

Delhi reports 332 deaths, over 17K new cases

Hospitals across the city report thinner crowds as surge shows signs of weakening

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Capital reported 332 COVID-19 deaths in the past 24 hours, pushing the toll to 19,071 on Saturday. A total of 17,364 new infections were also reported during the same period, taking the tally to 13,10,231, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government. Of the total cases, 12,03,253 people have recovered and there are 87,907 active cases in the na-

tional capital.

A total of 74,384 tests were conducted in 24 hours. The test positivity rate was 23.34%. This means that about 23 out of 100 people tested turned out to be COVID-19 positive.

There was a sharp rise in test positivity rate from 3.5% on April 1 to 36.2% on April 22. The test positivity rate fell below 25% on May 6 and has stayed below the mark since.

Decreasing test positivity

rate is a good sign, said experts. The test positivity rate should be ideally below 5%.

Meanwhile, the rush outside Safdarjung Hospital has reduced compared to two weeks back when the number of new cases in the city was around 25,000 a day. There was no ambulance waiting outside the building around 5 p.m. on Saturday.

Officials said that other hospitals such as Lok Nayak and Guru Teg Bahadur are al-

so witnessing a reduction in number of ambulances arriving at COVID wards. At GTB Hospital, the emergency ward is now less crowded and there are no long queues, said doctors.

The Delhi government on Saturday also declared Indira Gandhi Hospital in Dwarka as a dedicated COVID-19 facility. Initially, 250 beds of the 900-bed facility will be opened for COVID-19 patients, read an order.

'Oxygen langar' breathes life into patients

Free service at a parking lot in Noida has been assisting around 15 people daily

JATIN ANAND

NOIDA

A free, drive-thru 'oxygen langar' at a parking lot in Noida is literally breathing life into COVID patients with dangerously fluctuating oxygen levels. They are given assistance till such time as their families manage to arrange liquid oxygen or get a hospital bed on their own.

The langar, which started functioning on May 6, has assisted at least 15 patients daily in getting their oxygen levels boosted. It was set up at the multilevel parking behind the Botanical Garden metro station in the heart of Gautam Buddha Nagar district by the management of Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, NGO Khalsa Aid and the district administration.

The facility has 14 oxygen



A COVID-19 patient gets assistance at the 'oxygen langar' in Noida. ■ JATIN ANAND

concentrators, with more expected over the coming days, as well as oxygen cylinders for emergency cases.

The service is available for patients with an oxygen level till 80. "Relatives can drive up with patients in their vehicles whenever they need oxygen on a first-come-first-serve basis. They can either receive support in their vehi-

cles or on beds along with assistance from paramedical staff till their oxygen level is up to 95," said Lt. Colonel Surjeet Singh (retired), who is part of the initiative.

"There are times when some patients with oxygen levels below 80 also turn up and we attend to them on a humanitarian basis, however, we do advise anyone with an oxygen level below 80 to go to a hospital. In the meantime, we are getting cylinders from the administration to tend to such emergency cases," he added.

Food service

Bhai Gurdeep Singh, head

granthi of the gurdwara that

manages the service, said

they are operating round the

clock and have 12 volunteers

divided into groups working

12-hour shifts.

The gurdwara, with a separate team of around 25 volunteers, also provides meals to 1,000 COVID-affected households in Noida twice a day. Mr. Singh said he could be contacted at 9654714986 for the emergency 'oxygen sewa' as well as food arrangements.

Mandeep Awana (name changed on request), a property dealer, took his 75-year-old grandmother to the facility on Saturday. "I was trying to arrange an oxygen concentrator but could not despite trying all my contacts. Either they were only available on rent or not at all. My grandmother's oxygen level has been fluctuating for days and I could not risk her life waiting for a miracle, so I brought her here," he said.

More platforms

"We were getting com-

plaints regarding waiting

hours at the Hindon crea-

memorium. Though we had

constructed more plat-

forms but still there was a

long waiting time. Initially,

we revived a crematorium in Indirapuram that was not in use as people preferred

Hindon. But that too was al-

so running out of space, so

we have revived the one in

Sahibabad area," said an of-

ficial with the GMC.

Aditya Gaur, a priest at the Sahibabad crea-

Unused crematoriums revived in Ghaziabad as space runs out

There was a long waiting time at the Hindon facility, says civic body

SAURABH TRIVEDI

NEW DELHI

Unable to cremate all COVID-19 bodies due to 'never ending' queues at the Hindon crematorium, the Ghaziabad administration has decided to reuse the defunct crematoriums in the city.

Recently, the Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation (GMC) has revived cremation grounds in Shalimar Garden, Indirapuram, Raj Nagar Extension and Karhera.

Last week, a priest at the Hindon crematorium had put 'houseful' board at the entry gate after there was no space left for cremation of bodies.

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At present, the GMC has

provided 34 platforms at

the Indirapuram cremation

ground for COVID and non-

COVID bodies. If required

more platforms will be con-

structed.

"Before the ashes cool

down, another body takes

over the space. Back-to-

back cremations have

caused a shortage of wood,"

said Triloki Nath, a priest at the Indirapuram cremation

ground.



A view of the cremation ground in the Shalimar Garden area which is getting revamped. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

ziabad administration has woken up late to the crisis. There should be more electric crematoriums for COVID bodies," said Mr. Singh.

Santosh Kumar, who had come to cremate his nephew, said now at least they will get ashes of their loved ones. "I went to the Hindon crematorium 10 days ago for the creation of a man who died of natural causes. I was shocked to see the chaos. We were not even allowed to wait till the body got cremated. We left the crematorium without collecting the ashes," he said.

Sushil Kumar, a farmer from Karhera area of Sahibabad, was disturbed after seeing the videos and photos of queues at the crematoriums. He has offered his 1,500 gaj land worth of several acres for a crematorium. "I have written a letter to the GMC and offered land for cremation of COVID-19 bodies. A team visited the plot and they have started constructing 10 platforms," he said.

A GMC official said after verifying the documents and getting other formalities done, they have started constructing platforms and have arranged wood and other facilities at the location for the visitors.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

REMEMBRANCE

Respectful pranams at the lotus feet of Our beloved Guru Pujyashri Mathioli Saraswathy 09/05/2021



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- Devotees

DEATH



S. SESHADRINATHAN (BALAJI), (82 Yrs)

Proud Native of Sekharipuram, Palakkad

"A Self-made Man and A Gentle Soul"

Passed away on 06th May 2021 at Chennai

Mourned by:

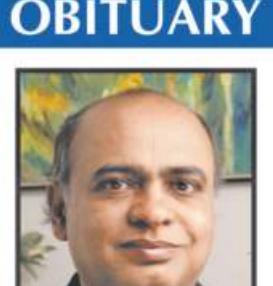
Sridhar & Krishna
Ganga Krishnan, Prema & Sunder, Mani & Kanthi
Chellam & Krishnamurthy, Raji & Ram, Ambu
Cousins, Nieces, Nephews, Grandchildren
Friends & Well-wishers

WhatsApp, Phone, E-mail condolences only:

+91 425 301 9844 / 044 2499 2935, gopalak@gmail.com

Om Namo Narayaya

DEATH



P Sundararajan

Head – Compliance and Company Secretary

Sundaram Mutual family deeply mourns the demise of Mr. P Sundararajan on Saturday, 8th May 2021.



SUNDARAM MUTUAL

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Smt. R. Rukmani (94)
Founder-Managing Trustee, Marabu Foundation
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Inserted by Dr. Rama, Kausalya, R. Narasimhan (Babu) & Meenakshi Rajmohan

04362-260606 / 94437 40303 Email: drramakausalya@gmail.com

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Crime Branch to probe hoarding of oxygen concentrators at posh eateries

Over 500 devices have been seized in multiple raids

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A case registered in connection with black marketing and hoarding of oxygen concentrators at restaurants in Khan Market was transferred to the Crime Branch on Saturday.

On May 6, Delhi Police had recovered 419 oxygen concentrators following a raid at an upscale restaurant in Lodhi Colony. The owner was identified as Navneet Kalra. The oxygen concen-

trators were being sold at exorbitant prices, police said.

Four persons, including restaurant manager Hitesh, were arrested. Subsequently, raids were conducted at two other restaurants owned by Mr. Kalra in Khan Market. A total of 96 oxygen concentrators were found at Khan Chacha and nine at Town Hall.

"With further seizure of 105 #OxygenConcentrator from Khan Chacha & Town Hall, 2 upscale restaurants in

Khan Mkt, total 524 seized frm #blackmarketeers Owner Navneet Kalra, also owns Dayal Opticals, is on run. Manager, 3 staffers arrested by #DelhiPolice SouthDist. Further raids on [sic]," the Delhi Police had tweeted.

Initial probe revealed that the concentrators were imported from China by a private company for ₹16,000-₹22,000. They were being sold for ₹50,000-₹70,000.

Teams have been formed to trace Mr. Kalra.

CREATIVELY ENGAGE CHILDREN DURING THEIR ACADEMIC BREAK</

Timings

DELHI

SUNDAY, MAY. 09	max	min
RISE 05:35 SET 19:02		
RISE 04:19 SET 16:58		
MONDAY, MAY. 10		
RISE 05:34 SET 19:02		
RISE 04:48 SET 17:50		
TUESDAY, MAY. 11		
RISE 05:34 SET 19:03		
RISE 05:18 SET 18:43		

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	39	22
Safdarjung	39	22
Palam	40	24

Delhi Palam Today

40°C Rise in day temperature. A hot day with partly cloudy sky. Chances of thunder clouds development at few places.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

41°C A hot day would continue. A spell of rain or thunderstorm may occur at few places.

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THE HINDU

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Task force set up to assist children

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government's Women and Child Development Department has constituted a 'District Task Force' for COVID-19 positive children who are in Child Care Institutes or whose parents have died due to the virus.

"The Delhi government has been taking effective measures to tackle the multiple issues of children orphaned due to the pandemic," WCD Minister Rajendra Pal Gautam said, adding that the newly constituted task force will set a good model of childcare, especially in COVID-19 management through testing, timely medical care, and good nutrition for children.

Quarantine centres
During the meeting, it was informed that the department has set up two quarantine centres for children so that new admissions sent through child welfare committees do not get mixed up with existing residents.

The WCD department, through its network of Anganwadi services and newly created Saheli Samavay Kendra, has been training Anganwadi workers for spreading awareness about COVID-19 appropriate behaviour.

Couple held with 125 kg of heroin

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A husband-wife duo has been arrested for allegedly supplying heroin, police said on Saturday, adding that drugs worth ₹860 crore have been recovered from their possession. The accused are allegedly refugees from Afghanistan.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Urvija Goel said 48-year-old Mohammad Shafi and 36-year-old Tareena, both from Kandahar in Afghanistan, were arrested with over 125.8 kg of heroin.

"On May 7, the police received information that two people would come from Wazirabad with heroin in their car and will go towards Khyala. A trap was laid and the accused were apprehended. The heroin was kept in seven plastic bags," Ms. Goel said.

Shafi allegedly told the police that they were out to supply heroin from Wazirabad to Khyala and thereafter to Punjab.



1 down, 1 to go

Though off to a slow start, people in the 18-44 age group are now coming out in droves across Delhi to get the COVID-19 vaccine and taking the first step towards safeguarding themselves from the virus



People in the 18-44 age group getting the COVID-19 vaccine at various facilities across Delhi-NCR.

▪ PHOTOS BY: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR, R.V. MOORTHY, SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA, MANOJ KUMAR

Vaccination process at Delhi govt. schools quick, smooth'

Several in 18-44 age bracket say their doubts about facilities proved wrong

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

Amid the rush for vaccines, several people in the 18-44 age bracket, who got vaccinated at Delhi government schools, said that their initial apprehensions about the facilities proved wrong and that the entire vaccination process turned out to be seamless at the schools.

For South Delhi resident Aneet Chetri, the dilemma of visiting a hospital to get vaccinated was cleared once slots for the government schools opened up.

"I realised that getting vaccinated was important. But I kept thinking what if I visit a hospital and get infected instead of the vaccine? I was worried and not confident at all. Getting a slot was not easy but I somehow managed to book one in Central Delhi. To my surprise it turned out to be a government school in Karol Bagh where the process was extremely smooth," said Mr. Chetri.

Volunteers to help

Stating that the entire process was over within an hour, including the 30-minute observation period, Mr. Chetri said, "There were volunteers to help at every corner. During the monitoring period, post-vaccination, the staff even responded to queries about the second dose and gener-



A civil defence volunteer assists a healthcare worker at a vaccination centre in a Janakpuri school in New Delhi on Saturday. ▪ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

al side effects. Everything seemed well organised. I felt safe and even encouraged my friends and colleagues to get vaccinated as soon as possible."

At a government school in Safdarjung Enclave, those with appointments for the 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. slot began lining up outside the centre by 8:15 a.m.

Those who got the jab on Saturday said while the vaccination process began at around 9:30 a.m., the rest of the process was quick and smooth.

Properly demarcated waiting areas within the school premises and a well managed crowd by the civil

The workers replied to queries about the second vaccine dose and general side effects. Everything seemed well organised. I felt safe

A BENEFICIARY

cluding the 30-minute observation period. The only thing I would have liked a bit more would be if the attendants shared some general information about the vaccine while administering it," said Mr. Didwana, who took the jab at a school in Moti Bagh.

For Suresh Kumar Chugh, a finance professional, the process of getting vaccinated was "unbelievably smooth", he said.

"Given that it was a government school, one is mentally prepared for long queues but there was no queue when I went during my time slot at 3 p.m. I got vaccinated within five minutes after getting my credentials and appointment slip checked. Half an hour later, I was out of the school. The staff was friendly and premises clean," said Mr. Chugh.

A steady stream of people has been lining up outside government schools over the past few days with several of them posting positive reviews on social media as well.

Delhi to increase vaccination centres to 300, says Kejriwal

'We want all the people to get vaccinated as soon as possible'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday visited a vaccination centre at Chirag Delhi where he said the government needed to administer 3 lakh doses daily if the entire population of the city was to be inoculated within three months.

The Delhi government, he said, was going to increase the number of vaccination centres from 100 to 300 for the same.

"We want all of Delhi to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Vaccination is a defence mechanism that can save lives. Right now, the second wave is in operation and it is being said that the possibility of a third wave looms large. Thus, it is our



Arvind Kejriwal

aim that the entire Delhi be vaccinated within 3 months," he said.

"There are 1.5 crore people in Delhi above the age of 18. They need 3 crore vaccine doses. As of now, we have received only 40 lakh doses from the Centre... so we need an additional 2.6

crore doses," he added.

Mr. Kejriwal also said that so far arrangements had been made in 100 schools and 1 lakh vaccine doses were being administered daily. In the next few days, the Delhi government would increase the number of these sites to 300 schools and work on increasing capacity to administer 3 lakh doses per day.

He also termed "a firm possibility" of 'one vaccine programme' in the country.

"The Central government is offering full assistance. Whenever we needed facilities, we asked the Centre for aid and it did the best to provide help on their part. Hopefully, the Central government will assist in this too," he said.

Food service for families of patients

Facility available at RML, AIIMS and Lok Nayak hospitals

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Saturday launched a food service for family members of COVID-19 patients in three hospitals.

Party unit president Adesh Gupta was part of the launch at Ram Manohar Lohia hospital, Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri at AIIMS, and State organisational general secretary Siddharthan at Lok

Nayak Hospital. The drive was launched simultaneously at all three venues.

"This service is now available near or outside these hospitals and food will be available between 1.30 p.m. and 2.30 p.m., and in the evening from 7.30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m.," Mr. Gupta said.

He also inspected a COVID Care Centre at the North Delhi corporation-run Balak Ram Hospital, which has oxygen cylinders, concentrators and 100 beds.

"The corporation's concept of oxygen on wheels has now been realised and started here at Balak Ram Hospital. The idea is if any of three hospitals face oxygen shortage, it can be obtained from here," said North corporation Mayor Jai Prakash.

"In the past 25 days, the corporation has arranged 500 beds whereas the city government has reduced beds by 1,500," he claimed.

THE HINDU CLASSIFIEDS

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MATRIMONIAL

BRIDEGRoOMS WANTED

INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

BRIDEGRoOMS WANTED

BRIDES WANTED

BRIDES & GROOMS WANTED

Classification common for Brides, Bridegrooms, Brides & Grooms

Assamese

Awadhi

Bengali

Bhojpuri

Bihari

Chhattisgarhi

English

Gujarati

Haryanvi

Hindi

Kannada

Kashmiri

Konkani

Malayalam

Manipuri

Marathi

Marwari

Nepali

Oriya

Parsi

Punjabi

Saurashtra

Sindhi

Tamil

Telugu

Tulu

Urdu

Advocate

Business

Defence

Doctor

Engineer

Finance/ Banking

Government/ Quasi-Govt.

IAS/ Allied Services

Information Technology

MBA/ CA/ ICWA

NRI

Cosmopolitan

Divorcee

Physically Challenged

MARRIAGE BUREAUS

WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS

COMPUTER / INFO.TECH.

INTERCASTE PARENTS Kammanai/Dendrakula Vellarai, Girl/ Fair/ 26 / 164 cms/ Pooradam/ B.Tech. IT/ 12-14 PA CTC working Bangalore seeks suitable groom caste no bar. For details Bharath Matrimony ID M4522969 / 9944021354.

INTERCASTE DOCTORS Parent / Girl/ 27/160 cms/ moderm/ ME about to complete P.HD in CSE / 5 LPA seeks suitable groom. Caste No Bar. For details Bharathmatrimony ID M4563886 / 9159966477

COSMOPOLITAN

ELITE FAMILY Naidu utthiram 4 magaram/27/1990/165 Fair, MBBS Dr. TN Govt Chennai seeks Dr, Govt class-A officer, Business Groom Any FC/BC, 9841743268

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PARENTS OF Obstetrician & Gyneacologist MBBS MS Good looking and clean habits 29 Gavara Naidu looking for well settled well mannered Groom . PG doctors /Grade 1 officers sub sects no bar Please mail bidata Horoscope photos

TAMIL/THULUVAVELLALA, 153cm MBBS/MS (O&G) seeks doctor groom MBBS/MD/MS from same community Ct:9865294257/8015625584

28/

DOCTOR

DOCTOR NAIR Girl, Thrissur, 30/162, Doing MS Surgery, parents doctors. Seeks suitable groom MD/MS/DMC/MC. Call: 9605659777.

DOCTOR GIRL MS, MCh (doing), Chennai, slim, fair 28 yrs,164cm, Maruthvar, seeks a groom talented, good habits. MS(MD/clinical)/ Super specialty DM/MBBS/DBN 29 to 33yrs from Maruthvar/MBC/CFC from good family with values. Contact: chengansrirangan@gmail.com

NADAR - MBBS, DGO - 26yrs, Fair Bride / Seeks Doctor Groom or Rich Others. Ct: Rajan Nadar - 7338812126

25 B.E MBA Kamma Naidu Upper Middle Class, seeks suitable groom. Contact: 94433 17273 / 94870 25479

SC, AGE 31, Fair, MBBS, MD, Doctor, Chennai. Seeks Doctor,B.E. MCh or Any Govt. 9710840909, 7845089996

HINDU AD age 28 Tamil 153CM B.Tech MS IT USA H1B visa working girl, well to do, educated family seeks USA based well educated groom, caste and language no bar. ct 8879662792

HINDU SC PR Kongu 36, MBBS DCH Doctor, working in Govt Hospital seeks suitable Groom. Ct: 94436-80973.

TAMIL VISWAKARMA, 38/150cm, Thiruvonam, M.E, Rich seeks suitable Groom from Same Caste. 9486320982

CHENNAI BASED Brahmam Iyer girl, Doctor, 25 yrs doing her MS, Hashram, Kanji Rasi, koundinya, 172 cm, slim, bestfully seeking alliance from Iyer/Iyengar, post graduate Doctor from Rich/Affluent, family oriented, handsome boy with clean habits from a good family. 9500009904 kalyanasundaram123@gmail.com

ASST. PROF. Tulva Vellala Muddalal Good looking Girl 33 (Uthirattiy, Meenam, Ph.D). Family. Seeks Alliance from First and Unmarried Bachelor. Bridgegroom Aged 33 - 36 Yrs, Employed, Caste No bar. Ct: After 7 PM. 9940840706, 7550245659 / 9790739037

DVK HINDU 35/158/BE Visakan/ Thulam & 32/163/BE/Software Engineer 10L Ashwini/Mesham Chennai Seeks alliance from same community Ct:8884053046 / 9604664742.

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YADAVA GIRL, 33, Star: Poosam, Govt. Officer. Seeking suitable Groom from Madurai or south Tamilnadu. Mbo: 9443393719

HINDU, 32/152, B.E. Middle Class. Diverse Seeks Suitable Groom. Caste No Bar. Ct: 94896 95984

CHETTIAR / Mudalar / Pillai : 25 / 173, Fair, Tall and Good Looking B.Tech., from educated affluent family seeks well educated handsome Groom from similar background. Ct: 99949 15406 / 73038 10258

YADAVA GIRL, 25/155/B.E. working in S/W Co Chennai getting 1.5L p.m.eeks suitable Yadava Groom:7010056280

BRIDE GROOM WANTED

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CSI AD Christian 33/165, MSC, Project manager MNC Chennai, seeks professional Groom. Ct: +91 9003154162

BE/21/2/RC VELLALAR/AFFLUENT family, seeks groom below 27 from very affluent family, email-tesscoservice@gmail.com.

CSI CHRISTIAN Nadar Girl Fair, Looking, 03-04-1986 born / 152cm / M.Sc M.Phil , working as Assistant Professor in a Reputed Women's College, Mount Road, Chennai. Both Parents Doctors (Private) Suitable Alliance, Employed in Chennai / With Clean Habits from Same Community. Contact: 984182514

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MUDALIAR/ PILLAI 25 B.E. (ece) Ketali, working in MNC. Soft Spoken 160 cm tall business man from Chennai. Ct:840871430, 9446463301.

HINDU YADAVA MCA SWE Chennai 45 yrs Divorcee no children seeks good Groom. Contact: 9442571413.

NADAR AGAMUDAYAR Divorcee 29, ME, Uthiram. Contact: 9442635623. Cast No Bar.

DKV RISHABAM Karthigai 30/157 MCA Working IT Chennai 30000pm Seeks Groom from Decent Family. Ct: 945378089.

AGE 42 yrs, Christian, M.B.A. LLB Divorced. wanted Groom below 47 years Chennai only. Ct: 9940280904

PILLAI/ MUDALIYAR subect no bar 44/165 M.Sc (Agri) AO govt, unmarried,seeks groom 9842370325, 9826945465

VANNIAKULA KSHATRIYAR 35/164 Fair, Poondicherry, Seeks Professional, Working as Assistant Professor, Lives in Pondicherry, Seeks same profession and community Groom. Contact: 9443080800

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VELLALAR/MUDALIYAR 25/153 BVA, Ch. Elite Family seek Groom Good Looking/settled in Ch/USA Ct: 9790931425

LIFE MADE SIMPLE

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IN BRIEF



TRS leader questioned in lawyer murder case

HYDERABAD

The Telangana police have picked up TRS leader and Peddappa Zilla Parishad Chairman Putta Madhu, who reportedly disappeared a week ago, from Bhimavaram in Andhra Pradesh. He was being questioned in connection with the twin murder of lawyer couple Gattu Vaman Rao and P.V. Nagamani.

One held for illegal sale of oxygen cylinders

BENGALURU

A man has been arrested for selling oxygen cylinders to patients at ten times the government price of ₹300, the police said on Saturday. Ravi Kumar, who is the branch in charge of Siga Gases at Peenya Industrial Area in the city, was selling oxygen cylinders for ₹3,000 per 47 litres of oxygen. PTI

Counsellors offer lifeline to patients, kin

Death of near and dear ones & loss of jobs have shaken many people in the second wave

R.K. ROSHNI
A.S.JAYANTH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A retired nurse at the Government Medical College Hospital in Thiruvananthapuram lost her husband to COVID-19. Her son too tested positive and had to enter isolation. Caught between grief for her husband and worry for her son, she went through a harrowing time.

There was no family or friend to hold on to amid the pandemic. As reassurance and support were what she needed most, Anilkumar TV, professor of psychiatry at the hospital, communicated with her over the phone regularly.

Not gradual

Unlike the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was a gradual build-up of cases and people had time to come to terms with what was happening, the second wave has spread like wild-

fire, bringing with it fear and anxiety. To cope with these, people are increasingly turning to counsellors and psychiatrists.

Shintu Sebastian, a mental health counsellor attached to the Kozhikode-based Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (IMHANS), says in the initial days of the lockdown last year, many were scared about the impact of the pandemic. Some were depressed after they lost their jobs. There were parents concerned about behavioural changes in children. However, when the number of fresh cases declined, so did the calls.

Now, as the second wave of infection spreads, the calls too have started coming in at IMHANS, says Ms. Shintu.

Asha Raj, a counsellor at the GLV Higher Secondary School, Arayoor, near Parassala, who also provides counselling under the State



Mental Health Programme, says people undergo immense stress worrying about the infection.

Harrowing nights

Stressors can be varied. A young bank employee Ms. Raj narrates how a young woman teetered on the brink of suicide when the rest of her family became infected. Her sister used to supervise her medication, but alone in a room, the young woman expressed apprehension that she would overdose on them. As she was under treatment as part of the District Mental Health Programme, her details were passed on to them for follow-up.

Trauma and isolation experienced by people will only increase as cases surge, especially if there are deaths. When people do not get to bid a final farewell to their loved ones, they are denied a closure and the healing process suffers, Dr. Anilkumar points out.

Cini Rajan, a resident of Thiruvananthapuram, has first-hand experience of this. From losing his job abroad to the death of both parents

of those under treatment for such issues. Ms. Raj narrates how a young woman teetered on the brink of suicide when the rest of her family became infected. Her sister used to supervise her medication, but alone in a room, the young woman expressed apprehension that she would overdose on them. As she was under treatment as part of the District Mental Health Programme, her details were passed on to them for follow-up.

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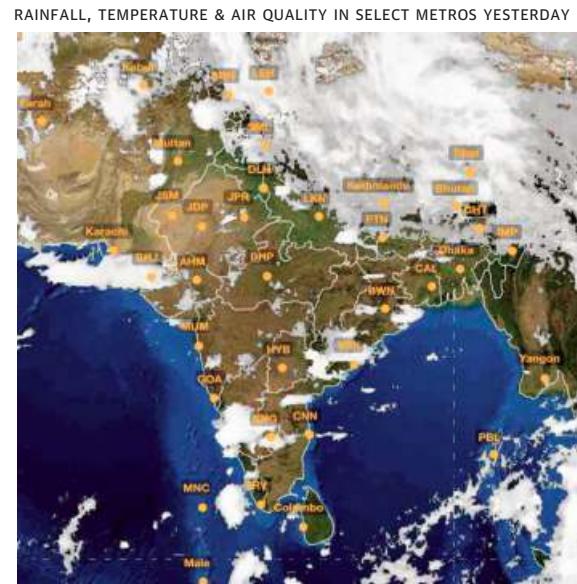
from COVID-19 to spending time in the ICU, he went through an ordeal last year. By the time his wife tested positive, he felt strong enough to cope with her illness. After all, he had seen six people die in a single day in the ICU and spent over two months in quarantine in total. But he is infinitely thankful to family, friends and healthcare workers who supported him.

Online therapy

Meanwhile, IMHANS is conducting online therapy sessions for people with existing mental health issues who might have missed medications or routine check-ups, says Ms. Sebastian.

The helpline of Manasa, a non-governmental organisation of medical college doctors in Thiruvananthapuram, is also available for patients who have returned home to call up and seek clarifications.

WEATHER WATCH



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSTAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 21:00 HRS)
Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorms with lightning, hail and gusty winds (speed reaching 30-60 kmph) likely at isolated places over east Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	17...	34.2...	23.0	Kozhikode	2...	35.0...	25.6
Ahmedabad	...	42.8...	30.0	Kurnool	...	40.1...	28.6
Aizawl	...	27.9...	15.9	Lucknow	...	37.2...	24.7
Allahabad	...	40.6...	24.5	Madurai	14...	34.6...	24.6
Bengaluru	...	32.7...	23.3	Mangaluru	...	33.8...	23.1
Bhopal	...	39.8...	25.6	Mumbai	...	33.8...	27.0
Bhubaneswar	0.7...	39.7...	25.0	Mysuru	...	33.8...	21.3
Chandigarh	...	36.8...	26.8	New Delhi	...	38.8...	22.3
Chennai	...	35.6...	28.2	Patna	...	36.6...	21.6
Coimbatore	6...	34.0...	23.4	Port Blair	29...	30.9...	25.3
Dibrugarh	...	33.2...	18.7	Puducherry	...	34.4...	26.8
Gangtok	...	18.8...	13.3	Pune	...	39.4...	24.6
Goa	1...	35.0...	27.2	Raipur	...	38.4...	24.6
Guwahati	11...	30.3...	20.9	Ranchi	2.2...	34.4...	19.7
Hubballi	...	34.0...	24.0	Shillong	15.4...	20.9...	13.4
Hyderabad	...	36.9...	26.8	Shimla	3...	25.9...	13.5
Imphal	...	27.9...	18.0	Srinagar	...	24.0...	9.2
Jaipur	...	40.2...	27.0	Thiruvananthapuram	36...	33.9...	25.8
Kochi	4...	32.4...	25.0	Tiruchi	...	37.7...	26.4
Kohima	...	22.0...	13.2	Vijayawada	...	38.6...	27.4
Kolkata	35.0...	26.3	20.9	Visakhapatnam	...	37.4...	28.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Yesterday

CITIES	SO	NO	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	32	46	43	77.7	133	...
Bengaluru	2	82	38	28	68	...
Chennai	62	5	35	22	26	...
Delhi	21	42	88	187	136	...
Hyderabad	4	47	39	28	67	...
Kolkata	10	20	15	38	49	...
Lucknow	.6	30	44	73	94	...
Mumbai	69	2	16	32	45	...
Pune	...	37	74	84	—	...
Visakhapatnam	17	21	8	14	27	...

In observation made at 4.00 p.m. The Maharashtra AQI score of 304 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 21

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

(With inputs from Thiruvananthapuram, Vijayawada, Hyderabad & Chennai bureaus)

+ NORTH & EAST +

Help is at hand | New care facilities

are being set up across districts to cater to the spiraling number of COVID-19 patients. The graph shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States.



Healing touch: A 100-bed COVID-19 isolation facility being readied at Calvary Temple, a church in Hyderabad, on Saturday. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

Sambalpur tops with 57%

SATYASUNDAR BARIK

BHUBANESWAR

Odisha, which has been successively reporting daily surge of over 10,000 for past three days, continues to witness high test positivity rate with 19 of its 30 districts figuring in 300 districts of India, where TPR is above 20%.

The weekly list of district-wise positivity rate above

20%, released by Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, says Odisha is among first 10 States having 19 or above districts reporting TPR higher than 20%.

The TPR table for May 1 to 7 says most of western Odisha have reported high TPR. Sambalpur is probably among very few districts where the TPR exceeded 50%. As many as 57 persons in Sambalpur test positive for COVID-19 out of every 100 persons undergoing tests.

Incidentally, the TPR has crossed 20% in 19 districts

With nearly 90,000 fresh cases, they face a big challenge

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

Karnataka on Saturday reported 47,563 new cases of COVID-19 and 21,534 of these were from Bengaluru Urban, while there were 482 more deaths.

The State, with a lockdown plan from May 10, had 5,48,841 active patients and test positivity rate (TPR) of 30.28%.

Kerala's COVID-19 worries persisted with 41,971 new cases on Saturday from 14,854 samples, representing an average TPR of 28.25%. The State had 41,7101 active cases. A record number of 64 recent

deaths were added to the State toll. Kerala went into a nine-day lockdown on Saturday.

Andhra Pradesh reported 96 deaths, the highest daily toll in eight and half months, and 20,065 new infections on Saturday. For 1,01,571 samples tested, the TPR was 19.75%.

Active COVID-19 cases in Telangana were below the 70,000 mark for the first time in 12 days, even as 5,186 new cases and 38 deaths were reported as of Saturday evening..

An official bulletin indicated that the daily infection rate was dropping slowly as it

six digit numbers.

The State reported highest ever single day fatality with 21 persons succumbing to COVID-19 on Saturday. The death-toll has reached 2,161. It is alleged that the death-toll was hugely under-reported.

Vaccine consignment
Meanwhile, the first consignment (one lakh doses) of Covishield vaccine for 18-44 age group has reached Bhubaneswar Airport, from Serum Institute of India on Saturday.

The Amritsar MLA further said that giving six months to a new special investigation team (SIT) for

Sidhu hits out at Amarinder

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHANDIGARH

Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu once again on Saturday targeted Punjab Chief Minister

FROM PAGE ONE

DCGI nod for DRDO's anti-COVID-19 drug

Clinical trial results have shown that this molecule helps in faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces supplemental oxygen dependence, noted the release. It further said that higher proportion of patients treated with 2-DG showed RT-PCR negative conversion in COVID-19 patients.

In April 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic, INMAS-DRDO scientists conducted laboratory experiments with the help of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, and found that this molecule works effectively against SARS-CoV-2 virus and inhibits the viral growth.

10 workers killed in blast at limestone quarry in A.P.

The impact was such that body parts were strewn over a half a km radius. The toll was expected to rise as teams were formed to identify and collect the body parts.

Rescue operations were delayed as the accident site is in a remote area, residents said. Those who received moderate injuries were rushed to hospitals in Badvel.

A senior police officer, who rushed to the spot, said rescue operations had become difficult as the quarry was in a rough terrain, surrounded by hills and forest ranges of Kadapa, Kurnool and Prakasam districts.

Superintendent of Police, Kadapa, K.K.N. Anburajan told *The Hindu* that they

The DCGI permitted Phase-II clinical trial of 2-DG in COVID-19 patients in May 2020.

In Phase-II trials (including dose ranging) conducted during May to October 2020, the drug was found to be safe in COVID-19 patients, and showed it led to significant improvement in their recovery.

Phase IIa was conducted in six hospitals and Phase IIb (dose ranging) clinical trial was conducted at 11 hospitals all over the country. Phase-II trial was conducted on 110 patients.

In efficacy trends, patients treated with 2-DG showed faster symptomatic cure than Standard of Care (SoC) on various endpoints.

had received a complaint that 10 workers were killed. The police have so far traced six bodies, and a search is on to determine the fate of the other victims. "Our personnel rushed to the spot, and the investigation into the accident has begun," he said.

The SP said that as per preliminary information, the limestone quarry sites in Kalasapadu mandal had all valid permits.

"However, we will be investigating the details to ascertain the facts," Mr. Anburajan said.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy expressed shock over the tragic death of the quarry workers and spoke to the district authorities about the incident.

'Test for COVID-19 not a must for admission'

"The revised guidelines cover medications such as oxygen or essential drugs even if the patient belongs to a different city," added the release.

The revised guidelines noted that no patient shall be refused admission on the ground that he/she was not able to produce a valid identity card establishing they belonged to the city where the hospital is located.

"Admissions to hospital must be based on need. It should be ensured that beds are not occupied by persons who do not need hospitalisation. Further, the discharge should be strictly in accordance with the revised discharge policy," added the Ministry.

The Ministry has advised

SC orders decongestion of prisons immediately

In addition to these fresh releases, the court said prisoners who were released on interim bail during the 2020 surge should be freed again "forthwith". Ninety percent of inmates released last year had returned to their prisons in February and March 2021.

Similarly, inmates who were given parole in 2020 should be released again on a 90-day parole in a bid to de-congest prisons, control infections and save lives within the prison walls.

"India has more than four lakh prison inmates. It is observed that some of the prisons in India are overburdened and are housing inmates beyond optimal capacity... The requirement of decongestion is a matter concerning the health and right to life of both the prison inmates and the police personnel working," the Bench led by Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, and comprising Justices L. Na-geswara Rao and Surya Kant, stressed.

Significantly, the court addressing the government, said "the fight against the pandemic is greatly benefited by transparent administration".

A week after election results, violence continues in Bengal

Verifying posts, videos on social media have proved to be a challenge for police

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA

Nearly a week after the result of the bitterly contested West Bengal Assembly poll was declared, post-poll violence continues in different parts of the State.

Even after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee appealed for peace, announced compensation for those who died and the Union Home Ministry sent a team to take stock of the situation, a string of posts and videos, including fake ones, have surfaced on different social media platforms.

Verifying the videos has proved to be challenging not only for websites and journalists but also for law enforcement agencies. On Thursday, five days after the results of Assembly polls, the Kolkata police from its official Twitter handle urged people to report fake news.

"If you have any informa-



Taking stock: A team from the Union Home Ministry arrived in West Bengal on Thursday to file a report on the violence. ■ PTI

tion about FAKE NEWS You can send an email to cyberps@kolkapatapolic.gov.in or Contact: Land 03322143000," Kolkata police tweeted from its official handle.

Over the past couple of days, the official handles of Kolkata police and West Bengal police have been busy sifting information relating to violence.

Social media posts by ver-

ified Delhi-based handles about BJP polling agents allegedly being raped in Birbhum were called out as fake by West Bengal police as early as May 4.

In another instance on

May 6, the Kolkata police busted another fake post in which a pro-BJP handle claimed that a party worker Mainak Mitra was killed in Sitalkuchi.

A scroll on the timeline of

official handles of the police forces refers to at least half a dozen or more posts and videos of violence, burning of houses or vehicles being called out for being fake.

The West Bengal Police Criminal Investigation Department has arrested a youth from Deganga in North 24 Parganas for spreading fake information and attributing it to post election violence.

Police officials admit that they are constrained to act in many cases, as the handles peddling the misinformation are operated by people outside the State.

In the violence that has raged for the past six days, supporters of both the BJP and the Trinamool have lost lives.

The BJP has claimed 14 of its party workers have been killed, whereas the Trinamool has said that four of its supporters lost their lives.

BJP Assam CM pick remains a suspense

Legislative party meeting today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislative party in Assam has been called on Sunday to decide who will be the next Chief Minister of the State. The suspense over the name remained unresolved on Saturday despite incumbent Sarbananda Sonowal and State Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma hot footing it to Delhi for meetings with the BJP's top leadership.

After the party dragged its feet on the question of a new Chief Minister for the State, even after all other States that had gone into Assembly polls at the same time had new Chief Ministers taking oath of office, Mr. Santosh called up both Mr. Sonowal and Mr. Sarma on Friday night and asked them to travel to Delhi for meetings with Mr. Shah and Mr. Nadda.

The MLAs from Naharkatia and Tingkhong – Tarangga Gogoi and Bimal Borah, respectively – also travelled with Mr. Sarma. Mr. Gogoi is a former aide to Mr. Sarma, while Mr. Borah is said to be close to Mr. Sonowal.

Both camps remained tight-lipped over the contents of the meeting or the decision taken.

been scheduled for Sunday, and that State in-charge Bajayant Panda and party general secretary Arun Singh may also travel to Assam on Saturday evening.

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E.U., India relaunch FTA talks, sign connectivity partnership

Delhi, however, fails to secure support for proposal on vaccine IP waiver

SUHASINI HAIDAR

NEW DELHI

India and the European Union agreed on Saturday to relaunch free trade negotiations by resuming talks that were suspended in 2013 for the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA), as Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted virtually from Delhi with President of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen and E.U. Council President Charles Michel along with 27 European leaders gathered in Porto, Portugal, on Saturday.

The E.U.-India leaders meeting also discussed COVID recovery plans and vaccine cooperation, adopted a Connectivity Partnership document outlining plans to cooperate on digital and infrastructure projects, and signed the contract for the second tranche of \$150 million from the E.U. for the

Pune Metro rail project.

However, India failed to secure the support of the European leaders for its proposal at the World Trade Organisation at the meeting for patent waivers for COVID vaccine, and government officials said they hoped to see the E.U. continue to debate the issue. President of the European Commission

Briefing the media at the end of the meeting, Ms. Von Der Leyen and Mr. Michel said a greater imperative at present was for countries to ramp up the production and delivery of SARS-CoV-2 vaccines through greater investment.

"There are different feelings about the [Indian] request from around the world... In the short term many of us think that this may not be the magic solution, but we would like to keep a closer eye and keep



President of the European Council Charles Michel, left, and European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen at a press conference in Porto, Portugal, on Saturday. ■ AFP

discussing the issue," said Mr. Michel. Ms. Von Der Leyen said the E.U., which was the "pharmacy of the world" and had exported 50% of its production of 400 million vaccine doses to other countries, had shown the way forward. India, which is facing vaccine shortages during the current crisis has had to halt its export programme for vaccines worldwide.

When asked about the

E.U. hesitation over supporting the proposal jointly presented by India and South Africa at the WTO, MEA officials pointed that the U.S. had recently changed its stand and now supports the idea of waiving intellectual property rights on vaccines for the duration of the pandemic, and India would therefore watch the "evolving E.U. position on this". The support of a major bloc like

the Modi government's decision to scrap all Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) in 2015 posed hurdles for new E.U. investments in India.

The timing and structure of the relaunched talks would be steered by the recently set up High-Level dialogue between Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and his counterpart, EU Trade Commissioner, said MEA Secretary (West) Vikas Swarup.

The India-E.U. connectivity partnership signed on Saturday also committed the two sides to working together on digital, energy, transport, people to people connectivity that was "transparent, viable, inclusive, sustainable, comprehensive, with a rules-based approach".

The partnership is seen as a response to China's Belt and Road Initiative, and comes as the E.U.'s negotiations with China on their Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) have run into trouble.

Webinar on effects of pandemic on students

Students asked to set up routines, find new hobbies, reach out if things get tough

JENNY VARGHESE

CHENNAI

Over the past year, the pandemic has affected students enormously. To help them cope, the SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST), in association with *The Hindu*, hosted a webinar on 'Helping Students Navigate the Uncertainties during the Pandemic'.

The session began with Nandini Raman, consultant counsellor, corporate trainer and columnist, discussing the effects of the pandemic and virtual learning on students. She talked about the increasing number of students who are feeling over-

whelmed, fatigued and heading towards a burnout. Some of the challenges reported included trouble staying focused, anxieties from being indoors, addiction to gadgets and frustrations with online classes. She advised students to set routines, find new hobbies, look after their health and to not hesitate to reach out if things get tough.

Dr. Lakshmi Vijayakumar,

Founder of SNEHA and Head, Department of Psychiatry, Voluntary Health Services, highlighted the problem of improper usage of the Internet and ensuing addiction. She reiterated the pros and cons of increased Internet usage, especially during the pandemic, and emphasised the importance of being aware of adverse effects. Quoting Dan Zadra, she said, "Worrying is a misuse of the imagination." Instead she suggested using one's imagination for something positive. Three things would help one cope, she said: improving one's abilities and skills, being more flexible and adaptable

and being more responsible. Prince Kalyanasundaram, Deputy Director-Student Affairs, SRMIST, pointed out the importance of education even during these uncertain times.

There's more to education than getting good grades, he said, and offered pointers to cope with the challenges that students were facing currently. He also mentioned that proper support at home and from the institution is crucial.

The session ended with panellists answering various questions from the viewers. Those who missed the session can view it at <http://bit.ly/SRMTHYTI>

We have found three violations, including expansion by a resort'

RAHUL KARMAKAR

GUWAHATI

The authorities in Assam's Golaghat and Nagaon districts have begun probing cases of clearance of forest land, digging and construction activities on at least three animal corridors within the eco-sensitive zone of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

These two districts share large swathes of the 1,300-sq. km. tiger reserve that has nine identified animal corridors. Seven of these – Anguri, Bagori, Chirang, Deosur, Harmati, Hatidandi and Kan-chanjuri – are in Nagaon district while Haldibari and

Panbari corridors are in Golaghat district. Crucial for animals These corridors are crucial for the rhinos, elephants, tigers, deer and other animals that escape a flooded Kaziranga during the monsoon months for the safety of the hills of Karbi Anglong district beyond the highway skirting the southern boundary of the tiger reserve.

Tiger reserve's director P.

Sivakumar said he had prior to the Assembly elections in March-April written to the Golaghat district authorities underlining some construction activities on the Haldibari corridor. Two had a joint inspection with officials of the Revenue Department two days ago and found three violations on the corridor, including expansion by a resort. Further action will be taken in the coming days," he told *The Hindu* on Saturday.

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'Immediate measures needed for welfare of children'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Committee, in coordination with UNICEF, highlighted the need to urgently provide care and protect children suddenly made vulnerable by the loss of one or both parents to the second wave of COVID-19.

Supreme Court judge S. Ravindra Bhat, who is the Chairperson of the Juvenile Justice Committee, in a review meeting held with High Courts, representatives of States and the Centre, said concerted efforts should be

made to provide interim care for children who have been orphaned, abandoned or even left unaccompanied in their own homes.

"These children are more vulnerable now than ever before," Justice Bhat noted.

A statement released by the Supreme Court on Saturday said some of the measures discussed were the setting up State-level nodal officers and a district task force for rapid response for the care and protection of such children. Other steps include sponsorship for children who had lost parent/s

or bread-earners or were facing economic hardship.

Justice Bhat highlighted the need for clear guidance on steps to be taken in the event when such children in an extremely vulnerable state had been exposed to the virus or showed symptoms of infection. Care measures for their isolation and treatment needed to be stepped up, he said. In this regard, Justice Bhat said that caregivers and employees of childcare institutions – both government and private – should be vaccinated as frontline professionals. He said

childcare institutions should be declared "essential services".

The judge emphasised the need to provide heightened medical watch for children in institutional care.

The Supreme Court has been nudging the Centre to prepare for the third wave of the pandemic. Recently, a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud had highlighted reports that children would be affected in the third wave. The court has pushed for aggressive vaccination, especially for parents of young children, who

would be accompanying their children to hospitals as primary caregivers. Justice Bhat is also part of the Special Bench hearing issues regarding COVID-19 management and lapses.

Justice Bhat further spoke of the need to develop a mechanism to address the interim care needs of orphaned, separated, or unaccompanied children, including clear guidance on steps to be taken in the event that such a child has been exposed or has symptoms of the virus and requires a period of isolation and treatment.

Organise vaccination in tea estates: tea body

North Eastern Tea Association issues appeal after many tested COVID-19 positive in two estates

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

The North Eastern Tea Association (NETA) has appealed to the Assam government to urgently organise vaccination camps in the tea estates across the State.

The Association made the request after 505 plantation workers tested COVID-19 positive across 90 tea estates in 15 districts, 133 of them in Zaloni Tea Estate in Dibrugarh district followed by 52 in Dekorai Tea Estate and 48 in Pertabghur



A COVID awareness programme being held in the Dolaguri Tea Estate in Golaghat district. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Tea Estate in Biswanath district.

"Please direct the district authorities to set up vacci-

nation camps in tea gardens urgently, so that the front-line workers and residents are vaccinated at the earliest. Vaccination of the workforce is of utmost importance at this hour," NETA advisor Bidyandana Borakoty said in a letter to Samir Kumar Sinha, State Principal Secretary for Health and Family Welfare, on Saturday.

The tea garden population needs protection from the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic through vaccination. The estates did

not face this problem last year. Vaccinating the workforce is crucial before things go beyond control," Mr. Borakoty told *The Hindu*.

Containment zone

Officials in the affected districts said the estates with COVID-19 positive cases have been declared containment zones by the local administration.

Assam has 803 large estates and more than 1.5 lakh small tea gardens, together employing more than 10 lakh people.

Public transport suspended in Himachal from tomorrow

Essential goods shops will remain open for 3 hours in a day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SHIMLA

The Himachal Pradesh government has decided to suspend public transport from Monday to check the spread of COVID-19, an official spokesperson said.

The decision was taken during a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Saturday, he said.

It was also decided that

the daily needs and essential commodity shops will remain open only for three hours in a day and the timing of the same will be fixed by the Deputy Commissioners, the spokesperson said.

Coronavirus curfew is already in force in the State from May 7-17.

These strict restrictions will come into force on May 10 from 6 a.m., the spokesperson said.

All public transport will remain suspended till further orders and private vehicles will only be allowed in case of emergency services, he added.

Mr. Thakur said these decisions have been taken to break the chain of the virus. He urged people to give their wholehearted support in effective implementation of the curfew to combat COVID-19 threat.

about 10 lakh milk farmers were facing uncertain future after OMFED and other milk companies brought

down procurement from 5 lakh litre per day to 3.5 lakh per day, said Amiya Kumar Patnaik, president of the farmer wing of the Congress.

According to OMFED, milk procurement of the unions is showing an increasing trend and the average procurement is around 5.45 lakh kg per day and on the other hand, the disposal has been reduced significantly from around 3.75 lakh LPD to 2.0 lakh LPD.

Sympathy or schadenfreude? China's social media debates India's COVID crisis

It hints at broader tensions between internal messaging in that country

ANANTH KRISHNAN

A heated debate has dominated the Chinese social media attention this past week in the wake of a post linked to an official Communist Party account that mocked India's COVID-19 crisis, and subsequently polarised opinion among those calling for sympathy and others justifying a comparison of the two countries' responses to the pandemic.

The social media post, from an account affiliated to the Communist Party of China's top law enforcement body, the Political and Legal Affairs Committee, posted a message to its 15 million followers, sharing two images side-by-side of a rocket launch in China and a cremation ground in India, adding a message: "China lighting a fire, India lighting a fire".

The message initially went viral and prompted an instant backlash for its lack of sensitivity. Chinese journalists, including those who work for State media outlets, criticised the post, which was subsequently deleted.

That backlash to an official account then prompted a backlash of its own, particularly among more nationalistic voices, who argued China was justified to contrast the COVID-19 situation in both countries and to speak unabashedly of its successes.

Even Hu Xijin, firebrand editor of *Global Times*, a nationalist tabloid published by the *People's Daily*, came under attack for criticising the post, though he was also critical of India for not acknowledging the medical supplies it is receiving from Chi-



On the go: People using their phones at a park in Beijing. ■ AFP

na. "The official mindset of Chinese society toward India's epidemic situation must be sympathetic and supportive of their battle against it, and this is indeed the case. I don't think it's proper for social media accounts of certain Chinese official institutions or other influential forces to mock India at present," he wrote.

"Even today when India is in trouble and China is lending a helping hand, India still holds a grudge and remains narrow-minded. But currently, our prevailing attitude toward India should be

still to show our sympathy and support, without being distracted by other sentiments."

Shen Yi, a scholar at the Fudan University in Shanghai, criticised Mr. Hu and praised the original post. "Can so-called expressions of sympathy for India achieve the anticipated outcome?" Mr. Shen was quoted as saying by the *New York Times*.

"Where can an 800-pound gorilla sleep? Whe-

rever it wants to," he added, arguing the Communist Party-linked account was justified to say what it wished. The argument, reported the *China Digital Times* which tracks media in China, "led to a division of public opinion between a 'support Hu faction' and a 'support Shen faction'."

A *Global Times* reporter, Qinqing Chen, also came under fire for criticising the post, saying it was "completely ridiculous to make such a comparison" in a message on Twitter, a website blocked in China. Screenshots of her tweet, however, went viral on Weibo, leading to wide criticism. Ms. Chen subsequently deleted her tweet, which Mr. Hu, her editor, described as "inappropriate" and "immature".

Crumbling barriers

The debate hinted at broader tensions between internal messaging in China, including from official outlets which often tend to highlight China's successes and fail-

Imports of supplies from China surge

Orders placed for medical equipment

ANANTH KRISHNAN

Chinese companies manufacturing oxygen concentrators and other medical supplies are reporting a record surge in orders for April and May from Indian companies amid the current wave of COVID-19 cases and shortages in supplies.

"Domestic opinions on this issue of China vs. India are quite divided, and are roughly divided into two factions," observed the popular commentator Ren Yi.

"One faction thinks that the official Weibo of the Central Political and Legal Committee is very good. That's how it should be said, just say it. There is nothing that can't be said. The other faction thinks the level was not high and an official account should not post such things," he said, adding he supported the latter view.

He said "as long as an account is considered to reflect the official position of the Chinese government, it needs to be very cautious" and even "any information released by a young editor" who is sometimes managing such social media handles, charged with getting clicks, will be regarded abroad "as China's national opinion".

"China's current international environment is very complicated and quite unfriendly," Mr. Ren wrote.

"The G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting came to discuss China's challenges, as well as the Taiwan issue...Biden intends to regain character for the United States. What should we do at this time? One has to be extra cautious about relations with neighbouring countries. We cannot guarantee to make friends, but we must make sure not to make enemies."

Some Chinese companies have also said they are donating medical supplies.

'National lockdown to help health infra recover'

Doctors' body criticises slow govt. response to second wave

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Saturday asked the Centre to announce a national lockdown to help the healthcare infrastructure "recoup and replenish both material and manpower".

In a statement, the Association said: "We are astonished to see the extreme lethargy and inappropriate actions from the Health Ministry in combating the agonising crisis born out of the devastating second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The largest grouping of physicians from across the country said it has been insisting on the need for a complete, well-planned pre-announced national lockdown rather than a few States declaring complete lockdown ranging for 10 days to 15 days.

"This will allow breathing time for the health care infrastructure to recuperate and replenish both the material



A deserted street in Delhi on Saturday.

ment had failed to make the necessary road map to ensure vaccine stock, resulting in the fact that at a majority of the places vaccination could not be rolled out for people above 18.

Universal vaccination

It said that in 1997 and 2014 India could declare eradication of smallpox and polio, only by adopting universal free vaccination and not by a differential pricing system.

"When ₹35,000 crore were allotted in the budget, with which the maximum required 200 crore vaccine doses are purchasable, why did the Central government not take full responsibility? Today for nearly a week no vaccine is available in small and medium private hospitals. People are succumbing to oxygen mismatch supply and it is creating panic both among patients and medical fraternity," the Association said, appealing for urgent action.

'Movid pandemic': Congress

Opposition flays govt. for inept handling of the pandemic

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The editorial of top international medical journal *The Lancet* and a statement from the Indian Medical Association, both criticising the inept handling of the COVID-19 pandemic by the Modi government, gave the Opposition fresh ammunition, with former Congress president Rahul Gandhi terming it the "Movid pandemic".

Congress general secretary Ajay Maken said the Congress had been warning the government since the pandemic began last year but the government turned a deaf ear to any suggestions. "What *The Lancet* and the IMA have said are the same things that Mr. Rahul Gandhi pointed out in his letter to

the Prime Minister written on Friday," Mr. Maken said. Mr. Gandhi has been advocating a full lockdown in the country.

Mr. Maken said this was no longer a natural calamity. "What we are going through today is a man-made disaster, in fact I would go on to say, a Modi-made disaster," he said.

GST on vaccines

The party also attacked the government on GST being charged on vaccines. "It is preposterous that the Centre is charging GST on the vaccines being bought by the State government. Then it will use the same money to supply vaccines to the States from 45 and above categories," he added.

Mr. Gandhi too in a tweet, flagging news reports revealing that less than ₹5,000 crores have been spent on vaccines out of the ₹35,000 crore budget, said, "Vaccine budget underutilized. Human life undervalued. Because the PM's ego overflated."

The party also attacked the Central Vista project.

Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh tweeted: "The only thing that is bizarre is the Modi Govt thinks spending on a new Parliament, new mansion for the PM, and office buildings is an 'essential service', while the country is reeling from shortage of oxygen, beds, medicines, and even vaccines. Stop defending the indefensible!"

Imports of supplies from China surge

Orders placed for medical equipment

ANANTH KRISHNAN

Among them is Fosun Pharma, a major pharmaceutical company, which last week donated 150 ventilators through its subsidiary in Hyderabad Gland Pharma and 1,00,000 masks delivered to Mumbai. The company is also processing orders for 20,000 oxygen generators, Xinhua reported.

Since April, orders for at least 40,000 oxygen concentrators have been placed by Indian companies, of which 21,000 have so far been delivered, along with more than 5,000 ventilators, 21 million face masks and 3,800 tons of medicines, according to official Chinese customs figures.

Shares of medical manufacturers in China are also soaring on the back of the surge in orders.

Yuyue Medical, a prominent supplier, reported a 134% year-on-year increase in net profit to \$278 million in April, reported Yicai, a Chinese outlet, with 18,000 orders for oxygen concentrators from India. Its respiratory supplies division, charged with getting clicks, will be regarded abroad "as China's national opinion".

"China's current international environment is very complicated and quite unfriendly," Mr. Ren wrote.

"The G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting came to discuss China's challenges, as well as the Taiwan issue...Biden intends to regain character for the United States. What should we do at this time? One has to be extra cautious about relations with neighbouring countries. We cannot guarantee to make friends, but we must make sure not to make enemies."

Some Chinese companies have also said they are donating medical supplies.

India has requested Chinese authorities to ensure that supply channels remained open, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said. He told his counterpart Wang Yi that "many of our companies are ordering stuff from China and we are encountering difficulties in logistics, so please take a look at it which is something which we would appreciate," he said speaking at a virtual dialogue earlier this week. "After our conversation things did move," he said.

Bidders may request the tender document at the above address by Post/Mail. Detailed NIB may be viewed in websites: www.tenders.tn.gov.in

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Hope soars as Second World War airport in Assam takes commercial wings

Regional connectivity set to improve in the western part of the State

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

An airport built for warplanes in 1939 took commercial wings on Saturday, heralding the best of times for western Assam's Dhubri district during the worst of times.

Rupsi airport near Gauripur, about 15 km from district headquarters Dhubri, was one of South Asia's largest airports with a 1.8 km runway used by Allied aircraft for supplying arms, manpower and ammunition to forces in Burma and China during World War II. Rupsi is Assam's 7th airport

and 15th in the northeast including Pakyong in Sikkim. Commercial flights were allowed later.

India's Partition in 1947 began eroding the airport's importance. It was abandoned after the last flight – a Vayudoot from Dhubri to Guwahati – took off in 1983.

"It feels nice to be a part of history, and I hope the service is sustained for the sake of a corner of Assam that lost its importance as the regional communication hub soon after Independence," Gauripur MLA Nizamur Rahman said.

The All India United De-

mocratic Front leader was one of the passengers who alighted from the 72-seater twin-engine turboprop touched down from Guwahati at 12.10 p.m. The flight took off for Kolkata at 12.40 p.m. and returned to Rupsi at 4.10 p.m. en route to Guwahati.

Flybig, an Indore-based company, would be operating the Kolkata-Guwahati-Rupsi flight under the subsidised UDAAN scheme for regional connectivity.

"Work on reviving the airport began in 2019. The return of the COVID-19 scare had dampened our spirits,

but the flight happened despite the odds to make our hopes soar," Dhubri-based Bimal Oswal, the president of Rupsi Airport Revival Demand Committee told *The Hindu*.

"Rupsi is vital not only for western Assam. It used to

SPECIAL

and again will cater to the people of western Meghalaya, Cooch Behar and Aliapura districts of West Bengal and south-western Bhutan, besides fuelling small-scale industries," he said.



New connection: The commercial flight that touched down at Rupsi airport, 38 years after the last one was operated. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Jyotirmoy Chakraborty, the committee's general secretary said they had been fighting for the airport for more than 15 years.

"Dhubri used to be the gateway to the northeast during the British area. It was a strategic river port (the Brahmaputra flows by Dhubri town) and an important stop on the pre-1947 railway line through present-day Bangladesh next door," he said.

Partition virtually turned Dhubri into a prisoner of geography. The river port was closed after the India-Pakistan war in 1965 and the railway service suspended in 1988. The East-West Corridor connecting the northeast with India's "mainland" through Kokrajhar district to the east also reduced the dependence on the old highway via Gauripur. "Railway service resumed in 2011 after gauge conversion and the river port at Free India Ghat (Dhubri town) was revamped in 2018. We are now awaiting regular inland water service via Bangladesh, like in the pre-1965 days," Mr. Oswal said.

IN BRIEF



Epidemiologist Smarajit Jana passes away

KOLKATA/NEW DELHI A leader of the rights movement for sex workers in India and a public health expert known for his contribution to the prevention of HIV in the country, Smarajit Jana, passed away due to COVID-19 related complications in Kolkata on Saturday. He was 68 years old. An epidemiologist, he was also a member of the National Task Force on COVID-19. Dr. Jana spearheaded the first rights-based HIV intervention programmes in India by collectivising the sex workers of Sonagachi. He was also a member of the NACO's steering committee.

Bihar MLA booked for removing barricade

PATNA Ruling party Janata Dal (United) legislator in Bihar Narendra Kumar Neeraj alias Gopal Mandal has been booked for allegedly removing a barricade at a containment zone near Naugachia railway station in Bhagalpur. He claimed he had to attend to an "urgent call of nature". "I had a great urge to relieve myself and also felt hungry," the MLA was heard saying in a video that went viral on social media.

Pilgrimage centre in Srinagar turns hospital

SRINAGAR Pictures of pandemic-stricken patients from Delhi, gasping for oxygen on roads and outside hospitals, spurred a Good Samaritan effort in Srinagar this week – the setting up of a second-line of oxygen support in a pilgrimage centre-turned hospital in a record 72 hours. Kashmir Athrout, a charitable organisation, collaborated with the District Disaster Management Authority, Srinagar, to set up the facility in the Haj Complex.



Waiting for clarity: A group of NREGA workers, who said they were worried about taking the vaccine, at Jallipatti village in Tirupur. ■ S. SIVA SARAVANAN

As cases surge, vaccine hesitancy rife in rural T.N.

Lack of awareness and fear of side effects prevalent

R. AKILESH
COIMBATORE

Despite the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic raging through the country with the number of cases rising everyday, vaccine hesitancy continues, preventing many from ensuring their safety.

R. Kalavathi of Bodipatti village panchayat near Udmalpet in Tirupur district in western Tamil Nadu, is one of several persons who has not gotten vaccinated and is unsure of whether she wants to take the shot, fearing the side effects.

"Different people are saying different things, so I am still not sure," the 54-year-old said on Thursday.

The fact that her husband C. Venkatesan has taken his first shots has not convinced Ms. Kalavathi.

An automobile dealer, Mr. Venkatesan, 57, said he had experienced mild side effects after taking the first shot of Covishield vaccine on April 10 such as fever and diarrhoea for about two days. Ms. Kalavathi said seeing her husband experiencing these side effects aggravated her apprehensions

against vaccination further.

On the other hand, she admitted that hearing about how vaccines reduce the severity of COVID-19 infection has left her confused. "It is now scary to take the vaccine shot and it is equally scary to not take it," she remarked.

Many apprehensions

Her 27-year-old daughter V. Sathyai said she was ready to take the vaccine shots. However, she is also apprehensive that taking the shots would cause problems in the future. She claimed that many have not been vaccinated in her locality in Udmalpet town, where she resides with her husband and daughter.

At the premises of the government hospital at Jallipatti village panchayat near Bodipatti, about two dozen workers – most of them women – are working as cleaners, employed under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. However, except for five, most said that they were unwilling to take the vaccine shots. "If we fall sick

[after taking the vaccine shot] for 10 days, who will feed our families?" asked Lakshmi, one of the workers.

"We generally get only Sundays as holidays and most of us take rest on that day," said Sarojini, one of those who is yet to be vaccinated. Dhanalakshmi, who was among the few workers to get vaccinated, said that she managed to get her first vaccine dose at the Jallipatti government hospital recently, but she had to take rest for two days as she experienced mild fever and body ache.

Tiruppur District Collector K. Vijayakarthikeyan told *The Hindu* on Thursday that the district administration will conduct more outreach camps in rural areas to counter vaccine hesitancy, especially among the vulnerable populations.

"We have to keep creating awareness," he said. As of Thursday, over 1.4 lakh beneficiaries have been vaccinated (including the first and second dose) in the district, Mr. Vijayakarthikeyan noted.

Crowdfunding treatment likely to become difficult

Those without PAN or Aadhaar may face challenges

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government's move to allow cash payments over ₹2 lakh for COVID-19 patients' treatment could make it difficult for people to crowdfund bill payments. Patients without a PAN card or Aadhaar, as well as those who arrange to pay their treatment costs through cash loans of over ₹2 lakh from a single lender may also face challenges, said tax lawyers.

Section 269ST of the Income Tax Act, introduced after demonetisation, entails a 100% penalty for receipt of all cash payments over ₹2 lakh, but was proving to be a hurdle for several patients' families as many don't have access to cashless payment options.

Following a petition filed in the Delhi High Court on Friday that sought a relaxation of the relevant Income

Tax law provision, the government notified changes to permit such cash payments for COVID-19 patients' treatment till May 31, provided the healthcare provider obtains the PAN or Aadhaar of the patient and the "payee".

"How many people will be willing to help with cash for meeting medical bills if it requires them to share their PAN or Aadhaar, with the fear of tax department queries that could follow?" said a senior tax lawyer. Moreover, families looking to raise a cash loan from a single individual of over ₹2 lakh to meet medical expenses, may not be able to do so as a related section in the law prohibits such loans.

"Such large payments are usually required when a patient is becoming more critical and perhaps needs to move into an ICU from the

regular ward and time is the essence. Even digital payments through means such as NEFT sometimes take a couple of hours, but hospitals wait till these payments hit their accounts," said a lawyer.

The hospitals will also be required to note the relationship between the patient and the "payee", the notification said. The Finance Ministry did not respond to queries on whether the word "payee", which refers to the person being paid, was inadvertently inserted and would be corrected.

"It is also seen that during times like this, people borrow money from family and friends and many are using the prepaid payment instruments such as Google Pay, which are faster. However, many hospitals are not accepting payment on these platforms," the petition said.

"Such large payments are usually required when a patient is becoming more critical and perhaps needs to move into an ICU from the

Despite Supreme Court order, oxygen supply to Delhi falls short

Only 488 MT of required 700 MT received, says Sisodia

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi received only 488 MT of medical oxygen on Friday – about 70% the current need of about 700 MT a day, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Saturday.

"At present, Delhi requires a minimum of 700 MT of oxygen supply to cater to patients, and an increase in COVID beds and health infrastructure would necessitate oxygen allocation of 976 MT in the city," Mr. Sisodia said.

"Delhi received 730 MT of oxygen for the first time ever on May 5. However, we saw a persistent decline from May 6 onwards as we received 577 MT on that day, and 488 MT on May 7," he said.

The Minister said it will be hard to manage proper oxygen supply to all hospitals with the current deficit.

Mr. Sisodia pointed out

port in ensuring Delhi's oxygen supply does not decrease," the Minister said.

Delhi has been facing an oxygen shortage since April 18. On May 1, 12 people died at Batra Hospital, a private hospital, due to lack of oxygen.

Meanwhile, AAP national spokesperson Raghav Chadha added that the government was "somehow managing the situation" even with 488 MT of oxygen.

"A few days back, we observed that the Supreme Court, through its strongly-worded order, condemned the central government and stated that the centre must commit to supplying at least 700 MT of oxygen to Delhi. Right now, to conveniently run the total number of oxygenated beds in Delhi, whether ICU or non-ICU, we need at least 700 MT of oxygen," Mr. Chadha said.

SUDOKU



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★



A health worker carrying a cylinder of oxygen in Delhi.

■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

that though the Supreme Court has asked that 700 MT of oxygen a day be allotted to Delhi, no step has been taken by the central government on this front.

"We urge the Central government to provide us 700 MT oxygen daily as directed by the Supreme Court. We hope the Government of India will extend their full sup-

Nasheed taken off life support, vows to 'come back stronger'

Two persons arrested in connection with the blast; extremist link suspected

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Maldives parliamentary Speaker and former president Mohamed Nasheed, who survived an assassination attempt on May 6, is off life support and conscious, his family said on Saturday, while police arrested two persons in connection with the explosion.

Maldives police said they are on the lookout for further suspects involved in the blast, that they termed an "act of terror", outside Mr. Nasheed's home in Male. The attack, they said, appeared to have links with religious extremists, according



On road to recovery: A file photo of Mohamed Nasheed.

to local media.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nasheed's condition showed improvement, according to family members. "The doctors are very happy with recovery

Nasheed said in a tweet on Saturday. Mr. Nasheed remained in a critical condition on Friday following complex, "life-saving" surgeries, hospital authorities had earlier said.

The pro-democracy politician, who has consistently condemned religious extremism, sustained multiple injuries in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast, in what police described as a "deliberate act of terror". Police are probing the incident – no one has claimed the attacks so far – with help from Australian Federal Police, while other countries have also offered assistance.

Libya rebels raid hotel where rulers met

'There was no kidnapping, gunfire'

REUTERS
TRIPOLI

A senior official at Libya's new Presidency Council denied on Saturday that groups who entered a hotel where the body meets had been armed or used force, playing down an incident that had appeared to illustrate the risks facing the unity government.

Earlier, the Council's spokeswoman had said armed groups had stormed the Corinthia Hotel on Friday, though she also said nobody from the body had been in the building at the time.

"There was no kidnapping, gunfire, or an attack on me or the hotel," the head of the Presidency Council's office, Mohamed al-Mabrouk said in a social

media video, adding that he had been in the hotel at the time of the incident.

The Presidency Council was chosen through a UN-facilitated process that also selected a new Government of National Unity that took office in March, replacing rival administrations in east and west.

Armed groups based in western Libya have voiced anger at the Government of National Unity's Foreign Minister, Najla el-Mangoush.

In eastern Libya, commander Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) still hold sway.

In Tripoli, the armed groups that pushed Haftar back from the capital with Turkish support still control the streets.

Israeli police, Palestinians clash at Al-Aqsa mosque

Tensions rise as Palestinian families face eviction in Jerusalem to make way for Israeli settlers

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JERUSALEM

More than 160 people were wounded when Israeli riot police clashed with Palestinians at Jerusalem's flash-point Al-Aqsa mosque compound late on Friday, capping a week of violence in the Holy City and the occupied West Bank.

Stones, bottles and fireworks were hurled at officers who fired rubber bullets and stun grenades at the crowds at Islam's third-holiest site, also revered by Jews as the location of two biblical-era temples.

At least 163 Palestinians and six Israeli officers were reported wounded at Al-Aqsa and elsewhere in east Jerusalem, as the Palestinian Red Crescent said it had opened a field hospital be-



In the midst of chaos: A Palestinian man prays as Israeli police gather during clashes near the Al-Aqsa Mosque. ■ REUTERS

cause emergency rooms were full.

Police said officers had restored order following the "rioting of thousands of worshippers" after evening prayers.

Tensions in Jerusalem have soared in recent weeks as Palestinians have protest-

ed against Israel's restrictions on access to parts of the Old City during the Muslim holy month of Ramzan, and after authorities ordered several Palestinian families to leave their homes to make way for Israeli settlers.

The United Nations had warned the forced evictions

could amount to "war crimes".

The U.S. called for "de-escalation", later adding that the violence was "especially disturbing now, coming as it does on the last days of Ramzan".

Friday's unrest came on Al-Quds Day, an annual day of pro-Palestinian rallies held by Israel's arch-enemy Iran, which also saw many thousands march in Muslim-majority countries across the region and as far as Pakistan.

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas said he held the Israeli government "responsible" for the unrest and vowed "full support for our heroes in Aqsa".

International observers urged calm, with UN envoy Tor Vennestrand tweeting his

concern, and urging all parties to "respect the status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem's Old City in the interest of peace & stability".

The clashes erupted as Muslims packed the Al-Aqsa compound to pray on the last Friday of Ramzan.

In 2000, the compound was where the second Palestinian intifada broke out after a visit there by former opposition and right-wing Israeli leader Ariel Sharon, seen as a painful provocation by Palestinians.

Earlier on Friday, Israeli security forces killed two Palestinians and wounded a third after the trio opened fire on the Salem base in the occupied West Bank, police said, with the incident following days of bloody clashes and killings.

Blast near Afghan school kills 30

Students among the 52 injured who have been shifted to hospital: official

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

A blast outside a girls' school in an area of the Afghan capital populated largely by the Shia Hazara community killed at least 30 people and wounded scores, including students, on Saturday, officials said.

Interior Ministry spokesman Tareq Arian told reporters that at least 30 people were killed and 52 wounded" in the blast. "People have been evacuated to hospitals from the site," he added.

Mr. Arian's deputy Hamid Roshan told AFP that an investigation had begun into what he said was a "terrorist attack", adding that casualties included students.

The blast occurred in the west Kabul district of Dasht-e-Barchi as residents were out for shopping ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr next week that marks the end of Ramzan, the Muslim holy month of fasting.

The neighbourhood is populated largely by the Shia



Soft target: An injured woman being shifted to a hospital after the blast in Kabul. ■ REUTERS

Hazaras and is often a target for Sunni Islamist militants.

Mr. Roshan said that an investigation had begun into what he said was a "terrorist attack", adding that casualties included students.

Health ministry spokesman Dastagir Nazari said several ambulances had been rushed to the site and were evacuating the wounded.

"People in the area are angry and have beaten a number of ambulance workers," he told reporters.

The blast comes as the U.S. military continues to pull out its last remaining 2,500 troops from the country, despite faltering peace efforts between the Taliban and Afghan government to end a decades-long war in Afghanistan.

Officials have regularly blamed the Taliban for attacks in Kabul, which the insurgents have steadfastly denied.

The Taliban have largely refrained from launching major attacks in Kabul since

February last year, when they signed a deal with the United States that paved the way for peace talks and withdrawal of the remaining U.S. troops.

But the group has clashed in near daily battles in the rugged countryside with Afghan forces even as the U.S. military continues its withdrawal.

Taliban blamed

The Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood has been a regular target of attacks from Sunni Islamist militants.

In May last year a group of gunmen attacked a hospital in the area in a brazen daylight raid that left 25 people killed, including 16 mothers of newborn babies.

The hospital was supported by Doctors Without Borders, the international medical charity, which later pulled out of the project.

No group claimed that attack, but President Ashraf Ghani blamed the Taliban and the Islamic State group.

With 60 constituencies counted, the SNP had won 51 of the 129 seats and was clearly on course to extend its dominance of Scottish politics. However, given Scotland's electoral system, also allocates some seats by a form of proportional representation, the party may fall short of the 65 seats it would need in the Edinburgh-based Parliament to have a majority.

In Wales, the concluded vote count showed the Labour Party doing better than expected in the parliament-

tary election as it extended its 22 years in control of the Welsh government.

Ballots continue to be counted from local elections in England, which already have been particularly good for U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative Party. But it's the Scottish election that could have the biggest U.K.-wide implications by fast-tracking another referendum on Scotland's future within the U.K.



Nicola Sturgeon

Trump govt. secretly got journalists' records: report

Phone records of 3 reporters covering alleged Russian link to 2016 presidential poll were seized

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

The Trump Justice Department secretly seized the phone records of three *Washington Post* reporters who covered the federal investigation into ties between Russia and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, the newspaper said on Friday.

The disclosure sets up a new clash between the federal government and news organisations and advocates for press freedom, who regard the seizures of reporters' records as incursions into constitutionally protected newsgathering activity.

Similar actions have occurred only rarely over the



Controversial tenure: Donald Trump speaking to reporters in Washington, in this file photo. ■ AFP

past decade, including a seizure of phone records of Associated Press reporters and editors over a 2012 news report that revealed a foiled bomb plot.

In a statement published

partment of Justice should immediately make clear its reasons for this intrusion into the activities of reporters doing their jobs, an activity protected under the First Amendment."

The action is presumably aimed at identifying the reporters' sources in national security stories published in the early months of Mr. Trump's administration, as federal investigators scrutinised whether his 2016 campaign had coordinated with the Kremlin to sway the election.

The records' seizure was approved by Justice Department leadership last year. The reporters – Ellen Nakashima, Greg Miller and

Adam Entous, who has since left the *Post* – were notified in letters dated May 3 that the Justice Department had obtained records for their home, work or cellphone numbers.

The records sought cover the period of April 15, 2017, to July 31, 2017, according to the newspaper.

Justice Department guidelines for media leak investigations mandate that such actions are to be taken only when other avenues for obtaining the information have been exhausted, and that the affected reporters are to be notified unless it's determined that it would impede the investigation or interfere with national security.

WHO approves China's Sinopharm vaccine

It is first Chinese jab to get agency nod

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

The World Health Organization on Friday approved the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use – the first Chinese jab to receive the WHO's green light.

The UN health agency signed off on the two-dose vaccine, which is already being deployed in dozens of countries around the world.

The WHO has already given emergency use listing to the vaccines being made by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, J&J, and the AstraZeneca jab being produced at sites in India and in South Korea.

"This afternoon, WHO gave emergency use listing

to Sinopharm Beijing's Co-vid-19 vaccine, making it the sixth vaccine to receive WHO validation for safety, efficacy and quality," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

The WHO recommended that the two Sinopharm shots be taken three to four weeks apart.

The vaccine's efficacy for symptomatic and hospitalised cases of COVID-19 was estimated to be 79% when all age groups are combined, it said. The agency said few adults over 60 were enrolled in clinical trials of the vaccine, so its efficacy could not be estimated in that age group.

Saudi Arabia, Pakistan vow to reset ties

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JEDDAH

Saudi Arabia and long-standing ally Pakistan signed several agreements on Saturday and vowed to reset ties strained by months of disagreement over policy on the Kashmir dispute.

On his seventh visit to the wealthy kingdom since his 2018 election, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was given a warm welcome by Saudi officials in the western coastal city of Jeddah.

He was greeted by Saudi Arabia's de-facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the airport, before holding talks with Saudi officials at Jeddah's Al-Salam Palace.

"They affirmed the depth of relations between the two brotherly countries and underscored the importance of expanding and intensifying aspects of bilateral cooperation and coordination," a Saudi statement said.

Although the kingdom was the first foreign country Mr. Khan visited after taking office, Riyadh appeared frustrated with Islamabad last year.

In a sharply worded statement in August, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi called on the Saudi-based Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to convene a high-level meeting on Kashmir.

The call raised eyebrows in Riyadh, where it was widely seen as a warning that Pakistan was preparing to call for a session outside OIC auspices.

Riyadh is particularly sensitive about any move that might undermine its leadership of the 57-member pan-Islamic body.

Sri Lanka approves Pfizer shot

REUTERS
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka on Saturday approved Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use in Sri Lanka, as the island nation battles a third wave of the virus, while suffering a restricted supply of vaccines from neighbouring India.

Dr. Sudharshani Fernando, the Minister overseeing the fight against the epidemic, said the government would order 5 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

Sri Lanka is the first country in South Asia to approve the Pfizer vaccine. It has also approved Russia's Sputnik and China's Sinopharm vaccines.

SNAPSHOTS



Cleansing flashes

Now a team of scientists from Pennsylvania University in the U.S. has found that discharges that accompany lightning bolts, and which cannot be seen by cameras, produce large amounts of the hydroxyl radical. This serves to break up the green house gas methane in the atmosphere. The results are reported in *Science* and the *Journal of Geophysical Research*.



Sound from birth

Unlike humans, bats perceive the objects around them in terms of time and not distance. They use sonar to send out a sound wave and calculate how much time it takes to get reflected from the object. This calculation requires knowledge of speed of sound, which varies in different mediums. Now, a study in *PNAS* shows that the knowledge of speed of sound is innate in bats from birth.



Efficient drug delivery
University of Amherst researchers have engineered a nanoparticle that has the potential to change the way diseases including cancer are being treated. Published in *Angewandte Chemie*, the research combines two methods to precisely and effectively deliver drugs to specific cancerous cells. The team uses PACs or protein-antibody conjugates to manage the delivery of the drug to the cancer cell.



Physicists' feat
Physicists may have succeeded in paving the way to making the world's smallest lasers, according to a press release by University of Oldenburg. They have succeeded in making Bose-Einstein condensates in charge-carrier complexes closely linked to light particles. These states live on two-dimensional crystals made up of ultrathin semiconductors, just one layer of atoms thick.

How to solve the Bengaluru COVID-19 conundrum?

There should be at least one primary health centre and 5–10 health and wellness centres for each of the 198 wards

GIRIDHARA R. BABU

The current public health efforts in managing the pandemic in most urban areas are similar, with some minor differences. Bengaluru is no exception. In contrast to rural areas, the proportionate number of frontline health workers are not appointed by urban local bodies, and therefore, urban primary healthcare services suffer from a design weakness. Consequently, fewer trained persons are available for carrying a syndromic approach to detect suspected cases, subject them to targeted testing and carry on contact tracing.

In the first wave, this was temporarily addressed by mobilising staff from other departments in Bengaluru, which cannot be sustained when the pandemic rages on for many months. In the absence of such personnel, expanded testing and self-referral were the mainstays of case detection as the cases started surging in April. However, with the increasing workload on conducting RT-PCR in the laboratories, results of the tests could be available with a delay of five days, defeating the purpose of early isolation. Hence, the Government was compelled to decrease the total RT PCR tests to test mostly symptomatic persons and fewer categories. This led to an in-

crease in test positivity in the later half of April from below 10% to 39% by May 5, 2021. At the same time, many persons who are not tested continue to spread the infection. Also, the contagious nature of the newer variant, at least in part might be responsible for the higher number of cases due to population movement.

Weak mitigation

In this scenario, a complete lockdown in Bengaluru would have helped to reduce the rate of transmission. However, the current mitigation measures (called Janata curfew first and semi-lockdown from May 10) are incomplete and ineffectively implemented. Due to inefficient containment (testing, tracking and treating) and weak mitigation (restrictive measures), the infection has continued to spread unabated resulting in a faster and wider spread.

The capacity to provide critical care to persons with moderate-to-severe respiratory distress is limited in Bengaluru as in other areas. It is mostly the private hospitals that have more capacity for critical care, including ICUs and oxygenated beds, that have surrendered to the extent of 75% to treat persons with COVID-19. Despite this, there are not many beds available for critical care (<https://bbmpgov.com/>)

Measures to keep the virus at bay

The problem at hand is complex, so a multipronged approach is needed to solve it.



4 Enhance the capacity of the oxygenated beds

5 Set up triage facilities with basic healthcare and oxygen supplementation in each ward

6 Engage volunteers and civil society in handling the supplementary clinical processes

1 At least two to three medical officers and nurses permanently hired in each PHC

2 State centre for disease control, an analogous body of the National Centre for Disease Control

3 Even beyond the second wave, stronger syndrome-based case detection and higher testing levels

Long-term view:
The solutions cannot be transient as this is not going to be the last wave, nor will it be the last epidemic

chbms/). Due to ICU beds not being available, not many persons with severe distress can be saved. At the same time, the occurrence of fewer oxygenated beds pushes many persons with mild or moderate respiratory distress to deteriorate towards severe distress, creating a vicious cycle leading to higher fatality. This chain can only be broken if timely oxygen availability is ensured to all persons mild and moderate, preventing them from worsening further. Since the death numbers rise with a

lag time from case surges, Bengaluru will see an unfortunate increase in fatality from the current week.

The solutions to address Bengaluru's problems cannot be transient since this is not the last wave and certainly not the last pandemic.

Fortify human resource

First and foremost, the human resources in all the urban local bodies need to be augmented. In Bengaluru, it amounts to having at least one primary health centre (PHC) and 5–10 health and

wellness centres (HWC) for each of the 198 wards. In addition, there should be at least 2 to 3 medical officers and nurses permanently hired in each PHC. At the same time, each HWC should have permanent positions of nurse health practitioner, junior health assistants, also known as Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) (one for every 5,000 population) and USHAs (one for every 1,000 population). Hiring them for a short duration and discontinuing them after the wave recedes will hurt their mo-

rale and this weakens the health system.

Second, the containment efforts should be strengthened as a permanent mechanism, pervasive and persuasive to withstand the long haul of COVID-19 management. It is time to have a State centre for disease control, an analogous body of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) at each State level to coordinate the control measures.

Update strategies

Third, the surveillance, testing and control strategies should be dynamically updated to guide the implementation in the field. For now, increasing the rapid antigen tests for all the symptomatic persons will accomplish dual goals of earlier isolation of more than 50%

of people and reduce the burden on the labs to do the RT-PCR. Even beyond the second wave, stronger syndrome-based case detection and higher testing levels should be sustained to ensure that the signs of future waves are picked up earlier.

Finally, managing the persons with poor oxygen saturation shall be the most critical aspect of managing current and future surge in cases. In addition to setting up newer facilities, the capacity of the oxygenated beds should be enhanced by

oxygenation of all the available beds. Furthermore, the Government should set triage facilities having basic healthcare and oxygen supplementation in each of the wards. Doctors and Nurses alone cannot handle the workload during the surge in cases. Therefore, the Government should create a platform to engage volunteers and civil society in handling the supplementary clinical processes to make a meaningful impact. They can help in efficient community triage, prompt referral and offer support to the hospitals to fetch oxygen and other supplies as needed.

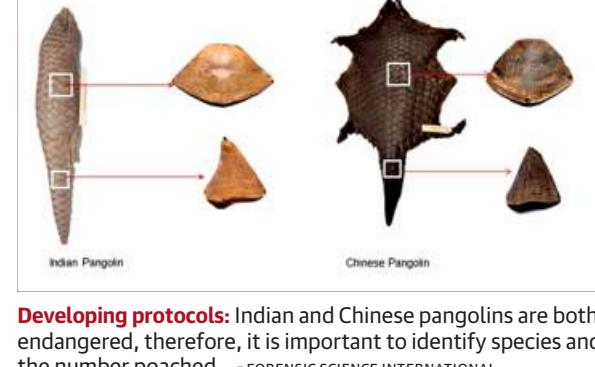
Harsh lessons
The fight against the novel coronavirus is a long-drawn-out battle. The second wave has offered some harsh lessons. While expanding vaccination coverage at faster rate is non-negotiable, the system should learn from the evidence and incorporate changes to combat this better in future. We simply cannot afford to repeat the same mistakes or commit newer ones.

(*Giridhara R Babu is a Professor and Head of Life-course Epidemiology at the Indian Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru, a constituent institution of the Public Health Foundation of India.*)

Wildlife forensics helps cause of pangolins

Researchers sequenced 624 pangolin scales, categorising the species

ASWATHI PACHA



Developing protocols: Indian and Chinese pangolins are both endangered, therefore, it is important to identify species and the number poached. ■ FORENSIC SCIENCE INTERNATIONAL

Pangolins, despite being listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 continue to be the world's most trafficked mammal. The primary demand for its scales in the making of traditional East Asian medicines has led to an estimated illegal trade worth \$2.5 billion every year. To enforce the appropriate national and international laws and to track the decline of the species, researchers of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Kolkata, have now developed tools to tell apart the scales of Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*).

They characterised the morphological features and investigated genetic variations between the two species by sequencing 624 scales of pangolins and comparing the sequences with all eight pangolin species.

Estimating casualty
He explains that when scales are confiscated, the wildlife officers just weigh and estimate how many pangolins might have been killed. "This needs revision as the dry weight of the scales from one single mature Chinese pangolin is roughly about

500 to 700 grams. However, in the case of Indian pangolin it goes up to 1.5 kg to 1.8 kg," explains Dr. Thakur.

"Studies have shown that between 2000 and 2019, an estimate of about 8,95,000 pangolins was trafficked globally, which mainly involved Asian and African pangolins. This has led to a drastic decline of the species. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Indian pangolins are endangered and the Chinese pangolins are critically endangered. Therefore, it is important to develop protocols that can readily identify species and the number of individuals poached in seizures," adds Dr. Thakur.

Prajnashree Priyambada, a PhD scholar at the University of Calcutta.

"Though the Chinese pangolin is distributed mostly in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, the northeastern part of our country is also its home. The population is already limited as it has a limited geographical range, low fecundity with just one offspring a year. It is also facing pressure due to habitat degradation and is prone to local extinction," adds Dr. Thakur.

Skill-building workshops

"We have been conducting training and skill-building workshops for the law enforcement agencies like various officials of forest department, police, revenue department and wildlife crime control bureau and this method of identifying scales will also be demonstrated soon. Forest guards, customs officials or the airport authority when they undertake search and seizure don't have much of a clue about identification. This study has laid out the methods to take a spot decision, which is crucial to prosecuting the case in the court of law," adds Dr. Thakur.

U.S.-based study

"While further research is needed, by preventing infections, including in people who have no symptoms, there is a high possibility that vaccination will decrease transmission of SARS-CoV-2," said Diego Hijano from the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in the U.S.

The study involved 5,217 St. Jude employees who were eligible under Tennessee state guidelines for vaccination between December 17, 2020, and March 20, 2021.

More than 58% of employees were vaccinated during that period. Most

Study finds vaccination correlated with lowering of infections

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Preventive measure: People who received the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at a U.S. hospital had dramatically lower symptomatic and asymptomatic infections compared with their unvaccinated peers, according to a study. ■ GETTY IMAGES

workers received both doses. Overall, vaccination reduced the risk of asymptomatic and symptomatic SARS-CoV-2 infection by 79% in vaccinated employees compared with their unvaccinated colleagues, the researchers said. An analysis of asymptomatic infections alone found vaccination reduced the risk by 72%, they said.

Two doses

Researchers found that protection was even greater for employees who completed two doses.

A week or more after receiving the second dose, vaccinated employees were 96% less likely than unvaccinated workers to become infected with SARS-CoV-2, they said. When researchers looked just at asymptomatic infections, vaccination reduced the risk by 90%.

During the study, 236 of the 5,217 employees included in the analysis tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. They included 185 unvaccinated employees and 51 of the 3,052 workers who had received at least one dose of the vaccine.

Almost half of the positive cases, 108, reported no symptoms upon testing, the researchers said. The asymptomatic cases included 20 employees who had received one vaccine dose and three who tested positive within seven days of the second dose, they said.

Study reveals interesting facet of the novel coronavirus

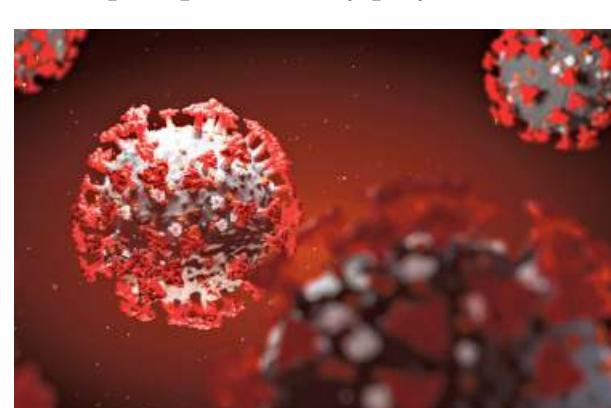
The nucleocapsid or N protein and not just the spike protein may play a role in the infectivity of SARS-CoV-2

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

Studies of the coronavirus have largely focused on its 'spike' protein. A new study from IISER Bhopal has found that other proteins, in particular, the nucleocapsid or 'N' protein may also be responsible for the infectivity of the virus.

SARS-CoV-2 structure

The SARS-CoV-2, or novel coronavirus, consists of an RNA genome contained in a spherical capsule which has many proteins, one of which is the 'spike' protein that gives it its characteristic spiky surface or 'crown'. These spike proteins are the ones that help the virus penetrate and enter the body of human hosts. This is therefore used as a target by those developing vaccines as well as drugs. In order to test the effect of these formulations on the virus, scientists often use not live virus particles but 'pseudotype' them. That is, they



Crown of spikes: The novel coronavirus consists of an RNA genome contained in a capsule which has many proteins, one of which is the spike protein that gives it its characteristic 'crown'. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Combination effect
The infectivity of each of the pseudoviruses containing the 24 proteins was tested separately, and the group found that the pseudovirus containing the nucleocapsid 'N' protein had higher infectivity than the others.

The researchers used an assay where the extent of in-

nfectivity can be readily quantified using either enzymatic activity or fluorescence. "For this, we included a pair of reporter genes in the pseudoviruses (lentiviral vectors), which when delivered to the target cells expresses both an enzyme (called 'luciferase') and a green fluorescent protein," explains Srividya Chande.

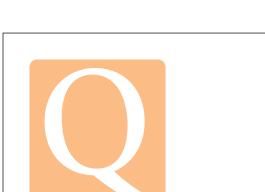
More possibilities
According to him, this discovery opens up exciting

possibilities. "Ongoing or planned studies which seek to screen neutralising antibodies or therapeutic drugs could benefit by incorporating the N protein as a part of their experimental setup while using such pseudotyping systems," says Dr Chande.

"After allowing the viral infection to occur, we measured the level of enzyme activity and counted the number of cells showing fluorescence, which gave a quantitative estimation of how infectious the virus would have been," adds Tarun Mishra, also an author of the paper. The inference was that stronger the signal, higher was the infectivity.

These results were found to hold when they studied the so-called U.K. variant also. "The results which hold true for the original spike protein remain unchanged in the case of this mutant as well - the N protein, when included, leads to the production of more infectious viral particles," says Dr Chande.

More possibilities
According to him, this discovery opens up exciting



Question Corner

Homing sharks

Do sharks navigate using Earth's magnetic field?

Several birds and animals have been known to use magnetoreception or the special sense to detect Earth's magnetic field to perceive the location and also track the direction during migration.

Project leader Bryan Keller explained in a release that bonnethead sharks return to the same estuaries each year demonstrating that the sharks know where 'home' is and can navigate back to it from a distant location. But the question of how sharks navigate has remained unanswered for about 50 years because sharks are difficult to study, he adds.

bonnethead sharks (*Sphyrna tiburo*) from the Gulf of Mexico and transported them to the Florida State University lab for experimentation.

They exposed the animals to artificial magnetic conditions which represented locations hundreds of kilometres away from their capture location. They found that the sharks orientated themselves according to the provided artificial magnetic field.

A new study published in *(Current Biology)* found the first solid evidence that sharks also use Earth's magnetic fields for their long-distance travel. Sharks undergo precise, long-distance migrations and make round-trips for over 20,000 kilometres.

For the study, the team captured 20 juvenile

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



People waiting after receiving a shot of COVID-19 vaccine in New Delhi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

IP rights and vaccines

How will the U.S. support for waivers help in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic?

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

The story so far: Breaking with a long-held position, the U.S. Trade Representative, Katherine Tai, announced that the Biden administration would support waiving trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS) for the production of COVID-19 vaccines. The news was welcomed by liberal activists and some global leaders, given that the United States was until now a major World Trade Organization (WTO) member blocking such a proposal, framed by India and South Africa. The proposal, if passed by the WTO with the support of the European Union (EU), could dramatically alter how pharmaceutical companies worldwide access proprietary trade know-how for the production of leading vaccines. However, questions remain regarding whether the easing of TRIPS rules for COVID-19 vaccines will lead to a greater supply of efficacious vaccines in countries where they are the most needed, or if less circuitous options to boost supply are more relevant in the present scenario.

A 'tech transfer' is also needed for pharma companies to begin production. Pfizer has pointed out that its vaccine requires the use of 280 components from 86 suppliers and highly specialised manufacturing equipment

What is the argument in favour of relaxing TRIPS rules?
The broader context for emergency action aimed at rapidly increasing vaccine availability across the world is the sharp surge in COVID-19 cases in India and Brazil. Global concern also stems from the risk that the Indian variant, believed to be driving a second wave of devastating intensity in the country, could potentially fuel second or third waves

across the world, causing a setback to the progress made in controlling transmission across the U.S. and EU. Additionally, the Brazil and South African variants still pose a threat in some pockets. Across many affected nations, vaccine availability has emerged as a bottleneck impeding progress.

In this context, a fierce debate has been underway, pitting global-vaccine-access advocates against vaccine developers and pharmaceutical firms that rely on patented technology, usually of a highly specialised nature, to produce vaccines. The latest step by the U.S. to declare its support for TRIPS waivers for such vaccines stems from the promise Joe Biden made during his election campaign, to "absolutely positively" commit to sharing vaccine technology if elected.

Can a waiver resolve the vaccine shortage?
This is a complex question to which there is, so far, no clear answer. On the one hand, it is undeniable that intellectual property rights are a part of the problem of worldwide vaccine shortages – the logic of a wider production base globally leading to an exponential increase in vaccine production is undeniable. However, several caveats remain.

First, there may be serious issues associated with manufacturing vaccines, for example, with those based on messenger RNA (mRNA) technology, if there is just an easing of the associated intellectual property rights rules but no further support to generic pharmaceutical firms in countries such as India and South Africa. This is because a "tech transfer" is also needed for the latter to actually commence production, especially for mRNA vaccines, including the ones produced by Moderna and Pfizer along with BioNTech. To illustrate, Pfizer has pointed out that its vaccine requires the use of 280 components from 86 suppliers and highly specialised manufacturing equipment.

Second, there is a strong likelihood that it will take a considerable amount of time, even several years, for generic producers' plants to become operational at optimal capacity. This raises the question of whether today's vaccines would even be relevant at that point in time, especially if new variants prove resistant to vaccine formulations currently available.

Finally, there is the classic counter-argument to calls for patent relaxations, that such policies could discourage pharmaceutical companies from investing in producing next-generation vaccines. Though many, including Mr. Biden, have argued that humanitarian need trumps the profit motive during a pandemic, the decision to waive all TRIPS rules should be preceded by a rigorous analysis of the effects such a policy would have on the biotechnology sector and global supply chains for its products.

What actions are likely?

No significant steps forward will be possible until other major member nations of the WTO sign on, including the EU. The speed of potential action will also be dampened by the fact that in parallel to the waivers, a transfer of personnel, raw materials and equipment to developing nations will be necessary.

However, there is another possibility: Mr. Biden may either intend to release more of the existing U.S. vaccine stockpile to other countries to meet emergency needs and seek the cooperation of pharmaceutical companies in that mission, or he may be using the threat of the TRIPS waivers to nudge U.S. vaccine producers to ramp up their production and donate more doses to countries like India and Brazil.

Either way, it would be unwise for countries like India to rely on this initiative for an increase in vaccine supply.

Use of CT scans and steroids for COVID-19

Why have doctors cautioned against exposing people, especially those with mild symptoms, to radiation?

C. MATA

The story so far: As doctors try out different protocols to manage patients with COVID-19, Dr. Randeep Guleria, director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and member of the National Taskforce on COVID-19, has cautioned against the use of CT scans indiscriminately to diagnose the disease, especially in the early stages. This exposes individuals to unnecessary radiation, which could be harmful in the long run, he said. A single CT scan is equal to 300 X-rays, Dr. Guleria warned, which may increase the risk of cancer later in life for young people. Doctors and the World Health Organization (WHO) are also cautioning against the use of corticosteroids like dexamethasone, a potent anti-inflammatory drug, for patients who have non-severe COVID-19. Corticosteroids have been proven to benefit patients with moderate and severe infection.

When is a CT scan advised for a COVID-19 patient?

An RT-PCR test is the standard for diagnosis or confirmation of COVID-19. Use of CT for the diagnosis of COVID-19 should be restricted to that subgroup of patients who may have classical symptoms of the illness but have a negative RT-PCR test result. However, a chest CT can be useful in evaluating patients with moderate or severe disease, to identify complications like thromboembolism or pneumomediastinum.

There are certain situations involving COVID-19 patients in which a clinician might depend on a CT scan to arrive at treatment decisions. These include scenarios where a patient may have classical symptoms of COVID-19 but his RT-PCR test is negative, or situations when a CT pulmonary angiogram might be in order to rule out pulmonary embolism in a patient who is on anti-coagulants and steroids and is not showing any signs of recovery. Also, in cases where a patient in the ICU with severe COVID-19 is not showing any improvement and a chest X-ray shows new lesions, a CT appearance might give a clue towards a diagnosis of dangerous COVID-19-associated fungal super-infections like aspergillosis or mucormycosis. In a fourth scenario, a clinician might order a CT chest to rule out spontaneous pneumomediastinum, a life-threatening complication.

"However, these four scenarios together constitute less than 2% of situations where a CT chest is ordered in COVID-19 cases. Rather than CT findings, it is oxygen saturation that is the key to treatment decisions. Yet, in 95% of the cases, CT scan is a misused tool, often prescribed to rule out pneumonia even in mild cases of COVID-19. There is no point in ordering CT early in the course of COVID-19 because even patients with mild severity may have some ground-glass opacities in the lungs, which do not merit treatment and will resolve on their own," says R. Aravind, Head of Infectious Diseases, Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram.

The consensus statement from Fleischner Society, an international, multidisciplinary association for thoracic radiology, states that "imaging is not indicated" in suspected COVID-19 infection with mild clinical features. The statement supports the use of imaging in patients with worsening respiratory status as well as in those with moderate to severe clinical features that are indicative of COVID-19 pneumonia.

To sum up, although CT has been used in assessing the severity of COVID-19 pneumonia, its routine use is not recommended.

Are multiple CT scans harmful?

When indicated, a chest CT should be performed with a low-dose, single-phase protocol using fast scanning techniques to minimise motion artifacts (patient movement leading to subtle errors).

There is no evidence to support the use of routine multi-phase chest CT in patients with COVID-19 pneumonia. Dr. Guleria said according to data from the



A doctor checking a CT scan of a COVID-19 patient at a hospital in Allahabad on Monday. ■ AFP

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2007 said based on data from 1991 to 1996, 0.4% of all cancers in the U.S. may be attributable to radiation from CT studies and that the current estimate could be in the range of 1.5% to 2%

International Atomic Energy Agency, one CT scan was equivalent to almost 300 to 400 chest X-rays, which put youngsters at substantial risk of cancer in the long term. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2007 said based on data from 1991 to 1996, 0.4% of all cancers in the U.S. may be attributable to radiation from CT studies and that the current estimate could be in the range of 1.5% to 2%.

Apart from all this, the risks of transmission and contamination faced by radiology technicians and staff every time a COVID-19 patient undergoes diagnostic imaging, especially in an air-conditioned, closed space, cannot be dismissed.

Why are steroids being prescribed for COVID-19 patients?

Even though many doctors in India had started treating seriously ill COVID-19 patients with corticosteroids like dexamethasone much earlier during the pandemic, recommendation on their use from international agencies like the WHO came only in September 2020, following the U.K.'s RECOVERY Trial, which found mortality benefit for patients who received steroids.

In many patients, death occurs following a hyper-immune response (cytokine storm) to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which damages the lungs and other organs, leading to multi-organ dysfunction syndrome. Corticosteroids like dexamethasone, as anti-inflammatory agents, work by calming down the immune system and preventing the progression of organ damage.

"Steroids are the most potent weapon we have to combat COVID-19. But the therapeutic window for starting steroids has to be spot-on. Determining the timing, dosage and duration is an art which has to be mastered," says Dr. Aravind.

One of the main concerns is that we do not want to start steroids too early in the illness when viral replication is happening as it might interfere with the immune system's natural ability to fight back. We also do

not want to miss that critical point when steroids can prevent the immune system from unleashing the cytokine storm, he says.

The WHO guidelines say that steroids may be administered to patients whose resting saturation levels are below 94% and whose respiration rate at rest is over 24 per minute. However, steroids can benefit some patients who are not on supplementary oxygen yet but are showing early indications that they might worsen.

Kerala's guidelines thus talk about recognising exertional desaturation – the fall or depletion in oxygen saturation reading by over 3% from the baseline oxygen levels, post-exercise or after the six-minute walk test – and addressing it at the right time so that interstitial inflammation can be arrested. The walk test requires individuals to walk for six straight minutes, without a pause, on an even surface with an oximeter on the finger. After six minutes, if the oxygen level does not go down, the individual will be considered healthy. If the oxygen level drops below 93%, or by 3%, or if the individual suffers from breathlessness, then they are advised to seek medical attention.

"We want to pick up patients who are at risk of progressing to hypoxemia at rest. The earliest feature of COVID-19 pneumonia will be interstitial involvement, which leads to a demand-supply mismatch of oxygen. So, patients with normal oxygen saturation (> 94%) at rest in room air and who are clinically stable are put through the six-minutes/40-step walk test. If the oxygen levels drop after the walk test, these patients may be started on low-dose steroids after consulting the pulmonary specialist or a physician to prevent the cytokine storm syndrome," says Dr. Aravind.

When do steroids become a double-edged sword? That said, steroids can turn out to be a double-edged sword if the dosage, timing or duration of the drug goes wrong. Steroids are not mandated for all patients and certainly not for mild patients in the early stages of the illness. The trigger for starting steroids has to be exertional desaturation and not the day of illness.

Dr. Guleria had pointed out recently that he was seeing many mild COVID-19 cases where steroids had stimulated viral replication, causing oxygen levels to drop. There is potential harm associated with the long-term use of steroids in a serious COVID-19 patient. This includes a rise in blood glucose levels, which will need to be carefully managed with insulin to prevent secondary bacterial or fungal infections.

The SC ruling on identifying backward classes

What was the court's opinion on the debate around the 102nd Constitution Amendment?

K. VENKATARAMAN

The story so far: In the judgment that declared the Maratha reservation unconstitutional, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court dealt with another issue. By a 3:2 majority, it ruled that after the passage of the 102nd Constitution Amendment Act in 2018, the States do not have any power to identify 'socially and educationally backward' (SEBC) classes. The Union government argued that it was never its intention to deprive State governments of their power to identify SEBCs, but the Court interpreted the bare text of the Amendment to the effect that only the President can publish a list of backward classes in relation to each State and that only Parliament can make inclusions or exclusions in it.

What does the 102nd Amendment say?

The Amendment established a National Commission for Backward Classes by adding Article 338B to the Constitution. The five-member Commission was tasked with monitoring safeguards provided for socially and educationally backward classes, giving advice on their socio-economic development, inquiring into complaints and making recommendations, among other functions. Significantly, it was laid down that the Centre and the States shall consult the Commission on all policy matters concerning the SEBCs.

The Amendment also added Article 342A, under which the President shall notify a list of SEBCs in relation to each State and Union Territory, in consultation with Governors of the respective States. Once this 'Central List' is notified, only Parliament could make inclusions or exclusions in the list by law. This provision is drafted in exactly the same word as the one concerning the lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Further, a definition of 'SEBCs' was added to the Constitution – 'SEBC' means "such backward classes as are so deemed under Article 342A for the purposes of this Constitution".

Why did this Amendment come up for judicial interpretation?

The reservation for the Maratha community was challenged in the Bombay High Court on various grounds. One of the grounds was that the Act creating the Maratha quota through a new category called 'SEBC' was unconstitutional because after the introduction of the



The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to notify the list of socially and educationally backward classes for each State and Union Territory, and until it is done, the present State Lists may continue

One, the text was clear that the President alone could notify the list, and subsequent changes could be made only by Parliament by law.

Two, the text was identical to the provisions governing the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the procedure to identify SCs was exactly the same, which led to the conclusion that Parliament intended to "replicate" the same process for backward classes, too.

Third, a definition clause was added to the effect that only a class found in the list notified by the President under Article 342A was an SEBC. Further, the definition was for "the purposes of the Constitution", which meant that it was to apply to the Constitution as a whole, including Article 15(4) and Article 16(4), which enable special provisions for backward classes, including reservation in public services, and are also implemented by the States.

The Supreme Court's judgment also drew on deliberations before a Rajya Sabha Select Committee that showed that the Centre had rejected suggestions from members who demanded that a specific clause be added saying that States would continue to have the power to identify SEBCs.

Justice Ashok Bhushan, with another judge agreeing with him and constituting the minority on this point, accepted the Union government's position that it was never its intention to deprive the States of their powers. They held that the 'Central List' was only for use by the Centre in reservations for jobs and institutions under the Union government, and will not apply to States.

What next?

The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to notify the list of SEBCs for each State and Union territory, and until it is done, the present State Lists may continue to be in use. The Centre may either comply with this or seek to further amend the Constitution to clarify the position that the 102nd Amendment was not intended to denude the States of their power to identify SEBCs.

I-PAC

The rise of professional political campaigners

The victories of the DMK and the Trinamool have turned the spotlight on the Political Action Committee that worked with their campaigns

NISTULA HEBBAR

The recently concluded round of assembly polls had clear winners and losers in each state, but the biggest winner by far was the Indian-Political Action Committee (I-PAC) and its lodestar Prashant Kishor, who helped steer the campaigns for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu and the All India Trinamool Congress in West Bengal.

In both cases, the parties were successful: one returned to power with a huge mandate and the other defeated the ruling party and captured power. The victories turned the spotlight on the I-PAC and its good record with campaign management (the 2017 Uttar Pradesh Assembly election, in which Mr. Kishor's team worked with the Congress party's campaign, is the only blemish on its record, so far).

The formation

Mr. Kishor, the public face of the I-PAC, chucking a job in public health in the United Nations and was associated with Narendra Modi's campaign in 2014, under the aegis of an organisation called Citizens for Accountable Governance (CAG). After the 2014 poll, however, Mr. Kishor and the Modi team parted ways. There are different accounts on why this happened, but all versions agree that Mr. Kishor did not find space in a set-up where current Home Minister Amit Shah was ruling the roost, resulting in some of the toughest grudge matches being fought between the two in polls across the country.

What followed was a difficult period for him and the three associates from CAG who followed him out of the Modi war room – Pratik Jain and Rishi Raj Singh, both former IITians, and Vinesh Chandrel from the National Law Institute University, Bhopal.



Countering criticism that the I-PAC, which has worked with many parties, is ideologically promiscuous, its leaders say they have a vision and are 'not a gun for hire'

it is his brand recall that attracts a lot of the political parties. "We provide a 360 degree range for a political campaign, from initial surveys, to micro issues, campaigns, district wise flagging of issues, continuous seat calling, etc., the team expands and contracts as required, but the core leadership is what has been there from the beginning," says Mr. Chandrel, one of the directors.

The average age of employees is between 25 and 26 years and of diverse back-

grounds and skill sets. "There is even a doctor who gave up a position in AIIMS to join us," says Mr. Rishi Raj Singh.

The journey

Mr. Kishor dismisses the fact that he may have birthed the professionalisation of political campaigns in India. "Every politician standing for polls will look for the best resources for managing the campaign, either from within the party or even kin groups. I like to keep things simple, the real task is to convince the leader that we can add value to the campaign messaging, bring scale and bring it to the wider work. We work as an invisible force, not really the way that it's done in the United States, for example," he told *The Hindu*.

The campaign in Bihar was a runaway success, with the Mahagathbandhan storming to power and Mr. Nitish Kumar becoming Chief Minister for the third time. Some of the things tried in that campaign were repeated elsewhere – close alignment with the top leader, projecting a face, doing micro-level messaging and district level feedbacks, etc.

For a while, Mr. Kishor looked like he was going to grow political roots in Bihar. His close relationship with Mr. Kumar was said to have influenced the latter in seeing him as a political heir. That did not work out and the complications of party politics saw Mr. Kishor exit Bihar and work with Capt. Amarinder Singh in Punjab and the Congress party in Uttar Pradesh in 2017, a year of mixed success for the I-PAC.

Subsequent campaigns in Andhra Pradesh with the YSR Congress Party (General Election 2019), Maharashtra with the Shiv Sena (Assembly poll 2019) and Delhi with the Aam Aadmi Party (Assembly poll 2020) saw more success come to the I-PAC. In all these, the question of larger party structures and their relationship with the I-PAC is



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

"not a gun for hire". "The vision of the I-PAC is that of a political action committee, the first of its kind in India," he says. The clients, they say, have been on "one side of the balance", largely neutral parties or non-NDA.

The one NDA party they worked with since 2014 was the Shiv Sena, in the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly poll. (Currently, the Shiv Sena is out of the NDA and is with the Maha Vikas Aghadi, an alliance with the Congress and the NCP).

With Mr. Kishor declaring that he was "leaving the space" of campaigning, what lies ahead for the I-PAC? The founders are hoping that their track record and experience will help them keep the organisation in business, and that Mr. Kishor's declaration that he would like to do "the things he wants to do" would not cut him off from the I-PAC. In India's contested political landscape, however, the organisation can, in all honesty, pride itself for striking a maverick path.

In Focus

■ The roots of the I-PAC go back to the 2014 campaign of Narendra Modi, in which Prashant Kishor's Citizens for Accountable Governance played a major part

■ After falling out with the BJP, Kishor and his team formed the I-PAC as a professional campaign organisation, and have worked with mostly non-NDA parties and scored a high success rate

■ Kishor doesn't hold any formal position in the organisation's hierarchy. Its directors say he is like a 'mentor' for them

K.K. REMA

Daughter of Onchiyam

Widow of slain RMP leader says her win is a verdict against political violence

BIJU GOVIND

Some time in a wet June nine years ago when Kerala was keenly engrossed in the Neyyattinkara Assembly bypoll in Thiruvananthapuram, veteran Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] leader V.S. Achuthanandan made a surprise visit to the house of K.K. Rema, widow of the slain Revolutionary Marxist party (RMP) founder-leader T.P. Chandrasekharan, raising the political ombrometer during the monsoons in the State.

The incident not only sent shock waves among the CPI (M) leadership, the image of Ms. Rema crying on the shoulders of the then Leader of the Opposition Achuthanandan still remains etched in the political memory of Kerala.

The hacking of Chandrasekharan, who had walked out of the CPI(M) and floated a dissident outfit, by a seven-member gang engaged by a section of local CPI(M) leaders at Onchiyam on May 4, 2012, continues to haunt the party in the State. Even in the just-concluded Assembly poll, the Left-led coalition filed a complaint against Ms. Rema, a Congress-led UDF-backed candidate in Vadakara, for trying to influence voters by using pictures of VS, as Mr. Achuthanandan is popularly known, in the campaign material.

Last week, Ms. Rema seemed to be the happiest, emerging victorious by a



margin of 7,000 votes. Her victory gave a major embarrassment to the CPI(M).

"This is the victory of T.P. Chandrasekharan. The electorate responded to his cold-blooded murder. The voters showed that the nine-year wound did not heal so easily. This is an achievement against political violence and injustice," the 50-year-old proclaimed at Onchiyam.

Ms. Rema was born the second of the three children of K.K. Madhavan and K.K. Dakshayani. By her own account, her political vibes began to merge when she joined the pre-university course at the Guruvayurappan College in Kozhikode. She was nominated to the district unit of the Students' Federation of India (SFI), the students affiliate of the CPI(M).

In 1993, she met her future husband, the "brave and aggressive" TP. But the marriage proposal came via the party. "I knew TP, and

we used to talk. It was a sort of arranged-love marriage," she says. A year later, they tied the knot and she moved to Onchiyam. Though many CPI(M) leaders persuaded her to join active politics, she remained a home-maker. Her family life kindled in her after the birth of their son, Abhinand, in 1997.

Party factionalism
Meanwhile, factionalism in the CPI(M) Kerala unit had its reverberations in a bigger way in Onchiyam. Perhaps the infighting started much earlier than 2006 when Mr. Achuthanandan contested the Assembly election after initially being denied a ticket and then went on to become the Chief Minister.

Chandrasekharan, identified with the Achuthanandan camp, had been DYFI Kozhikode district secretary. After a local intra-party dispute in 2008, he left the CPI (M) and formed the RMP. Ms. Rema recollects that the CPI(M) decided to

eliminate him as its leadership did not want a parallel dissident unit to function in Onchiyam, a region of martyrs where 10 party workers were killed in 1948, eight in police firing and two others in police custody. Political realities changed after Chandrasekharan left the party. The CPI(M) lost the Vadakara Lok Sabha constituency in the 2009, 2014 and 2019 elections.

Realities also changed for Ms. Rema. In 2016, the RMP merged with nine other small leftist parties scattered across the country to form the RMP India. Her endeavour against odds brought her to electoral politics. She unsuccessfully contested the Assembly poll in 2016, securing over 20,000 votes. None will forget when Ms. Rema sat on dharna before AKG Bhawan in New Delhi in 2018.

Ms. Rema still feels that the conspiracy angle has not been probed into the murder of her husband although a special additional sessions court convicted 12 accused, including three leaders of the CPI(M) in 2014.

Now, her dependence on the UDF appeared very obvious as the CPI(M) is still hostile to her and the party she leads. Today, Ms. Rema has a new job to move ahead on multiple fronts simultaneously. She has an agenda for her constituency to gain more public support. "Political culture should change in Kerala. Political leaders should learn to respect the opposition," she says.

SUVENTU ADHIKARI

The giant-killer of Nandigram

Mamata's aide-turned-rival faces a tall task in winning over the State for the BJP

SUDIPTA DATTA

What did I not do for him?" At her rallies in Nandigram, after Mamata Banerjee took up the challenge to contest the West Bengal Assembly election from there instead of her home seat of Bhabanipur against her party man-turned-rival Suventu Adhikari, she often listed the largesse showered on him, both ministerial and others. She called Mr. Adhikari a 'gaddar' and Mir Jafar (traitor) as the crowd cheered on. Taking the fight to her former aide in his bastion, she urged the people to come out and vote without fear for the 'bhoomi kanya' (daughter of the soil).

The turnout was high – a little over 80% – amid bouts of violence, and Mr. Adhikari romped home by a tiny margin of 1,956 votes, but Ms. Banerjee led her party to a massive win for a third term in the State: the Trinamool Congress won a record 213 seats, garnering a 47.9% vote share compared to the BJP's 77 seats (38.1% vote share).

During the campaign, the 50-year-old Mr. Adhikari was accused of playing the polarisation card. He called Ms. Banerjee 'Begum' and an 'outsider', which the Trinamool chief fiercely rebutted.

Till Mr. Adhikari switched to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) last December, he was a powerful leader in the Trinamool. This was evident in the responsibility and power thrust on him by the Chief

Minister. After he won from Nandigram in 2016, he held the portfolios of irrigation, environment and transport, headed the Haldia Development Authority, was part of the seven-member apex steering committee of the State, was a general secretary of the party, and was also asked to take charge of Murshidabad district, besides his home turf of Medinipur and adjoining districts.

Some in the Trinamool, like Kolkata Municipal Corporation chairman Firhad Hakim, openly said he was happy Mr. Adhikari had quit the party. His name had come up in the chit fund scam and also in the Narada sting before the 2016 election that showed several party leaders accepting bribes. In Nandigram, people were confused – should they punish Mr. Adhikari for corruption at the local level or the Trinamool, of which he was a part? "He had nurtured Nandigram well at the behest of Didi, but now he is playing communal politics," several women in his constituency said.

Mr. Adhikari, said to have chief ministerial ambitions, will be an important face of the Opposition BJP in the Assembly. His task is cut out. He may have defeated Ms. Banerjee in Nandigram but he will have to start afresh to win over the State. He perhaps needs to go back to his early days as Nandigram MLA, when he vowed to represent all, without the polarisation pitch.

Parting with the party
By November last year, it was clear Mr. Adhikari was firm on switching loyalties. He stayed away from meetings before stepping down, and even a last-ditch effort by Trinamool leader Saugata Roy to stop him from leaving the party failed. He



ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

joined the BJP in December. The BJP exulted at the move and pinned its hopes on leaders like Mr. Adhikari to win Bengal. His father, Sirir Adhikari, a Trinamool MP, and one of his brothers Soumendu Adhikari, then Contai Municipality administrator, also joined the BJP. Mr. Suventu Adhikari may have narrowly clung on to Nandigram, but the BJP has not fared well in Medinipur and adjoining districts.

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Oxygen curbs hit container availability

Exports affected as 'thousands of damaged containers unusable'; gas key to welding process in repairs

LALATENDU MISHRA

MUMBAI

The curbs placed on industrial use of oxygen by the Centre to augment availability of medical grade oxygen for hospitals to save lives of critically ill COVID-19 patients, is impacting exporters by exacerbating a shortage of containers.

Thousands of damaged containers, which arrived with import consignments on shipping lines, have not been repaired due to lack of oxygen and are hence not available for exporters, said industry executives.

'Damage unavoidable'

With containers being handled by heavy cranes and transported over long distances by trains and trucks, some containers get damaged and typically undergo



Trade off: Export of items moving in large volume, such as rice, sugar, stones and tiles, has been impacted. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

repairs before being returned to the system.

The percentage of damaged containers may be in the range of 1-5% of the total containerised trade, but this volume is significant enough

"Since mid-January, the situation in container movement was easing, following government intervention. But the second wave of the pandemic and shortage of industrial oxygen supply has aggravated the issue of container shortage," said Sanjay Bhatia, co-founder & CEO, Freightwalla, a digital freight-forwarding company.

"Oxygen is essential for repairs and welding of damaged containers; due to the prohibition it cannot be availed of. It has now become a big issue. There are thousands of empty containers lying unprepared. This has further added to the crisis for exporters," he said, adding the problem started from the third week of April.

According to industry officials, exports of commodities moving in large volume

have been impacted. These include rice, sugar, stones and tiles, as well as plant and machinery. However, lightweight containerised cargo is getting loaded on ships.

Besides, the dwelling time of containers has almost doubled to 45-50 days due to the emergence of the second wave of the pandemic globally on account of short supply of workers, officials said.

'Imbalance began early'

The imbalance in container supply surfaced from the beginning of the pandemic due to congestion at major ports worldwide and piling of containers in key global destinations due to lockdowns and slower consumption.

In such a scenario, any shortage in the supply would naturally hit exporters hard, officials added.

CBIC allows goods import, export sans Customs bond

Tax body eases norm till June 30 to avoid delays on COVID

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) on Saturday allowed businesses to import and export goods without furnishing bonds to the Customs authorities until June-end, a move aimed at ensuring no delay or disruption in EXIM trade due to COVID-19.

In a circular, the CBIC said importers and exporters will have to furnish an undertaking in lieu of the bonds till June 30.

The indirect tax body said it has received representation from traders to accept undertaking in lieu of bonds in certain cases of Customs clearance, in view of the difficulties being faced in the



ongoing lockdown/constraints imposed in different regions of India.

Expediting clearance

To expedite Customs clearance of goods and for maintaining balance between Customs control and facilitation of legitimate trade, the CBIC said it has approved relaxation of the requirement to submit bonds.

"The Board has decided to restore the facility of acceptance of an undertaking in lieu of bond by Customs formation ... till June 30, 2021," the CBIC said in a circular. "Importers/exporters availing this facility shall ensure that the undertaking furnished ... is duly replaced with a proper bond by July 15, 2021," it added.

Last year too in the wake of COVID pandemic, the CBIC had allowed businesses to import and export goods without furnishing bonds.

"These measures would facilitate international trade and ensure continuance of business operations," said AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan.

Norms eased for LIC claims settlement

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has relaxed claims settlement norms on account of the pandemic. The insurer will accept alternative proofs in lieu of municipal certificates where death has occurred in a hospital.

For annuities with return of capital options, production of life certificates has been waived for annuities due up to October 31. Besides, life certificates sent via email, in other cases, will be accepted.

Life certificates can be procured via video calls. Also, documents can be submitted at any local LIC office for claims settlement at the servicing branch.

Bandhan Bank net dives on microfinance loans

It writes off ₹1,929-cr. disbursements



C. S. Ghosh

ated write-off, the bank's overall provisions shot up to ₹1,594 crore from the year-earlier period's ₹827 crore, which had a direct impact on the profit line. Operating profit, which is arrived at by excluding the provisions, was up 13% to ₹1,729 crore.

Additionally, Bandhan Bank restructured over ₹600 crore of advances.

As a result of the acceler-

India requires two lakh ICU ventilators, says device maker

'Country has only 25,000 personnel familiar with machines'

MINI TEJASWI
BENGALURU

India would ideally require at least two lakh ICU ventilators, to cope with the current COVID wave, if it had enough doctors, respiratory technicians and paramedical staff trained to efficiently operate these technologically sophisticated machines, said Vishwaparesh Alva, MD of Skanray Technologies, a manufacturer of medical equipment including ICU ventilators.

"Prior to the pandemic, the country had 11,000 ICU ventilators and some 15,000 doctors/ICU staff who can handle these machines effectively," said Mr. Alva.

"Last year, the country may have added 10,000 se-



"During the first wave, over 40,000 additional ICU ventilators were introduced to the healthcare industry, of which some 10,000 units are still lying idle somewhere due to shortage of qualified medics," he added.

"Last year, the country may have added 10,000 se-

mi-trained doctors and medical staff who can operate ICU ventilators. It is extremely critical to have skilled professionals who can handle these high-tech machines to derive better outcomes from ICU ventilators," he added.

Last year, officials from Niti Aayog contacted Skanray with a requirement for 1 lakh ICU ventilators.

"This was a huge order for us when our annual production capacity was 5,000 units," said Mr. Alva, adding the company partnered with BEL for scaling up production.

"Last year, the country may have added 10,000 se-

tion award. To guard against cash being taken over, the Ministry has asked public sector banks (PSBs) to be on a high vigil against any attempt being made to seize their overseas deposits to recover \$1.2 billion that the U.K.'s Cairn Energy has been awarded against India levying retrospective taxes, sources said.

Cairn had previously stat-

ed it can seize Indian assets abroad if it is not paid \$1.2

billion plus interest and cost

an international arbitration panel had awarded against levy of retrospective taxes.

Cash of Indian banks ly-

ing in nations such as the

U.S. and the U.K. are said to

be easy targets for seizing

and enforcing the arbitra-

This will allow the Indian government to quickly take legal recourse to prevent the assets from being taken over, they said.

INTERVIEW | SRIRAM MANOHARAN

'OTT will become as popular as TV cable connection now is'

GudSho will focus on south Indian content, rural viewers

N. VENKATESWARAN

Software firm Contus is set to unveil GudSho, an Over The Top (OTT) platform that will focus on content in the south Indian languages. Sriram Manoharan, founder and MD, said OTT platforms are set for rapid growth but also that post-pandemic, the theatre industry will still co-exist with OTT platforms.

Theatres and OTT platforms will co-exist. People know that all new movies will be telecast on OTT soon. But theatres are still preferred for superstar or grand-theme movies

will you compete?

■ We are concentrating only on movies and have no plans to develop original content. We have already built up a library of over 100 movies and continue to acquire more. We have set aside a sum of ₹50 crore to buy content for the first six months. The funds are from internal accruals only; we have no plans to bring in any investors from outside.

Smaller OTT players are either knocking on the wrong producer's door or finding it hard to create a business model that suits filmmakers. Users, on the other hand, are confused as to which platform to choose.

We are promising content creators and producers favourable terms and also revenue share with an assured guaranteed model, which other players do not give.

Will these be enough to get in people on your platform?

■ People living in the interior parts of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh or Karnataka are exposed to the same Hindi content that is being provided for urban audiences by top operators.

The south Indian OTT market has around 10 million active users. People are willing to spend but a lack of awareness and a lack of preferred content is stopping them. Unlike others, GudSho will not have a fixed sub-

ICICI Lombard extends pay to COVID-hit staff

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Private sector non-life insurer ICICI Lombard on Saturday said it will give up to two months' gross salary in advance to all its COVID-positive employees.

The individual can pay back the advance in 6 or 12 monthly instalments at a later date, the insurer said.

The company will also reimburse medical infrastructure support expenses up to a maximum of ₹10,000 per family member, arising from home quarantine in case of infected employees.

The company is also providing a family floater cover of ₹4 lakh and a corporate buffer of ₹3 lakh to support their employees and families during such trying times.

D-Mart sees 'severe impact' on revenue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Avenue Supermarts Ltd., that owns and operates retail chain D-Mart, on Saturday said it is having an 'adverse and severe impact' on its revenue due to 'significant disruptions' of its store operations from March.

Besides, D-Mart may also face a challenge of 'excess inventory' as with the receding threat of the pandemic and sales surge in the last two quarters, it had optimistically made plans.

According to the company, over 80% of stores are operating for a significantly lower number of hours or are even shut for one-two weeks or on weekends.

"These shutdowns are having an adverse impact on revenues," it said.

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CM YK

1980 Olympic Games gold-winning hockey stalwarts pass away

M.K. Kaushik succumbs to lung infection

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Olympic gold medallist, former India coach, Arjuna, and Dronacharya awardee Maharaj Kishen Kaushik passed away at a city hospital on Saturday. He was 66 and is survived by his wife and two sons.

Kaushik had been hospitalised two weeks ago after scans revealed his lungs had been affected with pneumonia despite testing negative for COVID-19 after developing symptoms. His Oxygen saturation levels kept fluctuating, falling as low as 50 at nights after meals although he remained stable through the day.

His lungs, however, did not get better and doctors had tried life-saving drugs as well but things did not improve. He was shifted on to a ventilator earlier in the day but that did not help, his family said. His wife had also tested positive but had recovered and returned home a few days back.

A member of the 1980 gold-winning Olympic side, Kaushik was one of the rare hockey personalities who shone both as a player and coach.

Successful coach
He excelled as coach with both the men's and women's teams, guiding them to podium at major continental



M.K. Kaushik. ■ FILE PHOTO

events including the Asian Games and the Asia Cup. A right-winger, Kaushik was known for his speed and thrust as a player.

Having retired as Deputy Director of Sports with Haryana, Kaushik was also in charge of the Madhya Pradesh Hockey Academy and later at the National Hockey Academy in New Delhi as part of Khelo India before retiring late last month.

Ravinder Pal Singh loses battle with COVID

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Former India hockey player Ravinder Pal Singh, a member of the 1980 Moscow Olympics-winning side, passed away at a Lucknow hospital early on Saturday. He was 61.

Singh had tested positive for COVID on April 24 and had been hospitalised since then. He had been shifted to a non-COVID ICU on Thursday after testing negative but his conditions suddenly deteriorated and he had to be put on ventilator on Friday.

A two-time Olympian – he was also part of the 1984 LA Olympics – the Sitapur-born Singh was only 20 when he became an Olympic gold medallist. A product of the Lucknow Sports Hostel and a contemporary of Mohammed Shahid, Singh was known for his speed and interception.

Keeping away
Employed with State Bank of India, Singh had taken early retirement and is survived by his niece Pragya Yadav, having remained unmarried. He withdrew completely from the sport or anyone associated with it once he quit hockey.

The last time he was seen in public was at a function some months back organised by R.P. Singh, another of



Ravinder Pal Singh. ■ THE HINDU ARCHIVES

hockey stalwarts from UP and the current State sports director. It was a rare occasion for someone who, in his own words a few years ago, “hardly watched any hockey”. In his later years, he was more into football, perhaps a throwback to his father who was also a football player.

On field, it was his speed and interception and off it, his ability to avoid people that made Ravinder Pal Singh unique. Sadly, he could not evade COVID.

Former players pay tributes

Baskaran, Zafar, Mukesh, Munee laud the departed duo

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

V. Baskaran, who captained the 1980 Olympics gold medal-winning squad, lamented that the passing away of teammates Ravinder Pal Singh and Kaushik on the same day was “too much to take.”

Baskaran said Kaushik had a fantastic final against Spain. “I vividly remember him scoring a goal and being instrumental in getting the team a penalty stroke, which Surinder Singh Sodhi converted,” he said.

“He was equally successful as a coach and gave a facelift to the Indian women’s team,” added Baskaran.

Baskaran labelled Ravinder Pal as a ‘complete player’. “His basics were sound. He had

speed, endurance and strength. He enjoyed his role as centre-half and moreover he came at a time when there was a big vacuum in that centre-half position,” he said.

Calm and composed

Zafar Iqbal, Ravinder Pal’s teammate and senior at the Olympics, said “he was excellent with his ball-distribution and anticipation. Calm and composed, he was a complete player.”

Triple Olympian N. Mukesh Kumar said the death of Kaushik was a personal loss to him. “I remember every moment of my association with this wonderful coach, especially being a member of the gold medal-winning team at the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games.

“He knew who would

deliver the results and ensured that the whole team gelled well.”

Former India goalkeeper and Olympic medallist Munee Sait expressed his condolences.

Tragic loss

“Kaushik was a speedy right winger with skill and thrust. And he became a successful coach too. His death is a tragic loss,” said Sait.

Speaking about Ravinder Pal, Sait said “A very depressing piece of news. I was hoping and praying that he would pull through. I was one of the selectors who picked him in the Indian team.”

(with inputs from K. Keerthivasan, Uthra Ganeshan, V.V. Subrahmanyam, S. Dinakar)

TV PICKS

Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 4 p.m., 6.30 p.m., 9.30 p.m. & 12.15 a.m. (Monday)

Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 4.30 p.m., 6.30 p.m., 9 p.m. & 11.30 p.m.

Formula One: Spanish GP, SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Neymar extends PSG contract to 2025

PARIS
Neymar has agreed a contract extension with Paris Saint-Germain until 2025, the reigning French champions announced on Saturday. The world's most expensive player has claimed three Ligue 1 titles with the Parisians but has yet to win the Champions League since arriving in 2017 from Barcelona. AFP

Zverev cruises into final

Dispatches Thiem without a fuss

MADRID OPEN

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

Alexander Zverev produced an impressive display to beat Dominic Thiem in straight sets on Saturday and book his spot in the Madrid Open final.

Fifth seed Zverev, who stunned five-time champion Rafael Nadal in the quarter-finals, saw off Thiem 6-3, 6-4 in a repeat of the 2018 final, which was also won by the German.

Thiem threatened a late fightback after trailing 4-1 in the second set, but had too much to do to reach a third Madrid final.

The Austrian third seed will now turn his attention

to Rome next week and then the French Open which starts later this month, where he is also a two-time runner-up.

The tournament has seen a welcome return to form for Zverev, who had won only two matches in his previous three events since lifting the Acapulco title in March.

The results:

Men: Semifinals: Alexander Zverev bt Dominic Thiem 6-3, 6-4.

Quarterfinals: Casper Ruud bt Alexander Bublik 7-5, 6-1; Matteo Berrettini bt Cristian Garín 5-7, 6-3, 6-0.

Doubles: Quarterfinals: Alexander Zverev (Ger) & Tim Puetz (Ger) bt Rohan Bopanna & Neeraj Shapovalov (Can) 6-4, 3-6, [10-5].

BCCI scorer Tiwari passes away

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

BCCI scorer Krishan Kumar Tiwari passed away due to COVID at the AIIMS, Jhajjar (Haryana) on Saturday. He was 52. He is survived by wife, two daughters and a son.

Last fortnight, after Tiwari complained of uneasiness. He was admitted to Hedgewar Hospital where he tested positive. Later, following an intervention by DDCA president Rohan Jaitley, Tiwari was moved to Jhajjar, since no bed was available in the Capital. He was a member of the DDCA's Umpire and Scoring Committee.

Hamilton claims his 100th pole

Verstappen to take front row along with the Briton

SPANISH GP

REUTERS
BARCELONA

Seven-time World champion Lewis Hamilton became the first Formula One driver to take 100 pole positions after lapping fastest in Spanish Grand Prix qualifying on Saturday.

The 36-year-old Mercedes driver was already the record holder by a big margin, with retired Ferrari great and fellow seven-time champion Michael Schumacher second on the list with 68.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen qualified on the front row alongside the championship-leading Briton, who has an eight-point lead



Lewis Hamilton...
memorable milestone. ■ AP

over the Dutch driver, with Valterri Bottas qualifying third for Mercedes. “I feel very humble and very grateful. I’m ecstatic, like it’s my

Most pole positions (top-5)

- 100 Lewis Hamilton
- 68 Michael Schumacher
- 65 Ayrton Senna
- 57 Sebastian Vettel
- 33 Jim Clark

Prasidh, Seifert test positive

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU

Kolkata Knight Riders pacer Prasidh Krishna and wicketkeeper batsman Tim Seifert have tested positive for coronavirus and the former is in quarantine in his home town Bengaluru, a BCCI source said on Saturday.

The 25-year-old Prasidh is the fourth KKR player to have contracted the dreaded virus. “Prasidh is COVID-19 positive and currently in home isolation in Bengaluru,” a BCCI source said.

New Zealand's Seifert is also in isolation in Ahmedabad from where he will go to Chennai for treatment at a private hospital.

Pramod Sood no more



Pramod Sood.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Well-known cricket organiser Pramod Sood passed following a heart attack while undergoing treatment for COVID-19 at a hospital here in Dwarka on Friday. He was 62.

Survived by wife and two sons, Pramod was the man behind the organisation of the prestigious Om Nath Sood tournament in the Capital for over three decades. In fact, the 31st edition of the tournament was suspended last month due to rise in COVID-related cases.

Several players and officials expressed their condolences on the sudden passing away of Pramod.

Abid completes double century

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HARARE

Pakistan took total control on the second day of the second Test against Zimbabwe here on Saturday, outclassing the home side with both bat and ball.

Zimbabwe was 52 for four at the close in reply to Pakistan's 510 for eight declared. Opening batsman Abid Ali made an unbeaten 215 and Nauman Ali 97. The scores: Pakistan 510/8 decl. in 147.1 overs (Abid Ali 215 n.o., Azhar Ali 126, Nauman Ali 97) vs Zimbabwe 52/4 in 30 overs.



Ramos injured again

MADRID
Sergio Ramos has suffered a hamstring injury, Real Madrid announced on Saturday, raising the possibility the defender has played his last game for the club. Ramos will not be available now for Madrid's game against Sevilla on Sunday, which could prove crucial to LaLiga's title race. AFP

Murray to practice with Djokovic at Rome

LONDON
Andy Murray will head to the Rome Masters next week and practice with Novak Djokovic as he once again attempts to reignite his injury-stalled career. AFP

SAI, IOA collaborate to help former athletes

NEW DELHI
Sports Authority of India (SAI) and Indian Olympic Association (IOA) have formed a working group to help former international athletes and coaches in battling the COVID-19 pandemic. The working group consists of SAI DG Sandip Pradhan, IOA President Narinder Batra, IOA secretary-general Rajeev Mehta, among others.

Pant donates to procure oxygen cylinders

NEW DELHI
Rishabh Pant on Saturday pledged an undisclosed amount to procure oxygen cylinders with beds and kits for COVID-affected patients. The 23-year-old said he will donate the amount to Hemkunt Foundation, a Gurugram-based NGO. PTI



Checked: Atletico's Luis Suarez is tackled by Barcelona keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen and Gerard Pique. ■ AP

as host Leeds United condemned it to a 3-1 defeat.

Important results: Premier League: Leeds 3 (Dallas 13, Bamford 42, Rodriguez 84) bt Tottenham 1 (Son 25); Sheffield United 0 lost to Crystal Palace 2; Benteke 2, Eze 88.

Bundesliga: Borussia Dortmund 3 (Reus 7, Sanchez 51, 87) bt Leipzig 2 (Klostermann 63, Olmo 77); Wolfsburg 3 (Brekalo 12, 63, 90) bt Union Berlin 0; Stuttgart 2 (Foerster 11, Kalajdzic 74) bt Augsburg 1 (Niederlechner 59).

LaLiga: Alaves 2 (Pons 30, Jovel 87) drew with Levante 2 (Nogales 36, 42); Barcelona 0 drew with Atletico Madrid 0; Real Sociedad 2 (Elustondo 72, Oyarzabal 90+2) bt Elche 0.

Series A: Spezia 1 (Piccoli 64) lost to Napoli 4 (Zielinski 15, Osimhen 23, 44, Lozano 79).

Adhiban in semifinals

RAKESH RAO

Top seed B. Adhiban stopped R. Pragnanandhaa 3-1 for a place in the semifinals of the online Indian Qualifier for the Champions Chess Tour on Saturday.

Aravindh Chithambaram blanked Surya Shekhar Ganguly 2-0 in the blitz tie-break.

The results: Quarterfinals: B.

Adhiban bt R. Pragnanandhaa 3-1; Aravindh Chithambaram bt Surya Shekhar Ganguly 4-2 (2-0 in blitz tie-break); D. Gukesh bt Mitrabha Guha 2.5-1.5; Arjun Erigaisi bt Harsha Bhartukoti 2.5-1.5.

First round: Adhiban bt Aranyak Ghosh 2.5-1.5; Pragnanandhaa bt M. Karthikeyan 2.5-1.5; Aravindh bt D. Harika 3-1; Ganguly bt N. R. Visakh 2.5-1.5; Arjun bt Nihal Sarin 2.5-1.5; Harsha bt S.P. Sethuraman 4-2 (2-0 in tie-breaker); Gukesh bt Abhijeet Gupta 2.5-0.5; Mitrabha bt K. Sasikiran 2.5-1.5.

Gurpreet Singh (77kg) and Sunil Kumar (87kg) also lost early but remained in the race for bronze by time

