

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 13 MAY 2021



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Salman opens up about lockdown hardships and how he's trying to help

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RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

Vol. 28 No. 86 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00

WINDOWS



US' Jessica Pegula returns a shot to Japan's Naomi Osaka during their match of the Women's Italian Open at Foro Italico in Rome on Wednesday. — AFP

SC: No bail for Navlakha, house arrest an option

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Wednesday rejected a plea for default bail by human rights activist Gautam Navlakha, one of the accused in the January 2018 Bhima Koregaon violence case, over his alleged links with Maoists. Rejecting Mr Navlakha's bail plea, a bench of Justices Uday Umesh Lalit, Indira Banerjee and K.M. Joseph suggested that the lower courts could put him under house arrest, given the need to stop overcrowding of jails in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic's second wave. **Full report on Page 4**

Hearing deferred as SC judge is Covid +

New Delhi: The Supreme court hearing on Thursday on suo motu petition relating to the management of different aspect of Covid treatment has been deferred as Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, heading the bench, has reportedly tested positive for Covid-19. **Full report on Page 2**

No recording, pics at Central Vista site

New Delhi: Amid criticism over the Central Vista Redevelopment Project, the CPWD has prohibited photography and video recording at the construction site near India Gate. An official in the CPWD did not comment on this when contacted. **Full report on Page 2**

COUNTERPOINT



Everyone in the party should use cow dung, which is more powerful than a PPE Kit!

WEATHER

Max: 34°C
Min: 24°C
RH: 45%
Rain: 20%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha Vidiya till 5.38 am
Star: Rohini till 5.44 am
Varjyam: 8.42 pm to 10.30 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.04 am to 10.55 am; 3.11 pm to 4.02 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
SUNSET TODAY 7.03 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.31 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.26 AM
MOONSET TODAY 8.32 PM

India sets another tragic record: 4,205 die in 24hrs

Calling B.1.617 Covid strain 'Indian Variant' has no basis: Health ministry

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

With 4,205 fatalities, India on Wednesday set a new world record in the number of deaths in a single day from Covid-19. Ten states account for 73.17 per cent of these deaths out of which Maharashtra recorded the maximum fatalities (816), followed by Karnataka (517) and Delhi (300) in the last 24 hours. The Maharashtra government is now contemplating extending the lockdown for another 15 days. Assam too has decided to go for stricter restrictions as 5,657 people tested positive in the state on Wednesday.

While India on Wednesday recorded 3.48 lakh new cases, it also had a high number of recoveries as 3.55 lakh people got cured of Covid in the last 24 hours. India's recovery rate — 83.04 per cent — and cumulative number of recoveries — 1,93,82,642 — are now the highest in the world.

However, in the last one week about 30 lakh new infections have been recorded and the present



Family members mourn the death of a Covid-19 victim at Patna Medical College and Hospital on Wednesday. — PTI

national positivity rate stands at 17.56 per cent. Amid rising cases, experts have been constantly advocating quick vaccination for the entire population but several states in India have been complaining of vaccine shortage and are being forced to float tenders for global procurement.

As per the Union health ministry, 4.79 lakh beneficiaries in the 18-44 age group received their first dose of Covid vaccine in the last 24 hours and cumulatively 30.44 lakh have been vaccinated

across 30 states/UTs since the start of phase-3 drive. Maharashtra (5.96 lakh) and Delhi (4.21 lakhs) have seen the highest number of vaccinations in the 18-44 age group since May 1.

India will soon begin the Phase 2 and 3 trials of Covaxin on children from 2 to 15 years of age. "Recently, the expert committee of DCGI gave permission for vaccine trials on children from 2 to 15 years of age to Bharat Biotech. We are waiting for DCGI approval. **■ Turn to Page 4**

HC: Door-to-door vaccination would have saved many

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MAY 12

The Bombay high court on Wednesday asked the Centre to reconsider its current protocol that doesn't allow door-to-door vaccination. It also said that had the government incorporated such a policy earlier, it could have saved lives of senior citizens and specially-abled persons who were unable to visit vaccination centres.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Girish S. Kulkarni was hearing a PIL filed by city-based lawyers Dhruvi Kapadia and Kunal Tiwari, seeking directions to the Centre, the Maharashtra government and the Bombay Municipal Corporation to provide door-to-door vaccination facility for people over 75 years of age, specially-abled and those who are bed-ridden. **■ More on Page 4**

India's Florence Nightingales take oath on Nurses' Day



Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation nurse staff take an oath on International Nurses Day at Vashi in Navi Mumbai on Wednesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised nursing staff on the occasion, saying their sense of duty, compassion and commitment towards a healthy India is exemplary. — PTI

Mamata to gov: No 'field trips' sans permission

Dhankhar to visit areas hit by violence

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 12

A day before West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar was scheduled to begin his tour of areas affected by post-poll violence, chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday advised him to "desist" from undertaking "field trips" and follow the established government protocol.

In a strongly worded letter to the governor, who is planning to undertake the trip in a BSF helicopter, Ms Banerjee drew his attention to the state home (political) department's "Manual of Protocol & Ceremonials" which mentions: "The programme for the governor's visits to places in the districts is finalised by the secretary to the governor after obtaining the orders of the government. However, before



recommending a request to the governor for acceptance, whether it is from a private party or a government Institution, the secretary to the governor consults the government and the commissioner of the division and the district officer in charge of the proper execution of the overall programme." She told the governor, "I find from social media that you are unilaterally proceeding to the district of Coochbehar on 13-5-2021 and, sadly, I find that to be violative of the long-standing norms as evolved over several decades. I, therefore, would expect that you will kindly **■ Turn to Page 4**

■ 12 Opp. leaders write to Modi, request a response

'Begin mass, free vaccination, suspend Central Vista project'

New Delhi, May 12: Leaders of 12 Opposition parties Wednesday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a free mass vaccination campaign against coronavirus, and suspension of the Central Vista revamp project to aid the fight against the pandemic.

"Stop Central Vista construction. Use the allocated money for procuring oxygen and vaccines, instead. Release all money held in the unaccounted private trust fund, PMCares to buy more vaccines, oxygen and medical equipment required." — Leaders to PM in their joint letter

The 12 Opposition leaders, who include Sonia Gandhi, Sharad Pawar, chief ministers Uddhav Thackeray, Mamata Banerjee, M.K. Stalin and Hemant Soren, also demanded providing foodgrains to the needy, and giving ₹6,000 per month to the unemployed.

The leaders have said the Covid-19 pandemic has assumed unprecedented dimensions of a human catastrophe in the country, and that it was absolutely imperative for the Central government

Stop Central Vista construction. Use the allocated money for procuring oxygen and vaccines, instead. Release all money held in the unaccounted private trust fund, PMCares to buy more vaccines, oxygen and medical equipment required. — Leaders to PM in their joint letter

to undertake and implement these measures.

"Unfortunately, your government has either ignored or refused all these suggestions. This only compounded the situation to reach such an apocalyptic human tragedy," they said.

Without going into all the "acts of commission and omission" by the Central government that have brought the country to such a "tragic pass", the Opposition leaders demanded that some measures suggested by them must be undertaken on a war footing. "Procure vaccines cen-

'Import more jobs, allow global giants'

Kolkata: West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday also wrote separately to PM Narendra Modi, asking him to import more doses of Covid vaccine immediately and allow reputed global companies to open their franchise operations in the country. She also assured Mr Modi that her government would provide land and support for franchise operations. **PAGE 3**

trally from all available sources — global and domestic. Immediately begin a free, universal mass vaccination campaign across the country. Invoke compulsory licensing to expand domestic vaccine production. Spend budgetary allocation of ₹35,000 crore for the vaccines," the leaders said in their letter.

The signatories to the joint letter include Congress president Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Minister and JD(S) leader H.D. Deve Gowda and NCP supremo Sharad **■ Turn to Page 4**

Delhi runs out of Covaxin, says Centre blocking fresh supplies

Sisodia: Bharat Biotech refused more doses due to govt orders

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

Delhi's deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday alleged that Bharat Biotech had refused to supply the required doses of its Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin to Delhi.

Addressing a press conference, Mr Sisodia said Delhi had asked for 1.34 crore doses of two Covid vaccines — 67 lakhs each of Covaxin and Covishield. However, Bharat Biotech had told the Delhi government of its inability to supply these doses as it is "making dispatches as per the directives of concerned government officials". Mr

Sisodia said it was obvious Bharat Biotech was referring to Central government officials.

"They further wrote: 'We sincerely regret that we cannot make any additional supplies as required by you'. I don't know how much is being supplied to other states, but they have written to us they can't provide to Delhi as they have to supply as per the Central government order," the deputy CM said.

Mr Sisodia said Delhi had run out of its reserve stock of vaccines. "Our reserve stock has been exhausted. The centres administering Covishield vaccines are functioning, but we had to close the

centres administering Covaxin. We had to close down more than 100 centres across 17 schools," Mr Sisodia said.

The deputy CM urged the Centre to stop all vaccine-related exports and allow more companies to produce doses. He said the Centre must import vaccine doses from across the world and make them available to state governments. "Importing vaccines and making them available to state governments should be the Centre's responsibility. State governments should be responsible for smooth and fast immunisation drives," he said. **■ More on Page 2**

■ Senior Hamas commander killed ■ Israel vows more hits

Raging conflict triggers fears of a 'full-scale war'

Jerusalem, May 12: Relentless rocket fire and rioting in mixed Jewish-Arab towns fuelled growing fears on Wednesday that deadly violence between Israel and Palestinians could spiral into "full-scale war".

Israel's defence minister Benny Gantz vowed more attacks on Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in Gaza to bring "total, long-term quiet" before considering a ceasefire.

Gaza militants have launched more than 1,000 rockets since Monday, said Israel's army, which has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Islamist groups in the crowded coastal enclave of Gaza.

The most intense hostilities in seven years have killed at least 53 people in Gaza, including 14 children, and six in Israel, including an Israeli soldier and one Indian national, since Monday.

Three Palestinians were killed in West Bank clashes. And at least 230 Palestinians and 100



People gather amidst the rubble in front of Al-Sharouk tower that collapses after being hit by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City on Wednesday. — AFP

Israelis have been wounded. The bloodshed was triggered by weekend unrest at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which is sacred to both Muslims and Jews.

As world powers voiced growing alarm and the UN Security Council readied for another emergency meeting on the bloody crisis, the UN Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland warned that "we're escalating towards a full-scale war". Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu declared a state of emergency in the mixed Jewish-Arab Israeli city of Lod, where the police said "wide-scale riots erupted among some of the Arab residents".

In another strike, Hamas' Gaza City commander was killed Wednesday, the group confirmed, making him the highest-ranking military figure in the group to be killed by Israel since the 2014 war. — AFP, AP **■ More on Page 6**

Nepal's main Opp. party to stake claim to form next govt

Kathmandu, May 12: Nepal's main Opposition party, the Nepali Congress, has decided to stake a claim for the Prime Minister's post and is engaged in hectic parleys with other parties to conclude a deal ahead of Thursday's deadline issued by the President to political parties to form a new government as the one headed by K.P. Sharma Oli lost a crucial trust vote.

The decision to form a new government was taken after the office-bearers of the Nepali Congress (NC) met on Tuesday under the leadership of party president Sher Bahadur Deuba.

The Office of President Bidya Devi Bhandari on Monday said she has decided to invite parties to form a majority government pursuant to Article 76 (2) of the Constitution of Nepal.

On Tuesday, Mr Deuba held a meeting with the opposition leaders and discussed ways to form a new government under his leadership. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Huge cache of medicines dumped in south Delhi

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday was informed by a law student that a huge cache of medicines, having stamps which show they were meant for Delhi government hospitals, was dumped near the Ahinsa Sthal — a Jain Temple — on the Mehrauli-Gurgaon road. The high court directed the police to immediately seize the cache of medicines lest people who come across it take the drugs and start using them. A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli also directed lodging of a case in connection with dumping of the medicines and to start the investigation. It directed that a status report regarding steps taken be placed before it on the next date of hearing on May 19. The dumping of the medicines was brought to the attention of the bench by a law student during the hearing of several pleas on various Covid-related issues, like lack of beds and medicines and black-marketing of equipment, which are plaguing the national capital. The law student, Sagar Mehlawat, told the bench that some of the medicines were expired, while others were well within their expiry dates and good to be used. — PTI

ASI monuments to remain closed for visitors till May 31

New Delhi: All centrally-protected monuments under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will continue to remain closed till May 31 due to a surge in Covid-19 cases, Union culture minister Prahlad Patel said on Wednesday. An order to this effect was issued by the ASI and it was tweeted by Patel. These monuments are currently closed for the public till May 15 by an earlier order. "In continuation to the office order of April 15, 2021, all the centrally-protected monuments, sites and museums under the ASI shall continue to remain closed due to the present Covid-19 pandemic situation till May 31, 2021, or till further orders with immediate effect and till May 15 or until further orders," the ASI said in its order. These include 3,693 monuments and 50 museums. Last year, too, all monuments and sites maintained by the ASI were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic on March 17. They reopened in July with strict restrictions like mandatory wearing of masks, a cap on the number of visitors and social distancing. The curbs were relaxed later in the year. — PTI

Hansraj hostel turns into 100-bed Covid centre

New Delhi: Joining hands in a bid to fight Covid-19, Delhi University's Hansraj College on Wednesday thronged open its premises as a newly set-up vaccination center and a 100-bed health facility centre. The College turned its hostel premises into a 100-bed health facility for Covid-19 patients. According to the principal of Hansraj College, Rama Sharma, "The management had written to the chief minister, deputy CM and the lieutenant governor requesting them to convert its hostel space into a 100-bed Covid center with oxygen beds or a vaccination centre. The college on Tuesday also set up a kiosk for RT-PCR testing on the campus, which was opened for people on Wednesday. "The lab is approved by the ICMR AND NABL. It has been set up by the college in collaboration with JTM Skills Pvt Ltd. The testing center will be open for everyone," Sharma added. Hansraj College has a hostel that caters to 200 residents. "We are ready to offer the space with your support that can be converted into 100 ICU facilities as the Covid patients are not getting hospital beds and that is causing anxiety," she had said in the letter. The principal had also sought the setting up of a vaccination center at the college for administering Covishield vaccine to university staffers. "Delhi University's Health Centre in Shivaji College is administering Covaxin so we thought we could get Covishield administered on the campus. But even if we are given both Covishield and Covaxin, we will be happy," she said.

■ Inoculation put on hold in hospitals due to vaccine shortage

Ganga Ram among hospitals to halt vaccine drive in Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

Paucity of vaccines in the national capital has forced several government and private hospitals to stall the inoculation drive. While some hospitals as a last resort had to discontinue the vaccination drive last week, with the shortage of vaccines availability, it has become a herculean task for several hospitals management to deal with the crisis.

According to officials, though there has been a shortage of vaccine in the city, the city hospitals have the capacity to vaccinate more people. On Wednesday, the Delhi Government received 2,67,790 doses of Covishield vaccine for people in the 18 to 44 years age group. It has become a concern for hospitals like Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Super

Delhi reports 13,287 Covid cases, 300 more deaths

New Delhi, May 12: The national capital reported 13,287 new coronavirus cases and 300 more fatalities on Wednesday, while the positivity rate came down to 17 per cent, the lowest in nearly a month, according to the health department.

The 13,287 new cases came from 78,035 tests, including 63,315 RTPCR/CBNAAT/True Nat tests, conducted on Tuesday.

As many as 14,071 people recovered from the infection during the period, the health bulletin said.

Speciality Hospital, Fortis Health Care and others to continue the inoculation drive.

As per an official from Rajiv Gandhi Super

Now there are 82,725 active cases, down from 83,809 the previous day and 49,974 of them are in home isolation, it said.

The number of cumulative cases stands at 13,61,986 and the death toll at 20,310. Over 12.58 lakh people have either recovered, migrated out or have been discharged, according to the health bulletin.

The positivity rate reported Wednesday is the lowest since April 14, when it stood at 15.9 per cent. It has remained above the 20 per cent mark since April 17. — PTI

Speciality Hospital, the Covid vaccination drive can't be expanded as it is getting only 200 doses of Covishield every day. According to the informa-

Photography prohibited at Central Vista site: CPWD

New Delhi, May 12: Amid criticism over the Central Vista Redevelopment Project, the Central Public Works Department has prohibited photography and video recording at the construction site near India Gate. Sign boards have come up at the redevelopment site of the Central Vista Avenue, which read: 'No photography', 'No video recording'.

An official in the

CPWD, which is executing the project, did not comment on this when contacted.

The government has been facing criticism from the opposition for executing the Central Vista Redevelopment Project amid the raging COVID-19 pandemic.

The redevelopment of the Central Vista, the nation's power corridor, envisages a new Parliament building, a common central secretariat, revamping of

the 3-km Rajpath from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate, new Prime Minister's residence and office, and a new Vice President Enclave. Last week, Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri had attacked the Congress for criticising the government over the project, saying the party's discourse is "bizarre" as its leaders themselves had supported the idea when the UPA was in power. — PTI

Oxygen tanker falls into ditch on way to hospital

New Delhi, May 12: An oxygen tanker met with an accident as it turned turtle after the vehicle allegedly fell into a roadside ditch in north Delhi's Civil Lines area, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place late on Tuesday night, they said.

On reaching the spot, the tanker was found to have fallen in a ditch dug by the Public Works Department (PWD) for some construction work near Swami Narain Mandir on Outer Ring Road, the police said.

"Immediately, a crane from the traffic police and another hydraulic crane were arranged by local police at the spot. On interrogation, the tanker driver Raju disclosed that due to lack of sleep over the last few days, his eyes winked and he lost con-

trol over vehicle," said Anto Alphonse, Deputy Commissioner of Police (North). "He further disclosed that after filling oxygen supply in Tirath Ram Hospital, he was proceeding to Shanti Mukund Hospital in Karkari Mor," Alphonse added.

As the matter related to oxygen supply needed for Covid-19 patients, the rescue operation was launched and the cranes were able to lift the tanker out of the ditch after about an hour, he said.

Meanwhile, the oxygen supply was managed with the help of Ionex company for patients in Shanti Mukund Hospital and a tanker was also diverted from Moolchand Hospital to Shanti Mukund Hospital, the DCP said. — PTI

5 held for selling flow meters, O2 concentrators at exorbitant rates

New Delhi, May 12: Five men were arrested here in two separate incidents for allegedly selling oxygen flow meters and oxygen concentrators at exorbitant rates, police said on Wednesday.

Karanjeet Singh (20) and Bhanu (21) were apprehended in Burari. Thirty-two oxygen flow meters were recovered from their possession," police said. On their instance, another accused Arun Gupta was arrested from Shastri Nagar Metro Station and four oxygen flow meters were seized from his possession.

In another incident, two people were arrested for allegedly selling oxygen concentrators at higher rates. Those arrested were identified as Neelansh (24) and Mohd Danish. — PTI

Court order on anticipatory bail of 'Khan Chacha' owner today

New Delhi, May 12: A Delhi Court will pronounce on Thursday the order on the anticipatory bail plea filed by businessman Navneet Kalra in connection with the seizure of oxygen concentrators, required by Covid-19 patients, from his upscale restaurants including 'Khan Chacha' in the national capital.

Additional Session Judge Sandeep Garg reserved the order on the pre-arrest bail for Thursday at 10 am after hearing the arguments of both the prosecution and defense at length.

During a recent raid, 524 oxygen concentrators were recovered from three restaurants owned by Kalra and it is suspected that he has left Delhi along with his family. These concentrators are the crucial medical equipment used for COVID-19 management.

During the proceedings, Public Prosecutor Atul Shrivastava opposed the pre-arrest bail plea and told the court that Kalra's custo-

4 employees of Matrix Cellular granted bail in O2 hoarding case

New Delhi, May 12: A Delhi Court on Wednesday granted bail to four employees of Matrix Cellular, including its CEO and vice president, in connection with allegedly hoarding and selling the equipment at exorbitant prices.

The company's CEO Gaurav Khanna, vice-president Gaurav Suri and two other employees Vikrant and Satish Sethi were granted bail and asked to furnish personal bond of ₹50,000 each. They were arrested last week in connection with

dial interrogation is required and that bail should not be granted as he is an influential person.

His intention was to cheat the public at large and wrongfully gain. Had Delhi Police not busted the racket, many people would have been cheated, the Public

black marketing of oxygen concentrators recovered from three top restaurants in Delhi by the police.

According to Delhi Police, Matrix Cellular received a consignment of 650 oxygen concentrators from China, of which 524 have been recovered. The concentrators were being sold for as much as ₹70,000.

On Tuesday, the court had come down heavily on the prosecution in the case, saying that it cannot penalise people before making the law. — PTI

Prosecutor said. Navneet Kalra, who is also the business owner of Dayal Opticals, started the business of oxygen concentrators out of greed, Shrivastava said, adding that anticipatory or regular bail should not be granted in such white collar crimes. — PTI

Bharat Biotech refuses additional Covaxin doses to Delhi: Sisodia

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday alleged that Bharat Biotech has refused to supply the required doses of its Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin to Delhi.

Addressing a press conference, Sisodia said that Delhi had asked for total 1.34 crore doses of two Covid vaccines - 67 lakhs each of Covaxin and Covishield. However, Bharat Biotech informed the Delhi government of its inability to supply the said doses as it is "making dispatches as per directives of concerned government officials".

Sisodia claimed that it was obvious that Bharat Biotech was talking about central government officials. "They further wrote, 'We sincerely regret that we cannot make any additional supplies as required by you'. I do not know how much is being supplied to other states but they have written to us that they cannot provide to Delhi



Manish Sisodia

because they have to supply as per the central government order," the deputy CM said.

Manish Sisodia said that Delhi has run out of its reserve stock of vaccines.

Our reserve stock has been exhausted. The centres administering Covishield vaccines are functioning but we have had to close the centres administering Covaxin. So, we have had to close down more than 100 centres across 17 schools," Sisodia said.

The deputy chief minister and AAP leader urged the Centre to stop all vaccine-related exports and allow more companies to produce the doses.

"The Centre should act as the government of a

country. They should carry out their responsibility and stop all exports," he said.

Sisodia also said that the Centre must import vaccine doses from across the globe and make them available to state governments. "Importing vaccines and making them available to state governments should be the Centre's responsibility. The state governments should be responsible for smooth and fast immunisation drives," he said.

Under the national vaccine policy, the Centre is responsible for the immunisation drive for all adults above the age of 45. For the age group 18-44, the state governments have been asked to procure the vaccines directly from sellers, domestic or international. However, domestic manufacturers - Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech are under obligation to sell at least 50 per cent of their stock to the Centre, while the rest can be sold to the states as well as to health care facilities.

Judge tests +ve, SC defers hearings

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

The Supreme court hearing on Thursday suo motu petition relating to the management of different aspect of Covid treatment has been deferred as Justice D.Y. Chandrachud heading the bench has reportedly tested positive of Covid.

The top court in a suo motu proceedings is hearing issues relating to the distribution of essential supplies and services during pandemic. The matter was listed on May 10 but due to technical glitches disrupting the hearing through video conferencing, the matter was adjourned for May 13, 2021.



D.Y. Chandrachud

A notice issued by the top court registry today said that since one of the judges hearing suo motu matter has

tested Covid positive, the matter listed before the special bench stand deferred and the fresh date of listing will be notified later.

Though the notice by the top court registry does not name the judge who has tested positive, Justice Chandrachud, the sources said has tested positive.

Besides Justice Chandrachud, other judges

on the bench are Justice L. Nageswara Rao and Justice S. Ravindra Bhat.

In April, four judges of the Supreme Court had tested positive for Covid-19, with one of the judges requiring hospitalization.

Justice Chandrachud by his April 30, 2021, judgment had asked the Central government to go for centralized procurement and decentralised distribution of Covid vaccine. The court had asked the Centre to revisit its differential pricing of the Covid vaccine.

The court had also said that the existing policy that burdens States to individually source the vaccine may lead to chaotic situations. However, the Centre in

response by an affidavit on May 9, 2021, had defended its market driven differential pricing of Covid vaccine asserting that it will incentivised demand, lead to higher production, competition and attract overseas investors.

Telling the top court to keep-off from the executive domain, the Centre in its affidavit had said that an "Any overzealous, though well-meaning judicial intervention may lead to unforeseen and unintended consequences, in absence of any expert advice or administrative."

The Centre had further said that t in such "grave and unprecedented" crisis, the "wisdom of the executive should be trusted".

Eid ul-Fitr

This Year Offer Namaz from Home

Our Request

Maintain Social Distancing

Avoid Personal Greetings or Hugs

Avoid Social Gatherings & Wear Mask

IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORONAVIRUS NO GATHERING ALLOWED AT RELIGIOUS PLACES/ PUBLIC PLACES/ GROUNDS/ PARKS ETC.

Follow Latest DDMA Guidelines & Have a Safe EID

Email to CP, Delhi at : cp.snshrivastava@delhipolice.nic.in | Write to CP, Delhi at P.O. Box No. 171, GPO, New Delhi

FOR IMMEDIATE POLICE HELP CALL: 112

TO SHARE INFORMATION CALL: 1090

SHORT TAKES

Bullets fired at NCP MLA's Pimpri office

Pune: A civic contractor's manager allegedly fired around three bullets at NCP leader and Pimpri MLA Anna Bansode's office on Wednesday afternoon in Pimpri Chinchwad township near here following a heated argument, police said. Nobody was hurt in the incident, police said, adding that they were trying to find out if the bullets were aimed at Bansode or some other person. The incident occurred around 2 pm in Pimpri, he said. Pimpri Chinchwad police commissioner Krishna Prakash said the incident took place following an argument between the contractor's manager and Bansode's men. "The manager of the contractor had come to Bansode's office, where an argument broke out between him and the MLA's men. Soon it led to a brawl and the former allegedly fired multiple shots," he said. — PTI

103-year-old wins fight against Covid

Bengaluru: Eminent Gandhian and freedom fighter H.S. Doreswamy has won the Covid-19 battle at the ripe old age of 103 and is returning home. "I developed symptoms five days ago but there were no complications as such. Yet, I decided to get admitted because I have respiratory problems. Now, I am getting discharged," the centenarian said. According to him, he got admitted to Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research. Sources close to him said Jayadeva Institute director Dr C.N. Manjunath, an eminent cardiologist and the son-in-law of former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, personally monitored the treatment for Doreswamy. — PTI

ASSAMESE LITTERATEUR BORGOHAIN DIES

Guwahati: Eminent Assamese litterateur and journalist Homen Borgohain died at a hospital in Guwahati on Wednesday, following post-Covid complications, doctors said. He was 89 and survived by two sons. He has been separated from his wife Nirupama, also a noted litterateur and journalist, for several years. Borgohain was found to be Covid-positive on April 24 and admitted to the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital, from where he was released on May 7. He fell from the bed in his sleep last night and was rushed to a local hospital where he died at 6.58 am. A prolific author and columnist, Borgohain received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1978 for his book *Pita-Putra* (Father and Son), which he returned in 2015 in protest against the rising religious and social intolerance in the country. At the time of his death, he was the editor-in-chief of Assamese daily *Niyomiya Barta*. — PTI

After Bihar, UP, bodies found floating in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAY 12

In a replay of the horrific sight of immersion of bodies in the Ganga river in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, two corpses were found floating in a water body in a village in Madhya Pradesh, sending the local administration into a tizzy. Two bodies were found floating in Runj river, a tributary of Ken, near Nandanpur village in Panna district on Tuesday evening. The police was alerted to the incident on Wednesday. This prompted Panna district collector Sanjay Kumar Mishra and local superintendent of police Dharmaraj Meena to rush to the spot to probe the incident. "The two bodies were of locals. One of them died of cancer and the other died due to old age. The families of the two deceased had immersed the bodies in the river, instead of cremating them, following an age-old

practice prevalent in the area. As per the tradition, the locals immerse the bodies of people who die of cancer. Similarly, bodies of the deceased who have white spots are also thrown into the river, instead of cremating them", Mr Mishra said. He, however, dismissed the "rumours" making round the area that 5-6 bodies were found floating in the river. "We have searched around a 2 km area in the river. No other bodies were found", he added. The two bodies were fished out of the water and buried, he said. The SP said people in the village were sensitized against immersion of the bodies and asked to cremate them properly. Sources said police began a probe if there was any ulterior motive in the incident. A couple of days ago, scores of bodies were found floating in river Ganga in Buxar district of Bihar and Ghaziabad district in Uttar Pradesh, sparking rumours that the corpses might be those of Covid victims.

TN leads the way, declares incentives for health staff

New govt hold all-party meet on Covid, plans global tender for vaccines

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR and D. SEKAR
CHENNAI, MAY 12

Intensifying its fight against the second wave of Coronavirus, the newly-elected government, led by M.K. Stalin, took a slew of path-breaking decisions like importing vaccines through global tenders, giving incentives to medical personnel and holding an all-party meeting to chalk the future strategy. After a review meeting at his chamber in the Kalaivanar Arangam Assembly premises on Wednesday, Stalin announced that the State would procure vaccines through global tenders with a view to vaccinating its population between 18 and 45 years



Nurses light candles to pay tribute to Florence Nightingale, on the occasion of International Nurses Day, at the Kilpauk Medical College hospital in Chennai on Wednesday.

— PTI

expeditiously. The supply of vaccine from the Centre was inadequate and that the Centre itself had given the go-ahead to the States to procure vaccines on their own, he said. Similarly, he also

ordered the industry, health and social welfare departments to ensure that the supply of medical oxygen to the hospitals in the State was maintained by procuring it from other States. Though the supply of

oxygen to the State was increased from 280 tonnes to 419 tonnes, there was still a shortfall, he said.

Also to encourage and motivate the medical professionals to help the State continue the fight against Coronavirus, he announced an incentive ranging from ₹15,000 to ₹30,000 to different categories of health workers for the months of April, May and June in the second wave of the pandemic.

While doctors would get ₹30,000, nurses, PG students and medical interns would get ₹20,000 and all other medical staff like lab technician, CT Scan operators, ambulance workers and sanitary staff would get ₹15,000.

'Odisha must set up Covid crisis units at village-level'

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 12

Amidst the rising number of Covid cases being reported from rural parts of Odisha, petroleum and natural gas minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Wednesday urged chief minister Naveen Patnaik to set up Covid crisis management committees at village and municipal ward level comprising members from all political parties for effective management of the pandemic situation. Speaking to CM Naveen, Mr Pradhan briefed him about the efforts being taken by the Union government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to further bolster Odisha's response to the current and emerging challenges of Covid-19.

"The next 15 days are crucial in order to contain and control the surge of Covid-19, especially in Odisha. Members of the civil society as volunteers and watchdogs should be engaged in strengthening relief measures and containment efforts at the grassroots level," Mr Pradhan told the CM. When Patnaik asked Pradhan to enhance the availability of vaccines, he reportedly briefed him about his discussion with Union health minister Harsh Vardhan and minister Mansukh Mandviya on extending all possible support to Odisha apart from facilitating smooth supply of Covid-19 vaccines.

Sadhus, beggars, others will benefit Odisha: Vaccine soon for people without ID proof

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 12

The Odisha government on Wednesday decided to administer Covid-19 vaccine to vulnerable people who don't possess any identity proofs.

In a letter to all the collectors and Municipal corporation commissioners, additional chief secretary to the government P.K. Mohapatra, asked to immediately identify such persons and bring them under the inoculation process. "In all the phases of Covid-19 vaccination drive, it has been prescribed that the beneficiary must register in the COWIN portal. The beneficiary has to register in the portal with one of the seven prescribed ID proofs. However, some vulnerable groups of citizens may not possess any of the seven prescribed identity cards. Such vulnerable persons may not



A consignment of 100 oxygen concentrators arrived from Japan to support India's fight against Covid-19 being unloaded at Delhi airport.

— PTI

be denied vaccines for absence of identity proof," Mr Mohapatra wrote in the letter. "Such groups of people include nomads (including sadhu/saints from various religions), prison inmates, inmates in mental health institutions, citizens in old age homes, roadside beggars, people residing in rehabilitation centres/camps and any other identified eligible

persons, aged 18 years or more. The COWIN portal will provide the facility for the creation of special vaccination sessions for this purpose," the official said in the letter. Meanwhile, after witnessing a steady decline in the number of daily cases, Odisha once again registered an upswing in the infection figures. The state recorded 10,982 new Covid positive cases and 17 fatalities.

Cong slams Centre for lack of doses

Govt celebrated Tika Utsav but made no arrangements for vaccines: Priyanka

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

The Congress Wednesday hit out at the Centre over the lack of vaccines and said that it allegedly did not make arrangements to provide vaccines against Covid-19 which led to a decline in vaccinations. Taking to twitter, party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi said, "India is the largest vaccine-producing country. The BJP government marked 'Tika Utsav' on April 12, but did not make arrangements for provid-

ing vaccines and in 30 days there was an 82 per cent decline in our vaccinations." The Central government had marked 'Tika Utsav', a vaccination drive between April 11 and 14, with an aim to vaccinate the maximum number of eligible people against coronavirus amid a surge in cases. She also shared a graph showing that India was behind countries like the US, the UK, Turkey and France in terms of vaccinating citizens. She further said, "Modi ji went to vaccine factories, also got photo-

graphs clicked, but why did his government place its first order for vaccine doses only in January 2021? The United States and other countries placed orders with Indian vaccine companies long ago. Who will take responsibility for this?" Several states have had to reschedule their vaccination plans due to slow availability of vaccines. In states like Maharashtra the emphasis has been to provide the second dose to people who have already taken the first dose. While sev-

Vaccine supply insignificant, says Bengal CM Import more foreign jabs, liberalise policy: Didi to PM

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 12

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to "speedily import vaccines" to match the massive demand in the country. She also urged the Prime Minister to allow reputed global Covid-19 vaccine producers to open their franchise operations in the country to tackle the scarcity of antidotes.

The Trinamul Congress supremo also informed Mr Modi that her government would provide the international giants land and support for their franchise operations, even by the national players in the case, for bulk production of the vaccines.

Ms Banerjee told the PM, "It seems, however, that the production (and hence, the supply and distribution) of vaccines in the country is extremely inadequate, and insignificant in the context of the massive needs of the people at large. About 10 crore people in West Bengal and 140 crore people in the country need vaccination, here and now, but only a microscopic percentage has been covered."

K'taka govt halts vaccination for 18-44 age group

Bengaluru, May 12: The Karnataka government on Wednesday decided to import vaccines, as shortage of dosages hit the state and the demand went up substantially with alarming rise in Covid cases.

The state government also decided to suspend the vaccination for people between 18-44 years age group, which had started symbolically on May 1, till further orders. "Today the state government has decided that the vaccine procured directly by the state for vaccination of persons between 18 and 44 years will be utilised for vaccination of beneficiaries who are due for second dose," a notification issued by the government said. — PTI



An elderly survivor waves as he leaves after getting discharge from a government-run Covid-19 hospital in Kolkata on Wednesday.

— PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Ms Banerjee underlined that vaccination, according to experts, is the "real antidote" as the country battles an aggressive second wave of infections.

"With the aid of scientists and experts it is possible to identify the reputed and authentic manufacturers... and it is possible for us in this country to speedily import vaccines from those ends across the different parts of the world. I urge you to embark upon this endeavour without any further delay," Ms Banerjee wrote.

Liberal, proactive and discerning import of vaccines is the paramount need today, she stressed.

Ms Banerjee added, "Also, it may kindly be considered if we could encourage the world players to open up franchise operations in our country. Even the national players could be inspired to go for the franchise mode for bulk production of vaccines. We, in West Bengal, are ready to provide land and support for any manufacturing/ franchisee operation for authentic vaccine manufacturing. I would request you to kindly consider the proposition."

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
Tender Notice (Through e-tendering)	
Name of work with its location	Signalling work in connection with sectional signal maintenance contract in section of ADSTE/PS of Delhi Division.
Approx. cost of the work (₹)	₹85,10,676/- only
Address of the Office	Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3rd Floor, Annex-1, DRM Office, New Delhi-110055
Date & Time for upload the tender/Closing of tender	Tender uploading/closing date & time 09.06.2021 up to 15.00 hrs
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.	See the Northern Railway website www.irps.gov.in & Notice board at S&T branch, 3rd Floor, DRM Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055
Tender No. 558-Sig-16-M-Tender-1360 Dated : 11.05.2021	1015/2021
Serving Customers With A Smile	

INDIAN RAILWAYS	
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA	
MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS	
(RAILWAY BOARD)	
E-TENDER No. 2021RS18742TC	
Director, Railways Stores (W), Ministry of Railways, Railway Board, Government of India invites e-tender for procurement of 4,36,598 Nos. Grease Seal to RDSO Specification No. WD-50-Misc-2007 of Oct 2007 or latest amendments, if any for AAR Standard Class 'E' (6" x 11") bearings used on CASNUB bogies of freight stock.	
2.0 The interested tenderers are advised to visit the website http://ireps.gov.in for details of the tender and submission of their e-bids.	
3.0 No manual offers will be accepted against e-tender.	
4.0 Tender will be closed at 15.00 hours on 15.06.2021.	
Director, Railway Stores (W) Ministry of Railways, Railway Board, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India	
1002/2021	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

SEARCH FOR MISSING	
	General Public is hereby informed that a female namely Seema Gupta W/o Shyam Lal Gupta, R/o RZ-90A, Gali No.11, Madan Puri, New Delhi has been missing since 09.03.2021 from the jurisdiction of PS Sagarpur, New Delhi. In this regard a DD No. 71A dated 15.03.2021 has been lodged at PS, Sagarpur, New Delhi. The description of missing female is as under :-
Seema Gupta	Name: Seema Gupta, Husband's Name : Shyam Lal Gupta, Age: 47 Years, Height: 5'2", Face: Oval, Complexion : Fair, Sex : Female, Wearing : Green Colour Suit and Salwar Hair: Long, ID Mark: left eye a mole.
	If anyone having any clue/information, kindly inform the undersigned at following phone numbers.
Website : http://cbi.nic.in e-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in Fax : 011-24368639 Ph. : 011-24368638, 24368641	SHO P.S., Sagarpur, New Delhi Ph. : 011-28522653, 7065036228

IMPORTANT NOTICE				
It is notified for the information of passengers that Railways have decided to withdraw the stoppage from Dimapur station and to provide temporary alternate stoppage at other stations on temporary basis upto 15.05.2021 instead of till further advice. The details are given below:-				
Train No. & Name	Alternative Stoppage	Arr.	Dep.	
05909 Dibrugarh - Lalgarh Jn. (Via Barabanki & Lucknow) Special Express	Bokajan Station	15:42	15:44	
05910 Lalgarh Jn.- Dibrugarh (Via Lucknow & Barabanki) Special Express	Bokajan Station	08:50	08:52	
05933 New Tinsukia Jn. - Amritsar Special Express	Bokajan Station	13:41	13:43	
05934 Amritsar - New Tinsukia Jn. Special Express	Bokajan Station	21:25	21:27	
02503 Dibrugarh - New Delhi Rajdhani Express	Bokajan Station	00:04	00:06	
02504 Dibrugarh - New Delhi Rajdhani Express	Diphu Station	01:17	01:19	
02504 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express	Diphu Station	23:03	23:05	
02504 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express	Bokajan Station	00:54	00:56	
02423 Dibrugarh - New Delhi Rajdhani Express	Bokajan Station	01:38	01:40	
02423 Dibrugarh - New Delhi Rajdhani Express	Diphu Station	02:39	02:41	
02424 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express	Diphu Station	00:07	00:09	
02424 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express	Bokajan Station	01:22	01:24	
Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.				
For any kind information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTESApp.				
<div> <div>1021/21</div> <div> RailMadad Helpline No. 139 Visit RailMadad website : www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in & download Railmadad app. </div> </div> <div> Please join us on NORTHERN RAILWAY Visit us at: www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in </div> <div> SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE </div>				

IMPORTANT NOTICE			
In continuation to the public notice published on 12.05.2021 regarding shifting of traction change point of following Rajdhani Express Special trains, it is notified that, now it has been decided by the concerned zonal railway, i.e., North Frontier Railway to advance the date of shifting of traction change to New Cooch Behar as per detail given below. The revised Time-Table of these Rajdhani Special Trains will also be effective from these advance dates as shown against each:-			
Train No.	From	To	Traction Change
02504 UP	New Delhi	Dibrugarh	12.05.2021 13.05.2021
02503 DN	Dibrugarh	New Delhi	12.05.2021 13.05.2021
02506 UP	New Delhi	Dibrugarh	13.05.2021 14.05.2021
02505 DN	Dibrugarh	New Delhi	14.05.2021 15.05.2021
Rest of information notified will hold good.			
For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table and stations en route etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.			
All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.			
<div> Visit RailMadad website:- www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in Download RailMadad app. RailMadad Helpline No.: 139 Please join us on </div> <div> NORTHERN RAILWAY Your Convenience - Our Concern Visit us at: www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in </div> <div> SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE </div>			

SHORT TAKES

Naravane speaks to US Army Chief

New Delhi: Chief of Army Staff Gen. M.M. Naravane held a telephonic conversation with his American counterpart Gen. James C. McConville on Tuesday, focusing on bilateral military cooperation as well as effectively dealing with the coronavirus. Officials said Gen. Naravane and Gen. McConville discussed ways to expand cooperation between the two armies in specific areas in view of the evolving regional security scenario. They also deliberated on effectively dealing with the coronavirus pandemic. "General M.M. Naravane #COAS had telephonic interaction with General James C. McConville, Chief of Staff of the Army #USArmy on Tuesday and discussed issues of bilateral defence cooperation," the Indian Army said in a tweet. The Indo-US defence ties have been on an upswing in the last few years. — *PTI*

Jailed Dera chief taken to hospital

Chandigarh: Jailed Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh took ill Wednesday and was moved to PGIMS Rohtak on the advice of prison doctors, officials said. The 53-year-old chief of the Sirsa-headquartered sect would be kept under the observation of a team of doctors in the government hospital, the officials in the prisons department said. Gurmeet Ram Rahim, who has been lodged in Rohtak's Sunaria jail since 2017 following his conviction for raping his two women disciples, was examined by the doctors at the high-security prison after he complained of blood pressure-related issues, the officials said. After being examined by the jail doctors, he was taken to PGIMS at Rohtak for better observation and management, they said. — *PTI*

BMC floats global tender for 1cr jabs

Mumbai: In view of the shortage of Covid-19 vaccines, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Wednesday floated a global expression of interest (Eoi) for procurement of one crore doses to expedite the vaccination process, a civic official said. The interested parties will have to submit their expression of interest before 1 pm on May 18 and they will be opened on the same day at 3 pm, the official said. Due to the shortage of vaccines, the vaccination drive in the city has been badly hit since the last one month. The civic body was even forced to suspend the drive for a few days and keep many of the nearly 175 centres shut from the last few days due to unavailability of doses. — *PTI*

MEDICAL COLLEGE TEACHERS GO ON STRIKE IN GUJ

Ahmedabad: Teachers of government-run medical colleges in Gujarat went on a strike on Wednesday, accusing the administration of failing to fulfil its assurance about their demands. Hundreds of professors and lecturers affiliated to the Gujarat Medical Teachers Association (GMTA) joined in the protest. GMTA members had proceeded on strike last Friday demanding pay hike among other things but withdrew it hours later after the government promised to find a solution. "We had a high-level meeting with the government's representatives on May 7, and we were happy that our demands were heard and the attitude of the government was positive. But we have not yet received any written proof of which demands have been accepted by the government. "Which is why we have called a new strike," said Dr Rajnish Patel, president of GMTA. Chief minister Vijay Rupani said "all justified demands have been accepted". "As chief minister I request them to withdraw the strike as this is a time to save people together from (coronavirus) infection," he told reporters. Deputy chief minister Nitin Patel, who holds the health portfolio, said in a late night statement that he had approved steps to resolve the ten issues raised by striking teachers, and expressed hope that they will resume duty. — *PTI*

Muslim performs last rites of Hindu friend, wins hearts

AKSHAYA KUMAR SHAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 12

Praises continue to pour in for Rahmat Ali, a Muslim man hailing from Odisha's Sundergarh, after he actively participated in the funeral of his Hindu friend who died of Covid-19 last week.

According to reports, a 40-year-old man, identified as Sanatan Patel of Bandhapali area in Sundergarh, died while undergoing treatment at a Covid hospital. His body was taken to the nearby crematorium for last rites.

When Rahmat Ali got the shocking news of his friend's death due to coronavirus, he immediately rushed to the crematorium where he along with the crematorium staff members performed the last rites with complete adherence to Covid-19 guidelines.

He also changed 'Ram

Nam Satya Hai, Hari Nam Satya Hai' while carrying the bier along with the deceased's relatives to the crematorium at Ranibagicha.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has affected us like nothing else in our lifetimes and it has taught us that humanity is above everything else. Rahamat's act inspires hope in these times of despair and despondency," Sidhant Panda, a staff member of the crematorium said on Wednesday.

"Amidst the plethora of disturbing images of the dead being abandoned and denied a dignified funeral, even by the near and dear ones, Rahmat Ali's humanly act not only gives a message that humanity transcends all barriers of faith, but also teaches us how to surmount the evils of fear and stigma in these dark times," said R.P. Gupta, a noted social activist of Sundergarh.

■ Court asks Centre to review vaccine policy

Could have saved many lives with door-to-door doses: HC

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MAY 12

The Bombay high court on Wednesday asked the Central government to reconsider its current protocol that doesn't allow door-to-door vaccination. The court also said that had the government incorporated such a policy earlier, it could have saved the lives of senior citizens and specially-abled persons who were unable to visit vaccination centres.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Girish S. Kulkarni was hearing a PIL filed by city-based lawyers Dhruvi Kapadia and Kunal Tiwari, seeking directions to the Centre, the Maharashtra government and the BMC to provide door-to-door vaccination facility for people over 75 years of age, the specially-abled and the bed-ridden.

On April 22, observing that senior citizens should be given priority and cannot be left to die, the HC had directed the Union ministry of health and family welfare to have a relook at its decision and find a solution or "via media" to cater to the requirement of senior citizens of getting vaccinated.

On Wednesday, the HC noted that the Centre had

BJP defends Covid-19 vaccine export amid flak from Oppo.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

Hitting back at the Congress and the AAP over allegations against India's Covid-19 vaccine programme, the BJP said over 84 per cent of the vaccine doses sent abroad were part of the commercial and licensing liabilities of the two Indian manufacturers. The BJP said SII and Bharat Biotech sent vaccine doses abroad also because of the agreement they had signed to procure raw materials for preparing the jabs.

BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said 1.07

crore vaccine doses sent abroad were India's aid to different countries and noted that of those, 78.5 lakh were dispatched to seven neighbouring countries. "A safer neighbourhood is good for India too," he said and also informed that more than two lakh doses were given to the UN peace-keeping force, in which over 6,600 Indian soldiers are deployed.

He attacked Congress's Rahul Gandhi and the AAP for spreading misinformation that the government has exported over 6.63 crore doses abroad, while not using those to inoculate Indians.

Justice Kulkarni said, "If we were to have door-to-door vaccination sometime back, so many of our prominent citizens across fields, who were not in good health, we could have saved them."

Justice Kulkarni said, "If we were to have door-to-door vaccination sometime back, so many of our prominent citizens across fields, who were not in good health, we could have saved them."

Members of Dawoodi Bohra community exchange greetings amongst family members after offering prayers at home on Id-ul-Fitr in Bhopal on Wednesday. — *PTI*

India sets another tragic record

■ Continued from Page 1
Hopefully, we will soon start phase 2 and phase 3 trials," Dr Sanjeev Sinha, Department of Medicine, AIIMS, said.

The Centre has said current production capacity of Covaxin vaccine will be doubled in May-June 2021 and it will then be increased six-seven fold by July-Aug 2021. The production is expected to reach nearly 10 crore doses per month by September 2021, officials said.

The World Health Organisation has said the mutant variant of the Covid virus -- B.1.617 --

that is believed to have led to massive spikes in the second wave in India, has been detected in 44 countries. This variant was first detected in India in October and since then the WHO has termed it as a "variant of global concern".

The Indian health ministry has strongly objected to calling B.1.617 the "Indian variant", saying the WHO has never mentioned the new mutant variant as "Indian".

"Several media reports have covered the news of the World Health Organisation (WHO) classifying B.1.617 as a variant

SC: No bail for Navlakha, house arrest is an option

Lower courts advised to use provisions of Section 167 CrPC

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

The Supreme Court Wednesday rejected a plea for default bail by human rights activist Gautam Navlakha, one of the accused in the January 2018 Bhima Koregaon violence case, over his alleged links with Maoists.

Rejecting Mr Navlakha's bail plea, a bench of Justices Uday Umesh Lalit, Indira Banerjee and K.M. Joseph suggested that the lower courts could put him under house arrest, given the need to stop overcrowding of jails in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic's second wave. They said that using the provisions of Section 167 CrPC, an accused can be put under house arrest when sent to judicial custody instead of sending him to jail as is ordinarily done.

Speaking for the bench, Justice Joseph said: "The



Gautam Navlakha

■ NAVLAKHA AND the other activists are accused of allegedly making inflammatory speeches and issuing provocative statements at the Elgar Parishad meeting in Pune on December 31, 2017 that led to violence at Bhima Koregaon the next day. The NIA had filed the chargesheet on October 9, 2020.

concept of house arrest as part of custody under Section 167 has not engaged the courts, including this court. However, when the issue has come into focus, and noticing its (Section 167) ingredients we have formed the view that it involves custody which falls under Section 167."

Justice Joseph said: "We observe that under Section 167 in appropriate cases it will be open to the courts to order house arrest."

Indicating the criteria, which it said was not exhaustive, Justice Joseph

said an accused could be sent to house arrest given factors like "age, health condition and the antecedents of the accused, the nature of the crime, the need for other forms of custody and the ability to enforce the terms of the house arrest".

Having shown the new course for the subordinate judiciary to follow by sending an accused to house arrest, in the case of Mr Navlakha, the court rejected his contention that he was entitled to default bail as the National

Investigating agency did not file the chargesheet within the statutory 90 days from the date of his arrest.

He had contended that the 34-day period when he was put under house arrest by the Delhi high court have not been accounted for in the 90-day time limit for filing the chargesheet.

Mr Navlakha was put under house arrest by the Delhi high court while hearing his challenge to the transit custody granted by a Delhi court to the Mumbai police. The high court held the magistrate's order as flawed.

Holding that his house arrest wasn't under Section 167 CrPC, the Supreme Court in its 206-page ruling upheld the Bombay high court's ruling that the law requiring the NIA to file the chargesheet against an accused within 90 days of arrest was not flouted.



Fireworks at Golden Temple on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Guru Angad Dev Ji, the second guru of Sikhs, in Amritsar on Wednesday. — *PTI*

Visva-Bharati courts controversy

Announces lecture on reasons of BJP's defeat in Bengal polls, cancels later

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 12

The Visva-Bharati authorities courted a major controversy after they uploaded a notice on the Central university's website on Wednesday about a virtual lecture on the reasons behind the BJP's whitewash in the West Bengal Assembly polls.

The proposed online event, "Why BJP failed to win West Bengal Assembly Elections" by Niti Aayog joint advisor Prof. Sanjay Kumar, was part of the Visva-Bharati Lecture Series and vice-chancellor Prof. Bidyut

Chakrabarty was scheduled to preside over the programme on May 18.

A notice inviting people to attend the lecture to be held at 4 pm on May 18 via Zoom platform was posted on the central university's website earlier in the day.

"Visva-Bharati cordially invites you to the lecture by Prof. Sanjay Kumar, in the Visva-Bharati Lecture Series. The title of his talk is "Why BJP failed to win West Bengal Assembly Election?" Prof. Kumar is joint advisor, Niti Aayog, Govt. of India and formerly Director of Centre for the Study of Developing

Societies (CSDS), New Delhi," the notice stated.

The political topic instantly infuriated people cutting across barriers at Shantiniketan and beyond. Supriyo Tagore, a family member of poet Rabindranath Tagore, whose brainchild V-B is, said, "Politics never existed in Visva Bharati. Rabindranath Tagore also did not like it. But politics has taken control of Visva Bharati now. It is unfortunate and an injustice." Saoni Chakraborty, a student, alleged, "We condemn such events on the interests of a particular political party."

Hit by the massive uproar, the V-B authorities later replaced the notice with another stating, "Due to some unavoidable circumstances, this lecture is treated to be cancelled for the time being." Later the second notice could not be found also.

Dulal Chandra Ghosh, a V-B executive council member who is also a nominee of Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the central university: Narendra Modi, claimed, "The V-C is behind all such events to save his job. He initiates these exercises but blames the BJP."

Mamata to gov: No 'field trips'

■ Continued from Page 1

follow the well-established norms of protocol, as stated above, and desist from abrupt decisions with regard to field visits."

Reminding Mr Dhankhar of one of her previous letters, Ms Banerjee added, "I had requested and specifically advised you to refrain from surpassing the chief minister and her Council of Ministers and communicating with and dictating to the state officials, in excess of your power under the Constitution and directing them to attend before you". I find that you are steadily ignoring this advice,

solemnly rendered by me to you, and have been communicating with and dictating the state officials. You have also been seeking reports from them directly. I urge you and again request and advise you to refrain from this. I am asking my chief secretary to go by this norm."

Hitting back at the Trinamul Congress supremo immediately, Mr Dhankhar, who plans to visit Assam first on Thursday morning to meet BJP workers in a shelter there, rejected her advice and reminded her of his "constitutional duties."

In his reply to her, Mr Dhankhar wrote, "In time of such unprecedented crisis there was need to act in togetherness with all concerned, including the governor. It was no time for optics or playing to the gallery when we are in the midst of unprecedented post-poll retributive violence. I can't persuade myself to subscribe to the stance reflected in your communication. It betrays elementary ignorance of constitutional provisions. We both, being constitutional functionaries, are subject to the Constitution. I am sure you will at least concede supremacy of the

Constitution, that by oath you are ordained to follow.

It is a textbook proposition that provisions of the Constitution can neither be diluted nor ignored."

He added, "I am appalled that a leader of your stature should be even contemplating that in making visits the governor has to obtain orders of the government. Surprising that you became aware of this constitutionally untenable provision at a time when my visits are to share the pain and agony of suffering people. I am just not persuaded by your stance. There would be no sane takers of this."

'Begin mass, free vaccination'

■ Continued from Page 1
Pawar. Others include chief ministers Uddhav Thackeray (Shiv Sena), Mamata Banerjee (TMC), M.K. Stalin (DMK), and Hemant Soren (JMM).

Former chief ministers Farooq Abdullah (NC) and Akhilesh Yadav (SP) have also signed the letter, alongside Tejashwi Yadav (RJD), D. Raja (CPI) and Sitaram Yechury (CPI-M). The Opposition leaders also demanded giving all jobless at least Rs 6,000 per month and a free distribution of foodgrains to the needy, saying over one crore tonnes of foodgrains are currently "rotting in



People wait outside Thane Nurses Training Vaccination Centre to receive a dose of Covid-19 vaccine on Wednesday. — *PTI*

central godowns". The leaders have also demanded a repeal of the three Central farm laws

which, they claimed, will help protect lakhs of "annadatas" (food-growers) from becoming the

victims of pandemic.

A large number of farmers are sitting in protest at three borders of Delhi, seeking the farm laws passed by Parliament in September last year be scrapped. "Repeal farm laws to protect lakhs of our annadatas becoming victims of the pandemic so that they can continue to produce food to feed the Indian people," they said.

"Though it has not been the practice of your office or government, we would appreciate a response to our suggestions in the interests of India and our people," the leaders said in the letter. — *PTI*

THE ASIAN AGE

13 MAY 2021

Be grateful for ideas, don't cast them in partisan light

The abject failure of the Union government in anticipating, and preparing the nation for, the second wave of the pandemic Covid-19 seems to have unsettled the ruling dispensation with its leading lights jeering at every criticism, instead of offering an answer. The practical suggestions former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had listed in his letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi were met with an uncharacteristically scornful reply by health minister Harsh Vardhan. And now the letter BJP president J.P. Nadda has written to Congress president Sonia Gandhi in reply to the Congress Working Committee's criticism that the Centre has abdicated its role in fighting the pandemic is another example. As the principal Opposition party, the Congress would be failing in its job if it does not call out the lapses of the government and force it to correct its course. The government needs to answer it but the BJP has chosen to do the job, seeing it as a political issue. It hardly is.

The BJP president's letter

Everyone will join Mr Nadda when he says the vaccine that is made in India should be a matter of national pride but his overplaying the nationalistic cap will be unacceptable

age of doses. The shortage was felt even before the third phase of vaccination, to be taken up by the states, started. The states never wanted to pay twice or four times the price the Centre pays the vaccine manufacturers for each dose; nor did they ask for organising a competition with one another and the private sector for vaccines. Now several states, including those ruled by the BJP, are forced to float global tenders for sourcing the vaccine.

The BJP president says the Opposition parties were less appreciative of the achievements of Indian scientists in developing the vaccine. Everyone will join Mr Nadda when he says the vaccine that is made in India should be a matter of national pride but his overplaying the nationalistic cap will be unacceptable. True, there were sceptics even in the scientific community when the authorities concerned cleared the India-made vaccine for emergency use without waiting for the scientific process to get completed. Mr Nadda gives a partisan tilt to the call for adherence to the scientific process. This is unfair.

The Congress' criticism that India is witnessing a "grave calamity" was in fact shared by Mr Nadda's former colleague in the Union council of ministers, Santosh Gangwar, who put it on record in his letter to Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath. Mr Gangwar was only reflecting what millions of Covid-19 patients and their dear ones have been feeling. The BJP must realise that shooting the messenger hardly helps solve issues.

Is it time to free Rajiv killers?

The clamour for the release of seven Rajiv Gandhi assassination case convicts is bound to grow. The change in government in Tamil Nadu has given fresh impetus to what is already a state-wide push to see those involved in the periphery of the LTTE plot to kill a Prime Minister of India be freed as they have been incarcerated for close to 30 years now — May 21 will mark the 30th anniversary of the sombre event that shook the nation. The killing itself had come straight out of a Frederick Forsyth novel with belt bomber Dhanu activating the device while pretending to greet Rajiv Gandhi in Sriperumbudur when he was on a campaign visit.

The Centre has been steadfast in its refusal to countenance the release of the prisoners for life, some of whose death sentences were commuted to life. The rationale for the refusal to consider several pleas, an Assembly resolution and a Cabinet decision to recommend that they be freed on compassionate grounds has been that those associated with the killing of a Prime Minister of the land cannot be sown any mercy. The breach of security taking a PM's life — Rajiv was a former PM at the time as he had refused to try to retain his post though Congress was returned as the single largest party after the 1989 polls — was considered a national affront that hurt even more as the conspiracy was hatched outside India.

The Tamil Nadu governor, acting obviously on orders from the Centre, sat on the matter of freeing many who had spent their entire youth in jail, including for the possibly innocent act of procuring a nine-volt battery for the detonator. The LTTE was subsequently decimated after a civil war that lasted over 25 years and Rajiv Gandhi's wife and children had also forgiven the killers. The sentiment in Tamil Nadu is overwhelmingly in favour of the prisoners' release but it is complicated as it involves foreigners. Whether cold-blooded conspirators in assassinating an Indian PM deserve any mercy when they should be in prison for life is another matter.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUBHAKAR

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 25211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ. RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Ashwani Kumar



Amid grief as Covid surges, India needs divine mercy!

Driven by a compelling need to unburden an unbearable sense of grief, this article is also a supplication for divine mercy in these calamitous times. It is about the moral impoverishment of an ancient society and wanton abandonment of empathy, that is an essential condition of our coexistence.

Proud citizens of a resurgent nation that seeks a place on the high table of global politics have been reduced to beggary — begging for a gasp of breath, a ventilator, a hospital bed and medicines, a chance to be vaccinated on a non-discriminatory basis, transportation of the sick and the deceased, sources of information for medical relief and, above all, a cylinder of oxygen to buy time in a hope to live, have robbed us of our innate dignity which defines our humanity. The trauma of seeing a loved one slip away gasping for breath while struggling to hold on to life, wanting to live, is a burden too heavy to carry, and I should know, having lost my wife to lung failure. That she did not go due to lack of oxygen seems like a divine benediction today.

And we die a thousand deaths suffering the loss of our soul every time our dignity is wounded, when the dead do not find space in cremation grounds, when bodies are piled one upon the other waiting to be cremated even as unending funeral pyres test the boundaries of our grief, when the helpless die in rickshaws, scooters and makeshift ambulances outside hospital gates for want of oxygen or hospitalisation — alone and in the cold without family or friends, when the nearest and dearest ones are forced to turn away or when nurses steal critical drugs to profiteer over human misery. When an elderly patient gives up his bed to save the life of a younger person or when the allocation of a ventilator depends on the age of the patient, we know what we are or have become — a savage society.

How else can we respond to Sahir Ludhianvi's damning interrogatory: "Kahan hain, kahan hain muhafiz khudi ke" (Whither the sentinels of honour), except by way of humble repentance for our moral, political and societal excesses? Living with the thought of dying alone with no one to

hold our hand in the last moments, not able to feel the warmth of those who are integral to our lives... remains a mourning in perpetuity.

Loneliness, as Mother Teresa had reminded us, is about the feeling of being unloved. Thoughts about the futility of human relationships and about the dispensability of those who define us have added to an unprecedented sense of aloneness. Gulzar's poignant verse depicting a decline in human togetherness even in normal times has an added resonance today: "Zindagi yun hui basar tanha, kafil saath aur safar tanha" (Life lived alone, surrounded by a crowd). And now we are compelled to be alone even in death. Hopefully, this will not be the life we want for the generations to come.

Wailing mothers, grieving children and the helplessness of marginalised people mock our politics and proclaim a failure of the dignitarian promise of our national charter. Our "raucous" democracy remains enthralled with electoral triumphs and the vanquishing of political opponents even as the nation's soul is scarred beyond all

recognition. The political parties are complicit in their failure to prevent large gatherings, protest movements or religious congregations — all of which are responsible for the pandemic's massive surge across the country. Our exalted institutions of democracy, including Parliament, the Election Commission and even the Supreme Court, have failed the nation. Despite its celebrated jurisprudence on human rights issues, our highest court's inability to issue binding judicial dikats against the holding of massive electoral rallies during the time of a pandemic is wholly inexplicable considering the indisputable evidence that huge physical gatherings compromise the social distancing norms and the legally enforceable Covid-related protocols. An eloquent newspaper headline about a high court sums up in varying degrees the unintended but failure nevertheless, of our constitutional institutions. It reads: "High court hearing, plea to get ICU bed, man dies in wait". (Indian Express, May 1)

Clearly, in matters of life and death, judicial inaction cannot be passed off as

an act of judicial restraint. The constitutional courts with a large remit need not be reminded that securing the right to life is the first charge on the exercise of judicial power and that in moments of test, justice and judgment cannot lie apart.

Politicians for their part must know that "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" and that the excesses of power are invariably called to account. We must all accept that the embrace of humility coupled with a rejection of hubris is, in the order of things, both a sign of strength and a condition of our existence. Although the anguish and deep sorrow that drives this article is beyond the "realm of articulate thought", the soaring and silent ache in the heart begs no expression. We know that grief, felt in the innermost recesses of our being, heals even if it is a terrible burden of being, and that "God brings men in deep waters not to drown them but to cleanse them".

The writer is a former Union law minister

Subhani



Will Beijing return the remains of 1962 hero?



Claude Arpi

In recent months China has given a lot of publicity to several new war memorials which have come up in Tibet; this mushrooming is probably due the Galwan incidents in which the People's Liberation Army lost some 45 men and officers in July 2020, although this information is still a state secret within China (it took months for Beijing to finally admit four Chinese had died in the brawl with Indian troops).

On May 6, *China Tibet Net* published pictures of the Lhoka (Shannan) Martyrs' Cemetery. This sub-district of the Tibet Military Region (TMD) faces the northern borders of Bhutan and the western part of the McMahon Line, north of the Tawang sector in Arunachal Pradesh.

The article says: "Among the green pines and cypresses is the solemn Shannan Martyrs Cemetery, where are buried [the martyrs] of the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, the Tibetan rebellion, the Sino-Indian border self-defence counter-attack, and the socialist revolution and construction in Tibet."

More than 700 soldiers are said to be buried there.

Tibet's so-called "peaceful liberation" should be read as the invasion of the Roof of the World; the Tibetan "rebellion" is the Tibetan masses' uprising against the occupiers in March 1959 while "the self-defence counter-attack" is the treacherous attack against India in October 1962.

Along with the memorial, "sculptures, manuscripts, pictures, certificates of merit, military medals... all cultural relics, silent and sacred, telling the infinite loyalty and love of revolutionary martyrs to the motherland and people."

Similar memorials can be found in Gar and Tsanda in Ngari Prefecture (Western Tibet), in Rima (north of Kibithu in Lohit Valley) and of course in Lhasa and Shigatse; the most important one is Kanxhiwar Memorial on the Highway 219 (Aksai Chin road) in Xinjiang, which pays homage to the hundreds of Chinese soldiers who lost their life in the battle of Rezang-la in November 1962.

While there is nothing wrong in China honouring its soldiers, it is shocking that Beijing has never returned the remains of Subedar Joginder Singh, Param Vir Chakra, who died in Tibet in November 1962.

What happened to Joginder Singh?

In the morning of October 20, 1962, a JCO of the Assam Rifles posted at Bumla, north of Tawang, noticed some 1,000 labourers, with digging implements; they came protected by Chinese soldiers. The JCO rushed to inform the nearby platoon of a possible danger.

Nothing happened till 4.30 am on October 23, when suddenly the Chinese started firing with mortars and anti-tank guns to destroy Indian bunkers built south of the international border, and soon 600 Chinese attacked the Assam Rifles post, which was quickly overrun, though after inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy.

Subedar Joginder Singh of 1 Sikh Regiment was posted a few hundred metres away. According to the official report of the 1962 War: "The enemy attacked the forward platoon position of 'D' Coy [Company] of the Sikhs at the IB [Inspection Bungalow] Ridge, at about 5:00 hrs with the objective of capturing 'Twin Peaks'. As the climb from the bed of the nullah to the platoon position was steep,

the Sikhs were able to inflict heavy casualties to the Chinese, compelling them to retire."

Joginder Singh immediately asked for more ammunition, but by that time the enemy had cut the communications with the company headquarters. Joginder Singh fought like lion, he was badly wounded in the process and then taken prisoner.

The citation for the PVC gave more details: "In this fierce action, the platoon lost half of its men but not the will to fight. Subedar Joginder Singh, despite a wound in the thigh, refused evacuation. His platoon also refused to yield any ground to the enemy. The last wave of the Chinese attack, which was more determined and more forceful, followed next. Now the platoon had very few men left to fight. Subedar Joginder Singh, therefore, manned a light machine gun and killed a large number of enemies. But he could not stem the tide of the enemy advance single-handed. The Chinese continued advancing with little concern for the casualties."

The report concluded: "While in the enemy's custody he died because of his wound. He was awarded the PVC (posthumously) for his bravery."

Joginder was very badly wounded. When a few days later he arrived at the PoWs' camp near Chongye in central Tibet, Chinese doctors immediately suggested an amputation (he was also suffering from frostbites), which the brave subedar refused; his chances of being promoted to *Subedar-Major*, the senior-most rank for a JCO (junior commissioned officer) would be jeopardised.

The report concluded: 'While in the enemy's custody he [Joginder Singh] died because of his wound. He was awarded the PVC (posthumously) for his bravery.'

The Chinese doctors asked the Indian commanding officers in the camp to try to convince Joginder it was necessary if he wanted to survive. But the Indian officers failed to do so and soon after Joginder passed away. This was sometime in November 1962.

Ironically, it is at Bumla, the place where Joginder fought so well, that the first wounded jawans were repatriated by the Indian Red Cross on December 15.

In his memoirs, one of the COs remembered that on March 23, 1963, the PoWs were informed that Maj. Gurdial Singh of the Rajputs, who was in the camp, was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra. At the same time, they probably heard of the PVC for Joginder Singh.

The officer noted: "On 26 March 1963, the commandant of the camp called us to tell us we were going to be returned to India via the mainland." He further recalled: "Before leaving the PoW camp, we asked the Chinese to take us to the graves of our soldiers who had died in our camp. There were seven of them, including Subedar Joginder Singh, who had been awarded the highest gallantry award, the PVC. We were told by the Chinese that he had refused to have his toes, which were affected by frostbite [and bullet wounds], amputated... He [had] died of gangrene."

Incidentally, a war memorial has recently been constructed to honour the PVC awardee at Bum La; it was inaugurated by Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu, with Joginder's family and Army representatives present. It is a first step in the right direction, but it is time for New Delhi to ask the Chinese government to repatriate to India the mortal remains of the brave Sikh soldier as well as his six other companions still buried in Tibet.

It would only be late justice.

The writer is based in South India for the past 42 years. He writes on India, China, Tibet and Indo-French relations.

LETTERS

KARNATAKA MESS

The dearth of oxygen supply has come to haunt Covid patients in various parts of the country. Close on the heels of Karnataka's Chamarajnagar tragedy where 23 Covid patients perished after the treatment facility ran out of oxygen comes the grim news of 26 Covid patients in Goa Medical College and 11 patients in the ICU ward at the Sri Venkateswara Ramnarain Ruia Government General Hospital in Tirupati succumbing to lack of oxygen. The authorities blaming lack of tanker drivers and delay in transporting oxygen does not wash. They must be made accountable for their indecision and callousness, which have cost precious lives!

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

ANGELS OF MERCY

THE INTERNATIONAL Nurses Day, May 12, is a day to express gratitude to the hardworking nursing staff, who is at the forefront of fighting Covid-19. Their sense of duty, compassion and commitment towards a healthy India is exemplary. The day this year is being observed amid the ongoing second wave in India and it highlights the contribution of nurses in the entire healthcare system.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

CORNER CHINA

THE WORLD MUST investigate the truth behind reports in the Australian and British media of China weaponising Covid-19, with the US state department also reportedly laying hands on papers written in 2015 by Chinese military scientists talking of new-era genetic weapons. The WHO's executive board must take proactive measures to force China to cooperate. Deaths have devastated families. The world has to learn to shed its dependency on Chinese goods and be self-sufficient.

Brij B. Goyal
Ludhiana

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

SHORT TAKES

IRAN CLASH KILLS
2 GUARD TROOPS,
7 MILITANTS

Tehran: Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard forces on Tuesday killed seven militants and dismantled their cell in the country's northwest near the border with Turkey, Iran's state-run *IRNA news agency* reported. Two Guard members were also killed in the shootout.

IRNA said the "group of terrorists" had snuck into Iran illegally from Turkey. The clash took place around noon in the city of Salmas in Iran's West Azerbaijan province, according to the report.

The city is located about 650 kilometers (400 miles) northwest of the capital, Tehran. The area has seen occasional fighting between Iranian forces and Kurdish separatists as well as militants linked to the extremist Islamic State group.

In November, unknown gunmen killed three and wounded two Iranian border guards in the province.

SUDAN FORCES
DISPERSE PROTEST;
TWO KILLED

Cairo: Two protesters were killed when Sudanese security forces dispersed a demonstration late Tuesday in the capital of Khartoum, a local medical group said.

The violence broke out when dozens of protesters made their way late in the day to the sealed-off area outside the military's headquarters to commemorate a deadly break-up of a protester camp two years ago. The protesters have demanded justice for those killed in the 2019 violence. Security forces closed off major roads and streets leading to the government and military headquarters in Khartoum ahead of the protests.

The Sudanese doctors' committee said security forced fired live bullets and tear gas to disperse the protesters, killing at least two people and wounding more than 15 others, some of them in critical condition. The committee is the medical arm of the Sudanese Professionals' Association, which spearheaded the popular uprising that led to the military's ouster of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.

CHANCELLOR
PROBED OVER LYING
TO MPs IN AUSTRIA

Vienna: Austria's Sebastian Kurz said on Wednesday that he was being investigated over possible false statements to a parliamentary committee probing corruption, in the latest headache for the conservative chancellor.

"I wish to inform you that... prosecutors have opened an investigation against the head of my office," Bernhard Bonelli, "and against me", Kurz told reporters before a cabinet meeting.

Kurz denied any wrongdoing, saying: "I always answered all (the committee's) questions truthfully." Prosecutors confirmed in an email that the investigation had been opened after several complaints were made to them.

The offence of lying under oath carries a prison term of up to three years.

The investigation comes after the opposition Social Democrats (SPOe) and NEOS parties accused Kurz of not telling truth in front of the committee of MPs, who are investigating the fallout from the so-called "Ibizagate" scandal that brought down Kurz's previous government in 2019.

KREMLIN IMPOSES
CUTS AT
U.S. EMBASSY

Moscow: Under Kremlin orders, the U.S. Embassy has stopped employing Russians, forcing the embassy to cut its consular staff by 75 per cent and limit many of its services.

The order went into effect on Wednesday, bringing the sharply deteriorating U.S.-Russia relationship to an intensely personal level. Because of the cuts, the embassy can offer only very limited services, such as considering "life-and-death" visa applications. That leaves Russian businessmen, exchange students and romantic partners adrift because they won't be able to obtain visas. Even Americans will be unable to register their newborns or renew their passports.

For Anastasia Kuznetsova, a 20-year-old engaged to marry a Californian, it's a crushing blow. She had already spent about two years seeking a fiancée's visa. The notoriously laborious process for Russians to get US visas had already been slowed by Covid. "I felt destroyed, much more depressed than I was before," said Kuznetsova.

Israel PM declares emergency in Lod

Netanyahu visits Tel Aviv suburbs as cops accuse Arab residents of causing riots

Jerusalem, May 12: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday declared a state of emergency in the central city of Lod as police accused Arab residents of waging "wide-scale riots".

Netanyahu's statement came after an Israeli Arab was killed in Lod the previous night as violence soars between Israel and the Palestinian territories.

According to a photographer, Netanyahu himself went to the city, which is in the suburbs of economic hub Tel Aviv near the Ben Gurion airport, to call for calm.

The city of 77,000 people, including 47,000 Jewish Israelis and 23,000 Arab Israelis, had been the scene of violent clashes on Monday, the local police confirmed.

But on Tuesday evening, as protests multiplied across East Jerusalem, the occupied West Bank and also Israeli Arab cities, the situation degenerated in Lod, police said.

"Wide-scale riots erupted by some of the Arab residents and endangering communities," the police said in a statement.

"Vehicle were burnt and damage caused to property." "The government said reinforcements had been deployed after Israeli media reported that three synagogues and several businesses were set on fire in Lod.

"Sixteen border police platoons (have been) mobilised in areas in order to deal with the violence," the police added.

There were also violent scenes in Israeli Arab areas including Acre, Wadi Ara and Jisr A-Zarqa, where eight people were arrested, police said.

Weeks of tensions boiled over when Israeli riot police clashed with crowds of Palestinians at Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque, on the last Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Nightly clashes since then at the compound, which is holy to both Muslims and Jews, and elsewhere in east Jerusalem have left at least 700 Palestinians injured.

On Tuesday Palestinian militants Hamas and the Israeli army traded their heaviest fire for several years, with rockets fired at Tel Aviv after an Israeli strike destroyed a tower block in Gaza.

● Weeks of tensions boiled over when Israeli riot police clashed with crowds of Palestinians at Al Aqsa mosque.

Taliban seizes
Afghan district
before ceasefire

Kabul, May 12: The Taliban have seized a district from Afghan government forces on the outskirts of Kabul, ahead of a three-day ceasefire agreed between the warring sides, officials said.

Nerakh district is around 40 kilometres (25 miles) from the Afghan capital in neighbouring Wardak province, which has long been used by militants as a gateway to reach Kabul and launch deadly attacks.

Violence has soared since May 1 when the US military began formally withdrawing its last remaining troops, as peace efforts between the Taliban and the Afghan government have stalled.

"Security and defence forces made a tactical retreat from the police headquarters of Nerakh district," Interior Ministry spokesman Tareq Arian said.

Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, said the insurgents had captured the area on Tuesday, adding that their fighters had seized the police headquarters and an army base.

The Defence Ministry on Wednesday said it would launch an offensive to win back the district, home to more than 60,000



Palestinians wave the Hamas flag during the funeral of Rashid Abu Ara, 16, who was killed during clashes with Israeli troops in village of Aqaba near Nablus, in the north of the occupied West Bank, on Wednesday. — AFP

Fear of 'war' looms over Israel

Tel Aviv, May 12: Relentless rocket fire and rioting in mixed Jewish-Arab towns fuelled growing fears on Wednesday that deadly violence between Israel and Palestinians could spiral into "full-scale war".

Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz vowed more attacks on Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in Gaza to bring

"total, long-term quiet" before considering a ceasefire.

Gaza militants have launched more than 1,000 rockets since Monday, said Israel's army, which has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Islamist groups in the crowded coastal enclave of Gaza.

The most intense hostilities in seven years have

killed at least 53 people in Gaza, including 14 children, and six in Israel, including an Israeli soldier and one Indian national, since Monday.

Three Palestinians were killed in West Bank clashes. And at least 230 Palestinians and 100 Israelis have been wounded.

The bloodshed was triggered by weekend unrest

at Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque compound, which is sacred to both Muslims and Jews.

As world powers voiced growing alarm and the UN Security Council readied for another emergency meeting on the bloody crisis, the UN Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland warned that "we're escalating towards a full-scale war". — AFP

Hamas: Gaza City
commander killed

Gaza City (Gaza Strip), May 12: Militant group Hamas confirms that its Gaza City commander was killed in an Israeli airstrike, the highest-ranking militant killed since the 2014 war in the Palestinian territory.

Earlier, Israel's internal security agency said that a series of airstrikes had killed Bassem Issa and several other senior Hamas militants.

The army released a statement on Wednesday, saying that it carried out a complex and first-of-its-kind operation. Those targeted, it said, were a key part of the Hamas General Staff and considered close

to the head of the group's military wing.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Israel will use an iron fist if needed to stop widespread protests by Arab citizens that have resulted in injuries, arrests, and property damage.

Netanyahu said on Wednesday that Israel will stop the anarchy after deploying Border Police forces to calm unrest in recent days in the cities of Lod and Acre.

The mounting unrest comes after weeks of violence in Jerusalem and heavy fighting between Israel and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip. — AP

India expresses concern
over Palestine violence

United Nations, May 12: Amid escalating tensions between Israel and Palestinian militants, India has expressed deep concern at clashes and violence in Jerusalem's Temple Mount as well as over evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods and called on both sides to avoid changing the status-quo on the ground.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti tweeted that in the UN Security Council meeting on Tuesday on the escalation in East Jerusalem, he said that

India is deeply concerned at clashes & violence in Haram Al Sharif/Temple Mount and equally concerned about evictions in Sheikh Jarrah & Silwan neighbourhoods." He said India calls on both sides to avoid changing the status-quo on the ground. He added that the old city also houses Al Zawiyya Al Hindiyya — The Indian Hospice.

India also condemned rocket fire from Gaza, Tirumurti tweeted.

India also urged restraint of all parties and to adhere to Security Council resolution 2334, which reaffirms that the

establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The resolution also reiterates its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and that it fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard. — PTI

China, Russia using digital
tech to sabotage, steal: UK

London, May 12: It is important to win the "hearts and minds" of like-minded countries such as India to prevent countries like China and Russia from filling the multilateral vacuum and misusing digital technology to steal and sabotage, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab warned on Wednesday.

In a keynote speech at the CyberUK Conference 2021 organised by the UK's National Cyber Security

● WE HAVE got to win hearts and minds across the world for our positive vision of cyberspace as a free space, said Raab.

Centre (NCSC), the Cabinet minister issued a stark warning of all too real attacks on democracy as he announced GBP 22 million in new funding to support cyber capacity building in vulnerable

countries in Africa and the Indo-Pacific.

We invited ministers to join the (G7) meeting from India, Australia, South Korea, South Africa and Brunei, the current ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) chair, because we wanted to broaden the group of like-minded countries cooperating on cyber, Raab said.

We have got to win hearts and minds across the world for our positive vision of cyberspace as a

free space, open to all responsible users and there for the benefit of the whole world. And frankly, we've got to prevent China, Russia and others from filling the multilateral vacuum, he said.

The minister made reference to a clash between authoritarian and democratic states playing out in cyberspace at the moment, with malicious cyber-actors the "industrial-scale vandals of the 21st century". — PTI

RISKY | LIVING Urban areas are always exposed to climate change disasters

Cities fail to adapt to climate change: Report

Paris, May 12: Hundreds of cities have no climate adaptation plans in place despite rising threats like floods, heatwaves and pollution, according to a report on Wednesday that said this could put 400 million people at risk across the world.

Fast-expanding urban areas are home to more than half the population of the planet and are increasingly exposed to climate-fuelled disasters, economic shocks and health crises as the world warms, with fears that vulnerable communities

will be hardest hit. CDP, a global non-profit that collects data disclosed by companies, cities, states and regions on environmental impact, analysed over 800 global cities and found that 43 percent do not yet have a plan to adapt to the challenges of climate change.

With more and more people drawn to live in urban areas, CDP estimated that by 2030 around 400 million people will be living in poorly prepared cities.

"The urgent need to act and have adaptation measures in place to keep the

● WITH MORE and more people drawn to live in urban areas, CDP estimated that by 2030 around 400 million people will be living in poorly prepared cities.

citizens safe, is increasing together with (the growing urban population)," said Mirjam Wolfrum, CDP's Policy Director for Europe.

She said that 93 per cent of the cities included in

the report were facing "significant threats", while 60 percent highlighted "substantive" water security issues.

The top five hazards are flash and surface flooding — including from rising sea levels — heat waves, rainstorms, extreme hot days and droughts, she said, adding that air pollution is also a major health concern.

Ongoing adaptation strategies in the municipalities that reported to CDP include tree planting (20 percent), flood mapping (18 percent) and

EGYPT PLANS TO
WIDEN, DEEPEN
SUEZ CANAL

Cairo, May 12: Egypt on Tuesday announced plans to widen and deepen the southern part of the Suez Canal where a hulking vessel ran aground and closed off the crucial waterway in March.

The head of the Suez Canal Authority, Lt Gen Osama Rabie, announced details of the plan in a televised ceremony in the canal's city of Ismailia. Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi and top government officials attended the ceremony.

The plan includes widening the canal's southernmost stretch by about 40 meters (yards) to the east, on the side of the Sinai Peninsula, Rabie said. That segment would also be deepened to 72 feet, from the current 66 feet in depth. That part of the canal is 30 kilometers (18 miles) long.

The plan also includes a 10-kilometer-long extension of a second lane of the waterway that opened in 2015. That would bring the double-lane stretch of the canal to 82 kilometers, or 60 miles, allowing more vessels to pass through the canal.

The Ever Given, a Panamax-class Japanese-owned ship, had ran aground in the single-lane stretch of the canal on March 23 before it was extracted six days later after a massive salvage effort by a flotilla of tugboats. The vessel is still held in the canal's Great Bitter Lake amid a financial dispute between its owners and the Suez Canal Authority. The six-day blockade disrupted global shipment. Some ships were forced to take the long alternate route around the Cape of Good Hope. — AP



Boris Johnson

DESPITE COURT
ORDER, UK PM
IGNORES DEBTS

London, May 12: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose personal finances are under scrutiny after several scandals, has failed to pay a small debt nearly seven months after a court order, documents showed Wednesday.

An online database of civil county court judgments in England and Wales showed Johnson has yet to settle the debt of 535 (\$757, 624 euros) following a ruling on October 26 last year.

The judgment, confirmed and first reported by the fortnightly satirical and news magazine Private Eye, does not reveal details about the nature of the debt or the creditor. Johnson is named as the debtor and lists his address as 10 Downing Street — the home of prime ministers since 1735 and one of the country's best-known residences. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,690.80	-0.96
Nifty 50	14,696.50	-1.04
S&P 500*	4,103.24	-1.18
Dollar (₹)	73.42	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.78	-0.12
Euro (₹)	89.10	0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,074.229	0.48
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.54	1.44
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.010	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.668	0.044

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Nod for ₹18,100 cr PLI scheme for battery storage

New Delhi: The government approved the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for promoting battery storage at an estimated outlay of Rs 18,100 crore. With the objective to promote the 'Make in India' initiative, the National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage is expected to attract investment of Rs 45,000 crore, information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said.

EU economy to expand, bouncing back from slump



Brussels: The European Union economy is set to bounce back this year after the deep Coronavirus recession and member states are forecast to have recouped the ground that they had lost by the end of next year. In its latest forecast, the EU's executive commission said that growth in the 27-nation bloc is predicted to expand by 4.2% this year, a significant uptick from a February prediction of 3.7%.

\$376 mn outflow in India-focussed offshore, ETFs

New Delhi: India-focused offshore funds and exchange-traded funds (ETFs) witnessed a net outflow of \$376 million in three months ended March 2021, making it the twelfth consecutive quarter of withdrawal, according to a Morningstar report released on Wednesday. This was markedly lower than the net outflows of USD 986 million registered during the quarter ended December 2020.

SoftBank sets record with \$17.7bn profit

Tokyo: SoftBank Group Corp. reported a \$17.7 billion fourth-quarter profit, setting a new record for Japan thanks to an unprecedented windfall from its investment business. The net income was 1.93 trillion yen in the three months ended March 31, according to a filing by SoftBank on Wednesday. That's the highest ever for a listed Japanese company in any quarter dating back to 1990.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09. Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Food basket inflation at 2%; manufacturing surges

Inflation eases, IIP up

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MAY 12

With the easing of food prices, India's retail inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index or CPI, slowed to 4.29 per cent in April 2021, while industrial output, measured by the Index of Industrial Production or IIP, grew 22.4 per cent in March 2021 as compared to 16.7 per cent in the same period a year-ago, government data showed on Wednesday.

The CPI data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, however, showed that inflation in the food basket was 2.02 per cent in April, down from 4.87 per cent in the preceding month. The consumer retail inflation was predicted to cool to 4.2 per cent in April, just above



the RBI's 4 per cent target and down from March's four-month high of 5.52 per cent, according to a Reuters poll which was taken over the past week.

Meanwhile, the industrial output, or IIP, on the whole grew 22.4 per cent in March 2021 as compared to 16.7 per cent in the same period a year-ago. Despite the massive spread of Covid-19 across

the country in its second wave, industrial activities were not hampered to a great extent.

A separate data, released by the National Statistics Office, also showed that the manufacturing sector output surged 25.8 per cent in March 2021. "Besides, mining output too climbed 6.1 per cent and power generation increased by 22.5 per cent in March. The IIP had shrunk by 18.7 per cent in March 2020," it showed.

As per the data, during 2020-21, the IIP contracted 8.6 per cent compared to 0.8 per cent contraction in 2019-20. Industrial production has been hit due to the Covid-19 pandemic since March last year when it contracted by 18.7 per cent.

The IIP had registered a growth of 5.2 per cent in February last year.

IEA SAYS OIL GLUT GONE EVEN AS DEMAND FORECAST CUT ON INDIA

GRANT SMITH MAY 12

The International Energy Agency said the supply glut created by the global pandemic has cleared, even as demand suffers a blow from a resurgence of the virus in India.

Surplus oil inventories in developed nations are now just a small fraction of the levels seen when demand collapsed last year, with output cuts by OPEC and its allies draining the excess, the IEA said on Wednesday. Still, the agency sees a temporary setback for global consumption as infections rock India, before the recovery resumes later in the year.

"Bloated world oil inventories that built up during last year's COVID-19 demand shock have returned to more normal levels," the IEA said in its monthly report. "But India's COVID crisis is a reminder that the outlook for oil demand is mired in uncertainty. Until the pandemic is brought under control, market volatility is likely to persist."

Oil markets have extended their recovery as fuel consumption roars back in China and the US, buoying crude prices to about US\$69 a barrel in London. — Bloomberg

U.S. REVERSES TRUMP JAB, REMOVES XIAOMI FROM BLACKLIST

May 12: The US Defence Department will remove China's Xiaomi Corp from a government blacklist, a court filing showed, marking a reversal by the Biden administration of one of Donald Trump's last jabs at Beijing before exiting office.

The court filing said the company and the US government would agree to resolve their ongoing litigation, bringing to an end a brief and controversial spat between the hardware company and Washington that had further soured Sino-US ties.

A Xiaomi spokeswoman said the company is watching the latest developments closely, without elaborating.

Shares in the company jumped over 6 per cent in Hong Kong as news of the decision spread. The company's share price has tumbled roughly 20 per cent since it was placed on the blacklist in January in the waning days of the Trump administration.

The defence department did not immediately comment. A justice department spokeswoman declined to comment.

The department had designated the firm as having ties to China's military and placed it on a list that would restrict US investment in the company.

Xiaomi went on the offensive by filing a lawsuit against the US government, calling its placement "unlawful and unconstitutional" and denying any ties to China's military. — Reuters

Job postings decline yearly, sequential fall

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 12

Amid the second wave of the pandemic, online job postings saw a decline in April, both against March 2021 as well as lockdown-hit April 2020.

The employment index saw a decline in job posting activity in April 2021 compared to the previous month by 3 per cent. Overall job postings have declined by 4 per cent year-on-year in April 2021 compared to April 2020, Monster.com said.

The job postings for entry-level roles have declined by 5 per cent month-on-month in April 2021 against March 2021. The decline in postings is due to the onset of the second wave of the pandemic leading to lockdowns, Monster.com reported.

Industries that exhibited the highest decline in job postings compared to the previous month include engineering, cement, construction, iron and steel, which declined 15 per cent, retail 14 per cent, FMCG, food and packaged food 12 per cent and logistics, courier/ freight/ transportation 12 per cent.

Meanwhile, industries such as travel and tourism declined 52 per cent, education 34 per cent, engineering, cement, construction, iron/ steel 26 per cent as of April 2021 compared to April 2020.

Online job postings in Delhi were down 1 per cent and Mumbai 2 per cent in April compared to March. Cities like Baroda



with a 10 per cent decline and Jaipur with 5 per cent have been the most impacted sequentially.

However, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai reported significant increase in the number of job postings year-on-year and marginal growth month-on-month. Agrobased industries, chemicals/ plastic/ rubber, paints, fertilizer/ pesticides and printing/ packaging recorded good growth over April 2020. Software and hardware, telecom and shipping and marine too saw growth in April.

"The second wave of the pandemic and various intensities of lockdowns across the country have impacted hiring activity. However, hiring activity in cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai indicate a positive uptick, and year-on-year growth across certain sectors and functions have been witnessed. These are positive indicators that we are better equipped to face the impact this year compared to April 2020," said Sekhar Garisa, CEO of Monster.com.

FMCG industry grows record 9.4%

New Delhi, May 12: The Indian FMCG industry has recorded a 9.4 per cent growth in the January-March quarter of 2021, helped by a consumption-led growth and value growth by increased prices of products, especially of staples, said data analytics firm Nielsen.

The rural market continued to perform with strong growth of 14.6 per cent during the period and the metro markets have registered a positive growth after two quarters.

Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry sales growth from the tra-

ditional trade channels jumped to double digits, while growth in e-commerce normalised down to single digits in the January-March quarter.

"FMCG industry in India has built growth momentum by growing at 9.4 per cent in the quarter ending March 2021 after growing at 7.3 per cent in the previous quarter (October-December 2020), over the same quarter of the previous year," said FMCG Snapshot for Q1 2021 released by NielsenIQ's Retail Intelligence team. NielsenIQ South Asia

Lead Diptanshu Ray said: "This is backed up by staples, essential non-foods and indulgence categories." He cautioned that the beginning of the second quarter may bring some new dimensions, as the situation is dynamic.

"Now that lockdowns have resurfaced, and with last-mile delivery boost up, the e-commerce channel will continue to be dynamic," it said.

According to the report, metros have registered a growth of 2.2 per cent in the January-March quarter after two-quarters of decline. — PTI

New Covid-19 lockdowns hit vehicle sales: Siam

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 12

The Covid-19 pandemic induced partial lockdown in several states hit sales of cars, SUVs, vans, bikes and scooters during April as showrooms remained shut while those open were a deserted look.

On Wednesday the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers or Siam said passenger vehicles sales in April fell 10 per cent at 2,61,633 units compared with 2,90,939 units sold in March 2021. No year-on-year compari-

son data is available due to total national lockdown in April 2020 which led to zero sales in that month.

Sales of two-wheelers also fell 33 per cent last month at 9,95,097 compared with 14,96,806 units sold in March.

While sales of three-wheelers dropped 57 per cent at 13,728 units, the all categories of vehicles plunged 30 per cent at 12,70,458 units.

While showrooms remain shut in most parts of the country, automakers have been forced to advance their maintenance

shutdown by a month to May due to a number of business disruptions.

Maruti Suzuki, Hero MotoCorp, Honda Cars, Honda Motorcycles and Scooter, Toyota Kirloskar, MG Motor, Yamaha and Mahindra & Mahindra announced temporary plant closures. Other companies like Tata Motors are rationalising output as per demand.

Since retail off-take has been impacted, automakers are trying to avoid a pile of inventory by cutting back on production.

The lockdown has hit the supply chain involving component suppliers.

"Supply chain related production challenges continue with the lockdown restrictions in many parts of the country. The demand has been clearly impacted by the second wave of Covid-19, both in terms of low consumer sentiments and closure of dealerships due to lockdown restrictions," Rajesh Menon, Director General at Siam, said.

On May 10, the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association or

FADA also reported lower sales during April based on the vehicle registration data sourced from the regional transport offices.

When compared to the previous month of March, FADA said in April 2021 total vehicle registrations were down 28.15 per cent at 11,85,374 units versus 16,49,678 units.

Passenger vehicle registrations were down 25.33 per cent at 2,08,883 units in April, as against 2,79,745 units in March this year, while those of 2W declined by 27.63 per cent at 8,65,134 units, as against

11,95,445 in the previous month, it pointed out.

Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, UP, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Goa are some of the states that have announced full lockdowns, putting automotive sales in the non-essential category.

"The first nine days of May have seen extremely lean sales due to lockdown announced by a majority of states. Even where dealerships are open, the walk-ins have dropped to 30 per cent and customers are delaying their decision," FADA said.

DII stake in Nifty 500 at 14.3%

Mumbai, May 12: As foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have increased their holding in the domestic stocks, domestic institutional investors (DIIs) have been net sellers, and their stake in Nifty-500 stocks declined to a seven-quarter low of 14.3 per cent in the March 2021 quarter, shows a brokerage analysis.

On an annualised basis, the overall FPI ownership in Nifty-500 stocks rose 160 bps to 22.3 per cent in the March quarter from 20.7 per cent in March 2020, while that of DIIs

declined 50 bps to 14.2 per cent from 14.7 per cent in March 2020.

On a quarterly basis, the same FPIs saw a 20 bps decline from the December 2020 quarter, and DIIs witnessed decline by 10 bps, show data from domestic brokerage Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

In the March quarter, while foreign portfolio investors pumped \$7.3 billion into domestic equities, domestic institutional funds saw a net outflow of \$3.2 billion. It indicates that vastly divergent

sequential trends are seen between FPI and DII purchases of equities, it said.

While FPIs increased weights in two-thirds of the sectors (telecom, metals, consumer durables, realty, and cement), DIIs trimmed weights on these sectors in particular and the overall market in general between the December and March quarters.

The overall FPI ownership in Nifty-500 grew 160 bps year-on-year to 22.3 per cent while DII holdings were down 50 bps down year-on-year to 14.3 per cent. — PTI

GOOD TIMES

Once-in-a-decade opportunity sees new highs; BSE IT Index rises 101%

IT, metal, small-cap focused funds top MFs' harvest

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 12

The last one-year period has brought bumper returns for mutual fund investors, that is seen once in a decade.

No less than 14 schemes have returned more than 100 per cent during the last one year period. Even the largest funds managed by HDFC Mutual Fund and ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund falling in the safer hybrid category balanced advantage fund have generated 40 to 60 per cent returns compared to around 60 per cent returns given by almost all large cap equity funds.

Mid-cap equity funds return range between 59 and 78 per cent while the small-cap equity funds have turned the table this year with 80-100 per cent or more in return for most of the funds in the sub-category.

Said Ravi Singhal, vice chairman, GCL Securities, "Such opportunities come once in ten years. After the 2008 financial crisis, select mutual funds had displayed similar performance in 2009. Otherwise, in general, one should not expect more than 15-20 per cent yearly return from the stock market and equity-orient-



ed mutual funds."

"The BSE IT index has given a 101 per cent return in the last one year. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, IT stocks were investors choice, as these companies are getting mammoth deals. Owing to

reasons such as an increase in the Work From Home (WFH), change in business tactics, use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), cloud, online advertising and social media, increase in internet consumption and many more, the IT sector remained an outperformer. Looking at these factors, IT stocks will remain agile during the pandemic," Singhal said.

The BSE Metal Index has given an outstanding return of 182 per cent in last one-year period.

"Due to the low-interest rates, metal demand has increased significantly across the world. As per

recent data, home sales in the USA have remained the highest since 2007. Moreover, rising housing and infrastructure demand in China will further augment the metal demand. These factors are helping the metal sector to outdo this excellent performance for one more year," Singhal said.

Small cap companies have displayed fairly good performance, the BSE small cap index return was at 99.51 per cent in the last one year.

"Due to the COVID-19 challenge, a limitation in boundaries is helping the small cap companies. Owing to a new taxation

system, small companies are finding it easier to fight with large companies. On account of fewer imports from China due to the cold war situation and border tussles, small cap companies are immensely benefiting," Singhal said.

The IT sector funds with over 100 per cent return as on April 27, include ICICI Prudential Technology Fund (154%), Tata Digital India Fund (113%), Aditya Birla Sun Life Digital India Fund (113%).

The small-cap funds include Quant Small Cap Fund (175%), Kotak Small-cap Fund (114%), Nippon India Small-cap Fund (102%).

SHORT TAKES

NZ 'keeper Watling to retire after WTC

Wellington: New Zealand wicket-keeper batsman BJ Watling on Wednesday announced that he will end his over-decade-long career in all forms of cricket after the World Test Championship final against India next month. New Zealand will also play two Tests against hosts England before the WTC final against India in Southampton from June 18. The 35-year-old has been a stalwart of the Test side since debuting in 2009 as an opener, going on to establish himself as a world-class keeper-batsman and claiming numerous records in his 73 Tests to date. The Northern Districts gloveman had been pondering his options for a while. "It's the right time," said Watling. The announcement of Watling's retirement was also expedited by his expected omission from the player contracts list. — *PTI*

Perera appointed Sri Lanka skipper

Colombo: Wicketkeeper-batsman Kusal Perera was on Wednesday named Sri Lanka's ODI captain with Kusal Mendis as his deputy for the away series against Bangladesh this month. Perera, who has represented Sri Lanka in 101 ODIs, 22 Tests and 47 T20Is, takes over the reins from Dimuth Karunaratne who has been dropped along with Angelo Mathews and Lahiru Thirimanne. — *PTI*

Squad: Kusal Perera (capt), Kusal Mendis (vice-capt), Danushka Gunathilaka, Dhananjaya Silva, Pathum Nissanka, Dasun Shanaka, Ashen Bandara, Wanindu Hasaranga, Isuru Udana, Akila Dananjaya, Niroshan Dickwella, Dushmantha Chameera, Ramesh Mendis, Asitha Fernando, Lakshan Sandakan, Chamika Karunaratne, Binura Fernando, Shiran Fernando.

Need competitions before Oly: Neeraj

Mumbai: The training has gone along just fine but Olympic-bound star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra on Wednesday said he is desperate for some competition ahead of the Tokyo Games given that two years have simply been "wasted" because of injury and the Covid-19 pandemic. The 23-year-old, who is being seen as a strong medal hope in Tokyo, said he has been coordinating with the Sports Authority of India to get some competition exposure. "I am trying to give my 100 per cent in training and have been training as I used to do before. The focus on training is good and it is happening well. But I am in need of competitions and we are trying for it," he said. "It has been over two years that I haven't played international competitions," added Neeraj. — *PTI*

RP Singh loses his father to Covid-19

New Delhi: Former India cricketer Rudra Pratap Singh lost his father to Covid-19 on Wednesday. The 35-year-old left-arm pacer from Uttar Pradesh informed about the death of his father Shiv Prasad Singh on twitter. "It is with deepest grief and sadness we inform the passing away of my father, Mr Shiv Prasad Singh. He left for his heavenly abode on 12th May after suffering from Covid. We request you to keep my beloved father in your thoughts and prayers. RIP Papa," he tweeted. RP Singh represented India in 14 Tests, 58 ODIs and 10 T20 Internationals before hanging his boots in September 2018. — *PTI*

Semenya held for reckless driving

Cape Town: Olympic champion Caster Semenya was sentenced to 50 hours of community service for speeding while driving in South Africa, prosecutors said on Wednesday. The runner was arrested last Thursday and released on \$35 bail, the National Prosecuting Authority said. Semenya appeared in court in the capital, Pretoria, on Friday and pleaded guilty to the offense, the NPA said. — *AP*

ALL-ROUND VALUE

Bowling coach says Shardul has proven to be an all-rounder

New Delhi, May 12: India bowling coach Bharat Arun on Wednesday said Shardul Thakur has what it takes to be the fast-bowling all-rounder that the team has needed ever since Hardik Pandya's back injury restricted his role with the ball. Pandya was not included in the Test team for the tour of England as he "was not in a position to bowl", according to the BCCI.

Arun said that while the selectors will have the last word on finding the next set of options, Thakur has certainly made a case for himself.

"It is more of a selectors' job to find them and then we can develop those all-rounders. Shardul has proved he can be an all-rounder. What he did in Australia was fabulous," Arun said.

Pandya last played Test cricket for India in 2018, during the tour of England. He has been battling a back injury since 2019 and recently, during the IPL, also picked up a shoulder niggles.

Arun agreed that finding someone as good as Pandya would be a very tough job.

"I wish you could just wish and develop bowlers like that. Hardik is an outstanding talent, but unfortunately, he had to undergo a back operation and then it's not very easy to come back after that," he said.

"He bowled against England, I thought he did a really good job. But, to sustain that we need to manage him well and build on his strength," he added.

The two-Test old Thakur was mighty impressive in the only longest format game he played in the away series against Australia.

— *PTI*



A file photo of India bowling coach Bharat Arun (left) with Shardul Thakur.

Dravid picked Aussie brains: Greg

Sydney, May 12: Rahul Dravid picked Australian brains to create a talent identification system better than Australia in India, the legendary Greg Chappell has said, lamenting the current lack of a similar structure in his own country that was "one of the best at developing young players."

"Chappell said that both India and England have

overtaken Australia as the best in recognising young talent and providing them a platform to succeed.

"India have got their act together and that's largely because Rahul Dravid has picked our brains, seen what we're doing and replicated it in India and with their much larger (population) base," told cricket.com.au.

Dravid is the Director of Cricket Operations at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru. He was the head coach of India A and India under-19 cricket teams between 2016 and 2019.

Chappell, one of the finest batsmen to have played the game, cautioned that talented Australian cricketers might find their careers at

crossroads because of the domestic structure.

"Historically, we've been one of the best at developing young players and keeping them in the system, but I think that's changed in the last couple of years. I'm seeing a bunch of young players with great potential who are in limbo. That's unacceptable. We cannot afford to lose one player." — *PTI*

BARCA TITLE HOPES HANG BY A THREAD

Madrid, May 12: Lionel Messi scored a brilliant volley but Barcelona's title hopes could be over, with a 3-3 draw away at Levante on Tuesday giving Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid the chance to pull away at the top of La Liga.

Another slip could prove decisive given Atletico will move four points clear of Barca with two games left if they can win away at Real Sociedad on Wednesday. Real Madrid will edge two points ahead of Ronald Koeman's side if they win away on Thursday at Granada. There are certainly no guarantees in what has been a frenetic and thrilling title race in recent weeks, with all of Spain's four contenders stumbling down the final stretch. — *AFP*

UEFA BEGINS LEGAL BATTLE WITH REBELS

Lausanne, May 12: UEFA on Wednesday initiated disciplinary proceedings against Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus, the three clubs yet to renounce the aborted European Super League project.

European football's governing body has appointed disciplinary inspectors to conduct an investigation regarding a potential violation of UEFA rules by the clubs "in connection with the so-called 'Super League' project", it announced.

"Further information regarding this matter will be made available in due course."

UEFA last week said it would take "appropriate action" against the three clubs who still support the proposed Super League, a competition that would guarantee its founding members involvement every season, instead of having to qualify. — *AFP*



A file photo Saina Nehwal.

Saina, Srikanth to miss Games

New Delhi, May 12: Star Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth's chances of booking berths for Tokyo Olympics are all but over after the world body on Wednesday cancelled the last qualifying event in Singapore due to the coronavirus-related travel restrictions.

The tournament organisers Singapore Badminton Association (SBA) and Badminton World Federation (BWF) jointly agreed to cancel the Singapore Open scheduled for June 1-6.

The Singapore Open, a Super 500 event on the BWF World Tour, was the last tournament offering Race To Tokyo ranking points inside the Olympic qualifying window.

"In the interests of all players, tournament personnel and the local community's health and safety, the event has been cancelled. BWF can confirm the tournament will not be rescheduled," the BWF said in a statement.

"All attempts were made by the organisers and BWF to provide a safe tournament environment for all participants. However, rising Covid-19 cases globally led to complex challenges in managing inbound travel."

The BWF said it will

The Singapore Open, a Super 500 event on the BWF World Tour, was the last tournament offering Race To Tokyo ranking points inside the Olympic qualifying window.

issue a further statement on Tokyo Olympics qualifying at a later date.

The chances of London Olympics bronze-medallist Saina and Srikanth qualifying for the Olympics had hinged on the Singapore Open after the Malaysian Open (May 25 to 30) was postponed on May 7.

After the postponement of the Malaysian Open, Badminton Association of India (BAI) had reached out to the world body, seeking clarity on the qualification scenario for its shuttlers. With Singapore suspending all flights from Covid-ravaged India, it was always going to be a difficult task for the Indian players, to travel to the country for the last qualifier.

Indian shuttlers who have already made the cut for the Olympics include PV Sindhu, B Sai Praneeth and the men's doubles pairing of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy.

— *PTI*

OLYMPICS CANCELLATION DEMANDS GROW LOUDER

Tokyo, May 12: A full-page newspaper ad says Japanese will be "killed by politics" because the government is forcing them to endure the pandemic without vaccines. More than 300,000 people have signed a petition calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be canceled. And a swimming star has faced pressure to drop out of the games. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, meanwhile, has caused anger and confusion by repeatedly vowing to skeptical lawmakers that the Olympics will be safe, even as some hospitals struggle to find beds for the sick and dying and a state of emergency was extended on Wednesday to more places in Japan.

Public frustration has even targeted Japanese swimming star Rikako Ikee who tweeted recently that she has received messages that "pained her heart" by urging her to oppose the Olympics and not attend.

Meanwhile, Japan plans to vaccinate its Olympic athletes before the Games, a move that would place them ahead of the general population as the government faces pressure over a slow rollout.

— *AP*



A Manchester City fan celebrates his club's EPL triumph.

PROLIFICITY!

Manchester City win EPL title for third time in four seasons

London, May 12: Manchester City were crowned Premier League champions for the third time in four seasons after Manchester United crashed to a 2-1 defeat against Leicester on Tuesday.

Pep Guardiola's side are 10 points clear of second placed United and have wrapped up the title with three games to spare.

In the midst of a gruelling run of three games in five days, United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer effectively handed the title to arch rivals City by picking a weakened team with 10 changes.

With many of City's players watching on television, Luke Thomas' 10th minute volley put Leicester ahead before Mason Greenwood equalised five minutes later.

Agalr Soyuncu's towering header in the 66th minute ensured City could pop the champagne corks for a title party that has seemed inevitable for months.

City were denied the chance to celebrate on Sunday when Chelsea won 2-1 at the Etihad



This has been a season and a Premier League title like no other. This was the hardest one. To come through this season, with all the restrictions and difficulties we've faced, and show the consistency we have is remarkable. It is relentless

— **PEP GUARDIOLA**
Manchester City manager

Stadium, while United kept them waiting with a victory at Aston Villa on Sunday.

But the delay was only temporary and City, who also won the League Cup in April, can finally savour a title triumph that is all the sweeter given the obstacles they have overcome this term.

"This has been a season and a Premier League title like no other. This was the hardest one," Guardiola said.

"We will always remember this season for the way we won. I am so proud to be the manager here and of this group of players."

"They are so special. To come through this season, with all the restrictions and difficulties we've faced, and show the

consistency we have is remarkable. It is relentless."

Treble-chasing City's seventh top-flight title could be the prelude to an even greater triumph on May 29 when they face Chelsea in their first ever Champions League final.

Drained by the late finish to last season and ill-prepared due to the subsequent lack of a proper pre-season, City were slow out of the blocks.

After a dismal 1-1 draw against lowly West Bromwich Albion in December, City had won just five of their opening 12 Premier League games. It was the worst start to a season of Guardiola's managerial career, prompting the Spaniard in the startling admission that he didn't

TOTAL TITLES (EPL ERA)

Manchester United	13
Chelsea	5
Manchester City	5
Arsenal	3
Blackburn Rovers	1
Leicester City	1
Liverpool	1

like his team. A coronavirus outbreak in the squad added to Guardiola's problems in December.

Having surrendered the title meekly to Liverpool the previous season, it seemed City were heading for a period of regression. But Guardiola masterminded such a superb recovery that City turned the title race into a procession, giving him three Premier League crowns to go with three La Liga trophies with Barcelona and three at Bayern Munich.

Following the West Brom game, City powered to 21 successive victories in all competitions, a record for an English top-flight club, including a 4-1 rout of Liverpool at Anfield. — *AFP*

TT loses a legend and brave fighter

NEHA SURANA
CHENNAI, MAY 12

The Indian table tennis fraternity on Wednesday expressed shock and sorrow at the demise of Arjuna awardee V. Chandrasekhar. Chandra, as he was fondly called, passed away due to Covid-19-related complications here on Wednesday. He was 63 and is survived by his wife and son.

A three-time national champion, Chandra was a stylish player with a huge fan following during his playing days. As a coach, Chandra played a key role in grooming champions such as S. Raman and G. Sathiyam. His academy in Chennai has produced many a quality player.

Sathiyam, who trained under Chandra for 14 years, said his demise felt like a personal loss. "My family was pretty close to him. I have a lot of memories which I will cherish forever. When I found out he was hospitalised, I kept calling to check on his health. He was fine for a few days but I think things went out of control in the past two days," said Sathiyam.

Veteran paddler Sharath Kamal said the sport had lost a legend. "It's a very



V. Chandrasekhar

tough loss for the fraternity. Had he continued playing, he would have brought more laurels to the country. But what happened to him, was really unfortunate," said Sharath.

Chandra's life turned upside down in 1984 after he underwent a botched knee surgery at a private hospital. His brain suffered damage, he lost control over his limbs and spent more than a month in a near-coma state. His valiant legal fight against the hospital made the headlines and he won the lawsuit later.

Raman hailed Chandra as a "fighter". "A multi-talented person before medical negligence reduced him to fight for survival. As a player he fought against the system. Remained a fighter till the very end, battling tooth and nail with Covid," said Raman, who coaches Sathiyam now.