SATURDAY
29 MAY
2021

The Statesman

www.thestatesman.com

FIND US ONLINE
Scan this with your smartphone

twitter.com/TheStatesmanLtd
facebook.com/thestatesman1875

Pages 12 | ₹ 5 | LC

KOLKATA | **NEW DELHI** | SILIGURI | BHUBANESWAR

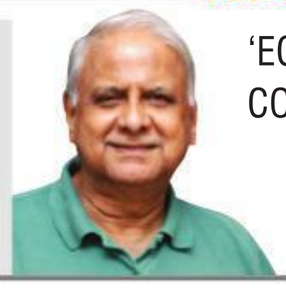
PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION

DELHI UNLOCK TO BEGIN FROM 31 MAY

P2

WAR CRIMES

P6



'EC NEEDS TO DO COURSE CORRECTION'

P7

THE HONOUR GUARDIOLA WANTS AGAIN

P12

WEATHER

Partly cloudy sky. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 40 and 26 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY
Max: 74% Min: 39%

TEMPERATURE
Max: 40.1°C (0) Min: 25.3°C (-1)

SUN RISES	SUN SETS
05:25 hrs	19:13 hrs
MOON RISES	MOON SETS
22:35 hrs	09:04 hrs

THUMBNAILS

The aftermath of cyclone *Yaas* at Shankarpur in East Midnapore on Friday. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee met PM Modi at Kalaikunda in West Midnapore on Friday, and submitted a report on the damage. BHASKAR MALLICK

Bengal chief secretary recalled to Delhi: The Centre has directed state chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay to serve with the Government of India in Delhi. The Cabinet Appointment Committee has approved Mr Bandopadhyay's placement following which he has been asked to report to the department of personnel and training, North Block in New Delhi at 10 am on 31 May. The state government has been asked to relieve Mr Bandopadhyay with immediate effect.

Interim bail for Narada 4

Four leaders released on ₹2L bond each, told not to speak to media on the issue

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 28 MAY

Interim bail was granted to four heavyweight political leaders, namely Bengal ministers Subrata Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim, TMC MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata mayor Sovan Chatterjee, on personal bonds of Rs 2 lakh for each petitioner by a five-judge Bench of Calcutta High Court today.

The Bench, comprising acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal, Justice I P Mukerji, Justice Harish Tandon, Justice Soumen Sen and Justice Arijit Banerjee, had been constituted after a two-judge Bench that was considering the matter could not reach agreement on granting of bail to the four leaders.

RELIEF, FINALLY

- The interim bail order ends the house arrest of Subrata Mukherjee, Firhad Hakim, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee, arrested by the CBI in the Narada sting tapes case.
- The four petitioners were directed not to tamper with evidence and to "meet virtually" the investigating officer of the case whenever required

As a bail condition, the leaders, who were seeking recall of the stay order of Calcutta High Court of a trial court order granting bail to them, have been directed not to speak to the media about the Narada sting case and old cases relating to this issue.

The four petitioners were directed not to tamper with evidence and to "meet virtually" the investigating officer of the case whenever required.

The day's interim bail order ends the house arrest of the four leaders, which the previous two-judge Bench had directed earlier.

Earlier, acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal said as the case will continue for a long time, the petitioners may be granted interim bail subject to the result of this writ petition. The matter won't be consigned to cold storage, he assured the solicitor general, Tushar Mehta.

Earlier, Mehta had opposed the granting of interim bail as the petitioners are influential persons. Justice Mukerji pointed out that these persons were influential persons in 2017 when the case started but no arrests were made then. Then why arrest them now, he asked.

Against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, the leaders do not have much scope for public interaction, Justice Mukerji said. But they are needed to monitor the fight against Covid, he added.

The four leaders were arrested by the CBI from their homes on 17 May in connection with the Narada sting case. At a virtual hearing, the CBI court granted bail to the four. Later, Mehta, appearing for the CBI, challenged the matter before a High Court Division Bench, which stayed the bail.

GST Council leaves tax on vaccine unchanged

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The GST Council on Friday left taxes on Covid-19 vaccines and medical supplies unchanged but exempted duty on import of Amphotericin B, used for treatment of black fungus.

A group of ministers will deliberate on tax structure on the vaccine and medical supplies, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told reporters after a meeting of the GST Council. The GST Council, which is headed by the Union Finance Minister and comprises representatives of all states and union territories, exempted levy of I-GST on import of Amphotericin-B, which is used for the treatment of black fungus.

The GST Council, headed by the Union Finance Minister and comprising representatives of all states and UTs, exempted levy of I-GST on import of Amphotericin-B, which is used for the treatment of black fungus.

Currently, vaccines attract 5 per cent GST.

Sitharaman said the Council decided to continue a waiver of I-GST on free Covid-19 related supplies imported from abroad. Also, the panel decided that the Centre will borrow Rs 1.58 lakh crore and pass it on to the states to make up for the shortfall in their revenues from the implementation of the GST.

A special session of the Council will be held soon to consider extending the five-year GST shortfall compensation period to states beyond 2022. The panel provided relief to small GST taxpayers through an amnesty scheme for late return filers.

'Will complete jabs by Dec': Javadekar after Rahul jibe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Asserting that the Covid-19 vaccination will be complete in India by December this year, the BJP on Friday slammed Rahul Gandhi for his attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the pandemic's spread and said the language he used and the way he tried to stoke "fears" confirm that the Congress was behind the "toolkit".

Speaking to reporters, senior BJP leader and Union minister Prakash Javadekar noted that the health ministry had recently given a roadmap about producing 216 crore doses by December and how 108 crore people will be vaccinated, as he rebutted Gandhi's claim that it may take three years to finish the exercise.

Attacking the Congress leader, the Information and Broadcasting minister alleged that his choice of words like "*nautanki*" for the Prime Minister when he is working to curb Covid is part of the toolkit's script, referring to a controversial document about targeting the government. The BJP has claimed that the Congress is behind it, a charge the Opposition party has rejected.

Earlier, Gandhi had held Modi's "theatrics" responsible for the second coronavirus wave and warned of more waves at the current rate of vaccination. Calling on the government to evolve a vaccine strategy for the entire population, the former Congress chief said Modi and his government have still not understood the virus and that is why they have no strategy.

Going by the current pace of vaccinations, the entire inoculation exercise will take another three years, till May 2024, and the country will witness several Covid waves by then, Gandhi warned.

1.86 L new cases

India's fresh daily Covid-19 caseload fell below the 2-lakh mark for the second time this month on Friday, with the Union health ministry reporting 1,86,364 fresh Covid-19 cases and 3,660 Covid-linked deaths in the last 24 hours. Friday's figures of new cases was the lowest in around 44 days. India's overall tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,75,55,457 with 23,43,152 active cases, and 3,18,895 deaths, so far.

Delhi adds 1,141 cases, 139 deaths: Delhi today logged 1,141 new coronavirus cases and 139 Covid-linked deaths while the positivity rate climbed to 1.59 per cent. SNS

FACT FILE

TOTAL CASES	2,75,55,457
ACTIVE CASES	23,43,152
NEW CASES	1,86,364
NEW RECOVERIES	2,59,459
TOTAL DEATHS	3,18,895

UNION HEALTH MINISTRY FIGURES AS OF 8.00 A.M. FRIDAY 28 MAY 2021

Saving oneself from getting infected from coronavirus is the need of the hour

ANIT THAPA, LEADER, GORKHA JAN MUKTI MORCHA (BINOY TAMANG CAMP)

AFTER ATTENDING THE FUNERAL OF A PARTY YOUTH LEADER OF LONGVIEW AREA NEAR KURSEONG

Delhi to start 'unlocking' from Monday: Kejriwal

It'll be done in a staggered way starting with construction activities and factories, says CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

After more than 40 days of the Covid-induced lockdown, Delhi will start the process of "unlocking" gradually from 31 May in a staggered manner.

This was announced by Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal at his online press briefing today.

The CM said that Delhi has somehow gained control over the devastating second wave of coronavirus with the support of its people and that the government will now start the process of lifting the lockdown gradually, starting with resumption of construction activities and reopening of factories from Monday.

This however would not mean that the battle against the contagious, deadly pathogen has ended, Kejriwal stressed.

"It is time to start the unlock process. It should not be the case that people escape coronavirus but die of hunger... We have to maintain a balance between controlling the spread of coronavirus and allowing economic activities," he said.

"At a meeting of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) today, it was decided that the lockdown be lifted gradually. In this process, we have to take care of the lowest strata first ... daily wagers, labourers, migrant workers who come to Delhi from far off areas in search of livelihood," the CM said.

"Keeping this in mind, it has been decided to open factories and allow construction activities from Monday," Kejriwal said, adding that the Delhi government will continue the unlock process every week based on the opinion of experts and the public while keeping in view the Covid situation in the national capital.

"If the Covid cases start rising again, we will have to stop the unlock exercise," the CM said and appealed to Delhi'ites to follow all precautions against Covid and not to step out unless it is "absolutely necessary".

In the last 24 hours, Delhi reported a positivity rate of around 1.5 per cent and about 11,00 new coronavirus cases, he said.

Delhi has been one of the worst-affected during this raging, ferocious Covid second wave, which killed thousands of people in the city amid acute shortages of oxygen, hospital beds, and essential medicines over the last few weeks.

The spiralling Covid cases and deaths had forced the Delhi government to impose a lockdown in the city from 19 April. Thereafter, the government kept extending the lockdown every week, hoping to break the chain of infections as hospitals reeled under a massive surge of cases and shortages of oxygen and essential drugs.

"The number of cases and the positivity rate have declined gradually. There is no difficulty in getting hospital beds now, and oxygen and ICU beds are also available in good numbers. But the war against the virus hasn't ended," Kejriwal said.

"So whatever gains Delhi has made in the one-and-a-half month of lockdown cannot be squandered by lifting the restrictions in one go," he added.

Delhi traders want shops to be reopened soon as part of 'unlock' process

PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Traders in the national capital are unhappy about the Delhi government's decision on Friday to allow just construction activities and factories to resume during the first phase of unlocking the city which begins from May 31.

Atul Bhargava, the president of the New Delhi Traders Association, said they would request the Delhi government to allow shops to be opened in the next phase of the unlock exercise.

"Definitely today's announcement has come as another blow to us. It has been fifteen months and no respite for traders. If factories are safe from virus why are not the stores in Connaught Place where it is easier to maintain social distancing? "There has been no relief package for traders during the entire pandemic, we are running our business at our own capital and now not being supported in even that," said Bhargava who represents traders from Delhi's prime commercial hub -- Connaught Place.

His views were echoed by Sanjeev Mehra, the president of Khan Market Traders Association. He said a safe arrangement that includes following Covid protocols can be worked out.

Praveen Khandelwal, the secretary general of the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), said though curbing the spread of COVID-19 infection is the priority of not only the government but also of the traders and the people of Delhi, yet when the case positivity rate is about 1.5 per cent, markets in Delhi should also have been allowed to open, maybe in a phased manner.

"The reason cited by Delhi government about resuming construction activities and factories as the need to provide a livelihood to migrant workers is half-baked. More than 15 lakh small and big traders of Delhi are providing employment to more than 35 lakh people who are largely migrants and as such for their livelihood the shops are also eligible to open," he said.

Brijesh Goyal, the chairman of the Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI), a traders association in Delhi, had on Thursday said they conducted a survey across markets in Delhi and found out that 80 per cent of traders were in favour of reopening markets when lockdown is lifted.

"About 560 traders organizations from Delhi participated in this survey. Market associations, industry associations, hotel and restaurant associations, beauty and wellness associations all took part.

"With the reduction in corona infection cases, Haryana and Gujarat have started opening up markets and factories with certain conditions, Since Corona infection has also declined significantly in Delhi, now the traders of this city have also requested the government to open markets and factories," he said.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said Delhi has somehow gained control over the second wave of COVID-19 and the government will now start the process of lifting the lockdown gradually, starting with the resumption of construction activities and reopening of factories for one week from Monday.

An official, who was present in the meeting of Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), said there was also discussion on allowing markets and liquor shops with staggered timing from May 31, but there was no consensus on this as the daily rise in cases is still over 1,000 in the city.

The official said decisions on other relaxations will be taken depending on the COVID-19 situation in the national capital.

It's living hell, we are helpless: HC on black fungus drug shortage

PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

"We are living this hell. Everyone is living this hell. It's a situation where we want to help but we are helpless," the Delhi High Court lamented on Friday while hearing pleas on the shortage of black fungus medicine and the problems being faced by the patients.

While the Centre placed a report giving the steps taken by it to source the medicine and overcome shortages, the high court directed it to give further details on current status of its imports and when the stocks are expected.

The court, which was hearing two pleas seeking medicine vials for two patients admitted here for black fungus infection, expressed helplessness over the situation and said it cannot pass any order that a particular patient should be given preference for treatment while denying it to others.

The issue of shortage of the medicine for treating black fungus was raised by advocate Rakesh Malhotra who said the black fungus cases, affecting COVID-affected people, are rising.

The court, which was informed that steps are being taken by the Centre to procure 2.30 lakh vials of Liposomal Amphotericin-B from six countries, asked the government to explain the reason behind choosing this figure as the today's requirement of the medicine is much more.

The Union of India shall place a report giving the detailed current status of the said imports. It will be considered on Monday. It has to indicate how the figure of 2.30 lakh vials was arrived at and whether there is a greater availability of the drug which could be imported, a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said, which heard for six hours the matter relating to various issues arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The court asked the Centre to come back on May 31 with a definite statement as to what happened to these 2.30 lakh vials, where are they, what is the stage, when are they coming to India, has the order been placed or not.

When one of the Centre's advocate said the order for the vials has been placed abroad, the bench said, we are running against time. If you placed the order on May 24, today it should have been here.

We are only expressing out anxiety because of the proportions this thing is assuming. Every hour is assuming a new proportion, the bench said, adding that the effort here is to save lives and every hour matters.

Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma said as per the information updated on the portal, the number of patients under treatment for mucormycosis (black fungus) in India are 14,872 on May 28 (9 AM) and this includes 423 patients in Delhi.

Out of the sources that have been presently identified abroad, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) on May 24 has called upon Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to take steps to procure 2,30,000 vials of Liposomal Amphotericin-B from Australia, Russia, Germany, Argentina, Belgium and China.

"MEA has also been called upon to procure 50,000 tablets of Isavuconazole. Steps in this regard are being taken by the MEA, said the Centre's report, filed through advocates Amit Mahajan, Kirtiman Singh and Nidhi Mohan Parashar.

The Centre said domestic production capacity of Amphotericin B Liposomal Injection has progressed as while in April it was 62,000, in May it was 1,40,000 and in June it is expected to be 3,25,114.

It said the main impediment in granting more licences for manufacture of Liposomal Amphotericin B is the shortage of the raw materials and excipients worldwide.

It said the MEA has been working on ensuring supplies of key excipients from sources abroad for production of Liposomal Amphotericin B (Amphonex) in India and added that imports are being made by Mylan Labs from Gilead Inc. USA and the government is working to increase the imports and for early delivery.

Regarding the medicine supplies made to Delhi, the Centre said 400 vials were allocated on May 24, 300 vials on May 26 and 1920 vials on May 27.

It said as per the tentative estimation of joint monitoring committee under the Directorate General of Health Services, 20 per cent of the total active COVID-19 cases are moderate to severe and may require hospitalisation. From these 20 percent of moderate and severe cases, 1:500 to 1:1000 cases may develop mucormycosis.

The court had earlier said the gap between demand and supply of Amphotericin B was too wide to bridge and drastic steps are required to be taken.

According to the Union Health Ministry, people catch mucormycosis by coming in contact with the fungal spores in the environment. It can also develop on the skin after the fungus enters the skin through a cut, scrape, burn, or other type of skin trauma.

The disease is being detected among patients who are recovering or have recovered from COVID-19. Moreover, anyone who is diabetic and whose immune system is not functioning well needs to be on the guard against this, the ministry has said.

Another Sushil associate held in murder case

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Delhi Police on Friday arrested another associate of Olympian wrestler Sushil Kumar in connection with the murder of wrestler Sagar Dhankar.

The accused, identified as Rohit Kakor, was present at the Chhatrasal Stadium when the violent incident took place, police said.

Earlier, the police had issued a non-bailable warrant against Sushil Kumar's associates Rohit Kakor and Virendra Binder, another accused who is still absconding.

Eight accused including Sushil Kumar have been arrested in connection with 23-year-old Sagar Dhankar's murder at Chhatrasal Stadium.

The 38-year-old wrestler, Sushil Kumar, a prime suspect in this murder case, and his associate Ajay Bakkarwala were arrested by a team of Special Cell of Delhi Police on 23 May from the Mundka area of the national capital, following which a Delhi court granted six days of police custody of the two-time Olympic medallist wrestler.

Delhi Police's Crime Branch is investigating the case related to the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl on 4 May that led to the murder of Sagar Dhankar here.

HC declines to entertain plea to restrain 'media trial' of Olympian wrestler Sushil

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The Delhi High Court on Friday declined to entertain a plea to restrain the media from 'sensationalising' the trial of wrestler and Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar in connection with the death of a 23-year old man, and seeking rules for reporting criminal cases, saying a PIL cannot be filed for an individual who is a "vigilant person".

A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said the petition has been filed on behalf of a "vigilant person" - Kumar - claiming that media has defamed him by its reportage of the murder case in which he is an accused.

"You cannot file a PIL for an individual. We see no reason to entertain litigation on behalf of a vigilant person," the court said and disposed of the plea by a law student.

The law student had alleged that Kumar's career and reputation has been damaged by the media's reporting of the case against him in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of the 23-year-old wrestler.

On May 23, a Delhi court sent Kumar to 6-day police custody for interrogation in connection with the killing of a fellow wrestler, saying the allegations against him are serious in nature and that no one is above the law. PTI

Classified

TENDERS

e-TENDER — Tender is invited by the undermentioned for 1 No. NREGA e-Tender No.: 151 / Khanakul-1 GP / MGNREGA / 2021, Dated 28.05.2021. Details are available in Websites: http://wbtenders.gov.in
Pradhan
Khanakul-1
Gram Panchayat
Khanakul, Hooghly

COLLECTION: 110, B.C. RD., Barabazar (Near C.M.S. School) Burdwan, Ph.: 0342-2560069 / 8926434614. **NEW COMPUTER INDIA:** New Market, Benachity, Durgapur-713213. Ph.: 9883934508. M: 9732302070. **NARAYAN DASGUPTA:** Mahakali Paper Centre, B-9/16 (CA), Kalyani-741235, Nadia. Phone: 9851771877 / 2582-7177 (10 a.m. – 6 p.m.), Sunday Closed. **STANDARD BOOK DEPOT:** 10/1, Grand Trunk Rd. (South) Howrah Maidan, Howrah-711101. Ph.: 2641-4114 / 2474-5856. **RINKU AD AGENCY:** Chanchal Bhattacharya, 74, Santiram Rasta, Bally, Howrah-711201. Mobile: 831833485. **RAYCOGNISE:** Arghya Commercial Plaza, Upper Ground Floor, Room No. 8, Burnpur Rd., Asansol-4, Burdwan. Ph.: 933 3104777. Fax: 933 2253099. **AISHEE XEROX CENTRE:** Khudiram Nagar, Opposite Zilla Parishad, Paschim Medinipur, 721101, 9434702050, 9434259909. **S. TRIVEDI,** Pathakpara, Bankura, (0324) 2320665, 9735801256–57. **TYPE CORNER,** Collectry More (opposite SP Bunglow), Krishnanagar-741101, Dist.: Nadia, 9474334978, (03472 257432). **KRISHNA DEB,** C/o Balurghat Barta, Balurghat-733101. Dist.: Dakshin Dinajpur (W.B.). Ph.: (03522) 249230. Mobile: 8759169158 / 09434247137.

The Statesman

KOLKATA
Statesman House,
4, Chowringhee Square
Kolkata-700 001
Tel: (033) 22127070-76,
(033) 41071700
Fax: (033) 2212-6181 / 7107-1780
Email: thestatesman@vsnl.com
statesmandisplay@gmail.com
thestatesmanclassified@gmail.com

DELHI
Statesman House,
148, Barakhamba Road,
New Delhi-110 001
Tel: (011) 2331 5911
Ishan House (2nd floor)
A-90, Sector II, NOIDA,
UP 201 301
Tel: (0120) 4171421
Email:
delhistatesman@gmail.com
delhi@thestatesmangroup.com
Hiten Rathore : 9212192123
Pawan Dogra: 9811963623

BHUBANESWAR
Plot 3A, Zone B, Sector A, Mancheswar Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751 010.
Tel: (0674) 2588060/61/62/ 2586371,
Telefax: 0674-2588061
Email:
bhubaneswar@thestatesmangroup.com
statesmanbbsr@gmail.com

SILIGURI
Spencer Plaza, 18/19, 1st Floor
Burdwan Road, Above Vishal Mega Mart
Siliguri-734005, West Bengal
Ph.: 9832082429
Email:
siliguri@thestatesmangroup.com
sil_statesman@yahoo.co.in

HYDERABAD
The Statesman Limited, 2nd Floor, UNI Building,
A.C. Guards, Hyderabad-500004,
Ph.: 040-2339 1739
Email:
delhistatesman@gmail.com
hyderabad@thestatesmangroup.com
Mob. 9866323009
Mob. 9212192123

BANGALORE
No. 68, First Floor, Gold Tower,
50 Residency Road, Bangalore-560025.
Email:
delhistatesman@gmail.com
bangalore@thestatesmangroup.com
Mob. 9212192123
Mob. 9811963623

MUMBAI
5, Kasturi Buildings, Jamshedji Tata Road, Mumbai-400 020
Mob. 9212192123
Tel: (022) 2202 1045,
Email:
delhistatesman@gmail.com
mumbai@thestatesmangroup.com
manuelfrancis@thestatesman.com

CHENNAI
Fagun Mansion (4th floor), 26, Ethiraj Road, Chennai-600 008, Tel: (044) 28278037, 28224800
Email:
delhistatesman@gmail.com
chennai@thestatesmangroup.com
Swaminathan : 9884924884
Mob. 9212192123
Mob. 9811963623

LUCKNOW
2/2, Butler Palace (Near Jopling Road), Lucknow-226 001,
Email:
delhistatesman@gmail.com
lucknow@thestatesmangroup.com
Mob. 9212192123
Mob. 9811963623

RANCHI
11/C, Road#1, Ashoknagar,
Ranchi - 834 002
Fax: (0651) 2247054
Email:
delhistatesman@gmail.com
ranchi@thestatesmangroup.com
Mob. 9212192123
Mob. 9811963623

SHIMLA
Mob. 9212192123
Mob. 9418027177

AIR-SURCHARGE; Kathmandu - Rs. 2, Eastern Region - Re. 1
All other stations in India - Re. 1

अधीक्षण अभियंता, पी.एम.जी.एस.वाई. वृत्त, लो.नि.वी. ज्योलिकोट, नैनीताल

Ref No: 321/01 कैश/ पीएमजीएसवाई/21 Dated : 27.05.2021

ई निविदा सूचना - Deposit Work /पी.एम.जी.एस.वाई वृत्त, लो.नि.वी., ज्योलिकोट, नैनीताल

मा. राज्यपाल उत्तराखंड की ओर से अधीक्षण अभियंता, पी.एम.जी.एस.वाई. वृत्त, लो.नि.वी., ज्योलिकोट, नैनीताल द्वारा ई निविदा के माध्यम से मद आधारित दरों पर पी.एम.जी.एस.वाई. के अन्तर्गत की निविदा पात्र ठेकेदारों, जो लोक निर्माण विभाग / केंद्रीय लोक निर्माण विभाग अथवा समकक्ष में पंजीकृत हों, से आमंत्रित की जाती है।

ई निविदा के माध्यम से निविदा आमंत्रण की तिथि : 05.06.2021

जनपद	पैकेज नंबर	मद	कार्य का नाम	ल. किमी	Estimated Cost in Lakh	Bid Security in Lakhs	Period of Completion Month	No of Bids	Cost of Bidded Document
नैनीताल	Deposit Work	जिला खनन न्यास नैनीताल	जनपद नैनीताल के विकासखंड कोटाबाग भण्डारपानी पाटकोट किमी 5.00 से ओखलढूँगा (चे. 2.00 से चे. 11.00 किमी) में सुधारीकरण का कार्य	9-00	103.00	2.06	6	01	Rs.3000 in Favour of EE PMGSY ID Haldwani

निविदा प्रपत्र की उपलब्धता एवं जमा किये जाने की विधि : निविदा प्रपत्र ऑनलाइन उपलब्ध है तथा www.pmgsytenderuk.gov.in में ऑनलाइन ही जमा किये जाने हैं। निविदादाताओं को वेबसाइट में पंजीकरण करना होगा जो कि निशुल्क है। निविदा को जमा करने हेतु निविदादाता के पास अधिकृत प्रमाणीकरण संस्था (Certifying Authority) द्वारा निर्गत डी.एस.सी. (Digital Signature Certificate) होना चाहिए। निविदादाता द्वारा (अ) निविदा प्रपत्र के मूल्य की धनराशि का ड्राफ्ट (ब) अनुमोदित रूप में निविदा सिक्योरिटी की धनराशि एवं (स) आई.टी.बी. के प्रस्तर 4.4 (ii) के अनुसार प्रस्तुत अभिलेखों के सही होने संबंधी शपथपत्र मूल रूप में संबंधित अधीक्षण अभियंता कार्यालय में निविदाएं जमा करने (Submission of Bid) की तिथि एवं समय से पूर्व पंजीकृत डाक द्वारा अथवा व्यक्तिगत रूप से उपलब्ध कराया जाना अनिवार्य होगा। उक्त अभिलेख मूल रूप से निर्धारित अवधी के अंदर प्राप्त न होने की दशा में दी गई निविदा को अमान्य घोषित कर दिया जाएगा। निविदाएं जमा करने की तिथि व समय के उपरांत प्राप्त होने वाले मूल अभिलेखों को स्वीकार नहीं किया जाएगा। ई निविदा के माध्यम से निविदा जमा करने की अंतिम तिथि व समय – 15.06.2021 सायं 1 बजे तक। अधिक जानकारी हेतु कृपया www.pmgsytenderuk.gov.in देखें। निविदादाता जो पंजीकृत नहीं हैं वो भी निविदा दे सकते हैं, किन्तु सफल निविदादाता को अनुबंध हस्ताक्षरित करने से पूर्व उच्च श्रेणी में समक्ष प्राधिकारी से पंजीकरण करवाना अनिवार्य होगा।

2. Date of release of invitation for Bids through e-procurement Dated-05-06-2021
3. Cost of Bid form: As mentioned in column number 10 (Non-refundable)
4. Availability of Bid Document and mode of submission: The bid document is available online and bid should be submitted online on website www.pmgsytenderuk.gov.in. The bidder would be required to register in the web-site which is free of cost. For submission of his, The bidder id required to have Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized certifying authorities (CA) aspiring bidder who have not obtained the same from the website www.pmgsytenderuk.gov.in. Digital Signature is mandatory to participate in the e-tendering. Bidders already possessing the digital signature issued from authorized CAs can use the same in this tenders.
5. Submission of Original Documents: The bidders are required to submit (a) original demand draft towards the cost of bid document and (b) original bid security in approved form and (c) original affidavit regarding correctness of information furnished with bid document as per provision of Clause 4.4 B (ii) of ITB with the CONCERNED/RESPECTIVE CIRCLE OFFICES only up to or before the time and date of the submission of the bids, either by registered post or by hand, failing which the bids shall be declared non-respnsive . No physical documents will be accepted after the losing date and time of submission of bids.
6- Last Date- time for receipt of bids through e-tendering 15-06-2021, 01:00 PM
7- The site for work is available.
8- Only online submission of bids is permitted, therefore: bids must be submitted online on website www.pmgsytendersuk.gov.in. The technical qualification part of the bids will be opened online on 15-06-2021 3:00PM by the authorized officers. If the office happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified the bids will be opened on the next working day at the same time.
9-The bids for the work shall remain valid for acceptance for a period not Less than ninety days after the deadline date for bid submission.
10- Bidders may bid for any one or more of the works mentioned in the table above. To qualify for a package of contracts made up to this and other contracts for which bids are invited . The bidder must demonstrate having experience and resources sufficient to meet the aggregate of the qualifying criteria for the individual contracts.
11- Other details can be seen in the bidding documents. The employer shall not be held liable for any delays due to system failure beyond its control. Even though the system will attempt to notify the bidder of any bid updates, the employer shall not be liable for any information not received by the bidder. It is the bidders responsibility to verify the website for the lates information related to the tender.
12- All bidders are required to quote there item rates excluding goods and services Tax (GST) and all taxes falling within purview of GST-Act 2017 but including labor cess royalty etc. Payment of GST and required deductions in the reference wilt be made as per prevailing rules.
13- SRRDA / Employer reserves all the rights in reference to the MD Section -2 ITB Para- 4.7 bidders are subjected to the disqualified if:-
I- Made misleading or false representations in the forms, statement affidavits and attachments submitted in proof of the qualification requirements: and /or
ii- Record of poor performance such as abandoning the works, not properly completing the contract, inordinate delays in completion, litigation history or financial failures etc.
iii- Participated in the previous bidding for the same work and had quoted unreasonably high or low bid prices and could not furnish rational justification for it to the employer.
14- Experience of Similar Nature works as required in MBD Section-2 (ITB) Clause 4.2 (c) & 4.4 A (b) will only be considered for the works completed before the publication date of tender.
15- Stage II works which have been sanctioned in innovative Technology. i.e Cold Mix an affidavit to be submitted by the participation bidder that he will use the new technology material as per provisions made in BOQ and also provide the machines and other arrangements required for completion of work and also follow the directions given by the technology provider and will sign the tripartite agreement.

Non Registered Bidders may submit bids, however successful bidders must get registered in appropriate class with appropriate authorities before signing the contract.

अधीक्षण अभियंता, पी.एम.जी.एस.वाई. वृत्त
लो.नि.वी. ज्योलिकोट

I have seen that most of the areas have been inundated. Houses and large tracts of agricultural fields are under water. A field survey will also be conducted

MAMATA BANERJEE
WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

HP extends 'Corona curfew' till 7 June with relaxations

All shops to open in the state from Monday; govt allows onsite Covid jabs registration for 18-44 yrs in remote, tribal areas

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 28 MAY

The Himachal Pradesh government on Friday extended the "Corona curfew" in the state till 7 June. However, some relaxations have been offered to business establishments.

Announcing the decision, HP chief secretary Anil Khachi said the Corona curfew had been extended till 6 am of 7 June and restrictions as per guidelines already issued will continue to remain in effect.

"However, all markets/shops can open from Monday to Friday for 5 hours (from 9 am to 2 pm and will remain closed on Saturday and Sunday. Shops dealing with items of daily need such as fruits, vegetables, milk, milk products, pharmacy and other essential items are however allowed to open for 5 hours on Saturday and Sunday also," he said.

Khachi said the shopkeepers and buyers must ensure compliance of Covid appropriate behavior and safety protocols as per the health department's instructions issued from time to time.

All the stand-alone offices with strength of up to 4 employees will remain open with full strength and other offices of government departments, public sector units, local bodies, autonomous bodies including the HP Secretariat will operate with 30 per cent attendance.

"The heads of departments or offices will take the decision on the actual roster as per requirement and these offices must ensure compliance of Covid-19 appropriate behavior and safety protocols at the workplace.

Besides, the employees with disability, pregnant/lactating women will not be asked to attend offices and they will continue to work from home.

Similarly, all employees not in roster will be available for call up at short notice if required by the head of office," he said, adding the HP High Court will issue separate orders on functioning of its office and subordinate offices in the state.

Khachi further stated that however, all educational institutions, training and coaching institutes will remain closed and those found violating the Corona curfew will be prosecuted under provisions of the Disaster Management Act.

Meanwhile, the Himachal Pradesh government on Friday also decided to allow onsite scheduling/ appointments for persons residing in tribal and remote areas in the state for Covid vaccination of the 18-44 years age group.

A health department official said as per the strategy, in the tribal and remote areas there will be full access to onsite registration.

"In case of use of on-site registration module, the officials will ensure prior intimation to the state headquarters. The district may publish session with either 100 per cent prescheduled online appointments or 100 per cent onsite registration and scheduling in these tribal and hard areas," he added.

He stated that the district administration or the local administration should take a lead in the planning of onsite sessions in "tribal/hard areas" to ensure no overcrowding or law and order situation.

"It has also been decided that in non-tribal and other than hard areas, the session will be published only with the option of online pre-scheduling and appointment so there will be no onsite registration in the non-tribal and non-remote areas," he said.

He appealed to all the 18-44 years age group persons to visit the session site only after scheduling and booking their online appointment.

He further clarified that in case there are slots left due to the absence of pre-booked beneficiaries, then those slots will be published again online only in the same session by extending the session for a maximum of 9 beneficiaries on the day of vaccination.

This strategy had been designed to minimize the vaccine wastage, he added.

He urged the general public to ensure that any overcrowding and law and order situation at these session sites may be avoided and added that the state government will monitor vaccine wastage strictly.

He said that the state government had also included new categories of persons in priority groups for Covid vaccination in the state.

"Now specially abled persons, staff of government and private educational institutions, Animal Husbandry, telecom providers, Fire, Forest, IPH, PWD, EPFO ,Insurance, MPP, Power and Power Projects, Postal, Railways, Industries departments employees and that of boards and corporations will be included as priority groups for Covid vaccination in the state. It will also include advocates and all the staff working in judicial institutions including those under the Prosecution department, prisoners above 18 years, NCC cadets more than 18 years of age and volunteers on Covid duty in Himachal," he added.

Black fungus claims two lives in HP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 28 MAY

Two persons who had contracted mucormycosis or black fungus in Himachal Pradesh succumbed to the disease while undergoing treatment at Indira Gandhi Medical College (IGMC) Shimla on Friday.

IGMC Shimla medical superintendent Dr Janak Raj confirmed the deaths and said a 47-year-old male patient from Kasauli in Solan district and a 38-year-old male from Hamirpur district had succumbed to the disease today as the black fungus infection had reached the brain.

The 47-year-old patient was referred to IGMC Shimla on 22 May and he was suffering from uncontrolled sugar and kidney problems while the 38-year-old patient was referred to IGMC on 27 May with diabetes ketoacidosis.

"Both the patients succumbed to the black fungus disease during treatment at the hospital as the infection had reached till the brain," he added.

Dr Nipun Jindal, mission director, HP National health Mission said at present, there were 8 cases of black fungus, out of which two succumbed to the disease today.

"Three cases of mucormycosis have been reported in Kangra district, two in Solan district and three in Hamirpur district," he said.

Jindal said mucormycosis is a fungal disease which generally affects the nose, eyes and cerebral area in a human body and the reason for surge is that Covid-19 infection worsens diabetes, precipitates new diabetes and sometimes develops deficiency of white blood cells.

Further, the immunosuppressive treatments such as steroids being used in Covid patients result in decrease in immunity.

He stated that the chronic respiratory disease, intubation, mechanical ventilation and coexistence of other infections during COVID-19 also increase chances of mucormycosis.

In addition, uncontrolled diabetes mellitus, immunesuppression by steroids, prolonged ICU stay, comorbidities like malignancy, post transplant are the major risk factors for this fungal disease, he stated.

He stated that nose and sinuses were the relatively early sites of black fungus infection and the major symptoms include headache, nasal obstruction which was persistent and not responding to medicines.

This fungal disease also affects eyes which can result in swelling and redness of eyes, double vision, loss of vision, pain in the eye, drooping eyelid, he added.

Centre clears extra Covid jabs for HP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 28 MAY

The Central government has approved an additional quota of Covid vaccine doses to Himachal Pradesh for the month of June under which the state will get 94,050 extra doses, Dr Nipun Jindal, mission director, HP National health Mission said on Friday.

Dr Jindal said the Central government had earlier fixed an allocation of 1,19,760 doses of Covishield vaccine to the state for procurement for the 18-44 years age group in the month of June.

Similarly, allocation of 2,52,770 doses of Covishield was to be made available to the state under free supply from the Union government in the first fortnight of June to Himachal for vaccination of 45 plus age group.

"But the state government has taken up the matter with the Union government for more supply to cater to the high demand of vaccination in the state.

Now, the Centre has enhanced the quota available for procurement by 47,420 doses for the 18-44 years age group while the state will receive 46,630 additional doses for vaccination of persons over 45 year age," he added.

He stated that with this additional allocation, the total revised quantity of vaccine doses available under free supply for Himachal for the first fortnight of June 2021, will be 2,99,400 vaccines.

Similar supply is being requested for the second fortnight of June 2021.

He further stated that with continuous and dedicated efforts of the health department, Himachal had vaccinated 27.4 per cent of its total population (Census 2011) including 34 per cent of the eligible beneficiaries (18-44 years category) and 89.4 per cent in the 45 plus age appropriate population till 26 May.

Design energy-efficient buildings based on local aesthetics: Himachal CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 28 MAY

Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur on Friday said the designs of new buildings that will be constructed in future must be prepared in such a way that they are not only energy-efficient but also have local aesthetics.

Besides, these buildings must also have scope for further expansion, he said while presiding over a meeting to review progress and developmental works of Seraj assembly segment of Mandi district.

He directed the officers to ensure time bound completion of various developmental projects with special emphasis on those projects which were nearing completion.

"The officers must ensure top most priority on completion of Chief Minister's announcements and quality construction must be ensured in all the developmental works.

Besides, action will be taken against the contractors and officers who compromise with the quality," he added.

Thakur stated that keeping in view the limited working season in most of the parts of the constituency, work must be speeded up during the working season so that projects could be completed within the stipulated period.

He instructed the officers to also resolve issues related to land for construction of roads particularly under the PMGSY so that maximum villages could be connected by roads.

Out of total 247 villages in the constituency, 205 had been connected with roads and work under NABARD, CRF and other external aided projects must be completed at the earliest so that people could be benefitted, the CM said.

He reviewed the progress of Jal Shakti department in Seraj Vidhan Sabha area and said 37 water supply projects including 19 Jal Jeevan Mission, 8 projects under NABARD, six Scheduled Castes Sub Plan and four ADB projects were under execution in the constituency.

Out of these eight schemes worth Rs 13.71 crore had been completed and were ready for inauguration.

He called for augmentation of various water supply schemes in Janjehli area and Gram Panchayat Tandi, Saroa and stated that these were nearing completion.

He directed the officers of Jal Shakti department to complete the work on remaining projects under Jal Jeevan Mission within the stipulated period.

He added that being a hilly area, there was limited scope for providing irrigation facilities to the farmers and to resolve the issue, 12 irrigation schemes worth Rs 12.50 crore were being implemented which include six schemes under NABARD.

He also asked the officers to ensure effective implementation of Rs 50.89 crore Pradhanmantri Krishi Sinchai Yojna in the area so that farmers could go for crop diversification to enhance their economic status.

He also directed the officers for ensuring time bound completion of flood protection works in the area.

O2 concentrator blackmarketing case: Had no criminal intent to cheat, Kalra tells court

PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Businessman Navneet Kalra, who is an accused in the oxygen concentrator blackmarketing case, on Friday submitted before a court here that he had no criminal intent to cheat people and cannot be kept in pre-trial detention.

During a recent raid, 524 oxygen concentrators, which are crucial medical equipment used for COVID-19 patients, were recovered from Khan Chacha, Town Hall, and Nege & Ju restaurants owned by Kalra. The restaurateur is in judicial custody till June 3.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Arun Kumar Garg was hearing the bail application of the businessman who was arrested on May 17 for allegedly hoarding oxygen concentrators and selling them at exorbitant price.

Kalra, through senior advocate Vikas Pahwa, told the court, I had no criminal intent to cheat anyone.

BKU-Ekta Ugrahan begins 3-day protest against Punjab govt's Covid handling

PTI
PATIALA, 28 MAY

Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) on Friday began a three-day protest in Patiala, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's home constituency, over the state government's alleged failure to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

One of the largest farmers' unions in Punjab, BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) said only a few protesters will stay at the venue through the night while the rest will join them again the next morning.

A leader of the outfit told reporters here that the government had failed to tackle the situation brought about by the pandemic.

The people are bearing the brunt because of the government's failure on various fronts. Doctors are not available in several villages. Government hospitals have ventilators, but lack technical staff to run them. Private hospitals are fleecing the patients, he alleged.

He further alleged that the Centre had also failed to deal with the COVID-19 situation and some BJP leaders were now trying to shift blame on farmers to defame their agitation by accusing them of spreading coronavirus infection.

CM Amarinder Singh had on Sunday urged the BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) not to hold their planned sit-in over his government's "failure" to tackle coronavirus, saying their three-day protest may turn into a super-spreader event.

Rejecting the allegation that his government failed to tackle the pandemic, the CM had earlier said they fought hard to prevent Punjab going the way of some other states such as Delhi, Maharashtra and even Uttar Pradesh.

Singh had urged farmers not to act "irresponsibly" and endanger their own lives as their protest may negate the gains made by the state government in the fight against the pandemic, amid a complete ban on all gatherings.

Such a dharna will draw people mainly from villages, which are in any case going through a crisis during the second wave of the pandemic, he had said.

There is no scope for any laxity in COVID-appropriate behaviour and dharnas of any kind are totally unacceptable when the lives are at stake, the CM had said.

BKU leaders, though, said all COVID-related protocols were being followed during the protest.

Due care was being taken to ensure that everyone wore a mask and sanitised hands at the machines provided at the protest venue.

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that one male was found dead near Ring Road, Metro Piller No. 105, Kashmere Gate, Delhi on 21.05.2021. In this regard a **DD No. 68-A u/s 174 CrPC, Dated 21.05.2021** has been lodged at **P.S. Kashmere Gate, Delhi.** The description of the dead body is given as under:
Name: Unknown, **S/o:** Unknown, **R/o:** Unknown, **Age**: about 50 years, **Height:** 5'1" Feet, **Face:** Long, **Complexion:** Shallow, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing**: Grey Blue Colour Shirt.
Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the information about the dead male but no clue has come to light so far. If any one is having any information about this dead male please inform the undersigned.

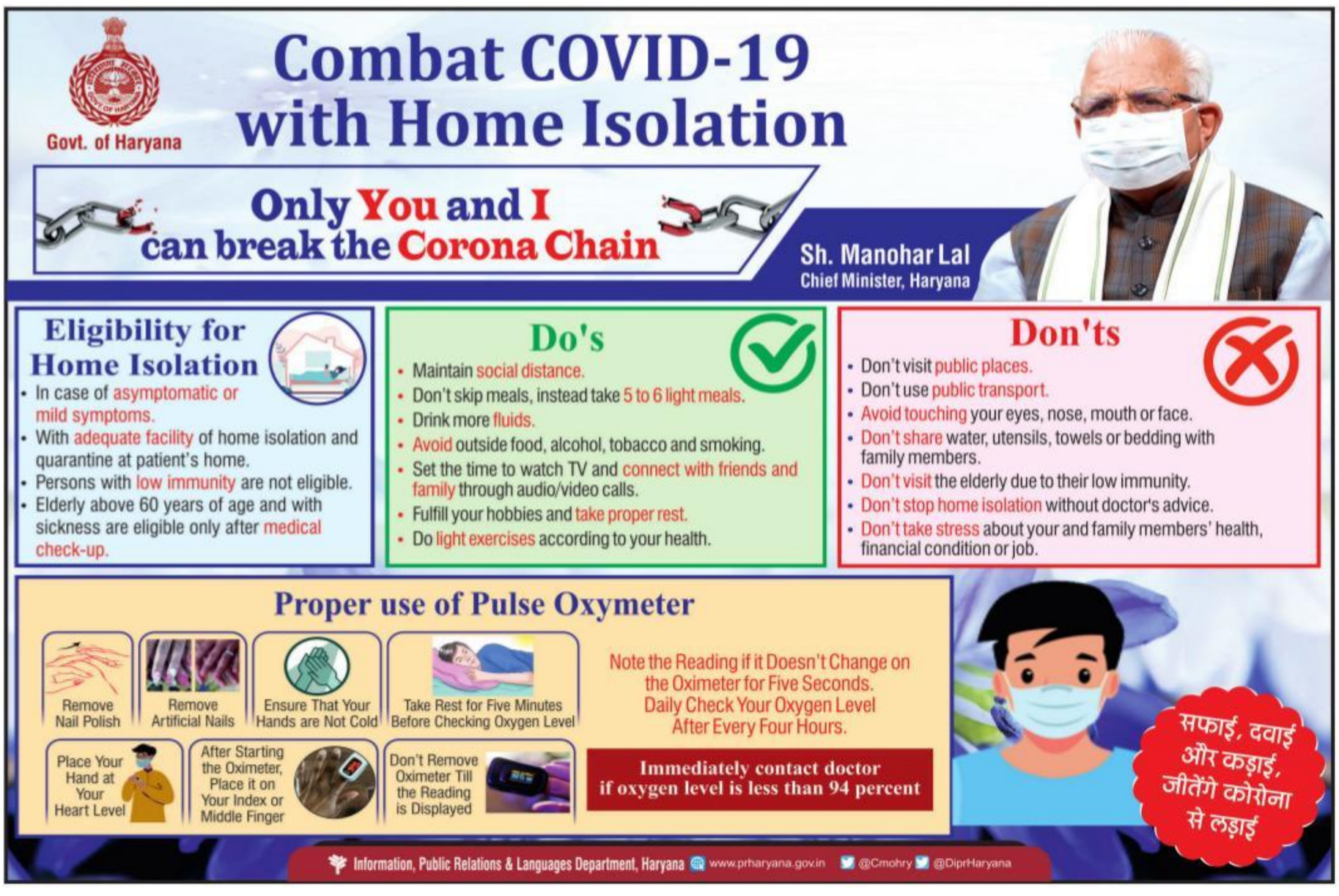
S.H.O
P.S. Kashmere Gate, Delhi
Ph.: 011-23967889, 23968730
DP/1229/N/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

Manoj Kumar

The General public is hereby informed that a man namely **Manoj Kumar**, **S/o** Shri Janki Prasad **R/o** H.No. A1/404-A, Gali No. 5, Madhu Vihar, New Delhi has been missing/kidnapped since 23.04.2012 from the area of PS Dabri, Delhi. In this regard a **DD No. 33A dated 28.04.2012 has been registered at P.S. Dabri, Delhi.** Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the missing/kidnapped man but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the missing/kidnapped man are as under:
Name: Manoj Kumar, **Gender:** Male, **Age:** 47 years, **Height:** 5'7", **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Face:** Round, **Wearing:** Black colour pant and green-black-white colour t-shirt.
If anyone has any information regarding this missing/kidnapped Man, kindly inform SHO/Dabri, Delhi.

E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax : 011-24368639
DP/212/DW/2021
SHO
P.S. Dabri, Delhi.
Ph. No. 011-25635178



The UP government is following the dictatorship. The government policies are against the democratic rights of employees

CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA
AFTER THE UTTAR PRADESH GOVERNMENT EXTENDED THE ESMA

THUMBNAILS

Officials of Lite Bite Food organisation distribute food to needy people in New Delhi on Friday. SNS

Diya Kumari in IPU panel: Rajsamand MP Diya Kumari has been nominated as a member of the Bureau of Inter-Parliamentary Union Standing Committee of United Nations Affairs.Parliament's effective response to emergency health crises, implementing effective policies and judiciously managing public resources will help us build a better tomorrow, she said. PTI

EAM focuses on Indo-US ties, climate change, pandemic

Leaders discusses a range of issues, agreed that US, India should continue working closely: White House

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, 28 MAY

External affairs minister S Jaishankar met US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan during which they held wide-ranging discussions and agreed that people-to-people ties and shared values are the foundation of the US-India strategic partnership that is helping to end the pandemic, supporting a free and open Indo-Pacific and providing global leadership on climate change.

Jaishankar, the first Indian Cabinet minister to visit the United States under the Biden administration, met Sullivan on Thursday.

"Pleased to meet Jake Sullivan. Wide-ranging discussions including on Indo-Pacific and Afghanistan. Conveyed appreciation for US solidarity in addressing the Covid challenge. India-US vaccine partnership can make a real difference," Jaishankar said in a tweet after the meeting.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar with US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines in New York.

"Our people-to-people ties and our values are the foundation of the US-India partnership and will help us end the pandemic, lead on climate, and support a free and open Indo-Pacific," Sullivan wrote on Twitter after the meeting. The US government and Americans across the country have delivered over USD 500 million in Covid relief to India. "We will beat this pandemic together," Sullivan tweeted.

During the meeting, Sullivan and Jaishankar welcomed the cooperation in recent weeks that resulted in deliveries of over $ 500 million in Covid relief supplies from the US federal and state governments, US companies and private citizens across America for the people of India, said Emily Horne, Spokesperson of the National Security Council, White House.

"They discussed a range of regional and global issues and agreed that the United States and India should continue working closely together to address common challenges throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

"They agreed that people-to-people ties and shared values are the foundation of the US-India strategic partnership that is helping to end the pandemic, supporting a free and open Indo-Pacific, and providing global leadership on climate change," she said.

India, the US and several other world powers have been talking about the need to ensure a free, open and thriving Indo-Pacific in the backdrop of China's growing military manoeuvring and aggression in the region.

The Chinese military is also actively eying the strategic Indian Ocean region to step up Beijing's influence.

China claims nearly all of the disputed South China Sea, though Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all claim parts of it. Beijing has built artificial islands and military installations in the South China Sea.

In 2017, India, Australia, Japan and the US gave shape to the long-pending proposal of setting up the 'Quad' or the Quadrilateral coalition to counter China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region.

Jaishankar also held an important meeting with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai to discuss a wide range of bilateral trade issues.

The minister described it as good discussions. "Welcomed her positive stance on IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) issues & support for efficient and robust supply chains," he said in a tweet after the meeting.

Early this month, Tai, after consultations with various stakeholders, had announced support to the move by India and South Africa to waive certain IP aspects of vaccines at the World Trade Organization .

"Our trade, technology and business cooperation are at the core of our strategic partnership. Enhancing them is vital to post-Covid economic recovery," Jaishankar said in another tweet.

Choksi to be kept in Dominica: Court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

A court in Dominica has "restrained" authorities from removing fugitive businessman Mehul Choksi from the Caribbean island country till further orders, local media reported. The order came on a petition filed by the lawyers of Choksi, who was detained in Dominica for "illegal entry".

"The legal team has filed a habeas corpus petition in Dominica for Mehul Choksi and have also highlighted deprivation of access to Mehul Choksi and deprivation of constitutional rights to legal assistance," Choksi's lawyer Vijay Aggarwal said.

The High Court of Justice in Dominica "restrained" the authorities from "removing" Choksi till further orders and listed the matter for hearing on Friday (May 28 at 9 am local time), Antigua News Room reported.

On Thursday, Aggarwal had raised doubts about the way Choksi had gone missing from Antigua and Barbuda only to be detained in Dominica, for illegal entry. Choksi's lawyer in Dominica, Wayne Marsh, had told a radio show that in a brief interaction with his client, allowed by authorities after a lot of efforts, the diamantaire had claimed that he was picked up at Jolly Harbour in Antigua and Barbuda by men looking like Indian and Antiguan policemen and was put in a vessel. Marsh had said he saw marks on the body of Choksi. He said Choksi is a citizen of Antigua and Barbuda and not India hence he should be sent back.

Aggarwal called the entire episode of Choksi's mysterious disappearance and detention in Dominica "fishy".

"Lawyers for Choksi in Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica have been trying to have a legal interview with him but they were denied access to him. After great effort they were able to speak to him for two minutes during which he narrated a horrifying experience which is an eye-opener and vindicates my stand that he would not have gone from Antigua voluntarily," Aggarwal said. PTI

NCB arrests Sushant's flatmate from Hyderabad

Pithani was Rajput's friend and was staying with him in Bandra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 28 MAY

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has arrested Siddhartha Pithani, a flatmate of Sushant Singh Rajput, in a drug case linked to the Bollywood actor's death last year, an official said on Friday. Pithani was arrested from Hyderabad and produced in a special court in Mumbai which sent him in the NCB custody till June 1.

Pithani was Rajput's friend and was staying with him in Bandra.

According to his statement to Mumbai Police, Pithani was among the first to see the actor's hanging body on June 14, 2020. The NCB began a separate probe when some WhatsApp chats of the late actor indicated drug use.

As Pithani's alleged role in drug procurement came to light, notices under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act were issued to him earlier, asking him to join the investigation, but he did not respond, the NCB official said.

A team led by the NCB's Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede had launched a manhunt for Pithani who was tracked down to Hyderabad.

A team of Mumbai NCB apprehended him in Hyderabad on 26 May, the official added.

He was arrested under the NDPS Act and produced before a local court which granted the NCB his 'transit remand', allowing the agency to take him to Mumbai. He was produced before a chief metropolitan magistrate in Mumbai on Friday who remanded him in the NCB custody till 1 June as requested, special public prosecutor Advait Sethna said.

SHEEP-SHAPE

A shepherd with his flock of sheep and goats, near the Atal Tunnel Rohtang North Portal on Friday. IANS

Yaas imperils tigers, crocs in Sunderbans

TIRTHANKAR MITRA
KOLKATA, 28 MAY

Eluding the eyes of most of the tourists and boatsmen, deer herds, Royal Bengal tigers and crocodiles had the free run of the jungles and rivers of Sundarbans till Yaas struck.

Even as rescuers are extending a helping hand to marooned humans, the wild denizens of the largest delta of the world can find themselves in the homes of humans whom they habitually avoid following animals' natural instinct.

Sight of pug marks triggered panic at Nagenabad village under Moipeeth-Baikunthapur gram panchayat area.

However, state forest department officials from Kultali identified the pug marks to be that of a wild cat restoring calm.

But forest department officials are keeping their fingers crossed as much of the tiger project area is inundated. Deaths of animals of endangered species are not ruled out as though amphibious, the onrushing waves can catch them unaware.

Even as rescuers are extending a helping hand to marooned humans, the wild denizens of the largest delta of the world can find themselves in the homes of humans whom they habitually avoid following animals' natural instinct

The nylon nets around the tiger projects having given way to the onrush of choppy river water can clear the path for "Mr Stripes" to the villages, a senior forest official said.

The villages in and around the tiger project thus remain sans a barrier to the big cat.

The uninterrupted flow of river water augmented by showers have made its way into Bhagabatpur crocodile project, it was learnt.

Initial panic subsided after state forest department officials assured that the crocodiles have not swum or slithered out of their breeding centre, the only one in the state.

Four deer have been rescued at Dayapur, Jingakhali, Dulki and Sonagaon.

The herbivores had swam to safety when Yaas was raging give rise to the fear that their natural predator tiger following its prey can lead to a man-animal conflict.

Covid origin: India backs call for more studies

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

India today termed the global study on the origin of Covid-19 convened by the World Health Organisation (WHO) "an important first step" and said the follow up of the report deserved the understanding and cooperation of all to reach robust conclusions.

The WHO's decision comes against the backdrop of the United States calling for a 'transparent' second phase of investigation into the origins of Covid-19 and the route of introduction to the human population.

Responding to media queries, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said, "The WHO convened global study on the origin of Covid-19 is an important first step. It stressed the need for next phase studies as also for further data and studies to reach robust conclusions."

The spokesperson said the follow up of the WHO report, and further studies deserved the understanding and cooperation of all.

In January, a global group of experts visited Wuhan in China to investigate the origins of Covid-19 and identified two most likely scenarios that caused the virus transmission to the human population, including the one involving intermediary host species.

During the initial days of the outbreak, it was being believed that it spread from a laboratory, but the WHO's global study group found it 'extremely unlikely'.

Recently, top American infectious disease expert Dr Anthony Fauci had raised doubts over the initial reports. He said, "I am not convinced... I think we should continue to investigate what went on in China until we find out to the best of our ability exactly what happened."

Yesterday, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian said the US, turning a blind eye to facts, science, the questionable study of origins and botched response at home, kept clamouring for additional investigation in China.

"This shows that they don't care about facts or truth and have zero interest in a serious science-based study of origins. Their aim is to use the pandemic to pursue stigmatization and political manipulation to shift the blame," Zhao said.

'Dharavi model' helps tame 2nd Covid wave in slum town

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 28 MAY

After reporting up to 99 Covid cases daily in April, Mumbai's slum colony of Dharavi has seen a gradual drop in single-day infections - below 5 - in the last couple of days with the tally of patients under treatment dropping to 50, marking a turnaround in the second wave.

The 'Dharavi model' of Covid management and the vaccination drive have helped in successfully containing the second wave in the area, officials said. A steady drop in cases in Dharavi, has brought huge relief to the civic authorities in Mumbai.

BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) officials said the slum cluster, spread across 2.5 square km, reported three and four cases on Wednesday and Thursday, respectively, while Mumbai is still witnessing daily coronavirus cases in four digits. They said Dharavi's active cases have come down to just 50. This was in sharp contrast to the adjoining Dadar and Mahim areas, which have 204 and 254 active cases, respectively.

Vaccination going on at the BMC school vacination centre, in Mumbai on Friday.

Since the outbreak of coronavirus in April 2020, the slum-dominated area has reported 354 deaths (till May 26). Of those, 42 fatalities have been recorded since February 7, 2021, the officials said.

UP vaccine goof-up: Medical officer transferred

SIDDHARTHNAGAR, 28 MAY

A health worker was suspended and a medical officer transferred two weeks after 20 villagers here were administered Covaxin after getting Covishield as their first dose. The goof-up took place on May 14 at the primary health centre in Barhni where people from Audahi Kala and another village received Covaxin shots. An inquiry was ordered and action taken against Auxiliary Nursing Midwife (ANM) Kalavati was suspended and Shivesht Kumar, the medical officer, for negligence, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Sandeep Chaudhary said. The CMO also issued a recovery order of Rs 7,500 against Immunisation Officer Shanti Singh after 50 doses of Covishield were found missing from the cold chain, it said. Meanwhile, medical teams visited villages, to examine the people who received the wrong jabs. PTI

Yaas readiness acid test for Bihar's Covid preparations

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
PATNA, 28 MAY

The intermittent rains as a result of *Yaas* has exposed the Bihar government's preparations to fight Covid with several government hospitals across the state getting flooded due to rainwater. Let aside the government hospitals located in rural areas, even the condition in the state capital remains very pathetic.

Patients admitted to Jai Prabha hospital in Patna were shocked when they found the hospital premises flooded and the water entering the wards meant for Covid patients and the Covid testing. TV footages showed the hapless patients and their attendants wading through knee-deep water to meet their daily needs. Medicines, used syringes and bottles were also found floating. "This is our destiny. We have been working in this environment and will have to work this time again," said a doctor . A testing centre staff said the Covid testing would go on even though the premises remained flooded since they had no option. Similar is the condition of the Nalanda Medical College and Hospital in Patna.

TV footages showed the hapless patients and their attendants wading through knee-deep water to meet their daily needs. Medicines, used syringes and bottles were also found floating

TENDER

NORTHERN RAILWAY

TENDER NOTICE

For and on behalf of the President of India, the Deputy Chief Mechanical Engineer (Train Set), Northern Railway, Charbagh Workshop, Lucknow invites following e-tender from reputed firms for works as given below:-

Tender No.	W-CB-01-CTRB-T18-2021-22
Name of Work	Refurbishment/Overhauling of Timken Make CTRB (Type: 130x240) for Train-18.
Quantity	256 Nos.
Estimated Cost of Work	Rs. 64,04,096/-
Earnest Money	Rs. 0/- only
Cost of Tender Form	Rs. 5,000/- only (accepted through net banking or payment gateway only)
Period of Contract	24 Months
Date & Time for Submission of Tender	from 10.06.2021 to 24.06.2021 up to 15:00 Hrs.
Date & Time for Opening of Tender	after 15:15 Hrs. on 21.06.2021

- The tender form may be submitted on the website www.ireps.gov.in from 10.06.2021 to 24.06.2021 (up to 15:00 Hrs.)
- Mannual offers are not allowed against this tender, any such mannual offer received shall be ignored.
- Contractors are allowed to make payment against this tender towards tender document cost and earnest money only through online payment modes available on IREPS portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc.. Mannual payments through Demand draft, Banker's cheque, Deposit receipt, FDR etc. are not allowed.
- The tender will be opened on specified date and time as above. In case the above date is a holiday the tender opening would be conducted at the same times on the next working day.
- No post tender correspondance for submission of additional documents shall be entertained after opening the technical & commercial offers. Even suo-moto post letter of the tender shall be treated as NULL & Void.

No.: NR/CB Workshop/May/CTRB Train-18/2021-22/01 Date: 25.05.2021
1148/2021

Serving Customers with a Smile

SC asks states to help children orphaned by Covid-19

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Observing that it cannot even imagine how many children in this large country have got orphaned due to the devastating pandemic, the Supreme Court Friday directed the State authorities to immediately identify them and provide relief.

The top court asked state governments to understand the agony of children starving on the streets and directed the district authorities that they be immediately taken care of without waiting for any further orders from the courts.

A vacation bench of Justices L N Rao and Aniruddha Bose directed district administrations to identify the orphans in their areas and upload their data on the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) website by Saturday evening.

The top court's direction came on an application filed by amicus curiae Gaurav Agrawal in the pending suo motu case seeking identification of orphaned children due to Covid or otherwise and providing them immediate relief by the state governments. The bench said state governments must inform it of the position of these children and the steps they have taken to provide them immediate relief. We have read

somewhere that in Maharashtra over 2,900 children have lost their one or both the parents due to Covid. We don't have an exact number of such children. We cannot even imagine how many such children in this large country have got orphaned due to this devastating pandemic, the bench said. It told the state government's counsel appearing in the matter, I hope you understand the agony of the children starving on the streets. You please ask the state authorities to immediately take care of their basic needs.

The top court noted that the Centre has already issued advisory to the concerned authorities for the protection of children, who have lost their parents due to Covid.

There is an obligation on the part of the authorities to ensure such children in need are taken care of, the bench said, while referring to various provisions of the Juvenile Justice Act.

It said the district administration authorities should upload the latest data of such orphaned children on the website Baal Swaraj' of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) by Saturday evening.

We are of the opinion that Centre and State shall get the latest information on the identification of children, who have lost their one or both the parents due to pandemic and the steps taken to attend to their basic needs, it said, and listed the matter on June 1. At the outset, Agrawal said that he has filed the application as there are numerous children, who have lost one or both the parents or guardians due to the COVID and they need to be immediately taken care of by the state governments.

He said there are two categories of children adversely affected due to the Covid -- the ones who lost both parents/guardians and those who have lost the earning parent/guardian of the family since March 2020.

epaper.thestatesman.com

Considering the impact of the cyclone Rs 1,000 crore is grossly insufficient to meet the needs of lakhs rendered homeless and without a livelihood.

CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY RANDEEP SURJEWALA
URGING PM MODI TO SHOW MAGNANIMITY FOR CYCLONE-HIT STATES

Lockdown extended in Tamil Nadu

CHENNAI, 28 MAY

Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin on Friday extended the ongoing complete lockdown in the state by one more week till 6 am on 7 June. Though capital Chennai showed signs of flattening the curve, the industrial city Coimbatore neighboring Kerala witnessed steep rise in new cases giving concern to the authorities.

During the lockdown, supply of vegetables and fruits will continue through government departments while groceries will be sold through vehicles or push carts in association with local grocery shops. Besides, delivery of groceries at the doorsteps of the customers for orders taken over the telephone and online is allowed between 7 am and 6 pm. The CM, in a statement here, said with a view to reducing the difficulties faced by the public, Covid-19 relief kits containing 13 grocery items will be supplied to all rice cardholders in the state free of cost during the month of June. With western districts, especially Coimbatore, becoming a cause of concern with rising numbers of Covid cases, Mr Stalin will visit the industrial city Sunday to personally monitor measures being taken to control the spread.

Health Minister M Subramanian and Health Secretary Dr J Radhakrishnan today rushed to Coimbatore to take stock of the situation. SNS

Andhra to set up 16 health hubs

State govt to offer free land for super speciality hospitals

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD, 28 MAY

After neighbouring Telangana recently turned away ambulances carrying Covid-19 patients from Andhra Pradesh chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy today announced plans to set up 16 health hubs through public-private participation across the state with the government offering free land to those willing to invest Rs 100 crore for super speciality hospitals in order to ramp up health infrastructure.

After bifurcation of the state Andhra Pradesh was left without a tier I city and people of the state are often forced to travel to Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru to avail quality medical care. Keen to improve the health infrastructure and medical care available to the people Mr Reddy in a meeting with officials elaborated upon his plans to set up at least one hub in each of the 13 district and the three municipal corporations at Vijayawada, Tirupati and Rajahmundry. About 30-40 acres of land can be acquired for each health hub. He said: "Each hospital should be allotted five acres of land. Hospitals which can invest some Rs 100 crore in three years will be given land." Along with the 16 medical colleges and hospitals and nursing colleges the chief minister now targets to set up at least over 80 multi-speciality or super-speciality hospitals across the state.

The Andhra Pradesh government has already covered treatment of Covid-19 under its Arogyashri health scheme. However, it has not stopped those who can afford better medical care to travel to distant cities in neighbouring states for treatment. With the Centre limiting resource allocation such as oxygen and critical drugs according to population Telangana government decided to stop ambulances from Andhra Pradesh at its borders leading to a huge controversy. The Andhra Pradesh government too came under fire for failing to provide better medical care. It was only after the intervention of Telangana High Court that the ambulances were allowed to cross the borders.

Yedi will complete term, says state BJP chief

BENGALURU, 28 MAY:

State BJP chief Nalin Kateel today ruled out any possibility of a replacement for chief minister, B S Yediyurappa.

He told newsmen late this evening that Yedyurappa " is a unanimous leader" and would complete his term . He also directed his partymen and legislators alike to stick to management of the pandemic instead of any other activity.

At the same time he was quick to assert that the party would also seek an explanation from tourism minister, C P Yogeshwar ,over his disgruntlement, indicated, incidentally, by the latter , yesterday . In fact, the minister had clearly hinted that Yedyurappa's son, Vijayendra, was interfering in the affairs of the state, without naming him, though.

This did not come as a surprise as some other MLAs and ministers have often raised the issue ,even if discreetly. This apart, the disgruntled ministers have even expressed concern over allegations of corruption in the government. SNS

Manufacturing cycle of Covaxine takes four months

HYDERABAD, 28 MAY

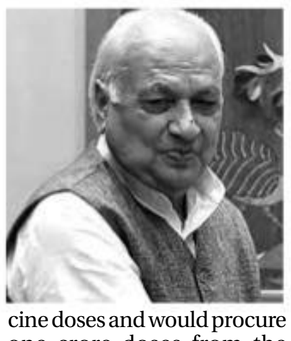
Amidst complaints of vaccine shortages and delay in getting stocks Covaxin manufacturer Bharat Biotech has clarified that there is a lag time of four months for its vaccine to translate into actual vaccination. "The timeline for manufacturing, testing and release for a batch of Covaxin is approximately 120 days, depending on the technology framework and regulatory guidelines to be met. Thus production batches of Covaxin that were initiated during March this year will be ready for supply only during the month of June," read a statement released by Bharat Biotech. All vaccines supplied in the country are mandated by law to be submitted for testing and release to the Central Drugs Laboratory.

The timeline for vaccine supplies to reach the depots of the state and Central governments from Bharat Biotech's facilities is around two days. More days are required to further distribute the supplies.

Meanwhile, in a bid to augment the Covid-19 vaccine production, the Union Government has decided to support the public sector undertaking Indian Immunological Limited (IIL), to produce drug substance for Covaxin from the month of June. SNS

Second wave would pose challenge to state's economic growth: Kerala governor

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 28 MAY



Kerala governor Arif Mohammad Khan on Friday said that the second wave of the Covid pandemic would cause major impediments to the state's economic growth as it is likely to witness high revenue and fiscal deficits.

"We expected a sharp recovery in the economic growth to 6.6% in 2021-22. But the second wave of the pandemic can be an impediment to this expectation," governor Khan said in his first policy address to the 15th Legislative Assembly. He further said that the downturn in growth of GSDP would naturally have adverse consequences on the state's revenue receipts as well Reiterating the state government's policy to provide free vaccines to all, Khan said the differential pricing of vaccines would cause an additional burden of Rs 1,000 crore to the state exchequer. "The state government has floated a global tender for import of three crore vaccine doses and would procure one crore doses from the domestic market," the governor said .

Speaking on the welfare programmes implemented,the governor said the state government, in the current second wave, has announced Rs 1,000 crore as ex-gratia payments to all BPL families who do not have welfare pensions.

Flaying the central government, governor Khan said the Centre's imposition of conditions for raising the state's annual borrowing limit ran counter to the basic principles of cooperative federalism. On the Cooperative sector, the recent policies of the Centre were retrogressive for the sector, the governor said.

The academic quality and physical infrastructure of higher education institutions will be enhanced to national and international standards so as to ensure Kerala's steady transformation into a modern knowledge society, he said . The quality of self-financed higher education Institutions will be ensured through a state-level accreditation mechanism, he said.

Stating that the government will continue its welfare schemes, he said the state government continue the distribution of kits of essential commodities and ensure prompt payment of welfare pensions

Charting out government's of agriculture,he said the production of vegetables in Kerala will be increased to attain self-sufficiency in it,farmers' income will increase by 50 per cent and all Krishi Bhavans in the state will be converted to Smart Krishi Bhavans. Research from universities will be utilised to enhance agricultural yield.

11 dead after consuming spurious liquor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ALIGARH (UP), 28 MAY

Eleven people died on Friday and some more were taken ill after allegedly consuming spurious liquor sold by a licensed vendor here, a senior official said.

Taking note of the incident, the authorities ordered a magisterial probe and suspend three excise officials.

The inquiry will be conducted by an additional district magistrate-rank officer, DM Chandra Bhushan Singh told mediapersons.

The administration is likely to invoke the stringent National Security Act (NSA) against those found guilty, he said.

Confirming the 11 deaths, the DM said information about other people who had consumed liquor bought from the same vendor is trickling in.

DIG Dipak Kumar said the Lodha police station was informed in the morning about the death of two people after consuming country-made liquor bought from a vendor in Karsia. The victims were truck drivers who had gathered at a gas depot on the Aligarh-Tapaal highway for work, he said.

However, when police and senior district officials reached the spot, they were informed that six more people belonging to Karsia and adjoining villages had died, the DIG said, adding that the bodies were sent for a post-mortem examination.

Some of those taken ill were rushed to the district hospital and from there shifted to Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital at Aligarh Muslim University. The liquor shop has been sealed and samples have been collected for testing.

Meanwhile, Additional Chief Secretary (Excise) Sanjay Bhoosreddy said District Excise Officer Dheeraj Sharma, Excise Inspector Rajesh Kumar Yadav and Head Constable Ashok Kumar have been suspended with immediate effect.

A departmental action has also been initiated against them, he added. According to locals, people had started falling sick on Thursday. Many others from neighbouring villages had also consumed the liquor, they added. Meanwhile, family members of the victims were seen crying at Karsia and Andla villages. Andla village head Om Dutt said apart from those who died, a large number of people were taken ill after consuming spurious liquor since Thursday afternoon.

He alleged that widespread reports suggested a racket behind spurious liquor.

The vice-president of the Youth Congress in UP, Gorang Dev Chauhan, demanded that all liquor vends in the state be closed.

Yaas: List of sector-wise aid, nodal depts issued by govt

'Duare Traan' scheme will start from 3 June, applications will be received from 3 to 18 June

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 28 MAY

The state government today enumerated on financial compensation and its nodal departments after chief minister Mamata Banerjee had launched 'Duare Traan' to distribute relief to people at doorstep in the aftermath of cyclone Yaas.

The state government has announced sector-wise aid depending on the magnitude of damage and notified its nodal departments.

The scheme was launched yesterday with an initial fund of Rs 1,000 crore. The state disaster management department today notified the compensation amount along with the nodal departments so as to ensure proper distribution and transparency.

Farmers will receive an assistance of a minimum of Rs 1,000 to a maximum of Rs 2,500 for crop damage and the agriculture department will be the nodal agency. The preliminary report has found that 1.16 lakh hectare of agriculture land have been damaged due to the cyclone leading to a total loss of over Rs 2,000 crore. This apart, a cash compensation of Rs 5,000 will be given to each affected farmer for damaged betel-vine structures.

With three lakh houses being damaged leading to losses amounting to Rs 3,000 crore, the government will provide Rs 20,000 for fully damaged houses and Rs 5,000 for partially damaged.

For damage of cattle, the compensation has been categorised, for instance Rs 30,000 (for buffalo, cow), Rs 3,000 (sheep, goat, pig), Rs 25,000 (bullock), Rs 16,000 (calf). The animal resources development department had managed to save some cattle by shifting them to 500 shelters.

Assistance would be given to fishermen for repair and replacement of hundis, nets or boats. For instance, Rs 300 would be given per fisherman per hundi, Rs 2,600 per net and Rs 10,000 and Rs 5,000 for fully damaged and partially damaged boat respectively.

Further, assistance would also be given to artisans and weavers for replacement of damaged tools, loss of raw material or finished goods and for damage to godowns or showrooms. Rs 4,100 would be given per artisan for equipment and for raw materials.

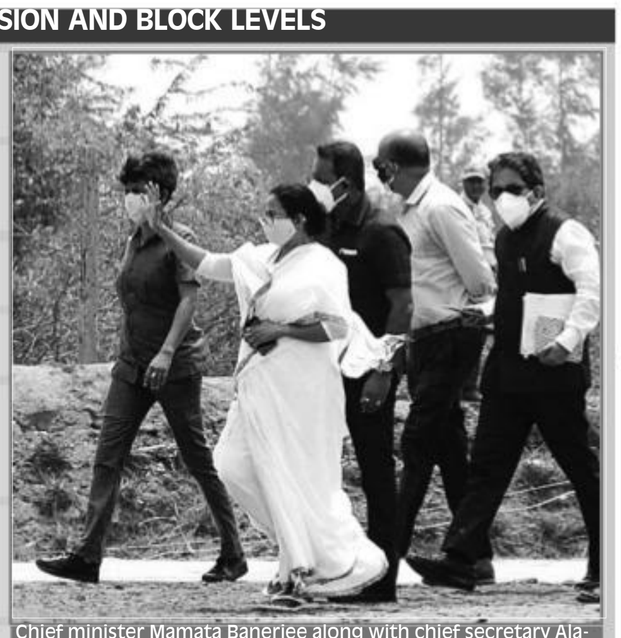
To ensure smooth implementation and seamless coordination between various stakeholders a state-level task force headed by chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay was set up with heads of several departments. Similar task forces were set up at the district, sub-divisional and block levels.

According to the notification, 'Duare Traan' scheme will start from 3 June, applications would be received from 3 to 18 June and enquiries would be done from 19 to 30 June.

Beneficiaries will receive the funds directly to their bank accounts from 1 to 7 July.

TASK FORCE SET UP AT DISTRICT, SUB-DIVISION AND BLOCK LEVELS

- **Farmers will receive an assistance of a minimum of Rs 1,000 to a maximum of Rs 2,500 for crop damage and the agriculture department will be the nodal agency.**
- **The preliminary report has found that 1.16 lakh hectare of agriculture land have been damaged due to the cyclone leading to a total loss of over Rs 2,000 crore.**
- **A cash compensation of Rs 5,000 will be given to each affected farmer for damaged betel-vine structures.**
- **The government will provide Rs 20,000 for fully damaged houses and Rs 5,000 for partially damaged**
- **For damage of cattle, the compensation has been categorised, for instance Rs 30,000 (for buffalo, cow), Rs 3,000 (sheep, goat, pig), Rs 25,000 (bullock), Rs 16,000 (calf)**
- **For repair of hundis, nets and boats Rs 300 would be given per fisherman per hundi, Rs 2,600 per net and Rs 10,000 and Rs 5,000 for fully damaged and partially damaged boat respectively**
- **Assistance would also be given to artisans and weavers for replacement of damaged tools.**



Chief minister Mamata Banerjee along with chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay and others visit the Sagar Island in South 24-Parganas on Friday. ■ SNS

Mamata seeks ₹20K-cr relief package, skips review meet

BISWABRATA GOSWAMI
MIDNAPORE, 28 MAY

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee skipped the slated review meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and instead met him at the Kalaikunda Air Force station near Kharagpur in Midnapore west.

Miss Banerjee submitted a detailed report of the damages caused by cyclone Yaas, in a separate meeting with Modi for which a slot of 15 mins was allotted.

In the meeting which lasted for about a few minutes, Miss Banerjee told Modi that West Bengal is estimated to have suffered a loss of Rs 20,000 crore.

She also submitted a proposal of two packages of Rs 10,000 crore each for the development of cyclone affected Digha and the Sunderbans.

"We have sought a package of Rs 10,000 crore each for the redevelopment of Digha and the Sunderbans... It could well be that we might not get anything," she said following an administrative meeting held in the tourist town of Digha.

Accompanied by chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay, the CM reached Kalaikunda air base after conducting an aerial survey of cyclone-hit areas in North 24 Parganas district.

Earlier in the day, Modi flew down to Odisha to review the post-cyclone situation, and then made his way to West Bengal, where the storm wreaked havoc in the coastal districts.

He landed at Kalaikunda after conducting an aerial survey in Odisha and Bengal. "When the PM arrived to attend the review meeting, there was no one from the West Bengal government. Both chief minister Mamata Banerjee and the chief secretary of West Bengal were present in the same premises and yet they did not come to receive the PM," a source said.

A government official said the PM, Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and Union ministers patiently waited for 30 minutes for state government representatives to turn up. Suddenly, Miss Banerjee strode in and handed over a copy of the report on damages. She left the Air Force station before the meeting began.

According to sources, Miss Banerjee did not attend the meeting due to the invitation of Leader of Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly Suvendu Adhikari. It has also been learned from sources that on behalf of the chief minister's office that a letter was written to the Prime Minister's office asking why MLAs and MPs were being included in this meeting.

Later, Modi announced financial assistance of Rs 1,000 crore for immediate relief activities and Rs 500 crore for Odisha. Another Rs 500 crore was announced for West Bengal and Jharkhand, which will be released on the basis of the damage.

An ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh to the next of kin of deceased and Rs 50,000 for those seriously injured was also announced, the PMO said.

"Centre will deploy an inter-ministerial team to visit the states to assess the extent of damage, based on which further assistance will be given. PM assured Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand that the Centre would closely work with the state governments at this difficult time," a PMO statement said.

In the meeting, Modi asked the officials to ensure restoration work in the affected areas at the earliest to resolve people's plight.

Meanwhile, Dhankhar slammed Miss Banerjee for skipping the review meet with Modi. In a tweet, he said, "It would have served interests of state and its people for CM and officials @MamataOfficial to attend Review Meet by PM. Confrontational stance ill serves interests of State or democracy. Non participation by CM and officials not in sync with constitutionalism or rule of law."

Before Debts Recovery Tribunal-II, Delhi
4th Floor, Jeevan Tara Building, Parliament Street, New Delhi-110001

O.A. No. 785/18 Dt. 16-02-2021
Corporation Bank Applicant
Versus
Mr. Damnish Kumar & Ors. Respondent

To,
Defendant
3. M/s Pebbles Prolease Pvt. Ltd., A Group of Amrapali Dream Valley Pvt. Ltd. (Builder & Developer) A-169, 2nd Floor, Mandawali Fazalpur Ganga Ram Gali Shakarpur, Delhi-92 Also at: 307, 3rd Floor Nipun Towers Plot No. 15, Community Centre, Karkardooma, Delhi-92, Also at: C-56/40, Sect.-62, Noida, U.P., Also at: GH-05, Sect-Tech Zone IV, Greater Noida, U.P. Also at: 83, AGCR, Enclave Delhi-92, Also at: A-905, Amrapali Green Indirapuram, Ghaziabad, U.P. 201010

Whereas the above named applicant(s) has / have instituted a case for recovery of **Rs 1,10,11,641/- (Rs One Crore Ten Lacs Eleven Thousand Six Hundred Forty One Only)** against you and where as it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in the ordinary way therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in the Tribunal on **07-06-2021 at 10.30 A.M.**

Take notice that in default of your appearance on the day before the mentioned, the case will be heard and determined in your absence.

by order of the Tribunal
For Registrar, DRT-II, Delhi

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of Rail passengers that Railways have decided to extend the stoppage of Train No. 04441/04442 Ghaziabad-New Delhi-Ghaziabad EMU Spl. upto Delhi Jn. station w.e.f. 01.06.2021 to 15.06.2021 as per details given below :-

Train No. 04441/04442 Ghaziabad-New Delhi-Ghaziabad EMU Spl. (Daily) extended upto Delhi Jn.

Train No. 04441		↓ STATIONS ↑	Train No. 04442	
ARR.	DEP.		ARR.	DEP.
----	No Change	GHAZIABAD	01.20	----
No Change	No Change	SAHIBABAD	01.00	01.01
No Change	No Change	ANAND VIHAR (T.)	00.50	00.51
No Change	No Change	TILAK BRIDGE	00.41	00.42
No Change	No Change	SHIVAJI BRIDGE	00.36	00.37
23.45	23.47	NEW DELHI	00.30	00.32
00.05	----	DELHI JN.	----	00.15

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table of stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

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

RailMadad Helpline No. 139
Visit RailMadad Website :- www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in
Download RailMadad app.
1155/2021
Please join us on
NORTHERN RAILWAY
Your Convenience - Our Concern
Visit us at : www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of passengers that Railways have decided to change the timings of Train No. 02617 Ernakulam Jn.-Hazrat Nizamuddin Superfast Special (Daily) at Panvel & Kalyan Jn. Railway Stations as under:-

Revised Timings of Train No. 02617 Ernakulam Jn.-Hazrat Nizamuddin Superfast Special (Daily) at Panvel & Kalyan Jn. Railway Stations

STATION	TRAIN No. 02617				With Effect From
	Existing Timings		Revised Timings		
	ARR.	DEP.	ARR.	DEP.	
PANVEL	12:35	12:40	12:20	12:25	30.05.2021 (Sunday)
KALYAN JN	13:42	13:45	13:27	13:30	

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table of stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

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

1151/2021
RailMadad Helpline No. 139
Visit RailMadad Website :- www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in
Download RailMadad app.
Please join us on
NORTHERN RAILWAY
Your Convenience - Our Concern
Visit us at : www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

The Statesman
Incorporating and directly descended from THE FRIEND OF INDIA - Founded 1818

New Kerala Model

With the election of MB Rajesh of the CPI(M) as Speaker of the 15th Kerala Legislative Assembly with 96 votes against 40 of PC Vishnunath of the Congress on Tuesday, Pinarayi Vijayan began the historic second consecutive term of his Left Democratic Front government on a confident note, unmindful of the jinx that has visited every Kerala government with a massive legislative majority. In the current 140-member Assembly, the CPI(M) boasts of 62 members and the CPI 17, making a total of 79. Minor alliance partners have added 20 to the kitty, taking the total to an unassailable 99. Therein lurks the danger. In 1967, after prolonged spells of President's rule and continued political instability, legendary EMS Namboodiripad of the CPI(M) rustled up a seven-party United Front with the CPI and the Indian Union Muslim League among others and swept the polls with 113 seats in the 133-member House. By the sheer weight of numbers the United Front crashed in less than two years. Similarly in the 1977 General Election held after the internal emergency when the Congress was getting wiped out in most of the States, the United Democratic Front led by the Congress swept the polls with 113 seats in the 140-member House. The original UDF was led by the CPI and included, other than the Congress, the Muslim League and the RSP. Voted to power in 1970 with just 80 members, it stayed on in office for six and a half years, thanks to Indira Gandhi's internal emergency. The UDF won 112 seats in the 140-member Assembly in 1977 and K Karunakaran of the Congress became the Chief Minister. He was forced to quit in three weeks. AK Antony who succeeded him lasted just one year, followed by PK Vasudevan Nair of the CPI. Before he could settle down, the CPI left the UDF to join the LDF and he resigned. Mohammad Koya of the Muslim League took over as Chief Minister. His government fell in two months.

The UDF voted in with such an overwhelming majority could not complete half its term. With the excessive reliance on veterans the CPI-M had frittered away its chances in West Bengal and Tripura. Learning from this experience, Vijayan evolved a strategy of denying tickets to those who had completed two terms or more as MLA. By this decision veterans, including TM Thomas, popular finance minister, were kept out. In forming the new Council of 21 Ministers, Vijayan chose 17 new faces from the CPI(M) and the CPI reciprocated by selecting four freshers. Vijayan is the lone exception. He was under tremendous pressure to retain at least KK Shailaja, Health Minister, who had gained international acclaim for her handling first of the Nipah outbreak and then the Covid-19 pandemic. There is no reason to believe Veena George, a former journalist chosen to succeed Shailaja, will not be able to tackle the problems as effectively as her predecessor. The central leadership may not be happy with the induction of Mohammed Riaz in the Council of Ministers simply because he is the son-in-law of Vijayan. His new team looks as promising as his first team.

War Crimes

Benjamin Netanyahu has his back to the wall with the UN's rights chief, Michelle Bachelot, making it explicit that the recent Israeli strikes in Gaza constitute "war crimes", specifically that the offensive resulted in extensive civilian deaths and major destruction in the besieged enclave, home to two million people. That observation by a senior representative of a global rights body lends a new dimension to the eleven-day war, one of the worst hostilities in the recent tortuous narrative of the Middle East.

The likes of the Israeli Prime Minister need to reflect on the point that Israel's recent attacks on the Gaza Strip that killed more than 200 Palestinians constitute "war crimes" if they are shown to be disproportionate. Bachelet's comments on Thursday came as she opened a special session of the UN Human Rights Council, called at the request of Pakistan ~ on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation ~ and Palestine. Arguably with the moral support of the United Nations, an Islamic bloc has begun to germinate against the predominantly Jewish Israel. Ms Bachelot's message is indirectly addressed to the "friends" of Israel and the comity of nations. "Although reportedly targeting members of armed groups and their military infrastructure, the Israeli attacks resulted in extensive civilian deaths and injuries, as well as large-scale destruction and damage to civilian objects," she said, highlighting the scale of the destruction in Gaza, which has been under a 14-year Israeli blockade. "There is no doubt that Israel has the right to defend its citizens and residents. However, Palestinians have rights too. The same rights." Considering the number of casualties and the extent of destruction, that message must resonate in the echo chambers of Jerusalem. The enclave of two million people has been dubbed by the UN as the world's "largest open-air prison".

The imminent expulsion of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah led to widespread protests from Palestinians, which drew a harsh Israeli crackdown and raids on Al-Aqsa Mosque ~ considered the third holiest site in Islam. Palestinian factions in Gaza, including Hamas, said they fired rockets against Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem. Israel launched the military offensive after the rocket attacks began, but it has been criticised for use of disproportionate force in the Palestinian territory. The UN Human Rights Council is debating a draft resolution to launch a broad, international investigation into violations surrounding the latest Gaza violence, but also of "systematic" abuses in the Palestinian territories and inside Israel. Israel, Palestine and the world must keep their fingers crossed.

Challenge to education

While personal proximities and close physical monitoring of progress has been the hallmark of our education from time immemorial, virtual teaching has significantly eroded the role of the teaching community in exercising effective control

A year ago, most stakeholders in the education process were blindsided by the realization that closure of educational institutions were to be for an indefinite period. Accepting that education had to be carried out in the virtual medium, there was overnight a flood of online platforms catering to the newfound necessity of contacting the student community and keeping a semblance of education going under severe socio-economic conditions. The immediate crisis that came to the fore tore across the student community and the proverbial divide between the haves and have-nots was put into the sharpest focus, unseen across generations. Dependence on the internet and suitable and expensive mobility equipment immediately threw almost half of the nation's student population out of the educational system. Compounded by the fact that sudden closure of establishments rendered millions without the basic necessities of existence, it was a foregone conclusion that poverty would push another 30 per cent of the student population out of the reach of educational institutions. Effectively, within a month, the active student population of the country shrunk by 80 per cent and by June 2020 it was a foregone conclusion that most of the dropouts would be unable to return to the fold in the near future.

For a country whose policy makers and stakeholders had been exerting themselves continuously to bring down student drop-outs to single digit percentages, the sudden turn of events annulled decades of painstaking reach-out to bring in inclusive education across the country. Also, the sudden closure of educational institutions and the consequent mass dropouts across the country rendered the newly framed National Educational Policy practically infructuous in the short and medium run.

The crisis is not limited to our country with UNESCO figures claiming a total drop-out number of 1.6 billion children on a modest estimate. Such drop-out figures are not limited to south Asia or sub-Saharan Africa but encompass countries as diverse and advanced as the middle-income economies of Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Spain and Portugal. Clearly, Covid's impact on education is not merely universal but is also incomprehensible in its extent, range and depth. In order to frame recovery policies, comprehensive data-mining efforts have been planned and are under various stages of implementation.

RUDRASHIS DATTA
The writer is Assistant Professor of English, Pratilata Waddedar Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal

The chief among them is the UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank joint survey on National Educational Response to Covid-19 School Closures and the Covid-19 Global Educational Recovery Tracker, a new tool developed in partnership by Johns Hopkins University's e-School+ Initiative, UNICEF and the World Bank. The primary focus of this global outreach is to monitor school reopening and aid recovery planning efforts in more than 200 countries and territories. Initial data, as of April 2021 reveal that more than 168 million children globally have been shut out of any form of in-person learning for almost an entire year. Alarmingly, this figure does not include the children who have dropped out of school entirely as a result of the pandemic.

Covid-induced educational disruptions in India are increasingly bringing out other equally serious manifestations of the harm inflicted by the pandemic on education. While active involvement of the mobile service providers and equipment manufacturers for communication devices have mitigated the hardship to the student community to a large extent by increasing the coverage of mobile services and availability of cheaper equipment, it is increasingly becoming clear that education and assessment in the virtual medium are exposing their own patterns of disruptions, most of which threaten to expand to life-long cognitive debilities.

In the Indian context, the greatest challenge to education has come from the exclusive but unavoidable reliance on the virtual medium. While personal proximities and close physical monitoring of progress has been the hallmark of our education from time immemorial, virtual teaching has significantly eroded the role of the teaching community from exercising effective control of their instructions, with most teachers still struggling to know the number of students actively participating in the virtual instruction.

The scenario with online examinations and evaluation is more precarious. While we have adopted a 'blended' evaluation mode, closely resembling the western concept of the open-book examination, it is commonly seen that the evaluation has reduced itself to students copying 'answers' at home from books or the web and transferring them to institutions for evaluation. Needless to say, they end up with marks which are at the upper end of the spectrum. Clearly, such evaluation and the inflated marks they carry are not only poor indicators of student proficiency, but may actually turn counterproductive for such students in the long run with the stigma of having been evaluated under such farcical circumstances sticking to them before future employers and institutional job providers.

This is compounded by the huge cognitive and academic deficiencies that the student community is facing with most stakeholders agreeing that effective online instruction is easier said than done.

The challenge to the teaching community is no less profound. Within the space of a year, teachers have been burdened not only with managing online classes and evaluation but are constantly weighted down by a constant stream of online teaching products competing for their attention, most being repetitive applications and redundant online methodologies. Such inane teaching technologies have significantly diverted the energy of the teaching and educational administrative community; such energy could have been better used in augmenting effective instructional and evaluation efforts.

Under such challenging circumstances, the need of the hour is to garner a talent pool of stakeholders to steer education at such a critical time. Clearly, conventional policy bureaucratese would serve little purpose. Also, Indian educational contexts and conditions are radically different from international scenarios and we would not have the luxury of adopting foreign strategies which would face strong headwinds in micro-level educational contexts in our country. Mitigating the severe setback to education and rehabilitating the compromised education of millions of students across the country through appropriate remedies are the only ways in which damage to our student community can be minimized. A year into the pandemic and the long-term impact on education is already threatening an entire generation of our youth through poor skill attainment and compromised instruction.

This shall directly impact their ability to attain proficiencies for employability. The talent pool bottleneck this crisis shall create would threaten and choke the services and manufacturing sectors in the long run, thereby impacting the economy as a whole. The earlier this long-term danger is understood and addressed, the better it would be for our community.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Consolidated alliance

Last week's first in-person summit between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and US President Joe Biden served to put the two countries' alliance back on track. Their agreement on a broad range of issues is expected to help expand the scope and depth of the seven-decade-long alliance beyond bridging differences that came to the fore under the presidency of Biden's predecessor Donald Trump.

What made this possible were efforts by the two leaders to come closer to each other's requests, based on the need to upgrade cooperation between the allies to a higher dimension amid changing regional and global conditions.

At their summit in Washington on Friday, Biden reaffirmed his willingness to engage diplomatically with North Korea, backing Moon's push to revive his stalled Korean Peninsula peace process.

A joint statement issued after the summit made clear the Biden administration's commitment to previous inter-Korean and US-North Korea accords, including the Panmunjom Declaration and Singapore Joint Statement that Moon and Trump signed with the recalcitrant regime's dictator Kim Jong-un in 2018, respectively.

Holding a press conference with Moon following their talks, Biden said he might meet with Kim on the condi-

The Korea Herald

tion that Kim makes a serious commitment to discuss giving up his state's nuclear arsenal, which would have to be verified in pre-meeting negotiations. In a show of the robustness of the alliance, Moon and Biden agreed to terminate all US guidelines that have restricted South Korea's missile development since 1979.

They also agreed on the need for the two countries to pursue a global COVID-19 vaccine partnership, broaden cooperation in the nuclear energy sector and work together to achieve their shared goal of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

In what could be seen as quid pro quo for Washington's more positive response to Seoul's agenda, Moon agreed to address two sensitive issues his government had shunned in the joint statement.

The document said the two countries agreed to work together to improve the human rights situation in the North and opposed all activities that undermine, destabilize or threaten the rules-based international order in an indirect reference to China's increasing assertiveness. Notably, Moon and Biden emphasized the importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait as well as maintaining freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and beyond.

They agreed on the "fundamental importance" of trilateral cooperation involving Japan in dealing with North Korea, protecting regional prosperity and bolstering the rules-based global order.

It has yet to be seen whether the Moon administration is ready to depart from its blind pursuit of inter-Korean reconciliation and its insistence on maintaining an equal distance from Washington and Beijing.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

Beware the quack

SIR, I refer to the two-part article "Science vs. quackery" by Prasenjit Chowdhury. The bigger threat in these times of the surging virus is the infodemic that has been unleashed with false narratives offering cures from herbal to anecdotal remedies that are difficult to fight.

Our social media platforms are full of such misleading claims and people in the anxiety to find some relief or cure fall victim to this misinformation. Some even disparage evidence-based modern medicine.

It is not only at national gatherings of the Indian Science Congress that incredulous scientific claims have been made by prominent people but on many other platforms as well.

Tens of thousands of people have died in India and with little sign of the pandemic abating; this denial and criticism of science is having a profound effect on our citizens.

It is well known that misinformation and lies tend to spread faster than accurate information and it is not surprising that an overwhelming amount of misinformation and disinformation circulates on social media.

Our leaders, scientists, medical professionals and role models should promote trust in science and evidence-based medicine as the only way forward if we have to progress and overcome this pandemic. We should not encourage ill proved and anecdotal remedies as cures and bring more harm to our citizens.

Yours, etc., H N Ramakrisna
Bengaluru, 28 May.

COMPLIMENTS

SIR, This has reference to Prasenjit Chowdhury's two-part article "Science V quackery" (26 and 27 May). This timely and insightful write-up has cited innumerable instances of how the Government has spread unscientific and irrational values in public domain.

No doubt, this flies against the tenets of "scientific temper" as enshrined in the Constitution. That the battle against Covid-19 became tougher because of misinformation and wrong information nurtured by the government has been narrated at length by the writer. My compliments to *The Statesman* as well as the writer.

Yours, etc., Asok Kumar Dutta,
Kolkata, 28 May.

RESPECT THE PREROGATIVE

SIR, This refers to the article titled "Lines that must not be crossed", by Lokendra Malik, published in The Statesman today.

The article is educational and very important, more so in the context of developments in the state of West Bengal over the past couple of years. As has been pointed out by the writer, under the Indian constitutional scheme, the Governor is a constitutional head of the State Government and she or he acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister. The real power lies with the democratically elected state government with the Chief Minister at the helm. The Governor can definitely advise the Chief Minister by using constitutional platforms, within his capacity as the constitutional head in an effort to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution.

However, Mr. Jagdeep Dhankhar, the Governor of West Bengal, has gone out of his constitutional boundaries and limitations, and apparently acted in a politically partisan manner, being way too biased in his approach. Ever since he has taken charge as the Governor of the state, he has been extremely vocal about the functioning of the state government, more often than not openly criticising it in front of electronic media in unscheduled and unofficial media briefings. There have been instances when he has gone beyond his official capacity to defend leaders of the BJP and endorse their stands.

Two years back, he had rushed to Jadavpur University during a ruckus there involving BJP Member of Parliament, Babul Supriyo, and 'rescued' him when students were agitating against his presence. there. Very recently, Dhankhar had visited the post-poll violence-hit areas of Nandigram, accompanying BJP MP Nitish Pramanik, even after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had advised against it. There have been a few other instances as well, involving his

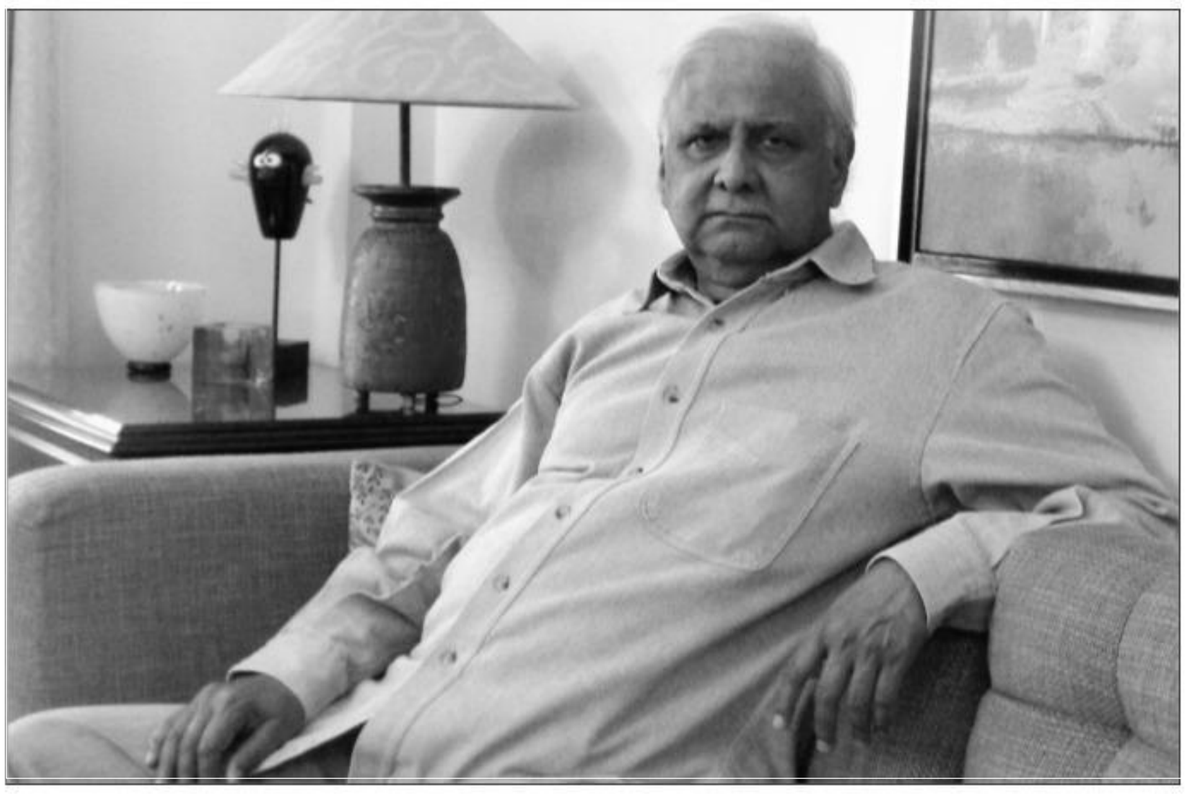
State Governors are nominated constitutional functionaries who report to the President of India and there should be absolute neutrality while discharging their functions and duties.

Yours, etc., Anupam Neogi,
Kolkata, 27 May.

epaper.thestatesman.com

SATURDAY INTERVIEW

'EC needs to do course correction'



PROF JAGDEEP S CHHOKAR is one of the founding members of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) — one of the leading voluntary organisations dedicated to strengthening democracy and improving governance in the country. He has worked for electoral reforms through the judicial system by filing Public Interest Litigations in the higher judiciary to get relevant laws improved, and on the ground by providing information to voters about the background of candidates contesting elections so that they can make informed choices while voting. Before founding the ADR, Chhokar — who has a PhD from Louisiana State University, USA — was a professor of Management and Organisational Behaviour at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. In an interview with **RAKESH KUMAR**, he shared his thoughts on a variety of issues roiling the country. Excerpts:

Q. Madras High Court recently observed that the Election Commission of India is 'singularly responsible' for the devastating second Covid wave for doing nothing to prevent political parties from violating Covid safety protocols. It even remarked that the EC should probably be booked for murder in this connection. What's your take?

A. The observation of the Madras High Court about booking EC for murder is an overstatement. But it is also a fact that Election Commission has not covered itself in glory, not only in this election but the elections held in the last four to five years. Therefore, Election Commission does need a significant amount of introspection or, I suppose, course correction. To say that they (EC) should be prosecuted for murder is I think an emotional or rhetorical statement. I won't take that seriously. EC's going to first High Court and then Supreme Court to seek withdrawal of that statement is also a little immature.

Q. Earlier, on 22 April, Calcutta High Court also rapped the EC for 'totally failing' to implement the Covid guidelines during the campaigning and voting period. Do you think such judicial censures came rather late in the day since the elections had virtually come to an end by then barring a few rounds of Bengal polls?

A. Yes, it came rather late, but I am glad it came. But the important point is Election Commission can't be under this impression that its job is only to issue the instructions. That is not entirely correct. My understanding of the law is that once the elections are declared in any state, the entire bureaucratic staff of the state is deemed to be on a deputation to Election Commission. Thus, EC transfers the Director General of Police, Chief Secretary and others. The EC is actually an executive authority in the state where election is announced. It is not right for them to say that we have issued the instructions, now it is for the states to implement. They need to understand that the so called state staff is with them in the election. Their job is to get the work done, not only issue the instructions.

Q. Do you think these Assembly elections in four states and one UT should have been allowed amid the raging Covid pandemic in the first place? And, who should be held accountable for the viral deaths and horrors convulsing the country now?

A. No! You can't say anybody is singularly responsible for it (though). Election Commission is answerable to the President of India and it could have sought the permission of the President to postpone the election. If the President would have thought that he needed judicial advice, he could have referred it to the Supreme Court of India. Then, the legal advice could have been taken. But none of them thought of it. Moreover, elections were announced in a very strange way too. When there is such an epidemic going on, there was no need to hold the election in so many phases. I got to know that in one district of Bengal, the poll was held in two phases. It is very bizarre and dangerous. Then in rallies, the national leaders did not wear masks, it is very unfortunate. When you are a constitutional body and do jobs like organising an election, you can't be deferential to the government. Where is independence?

Q. What is your assessment of the electoral bonds scheme?

A. It is the last nail in the coffin of transparency of electoral and political finances. After this, there is nothing to talk about transparency in political funding. It is absolutely ridiculous. There are many things wrong about which I have written extensively. To begin with, the electoral bonds scheme is unconstitutional. There is no reason why electoral bonds are part of a Money Bill. After that, I think the government has overruled two constitutional bodies: Reserve Bank of India and Election Commission of India, who disagreed and found fault with the scheme. They said it will result in forming of more shell companies. The scheme was introduced despite a lot of objections. Also, the electoral bonds have a potential to choke the funding of all Opposition parties. Since the ruling parties will have information about the bonds, therefore it can prevent anybody or everybody from donating to any other political party. This is a very terrible situation.

Q. Many Opposition parties are opposed to the use of EVMs for polling, charging that these machines could be manipulated or compromised. What are your views on the integrity and fairness of our elections — and what measures must be taken to improve it?

A. This is a big mess into which the country has been brought by all political parties. The reason being in 2009 a leading member of the current ruling party wrote a book (assailing EVMs) and a former deputy prime minister wrote a forward to it. This was the state in 2009. Then people picked this up as a very interesting ploy. Since then, whosoever lost the election blamed EVMs. As per my opinion, EVMs are perfectly alright even now. However, the introduction of VVPAT has muddied the waters. It involves too many things like you press the button and then a paper will come out and sometime things are not cleared. In the past, strange events had happened once the EC put up data of votes cast and votes counted in its website. There were differences in these two figures. When people pointed this out, the Election Commission stopped putting up the data. Again, rather than solving the problem, it raised doubts. Therefore, the Election Commission will have to be transparent and answer all questions of the people. They can't say we will make the EVMs available, and come and show me how it can be tampered. Why should they be defensive? Overall, EVMs are fine. Therefore, all political parties should behave in a mature and responsible manner when it comes to EVMs. Because once the people start doubting elections like this in the country, democracy is gone.

Q. Many leaders in the Opposition advocate for reintroduction of ballet papers in elections. What is your view on it?

A. In short, it is stupidity. There are problems but it does not mean that we should go back. We can't copy other countries, they have a different situation.

Covid-19 and the Chinese bluff

AMRITPAL KAUR

The second wave of Covid-19 is raging across India, showing the full range and might of this novel coronavirus. It is an unprecedented pandemic, a scenario unheard of for at least one century. The recent research studies on the origins of Covid-19 in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists and The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies as well as the report published by the American Department of State in January 2021 claim that Covid-19 is a laboratory-escaped virus, which was unleashed on the world from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in China.

Considering the fact that the Chinese State and media are in a frenzy to project China as the saviour of humanity in these dire times, this revelation sits at odds with the dominant Chinese discourse. Questions are being raised about the efficacy of Chinese gain-of-function experiments and the costs the world has to pay for such a risky scientific experiment. However, with regard to the South Asian region, where China is attempting to increase its heft, the fact that Covid-19 actually came from China itself and the bamboo curtain around its 'scientific research' should provoke additional caution in the minds of countries in this region.

America's State Department in January 2021 published a report saying there has been ample evidence to prove that the Covid-19 virus did not jump from bats to humans; rather it escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology in the city of Wuhan. Further research on this topic by people like Nicholas Wade has brought light on the idea that the basic difference between SARS-1 that spread as an epidemic in 2003 and the SARS-2 Covid-19 is the fact that there is ample evidence of SARS-1 having spread from host species to humans via intermediate links. However, there is practically no intermediate specie between host species and humans in the case of Covid-19.

Another aspect that Wade points out in his paper is the fact that though the Chinese were doing research on the coronavirus, there were very low security measures in place to contain its spread should the virus escape and the fact that three scientists in the WIV lab who got coronavirus- like symptoms in December 2019 itself points in this direction. Secondly, it is an established fact that there are close relations between WIV and the Peoples' Liberation Army. Clubbing this bonhomie with the idea that the Chinese have been discussing development of biological weapons for almost a decade is a worrisome proposition.

The State Department's report is crucial, because it is one of those rare moments when intelligence reports have been made public. However, there are rising noises about Chinese culpability especially since it did nothing to contain the virus when it spread in China in the early stages, and allowed a substantial number of asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic Covid-19 affected overseas Chinese to return to their places, hence spreading the virus the world over.

WHO investigations into the origin of Covid-19 point towards the wet markets. It argues that there were early cases of Covid-19 in the wet markets where exotic animals are sold and were responsible for the outbreak. However, the recent reports, especially that of Nicholas Wade, argue that the genetic mark-up of Covid-19 is complex and, in all probability, contains elements from various species including bats but not limited to it. Along with this, there is the fact that Covid-19 suddenly spread in one month (December 2019) like a bushfire. For an animal virus to so rapidly infect the human body within this time-frame is highly unlikely, unless there were test cases on humanized tissue or humanized lab-rats, because the intermediate link between the virus and human system is a necessary precondition for the spread of the virus itself. In this sense, there are suspicions raised on the efficacy of the WHO report.

The looming clouds of controversy on the origins of Covid-19 and China's role in it should provide an apt background for Beijing's overreach in the South Asian region. In April, President Xi Jinping had called on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to express concerns and offer help against the raging second wave of Covid-19. At the same time, Chinese media was publishing reports deriding India for not containing the virus, congratulating themselves for their better management and the recovery of their economy.

Simultaneously, the Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi, was busy holding meetings with his counterparts of six South Asian countries barring India, though he said that India was welcome as well. In these meetings the aim of the Chinese minister was to forge a 'Himalayan Quad', apparently in reaction to the QUAD grouping comprising India, the USA, Australia and Japan. His offer to South Asian countries to fight Covid-19 with Chinese help, in the light of India fighting a ferocious battle was opportunistic. The Chinese argument has been that India is busy fighting the Covid-19 demon, and has no time to help her South Asian neighbours. Thus, in place of India, China should be relied upon. However, the Chinese have carefully brushed aside any suggestion that Covid-19 originated in China and the plight of the world today is due to their negligence.

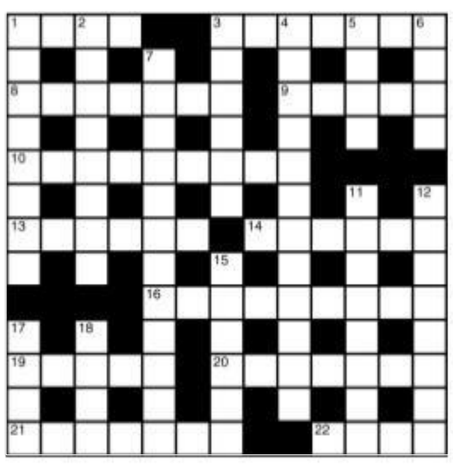
In comparison, India rose to her feet again within a month's time with a massive vaccination drive and preparation on a war-footing to take care of her sick. It is also heartening that in the hour of need, many countries have come to extend their help to India, in President Biden's words 'to repay India's kindness'.

No doubt, India was blindsided by the Covid-19 virus, but in true Indian fashion, we have fought a heroic battle. Within the context of diplomacy in the South Asian region, it is another grim reminder as to why cooperation between India and her neighbours is of paramount importance as our destinies are intertwined not only by our proximity, but also by the calamities that we face.

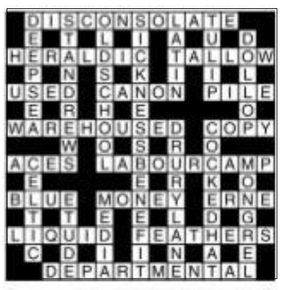
The writer is Research Scholar, Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

CROSSWORD

NO 28926



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



SOLUTION FOR 22 MAY

ACROSS

1 Government-funded body gives Dame Mary reduced work (6)
4 Centrally heated room mostly being used for procreation (2,4)
8 The bloke's right-wing past (7)
9 Killer stalks Frenchman in Spanish location (7)
11 Yankee separates two poets with identical cuts in brawl (10)
12 Top bishop has Father Ted defrocked (4)
13 Stroke stomach before beginning on legs (5)
14 One of Elgar's variations incorporated into finale and added to (8)
16 Holy man bores posh couples on the next floor (8)
18 Bread making instruments (5)
20 Type of music club (4)
21 Dotty made love in Doha ending early phase of chastity (10)
23 Lively old air, inspiring finale of Beethoven's ninth? (7)
24 Ruddy German after making U-turn tailgates German car, I hear (7)
25 Government, say, obstructs the return of Arab ruler (6)
26 Revolutionary part of Ptolemaic astronomy (6)

DOWN

1 Split leftover capital (5)
2 Anoint a Byzantine lady (7)
3 Serviceman captures a foul-mouthed nationalist (9)
5 Slender king's figure (5)
6 Old stager is a cavalryman? Sounds like it (7)
7 Dicky perished after overwhelming century breaks (9)
10 Wife's so nimble during dance movement (6,3)
13 A saucer, perhaps from Ganymede? (9)
15 America supports strike on Prince Edward Island (9)
17 Giving a name to bird and fish (7)
19 One lacking belief is given dabs of accessories to armed robbery (7)
21 Singular lame gags after raising a stink (5)
22 Architectural feature in Kosovo location (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with **The Independent, London**)

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

It was a happy inspiration which brought seven such important functionaries as the Ministers of Industry together at Simla on Empire Day, and their presence at the dinner given by His Excellency the Viceroy in honour of the occasion enabled him to make pointed and significant reference to the fact. It is to be hoped that the seven Ministers will leave Simla refreshed and inspired, as they certainly ought to be, by coming into personal contact with what we have often been assured is the busiest workshop in India, if not in the world. At the same time, one may also hope that their deliberations have not been altogether undiversified, and that they have received more than one useful lesson, by example as well as by precept, in the art of preventing Jack - if such a colloquialism is permissible in such a connection - from becoming dull through unremitting attention to work. The pleasure and profit to be derived from this meeting between the Ministers of Industry and the rulers of India was, doubtless, mutual, for it must also have brought to the weary Titans - or, to be correct, unwearied Titans - of Simla a cheering message of strength and vigour from outside, assuring them, as it were, that they do not plough an entirely lonely furrow in their Herculean efforts for the welfare and progress of India.

NEWS ITEMS

ASSAM-BENGAL RAILWAY STRIKE

As the Indian staff of the Assam-Bengal Railway have gone out on strike Anglo-Indian telegraphists have been sent to manage the telegraph service for the running of the trains. The Postmaster-General, Bengal and Assam, issues the following communiqué: Owing to the disturbed state of Eastern Bengal and Assam and on account of strikes on the Assam-Bengal Railway and in the Steamer Companies it has been decided to suspend all insurance and parcel traffic to and from places in the disturbed area. No parcel and no insured letter will be accepted for transmission to and from post offices in Chittagong, Tippera, Dacca, Mymensingh and Faridpur Districts and post offices in Assam excepting those at Gauhati and Shillong and in the Dhubri and Garo Hills Districts.

DACCA BANK REOPENS FOR BUSINESS

The Bank of Dacca, which suspended payment, was reopened today after 21 days for the transaction of business in the terms of resolutions passed at meetings of creditors and shareholders held on May 15 and 21, respectively. One of the terms is that only 5 per cent on all debts which have fallen due will be paid for the present. Shareholders have adopted all the resolutions passed by the creditors at a meeting held on May 15, with the modification that deposits by Directors would be for three years instead of for one year. The former managing agents have resigned. Rai Bahadur Pyar Lall Dass has taken up the Managing Agency, and he will be assisted by a strong Advisory Board and a Board of Directors.

STRANDED COOLIES' SUFFERING

Darjeeling, May 28
Yesterday morning the crews of the several steamers of the steamer companies at Goalundo declared a hartal in sympathy with the staff at Chandpur. Messrs. Bird & Co.'s labourers were intimidated and subsequently joined in the hartal. The E.B. Railway staff declined to join in the strike in spite of intimidation and threats from the local Marwari shopkeepers to cut off the sale of necessaries to the Railway staff. The authorities of the Railway are taking necessary precautions. In consequence of the strike at Goalundo the mails and passengers via the various steamer services have been held up there. It does not appear to have occurred to the strikers that they are cutting off supplies to the coolies at Chandpur on whose behalf the hartal has been declared.

RETIREMENT OF INDIAN CIVIL SERVANTS

London, May 28
With regard to the prevalent misunderstanding of the India Office's attitude towards civilian retirements attributable to the Reforms, it is understood that Mr. Montagu is not inclined to sanction terms which might induce a general exodus affecting even those who have not been upset by the new conditions. The difficulties of the position are illustrated by an application for retirement which the Government of India recommended should be accepted, but which was refused by the India Office on the ground that the applicant had been long dissatisfied and desirous of retiring. It is authoritatively stated that if any civilian desires to retire because his heart is not in his work, the case will be considered on its merits and the applicant will be treated as generously as possible.

epaper.thestatesman.com

India is well-placed to leverage artificial intelligence in unique ways to solve challenges and tap into opportunities.

NANDAN NILEKANI
ARCHITECT OF AADHAAR & INFOSYS CO-FOUNDER

Housing secretary promises to look into builders' demand

Realtors body Naredco makes several demands to revive both demand and supply in the sector

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Housing and urban affairs secretary Durga Shanker Mishra today said the government will look into various demands of the real estate industry, including an extension of timeline for completion of projects by 6-9 months.

He highlighted various initiatives taken by the government in the past seven years such as development of 1.12 crore houses under the Prime Minister Awas Yojana (PMAY), launch of the Affordable Rental Housing Complex scheme for migrant workers, "infrastructure" status to affordable housing, and 100 smart cities.

Mishra was addressing a webinar organised by realtors body Naredco.

Naredco's representatives made several demands before the secretary to revive both demand and supply in the sector that has been badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The association sought extension of timeline for completion of projects by 6-9 months under the realty law Rera, extension of all building permissions till March 2023, rationalisation of government taxes on real estate, and control of rising prices of cement and steel. It also sought reintroduction of interest subvention scheme, grant of input credit tax on GST paid in leased commercial real estate, suspension of insolvency law for some more period, and an online environment clearance system.

Responding to the demand of extension of timeline for project completion, Mishra assured that he will "go in detail" to understand the matter.

"If need be, we will take this matter to RAC (Rera Advisory Council)," he said.

However, the secretary did mention that this relief was given last year because of the imposition of the national lockdown. On high taxes levied by the Central and state governments on real estate, Mishra directed the ministry's senior officials to examine the matter in detail.

"We will try to reduce government levies," he said.

Regarding a rise in prices of steel and cement, Mishra said he took up this issue with the ministry's concerned and would discuss the issue again.

On the PMAY, he said 1.13 crore houses have already been sanctioned and out of that, 48 lakh have been completed and handed over to the people. The secretary informed that India's ranking in ease of doing business related to construction activities improved to 27 from 186.

He said the new ranking is expected any time and expressed confidence that "we will be in top-20".

The secretary said the real estate sector contributes seven per cent to the gross domestic product (GDP). It is a $200-billion industry and set to become a $1-trillion sector with rapid urbanisation, he added.

Emphasising on affordable housing, Mishra said the highest housing demand is in economically weaker section (EWS) and low-income group (LIG), and observed that the millennial also wants 2-3 BHK flats and not bungalows.

Talking about the Central Vista Project, Mishra said the new Parliament building will be ready next year. He also rubbished criticism about this project.

At the outset, Naredco president Niranjan Hiranandani said the construction activities have slowed down because of the second wave, as only 50 per cent labourers are working on sites. He demanded that timeline for completion of projects should be extended as it was done last year.

Naredco chairman Rajeev Talwar said all permission related to the development of projects should be valid till March 2023.

BUILDERS' PLEA

- Extension of timeline for completion of projects by 6-9 months under the realty law Rera and extension of all building permissions till March 2023.
- Rationalisation of government taxes on real estate, and control of rising prices of cement and steel.
- Reintroduction of interest subvention scheme and grant of input credit tax on GST paid in leased commercial real estate.
- Suspension of insolvency law for some more period, and an online environment clearance system.

BPCL stake sale: Govt may tweak FDI policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The government is considering a tweak in the current foreign direct investment (FDI) policy to allow overseas investors pick up majority stake in the India's second biggest oil refiner Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL), sources said.

The government is privatising BPCL and is selling its entire 52.98 per cent stake in the company.

For BPCL privatisation, mining-to-oil conglomerate Vedanta had put in an expression of interest (EoI) for buying the government's 52.98 per cent stake in the PSU. The other two bidders are said to be global funds, one of them being Apollo Global Management.

The proposal is under discussion between the departments of disinvestment (Dipam), industry (DPIIT) and economic affairs (DEA), they said.

At present, only 49 per cent FDI is permitted through automatic route in petroleum refining by the public sector undertakings (PSU), without any disinvestment or dilution of domestic equity in the existing PSUs. With this provision, a foreign player would not be able to buy more than 49 per cent stake in BPCL.

According to sources, Dipam has suggested to amend the existing FDI policy in order to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment in a Central public sector enterprise in the petroleum and natural gas sector.

On the other hand, the department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT) has proposed for a separate provision for this specific situation. The proposed amendment to the FDI policy is under consideration for enabling investment in BPCL as part of the disinvestment process, they added.

According to sources, Dipam has suggested to amend the existing FDI policy in order to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment in a Central public sector enterprise in the petroleum and natural gas sector.

THUMBNAILS

BSE SENSEX ▲ May 28, 2021

Top Gainers

Open: 51,381.27
Close: 51,422.88
Previous close: 51,115.22
Change: 307.66 (0.60%)

	Closing Price in ₹	% Change
Reliance	2,095	5.90
M&M	846	2.13
HDFC Bank	1,501	1.47
HDFC	2,541	1.37
Kotak Bank	1,800	1.23
IndusInd Bank	1,019	1.20
ITC	213	0.78
Bharti Airtel	524	0.71
Tata Steel	1,104	0.65
ONGC	112	0.54

KBK Infographics

Shibulal buys Infy shares: Infosys co-founder S D Shibulal has again bought shares worth Rs 100 crore of the IT major from wife Kumari Shibulal through an open market transaction, for the second time this week. "...We are hereby informing you about purchase of 7,22,545 equity shares (representing 0.02 per cent) of Infosys from Kumari Shibulal by way of block sale on the platform of the stock exchange on 27 May 2021," S D Shibulal said in a regulatory filing. Post the transaction, S D Shibulal's stake in Infosys has gone up to 0.12 per cent, while Kumari Shibulal's stake stands at 0.14 per cent, said the filing. PTI

Amazon insurance: Amazon on Friday announced that it was arranging Covid-19 health insurance cover, completely free of cost, for registered sellers on the Amazon.in marketplace, through Acko General Insurance Limited. Amazon will fully fund the premium cost for this group insurance policy that will be valid for one year after activation. Sellers with an active listing on Amazon.in between 1 January 2020 and 1 May 2021 can enroll themselves under the group policy to get coverage for Covid-19 hospitalisation and medical expenses up to Rs 50,000, said a Press release from the company. SNS

REC profit: State-owned REC's consolidated net profit jumped multifold to Rs 2,077.84 crore in the March 2021 quarter, mainly on the back of higher revenues. The company's consolidated net profit stood at Rs 473.99 crore in the quarter ended on 31 March 2020, according to a BSE filing. Its total income in January-March 2021 rose to Rs 9,215.76 crore from Rs 7,785.59 crore in the year-ago period. PTI

Canara cash chase: State-owned Canara Bank is looking to raise up to Rs 9,000 crore through equity and debt this financial year, as per the approval granted by the board of directors on Friday. The board of directors of the bank in its meeting held on 28 May 2021 approved the capital raising plan for the year 2021-22 amounting up to Rs 9,000 crore by way of equity and debt instruments, the bank said in a regulatory filing. PTI

M&M reports ₹163 cr profit in Jan-Mar quarter of FY'21

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Home-grown auto major Mahindra & Mahindra today reported a standalone profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 163 crore for the fourth quarter ended 31 March 2021, on the back of robust sales of passenger vehicles and tractors.

The Mumbai-based company, along with its subsidiary in the automotive sector Mahindra Vehicular Manufacturers Ltd, had reported a net loss of Rs 3,255 crore for the January-March quarter of 2019-20 fiscal.

On a consolidated basis, its PAT from continuing operations for the January-March period of 2021 stood at Rs 1,635 crore, against a net loss of Rs 588 crore in the year-ago quarter.

Its revenue on standalone basis rose to Rs 13,338 crore during the period under review from Rs 9,005 crore in the fourth quarter of FY'20, M&M said in a statement.

For the entire 2020-21 fiscal, the company posted a standalone PAT of Rs 923 crore, up 25 per cent as compared with Rs 740 crore in fiscal 2019-20.

Its standalone revenue during the last fiscal declined by one per cent to Rs 44,574 crore as against Rs 44,866 crore in FY'20.

The consolidated revenue for January-March 2021 from operations stood at Rs 21,456 crore as against Rs 16,315 crore in the corresponding period of the last fiscal.

For the entire 2020-21 fiscal, the company reported a consolidated PAT of Rs 3,702 crore as compared with Rs 2,713 crore in 2019-20.

Its consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 74,278 crore for the financial year 2020-21, as against Rs 75,382 crore in 2019-20.

The Mumbai-based automaker said overall demand for the company's passenger vehicle models remained robust in the fourth quarter of FY'21.

However, the global shortage of semiconductors impacted the production and sales for the quarter, it added.

The company sold 1,06,333 units during the fourth quarter, up 18 per cent from 90,481 units in the fourth quarter of FY'20. Total sales of PVs during the last fiscal, however, dropped by 26 per cent to 3,48,621 units, against 4,71,141 units in 2019-20.

Tata buys majority stake in Bigbasket

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Tata Digital Ltd has acquired a majority stake in online grocery platform Bigbasket. Tata Digital is a 100 per cent subsidiary of Tata Sons.

"Grocery is one of the largest components of an individual's consumption basket in India, and Bigbasket as India's largest e-grocery player, fits in perfectly with our vision of creating a large consumer digital ecosystem. We are delighted to welcome Bigbasket as a part of the Tata Digital," Pratik Pal, chief executive officer of Tata Digital, said in a statement today.

Specific details about the deal were not disclosed.

E-grocery has been one of the fastest growing segments in the consumer e-commerce space and its growth is propelled with India's rising consumption and digital penetration.

The current pandemic has further accelerated its adoption as consumers seek the convenience of ordering quality groceries to be delivered safely at home.

Bigbasket was founded in 2011 in Bengaluru and has expanded its presence to more than 25 cities.

"We are extremely excited about our future as a part of Tata Group. As a part of the Tata ecosystem, we would be able to build stronger consumer connect and accelerate our journey," Hari Menon, chief executive officer of Bigbasket, said.

According to the statement, Tata Group is building a digital consumer ecosystem addressing consumer needs across categories in a unified manner, and online food and grocery is an important part of this ecosystem.

This acquisition presents an attractive opportunity for Tata Group in its overall vision of creating a digital ecosystem, it added.

Net job creation falls by 16.9 lakh in FY'21

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 28 MAY

Net job creation in the economy fell by 16.9 lakh in FY'21 over the previous fiscal, shows an SBI Research analysis of EPFO payroll data.

However, the FY'21 numbers are better than the FY'20 net job creation, which had declined by 28.9 lakh, further cementing the view that the economy is not creating new employment opportunities.

The latest EPFO data show that net new EPF subscribers stood at 94.5 lakh in FY'21, and NPS added 5.82 lakh, taking the cumulative net addition to 100.4 lakh, which is marginally down from 102.3 lakh in FY'20.

However, according to Soumya Kanti Ghosh, SBI's group chief economic adviser, "this does not represent the correct picture as the data include the number of exited members who re-joined and re-subscribed, and thus not fresh job creation."

"An estimate of the actual net new payroll (first job) adjusted for re-joined/re-subscribed members and formalisation (based on ECR data), shows the actual net new payroll is only 44 lakh in FY'21, which is 16.9 lakh less than the net new payroll generated in FY'20, when the new payroll declined by almost 28.9 lakh," he said.

Ghosh also said most of the 44 lakh additions are low-quality jobs.

The second job (or the exited members who re-joined and re-subscribed) rose by 17.9 lakh in FY'21.

However, the number of new members who joined declined by 6.9 lakh in FY21 compared to an increase of 1.5 lakh in FY20.

DoT allocates spectrum to telcos for 5G trials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The department of telecom (DoT) has allocated spectrum to telecom operators to start 5G trials in the country, sources said.

The trials will be conducted at various locations, including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Gujarat, Hyderabad, among others, according to industry sources.

"Telecom operators have been allocated spectrum in 700 MHz band, 3.3-3.6 gigahertz (GHz) band and 24.25-28.5 GHz band across various locations," a telecom company official said.

On 4 May, DoT had approved applications from Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Idea and MTNL for conducting 5G trials without using technologies from Chinese companies. DoT had approved trials of 5G with Ericsson, Nokia, Samsung and C-DOT. In addition, Reliance Jio Infocomm will be conducting trials using its own indigenous technology.

According to DoT, 5G technology is expected to deliver ten times better download speed than that of 4G and up to three times greater spectrum efficiency.

During the trials, application of 5G in Indian settings will get tested. This includes tele-medicine, tele-education and drone-based agriculture monitoring, etc. Telecom operators will be able to test various 5G devices on their network.

The duration of the trials, at present, is for a period of six months. This includes a time period of two months for procurement and setting up of the equipment.

The permission letters specify that each telecom service provider will have to conduct trials in rural and semi-urban settings in addition to urban settings so that the benefit of the 5G technology proliferates across the country and is not confined only to urban areas.

Industry sources, however, said none of of the telecom operators has been allocated spectrum in Punjab, Haryana and Union Territory of Chandigarh.

Bengal SMEs for easing of Covid restrictions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, 28 MAY

In the wake of the extension of Covid-19 restrictions till 15 June in West Bengal, the small and medium enterprises and exporters have sought relaxation from restrictions for their survival.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday extended the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions till 15 June. SMEs have urged the chief minister that the extension of restrictions without amendments or relief will adversely affect the micro, medium and small enterprises (MSME) of the state.

"State MSMEs are gasping for survival and hence at this moment imposing any restriction against running the units will be hard to survive. We request that MSMEs be allowed to run their units in compliance with Covid-19 protocol in line with tea, jute and cinema production," Federation of Small and Medium Industries president Biswanath Bhattacharya said in a letter to the state government.

West Bengal hosts the highest number of MSMEs in the country and they play a vital role in the state economy.

Meanwhile, export bodies and organisations jointly have written to the state government for relaxation in Covid protocols for their survival and export commitments.

They said 50 per cent workforce in exporting units along with that at least 25 per cent of key officials be allowed to function at offices to carry out vital functions like accounting, export documentation, customs, port formalities which are not possible from home.

GradCapital to fund start-ups by college students

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, 28 MAY

In a generational world away from college students scrounging around for Rs 250 or chasing rich family uncles to sponsor bright ideas, a unique venture capital fund GradCapital is giving $25,000 each to student entrepreneurs to start their hopefully world-changing concepts.

"Our mission is to invest in such crazy folks through capital and advisory support," say the co-founders of the pan India student-driven GradCapital which this week launched a $1 million (Rs 7.3 crore) fund. GradCapital will provide early-stage investment to support graduate entrepreneurs with good ideas.

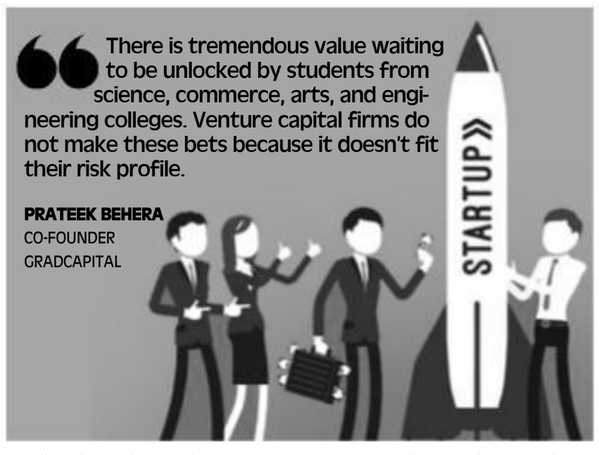
GradCapital will invest $25,000 each in 20 selected start-ups in its inaugural 12 months starting this week, and hopes to fund 100 start-ups in the next three years.

GradCapital co-founders Abhishek Sethi and Prateek Behera ~ both having studied at the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, and both wearing cheery, semi-sheepish grins like having just been nabbed by their Prof Anil Gupta for bunking class ~ have staked pioneering claims in the uncharted territory of college-campus entrepreneurship.

"There is tremendous value waiting to be unlocked by students from science, commerce, arts, and engineering colleges," Behera told the media. "Venture capital firms do not make these bets because it doesn't fit their risk profile."

Not much help either from college incubators which the GradCapital founders deem as bureaucratic and expensive. Behera says GradCapital will cater to millennial consumers, emerging technologies such as quantum computers entering mainstream uses, and new kinds of economies that may be unnoticed or not understood by traditional venture capital firms.

Behera was a junior research specialist at California's Berkeley University that has produced a fair share of the world's brilliant technology mavericks with "crazy" ideas, and was a financial analyst before co-founding GradCapital.



"Behera's business approaches and experiences differ starkly from mine," says co-founder Abhishek Sethi. "He is almost very detailed and organised - and I am haphazard, all over the place. He is fond of structures - while I find it limiting. To execute any project, a balance is required and that balance we saw at GradCapital."

GradCapital will invest in selected start-ups "for reasonable equity", support the start-ups through an eight-week intensive programme and then work with them throughout the year.

The hand-holding eight-week programme will include being part of a "cohort" ~ a support system group of about 10 start-ups getting to tap into the expertise and experience of leading businesses, investors and entrepreneurs.

The start-ups to be selected by August as part of the GradCapital cohort will get a $25,000 cheque and subsequent funding from other investors if the idea has sufficient potential.

Start-ups already under their cohort umbrella include social music discovery app Humit, new grocery delivery platform KiranaKart, Valerio Electric ("a single open platform that connects EV users with all types of charging stations and services") and Codedamn ("helps you learn coding like it's 2026").

The Centre for Innovation Incubation & Entrepreneurship (CIIE.CO) at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, is backing GradCapital which is "a unique attempt to promote student-led entrepreneurship in India," said the CEO of "Venture Investing" Kunal Upadhyay who is part of the CIIE.CO leadership team.

"Traditional accelerators, venture investors usually don't have clear insights about identifying and supporting the best founders on the campus," said "Seed Investing" partner Vipul Patel. "To bridge this gap, we are partnering with GradCapital that aims to identify exceptional student start-ups early on and invest in them, which will also help in expanding the start-up flow to our Innovation Continuum."

Innovation Continuum ~ which addresses the key processes leading an entrepreneurial concept from seed to fruit ~ is the core aim of CIIE.Co that was set up in IIM Ahmedabad as a centre of excellence, with support from the department of science and technology and Government of Gujarat.

Post-cyclone floods in Odisha

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 28 MAY

Even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi reviewed the cyclone Yaas damage situation and conducted an aerial survey, people across parts of Jajpur, Bhadrak and Mayurbhanj district were evacuated as rivers swelled and breached embankments.

Baitarani river and its tributary Kani inundated large areas of Jajpur, Dasarathapur, and Korei blocks.

The heavy downpour caused by very severe cyclonic storm Yaas triggered 'medium' floods in some of the villages.

Officials said, two embankments of the Kani River have been breached near Kantipada and Palasahi villages under Dasarathpur block in the district. More than 10,000 people of 27 villages under10 panchayats of Dasarathapur block has been affected due to the flood.

Two panchayats of the block are completely submerged due to the duo breaches.

Likewise, floodwater of Baitarani river has gushed into low-laying areas Panasa gram panchayat of Jajpur block and Mukundapur and Bandala Panchayats of Korai block in the district inundating the areas. More than 1000 people of Korei and Jajpur blocks have been affected due to the flood.

Vast areas of agriculture land have been submerged, first due to sea ingress in Bhadrak and Balasore district and now by floodwaters in Jajpur district.

Floodwaters of river Baitarani gushed into several villages of Dhamnagar and Bhandaripokhari blocks in Bhadrak district. Road connectivity between Bhadrak and Jajpur has been cut-off.

Jajpur collector Chakravarti Singh Rathore visited the duo breaches in Dasarathapur block last night to take stock of the flood situation and assured that the embankments will be repaired soon. He also visited Korei and Jajpur flood hit areas today and inspected the relief and rescue operation.

The Subernarekha river was also swelling.

The silver lining is that the summer flow in the rivers was low and it had a decent capacity to accommodate the heavy rain in the catchment areas, noted officers.

In Mayurbhanj district Food and Supplies Minister Ranendra Pratap Swain the Minister of Food Supplies reviewed the situation. He said adequate food stock has been placed at cyclone and flood shelters for evacuees.

Heavy rainfall in Jharkhand has led to swelling of river Subarnarekha, he observed.

Low lying areas of Bhograi and Baliapal in Balasore district are facing inundation. District officers have evacuated people from such low lying areas. Several villages are marooned.

Slump in COVID-19 testing, fatality swells in Odisha

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 28 MAY

The drop in COVID-19 positive cases the past 48 hours after the consistent clocking of 10,000-plus virus infections during the current month have projected towards a deceptive flattening of the contagion curve.

With test positivity rate showing no signs of subsiding, the slowdown of positive cases can be attributed to the relatively low number of tests conducted in the past 24 hours evidently in the wake of Cyclone Yaas which made landfall on the state's coast on Wednesday morning.

While 69,407 samples were examined on Tuesday, the number of such tests on Wednesday was only 46,241. There was sample testing of 43,768 on Thursday, the reports of which were released today in the state's COVID dashboard.

Odisha on Friday reported 7,216 positive cases while 33 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours.

The positivity rate of the samples tested in the last 24 hours stood at almost 16.48%.

The State's death toll has climbed to 2,651 while the State's cumulative pandemic caseload climbed to 7,39,955.

In the second wave, the highest numbers of tests of 69,407 were conducted last Tuesday. It has dipped to 46,000 and 43,000 in the last 48 hours. It needs to be further increased to one lakh-mark. Unless the test positivity rate dips below 10 percent, it will be a difficult proposition to keep the virus infection at bay, said public health experts.

As many as 2,39,557 virus infections have been reported in the state since 5 May, when lockdown was enforced in the state.

On Friday, the highest of 1,091 new infections were reported from Cuttack, followed by Khordha (809), Kendrapara (487), Dhenkanal (428) and Angul (409).

The State's recovery rate currently stands at 85.84% with as many as 6,35,179 cured of the disease so far.

Odisha currently has 1,02,072 active cases.

Naveen seeks expert advice on Covid strategy

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 28 MAY

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik sought the advice of eminent doctors and experts with regards to vaccination and better preparedness in the event of a third wave of COVID 19.

Addressing the first meeting of the vaccination advisory committee, the CM said suggestions of the experts will help fine-tune processes.

The second wave has caused so much turmoil that people are very scared about the future. They fear more variants and more waves.

It is more than a year and still there is no end in sight, he observed'

The lockdowns and its effect on the economy, have caused great financial pressure on many families and businesses, he said while expressed concern.

Odisha has managed uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen and dealt with the second wave quiet well. The Covid graph is on the decline, he added.

Dr. Devi Shetty said that vaccination is better than lockdown. The cost effectiveness of the vaccination is far better than lockdown.

He advised for priority in vaccination on the basis of occupation rather than age group. He also said this is the best time to conduct examinations as the cases are going down.

Eminent health experts and doctors, Dr. K. Srinath Reddy (Chairman), Dr. Devi Shetty, Dr. Ramakanta Panda, Dr. Subrat Acharya, Dr. Lalit Kant, Dr. Mrudula Phadke, Dr Datteswar Hota, Dr. E. Venkat Rao, Dr. Sanghamitra Pati, Dr MR Patnaik Dr. Ajay Parida and Dr. CBK Mohanty (Convenor) attended the meeting.

Chairman of the Committee Dr. K. Srinath Reddy advised on different strategies for advance planning which could possibly be taken up as per the advice of the expert doctors.

Making a presentation on the Covid 19 situation in Odisha, Prof. Venkat Rao said that Odisha has dedicated Covid hospitals to treat the patients and over 10,000 hospital beds with sufficient ICU facilities.

He also said that two crore people in the age group of 18-44 need vaccination. And this is a challenge as the Government of India is providing vaccines for 45 plus people.

Dr. Lalit Kant stated that USA has a large number of unused vaccine doses which they may not use. We may look for Astrazenica vaccines, he added.

He further said that Covaxin production in India will touch 7.82 crore per month by August and Covishield production to touch 10 crore per month. 250 million Sputnik V doses will also be available. Apart from these three, Novo Vax and Zydus Cadila may be available in future.

Dr. Ramakanta Panda opined that the virus is likely to stay for long like Flu.

He advised for ramping up the capacity, safe, clean Oxygen delivery, especially the use of medical grade oxygen for Black Fungus. He also advised for the decentralisation of health system. and dedicated infrastructure like cyclone shelter

Dr. Mrudula Fadke advised to focus on vaccination of pregnant and lactating mother while Dr. Subrat Acharya advised for focus on rural area and migrant population and

Dr. Ajay Parida proposed to identify the vulnerable groups and vaccinate them on priority.

ACS Health P.K. Mohapatra made a presentation on the fight against Covid in Odisha.

Odisha extends deadline for vaccine global tender

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 28 MAY

The Odisha government on Friday extended the deadline of global tender floated for procurement of Covid-19 vaccines till June 4 hoping for larger participation and for incorporation of certain relaxations made by the central government today.

In fact as of now the potential participants were only three – Covaxin, its UK based Astrazeneca, Covishield and Sputnik .

Already Covaxin and Covishield are overburdened with orders , hence Sputnik remains the possible option, said a senior officer before adding that clearance of DCGI is mandatory.

As things stand , the global tender appeared to get delayed when seen in the context of the speed in which the government had floated the tender and was to open the bids today.

Hopes are the latest relaxations would perhaps allow others like Pfzier , Moderna and others will be able to participate after due clearance from DCGI.

The state government, in an attempt to tide over the prevailing vaccine crisis and inoculate the state's entire population had floated a global tender for procurement of 3.80 crore of vaccine on 14 May. The bids were to open today.

The Odisha cabinet had approved the amended terms and conditions of the global tender for procurement of 3.8 crore doses of COVID vaccines.

Cop charged with rape

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BALASORE, 28 MAY

Acting on a complaint of a female subordinate staff, the In-Charge of Gopalpur police outpost was detained and interrogated today .

A woman constable had alleged she was sexually assaulted by Bansidhar Pradhan, the IC of Gopalpur outpost.

She had lodged a complaint before the Eastern Range IG Diptesh Pattnaik earlier and had allegedly attempted suicide.

The IG has shifted to the grievance cell and has been detained .

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a review meeting at Bhubaneswar today to assesess the damage caused by cyclone Yass in Odisha. Governor Prof Ganeshi Lal, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Union Ministers Dharmendra Pradhan and Pratap Sarangi, and other senior officials were present at the meeting. SNS

PM has been pro-active in helping Odisha: Pradhan

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 28 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of Rs 500 crore for cyclone relief and restoration work in Odisha is as per his steadfast approach of reaching out to the distressed in the state, noted Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Pradhan who accompanied the PM said on all previous occasions – be it cyclone Fani or Amphan, the PM had been the first to provide funds to the state.

The PM has also agreed to extend all possible support to the long term cyclone mitigation measures that were put forth by the state government. He has said a inter-ministerial team will visit the cyclone Yaas affected areas soon.

The Rs 500 crore announcement is virtually like unsolicited sanction because the state did not seek money for relief and restoration work.

BJP leaders here, however, took a subtle dig at the moral high ground attempted by CM Naveen Patnaik today in claiming that he did not seek funds for relief and restoration and burden the centre at a time of pandemic.

The centre has provided over Rs 2700 crore to the state and it has at least Rs 1198 crore as SDRF money. The centre has also sanctioned houses for 8 lakh people under the housing scheme.

The underlining meaning of pointing out at available unspent funds was intended to puncture the claim of the CM that he had not asked for funds for relief and restoration.

ASHA worker assaulted due to shortage of vaccine

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAGATSINGHPUR, 28 MAY

Irate villagers assaulted and ransacked the house of one ASHA worker at Charbatia village under Jagatsinghpur police limit when they failed to get vaccinated today.

Dalli Nath , ASHA worker at Salijanga Primary Health Center incurred the wrath of people without any fault. Only 30 doses were provided to the center due to shortage of vaccines. Hundreds of villagers had to return without getting inoculated.

They confronted Dalli Nath, who pleaded her helplessness and asked them to talk to higher officers on the availability of vaccines.

But a few villagers turned angry and today they assaulted her. They ransacked her house.

Nath has been hospitalized. She has lodged a police complaint. The IIC of Jagatsinghpur police station Rajani Kant Mishra said a case has been registered and investigation to nab the culprits is on.

Simlipal & Bhitarkanika National Parks withstand Cyclone 'Yaas' fury

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 28 MAY

The Simlipal Tiger Reserve (STR) and Bhitarkanika National Park (BNP), the much-acclaimed treasure troves of nature in Odisha, successfully withstood Yaas cyclonic fury with negligible damage as tropical cyclone barreled through coastal and northern parts of the state 48 hours ago.

While mangroves with their intricate root system that stabilizes the coastline emerged as protective barrier in Bhitarkanika, the luxuriant and dense tree cover in the Simlipal in Mayurbhanj acted as savior in considerably minimizing damage due to the very severe tropical cyclone Yaas, said senior forest officials on Friday.

The cyclonic storm had passed through STR from South-east to north-west direction on 26 May. It had rained in torrents with 100 kmph wind velocity.

However cyclone had failed to script major damage with luxuriant forest cover managing to endure the storm, said, officials.

There was no loss of human and wildlife. The damage caused to the forest properties and facilities was minimal.

A few wooden bridges, six anti-poaching sheds, a causeway besides a concrete culvert was damaged.

Besides the earthen road stretching up to 30 km suffered partial damage. The large trees and tourists recreation facilities remained unharmed in the cyclonic fury, according to preliminary damage assessment report compiled by STR.

The cumulative loss of properties was estimated at Rs 11.50 lakh as per a preliminary assessment, STR officials said adding that the road communications that were cut off were restored within 24 hours.

Similarly the 145 km stretch Bhitarkanika Nation Park in Kendrapara district, a globally acclaimed Ramsar wetland site, escaped nature's fury with negligible damage and destruction due to the tropical cyclone.

The national parks officials who have compiled the damage assessment report are of the view that the mangrove cover acted as buffer zone in minimizing the damage.

The park has reported the death of two spotted deer while around 100 trees were uprooted in the national park and peripheral hamlets. Ten accommodation facilities of the forest department also suffered partial damage. Six eco-tourism cottages and a jetty at Habelikhati Island were also partially damaged.

The estimated loss of property in the park is assessed at Rs 48.37 lakh as per a preliminary assessment

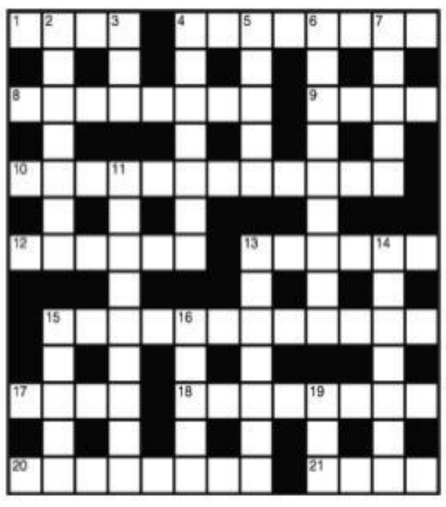
Scattered across 2,750 square km area of idyllic environs in Mayurbhanj district, STR is the fourth largest tiger reserve in the country.

The rich ecosystem is acclaimed as an ideal habitation corridor of Royal Bengal Tiger, elephants besides other wildlife. Because of its calm, serenity and natural environs, it attracts thousands of tourists every year.

Bhitarakanika is one of the richest storehouses of mangrove genes in the country. At least 11 of the 70 mangrove species, which were on the verge of extinction in the world, is found in Bhitarakanika. Mangroves are regarded as natural barriers against the tidal surge and cyclones. Because of its rich mangrove cover, cyclonic storms from time to time have failed to make inroads into the wetland sites.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Surrender (4)
4 Crimes (8)
8 Word for word (8)
9 Farewell gesture (4)
10 Boastful (12)
12 Pests (6)
13 Jaunty (6)
15 Fast food item (12)
17 Tramp (US) (4)
18 Computer ID (8)
20 Gathering (8)
21 Bloody (4)

DOWN
2 Raise (7)
3 Recede (3)
4 Bunting (7)
5 Leg bone (5)
6 'Big Apple' native (3,6)
7 Roof edge (5)
11 Myself (Informal) (6,3)
13 Stealing (7)
14 Vessel (7)
15 Vexed (5)
16 Young pigeon (5)
19 Horse (Informal) (3)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Gnome, 4 Adds (Nomads), 7 Overdue, 8 Afoot, 10 Mower, 11 Innards, 13 Deterio-rate, 17 Immense, 19 Swish, 20 Affix, 22 Arrival, 23 Fees, 24 Merry.

DOWN
1 Gloomy, 2 Overwhelm, 3 Endorse, 4 Again, 5 Duo, 6 Medicine-man, 9 Tusk, 12 Retriever, 14 Rostrum, 15 Visa, 16 Chilly, 18 Nexus, 21 Foe.

By arrangement with The Independent
Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker

RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson

DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski

NEED TO KNOW

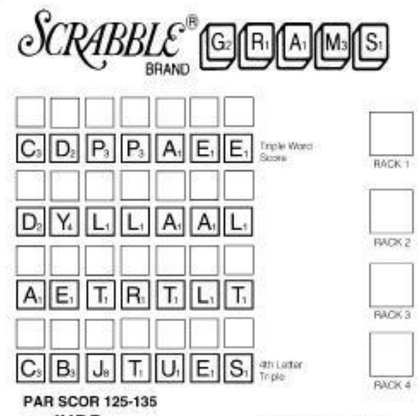
HOSPITALS
- AIIMS 26588500, 26588900
- Moolchand Medcity (formerly Hospital) 42000000 & 24-hour Chemist Shop 42000447
- Vidyasagar Institute for Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences 26924300, 26924304
- Batra Hospital & Medical Research Centre 29051280, 29958747
- Deen Dayal Upadhyay 25496320, 25494403
- Guru Tegh Bahadur 22586262, 22585007

RAILWAY INQUIRY
General Inquiry 139
- Toll Free Nos. 1800112511
- SMS Inquiry Nos. 57886, 54959, 5676747

ROADWAYS INQUIRY
- ISBT (General Inquiry): 23868836, 23865181
- Haryana Roadways 23861262
- Himachal Roadways 23717473, 23325320
- Punjab Roadways 23867842, 23860626
- Rajasthan Roadways 23864470
- U.P. Roadways 23868709

FLIGHT INQUIRY
- AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 18001801407
- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airport 011-25671580; Terminal I-B 25671576, Palam Road 25671579, 18001803838
- JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 39841111
- EMIRATES Flight Inquiry and Reservation 33773377
- Air Canada Flight Inquiry 25656421/25656431 Reservation 41528181
- Air France Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23466262 (City) 25652294 (Airport)
- Kuwait Airways Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23354373

SCRABBLE BRAND GRAMS



PAR SCORE 125-135
by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL
TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION BY JUDD

B8 R1 A1 S1 H4 E1 R1	RACK 1 =	70
C3 Y4 P3 R1 E1 S1 S1	RACK 2 =	68
B3 E1 D2 R1 O1 C3 K5	RACK 3 =	98
B3 O1 N1 I1 E1 S1 T1	RACK 4 =	59
PAR SCORE 195-205	JUDD'S TOTAL	295

Srabble and Scrabble Tiles are registered trademarks. All rights in the game are owned in the U.S.A by Hasbro Inc., in Canada by Hasbro Canada Inc., and elsewhere by J.W. Spear & Sons Limited, a subsidiary of Mattel, Inc.

irections Make a 2 to 7 letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right. 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words are in The Official Scrabble Players Dictionary(Merriam-Webster) and OSW Official Scrabble Words(Chambers). Judd's solution tomorrow. 10-25-12

SUDOKU
Conceptis SudoKu — By Dave Green

2					6	1		
1				9	2		8	
		7						4
	2	9	8					
	7			5			2	
					7	3	5	
4						9		
	8		4	1				7
		3	6					5

Difficulty Level ★★ 1/28

©2014 Conceptis Puzzles, Dist. by King Features Syndicate, Inc.

Answer to previous puzzle

1	6	9	4	3	5	7	2	8
2	8	4	9	6	7	1	3	5
7	5	3	8	1	2	6	4	9
9	2	6	1	4	3	5	8	7
3	1	7	2	5	8	9	6	4
8	4	5	7	9	6	2	1	3
6	7	1	5	8	4	3	9	2
4	9	2	3	7	1	8	5	6
5	3	8	6	2	9	4	7	1

answer to previous puzzle

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that no row, no column and no 3x3 box contains the same number. The difficulty level increases through the week.

epaper.thestatesman.com

China has no allies. We have many allies around the world... And that gives us greater capacity and greater capability

US DEFENSE SECRETARY LLOYD AUSTIN
DURING A HEARING ON THE FISCAL 2022 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

WEATHER

CITY	MAX	MIN	
SINGAPORE	30°C	28°C	H
HONG KONG	26°C	20°C	H
TOKYO	18°C	12°C	CL
LONDON	17°C	09°C	H
DUBAI	31°C	27°C	S
SAN FRANCISCO	13° C	04° C	H
NEW YORK	16° C	08° C	H
MOSCOW	15° C	05°C	H

S= sunny, CL= clear, H=hazy, R= rainy...

THUMBNAILS

A group of people thought to be migrants are brought in to Dover, Kent, in England on Friday. AP

2 dead, 10 missing after boat overturns in US: Two people are dead and 10 others are missing after their boat overturned on Thursday near the Florida Keys, officials said.The US Coast Guard responded to a location several miles off Key West around 1 p.m. Crews rescued eight people and pulled two bodies from the water, Petty Officer Jose Hernandez said. AP

Australia lockdown: Australia's second most populous state of Victoria on Friday entered a week-long lockdown over concerns about a "highly infectious" variant of Covid-19 first detected in India. The new restrictions were imposed after Melbourne's north saw 30 new coronavirus cases this week, authorities said. AP

'Global supply of COVAX hit due to Covid crisis in India'

WHO, UNICEF, GAVI & CEPI state there will be a shortfall of 190 mn doses by June end

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
UNITED NATIONS, 28 MAY

The "terrible" surge of the coronavirus cases in India has severely impacted COVAX's vaccine supply in the second quarter of this year to the extent that there will be a shortfall of 190 million doses by the end of June, according to a joint statement by the WHO, UNICEF, GAVI and CEPI.

The joint statement was issued on Thursday by Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) CEO Dr Richard Hatchett, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance CEO Dr Seth Berkley, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore.

Countries that are advanced in their vaccination programmes are seeing cases of Covid-19 decline, hospitalisations decrease and early signs of some kind of normality resume. However, the global picture is far more concerning, the statement said.

Giving a call to action to equip COVAX to deliver 2 billion doses in 2021, the statement said, we are seeing the traumatic effects of the terrible surge of Covid-19 in South Asia, a surge which has also severely impacted global vaccine supplies.

It added that COVAX has proven it works as the global mechanism for equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines, having delivered over 70 million doses to 126 countries and economies around the world since February from remote islands to conflict settings managing the largest and most complex roll-out of vaccines in history. Over 35 countries received their first Covid-19 vaccine doses thanks to COVAX.

The joint statement said even though COVAX will have larger volumes available later in the year through the deals it has already secured with several manufacturers, it warned that if we do not address the current, urgent shortfall, the consequences could be catastrophic. It said the pandemic has just taken a frightening new turn, as a deadly surge of cases rages across South Asia and other hotspots.

The global agencies called on nations to share doses now, saying the United States and Europe have collectively pledged to share 180 million doses. But we still need more, we need them to go through COVAX, and we need them to start moving in early June. At least one billion doses could be shared by wealthy countries in 2021.

COVAX's need for doses is greatest right now. Countries with higher coverage rates, which are due to receive doses soon, should swap their places in supply queues with COVAX so that doses can be equitably distributed as quickly as possible, it said.

The Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, is the key supplier of AstraZeneca doses to COVAX. According to the agreement between GAVI and SII, which included funding to support an increase in manufacturing capacity, SII is contracted to provide COVAX with the SII-licensed and manufactured AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine (known as Covishield) to 64 lower-income economies participating in the Gavi COVAX AMC (including India), alongside its commitments to the Government of India. However, supply of vaccines from SII to COVAX has been impacted as the second wave of the pandemic ravages India.

Last week, Ghebreyesus had said that once the devastating outbreak in India recedes, we also need the Serum Institute of India to catch up on its delivery commitments to COVAX.

Soaring India's domestic demand has meant that 140 million doses intended for distribution to low-and-middle-income countries through the end of May cannot be accessed by COVAX.

WHO budget

Member countries of the World Health Organisation have approved an ambitious increase in the budget for the UN health agency at a meeting, with some noting that WHO's chronic underfunding cripples its ability to protect global health.

Delegates approved a 16 per cent increase to WHO's proposed budget for the next two years, setting it at about USD 6.1 billion. More than 90 per cent of WHO's funding is tied to specific health issues, the agency often struggles to respond to urgent crises.

UK authorises use of J&J vaccine as cases edge up

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON, 28 MAY

Regulators on Friday authorised another coronavirus vaccine for use in the UK amid concerns about rising Covid-19 cases as a variant of the virus first identified in India spreads around the country.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency said the single-dose vaccine made by Johnson & Johnson met "the expected standards of safety, quality and effectiveness." The authorisation takes the number of vaccines in the UK's armory to four following earlier approvals for the two-dose regimens developed by Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford, and Moderna.

The regulator said the vaccine developed by J&J subsidiary Janssen has been shown to be 67 per cent effective overall in preventing infection and 85 per cent effective in preventing severe disease or hospitalization. It can be be stored at refrigerator temperatures of 2 to 8 degrees Celsius (36 to 47 F), which the regulator said makes it ideal for distribution to care homes and other locations."

The UK has rapidly rolled out vaccines since December. Nearly 58 per cent of the population has received at least one dose and around 35 per cent has gotten two shots. The UK has seen a modest uptick in new cases in recent days as a result of the variant identified in India, which is considered to be more transmissible than the previously dominant strain of the virus.

On Thursday, the country reported 3,542 new confirmed cases, its highest daily total since 12 April.

MERRYMAKING

Britain's Prince William and Kate, Duchess of Cambridge watch Highland dancers perform at the Beating of the Retreat at the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh. AP

UK's lockdown lifting plan hangs in balance over Covid-19 concerns

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON, 28 MAY

UK's roadmap to lifting all coronavirus restrictions appeared to be balanced on a knife-edge, with authorities and scientists urging caution amid the rapid spread of the B.1.617 Covid-19 variant first identified in India, which the health secretary says is estimated to be behind up to three-quarters of new infections.

Public Health England data shows cases of the variant have risen by 3,535 to 6,959 since last week. Health Secretary Matt Hancock told a Downing Street briefing on Thursday that the government had always expected cases to rise as restrictions were eased.

On Thursday, a further 3,542 coronavirus cases and 10 deaths within 28 days of a positive test were reported in the UK. It is the second day in a row the number of new Covid-19 cases has topped 3,000 ~ the first time infections have reached this level since mid-April.

"The latest estimates are that more than half and potentially as many as three-quarters of all new cases are now of this variant," Hancock told the briefing. "As we set out our roadmap we always expected cases to rise~ we must remain vigilant."

The PHE data found the worst-affected areas continue to be Bolton, Bedford, and Blackburn with Darwen, which have seen 1,354, 366 and 361 confirmed cases, respectively. PHE added, however, that there are small numbers of cases of the variant in most parts of the country.

But the health secretary said there were "early signs" rates in Bolton are starting to "cap out". Hancock said vaccines were "severing the link between cases and hospitalisations and deaths from coronavirus".

But he urged people to get both doses, saying that of the 49 people in hospital with Covid in Bolton only five had received two vaccinations.

Jenny Harries, chief executive of the UK Health Security Agency, told that many of the outbreaks were centred on "focal points", such as community centres, schools or faith buildings.

Increasing cases numbers were not "generally translating into increased cases of hospitalisation and definitely not into deaths," she said. "So the key message there is... if we can hold it while the vaccination programme gets rolled out, we stand a much better chance of getting through this session."

It comes after PM Boris Johnson said England "may need to wait" for the lifting of all Covid restrictions, which is currently planned for 21 June. Johnson said he saw nothing "currently in the data" to suggest the government would have to delay unlocking.

Belarus' leader seeks Russia's support amid showdown with EU

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, 28 MAY

Belarus' authoritarian leader will discuss closer economic ties with Russia on Friday, as he seeks support from his main backer amid a bruising showdown with the European Union over the forced diversion of a passenger jet to arrest a dissident journalist.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has found himself increasingly isolated after Belarusian flight controllers told the crew of a Ryanair plane to land because there was a bomb threat against it. No bomb was found once the place was on the ground, but 26-year-old journalist Raman Pratasevich was arrested along with his Russian girlfriend.

EU leaders denounced it as a hijacking and piracy and responded by barring Belarusian carriers from the bloc's airspace and airports and advising European airlines to skirt Belarus. The bloc's foreign ministers sketched out tougher sanctions on Thursday to target the country's lucrative potash industry and other sectors that are the main cash-earners for Lukashenko's government.

The dispute has pushed Lukashenko, who has relentlessly stifled dissent during his rule of more than a quarter-century, even closer to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the two will meet on Friday in the Black Sea resort of Sochi for talks on closer economic ties, according to the Kremlin. Earlier in the day, the countries' prime ministers met in Minsk to pave the way for the Presidents' talks.

"The events of the last days show a growing Western pressure on Belarus," Belarusian PM Roman Golovchenko said during the meeting. "The EU has made a political decision to introduce sectoral sanctions in an apparent attempt to ruin our economy and create conditions for the repeat of coup attempts. In this situation, we count on the support of our closest ally, the Russian Federation."

The two ex-Soviet nations have signed a union agreement that calls for close political, economic and military ties, but that stops short of a full merger. Moscow has helped buttress Belarus' economy with cheap energy supplies and loans, but the ties have often been strained with Lukashenko scolding Moscow for trying to force him to relinquish control over economic assets and abandon Belarus' independence.

US Senate eyes R&D Bill to counter China, bolster manufacturing

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 28 MAY

What started as a pragmatic effort to boost scientific research and development has morphed into sweeping Senate Bill aimed at making the US more competitive with China and other countries, including USD 50 billion in emergency funds to shore up domestic computer chip manufacturing.

The American Innovation and Competition Act is key to President Joe Biden's infrastructure plans and headed toward crucial votes late Thursday. It's also a test of whether the split 50-50 Senate can accomplish bipartisan achievements at a time when there's pressure on Democrats to change the rules to push past obstruction and gridlock.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., the Commerce Committee chairwoman managing the debate for Democrats, said, I actually think we have gotten more mindshare with people about why this is important, right, because we had an open debate process. The measure has enjoyed broad, bipartisan support, but became weighted down by the sheer scope of the effort.

As the Bill swelled to more than 1,000 pages actually, it's a collection of Bills Republicans threw up caution signs and senators in both parties sought additions and changes.

A top Republican author, Sen. Todd Young of Indiana said, "It's not about beating China, Young said in a speech Thursday. He said it's about rising to the challenge posed by China to be a better version of ourselves."

Biden had included elements of the legislation as part of his big infrastructure plan, the American Jobs Act, making a similar case that the US needs to increase its investments to stay competitive with rivals, particularly China.

During a virtual meeting with CEOs last month over the global computer chip shortage that has been disrupting supplies and sales of everyday goods ~from cellphones to new cars Biden explained his plan to build the infrastructure of today. Together, the massive innovation act would be one of the more comprehensive investments in US research and development in recent years as the country tries to bolster and rebuild home-state industries that have shifted overseas during globalization.

Man stabs, shoots three French police officers; motive unclear

PARIS, 28 MAY

An unidentified assailant stabbed a police officer at her station in western France then shot two other officers before being detained Friday, authorities said. The motive for the attack is unclear.

The suspect was gravely wounded during the arrest, France's national gendarme service told. His identity is being verified. The three officers were wounded but none is in life-threatening condition, the gendarmes said.

After stabbing the first police officer in her station in the Nantes suburb of La Chapelle-sur-Erdre, the assailant took her gun and fled, according to the gendarme service.

French police deployed helicopters, search dogs and more than 200 officers to find the suspect, and closed nearby schools and stores. When he was located, he fired on officers trying to arrest him, the gendarme service said.

Police and ambulances blocked roads in the normally quiet, residential area.

Interior minister Gerald Darmanin and the Nantes prosecutor headed to the scene of the attack. AP

3 officers face arraignment in Black man's restraint death

SEATTLE, 28 MAY

Five weeks after ex-Minneapolis policeman Derek Chauvin was convicted of murdering George Floyd, three Washington state officers have been charged in the death of Manuel Ellis: another Black man who pleaded for breath under an officer's knee.

Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson charged officers Christopher Burbank and Matthew Collins, who are both white, with second-degree murder on Thursday after witnesses reported that they attacked Ellis without provocation. Timothy Rankine, who is Asian, faces a charge of first-degree manslaughter. He is accused of kneeling on Ellis' back and shoulder as he died from a lack of oxygen, according to a probable cause statement filed in Pierce County Superior Court.

All three were in custody by Thursday evening and were scheduled to be arraigned on Friday. Their attorneys did not respond to messages seeking comment. Ellis, 33, died on 3 March 3, 2020 ~ tasered, handcuffed and hogtied, with his face covered by a spit hood~ just weeks before George Floyd's death triggered a nationwide reckoning on race and policing.

The Pierce County medical examiner called Ellis' death a homicide due to a lack of oxygen caused by restraint. AP

After delays, GOP poised to block bipartisan 1/6 riot probe

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 28 MAY

Senate Republicans are poised to block the creation of a special commission to study the deadly 6 January attack on the Capitol, dashing hopes for a bipartisan panel amid a GOP push to put the violent insurrection by Donald Trump's supporters behind them.

Broad Republican opposition was expected in what would be the first successful Senate filibuster of the Biden presidency, even as the family of a Capitol Police officer who collapsed and died after the siege and other officers who battled rioters went office to office asking GOP senators to support the commission. The insurrection was the worst attack on the Capitol in 200 years and interrupted the certification of Democrat Joe Biden's win over Trump.

A vote on the procedural motion was bumped to Friday after delays on an unrelated bill to boost scientific research and development pushed back the schedule.

Though the 6 January commission Bill passed the House earlier this month with the support of almost three dozen Republicans, GOP senators said they believe the commission would eventually be used against them politically. And former President Trump, who still has a firm hold on the party, has called it a "Democrat trap."

The expected vote is emblematic of the profound mistrust between the two parties since the siege, which has sowed deeper divisions on Capitol Hill even though lawmakers in the two parties fled together from the rioters that day. The events of Jan. 6 have become an increasingly fraught topic among Republicans as some in the party have downplayed the violence and defended the rioters who supported Trump and his false insistence that the election was stolen from him.

While initially saying he was open to the idea of the commission, which would be modeled after an investigation of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell turned firmly against it in recent days. He has said he believes the panel's investigation would be partisan despite the even split among party members.

McConnell, who once said Trump was responsible for provoking the mob attack on the Capitol, said of Democrats, "They'd like to continue to litigate the former President, into the future." Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski has said she will support the legislation because she needs to know more about what happened that day and why.

Biden, asked about the commission at a stop in Cleveland, said on Thursday, "I can't imagine anyone voting against" it.

Horror, heroism mark deadly shooting at California rail yard

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SAN JOSE, 28 MAY

Taptejdeep Singh died trying to save others from a gunman. Kirk Bertolet saw some of his co-workers take their last breaths. And friends, family and survivors were left to mourn after nine men died this week when a disgruntled coworker hauling a duffle bag full of guns and ammunition opened fire at a Northern California rail yard complex, apparently choosing his targets and sparing others.

Samuel Cassidy, 57, turned the gun on himself Wednesday morning as sheriff's deputies rushed in at the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority in San Jose.

Investigators were still trying to determine Friday what might have set off Cassidy, who for years apparently held a grudge against the workplace he detested.

The victims were Alex Ward Fritch, 49; Paul Delacruz Megia, 42; Taptejdeep Singh, 36; Adrian Balleza, 29; Jose Dejesus Hernandez, 35; Timothy Michael Romo, 49; Michael Joseph Rudometkin, 40; Abdolvahab Alaghmandan, 63; and Lars Kepler Lane, 63. The minutes-long attack was marked by both horror and heroism.

Singh, the father of a 3-year-old son and a 1-year-old daughter, was on an early shift as a light rail operator when the shooting began.

He called another transit employee to warn him, saying he needed to get out or hide.

"From what I've heard, he spent the last moments of his life making sure that others ~in the building and elsewhere~ would be able to stay safe," co-worker Sukhvir Singh, who is not related to Taptejdeep Singh, said in a statement.

Singh's brother, Bagga Singh, said he was told that his brother "put a lady in a control room to hide," the San Jose *Mercury News* reported. "He saved her and rushed down the stairway." Singh's brother-in-law, P.J. Bath, said he was told Singh was killed after encountering the gunman in a stairwell. "He just happened to be in the way, I guess," Bath told the paper.

Kirk Bertolet, 64, was just starting his shift when shots rang out, along with screams. As he and his coworkers threw a table in front of their door,

Bertolet called the control center. Then there was silence.

Cautiously, Bertolet left the barricaded office, hoping he could offer first aid. He couldn't. Bertolet, a signal maintenance worker who worked in a separate unit from Cassidy, said he is convinced Cassidy targeted his victims because he didn't hurt some people he encountered.

"He was pissed off at certain people. He was angry, and he took his vengeance out on very specific people. He shot people. He let others live," he said. "It was very personal."

Glenn Hendricks, chair of the VTA's board of directors, said he had no information about any tensions between Cassidy and the coworkers he shot. Cassidy fired a total of 39 bullets. Camera footage showed him calmly walking from one building to another with his duffle bag to complete the slaughter, authorities said.

"It appears to us at this point that he said to one of the people there: 'I'm not going to shoot you,'" Santa Clara County Sheriff Laurie Smith said. "And then he shot other people. So I imagine there was some kind of thought on who he wanted to shoot."

Cassidy's ex-wife said he had talked about killing people at work more than a decade ago. Cecilia Nelms told that he used to come home from work resentful and angry over what he perceived as unfair assignments.

The shooter spoke of hating his workplace when customs officers detained him after a 2016 trip to the Philippines, a Biden administration official told The Associated Press.

A Department of Homeland Security memo said Cassidy also had notes on how he hated the Valley Transportation Authority, according to the official. The official saw the memo and detailed its contents to the AP but was not authorized to speak publicly about the ongoing investigation.

Neighbors, acquaintances and an ex-girlfriend described him as a loner, unfriendly, and prone at times to fits of anger.Documents show he had worked at the transit authority since at least 2012.

For years, since my childhood, they have said you cannot do it, but God has destined us (to build) this.

TURKISH PRESIDENT RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN
WHILE INAUGURATING A LANDMARK MOSQUE IN ISTANBUL

THUMBNAILS

United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy to Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener (*left*), and Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi pose for media during a courtesy call at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Friday, in Tokyo. AP

Myanmar reports 96 new Covid cases: Myanmar reported 96 new Covid-19 cases in the past 24 hours, bringing the tally to 143,414 on Thursday, according to the country`s Health and Sports Ministry. The death toll stood at 3,216 while the number of recoveries rose to 132,269 so far IANS

Restaurants to close in Vietnamese city: Authorities in Ho Chi Minh City, the largest and most populous city in Vietnam, on Friday ordered the closure of restaurants accepting dine-in customers and restricted a range of activities amid a new Covid outbreak in the southern metropolis. IANS

Const. Bench to hear pleas on Nepal House dissolution

At least 30 writ petitions have been registered at the apex court against Bhandari's 22 May move

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KATHMANDU, 28 MAY

Nepal's Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana has picked four justices of the Supreme Court (SC) for the Constitutional Bench to hear the 30 writ petitions filed against the dissolution of the House of Representatives by the President, according to a media report on Friday.

There is a provision of a five-member Constitutional Bench to settle the disputes over constitutional matters.

As many as 30 writ petitions have been registered at the apex court against President Bidya Devi Bhandari's 22 May move to dissolve the lower house of Parliament on the advice of Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli, who is heading a minority government.

The newly-formed bench includes justices Dipak Kumar Karki, Aanand Mohan Bhattarai, Tej Bahadur KC and Bam Kumar Shrestha, besides the chief justice, The Kathmandu Post reported. Chief Justice Rana has formed the bench comprising senior-most justices, Kishor Poudel, a communication expert at the Supreme Court, told the Post.

Currently, there are 13 senior justices, besides chief justice, in the Supreme Court.

The initial hearing on 19 of such petitions was conducted by the CJ Rana-led bench on Thursday. The single bench, however, forwarded the writ petitions to the Constitutional Bench for further hearing.

Some of the petitioners had demanded an interim against the dissolution and calling of the House meeting to present the national budget. Rana, however, refused.

According to the constitutional provision, the government must present the federal budget at the federal Parliament by 29 May. Since there is no Parliament, the government is planning to bring the budget through an ordinance. President Bhandari dissolved the 275-member House of Representatives on Saturday for the second time in five months and announced snap elections on November 12 and 19 November on the advice of Prime Minister Oli.

She rejected the bids of both Prime Minister Oli and the Opposition alliance's claims to form a government.

Oli and Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba had staked separate claims to the premiership, saying the claims were insufficient. Nepal's Opposition alliance on Monday filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court demanding restoration of the House of Representatives and appointment of Deuba as the Prime Minister.

Others had also filed petitions against the dissolution of the House of Representatives. Earlier on 20 December, the President had dissolved the Parliament and called snap polls on 30 April and 10 May. However, two months later, the Rana-led Constitutional Bench on 23 February overturned the decision and reinstated the House.

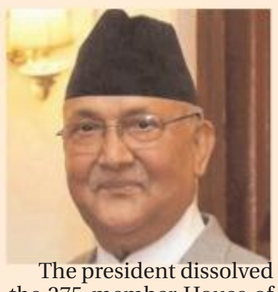
Constitutional experts have criticised Oli and Bhandari for their complicity in trampling upon the Constitution.

PM Oli calls upon political parties to form all-party govt and hold elections

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KATHMANDU, 28 MAY

Embattled Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli on Friday urged all political parties to form an all-party government and hold fresh elections, as he tried to justify the controversial dissolution of the House of Representatives by the President, saying a "functionless" Parliament turned out to be the main source of instability in the country.

Going for an election can never be a regressive act, Oli said in a televised address to the nation, a week after the House was dissolved by President Bidya Devi Bhandari.



The president dissolved the 275-member House of Representatives on Saturday for the second time in five months and announced snap elections on 12 November and 19 November on the advice of Prime Minister Oli, who is heading a minority government.

Oli called upon the political parties to form an all-party government and hold elections. Addressing the nation, Oli took most of his time to criticise the moves taken by the Opposition parties and his fellow party leaders.

He blamed the Opposition parties and dissident faction of the ruling CPN-UML for the dissolution of Parliament.

Oli said Parliament could not ensure stability in the country even after it was restored on 23 February through judicial intervention.

He claimed that he tried to prevent the lower house of Parliament from being dissolved.

HK tycoon Jimmy Lai sentenced to14-months

ASSOCIATED PRESS
HONG KONG, 28 MAY

Hong Kong media tycoon and outspoken pro-democracy activist Jimmy Lai was sentenced to more jail time Friday over his role in an anti-government protest in 2019, as authorities step up a crackdown on dissent in the city.

Lai and nine others were charged with incitement to take part in an unauthorized assembly when they walked down a road with thousands of residents on 1 October, 2019, to protest against dwindling political freedoms in Hong Kong.

All 10 pleaded guilty to organizing an unauthorized assembly.

Lai, 73, was sentenced to 14 months in prison. He is currently serving a separate 14-month jail term for other convictions earlier this year also related to unauthorized rallies in 2019, when hundreds of thousands repeatedly took to the streets in the biggest challenge to Beijing since the city was handed from British to Chinese control in 1997. Beijing promised that the territory could retain its freedoms not found on the mainland for 50 years.

With the two sentences combined, Lai will serve a total of 20 months behind bars.

The founder of The Apple Daily, a feisty pro-democracy tabloid, Lai is also being investigated under the city's sweeping national security law, imposed last year, on suspicion of colluding with foreign powers to intervene in the Hong Kong affairs.

Also receiving jail terms of 18 months each were former lawmakers Albert Ho and Leung Kwok-hung, as well as Lee Cheuk-yan, a pro-democracy activist and ex-lawmaker who helped organize annual candlelight vigils in Hong Kong to commemorate the bloody crackdown in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Meanwhile, police banned the 4 June candlelight vigil marking the Tiananmen crackdown for the second year in a row citing social distancing restrictions, organizers said Thursday.

Hong Kong's security minister warned residents that taking part in unauthorized assemblies is against the law and will be dealt with accordingly.

1998 nuclear tests: Pak marks 23rd anniversary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, 28 MAY

The Pakistan Army on Friday said that the country restored balance of power in the region on this day more than two decades ago by carrying out nuclear tests in response to India's Pokhran tests and establishing a "credible minimum nuclear deterrence".

Both the Army and Foreign Office issued statements to mark the 23rd anniversary of the 28 May, 1998 nuclear tests by Pakistan, codenamed 'Yaum-e-Takbeer' (The day of greatness). Pakistan carried out the tests after India conducted a series of five nuclear bomb test explosions at the Pokhran in May, 1998.

Twenty three years ago on this day, Pakistan restored balance of power in the region by successfully establishing credible minimum nuclear deterrence, the Army spokesperson said.

He said the Armed Forces and the nation pay tribute to all those involved in making this dream come true.

On the occasion of Yaum-e-Takbeer, the nation reaffirms its resolve to safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence against any form of aggression, the Foreign Office said.

Besides nuclear power generation, Pakistan has harnessed nuclear technology for public service in diverse areas including cancer diagnosis and treatment, public health, agriculture, environment protection and industry, it said.

S'pore rules out further tightening of Covid curbs

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
SINGAPORE, 28 MAY

Singapore's Covid pandemic-related restrictions are "working" and have helped to stall a slight rise in case numbers since last month, the city-state's Finance Minister Lawrence Wong said on Friday.

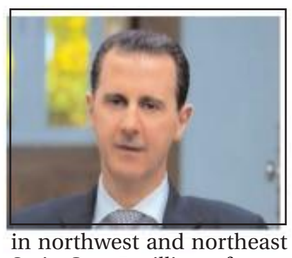
Saying case numbers had "even declined slightly" since the rules were brought in two weeks ago, Wong ruled out any "further tightening of posture" ahead of the June 13 end-date for the measures, which include limiting restaurants to takeaway or delivery, and capping attendance at events at 100 people, dpa news agency reported.

The Finance Ministry on Friday announced an additional $800 million in state funding for businesses affected by the retightening of curbs, adding gyms and arts education centres to the list of businesses receiving a 50 per cent wage subsidy.

The restrictions were imposed after the Health Ministry reported a rise in "unlinked" virus cases and after travel from hard-hit India and neighbouring countries was banned, including for work permit and residency holders.

Syria's Assad wins a fourth term in a predictable landslide

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DAMASCUS, 28 MAY



Syrian President Bashar Assad was re-elected in a landslide, officials said Thursday, ushering in a fourth seven-year term in the war-torn country following an election described as illegitimate and a sham by the West and his opposition.

Assad's win was not in doubt, in an election where officials said 18 million were eligible to vote. But in the country ravaged by the 10-year-old conflict, areas controlled by rebels or Kurdish-led troops did not hold the vote.

At least 8 million, mostly displaced, live in those areas in northwest and northeast Syria. Over 5 million refugees mostly living in neighbouring countries have largely refrained from casting their ballots.

US and European officials have also questioned the legitimacy of the election, saying it violates UN resolutions in place to resolve the conflict, lacks any international monitoring, and is unrepresentative of all Syrians.

Syria's parliament speaker, Hammoud Sabbagh, announced the final results from Wednesday's vote. He said Assad garnered 95.1 per cent of the votes. He said turnout stood at 78.6 per cent of the voters, in an election that lasted for 17 hours on Wednesday with no independent monitors.

Meanwhile, thousands gathered in major squares in Damascus, and the coastal city of Tartus, dancing while waving flags and pictures of Assad. They chanted: With our soul, blood, we defend you Bashar, and We only choose three: God, Syria and Bashar.

Covid : Malaysia imposes total lockdown as cases soar

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KUALA LUMPUR, 28 MAY

Malaysia's prime minister says a total coronavirus lockdown will be imposed in the country, with all business and economic activities to be halted for two weeks to contain a worsening outbreak.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin announced that the decision to implement the lockdown starting 1 June came after new infections breached 8,000 on Friday for the first time, sparking fears the disease could spiral out of control.

The government earlier this month imposed a near lockdown until 7 June, stopping short of shutting down businesses to prevent a possible economic catastrophe.

But new infections have climbed since the recent Muslim Eid festival, crossing 6,000 on 19 May for the first time and soaring to 8,290 on Friday. This raised the country's total cases to 549,514. Malaysia's total cases and deaths have jumped nearly five-fold compared to all of last year.

There are currently 808 patients in the intensive care unit, a new record for the fourth consecutive day. Of these, 403 require respiratory support.

Sixty-one more Covid-19 fatalities, aged between 27 and 92 were reported, pushing Malaysia's death toll to 2,552. Two of the victims are foreigners while 59 are citizens.

The health ministry also identified 21 new clusters, taking the number of active clusters in the country to 614. Among them is a cluster of 37 cases in Kedah as a result of visiting during the festive season.

Germany recognises colonial killings in Namibia as genocide

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BERLIN, 28 MAY

Germany has reached an agreement with Namibia that will see it officially recognise as genocide the colonial-era killings of tens of thousands of people and commit to spending a total of 1.1 billion euros ($1.3 billion), largely on development projects.

The accord announced Friday is the result of more than five years of talks with Namibia on the events of 1904-1908, when Germany was the southern African country's colonial ruler.

Historians say German Gen. Lothar von Trotha, who was sent to what was then German South West Africa to put down an uprising by the Herero people in 1904, instructed his troops to wipe out the entire tribe.

They say that about 65,000 Herero were killed and at least 10,000 Nama. "In the light of Germany's historical and moral responsibility, we will ask Namibia and the descendants of the victims for forgiveness," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said in a statement. "Our aim was and is to find a joint path to genuine reconciliation in remembrance of the victims," he said.

That includes our naming the events of the German colonial era in today's Namibia, and particularly the atrocities between 1904 and 1908, unsparingly and without euphemisms. "We will now officially call these events what they were from today's perspective: a genocide."

Talks between Germany and Namibia opened in 2015 which she said were what today would be labeled as genocide. Germany gained control over the country in the 1880s and surrendered the territory to South Africa in 1915. Namibia gained independence in 1990.

THE AFTERMATH

Sri Lankans salvage wreckage washed ashore from the burning Singaporean ship *MV X-Press Pearl*, which is anchored off Colombo port at Kapungoda, outskirts of Colombo. AP

Japan's unemployment rate rises to 2.8 pc in Apr

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
TOKYO, 28 MAY

Japan's unemployment rate rose to 2.8 per cent in April from 2.6 per cent recorded in the previous month, the government said on Friday.

The number of unemployed people in April rose 10.6 per cent year-on-year to 2.09 million for the 15th straight month of rise, dpa news agency reported citing a report published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Though the unemployment rate remained relatively low despite the coronavirus pandemic, one of the most critical issues in Japan's labour situation has been under-employment, analysts argue.

The proportion of temporary and part-time workers, many of whom are women and young people, stood at 36 per cent in April, the ministry said. These workers in these types of roles typically earn less.

In 2019, their wages were nearly one-third of those of regular salaried employees. Such contingent workers also bore the brunt of the economic fallout of the pandemic.

Japan's economy shrank at an annualised rate of 5.1 per cent in the January-to-March period, the first contraction in three quarters, as the country has been struggling with a slow vaccination roll-out and rising coronavirus infections.

Meanwhile, Japan has extended emergency coronavirus measures in Tokyo and several other regions as the country struggles to rein in the latest wave of infections.

Erdogan inaugurates landmark mosque at Istanbul main square

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ISTANBUL, 28 MAY

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was set on Friday to inaugurate a landmark mosque in Istanbul's Taksim Square, fulfilling a long-time ambition to build a Muslim house of worship at the city's main public space that has become an emblem of the modern Turkish Republic.

Erdogan was scheduled to join a group of worshippers for the first prayers at the towering 3,000-capacity mosque on Taksim which was also the site of the mass anti-government protests in 2013 sparked by the government's construction plans at the adjacent Gezi Park.

The Turkish leader, who has steadily consolidated power in his 18 years in office, had long promised supporters of his Islam-oriented ruling party a mosque on Taksim, saying it is inconceivable for Istanbul's main square not to have a Muslim house of worship.

Critics, however, see the mosque's construction as being part of Erdogan's plans to transform Taksim and undermine the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who established the secular-oriented republic after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

A cultural center at Taksim, which was named after Ataturk and seen as a symbol of his heritage, has been demolished and is being replaced by a new structure.

In 1997, Turkey's military leaders had pressured an Islamist-led government which Erdogan belonged to out of power for allegedly undermining secular laws, citing its declared plans to construct a mosque on Taksim as one of the reasons.

"For years, since my childhood, they have said you cannot do it," Erdogan told ruling party regional leaders in a speech Thursday.

"But God has destined us (to build) this."

For decades, the bustling square has been the heart of the city's cultural scene but also the site of street battles between police and demonstrators.

In 1977, 34 people were killed in the square during a May Day commemoration when shots were fired into the crowd from a nearby building.

The 2013 protests against Erdogan's rule, grew from a sit-in demonstration by a group of protesters trying to prevent plans to demolish Gezi Park.

Nine people were killed during the nationwide protests. Authorities have declared Taksim off-limits to demonstrations in recent years.

Airstrikes kill 23 Taliban militants

KABUL, 28 MAY

A total of 23 Taliban militants were killed in airstrikes that targeted hideouts in Afghanistan's Balkh province, an army spokesman said on Friday.

The sorties, according to the spokesman, were launched on Thursday afternoon in Bodana Qala village of the restive Sholgara district.

As a result, 23 armed militants were killed and 11 others injured.

Three motorbikes of the militants were also destroyed in the airstrikes, the official said.

Taliban militants, who are active in parts of Balkh province with Mazar-i-Sharif as its capital, haven't commented. IANS

epaper.thestatesman.com

The Statesman
Sport
Postal Reg. No. DL (ND)-II/6088/2018/-19-20

LATE SWING

Bhuvneshwar Kumar (photo, left) says he never realised the importance of adding pace to his bowling in his formative years but, once he did, it helped him "maintain that swing" which kept batsmen guessing. The 31-year-old has so far taken 63 wickets in 21 Tests, and 138 and 45 in 117 One-Day Internationals and 48 Twenty20 Internationals.

For more updates www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Allegri to coach Juve: Massimiliano Allegri returned to Juventus on Friday, taking over as coach only hours after Andrea Pirlo left the job. Allegri won five straight Serie A titles with Juventus, including four league and cup doubles, and also reached two Champions League finals.

Stimac's tenure extended: National football team coach Igor Stimac's tenure was on Friday extended till September by All India Football Federation's technical committee, which appointed Savio Medeira as interim technical director in place of the outgoing Isac Doru.

Olympians can't hold Tokyo organisers responsible for Covid-19 problems

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LAUSANNE, 28 MAY

Olympic athletes were told by the International Olympic Committee that a waiver they must sign releasing Tokyo organisers from liability for Covid-19 issues was "standard practice" for major sports events.

The issue was raised when IOC president Thomas Bach took questions to cap a two-day online conference hosted by the official Olympic commission representing athletes.

"I know this is a concern for a number of you," Bach said, before asking IOC chief operating officer Lana Haddad to give what he called "an expert's answer." The waiver is included in the traditional entry form Olympic athletes must sign, which was "updated to include Covid-19 related consideration," Haddad said. "This is really to provide transparency and ensure the informed consent from the Games participants," she explained. "The entry forms are consistent with the standard practice of all other big event organisers. And the forms are within the framework of the law, if I may add."

Athlete groups not formally recognised by the IOC have argued that too much risk and responsibility is being placed on the 11,000 competitors set to take part in the 23 July - 8 August Tokyo Olympics. The Games will bring tens of thousands more coaches, officials, media and other support workers into Japan. The IOC and Japan's government insist the Games will be safe and secure with participants kept mostly isolated from the general public.

Virus emergency

Japan is set to extend a coronavirus state of emergency in Tokyo and other areas with infections not yet slowing to levels it can safely host the Olympics opening in just over 50 days.

The extension is needed as people are increasingly roaming in public, especially in Tokyo and Osaka, when they should be doing the opposite, and it is feared that lifting the emergency would cause an instant rebound in infections, economy revitalisation minister Yasutoshi Nishimura said.

The current emergency in the capital and eight other metropolitan areas was to end next Monday, but hospitals in some areas were still overflowing with Covid-19 patients and the number of seriously ill patients hit new highs recently.

Nishimura told reporters the government proposal of a 20-day extension to 20 June in the nine areas received preliminary approval from experts ahead of an official announcement. Olympic organisers have to decide whether to allow any fans at all, after overseas spectators were banned months ago. A plan to prioritise vaccinations for Japanese athletes also is being delayed, according to media reports.

Experts have warned that more contagious variants are infecting more people, leaving them seriously ill and flooding hospitals.

Prime minister Yoshihide Suga and his government are determined to host the Olympics. The IOC has also said the Olympics would go ahead even if Tokyo is under emergency measures.

Japan has reported about 730,000 infections and more than 12,700 deaths.

Joint-winners if final ends inconclusively

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI, 28 MAY

India and New Zealand will be adjudged joint-winners of the inaugural World Test Championship if their final clash in Southampton ends in a draw or a tie, the International Cricket Council said today.

According to the playing conditions unveiled by the global body, "a draw or a tie will see both teams crowned joint-winners." The ICC has also allocated a reserve day to make up for any lost time during the final, scheduled to be played from 18 June. It said that 23 June had been set aside as reserve day. "Both the decisions were made in June 2018, prior to the start of the tournament," it said.

The reserve day has been scheduled to ensure five full days of play, and it will only be used if lost playing time cannot be made up for through the normal ways each day. "There will be no additional day's play if a positive result is not achieved after five full days of play and the match will be declared a draw in such a scenario," the ICC stated.

In the event of time being lost during the match, the ICC match referee will regularly update the teams and the media about the way in which the reserve day may be used. The final decision on whether the reserve day needs to be used will be announced at the start of the last hour on the fifth day. While India play at home with the SG Test and New Zealand, the Kookaburra balls at home, the final will be played with Grade 1 Dukes.

The final will also feature the implementation of three changes to international playing conditions, which were brought into effect with the World Cup Super League series between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka:

Short runs: The third umpire will automatically review any call of a short run by the on-field umpire and communicate the decision prior to the next ball being bowled.

Player reviews: The fielding captain or the dismissed batsman will be able to confirm with the umpire whether a genuine attempt has been made to play the ball prior to deciding whether to initiate a leg-before-wicket review.

DRS reviews: For LBW reviews, the height margin of the wicket zone has been lifted to the top of the stumps to ensure the same umpire's call margin around the stumps for both height and width.

'Sleepless nights'

Ravichandran Ashwin **(in photo)** had "sleepless nights" inside the Indian Premier League bio-secure bubble when most of his family members were suffering from Covid-19 and said he had "had to" leave the tournament to help his close ones fight the deadly virus. Ashwin is now back in another bubble, this time with the Indian team, who leave for a 104-day UK trip on 2 June.

"I couldn't sleep for almost eight or nine days. Since I couldn't sleep, it was really stressful for me. I was playing matches without getting any sleep. And since I found it really taxing, I had to quit the IPL and go home midway through it. In fact, when I left, I had thoughts on whether I would be able to play cricket thereafter. But still, I did what was required at that point of time," Ashwin said on his *YouTube* channel. "It's really difficult, guys. It might look from the outside that we are staying at a luxurious five-star hotel. But it is not that easy. Like I said earlier, it is not seven days, but a 14-day quarantine," the star spinner said, adding: "We came here on the 19th and we are leaving for England on 2 June. So basically, we will finish our 14-day quarantine here in India. And we will have a test here every two days," Ashwin said.

Asian Boxing Ch'ship: Sakshi loses final spot on bout review

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI, 28 MAY

Indian boxer Sakshi Choudhary (54kg) has lost her final spot in the Asian Championships after her rival, top-seeded Kazakh Dina Zholaman successfully challenged the narrow victory that the two-time youth world champion had clinched in the last-four stage.

Sakshi had prevailed 3-2 in the regulation bout but the decision was challenged by the Kazakh team and eventually overturned.

"Kazakhstan's Dina Zholaman defeated India's Sakshi Choudhary at the women's bantamweight (54kg)," the Asian Boxing Confederation announced.

Zholaman was declared winner in the official result sheet that came out at the end of the day's proceedings late on Thursday night.

"The Kazakh team sought a review of the third round, which it felt should have been scored in favour of their boxer. On review, the jury found their contention to be correct and overturned the original verdict," a source in the Indian contingent said.

The bout review system was introduced by the International Boxing Association (AIBA) in 2019.

"She is a bit upset by understands that the fight was very close. I told her that she is young and has to prepare for the 2024 Olympics. I was angry about how thing panned out. Sakshi is much better now," Indian women's boxing's High Performance Director Raffaele Bergamasco said.

The team manager or the head coach of the losing boxer gets 15 minutes after the decision is announced to submit their protest and complete the paperwork for it in the next 30 minutes.

Decisions with scores 5-0 or 4-1 are not reviewable under this system.

Each team is allowed up to two failed reviews.

"If the Technical Delegate determines, after consulting the Bout Review Jury, that the protest should be allowed to proceed, the bout will be reviewed by the Jury the Observer, the Referee Evaluator and the Judge Evaluator," the AIBA had said.

In case of a protest claiming that an AIBA technical rule was violated by the referee, the aggrieved team has to specify the breach, the round in which it allegedly took place, and how it affected the final result.

Tokyo hopes end for Srikanth and Nehwal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Kidambi Srikanth and Saina Nehwal's slim hopes of qualifying for the Tokyo Olympic Games ended after the game's governing body, the Badminton World Federation, today made it clear there would not be any change on the current rankings list and no other tournament would be held inside the qualification period.

Former world No 1 Srikanth and London Games bronze medallist Nehwal's hopes were all but dashed when the last of the Olympic qualifiers in Singapore was cancelled owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. The duo had hung on to only very a slim hope when the governing body said that it "will issue a further statement on Tokyo Olympics qualifying at a later date."

The decision was a big blow. "The BWF can confirm no further tournaments will be played inside the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games qualifying window," the apex body said in a statement. "As such, while the qualification period officially closes on 15 June 2021 according to the revised Tokyo 2020 qualification system, the current Race To Tokyo rankings list will not change."

Owing to the health crisis, the world body earlier revised the qualification period, extending it by nearly two months to 15 June after the postponement of three important events. However, with no respite being allowed by the pandemic, the BWF was forced to cancel or postpone the last three qualifiers -- the India Open, Malaysia Open and the Singapore Open - leaving players, including Srikanth and Nehwal, with no chance to make it to the Olympics.

"The Olympic qualification process is in effect closed as there are no additional opportunities for players to earn points," BWF secretary general Thomas Lund said. "However, we still need to receive confirmations from national Olympic committees and member-associations, followed by any possible reallocations, and this will take a number of weeks to complete," the BWF said.

According to the qualification rules, the top 16 players - a maximum of two players each in men's and women's singles from a country - as on 15 June will gain direct entries. The BWF said "invitations will be sent shortly with final participation lists and seedings to be published at the conclusion of this process."

Global talent will decide 'all-English' CL final

AGENCIES
LISBON, 28 MAY

After a season in which Europe's traditional powerhouses stumbled, Saturday's Champions League final between Manchester City and Chelsea is a showcase for the contemporary dominance of England's Premier League.

Neither club can boast a rich pedigree at this level -- City are making their debut on this stage while Chelsea will be featuring in their third Champions League final, having won the competition in 2012. It is an 'all-English' final but both teams highlight the Premier League's ability to recruit the finest coaching and playing talent from across the continent and beyond.

City are coached by Spaniard Pep Guardiola **(in photo)**, who won the competition twice when guiding Barcelona, while Chelsea's German boss Thomas Tuchel led Paris St Germain to the final last season, where they were beaten by Bayern Munich. Both have benefited from their foreign owners' willingness to invest in top international talent with City's Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan from Abu Dhabi and Chelsea's Russian backer Roman Abramovich con-

stantly providing the millions needed.

It is the second all-English Champions League final in three years, confirming the long-standing fears of debt-ridden Spanish giants Real Madrid and Barcelona that the unmatched global commercial success of the Premier League will eventually be replicated on the field.

Indeed, a recent Uefa report showed that English clubs were responsible for 43 per cent of all global transfer activity in last summer's trading window. There is of course, as Manchester United continue to prove, no guarantee that financial power delivers success on the field. City's success, in winning three of the last four Premier League titles, owes much to Guardiola's brilliance as a coach and tactician and the club's excellent record in recruitment. Under the Spaniard, City have produced some magnificent passing football but this year, largely thanks to the signing of Portuguese defender Ruben Dias, they have added steel at the back to the flair in the final third.

In previous European campaigns, City have exited after poor defensive displays where they fell apart at the back in crucial periods. This season though, City did not concede for 790 minutes of Champions League football, a run stretching from their opening group game against Porto until the 84th minute of the quarter-final, first leg against Borussia Dortmund.

Chelsea, with Brazilian veteran Thiago Silva at the heart of their defence, have also tightened up at the back and indeed the two finalists have conceded just four goals each in Europe this season. That is lowest total for the two finalists since Barcelona (four goals against) took on Arsenal (two) in the 2006 decider.

Neither side have conceded more than once in a Champions League game this season. But thankfully there will be no shortage of attacking talent aiming to exploit any lingering weaknesses in the two defences.

City have an abundance of attacking options, so much so that Guardiola has often been so confident in the goal-threat of his wide players and attacking midfielders that he has played without either of his centre forwards -- Argentine Sergio Aguero or Brazilian Gabriel Jesus. On the right, Algerian winger Riyad Mahrez has scored 14 goals and claimed nine assists in all competitions with Phil Foden on the left producing 16 goals and creating 10 this season. The attacking contributions from midfield are equally impressive with German Ilkay Gundogan claiming 17 goals and Belgian Kevin De Bruyne 18 assists.

Yet despite those numbers, Chelsea have shown that they can get the better of Guardiola's side -- the Londoners have won the last two encounters, at Wembley in the FA Cup semi-final and at the Etihad in the league earlier this month. Englishman Mason Mount and American Christian Pulisic bring speed and precision to Chelsea's attack and while Germans Timo Werner and Kai Havertz have yet to fully deliver on their promise, they present a threat.

After a season in which games were played behind closed doors, up to 16,500 fans will be present at the Estadio do Dragao, the bulk of them having travelled from England. They could be in for a treat.

Another year, same question: Can anyone stop Nadal?

AGENCIES
PARIS, 28 MAY

Unbelievably, 13-times French Open champion Rafael Nadal **(in photo)** is only third seed for this year's Roland Garros fortnight, below Daniil Medvedev who has never won a match on the Parisian clay.

The Spaniard has also been lumped in the same side of the men's draw as his great rivals, world number one Novak Djokovic and the returning Roger Federer. He also turns 35 next week.

Yet, it would still be a huge surprise if Nadal were not the last man standing when the tournament concludes on 13 June. With each passing year questions are inevitably asked about whether Nadal's vice-like hold on the French Open will be loosened. Each time, the answer has been an emphatic NO.

And after his sweep to a 10th Rome Masters title earlier this month, the 88th Association of Tennis Professionals title of his career, few will be holding their breath waiting for Nadal's downfall. If the Mallorcan needed any extra motivation he knows that lifting the Coupe des Mousquetaires once again next month will see him move ahead of Roger Federer at the top of the all-time list of men's Grand Slam champions, with 21.

Nadal did show some vulnerability when he lost to Andrey Rublev and Alexander Zverev in Monte Carlo and Madrid respectively, but his commanding win over Djokovic in the Rome final sent out a powerful statement.

"Rome was crucial to him," two-time French Open runner-up Alex Corretja said in the build-up. "It was a reminder that he is the best on clay ever and the fact that he beat Novak in the final is something that gives him so much confidence."

Djokovic, whose hope of winning a second French title were destroyed by a ruthless Nadal in last year's final, could lock horns with his claycourt nemesis in the semi-final this time. The Serb could also face 39-year-old Federer in the quarter-finals, although with the Swiss having lost his only match on clay this year, his expectations are perhaps as low as they have ever been ahead of a Grand Slam.

"I think for Roger to reach the quarter-finals would be an unbelievable result," Corretja said. "It's Roger, so you can never count him out, but I think if he reaches the second week it would be an amazing result. He played in Geneva and couldn't find his rhythm. I don't think he is thinking he can win it, he's just going day by day and to be in his best condition for when the grasscourts start."

Austrian Dominic Thiem, the fourth seed who has twice fallen to Nadal in the French Open final, will be favourite to come through in the bottom half of the draw although his form has been patchy in the run-up. Russian Medvedev, despite being seeded two as per his world ranking, will be happy just to win a match having failed to do so in his previous four main draw appearances at Roland Garros.

Far more likely challengers are Germany's Zverev and Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas.

All-court player Tsitsipas, seeded five, arrives in the French capital on the back of claycourt titles in Monte Carlo and Lyon while Zverev beat both Nadal and Thiem on his way to winning the title in Madrid. Away from the obvious contenders, youngster Jannik Sinner, together with Matteo Berrettini and Fabio Fognini, head a strong-looking Italian challenge.

Printed and published by VINOD KUMAR GUPTA for THE STATESMAN LTD, Statesman House, 148 Barakhamba Road, New Delhi ♦ Editor: RAVINDRA KUMAR ♦ Executive Editor: ARYA RUDRA ♦ Printed at Vibha Publication Pvt Ltd, D-160 B, Sector 7, NOIDA 201301 (UP). © The Statesman Ltd. RNB REG. No. M-8905, RNI No. 507/57

epaper.thestatesman.com