

SHORT TAKES

Patients should not take Remdesivir at home: AIIMS docs

New Delhi: Covid-19 patients in home care should not take Remdesivir medication and they should get admitted at a hospital if the oxygen level drops below 94, AIIMS doctors advised on Saturday. The doctors were addressing a webinar on 'Medication and Care in Home Isolation' for Covid-19 patients.

"Remdesivir should never be taken at home. Positive attitude and regular exercise are a must for patients in home isolation," said Dr Neeraj Nishchal of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). Dr Manish, also from AIIMS, said if the oxygen level goes below 94, patients should be admitted, adding that while checking the oxygen level the age of the patient and other chronic diseases should be kept in mind. "If the RT-PCR test comes out to be negative, but symptoms are present, it is recommended to go for another test. Whether hospitalisation is required is to be decided based on the intensity of the disease," he said.

The doctors also advised that medications must be taken in the proper quantity and at the right time. "Knowing about the medicine is not enough. Patients should also know how and when they are to be taken, only then would it prove to be beneficial," said Dr Neeraj. The decision of home isolation for patients above 60 years and with comorbidities like hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, and chronic ailments related to kidneys and lungs should be taken only after consulting doctors, they said. The commonly observed symptoms among Covid-19 patients are fever, dry cough, tiredness, and loss of taste or smell.

— PTI

Delhi dist courts on vacation from tomorrow

New Delhi: In view of the "alarming rise" in Covid-19 infections and the toll it has taken on the health and lives of judicial officers and staff of subordinate judiciary, the Delhi High Court has preponed the vacation of district courts. The high court has decided that the district courts, except that of metropolitan magistrates, in Delhi will remain closed for summer vacation from May 17 to June 3, both days included, according to an office order issued by Registrar General Manoj Jain. It also said that the courts of metropolitan magistrates will remain closed for vacation from May 17 to May 27. According to the earlier schedule, the district courts' summer vacation was to commence from June 14 and end on June 30, both days included. The high court has also directed that the cases listed in the district courts between May 17 and June 3 shall be taken up from June 14 to June 30. It also said that the existing system of functioning via video conference shall continue till June 30 in the district courts. The high court's office order has also directed that the Principal District and Sessions Judge and Principal Judge (Family Court) shall ensure that bare minimum staff is called physically and that majority of them should mandatorily work from home till the situation becomes normal. — PTI

Man arrested for hoarding of oxygen cylinders

New Delhi: A 29-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly indulging in black marketing of oxygen cylinders in southwest Delhi's Dwarka area, police said on Saturday. Four oxygen cylinders have been seized from Mohit's possession, they said, adding that the car used in their transportation has also been seized. The police said Mohit, a resident of Dwarka, owns a mobile shop. The accused claimed that when one of his family members tested Covid-19 positive, he contacted someone who arranged oxygen cylinders. Thereafter, he too started indulging in hoarding and black marketing oxygen cylinders. After receiving information on Friday that Mohit was hoarding oxygen cylinders and would come to Sector 23 in Dwarka to sell them, a raid was conducted and he was apprehended, police said. — PTI

■ Oxygen bank will have 200 concentrators in each of the 11 districts: CM

Kejriwal launches O2 bank for home-isolated patients

New Delhi, May 15: Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, on Saturday, announced the launch of an oxygen concentrator bank for Covid patients requiring oxygen support in home isolation or those recuperating after discharge from hospital.

He said despite declining number of cases and positivity rate in the national capital, there would be no laxity in the fight against the virus.

Each district in Delhi will have a stock of 200 concentrators that will be rushed to the doorsteps of the patients requiring oxygen within two hours, Mr Kejriwal said at an online briefing.

Those requiring oxygen concentrators can call the helpline number 1031 and it will be provided free of cost after it is recommended by the doctors, he said.

"The oxygen bank will have 200 oxygen concentrators in each of the 11 districts for Covid patients under home isolation and for patients who have returned home after recovery from hospital but require oxygen support as recommended by the doctors," said the chief minister.

The Covid patients who are not enrolled under home isolation protocol of the Delhi government may call 1031 and avail the oxygen concentrator facility, he said.

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain, in a tweet, said that Covid patients under home isolation or those discharged from the hospital can avail the facility of the first oxygen concentrator bank in Delhi, after it is prescribed by the doctors.

Oxygen concentrators are portable devices that enrich oxygen content in the air breathed by a person.



The oxygen bank will have 200 oxygen concentrators in each of the 11 districts for Covid patients under home isolation and for patients who have returned home after recovery from hospital but require oxygen support as recommended by the doctors

— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi CM

According to the Delhi government's health bulletin on Saturday, there are 42,482 Covid patients under home isolation out of 66,295 active cases.

Mr Kejriwal said that often oxygen level drops in Covid patients and they can be saved from further deterioration if oxygen is given to them immediately.

"If patients under home isolation require oxygen, our team will ensure the oxygen concentrator reaches them within two hours. A technician will also accompany the team to explain to the family members how to use the device," he said.

Delhi government doctors will stay in touch with all those who are being given oxygen concentrators. If the need arises to send them to a hospital, it will be taken care of, he said.

— PTI

Delhi govt to procure 67L Sputnik V vaccines: CM

New Delhi, May 15: Amid vaccine shortage faced by Delhi, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said his government has written to Dr Reddy's Laboratories for supply of around 67 lakh doses of Russian Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik V.

Dr Reddy's Laboratories launched Sputnik V — the first foreign-made vaccine being used in the country — on Friday.

Kejriwal's announcement came after deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia earlier this week claimed that Covaxin manufacturer Bharat Biotech has refused to provide additional doses to the national capital. "We have asked for 67 lakh

doses each of Covishield and Covaxin and have written to Dr Reddy's who are dealers of Sputnik in India for nearly the same quantity," Kejriwal told reporters.

The response from Dr Reddy's is awaited, he said. "We have asked them (Dr Reddy's) how many doses and by what time they can provide. No response has come from their side as yet."

Kejriwal said experience of many countries shows that coronavirus infection can be reduced through mass vaccination. He expressed hope that the vaccination programme in the country will pick up pace with the increased availability of jabs. — PTI

Delhi records 6,430 Covid cases, 337 more deaths

New Delhi, May 15: Delhi recorded 6,430 new Covid-19 cases and 337 more fatalities on Saturday while the positivity rate dipped to 11.32 per cent, authorities said. The national capital had recorded 8,506 new cases on Friday and a positivity rate of 12.40 per cent.

The Delhi government has fixed the rates for hears services provided for deceased Covid-19 patients, according to an official order on Saturday. A committee was constituted under the chairmanship of the North Delhi Municipal Corporation commissioner, which recommended the rates for hears/mortuary services to be provided to deceased coronavirus patients, it said. On the recommenda-

tions of the committee, the rates have been fixed, the order by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority said. "The rates of hears van facility for deceased Covid-19 patients has been fixed at ₹1,300 per trip for initial 10 kilometres and ₹100 per kilometre thereafter," it said.

If the family members of the deceased patient desire to avail "dead body-wrapping" facility as per corona protocol, they would have to pay an additional ₹700. "In case the services of an additional person is required by the family of the deceased patients to handle the body/wrapping etc the charges would be ₹500 which includes charges of safety gear to be worn by the additional person," it said. — PTI

25 FIRs filed, 25 held over pasting anti-Modi posters

'Modiji humare bachon ki vaccine videsh kyu bhej diya', read posters

New Delhi, May 15: The Delhi Police has registered 25 FIRs and arrested as many people for allegedly pasting posters critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in connection with the vaccination drive against Covid-19, officials said on Saturday.

The posters reading "Modiji humare bachon ki vaccine videsh kyu bhej diya (PM why did you send vaccines of our children to foreign countries?)" were plastered in several parts of the city, they said.

On Thursday, police received information about the posters following which senior officers of the districts were alerted.

Based on further complaints, 25 FIRs were registered under sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by pub-

lic servant) of the Indian Penal Code and other relevant sections, including section 3 of the Prevention of Defacement of Property Act, across various districts of the Delhi Police, officials said.

A senior police officer said, "More FIRs are likely to be registered if further complaints are received. investigation is underway to ascertain on whose behalf these posters were being put up."

Three FIRs were registered in west and five people were arrested while another three FIRs were registered in outer Delhi and three more people were nabbed from there. In northwest part of the national capital, four FIRs were registered after which two were arrested, police said.

They said two FIRs were registered in the central part of the city and four people were arrested while two FIRs were registered in Rohini and another two FIRs in south were also registered.

— PTI

₹1,051cr announced for municipal staff salaries

New Delhi, May 15: The Delhi government on Saturday announced a fund of ₹1,051 crore for the three municipal corporations here to pay salaries of healthcare workers and other employees amid the ongoing second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, in an online briefing, said despite constrained circumstances due to the lockdown, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has taken this decision as those people who are helping fight the Covid-19 pandemic should get their salaries.

Doctors and other employees of the civic bodies are not getting their salaries due to "mismanagement and corruption in MCD (municipal corporations

of Delhi)", the Aam Aadmi Party leader alleged.

The South Delhi Municipal Corporation, East Delhi Municipal Corporation and North Delhi Municipal Corporation are all BJP-led civic bodies.

"The Delhi government has released ₹1,051 cr to the three municipal corporations in total so that they can pay salaries of their employees, amid this pandemic... the east corporation is to get ₹367 cr, north corporation about ₹432 cr and south corporation ₹251 cr," he said.

The minister asserted that civic authorities must ensure this fund is used for paying salaries of employees only and not "diverted for other usage".

— PTI

Centre launched for real-time Covid-19 data

New Delhi, May 15: Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday launched an integrated command and control centre (ICCC) to capture realtime pandemic management data.

The Covid care centres that were closed down after decline in the first wave will be reopened and strengthened further, Kejriwal told reporters. The new centre will help in furnishing vaccination details, availability of oxygen, beds and medicines in both private and government hospitals. The real-time data will be made available to the officers through an app, while the government will also consider to what extent access can also be provided to public," Kejriwal said. — PTI

Delhi's 'ambulance couple' goes where even relatives sometimes fear to tread



In the combo pictures, Himanshu and Twinkle Kalia ferry the ill to hospital, fetch medicines, arrange funerals and sometimes perform the last rites in New Delhi. — PTI

New Delhi, May 15: Profiles of humaneness in the time of Covid, Himanshu and Twinkle Kalia spend their days between helping the ill get a fighting chance at life and ensuring dignity in death for those who don't make it.

As the second Covid-19 wave ravages large parts of India — including the national capital that has seen thousands scramble for oxygen, hospital beds and crematorium spots — the Kalias, Delhi's 'ambulance couple', ferry the ill to hospital, fetch medicines, arrange funerals and sometimes step in to perform last rites too.

Cloaked in PPE suits, face shields and masks, the Kalias go where even close relatives fear to tread, spending their days tending to people suffering from Covid or those who have died of it and making sure their fleet of

In 2019, Twinkle was awarded the Nari Shakti Puruskar by President Ram Nath Kovind. Four years before that, in 2015, an organisation in Dubai honoured her as the First Woman Ambulance Driver". In 2016, Himanshu got the Ambulance Man' award in Malaysia.

12 ambulances are road ready to tackle any emergency. "We don't put it in records but in the second wave of coronavirus we have been helping almost 20-25 patients daily reach hospitals. We have performed cremations of 80 people who have died of COVID-19 and helped over 1,000 people in arranging for cremations," Himanshu told PTI.

It's all free of course, the 42-year-old hastened to add. A few days ago, they got a call from Mayur Vihar in east Delhi about a patient who had died in an autorickshaw on the way to hospital, said Twinkle. The Kalias, who live in Pratap Nagar in north Delhi, reached there quickly, got the body verified by a doctor and helped in the last rites.

"We got a call from Sandeep Mitra whose wife Madhura had collapsed in an autorickshaw while he was taking her to a hospital. He was not getting any help from his society or elsewhere. We reached there, got a doctor to the spot and performed her cremation at the Sarai Kale Khan crematorium," Twinkle said.

The 39-year-old is a cancer survivor and the couple has two daughters, Japji (13) and Riddhi (7). But personal commitments don't come in the way of their zeal to help others in these days of

India's most serious health crisis. The couple was doing charitable work even before the pandemic struck and has received several awards.

In 2019, Twinkle was awarded the Nari Shakti Puruskar by President Ram Nath Kovind. Four years before that, in 2015, an organisation in Dubai honoured her as the First Woman Ambulance Driver". In 2016, Himanshu got the Ambulance Man' award in Malaysia.

Hoping to ramp up their work of facilitating hospital admissions, blood donations and arranging funerals, Himanshu and Twinkle said they have expanded their team.

As millions of Indians battle infection and death, there are many more miles to go and hurdles to cross for this intrepid couple. — PTI

4 hawala operators under ED scanner for alleged Chinese links

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

Role of at least four Delhi-based alleged hawala operators is now under the scanner of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for their links with two Chinese nationals — Charlie Peng and Carter Lee. Both Chinese nationals were arrested by the ED in January in connection with a money laundering probe linked to an alleged hawala racket worth an estimated Rs 1,000 crore that involved shell or dubious firms.

Sources said, "Investigation by the central probe agency has revealed that Charlie Peng and Carter Lee were in constant touch with four Delhi-based hawala operators for sending money outside the country through illegal channels". The agency will

soon call them for questioning, they added.

The ED case against Peng stems from an Income Tax Department investigation of last year and an FIR filed by the Delhi Police special cell against him in 2018. Peng's name had cropped up last year in connection with the detention of two persons in Himachal Pradesh who were allegedly tracking Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama's movement on his direction. The Chinese nationals and some of his alleged associates, including bankers, had also been raided by the Income Tax Department last year.

Peng, sources had alleged, had a fake Indian passport. Tax officials had claimed that he created a web of sham companies to launder hawala funds to and from China in the past

two-three years. Sources had said his front or show-case business was import and export of medical and electronic goods and some other items. Peng was arrested by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police in September 2018 on charges of fraud and forgery and was allegedly running an illegal money changer. Both ED and I-T department, sources had said, are also probing allegations if Peng was "bribing" some Tibetans living in Delhi.

In a statement in August last year, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) had, without identifying the entities involved, stated that its searches were based on "credible inputs that a few Chinese individuals and their Indian associates were involved in money laundering and hawala transactions through a series of shell entities".

Delhi riots: No bail to former AAP councillor Tahir Hussain

New Delhi, May 15: A court here on Saturday dismissed the bail applications of former AAP councillor Tahir Hussain in connection with two Northeast Delhi riots cases, saying he used his muscle power and political clout to act as a kingpin in planning and instigating the communal conflagration.

The court said that Hussain did not use his hands and fists but rioters as "human weapons" who on his instigation could have killed anybody, and denied him relief citing the gravity of the offence and his influence in the locality. — PTI



Tahir Hussain

NBW issued against wrestler Sushil Kumar in stadium brawl case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

A Delhi court on Saturday issued 'Non-Bailable Warrant' (NBW) against Olympic medalist, Indian wrestler Sushil Kumar, who is absconding ever since his role surfaced in a brawl that led to the murder of a 23-year-old budding wrestler. Sources said that a reward is likely to be announced on information on his arrest.

"Police on Saturday moved an application before the court to issue NBW against Sushil Kumar and six others which was approved," said a senior police official.

Police said that after police served notice to Kumar to join the investigation, he switched off his phone and has been on the run since then. Police teams are conducting raids in neighbour-



Sushil Kumar

ing Haryana and at his friends' residences. Delhi Police on Friday had written a letter to Delhi Government stating that their official, Sushil Kumar, and his associate, Ajay Kumar, who is a physical education teacher, have been named by the victims and a departmental action should be taken. Kumar was appointed 'Officer on Special Duty' at Chhatrasal Stadium by the city government.

Sources said that Kumar, to avoid arrest, is changing his location quickly. It has been learnt that Sushil left for Haridwar and then Rishikesh after the incident.

SHORT TAKES

US greets prez of Tibetan govt in exile

New Delhi: In a move that is bound to anger China, the United States on Saturday congratulated Penpa Tsering who has been elected as the new president of the Central Tibetan Administration — popularly known as the Tibetan government-in-exile — based at Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh. Mr Tsering will succeed the current CTA President Lobsang Sangay. US state department spokesperson Ned Price tweeted, “The United States congratulates Penpa Tsering on his election as the next CTA ‘Sikyong’ (president in the Tibetan language). We look forward to working with him and the CTA to support the global Tibetan diaspora.” According to reports, thousands of mask-wearing Tibetan refugees in India and other countries had turned out to vote for the election of the president and members of the 17th Tibetan parliament-in-exile on April 11.

6-time Amritsar MP Bhatia dies at 100

Amritsar: Senior Congress leader and six-time MP from Amritsar Raghunandan Lal Bhatia passed away after a brief illness, his family members said on Saturday. He was 100. Raghunandan Bhatia died at a private hospital here on Friday night. He is survived by his son Ramesh Bhatia, daughter Saroj Munjal and younger brother J.L. Bhatia, they said. He was first elected to the Lok Sabha in 1972 from Amritsar and again re-elected from the same seat in the 1980, 1985, 1992, 1996 and 1999 elections. Raghunandan Bhatia had also served as the governor of Kerala and Bihar from 2004 to 2008 and 2008 to 2009, respectively. He had also served as the minister of state for external affairs in 1992. He held various positions in the party, including the post of Punjab unit president and general secretary. — PTI

2 policemen shot dead in Punjab

Ludhiana: Two policemen were shot dead in Punjab's Jagraon town, about 45 kilometres from here, an official said. They were shot dead by some unidentified car-borne persons when they were chasing a truck, said the police. Deputy superintendent of police G.S. Bains said assistant sub-inspector Bhagwan Singh died on the spot while critically injured ASI Dalwinder Singh succumbed to his injuries on the way to hospital. Both were posted in the state's criminal investigation agency (CIA) in Jagraon. The police said the assailants managed to escape after the incident, which took place near the new grain market. The police has sounded alert in Ludhiana and other adjoining districts. — PTI

FM TO GOLD GST COUNCIL MEET ON MAY 28

New Delhi: Amid a growing chorus over the GST Council meeting not being convened for over seven months, the Union finance ministry on Saturday announced that the next meeting of the panel that decides on taxes on goods and services will be held on May 28. After over a dozen Central and state levies such as excise duty, service tax and VAT were subsumed in a nationwide Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017, the council, headed by the finance minister and including representatives of all states and union territories, was mandated to meet every quarter to deliberate on issues at hand. The GST Council last met on October 5, 2020 to finalise contours of borrowings by states to meet shortfall in tax revenues. The meeting got extended and ended on October 12. Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman will chair the 43rd meeting of the GST Council on May 28, her office tweeted. “Smt @nsitharaman will chair the 43rd GST Council meeting via video conferencing at 11 AM in New Delhi on 28th May 2021. The meeting will be attended by MOS Shri @ianuragthakur besides Finance Ministers of States & UTs and Senior officers from Union government & states,” it said. Opposition party-ruled states have been complaining about not holding the GST Council meeting in recent weeks. — PTI

Torrential rains batter Kerala

Claim 2 lives, houses damaged, cracks develop in 200 metre-long Valiyathura sea bridge

Thiruvananthapuram, May 15: Torrential rains accompanied by fierce winds and high tidal waves wreaked havoc and claimed two lives in Kerala, as it lashed the state since Friday night, forcing the government to shift hundreds of families to relief camps, sources said Saturday. The southernmost district, Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod in the northern tip, witnessed widespread uprooting of trees, waterlogging and disruption of power supply since last night. The Central Water Commission issued flood warning to the state in the wake of rising water level in rivers like Manimala and Achankovil.

As the India meteorological department (IMD) sounded “red alert”, indicating the possibility of extremely heavy rainfall above 204 mm in 24 hours, in nine districts, the entire state was put on high vigil. Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the impact of Tauktae was expected to last the next 24 hours in the state. “Two persons drowned in Ernakulam and Kozhikode districts,” he said.

Meanwhile, to ensure the safety of people, night travel in high range Idukki district was completely banned from 7 pm by the district administration. As the water level in major rivers like Meenachil, Achankovil and Manimala was rising steadily, authorities cautioned people living on its banks to be vigilant.

The shutters of the Kallarkutty and Malankara dams in Idukki and Bhoothathankettu dam in Ernakulam were opened and that of the Maniyar in Pathanamthitta and Aruvikkara here were raised as a precautionary measure following high inflow in the catchment area.

Valiyathura pier, one of the oldest sea bridges in the state located here, developed a crack in the strong winds which hit the shores since last night. A portion of the over 200 metre-long structure, which offers a breathtaking view of the sea, seemed tilted to a side in the morning, locals said. — PTI



A man walks along a beach as gulls fly past during rough sea weather conditions, owing to the cyclone Tauktae in the Arabian Sea, in Kozhikode on Saturday, May 15, 2021. — PTI

Cyclone Tauktae: PM also reviews Covid readiness

Modi asks officials to take all steps for public's safety

New Delhi, May 15: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday reviewed the preparedness of states, Central ministries and agencies concerned to deal with the situation arising out of cyclone Tauktae and asked them to take every possible measure to ensure that people are safely evacuated.

He also called for ensuring maintenance of all essential services such as power, telecommunications, health and drinking and their immediate restoration in the event of damages caused to them, a statement said.

At the high-level meeting which was attended by home minister Amit Shah and top officials concerned, Mr Modi directed them to ensure special preparedness on Covid management in hospitals, vaccine cold chain and other medical facilities on power back up and storage of essential medicines and to plan for unhindered movement of oxygen tankers, the PMO said.

“He (PM) also directed



Fishermen anchored their boats at Versova beach in Mumbai on Saturday. — PTI

for 24x7 functioning of control rooms. He also said that special care needs to be taken to ensure that there is least possible disruption in oxygen supply from Jammagar. He also spoke about the need to involve the local community for timely sensitisation and relief measures,” it added.

The India meteorological department said at the meeting that the cyclone is expected to touch Gujarat coast between Porbandar and Naliya around May 18 afternoon or evening with a wind speed ranging up to 175 kmph.

It is likely to cause heavy rainfall in the coastal districts of Gujarat, including extremely heavy falls in Junagadh and Gir Somnath and heavy to very heavy rain at a few places in the districts of Saurashtra, Kutch and Diu, namely Gir Somnath, Diu, Junagadh, Porbandar, Devbhoomi Dwarka, Amreli, Rajkot, Jammagar.

The PMO noted that the Cabinet secretary is in continuous touch with the chief secretaries of all the coastal states and agencies concerned, and the home ministry is reviewing the situation round

5 teams of NDRF from Odisha fly to Gujarat

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANSWAR, MAY 15

Five teams of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) from Odisha on Saturday left for Gujarat to join the post-cyclone rescue and relief operation as the cyclone ‘Tauktae’ is very likely to hit Gujarat coast in the form of very severe cyclonic storm on Tuesday.

The cyclone is currently brewing in the Arabian Sea.

There are 125 personnel in each NDRF team. The team members will join the rescue activities in Rajkot in Gujarat.

“The cyclonic storm, ‘Tauktae’ formed over the Aarabian Sea is very likely to intensify further into a severe cyclonic storm by 5.30 pm today and very severe cyclonic storm by 11.30 am tomorrow,” the regional weather office said.

According to reports, more than 50 teams of the NDRF (National Disaster Response Force) have been kept ready for rescue and relief operations in sensitive States- Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra which are likely to bear the brunt of the cyclone.

Red and orange alerts have been sounded in various parts of Gujarat. Low-lying areas of the Islands of Lakshadweep are likely to get flooded, reports said.

Fishermen have been asked to avoid venturing into Arabian Sea till Tuesday as the sea condition will remain very rough during the time.

Govt's 'disastrous policy' will ensure third wave: Rahul

New Delhi, May 15: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday called for a national vaccine strategy and claimed that the government's “disastrous” inoculation policy will “ensure a devastating third wave” in the country.

He also accused the prime minister of making “mother Ganga cry” after bodies of suspected coronavirus victims were found floating in the river. “The Government of India's (GOI's) disastrous vaccine strategy will ensure a devastating third wave. It can't be repeated enough — India needs a proper vaccine strategy,” he said on Twitter.

Tagging media reports claiming that over 2,000 bodies have been found in 1140 km area along the Ganga, he alleged, “One who used to say ‘Ganga’ has called him has made Mother Ganga cry.”

Mr Gandhi and the Congress have been attacking the prime minister and his government over its vaccine strategy and handling of the pandemic.

In yet another tweet, Mr Gandhi appealed to people to stay safe after cyclone Tauktae warning was issued by the government in many states. He also appealed to Congress workers to provide all assistance to those in



Rahul Gandhi

Sena hails MP govt for aiding orphans

Mumbai: The Shiv Sena praised the BJP government in Madhya Pradesh for its decision to provide a monthly pension of ₹5,000 and free ration to children orphaned due to the Covid-19. The Sena's comments *Saamana* are viewed as a veiled swipe aimed at deputy CM Ajit Pawar in view of the state government's decision to allocate nearly ₹6 crore for appointing a private agency to handle his social media accounts.

need. “May 15 Cyclone Alert has been issued in Kerala, Maharashtra, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Karnataka. Cyclone Tauktae is already causing heavy rains in many areas. “I appeal to Congress workers to provide all possible assistance to those in need. Please stay safe,” he said on Twitter. — PTI

Govt, admin, public dropped guard after 1st wave: Bhagwat

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

Amidst India witnessing the second wave of Covid-19, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Saturday said the government, administration and public dropped their guard after the first wave, leading to the current situation and urged people to stay positive and proactive to fight the pandemic. Mr Bhagwat's remarks have come at a time when the Modi government has been facing severe criticism over its preparedness against the second wave of the global pandemic. Mr Bhagwat said with scientists cautioning about a third wave, the country needs to be better prepared for it.

Addressing a lecture series ‘Positivity Unlimited,’ the RSS chief said the country should stay united and work as a team in these testing times, instead of pointing fingers at each other. The lecture series is part of the RSS efforts to infuse positivity and confidence among people as the country faces the global pandemic.

“We are facing this situation because, whether it was the government, administration or public,



Mohan Bhagwat

everyone dropped their guard after the first wave despite indications from doctors,” said Mr Bhagwat while adding that there is talk of a third wave.

“But, we will not be scared. We shall stand like a rock.. We have to stay positive and take precautions to keep ourselves Covid negative in the present situation,” said the RSS chief.

Mr Bhagwat said this is not an appropriate time to point fingers and all should avoid making irrational remarks.

Citing England's situation in World War II when everything seemed going against it, he said a quote was written on the then prime minister Winston Churchill's desk which read, “There is no pessimism in this office. We are not interested in the possibilities of defeat. They don't exist”.

Amarinder slams Yogi over 'hate' tweet

Chandigarh, May 15: Chief minister Amarinder Singh Saturday criticised his Uttar Pradesh counterpart Yogi Adityanath over his “inflammatory” tweet on the declaration of Malerkotla as the 23rd district of Punjab, terming it an attempt to incite “communal hatred” in the peaceful state.

Contrasting the communal harmony in Punjab with the “divisiveness being promoted by the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh, Mr Singh asked the former to stay out of his state's affairs as

they are in much better shape than those in UP.

“Any distinction on the basis of belief and religion is contrary to the basic spirit of the Constitution of India. Presently, the formation of Malerkotla (Punjab) is a reflection of the divisive policy of the Congress,” Mr Adityanath had tweeted earlier in Hindi.

The UP CM's tweet came a day after Mr Singh announced the only Muslim majority town in Punjab to be the state's 23rd district on the occasion of Id.



Amarinder Singh

“What does he (Yogi) know of Punjab's ethos or the history of Malerkotla, whose relationship with Sikhism and its gurus was known to every Punjabi? And what does he understand of the Indian Constitution, which is being brazenly trampled

every day by his own government in UP? asked the Punjab chief minister, in a strong reaction to his UP counterpart's tweet.

Mocking the UP CM's comment, Mr Singh said given the Yogi government and the BJP's track record of spreading communal hate, such a remark was utterly ridiculous, apart from being totally unwarranted and uncalled for.

“The whole world knows of the communally divisive policies of the BJP, and particularly the Yogi Adityanath government in UP,” he said. — PTI

Man makes 'peepal' tree 2nd home to 'maintain' O2 level

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAY 15

Amid a serious oxygen crisis unfolding across the country, a 68-year-old man in a Madhya Pradesh village has chosen to make a ‘peepal’ tree his second home to maintain a healthy SpO2.

Rajendra Patidar of Rau Rangwasa village, nearly 40 km from Indore, has been spending around four hours in the day every day since the last couple of weeks to ensure that his blood oxygen level (SpO2) is maintained at 98-99.

The idea to live in the tree during day time to maintain a healthy blood oxygen level has hit upon him when he learnt about the death of scores of Covid-19 patients in different hospitals in the state due to lack of oxygen from visual and print media.

“Death of so many



Rajendra Patidar

Covid victims due to lack of oxygen has disturbed me. I thought that I should apply our traditional knowledge of staying close to a peepal tree to get sufficient oxygen to avoid such a crisis. Hence, I decided to spend at least four hours a day on the peepal tree,” he told this newspaper.

Mr Patidar, a farmer, sits on a plastic chair perched on the branches of the peepal tree at least for four hours every day and does breathing exercises. “I maintain SpO2 of 99,” he said.

MP sees sharp drop in fresh Covid cases

Bhopal, May 15: Madhya Pradesh has reported a sharp drop in new Covid cases and positivity rate in the last 24 hours, providing a ray of hope for the administration to tame the second wave of pandemic soon.

The state reported 7,571 fresh cases on Friday, the lowest single-day growth in positive cases in the last 18 days.

It had reported 13,254 fresh positive cases on April 27. Similarly, the positivity rate has also come down sharply from 18 per cent on May 5 to 11 per cent on May 14.

In fact, the positivity rate had climbed to 22 percent three weeks ago.

Five of 52 districts in the state have reported less than 50 fresh cases on Friday. The state has also recorded an impressive recovery rate of 86 per cent.

SpiceJet crew spend 21 hrs inside jet at Zagreb airport

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

Pilots flying a SpiceJet flight had no option but to spend 21 hours resting in the aircraft in the Croatian capital Zagreb after authorities there refused to allow them to get off the plane as they did not have a RTPCR negative certificate.

The airline blamed Croatian authorities for changing orders mid-air and insisting on RTPCR negative tests after initially saying it was not required.

The aircraft was apparently on a charter flight SG-9035 on May 11 on the New Delhi-Thbilisi (Georgia)-Zagreb (Croatia) sector with two sets of the cockpit crew. Aviation regulator DGCA has “admonished” the airline for the incident, a DGCA official said on condition of anonymity.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is notified for the information of rail passengers that the Railways have decided to cancel the following Special Trains keeping in view the cyclone warning in Coastal Gujarat Region, as per the following details:-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS	
Train No. & Name	Date of Cancellation
04321 Bareilly-Bhuj Express Special	16.05.2021 & 17.05.2021
04678 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-Hapa Express Special	17.05.2021
04680 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-Jamnagar Exp. Special	16.05.2021
09070 Varanasi Jn.-Okha Superfast Special	15.05.2021
09566 Dehradun-Okha Uttaranchal Express Special	16.05.2021
09270 Muzaffarpur Jn.-Porbandar Express Special	16.05.2021
04322 Bhuj-Bareilly Special	17.05.2021
04312 Bhuj-Bareilly Ala Hazrat Express Special	18.05.2021
04677 Hapa-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Express Special	18.05.2021
09565 Okha-Dehradun Uttaranchal Express Special	21.05.2021
04679 Jamnagar-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Exp. Special	19.05.2021

Note: For any kind of information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website: www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in

Visit RailMadad website:-
www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in
Download RailMadad app.
RailMadad Helpline No.: 139
Please join us on [on](#) [f](#) [t](#)



NORTHERN RAILWAY
Your Convenience - Our Concern
Visit us at : www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in

"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"

SHORT TAKES

Ex-IAS booked for spreading flase info

Unnao: A former IAS officer has been booked for spreading misinformation by tweeting a seven-year-old photograph of dead bodies floating in the Ganga in Unnao and claiming them to be recent ones spotted in the river in Ballia. The police said the 1982-batch, UP-cadre officer Surya Pratap Singh was booked on May 13 after he tweeted an Unnao picture of 2014 vintage, claiming that bodies being seen in them were spotted a day earlier in the Ganga in Ballia district. Earlier, officials said, a total of 52 bodies found floating in the Ganga in Ballia district on Tuesday were retrieved and were disposed of after proper last rites. In an FIR lodged at the Unnao Kotwali police station, Mr Singh has also been accused of claiming on social media that 67 bodies were buried on the Unnao riverbank using JCB and without last rites. — *PTI*

YSRC MP sent to 14-days custody

Amaravati: A designated CID court on Saturday night remanded arrested YSR Congress MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju to 14 days in judicial custody but directed that he be admitted to a hospital for treatment of injuries allegedly caused due to police torture. The CID court magistrate directed that the MP be kept in hospital till he was completely cured. On the other hand, hearing a Habeas Corpus petition, the Andhra Pradesh High Court constituted a medical board to examine Raju's injuries and submit a report by Sunday. Mr Raju submitted a four-page letter to the CID court magistrate in Guntur alleging that the sleuths beat him, causing severe injuries particularly to his legs. He submitted photographs showing his swollen and bruised feet as evidence of police torture. — *PTI*

Cong says Guj under-reporting Covid-19 deaths

■ **Continued from Page 1** of Gujarat has officially admitted to only 4,218 Covid-related deaths. Mr Chidambaram said the difference between the increase in the number of death certificates (65,805) and the official Covid-related deaths (4,218) in this period must be explained. It cannot be a "natural annual increase" or "due to other causes", he noted. The Gujarat government rejected the Congress' claim and media reports suggesting that deaths due to Covid-19 in Gujarat are being underreported as "baseless and differing from the reality". Rubbishing allegations that it was hiding the correct figure of Covid-19 related deaths in the state, the Gujarat government claimed the reports were "misleading" and have been published "with the mentality of creating panic among people."

The Gujarat government said one cannot claim more people died due to Covid-19 by simply comparing death certificates of two years, which is not accurate as there are many factors to be considered, including the fact that the state government decided to issue death certificates without late fee and affidavit till July 31, 2021.

Gujarat home minister Pradeepsinh Jadeja said in a statement that "baseless analysis" has been presented by the media reports by "twisting three aspects together, including time of the death in the family, registration for the death certification and issuing of the certificate... All these three things combined together to show death figures and analysis in the print media report is totally inappropriate. The data of the year 2020 has no accuracy at all in this report."

Mr Jadeja maintained that per the government data, 8,944 Covid-19 deaths have been reported in the state till Friday. He also said that death certificates are obtained online for various purposes by the family and one cannot ignore the possibility of more than one registration for a person sometimes and also delay in obtaining the certificate by the family.

The minister asserted that Gujarat has "to a large extent controlled the situation" with the help of doctors, health workers, cooperation of people and a collective approach.

Migrant exodus 2.0



People, including migrant workers, sit on the top of a bus to leave Kolkata after the West Bengal announced the complete lockdown from Sunday till May 30 to curb the surge in coronavirus cases. The state has been witnessing a surge in Covid cases since the first week of April, amid the eight-phase assembly elections and high-octane campaigning by political parties.

Black fungus a notified disease in Haryana: Vij

Chandigarh, May 15: Haryana health minister Anil Vij on Saturday said that black fungus has been declared a notified disease in the state. Now, if any cases of this disease are found, the doctors will have to report them to the concerned chief medical officer (CMO), Vij said in a statement here. The black fungus infection, also known as mucormycosis, is caused by a fungus called mucor. Black fungus has been declared a notified disease in Haryana, Vij said. Now, if a patient is diagnosed with black fungus in any government or private hospital of the state, it will have to be reported to the CMO of the concerned district so that appropriate steps can be taken to prevent the disease, he said.

Senior doctors of PGIMS, Rohtak will conduct meetings through videoconferencing with all the doctors who are treating coronavirus patients in the state and inform them about the treatment of black fungus. Recently, several states have flagged cases of Covid-triggered mucormycosis, especially among patients who are diabetic.

Earlier this month, Niti Aayog member (health) V.K. Paul had ruled out an outbreak of Covid-triggered mucormycosis and said that the situation was being monitored. — *PTI*



Anil Vij

Bengal governor

■ **Continued from Page 1** in a threatening mood. "Lakhs of people have fled the state and took shelter elsewhere. Did you have a look at these people? The Indian Constitution has its power... Wake up and stop the state supported, organised and condoned violence." Tweeting a video of the women, Mr Dhankhar wondered, "Unimaginable post poll violence @MamataOfficial. Terrified people with difficulty and fear @WBPolice and reprisals at hands of ruling party workers narrate indescribable woes of horror. Appeal CM to take

PM reviews situation

■ **Continued from Page 1** the hour, especially in states with high positivity rate in districts. He also said states should be encouraged to report Covid-19 numbers transparently, "without any pressure of high numbers showing adversely on their efforts", remarks that come amid reports that many states have been under-reporting their case and fatality tallies. Mr Modi also directed that a distribution plan for ensuring oxygen supply in rural areas should

Full lockdown for 14 days till May 30 in West Bengal

CM Mamata's brother dies due to Covid complications

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 15

West Bengal is finally entering another phase of lockdown from Sunday for the next two weeks till May 30 as the second wave of Covid-19 struck chief minister Mamata Banerjee's family. Ms Banerjee's brother Ashim Banerjee, who was undergoing treatment for Covid-19 at a hospital here, died on Saturday morning.

West Bengal reported 144 new deaths and 19,511 fresh cases of Covid-19 infection in the last 24 hours.

State chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay announced on Saturday that the latest curbs in view of the surge in Covid-19 cases would be enforced from 6 am on May 16 to 6 pm on May 30 during which all government offices and private establishments and educational institutions, including schools, colleges and universities, will remain shut.

During this period, all government and private



People stand in a queue to buy alcohol in Kolkata after West Bengal government on Saturday announced complete lockdown till May 30 due to surge in Covid cases.

offices, shopping complexes, malls, bars, sports complexes, pubs, cinema halls and beauty parlours will remain closed other than those relating to emergency and essential services, including health-care, law and order, courts, power, drinking water and media.

Among others, parks, zoos, sanctuaries, all intra-state local trains, Metro railway and intra-state bus services and inland water transport, movement of private vehicles, taxis and autorickshaws, all intra-state movement of trucks and goods carriers and all industries and manufacturing units will remain closed. All administrative, academic, entertainment, political, cultural and religious gatherings, groupings and congregations and all outdoor activities — between 9 pm to 5 am — including the movement of people and vehicles have been further strictly prohibited. Retail shops and supplies, bazaars and haats, which were allowed to be run in two phases a day earlier, will remain open between 7 and 10 am only.

Odisha docs save life of 15-day-old Covid +ve baby

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 15

Doctors in a private hospital in Bhubaneswar have done wonders as they saved the life of a 15-day-old girl who had almost slipped into a vegetative state after contracting Covid-19.

The girl named Gudia hailing from Madanpur in Odisha's Kalahandi district was fully cured of the disease and returned home with her parents on Friday, the hospital authorities said on Saturday.

According to reports, Gudia tested positive for

the virus just 15 days following her birth. Incidentally, all her family members also tested positive. The baby was immediately shifted to the private hospital after her health deteriorated further. Even her major organs were on the brink of failure and she was gradually slipping into a vegetative state.

However, the doctors succeeded in saving the life of the child after 20 days of treatment that included 10 days of ventilator support.

The treatment process was not that easy. The doctors had to administer both steroids and

Remdesivir to Gudia

Odisha DGP appeals to Maoists infected with Covid to surrender

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MALKANGIRI, MAY 15

Amid reports that several Maoist cadres have died of Covid-19 and many others are down with the disease, Odisha DGP Shri Abhay Saturday appealed to the Left-wing extremists to surrender before police for early treatment.

The DGP assured them of all necessary medical

assistance with empathy and compensation as per government protocols.

During his visit to various Maoists-affected regions in Malkangiri, Koraput and Nabarangpur districts, the top police officer said that the government would bear the cost of treatment of the infected rebels if they surrender at the earliest.

made these life-saving interventions with the

Anti-Israel protest in J&K, 20 detained

Top cop warns netizens against 'irresponsible remarks'

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MAY 15

The Jammu and Kashmir police has detained at least 20 people, including a graffiti artist, following protests were held in capital Srinagar and some other party of the predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley against Israel in the backdrop of its airstrikes and surface offensive in Gaza Strip.

As many people have over the past few days used social media platforms to vent their anger against Israel and show solidarity with the Palestinians, the J&K police on Saturday warned that "irresponsible social media comments that may result in actual violence on streets over the happenings in Palestine would invite action under the law".

Inspector-general of police (Kashmir range), Vijay Kumar, said, "J&K Police is keeping a very close watch on elements who are attempting to leverage the unfortunate situation in Palestine to disturb public peace and order in the Kashmir

Valley." He added, "All irresponsible social media comments that result in actual violence and breaking of law including Covid protocol will attract legal action." Mudasir Gul, the 32-year-old artist, who is among the detainees had on Friday climbed onto a steel platform close to an overhead water tank in Srinagar's Padshahi Bagh area to paint the face of a sobbing woman wearing Palestine's flag as the headscarf. He also wrote on the graffiti "We are Palestine".

He added, "All irresponsible social media comments that result in actual violence and breaking of law including Covid protocol will attract legal action." Mudasir Gul, the 32-year-old artist, who is among the detainees had on Friday climbed onto a steel platform close to an overhead water tank in Srinagar's Padshahi Bagh area to paint the face of a sobbing woman wearing Palestine's flag as the headscarf. He also wrote on the graffiti "We are Palestine" amid chanting of anti-Israel slogans by an impromptu crowd.

Some Angry youth put several Palestine flags atop the platform crisscrossing a passageway, the witnesses said. Local sources said that it was a group of youth of Padshahi Bagh who "feeling disturbed and highly passionate over the mayhem caused by the Israeli forces in Gaza Strip" had persuaded Gul to draw the graffiti. Later in the evening, the police visited Gul's home and, according to his elder brother Badrul-Islami forced him to deface the graffiti by spreading patches of black paint over it and then took him along. The police overnight also raided several homes in Padshahi Bagh and arrested several local youth who had reportedly participated in the anti-Israel protest.

The police early Saturday also detained a Muslim cleric Sarjan Barkati from southern Shopian district, two days after he had reportedly criticised Israeli's military "aggression" against Palestinians. However, the local police officials said that Barkati was not arrested for his anti-Israel outburst but for making a 'provocative statement' during his speech to the worshippers on Id day.

BODY OF KERALA WOMAN KILLED IN HAMAS STRIKE REACHES INDIA

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

The mortal remains of Soumya Santosh, 31, the Indian woman killed in the Hamas rocket attack reached Delhi from Israel en route Kerala on Saturday where it was received by minister of state for external affairs V. Muraliedharan in the capital.

"With a heavy heart, received the mortal remains of Ms. Soumya Santhosh in Delhi and paid my last respects. CDA of Israel embassy @RonyYedidia also joined. I empathise with

the pain and sufferings of the family of Ms. Soumya. More strength to them," the MoS tweeted.

Santosh was killed in a rocket attack in Israel carried out by militant group Hamas. The victim, who is survived by husband and nine-year-old son living in Kerala, was working as a domestic help at a house in the Israeli city of Ashkelon when a rocket fired by Hamas hit the house. Both MoS Muraliedharan and Israeli ambassador Ron Malka had earlier spoken to the family of the victim.

Maha Cong MP's health worsens after testing -ve

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MAY 15

Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP Rajiv Satav's health has deteriorated once again due to pneumonia and cytomegalovirus. A few days ago, his Covid test came negative. Revenue minister Balasaheb Thorat met to Mr Satav in Pune's Jehangir hospital on Saturday.

Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope told the reporters that Mr Satav's condition is delicate. Mr Tope has spoken with Jehangir Hospital's director to enquire about the MPs health. He would meet Mr Satav on Sunday.

"The doctors are trying their level best. He is on a ventilator and recovering from the disease but he is suffering from Cytomegalovirus," Mr Tope said. Mr Satav is being treated for Cytomegalovirus but he is suffering from additional infections also.

Mr Tope said that all the expert doctors are being called to treat Mr. Satav. Mr Satav, who is close to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, is a member of the AICC and considered a mainstay of his party in the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions.

Cairn eyes AI assets abroad

■ **Continued from Page 1**

set aside. Sources said the government has also engaged a counsel team which is ready to defend against any enforcement action.

While they maintained that neither the government nor any PSU has received any such notice, people aware of the Cairn lawsuit said the case has been brought only on Friday and notices in due course will come to the concerned authorities.

The sources said as and when any such notice is received, the government/concerned organization shall take all necessary steps to defend against "any such illegal enforcement action".

Cairn had first moved courts in the US, the UK, Canada, France, Singapore, the Netherlands and three other countries to register the December 2020 arbitration tribunal ruling that overturned the Indian government's ₹10,247 crore demand in back taxes and ordered New Delhi to return the value of shares it had sold, dividends seized and tax refunds withheld to recover the tax demand.

Subsequent to the courts in the US and other places giving recognition to the arbitration award, the firm has now begin bringing law-

suits to pierce the corporate veil between the Indian government and its owned companies such as in oil and gas, shipping, airline and banking sectors, to seize their overseas assets to recover the money awarded.

The lawsuit is similar to the one brought by Crystallex International Corp to attach property of Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A (PDVSA), the state-owned oil company of Venezuela, in Delaware couple of years back after the Latin American country failed to pay the firm \$1.2 billion that an arbitration tribunal had ordered to pay in lieu of the 2011 seizing gold deposits held and developed by the firm.

Indian assets across several jurisdictions have been identified that Cairn will be seeking to seize to enforce the award. "Cairn is taking the necessary legal steps to protect shareholders' interest in the absence of a resolution of the arbitral award," a company spokesperson said. "Cairn remains open to continuing constructive dialogue with the Government of India to arrive at a satisfactory outcome to this long-running issue."

The Scottish firm invested in the oil and gas sector in India in 1994 and a decade later it made a huge oil dis-

covery in Rajasthan. In 2006, it listed its Indian assets on the BSE. Five years after that the government passed a retroactive tax law and billed Cairn ₹10,247 crore plus interest and penalty for the reorganisation tied to the flotation. The state then expropriated and liquidated Cairn's remaining shares in the Indian entity, seized dividends and withheld tax refunds to recover a part of the demand.

Cairn challenged the move before an arbitration tribunal in The Hague, which in December awarded it \$1.2 billion (over ₹8,800 crore) plus costs and interest, which totals ₹1.725 million (₹12,600 crore) as of December 2020.

The company has been since then courting Indian government officials to get the money paid. Its officials have held three face to face meetings with the then revenue secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey in February and at least one video call with his successor Tarun Bajaj.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had last month reiterated that international arbitration ruling on India's sovereign right to taxation sets wrong precedent, but had said that the government is looking at how best it can sort out the issue. — *PTI*



THE ASIAN AGE

16 MAY 2021



Ranjona Banerji

Off the beaten track

Freedom, as understood by escapists and readers

When I was about 17, I got hooked to JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. I had read *The Hobbit* earlier. And once I moved from the adventures of Bilbo Baggins to Tolkien's massive trilogy, this became my go-to book to answer all my questions about life and its own questions. All right, that's a sweeping statement. Maybe not the only book, but one of my main "escape" books. From 17 to about 45, I read the series every six months. Curled up, shut out the outside world and delved into that dark, funny and magical world of good and evil but most of all, of human frailty.

Sometimes, it answered my questions. Sometimes it made me question my assumptions. Sometimes it just took me away from whatever was happening.

Children's literature, if you can call Tolkien that, has been a go-to from whenever I stopped being a child, if that ever happens either. I am far from alone in this, but we all have our own reasons. If Bruno Bettelheim points out that the "Uses of Enchantment" are integral to human growth, then writing for children is our first step to being us.

For the same reason, in my youth at least, the insistence by adults that Charles Dickens was essential reading for children destroyed for me and many others a fine Victorian novelist. *Oliver Twist* and *Little Nell* were children yes, and David Copperfield started off as one in the novel, but Dickens did not write for children. He wrote about children.

I quibble and digress.

Those fables and fairy tales told to children follow similar patterns: that adults can be evil, you have to look out for yourself. Thus, mythology is perfect reading for the young, once you get past censoring out the sex! Although my paternal grandmother thought the chicanery and wickedness did not provide good lessons for children! For a few generations of Indians, the sanitised pretty-picture version of Indian mythology in the Amar Chitra Katha comics replaced grandmothers and their tales.

From Robert Graves to Joseph Campbell, mythology has long been another escape from everyday reality to larger human reality. To understand why we are what we are, our old tales and fables and philosophies provide invaluable pointers. That behind the history of wars and victors is the human story of why and how our minds work and what we have done with them.

What is growing up then and do we ever do it? All those cartoons we watched in our childhood, Tom and Jerry for instance. Violence, wit and western classical music. Is that being cynical? But the lesson is always the same. The good, the bad, the tricky nature of life. You might run a mile in fright if you see a real-life mouse and lovingly cuddle your cat, but you really wanted the mouse to win! The wily coyote to fall off the cliff. The duck and rabbit to outwit the gun.

Obviously, I was grown up (well, open for debate!) by the time I reached J.K. Rowling and the Harry Potter series. I devoured them all the same and shared the wonder with my nephews. I saw the references to Tolkien and C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* and so many other similar writers before Rowling, but you had to appreciate her own story and her adherence to that age-old dictum: adults can be evil, children for themselves.

There are books and books and reasons and reasons for reading them. But I'm thinking about books for escape. For when reality is tough and you crave the thrill of familiar fears, hopes and solutions. One of my favourite sections of *Lord of the Rings* is when Aragorn demands the dead fulfil their promise, powerfully conjured in the Peter Jackson films. And then always, for the comfort of food, song and magic, the time that the hobbits spent with Tom Bombadil, sadly and unforgivably left out of the Jackson film series. Two favourite bits, dark and light but think a bit and you don't know which is which.

Last year, I read through the entire Georgette Heyer romance series to shut out the pandemic. The effects of this year's pandemic are so bad, that I have not been able to find that solace. *The Lord of the Rings* saw me through the Gujarat riots of 2002, and I have not read the series since. Instead, I have done the unthinkable and watched the films over and over again. I started with a six on ten, but the marking has improved since then.

It's magic that gets me through, though. The unreality of our reality. The wonders of nature, of anthropomorphic animals that tell us about ourselves in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, the humour, the sensitivity, is distilled into Rat's words, "This is the place of my song-dream", in the chapter, Piper at the Gates of Dawn. From Pink Floyd to the craving for divinity to mythology to human longing to Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines*, it's all in that chapter.

Somewhere trawling through the online world of books, I downloaded a book about Bengali fairy tales. I want to hear them in my Mother's voice but I cannot. So, I read about the boy whose soul was locked into a box and I wonder. I cannot escape our current reality because I do not want to, and I cannot do the other human thing of belief. But I can dream of running away. To where, and in which book, is what I can no longer answer.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjona.

Subhani



How govt's own credo of accountability got violated



Pavan Varma

Chanakya's View

Although the BJP likes to appropriate our ancient wisdoms, it is becoming increasingly clear that the government does not follow their injunctions.

"Oriental despotism" was the label that misinformed and biased historians often dismissively used for politics in ancient India. The truth is that political science was a sophisticated discipline then. The most important texts on this subject are, of course, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and the Shanti Parva passage in the *Mahabharata*. Apart from these, there are important sections in the Ramayana, the Dharmashastras, Thiruvalluvar's *Thirukkural*, and later during the Gupta period, the *Nitisara* (Essence of Politics) of Kamandaka, and the *Nitivakyamrita* of the Jain scholar, Somadeva Suri. Kautilya mentions that there were at least four schools of political science that predated his work, and names as many as 13 authors prior to him that contributed to them.

Ancient political theory focuses extensively on the responsibilities of a ruler. Matsya Nyaya, where big fish eat the small at will, was a prescription for anarchy. The institution of kingship was essential to prevent this state of anarchy. The philosophical sanction for a ruler was thus quite akin to Locke's Social Contract, wherein people themselves, in their own self-interest, concur in one of them assuming the power of a ruler. In today's context, such a

ruler, elected democratically, is the Prime Minister.

All our ancient texts categorically state that the ruler is duty bound to work for the welfare of the people, and discuss the qualities needed for this purpose. The *Arthashastra* says: "The king's pious vow is readiness in action, his sacrifice, the discharge of his duty. In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness, in the welfare of his subjects, *yogakshema*, his welfare. The king's good is not that which pleases him, but that which pleases his subjects." The Shanti Parva admits of no double standards. "Let the king first discipline himself. Only then must he discipline his subordinates and subjects, for that is the proper order of discipline. The king who tries to discipline his subjects without first disciplining himself becomes an object of ridicule in not being able to see his own defects."

These explicit injunctions have been much too often breached before too. But, in the current context, we see just how flagrantly they were violated in the preparation for and handling of the pandemic's vicious second wave. The intention here is not to politicise a tragedy, but to understand the gulf between what the BJP professes to believe in, and what those in power actually do.

Firstly, it is clear that the PM did not discipline himself first while instructing his subjects to do so. There is little point in coining the slogan, *do gaz ki doori, mask hai zaroori*, when

this was the first rule thrown to the winds in the dozens of political rallies addressed by him.

True, other political parties were equally guilty. But there is an important difference. They were not the ruling party at the centre, nor did they coin this catchy slogan. According to the Mahabharata, the leader must serve by example, or else he will become an object of ridicule.

The permission given to hold the *shahi snans* in the Kumbh Mela is a classic example of doing what pleases oneself but is not for the good of the people. The sanction to such a "super-spreader" event, just because it catered to what the BJP perceives to be its vote bank, was decidedly against the interests of the vast number of Hindus, and Indians as a whole. Lakhs of people in such mask-less proximity made a mockery of the public posturing to the contrary of the leader.

We have also seen how "readiness in action" was missing. A spectacular lack of preparation in anticipation of the inevitability of a second wave was evident. There was a delay of eight months in inviting bids for oxygen plants after India declared the pandemic to be a disaster on March 14, 2020. And, out of the 162 oxygen plants planned for, only 33, as per the health ministry, have been installed. The

The current policy, where each state is independently floating global tenders, often from the same producer, is anarchic, impractical and a blatant abdication of responsibility by the Centre. Indeed, there is a verifiable attempt to pass the buck...

position of oxygen supply has somewhat improved now, but when the crisis was fully upon us, there was gross lack of coordination too in the distribution of available oxygen. The number of hospital beds and ventilators remained stagnant in the mistaken hubris that we have "conquered" the virus.

Our vaccine policy is in shambles. The Centre announced that those in the 18-44 age group could be vaccinated from May 1, even when they knew that vaccines are just not available for this purpose. Earlier, millions of vaccines were exported or gifted abroad, and no planned steps were taken to timely boost production or increase stocks. The current policy, where each state is independently floating global tenders, often from the same producer, is anarchic, impractical and a blatant abdication of responsibility by the Centre. Indeed, there is a verifiable attempt to pass the buck to the states when the responsibility in such matters is clearly that of the central government. Under the National Disaster Management Act (NDMA) 2005, the primary responsibility for "prevention of disaster, or the mitigation or preparedness and capacity building for dealing with threatening disaster situations", is that of the Centre.

Our ancient seers were repositories of much wisdom. The BJP swears by them, and invokes them with smug proprietorship, but the practices they adopt tell an entirely different story. Chanakya must be wondering how those of his descendants, who proudly — even exclusively — claim him as their own, have drifted so far away from his precepts.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

WHAT A FALL!

This is the story of the week. India's only double Olympic medallist and its most decorated wrestler Sushil Kumar has been absconding now for a little over a week, booked that he is for the murder of his compatriot Sagar Rana outside the Chhatrasal stadium. The charges include both murder and conspiracy. It is said that Rana had fallen into the company of gangsters but the dispute was one over petty property. But the events certainly add grist to theories about wrestling's close links with the world of crime in the badlands of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Priyanka Mathur
New Delhi

KEJRIWAL'S EXAMPLE

IT IS HEARTENING to see the Delhi chief minister looking at a far larger picture and thinking about children orphaned by Covid-19. This amidst his pressing concerns of battling the scourge in his territory. Leaders need to be sensitive and nurture an ethos of inclusiveness. The resources of the state will then follow. West Bengal is at the threshold of a third Covid wave and going under lockdown. Its governor, Jagdeep Dhankhar, still cannot see beyond the recent Assembly poll only to keep flogging a post-poll violence issue.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

EC'S FAULT

IT IS SHOCKING to know that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's younger brother Ashim Banerjee died due to Covid-19 on Saturday. He was undergoing treatment for Covid-19 at Medica Hospital in Kolkata for nearly one month after he tested positive for the virus. In the wake of rising coronavirus cases, the West Bengal government on Saturday extended the lockdown till May 30. With this, Ms Banerjee took a personal loss as a result of the Election Commission's decision to bow to the wishes of the Centre and hold an eight-phase legislative assembly election in the state.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

BRACE FOR CYCLONE

AS PER THE India Meteorological Department (IMD), the depression in the Arabian Sea is likely to intensify into a "very severe cyclonic storm" on May 17 and cross the Gujarat coast a day later. It had also said the weather condition has intensified into a deep depression, and it is very likely to further intensify into cyclonic storm, Tauktae. The cyclone has already triggered heavy rainfall in Kerala and is expected to extend to Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Red and orange alerts have been sounded in various parts. In these distress times, the heavy rains would add to the troubles of the people. The authorities need to take precautionary measures.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

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

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup

Damage control keeps ministers busy; will Diggi replace Ahmed?

Senior Congress leader Pramod Tiwari took his colleagues by surprise at the party's working committee meeting last week when he referred to Ahmed Patel's passing and suggested that someone be appointed to take his place. Mr Tiwari pointed out that as Congress president Sonia Gandhi's political secretary, Patel played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between her office and the party at large. Stating that this communication had broken down after Patel's death, Mr Tiwari requested that the Congress president fill this spot with the appointment of a senior party leader who has administrative experience and a good working relationship with party workers. This left everyone wondering if Mr Tiwari was pitching for former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijaya Singh.

At a time when the country is witnessing its worst health crisis, it would be expected that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet colleagues would have enough on their plate these days. And yet Union ministers are busy writing articles or getting well-

wishers to pen newspaper columns either attacking the Opposition or trying to burnish Mr Modi's image which has been severely dented by his government's poor handling of the pandemic. For instance, urban development minister Hardeep Puri obviously has plenty of time to respond extensively on Twitter to critics about the Centre's decision to continue with the Central Vista redevelopment project, which includes the construction of a palatial new home for the Prime Minister, during the pandemic. Mr Puri was beside himself with anger that "canards" were being spread about the PM's dream project though he was unable to explain the rush to declare the construction as an essential service at a time when people are battling for their lives due to lack of oxygen, hospital beds and medicine. Then, again a furious Mr Puri posted lengthy tweets in response to Congress leader Jairam Ramesh's post mocking the decision to use Mr Modi's photograph on vaccine certificates. Mr Puri's colleagues are similarly engaged but none has cared to empathise with those suffering or offered condolences to families who have lost

their loved ones.

Pragya Thakur, the controversial Lok Sabha MP from Bhopal, finally put in an appearance in the Madhya Pradesh capital last week after a gap of over two months. Ms Thakur ensured that her arrival was duly noted by the local media as photographers and reporters were assembled to witness and record the distribution of face masks and steamers to needy persons by her. She subsequently disappeared after the photo-op. Pragya Thakur has acquired a reputation for going missing on the pretext of undergoing medical treatment each time the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Madhya Pradesh government are in trouble. Thakur was nowhere to be seen during the first wave of the pandemic last year and it was no different this time which prompted a Congress leader to announce a reward for the "missing" MP. Her absence has been particularly glaring during the second surge of coronavirus infections as Bhopal has been among the worst affected cities in the state.

Superstar Amitabh Bachchan's donation of ₹2 crores to the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Managing Committee for a covid centre at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj has set the proverbial cat among the pigeons. With the DSGMC heading into elections, Bachchan's donation has become a hot-button issue with the committee's former presidents Paramjit Singh Sarna and Manjit Singh G.K. coming down heavily on the current head Manjinder Singh Sirsa for accepting money from the actor. According to them, Bachchan was closely associated with Rajiv Gandhi and was suspected of supporting the anti-Sikh riots which followed Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. Bachchan's money, they maintained, is tainted and should not have been accepted by the DSGMC. They demanded that Sirsa be removed immediately. Several other members of the Sikh community also joined this chorus with an eye on the DSGMC elections.

The plight of Bharatiya Janata Party legislators in Uttar Pradesh today is similar to that of their counterparts in Punjab some months ago. Like Punjab

MLAs and MPs, who went into hiding when faced with the wrath of agitating farmers, legislators belonging to the saffron party in UP are now at the receiving end as they are unable to respond to desperate requests from their constituents for hospital beds and oxygen. The health infrastructure in the state has proved to be woefully inadequate as the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic has ravaged both cities and the rural areas, taking a heavy toll on people's lives. Predictably, the BJP MLAs are a worried lot. The Assembly elections are due early next year and, if people's anger persists, they will have a tough time getting re-elected. Meanwhile, UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath's office is busy putting a gloss on the horror stories being reported on a daily basis, pointing to an article on the WHO website praising the state government's efforts in micro planning, house visits and concurrent monitoring of the coronavirus cases, ensuring that nobody missed access to health care services.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

SHORT TAKES

11 FROM SAME FAMILY DROWN IN PAKISTAN CANAL

Lahore, May 15: Eleven people, including seven children, of the same family drowned after their vehicle plunged into a canal in Pakistan's Punjab province, rescue authorities said.

The accident happened on Friday in Sheikhpura district, some 50 kms from Lahore, when the vehicle heading towards Khanqah Dogran from Qila Didar Singh skidded off the road and plunged into the canal.

After being informed of the accident, police and Rescue 1122 officials rushed to the accident spot and retrieved the bodies from the canal.

"Before the rescue divers reached there all 11 people – seven children, two women and as many men drowned and died," Rescue official Muhammad Farooq said.

He said the Rescue divers had recovered all bodies and handed them over to the families.

U.S. WOMAN: \$26M LOTTERY TICKET GOES DOWN DRAIN

Norwalk, Calif., May 15: The winner of a \$26 million California Lottery prize may have literally washed the chance of a fortune down the drain.

The winning SuperLotto Plus ticket for the Nov. 14 drawing was sold at an Arco AM/PM convenience store in the Los Angeles suburb of Norwalk. Thursday was the last day to redeem it.

Nobody did. Store employee Esperanza Hernandez told the Whittier Daily News that a woman came in Wednesday and told workers that she had put the ticket in her pants and it was destroyed in the laundry.

The store's manager told KTLA-TV that surveillance video showed the woman who bought the ticket, and she's known to store workers.

A copy of the surveillance video was turned over to California Lottery officials, the manager said.

The claim will be investigated, lottery spokeswoman Cathy Johnston said.

MASSACHUSETTS EX-MAYOR GUILTY OF CORRUPTION

Massachusetts, May 15: Former Massachusetts mayor first elected at the age of 23 by touting himself as a successful entrepreneur was convicted Friday of stealing money from investors in his start-up to bankroll his lavish lifestyle and soliciting bribes from marijuana vendors who wanted to operate in the struggling mill city.

Jasiel Correia was found guilty of extortion, fraud and filing false tax returns after 23 hours of jury deliberations over four days in a trial that highlighted Correia's swift rise and fall in Fall River, where he had dazzled voters at a young age with his promises to turn the city around.

Correia, now 29, was also acquitted on three counts, including accusations that he forced his chief of staff to give him half of her salary in order to keep her city job.

Correia pleaded innocence and claimed that the charges were politically motivated. He also told reporters that his "fight is not over" and predicted he would win on appeal.

CALIF. UNIVERSITY DROPS SAT SCORES FOR ADMISSION

San Francisco, May 15: The University of California won't consider SAT and ACT scores that are submitted with admission and scholarship applications under a settlement of a student lawsuit that was announced Friday.

The 10-campus system, which has more than 280,000 students statewide, decided not to continue fighting a judge's injunction issued last fall that barred it from considering the scores for admission even when they were submitted voluntarily, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Activists have long argued that standardized tests put minority and low-income students at a disadvantage. Critics say test questions often contain inherent bias that more privileged children are better equipped to answer. They also say wealthier students typically take expensive prep courses that help boost their scores, which many students can't afford.

That was the argument in a 2019 lawsuit filed against the UC system on behalf of some high school students and non-profit groups.

Vaccines 'less effective' against B.1.617.2

UK expert reiterates no evidence of increased severity of illness from the variant first identified in India

London, May 15: The vaccines being administered to protect against Covid-19 are almost certainly less effective against preventing the transmission of the B.1.617.2 variant first identified in India, a leading UK scientist who advises the country's vaccination programme said on Saturday.

Professor Anthony Harnden, from the University of Oxford who is the deputy chair of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), said it was important to approach the easing of lockdown in England with utmost caution as it remains unclear exactly how much more transmissible the variant detected in India is. But he reiterated that there is no evidence so far of increased severity of illness or that the particular mutation of the coronavirus evades the vaccine.

The vaccines may be less effective against mild disease but we don't think they're less effective against severe disease. But in combination with being less effective against mild disease, they're almost certainly less effective against transmission, Prof. Harnden told the BBC. We don't know how much more transmissible it is yet. All the evidence so far suggests there is no evidence of increased severity of illness or that it evades the vaccine. So, at the moment, on the basis of the evidence we are doing the right thing, coolly, calmly continuing with Monday, but keeping everything under review, he said, in reference to the next stage in the easing of lockdown that begins in England from Monday.

His comments follow UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Downing Street press conference on Friday evening. — PTI



Brazilian athletes, health workers and military officers pose for a photo with Covid-19 vaccination mascot named "Ze Gotinha," or Joseph Droplet, after the athletes got shots of the Pfizer vaccine at Urca military base in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Friday. — AP

Pandemic to be 'far more deadly' this year: WHO

Geneva, May 15: The World Health Organisation issued a grim warning on Friday that the second year of Covid-19 was set to be "far more deadly", as Japan extended a state of emergency amid growing calls for the Olympics to be scrapped.

"We're on track for the second year of this pandemic to be far more deadly than the first," said WHO director-general Te-

dro Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The mood also darkened in Japan where the Coronavirus state of emergency took in another three regions just 10 weeks before the Olympics, while campaigners submitted a petition with more than 350,000 signatures calling for the Games to be cancelled.

With Tokyo and other areas already under emer-

gency orders until the end of May, Hiroshima, Okayama and northern Hokkaido, which will host the Olympic marathon, will now join them. Japanese public opinion is firmly opposed to holding the Games this summer.

Swiss tennis great Roger Federer said Friday that "what the athletes need is a decision: is it happening or isn't it?" — AFP

TAIWAN FACES COVID-19 WORST OUTBREAK

Taipei, May 15: The island of Taiwan, which has had enviable success in containing Covid-19, imposed new restrictions in its capital city on Saturday as it battled its worst outbreak since the pandemic began.

Authorities raised the alert level for Taipei, the capital, and the surrounding area of New Taipei city. The level 3 alert, which remains in effect for two weeks, requires people to wear a mask outdoors and limits indoor gatherings to five people and outdoor gatherings to 10 people. — AP

GENERAL LEADING CANADA VACCINE DRIVE STEPS ASIDE

Montreal, May 15: The general in charge of coordinating Canada's Covid-19 vaccination campaign has left his post in the Public Health Agency as he is being investigated by the military, the Department of National Defence said Friday.

Formerly commander of the Nato mission in Iraq, Major-General Dany Fortin has left his public health assignment "pending the results of a military investigation". He was appointed last November by PM Justin Trudeau to coordinate the logistics of the largest vaccination campaign. — AFP

NYC Mayor to give aid to India UK eager for a big reopening

New York, May 15: New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has announced plans to tap into the city's stockpile to send Covid-19 test kits, swabs, ventilators, pulse oximeters and other vital medical supplies to India to save lives and beat back the pandemic. His announcement came as India recorded 3,26,098 fresh Covid-19 cases that took the national tally to 2,43,72,907, while 3,890 new fatalities pushed the death toll to 2,66,207.

In a statement posted on the official website of the City of New York, he said that just over a year ago, New York City was the centre of the global pandemic. Now it is our turn to

step up and help India in its moment of crisis. We are sending vital medical equipment to India to send a clear message: Nobody is in the fight against Covid-19 alone. Together, we can save lives and beat back the pandemic, the mayor said. Kapil Longani, Counsel to the Mayor said: As a proud Indian immigrant with generations of family currently living in India, it breaks my heart to see the ongoing Covid-19 tragedy unfold. The Mayor is a leading citizen of the world, and on behalf of the Indian community, I offer my deepest gratitude for his decision to commit life-saving resources to India. — PTI

London, May 15: When London's Science Museum reopens next week, it will have some new artifacts: Empty vaccine vials, testing kits and other items collected during the pandemic, to be featured in a new Covid-19 display.

Britain isn't quite ready to consign the Coronavirus to a museum — the outbreak is far from over. But there is a definite feeling that the UK has turned a corner, and the mood in the country is upbeat.

"The end is in sight," one newspaper front page claimed. "Free at last," read another.

Thanks to an efficient vaccine rollout programme, Britain is finally

saying goodbye to months of tough lockdown restrictions.

Starting Monday, all restaurants and bars in England can reopen with some precautions in place, as can hotels, theatres and museums. And Britons will be able to hug friends and family again, with the easing of social distancing rules that have been in place since the pandemic began.

It's the biggest step yet to reopen the country following an easing of the crisis blamed for nearly 128,000 deaths, the highest reported Covid-19 toll in Europe.

Deaths in Britain have come down to single digits in recent days. — AP

US joins global effort against violent extremism

Washington, May 15: Two years after a white supremacist in New Zealand livestreamed the slaughter of 51 Muslim worshippers on Facebook, French President Emmanuel Macron says the internet continues to be used by terrorists as a weapon to propagate hate.

Macron and other leaders from tech giants and governments around the world — including the US for the first time — gathered virtually on Saturday to find better ways to stop extremist violence from spreading online, while also respecting freedom of expression.

It was part of a global effort started by Macron and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern after deadly attacks in their countries were streamed or shared on social networks.

The US government and four other countries joined the effort, known as the Christchurch Call, for the first time this year. It involves some 50 nations plus tech companies including Google,

Facebook, Twitter and Amazon, and is named for the New Zealand city where the slaughter at the two mosques took place.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a prerecorded video that authorities in his country alone had taken down more than 300,000 pieces of terrorist material from the internet over the past decade, which he described as a tsunami of hate. "Terrorist content is like a metastasising tumor within the internet, or series of tumors," Johnson said. "If we fail to excise it, it will inevitably spread into homes and high streets the world over."

Since its launch, governments and tech companies have cooperated in some cases in identifying violent extremist content online. Ardern, however, said more tangible progress is needed to stop it from proliferating.

The meeting was aimed at revitalizing coordination efforts, notably since President Joe Biden entered office. — AP

Brexit lawsuit: EU mulls 'next steps'

Brussels, May 15: The European Union said Saturday it was weighing its "next steps" after Britain formally responded to Brussels over the launch of legal proceedings alleging London broke the Brexit protocol covering Northern Ireland. "We can confirm that the United Kingdom replied on May 14 to the European Commission's

letter of formal notice, sent on 15 March," a European Commission spokesperson said.

"The Commission will now assess the contents of the letter before deciding on next steps." The EU began an "infringement procedure" in March after London unilaterally delayed until October the introduction of custom controls on goods arriving in

Northern Ireland from mainland Britain.

Brussels said this violates the protocol of the 2019 divorce pact that deals with Ireland, one of the most sensitive and fought over issues of Britain's break from bloc membership after 47 years. The two sides insist they are working hard to find a solution after the protocol helped generate a leader-

ship crisis and unrest in Northern Ireland.

The protocol is designed to prevent the emergence of a "hard border" between Northern Ireland, which remains part of the United Kingdom, and its EU neighbour, the Republic of Ireland.

The special arrangement shifts customs and regulatory checks to Northern Irish ports on goods arriv-

ing from mainland Britain, effectively keeping the UK region within the EU's customs orbit.

The dispute over the Northern Ireland protocol is one of multiple feuds souring post-Brexit ties between the EU and its former member — with France and Britain also recently squaring off over fishing rights around the Channels Islands. — AFP

Texas man was out on bond for a 2017 fatal shooting charge

Search for tiger on as 'owner' back in jail

Texas, May 15: While a Texas man who police allege is the owner of a tiger that frightened residents after it was seen briefly wandering around a Houston neighbourhood was ordered back behind bars on Friday, the animal's whereabouts remain a mystery.

An all-day court hearing Friday didn't reveal any new information on the tiger's whereabouts as Houston police say about 300 tips they've so far received haven't panned out. Police allege Victor Hugo Cuevas is the owner of the tiger, a 9-month old male named India, and he is facing a charge of evad-

ing arrest after authorities allege he fled from Houston officers who responded to a call about a dangerous animal on Sunday night.

After a court hearing in a separate case Cuevas, 26, is facing in neighbouring Fort Bend County, his attorney, Michael W. Elliott, reiterated his client doesn't own the tiger. Elliott said he only knew the first name of the owner, that he has been working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to find India and that Cuevas only wants for the animal to be safe.

"We want to find India. Somebody knows where India is at. Hopefully the

cat is still doing well," Elliott said. At a separate news conference in Houston, police Cmdr. Ron Borza said some of the tips officers have received on the tiger's possible location have been "a little bit crazy."

"We know the group of people that are involved in the exotic animal trade here in Houston ... We have visited all of them and no luck so far," Borza said. Investigators believe the tiger has likely been passed around between six and eight different locations in Houston in an effort to hide it but that the animal is probably still in the city, Borza said.

Carole Baskin, from the Netflix's docuseries "Tiger King," has offered a \$5,000 reward for the tiger's safe return.

At the time of his arrest on Monday for allegedly evading Houston police, Cuevas was already out on bond for a murder charge in a 2017 fatal shooting in Fort Bend County. Cuevas has maintained the shooting was self-defense, Elliott said.

Cuevas had been released on a separate bond for the evading arrest charge on Wednesday. Fort Bend County prosecutor Christopher Baugh asked Cuevas be held without a bond for the mur-

der charge, alleging the incident showed Cuevas "has a total disregard for the public safety."

State District Judge Frank J. Fraley did not grant the request, but instead revoked Cuevas' current \$125,000 bond and issued a new bond for \$300,000. It was the fifth time that Cuevas' bond had been revoked in the murder case.

Borza said that Cuevas and his attorney have not cooperated with Houston police in the search for the tiger but "maybe if he goes to jail he'd be more cooperative with us. We'll see how that goes." — AP

OUR CRITIC'S RATING

Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

Unbearably stupid and boring

Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai

CAST: Salman Khan, Disha Patani, Randeep Hooda, Jackie Shroff**DIRECTOR:** Prabhu Deva**RATING:** TT

Streaming on Zee5

SUPARNA SHARMA

Radhe is allegedly an official remake of the 2017 South Korean film, *The Outlaws*. This means that we could sit with both the films and play “spot the difference” till the end of time. But what’s the point?

No Salman Khan film before and since *Dabaang* (2010) and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015) has really had a point except to treat India’s legions of Salman-esque man-babies to how “bhai” shaves, dances, kicks and flexes.

In fact, Salman Khan films these days don’t even qualify as films, in the sense that they are not even moving images. They are simply a collage of snap-shots of him posing in high heels which his pants try to hide by splitting at the bottom and flaring out.

It’s one thing to suspend disbelief for the sake of a story, characters, a world conjured up. It’s quite another for us to have to also pretend that Salman Khan is tall, that he can move, and that he is a young man and not a 55-year-old first-in-line for the Covid vaccine.

The Salman Khan universe is always pivoted on imagined masculine physical power, prowess, speed and moral courage where he is the good guy up against bad guys. And this is the plot of *Radhe*.

The Outlaws was about a

group of cops. But here, as in most Salman films, no one else matters except him. That is because his Radhe has super-powers that even Superman, Spiderman, Shaktiman haven’t yet harnessed.

Radhe is no ordinary cop. He is an encounter specialist on suspension, and yet when the menace of drugs and suicides spreads through the schools and colleges of Mumbai, it is he that the commissioner of police turns to for help.

Because even when he is off duty, Radhe flies into the high-rise apartment of a bad guy who has raped and killed a girl. Why he couldn’t get there earlier and save the girl is not disclosed. But then, that’s not the point of this scene. This scene is meant to inspire *The Matrix* people.

Radhe, you see, is so fast that he’s not even a blur. People he attacks and even kills are not even aware that they have been attacked till they find themselves bleeding or dead. But since some people need to see and process how lethal he is, Radhe kills everyone and then proceeds to show the main bad guy a replay of how he did it.

Director Prabhu Deva’s *Radhe* is like that horrible “I’ve Mixed Everything That Was Leftover” dish which Mummyjis are given to cooking every few months.

The film can’t even come up with a single whistle-worthy dialogue and uses that old “*Ek baar jo main commitment karta hoon...*” line over and over.

Even the supporting characters are like zombies who have risen from Salman’s previous tacky films. As if, upon hearing that Salman is making another film, they crawled out of those films and arrived on the sets of *Radhe*. They do here what they did then.

Radhe’s official world is made up of minions who are devoted *bhaks* and his bosses are either corrupt or bumbling



fools. ACP Avinash Abhyankar (Jackie Shroff) is a moron who gets to wear a silk maroon dress and show-off his waxed legs.

The wider world is made up of a good, old Muslim man who is a mute, moral approver, a young kid who wants to catch the bad guys, and several women who either get raped, killed or beaten. Except for the one Salman is romantically inclined towards, of course.

Salman Khan could never really act and for a while now he has stopped moving as well. Throughout *Radhe*, Salman carries a fixed expression, as if he sent his wax statue to the shoot and everyone around had to pretend it was the real thing.

So directors, choreographers and fight masters have to make him stand in poses that can be joined together later, on the editor’s screen, to insinuate movement.

This means that we get several stills of him: The pinky-lipped pout, eyes crinkled to project smoldering, Salman standing with feet shoulder distance

apart and arms making round brackets around his torso. Sometimes, after beating the bad guys, he hooks his jacket to his index finger and flings it on his back. There are also several shots of him holding his belt buckle or hands in his pant pocket. All these call attention to his manhood which, unfortunately, is shy and whimpering when it comes to having any meaningful contact — romance, chemistry — with any actress.

Since Salman Khan went bonkers over a girl in the 2003 *Tere Naam*, he has been a reluctant suitor. So it’s the women who must prance around him like dizzy squirrels in short skirts. These women are shapely, much younger do-gooders who, when not simpering or dancing, are helping others. When they are dancing they take his hand and place it on their waist or present their booties for him to do a gentle tabla thing on it.

In *Radhe*, Disha Patani’s name is Diya. Since she is always in shorts and skirts, she gets told off about her clothes, Baddi Ammi style. But there is that mandatory bare torso scene of Salman for his fans to swoon

over.

In *Radhe*, Salman doesn’t just show us a six-pack torso (hello, CGI), but attention is also called to his ample man-boobs which twitch in a rather creepy way at the sight of Ms Diya.

The main bad guy in *Radhe* is Rana (Randeep Hooda) whose shoulder length hair is annoying.

Rana doesn’t seem to have or want a life. He stays in an abandoned mill and with his two men eats out of aluminium takeaway containers. Sometimes the sweet people who send him food also send him thermocol plates.

Rana doesn’t inspire much love for a life of crime. And just a video of his sad life would have been enough to deter future criminals. But since Salman Khan films are a sequence of dances and fights, he goes after Rana.

In *Radhe*, Salman doesn’t just beat up all the bad guys, he converts some into duffle bags and even sends a flying knife into a goon’s half-eaten Batata Vada and pins it to a wall.

At the end he jumps out of an SUV and flies into an airborne helicopter. It all ends with a dance where Salman barely moves and Disha Patani over-compensates with worrying pelvic thrusts.

What is more worrying, however, is that two very loved men of our film fraternity — Salman Khan and Prabhu Deva — think it is okay to peddle this imbecility as a film.

PS

A joke has been doing the rounds on WhatsApp about Radhe:

“You guys don’t know him, but I have a friend who has been on a wheelchair most of his life. And today he stood up to switch off the TV while watching *Radhe*.”

I just want to know at what point he stood up from the wheelchair. I want to frame that scene.



You wanted lots of blood? Mortal Kombat listened

MARK KENNEDY

The first death in the *Mortal Kombat* reboot occurs less than three minutes in, which is actually pretty coy. This is a movie, after all, based on a video game where the point is bloody violence.

A katana slices a man vertically in half, triggering a burst of controlled murders. By the 6-minute mark we’ve seen seven more men cut to pieces, including one who has a sword slammed directly down through the top of his skull.

The clever use of a gardening trowel — likely not what the agricultural manufacturer initially intended — knocks off four more and then we’re off on a bloody tear for the next 110 minutes through history, legend and comprehension.

It may come as no surprise that *Mortal Kombat* swaggers when it comes to hand-to-hand combat:

The effects are

impressive, from the

flips and slashes to

the sound of blood

gushing and the

clunk of metal

through bone.

But the acting is

laughable, the dialogue

may make you wish for your own

quick dispatch and the plot —

gobbledygook about strange

dragon markings, chosen ones

and other realms — only

makes sense if you’re high.

“I’ve spent years trying to

figure out what it all means,”

one character complains. Don’t

waste your time.

Cherished fighters from the

game are all here — Sonya

Blade, Kano, Sub-Zero, Liu Kang,

Kung Lao and Jax —

interwoven into the story of a

new character — Cole

Young. He’s a struggling mixed

martial arts fighter — really

a “human punching bag” —

who gets beat up for \$200 a

bout but has a super nice, well-

adjusted family.

But Cole (Lewis Tan) has a

mysterious dragon mark on

his chest — “It’s not a birth-

mark!” he’s told — and soon

learns what it means: “An

ancient prophecy foretells”

that a new group of fighting

champions will mass and

threaten order on Earthrealm,

also known as, you know,

Earth.

Simon McQuoid does a

decent job on his feature

directorial debut, giving us

a constantly staggered

hits of dopamine in the

form of controlled

violence. Screenwriters

Dave Callahan and Greg

Russo have a strong

tendency to lean into

ancient Asian mysticism

(“There is much to learn”)

and stilted medieval ones,

too: “The prophecy is upon

us!”

Australian actor Josh

Lawson as the psycho

Kano steals the movie

with enough twisted

humor to deserve his own

franchise. “Hey, David

Copperfield,” he says to

Liu Kang after an

impressive control of a

fireball. Many of his

lines seem gleefully

ad-libbed and he

stands out in a

forest of stilted

dialogue.

Anyway, Cole, Sonya

Blade and Kano must

train for a big

showdown and find

their inner fighting

mojo. “The fate of

Earthrealm is in our

hands,” says Liu Kang.

If they don’t

win over enemies

from out there (in

the, uh, Outworld),

the whole human

race will be

enslaved. This film

has equal parts

Karate Kid, *X-Men*,

Indiana Jones and

more than a

whiff of *Star Wars*.

It all culminates in

what seems to be a

massive multi-part

fight but then all

the combatants

realize that love

is stronger than

hate and put

down their

weapons and

hug it out. Ha!

No way, dude,

just kidding.

It’s a full-on

gore-fest of

fight porn.

Video game

adaptations

are famously

hit or miss,

and this

franchise has

been both. The

first is well

regarded

while its

sequel was

widely

panned. This

new one is

exactly

what the

doctor

ordered if

you’re a

fan. And

that’s

because

everyone

onscreen

needs a

doctor.

— AP

mortal kombat

CAST: Lewis Tan, Jessica McNamee, Josh Lawson, Joe Taslim, Mehcad Brooks**DIRECTOR:** Simon McQuoid**RATING:** ★★

Streaming on Netflix



Wonder Woman combats a huckster’s rise in ‘1984’

JAKE COYLE

If you’re going to make a movie about wish fulfillment, 1980s America is about as good as you can do for a setting outside the Arabian Desert.

“Wonder Woman 1984,” Patty Jenkins’ time-traveling sequel to 2017’s record-setting *Wonder Woman*, shuttles Gal Gadot’s warrior to the era of Regan economics, parachute pants and “Rio.” All have their cameos in *Wonder Woman 1984*, a superhero parable of greed and fanny packs with pointed references to today.

Two movies in, it’s clear that Jenkins and DC Comics have a thankfully different concept for Wonder Woman as a film franchise. Like its predecessor, *Wonder Woman 1984* is spirited, purposeful and blessedly lacking in grandiosity. And both films place Wonder Woman not under the burdensome heft of world building or even universe saving — or at least Gadot comes across as too resplendently regal to ever seem weighed down. She’s more a moral and muscular counterweight to ego-driven male misdirections, steering

Wonder woman

CAST: Gal Gadot, Chris Pine, Kristen Wiig, Pedro Pascal, Robin Wright, Connie Nielsen**DIRECTOR:** Patty Jenkins**RATING:** ★★★★★

Streaming on Amazon Prime Video

history through the repeating pitfalls of megalomaniacs intoxicated by power.

Last time, it was German and British military leaders under the sway of Ares, the god of war. This time, it’s a struggling entrepreneur/TV personality who, in stealing

an ancient gem the “dream stone” from the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. (where Gadot’s Diana now works), gains the power to grant wishes. Max Lord (Pedro Pascal) goes from deadbeat dad to despot, turning into a conman of mythical dimensions. He’s a diabolical genie without a bottle, or to paraphrase Robin Williams’ Aladdin, he’s got phenomenal cosmic powers sans the itty, bitty living space.

A snake oil salesman who placates cravings while stealing everything else is, you might say, a touch timely. *Wonder Woman 1984* plays up its Trump critique about as much as it does its ‘80s style. In one scene, Steve Trevor (Chris Pine), summoned from the grave by Diana’s own wish while holding the gem, giddily tries on all the period-appropriate clothing like Ken’s fashion show in *Toy Story 3*. Best in the first “Wonder Woman” were the screwball fish-out-of-water scenes of Diana experiencing London with Trevor; this time the roles are reversed, and the charm a little less.

What does Max’s rise have to do with Wonder Woman? A huckster is a kind of perfect foil to Diana, conceived from the start as a force for truth. (Her lasso of truth was modeled after the polygraph, an invention of Wonder Woman creator William Moulton Marston.) Jenkins opens the film with an Amazonian flashback to an obstacle course race on the island of Themyscira where a young Diana learns the value of truth. “No true hero is born from lies,” says Antiope

(Robin Wright).

The dream stone transforms another, too: Barbara Minerva, a meek archeologist played by Kristen Wiig. Awkward in heels and most everything else, she mutters that she’d like to be more like Diana when holding the stone, setting off a metamorphosis that playfully remakes Wiig’s typical screen presence, and creates another foe for Wonder Woman.

Just as in *Wonder Woman*, I think Jenkins has left some opportunities on the table. The first film, despite being set in 1918 during WWI, omitted any real interaction with the era’s then-flourishing women’s rights movement — a vital source of inspiration to Marston. Likewise, *Wonder Woman 1984* — more focused on “greed is good” decade and its contemporary resonances — doesn’t much pause to interrogate the 1980s’ gender imbalances. Like the last movie, *Wonder Woman 1984* becomes consumed by its (admittedly quite good) antagonist. It drags in the third act in a messy White House battle and a prolonged finale.

— AP

Passing on your password? Streaming services are past it

MAE ANDERSON

Many of us were taught to share as kids. Now streaming services ranging from Netflix to Amazon to Disney+ want us to stop.

That’s the new edict from the giants of streaming media, who are hoping to discourage the common practice of sharing account passwords without alienating subscribers who’ve grown accustomed to the hack.

Password sharing is estimated to cost streaming services several billion dollars a year in lost revenue. That’s a small problem now for an industry that earns about \$120 billion annually, but something it needs to address as spending on distinctive new programming skyrockets.

Amazon’s upcoming *Lord of the Rings* series will reportedly cost \$450 million for its first season alone — more than four

times the cost of a season of HBO’s *Game of Thrones*.

“Frankly the industry has been gravitating toward that. It’s a question of when, not if,” said CFRA analyst Tuna Amobi. “The landscape seems to be pretty set in terms of these new entrants, so it seems like a good time to get a much better handle on subscribers.”

It’s a tricky balance. The video companies have long offered legitimate ways for multiple people to use a service, by creating profiles or by offering tiers of service with different levels of screen sharing allowed. Stricter password sharing rules might spur more people to bite the bullet and pay full price for their own subscription. But a too-tough clampdown could also alienate users and drive them away.

In March some Netflix users began to get popups asking them to verify their account by entering a code

sent via email or text, but also gave them the choice of verifying “later.” Netflix did not say how many people were part of the test or if it was only in the U.S. or elsewhere.

“They’ll be taking a very cautious approach to it,” Amobi said. “Handled the wrong way, there’s always a downside to a move like this.”

The test comes at a crucial time for Netflix. Last year’s pandemic-fueled subscriber growth is slowing. It remains the streaming service to beat with more than 200 million subscribers globally. But a bevy of new competitors have emerged, including Disney+, which is cheaper and has quickly snapped up 100 million subscribers in less than two years.

When Disney+ launched in 2019, then CEO Bob Iger said the service was modeled on sharing.

“We’re setting up a serv-



SHORT TAKES

Torres treble helps
City pip Newcastle

Newcastle: Pep Guardiola suggested Ferran Torres could fill Sergio Agüero's boots as Manchester City's leading striker next season after the Spaniard scored a hat-trick in a 4-3 win over Newcastle on Friday.

With a third Premier League title in four years already sealed with three games to spare, Guardiola again took the chance to hand a number of his fringe players an opportunity to shine two weeks ahead of the Champions League final. Torres made the strongest case to be involved against Chelsea in Porto on May 29 with a trio of fine finishes to take his tally for his first season in England to 13 goals.

The 21-year-old, who also scored a hat-trick for Spain against Germany earlier this season, was bought by City in August off the back of his impressive performances for Valencia as a winger. — *AFP*

Sharma lies 53rd
at British Masters

Wishaw, UK: Indian golfer Shubhankar Sharma was lying tied 53rd after an action-packed closing with birdies on 15th and 18th besides two bogeys in between in the third round of the Betfred British Masters here. The only Indian to make the cut among four participants, Sharma carded 1-under 71 in the third round of the tournament hosted by Danny Willett. S.S.P. Chawrasia, Ajeetesh Sandhu and Gaganjeet Bhullar had missed the cut. England's Eddie Pepperell's bid to win the British Masters for a second time got a boost as he carried a one-stroke lead into the final round.

TVESA MAKES CUT

Tvesa Malik battled swirling winds and gusts of up to 35km per hour but still made the cut at the Investec South African Women's Open in Cape Town. — *PTI*

Pole potential from
Honda in France

Le Mans, France: The most dramatic Qualifying of the year produced a rollercoaster of emotion for the Repsol Honda Team as both Marc Marquez and Pol Espargaro challenged for pole position. Rain just before the start of Free Practice 3 meant the participants for Q2 were already set, Marc Marquez and Pol Espargaro holding their places in the top ten. The weather would dictate much of Saturday's action as sporadic showers left the Le Mans circuit damp throughout the day. The morning's wet conditions suited Marc Marquez well, able to show his speed without stressing his still-recovering body. Marquez's performance in Free Practice three saw him end the penultimate practice session on top, marking the first session he has led since Warm Up at the 2020 Spanish Grand Prix.

Mavs book NBA
playoff berth

Los Angeles: Luka Dončić's 11th triple-double of the season propelled the Dallas Mavericks to a 114-110 victory over the Toronto Raptors on Friday and into the NBA playoffs. Dončić scored 20 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and handed out 11 assists and the Mavs held off a late challenge from the short-handed Raptors, whose seven absentees included stars Kyle Lowry, Pascal Siakam and Fred VanVleet. Kristaps Porziņģis scored 21 points and Dorian Finney-Smith drained two late three-pointers for the Mavs, who saw a 10-point lead midway through the fourth quarter dwindle to two points with 4.9 seconds remaining. — *AFP*

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Tottenham Hotspur vs Wolverhampton Wanderers from 6.35 pm; West Bromwich Albion vs Liverpool from 9 pm; Everton vs Sheffield United from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian league: Fiorentina vs Napoli from 4 pm; Udinese vs Sampdoria from 6.30 pm; Parma vs Sassuolo from 9.30 pm; AC Milan vs Cagliari from 12.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. And Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C - 9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301.
Editor - T. Venkatram Reddy,
RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep.Rs. 20.00 per copy.

SMEAR GAME
Raman alleges campaign against him

New Delhi, May 15: Sacked as women's cricket team coach, W.V. Raman has alleged that a "smear campaign" against him has gained unwarranted traction and urged the BCCI president Sourav Ganguly to stop it.

In a mail that has also been marked to National Cricket Academy head Rahul Dravid, Raman wrote it will be "extremely disconcerting" if his candidature was rejected due to reasons other than "my incompetency as a coach".

In a surprising move, Raman was not retained as the head coach of the senior women's team by the Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) which picked Ramesh Powar for the top job.

It was under Raman that Indian team cherished a runner-up finish at the women's T20 World Cup last year.

"I presume you might have been told different views about my style of functioning and work ethic. Whether those views conveyed to the officials of the BCCI had any impact on my candidature is of no consequence now," Raman wrote in the letter which is in possession of PTI.

"What is important is that the smear campaign seems to have gained some unwarranted traction with some BCCI officials which needs to be halted permanently. I am prepared to give an explanation should you or any of the office bearers require it."

He said he was not used to "moaning and whining" but was bringing up the issues in case the



BCCI president wishes to do a course correction.

"If I were to be rejected due to my incompetency as a coach, there is no argument on a judgment call at all. But what will be extremely disconcerting is if my candidature was rejected due to any other reasons," said the former India opener.

"Especially if it was due to allegations from people who were more focussed on achieving their personal objectives at the expense of the overall hygiene and welfare of the Indian women's team and the pride of the country." — *PTI*

SURINDER AMARNATH APPLIES
FOR JUNIOR SELECTOR'S JOB

New Delhi, May 15: Former India batsman Surinder Amarnath has applied for the junior selector's position in the BCCI. The application deadline for the five vacancies ended last month and the BCCI will soon get going with the selection process.

Surinder, the son of the great Lala Amarnath, played 10 Tests and three ODIs for India.

"Our national team is doing well. It is mainly because of the robust structure in place that we keep producing good cricketers. I hope to unearth more of that talent as a junior selector if given the opportunity," the 72-year-old said.

Besides his rich experience of playing the game, Surinder also has substantial coaching experience. He spent three years in Morocco, developing the game from scratch and was also chief consultant for Goa Cricket Association. — *PTI*

BCCI SNUBBED
STRICKEN VEDA,
LAMBASTS LISA

New Delhi, May 15: Former Australian women's team captain Lisa Sthalekar has claimed that the BCCI neither checked on Veda Krishnamurthy after the twin tragedies in her family nor communicated to the bereaved India cricketer its decision to not consider her for the upcoming tour of England.

Earlier this month, the flamboyant middle-order India batter lost her elder sister Vatsala Shivakumar to Covid-19, two weeks after her mother succumbed to the dreaded virus.

On expected lines, she was not included in the Indian Test and ODI team for the tour of the United Kingdom, but ICC Hall of Famer Sthalekar was not convinced with the BCCI's handling of the whole episode.

"Whilst not selecting Veda for the upcoming series may be justified from their point of view, what angers me the most is that as a contracted player she has not received any communication from BCCI, just to even check how she is coping," Sthalekar said in a note on her Twitter handle.

She added, "A true association should deeply care about the players that play the game... Not focus solely on just the game at any cost. So disappointed." — *PTI*

BANCROFT SAYS OZ BOWLERS
AWARE OF BALL-TAMPERING

London, May 15: Cameron Bancroft, one of the three central figures in the infamous ball-tampering scandal, says it is "self explanatory" that apart from Steven Smith, David Warner and himself, Australian bowlers were also aware of the illegal tactics during the Newlands Test.

Bancroft was caught on camera using sandpaper on the ball in the third Test against South Africa in 2018, a scandal that had rocked Australian and world cricket.

In an interview with *The Guardian*, asked if some of the bowlers knew what he was doing, Bancroft replied: "Yeah, look, all I wanted to do was to be responsible and accountable for my own actions and part."

"Yeah, obviously what I did benefits bowlers and the awareness around that, probably, is self-explanatory," he added.

Asked again if his bowling colleagues had some knowledge of what was happening, he replied: "Uh yeah, look. I think, yeah, I think it's pretty probably



Cameron Bancroft

self-explanatory."

The Australian bowling attack in the Newlands Test had comprised pacers Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Marsh and spinner Nathan Lyon.

Bancroft said he wanted to be "liked" by his teammates and in turn lost control of his values.

"I invested too much to the point where I lost control of my values. What had become important to me was being liked, being well valued, feeling really important to my teammates, like I was contributing something by using sandpaper on a cricket ball." — *PTI*

TOKYO | OLYMPICS

Athletes need to
know more: Fed

Geneva, May 15: Roger Federer said on Friday that athletes need a firm decision on whether the Tokyo Olympics are going ahead, with the tennis star saying he was in two minds over the Games.

An Olympics singles gold medal is the only major honour missing from the Swiss great's collection — but the 39-year-old said he would understand if the Games were called off.

The pandemic-postponed 2020 Olympics are due to open on July 23.

"It's difficult," Federer told Switzerland's *Leman Bleu* television.

"We're not hearing much. That makes me think the Games will happen, even if I've heard that lots of people in Tokyo are against the Games."

Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency Friday, just 10 weeks before the Olympics, as campaigners submitted a petition with more than 350,000 signatures calling for the Games to be scrapped.

With Tokyo and other areas already under emergency orders until the end of May, three more regions — including northern Hokkaido, which will host the Olympic marathon — now join them.

● **An Olympics singles gold medal is the only major honour missing from Roger Federer's collection — but the 39-year-old said he would understand if the Games were called off.**

The widening emergency, aimed at combatting a fourth wave putting Japan's medical system under strain, comes with public opinion firmly opposed to holding the Games, fearing further infections. "Honestly I don't know what to think," said Federer.

"I would love to play in the Olympics, win a medal for Switzerland, that would make me so proud."

"But if that doesn't happen due to the situation, I would be the first to understand. But I think what the athletes need is a decision: is it happening or isn't it?"

"At the moment, we have the impression that it will. We know it's a fluid situation. And also you can also decide as an athlete if you want to go. If you feel there's a lot of resistance, maybe it's better not to go. I don't know." — *AFP*

Novak Djokovic celebrates his win on Saturday. — *AFP*DJOKOVIC RALLIES TO
BEAT TSITSIPAS IN QF

Rome, May 15: World number one Novak Djokovic survived a three-set battle with Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas over two days in their rain-delayed quarter-finals to advance to the Italian Open semi-finals on Saturday. The defending champion won through 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 after 3hr 16min on court in the clash which had been suspended from Friday because of rain in the Italian capital.

The Serb, a five-time Rome winner, had been trailing 6-4, 2-1 when the game was halted overnight.

Djokovic twice recovered from a break down in the final set to seal a berth in the final four for the eighth straight year on his second match point.

NADAL ENDS LOSING STREAK AGAINST ZVEREV

Rafael Nadal ended a run of three straight losses to Alexander Zverev with a convincing 6-3, 6-4 win over the German to reach the semifinals on Friday.

Zverev beat Nadal in straight sets at the same stage in Madrid a week ago and their latest meeting was also one-sided. Nadal will next face big-serving American Reilly Opelka, who reached his first Masters semifinals by edging Argentine qualifier Federico Delbonis 7-5, 7-6 (2). — *Agencies*

Games a win over
Covid, says Batra

New Delhi, May 15: Opposition to the Olympic Games will be there amidst a raging Covid-19 pandemic but conducting the biggest sporting spectacle in Tokyo will send out a strong message that the world is moving beyond the catastrophic situation, IOA President Narinder Batra said on Saturday.

The Tokyo Olympics, which was scheduled to be held last year, was postponed because of the pandemic.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President, who is also an International Olympic Committee (IOC) member, is hoping that the Games will be held as scheduled, from July 23.

"Life has to move on and conducting the Olympics will give a strong message that we have moved beyond the Covid-19 pandemic," Batra said.

"Opposition to the Games will always be there but it is now up to the organising

committee of Japan and IOC to decide.

"But as far as Indian athletes are concerned we are taking all necessary precautions and have been preparing to the best of our abilities to put up our best-ever performance in the Olympics" he added.

Batra's comment has come after critics from Japan on Friday submitted a petition, calling for the Games to be cancelled as the host nation fights a fourth wave of coronavirus infections.

The petition, signed by 3,50,000 people was submitted to the IOC and International Paralympic Committee (IPC) chiefs as well as Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike.

The IOA chief also assured that the travel ban imposed on India by Japan wouldn't affect country's participation in the Games. Japan on Thursday suspended entry of foreign nationals from 153 nations, including India. — *PTI*

England's IPL players may
miss Tests against Kiwis

London, May 15: England are unlikely to rush their Indian Premier League players straight from quarantine to the Test squad against New Zealand as they would be lacking red-ball practice, according to reports.

This will mean that the likes of Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow, Chris Woakes, Sam Curran and Moeen Ali, who are serving a mandatory 10-day quarantine after returning from the currently-suspended IPL, are likely to miss the two Tests against NZ, starting on June 2.

Their isolation period expires at the weekend, leaving little more than two weeks before the first Test at Lord's.

"The timeline is considered too tight for the (IPL) returning players, meaning calls up are expected for the likes of Ollie Robinson, Craig Overton and James Bracey," according to a report in *BBC Sport*.

"While fitness levels could be managed, the

ENGLAND COACH TO TAKE
BREAK AFTER NZ SERIES

London, May 15: England head coach Chris Silverwood will take a break after his team's two Tests against New Zealand, handing over the reins of the ODI side to his assistants for the home series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan, starting late June.

Having been part of England's tours of Sri Lanka and India earlier this year, Silverwood said he will take a break to refresh himself before returning at the helm for the marquee Test series against visiting Indians, starting in August.

In Silverwood's absence, his assistants Paul Collingwood and Graham Thorpe will take charge of the ODI team for one series each in the home matches against Sri Lanka and Pakistan from late June to mid-July. — *PTI*

lack of red-ball practice could be a concern — particularly with other options having spent several weeks competing in the County Championship," said another report in *The Independent*.

Head coach Chris Silverwood will on Tuesday convene his first selection meeting

since taking full control of the process from Ed Smith.

England men's cricket managing director Ashley Giles had earlier hinted that players who returned from the suspended IPL are unlikely to feature in the Test series against New Zealand. — *PTI*

Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

Test cricket offers a different kind of pressure and two Indian teams will soon be part of cricket's bio-bubble that will engulf their existence in the coming months. The Indian men's cricket team are to embark on their onward journey to England in the first week of June to play the first ever International Cricket Council (ICC) World Test Championship Final that is stated to be played in Southampton on June 18 against New Zealand.

They will be joined, in the Old Blighty, by their

women counterparts who will lock horns with England, two days earlier in a one-off Test match at Bristol on June 16. The preparations, for both tours are purely mental considering the vagaries of the dreaded pandemic whose second innings has left a sorry tale in India. While the 20 picked in the men's squad are going through the long distance motions prescribed by the Indian support squad even as they are getting out of the hangover caused by the truncated Indian Premier League (IPL), the members of the

women's squad have yet to be picked.

For the women who will be playing a Test match for their country a little after six years — they last played in Mysore against South Africa in November 2014 — this is an opportunity they're certainly looking forward to being a part of.

Considering that two of India's senior-most women cricketers, Mithali Raj and Jhulan Goswami, have played only 10 Test matches each since they made their Test debuts against England in 2002, the Bristol game assumes a lot of significance.

The biggest worry that the two squads (men and women) will have is the lack of proper match practice. For the Virat Kohli-led team, their Test series victory against Joe Root's Englishmen earlier this

year will give them a semblance of confidence, not to forget their recent forays while playing the IPL. The women's squad, however, will have loads of work to do considering their series losses (One Day and Twenty20) to South Africa a few months ago.

The series, held in Lucknow should be considered more as a warm up since the Indian eves didn't really get a chance to shake off the rust accumulated by the forced lockdown.

For the ladies, the England tour is a comeback for sorts as they will be playing three One Day and Twenty20 matches apart from the sole Test match at Bristol. The good news, and one so much needed for Indian women's cricket is that that Board of Control for

Cricket in India (BCCI) have given their go ahead for Indian women to participate in the much awaited 'The Hundred' in England. Teen sensation Shafali Varma, top of the T20 ranks, will join four of her teammates in the 100-ball gala this July.

Win or lose, this summer is going to be very special for Indian women cricketers.

The BCCI in its able judgement have shown that they are more than happy to promote the game amongst the ladies by giving them more international opportunities. Just like the men, women's cricket too will fulfill the potential it has shown with remarkable talent cropping up from nooks and corners of India.

For now, it's one step at a time!