| British Pound | 102.79 | 103.27 |
| Japanese Yen (100) | 67.85 | 68.16 |
| Chinese Yuan | 11.42 | 11.47 |
| Swiss Franc | 81.29 | 81.65 |
| Singapore Dollar | 55.64 | 55.89 |
| Canadian Dollar | 60.18 | 60.45 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 18.02 | 18.12 |

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Wipro raises IT services revenue guidance

NEW DELHI
Wipro on Friday revised upwards its IT services revenue outlook to 8-10% sequential growth in the June quarter, following the completion of its \$1.45 billion buyout of Capco. While announcing its March quarter results, Wipro had said it expects to log a sequential growth of 2-4% without including revenue from Capco and Ampion acquisitions. PTI

SFHL raises stake in Flometallic by 6.84%

CHENNAI
Sundaram Finance Holdings Ltd. (SFHL) has increased its stake in Chennai-based Flometallic India Pvt. Ltd. (FIPL) to 46.8%, following the acquisition of 650 shares from individual shareholders for ₹12.5 crore. The shares of ₹1 lakh each have been purchased, exclusive of stamp duty, from 14 individual shareholders, SFHL, which earlier owned 40% in FIPL, said in a filing.

Borosil unveils COVID-19 relief plan for employees

MUMBAI
Borosil Ltd. and Borosil Renewables Ltd. said in the event of an employee losing life due to COVID-19, his/her family will continue to receive the salary for the next two years (in addition to all the other benefits). "The firm will also take care of the education of their children till graduation," Swapnil Walunj, head of marketing, Borosil Renewables Ltd. said in a LinkedIn post.

M&M to buy out shareholders of Meru

NEW DELHI
Mahindra and Mahindra on Friday said it has inked a pact with shareholders of Meru to increase its stake to 100% in the ride-hailing service provider. M&M will acquire 44.14% shares from private equity investor True North and others for an amount not exceeding ₹76.03 crore and 12.66% shares from Neeraj Gupta and Farhan Gupta, for an amount not exceeding ₹21.63 crore, it added. PTI

Reliance Q4 profit more than doubles

Jio, retail arm spur parent profit to ₹13,227 crore; RIL's FY21 revenue falls on lower volumes, realisation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Reliance Industries Ltd. on Friday said fourth-quarter consolidated net profit more than doubled to ₹13,227 crore, from ₹6,348 crore a year earlier, as revenue grew 13.6% to ₹1,72,095 crore.

For the year ended March 31, RIL recorded an 18.3% decline in revenue to ₹5,39,238 crore. Net profit (after exceptional items) increased 34.8% to ₹53,739 crore. The board announced a dividend of ₹7 per share.

"The decrease in revenue was primarily due to lower volumes and realisation across key products in O2C segment," RIL said in a filing. "The retail segment also reported lower revenue, [affected by] the pandemic. This was partially offset by



Pace slows: Sharp demand contraction in the first half impacted growth for Reliance in the full year. ■REUTERS

higher ARPU [average revenue per user]," it added.

Jio Platforms Ltd.'s fourth-quarter profit zoomed 47.5% to ₹3,508 crore. Revenue from operations rose 19% to ₹18,278 crore. Its value of services grew to ₹21,650 crore,

from ₹17,993 crore. For the full year, Jio reported net profit of ₹12,537 crore.

Its total customer base increased by a net 37.9 million customers to 426.2 million. Jio clocked total data traffic of 62.5 billion GB, recording

28.9% growth. Reliance Retail reported fourth-quarter net profit growth of 45% to ₹2,247 crore. Revenue from operations rose 20% to ₹41,296 crore. For FY21, revenue from operations at the retail arm slipped 4.92% to ₹1,39,077 crore.

Annual revenue at its oil to chemicals business declined 29% to ₹3,20,008 crore on account of lower volumes and price realisation across key products. Sharp demand contraction in the first half impacted growth.

"We have registered ro-

bust recovery in O2C and retail segments, and resilient growth in the digital services business," said CMD Mukesh Ambani. "Sustained high utilisation rates across sites and improvement in downstream product deltas as well as transportation fuel margins aided O2C earnings growth," he added.

"Our consumer businesses have proved to be a digital and physical lifeline for the nation in these challenging times. Jio's high-speed connectivity services enabled millions of Indians to work from home, study from home and even receive healthcare from home. Reliance Retail ensured safe supplies of essential goods and services to customer homes," he said.

(With PTI inputs)

March core sector sees rebound on base effect

Output of 8 sectors shrank 7% in FY21

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). Care Ratings chief economist Madan Sabnavis said industrial output is expected to grow close to 10% as it had contracted 16.7% in March 2020.

"The March, April and May growth numbers for core sector and industrial growth were expected to be high and misleading as they come on the back of sharp declines registered last year... core sector growth in March must be interpreted with caution," he said, adding that core sector output fell 7% in FY21 – the first such instance in eight years.

ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar said the core sector had been expected to grow by about 10% in March. This accounted for about 90% of the total non-food credit deployed by all scheduled commercial banks for the month.

However, credit growth to agriculture and allied activities accelerated to 12.3% from 4.2%. Credit to industry decelerated marginally to 0.4% from 0.7%. Credit to medium industries registered robust growth of 28.8% compared with a contrac-

tion of 0.7%. Growth in credit to micro and small industries decelerated to 0.5% from 1.7% a year earlier. ■PTI

gems & jewellery, paper & paper products, glass & glassware, wood & wood products and leather & leather products saw accelerated growth.

However, credit to mining & quarrying, rubber, plastic & plastic products, vehicle,

Yes Bank posts Q4 loss of ₹3,788 cr.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

'Sales in April dip from the March level'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The recent outbreak of the second wave of COVID-19 and semi-lockdowns in many States may impede the housing sector's revival seen during the last nine months, a real estate industry executive said.

"In April 2021, the online demand for houses has decreased as compared to March 2021. There has been a low double-digit decline," said Mani Rangarajan, Group COO, Housing.com, Makaan.com and PropTiger.com. "If the COVID situation worsens from now, the real estate market will take a bigger hit," he added.

PropTiger.com on Friday released a research report on the housing sales for January-March 2021 quarter in top cities. According to the report, nearly half of the to-

tal housing demand in the primary residential market across 8 major cities was for two bedroom apartments costing up to ₹45 lakh.

It said housing sales across eight major cities declined by 5% year-on-year to 66,176 units, indicating that demand is inching back to pre-COVID levels.

According to the report, about 45% of sales in January-March 2021 were affordable homes priced below ₹45 lakh.

'COVID-19 curbs to delay multiplexes' recovery'

Sector may recoup only in FY23: Crisil

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Localised lockdowns and night curfews amid the newer wave of COVID-19 are set to take a toll on multiplexes in the country, and companies in this sector will report operating losses for the second consecutive year, a report said on Friday.

The sector, arguably one of the worst impacted by the pandemic, can look at a recovery only in the next financial year, the report by domestic credit rating agency Crisil said.

Crisil reminded that multiplexes were the first ones to close in March 2020, even before a lockdown was announced, and the last to resume operations in October.

Occupancies had started improving post-resumption

HDFC Bank to revamp, focus on three areas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Seven months after Sashi Jagdishan took over as its CEO and MD, HDFC Bank announced wide-ranging organisational changes.

The bank has been reorganised into three pillars of 'business verticals,' 'delivery channels' and, 'technology and digital,' as per a statement. The lender has made a slew of changes in the senior leadership roles as well, with group head for corporate banking Rahul Shukla being entrusted with commercial banking (MSME) and rural verticals.

"We are creating engines of growth with top talent backed by technology and digital transformation to capitalise on opportunities accuring in the coming time," Mr. Jagdishan said.

'April GST collections may go up to ₹1.2 lakh cr.'

E-way bills will cross 5.5 cr.: SBI report

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections are likely to remain robust at about ₹1.15 lakh crore to ₹1.2 lakh crore in April, despite the spate of lockdowns across the country, SBI said in a report on Friday, ahead of the official GST revenue data expected on May 1.

GST collections have clocked more than ₹1 lakh crore for six months in a row, with a record ₹1.24 lakh crore flowing in, in March.

"Despite the cur

Rahul, Gayle, Harpreet put a spoke in the RCB juggernaut's wheel

Captain's 91 n.o., West Indian's 24-ball 46 and left-hander's game-breaking impact (cameo with bat and scalps of Kohli, Maxwell, de Villiers) earn PBKS a 34-run win



Ruling the night: Harpreet, who chipped in with the bat too, derailed RCB's chase by picking up three quick wickets after Rahul and Gayle had powered PBKS to 179. ■ SPORTZPICS/IPL



SCOREBOARD

PUNJAB KINGS

K.L. Rahul (not out) 91 (57b, 7x4, 5x6), Prabhsimran Singh c Kohli b Jameson 7 (7b, 1x4), Chris Gayle c de Villiers b Sams 46 (24b, 6x4, 2x6), Nicholas Pooran c Shahbaz b Jameson 0 (3b), Deepak Hooda c Patidar b Shahbaz 5 (9b), Shahrukh Khan b Chahal 0 (3b), Harpreet Brar (not out) 25 (17b, 1x4, 2x6); Extras (lb-1, w-4): 5; Total (for five wkts. in 20 overs): 179.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-19 (Prabhsimran, 3.3 overs), 2-99 (Gayle, 10.4), 3-107 (Pooran, 11.3), 4-117 (Hooda, 13.6), 5-118 (Shahrukh, 14.4).

RCB BOWLING

Sams 4-0-24-1, Siraj 3-0-24-0, Jameson 3-0-32-2, Chahal 4-0-34-1, Harshal 4-0-53-0, Shahbaz 2-0-11-1.

ROYAL CHALLENGERS

Virat Kohli b Harpreet 35 (34b, 3x4, 1x6), Devdutt Padikkal b Meredith 7 (6b, 1x6), Rajat Patidar c Pooran b Jordan 31 (30b, 2x4, 1x6), Glenn Maxwell b Harpreet 3 (9b), Shahbaz Ahmed c Harpreet b Bishnoi 8 (11b, 1x4), Daniel Sams b Bishnoi 3 (4b), Kyle Jamieson (not out) 16 (11b, 1x4, 1x6), Harshal Patel c Bishnoi b Shami 31 (13b, 3x4, 2x6), Mohammed Siraj (not out) 0 (1b); Extras (lb-8, w-3): 11; Total (for eight wkts. in 20 overs): 145.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-19 (Padikkal, 2.3), 2-62 (Kohli, 10.1), 3-62 (Maxwell, 10.2), 4-69 (de Villiers, 12.1), 5-91 (Patidar, 14.4), 6-96 (Shahbaz, 15.4), 7-96

(Sams, 15.5), 8-144 (Harshal, 19.4).

PUNJAB KINGS BOWLING
Meredith 3.2-0-29-1, Shami 3.0-0-28-1, Bishnoi 4-0-17-2, Harpreet 4-1-19-3, Jordan 4-0-31-1, Hooda 1-0-13-0.

Toss: RCB; **MoM:** Harpreet.

PBKS won by 34 runs.

Innings scan

| PBKS | RCB |
|------|-------|
| 41 | Dots |
| 15 | Fours |
| 9 | Sixes |
| 49/1 | PP |
| 8.95 | RR |

Next assignment

PBKS: May 2 vs. DC
Ahmedabad, 7.30 p.m.

RCB: May 3 vs. KKR
Ahmedabad, 7.30 p.m.

Top of the charts

ORANGE CAP

K.L. RAHUL (PBKS)

Matches: 7 | Runs: 331

HS: 91 n.o. | SR: 136.21

PURPLE CAP

HARSHAL PATEL (RCB)

Matches: 7 | Wickets: 17

BB: 5/27 | Econ: 9.17

AFTER THE PBKS-RCB MATCH ON APRIL 30

POINTS TABLE

| Team | M | W | L | PTS | NRR |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|-----------|--------|
| Chennai Super Kings | 6 | 5 | 1 | 10 | 1.475 |
| Delhi Capitals | 7 | 5 | 2 | 10 | 0.466 |
| Royal Challengers | 7 | 5 | 2 | 10 | -0.171 |
| Mumbai Indians | 6 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 0.071 |
| Punjab Kings | 7 | 3 | 4 | 6 | -0.264 |
| Kolkata Knight Riders | 7 | 2 | 5 | 4 | -0.494 |
| Rajasthan Royals | 6 | 2 | 4 | 4 | -0.690 |
| Sunrisers Hyderabad | 6 | 1 | 5 | 2 | -0.264 |

After the PBKS-RCB match on April 30

IPL 2021

ASHWIN ACHAL

It was a night to remember for Harpreet Brar. Playing his first match of the tournament, he returned a terrific all-round performance to guide Punjab Kings to a 34-run win over Royal Challengers Bangalore at Ahmedabad on Friday.

After making an unbeaten

25, Harpreet picked up the crucial wickets of Virat Kohli, Glenn Maxwell and AB de Villiers to stifle the RCB chase.

Chasing 180, RCB lost Kohli (35, 34b) in the 11th over. The skipper rushed down the track, but played all over a short, skiddy delivery from Harpreet.

The left-arm spinner struck the very next ball, clipping Maxwell's off-stump with a beauty. Harpreet then accounted for de Villiers (3, 9b), who punched straight to K.L. Rahul at cover.

Harpreet's triple strike, executed in the space of two overs, shut RCB out of the contest.

Harpreet, featuring in only his fourth match in three IPL seasons, finished with figures of three for 19.

PBKS, which recorded a third win in seven outings, scuttled RCB's chance to take

the sole lead in the points table.

Earlier, captain Rahul carried PBKS to a good score. Rahul became the highest run-scorer of the tournament during the course of his unbeaten 57-ball 91.

On the rampage

Chris Gayle, who blasted a quick 46, provided some support. The West Indian let loose in the sixth over,

smashing Kyle Jamieson for five fours. Gayle's assault gave PBKS – stuck at 29 for one in five overs – a much-needed boost.

After Gayle departed, wickets began to tumble, leaving PBKS at a precarious 118 for five. Nicholas Pooran's woes continued, when he was dismissed by Jamieson for a fourth duck this season.

Rahul, who started slowly, dragged the side back into

the contest along with Harpreet (25 n.o., 17b, 1x4, 2x6). The duo's unbroken 61-run sixth-wicket stand turned out to be a key factor in PBKS' success.

Rahul was severe on pacer Harshal Patel, who leaked 40 runs in the 18th and 20th overs. Rahul extended his golden run against RCB, to go with scores of 61 n.o. and 132 n.o. in the previous two meetings between the sides.

QUICK SINGLES



Unadkat donates for COVID relief

NEW DELHI

Rajasthan Royals fast bowler Jaydev Unadkat will donate 10% of his IPL salary to help COVID-19 patients who need essential medical resources as India battles an unpreceded health crisis.

Dhawan gives ₹20 lakh for oxygen cylinders

NEW DELHI

Shikhar Dhawan has donated ₹20 lakh to an NGO for buying oxygen cylinders and concentrators, helping the country tackle the second wave of the pandemic. PTI



Mixed bag: Rohit's men, with a 3-3 record, will be keen to get it right against Dhoni's side.

Heavyweights go toe to toe in marquee clash

CSK's punches have been more on target this season; MI is finding its feet

S. DINAKAR

Clash of the titans. That's what it is when Chennai Super Kings meets Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League.

The two most successful teams in the IPL, outfits with character and resilience, that's what CSK and MI are.

And when they clash at New Delhi's Feroze Shah Kotla ground on Saturday, it will be two heavyweights landing blows on each other.

CSK's punches have been more on target lately though. M.S. Dhoni's men have run into serious form with five wins in six games.

MI, invariably a sluggish starter, has three in six.

Plenty of factors have been going right for CSK this season.

Its openers have run into form, so crucial since the side bats deep, and thus, with wickets in hand, can blaze away in the end overs.

Grace and flow

Light of foot, Ruturaj Gaikwad has delighted at the top of the order with his timing and placement. The grace and flow in his batting is hard to miss.

His opening partner Faf du Plessis, with exemplary hand-eye coordination, has fired the ball to different parts of the ground.

The two will, however, be up against a high-quality

new-ball pair in Jasprit Bumrah and Trent Boult, a right-left combination of toe crushers and swing.

Leg-spinner Rahul Chahar will also be a threat.

Moeen, a vital cog

And Moeen Ali is critical to CSK. He lends the line-up aggression and momentum at No. 3.

And along with the game-changing Ravindra Jadeja, forms a competent spin attack that can derail MI in the middle overs even if the pitch is expected to favour batsmen.

MI has stroke-makers at the top, none more dangerous than Rohit Sharma, and heavy-hitters who can fire

TODAY'S MATCH

VS. MUMBAI INDIANS

DELHI, 7.30 P.M.

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Played: 30

MI 18 | CSK 12

In 2020

Played 2 | MI 1 | CSK 1

STAR SPORTS 1 & STAR SELECT 1 (SD & HD)



Riding high: Super Kings have won five of their six games. ■ SPORTZPICS/IPL

Alam and Butt in good nick



Fawad Alam. ■ FILE PHOTO

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE HARARE

Fawad Alam notched up his fourth Test hundred as Pakistan built an imposing first innings lead over Zimbabwe on the second day of the first Test here on Friday.

Alam's unbeaten 108, along with Imran Butt's painstaking 91 earlier in the day, guided Pakistan to 374 for six at close, giving the visitors a lead of 198. Zimbabwe was bowled out for 176 in its first innings. Fawad has hit 16 fours in his 155-ball innings so far.

The scores: Zimbabwe 176 vs Pakistan 374/6 in 120 overs (Imran Butt 91, Abid Ali 60, Fawad Alam 108, Rizwan 45, Donald Tiripano 3/89).

UAE back-up for T20 WC

BCCI still has hopes of hosting it

AMOL KARHADKAR

Days after the pandemic forced the International Cricket Council's events team to defer its plan to conduct a recce of the grounds shortlisted for the T20 World Cup, the BCCI has confirmed the United Arab Emirates as the back-up venue for the marquee event.

"It would be UAE. And we are hoping it will again be done by BCCI. We will take the tournament there, so it will be still run by BCCI," Dhiraj Malhotra, BCCI-appointed tournament director for

TV PICKS

Sri Lanka vs Bangladesh: 2nd Test, Sony Six (SD & HD), 9.45 a.m.
Premier League: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., 7.30 p.m.
 10 p.m. & 12.30 a.m. (Sunday)
Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m., 9.30 p.m. & 12.30 a.m. (Sunday)
IPL: Star Sports 1 & SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.
Formula One: Portuguese GP (Qualifying): Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

'Shooter Dadi' succumbs to COVID-19

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Octogenarian shooter Chandru Tomar, who became the oldest woman sharp shooter in the world after taking up the sport in her 60s, died on Friday after battling COVID-19.

She was 89 and was being treated at a hospital in Meerut since April 26.

'She has left me'

"Mera saath chhoot gaya, Chandru kaha chali gayi (She has left me, Chandru where have you gone?)," her sister-in-law Prakashi Tomar, who is also one of the oldest female sharp shooters, wrote on her Twitter page.

Tomar, who was nicknamed 'Shooter Dadi' for her exploits, was hospitalised after complaining of difficulty in breathing.

Tests revealed she had contracted the highly contagious virus.

Hailing from a village in Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat district, Tomar was 60-plus when she picked up the gun for the first time but went on to win many national competitions for veterans.

An icon

Considered a feminist icon, Tomar was all of 15 when she got married and took to shooting after she was well over 65.

Olympics more important than World Cup

Asian skeet champion Angad says May and June will be crucial for preparations

SHOOTING

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Champions have an uncanny sense of timing. When some Indian athletes are struggling to travel for training and competition abroad, Asian skeet champion and World record holder Angad Vir Singh Bajwa was able to find his way to Italy, for a long training stint.

With the shotgun World Cup scheduled to be staged in Lonato from May 7, Angad flew into Europe, about a month in advance, before airlines and countries banned Indian travellers.

Relieved

"I came before the situation got bad. I am training at my own expense," said Angad from Italy, relieved that he could not only train but also get some repair work done on his gun.

The government machin-



Prep time: Angad Vir Singh Bajwa, seen with former India coach Ennio Falco, is fine-tuning his skills at his own expense in Italy. • FILE PHOTO: KAMESH SRINIVASAN

ery often does not keep pace with the urgency of the athletes.

Even though he has been covered by the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), there was no time for Angad

to wait and get the sanction.

"It is unfortunate that athletes who are going to the Olympics cannot get sanction, but others do. Olympics is very important and training here is the key, especially

with the COVID cases in India going crazy. Hoping to stay here and train till the situation gets better," said Angad.

About a fortnight after Angad, another skeet shooter

Gurjot Singh Khangura also managed to reach Italy. Coach Jitender Beniwal is with Angad and that has been a big help.

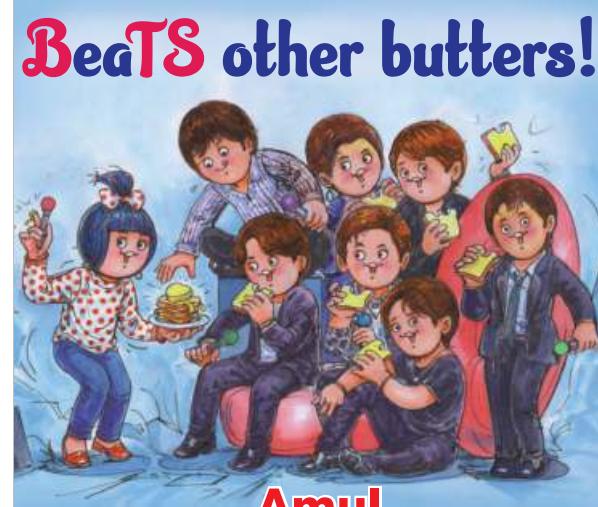
Mairaj Ahmad Khan, the second Olympic quota winner in skeet, has had a bereavement in the family with his father passing away.

"I will start training at the Delhi range next week. As the COVID scene is very bad, trying to keep safety as a priority," said Mairaj, hopeful of regaining his focus.

"I hope Mairaj can make it here, as he will benefit with training here prior to the Olympics. The Olympics are more important than the World Cup," observed Angad.

With a long term visa helping in training in Europe, Angad was optimistic of capitalising on the situation.

"May and June will be really important for Olympic preparation," observed Angad.



Amul
K-Pop it onto bread!

daCunha/AB/737

Porter sets new mark in Rockets' win

Fourth and the youngest to score 50 points in a match before turning 21

NBA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HOUSTON

Kevin Porter became the youngest NBA player to post a 50-point double-double with assists as last-placed Houston Rockets snapped a five-game losing skid with a 143-136 upset win over Milwaukee Bucks on Thursday.

The 20-year-old finished with 50 points and 11 assists to join LeBron James, Brandon Jennings and Devin Booker as the only players to score 50 points in an NBA contest before turning 21. "After I saw the third three



Porter. • AP

go down, I knew it was going to be a special night," Porter said. "It was all up to me. I just stayed aggressive."

Bucks lost Giannis Antetokounmpo, who left the game after spraining his ankle in the opening quarter.

Kevin Durant scored a season-high 42 points as first-placed Brooklyn Nets won its fourth straight game, a 130-113 win over Indiana Pacers.

The results: Oklahoma City 95 lost to New Orleans 109; Denver 121 bt Toronto 111; Houston 143 bt Milwaukee 136; Minnesota 126 bt Golden State 114;

Detroit 105 lost to Dallas 115; Indiana 113 lost to Brooklyn 130.

FC Goa ends campaign on a disappointing note

AFC CL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MARGAO

FC Goa suffered a 2-0 defeat at the hands of UAE's Al Wahda in the final group stage match to end its maiden campaign in the AFC Champions League on a disappointing note on Thursday.

Iran's Persepolis FC topped the group with 15 points after beating Al Rayyan of Qatar earlier in the day. Al Wahda also qualified for the knockouts as one of three best runners-up with 13 points. Goa failed to register a win but logged three points after drawing three matches and losing as many games.

An unmarked Omar Khrbin struck in the 61st minute, taking advantage of a brilliant ball from Tim Mat-

vaz, sending his shot on to the left side of the FC Goa goalkeeper. The visitor made it 2-0 when Mohammed Ali Menhal found the back of the net in the 90th minute.

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The result: FC Goa 0 lost to Al Wahda 2 (Khrbin 61, Menhal 90).

Mirabai Chanu all set to fly to USA today

Trip approved at a meeting between Sports Ministry and SAI officials

WEIGHTLIFTING

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

Ace weightlifter Mirabai Chanu will fly to the USA on Saturday to address her shoulder issue.

After failing in her first two snatch attempts and managing 86kg in her third in the Asian championships in Tashkent recently, Mirabai had requested the government to allow her to train in the USA so that she could get rid of the problem prior to the Tokyo Olympics.

During an interaction with the media on Thursday, Mirabai – who created a world record in clean and jerk in Tashkent – said her USA trip would ultimately help her improve her snatch



Optimistic: Mirabai Chanu expects the training stint to help her solve the snatch problem ahead of the Games. • FILE PHOTO

performance.

Mirabai's trip to the USA for training was approved at a meeting between the Sports Ministry and Sports Authority of India (SAI) officials on Friday. The SAI and the Indian Weightlifting Fed-

er for a short period to look after their day-to-day affairs in the USA.

Cleared quickly

"Since Mirabai has an American visa, her proposal was cleared quickly. As there is uncertainty over the status of flights next week due to the COVID crisis, the authorities thought it would be wise to send Mirabai this week," said a source close to the development.

Mirabai, a former world champion and a Tokyo Olympics medal prospect in 49kg weight class, will train under the guidance of physiotherapist Dr. Aaron Horschig for around two months. Last year, Mirabai trained with Dr. Horschig for a month to treat her lower back issue.

Team should aim for a medal, says Baskaran

HOCKEY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former captain V. Baskaran feels the Indian men's hockey team cannot afford to be content with only playing in the Olympics if it is to relive the glory days and finish on the podium in Tokyo.

Baskaran, who had led India to its last Olympic gold medal in hockey in the 1980 Moscow edition, said: "The men's team has been playing really well," Baskaran said on a HI podcast 'Hockey Te Charcha.'

"It would perhaps be the first Olympics for about seven-eight players, and I feel they shouldn't just be happy with the 'Olympian' title but they should aim for a medal. This is possible only when everybody in the team believes that they can be a medal-winning team."

Things looking tough for Sreeshankar

Ace long jumper unable to compete abroad

ATHLETICS

STAN RAYAN
KOCHI

With the list of countries suspending flights from India getting longer every day, long jumper M. Sreeshankar is aware that this July's Tokyo Olympics is going to be a tough one.

"We had planned for some international competitions during the last week of May and June but now I think the chances of going are down," said the 22-year-old in a chat with *The Hindu* from Palakkad.

Sreeshankar hit a high in March when he broke his own National record with an 8.26m leap at the Federation Cup in Paritala and qualified for the Olympics.

Currently joint third in the world outdoor list, he realises that with every passing week, the odds stacked against him are getting bigger.



M. Sreeshankar. • FILE PHOTO

"Competitions are going on in American, Caribbean and European countries, so they have a big advantage," said the youngster.

Quality competition

Sreeshankar desperately needs quality competition to fine-tune his act for Tokyo, feels his dad S. Murali, a former international who is also his coach.

"We need to get some three to four competitions to get to form, if not outside, at

least in India," he said. With the COVID situation in the country appearing to get under control a couple of months ago, Sreeshankar had planned to go abroad.

"We were planning to go to France and applied for visas. We don't know what stage the process is in now. And since our teams could not go for the Relay Worlds, we know there will be a problem for the travel," said Murali.

Reasons to worry With the next few competitions, including the Grand Prix (June 15) and Inter-State Nationals (June 25-29) looking doubtful, Sreeshankar has many reasons to worry. But the star and coach are trying to stay positive.

"We have our training in Palakkad, some four hours every evening even during lockdown. And I feel we may go to the Olympics directly from here. That is how it looks like now," said Murali.

Team should aim for a medal, says Baskaran

HOCKEY

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

THE HINDU

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dians flying out of their country. "Our president (Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh) approached the Ministry of External Affairs. Following negotiations with the Dutch and French embassies, both countries relaxed travel formalities for the Indian wrestlers on a priority basis.

"Finally, we booked the tickets on a flight via Paris and our wrestlers boarded the flight on Thursday night," said Tomar.

India has selected three wrestlers each in men and women freestyle categories and six in Greco Roman weights for the qualifying event.

THE HINDU GROUP