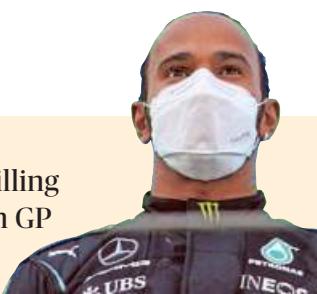




Customs duty waiver available to COVID-19 relief material: Nirmala
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Environment panel allows Great Nicobar plan to advance
page 9



Hamilton pips Verstappen in a thrilling duel, claims Spanish GP
page 13

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NEARBY



Delhi sees lowest daily cases in nearly a month

NEW DELHI
Delhi recorded 13,336 new COVID-19 cases in a 24-hour period – the lowest since April 12, said a health bulletin released on Sunday.

Relatively fewer tests, 61,552, were conducted during the same period. A total of 273 people also succumbed to the virus in a single day, which is the lowest since April 21.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Actor Rahul Vohra dies of COVID complications

NEW DELHI
Actor-YouTuber Rahul Vohra died on Sunday at a hospital here due to COVID-19 complications, theatre director-playwright Arvind Gaur confirmed. On Saturday, Mr. Vohra, in a Facebook post, had tagged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and asked for better treatment.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

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EDUCATION PLUS ▶ PAGE 5

Himanta to take over as Assam CM today

Sonowal proposed his name at BJP Legislature Party meet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma, the face of the BJP in Northeast India, will be sworn in on Monday as the 15th Chief Minister of Assam.

Dr. Sarma and the outgoing Chief Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal, met Governor Jagdish Mukhi on Sunday afternoon and put forward the BJP's claim to form the government.

Earlier, Mr. Sonowal submitted his resignation to the Governor, paving the way for his younger colleague to succeed him.

Both leaders had cut their political teeth in the All Assam Students' Union.

The BJP won 60 of the 126 seats in the Assam Assembly election. Its allies, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), won nine and six seats, respectively.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Sonowal proposed the name of Dr. Sarma as the Chief Minister at the BJP Legislature Party meeting, ending a week of speculation over who would take charge of the new government. BJP State president Ranjeet Kumar Dass and MLA-elect Nandita Goswami seconded the proposal.

The AGP and the UPPL too extended support.

The BJP's central leaders



Change at the top: BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma being congratulated by outgoing Chief Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal, in Guwahati on Sunday. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

Narendra Singh Tomar, B.L. Santosh, Arun Singh and Baijayan Panda attended the meeting.

"A few MLAs of our party and the two allies will be sworn in as Cabinet Ministers along with Dr. Sarma around noon. Others will be sworn in later," Dilip Saikia, Lok Sabha member, said.

Party insiders said Dr. Sarma was likely to keep the Finance, Health and Home portfolios with him. He handled Finance and Health in the Sonowal government as also in the Tarun Gogoi-led

Congress government earlier.

Mr. Sonowal said he was confident of Dr. Sarma leading Assam well and strengthening the BJP. "We managed to ensure peace, progress and security because of which the people re-elected us. I have the faith Himanta will serve people honestly and fight corruption," he said, urging the MLAs to stay united.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8
THE MAN WHO PUT OUT MANY FIRES FOR ASSAM BJP ▶ PAGE 9

Distress signal



Sad tale: Firewood stocked at the Seemapuri crematorium in New Delhi on Sunday. The Capital is in the grip of a devastating second COVID-19 wave. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Grief, groceries, all shared in this fight

Volunteers are stepping up to assist those in Delhi-NCR burdened by COVID-19 disease and death

SUNALINI MATHEW

NEW DELHI

On Thursday, Pritam Singh helped cremate a 24-year-old man. But that wasn't his worst experience over the past year. He remembers having to carry the body of a man past his young son, saying they were just taking him into a hospital emergency. "The family had told us not to reveal that his father had died," he says.

Mr. Singh and his team of seven, has, over the past year, supported free of cost, about 400 families struggling to perform the last rites of kin who have died of COVID-19. "Usually, when we go to a house, there are only two or three people. At the most, neighbours will come out of their homes when we are



Team solace: Tapesh Nagaria is reaching out through the Human Solidarity Foundation helpline. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

putting the body into the ambulance, but otherwise, there is no one to help," says the 48-year-old, who heads United Sikhs. The lack of support from those they thought could lean on and the breakdown in government machinery is what both angers

grieves people, he says.

Mr. Singh and his team have helped with Hindu and Sikh cremations and Muslim and Christian burials, but feel bad that they have to turn down many people simply because they have neither the volunteers nor the vehicles. Last year, the

daily calls were four or five; this year, it is 18-20.

'We cry every day'

For a group of men who work at their businesses or in IT, their ages ranging from 20s-40s, dealing with death every day has not been easy. "Hum roz rote hain (we cry every day)," Mr. Singh says.

In Gurugram, Honey Tandon, who started Helping Hands to provide meals, says people are donating in kind – flour, pulses and fruit.

Even as Mr. Singh starts his day at 6.30 a.m. in West Delhi's Tilak Nagar, in Gurugram dietician Honey Tandon packs breakfast for a few guards and people who live outside her condo gates. She quickly gives her

father and son the same food and rushes out.

Ms. Tandon began Helping Hands free of cost for those in her building who got COVID and a few workers who had planned to go back to their villages. "Soon people in other parts of Gurgaon started asking for home-cooked meals, so I began charging ₹100 per meal, from those who can afford it," she says. For those who can't, it's free.

In the three weeks that Helping Hands has been operational, it has provided about 30 meals each for lunch and dinner, with fewer for breakfast. People have started reaching out with donations in kind – flour, pulses and fruit.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



MONDAY, MAY 10, 2021



Debris from China rocket falls into Indian Ocean near Maldives

page 11

Delhi lockdown extended till May 17

Metro services suspended; CM says positivity rate has dipped following curbs

JAIDEEP DEO BHANJ
NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro services will be suspended from May 10 till May 17 as the Delhi government on Sunday announced a more stringent lockdown in the city for a week.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in a digital statement, announced that the lockdown in the Capital that was due to end on May 10, would be extended till May 17.

Mr. Kejriwal said because of the lockdown, the positivity rate in the Capital that peaked at 36.37% in April has started coming down and over the past few days has settled below 25%.



Motorists passing through a police checkpoint in Delhi on Sunday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

"Cases have come down, but we need to extend the lockdown. If we do not, we will lose what we have gained. We need to save lives at this point despite the hardships and will extend it by another week," Mr. Kejriwal said.

The Chief Minister said the government has used the lockdown to improve the health infrastructure in the national capital.

"Over the past few days our oxygen situation has also

improved and we have improved the system. We are no longer getting as many SOS calls and hearing that hospitals have run out of oxygen," Mr. Kejriwal said.

He added that the decision to extend the lockdown has been taken after consulting all stakeholders.

On the vaccination drive, he said the 18-44 age group has shown a tremendous response to get vaccinated but vaccine stocks in the Capital were low and the government was hoping that the Centre would provide vaccines soon.

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2 & 3

'Excessive use of oxygen in U.P. hospitals'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Some hospitals in Uttar Pradesh are consuming oxygen at levels several times higher than the average, the State government said on Sunday based on the preliminary report of an oxygen audit conducted by it.

Taking note of it, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directed the Health and Medical Education departments to coordinate with such hospitals and take action to 'balance' the consumption.

The government's observation comes as hospitals and legislators of the ruling BJP are reporting a shortage of medical oxygen in the State. In the past 24 hours, 950 metric tonnes of oxygen was supplied and distributed in the State, the government said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Gangwar unhappy with U.P.'s COVID-19 response

Patients struggling for admission, Labour Minister tells CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Union Minister of State for Labour and Employment Santosh Kumar Gangwar flagged concerns over the COVID-19 response in Uttar Pradesh in a letter to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on May 8. Mr. Gangwar complained that officers were not answering phone calls and patients were being forced to visit multiple facilities before being admitted to hospital.

Mr. Gangwar participated in a review meeting in Bareilly, his Lok Sabha constituency, called by the Chief Minister on May 8, where, sources said, the letter with suggestions and complaints was handed over.

In a tweet on Sunday, Mr. Gangwar said the Chief Minister met the elected representatives and officials of Bareilly to review the measures against the second wave of COVID-19. He made suggestions to improve the healthcare facilities.

Mr. Gangwar wrote that it



Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar is Bareilly MP.

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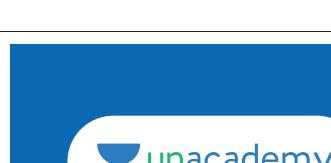
Mr. Gangwar wrote that it

'Cap prices of machines'
In the letter, Mr. Gangwar said vendors were selling essential equipment needed by hospitals such as ventilators at higher prices. He said the government should fix the prices.

He suggested that all private hospitals in Bareilly cater to COVID-19 patients.

Mr. Gangwar wrote that it

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



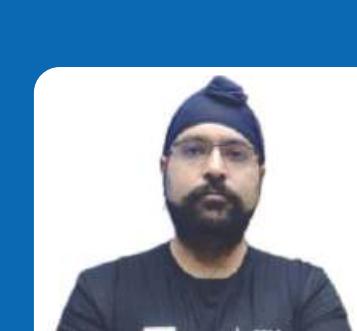
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TURN TO PAGE 9
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GURUGRAM/ NEW DELHI

Several Residents' Welfare Associations in the Millennium City have managed to come up with makeshift COVID care facilities after permission from the district administration a week ago. But arranging liquid oxygen and medical and paramedical staffers remain major challenges for them.

"I would not call it a COVID care facility, but just an emergency facility to take care of patients till the time they get a hospital bed. We are not treating patients. We have set up three beds in our club. It is a complete setup with oxygen cylinders, concentrators, and a round the clock nurse. We have tied up with a nursing home treating COVID patients for a doctor's visit in case of an emergency," said Mamta Yadav, RWA president of The Seven Lamps in Sector 82.

Four to five critical patients have been given medical aid at the facility in a week's time. The RWA has procured its own stock of medicines, PPE kits and oxygen cylinders so that the residents need not run around in case of an emergency. "But the only challenge that remains is getting the oxygen cylinder filled. There is a huge crowd at the filling stations. It is not too safe for people to stand in queues at these stations as they might get infected," said Ms. Yadav.

Funded by residents

The gated community has around 550 units with 45 active cases. "We have invested so much, all from residents' funding. But three beds may not be sufficient. We have space for 2-3 more beds, but we need support from the administration. I spoke to the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) and he has promised to arrange two concentrators based on the number of residential units.



The COVID care facility set up by the Civil Lines RWA with the help of police.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Care facilities up, but face hurdles galore

Problems persist for RWAs in procuring oxygen cylinders and staffers

It's. We need support to fill oxygen cylinders too. The COVID care facilities inside societies should be given priority for cylinder refill," said Ms. Yadav.

She added the RWA was also getting consent forms filled from the patients so that they do not turn around to blame them if things go wrong at any stage.

Another group housing society in its neighbourhood – Vipul Lavanya Apartments – has also set up a small emergency facility. "We have hired an ambulance belonging to one of our residents, who is a doctor. We have used the swimming pool lounger chairs and two oxygen cylinders to set up the facility. Also, we collected

residual tablets from patients who have recovered, bought PPE kits, face masks, and medicines. But we don't take permanent admissions. As per the guidelines, our facility has separate entry and exit," said Sanjay Raj Singhvi, RWA secretary of Vipul Lavanya Apartments in Sector 81.

"Two people from the Deputy Commissioner's office came to us seeking to know how many cylinders we have. We gave them a demand letter saying we need four cylinders and refilling them is a major problem. We also got a call from the ADC office on Friday," said Mr. Singhvi. The society has 28 active cases and five people have died so far.



Ramprastha City's Atrium Condominium Welfare Association president Pradip Rahi said they too wanted to set up their own COVID care facility and the developer was ready to help them, but they could not find the space that meets the guidelines.

Difficult guidelines

"It is difficult to meet all the guidelines issued by the district administration. We could not find a space with separate entry and exit. It is also very difficult to find medical and paramedical staffers. So we collected fund to procure half-a-dozen oxygen cylinders and medicines for any emergency," he said.

Hence, some of the residents have set up their own home Intensive Care Units with the help of a private company, he said. "It costs around ₹25,000 per day. But they need to arrange their own oxygen cylinders. We helped one such elderly couple to get oxygen. We had to go to far off places as Alwar and Kanpur to get the cylinders refilled," said Mr. Rahi.

Court orders DSLSA to compensate kin of man who died in custody

'Process application for compensation'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has ordered the Delhi State Legal Service Authority (DSLSA) to give compensation to the widow and two minor daughters of a thief who died while under judicial custody.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh ordered that DSLSA should process the application for compensation under the Delhi Victims Compensation Scheme, 2018.

The High Court's order came on a plea by the wife of the deceased Salman alias Mesar, who was arrested on November 11, 2020. The allegation against Salman was that he was involved in the theft of a vehicle. He was then produced before the Metropolitan Magistrate, where it was recorded by the Magistrate that his physical condition was not good and that he was not even able to stand.

Salman was, however, remanded to judicial custody and on the next day itself, he passed away in custody. He left behind his wife and two minor daughters – one who is six years old and other who is five months of age.

DSL SA submitted that if there is a loss of life in judicial custody, the legal heirs or dependents of the deceased would be entitled to compensation, which would be minimum of ₹3 lakh and maximum of ₹10 lakh.



pensation of ₹1 crore.

On the previous hearing, the court had noted that the police in its status report "merely" records the dates on which he was admitted to jail and his medical examination was conducted and the date when he was admitted to hospital at the time of his death.

DSL SA stated that the Delhi Victim Compensation Scheme permits the grant of compensation in case of such deaths. In its status report, it stated that Salman appears to have succumbed to injury inflicted to him during the course or after his apprehension in the theft case. While the theft case was itself subject matter of an FIR, in respect of his death another FIR has been lodged.

His wife, in her plea before the High Court, has claimed that he was subjected to torture by the police, but it was recorded in the remand order that the deceased was beaten up by the public. She sought a com-

IN BRIEF

File case against Delhi govt., demands BJP

NEW DELHI
The Delhi BJP on Sunday demanded that a case of criminal negligence be filed against the Delhi government for its management of the COVID-19 crisis. Delhi BJP President Adesh Gupta alleged that the Kejriwal government's callousness is responsible for Delhi witnessing the worst COVID-19 as the Centre warned Delhi of a major wave as early as in October 2020. He said the Kejriwal government wasted six months in politics of confrontation with the Centre and added not a single bed or any facility like oxygen plant in any hospital.

Extension of lockdown shows AAP's failure: Cong.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Sunday said that the Delhi government's decision to extend the lockdown in the Capital by another week proves that the Arvind Kejriwal government has failed to control the virus and death rates as people scramble for treatment and are forced to deal with black-marketeers and unscrupulous elements cashing in on people's misery.

Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee President Ch. Anil Kumar said that Mr. Kejriwal wasted one year playing petty politics instead of ramping up hospital infrastructure.

"Mr. Kejriwal wasted time in playing blame game with the Modi government, instead of taking urgent remedial measures himself to ensure COVID-19 cases did not soar beyond control. Thousands of seriously-ill are under home isolation, unable to get bed in government hospitals and COVID Care Centres, as they are unable to bear the highly inflated cost of treatment in private hospitals," Mr. Kumar said.

He also demanded that the Delhi govt. facilitate travel arrangements for the migrant labourers wanting to return to their villages.

Crime Branch conducts multiple raids to nab Navneet Kalra

524 oxygen concentrators were recovered from his restaurants

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police on Sunday conducted multiple raids in Delhi-NCR for the owner of the restaurants from where more than 500 oxygen concentrators were recovered, said a senior police officer.

The officer said that Navneet Kalra, the owner of all three restaurants from where police had recovered oxygen concentrators, is missing. On Saturday, a raid was conducted at his farmhouse in Chhattarpur but he was not found. He was allegedly involved in hoarding and black marketing of oxygen concentrators. The role of other people in the case is under investigation.

"After the raid at his restaurant, he stopped responding to calls and his last



Buyers used to stand in a queue outside the restaurant to purchase oxygen cylinders. ■ FILE PHOTO

switched off," said the officer.

On Saturday, police had transferred the case from local police to Crime Branch for a detailed investigation. On Thursday, Lodhi Colony police had recovered 524 oxygen concentrators from Khan Chacha, Nege Ju and Town Hall restaurants after they received information of alleged hoarding of the device.

Imported by pvt. firm

Police said that these oxygen concentrators were imported by a private company and later Mr. Kalra was selling it at an exorbitant rate. He has approached buyers on WhatsApp. Buyers used to stand in a queue outside Khan Chacha restaurant to purchase oxygen concentrators for ₹60,000-80,000.

Rags, riches



A ragpicker sorting out useful items from a heap of garbage while her son is asleep, on Mother's Day in New Delhi on Sunday.

■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Activist Natasha's father succumbs to COVID-19

She has been lodged in Tihar on charges of conspiracy in north-east Delhi riots

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Activist Natasha Narwal's father Mahavir Narwal died due to COVID-19 related complications on Sunday. Ms. Natasha has been lodged in Tihar Jail after being arrested in May last year for allegedly being part of a premeditated conspiracy in the north-east Delhi riots in February that year.

Breaking the news, Pinjra Tod, the organisation Natasha has been a part of said her bail petition to visit her

father in the hospital was to be heard on May 10.

"Mahavir Narwal campaigned hard to prove the innocence of Natasha, who was incarcerated for her peaceful participation in the protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. He himself had been imprisoned for his participation in protests during the Emergency period," Pinjra Tod said in a statement.

Mr. Narwal was associated with the People's Science Movement and the Gyan-Vi-

gyan Andolan since its inception in Haryana.

Condolences pour in

Several left-wing politicians and activists condoled his death. CPI(M) politburo member Brinda Karat tweeted: "Extend my deep condolences to Natasha and her brother Akash. The terrible injustice of the system in which a daughter wrongly locked up for a year unable to see her father even for a final farewell."

CPI(M) politburo member

Kavita Krishnan tweeted: "This is so bloody cruel & sadistic: it's a form of torture to keep political prisoners jailed during a pandemic, forced to suffer not only prison, but the pain of being away from loved ones who are dying. Natasha's brother also has Covid-19 [sic]," she said.

Earlier, Pinjra Tod had organised a Twitter storm to campaign for Ms. Natasha's release so that she could be with her father and support her family as they were battling COVID-19.

Statements of Chhatrasal Stadium brawl victims recorded: police

Search on for wrestler Sushil; 1 apprehended with weapons

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Police have recorded the statement of the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl victims, which had ended in the death of a wrestler.

A senior police officer said that the victims recorded their statement where they said the incident took place over a dispute of vacating a flat in Model Town. The victims also alleged that Olympian Sushil Kumar was present when the incident took place, they said.

On the hunt

Mr. Kumar is absconding and efforts are being made to nab him. Raids are being conducted in Delhi-NCR and neighbouring States, the officer said.

"If I would have got better treatment maybe I could be saved. [Mujhe bhi accha treatment mil jaata to mai bhi bach jaata tumhara]," Vohra had written.

of Tuesday and Wednesday

Police had said that information regarding firing inside the Chhatrasal Stadium was received, following which they reached the spot and found five cars parked in the parking area of the stadium.

During the inquiry, it was found that a quarrel had taken place allegedly between Kumar, Ajay, Prince, Sonu, Sagar, Amit, and others in the parking area. Thereafter, police registered a case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Arms Act at Model Town police station. The injured were shifted to BJRM Hospital for treatment.

The crime scene as well as all the five vehicles was inspected. During the inspection, one double barrel loaded gun with five live cartridges was found in a car and two wooden sticks were also recovered from the spot. All five vehicles and weapons of offence were seized. The crime scene was further inspected by forensic experts of FSL, Rohini. During the investigation, information regarding the death of Sagar, son of a head constable, and injury to Sonu was received from Trauma Centre, Civil Lines, following which Sections 302, 365, 120B of the IPC were registered, police had said.

One apprehended

Police had apprehended one Prince Dalal (24), a resident of Jhajjar in Haryana, along with one double barrel gun. Police recovered two double barrel guns, seven live cartridges, two wooden sticks, and five cars. "It was not a case of trespassing. The accused took the victims inside the stadium where they assaulted them in the parking area. Mr. Kumar was present at the spot when the incident happened. However, police are investigating his role in the assault," an official source had said.

YouTuber Rahul Vohra dies of virus complications

He had earlier tagged PM and Deputy CM asking for better treatment in FB post

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Actor-cum-YouTuber Rahul Vohra died on Sunday at a hospital in East Delhi due to COVID-19 complications, theatre director-playwright Arvind Gaur confirmed.

Vohra, 35, had shared his COVID-19 diagnosis earlier this week in a Facebook

post. He was admitted at the Rajeev Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital in Tahirpur and was shifted to Ayushman Hospital in Dwarka on Saturday evening.

Mr. Gaur confirmed the news of Vohra's demise on Facebook. "Rahul Vohra is gone, my talented actor is no more. It was only yester-

day [Saturday] that he told me his life could have been saved if he got better treatment. He was shifted to Ayushman, Dwarka last evening but we could not save him. Please forgive us, we are all your culprits. My last respects [sic]," he wrote.

On Saturday, Vohra in a Facebook post had tagged

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and asked for better treatment.

"If I would have got better treatment maybe I could be saved. [Mujhe bhi accha treatment mil jaata to mai bhi bach jaata tumhara]," Vohra had written.

Timings**DELHI**

MONDAY, MAY. 10
RISE 05:34 SET 19:02
RISE 04:48 SET 17:50
TUESDAY, MAY. 11
RISE 05:34 SET 19:03
RISE 05:18 SET 18:43
WEDNESDAY, MAY. 12
RISE 05:33 SET 19:03
RISE 05:51 SET 19:38

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	39	23
Safdarjung	39	23
Palam	41	25

Delhi Palam Today
40°C A comfortable morning and hot day. A spell of rain or dust storm/thunderstorm may occur at few places.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
40°C Another hot day would continue. A spell of rain with thunderstorm may occur at some places.

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(From left): A man unloads oxygen cylinders from a truck at a DTC depot in Dwarka; health workers drink coconut water during a break near the Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital in Delhi on Sunday. ■ V. KRISHNAN, R.V. MOORTHY

Capital records lowest number of daily cases in nearly a month

City sees dip in testing; 273 people died on Sunday, which is the lowest in 18 days

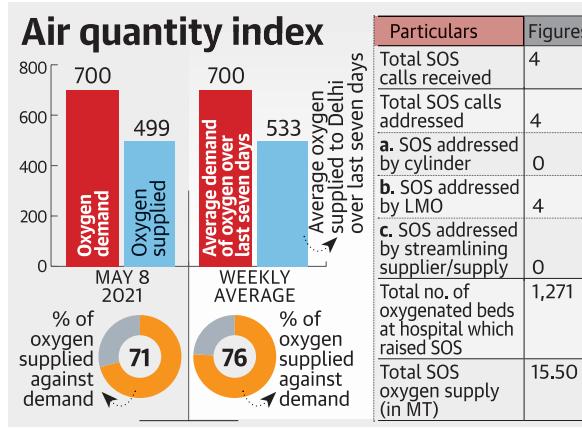
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Capital on Sunday recorded 13,336 new COVID-19 cases – the lowest figure since April 12 – as the lockdown was extended for another week to put brakes on the virus spread and strengthen the city's health infrastructure. Also, 273 persons died on the day, which is the lowest on record after April 21.

The health bulletin issued by the Delhi government showed that 61,552 tests have been conducted over a 24-hour period with a positivity rate of 21.63%, which was less than the 74,384 tests conducted the previous day that showed a positivity rate of 23.34%.

The bulletin did not mention any reason for the fall in



the number of tests.

Active cases

The Capital now has 86,232 active cases with 52,263 under home isolation. The number of containment zones has risen to 53,127

from 51,338 the previous day. The cumulative figures for the city now stand at 13,23,567 positive cases with 19,344 deaths and 12,17,991 recoveries.

The government said the Capital had received 499 me-

etric tonnes (MT) of oxygen on Saturday against its daily demand of 700 MT as per the directions of the Supreme Court. The average oxygen supplied over the past seven days was 533 MT, which was 76% of the quantity directed by the Supreme Court, it said. The government added that it received four SOS calls regarding the shortage of oxygen and addressed all of them.

On the vaccination drive, the government said 1,29,142 beneficiaries had been vaccinated in 24 hours, which is the highest since the drive began on January 16. Of these, 90,289 were those who got their first dose. The cumulative beneficiaries vaccinated so far now stand at 3,875,636 of which, 8,60,639 have received both doses.

Sisodia lashes out at Centre for exporting 6.5 cr. doses of vaccine

CM writes to Union Health Minister for sufficient supply of vaccine

VACCINE TRACKER

STOCK POSITION OF COVID VACCINES

GOI Supply for age 45+, frontline workers, healthcare workers	Vaccine	13,91,800
doses received till date	29,28,690	43,20,490
Vaccine	11,68,050	26,85,250
doses utilised till date	38,53,300	
Balance Stock	2,23,750	2,43,440
	4,67,190	2,74,460



VACCINATIONS ADMINISTERED

Total vaccine doses administered	38,96,551
• 1st dose administered	30,35,279
- Healthcare workers	2,37,294
- Frontline workers	3,68,086
- Aged 45+	21,28,788
- 18 - 45 years	3,01,111
• 2nd dose administered	8,61,272
Vaccine doses administered on 08.05.2021	1,28,441

VACCINATION CENTRES

Locations	Centres	Capacity
For healthcare workers, frontline workers, aged 45+	374	470
18 - 45 years	96	394
		59,100

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday lashed out at the Centre for exporting 6.5 crore doses of vaccines to 93 nations.

He alleged that they did so to build their image globally instead of making the vaccine available to its own citizens. He said the vaccines could have instead been used to inoculate youth, many of whom have died during the current wave.

"Since the start of this second wave, we have lost a cumulative of 1 lakh people in India as a result of COVID-19. What was hoped from the Central Government was to manage the COVID crisis in India, but they were too busy in managing their image instead. It is important to help nations in this crisis, and it is required, but not at the expense of our own people," Mr. Sisodia said.

He alleged that when States were pleading with the Centre to increase doses, it was too busy providing the vaccines to other nations.

"I request the Central Government to learn something

I request the Centre to learn something from the International fraternity. Canada, U.S., France and European nations prioritised vaccinating their own people first....

MANISH SISODIA
Deputy Chief Minister

from the International fraternity. Canada, U.S., France and European nations prioritised vaccinating their own people first."

On the issue of vaccines being made available, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal wrote a letter to Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan asking for vaccines to be supplied in sufficient quantity to the Capital. He said the government has put in place the infrastructure needed to vaccinate over three lakh people a day.

The Chief Minister also pointed that there were continuous glitches in the CowIN app that was leading to most people spending valuable time registering and trying to book an appointment. "A large number of people are not savvy to be able to register themselves. I request you to allow States to develop their separate app or develop mechanisms other than apps to manage vaccinations in their States," he wrote.

However, as the son remained adamant about not shifting his father following which the court allowed continued treatment of the man at IHBAS. The court also clarified that IHBAS would not be held liable in any manner, as the man and his family are conscious of the fact that the doctors at the facility may not have the same specialisation required for a COVID patient.

HC asks govt. to create COVID facility at IHBAS

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Considering the acute shortage and severe demand for beds pertaining to COVID-19 patients, the High Court has directed the Delhi government to process the proposal to create a COVID facility at the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS).

Justice Prathiba M. Singh also asked the government to assist in making 60 to 80 beds at IHBAS as a designated COVID facility. "Further, an endeavour shall be made to immediately operationalise the said COVID facility at IHBAS, as per the applicable protocols and norms," the court ordered.

The court's direction came while hearing the plea of a man whose 83-year-old father was admitted at IHBAS on April 29, 2021 due to an emergency suggesting a neurological ailment. The son said his father suffered a brain stroke and was admitted to IHBAS. Later, the father was detected with fever and upon conducting an RT-PCR test, he turned out to be positive for COVID-19.

The grievance raised by the son is that IHBAS, not being a designated COVID-19 hospital, has asked him to shift his father to LNJP. He has asked the court to direct the IHBAS to treat his father and not discharge him, as it would jeopardise his life and chances of survival.

It was submitted by a team of doctors from IHBAS that the patient has neurological as also cardiac issues, and hence it would be advisable for the patient to move to a general hospital like LNJP Hospital rather than a specialised hospital like IHBAS. The government also assured the court of the availability of a bed for the father in LNJP Hospital with a transport facility through an ambulance from IHBAS.

However, as the son remained adamant about not shifting his father following which the court allowed continued treatment of the man at IHBAS. The court also clarified that IHBAS would not be held liable in any manner, as the man and his family are conscious of the fact that the doctors at the facility may not have the same specialisation required for a COVID patient.

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THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

Steadfast farmers work on immunity, seek vaccination

They say they will not move until their demands are met

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Desi 'kaadha' and lemonade have become the most consumed beverages among farmers protesting against the agricultural laws at three borders in Delhi for nearly six months now, even as the raging pandemic claims hundreds of lives daily and leaves thousands sick.

They have also added multi-vitamin and zinc tablets as supplements hoping to improve their immunity against the virus, but are resolved not to yield ground until their demands – a repeal of the three farm laws and a new one guaranteeing MSP on crops – are met.

But, they say, they would take the vaccination.

Hundreds of farmers, chiefly from Punjab, Haryana

and Uttar Pradesh, continue to encamp Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur border points of Delhi despite "a few" of them being removed after testing positive for COVID-19 and some symptomatic protesters undergoing medication.

"There are no such cases of COVID here at Singhu border. The farmers are taking care of themselves by consuming 'kaadha' [a traditional Indian hot beverage mixed with herbs and spices to boost immunity] and multi-vitamins. The situation at the border area is normal, as it was earlier. There is nothing to worry about," said Sukhwinder Singh, a farmer.

Farmer leader Kulwant Singh, who hails from Punjab, said a vaccination centre is being operated at a hospital at the Singhu border.

Vaccination facility
At Tikri and Ghazipur, the protesters said they have demanded for a vaccination facility but the government has not responded to their appeal yet. They added they are firmly resolved to stay put at Delhi's borders, and are making arrangements to ensure COVID-appropriate behaviour among crowds.

'Helplessness during this time lead to The Good Food Project'

Two friends join hands to help crematorium staff workers with food; they have a team of 15 volunteers from across the globe now



A COVID-19 victim being cremated at the Nigambodh Ghat in Delhi on Sunday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

coming in. A worker told us that bodies come all night these days. The crematorium office staff person said they provide all meals to the workers. But when we asked the workers, they said they are managing themselves. We gave dinner packets to about 30 of them," Mr. Gupta said.

The rest of 70 packets were distributed to other workers at the crematorium, he added.

Taking the idea forward and calculating the amount — ₹50,000 a day if they fed even 100 people daily at a few crematoriums — they decided to set up a crowdfunding online, which has been steadily growing.

By Sunday night, they formed a team of 10 persons

— all friends, including Kriya Bhansali from Mumbai, managing social media and research, and Siddharth Pandey in London arranging and coordinating volunteers from London.

By Monday, over 15 people were ready to go and help the team with delivering food to crematoriums. "Most of the people who agreed to volunteer were those who had faced a personal loss due to COVID-19," Mr. Gupta said.

Personal loss
Twenty-nine-year-old Dawar Naqvi said he became a part of the project because one of his uncles — a retired Army Colonel — died of COVID-19 and there

Regional front in Assam may have been factor in loss of Cong., allies

BJP-led alliance said it also suffered a few setbacks because of the Mahajot

RAHUL KARMAKAR

GUWAHATI
The regional front of the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and jailed activist Akhil Gogoi's Rajoor Dal (RD) could have been a factor in the failure of the Congress-led Mahajot, or grand alliance, in dislodging the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies in Assam.

The BJP-led Mitrajot (group of friends) won 75 of the 126 Assembly seats while the Mahajot settled with 50. Mr. Gogoi was the lone winner for the regional front that engaged in a "friendly fight" in a few constituencies.

Anti-CAA fire

Both the AJP and the RD were forged in the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act fire that had swept Assam briefly in December 2019.

Data from the Election Commission of India reveal that the votes polled by the AJP-RD combine exceeded the victory margin of the BJP

and its allies in 14 constituencies. Eleven of these seats were among the 47 where elections were held in the first phase, 37 of which were won by the BJP and its allies. Of these 14 seats, the BJP won 11 and the ally Asom Ganparaishad (AGP) three.

Electoral to one of these seats, Barhampur, was held in the second phase on April 1. The remaining two are in western Assam, which went to the polls in the third and final phase on April 6.

The BJP had contested Barhampur after the AGP denied ticket to former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Manta, who had held the seat since 1991. The BJP's Jitu Goswami had polled 79,111 votes, 751 more than his nearest Congress candidate Suresh Borah while the AJP's Dipika Saikia Keot bagged 1,922 votes.

AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi contested Duliajan and Naharkatia constituencies where he garnered

24,192 and 24,232 votes respectively. The margin of votes between the BJP victors and the Congress losers in these two constituencies was 14,976 and 8,110.

Victory margin

Likewise, AJP general secretary Jagadish Bhuyan received 29,849 votes in Sadiya constituency, 7,765 more than the margin of victory of BJP's Bolin Chetia over Lakshmin Chandra Chetia of the Congress. On April 1, BJP's chief poll strategist Himanta Biswa Sarma told a local TV channel that his party had encouraged the formation of the AJP and the RD with the objective of splitting the anti-CAA votes.

Alluding to this claim after the results were announced, Congress pointsman Jitendra Singh attributed the party's loss in at least 10 sets to the AJP-RD factor. "The regional front was definitely one of the factors," State Congress leader Apurba Bhattacharya

said while analysing his party's poll performance.

Had the Congress managed to win the 14 seats, the 10-party 'Mahajot' tally would have been 64 – the majority mark in the Assam Assembly.

"Linking of the regional front to our party's victory is crying over spilt milk. A few of our candidates lost for similar reasons, but there's no point talking about it now," BJP leader Dhrubajyoti Morai said.

The BJP gave the example of the Nazira seat to drive home the point. Debabrata Saikia of the Congress defeated Mayur Borgohain of the BJP by 683 votes to retain Nazira. The AJP's Ribulaya Gogoi polled 2,896 votes here.

AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi said blaming his party for the loss of an alliance was ridiculous. "The votes we got reflect the scope for a regional party. This is just the beginning for us," he said.

J&K extends lockdown till May 17

Administration starts reappointing retired healthcare workers, medical officers

PEERZADA ASHIQ SRINAGAR

The J&K administration on Sunday extended 'Corona curfew' up to May 17 in all 20 districts, with the experts fearing that daily positive cases may touch up to 10,000 a day in coming weeks.

"Corona curfew imposed in all 20 districts of J&K till 7 a.m. on Monday is extended further by seven days till Monday (May 17). The curfew will be strict except for a few essential services," a government spokesman said.

The spokesman said the gathering permissible for marriages is now reduced to 25.

L-G chairs meet

These decisions were taken during a high-level meeting of the Covid Task Force chaired by J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

"Ten additional oxygen generation plants are coming up in J&K soon with the intervention of the Central government. Most of the big COVID care government hospitals



A policeman stops vehicles during curfew in Srinagar on Sunday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

added.

The fresh measures have come after Prof. M.S. Khuroo, Chairman of the Apex Level Advisory Committee of Government of Jammu and Kashmir for COVID-19, in an interview to a local daily, asked the administration to prepare for receiving close to 10,000 COVID positive cases with around 100 deaths per day.

Likely to peak

"The pandemic is likely to peak within 3 to 4 weeks and stay at a plateau for several weeks before showing regression. The next six to eight weeks are crucial as J&K is likely to witness 6,000 to 10,000 cases, 60 to 100 deaths per day," Prof. Khuroo was quoted as saying by the daily.

He said many mutant strains of the virus in addition to the wild strain have resulted in some distinctive features this year. "There is a suspicion that COVID-19 as of today in J&K has higher mortality and morbidity," he added.

here now have their own oxygen generation plants. The upcoming plants will add to the capacity of oxygen availability in the UT," Mr. Sinha said.

Meanwhile, restrictions have yielded some favourable results in containing the spread of the corona virus, especially at the community level, the officials said.

The J&K administration also decided to start contractual reappointment of retired healthcare workers, including faculty members, medical officers and senior-cum-junior consultants.

"In view of the surge in

13 prisoners escape from COVID-19 facility in Haryana

Four teams have been formed to trace them: police

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA CHANDIGARH

Thirteen prisoners escaped from a jail in Haryana's Rewari, a dedicated facility for COVID-19 positive inmates in the State, officers said on Sunday.

Four police teams have been formed to trace the prisoners while the Rewari Police is also coordinating with police departments of neighbouring districts including Narnaul, a senior officer said.

The incident took place on the intervening night of Saturday-Sunday, they said.

The prisoners, who were kept in a special section of the Rewari jail, cut an iron grill of the barrack in which they were lodged and used

C The prisoners were facing cases including murder, theft, dacoity and rape in Rewari and Mahendergarh

ABHISHEK JORWAL Rewari SP

Cloth from their beddings as rope to escape, they added.

At present, the jail is functioning as a dedicated facility for COVID-19 positive prisoners in the State.

As many as 493 COVID positive undertrial prisoners from different parts of the State are lodged in the special section of the Rewari jail, which is in the final stages of construction, Rewari Superintendent of Police

Abhishek Jorwal said over the phone. Inmates from different Haryana jails are shifted to the facility for isolation and treatment once they test positive for the coronavirus.

"Thirteen prisoners have escaped. They were facing cases including murder, theft, dacoity and rape in Rewari and Mahendergarh. They were brought to Rewari from Narnaul jail," Mr. Jorwal said.

Mr. Jorwal said jail officials informed the police that during a routine counting of the prisoners in the morning, 13 were found missing. He said a case has been registered in the incident and negligence on part of the jail officials is being investigated.

Fight against COVID-19



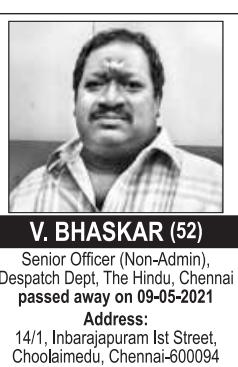
Police personnel standing outside the historic Sanganeri Gate to enforce the lockdown in Jaipur on Sunday. ■ PTI

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

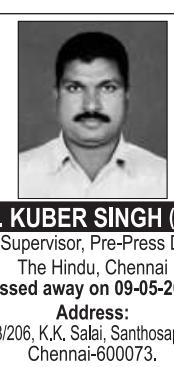
DEATH

DEATH



V. BHASKAR (52)

Senior Officer (Non-Admin), Despatch Dept, The Hindu, Chennai passed away on 09-05-2021. Address: 14/1, Inbarajapuram 1st Street, Choolaimedu, Chennai-600094 Mobile: 9840159798



S. KUBER SINGH (59)

Sr. Supervisor, Pre-Press Dept, The Hindu, Chennai passed away on 09-05-2021. Address: No. 8/206, K.K. Salai, Santhosa puram, Chennai-600073, Mobile: 8939449193.



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AUM SHANTI
A mentor, guide and inspiration to us all. His life presence was loud, potent and exuberant and at the same time calm, observant and tranquil. A life so beautifully lived, a heart that deeply loved with an amazing sense of humor but went away too sooner. The loss is immeasurable, but so is the legacy left behind.

Hari Madhavan

(13/01/1971 - 08/05/2021)
S/o Mr.K.Madhavan, Hari Villa, Shenoy Nagar, Chennai

May the Almighty give rest & peace to the departed soul

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Priya Darshani
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DEATH

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This is to inform the General Public that Management of Sehgal Neo Hospital, Meera Bagh will destroy the patient's old record until 31-12-2017. Therefore, anyone who requires the said records may acquire the same from the Hospital record room on submission of an application within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The management will not be responsible afterwards.

Medical Director - Sehgal Neo Hospital B-Block, Meera Bagh, New Delhi-110063

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READ

Lockdown failed to slow down iron ore extraction in Odisha: RTI reply

STAFF REPORTER BHUBANESWAR

When frequent COVID-19 lockdowns brought life to a halt across the country last year, it was business as usual for the mining sector in Odisha, said activists.

According to the information obtained through the exercise of the Right to Information, 1,109.86 lakh metric tonnes of iron ore was extracted in the State from January to December 2020.

"When the whole State was under lockdown and manufacturing sector could not function to its potential, iron ore extraction went on unabated. Of the 1,109 lakh mt iron production, 240 lakh mt was exported," said Pradip Pradhan, the RTI activist who obtained the information.

Govt. got ₹5,663.68 crore

Mr. Pradhan said the State government got richer by ₹5,663.68 crore on account of iron ore extraction.

He added lessees operating merchant mines continued the operations and accrued huge benefits.

Odisha, which accounts for 64% of India's iron production, has been extracting iron ore above 1,000 lakh mt for the past several years.

The State boasts of 33% India's iron ore reserves.

During the lockdown, 7,086.835 hectares of area bearing iron ore were leased out to different companies, he said.

Exports to China

According to the RTI information, even during the India-China border stand-off, huge quantities of iron ore were exported to China through Pradip Port.

Recently, sarpanches of three gram panchayats - Talakanisar, Kumundi and Suakati - around the Gandhamardan Iron Ore mine in Keonjhar district had urged the State-run Odisha Mining Corporation to stop ore transportation in the wake of rising COVID-19 cases. However, it is alleged that the company did not pay any heed to the request.

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Lockdown gains

State shutdowns are inevitable, but they must be used to augment the health system

Several States have done the inevitable, going into a strict lockdown for a fortnight to arrest India's calamitous descent into COVID-19 hell since mid-March. The horror of sweeping infections, severe disease and staggering death rates has made a lockdown a popular measure, unlike last year's imposition on an ill-prepared nation. Public acceptance of restrictions comes with the realisation that the threat to life from a mutating virus has aggravated manifold, although the spread of the scourge, from about 9,000 new daily cases in early February this year to over 4,00,000 in May, was brought about mainly by wrong messaging, massive political rallies and large religious events. After having been failed, what people now look forward to are measures that draw insights not from crude policing, but public health research. Unlike in 2020, the evidence is also stronger: WHO explains that SARS-CoV-2 spreads primarily through respiratory droplets and aerosols produced when people cough, sneeze, speak, sing or breathe, are within one metre of each other and also in crowded, poorly ventilated settings. Contact with contaminated surfaces poses another risk. Insistence on wearing good masks, distancing and a prohibition on risky gatherings, such as in restaurants, malls, religious sites, auditoria and on public transport are, therefore, essential. It is welcome that lessons have been learnt, and people were given time to prepare this time. Moreover, rather than shut out employment and services completely, home delivery services and some vending have been permitted. Tamil Nadu, which has commendably announced a relief of ₹4,000 for COVID-19, part of it to be disbursed during the lockdown, should avoid big gatherings at ration shops, opting instead for e-payments or doorstep disbursement. States should prevent crowding at shops open for limited hours by allowing door deliveries of all consumer goods and not just food, using online services. Travel for emergencies must be facilitated without harassment.

For an exhausted medical community, staggering under the weight of over 37 lakh active COVID-19 cases and a severe shortage of medical oxygen and drugs, the pause in activity comes as a life saver. The lockdown window can help it manage existing patients while governments augment critical supplies; a slowing infection curve will give everyone breathing space in coming weeks, although the heart-rending death rate may take time to decline due to the lag effect. A drop in the vaccination rate poses a serious challenge, and it is incumbent on the Centre to arrange for vaccine imports or augment domestic production to scale it up. Testing access must also be dramatically increased by May-end to assess the true scale of the pandemic. Without such progress, the lockdowns may yield only small gains, since the opportunity to build the systems to handle another surge would have been frittered away, again.

Outreach and overreach

As long as the court does not usurp executive's role, action to mitigate a crisis is welcome

Judicial intervention in response to the Union government's flailing response to the health crisis has reached its apotheosis with the Supreme Court ordering forming a 12-member national task force for the effective and transparent allocation of medical oxygen to the States and Union Territories "on a scientific, rational and equitable basis". Making recommendations on augmenting the supply based on present and projected demands and facilitating audits by sub-groups within each State and UT is also part of its remit. The Court has also mandated it to review and suggest measures for ensuring the availability of essential drugs and remedial measures to meet future emergencies during the pandemic. In other words, the national task force has become a judicially empowered group that may significantly guide the handling of the health crisis set off by the second pandemic wave. Faced with proceedings in High Courts relating to the allocation and availability of oxygen, the Centre submitted that an expert committee may be constituted, consisting of persons drawn from public and private health-care institutions, to facilitate a fresh assessment of the basis for the allocation.

When the Karnataka High Court ordered last week that the Centre should supply 1,200 tonnes of medical oxygen daily to the State, the Centre rushed with a challenge to the apex court. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued that if every High Court started entertaining petitions on equitable allocation of oxygen, pandemic management would become unworkable. The Supreme Court declined to stay the order, describing it as a careful and calibrated one. Several High Courts and the Supreme Court are examining different aspects of the pandemic response, including availability of beds and oxygen. The trend did raise concerns about the judiciary encroaching on the executive domain. There is some merit in the argument that allocation of resources based on a formula related to the present and projected requirements of each State is indeed an executive function. However, as the daily infection numbers and death toll have acquired frightening levels, the constitutional courts felt obliged to take it upon themselves to protect the right to life and good health of the population. It cannot be forgotten that the judiciary drew much flak last year for its initial failure to mitigate the crisis set off by the lack of succour to millions of migrant workers. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, who heads the Bench hearing the *suo motu* proceedings, has clarified that the Court was not usurping the executive's role, but only wanted to facilitate a dialogue among stakeholders. As long as this position is clear, the present intervention need not be seen as a dangerous overreach.

Continuity of Dravidianist electoral dominance

Opportunities nevertheless exist for political forces seeking to redistribute power and resources more equitably



NARENDRA SUBRAMANIAN

The Dravidian parties maintained their electoral dominance in the first Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly elections since the passing of their earlier dominant leaders, Jayalalithaa and M. Karunanidhi. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam gained 67.1% of the vote and, along with the smaller Dravidian parties, the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam and the Marumalarchchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, polled 70.4%. This was the second highest vote share the Dravidian parties have ever drawn, only 3.5 percentage points lower than their highest share of 73.9% in 2016. The maintenance of Dravidianist electoral dominance is more striking than the DMK's anticipated return to power.

Expectations, outcomes

The AIADMK's support seemed likelier to erode than the DMK's because it depended far more on the charisma of its two successive leaders (MGR and Jayalalithaa), Jayalalithaa had not developed a successor unlike Karunanidhi, and its party institutions were weaker. Moreover, since Jayalalithaa's passing, its leaders were inadequately independent of the central government, insufficiently defended the State's moderately welfarist orientations, and supported or barely resisted the Centre's authoritarian, Hindu majoritarian, and wholeheartedly neoliberal policies. These policies included the adoption of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the demolition of Jammu and Kashmir to Union Territories, the adoption of centralised examinations at different stages of school education, the reduction of agrarian subsidies, and the accelerated corporatisation of agriculture.

The DMK outperformed the AIADMK but not overwhelmingly. It did so by only 3.1 percentage points, polling 35.1% to the latter's 32.0%, gaining 3.2 percentage points since the 2016 elections while the AIADMK lost 9.1 percentage points. The 12.3% vote shift between the major parties was ne-

vertheless significant. The two major alliances' vote shares differed by 5.7 percentage points – the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance gained 45.4% to the AIADMK-led National Democratic Alliance's 39.7%. Their high combined vote share of 85.1% underlined the continuity of Dravidianist electoral dominance. The DMK's performance remained strongest in the northern plains and Cauvery delta, while the AIADMK remained stronger in the western plains though no longer in the south.

Conversely, the political forces that had hoped to benefit from the uncertain leadership transition did not grow much. The older national parties stagnated. The Congress Party's vote share declined from 6.5% to 4.3%, partly due to contesting fewer seats (25 rather than 41), continuing an unsteady downward trend since 1989 when it got 20.2%. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s diminished from 2.9% to 2.6% perhaps because it contested only 20 seats while it had vied for all the seats in 2016, compared to a high of 3.2% in 2001. Of the parties formed since party competition changed in 1989, catchall parties that address all major demographics polled 13.0% compared to just 4.4% in 2016 and a high of 14.4% in 2006, and niche parties that primarily engage specific castes, religious groups or regions polled 6.7% compared to a high of 8.1% in 2011.

The largest new catchall party is the Naam Tamil Katchi (NTK) which polled 6.6%, followed by the AMMK and Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maam that got 2.3% each. These parties overtook the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam that polled merely 0.4%, in contrast with having drawn 2.4% (to the NTK's 1.1%) in 2016 and 8.4% in 2006. The Vanniyar-based Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) remained the largest niche party and the largest of the caste parties that together drew 6.0% compared to 7.7% in 2016 and a high of 8.1% in 2011. But it only gained 3.8% compared to its best performance of 5.9% in 1991. The BJP with 2.6% remained the largest of the religious parties which together gained 3.6%. The Dravidian parties thus remain electorally dominant although their social presence has gradually declined since the 1990s.

What shaped these electoral trends? What do they portend?



How do they compare with experiences elsewhere in India? What might these patterns suggest about the scope to change the Indian polity?

Bases of sustained success

The Dravidian parties grew from the 1950s to the 1970s by mobilising the middling and lower castes and classes that other parties and governments had only marginally engaged, using populist discourses distinguishing the popular community from elites based on caste, language, dialect, and occupation. They remained dominant subsequently because they formed strong party institutions and cohesive subcultures sustained through moderately egalitarian development policies, which they retained even while adopting much of the Centre's neoliberal orientation from the 1990s. Most notable among such policies were the high educational and job reservations (69%), the midday meal scheme that especially improved nutrition, health, and education among the poorest, high investments in education and primary health, and a rural employment programme that was among the best implemented until 2016.

The Dravidian parties drew closer to upwardly mobile and privileged groups from the 1970s. Their reservation policies benefited the middle castes much more than Dalits and Adivasis. They doubled the Other Backward Classes quota to 50% but also entitled a further 27% of the population to it, including many prosperous castes such as the Kongu Vellala Gounder that became the preponderant beneficiaries. By contrast, they increased the Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribe quota by under a fifth, from 16% to 19%, below these groups' under-

counted population share of 21%. This was partly balanced by introducing a 1% ST tier and a 20% tier for the Most Backward Classes and denotified communities in 1989, and a 3% Arunthathiyar tier in 2009 – Vanniyars were granted a 10.5% tier within the MBC quota last February to placate the PMK and boost the AIADMK's electoral prospects, with uncertain distributive effect for this reduced the DNC quota to 7% and that of all other MBCs to 2.5%.

Other Dravidianist policies provided assets mainly to the upwardly mobile. Land ownership and tenurial reforms primarily helped middling tenant farmers, largely from the middle castes, but only a small section of Dalits. These groups bought land that landlords sold due to declining irrigation and soil fertility, and benefited from generously subsidised agrarian inputs and credit, and loan waivers. Such policies helped lower-middle and intermediate strata move up, maintained Dravidianist electoral prominence, and contained challenges to caste and class inequality.

Alternatives, their prospects

These experiences enabled Dravidian party dominance thus far, but are unlikely to indefinitely sustain it as these parties withdrew from mobilisation from the 1990s. Other outlooks thereafter inspired civil society, especially caste associations, opponents of corporatism, and religious nationalists. Their effects on the party system have so far been minor – enabling the limited growth of the PMK and other middle caste parties from 1989, that of the BJP, the DMK, and the Dalit parties in the 2000s, and the NTK's since 2016. These forces either demanded greater resources and rights for specific caste clusters as the PMK and Dalit parties did or sought like the DMK and the NTK to revitalise plebeian ethno-linguistic politics, thus building on aspects of Dravidian ethno-populism.

Widely popular public figures not closely associated with popular sectors or with language- and caste-focused outlooks such as Kamal Haasan and Rajinikanth have impacted party competition less. This suggests that the prospects are brightest for political forces that seek to redistribute power and resources more equitably than the Dravidian parties did if they build on some aspects of Ta-

mil Nadu's existing political culture.

Portents for democracy

Some who seek to limit the erosion of democracy and the rights of religious minorities and disadvantaged groups around India under BJP rule draw hope from the Assembly election results. The All-India Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, the Left Democratic Front in Kerala, and the DMK in Tamil Nadu have in different ways resisted the Centre's Hindu majoritarianism, centralisation of power, and violations of democratic norms. Their victories show that prior political alignments limit Hindutva growth in some regions, though less in West Bengal where the BJP's vote share increased by 28 percentage points since 2016, and it overtook the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Congress to become the primary Opposition party. The victories of the incumbents in Kerala and West Bengal, unlike in Tamil Nadu, and the increase in their victory margins by 1.4 and 4.1 percentage points, respectively, were also minor positive verdicts on their governance.

Two considerations should temper inferences about constraints to BJP growth and the Centre's authoritarian tendencies. First, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are exceptions to the nearly national pattern of rising BJP fortunes. Second, the design of India's asymmetric federalism grants the Centre considerable leeway to determine resource distribution and authority over concurrent subjects, which it has used crucially according to whether a single party predominates parliamentary representation. The centralisation of authority by BJP governments with Lok Sabha majorities since 2014 followed devolution by coalition governments from 1989 to 2014 and earlier centralisation by Congress-led governments. It will limit the ability of the recently elected Opposition State governments to resist the Centre's promotion of authoritarianism, Hindu hegemony, and corporate-led growth, to offer more democratic and equitable governance, and to significantly constrain further BJP growth.

Narendra Subramanian is Professor of Political Science, McGill University, Canada, and the author of *'Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization: Political Parties, Citizens, and Democracy in South India'*

A TRIPS waiver is useful but not a magic pill

The U.S.-supported move will have an effect if countries simultaneously address non-IP bottlenecks among other things



PRABHASH RANJAN

The United States has finally relented and declared its support for a temporary waiver of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement for COVID-19 vaccines at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In October 2020, India and South Africa, at the WTO, proposed (<https://bit.ly/3vTJSK0>) waiving Sections 1, 4, 5, and 7 of Part II of the TRIPS agreement (covering copyrights, industrial designs, patents, and undisclosed trade information) related to the prevention, containment, or treatment of COVID-19.

The U.S.'s support of the TRIPS waiver is a significant step forward in the global fight against the pandemic. Hopefully, the U.S.'s decision would cause other holdouts like Canada and the European Union to give up their opposition. Legally, the waiver is surely possible since Article IX of the WTO Agreement allows for waiving obligations in 'exceptional circumstances' (<https://bit.ly/3uCTMjy>), which the COVID-19 pandemic undoubt-

edly is. The stumbling block is the political will of the richer countries that house the giant pharmaceutical corporations producing COVID-19 vaccines and medicines.

Devil in the details

While the U.S.'s decision is to be welcomed, the devil would be in the details. The countries would now negotiate on the text of the waiver at the WTO. If the experience of negotiating such waivers, especially on TRIPS, were anything to go by, it would be too early to celebrate. In the aftermath of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa in the 1990s, the WTO adopted a decision in 2003 waiving certain TRIPS obligations to increase the accessibility of medicines in countries that lacked manufacturing capability. Specifically, the obligation contained in Article 31(f) of TRIPS (<https://bit.ly/3vMmfWc>) that medicines produced under a compulsory licence are predominantly for the domestic market of that country was waived, paving the way for the export of such medicines to a country that lacked manufacturing capability.

However, this waiver (later incorporated as Article 31 bis in the TRIPS agreement; <https://bit.ly/3tBzRsZ>) was subject to several stringent requirements such as the drugs so manufactured are to be exported to that nation only;



the medicines should be easily identifiable through different colour, or shape; only the amount necessary to meet the requirements of the importing country are to be manufactured; the importing country has to notify to the WTO's TRIPS Council, etc. Given these cumbersome requirements, hardly any country, in the last 17 years, made effective use of this waiver.

Developing world must watch

The statement issued by Katherine Tai, the U.S. Trade Representative (<https://bit.ly/3hbtpXl>), states that the negotiations on the text of the waiver will 'take time' given the WTO's consensus-based decision-making process and the complexity of the issues involved. This signals that the negotiations on the waiver are going to be difficult. While the U.S. would not like to be seen as blocking the TRIPS waiver and attracting the ire of the global

community, make no mistake that it would resolutely defend the interests of its pharmaceutical corporations. The developing world should be conscious to ensure that a repeat of 2003 does not happen.

Ms. Tai's statement also reveals that the U.S. supports waiving intellectual property (IP) protections on COVID-19 vaccines. However, India and South Africa proposed a waiver not just on vaccines but also on medicines and other therapeutics and technologies related to the treatment of COVID-19. So, the U.S. has already narrowed down the scope of the waiver considerably by restricting it to vaccines. Medicines useful in treating COVID-19 and other therapeutics must be also included in the waiver.

Overcoming key obstacles

While the TRIPS waiver would lift the legal restrictions on manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines, it would not solve the problem of the lack of access to technological 'know-how' related to manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines. Waiving IP protection does not impose a legal requirement on pharmaceutical companies to transfer or share technology. While individual countries may adopt coercive legal measures for a forced transfer of technology, it would be too draconian and counterproductive. The

before, governments would have to be proactive in negotiating and cajoling pharmaceutical companies to transfer technology using various legal and policy tools including financial incentives.

Finally, while a TRIPS waiver would enable countries to escape WTO obligations, it will not change the nature of domestic IP regulations. Therefore, countries should start working towards making suitable changes in their domestic legal framework to operationalise and enforce the TRIPS waiver. In this regard, the Indian government should immediately put in place a team of best IP lawyers who could study the various TRIPS waiver scenarios and accordingly recommend the changes to be made in the Indian legal framework.

Notwithstanding the usefulness of the TRIPS waiver, it is not a magic pill. It would work well only if countries simultaneously address the non-IP bottlenecks such as technological 'know-how', production constraints, and other logistical challenges such as inadequacy of supply chains and unavailability of raw materials to manufacture vaccines and medicines.

Prabhash Ranjan is a senior assistant professor at South Asian University's faculty of legal studies. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

IPR waiver
While the second act of the great COVID-19 tragedy is unfolding in India, Brazil and South Africa, the rich countries that have acquired the world's supply of vaccines are only interested in talking and watching. The illogical opposition to technology transfer by some of the countries such as Germany is breathtakingly short sighted, because

"nobody is safe until everybody is safely vaccinated". What the European Union leaders are genuflecting to is the extraordinary lobbying power of the big pharmaceutical companies, where profit making trumps even a global catastrophe. The tortured explanations given by various political leaders about the stifling of innovation are not only

dishonest but are also self-defeating in the long run. While the slow moving consensus building WTO discussions are under way, the COVID-19 virus is fast mutating into several variants. It is rather shameful to witness the supremely adamant Angela Merkel of Germany, the equivocating Emmanuel Macron of France and Prime Ministers Trudeau and Johnson of

Canada and Great Britain, respectively, holding the Global South and its population to ransom during this global pandemic.
G. PARAMESWARAN, Coimbatore

The pandemic fight
The two things that increase correspondingly with the increase of COVID-19 cases are drug prices and hospital bills. It

is distressing that patients are made to run around to get essential drugs for treatment. Another fact is that key drugs are not available in the rural areas. Where do the middle class and others go when black-marketeers overrun the situation and take control?
D. SETHURAMAN, Chennai

■ The authorities in Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand need

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to step up screening for COVID-19 as many residents in the region are ill, with symptoms of fever, cold and cough. As many of these overlap those for COVID-19, this has added to widespread fears here. Any possibility of a novel coronavirus wave in this region needs to be ruled out.

PRANAV CHANDRA, Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand</p

The changing nature of the Left in Kerala

It has moved away from a party-centric state deemed to protect some sections to one that caters to all



BURTON CLEETUS

The Left Front has retained power in Kerala by winning more than two-thirds of the seats to the Legislative Assembly. This is unheard of in a State that was used to alternating between the Left and the Congress for more than four decades. The change in this familiar pattern was possible only because there was a fundamental change in the nature and practice of politics in the State after years.

Conception of the modern state
As a political organisation, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)] has a different conception of state and governance. This is broadly viewed as the Leninist model and is fundamentally different from the structure of most political organisations in the country. During the early days of its inception and into the 21st century, the Left conceived the modern state system as being bourgeoisie. This modern state, it felt, needed to be transformed from within. Thus, the Left governments implemented or were expected to implement the agenda of the party in order to achieve their ultimate goal of revolution. The party was always considered more powerful than the government.

This has changed fundamentally in the last few years in Kerala. The end of the Left Front government in West Bengal and the Left's subsequent loss of power in Tripura reduced the Polit Bureau, the highest decision-making body of the CPI(M), to a mere shadow of its former self, thereby weakening the hold of the party over the government in Kerala.

In 2016, when the Left contested the Kerala Assembly elections, the general perception was that V.S. Achuthanandan would be made the Chief Minister as the Left rode to power on his popularity. However, the party decided to pick its powerful State Secretary for the post. This marked a new era in the nature of Left politics in the State. This meant that, unlike in the past, the government of Pinarayi Vijayan was



Election posters of LDF candidate and CPI (M) Polit Bureau member Pinarayi Vijayan amid campaign posters of the Congress party on a wall in Dharmadam constituency in Kannur in April. ■ S.K. MOHAN

considerably relieved of both the constraints of building the organisation of the party and its ideological tasks.

Confrontation to consensus

The new government ended the politics of confrontation between the landowners and the peasants, and between the industrial workers and the industrialists, which was central to the politics of Kerala for long. Such a change in the nature of the Left Front government was also structured by the changing socio-cultural demography of the State. A large middle class population emerged with changing economic activity in the State – agricultural land reduced and migrant labourers from north and northeast India entered Kerala. All this compelled the Left to change its political slogans of worker/agricultural labour emancipation to slogans that resonated with middle class aspirations.

In the process, it made peace with the Christian church and other powerful social, religious and economic sections of the state, with which it had been in confrontation for more than half a century. The Left's conception of the modern state as a bourgeois one began to peel away. Rather, it used the state and its mechanisms to protect the in-

terests of the emerging middle class of Kerala. By moving away from being supporters of only economically backward castes, classes, communities and groups to one that became more acceptable to a wider multi-class population, largely devoid of any caste/class/community divide, the Left Front government was entering the terrain which was considered the domain of the Congress and its allies.

The two massive floods and the pandemic that ravaged the State came more as an opportunity rather than as a challenge for the Left. Through a slew of welfare measures including the setting up of free feeding centres, providing ration kits for all and providing pensions for the old, the Left Front government transformed itself as a caring protector that was not against any particular class. It benefited the middle class in particular. Unlike the early masculine image of the party, of protest and confrontation, the new Left was one of consensus. The sudden rise of Health Minister K.K. Shailaja as an important figure in the fight against the pandemic led to the creation of a new conception of the state as a representation of the ideal caring middle class family. The policy of giving free rations meant that the govern-

ment as a 'super family' is there to feed and care.

Losing ground

While the Left Front government was using the optimal potential of the modern state system and pursuing a policy of consensus even with the Opposition, the Congress was increasingly losing its political space. By moving away from its earlier version of a party-centric state deemed to protect sections of the population to one that aimed to cater to all, the Left was venturing into a space that was held by the Congress for long. For the last couple of years, the Congress has been in a dilemma of whether it should support or oppose the government. With no ideology and a weak party mechanism, the Congress has survived as a response to the politics of the Left, which was seen as confrontational and therefore unacceptable to large sections of the State. Without any proper organisational mechanism and ideology, the Congress has won elections on an anti-leftist plank. However, it failed to see the political discourse changing.

A large section of the minorities became apprehensive of rising Hindutva politics and considered the Left as a viable option in the fight against the Right. When the Supreme Court delivered its verdict on Sabarimala, the Congress decided to oppose the verdict and argued that tradition should be defended. One could argue that this was the only option it was left with in the political discourse of the State. But the Congress made the mistake of raking up this issue even in these elections in the hope of getting upper caste conservative Hindu votes. However, the issue of Sabarimala had become a dead horse and the Congress's attempts failed to evoke any response. The Congress failed to build any convincing narrative against the Left.

By deviating from the ideological context of the conventional Left to domains that were hitherto considered as the space of the Congress, the Left has won Kerala again. To what extent the Left can retain this space without being in confrontation with its core values and to what extent the Congress can reclaim lost ground remains to be seen.

Burton Cleetus is Assistant Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, JNU, New Delhi

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Parody in the time of tragedy

It is important for the government to listen to critical voices from the media to understand the gravity of the situation



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

from the government has no semblance to what journalists are witnessing. The cruel second wave of the pandemic has finally started ripping off the Teflon coat of hyper-nationalism that glossed over inefficiency and inhumanity.

Reporting the reality

Nieman Lab, which is part of Harvard University's Nieman Foundation, and which tracks the state of journalism across the world, in its report on May 3 pointed out the difficulties faced by journalists in India during this pandemic. The report read: "It's hard to overstate the enormity of the public health calamity unfolding in India as the nation of 1.4 billion people fights what seems like a losing battle against the virus. But did it have to be this way? Answering that question is the responsibility of the free press of the world's largest democracy. They have the unenviable task of writing the first draft of this wretched chapter in the nation's history. They shoulder the burden of speaking truth to power – recording the tales of colossal missteps like not preparing for a second wave, calling out the political hubris in allowing massive campaign rallies, and criminal negligence that led to severe shortages of essential hospital supplies like oxygen." The report has a very disturbing, but accurate conclusion: "In India, the media's ability to pursue truth and tell it without fear is a matter of life and death."

It is important for the government to listen to critical voices from the media to understand the gravity of the situation. The official spokespersons of the government are not in competition with the parody column, 'Allegedly'. They are expected to come up with decisive administrative moves that address the needs of the patients who are flocking to overburdened hospitals across the country.

Instead of arresting journalists like Sidique Kappan for trying to report on the Hathras gang-rape case and filing cases against those who either seek or amplify the need for oxygen, the government needs to address the impending problem highlighted by the respected scientific journal, *The Lancet*. Citing the study of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, the journal fears that the deaths due to COVID-19 in India may cross a million by August 1. We are at a stage where neither Thiruvalluvar nor Mr. Sampath can provide mitigation. It has to come from the government.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

Back in the shortage economy

India has recovered from extremely trying crises in the past, with sincere and competent leadership

PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN

We have been witnessing shortages of almost everything needed to treat COVID-19 patients: hospital beds, drugs, ventilators and, above all, oxygen. The world has taken note, and offers of help have come in from the U.S., the U.K., the European Union, and even China. India is once again the focus of global attention, as it was in the mid-1960s when two consecutive years of drought resulted in a severe shortage of food. Then, India had to turn to the U.S. for assistance. This did arrive, but grudgingly, for India had not supported the West during the Cold War. The lore is that President Lyndon Johnson had directed: "Send food to India by the shipload, so that she is kept on a short lease".

Though that moment in our history is not a happy memory, that of the response of the country's then leadership is inspiring. Prime Ministers Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi and their cabinet colleagues had stirred the scientific and bureaucratic communities to bring about a quantum leap in food production. This was achieved within a few years. No one imagined that India, a byword for a basket case, would be able to feed itself. The Green Revolution stands out in Indian history as a display of extraordinary accountability by the political leadership, combining resolve, humility and intelligence. We crucially miss this today.

Lessons from the sixties

Unlike the two years of drought that tipped the country into food shortages in the mid-sixties, the need for ramping up the health infrastructure could have been anticipated in March 2020 when a lockdown was announced at very short notice. In fact, the medical case for a lockdown was that it would slow the spread of the disease thus avoiding overwhelming the health system and giving time to strengthen the capacity of the health system.

The lesson from the Green Revolution is that India has recovered from extremely trying crises, under the most adverse of circumstances, in the past. It is entirely possible to replicate this now, but we need sincere and competent leadership.

In many ways the task is far easier today. Now India has something that it lacked in the mid-sixties, namely, industrial muscle. It should not be too difficult to ramp up hospital beds, ventilators and oxygen supply within a reasonable time. That certain parts of the country actually have a surplus of oxygen should give confidence on this score. An additional feature today, again in contrast to the mid-sixties, is the considerable foreign exchange reserve. Therefore, some crucial medical inputs can be imported, especially vaccines. But it is important to recognise that these measures are absolutely necessary. We should not adopt an ostrich-like posture denying shortage, which the Central government is displaying on the issue of vaccines in particular.

Health spending

The inter-State variation in the death rate in India is directly related to the extent of health spending in relation to the state domestic product. It is also related to health infrastructure, but less strongly. This is also true for COVID-19-related deaths across South Asia. So, to avert a health crisis in the future, the States would have to raise the level of spending on health very substantially. On average, States spend only around 5% of their total expenditure on health. Should we be surprised at the shortages we are facing now?

Finally, even as we struggle against the health emergency, a shortage that we should do everything to avoid is with respect to food. Food prices shot up from April 2020 suggesting that there may have been a disruption of supply due to the lockdown. It would be advisable to anticipate a similar disruption following State-level lockdowns now, and take all possible measures to assure the supply chain. The kharif operations are set to commence. As agricultural activity takes place at the level of the States, Prime Minister Narendra Modi needs to interact closely with their leaders and the farming community. This is the abiding lesson from the mid-sixties when we as a nation were in a similar place.

Pulapre Balakrishnan teaches at Ashoka University, Sonipat

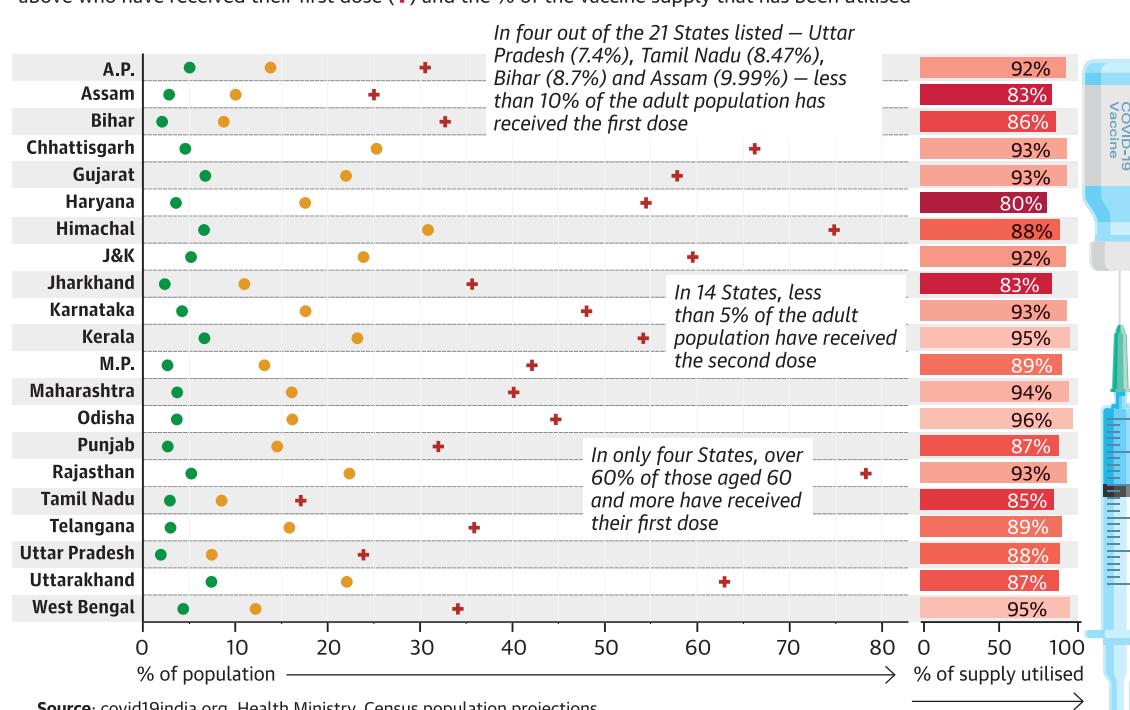


DATA POINT

Slow and unsteady

Only 40% of India's population over the age of 60 have received the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. In Tamil Nadu (17%), Uttar Pradesh (23.8%) and Assam (25%), less than 30% of them have received their first shot. In all the major States, over 80% of the doses supplied by the Centre have already been utilised. With those in the age group of 18-44 also becoming eligible for vaccination from May 1, the overall vaccination rate has slowed down. Until Sunday, barely 3.6% of the adult population in all the major States taken together had received their second dose. By **The Hindu Data Team**

HOW TO READ THE CHART | The chart shows the % of the adult population that has received at least one dose of a vaccine (●) and the share that has received both doses (●) in major States. It also shows the share of people aged 60 and above who have received their first dose (+) and the % of the vaccine supply that has been utilised



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 10, 1971

UPSC told to review exam

New Delhi, May 9: The Government of India has asked the Union Public Service Commission to reconsider its decision on the question of the medium of examination for the All-India and higher Central services, it is learnt. At present, candidates for the IAS and other Central services are permitted to exercise their option to write their answers in two of the three compulsory general papers namely, essay and general knowledge, in any of the languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution besides English. Earlier, the UPSC had while agreeing to the candidates being given the option to write their answers in the two papers in the Indian languages besides English, made it clear to Government that it would not be possible for it in the foreseeable future to make arrangements for setting and printing the question papers in the Indian languages besides English, without serious risk of compromising the accuracy and secrecy of the question papers. The Commission, therefore, expressed the view that even though the candidates may write the answers in the two papers in any of the Indian languages, the question paper would necessarily continue to be set and printed in the English language only.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 10, 1921

The other side

The panic among a certain section of the people at Allahabad, which Pandit Motilal Nehru has found it necessary to allay by a reassuring letter to the Press, shows at once the extent of the hold that the Non-Co-operation movement, the misleading Leader notwithstanding, has over the public, and the erroneous ideas about Non-Co-operation which have been sedulously propagated by hostile critics. It is the aim of this vile propaganda to discredit the movement by exaggerating the sporadic outbreaks which are due less to Non-Co-operation propaganda perhaps than to the accumulation of unaddressed wrongs dating for years. Even if the Malegaon outbreak, for instance, is due to Non-Co-operation, it is only an exception which proves the rule that the movement is one which essentially makes for peace and non-violence. That it incites ideas of ordered and disciplined non-violent conduct in the face of grave and humiliating provocations must now be admitted by all impartial critics.

FROM PAGE ONE

Himanta to take over as Assam's 15th CM

Mr. Sonowal had on Friday said he has no immediate plans to move to the Centre and would be happy to serve his constituency Majuli as an MLA.

Dr. Sarma said Mr. Sonowal's "spotless tenure" was a factor in the first non-Congress government managing to retain power in Assam. He also credited the electoral victory to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for the northeast.

"Mr. Sonowal was our leader and he will remain so. We will march ahead by

following the road he showed us," Dr. Sarma said.

"I promise the value-based politics will remain in our endeavour to become one of the five best States in India," he said.

The oath-taking ceremony on Monday would be held at the Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra on the southern edge of Guwahati. "The ceremony will be organised with adherence to COVID-19 protocols," Biswajit Pegu, the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup (Metropolitan), said.

'Excessive use of oxygen in U.P. hospitals'

Last month the government announced an audit of the sale, purchase and consumption of oxygen. This audit was to be conducted via premier institutes such as the IIT-BHU, IIT-Kanpur and IIM-Lucknow for proper monitoring of the medical oxygen.

Curfew extended

Meanwhile, the "partial corona curfew" was extended till May 17, the State government said. The partial curfew was yielding positive results and helping in breaking the chain of the infection, officials said.

All government and private educational institutions and coaching institutes

would be shut till May 20.

The State recorded 23,333 new cases while 34,636 people were discharged as of Sunday. In all, 2.29 lakh samples were tested over the past 24 hours, including 1.11 lakh through RT-PCR, the government said.

Uttar Pradesh has 2.34 lakh active cases, a drop of 77,000 from April 30.

So far, 1.37 crore doses of vaccine had been administered across the State. In the 18-44 age group, 1.17 lakh doses had been administered in seven districts, the government said. From May 10, the drive for the 18-44 group will be expanded to 11 more districts.

Grief, groceries, all shared in this fight

"My husband buys the groceries, and my father begins cutting the vegetables in the morning," Ms Tandon says, adding that she spends a lot of time in the kitchen. She confesses she hasn't really cooked on a regular basis till the recent crisis. "My husband joked that people wouldn't be able to eat the rotis, but they're getting better," she says, laughing.

The Tandon couple deliver every meal in their car or on an electric scooter that EVeez has lent them. Now Ms. Tandon has started a fundraiser so she can feed more people.

Doctor on call

Serving Delhi from faraway Durg, in Chhattisgarh is Dr. Tapesh Nagaria, who works with the Human Solidarity Foundation helpline (9971736222). Having taken a gap year to study for his post graduate entrance exams, he thought it a good opportunity to both help people and gain some experience. "I was really nervous, because medical school doesn't prepare you for the real world," he says.

The real world here was a host of different things – of a new disease that doctors themselves were grappling with, of the fact that even when he knew the patient needed to be in a hospital there were none to be had, and of people sharing medication lists with each other and self-medicating.

"What do you do when a drug is not available? Or when an HRCT is needed but I will be putting another life in danger because the

patient will not go alone to a hospital? Or when I need to prescribe blood thinners, but these are ideally given only when a doctor can monitor the patient?" He prefers to err on the side of least medication, and also makes sure his prescription is watermarked with the name of the patient, so it can't be forwarded. "It's been a very steep learning curve." About 70% of callers to the network of about 30 doctors are from Delhi, though the helpline is open to people across India, free of cost.

Youth brigade

The phone is everyone's lifeline, even as lockdowns put a pause on movement. An NGO, Caregiver Saathi, is using phones to verify information related to COVID-19, so caregivers have lists of ambulances, blood banks, and other resources that work. They put out a call for volunteers and 44 children – all under 18 – registered. Many had had their own experiences with COVID and wanted to help.

In Bengaluru, Nimisha Maria Nishant, 15, who heads the teams for Haryana, says the first time someone died and she couldn't source information in time, she broke down. "It was emotionally exhausting, but my team mates helped me."

Fellow volunteer, Gurugram-based Mahira Vohra, 16, says, "When leadership fails to provide us with even basic healthcare, it's up to us to make the community better; to step up and do something."

16 AMU staff, ex-teachers die of COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

After 16 of its faculty members, other employees and retired teachers living in the vicinity of the campus died of COVID-19, the Aligarh Muslim University wrote to the Indian Council of Medical Research asking for an analysis of the samples to find out what was behind the surge.

In a statement on Sunday, AMU public relations officer Omar Peerzada said, "In order to analyse the severity of COVID-19 and its suspect-

ed new variant that wreaked havoc in Aligarh the samples collected have been sent for viral genome sequencing to the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, New Delhi, after suspicions of a new variant fuelling the surge of Coronavirus cases in Aligarh."

The statement said the samples had been sent along with a letter by AMU V-C Prof. Tariq Mansoor to ICMR Director-General Balram Bhargava requesting him to order the test.

'COVID waves inevitable without proper protocol'

Preventive vaccination, data analysis and behavioural changes among the population are crucial, say epidemiologists

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

Recurring waves of coronavirus infections are inevitable if existing practices such as expanding India's vaccination drive and following COVID protocol are not adhered to, say experts.

Earlier last week, Principal Scientific Advisor K. VijayRaghavan said, "A phase three is inevitable, given the higher levels of circulating virus."

"There is, however, no clear time-line on when this third phase will occur. We should be prepared for new waves and COVID appropriate behaviour and vaccine upgrades are the way forward," he added.

On Friday, however, he qualified his statement saying that such a wave was not a foregone conclusion. "If we take strong measures, the third COVID wave may not happen in all the places or indeed anywhere," Dr. Vijay Raghavan said.

After cases peaked and registered a steady decline since September and well into early March, life in India had gone back to normal with the inevitable crowds. While multiple serology surveys by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had suggested that at most



Dire situation: A patient collapses as she is rushed on a cycle rickshaw, outside a gurdwara which provides free oxygen to patients in Ghaziabad. • AFP

21% of India had been exposed to the coronavirus, the subsequent decisions to have a staggered vaccine rollout that would cover only the most at-risk populations and to be entirely dependent on locally produced vaccines reflected the government's calculation that a devastating second wave was unlikely.

Unprepared?

"I am angry," said Samiran Panda, who heads ICMR's epidemiology division. "Not counting healthcare workers, effectively 75% of the country continued to be vulnerable in January. Social distancing, infrequent mask

use and vaccine hesitancy have all played a role. I wouldn't hesitate to say that a third and fourth wave is inevitable if these conditions continue."

Unlike in January and February when the limited vaccine rollout was yet to accelerate, there is currently a shortage in vaccine supply, with less than 2 million doses being administered a day, and supplies of both Covishield and Covaxin unlikely to significantly pick up before July.

Dr. Panda adds that vaccines ought to be preventive and be administered before infections ravage a community

ity and not after.

"In future, we should consider a cut-off, say a 10% test positivity, and through a smart combination vaccinate people in districts with low infection spread as well as high spread. That is the essential lesson from our previous experience with HIV epidemic." Test positivity refers to the number of samples that test positive for the coronavirus and a percentage above 15% indicates high prevalence of the infection in a community.

Policy response

The Lancet Commission Task Force, which has a

range of public health and policy experts spanning the State universities and even those with the ICMR, has in two reports, in April and May, pointed out that there was no unique policy response to rein in the pandemic.

The group presented a "checklist" that highlights a range of actions needed for different places with varying disease burden.

These include "credible and regular projections" of the trajectory of the pandemic that would help policy makers to evaluate the relative success of different approaches, putting in place a system to share anonymised microdata with a larger pool of researchers to understand more nuanced trends of hospitalizations, disease severity, long COVID-19 characteristics. This would help to better prepare the health system and the administration with the consequences of the surge and, ramping up genome sequencing to 5% of all tests on a monthly basis and ensure that the data on variants of concern (VoCs) from genomic surveillance was shared across to the districts.

Shahid Jameel, virologist and advisor to the Indian Scientists SARS-CoV2 Genome Consortium, however, said waves would keep happening until actions were taken. "We know some variants are more transmissible. We should be testing the India variants against vaccines, in labs and in real world settings."

"third wave" was not inevitable.

"Hopefully, the powerful lessons of what is happening now will not be forgotten in a hurry. Social factors, more than even the biology of the virus, govern how epidemics proceed. Provided we can reconfigure our lives so that physical distancing, mask wearing, working from home where possible, reducing crowding in public places and paying careful attention to ventilation becomes a part of our daily life, we can be spared another wave. To do this until a substantial proportion of our population can be vaccinated, that is what should be our priority," he told *The Hindu*. In the long run, dominant strains of the coronavirus would tend to be more transmissible and less virulent but when that would happen couldn't be calculated at present.

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China Red Cross sends oxygen concentrators, ventilators

It will also release \$1 million to the Indian Red Cross: envoy

ANANTH KRISHNAN

A first batch of oxygen concentrators and ventilators donated by the Red Cross Society of China arrived on Sunday on a cargo flight from China.

The consignment marks among the biggest donations of medical supplies so far from China, from where India has been purchasing a huge amount of supplies, including oxygen concentrators.

"The first batch of 100 oxygen concentrators, 40 ventilators and other anti-epidemic supplies donated by the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) arrived in India today by Chinese cargo flight from Chengdu, China," Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Weidong said on Sunday.

Following Mr. Seth's letter to the Lucknow Police Commissioner, the police said it has initiated a probe in the matter under a team led by DCP East Lucknow.

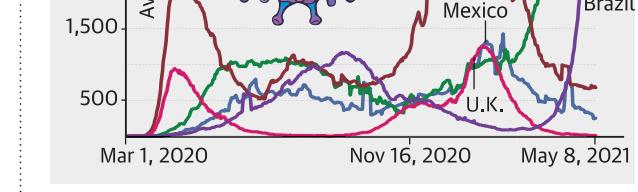


Sun Weidong

some of which is being sent to the Indian Red Cross Society. China's government has also offered official assistance, conveyed on April 30 in a letter from President Xi Jinping to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and in a phone call between the two Foreign Ministers on the same day.

Much of the critical imports of medical supplies have been coming in from China with a surge in orders from Indian companies. Since April, orders for at least 40,000 oxygen concentrators have been placed by Indian companies, of which 21,000 have so far been delivered, along with more than 5,000 ventilators, 21 million face masks and 3,800 tons of medicines, according to official Chinese customs figures.

India has said it is open to receiving assistance from civil society organisations and private companies in China,



India reports 3.55 lakh new cases, 3,461 deaths

Maharashtra, Karnataka top list

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

India recorded 3,55,174 new COVID-19 cases until 9.30 p.m. on Sunday. As many as 3,461 new deaths were also registered. The country has so far reported a total of 2,26,51,267 cases and 2,45,860 deaths.

Maharashtra reported 48,401 infections, followed by Karnataka (47,930) and Kerala (35,801). Maharashtra also recorded 572 casualties, followed by Karnataka (490) and Uttar Pradesh (296).

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Ladakh. The data are sourced from the respective States' health bulletins.

Around 18.65 lakh tests were conducted on Saturday (the results for which were made available on Sunday). Daily tests have remained around the 18-lakh mark between May 6-8. As

many as 30.22 crore samples have been tested in the country since the beginning of the pandemic.

On both May 7 and 8, India recorded more than 4,000 COVID-19-related deaths. Prior to May 7, the daily recorded deaths in the country never crossed the 4,000 mark. With 2,42,399 cumulative deaths recorded until May 8, India's death toll is the third highest in the world after that of the U.S. and Brazil.

However, among the five countries with the highest recorded death toll, daily fatalities are rising constantly only in India.

Only 20.23 lakh daily vaccine doses were administered in the country in the 24 hours ending 7 a.m. on Sunday, which is about 3.49 lakh doses lesser than what was recorded in the previous 24 hours. However, it is around 1.97 lakh doses more than what was recorded in the same period, one week ago.

Nirmala lists tax waiver on relief goods

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

In response to a letter written by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman replied through her Twitter handle, on Sunday.

Ms. Banerjee wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to consider exempting organisations, agencies and individuals supplying equipment and drugs related to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic from customs duties, including IGST, is already available to ALL COVID relief

material (not confined to a list) imported by @IndianRedCross for free distribution in the country."

Ms. Sitharaman further tweeted, "With effect from 3 May, 2021, full exemption from all duties has been provided to Remdesivir injections, Remdesivir API, and for a chemical for the manufacture of this drug."

She tweeted, "Also to Medical Oxygen, equipment used for the manufacture, storage and transportation of oxygen, equipment used for providing oxygen therapy to COVID patients such as Oxygen Concentrators, Ventilators, Non-invasive oxygen masks etc."

"Also to Inflammatory diagnostic kits and reagents for COVID testing and COVID vaccines," she added.

Ms. Sitharaman tweeted, "This exemption applies to all above mentioned goods when imported free of cost for free distribution in the country by any entity, State government, relief agency or autonomous body on the basis of a certificate issued by a State government."

Orders placed for 500 concentrators

gen plants to meet the rise in demand for medical oxygen across the country.

"Initially, NLCIL has planned to set up nine plants with capacity of 12 NM3/hour to 30 NM3/hour based on the requirement at different locations. Two plants of 12 NM3/hour capacity costing ₹25 to ₹30 lakhs will be installed at the NLCIL Hospital in Neyveli while three plants of 30 NM3/hour capacity costing ₹65 lakhs to ₹70 lakhs each will be installed in Chennai," Rakesh Kumar, Chairman-cum-Managing Director of the NLCIL, told *The Hindu*.

Tenders have been floated for the plants and once the process is completed, they will be set up within a month. The move is in line with the direction of the Union Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi to PSUs to set up oxy-

COVID-19 surge: NLCIL to set up nine oxygen plants

Orders placed for 500 concentrators

S. PRASAD
CUDDALORE

With a view to augment the supply of medical oxygen, Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) NLC India Ltd. (NLCIL) is in

Sarma, the man who put out many fires for BJP in Assam

He was the 'go-to' leader in the Gogoi and Sonowal regimes

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Himanta Biswa Sarma was elected the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Legislature Party in Assam, making him the Chief Minister-designate of the State, six years after he quit the Congress and joined the BJP. For 52-year-old Mr. Sarma, it is the culmination of a career famous for pulling off victories with political deftness, and assuming the top position after being the go-to man that kept the governments of the late Tarun Gogoi and his immediate successor Sarbananda Sonowal going.

The replacement of Mr. Sonowal with Mr. Sarma is the recognition of the fact that the latter has not only put out many fires for the BJP in Assam, like the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), but also his role as the Health and Finance Minister in Assam in managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Ph.D. from Gauhati University, Mr. Sarma is a lawyer by training and was active in student politics as general secretary (for three terms) at Cotton College and with the All Assam Students' Union. He joined the Congress in the 1990s and became an MLA from the Jalukbari constituency, defeating Asom Gana Parishad's Bhrgu Phukan in 2001. Since then, he has represented Jalukbari on behalf of the Con-



In the saddle: Himanta Biswa Sarma, left, with Sarbananda Sonowal in Guwahati on Sunday. ■ AFP

gress till 2016 and from 2016 to the present on BJP ticket. He became Minister in the Congress-led State governments and also rose to the position of the 'action man' of the Tarun Gogoi government. Much of the credit for the 2011 Congress victory in the State is laid at his door.

Mr. Gogoi and Mr. Sarma came at odds with each other over the former's plans to promote his son, Lok Sabha MP Gaurav Gogoi, in politics, while Mr. Sarma had earmarked the position of successor for himself.

The differences became too big and the Congress high command was either unwilling or unable to sort it out. In either case, Mr. Sarma jumped ship and joined the BJP, despite the party's own attack on Mr. Sarma a few months before this on the issue of a CBI inquiry against him in the Louis Berger case.

Mr. Sarma, however, with his mastery over the Congress' electoral machinery and his considerable politi-

COVID: Kharge asks Modi to hold all-party meeting

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asking him to immediately convene an all-party meeting to "collectively forge a holistic blueprint to tackle the pandemic".

Accusing the Narendra Modi government of abdicating its responsibility towards the citizens, he said the situation requires "consensual and collective effort" and offered six specific suggestions.

Mr. Kharge called for free immunisation for all citizens by utilising the ₹35,000-crore earmarked by Parliament for vaccination, expand the scope of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to 200 days and expedite the distribution of relief material and proactively disclose where it is shipped.

In a separate letter to Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu, Mr. Kharge asked him to convene virtual meetings of the Parliamentary Standing Committees as Parliament cannot remain a "mute spectator".

"At this hour of collective crisis, Parliament cannot be and must not be a mute spectator. It must give a message of solidarity with the people, of serious business to alleviate their agony and of unity of purpose," he wrote to Mr. Naidu.

India in the Global Power Aspirations of China

SPACE MARKETING INITIATIVE
The Shaksgam valley, whose access is through Aksai Chin, is a part of the Gilgit Agency and home to 242 glaciers. It is the most glaciated region on earth after North Pole and South Pole.



Pavneet Singh
Top Unacademy Educator

manufacture low cost and high-quality polysilicon for the world.

The US and China Cold War is going to divide the world of the 21st century into states that have access to advanced microchip technologies and states that do not and the key of this 21st century power struggle lies in Kashmir. On 21st November 2016, the USS Zumwalt, a guided missile destroyer of US Navy, was traversing the Panama Canal and when it suffered a catastrophic propulsion failure, an investigation identified that the failure occurred due to Chinese chip destroyers used in the ship which had backdoors installed for easy hacking.

The US Navy, as a cost cutting measure, was forced to buy tens of thousands of Chinese PLA manufactured microchips. The Chinese are at the forefront in developing microchips at low prices that they are selling to different militaries in the world like US, Britain and France. The Chinese government has created China's National Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, which has been allocated financial support to manufacture microchips through twenty firms that also include ZTE and Huawei.

In Sin-kiang Taklamakan desert, which is located north of Siachen Glacier, is a green oasis where there is a newly built manufacturing facility which is likely to alter the geostrategic dimensions of US, China and India because this facility is going to be the world's largest manufacturing unit of polysilicon, which is an intermediate product to manufacture Silicon wafers.

The Silicon Wafers would then be transformed into multiple microchips and applications that range from pacemakers to mobiles to geostationary satellites because the world is powered by microchips. Just outside Kashgar, in Sin-kiang, GCL Polycrystalline Holdings, the core Chinese poly silicon and silicon wafer producer, is establishing a 130,000 MT polysilicon plant that would



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Sino-India standoff in Ladakh must be viewed through this strategic lens.

To counter the Chinese rush, India must firstly protect the natural resources, territory, and sovereignty of Kashmir. Secondly, abrogation of Article 370 is a step to safeguard India's strategic natural resources. Lastly, India needs to seek technological support from Japan and South Korea to develop capacities to fully utilize legally permitted share of waters under Indus Water Treaty, 1960.

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Three booked for dealing in stolen coal

The Environment Appraisal Committee, which had flagged concerns, has now 'recommended' it 'for grant of terms of reference' for EIA studies

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The CBI booked three residents of Uttar Pradesh for their alleged involvement in the illegal sale of stolen coal in different parts of the country.

The accused were identified as Niyaj Ahmed, Muhammed Seth and Krishna Nand.

In the FIR, the agency mentioned Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh as the States where the three allegedly dealt in stolen coal.

The CBI also added certain provisions under the Prevention of Corruption Act, indicating that the agency suspected the role of public servants. Incidentally, in November last year, the CBI had registered an FIR against alleged coal mafioso Anup Majhi and others for illegal mining and theft of coal from the Kunustoria and Majora collieries of the Eastern Coalfields Limited in West Bengal. Several officials of the ECL, the Central Industrial Security Force and the Railway were found to be involved in the case. The ED had earlier arrested one Vikas Mishra, brother of a Trinamool Congress leader, Vinay Mishra, in the case.

Green panel allows Great Nicobar plan to advance

PANKAJ SEKHSARIA

The Environment Appraisal Committee (EAC) - Infrastructure I of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has flagged serious concerns about NITI Aayog's ambitious project for Great Nicobar Island ('NITI Aayog vision for Great Nicobar ignores tribal, ecological concerns', *The Hindu*, March 21, 2021). The committee has, however, removed the first hurdle faced by the project. It has "recommended" it "for grant of terms of reference (TOR)" for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies, which in the first instance will include baseline studies over three months.

Documents uploaded recently on the MoEFCC's Parivesh portal show that the 15-member committee headed by marine biologist and former director, Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Deepak Apte, made the decision following two meetings held on March 17 and 18 and April 5 and 6. The EAC was responding to the 126 page 'pre-feasibility' report, 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman and Nicobar Islands', prepared for the NITI Aayog by the Gurugram-based consulting agency Ae-



A Leatherback turtle at the Galathea Bay nesting beach, Great Nicobar Island. ■ FILE PHOTO

India. A point-wise response to concerns was submitted by the project proponent, the Andaman and Nicobar Island Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO), on April 5, the very day the committee convened for its next meeting. Yet, the proposal was taken up for consideration and even recommended for grant of ToR to go ahead.

This, despite the fact that the committee raised a number of additional issues, including about Galathea Bay, the site of the port and the centrepiece of the NITI Aayog proposal. Galathea Bay is an iconic nesting site in India of the enigmatic

Giant Leatherback, the world's largest marine turtle – borne out by surveys done over three decades by the island's Forest Department and research agencies like the Andaman and Nicobar Environment Team, Dakshin Foundation and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) ('Leatherback nesting sites could be overrun by Andamans projects', *The Hindu*, February 15, 2021).

The committee noted that the site selection for the port had been done mainly on technical and financial criteria, ignoring the environmental aspects. It has now asked for "an independent study/ evaluation for the

suitability of the proposed port site with specific focus on Leatherback Turtle, Nicobar Magapod (sic) and Dugong".

Action points

This, in fact, is only one of over 100 specific points of action listed out by the committee. They include, among others, the need for an independent assessment of terrestrial and marine biodiversity, a study on the impact of dredging, reclamation and port operations, including oil spills (to be carried out by nationally recognised institutions such as the Wildlife Institute of India, IISc or the Salim Ali Centre for

AECOM's pre-feasibility report has proposed 2022-23 for the commencement of work on the site. "How is that possible," asks an island expert, requesting anonymity. "One year is simply not enough if the government and project proponents follow the EAC's recommendations in letter and spirit. And how can extensive baseline studies be carried out in just three months?"

Ecological surveys in the last few years have reported a number of new species, many restricted to just the Galathea region. These include the critically endangered Nicobar shrew, the Nicobar frog, the Nicobar cat snake, a new skink (*Lipinia* sp.), a new lizard (*Dibamus* sp.) and a snake of the *Lycoodon* sp that is yet to be described.

"None of these are even mentioned in AECOM's pre-feasibility report or the EAC's observations," he notes. "We don't even fully know what exists here, leave alone understanding the many fragile inter-linkages of the Great Nicobar's complex systems."

Pankaj Sekhsaria has been researching issues of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for over two decades. He is also the author of five books on the islands

Punjab govt. promoting 'mafia raj', says Sidhu

'It is more responsive to the Badals'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Punjab Minister and Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu on Sunday said on Twitter that the State government was promoting "mafia raj" and the administration was more responsive to the Badals of the Shiromani Akali Dal than Congress lawmakers and workers.

Mr. Sidhu's comments come just a day ahead of the Congress Working Committee's meeting to analyse the party's performance in the recently concluded Assembly elections.

"Consensus among MLAs, Badal Sarkar is ruling in lieu of Congress Govt ... Bureaucracy and Police act as per wishes of Badal Family, more often than listening to our MLAs and Party workers. Govt run not for welfare of the People, but for continuing control of Mafia Raj # 75-25," Mr. Sidhu said.

For several days now, Mr. Sidhu has been vocal against his own government over the delay in investigation into the 2015 Kotkapura firing incident following the desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib in Faridkot in Punjab.

SRMIST and *The Hindu* host webinars on higher education, careers

Experts discuss ways to fight challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the skills needed for emerging fields

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST), in association with *The Hindu*, hosted two webinars yesterday as part of the SRM Virtual Conclave for Career Guidance 2021.

In the first webinar on 'Higher education in India post COVID-19', Jitin Chadha, founder and director of the Indian School of Business and Finance (ISBF), explained that there were several ways to combat COVID-19-related challenges in education. This included "creating a community of learners where students

work in teams for capstone projects and take ownership of their learning". Yet another method is "assessments through hackathons where students can innovate and ideate in teams to tackle real-world problems".

Problem-solving skills
Manoj P., registrar, Azim Premji University, emphasised the necessity for stu-

dents to be problem-solvers. He also said that no matter what a student studied, problems can be solved only by interdisciplinary studies.

K. Ramaswamy, director of faculty and academics, SRMIST, shed light on the multiple career options available to students and about the importance of opting for integrated programmes. "It is imperative to start promoting research, which is why UG [undergraduate] and PG [postgraduate] are integrated with research," he said.

The second session on 'New-age career options after school' discussed the multiple options available

and the kind of skilling and upskilling required to remain relevant.

Vinesh Menon, CEO, education, skilling and consulting services, Ampersand Group, spoke about how "technology requires constant upskilling, reskilling and updates". He also encouraged students to work on communication skills so that they could communicate the available information "succinctly and capture audience interest".

Another piece of advice he offered was to "hone listening skills". "Develop empathy in a society with several divides. Be flexible and

learn to adapt to any situation that arises," he said.

Public health

T.V. Gopal, dean-CET, SRMIST, spoke about the importance of public health as a career option. The focus, he said, was not on treating people but on ensuring conditions for them to be healthy. He also listed several other lucrative careers, such as biomedical and automobile engineering, and explained that jobs of tomorrow required interdisciplinary knowledge, and that students ought to possess complex

problem-solving abilities, the ability to accept failure, and develop people skills in order to succeed.

Richa Dwivedi Saklani, founder-CEO Inomi Learning LLP, pointed out that "while AI and Robotics have replaced jobs, many others are being created". Blockchain, law, finance, climate change are all impacting today's world, and emerging career options in these fields are influencing students' choices, she said.

Both sessions concluded with a Q&A session, in which the speakers fielded questions from audience members.

Survivors' tales: grit, gumption and abiding hope

As the invisible enemy sweeps through the country causing unprecedented devastation, a few recall their fight and triumph against the deadly virus



Safe space: People of the Hakki-Pikki community standing outside the isolation tent. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Hakki-Pikki tribal wins a battle

Vatsala beats the virus, but now her husband, children have developed symptoms

G.T. SATHISH
HAASAN

Life has never been easy for Vatsala from the Hakki-Pikki community, a resident of Anagadihalli in Hassan district of south Karnataka, but last month it became worse after she contracted COVID-19.

Like many people of the tribal community, the 35-year-old mother of four earns a living by selling *mani-sara* (necklaces) and *drishi bombe* (dolls), travelling from one town to another.

Along with her husband Somu, she had been to Mangalore to sell the knick-knacks. After she returned, Ms. Vatsala felt tired and had high fever. She visited the primary health centre at Ha-

gare, a neighbouring village, where she tested positive for COVID-19, and was later admitted to Hassan Institute of Medical Sciences. She was under treatment for about a week and was advised isolation later.

But isolation is next to impossible for Ms. Vatsala, and many like her in the community who live in makeshift houses with corrugated sheets for walls, not having secured land for cultivation despite decades of struggle. Most members do not have pucca houses.

So Ms. Vatsala's husband, with the help of relatives, erected a tent near the house. "Of course, we don't have rooms for isolation. The tent with a roof covered

with plastic sheets was ready by the time she returned to the village," said Kanchana, Ms. Vatsala's relative.

Ms. Vatsala stayed in the tent for about 15 days, avoiding contact with her family members, who brought her food regularly. She returned

I am taking care of them... I have no doubt all will recover soon

VATSALA

home last week. But now her husband and two children have developed symptoms and they have moved to the tent, while she stays in the house with the other children.

"I am taking care of them

[those ailing now] by supplying food and ensuring that they get medicine regularly. I have no doubt all will recover soon," said a confident Ms. Vatsala.

Livelihood woes

But she worries about how the lockdown will impact her and many like her. With restrictions on movement, they have lost their source of income. "The government has not bothered to provide us land, despite our repeated demands. Whenever lockdown is imposed, we struggle hard to fulfil our basic needs," said village elder Hooraja, who represented the community at the Republic Day parade in New Delhi in 2020.

"I am taking care of them

[those ailing now] by supplying food and ensuring that they get medicine regularly. I have no doubt all will recover soon," said a confident Ms. Vatsala.

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"I am taking care of them

Back from the brink after 58 days

+ Chennai resident recalls journey from ventilator to victory

R. SUJATHA
CHENNAI

When Nagarajan tested positive for COVID-19 on October 31 last year, he was not worried. On his wife's advice, the 54-year-old Chitlapakkam resident got hospitalised at a facility at OMR in Chennai.

However, four days after admission, his oxygen levels fell below 90. A CT scan revealed lung damage. A couple of days later when the second scan revealed severe damage he was shifted to a private hospital in Nungambakkam.

Mr. Nagarajan said he has been mildly hypertensive and on pills to control BP for over a decade. Within four days over 75% of his lung was damaged as the infection spread. He needed oxygen support and soon he became unconscious. He was



An oxygen tank being refilled at a hospital in Chennai.

put on ventilator and transferred to the intensive care unit. As his condition deteriorated his family was told to be prepared for any eventuality.

"The most critical day was November 30," his wife Latha recalled.

By the first week of December the doctors had also put him on nasal feeding and a tracheostomy had

been done. "The doctors told me to bring the children and talk to him to give him confidence," Ms. Latha said.

The tide began turning around the first week of December after which he was shifted from critical care unit to a step-down ward. When he recovered consciousness he was put on physiotherapy.

On January 4, 58 days after he had been hospitalised, Mr. Nagarajan was discharged. He was advised rest at home to recuperate. Around 45 days ago he returned to work. "I was optimistic and always felt he would come back. His sickness and the subsequent hospitalisation made me realise how important a life partner is to a person," Ms. Latha said.

(Names have been changed on request)

Last year, during the COVID-19 outbreak in Kerala, 83-year-old P.O. Shamsudeen, resident of Pattayam panchayat in Kannur district, was quickly moved to hospital after he tested positive for the infection.

The octogenarian contracted the virus from his grandchildren who had returned from Dubai. Besides his age, what bothered the family and the hospital authorities was that he had already undergone two open-heart surgeries and had been operated upon for prostate. There was total panic in the family, as not just him, but 10 others were also affected by the illness.

Mr. Shamsudeen said the term 'COVID-19' was still new then. He recalled that he had to stay in the ICU for 47 days before being declared out of danger. "I could survive the virus due to the care and attention given by the State and the hospital authorities at the Kannur Medical College hospital," he said. "The suffering and trauma that the disease brings can severely affect the patients and family members. Hence people should act responsibly and follow COVID-19 protocols strictly."

Today, Mr. Shamsudeen is busy creating awareness about the disease through social media and by talking to people, especially migrant workers.

The infection, however, left Thankamma G., an 88-year-old woman from Vazhappally in Kottayam, physi-

cally and mentally drained. She suffered from fever, body pain, shortness of breath and loss of smell and taste. Safely back home after treatment at the General hospital in Changannassery, her health has still not returned to normal.

A nightmare'

"It was like a nightmare with your eyes wide open as I was unable to take food for nearly four days. I eventually fell unconscious and was given glucose infusion for the next three days," she recalled.

But even as she has come to terms with the enormity of the crisis she faced, Ms. Thankamma is now witnessing the suffering of her family members who are also on the road to recovery from the infection.

T.S. Yohanian, a 72-year-old farmer from Kandanad, near Kochi, was already battling cancer, when COVID-19 struck him this year. He won the battle and regained his health, but his wife has now tested positive for the disease. "Both of us are now at home, my wife under quarantine. I feel the disease can be avoided if one adheres to the protocol, sticks to hygiene, eats good food and adopts a healthy lifestyle, while being confined home."

During hospitalisation,

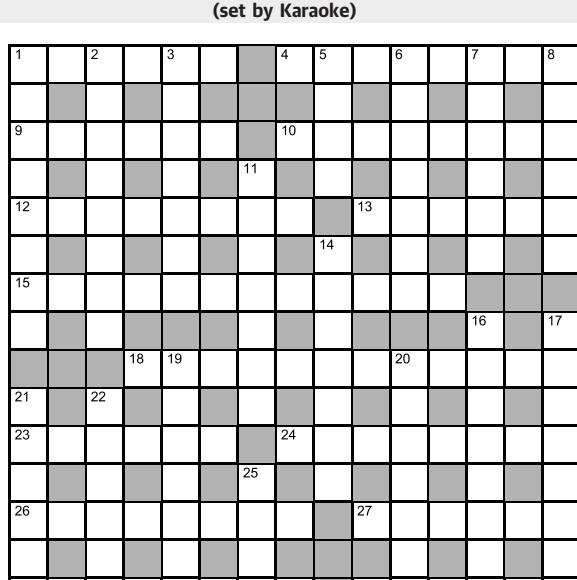
Mr. Joshi was perturbed by negative thoughts after coming across news of people succumbing to the disease.

He kept swinging between uncertainty and hope. "It would have been a Herculean task to get a bed, had I been infected now," Mr. Joshi said, advising people to stay positive through one's worst time.

TH CROSSWORD + 13243

(set by Karaoke)

Feeling down in lockdown?
Get across to our Crossword site.
@ <https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn>



ACROSS

- English cricketer's refreshing century (6)
- What would a cricketer do to impress greatly? (4,4)
- Accidental death gets initial reactions in series of messages (6)
- Troop assembled by army officer as per procedure (8)
- The may allow you free trips by express very much (3,5)
- Lumberjack reported swelling on big toe (6)
- One who allocates jobs gives birth to crooked teamer with some

- knowledge (7-5)
- Brave a trying situation? Dial chemist with essential drugs hurriedly (4,3,5)
- Bird of prey with abductor about to be released for ransom first (6)
- Aunt in agony occupied second home at natural elevation (8)
- Naked or wear thin to reveal (2,3,3)
- Zebra or horse in aqua perhaps (6)
- Sea monster, not working for the Knight of the shears (8)
- Inflammation of the ear? It is to be treated (6)
- DOWN
- Bird house, of course, spooner says (8)
- Deadly Boer War overwhelmed Dutch cabinet (8)
- Facelift without others' presence in a way of speaking (7)
- Monster to look greedily left to right (4)
- Leaves money? (7)
- Sufferer's energy conserved by citrin regularly (6)
- Annoying decision gains interest to execute second culprit (6)
- Permit that lady to adopt a kid (7)
- Runs out of wreck. Everything is lost with inexperienced money-spinner (4,3)
- Without a tinge of turmeric, cottagers cooked an edible snail (8)
- Disgraceful persons get caught in slippers (8)
- Buffs at a party rudely err with senate (7)
- Extensive search for criminal servant locking knight inside dwelling (7)
- Browse around about Italian products (6)
- Messy Nell ignored health plan revision for ulcer (6)
- Once-in-a-lifetime right date shows up (4)

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13242

P	E	D	A	G	O	G	Y	F	R	O	S	T	Y	
R	I	R	O	A	O	O								
J	I	L	N	E	S	M	O	D	U	L	A	R	E	
I	M	N	P	E	E	A	D	E						
L	S	O	R	U										
E	M	I	S	S	R	A	Y	T	R	A	C	E	R	
C	O	M	E	T	I	N	T	E						
P	L	A	N	T	M	I	X							
A	N	T	M	I	X									
Y														

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

FAITH

Two kinds of light

When Bhooma Devi told Brahma that She could not bear the burden of the Earth, Brahma, accompanied by Siva and celestials, asked Lord Narayana for help. They went to the Lord, who was reclining on the milky ocean. The Lord assured them of help and told them about the Krishna avatara which He was going to take. Parasara, Vyasa and Suka have all described this. The story then goes on that the Lord shed two hairs – one white, one black, and that Balarama came from the white hair and that Krishna came from dark hair. But is this correct interpretation of the sloka describing the incident? Quoting from Engelazhvan's commentary, V.S. Karunakarachari explained that one should not interpret the word 'kesa' to mean hair. What the sloka indicates is that two kinds of light emanated from Lord Narayana.

One was a white light. The other was a blue light. The white light took the avatar of Balarama and the blue light took the avatar of Krishna. A similar interpretation of the word 'kesa' is offered by Sankara Bhagavadpada, in his interpretation of a Vedic mantra. He too gives the interpretation of radiance for the word 'kesa,' in that context.

In Sri Mad Bhagavatam, the Lord, after indicating to those gathered around Him, that He was going to take the Krishna avatara, also gave them the option of being born on the Earth during His avatara. They could either be with Him in Gokula, during His growing up years. Or, if they wished, they could serve the grown up Krishna. Some devas chose the latter option, namely serving Him after His years in Gokula, and they came as the five Pandava brothers. And so, we have Yama being born as Yudhishtira, Vayu being born as Bhima, Indra being born as Arjuna, and the Ashvin twins being born as Nakula and Sahadeva.

The anxiety pandemic

Amrita Tripathi and Kamna Chhibber, co-authors of *Age of Anxiety*, discuss mental health in the context of the second wave of the pandemic

SANGEETHA DEVI DUNDOO

Trigger warning: this article contains material related to suicide and mental illness. Discretion is advised.

If 2020 was a year of uncertainty and had us taking up safety behaviours to try and ward off COVID-19, 2021 is proving to be far more stressful with the second wave of the pandemic. *Age of Anxiety*, the third book in the Mindscape series published by Simon and Schuster India, comes at a time when emotional wellness is increasingly being discussed.

After *Young Mental Health* and *Real Stories of Fighting Depression*, this third book is co-authored by Amrita Tripathi and clinical psychologist Kamna Chhibber. Amrita is the founder-editor of The Health Collective India (healthcollective.in).

The book discusses the basics of anxiety, the terminology

used, while debunking myths and providing self-care tips. A section of the book, titled 'COVID-19 and the age of anxiety', addresses the challenges for those with pre-existing conditions and those who may be experiencing it for the first time.

Edited excerpts from an interview with Amrita:

Your book comes at a time when anxiety is being discussed more than ever before. How do you suggest a reader approach the book?

● Start with the foreword by Dr Achal Bhagat and then take a beat, read the introduction, which will give a good sense of what to expect from the book, and then maybe a chapter at a time.

Take your time, there's no rush to read it cover to cover! We have been able to share information on anxiety through

different narrative forms – whether it's from Kamna Chhibber's perspective as a psychologist, or several contributors' first person accounts of lived experience, creative writing by Iliana Acharya and Jessica Xaldo, and via interviews. We've collected myths and facts, colloquial terms for anxiety and tried to distil a lot of the information in a conversational, accessible way.

At the time of working on this book, what were your thoughts on the mental health issues associated with the pandemic? Can you discuss the difference between the problems last year and this year?

● There are so many layers to this question, and so many different experiences to unpack. First off, to acknowledge that we are in a very different position in 2021 than last year.

● If you are a caretaker for a COVID-19 patient at home: It is easy to fall into a pattern of ignoring what your body and mind need to cope with the distressing experiences. Try and create a schedule for yourself while including some activities that relax and calm you.

● Staying connected to people who form your support system. If you don't have a support system, make an active effort to connect with neighbours, coworkers, family members and acquaintances to build it.

● Self-care: Indulge in activities that you like, which contribute towards making you feel relaxed and calm. These can range from exercise, cooking, playing games, to indulging in art, music, dance, meditation, or yoga.

In March 2020, for example, I felt I was going through an emotional rollercoaster, and couldn't put my finger on what the experience was all about.

One thing that helped me was doing a course online by Professor Steve Joordens of the University of Toronto Scarborough called 'Mind Control: Managing Your Mental Health During COVID-19', which broke down some of what was going on in the brain, the body, etc.

Today, many more of us and our loved ones are grieving, mourning or bereaved. There's grief, despair, fear, panic, high levels of stress and anxiety. People feel much more desperate

and are fighting a battle for survival.

Kamna and others also see people talking about relationships as a stressor, and loss of a job, or the fear of job loss as stressors – there is so much going on during this pandemic, that experts are bracing for an impending crisis to come as well. I hope that we are prepared for that.

The frontline workers are stretched. We are already seeing signs of doctors' adverse mental health with the recent suicide. How do you think this segment will be different from people like you and me?

● This is such a huge concern and issue – it's not just extreme burn-out and fatigue, there's also the concept of secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, guilt, survivor's guilt, PTSD. Suicide is a huge challenge for both the country and the medical community, and while there are helplines available, the jury's out on whether that's enough support.

The helpline volunteers and counsellors themselves would need psychological support. Many stakeholders are aware of the issue – for example, One Future Collective founder Vandita Morarika (a Health Collective contributor) is working on a rehabilitation programme (by crowdsourcing funding) that includes getting peer counselling support to frontline workers.

If these topics cause emotional, mental, or physical distress, please call Sneha 044-24640050 or Aasra 9820466726



Kamna Chhibber Speaks

- Focus on the things that you can control. Follow safety protocols and engage in COVID-19 appropriate behaviour. Be mindful of your own emotional experiences and be willing to discuss what you are going through with those around you. Reach out for support if you feel too overwhelmed.
- Make a conscious effort to limit information overload to ensure you are well so that you can provide much needed support to those around you. Follow reliable and verified sources to make sure that the information you have is authentic and accurate.
- If volunteering to coordinate SOS calls and tweets, be watchful of shifts in your own emotional experiences. Being mindful can help you pace yourself better. Get peer or expert supervision to ensure that the ways in which you are handling situations are okay both for the callers as well as for your own well-being.

- If you are a caretaker for a COVID-19 patient at home: It is easy to fall into a pattern of ignoring what your body and mind need to cope with the distressing experiences. Try and create a schedule for yourself while including some activities that relax and calm you.
- Staying connected to people who form your support system. If you don't have a support system, make an active effort to connect with neighbours, coworkers, family members and acquaintances to build it.
- Self-care: Indulge in activities that you like, which contribute towards making you feel relaxed and calm. These can range from exercise, cooking, playing games, to indulging in art, music, dance, meditation, or yoga.

ALIVE! LIFESTYLE CHANGES TO AGE-PROOF YOUR MIND AND BODY

By Rachna Chhachhi, Harper Collins Publishers India

Nutritional therapist Rachna Chhachhi offers a four-step plan to age proof the mind and the body. The author shows us how to add life to our years and overhaul our lifestyle. Modern medicine has increased longevity but healthy life expectancy has become our greatest challenge, she says. The author believes nutrition, sleep, exercise and stress management help to build on the mind-body balance and connection. She advises an unhurried pace and the need to focus on the tiny changes to transform our quality of life. Eliminate what harms you and imbibe what heals you and

consciously nurture this healing lifestyle to strengthen the immune system, writes Chhachhi, who has been through health complications and speaks from her experience.

HOW TO DO THE WORK: RECOGNIZE YOUR PATTERNS, HEAL FROM YOUR PAST + CREATE YOURSELF

By Dr Nicole LePera, Hachette India

Clinical psychologist Nicole LePera writes about harnessing the power of self-healing to produce lasting changes in the body, and describes her book as a celebration of empowerment. Combining the philosophies behind mental, physical and spiritual health, she promotes holistic psychology. She believes the adverse experiences we face in childhood never leave us and if we do not address the trauma, it turns into a self-sabotaging behaviour. This could mean leading cynical, unhappy, unwell and unfulfilled lives. LePera writes she felt frustrated by the limitations of traditional psychotherapy and embarked on the journey of exploring ailments and their healing modalities, drawing from scientific research and her own clinical experience.

HAPPY MOMENTS: HOW TO CREATE EXPERIENCES YOU'LL REMEMBER FOR A LIFETIME

By Meik Wiking, Penguin Random House

The book reminds us that life is made of wonderful moments waiting to be acknowledged. Meik Wiking who founded the world's first Happiness Research Institute in 2013 in Copenhagen, Denmark, tells us how to create and recreate happy moments forever. To go about it he says we should look at our experiences and turn them into something extraordinary with simple inputs. From eating dinner at the table (rather than in front of the TV) to exploring a new part of the neighbourhood, life's daily

experiences need not be bombastic. But an effort should be made to boost the number of such simple experiences and treasure them as happy memorable ones. That is the essence of good living.

THE GUT: STORY OF OUR INCREDIBLE SECOND BRAIN

By Payal Kothari, Rupa Publications

The author tells us how to listen to our gut instinct. Host to 100 trillion good and bad bacteria living in synergy with each other to help fight against pathogens, diseases and germ attacks, a healthy gut accelerates weight loss, builds immunity and cognitive fitness and protects our mental well-being. But our modern lifestyles and eating patterns, make the gut vulnerable to infections. Payal Kothari, one of the few certified Indian coaches from the Institute of Integrative Nutrition, New York, has put together this easy guide that helps readers understand their gut and its biological needs. She writes every problem from acidity, obesity to brain fog can be healed not just by managing the symptoms but by treating it from the root cause. For that we need to understand the relationship between the gut and the rest of the body.

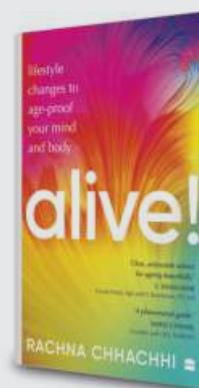
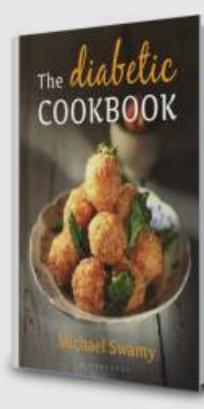
WORDS OF WISDOM

SOMA BASU

The Diabetic Cook Book

By Michael Swamy, Bloomsbury

Chef Michael Swamy introduces readers to familiar dishes such as lentils and khichdi that can be altered for those with diabetes, by using easily available super foods and super ingredients. He says he wrote the book because many people think that eating a balanced and healthy diet, and taking steps to control the disease means depriving themselves of tasty food. He offers 70 recipes of soups, salads, starters, breads, beverages and desserts that help to lower blood sugar levels or keep them at an even keel. He also shares with readers how to increase protein intake with fewer meats on the plate and rejoice in a variety of vegan and vegetarian dishes.



Different narratives
The book cover,
Amrita Tripathi and
(below) Kamna
Chhibber • GETTY
IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO AND
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

MY MIND MATTERS



Of memories and losses

My WhatsApp is buzzing continuously and Facebook newsfeed is choking with COVID stories from back home. For some time I managed to hold myself together, but the news of losing one of my classmates to COVID last week broke me. He was only 42.

I spent the next 24 hours going through old albums, a stash of greeting cards and letters – and memories. I smiled one minute, sobbed the next. There were memories that we were able to share as a group. Then there were our collective recollections of just what a great guy and a wonderful friend he was.

This person was my best buddy. We got along really well when we were in school, kept in touch through university days and beyond. He was back in hometown Delhi after a stint in the US around the same time as my separation and divorce. He was one of the people in my life that built me up during that difficult time. We spent hours talking on the phone – many a times through the night, hanging up only because we had to get to work. Then catching up where we left in the evening.

Years went by. We were both still single. And we decided to be 'friends with benefits' – thinking neither of us were in any rush to get married so why not be there for each other. But that didn't end well. Within a few months, he gave in to the pressure from his family and agreed to an arranged marriage. He dropped the news on me one afternoon – on my week off. He was to be married the following month.

That was it. I think I felt betrayed more as a friend than as a 'girlfriend'. It hurt so much that I thought I would die (the irony is not lost on me!) I spent three sleepless nights crying helplessly. I finally came out on the other

The writer wishes to remain anonymous

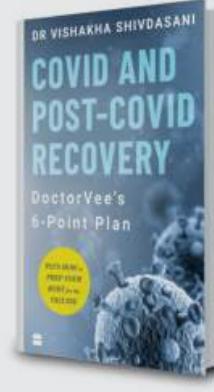


THE ART OF RESILIENCE: 40 STORIES TO UPLIFT THE MIND AND TRANSFORM THE HEART

By Gauranga Das, Penguin Random House

In this age of social media, the filtered image we present of ourselves to the world and our excitement at the likes

and comments, cannot match up to true and long lasting happiness, says the author. Unless we take an inner journey to explore our inner self, we will never be able to discover our real selves. It is important to go beyond expectations, disapproval, and self-deception to bring ourselves closer to truth. Honest relationships and lasting happiness emerge only when we encounter our true selves and not live in a make-believe world.



COVID AND POST-COVID RECOVERY: DOCTOR VEE'S 6-POINT PLAN

By Dr Vishakha Shivdasani, Digital release by Harper Collins Publishers India (download on Kindle, Google Play and Juggernaut.in)

Functional medicine specialist and nutritionist Vishakha Shivdasani offers help to rebuild your health and immunity after COVID. In the nutrition-based health guide, she says the best results can be obtained if modern medicine is intelligently combined with lifestyle changes. "You have more power within yourself than you think," she writes and advocates the known regimes of healthy food, regular exercise, sufficient sleep, a positive mind, and a daily dose of laughter as part of one's daily routine to deal with 'long COVID'.

Neetika Kapani,
works for Australian Energy Market Operator, Perth
To her mother, Anu Kapani

It is two years since we last met. It feels strange considering we try and see each other at least twice a year. Since the borders are closed, and I don't have any superpowers to be able to teleport myself to Bengaluru, here is my little love note to you.

You will never know what you mean to me because words can never do justice. It tugs at my heart that I can't be with you to give you a hug, wish you Happy Mother's Day, and be wrapped in your warm embrace.

My sense of resilience comes from you; you have taught me to be strong yet empathetic. I thank you for putting up with my tantrums, for calming my intense spirit when I struggle to see reason. I don't know where you get the reservoir of energy to love me unconditionally, but I thank God every day for blessing me with a mother like you... my best friend.

I wish I could buy you the lilies you like, and take you to China Bistro. I wish I could massage your feet and kiss you a million times, and indulge in our silly banter which would usually end with me saying, 'But seriously ma, I love you for all that you do for me, for inspiring me to be the best version of myself, for not giving up on me even when I feel there is no hope, and for being my strongest rock.'

As told to Shilpa Nair Anand



Shilpa Nair,
Advertising professional, Dubai
To her mother, Girija Nair

They say distance makes the heart grow fonder. But this adage does not apply to the relationship with you, *amma*. The pandemic may keep me physically away from you, but technology has helped us stay connected.

It pains me to hear your frustration at being home-bound for several months at a stretch. But the fact that you are safe makes me realise that we are among the fortunate lot. Although Zoom calls keep me updated about your health, I miss your gentle touch, warm hug, welcoming smile, your inimitable spirit, and of course your astute commentary on politics and cinema, and your trademark delicacies.

The prospect of being so far apart seems daunting, but I try and put on a brave face to cheer you up. If I were with you on Mothers' Day, I would have spoiled you with the best sarees, treat you to Mohanlal movies, and accompany you on your temple visits.

You are a superwoman. You manage the house, office, kitchen, family, bank account, investments and much more. More power to you!

As told to K Jeshi

Revathy Menon,
Independent writer and editor, Luxembourg
To her mother, Parvathy Menon

I speak to you every day, hear your strong, unfaltering voice through the phone, see your face on video call – pixelated, but always honest and smiling. I know how you are.

You are missing your children, sad that we cannot meet, worried about the pandemic, hurting from the surgery, aching to hold your grandchildren, anxious to never become a burden, wishing with all your heart that things were how they used to be.

When I left India, my heart was filled with hope and excitement. No place was too far away. Of course, I would visit you every summer, I said – this was not a promise, it was an obvious fact. I was actually brimming with excitement in January last year, because the summer was going to be perfect. The kids and I would talk excitedly about eating *ammamma's* delicious food again. You and I were making plans over the phone. You were already gathering all the stuff you wanted to send back with me. Then the pandemic hit us.

We exchanged stories of how someone in the neighbourhood, someone's friend or a faraway relative had succumbed to the virus. With each call, hopes diminished and anxiety grew. But we still laughed and joked. Your lilting laughter, like your fierce love, always feels well-earned.

In March, you fell. Again. My heart broke with the sound of shattering bones. This time I could not be there. I felt lucky and deeply

Thank you, Mom



grateful for my brother's committed care, for dad's calm optimism. Together, the three of us wept and wept because we couldn't ease your pain. And then slowly we watched in awe as you walked again, a little more broken but always our champ.

All the while, my fragile relief was ever threatened by the virus, still lurking, growing unchecked. Then it exploded. All hell broke loose.

The pandemic's second catastrophic wave in India has drawn a new deep chasm. My simple yearning for your loving presence has become a desperation. But we cannot meet yet *ma*. Not yet. This Mother's Day, I can only repeat, what I tell you every day. I love you. Stay safe. I live now to come home and embrace you.

As told to K Jeshi

POOCH CAFE



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



TIGER



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBES



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



Priyam Saharia,
Founder of Rhyme N Reason, Singapore
To her mother, Dhira Saharia

Yes, I will get you Estee Lauder's anti-wrinkle serum when I come home next. The last time I spoke with you on video call, you looked perfectly beautiful to me. When I see you in your starched cotton saree with your golden-rimmed spectacles, hair neatly tucked into a bun, I feel relieved that despite the chaos outside, you still remain the same. You are my constant. You give stability to my world.

I know you can't go to Barua aunty's house for your afternoon tea, you can't wear your lovely paat silk mekhela chadars to weddings, you can't even bargain with the vegetable vendors peacefully! But I am proud of you for going through this period of isolation with patience and resilience.

Your grandson told me today, "Why can't Amma come for my fourth birthday?" If you were here, you would have probably cooked enough to feed the whole neighbourhood.

Lockdown has significantly improved my cooking skills. Remember how much you harassed me during my teenage years that I should at least learn to make tea. Now, I am making biryani and caramel pudding! I miss your cooking, Ma.

Everything reminds me of you. When I cook, when I potter around my little garden, when I obsess about changing the pillowcases frequently and when I put extra sheets on my son at night. How I miss you my Mama-saurus, my Nirupa Roy, my Mother India! When I meet you next, I will find a nice new nickname for you. Until then, all I ask of you is, don't grow old!

As told to Prabalika M Borah

Udayan Bose,
CEO of NetElixir, New Jersey, USA
To his mother, Niyati Bose



This is the first time in the last two decades I have not met you and Baba in person for over nine months. Every morning, I wake up thinking about your health and wish we were all together now.

I yearn to hear you say, "Hobe na maane?, Nischoi aamra parbo. Aaro beshi cheshta korte hobe" (What do you mean it is not possible? Of course we can do it. We have to try harder). You have always encouraged me and my brother with these words and I realise how it helped surmount seemingly impossible challenges.

The word 'impossible' never existed in your dictionary and with an indomitable spirit you have fought every challenge in our lives. In our recent conversations, I sensed frustration creeping up in you. Please, don't let this pandemic eat into your buoyant spirit.

I am hoping we will soon make up for all the lost time and occasions with celebrations in Jaipur. Not necessarily a big one, but those simple, leisurely evening strolls to Statue Circle for our all-time favourite tangy *pani puri* and a chilled glass of *ganne ka ras* (sugarcane juice). Your grand kids are waiting for that lingering taste of *payesh, pathishapta* and *puli-pithe* you make during festivals.

I miss the warmth of your embrace, Ma. Keep your trademark smile going for us; soon we will relive those blissful days and enjoy the sunshine together.

As told to Soma Basu

Nina Sivan,
Audiologist, Ireland
To her mother, Mini Vasudevan,
founder-director of Sure Events

I have lived away from home since the age of 18, when I left for college. Ten years have passed. Now I am in a different continent. Yet home is still where you are, mom.

We are more like best friends than a mother-daughter duo. You have so many quirks that I love like your obsession for kitchen utensils, or your ability to fall asleep even before the credits of the movie starts! You always make me sit in the kitchen while you cook, but you never let me help you. All you expect is for me to be your radio. You have really funny nicknames for me, mostly you call me *vava* (regardless of my current age), *gudiya*, or '*Neenu peanut*' in a sing-song manner. And of course, you call me this in public no matter how many times I tell you not to!

I miss you, mom. But I am looking forward to coming home and spending time with you, and do all this again. Until then, we will continue our banter over phone calls. Happy Mother's Day, and thanks for being my one true friend.

As told to Sarashwathy Nagarajan



Key suspect in Nasheed attack arrested

Police say three of the four accused linked to the blast that injured the former President are in custody

ASSOCIATED PRESS
COLOMBO

Maldives police said on Sunday they arrested a person believed to be the prime suspect in an explosion that critically wounded the country's former President and which was blamed on Islamic extremists.

Police said they now have three of four suspects in custody. Thursday's blast targeted Mohamed Nasheed, currently the Speaker of Parliament, who is recovering in a hospital after multiple surgeries.

Police did not give details on the latest suspect, but in a text message confirmed that they believe he is the person whose pictures were released on Saturday as authorities sought public assistance in identifying him. The fourth suspect remains at large.



Anti-terror sweep: A police officer arresting a suspect in connection with the blast that injured Mohamed Nasheed. ■ AFP

Officials blamed Islamic extremists for the attack, although investigators still don't know which group was responsible. Two of Mr. Nasheed's bodyguards and two apparent bystanders, including a British citizen, were also wounded.

Mr. Nasheed has been an outspoken critic of religious extremism in the predominantly Sunni Muslim nation,

where preaching and practicing other faiths are banned by law. He has been criticised by religious hardliners for his closeness to the West and liberal policies.

Narrow escape

Hospital officials said Mr. Nasheed, 53, remains in an intensive care unit after initial life-saving surgeries to his head, chest, abdomen

and limbs. A relative tweeted early on Sunday that Mr. Nasheed had been able to have long conversations with some family members.

Shrapnel from the blast damaged Mr. Nasheed's intestines and liver, and a piece of shrapnel broke his rib and had been less than a cm away from his heart, hospital officials said.

Officers from the Australian Federal Police were assisting with the investigation, following a request from the Maldives. A British investigator was also set to arrive on Sunday.

Mr. Nasheed was the first democratically elected President of the Maldives, serving from 2008 to 2012, when he resigned amid protests. He was defeated in the subsequent presidential election, and was ineligible for the 2018 race due to a prison

sentence, but has remained an influential political figure.

He has championed global efforts to fight climate change, particularly warning that rising seas caused by global warming threaten the archipelago nation's islands.

The Maldives is known for its luxury resorts but has experienced occasional violent attacks. In 2007, a blast in a park in the capital wounded 12 foreign tourists, and was also blamed on religious extremists.

The Maldives has one of the highest per capita numbers of militants who fought in Syria and Iraq alongside the Islamic State group.

Authorities announced in January that eight people arrested in November were found to have been planning to attack a school and were in the process of building bombs in a boat at sea.

China rocket debris falls in Indian Ocean near Maldives

NASA slams Beijing for 'failing to meet responsible standards'

ANANTH KRISHNAN



A rocket with core module for China's space station lifts off in Hainan province. ■ AFP

vard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, said the uncontrolled reentry of the Chinese rocket was "the equal fourth-biggest" among uncontrolled reentries, on a par with the first Long March rocket that last year fell in the Ivory Coast where there were reports of debris damaging homes in villages. "An ocean reentry was always statistically the most likely," he said on Twitter. "It appears China won its gamble (unless we get news of debris in the Maldives). But it was still reckless."

The Long March-5B Y2 rocket was carrying the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, module, which is the first of three key components for the construction of China's space station, which will be completed by the end of next year.

Tianhe will act "the management and control hub of the space station" which is called Tiangong, or Heavenly Palace, Chinese authorities said after the April 29 launch of the rocket from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site on the island province of Hainan.

The space station, which will be the second after the International Space Station (ISS), has been designed with a lifespan of 10 years but could last 15 years, or until 2037. The life of the ISS, experts say, could be extended until 2030, by when one of its members, Russia, has said it would launch its own space station.

Chinese experts rejected the criticism over the uncontrolled entry, saying authorities had been tracking the course, although they did not have any control over where the debris would fall.

'Double standards'

"It only refers to the loss of propulsion, but in no way means that China has lost track of its flying trajectory and real-time location," Song Zhongping, an aerospace commentator and former instructor at a PLA Rocket Force affiliated university, told the *Global Times*, saying that debris from the U.S. SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket that fell on a farm in Washington State did not attract similar criticism and showed Western "double standards".

Jonathan McDowell, an astrophysicist at the Har-

bor Space Agency (CSMA) said on Sunday "the vast majority of the device burned up during the reentry, and the rest of the debris fell into a sea area with the centre at 2.65 degrees north latitude and 72.47 degrees east longitude," placing it west of the Maldives in the Indian Ocean.

The Maldives National Defence Force said on Sunday its Coastguard Squadron "is active after receiving reports of rocket debris fallen in Maldivian waters."

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson in a statement called on "spacefaring nations" to

minimise the risks to people and property on Earth of re-entries of space objects and maximise transparency regarding those operations.

"It is clear that China is failing to meet responsible standards regarding their space debris," he said.

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ASK US

K. NITYA KALYANI

Q. My father is 58 years old, just retired and my mother is 51, a homemaker. I'm interested in providing them a health insurance cover. Both of them don't have any prior health insurance covers. I am not clear as to the factors to consider while choosing the best scheme. Are Mediclaim and Health insurance the same? If not, what is the difference and should I purchase both to support their hospitalisation in future?

VIGNESH

A. The easiest way to get your parents hospitalisation insurance is to add them to your employer's policy where you are covered. If this is not an option you can buy a hospitalisation policy for them which will reimburse hospitalisation and related expenses as defined in the scope.

For choosing a policy, please consider the possible coverage you will need and the affordability of the premium. Considering the age band of your parents, insurance companies may offer only restricted cover to begin with. You can shop around for the optimum cover you want and enhance the cover going forward. You can drill down to coverage details like sub-limits on room rent and other expenses and see if the hospitals you will want to choose for treatment are on the preferred provider network of the insurer. The other factors for selecting a policy are the claims payment and customer friendliness of the company which you can read about or get references from your circle and the efficiency and responsiveness of the agent you are going to buy the policy from.

Mediclaim is a brandname for hospitalisation insurance used by the four public sector insurance companies namely, The New India Assurance Company Limited, United Indian Insurance Company Limited, The Oriental Insurance Company Limited and National Insurance Company Limited.

Private sector companies also offer hospitalisation policies with different names.

Health insurance is more a generic term which can include hospitalisation policies which are called indemnity policies because they indemnify, or make good, your expenses. They are annual policies and can be renewed for life.

The other type of health insurance is a benefit policy, also annual in nature. They pay a lumpsum benefit on diagnosis of a named illness in the policy or when a named major surgery becomes necessary. The claim amount is the sum insured of the policy and once it is paid the policy comes to an end and cannot be renewed. If you want to enhance your health insurance coverage you can buy a hospitalisation policy and supplement it with a critical illness or major surgery policy. You can also increase your coverage amount for hospitalisation by buying a top-up policy which will work out to be more cost effective than enhancing the sum insured on the basic policy.

Q. I am currently working for an MNC, and medical insurance premium for self and family is borne by the company. My question is, post-retirement, how may I opt for medical insurance by using the current claim history?

RAMAN N.S.

A. One way to make a smooth transition from your employer's corporate group hospitalisation policy to personal cover is to stay with the same insurer. Your employer may be able to help you with that.

Otherwise start a new policy with the same insurer a few years before your retirement so that you establish a track record and work off your waiting period for pre-existing conditions. This policy can even be a small one and the sum insured enhanced after retirement, but remember the waiting period will apply to the enhanced part of the sum insured. A third option is to provide your personal insurer, whether the same company or a different company, with your claims-free record during employment and negotiate a personal policy with a possible waiver of waiting period. I know of cases where this proof has worked for making a claim at a time when the waiting period was just going to be over, but the previous insurance records showed that it was not a pre-existing condition.

(The writer is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history)

Readers can send in queries on personal finance and investing to moneywise@thehindu.co.in. Our experts who write on personal finance will answer these queries. Moneywise will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund scheme, share or fixed deposit.

LOOSE CHANGE

RAVIKANTH



"What do you think? I feel it's a last-ditch attempt to make people stay home and safe!"

Don't sweat the small stuff

Try to focus on your long-term goals instead of getting swayed by short-term returns in pandemic-related themes

VIDYA BALA

Being alive, being well, and being safe is all that matters today. Everything else is small stuff and not worth your sweat right now. In case you have been fretting about the following issues to do with your money, let's just allay some of your concerns.

Low interest rate

If you're worried no end about the low interest your deposit is fetching you and making calls to banks or visiting their branches (with masks), to know where there are better rates, let it go. While the RBI is using many tools to keep the government bond rates low, the creeping inflation is slowly pushing rates up.

If you have not noticed, some of the large NBFCs deposits have started increasing their deposit

rates offered to senior citizens and you will likely see many such hikes slowly. Just renew your deposits for shorter periods of 3-6 months so that you can lock into higher rates a while later. If you have longer horizons, go for floating rate bonds from RBI or the other small savings schemes which still offer good rates.

From the viewpoint of ease of operation and returns, you must prefer breaking your FDs first, if you need cash

This temporary period of low returns should not push you into high-interest rate traps at this juncture - where promises of high returns may come with high risks to your capital. It is one stress fac-

tor you can easily avoid in these tough times! Just be patient for higher interest rates to come by. You are not alone here. We're all sailing in the same boat!

Stopping SIPs

While many of us will tell you that stopping SIPs is a 'bad habit' - this does not hold good in extraordinary times like the present one. If your job or salary is shaky or you have to spend more for the safety of your family - like buying a pulse oximeter or a good steam inhaler to buying a personal vehicle to avoid public transport for some time - those should be your priorities.

Skipping few months of SIP is ok. For long-term investments, this is not going to materially change your wealth status. And

you can always make up for the lost savings in good times that will follow! What is avoidable is skipping EMIs. Those will leave you with sleepless nights.

Selling investments

By now, most of us have heard or experienced the cost of treatment for COVID-19 and the after-costs such as oxygen and the support needed for extended periods.

While it is good practice not to dip into investments allocated for future goals, what are they for, if not to meet any sudden exigencies in the lives of your near and dear?

A few people I know are stressed about not having enough money to meet

any such exigencies because they are 'fully invested'. Yes, it will mean a hole in your investments made so far, especially if you are not covered by insurance (please explore Corona Kavach if you are in high-risk States). But there will be opportunities to invest and save with some prudent planning and cost cutting in future. So don't worry about it.

Hence, from a perspective of ease of operation and returns, prefer breaking FDs. Next, if you are into fancy new-age investments (I call them gambles) of bit-coins or dogecoin or NFTs (non-fungible token), encash them and keep in your savings account. Your family is unlikely to know that there is money stashed there (or know how to sell/withdraw from them) and may dip into other investments (like PF) to spend for

emergencies.

Finally, this may be a good time for you to exit some poor performing stocks or mutual funds and keep them as cash if that provides comfort to your family. Don't be obsessed with reinvesting the proceeds right away.

Money in a savings account can be a source of great relief for your family and there is no harm in providing that comfort in these tough times. You can always redeploy later. Cash is king - let nobody tell you otherwise for now.

Stop tracking daily

Trust me, nothing will be lost if you stop tracking investments daily. If any, it may even help avoid impulsive acts that turn out to be wrong. Try to focus on your long-term goals instead of getting swayed by short-term returns in pandemic-related themes. These can turn out to be unnecessary sources of stress later.

Instead of staring at your portfolio, entertain yourself - whether that means investing in a good musical app or podcast series or subscribing to OTT channels in these times.

Wish you all good health! Wealth shall follow.

(The writer is Co-founder, Primeinvestor.in)

THINK INVESTOR: MANAGING FINANCES

Get 'coached' on investments

You need a behavioural coach whether you self-manage your investments or not

VENKATESH BANGARUSWAMY

With the increase in emotional and physical stress that individuals are suffering from, guidance that extends beyond traditional advisory services certainly helps. In this article, we shall discuss the relevance of a behavioural coach in improving your financial well-being.

Adviser Alpha

An investment adviser typically helps in creating portfolios. This includes suggesting an appropriate proportion of equity and bonds (asset allocation) and how to tax-efficiently make such investments (called asset location). In a world where choosing investment products can be confusing, an adviser aims to provide allocation alpha and tax alpha.

That is, they strive to improve your portfolio returns by tax-efficiently investing an optimal proportion in equity and bonds and by selecting appropriate products within equity and bonds to suit your risk attitude.

Now, consider a parallel world where you keep your investments simple. That is, you choose one equity fund and one recurring bank deposit for each goal you pursue. You choose an index fund; for all index funds



Your coach can determine how you can adjust your savings going forward to achieve your goal. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

benchmarked to say, the NSE 50 Index, will generate similar returns. This reduces the regret of choosing a fund that could underperform peer funds.

As for your recurring deposit, you choose a maturity that matches with the time horizon for your life goal. What about your tax-efficient investments? Your Section 80C benefits are exhausted by investing in provident fund and public provident fund.

We previously discussed in this column some simple asset allocation strategies that you can adopt to self-manage your investments. In this parallel world, therefore, you may not require an adviser to choose investment products and help with your asset allocation.

Yet, a behavioural coach can improve your portfolio returns. Consider this scenario. It is four years since you started a portfolio to fund your child's college education. You have 11 years before your child enters college. Based on your savings, this portfolio requires a minimum return of 8.5% over 16 years.

This year, the market is currently down 10%. Regretting your decision to invest in equity, you want to move a significant proportion to bonds (read fixed deposits), as it feels safer given the market volatility. But if you move to bonds, you reduce your portfolio's expected post-tax returns.

What should do you? A behavioural coach should be able to help you understand

that the market being down 10% does not mean your portfolio is also down a similar percentage. Your coach can also determine how you can adjust your savings going forward to achieve your goal despite such downturns. Of course, you can do the math yourself. But having a coach tell you this can be reassuring.

At other times, you may be suffering from overconfidence, especially when your investments generates handsome returns. Your coach can help moderate your investment biases.

A behavioural coach, therefore, plays an important role in personal finance because successful investing is as much about emotional discipline as it is about technical knowledge. You should have a behavioural coach whether you self-manage your investments or not.

Such a coach will help you apply deliberative thinking to manage your investments. Otherwise, your emotional mind can hijack your thought process, driving you to take decisions that could hurt your financial well-being.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals for managing their personal investments)

TECH TRAIL: PRECIOUS METALS

Gold, silver sign off April on positive note

B. KRISHNAKUMAR

Bright futures



After three consecutive months of losing streak, the precious metals closed on a positive note for April 2021. The weakening of the U.S. dollar and the drop in the U.S. Treasury yields played a key role in pushing the precious metals to higher levels in April.

As a result, Comex gold gained 3% in April to close at \$1,767.7 an ounce. The rise in Comex silver was much sharper, with the white metal gaining 5.5% to settle at \$25.88 an ounce at the end of April.

Mirroring the global trend, MCX gold futures gained 4% to close at ₹46,750 per 10 gm. MCX silver futures gained 5.7% to settle at ₹68,366 per kg at the end of April.

The Comex gold price achieved the target of \$1,785-1,800 mentioned last month. The short-term outlook for Comex gold remains positive. A close above \$1,800 level would strengthen this view. Above \$1,800, Comex gold could head to the next target in the \$1,845-1,855 zone.

The short-term positive outlook for gold would be under threat if the price closes below the immediate support at \$1,710-1,720 zone. Until this support zone is breached, there would be a case for a rise to \$1,855 or higher.

The short-term outlook for Comex silver too is positive and the price could head to the immediate target at \$27.72-8.5. The outlook would be under threat if the price drops below the support of \$24-\$24.5. Until the support at \$24 is not

breached, there would be a strong case for a rise to \$28.5 and beyond.

In tandem, MCX gold too closed on a strong note in April and the price achieved the target zone of ₹46,750-47,000 mentioned in the previous post. The short-term outlook for MCX gold is positive and the price is likely to move towards the next target zone at ₹48,500-49,500.

This view would be invalidated if the price falls below the support level in the ₹45,000-45,200 zone. The near-term outlook for MCX silver too is positive. MCX silver could rise to the immediate target at ₹71,500-72,000. This view would be invalidated if silver price moves below ₹63,500-64,000. A close above ₹69,900 would strengthen the positive case scenario.

To summarise, the outlook for precious metals is positive. But it remains to be seen if the recovery marks the reversal of prior downturn or is just a short-term bounce.

(The author is a Chennai-based analyst/trader. Views and opinions are not meant to be trading or investment advice)

LOOSE CHANGE

RAVIKANTH



"What do you think? I feel it's a last-ditch attempt to make people stay home and safe!"

Bank fixed deposit rates

Bank fixed deposit rates

Interest Rates (%)

Bank Name

Highest Slab

1-year tenure

3-year tenure

5-year tenure

SMALL FINANCE BANKS

Jana Small Finance Bank

7.25

6.75

7.00

7.00

AU Small Finance Bank

6.50

5.25

6.50

6.25

ESAF Small Finance Bank

6.50

6.50

5.75

5.25

Capital Small Finance Bank

6.40

6.00

6.00

6.00

PRIVATE SECTOR BANKS

DCB Bank

6.75

6.05

6.75

6.75

RBL Bank

Too early to say how we can find a slot to complete IPL: Ganguly

BCCI president says India has a hectic schedule and there are lots of organisational hazards like 14-day quarantine which is tough to handle



That settled it: Once the players got infected, there was no way the IPL could have continued, says Sourav Ganguly. • FILE PHOTO

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

Sourav Ganguly, as the president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, must steer the ship in the most distressing times mankind has known.

The former India skipper is mindful of the sacrifices that players make in today's times and he backs them in their pursuit to play cricket.

In this chat with Sportstar, Ganguly shares his thoughts on the challenges faced over the past 14 months, the forthcoming series in England, which he reckons, will be tougher than the one against Australia.

The COVID-19 situation is

unlikely to improve anytime soon. So, what is the BCCI's biggest immediate challenge? The challenge has been there for a year now. COVID has hit us badly and we have all been struggling. Barring December 2020 to March 2021, it has been a battle. Battle to stay relevant. Battle to keep the people together. It has been extremely tough for all of us, and the cricketers were no exceptions.

How did you manage to host the India-England series without any glitches and also the domestic tournaments? Because the numbers were down, and we had just two teams. The bio-bubbles were there. We had 760 players in the bio-bubble (during the

domestic games), but the key was that the COVID numbers were down across the country – 7000 a day. Now we have more than 4 lakh daily cases.

Do you think you erred in continuing with the 2021 IPL? Could it have been called off earlier?

You can say that now in hindsight that the IPL should have been called off earlier. Mumbai and Chennai (leg) did not have cases. Only when the IPL reached Delhi and Ahmedabad did the cases rise. People will say lot of things in any case. The English Premier League had so many people affected. But the players were in the bubble and there were no crowds at the venues. Players were not getting infected. Once the

players got affected, we called it off.

Is there a possibility to hold the remainder of the tournament in England after the WTC final and before the England series? WTC final gets over on June 22 and the first Test starts on August 4. Or, after the England series? No. India is supposed to go to Sri Lanka for three ODIs and five T20Is. There are lots of organisational hazards like 14-day quarantine. It can't happen in India. This quarantine is tough to handle. Too early to say how we can find a slot to complete the IPL.

(To read the full interview, go to <https://sportstar.thehindu.com>)

IN BRIEF

Warner and Slater deny night brawl in Maldives

MALE
Star opener David Warner and cricketer-turned-commentator Michael Slater have denied reports of their involvement in a drunken bar brawl in Male, where Australian cricketers competing in the now-suspended IPL are waiting to board a flight home in a few days' time. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, Warner and Slater got into a late-night physical altercation after a heated argument. "There is absolutely nothing to the rumour mill Buzz. Davie and I are great mates and absolutely zero chance of (having) a fight," Slater was quoted saying by foxsports.com.au. PTI

Sakariya's father succumbs to COVID

RAJKOT
Young Saurashtra pacer Chetan Sakariya's father Kanjibhai Sakariya died due to COVID-19 at a hospital in Bhavnagar on Sunday. He was 42 and was battling the infection for the past few days. The Saurashtra Cricket Association condoled the demise, saying "everyone at Saurashtra Cricket Association is deeply saddened on the sad demise of cricketer Chetan Sakariya's father. Saurashtra Cricket Association conveys heartfelt condolences to Chetan. PTI

Dravid backs India to shade England

Says it will be visitors' best chance since 2007

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Batting great Rahul Dravid reckons India will prevail over England 3-2 in this summer's away Test series and calls it the visitors' "best chance" to win in the UK since 2007.

Dravid was the last Indian captain to win a Test series in England.

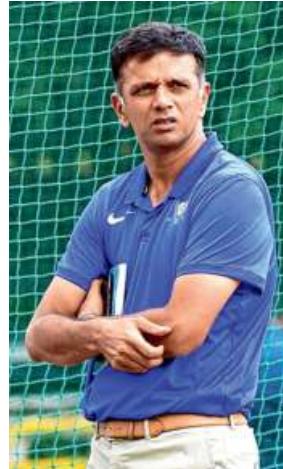
"I really do think India have a very good chance this time," Dravid said during a webinar, according to *ESPNcricinfo*.

Interesting sub-plot

Dravid, who is now the head of the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru, said R. Ashwin versus Ben Stokes could form an "interesting subplot" to what is expected to be an intriguing series.

"There's no question about their (England's) bowling. Whatever bowling attack England put on the park, especially their seam-bowling attack, is going to be fantastic. They have a lot of players to pick and choose from and that's going to be terrific.

"But if you look at their



Rahul Dravid. • FILE PHOTO

top six or top seven, you really think of one great batsman, a world-class batsman who is Joe Root.

"Obviously, Ben Stokes is another one, who is a good all-rounder, but for some reason Ashwin seems to do well against him. And that should be an interesting contest. I know he's done well against him (Stokes) in India, but it'll still be an interesting subplot to the series."

"... But I just think India will be well-prepared, have the confidence from Australia, there's lot of belief in the

squad. There's a lot of experience in the batting order this time around, so this is probably our best chance, maybe say 3-2 to India," Dravid said.

Lot of time

The former captain said India, to its advantage, will get a lot of time to prepare there for the rubber.

"I think India will play really well in England this time," Dravid said.

"It's a great opportunity we've got. After the WTC final, they're going to be in England for a whole month before the Test series starts. I don't think any team has had that kind of time to prepare for a Test series as India will have this time, so that surely should be a great advantage.

"In England, if there's one thing you've always got to respect, it's the conditions.

"To some extent you sort of get the feeling (as batsmen) that you're never set. Even if you're set and you get a good start, batting on 30, 40, 50, things can change very quickly, the weather can change, the ball can swing even after it's 40-50 overs old," Dravid observed.

'MI's foreign recruits reached destinations'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Five-time champions Mumbai Indians on Sunday said that all its foreign players and support staff have reached their respective destinations safely after the IPL 2021 was indefinitely suspended midway into the season due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of 14 foreign players and support of MI have left India after the cash-rich tournament had come to a halt on May 4.

According to MI, Kieron Pollard reached Trinidad safely, South African wicketkeeper-batsman Quinton de Kock and Marco Jansen had landed in Johannesburg.

MI's Australian players Chris Lynn, Nathan Coulter-Nile and support staff members, including chief coach Mahela Jayawardene have reached Maldives, and they will serve a 14-day quarantine there.

New Zealand players, including Adam Milne, Jimmy Neesham and Trent Boult and support staff, have reached Auckland.

Pakistan on cusp of series sweep

Nauman, Afridi and Hasan strike



Good support: Shaheen Afridi, who complemented Nauman Ali well, celebrates the exit of Brendan Taylor. • AP

REUTERS
HARARE

Left-arm spinner Nauman Ali took five for 86 as Pakistan closed in on an innings victory having reduced host Zimbabwe to 220 for nine at the close on the third day of the second and final Test at the Harare SC on Sunday.

Zimbabwe, which still trails by 158 runs, lost 15 wickets on the day having been dismissed earlier for 132 in the first innings. It is replying to Pakistan's massive 510 for eight declared.

Regis Chakabva struck an impressive 80 (13x4, 2x6)

and Brendan Taylor smashed 49 as they tried to put the pressure back on the tourists. But Zimbabwe could not stem the tide as Nauman and seamer Shaheen Afridi (4/45) picked up all the wickets to fall.

Earlier in the day, seamer Hasan Ali had wreaked havoc with five for 27.

The scores: Pakistan 510/8 decl. in 147.1 overs vs. Zimbabwe 132 in 60.4 overs (Chakabva 33, Hasan Ali 5/27) & 220/9 in 63 overs (Chakabva 80, B. Taylor 49, Jongwe 31 batting, Nauman 5/86, Afridi 4/45).

Bumrah can take 400 Test scalps: Ambrose

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

West Indies fast bowler great Curtly Ambrose says Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is "so different" from all other bowlers he has seen and has the potential to reach the 400-wicket milestone in Tests if he stays fit.

"India's got a few good fast bowlers. I'm a big fan of Jasprit Bumrah. He's so different than any bowler I have seen. He's so effective and I'm looking forward to him doing really well," Ambrose said on the YouTube show 'The Curtly & Karim Show'.

Asked if the 27-year-old can scalp 400 wickets in the longest format of the game, Ambrose said, "He can as long as he remains healthy, fit and play long enough. He can seam the ball, swing the ball and bowl great yorkers. He's got a lot in his arsenal. So as long as he can remain on the park for a long period of time, I'm sure he can get up there," Ambrose said.

Make that 98 and counting for Hamilton!

A pit-stop master-stroke sees the Mercedes driver outwit Red Bull's Verstappen

SPANISH GP

REUTERS

BARCELONA

Seven-times World champion Lewis Hamilton hunted down "sitting duck" Max Verstappen to win the Spanish Grand Prix for a record-equalling fifth year in a row on Sunday and go 14 points clear at the top.

Hamilton's 98th victory, from his 100th pole, was his third in four races as he and Mercedes played the strategy to perfection after Red Bull's Verstappen had muscled into the lead at the first corner.

The Briton pitted for fresh tyres and was set the task of closing a 22-second gap to Verstappen in 23 laps at the Circuit de Catalunya.

He did it in style, sweeping past to take back the lead with six laps to spare in a rerun of his epic chase of his Dutch rival at the 2019 Hun-



Peerless: Hamilton again underlined his status as the best of his generation with a strategy-driven win on Sunday. • AP

garian GP. "I was just hunting," said Hamilton, the first to win from pole this season and now a six-times winner here.

"It was a long way to come back from 20 odd seconds back but it was a good gamble, a really great strategy from the team... just a remarkable job by everyone in this team. What a day."

The results: 1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1hr 33min 07.680sec, 2. Max Verstappen (Red Bull) 15.841sec, 3. Valtteri Bottas (Mercedes) 26.610, 4. Charles Leclerc (Ferrari) 54.616, 5. Sergio Perez (Red Bull) 1:03.671, 6. Daniel Ricciardo (McLaren) 1:13.768, 7. Carlos Sainz Jr (Ferrari) 1:14.670; **1 lap:** 8. Lando Norris (McLaren), 9. Esteban Ocon (Alpine), 10. Pierre Gasly (AlphaTauri), 11. Lance Stroll (Aston Martin), 12. Kimi Raikkonen (Alfa Romeo), 13. Sebastian Vettel (Aston Martin), 14. George Russell (Williams), 15. Antonio Giovinazzi (Alfa Romeo), 16. Nicholas Latifi (Williams), 17. Fernando Alonso (Alpine); **2 laps:** 18. Mick Schumacher (Haas), 19. Nikita Mazepin (Haas). **DNF:** Yuki Tsunoda (AlphaTauri).

Standings (top-5): Drivers: 1. Hamilton 94 pts, 2. Verstappen 80, 3. Bottas 47, 4. Norris 41, 5. Leclerc 40. **Constructors:** 1. Mercedes 141 pts, 2. Red Bull-Honda 112, 3. McLaren-Mercedes 65, 4. Ferrari 60, 5. Alpine-Renault 15.

United makes City wait a tad longer

Powers to a comeback win at Aston Villa; Inter celebrates in style

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Manchester City's Premier League title celebrations were put on hold again as Manchester United fought back to win 3-1 at Aston Villa on Sunday.

City could have started the party if second-placed United lost at Villa Park, but its arch-rival kept the leader's champagne on ice with a second-half escape act.

Trailing to Bertrand Traore's first half rocket, United equalised through Bruno Fernandes' penalty before Mason Greenwood and Edinson Cavani netted to leave City frustrated.

City, with three matches to play, is now 10 points clear of United, which has four games left.

With thousands of fans celebrating outside the San Siro stadium and a guard of honour onto the pitch, Inter Milan celebrated its first Serie A title in over a decade with a 5-1 victory over Sampdoria giving Antonio Conte's side a record 14th successive home win.

"The satisfaction is immense," said Conte. "It's natural that we and our fans are now so desperate to celebrate something that we'd been waiting for so long to



Top strike: Mason Greenwood's brilliant finish on the turn put United ahead against Villa. • REUTERS

do. We're happy to bring this joy to them."

The results: Premier League: Wolves 2 (Traore 76, Gibbs-White 90) bt Brighton 1 (Dunk 13); Aston Villa 1 (Traore) lost to Manchester United 3 (Fernandes 52-pen, Greenwood 56, Cavani 87).

LaLiga: Getafe 0 lost to Eibar 1 (Recio 89-pen).

Bundesliga: Cologne 1 (Anderson 49) lost to Freiburg 4 (Petersen 18, Demirovic 20, Grifo

90+3, 90+6). **Saturday: Premier League:** Liverpool 2 (Mane 31, Thiago 90) bt Southampton 0; Manchester City 1 (Sterling 44) lost to Chelsea 2 (Yiach 63, Alonso 90+3); Sheffield United 0 lost to Crystal Palace 2 (Benteke 2, Eze 88).

Sunday: Cadiz 2 (Mauro 43, Silva 45+2og) bt Huesca 1 (Mir 45+1); Athletic Bilbao 2 (Morgillo 1, Sancto 62) drew with Osasuna 2 (Brasanac 12, Budimir 89).

Serie A: Udinese 1 (De Paul 23) drew with Bologna 1 (Soriano 82-pen); Inter Milan 5 (Gagliardini 4, Sanchez 26, 36, Pinamonti 61, Martinez 70-pen) bt Sampdoria 1 (Balde 35); Fiorentina 2 (Vlahovic 32, 89) bt Lazio 0.

Bundesliga: Werder Bremen 0 drew with Bayer Leverkusen 0; Hoffenheim 4 (Kramaric 47, Akpoguma 52, Baumgartner 60, Bebou 64) bt Schalke 04 2 (Uth 12, Mustafi 42); Bayern Munich 6 (Lewandowski 2, 34, 66-pen, Mueller 34, Coman 44, Sane 86) bt Borussia M'Gladbach 0.

Adhiban, Arjun qualify for Champions Chess Tour

Get the better of Aravindh and Gukesh

RAKESH RAO

B. Adhiban and Arjun Erigaisi took contrasting ways to earn the two qualifying spots for the cash-rich Champions Chess Tour after reaching the final of the online Indian Qualifier on Sunday.

TV PICKS

Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 12.30 a.m. (Tuesday)

IN BRIEF



Alvarez unifies super middleweight titles

ARLINGTON (USA) Saul "Canelo" Alvarez stopped Billy Joe Saunders in eight rounds on Saturday to unify three super middleweight titles. Four-weight world champion Alvarez retained his World Boxing Council and World Boxing Association titles and seized Saunders' World Boxing Organization belt when he retired on his stool after taking a beating in the eighth round. AFP

Ex official of rowing federation passes away

KOLKATA Kalyanmoy Ghose, one of the founding members of the Rowing Federation of India (RFI) and West Bengal Rowing Association (WBRA), passed away on Sunday due to COVID-19, according to a WBRA source. He was 79 and was a bachelor. Ghose served as a president of the RFI, WBRA and Calcutta Rowing Club.

Hockey umpire loses battle with COVID

KOLKATA Basu Bhattacharya, a National hockey umpire and a former assistant secretary of the Bengal Hockey Association, died of a drop in oxygen level due to COVID-19 infection on Sunday, according to a Hockey Bengal source. Bhattacharya was 61 and is survived by his wife and son.



Muller hails Bayern's achievement

MUNICH Thomas Muller hailed Bayern Munich's "phenomenal" achievement after it was confirmed Bundesliga champion for the ninth season in a row on Saturday. "Nine titles in a row, that's crazy. I was there each time. I'm very grateful for that. It's phenomenal," he said. AFP

Munich police takes a dig at Bayern's rivals

BERLIN Munich police issued a missing person's notice for Bayern Munich's Bundesliga challenger on Saturday. Local law enforcement celebrated Bayern's record-extending ninth consecutive title by joking on Twitter that it was looking for its missing rival over the past nine years. AP

Incredible Westbrook drives Wizards

181st career triple-double ties with Robertson for the most in NBA history



Phenom: Russell Westbrook's penchant for 'triple-doubles' hit a record high on Saturday. •AP

NBA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE INDIANAPOLIS

Another historic night from Russell Westbrook helped Washington Wizards to a 133-132 overtime victory over the host Indiana Pacers on Saturday.

Westbrook notched the 181st triple-double of his career (33 points, 19 rebounds and 15 assist) on Saturday, tying Oscar Robertson for the most in NBA history. Robertson established his record during an NBA career from 1960-74.

"Man, it's unbelievable,"

CM YK

AFC Cup thrown into turmoil

Breach of COVID protocol by BFC players; Group D matches postponed

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA
ASHWIN ACHAL
KOLKATA/BENGALURU

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has postponed the Group D and Playoff stage matches of the AFC Cup, scheduled to be held in Male (Maldives), involving ATK Mohun Bagan (ATKMB) and Bengaluru FC (BFC).

ATK Mohun Bagan was scheduled to leave for Male on Monday to play its Group D matches. The BFC squad, on the other hand, had landed in Male on Friday ahead of its playoff match against Club Eagles on Tuesday.

"The AFC Cup (South) Group and Playoff Stage matches are now postponed until further notice with more information to be announced in due course. Participating clubs who have travelled to Maldives for both the Group and Playoff Stages will be required to arrange for their return home while adhering to the COVID-19 health and travel protocols put in place by the country,"

an AFC statement read.

While the AFC did not mention a reason for the postponement, the announcement came after reports emerged of a breach of COVID-19 protocol by BFC squad members in Male.

Violation

Local media outlets in Maldives reported that a few BFC players and staff were spotted on the Male streets – a violation of the protocol set by the Health Protection Agency. The protocol states that the BFC contingent is allowed to leave the team hotel only to train and play the match.

A photo in a Channel News Maldives report shows BFC midfielder Erik Paartalu and two other BFC members outdoors.

A request made to BFC to confirm the identity of the two members – with their backs to the camera, unlike a clearly identifiable Paartalu – was not entertained.

The infraction prompted

Ahmed Mahloof, Maldives Minister of Youth, Sports & Community Empowerment, to ask BFC to leave the country.

"Unacceptable behavior from @bengalurafc (BFC) breaching the strict guidelines from HPA & @theafc-dotcom (AFC). The club should leave Maldives immediately as we can't entertain this act. We honoured the commitment we gave a few months back even with the surge in cases & pressure from the public," Mahloof tweeted.

BFC owner Parth Jindal apologised for the "inexcusable behaviour of three of our foreign players/staff while in Male" on Twitter, and promised to take "strictest action" against the offenders. The club released an apology note as well, stating that it will deal with the matter internally.

"The club is making arrangements to get all its players and staff home at the earliest. Bengaluru FC would al-

so like to place on record an unconditional apology for a health and safety breach, involving one member of staff and two players, in the Maldives, on Sunday," a BFC statement read.

Relief for ATKMB

The tournament's postponement brought a sense of relief in the ATK Mohun Bagan camp, which saw two of its Indian players Prabir Das and Sheikh Sahil testing positive for COVID-19.

"We have confirmation from AFC that the matches are being postponed. This is a relief for the team as we had to leave behind two of our regular players who have tested positive for COVID-19 during the screening process ahead of our departure for Maldives," said a Mohun Bagan official on Sunday.

The team was likely to miss a few of its foreign players, who could not leave the country owing to restrictions imposed in their respective countries.



Courting trouble: The Maldives authorities took strong exception to BFC players, including Erik Paartalu, walking on the streets of Male against orders. ■ FILE PHOTO

Osaka conflicted over holding the Olympics

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ROME

Naomi Osaka is conflicted over whether the Tokyo Olympics should be held amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"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," said the Japanese World No. 2.

"But I think that there's so much important stuff going on, and especially the past year," Osaka added. "I think a lot of unexpected things have happened and if it's putting people at risk, and if it's making people very uncomfortable, then it definitely should be a discussion, which I think it is as of right now."

Games can be a beacon of hope: Coe

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe said on Sunday he believes the Tokyo Olympics can be "a beacon of hope and optimism", despite infections surging around the world.

Coe, speaking at an athletics test event held behind closed doors at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium, said he believes the Games can "have a profound impact" on the world.

"I think that it will also act as a beacon of hope and optimism in a world that I hope is soon moving back to some type of normalcy," he told reporters.

"I think that these Games will leave a strong lasting legacy."

Khangura and nine others in lead

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Gurjot Singh Khangura shot two perfect rounds of 25 to lead with nine others on 50 in men's skeet on the first day of the shotgun World Cup in Lonato, Italy, on Sunday.

Anjum was all praise for the arrangements to train and compete in Europe. She is categorical that it was much better and safer in Europe than travelling in India in the current situation.

"This much is required, if everyone wants medals from us. We have to work. We can't sit and wait," said Anjum.

but could not train or travel owing to a bereavement in the family.

Mairaj said that he would reach Italy soon and start his Olympic preparation with coach Ennio Falco.

Despite missing the third World Cup for the shotgun shooters after the ones in Egypt and Delhi, Mairaj said that the decision to shoot the last World Cup in Croatia, before the Olympics, would be made by the coach.

Three more rounds will be shot in qualification and the top six will compete in the final.

Olympian Mairaj Ahmad Khan was also scheduled to compete in the World Cup,

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Gatlin eyes regaining 100m gold at Tokyo

The veteran sprinter refuses to rule out continuing career into his 40s

ATHLETICS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOYKO

Veteran US sprinter Justin Gatlin set his sights on winning another Olympic gold at the Tokyo Games on Sunday – then refused to rule out continuing his career into his 40s.

The 39-year-old will become the oldest man ever to win an Olympic track medal if he makes the podium at this summer's coronavirus-delayed Tokyo Games.

With Usain Bolt retired and reigning World 100m world champion Christian Coleman banned, Gatlin believes he has a realistic chance.

"I hope so – That's why I'm still here," he said after competing at a test event held behind closed doors at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium – he won the 100m in 10.24sec, and said he was satisfied with his form as he looks ahead to next month's US trials.

"I love making Olympic teams, but I'm not in it for the free trip. I want to be able to work hard and get on

top of that podium again at some point, and I hope this year is that year for me."

Gatlin won 100m gold in Athens in 2004 but was forced to miss the 2008 Games because of a suspension for drug offences.

He said on Sunday that Tokyo would be his "fourth and last Olympics" if he makes the US team.

But he quickly changed tack when asked if he would definitely hang up his spikes this summer. "I'm saying it right now, but obviously the way my career's going, I don't know," he said. "I'm happy with where I'm at. I'm still hungry for competition, so I won't say never."