

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 11 MAY 2021



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UK's Boris Johnson faces watchdog probe over luxury holiday in Caribbean

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Serena steps into arena after 3 mnths away, hints she could miss Olympics



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Ananya Panday living her dream, says she hopes to continue working harder

Vol. 28 No. 84 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00

WINDOWS



AC Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo eye the ball during the Italian Serie A match at the Juventus Stadium in Turin on Sunday.

— AFP

Shitalkuchi firing: 6 CISF personnel get CID summons

Kolkata: Six Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel, including two officers, have been summoned by the Criminal Investigation Department of the West Bengal police to appear physically at its headquarters in Kolkata on Tuesday morning to face questioning in the shooting which had left four villagers dead at a polling booth at Shitalkuchi in Coochbehar during the fourth phase of the Assembly polls in the state. Among the two CISF officers, one is a deputy commandant while another is a sub-inspector.

Full report on Page 3

Indian diplomat dies of Covid in Afghan

New Delhi: India's consul general in northern Afghanistan Vinesh Kumar Kalra has died of cardiac arrest there after contracting Covid-19. Kalra, who was posted at Mazar-e-Sharif, is the first Indian diplomat posted abroad to die of Covid, sources confirmed.

Petrol, diesel costlier, crosses ₹100 in Maha

New Delhi: Petrol and diesel prices hit record highs after rates were increased for the fifth time in a week, with petrol breaching the ₹100-a-litre mark in Maharashtra. Petrol price was hiked by 26 paise a litre and diesel by 33 paise per litre. — PTI

COUNTERPOINT



They are here for the second dose of the vaccine, sir!

WEATHER

Max: 39°C
Min: 26°C
RH: 28%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula
Amavasya till 12.29 am
Star: Bharani till 11.30 pm
Variyam: 7.15 am to 9.04 am
Durmuhurat: 8.22 am to 9.13 am; 11.05 pm to 11.50 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 7.02 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.32 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 5.17 AM
MOONSET TODAY 6.43 PM

Himanta vows 24/7 govt, urges Ulfa chief to end stir, join talks

Will move forward on NRC only after re-verification, says new CM after oath

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 10

Assam's new chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who took the oath and assumed office on Monday morning, straightaway called upon the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) commander-in-chief, Paresh Baruah, to abjure the path of violence and come to the table for talks. Saying the agenda of his government will be to maintain the state's prevailing peace and harmony and take it on the path of prosperity, Mr Sarma told reporters the people would get a proactive government which will work round the clock for them. "You will see a proactive government which will be there for you at 12 mid-



Himanta Biswa Sarma with wife Riniki before taking oath as the next chief minister of Assam during his swearing-in ceremony at Srimanta Sankaradev Kalakshetra in Guwahati on Monday.

— PTI

night, at 5 am and also at 2 pm. We will try and resolve all pending issues and seek the blessings of the people of Assam," he

said. He said his government's prime focus will be to fulfil electoral promises of one lakh jobs, waive off all microfinance loans

taken by women in the state and further strengthen the Arunodoi scheme, that provides ₹830 to eligible households every month. Mr Sarma said the first Cabinet meeting of his government will take place on Tuesday, and the prevailing Covid-19 situation will be on top of the agenda. "We will announce a planned roadmap to handle this Covid crisis. Daily cases in Assam have crossed 5,000. The situation in Assam may affect the other northeastern states as well," he said.

The chief minister pledged that all the promises made by the BJP and its allies in their election manifesto will be fulfilled. "We saw peace and development in the past

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Gov spars with TMC again, plans to visit riot-hit areas

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 10

In what appears to be his first confrontation with the third Trinamul Congress ministry in West Bengal, state governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Monday accused the Mamata Banerjee government of not arranging his visits to the post-poll violence-hit parts of the state. Mr Dhankhar vowed to go ahead with his planned visits on his own as Nandigram BJP MLA Suwendu Adhikari took a swipe at the chief over the post-poll violence after he became the new Leader of the Opposition.

At Raj Bhavan, the governor alleged: "We are in a very deep crisis in the state. Post-poll retributive violence, acts of arson and loot have graded to intimidation and extortion. This is very worrisome. I therefore decided to visit the affected parts of the state as part of my constitutional duty. I asked the state government to make arrangements. Unfortunately, the response has not been very responsive. I will go ahead with my schedule. This is the time for me to perform my constitutional duty to share the pain, agony and anguish of the suffering people, and will therefore make arrangements for such visits in the coming days."

He claimed: "The most alarming situation, the most concerning facet of this violence, is that in democracy the people are made to pay the price with their lives, rights and human rights because they chose to vote. If your vote becomes

■ Turn to Page 4



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee interacts with ministers during their swearing-in ceremony at Raj Bhavan in Kolkata on Monday.

— PTI

Amit Mitra, 2 others, in a first, take virtual oath

43 mantris sworn in, Didi allots portfolios

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 10

Forty-three Trinamul Congress leaders took their oath as ministers — 24 with Cabinet rank, 10 ministers of state (independent charge) and nine others as ministers of state in the third Mamata Banerjee government in West Bengal on Monday morning. The CM was present at the swearing-in ceremony.

Among them, three were sworn in at their residences in virtual mode by governor Jagdeep Dhankhar from the Raj Bhavan's Throne Room, marking a first due to Covid-19 pandemic. They are Amit Mitra, who becomes the state's finance minister for the third time though he did not contest the Assembly election, Dum Dum MLA Bratya Basu and Madhyamgram MLA

Rathin Ghosh. While Dr Mitra has not been keeping well, Mr Basu and Mr Ghosh had been infected by Covid-19 recently.

The ministerial portfolio allocations of the third TMC government also bears a massive change with Ms Banerjee, as CM, heading the maximum number of departments (six), including home and hill affairs and health.

In a significant move to boost women's empowerment, she also raised the number of women ministers to nine, including herself. Four of them are new faces, while the total number of new faces among the 43 is 16.

Ms Banerjee's Cabinet colleague Partha Chatterjee, who held education in the last term, has got three departments —

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■ All 77 BJP MLAs in West Bengal to have Central security cover: Page 4

CWC puts off prez election, Sonia riot act over setbacks

ASHHAR KHAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

The Congress Working Committee met on Monday and for the third time postponed its presidential elections citing the Covid-19 crisis facing the country. The Congress' poll body had said earlier voting for a party chief should take place on June 23. Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot proposed the idea of postponement, that was seconded by Ghulam Nabi Azad. Rahul Gandhi didn't attend Monday's meeting.

Insiders say Mrs Gandhi read the riot act to CWC members over the party's abysmal performance in the Assembly elections. She said the party should take note of the setbacks and put its house in order. "A small group will be set up to look at every aspect that caused the party's electoral reverses. We need to candidly understand why the Congress failed to dislodge incumbent governments in Kerala and Assam, and drew a complete blank in West Bengal," she said, adding: "These will yield uncomfortable lessons, but if we don't face up to reality, we will not draw the right lessons."

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Centre on vaccine policy: No need for judges to intervene

Govt defends differential pricing in SC

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

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► Covid mgmt: SC adjourns hearing to May 13 due to technical glitches

The Centre has justified differential Covid vaccine pricing, telling the Supreme Court that the three-slab "liberalised, market driven" rates for the Centre, states and private hospitals will incentivise demand, lead to higher production, competition and attract overseas investors. While it did not explain why the Centre was procuring the vaccines at one rate and states have to buy the same vaccines for double or more, it emphasised that citizens of all age groups will get free vaccination throughout the country.

The Centre also told the Supreme Court in no uncertain terms to stay away from the vaccination issue that squarely falls within the executive domain, adding that judicial intervention may have serious conse-

quences. Standing firm on the differential pricing of the two vaccines it has negotiated, the Centre told the top court in an affidavit submitted late on Sunday that differential pricing would "incentivised demand for the private vaccine manufacturers" and added that its vaccination policy — response and strategy — is completely driven by expert medical and scientific opinion, leaving little room for judicial interference.

"Any overzealous, though well-meaning judicial intervention may lead to unforeseen and unintended consequences in absence of any expert advice," the

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Bodies of suspected Covid-19 victims found floating in Ganga

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, MAY 10

Several dead bodies of suspected Covid-19 victims were found floating in the river Ganga near Chausa village in Buxar district of Bihar.

Sources from Buxar said that officials rushed to the spot after local people raised alarm on Monday. Local officials

believe that the dead bodies may have floated to Bihar's Buxar from neighboring Uttar Pradesh and belong to Covid patients. According to social activists, long queues and exorbitant cost of cremation may have compelled the relatives of victims to immerse the dead bodies into the river.

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3.6L corona cases, 3,754 die in 24 hrs across India

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

India on Monday recorded 3.6 lakh fresh cases of Covid-19 and 3,754 deaths. The numbers were less than the previous days, possibly due to fewer testing on Sunday. But Union health ministry officials said some places have started seeing a decline in new cases.

Delhi, which has been reporting very high daily cases for the past several weeks, recorded a positivity rate of less than 20 per cent (19.10%) while its new cases too came down to 12,651. Delhi had increased testing on Sunday than the previous day.

With oxygen supply from the Centre more or less stable, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said his government is increasing oxygen beds on a daily basis and the challenge is to upscale health infrastructure in the city to tackle the "third wave" as and when it comes.

"The scale at which we are creating infrastructure, we will be able to deal even if 30,000 daily cases are reported in the next wave," Mr Kejriwal said. Delhi in the second wave had the highest 28,000 cases in a day.

However, a bigger

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No nationwide lockdown, says home ministry

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

The MHA has ruled out any possibility of a nationwide lockdown saying only "local lockdown and containment" zones will be identified and imposed by respective state governments.

Sources said the issue of nationwide lockdown was discussed at the highest level but the Centre decided against it as it would have dealt a severe blow to the economy. Instead, it was decided to let state governments decide on the issue.

Sources said apart from the economic considerations it was also felt that Covid situation in every region or state was different from the others.

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Palestinians clash with Israeli security forces at the Al-Aqsa compound in Jerusalem's Old City on Monday, the latest in a series of confrontations that

is pushing Jerusalem to the brink of eruption. At least 305 Palestinians were hurt in the Al-Aqsa violence, including 228 who were hospitalised.

— AP

After Al-Aqsa clashes, Hamas fires rockets at Israel, tension flares up

Jerusalem, May 10: Hamas militants fired a large barrage of rockets into Israel on Monday, including one that set off air raid sirens as far away as Jerusalem, after hundreds of Palestinians were hurt in clashes with the Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites.

The attack drastically escalated what already are heightened tensions throughout the region following weeks of confrontations between the Israeli police and Palestinian protesters in Jerusalem that have threatened to

9 killed in Gaza: Israeli airstrike?

Gaza City: Gaza health officials say nine people have died in a blast in the northern Gaza Strip. The cause of the blast was not immediately known. It came as Gaza militants were firing rockets into Israel on Monday, and it was not clear if the people were hit by an errant rocket attack or an Israeli reprisal.

— AP

become a wider conflict. Shortly after the sirens

sounded, explosions could be heard in Jerusalem. One rocket fell on the western outskirts of Jerusalem, lightly damaging a home and causing a brushfire. The Israeli Army said there was an initial burst of seven rockets, one was intercepted.

Elsewhere in Gaza, an Israeli drone strike killed a Palestinian in the northern Gaza Strip, Hamas media reported. The Israeli Army said an Israeli civilian suffered mild injuries when a vehicle was struck by an anti-tank missile fired from Gaza.

— AP

SHORT TAKES

B.Tech student held for snatching woman's handbag

New Delhi: A 23-year-old B.Tech student dropped his mother at a hospital for Covid-19 vaccination, came outside and allegedly snatched a woman's bag as he wanted money to buy drugs, police said on Monday after arresting him. The accused has been identified as Nikhil Kumar Vats, a resident of Mandoli, they said. The incident took place on Saturday. Police received information that a woman's handbag containing ₹10,000, one gold ring and a pair of earrings has been snatched by a bike-borne man at GTB Enclave area, a senior official said. The police analysed the CCTV footage of the area and identified the registration number of the vehicle. The bike was found registered in the name of the accused's father who works in the electricity department, the officer said. "Thereafter, the police conducted a raid at the address of the registered owner and apprehended Vats on Saturday evening," Deputy commissioner of police R. Sathiyasundaram said. Interrogation revealed that the accused is a student of B Tech-III year. He is a drug addict and used to buy it through his associate Pankaj, police said. Police said Vats brought his mother to GTB hospital for Covid vaccination. He dropped her inside the hospital. Thereafter, he went to the Janta Flat area nearby and snatched the woman's handbag as he wanted money to buy drugs, police said. — PTI

3 held in Delhi for hoarding Remdesivir vials

New Delhi: Three people including, nursing assistants of two hospitals, have been arrested for allegedly indulging in black marketing of Remdesivir injections, police said on Monday. Anshul Aggarwal (22), a resident of Shahadra, was nabbed on May 8 while he was trying to sell the injection to a decoy customer sent by the police, officials said. Aggarwal used to help his father at his garment shop. His associates had tasked him to speak to customers over phone and get the deals fixed, police said, adding that he used to get ₹2,000 per deal. Police said the decoy customer spoke to Aggarwal and fixed the deal at ₹32,000 per injection on May 8. Aggarwal was nabbed when he came to deliver the injections, police said. The police also arrested two of his associates — Sunil Kumar and Rahul Paul — both residents of Nehru Nagar. While Kumar was working as a nursing assistant at a hospital in Delhi's Gulabi Bagh area, Rahul was a nursing assistant at a hospital in Ghaziabad, police said. The duo managed to get these injections from hospitals where the patient had either succumbed to Covid or did not care to report their theft, police officials said. A case has been registered under sections 420 (Cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property), 188 (Disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and 34 (Acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) of the Indian Penal Code and other relevant sections of Epidemic Act and Disaster Management Act, the police said. — PTI

Delhi gets 6 new Covid care centres

New Delhi, May 10: The national capital on Monday got at least six new Covid care centres and health facilities, including a 400-bed facility at the Gurudwara Rakab Ganj.

Set up by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), the Gurudwara Rakab Ganj facility is linked to the Delhi government's Lok Nayak Hospital.

DSGMC president Manjinder Singh Sirsa informed that the committee is taking care of the entire infrastructure, including medicines, with the support of doctors and nurses provided by the government. For setting up the facility, actor Amitabh Bachchan has donated ₹2 crore, he said.

On Monday, Delhi health

minister Satyendar Jain visited the facility at the Gurudwara. Jain said the government will extend all required support to the centre.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MPs Parvesh Sahib Singh and Ramesh Bidhuri also started similar facilities in their constituencies. South Delhi MP Bidhuri launched three Covid care centres with 125 beds.

Operated in association with Shiv Asra Trust (SAT), the centres are in Tughlaqabad village, Sangam Vihar and Mahipalpur village.

The centres in Tughlaqabad village and Mahipalpur village have 50 beds each while the one in Sangam Vihar has 25 beds.

"Patients with oxygen level between 86 to 94 will

Set up by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), the Gurudwara Rakab Ganj facility is linked to the Delhi government's Lok Nayak Hospital

be given free treatment at these centres. Doctors, nurses, safai (sanitation) workers will be available 24 hours besides oxygen concentrators and medicines," an official statement from the MP said.

Singh, who is the MP from West Delhi, started a Covid care centre at Ashok Nagar.

Opened in collaboration with his organisation Rashtriya Swabhimani, Radha Swami Satsang Beas and the local district administration, the centre has 100 oxygen beds to

start with and has the capacity to be expanded to 200 beds.

Each bed at the centre is equipped with oxygen concentrators. Patients will be provided free meals thrice a day, a statement from his office said.

Doctors and nurses will be available at the centre and medicines have been procured, it said.

The Delhi BJP organisational general secretary Siddharthan and former Delhi BJP president Vijender Gupta also launched a 20 bed Covid care centre in Rohini with oxygen support.

Recognised by the Delhi government, this centre has been set up by NGO Sampoorana, Bhagwan Mahavir Jain Samiti and Purushottam Bansal Foundation. — PTI

Delhi sounds alert on depleting vaccine stock

Vaccination centres for 18-44 age group will be shut if stocks are not replenished: Satyender Jain

319 deaths, over 12K cases in Delhi, positivity below 20%

New Delhi, May 10: Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Monday claimed the BJP government at the Centre has allowed only 3.5 lakh doses of coronavirus vaccine for the national capital in May even though the AAP dispensation had placed orders for 1.34 crore doses with the manufacturers.

The BJP is practising politics of lies and falsely accusing the Delhi government of ordering 5.5 lakh vaccine doses only, Mr Sisodia said.

He said that after the Centre decided in April that states can directly place orders with the vaccine manufacturers, the Arvind Kejriwal government ordered 1.34 crore doses for the people in the 18-44 age group. "Later, the Central government, in a letter, told us that we can have only around 3.5 lakh doses in May," he claimed.

Mr Sisodia lashed out at the BJP, saying its government was selling vaccines abroad when people were

dying in the country.

He charged the BJP government with holding Kumbh Mela and conducting Assembly polls amid the second wave of Covid-19 and alleged that it was more interested in selling vaccines abroad instead of

providing it to the state governments.

Health minister Satyendar Jain on Monday said Delhi has only one day's Covaxin stock left and its Covishield doses will last for just three to four days. "Covaxin doses

can last up to one day only, while Covishield doses can last up to three to four days," Mr. Jain told reporters after reviewing preparations at Guru Teg Bahadur Covid Care Centre at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib in central Delhi.

Meanwhile, AAP leader Atishi on Monday said the Delhi government will have to close the vaccination centres where Covaxin is being administered to beneficiaries in the 18-44 age group after Tuesday evening if its stocks are not replenished.

"After Tuesday evening, the Delhi government will have to start closing down the vaccination centres where Covaxin is being administered (to the 18-44 age group). We will also have to shut down Covishield inoculation centres after four days," she said.

Delhi vaccinated over 1.28 lakh people on Saturday. No vaccination took place on Sunday. — PTI



Youth Congress volunteers distribute food to homeless people outside Minto Road Kali Bari during the lockdown in New Delhi on Monday. — G.N. JHA

O2 hoarding case: Lookout notice issued against Kalra

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

A Delhi court on Monday refused to grant any interim relief to businessman Navneet Kalra, accused in the alleged black marketing of oxygen concentrators in the national capital, and said that the matter will be heard on Tuesday. Earlier in the day, Navneet Kalra had moved the court seeking anticipatory bail in connection with the seizure of oxygen concentrators from his restaurants by the Delhi Police. The matter will be heard by Delhi's Saket court on Tuesday.

The two restaurants, namely Khan Chacha and Town Hall in Delhi's upscale Khan Market area, are owned by Navneet Kalra, who is allegedly on run, while the manager and three staffers have been arrested so far.

The Delhi Police said on Monday a lookout notice has been issued against Navneet Kalra in connection with the alleged black marketing of oxygen concentrators. On

Wrestler Sushil Kumar still at large

New Delhi, May 10: The Delhi Police has issued a lookout notice against two-time Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler here, officials said on Monday.

A senior police officer said the notice was issued late Sunday evening. Police have already recorded the statements of the victims of the brawl. The clash took place over

vacating a flat in the Model Town area, they said.

Kumar, who has been named in the FIR in this case, is on the run, and efforts are on to trace him, a senior officer had said earlier, adding that raids were being conducted in the Delhi-NCR and neighbouring states to nab him. The victims alleged that Kumar was present at the spot when the clash took place, he said. — PTI

SC server down, hearing of cases deferred

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

On the first day of its summer vacation on Monday, two vacation benches of the Supreme Court had the blues of technical glitches with hearing on all the listed matters deferred as the top court server was down.

As Justice D.Y. Chandrachud heading a three judge bench and Justice Uday Umesh Lalit also heading a three judge bench appeared on computer screen, the court was informed that there were technical glitches interfering with the court proceedings.

The most crucial case of public importance of the day was the hearing on suo motu petition on the "distribution of essential supplies and services during pandemic", in which the Court had asked the Centre as to why a single price should not be fixed for the Covid vaccines and why should it not take responsibility of the centralised procurement of vaccine and decentralised distribution to the states.

Other judges on the bench headed by Justice Chandrachud included Justice L. Nageswara Rao and Justice C.S. Ravindra Bhat.

JUSTICE CHANDRACHUD said he could read about the affidavit from a report in a newspaper implying that a newspaper office had it even before it was delivered to him

In a brief interaction, Justice Chandrachud said that he got the government's 88-page affidavit late on Sunday night, while it reached the two other judges on the bench only at 10 am on Monday, an hour before the court was to be assembled.

Though the entire affidavit runs into 218 pages that includes annexure,

effectively the actual affidavit spelling out the government's stance on different issues runs into 88 pages.

In a dig at the Centre for supplying to him the lengthy affidavit late in the night, Justice Chandrachud said he could read about the affidavit from a report in a newspaper implying that a newspaper office had it even before it was delivered to him.

He was clearly expressing his displeasure over the affidavit reaching a newspaper office even before it could have reached them. — PTI

DELHI POLICE
SHANTI SEWA NYAYA

Unauthorized Adoption of a Child is Crime

Follow legal process to adopt a child

- COVID pandemic has made many children orphans. Some frauds are trying to use this for trafficking purposes.
- If a child loses both the parents to COVID, do not give away the child to any random person or shelter.
- If you come across any illegal or fraudulent offering for child adoption on social media, whatsapp or facebook etc. immediately inform Delhi Police.
- Remember, it is MANDATORY to follow Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA) guidelines and Child Welfare Committee (CWC) orders for child adoption.

For guidance and information, call:

Child Helpline 1098

Delhi Police 112 1291 011-23469900

Register online for child adoption @ cara.nic.in

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SHORT TAKES

Maha: 26.48L Covid patients treated free

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government on Friday told the Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court that 26.48 lakh patients have been treated free of cost in Covid Care Centres through various measures under the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Aarogya Yojana, a public health scheme for the underprivileged. The state government has filed the affidavit after the court, during an earlier hearing, told the state that Covid patients from weaker sections of the society should get all medical facilities to the "optimum" level and that it is "high time" the state strictly implement the MJPAJ, which is designed to offer free medical care to the underprivileged. A division bench of Justice Sanjay V. Gangapurwala and Justice Shrikant D. Kulkarni was hearing a PIL filed by Omprakash Shete through advocate A.B. Girase complaining about non-availability of benefits of the scheme declared by the state under various government Resolutions (GRs) issued in May 2020.

Odisha govt to float tender for vaccines

Bhubaneswar: With a view to address the problem of short supply of Covid vaccines, the Odisha government on Monday decided to float global tender to procure the live-saving injections to continue its inoculation programme. A proposal to this effect was cleared by the state cabinet chaired by chief minister Naveen Patnaik in the evening. State chief secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra informed the health and family welfare department has been entrusted with the responsibility to invite the global tenders. "The decision has been taken with an aim to procure vaccines for people of the state at the earliest," said the chief secretary. Besides, a technical committee will be formed to recommend steps to save human lives and restore livelihoods, the CS said.

750-bed coronavirus hospital in Varanasi

Lucknow: A 750-bed hospital set up by the DRDO for Covid patients on Banaras Hindu University's campus in Varanasi opened on Monday, an official statement said here. Currently, a 250-bed ICU facility is functional and the capacity of the Pandit Rajan Mishra Covid Hospital will gradually be expanded to 750 beds with anticipated patient inflow. All beds at this temporary facility set up by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) will be provided with oxygen as the hospital is well-equipped with 40 KL of oxygen stored in three tanks, the statement said. Medicines and food will be provided free of charge to all patients. There will be no direct walk-in admissions to the hospital and all admissions will be managed through referrals by the Integrates Command and Control Centre, Varanasi under the State administration. — PTI

COVID +VE WIFE NOT ADMITTED FOR 3 HRS: MLA

Firozabad: An Uttar Pradesh BJP MP has claimed that his coronavirus positive wife was not admitted to an Agra hospital for over three hours, with officials citing non-availability of a bed. Upset over this, Firozabad's Jasrana MLA Ramgopal Lodhi made a video over the issue and posted it on social media. His wife was given a bed at the hospital following the district magistrate's intervention, the MLA claimed. Lodhi, however, alleged that his wife was not given medicine and water on time. The MLA's video had surfaced on social media on May 8 when his wife was referred Agra's SN Medical College. "What would happen to a common man when an MLA's wife cannot be given proper care," Lodhi said in the video, alleging that his wife had to lie on the floor and was not admitted to the hospital for over three hours. Lodhi had too tested positive for coronavirus and had returned home after recovering from the infection on May 7. — PTI

Cong puts off polls for party prez in view of corona crisis

Party's election body recommends voting for its chief on June 23

ASHHAR KHAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) met on Monday and for the third time postponed its presidential elections citing the Covid-19 crisis prevailing in the country. The Congress' election body had recommended that voting for a party chief should take place on June 23 and the deadline for nominations could be June 7. But the CWC, the party's top decision-making body, said the elections should be deferred given the Covid-19 crisis.

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot proposed the idea of postponing the election that was seconded by Ghulam Nabi Azad. The Congress party has been waiting for a president for almost two years now. Rahul Gandhi, who had assumed the post in 2017, had resigned as the party president after Congress lost the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Since then, Sonia Gandhi has been the interim president. Insiders said that Mrs Gandhi read the riot act to the CWC members over the party's abysmal performance in the recently concluded Assembly elections. She



Rahul Gandhi

▶ **THE CONGRESS** party has been waiting for a president for almost two years now. Rahul Gandhi, who had assumed the post in 2017

▶ **RAJASTHAN CHIEF** minister Ashok Gehlot proposed the idea of postponing the election that was seconded by Ghulam Nabi Azad

said that the party should take note of the setbacks and put the house in order. "A small group will be set up to look at every aspect that caused the party's electoral reverses. We need to candidly understand as to why the Congress failed to dislodge incumbent governments in Kerala and Assam and drew a complete blank in West Bengal," Mrs Gandhi said.

Giving presentations on the Assembly elections in West Bengal, in-charge Jitin Prasada said that alliances at the state level should be done keeping the larger interest of the party in mind and not for a few local seats. He was opposed to the ISF alliance but the left parties prevailed. While Assam in-charge Jitendra Singh blamed factionalism and lack of a tall leader to take on the BJP juggernaut in the state, Kerala in-charge Tariq

Anwar admitted that the party underestimated the left and overestimated the anti-incumbency.

Speaking in the meeting, senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad mooted the idea of a select committee within the CWC to sew alliances and said it should not be left to the state units. He also added that he was opposed to the idea of an alliance with Badruddin Ajmal's AIUDF in Assam.

The CWC called the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic "a grave calamity and direct consequence of the Modi government's indifference, insensitivity, and incompetence."

Taking on the Centre over insufficient vaccine supply, the CWC resolution said the Modi government denies the hard facts. It also said that former PM Manmohan Singh had suggested ways to increase vaccine supplies

and coverage in a letter to PM Narendra Modi last month, but was given a reply by health minister Harsh Vardhan in the most undignified manner.

The CWC also slammed the Central Vista project, calling it a "personal vanity project of the Prime Minister" which is leading to criminal waste of money. "This is the height of callousness and insensitivity as also an insult to the people of the country," the CWC said.

Rahul Gandhi said the country needs breath and not the prime minister's residence. The redevelopment project of the Central Vista — the power corridor of the country — envisages a new triangular Parliament building, a common Central Secretariat, the revamping of the three-km-long Rajpath from the Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate and new residences for the PM and the vice president.

The government has brought the construction work for the ambitious project under the ambit of "essential services" to ensure smooth movement of labourers during the ongoing lockdown in Delhi.



Maharashtra protocol minister Aditya Thackeray pays a goodwill visit to the naval dockyard as INS Trikand carrying a shipment of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) cryogenic containers from Qatar's Hamad Port, as part of Samudra Setu II, arrives in Mumbai on Monday.

— PTI

HC to Maha: Hand over 12-ha plot for Covaxin unit

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MAY 10

The Bombay High Court has permitted Biovet Private Limited, an associate company of Bharat Biotech, to take possession of a fully operational and ready-to-use vaccine manufacturing plant on a 12-hectare plot in Pune to produce Covaxin. The HC directed the concerned state authorities to hand over peaceful possession of the ready-to-use vaccine manufacturing facility. The state had earlier refused to transfer the facility on the ground that the said land was reserved for forest.

The unit was being used by Intervet India Pvt Ltd, a multinational and subsidiary of Merck & Co, after the land was granted to it in 1973 to manufacture vaccine for Foot and Mouth Disease. Intervet is exiting business operations in India and entered into an agreement with Biovet to transfer the land and manufacturing unit to the latter.

When Biovet sought the government's approval for the transfer, the deputy conservator of forests (Pune division) pointed out that it was a reserved forest and the initial 1973 grant itself was bad.

Biovet then approached HC in the challenge and, in an interim application, also sought direction to the government to grant it licences and permissions to enable the manufacture of vaccine for Foot Mouth Disease as well as Covaxin.

MHA rules out nationwide lockdown

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

Home ministry has ruled out any possibility of a nationwide lockdown saying only "local lockdown and containment" zones will be identified and imposed by respective state governments.

Sources said the issue of nationwide lockdown was discussed at the highest level but govt decided against it as it would have dealt a severe blow to the economy. Instead, it was decided to let state governments decide on the issue.

Sources said apart

▶ **SOURCES SAID** apart from the economic considerations it was also felt that the corona situation in every region or State was different from the others.

from the economic considerations it was also felt that the corona situation in every region or State was different from the others. Thus, in areas where the positivity rate was less, there was no pointing in disrupting economic activity. In fact, officials added, even with one particular States there

was a lot of variation in Corona rate from one region to another.

Hence, officials added, after a lot of deliberations at the "highest levels in the Government" it was decided that this time during the second wave it would be best to leave the decision on lockdown or local containment zones to the States. Each State can decide on what kind of lockdown or restrictions they need to impose keeping in view their local ground situation.

Apart from local considerations, the Centre was also keen that eco-

omic activity should not be disrupted this time unlike the nationwide lockdown last year. At a time when economic activity was beginning to expedite again, a complete lockdown would have "wreaked havoc" with the economy affecting almost all sections of the society.

Home ministry officials also argued that last year the nationwide complete lockdown was necessitated as no one had any clue about the coronavirus, how it would react or spread and further there was no vaccine available also.

Sitalkuchi firing: 6 CISF troopers get CID notice

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 10

Six Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel, including two officers, have been summoned by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the West Bengal police to appear physically at its headquarters in Bhawani Bhavan in Kolkata on Tuesday morning to face questioning in the CISF shooting, which had left four villagers dead at a polling booth at Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar of North Bengal during the fourth phase of the Assembly election in the state.

Among the two CISF officers, one is a deputy commandant while another is a sub inspector. The rest are constables. The six CISF personnel were in charge of polling booth no. 126 in Sitalkuchi where the killings took place during a violent mob attack on April 10, according to CID sources.

Led by deputy inspector general Kalyan Banerjee, the special investigation team of the state detective agency recently sent the summons under Section 160 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to the six CISF personnel through their headquarters as per procedure after launching a probe on the orders of Trinamul Congress supreme and chief minister Mamata Banerjee despite a clean chit from the Election Commission to firing on the ground of "self-defence."

The six pleaded for their questioning on a virtual mode citing the Covid-19 pandemic, sources revealed.

Odisha CM clears ₹60L to feed stray dogs, cattle to feed stray dogs, cattle

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 10

Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik has sanctioned ₹60 lakh from chief minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) for feeding dogs and cattle roaming on deserted streets in urban areas during the ongoing 14-day lockdown.

"The lockdown is now underway across the state to control the Covid pandemic. Therefore, the stray dogs and cattle are deprived of getting food during the crisis. In view of it, chief minister Naveen Patnaik

has approved sanction of ₹60 lakh from his relief fund to 48 municipalities and 61 NACs," a release from chief minister's office (CMO) said on Monday.

The urban local bodies will provide food to stray animals through various voluntary organisations.

As per the order, while the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) can spend ₹20,000 per day towards stray animals, the daily expenditure will be ₹10,000 in Cuttack, Sambalpur, Rourkela and Barampur municipal corporations.

KIND ATTENTION RAIL PASSENGERS
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It is notified for the information of the general public that as per Goa State DC order no 07/DMC/ CORONA/2021/4571, the travelers bound to Goa State i.e Kulem, Sanverdam Church, Madgaon, Vasco Da Gama and other stations in Goa State should have RT-PCR NEGATIVE TEST report, test done within 72 hours of entry in Goa State or full (2 Doses) vaccination certificate.

The following categories of people are exempted from the above requirement.

- Residents of Goa State on production of proof of residence.
- Person entering in Goa for work on production of work ID/proof/letter from employer.
- Person entering in Goa for medical emergency, on production of proof or coming in ambulance.

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

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SEARCH FOR MISSING GIRL



General public is hereby informed that this girl
Name: Minakshi D/o Shri Chander Pal R/o 232, Patashe Wali Gali, Auchandi Road, Bawana, Delhi, **Age:** 13 Years, **Height:** 4'8", **Built:** Medium, **Face:** Long, **Complexion:** Fair, **Wearing:** Sky Blue Suit & Salwar and Sandals in Feet has been missing since 11.04.2021 at 06:00 PM. from the area of PS. Bawana, Delhi.

In this regard a FIR No. 188/21, Dated 13.04.2021, U/s 363 IPC has been registered at PS. Bawana, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this girl but no clue has come to light so far.

Any person having any information or clue about this girl kindly inform to the following.

E-Mail: cic@cbi.gov.in
Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>
Fax: 011-24368639
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641

SHO
PS. Bawana, Delhi
Ph. 011-27751949, 27756090
DP/997/ON/2021

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Train No. & Name	Alternative Stoppage	Arr.	Dep.
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05910 Lalgarh Jn. - Dibrugarh (Via Lucknow & Barabanki) Special Express	Bokajan Station	08:50	08:52
05933 New Tinsukia Jn. - Amritsar Special Express	Bokajan Station	13:41	13:43
05934 Amritsar - New Tinsukia Jn. Special Express	Bokajan Station	21:25	21:27
02503 Dibrugarh - New Delhi Special Express	Bokajan Station	00:04	00:06
	Diphu Station	01:17	01:19
02504 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Special Express	Diphu Station	22:03	22:05
	Bokajan Station	00:54	00:56
02423 Dibrugarh - New Delhi Special Express	Bokajan Station	01:38	01:40
	Diphu Station	02:39	02:41
02424 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Special Express	Diphu Station	00:07	00:09
	Bokajan Station	01:22	01:24

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

For any kind information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

C'garh: Positivity rate falls below 20

Raipur: The second wave of coronavirus pandemic in Chhattisgarh has shown a sign of ebbing with the positivity rate in the state maintaining the declining trend for the sixth day on Monday. The positivity rate which was 28 per cent on May four has dropped to 18 per cent on Monday. "This is the first time, the positivity rate in the state has dropped to below 20 per cent during the second wave which hit the state two months ago. This apart, the positive rate has maintained a declining trend for the last six days", an official spokesman of Chhattisgarh government said. On April 5, last year, the state recorded a positivity rate of 18 per cent. The positivity rate in Raipur district, the worst hit district in the state by pandemic, has also come down sharply from 31 per cent on May two to 15 per cent on May nine, the spokesman said.

Bodies in Yamuna trigger scare in UP

Lucknow: Local residents in Hamirpur district spotted five bodies floating in the Yamuna, creating a scare that these were of Covid patients, an apprehension dismissed by the authorities. The resident had spotted the bodies, including a half-burnt corpse, under a bridge on the Yamuna on May 6, according to an official. "After speaking to people and looking at the bodies, prima facie, it can be said these were not of Covid-19 patients as these were draped in a traditional manner and no body was wrapped as done in the case of Covid-19 victims," district magistrate Gyaneshwar Tripathi said in a statement. He said all bodies were cremated with full respect. The DM said local residents told police that people immerse bodies of their family members who die during the "Panchak Nakshatra". — PTI

1.2 cr gold granules found in instant drink

Chennai: The air Customs here claimed to have busted a new modus operandi vis-à-vis gold-smuggling, with officials recovering the yellow metal concealed as granules in instant drink mix. The seizure was made from the foreign post office (FPO) here based on intelligence. Accordingly, a postal parcel, which arrived from Dubai a few days ago, was intercepted at FPO on suspicion of containing gold. The parcel was declared to contain seeds and addressed to a city-based person, but when it was cut open, officials discovered four big containers of an instant drink mix that they found unusually heavy. A total of 2.5 kg of gold granules valued at ₹1.20 crore were recovered. — PTI

Himanta vows 24/7 govt

■ **Continued from Page 1** five years. I appeal to the remaining outlawed armed outfits in Assam to join the peace talks. I would make a special request to the leader of the United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (Ulfila) Paresh Baruah to shun violence and join talks for permanent peace in the state. In response to a question on the NRC, Mr Sarma said that as promised by the BJP in its manifesto, his government would seek re-verification of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The document that lists Indian citizens in Assam was released in 2019 with exclusion of the names of 1.9 million applicants. The BJP has termed it as faulty, saying while many genuine citizens got left out, those with dubious credentials managed to get enlisted. "Our view on the NRC is very clear. We want 20 per cent re-verification of the list in districts bordering Bangladesh and 10 per cent in other districts. If after that, the NRC is found to be correct, the government will accept it and take the process forward. But if the NRC is found faulty after re-verification, we would plead before the Supreme Court to view this issue critically," said the chief minister. On the granting of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to Ahoms, Koch-Rajbongshi, Moran, Motok, Sootias and tea-tribe, Mr Sarma said the state government would try and resolve the issue through talks and without affecting the rights of tribes already under the ST ambit.

■ Panic in Bihar: Locals say admin in denial over such cases

Bodies of suspected Covid victims dumped in Ganga

NAYEAR AZAD
with agency inputs
PATNA, MAY 10

Several dead bodies of suspected Covid-19 victims were found floating in river Ganga near Chausa village in Buxar district of Bihar.

Sources from Buxar said that officials rushed to the spot after local people raised alarm on Monday. Local officials believe that the dead bodies may have floated to Bihar's Buxar from neighboring Uttar Pradesh and belong to Covid patients. According to social activists here, "the long queue and exorbitant cost of cremation may have compelled the relatives of victims to immerse the dead bodies into the river".

Officials were informed about the incident by the local people and chowkidars. Reports also suggest that so far around 15 dead bodies have been recovered and none of the deceased belongs to the district.

"It is not yet confirmed whether the dead bodies belong to those who died due to Covid-19 infection. Uttar Pradesh is just across the river. It seems that the dead bodies found floating in the river could be three or four days old. We are trying to dispose them of properly," district administration said in a statement on Monday.

Some news channels claimed the number of bodies to be as high as 100, which the BDO dismissed as "highly exaggerated".

Later the video of dead bodies and stray dogs roaming around them went viral on social media which sparked outrage and panic in the area.

"The officials also believe that several dead bodies could be of those who may have died due to Covid infection. They have assured us to conduct an inquiry into the matter and we have also asked the officials to ensure that cremation is done properly," sources from Buxar said.

Many local residents, who spoke before cameras with their faces masked, claimed that the district administration was "in denial over many such unfortunate incidents involving residents of Buxar".

They alleged that those manning cremation ghats were charging a fortune whenever people reached there with the body of a near and dear one who died of the coronavirus.

"There is also a shortage of wood and other material required for cremation. Availability of these has



Health workers give a dose of Covid-19 vaccine to elderly at Sardar Patel Cricket Stadium in Ahmedabad on Monday. — PTI

MP steps up for 3rd wave; to set up kids, makeshift ICU beds

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAY 10

The Madhya Pradesh government has stepped up efforts to strengthen health infrastructure on war footing to tackle a possible third wave of coronavirus pandemic.

State medical education minister Viswas Sarang on Monday announced his government's decision to set up 366 pediatric ICU wards in district hospitals in the state following the apprehensions that the children may be affected in the third wave of pandemic. The pediatric ICU wards would be centrally air-conditioned and provided with facilities of ventilator, and oxygen points, he added.

The state government has also decided to establish 1,100 more ICU wards in different government hospitals. The state government has started building 1,000-bed makeshift Covid care centres in Bhopal and Bina in Madhya Pradesh.

taken a hit because of the lockdown. So many bereaved family members are impelled to immerse the bodies of their departed relatives in the river," one of the residents said. Often family members of a Covid victim are not handed over the body by the administration which claims it would perform the last rites observing the

A 2,000-bed makeshift Covid care centre has already started functioning in Indore.

Meanwhile, the government has cleared the proposal to build a 20-bed balloon ICU wards, made of PVC tarpaulin with plywood and aluminum frame, each in Bhopal, Jabalpur and Sehore.

The makeshift ICU ward being built by a private company is cost effective and has longevity of eight years.

The balloon ICUs can be dismantled and shifted to other areas in a few days. It can be made functional within just one week.

Cost of a 20-bed balloon ICU ward comes to around ₹85 lakhs. Work on a balloon ICU ward has already started in the complex of government-run Hamidia hospital.

Meanwhile, the state reported 9,715 fresh positive cases on Monday taking the tally of cases to 6,81,478. This was the first time in the last three weeks the single-day cases dropped to below 10,000.

protocol in place for the deadly virus, another local stated.

"What indeed happens is that the officials develop cold feet later and fearing that they might catch the infection themselves, they dump the bodies in the river and flee. Little do they realise that they are also polluting the river," he added.

Auto driver ferries Covid patients for free in Odisha

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 10

Kumar Tandi, an auto-rickshaw driver hailing from Dumerbahal village in Odisha's Nuapada district, has won many hearts by ferrying patients, including Covid-19 ones, to hospitals in his vehicle free of cost. Though himself an HIV patient, Mr Kumar has never cared for getting infected with coronavirus and says God will look after him as he has been engaged in humanitarian work.

"I have left behind the fear of getting infected with the coronavirus. The need of the hour is to provide service to poor people of our region. We don't have many government ambulances here. Since most of the patients in our district are poor and cannot afford to hire private ambulances," says Mr Kumar.

The 40-year-old youth has himself experienced discrimination after he was found to have been infected with HIV. This made him stronger and he decided that no one should be treated in such an inhuman manner.

"I can relate to the plight of other patients as I am a patient myself. The Covid-19 patients are facing social stigma and I too had to go through the same when I tested positive for HIV in the past," said Mr Kumar.

Sarma takes oath as 15th Assam CM with 13 mantris

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 10

Assam governor Jagdish Mukhi on Monday administered the oath to Himanta Biswa Sarma as the 15th chief minister of Assam at a swearing-in ceremony at Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra.

Mr Sarma, clad in traditional "pat silk" *dhoti* and *kurta* with a muga "gamosa" draped around his neck, took the oath of office and secrecy in Assamese. Along with him, 13 other legislators were also sworn in as ministers amid strict Covid-19 protocols.

Among the MLAs sworn in, 10 from the BJP, including state party president Ranjeet Kumar Dass and ministers of the outgoing government Chandra Mohan Patowary, Parimal Suklabaidya, Jogesh Mohan, Pijush Hazarika and Sanjay Kishan. The new faces as ministers from BJP were Ashok Singhal, Ranoo Pegu, Bimal Borah and the only woman in the Cabinet, Ajanta Neog. Ms Neog, a former Congress minister, had crossed over to BJP just before the assembly



Mrinalinee Devi, mother of the new chief minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma, blesses former CM Sarbananda Sonowal, during her son's oath ceremony in Guwahati on Monday. — PTI

polls. From UPPL quota Urkhao Gwra Brahma was inducted into the Cabinet. BJP president J.P. Nadda, outgoing chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Union ministers Jitendra Singh and Ramesh Teli, Nagaland chief minister Neiphu Rio, Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu, Manipur chief minister N. Biren Singh, Tripura chief minister Biplab Kumar Deb, Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma and Assam Congress chief Ripun Bora were among

those present at the swearing-in ceremony.

Mr Sarma, 52, who held key portfolios in the previous Assam government, including finance, health, and education — succeeded Mr Sarbananda Sonowal as the chief minister, garnering support from the 75 MLAs of the BJP-led alliance. He was elected as the leader of the newly-elected MLAs of the party on Sunday.

In the last five years, Mr Sarma has been at the forefront of planning mega-development schemes in Assam.

All 77 BJP MLAs in Bengal to have Central security

New Delhi, May 10: All the newly-elected 77 BJP MLAs in West Bengal are being provided security cover by central paramilitary forces in view of potential threats to them, official sources said on Monday.

They said the members of the Legislative Assembly will be secured by armed commandos of the CISF and the CRPF.

The Union home ministry has approved the cover after taking into cognisance a report prepared by central security agencies and the inputs of a high-level fact finding team of officers that was sent to the state by the ministry in the wake of post-poll violence in the state, including that against the workers of the BJP, they said.

Sixty-one MLAs out of the 77 will be covered under the lowest 'X' category and the commandos will be drawn from the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), as per fresh orders of the MHA, they said.

The rest are either enjoying the central security cover or will be cov-

ered under the next higher category of 'Y'.

Fifty-year-old Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari is already a 'Z' category protectee of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), they said. "These persons face potential threat in the wake of post polls scenario in the state and hence they need to be secured," a senior officer said.

A number of other candidates, including some turncoats, who contested the assembly polls from the BJP ticket will also continue to have the central security cover for some more time, they said. The BJP has emerged as the main Opposition party in the state, winning 77 seats in the 294-member house in the recently concluded polls where the TMC led by chief minister Mamata Banerjee formed the government.

While there can be 3-4 armed commandos under the 'X' category, the configuration increases to 6-7 under the 'Y' cover and the 'Z' category brings in about 6-9 commandos for the protectee. — PTI

Gov spars with TMC again

■ **Continued from Page 1** the cause of your death, destruction of your property, you are subjected to loot, arson, coercion, intimidation, it is the end of democracy. The Constitution cannot be taken to be functioning and democracy cannot flourish if people are made to suffer because they chose to vote in a particular way. This is very serious. There is anguish, anger, concern about what is happening in the land of culture."

At the BJP office, Mr Adhikari, elected as Leader of the Opposition with the support of 22 MLAs of his party, said: "The present Assembly

has three features. One of them is that a defeated candidate has become a CM. This never happened in the history of the state after Independence. Besides, several lakhs of people have been homeless due to post-poll violence because they belong to a particular community."

Mr Adhikari added: "It is often heard that people from another country take refuge in Assam. But now an instance of people from one state taking refuge in another has been created. Facing attacks, people from Cooch Behar fled to Assam and have been put up at refugee camps there. Nothing can be worse than this."

Amit Mitra takes virtual oath

■ **Continued from Page 1** industry, commerce and enterprises; information technology and electronics and parliamentary affairs.

The education portfolio went to Mr Basu while Mr Ghosh has been given food and supplies, of which Jyotipriyo Mullick was the minister earlier. Mr Mullick is now minister of forest, non-conventional and renewable energy sources. Former minister Chandrima Bhattacharyya also got three portfolios.

But the most surprising allocation was of outgoing Kolkata mayor and former municipal affairs and urban development minister Firhad Hakim, known for

his proximity to the TMC chief. He has got transport and housing this time.

In the afternoon Ms Banerjee chaired a Cabinet meeting with the new ministers at Nabanna, the state secretariat, and discussed her priorities regarding the battle against Covid-19.

"We are indebted to the people for creating the third TMC government in Bengal. It is their victory. We salute them with all of our gratitude and attitude. It is a verdict for development, harmony and inclusiveness. We will fulfil our promises made to the people. But now fighting the Covid-19 pandemic is the top priority," she said.

3.6L Covid cases, 3,754 deaths

■ **Continued from Page 1** challenge for the Delhi government is to vaccinate its younger population. The Delhi government said there is a shortage of vaccines and several people in the 18-plus and even 45-plus categories are struggling to get vaccine slots. The Delhi government accused the Centre of allotting lesser vaccines compared to the high requirement of the city.

"We are left with vaccine stock for 3-4 days. We have placed orders with companies but I think the Central government too is allocating the vaccines. We request the Centre to give us more vaccines," Mr Kejriwal said.

No judicial interference needed

■ **Continued from Page 1** Centre told the top court, adding that in such a "grave and unprecedented" crisis, the "wisdom of the executive should be trusted".

In its April 30, 2021, judgment, the Supreme Court had asked the government to revisit differential pricing of the Covid vaccines it had negotiated. It had also asked the Centre to opt for centralised procurement and decentralised distribution of Covid vaccine while noting that the existing policy, which burdens states to individually source the vaccine, may lead to chaotic situations.

The Serum Institute on India, which is producing Covishield, is selling it to the Central government for ₹150 a shot. But state governments are paying ₹300 a shot, and private hospitals ₹600 a shot.

Bharat Biotech, which is also selling each shot of Covaxin to the Centre for ₹150, is charging states ₹400 for a dose, while private hospitals have to pay ₹1,200 for each dose.

In its 218-page affidavit, including annexures, the Centre has said that differential pricing will not impact people in the age group of 18-44 as all of them will be vaccinated

free of cost.

It also told the court that in its "informal consultations" with vaccine manufacturers it "ensured that the price of vaccine is uniform for all the states so as to avoid any disparity resulting from one state ending up buying the vaccine at a higher price than the other." It added that based on the number of persons in the 18-44 age group in each state, the Centre has fixed the limit of the vaccines that each state can procure. The Centre also told the court that those who choose and can "pay the price, can go to private hospitals".

THE ASIAN AGE

11 MAY 2021

Himanta faces a new test, but choice is no surprise

Few are likely to be surprised at Himanta Biswa Sarma being officially chosen by the BJP as Assam's new chief minister and his taking the oath of office on Monday. The BJP is where it is today in Assam, and in the Northeast as a whole, due to Mr Sarma's tactical and organisational skills in political affairs, and indeed his ability to play the communal card with a rare deftness in the Assamese context, surpassing by far master tacticians like Narendra Modi and Amit Shah.

Back in 2014 when Mr Modi was on the stump, hoping to be Prime Minister, he would speak of letting in Hindu Bengali migrants from Bangladesh while leaving the Muslim migrants out. Herein lay the seed of the Citizenship Amendment Act. This particular aspect of Mr Modi's campaign was with an eye on capturing West Bengal in future, but he felt it had its uses in Assam too and used it in his Assam speeches as well.

When the CAA did eventually come and led to an anti-BJP backlash among caste Hindu society in Assam, on which the BJP based its political ambitions, it literally ran up against a wall. Assamese Hindu society did not want even Bengali Hindu migrants, unlike the BJP. But the skills of Mr Sarma, who left Congress in 2015 to join the BJP, managed to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the saffron party.

Mr Sarma has so far displayed political energy, political savvy and ambition of a very high order — qualities that will be an asset to any party he may be in. He has by now gained considerable administrative experience.

Mr Sarma worked on two tracks. He harped on Assam's neo-Vaishnavism linked to the great personality of Srimanta Sakardev as being the essential Assamese identity, and pitched this against the "miyan", the derogatory name for Muslim migrants from erstwhile East Bengal (later East Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh). This became an instant hit in an already somewhat polarised world.

It was communal to the core, of course, and yet its emphasis was on the so-called

Assamese identity and not on the Hindu-Muslim binary that the BJP usually pitches. In defining this identity, those not from Assam's Hindu society are wholly overlooked — such as the various tribal people, and Bengalis. But this worked as an election strategy to blunt Assam's intense anti-CAA movement.

Mr Sarma took no chances. The second prong of his strategy was to split the anti-CAA vote by being somewhere instrumental in encouraging the Rajior Dal and the Assam Jatiya Party.

Mr Sarma has so far displayed political energy, political savvy and ambition of a very high order — qualities that will be an asset to any party he may be in. He has by now also gained considerable administrative experience, having been the most important minister in his predecessor Sarbananda Sonowal's Cabinet and earlier in the Cabinet of stalwart Congress chief minister Tarun Gogoi.

However, in Assam this has not exactly been in play in the past five years which were consumed by the politics of the NRC/CAA and the agitations around these themes. As chief minister, Mr Sarma will have to wrap his mind around development, and the first charge on him cannot but be the pandemic that is ravaging every part of India. Even so, the NRC remains a live issue. Its consequences have brought this country the condemnation of the world and impacted ties with neighbouring Bangladesh in some measure. Mr Sarma will be on a different kind of test than previously.

Afghan terror: Little hope ahead

The last vestiges of civilisation are fast disappearing from Afghanistan. The Taliban and other insurgents attack maternity hospitals, ambulances and kill innocent schoolchildren as they leave the citadels of learning. Inured to a life of fear, they may live on not knowing where the crazed militants will strike next. There is no rationale for the Afghan terror, invariably stemming from Afghans taking aim at Afghans, especially at the ethnic Hazaras, who are Shias and thus invariably the target of avowed Islamic State affiliates. Barbarous attacks on girls who attend school in the afternoons after the boys are done with their classes lays bare the barren conscience of the attackers.

Truth to tell, the attack on the Darst-e-Barchi neighbourhood of Afghan capital Kabul is only a precursor of the "bad possible outcomes" of the planned withdrawal of 2,500 to 3,500 American and Nato troops. The foreign soldiers will be leaving the "forgotten war" that has raged over decades without clarity on what the Taliban or other Afghan rebels expect to gain from the savagery of their brand of terror in attacks not only on Afghan troops and policemen but also on the civilian population. If the foreign troops aiding the Afghan

forces in ensuring security pull out by September 11, the target date set by President Joe Biden and the US government, they will be leaving behind a land that will be open for exploitation by militants.

The families of the 70 schoolgirls who were killed on Saturday by blasts from three bombs are turning against the Afghan government as well as its international backers for their failure to put an end to the violence. The fear is over security levels that the government can guarantee when Afghanistan is left to the mercy of the Taliban, waiting to try and take the reins of power after 20 years. With the United States not inclined to even leave a small counter-terrorism force in Afghanistan, it would be solely up to the Ashraf Ghani government to end the violence, though multilateral talks may go on in search of a peaceful solution. The history of Afghanistan holds out little room for optimism.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani

CHINA
WEAPONISING
CORONAVIRUS
—REPORT



Check India's corruption, or insurgencies will go up



Mohan Guruswamy

Corruption is India's favourite conversation topic. We love discussing it and bemoan it's all-pervasiveness. Whenever two or more Indians meet, the conversation inevitably moves to corruption. Sometimes I wonder what we would say to each other if there were no corruption to talk about. We are all near experts at it and have all experienced it in one way or another and at all levels. Yet, with so much collective experience, it is an elusive topic to write about. Like our gods, it takes so many myriad forms. It defies a simple definition. But we all know what it is.

Economists prefer to bandy about a different term when referring to corruption. They call it "economic rent". According to the International Monetary Fund, "it is the extra amount paid (over what would have been paid for the best alternative use) to somebody or for something useful whose supply is limited either by nature or through human ingenuity". Quite clearly, this definition excludes the moral dimension. But then our problems get even more compounded when we realise that morality itself is very elastic and varies depending on time, place and context.

Economic rent takes other forms, which tax the common good much more. High import duties, for instance, meant to restrain imports, actually serve to increase prices and profits for domestic manufacturers. Did you notice how all car tyres or batteries cost about the same? Or how all similar sized air-conditioners and refrigerators cost about the same? Or, till recently, how all air tickets cost

the same and an arm and a leg at the same time? Adam Smith explained it best by noting that: "People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public."

Opinion polls show that there are some professions that are believed to be entirely corrupted. Politicians and policemen top this list. Much of the corruption we see in everyday life is a result of their unnecessary exertions. Some years back I had the opportunity every morning to contemplate a vacant plot of land in the Gurgaon neighbourhood I lived in. Roads bound the plot on all four sides and naturally people walking take a short cut across it. Some soul with a penchant for orderliness has taken upon him to put an end to this practice. First a sign came up demanding that people not do the most rational thing, which is taking a short cut. The sign was ignored, and my dog Charlie has been using the signpost to leave his signature. Then a small length of barbed wire pegged between two poles appeared astride the path at both ends. The people who use the path still find it convenient to go around the poles and take the not-so-short shortcut. Good old Charlie just slips under the wire and seems quite happy that he has two more poles to leave his daily markers on.

The nature of most of our lawmaking is just like this. They are irrational and people will respond rationally to them, by circumventing them if not completely ignoring them. Now the only way that plot can be prevented from being used as a short cut is to build on it. If the empty

plot is just walled up, the walls will encourage another use, which will be odious to boot. Laws that conflict with common sense just do not work. Which brings me to another aspect. We have laws that prohibit urinating in public and on walls, private and public. Urinating is meant to be a private business. But where are people to urinate when you just don't have enough urinals? Therefore, a law against urinating in public makes sense only when you have enough public urinals.

Thoughtless laws corrode a state thoroughly. This is why states built around tight regulation and appeals to a higher human ideal always fail. Corruption is all-pervasive and a worldwide phenomenon. It comes built in with nature. Animals steal food from each other just as humans extort from others. But human beings live in organised societies and societies are simply systems based on laws. For laws to work, it must be clear that if caught, the trial will be swift, and if found guilty the retribution will be commensurate.

That's where we have serious problems. Who makes the law? Politicians. Who enforces the laws? The police. Both are believed to be overwhelmingly corrupt. And can we expect anything better from the courts? Corruption in the judiciary and the need to uproot it were intermittently discussed in the past few years. Judges themselves have provoked these discussions. Former Calcutta high court judge Soumitra Sen became the first judge in the

A relatively honest society requires a system that inflicts swift and commensurate retribution on transgressors. It is apparent that we quite clearly do not have that and will not have in the foreseeable future.

country to be impeached by the Rajya Sabha for misappropriation of funds in 2011. P.D. Dinakaran, the former chief justice of the Sikkim high court, had to resign in July 2011 in the wake of graft allegations. The next year, former Chief Justice of India and National Human Rights Commission chief K.G. Balakrishnan faced allegations that his family members had amassed wealth disproportionate to their known sources of income.

In 2003, the CBI arrested Shomit Mukherjee, a former Delhi high court judge, for his alleged involvement in a land scam. In 2008 the Punjab and Haryana high court was rocked by a different type of controversy after a bag containing ₹15 lakhs was delivered at the residence of Justice Nirmaljit Kaur on August 13, 2008. The money was allegedly meant for another judge, Nirmal Yadav. Justice Yadav, who had to quit later, is still facing trial. The judicial process seems to be working for her, as it works for most of the well connected by lingering endlessly.

A just and relatively honest society requires a system that inflicts swift and commensurate retribution on transgressors. It is apparent that we quite clearly do not have that and will not have in the foreseeable future. The only way we can get that for ourselves is a vigilant media that relentlessly probes, investigates and informs the public. The fellows who still call the shots in our media businesses are the ones who have turned a calling into a business, like the fellows who got themselves farmhouses in Mehrauli. That then leaves the people to fend for themselves. Which is what they are doing in many parts of the country that are increasingly being gripped by insurgencies.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese

LETTERS

PASSING THE BUCK

The Supreme Court has once again overstepped its brief by forming the Oxygen Task Force. One must say that while the move might have been well intentioned, in doing so the country's highest court played straight into the hands of the Central government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mr Modi and his ministers have shown that they prefer to pass the buck. For instance, he washed his hands off the Covid-19 vaccine crisis by asking states to order the shots directly from the manufacturers. This decision will only help the concerned departments at the Centre to evade their responsibility.

Srinivas Kamat
Alto St Cruz, Goa

NO LOCKDOWN, PLEASE

THERE IS a lot of pressure being mounted on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government from various quarters, including from several state governments and other bodies, to impose a stringent nationwide lockdown to combat the deadly second wave of Covid-19. One needs to understand that lockdowns alone will not eradicate the coronavirus surge, they will only set back economic growth. But most important, it will hit livelihoods for thousands. Those people who may otherwise may have survived an infection will inevitably starve or else suffer irreparable consequences.

J. Vijay Kumar
Secunderabad

DEATH OF AN ICON

TRIBUTES CONTINUE to pour in condoling the death of Bengaluru's iconic bookseller, T.S. Shanbhag, owner of the erstwhile Premier Bookshop on Museum Road. A little-known fact was that he had started his bookshop in a building on Kasturba Road, opposite the museum, before moving on to Museum Road, where he operated till the store was forced to close down in 2009. Shanbhag was a Bengaluru institution, whose contribution to the city's literary life was priceless.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

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

Aakar Patel



Don't fudge Covid data, that'll make crisis worse

The world is worried about its "Vishwa Guru" as our mismanagement of the Covid-19 pandemic has turned into a global story. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, an independent research centre in the United States, has estimated that by September 2021, which means in just four months, another million Indians will die. And this is based on the official numbers, which are anyway difficult to accept given what has been revealed by the scenes in the crematoria across states and in our major cities, and also by the numbers that the newspapers have put out. A newspaper in Gujarat reported on May 6 that 17,822 bodies had been cremated or buried with Covid-19 protocols in one month in the state's seven major cities — Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Baroda, Surat, Rajkot, Jamnagar and Bhavnagar. But the government had acknowledged only 1,745 deaths officially from Covid-19, or 10 per cent. And remember that these cities are only about a third or less of the state's total population. In the

villages, the chances of those being tested and treated are even fewer.

This is, of course, not only about Gujarat. On May 3, a newspaper had reported that Bhopal had acknowledged only 104 deaths from Covid-19 while reports from the crematoriums and cemeteries spoke of 2,557 Covid patients among the total of 3,811 who were cremated or interred.

That is a ratio of 1:25. A report on May 4 from Haryana said that the difference between the official death toll and the number from crematoria was 1:2. This is similar to the number reported for Bengaluru for the last one month (1,422 official toll; versus 3,104 cremated with Covid-19 protocols). In Uttar Pradesh, a report from Meerut said the difference was 1:7.

If we remove the outliers and look at the data, it seems like a figure of twice and perhaps three times the official one is not unreasonable. If we take that into account, our official death toll of 2.3 lakhs, the third highest in the world, actually looks like 5.6 lakh or more than seven

lakh and easily the highest in the world. This will not surprise anyone and has been borne out by the sadening and shameful and horrific visuals that the entire world has now seen from India.

I should clarify that the fudging of the numbers is not entirely because of governmental fraud. It has happened in part because most people are dying at home, unable to access medical facilities or unable to afford them and they have not been tested. Second, how a death is classified depends a lot on the state government and the people making out the certificate. A person who has Covid-19 but also has another disease can be classified either as a Covid death or as something else. It serves the immediate purpose of the government to pretend that the official number is low because it makes it appear less incompetent and helpless than it really is. But hiding the number and not actively promoting the fact that things are much worse is dangerous for us all.

The first reason why the government should come clean and say

that its numbers are an undercount is public safety. If people are fed nonsense like "recovery rate" (a meaningless number for a disease that has no cure), then they will be less alert and more prone to carelessness about masking and social distancing. If they knew that many more people are dying after being infected, especially because the government cannot manage hospitals at this point in time, they would not think they were personally safe.

The second reason is our shortage of oxygen. After Delhi, now two BJP-run states, Gujarat and Karnataka, have said that they are not getting enough oxygen from the Narendra Modi government. Gujarat has said it needs 1,400 tons a day and will need 1,600 tons a day by May 15 but is currently getting only 795 tons. Karnataka had asked for 1,200 tons instead of the 962 tons allocated by the Centre. The Central government says that it has enough oxygen but this is untrue. We do not. And we will make our jobs more difficult if we continue to be in denial.

The third reason is credibility.

The world is reporting the Indian numbers and saying that these cannot be believed. And the world cannot be blamed for feeling this, because it is true — based on what our own media is reporting. The damage to India has already been considerable in terms of reputation, but that is not important. What will happen is that more countries will ban the entry of Indian travellers. Already that list is quite large. In time the wave will recede, but another one is likely to come. At that point, the world will look at our official numbers and try and add a factor of their own to arrive at the real number if they think that we are still fudging. This will harm Indians on work visas, families who are separated and Indian business in general.

That is why in our self-interest we should actively make attempts to find out the real fatality rate as the first step towards trying to curb this deadly Covid-19 pandemic.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES

MAN KILLS 6, THEN SELF, AT BIRTHDAY PARTY

Colorado Springs (US): A gunman opened fire at a birthday party in Colorado, slaying six adults before killing himself Sunday, police said.

The shooting happened just after midnight in a mobile home park on the east side of Colorado Springs, police said. Officers arrived at a trailer to find six dead adults and a man with serious injuries who died later at a hospital, the Colorado Springs Gazette reported.

The suspected shooter was the boyfriend of a female victim at the party attended by friends, family and children. He walked inside and opened fire before shooting himself, police said. The birthday party was for one of the people killed, police said.

Neighbor Yenifer Reyes told The Denver Post she woke to the sound of many gunshots. "I thought it was a thunderstorm," Reyes said.

MAN HURLS SLUR, KICKS INDIAN WOMAN IN S'PORE

Singapore: In an apparent incident of hate crime, a man hurled racial slurs and kicked a 55-year-old Indian-origin woman in Singapore for not wearing a mask while she was brisk walking.

Hindocha Nita Vishnubhai, a private tutor, was brisk walking on Friday morning when a man approached her and asked her to pull her mask up from her chin, her daughter Parveen Kaur was quoted as saying by the Channel News Asia on Monday. Nita was walking along Choa Chu Kang Drive when the man came up to her near a bus stop outside Northvale condominium, according to the Channel report.

"She explained that she was brisk walking but he didn't care. He hurled vulgarities and racial slurs at her," Kaur said in a widely circulated Instagram post. "My mum responded with a 'God bless you' and the guy kicked her in the chest. My mum landed on her back and hurt herself," she said. The man, whose identity is not yet known, ran away while the woman was left bleeding.

5 MIGRANTS DROWNED OFF LIBYA, SAYS UN

Cairo: At least five people, including a woman and a child, drowned when a boat carrying at least 45 Europe-bound migrants capsized off Libya, a UN migration official said on Monday.

The wreck was the latest disaster in the Mediterranean Sea involving migrants seeking a better life in Europe.

Safa Msehli, a spokeswoman for the International Organisation for Migration, said the wreck took place on Sunday. She said fishermen rescued 40 migrants and returned them to the shore. Msehli said the boat was among nine others carrying more than 700 migrants intercepted Sunday by the Libyan coast guard off the coast of the North African country.

The migrants were taken to overcrowded detention centers, where the UN migration agency fears more threats to their lives and violations of their rights, she said.

Libya has in recent years emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East.

S.KOREAN POLICE SUMMON ACTIVIST OVER LEAFLETS

Seoul: South Korean police on Monday summoned an activist who said he flew hundreds of thousands of anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets toward North Korea in defiance of a new law that criminalises such activities.

The questioning of Park Sang-hak came hours after President Moon Jae-in in a nationally televised speech issued apparent criticism toward Park without naming him, saying it's "never desirable" to dampen relations with the North by violating inter-Korean agreements and South Korean laws. While South Korea has faced criticism over the anti-leafleting law, which some human rights advocates see as an attack on democratic freedoms and efforts to break the North's information blockade, Moon stressed that his government has "no choice but to strictly enforce laws."

Police had searched Park's office last week after he announced that his group launched balloons carrying 500,000 leaflets, 5,000 one-dollar bills and 500 booklets about South Korea's economic riches across the border during April 25-29.

China opposes Taiwan joining WHO meeting

Beijing, May 10: China's government criticised U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday for urging the World Health Organisation to invite Taiwan, the island democracy claimed by Beijing as part of its territory, to participate in a meeting this month.

Blinken's statement on Friday adds to a similar joint appeal by foreign ministers of the Group of Seven major economies this month in London. That irked the Communist Beijing government, which insists Taiwan has no right to conduct foreign relations or join global bodies.

Blinken's appeal "seriously violates the one-China principle" and joint US-Chinese declarations, said a Foreign

Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying. "China firmly deplores and rejects it."

Taiwan split with the Chinese mainland in 1949 after a civil war. The two sides have extensive trade ties but no official relations. The US and other major governments have no official ties with Taiwan, but Washington and some others have expressed growing support for Taiwan during the Coronavirus pandemic and in response to Beijing's increasing assertiveness abroad. Blinken called Taiwan a "force for good in the world" and said it should be invited as an observer at the meeting of the World Health Assembly, the WHO decision-making body. — AP



Palestinian man runs away from tear gas during clashes with Israeli security forces in front of the Dome of the Rock Mosque at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City on Monday.

305 Palestinians injured in clash with Israeli police

Jerusalem, May 10: Israeli police firing tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets clashed with stone-throwing Palestinians at a flash-point Jerusalem holy site on Monday, the latest in a series of confrontations that threatened to push the contested city toward wider conflict.

More than a dozen tear gas canisters and stun grenades landed in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites, as police and protesters faced off inside the walled compound that surrounds it, said a photographer at the scene. Smoke rose in front of the mosque and the iconic golden-domed shrine on the site, and rocks littered the nearby plaza. Inside one area of the compound, shoes and debris lay scattered over ornate carpets.

More than 305 Palestinians were hurt, including 228 who went to hospitals and clinics for

treatment, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent. Seven of the injured were in serious condition. Police said 21 officers were hurt, including three who were hospitalized. Israeli paramedics said seven Israeli civilians were also hurt.

The confrontation was the latest after weeks of mounting tensions between Palestinians and Israeli troops in the Old City of Jerusalem, the emotional center of their conflict. There have been almost nightly clashes during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, already a time of heightened religious sensitivities.

Most recently, the tensions have been fueled by the planned eviction of dozens of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of east Jerusalem where Israeli settlers have waged a lengthy legal battle to take over properties. — AP

New military letter warns Prez over France's survival

Paris, May 10: A group of serving French soldiers has published a new open letter in a conservative magazine warning President Emmanuel Macron that the "survival" of France is at stake after he made "concessions" to Islamism.

The letter published in the conservative Valeurs Actuelles magazine published late on Sunday

echoes the tone of a similar letter printed in the same magazine last month which also warned a civil conflict was brewing.

The previous letter, signed by a handful of officers and some 20 semi-retired generals, sparked a furore in France with the prime minister calling it an unacceptable interference and France's top general vowing those behind

Getting people vaccinated only solution for India: Fauci

Biden's Chief Medical Adviser suggests additional resources from outside India too

Washington, May 9: Getting people vaccinated is the only long-term solution to the current Covid-19 crisis in India, America's top public health expert Dr Anthony Fauci said on Sunday as he called for scaling up manufacturing of Coronavirus vaccines both domestically and globally to fight the deadly pandemic.

The endgame of this all...is going to be to get people vaccinated... India is the largest vaccine-producing country in the world. They've got to get their resources, not only from within, but also from without, Fauci, who is the Chief Medical Adviser to U.S. President Joe Biden, told the ABC News in an interview.

That's the reason why other countries need to chip in to be able to get either supplies to the Indians to make their own vaccines or to get vaccines donated. One of the ways to do that is to have the big companies that have the capability of making vaccines to really scale up in a great way to get literally hundreds of millions of doses to be able to get to them, he said.

Responding to a question, Dr Fauci said that India needs to immediately build makeshift field hospitals like what China did a year ago.

You've got to get that. You can't have people out in the street not having a hospital bed. The oxygen situation is something that was really critical. I mean, to have people not have oxygen is really tragic, what's going on over there, he said.

The 80-year-old physician and immunologist, who serves as the director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases said there is an immediate problem of hospital beds, oxygen, PPE and other supplies.

Then there's the problem of looking forward to how are you going to shut this down, how are you going to turn it around, how are you going to break the chain of transmission? he said, underlining the need for a countrywide lockdown to arrest the spread of the virus.

Vaccines is one of them but there are other ways too, like shutting down the government. I have advised them in the past that you really need to do that. You've got to shut down. I believe several of the Indian states have already done that, but you need to break the chain of transmission. And one of the ways to do that is to shut down, the top American doctor said.

Fauci, in an interview last week, had termed the situation in India very desperate and suggested that the government marshal all its resources, including the armed forces, to immediately build makeshift field hospitals, and urged other countries to help with not only materials but also personnel.

He called for a nationwide lockdown, not necessarily for six months but for a few weeks to break the continuity and transmission of infection. — PTI



Staff member cleans the terrace outside a cafe in Paris on Monday as France is set to reopen its trademark sidewalk cafes and restaurants on May 19.

— AFP

Oz dismisses plea against ban on India returnees

Melbourne, May 10: An Australian court in Sydney on Monday dismissed the legal challenge filed by a 73-year old citizen stranded in Bengaluru against the federal government's controversial decision to temporarily ban the return of its citizens from Covid-19 stricken India.

In its first hearing, Justice Thomas Thawley, who presided over the case, said the law was drafted with an appreciation that biosecurity emergencies might take a wide variety of forms and the

precise nature of future threats could not be known. "It is tolerably clear that the chief medical officer thought further relief would come to Australia's quarantine endeavour by preventing further entry, even for those travelling indirectly through transit hubs," the judge said.

The application was filed by lawyers acting for Gary Newman last week, seeking to overturn an emergency declaration made by Health Minister Greg Hunt last month under the Biosecurity Act. Newman,

who is stranded in Bengaluru since March last year, has said that the ban was "unconstitutional". The declaration had taken into effect last Monday making it punishable with a maximum USD 66,000 fine, five years' jail term, or both, for those who tried to return back to Australia and have been in India in the past 14 days.

The temporary suspension was aimed to reduce the public health risk posed due to massive Covid-19 cases in India, the government said. — PTI

NORWAY PANEL: DROP ASTRA, J&J VACCINATION

Oslo, May 10: An expert committee set up by Norway's government to evaluate AstraZeneca's and Johnson & Johnson's Covid vaccines said on Monday that both should be abandoned over risks of rare but serious side effects.

In order to avoid a slowdown of the vaccine rollout the committee recommended that the two jobs should be made available for people on a voluntary basis. — AFP

FRANCE ACCEPTS EU CURB ON ASTRA VACCINE

Paris, May 9: French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed the decision from the European Union not to renew its order for the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine.

Macron said the EU policy is aiming at responding in particular to the variants... We see that some other vaccines are more efficient.

The bloc's Internal Market Commissioner, Thierry Breton, said on Sunday the EU Commission has not ordered AstraZeneca shots for after June. Two weeks ago, the EU launched legal proceedings against the pharmaceutical group for allegedly failing to respect the terms of its contract. — AP

London launches tourism campaign

London, May 10: London Mayor Sadiq Khan launched a campaign on Monday to bring tourists back to the British capital, ahead of a planned easing of government Covid-19 restrictions across England.

The 6 million (\$8.4 million, 7 million euro) campaign by Khan's office with the capital's tourism and transport bodies will look to drive domestic tourism to hospitality, culture, nightlife and retail venues in the city.

The plans are designed to boost the sectors, which

● **VACCINES IS** one of them but there are other ways too, like shutting down the government. I have advised them in the past that you really need to do that, said Dr Fauci.

ation in India very desperate and suggested that the government marshal all its resources, including the armed forces, to immediately build makeshift field hospitals, and urged other countries to help with not only materials but also personnel.

He called for a nationwide lockdown, not necessarily for six months but for a few weeks to break the continuity and transmission of infection. — PTI

Labour min. swaps team post UK polls

London, May 10: The leader of Britain's main opposition Labour Party shook up his top team after disappointing election results, moving his economy spokeswoman and chief whip in an attempt to exert control over a fractious membership.

But the moves by Labour leader Keir Starmer spurred new recriminations in a party that has not been able to make a breakthrough against Prime Minister Boris Johnson's governing Conservatives.

Starmer late on Sunday fired deputy party leader Angela Rayner from the post of party chairwoman and named Rachel Reeves his new Treasury spokeswoman, replacing Anneliese Dodds. Long-serving chief whip Nick Brown was replaced by Alan Campbell. — AP

make a breakthrough against Prime Minister Boris Johnson's governing Conservatives.

Starmer late on Sunday fired deputy party leader Angela Rayner from the post of party chairwoman and named Rachel Reeves his new Treasury spokeswoman, replacing Anneliese Dodds. Long-serving chief whip Nick Brown was replaced by Alan Campbell. — AP

Boris probed over Caribbean holiday

United Kingdom, May 10: Boris Johnson is under investigation over who paid for his Caribbean holiday with Carrie Symonds during Christmas 2019.

The parliamentary standards commissioner, Kathryn Stone, confirmed on Monday morning that she was investigating a possible breach of the MPs' code of conduct.

It is the latest allegation of impropriety faced by the prime minister, as the Electoral Commission continues its inquiry into the Conservative party over claims that a loan to cover works to Johnson and Symonds' Downing Street flat were not properly declared.

The "sleaze" attacks deployed against the prime minister in the run-up to last week's local elections seem not to have substantially damaged his reputation among voters, given the gains made by the Tories in the Hartlepool by-election and councils across England.

But some Conservatives are privately dismayed the party is being more opaque than they think it should be on issues of



Boris Johnson

funding and declarations. The investigation into Johnson's holiday comes after he took a trip to Mustique to celebrate new year at the start of 2020. The Daily Mail reported Johnson spent 10 days on a luxury villa break worth £15,000 – provided courtesy of the Carphone Warehouse founder and Conservative donor David Ross.

Johnson did record a "benefit in kind" from Ross worth £15,000 for "accommodation for a private holiday for my partner and me" in St Vincent and the Grenadines from 26 December 2019 to 5 January 2020. It was submitted to the register of members' interests on 27 January 2020. — Agencies

TURNING POINT 46-member scientific integrity task force to meet for first time

White House panel to split science, politics

Washington, May 10: Eager to the turn the page on the Trump years, the Biden White House is launching an effort to unearth past problems with the politicisation of science within government and to tighten scientific integrity rules for the future.

A new 46-person federal scientific integrity task force with members from more than two dozen government agencies will meet for the first time on Friday. Its mission is to

look back through 2009 for areas where partisanship interfered with what were supposed to be decisions based on evidence and research and to come up with ways to keep politics out of government science in the future.

The effort was spurred by concerns that the Trump administration had politicised science in ways that put lives at risk, eroded public trust and worsened climate change.

We want people to be able to trust what the fed-

● **SCIENTISTS AND** others have accused the Trump administration of setting aside scientific evidence and injecting politics into issues.

eral government is telling you, whether it's a weather forecast or information about vaccine safety or whatever, said Jane Lubchenco, the deputy director for climate and environment at the White House Office of Science

and Technology Policy. People need to know "it's not by fiat, somebody's sort of knee-jerk opinion about something, added Alondra Nelson, the science office's deputy director for science and society. Nelson and Lubchenco said ahead of a Monday announcement about the task force's first meeting and part of its composition. It stems from a January 27 presidential memo requiring evidence-based policy-making.

Scientists and others have accused the Trump administration of setting aside scientific evidence and injecting politics into issues including the Coronavirus, climate change and even whether Hurricane Dorian threatened Alabama in 2019.

Naomi Oreskes, a Harvard University historian said politicisation of science undermines the nation's ability to address serious problems that affect Americans' health, their well-being and the economy. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,502.41	0.60
Nifty 50	14,942.40	0.80
S&P 500*	4,229.49	-0.07
Dollar (₹)	73.35	0.23
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.35	-1.01
Euro (₹)	89.22	0.49
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,452.179	0.37
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.35	0.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.014	-0.02
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.568	-0.011

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Ahluwalia settles dispute with A2 Interiors

Ahluwalia Contracts Ltd has entered into a settlement agreement and resolved the payment issues with its operational creditor, A2 Interiors Products Pvt Ltd, and is filing an application to withdraw the insolvency proceedings. On May 5, the Delhi bench of the NCLT had allowed the insolvency plea filed by A2 Interiors against Ahluwalia Contracts claiming default of Rs 14.10 crore and had appointed an interim resolution professional.

Eli Lilly in ties with Sun, Cipla & Lupin for baricitinib



US drug firm Eli Lilly and Company said it has inked voluntary licensing agreements with Indian drug firms Sun Pharma, Cipla and Lupin to expedite availability of its arthritis drug baricitinib for treatment of Covid-19 patients in India. The company "has issued royalty-free, non-exclusive voluntary licences to established Indian pharmaceutical manufacturers of generic medicines," Eli Lilly said.

RBI appoints Kattoor as exec director

The Reserve Bank of India has appointed Jose J. Kattoor as executive director (ED). Prior to this, Kattoor was heading the Bengaluru Regional Office as RBI's regional director for Karnataka. He will look after human resource management, corporate strategy, budget department and Rajbhasha departments.



IOC converts LNG tankers to carry oxygen

Indian Oil Corporation is converting 14 liquefied natural gas (LNG) tankers into medical grade oxygen carriers. It had diverted high-purity oxygen used in its monoethylene glycol (MEG) unit to produce medical-grade liquid oxygen at its Panipat refinery complex. It is supplying 270 tonnes of LMO per day to the hospitals in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab. IOC is also converting 14 LNG tankers of 17 tonnes each.

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Govt expects prices to soften soon Cooking oil prices rise 50% in a year

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 10

Edible oil prices have shot up more than 50 per cent in a year's time on supply constraints. Production shortages, delay at the ports and lower imports have led to cooking oil burning a hole in consumers' pockets. However, the government is hopeful that the prices would soften in the days ahead.

According to government data, retail prices of edible oils have shot up by 55.55 per cent in over a year.

The retail price of vanaspathi has increased by 55.55 per cent to Rs 140 a kg on May 8 this year from Rs 90 per kg a year ago. The retail price of palm oil has risen by 51.54 per cent to Rs 132.6 per kg from Rs 87.5 per kg, soya oil by over 50 per cent to Rs 158 per kg from Rs 105 per kg, while that of mustard oil by 49 per cent to Rs 163.5 per kg. The retail price of groundnut oil has gone up by over 38 per cent to Rs 180 per kg from 130 per kg during the one-year period.

"The global demand-supply situation has been leading to price rise. Production has been down last year due to the pandemic. However, the demand started improving with the progress of vaccination," said Ajay Kedia, managing director, Kedia Commodities.

Further, the labour issues in Malaysia and Indonesia have been



Items	Price last year	Current price	% increase
Vanaspathi	90.00	140.00	55.55
Palm oil	87.50	132.60	51.54
Soya oil	105.00	158.00	50.00
Mustard oil	110.00	163.50	49.00
Groundnut oil	130	180.00	38.00

affecting production of palm oil and sunflower oil. Last week Malaysian palm oil futures touched their highest level since 2008. Soybean futures in Chicago too are trading close to multi-year highs. "In India, we had good production of edible oil seeds. But this did not help prices much," said Kedia.

Indian edible oil refiners also had curtailed palm oil imports for May and June as most states have imposed curbs on hotels and restaurants.

However, the government expects that release of imported stock, stuck at key ports, will help cool

prices in the coming days.

According to food secretary Sudhanshu Pandey, there was holding of some stock at Kandla and Mundra ports due to delay in clearances. Before clearing, tests were done by various agencies as part of the general risk analysis in view of the Covid situation.

"That problem has been addressed along with customs and Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. With that stock getting released in the market, we hope to see the softening impact on the oil prices," he said in a virtual press conference on Monday.

BLACKSTONE ACQUIRES EMBASSY INDUSTRIAL PARKS IN ₹5,250-CR DEAL

New Delhi, May 10: Global investment firm Blackstone on Monday announced the acquisition of Embassy Industrial Parks from Warburg Pincus and realty firm Embassy group in a big ticket deal estimated to be worth Rs 5,250 crore.

Blackstone and Embassy group did not disclose the value of the deal, which is one of the largest in the Indian logistics and warehousing segment.

In 2015, the Bengaluru-based Embassy Group had formed a joint venture with private equity firm Warburg Pincus to build industrial parks.

Warburg Pincus had a 70 per cent stake while Embassy has a 30 per cent shareholding in the joint venture, Embassy Industrial Parks.

NYSE-listed Blackstone said funds managed by Blackstone Real Estate have acquired Embassy Industrial Parks from Warburg Pincus and Embassy Group. Sources said the deal will be concluded in two stages.

In the first stage, Blackstone is buying Embassy Industrial Parks, having a portfolio of nearly 11 million sq. ft., at an enterprise value of around Rs 1,750 crore.

In the second stage, Blackstone, through its newly acquired firm Embassy Industrial Parks, would buy few land parcels directly from the Embassy group comprising another 11 million sq. ft. area, the sources said. —PTI

Mall footfalls vanish, recovery seen in Q3

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 10



DECLINE IN MOBILITY HITS RETAIL

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 10

India had high levels of mobility decline in the first week of May in places such as retail and recreation, groceries and pharmacies, parks, transit stations, workplaces, says a Google survey.

According to the Google Community Mobility Report, when compared to a pre-Covid baseline, the movement of people on May 5, 2021 was far less. The mobility in retail and recreation was down 59 per cent, groceries 20 per cent, parks 44 per cent, transit stations 44 per cent and workplaces 48 per cent. At the same time in residential places it was 24 per cent up.

Mobility of people has been affected the most in India among the top 10 countries with Covid caseloads, the report said.

"Mobility has fallen by high rates in five of the six parameters for India and was the highest on the one relating to being at home. Mobility has been impacted across the world, but India has probably witnessed the sharpest decline due to the recent restrictions imposed by various states," says Care Ratings.

For grocery, India is the only country which had a decline in mobility, indicating that the restrictions put by the government on shopping for just four hours a day had hit visits to the stores.

tions, almost 50 per cent revenue got reduced.

"April has been a wash-out. We don't expect much from the first quarter. By the second quarter, things will start improving and we expect footfalls to return to FY20 levels in the third quarter," said Kumar.

By then, vaccination would cover a large section of the society and provide people the confidence to venture out.

Moreover, some of the states have started using malls as vaccination centres.

While last fiscal revenues were severely affected, this year the impact is expected to be lower. "Last year, there were massive job losses and salary cuts. This time the incomes have not been affected much and the GST collections also are at record high," he added.

Passenger vehicle sales dip 14% in FY21: Dealers body

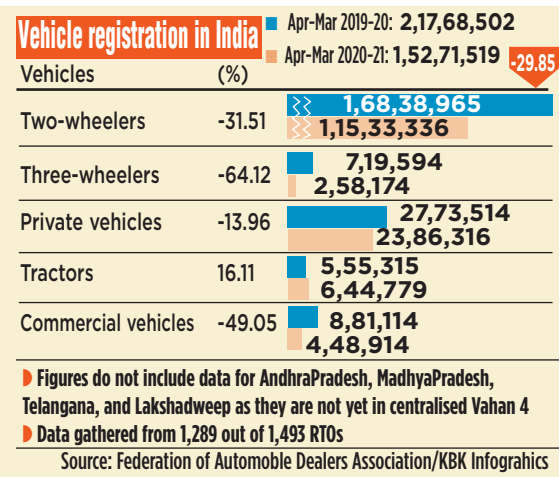
MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 10

Passenger vehicles (PV) sales declined 13.96 per cent at 23,86,316 units last fiscal, compared with 27,73,514 units sold in FY20 while total vehicle registrations in the country fell by 29.85 per cent to 1,52,71,519 units in FY21, the lowest in the last eight years, impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations, or Fada, said on Monday.

Total vehicle registrations were at 2,17,68,502 units in fiscal year 2019-20. All categories of vehicles, except tractors were in the red in FY21 with two-wheeler (2W), three-wheeler (3W), commercial vehicles (CV) and passenger vehicles (PV) falling by 31.51 per cent, 64.12 per cent, 49.05 per cent and 13.96 per cent respectively, the lowest in last eight years and way below the FY13 levels, Fada said in a statement.

Sales of two-wheeler also dipped 31.51 per cent to 1,15,33,336 units as compared to 1,68,38,965 units in the previous fiscal.

Three-wheeler registrations in FY21 were down 64.12 per cent at 2,58,174



units, as compared to 7,19,594 per cent in FY20, while CV registrations were at 4,48,914 units as against 8,81,114 units, a decline of 49.05 per cent.

Tractor registrations, however, grew by 16.11 per cent last fiscal at 6,44,779 units as compared to 5,55,315 units in 2019-20, it added.

As for April 2021, FADA said since India was under complete lockdown in April 2020 and not a single vehicle could be sold, a year-on-year comparison is not possible.

When compared to the previous month of March, Fada said in April 2021

total vehicle registrations were down 28.15 per cent at 11,85,374 units versus 16,49,678 units.

PV registrations were down 25.33 per cent at 2,08,883 units in April, as against 2,79,745 units in March this year, while those of 2W declined by 27.63 per cent at 8,65,134 units, as against 11,95,445 in the previous month.

Registrations of CV were at 51,436 units in April as compared to 67,372 units in March, down 23.65 per cent. Tractor registrations also witnessed a dip of 44.58 per cent last month at 38,285 units.

HUL'S SITAPATI MAKES WAY FOR SUNDARAM

New Delhi, May 10: F M C G major HUL on Monday said its executive director (foods and refreshment) S u d h i r



Sitapati is leaving the organisation and will be replaced by Srinandan Sundaram as part of top level management changes.

"Srinandan Sundaram replaces Sudhir Sitapati, who is leaving the organisation to pursue an external opportunity," HUL said in a statement.

Sundaram is currently executive director (customer development) at HUL.

The changes in the Management Committee would be effective from July 1, 2021, it added.

"I would like to thank Sudhir for his immense contributions to the company over the last two decades.

"We cherish iconic ad campaigns like Daag Acche Hain and Swad Apnepan Ka that were created under his leadership," HUL CMD Sanjiv Mehta said.

—PTI

Iron ore turns 'very, very hot' as prices jump 10% in minutes

May 10: Iron ore futures leaped higher as trading opened on Monday, extending a record run amid rampant Chinese demand and a wider surge in commodity prices as the global economy recovers.

Futures in Singapore jumped more than 10 per cent to hit a fresh record high of \$226 a tonne. The steel-making raw material is surging as strong demand from top buyer China leaves supplies stretched. Prices breached \$200 for the first time only last week.

"This sector is very, very hot, and just when China's steel demand

impulse will ease is perhaps the biggest question of 2021," Vivek Dhar, commodities analyst at Commonwealth Bank of Australia, said in Bloomberg Television interview. "Supply is still not able to meet that strong demand."

Iron ore is just one of a sweep of materials from copper to crops that have marched higher in recent months. Bloomberg's gauge of spot commodity prices finished last week at its highest in nearly a decade. Copper also extended its record rally Monday, soaring to \$10,500 a tonne in early trade.

Steel prices have jumped in China as heavy users like the construction and manufacturing sectors enjoy a busy period, as well as enjoying tailwinds from stimulus measures. Steel-makers in the rest of the world such as ArcelorMittal SA are also enjoying a boom as markets bounce back from the pandemic.

"There is a chance that ex-China demand can come back to such an extent that we still see steel demand pick up globally and that will see iron ore demand remain at these elevated levels," CBA's Dhar said.

—Bloomberg

HALTING | DEFECTIONS

Bank to pay sign-on bonus to associates

UBS promotees get \$40,000 bonus

CATHY CHAN MAY 10

UBS Group AG will pay a \$40,000 one-time bonus to its global banking analysts when they are promoted, doubling what some competitors are offering, as lenders seek to reward and retain younger employees weighed down by a surge in business and a prolonged work-from-home grind.

Starting as soon as this month the Swiss bank will pay the sign-on bonus to analysts promoted to associates on top of any regular salary increases, said people



familiar with the move who asked not to be identified because the information is private. The amount represents about 30 per cent of the annual base pay of a newly promoted associate, one of the people said.

Banks are raising pay for junior employees to prevent defections and ease discontent amid a jump in deals and an intensifying focus on work-life issues sparked by the pandemic. Wall Street was set abuzz earlier this year by a leaked presentation from junior analysts at Goldman Sachs Group Inc that detailed their gruelling workload and punishing hours.

A Hong Kong-based spokesman at UBS declined to comment.

UBS is upping the stakes, offering one-time bonuses that are double the amount that Credit

Suisse Group AG and Wells Fargo & Co have agreed to give their junior bankers. Other lenders such as HSBC Holdings Plc are also moving to raise pay and shortening the path to promotion, while Houlihan Lokey Inc has even offered some workers all-expenses-paid vacations.

Banks are also beefing up staff to avoid burnout. JPMorgan Chase & Co said last month it plans to add almost 200 staff, joining Goldman Sachs and Jefferies Financial Group Inc in boosting headcount.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Pakistan sweep Zimbabwe series

Harare: Pakistan quickly took the one wicket it needed Monday for another innings victory over struggling Zimbabwe in the second Test and a 2-0 series sweep. It took only five overs on Day 4 for Shaheen Shah Afridi to end it by having Luke Jongwe caught behind by wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan for 37. Pakistan won by an innings and 147 runs at Harare Sports Club to go with the innings and 116-run win in the first test at the same venue. Pakistan also claimed a slice of history with Afridi's 5-52 making him the third Pakistan bowler in the Test to take a five-wicket haul. He and Nauman Ali took five each in the second innings after Hasan Ali's five in the first. It's the first time Pakistan has had three bowlers with five wickets in a match, and the first time it has happened in tests since 1993. — *PTI*

Chawla's father dies of Covid-19

Mumbai: Experienced India leg-spinner Piyush Chawla's father Pramod Kumar Chawla on Monday died after battling COVID-19. He was around 60 years old. "With deepest grief, we announce that my beloved father, Mr Pramod Kumar Chawla, left for the heavenly abode on 10th May 2021. He was suffering from covid and post covid complications," Chawla wrote on his Instagram account. "We invite your kind thoughts and prayers in this difficult times. May his noble soul rest in peace." Chawla's latest IPL team Mumbai Indians too offered their condolences. — *PTI*

Zverev clinches 2nd Madrid title

Madrid: Alexander Zverev continued his impressive form going into the French Open by winning his second Madrid Open title. After beating top-seeded Rafael Nadal in the quarterfinals and fourth-ranked Dominic Thiem in the semifinals, Zverev rallied to defeat Matteo Berrettini 6-7 (8), 6-4, 6-3 for his second title this season. The sixth-ranked German also won the Mexican Open in Acapulco in March. Zverev won his first Madrid title in 2018 in a final against Thiem. The win on Sunday gave him his fourth Masters 1000 title, and first in three years. Zverev will be trying to improve from his fourth-round exit last year at the French Open. "To do well at the French Open, you need to be playing well during the clay court season," Zverev said. — *PTI*

Former footballer Franco no more

New Delhi: Fortunato Franco, one of the pillars of India's last Asian Games gold-winning football team in 1962, died in Goa on Monday. He was 84. The AIFF confirmed the news of his death but did not specify the cause of his demise. Franco is survived by his wife, son and daughter. One of India's finest mid-fielders, Franco was a part of Indian football's golden era between 1960-64. He was a part of the 1960 Rome Olympics squad but didn't get a game. However, he was an integral part of the 1962 Asiad gold winning team in Jakarta. — *PTI*

Shafali set to play for Birmingham

New Delhi: India's teen batting sensation Shafali Verma is set to play for Birmingham Phoenix in the inaugural edition of The Hundred and might also turn up for a Sydney franchise in the Women's Big Bash League later in the year. The 17-year-old thus will join her skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, vice captain Smriti Mandhana, Jemimah Rodrigues and Deepti Sharma in the 100-ball tournament involving eight men's and women's teams. "Shafali was approached by Birmingham franchise and the deal is about to be closed. She will be replacing New Zealand's Sophie Devine in the team," a BCCI source said. — *PTI*

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PINNED TO MAT

WFI says murder case against Sushil tarnished wrestler's image

New Delhi, May 10: At the peak of his prowess, Sushil Kumar single-handedly lifted Indian wrestling to unprecedented heights but as police looks for him in relation to a murder case, the sport's image has taken as much a beating as that of the trailblazing grappler. Sushil's international success triggered a revolution and created an inspirational legacy. The reserved grappler from Najagarh's Baprola village is till date India's only world champion (2010) in the sport. He is also the only one to claim two individual Olympic medals, an exceptional feat for a country which has seen very limited success at the Games.

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is concerned that the good reputation built over the years with stupendous international performances, many of them given by Sushil himself, has been ruined.

"Yes, I must say that the image of Indian wrestling has got hurt badly by this. But we have nothing to do with what wrestlers do away from the mat. We are concerned with their on-mat performance," WFI Assistant Secretary Vinod Tomar said.

Sushil's bronze medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics ended India's 56-year-long wait for an Olympic medal in wrestling.

The achievement had a tremendous impact as Indian wrestling witnessed the rise of Yogeshwar Dutt, Geeta and Babita Phogat, their cousin Vinesh, Rio bronze medalist Sakshi Malik and World medallists Bajrang Punia, Ravi Dahiya and Deepak Punia after that.

However, the fraternity is now shell-shocked as the police on Monday issued a 'Look-out Circular' (LoC) against the champion wrestler, who is untraceable since the brawl that led to the death of a young wrestler.

REBEL JUVENTUS RISK REMOVAL FROM SERIE A

Rome, May 10: Juventus will be kicked out of Serie A if it doesn't withdraw from the European Super League, Italian soccer federation president Gabriele Gravina said Monday. While AC Milan and Inter Milan backed out of the ill-fated bid to form a breakaway competition, Juventus remains the lone holdout in Italy.

"The rules are clear: If Juventus is still part of the Super League when it enters next season, it can't participate in Serie A," Gravina told Naples radio station *Kiss Kiss*.

"I would be sorry for the fans but rules are rules and they apply to everyone." Real Madrid and Barcelona are also still grasping onto the project, despite the risk of being banned from the Champions League. "I hope this holdout ends soon," Gravina added.

The Super League project imploded three weeks ago after the six English clubs involved, Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester United, Manchester City and Tottenham, backed out inside 48 hours of the project's announcement. — *AP*

Rome, May 10: Serena Williams raised doubts over her participation at the Tokyo Olympics on Monday, ahead of her return to the limelight this week at the Italian Open.

The 39-year-old, still ranked eighth in the world, has been absent from the courts since her semi-final defeat by eventual champion Naomi Osaka at the Australian Open in Melbourne in February.

Williams remains uncommitted about



The Delhi Police has issued a lookout notice against two-time Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl.

The incident has come at a time when Indian wrestling is celebrating its highest number of quotas — eight — for the Olympics. The anticipation of a best ever performance at the Tokyo Games is hard to miss.

The police is ascertaining the role of Sushil in a May 4 brawl that led to the death of 23-year-old Sagar Rana outside the Chhatrasal stadium.

"Not only this, but the incident that happened in February had also tarnished the image of Indian wrestling. The sport has struggled hard in earning a reputation because for long wrestlers were known only as a bunch of goons," Tomar lamented.

The WFI official was referring to coach

Sukhwinder Mor's involvement in the murder of five people, including a fellow coach Manoj Malik, in Jaat College in Rohtak district of Haryana.

Sukhwinder had allegedly gunned down five people due to his personal enmity with Malik and was arrested from New Delhi in a joint operation by Delhi and Haryana police.

Asked if WFI will remove Sushil from the annual contracts list, Tomar said they "were not mulling any such move as of now."

Sushil was handed an A grade contract in December 2018 along with four others for an annual financial support of ₹30 lakh.

However, he has not par-

ticipated in any international event since his first round defeat in the 2019 World Championship in Nur Sultan.

The image of Chhatrasal stadium, which has given India its finest wrestlers like Sushil, Yogeshwar, Bajrang and now Tokyo-bound Ravi Dahiya and Deepak Punia, has also taken a beating.

A source at the stadium said prominent wrestlers like Yogeshwar and Bajrang left the facility because "they were targeted by Sushil's camp for not toeing their line."

The 1982 Asian Games champion Satpal Singh, Sushil's coach and father-in-law, was in charge of the stadium till 2016 before he retired as additional director.

After that Sushil was

appointed an OSD and it is believed that the move was aimed at keeping the stadium in the tight grip of the family.

"Sushil, who is employed there on Railways' deputation, calls the shots. If you won't listen to him or do as he suggests, he would quietly start harassing you," the source said.

"People are scared to say anything. They come to make a career, not to indulge in politics. So they found it convenient to leave than tolerate the stadium politics," the source said.

The gravity of the current situation is enormous but Sushil is no stranger to controversy either.

In 2016, when WFI had chosen Narsingh Pancham Yadav to represent India at the Rio Games. He later failed a dope test and accused Sushil of having a role in spiking his food, a charge which was found to be false.

During the 2018 Commonwealth Games trials when Sushil beat Praveen Rana in the final, the supporters of the two camps traded blows outside the stadium.

Rana had later alleged that the bout was interrupted many times at the behest of Sushil and the officials were also threatened and finally it was awarded to the 2010 World Champion.

Sushil is also the President of the School Games Federation of India (SGFI), which was in news for all the wrong reasons.

He had alleged that SGFI secretary had forged his signature to change the by-laws of the organisation and also committed irregularities.

He filed an FIR against the secretary in December last year and was re-elected President of the body in March after fresh polls were held on the direction of the Sports Ministry.

— *PTI*

KOHLI | GETS A JAB



India skipper Virat Kohli gets vaccinated in New Delhi on Monday. — *Twitter*

Recovered KKR duo back home

New Delhi, May 10: Kolkata Knight Riders' leg-spinner Varun Chakravathy and pacer Sandeep Warrier, who were the first to test positive for COVID-19 in the currently-suspended IPL's bio-bubble, have returned to their respective home cities after completing 10 days of mandatory isolation. Tamil Nadu's Chakravathy was officially the first player in this edition of the IPL, who contracted the infection after going for some medical scans.

Subsequently, two of his teammates, Warrier and Prasidh Krishna, were also infected by the virus.

The Chennai-based Warriors' interaction with Delhi Capitals veteran Amit Mishra led to the veteran being found positive as well, causing ultimately

the league's suspension. "Yes, Chakravathy and Sandeep have gone home. They have completed 10 days of mandatory isolation. However, KKR as a franchise will keep monitoring their health," a BCCI official said.

Windies return

All the Caribbean players have reached home following concerted efforts by the BCCI and their respective franchises. Cricket West Indies CEO Johnny Grave has said. Top West Indies players like their white-ball captain Kieron Pollard, Jason Holder, Sunil Narine, Andre Russell, Dwayne Bravo, Nicholas Poonan, Shimron Hetmyer, and Fabien Allen were a part of the league. In all, nine West Indies cricketers competed in the event.

— *PTI*

TRIBUNAL GIVES CLEAN CHIT TO GUNAWARDENE

Dubai, May 10: An independent anti-corruption tribunal of the ICC on Monday cleared former Sri Lanka player Avishka Gunawardene of corruption charges, allowing him to resume participation in cricket-related activities with immediate effect. Gunawardene was facing two charges under the Emirates Cricket Board's Anti-Corruption Code.

The tribunal upheld one charge (2.4.6) against Sri Lanka's Nuwan Zoysa but dismissed the other three charges. "The detailed decision will be announced to the parties in due course and remains subject to appeal," an ICC released said.

Gunawardene was charged with Article 2.1.4 that relates to — Directly or indirectly soliciting, inducing, enticing, instructing, persuading, encouraging or intentionally facilitating any Participant to breach Code Article 2.1.

He was also charged with Article 2.4.5 that relates to, "Failing to disclose to the ACU (without unnecessary delay) full details of any incident, fact, or matter that comes to the attention of a Participant that may evidence Corrupt Conduct under the Anti-Corruption Code by another Participant." — *PTI*

SURGE IN | COVID CASES

IOC chief puts off trip to Japan

Tokyo, May 10: IOC President Thomas Bach has cancelled a trip to Japan because of surging cases of COVID-19 in the country, the Tokyo Olympic organising committee said on Monday in a statement.

Bach was to visit Hiroshima next Monday and meet the torch relay and then probably travel to Tokyo.

Organising committee president Seiko Hashimoto said last week that the trip would be "tough" for Bach to make, which was interpreted in Japan as meaning it was cancelled.

The trip was made impossible because of a state of emergency in Tokyo and other parts of the country that has been extended until May 31. The state of emergency was to have ended on Tuesday.

The statement said Bach's visit would be made "as soon as possible."

The postponement is an embarrassment to the IOC and local organisers with the Olympics opening in just over 10 weeks. Organisers and the IOC have repeatedly said the Olympics will not be cancelled, and will be "safe and secure."

Japan has attributed 11,000 deaths to COVID-19, better than many coun-

The trip was made impossible because of a state of emergency in Tokyo and other parts of the country that has been extended until May 31.

tries, but poor for Asia. Variants of the virus are spreading with reports of public health systems coming under pressure.

Public sentiment in Japan continues to run against holding the Olympics in the middle of a pandemic. Between 60-80% of Japanese people in polls have said the Olympics should be cancelled or postponed.

An online petition calling for the games to be canceled gained 300,000 signatures in three days, although a small protest against the Olympics on Sunday in Tokyo drew only 100 people.

Naomi Osaka, who will represent Japan at the Olympics, said she has mixed feelings.

"Of course I would say I want the Olympics to happen, because I'm an athlete and that's sort of what I've been waiting for my entire life," she said Sunday at the Italian Open.

— *AP*

Neesham doubts IPL re-start

Christchurch, May 10: New Zealand all-rounder Jimmy Neesham doesn't think that there is any chance of the remaining 31 matches of Indian Premier League happening in India this year, after the tournament got postponed due to COVID-19 cases inside the bio-bubble.

He also has serious doubts whether India would be able to host the 16-team T20 World Cup later this year.

India is in the midst of its worst ever health crisis in last 70 years with the country recording 400,000 cases on a daily basis with at least 4000 deaths on an average.

Both IPL and T20 World Cup are set to be re-scheduled to the United Arab Emirates.

"If it did start up again, I doubt the IPL would be in India again," said Neesham told Newshub.

"I think we've already seen plans for the T20 World Cup to move out of India later in the year and they're going to be ultra-cautious about that sort of thing," said Neesham, who was playing for Mumbai Indians in the now suspended league.

Neesham feels the bio-security lapses could be due to the fact that the



New Zealand's Jimmy Neesham represents Mumbai Indians in IPL.

teams were travelling across the country.

"Even though we were flying on chartered planes, we have to go through customs, hand your details over to people, walk through terminals, so there were always going to be pinch-points there," he said.

Neesham said that it is difficult to comprehend how the bubble was breached.

"We obviously don't know yet exactly how teams were infiltrated, but... it's such a difficult

prospect to keep everything perfect and when you've got so many guys that are close to each other, there are going to be social interactions after games.

"Once one team has it, you start looking back through your last week at who you talked to and who you shook hands with. It certainly gets your mind racing."

However Neesham isn't averse to the idea of going back to India again and playing the IPL if it resumes. — *PTI*

Returning Serena could miss Olympics



Serena Williams

this pandemic and there is so much to think about.

"Then there are the

Grand Slams. It's just a lot. So I have really been taking it one day at a time to a fault, and I definitely need to figure out my next moves."

Williams says she is "ready" to get started again in Rome as preparation for the French Open which starts in Paris on May 24.

"It's good to start fresh but it's also hard to start fresh," she told a press conference on Monday.

"I feel like I'm good. I'm in Rome. I'm going to have some good matches here

hopefully and then I will be at another Grand Slam which always makes me excited. So I think either way I'll be ready."

Williams has been stuck on 23 major trophies, one behind Australia's Margaret Court, since winning the 2017 Australian Open while pregnant.

Since then she has given birth, returned to the tour, and finished runner-up at four major tournaments — after losing just six out of 28 finals before 2017.

— *AFP*