

SHORT TAKES

Man beaten to death over theft suspicion, 2 held

New Delhi: A 20-year-old man was allegedly beaten to death by a group of people in outer Delhi's Swaroop Nagar over suspicion of theft, police said on Sunday. Two persons, Amit and Videsh, were arrested on Sunday in connection with the incident that took place late last night. Raids are being conducted to nab two others who were involved in the incident, they said. The victim, Sarfaraz, was caught by a few residents of Swaroop Nagar while he was roaming in the area late on Saturday night. They took him to a nearby factory where they allegedly tied him to a heavy machine used in construction work and thrashed him with sticks, the police said. Sarfaraz was found unconscious on early Sunday morning. He was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was declared brought dead, a senior police officer said. During inquiry, the victim's brother told police that he was beaten over suspicion of theft. The locals said Sarfaraz was seen roaming in the area and was caught by three-four men who allegedly thrashed him, the officer said. Sarfaraz was unemployed. He was a drug addict and was admitted to a rehabilitation centre two months ago, the police said. A case of murder has been registered at Swaroop Nagar police station. Amit and Videsh have been arrested in connection with the incident and two other accused have been identified. Raids are being conducted to nab them too, they said.

— PTI

1 held for duping kin of black fungus patient

New Delhi: A 28-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly cheating the kin of a patient suffering from black fungus by promising to home deliver a drug used in the treatment of the disease, police said on Sunday. Prasant Kumar Sharma, who hails from Ghaziabad and works as a part-time driver, neither delivered the medicine nor returned the money paid by the victim, they said. Sharma was arrested on Saturday after a resident of Shahdara in Delhi reported the matter to the police, police said. In his complaint, the man alleged that his brother-in-law was admitted at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital where he was being treated for black fungus and the doctor had prescribed Amphotericin B medicine used in treating the disease. Since the medicine was not available in the market, the complainant contacted a number which he found circulating on whatsapp groups, the victim told the police in his complaint. When contacted, Sharma assured the victim that he would provide the prescribed medicine and demanded ₹3,000 for it, police said. The victim then transferred the money on his Paytm account, but the accused neither delivered the medicine, nor did he return the money, police said.

— PTI

No Class 12 exams without vaccinating students: Sisodia

‘Can’t sacrifice students to uphold exam traditions’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 23

“We must think like parents. We can’t sacrifice the students to our desire to uphold exam traditions and rules,” said deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday during a high-level meeting called by the ministry of education to decide the fate of the pending Class 12 board exams and the subsequent entrance exams, which were postponed in view of the second wave of Covid-19.

He further said that the Delhi government is not in favour of the CBSE exploring options to conduct the Class 12 board examinations and going ahead with the process without vaccinating the students will prove to be a big mistake.

“Two options were discussed at the meeting. The first was conducting the exams in the present format for the major subjects and marking for the rest of the subjects on the basis of the performance in these papers. The second was having the exams in the students’ home schools, reducing the duration and changing the exam pattern. The Delhi government is not in favour of these options. We cannot play with the safety of students just to fulfill our stubborn wishes,” the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader told a press conference.

Sisodia, who is also the education minister of Delhi, said the education system has its own com-



Delhi deputy CM Manish Sisodia addresses a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

▶ **THE DELHI** government is not in favour of the CBSE exploring options to conduct the Class 12 board examinations and going ahead with the process without vaccinating the students will prove to be a big mistake, said Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia

pulsions but considering the extreme circumstances, they can be put aside.

“Conducting the examination by toying with students’ safety will prove to be a big mistake. First vaccine, then exams. There are over 1.5 crore Class 12 students across the country and 95 per cent of them are above the age of seven-teen-and-a-half years. The Centre should talk to experts if they can be given the Covishield or Covaxin vaccines.

“The Centre should also

talk to Pfizer to explore vaccination for the Class 12 students. It is a must to vaccinate students, especially with experts indicating that the third wave of the coronavirus will be more dangerous for children,” he added.

The meeting was chaired by defence minister Rajnath Singh. Union women and child development minister Smriti Irani and minister for information and broadcasting Prakash Javadekar also attended the meeting, besides the education ministers and secretaries of various states and Union territories.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had, on April 14, announced the cancellation of the Class 10 exams and postponed the Class 12 exams in view of a surge in the number of Covid-19 cases.

Death toll goes up to 23,202 with 189 fatalities in past 24 hours

1,649 Covid cases in Delhi, lowest since March 30

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI MAY 23

The national capital on Sunday recorded 1,649 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, the lowest since March 30.

According to a Delhi Health Department bulletin, the city reported 189 deaths due to the disease in the last 24 hours. The total death toll has gone up to 23,202. “Now the wave is weakening visibly. We haven’t won yet but we may be taking control of the wave. In 24 hours, the positivity rate is below 2.42 per cent. At one point 28,000 cases were reported daily. Now in 24 hours we have reported 1,600 cases,” Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said.

The positivity rate has declined to 2.42 percent which is the lowest since March 28 when the same was recorded at 2.35 per cent. The metropolis now has 27,610 active cases which is the lowest number since April 9 when the tally of active cases was 26,631. The total count of cases in the city stands at 14,18,868.

The city is under lockdown for almost a month and the number of new cases and positivity rate is declining in the city for the past few days. The health bulletin said 5,158 patients recovered from the infection in the



We didn’t know how long this wave would have lasted. But within a month, the people of Delhi cooperated. Delhi has fought the virus like a family...

— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi CM

last 24 hours taking the cumulative number of recoveries to 13,66,056. It said that 68,043 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours of which 46,745 were RT-PCR tests while 21,298 were rapid antigen tests. The case fatality rate stands at 1.64 percent and the cumulative positivity rate at 7.57 per cent.

The bulletin said that 64,319 people were vaccinated in the last 24 hours of which 44,752 took their first dose and 19,567 took the second dose of the vaccine. The

number of people under home isolation dipped to 15,844 from 18,060 on Sunday while the number of containment zones dropped to 46,570 from 48,429 a day before, the bulletin said.

Gearing up for the third Covid-19 wave, Arvind Kejriwal said that authorities are functioning day and night to make health infrastructure adequate including installing new oxygen plants and ICU beds. If the cases continue to decline with a similar trend, from May 31 the lockdown will be opened in a phased manner, he added.

“I consulted many people and the general opinion favoured lockdown extension for one week. So, the Delhi government has decided that lockdown will be extended to 5 AM on May 31,” he said.

Kejriwal said the lockdown was required so that the gains made after much struggle are not lost. The Delhi government has made arrangements to vaccinate all people in Delhi within three months but there is a shortage of vaccines in the country, the chief minister said.

It is being said that a third wave of COVID-19 will arrive. If everyone gets the vaccine, perhaps the third wave may not arrive, he said.

“We are preparing to vaccinate everyone at the earliest. We are talking to the Centre and the vaccine companies. I am myself talking to vaccine companies, foreign and Indian ones, about how to vaccinate maximum people. We are ready to spend any amount of budget to get the vaccines for Delhi people,” he said.

Meanwhile, Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot on Sunday said his department has approved more than 1.5 lakh cases under a scheme to provide one-time assistance of Rs 5,000 to each para-transit vehicle driver during the COVID-19-induced lockdown.

“I am happy to inform you that the transport department has approved 1,55,301 cases. Paratransit vehicle drivers/owners will start receiving Rs 5,000 in bank accounts linked to their Aadhaar from Monday,” he tweeted in Hindi.

Earlier this month, the Delhi government had decided to extend its scheme of one-time financial assistance to cover e-rickshaw owners.

The decision is likely to benefit more than 60,000 permit holders of paratransit vehicles and owners of e-rickshaws registered in Delhi.

Cop among 4 held for trying to rob businessman

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 23

Two men, including a Delhi Police constable, have been arrested and two juveniles apprehended for allegedly trying to rob a businessman in north Delhi’s Wazirabad area, police said on Sunday.

Police said constable Jatin, posted at the Timarpur police station has been arrested while constable Amit, posted at the Vivek Vihar police station in Shahdara district, is absconding.

The police said Jatin was arrested following a raid after other accused, Naresh and the two juveniles, revealed the involvement of the two policemen.

The incident took place on May 12 when the man was returning home in his four-wheeler after closing his shop, police said.

The man was also carrying ₹2 lakh. On the way, after he reached the Wazirabad area, he was stopped by another four-wheeler. While one of the accused knocked on his car’s window, the other accused, who were on a motorcycle and a scooter, surrounded him, police said.

A police constable, Manish, posted at the Wazirabad police station who was on his way to duty saw what was happening and approached the man to check on him, police said. Seeing the police, the accused fled the spot, a senior police officer said.

The victim was reluctant in filing a complaint, police said, adding that they took sou moto cognisance after recovering the scooter, registered an FIR and initiated an investigation, he said.

With the help of the registration number of the seized scooter and technical surveillance, Naresh (38) was arrested and the two juveniles apprehended, police said.

It was found that Naresh was earlier involved in several cases of theft and robbery, they said.

“The accused disclosed the names of the two policemen who were also involved in the incident and said they had shared information about the victim,” the officer said.



Chandni Chowk area in front of the Red Fort wears a deserted look during the Covid-induced lockdown in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

No Covaxin left for 45+ group, frontline workers: Delhi govt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 23

There will be no Covaxin doses left for those aged above 45 and frontline and healthcare workers in Delhi after Monday with no clarity on the supply of the next instalment from the Centre, AAP MLA Atishi said on Sunday.

She said the national capital has so far received 45.94 lakh vaccine doses for healthcare workers, frontline staff, and those aged above 45, of which 43.79 lakh have been administered to the beneficiaries. “Delhi has

only 25,000 Covaxin doses left for this (above 45 years) category. Though the last instalment received from the Centre is being used for the second doses, there will be no doses left after Monday,” she said.

Atishi rued that there has been no clarity on the supply of the next instalment of Covaxin for this category though the Central government had promised to provide more doses in June. She said the city has received 8.17 lakh vaccine doses for the 18-44 age group so far, of which 8.07 lakh doses

had been utilised by Sunday morning. “Vaccination centres administering Covaxin have already been shut. Similarly, Covishield inoculation centres will have to be closed from Monday,” she said.

Ms Atishi noted that 64,214 people received the vaccine jabs on May 22.

A total of 50.85 lakh doses have been administered to the beneficiaries in Delhi since the nationwide inoculation drive began on January 16. Around 11.51 lakh people have got both the doses, she added.



Artist Nizam inscribes on a gravestone of a deceased person at ITO graveyard in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

Cops conduct special drive to create awareness on apt Covid behaviour

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 23

The Delhi Police on Sunday said they want to curb the violations and their plan of “fine and prosecution” will be continued but they want to take a day off and educate people. Few of the districts in Delhi started the awareness drive early morning on Sunday.

In the Southwest district of Delhi, district team along with DCP Ingit Pratap Singh patrolled the streets and gave roses to the violators. “We started this as there were complaints all over Delhi that police was being harsh on violators. So, the violators will be stopped today but won’t be fined. We will give them masks and roses,” said a senior police officer.

In Shahdara, the district team decided to make announcements on the



A Delhi police personnel offers roses to a violator of traffic rules during the lockdown in New Delhi on Sunday.

streets about mask violations and coronavirus. Police personnel stepped out with speakers and mics to markets on Sunday.

R. Sathiyasundaram, DCP (Shahdara) said: “As the Covid cases have come down, the government may lift the lockdown soon.

People will start moving out and the possibility of a third wave is very high. We want to create awareness. On Sunday, we won’t fine anyone and ask them to strictly follow guidelines. The public needs awareness.”

While violators in south Delhi were given plant

saplings and were asked to plant them for sensitisation towards following Covid 19 rules.

Parvinder Singh, DCP (Outer District) said: “Our teams went to pickets in Peeragarhi and ORR to sensitise and brief people about the violations. Free masks were provided and we seek their (public) cooperation to fight Covid in the city.”

In Outer Delhi, police started the awareness drive at Outer Ring road and Paschim vihar which sees heavy traffic every day.

According to the data shared by Delhi Police spokesperson ACP Anil Mittal, the police has issued a total of 6,50,768 challans for mask violation since the lockdown. The police said they have collected a total of ₹11 crores in fines in the last month. The fines include for spitting and social distancing violations.

SHORT TAKES

After Guha, Murmu wants to rejoin TMC

Kolkata: With the TMC having emerged victorious with a thumping majority in the recently concluded assembly elections, turncoats who had quit the party to join the BJP seem to be making a beeline for re-entry into the Mamata Banerjee camp, the latest being Sarala Murmu. Ms Murmu, who had switched camp as she was reportedly unhappy with the ticket that was given to her by the ruling party, has expressed her desire to return to the TMC, a day after Ms Banerjee's former aide, Sonali Guha, made a similar appeal. Claiming that it was a mistake on her part to have joined the BJP, Ms Murmu said that she wants Ms Banerjee to pardon her. "If she accepts me, I will stay with her and work for the party diligently," Ms Murmu said. She was nominated from Habibpur seat in Malda, but party sources had then claimed that she was keen on contesting the election from Maldaha constituency. — PTI

Body taken in waste truck for last rites

Dewas: The body of a 21-year-old man, who allegedly committed suicide, was taken for last rites in a garbage vehicle in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas district, prompting the local civic administration to suspend its health official and terminate the services of three temporary employees. The incident took place in Sonkatch town on Saturday following which a video of it went viral on social media. In the video, some civic employees were purportedly seen dumping the body in an empty garbage vehicle. The Opposition Congress hit out at the BJP over the incident, but the ruling party said immediate action was taken by local civic authorities. According to sources, the victim, who was a resident of Rolupipalia village, had allegedly committed suicide. — PTI

'Every Indian to be vaccinated by Dec'

Jodhpur: Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat on Sunday asserted that India has been working fast to increase the production of Covid-19 vaccines and said each citizen of the country will be inoculated by December. He also attacked the Opposition, saying it has been trying to politicise matters related to the vaccination drive against the coronavirus. "We have been constantly working on increasing the production and availability of vaccines, and will have each Indian vaccinated by December, which will be a huge record," Mr Shekhawat said. He added that this will all happen on account of the country's own endeavours. "It is for the first time in history that India developed its own vaccines for any virus parallel to the rest of the world," he said. — PTI

CURBS' VIOLATION: BABU SHUNTED OUT FOR SLAPPING MAN

AGE CORRESPONDENT
RAIPUR, MAY 23

Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Sunday ordered removal of Surajpur district collector Ranbir Sharma after a video showing him slapping a youth in public for violating coronavirus restrictions went viral on social media. The collector was seen in the video clip slapping the youth, smashing his mobile phone and then encouraging the policemen accompanying him to assault him. In the video clip, the youth was seen showing the collector a piece of paper and something on his mobile phone. The collector, however, was seen smashing the phone in the video clip. The incident took place in the north Chhattisgarh town of Surajpur on Saturday. Soon the video went viral on social media inviting severe flak from several quarters for the collector for his "brazen" and high-handed act. The chief minister has strongly disapproved of the incident. "The matter came to my notice through social media. I condemn it. Such acts will not be tolerated in Chhattisgarh. I have ordered removal of the collector", a Twitter post by Mr Baghel said.

Regret row, withdrawing remark on allopathic medicines: Ramdev

Vardhan says statement 'extremely unfortunate', disrespects 'corona warriors'

New Delhi, May 23: Yoga guru Ramdev on Sunday withdrew his recent statements on allopathic medicine which triggered strong protests from the medical fraternity. Responding to a letter from Union health minister Harsh Vardhan, Ramdev said he wants to put the matter to rest. "Hon'ble Minister, I have received your letter. I withdraw my statement, putting to rest the controversy over various medical practices... (Jee aapka patr praapt hua, usake sandarbh mein chikitsa paddatiyon ke sangharsh ke is poore vivaad ko khedapoorvak viraam dete hue main apana vak-



In a strongly worded letter to Baba Ramdev, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said that 'through your statement you not only disrespected corona warriors but also deeply hurt the sentiments of countrymen'



tavy vaapis leta hoon)," he tweeted from his personal Twitter handle. Earlier on Sunday, the health minister had called Ramdev's statement on allopathic medicines "extremely unfortunate" and asked him to withdraw the remark, saying it disrespects "corona warriors" and can break the morale of healthcare

workers.

In a strongly worded letter to Ramdev, the minister also said that "through your statement you not only disrespected corona warriors but also deeply hurt the sentiments of countrymen".

"Your statement on allopathy can break the morale of healthcare workers and weaken our

fight against Covid-19," Mr Vardhan said and added that doctors are fighting day and night to save people's lives.

Citing a video circulating on social media, the Indian Medical Association on Saturday had said Ramdev has claimed that allopathy is a "stupid science" and medicines such as Remdesivir, Faviflu, and other drugs approved by the Drugs Controller General of India have failed to treat Covid-19 patients.

The doctors' body also quoted Ramdev as saying that "lakhs of patients have died after taking allopathic medicines".

— PTI

Cancel exams for Class 12, kids 'under pressure': Priyanka

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 23

The Congress on Sunday demanded that the Class 12 board exams should not be held as the children "were under immense pressure". In a series of tweets Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said that it was unfair and insensitive to expect children to take their exam "wearing all sorts of protective gear for hours at a stretch".

"They are already dealing with enough stress. I fail to understand the reasoning behind holding these exams, not to mention having stretched this decision out for months," she said.

Taking on the government Ms Vadra pointed out that many of the students were likely to have family members who were affected by the pandemic too and that would add to their present level of stress.

She added, "I fail to understand the reasoning behind holding these exams, not to mention having stretched this decision out for months. I have said this before and am repeating it again. The mental health of children is as important as their physical well-being. It's about time our education system incorporates

They are already dealing with enough stress. I fail to understand the reasoning behind holding these exams, not to mention having stretched this decision out for months.

— Priyanka Gandhi, Cong leader

sensitivity towards children's well-being and starts taking these issues seriously."

The Congress general secretary also mentioned the threat of Covid-19 looming large over children in the coming days and said, "Students studying for the CBSE 12th grade examinations have been sharing their concerns about these exams being held during the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. Their health and safety MATTERS. Why are we not learning our lessons? Gathering in closed spaces promote the spread of COVID. This wave has shown that children are vulnerable to new strains."

Meanwhile several state governments have reservations about the board exams but are looking for new ways to assess children.

Centre solely responsible for bodies flowing in river: Rahul

New Delhi, May 23: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said the Centre is solely responsible for dead bodies flowing in the Ganga and it is not a collective responsibility.

He said one should also understand the pain of those who left their kin along the river and it is not their fault.

"I do not like sharing photographs of dead bodies. The entire country and the world are sad seeing such photos, but one has to understand the pain of those who left their kin along the river Ganga out of compulsion. They are not at fault," the former Congress chief said in a tweet in Hindi.

"It is not a collective responsibility, but is only of the Central government," he said.

Mr Gandhi's remarks came after a number of bodies, presumably of Covid victims, were found floating in the river in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh recently.

Meanwhile, the Congress claimed that there is a shortage of Covid-19 vaccines in the country and asked the Centre to put out district-wise data of those inoculated as state-wise data "hides" many facts.

It also alleged that the manner in which the Centre has handled the entire vaccine issue is anything but cooperative federalism. — PTI

Vaccine drive to get faster from June: CM

Uddhav says his govt ready to make one-time payment for 12cr doses for beneficiaries in 18-44 age group

Mumbai, May 23: Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday expressed confidence that the vaccination drive would be expedited after the state starts getting adequate supply of doses from June.

Inaugurating a field training workshop titled "Pediatrics Covid-19", Mr Thackeray said his government was relentlessly pursuing the issue of vaccine supply, adding that his government was ready to make one-time payment for 12 crore doses for beneficiaries in the 18-44 age group, who account for six

crore of the state's total population.

"I am confident the vaccination drive will pick up once the supply is smooth after June," the CM asserted.

He said the state witnessed oxygen shortage during the second wave of infections but it was now well equipped to tackle a possible third wave since effective steps had been taken to make the state self-sufficient in the vital gas.

"Even though we haven't been successful in defeating the virus, we have kept the number of cases in



control. It is the success of our state as a united force comprising all stakeholders. We have to be alert to protect children from the possible third wave. The first wave hit senior citizens, the second one targeted youth and now chil-

dren are under threat," he said.

The CM said "unpleasant decisions" like lockdown had to be taken to contain the outbreak and asked people to get treated immediately if they are experiencing Covid-19 like symptoms.

Suhas Prabhu, head of the Covid-19 pediatric task force, said in a majority of cases, the only symptom may be fever with complete recovery being made in a week's time.

"The other possibility was Covid pneumonia and infection from Covid positive mothers after the

third trimester. Ninety per cent cases are likely to be asymptomatic, 5 percent moderate and 1-2 percent pneumonia," Mr Prabhu said, adding that pediatric Covid care hospitals, pediatric ICUs and high dependency units were being set up in the state in view of a possible third wave.

He said home care would be done through telecommunication in fever clinics.

Vijay Yevale, another task force member, said parents should take their children to a doctor as soon as the latter have fever. — PTI

Sena leader makes fun of Pragya's gau mutra claim

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MAY 23

The Shiv Sena on Sunday slammed the BJP for doing "politics" instead of working together to fight the pandemic and work for providing relief to the cyclone affected people.

Sena spokesperson Sanjay Raut said that despite the odd situation in Maharashtra, state BJP chief Chandrakant Patil has been making claims that his party would win 400 seats if the election were held in the country today.

Referring to Bhopal BJP MP Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur's statement, Mr

Raut said that Pragya Singh did not get Covid as she consumes *gau mutra* (cow-urine) every day. "The dead bodies, which are floating in Ganga, were not provided oxygen and vaccine. At least they should have been provided cow urine. Be it corona or cyclonic storm, politics is being played over every crisis," Mr Raut said.

Taking a dig at BJP leaders, Mr Raut also wrote that thousands of corpses of the corona-infected deceased were swept into the river Ganga as these mortal remains could not even be cremated properly as per the Hindu rituals.

Don't hold protest over Covid: Capt. to farmers

Chandigarh, May 23: Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh on Sunday urged the BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) not to hold their planned sit-in over his government's "failure" to tackle coronavirus, saying their three-day protest may turn into a super-spreader.

The farmers' outfit has decided to hold a protest from May 28 in Patiala, the CM's home constituency.

Rejecting the allegation that his government failed to tackle the pandemic, the CM said they fought hard to prevent Punjab going the way of some other states such as Delhi, Maharashtra and even Uttar Pradesh, where bodies floating in the Ganga exposed the

mismanagement by the BJP government.

According to a statement, he urged farmers not to act "irresponsibly" and endanger their own lives as their planned protest may negate the gains made by the state government in the fight against the pandemic, amid a complete ban on all gatherings.

Such a "dharna" will draw people mainly from villages, which are in any case going through a crisis during the second wave of the pandemic, he said, adding that the outfit's action is completely unwarranted, considering the support his government has extended to farmers on the issue of the Centre's farm laws, said the CM. — PTI

MP may shun global tender to procure corona vaccines

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAY 23

The Shivraj Singh Chouhan government is not keen to go for global tender to procure vaccines and may solely rely on Indian vaccine candidates, Covashield and Covaxin, for inoculation of people of Madhya Pradesh.

The chief minister dropped hints to the effect while interacting with industrialists here a couple of days ago, sources said on Sunday.

"The global tender may sound like a popular slogan. But, I am apprehensive about its effectiveness", he said while opening his mind on the matter. Mr Chouhan said the



Sputnik and Pfizer vaccines were also available choices.

The chief minister however said he found out that handling of Pfizer may prove challenging considering the climatic condition of MP and the cold storage chain available in the state since the vaccine has to be carried in -25 to -30 degree.

Mr Chouhan is the second chief minister after his Assam counterpart Himant Biswa Sharma to shun global tender to procure vaccines.

The newly appointed chief minister of Assam has recently said 'Global tender has no value beyond publicity'.

Mr Chouhan said he found the proper channel the best course to procure vaccines for people of the state and has been in touch with the PM Narendra Modi for supply of Covishield and Covaxin for the state.

The state requires an estimated 5.29 crore doses for inoculation of 18 plus age group people in the state. The state government has already placed orders for the procurement of 4.76 crore doses of Covishield and 52.25 lakh doses of Covaxin.

The vaccination drive for the 18 plus age group began on May 5.

One crore people of the total 7.5 crore population in the state have so far been vaccinated.

Cheetah to be back in India in Nov: Mantri

Bhopal, May 23: Cheetah, the world's fastest land animal which was declared extinct in India in 1952, is expected to be re-introduced into the country in November this year at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, state Forest Minister Vijay Shah said on Sunday.

The country's last spotted cheetah died in Chhattisgarh in 1947 and it was declared extinct in the country in 1952.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) some years back prepared a cheetah re-introduction project. The Supreme Court had

earlier given its approval to introduce African cheetahs to a suitable habitat in India on an experimental basis.

"We have started the process of creating an enclosure for around 10 cheetahs, including five females, to be brought from South Africa to Kuno in Sheopur district and it is going to be completed by August," Mr Shah said.

Officials from India will be sent to South Africa for sensitisation and training in June and July this year and according to the plan, the transportation of the cheetahs will take place in

▶ **THE COUNTRY'S last spotted cheetah died in Chhattisgarh in 1947 and it was declared extinct in the country in 1952**

October and November; he said.

Kuno, located in the Chambal region, is spread over an area of over 750 sq km and has a conducive environment for the cheetah, he said.

The protected area, comprising a considerable population of four-horned antelopes, chinkara, nilgai, wild boar, spotted deer and sambar, has a good

prey base for the cheetahs, he said.

"According to the approved timeline sent to us by the ministry of environment, forest and climate change this week, the tentative budget outlay of the "Project Cheetah" is ₹1,400 lakh for this fiscal," the minister said.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is going to release the money for the project to Madhya Pradesh and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) at Dehradun next month, Shah said.

An expert from South Africa visited the Kuno

National Park on April 26 this year along with scientists from the WII and inspected the facilities and habitat created there for the introduction of African cheetahs. They approved it and now the final process of bringing the cheetah is underway, a forest official said.

Earlier, experts from the WII had visited four places in Madhya Pradesh to look for the best habitat for the introduction of African cheetah in the country last year; additional principal chief conservator of forests J.S. Chauhan, said. — PTI

The complaint alleged that Mr Nath termed pandemic as Indian corona and hurt the image of the country abroad.

This amounted to sedition, the complaint alleged.

Mr Nath had earlier said that in January 2020 when pandemic hit the world, it was said the virus generated from a particular lab in a Chinese town.

But, the situation has come to a stage now that coronavirus was identified as Indian corona by countries.

SHORT TAKES

15 fall sick after ammonia gas leak

Paradip: Fifteen persons were on Sunday taken ill, including an eight-year-old child, after inhaling ammonia gas which reportedly leaked from a prawn processing plant and an adjacent ice factory in Odisha's Paradip. Three persons, including the child, were shifted to SCB hospital in Cuttack after their health condition deteriorated. As per the reports, technicians and experts from nearby industrial areas were called to assist in the efforts to contain the leak. Assistant director of factories and boilers Chandrakant Dalei said, "A hose pipe burst at the Laxmi Narayan Exports in Paradip Garh. The people working there, who came in immediate contact with the gas, were provided first aid at a nearby hospital. Later, we had to shift three persons to Cuttack." "An inquiry into the incident has already been ordered and we will be able to comment further only after receiving the report," Mr Dalei added.

Toolkit: C'garh cops serve notice to Patra

Raipur: The Raipur police in Chhattisgarh asked BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra to appear before it in person or through video-conferencing at 4 pm on Sunday in connection with an FIR lodged against him and senior colleague Raman Singh over an alleged fake toolkit, officials said. The FIR was filed in Civil Lines police station on May 19 on the complaint of an NSUI functionary who alleged Singh, Patra and others had circulated a fake toolkit using the letterhead of the Congress. An official said not complying with the notice would attract legal action. Similar notice has been served on Singh asking him to remain present in his residence at 12.30 pm on Monday for recording of statement in connection with the case, the Civil Lines police official added. — PTI

ED to initiate probe against IFFCO MD

New Delhi: More trouble seems to be in store for U.S. Awasthi, managing director and CEO of the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO), as the ED is now preparing to initiate a money laundering probe against him and others. Sources said the ED will soon initiate a money laundering probe against Awasthi and others on the basis of CBI's recent corruption case against him. "A case by the ED will be registered under the provisions of the PMLA. ED sleuths are in touch with CBI officials in this regard," sources said. The CBI recently registered a case of corruption against Awasthi, former MD of Indian Potash Limited Parvinder Singh Gahlaut and their sons for the alleged irregularities in the import of fertilisers and claiming subsidies.

Modi reviews preparedness for 'Yaas', urges timely evacuation

Asks officials to ensure no disruption is caused to Covid treatment, vaccines

New Delhi, May 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday called for timely evacuation of those involved in off-shore activities as he chaired a high-level meeting to review the preparedness of states and central government agencies to deal with the situation arising out of Cyclone Yaas.

He asked officials to work in close coordination with states to ensure safe evacuation of people from high-risk areas, and to ensure that time duration of outages of power supply and communication network are minimum and restored swiftly, a PMO statement said.

Mr Modi also asked officials to ensure proper coordination and planning with state governments to ensure that no disruption is caused to Covid-19 treatment and vaccination in hospitals.

He called for involving various stakeholders like coastal communities and industries and directly



Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairs a high-level meeting to review preparedness and planning to tackle Cyclone Yaas in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

reaching out to them and sensitising them, the PMO said.

The IMD has said that the cyclone is expected to cross West Bengal and north Odisha coasts by May 26 evening with the wind speed ranging 155-165 kmph and gusting to 185 kmph.

It is likely to cause heavy rainfall in the coastal districts of West Bengal and north Odisha.

The IMD has also warned of storm surge in coastal areas of West

Bengal and Odisha. The IMD has been issuing regular bulletins with latest forecast to all states concerned, the PMO noted.

The ministry of home affairs is reviewing the situation and is in touch with the state governments, UTs and the Central agencies concerned.

It has already released the first instalment of SDRF in advance to all states, and the National Disaster Response Force has pre-positioned 46 teams which are equipped

with boats, tree-cutters, telecom equipments in five states and UT. In addition, 13 teams are being airlifted on Sunday for deployment and 10 teams have been kept on standby, the PMO noted. Home minister Amit Shah, other ministers and senior officials attended the meeting.

In a tweet, Mr Modi said he emphasised on timely evacuation as well as ensuring that power and communications networks are not disrupted. — PTI

12 teams stationed in West Bengal so far, more on standby

Prepare for worst-case scenario: NDRF

Kolkata, May 23: As West Bengal and Odisha brace for another severe cyclone after the Amphan havoc last year, NDRF chief S.N. Pradhan has urged authorities in the two states to adopt an "over-preparing" approach for the impending natural disaster, and carry out evacuation even in the least vulnerable places.

He said those engaged in evacuation work must realise as well as make people understand that the choice is between temporary discomfort and death.

"What we have learnt so far from our experiences over the years is that if the disaster prediction is X, then you must prepare for 2X because a natural phenomenon can turn worse in a matter of hours. So, if the forecast is for a very severe cyclone of 150 kmph, you should gear up for an extremely severe cyclone.

"My advice to all the district magistrates would be to go for extra evacuation even in places identified as mildly vulnerable. Please remember, timely evacuation is a life saver. I believe the culture of over preparing has to come to India now," Mr Pradhan, the NDRF director general, told PTI in an interview.

He said 12 teams have so far been stationed in West Bengal and more are on standby.

Each National Disaster Response Force team has 47 personnel who are equipped with tree and



Vessels anchored in the river Ganga during the ongoing Covid-induced lockdown and as a part of preparation for Cyclone Yaas in Kolkata on Sunday. — PTI

THE NDRF chief said those engaged in evacuation work must realise as well as make people understand that the choice is between temporary discomfort and death

pole cutters, communication gadgets, inflatable boats and basic medical aid.

Several of its personnel have just returned from Gujarat, which was battered by Cyclone Tauktae a few days ago, and are being tested for Covid-19, he said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD), in an update, said that Cyclone Yaas is expected to cross West Bengal and north Odisha coasts by May 26 evening with wind speed of 155-165 kmph and gusting to 185 kmph.

It is likely to cause very heavy rainfall in the

coastal districts of West Bengal and north Odisha.

Mr Pradhan said the specialised force is more technologically equipped now to handle restoration work with improved equipment.

"There is a lot of automation these days. For example, we have battery-powered projectile cutters for tall trees that can be remotely cut. Plasma pole cutters are something new as well. We now also have the full component of our authorised boats," the top NDRF official said.

Mr Pradhan, however, expressed disappointment over the training and availability of State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel for emergency situations.

"Either they (SDRFs) are on paper or are minuscule in number and not trained enough," the NDRF chief said. — PTI

Cases continue to decline

Continued from Page 1 group (first dose), and 6,06,90,560 (first dose) and 97,87,289 (second dose) beneficiaries between 45 to 60 years; as well as 5,65,55,558 first dose beneficiaries and 1,82,44,476 second dose beneficiaries who are over 60, it further added. The health ministry said that over 21.80 crore vaccine doses have been provided to the states and UTs so far and over 1.90 crore jabs are still available with them. It added that 40,650 Covid-19 vaccine doses are in the pipeline and will be received by the states/UTs within the next three days.

"The government has so far provided, both through the free-of-cost category and through direct state procurement category, more than 21.80 crore vaccine doses (21,80,51,890) to states/UTs," the ministry said in a statement.

Of this, the total consumption, calculated based on average up to May 22, including wastage, is 19,90,31,577 doses (according to data available at 8 am on Sunday). Over 1.90 crore Covid vaccine doses (1,90,20,313) are still available with the states/UTs to be administered, it said.

With the fresh cases, India's Covid-19 tally climbed to 2,65,30,132. The death toll due to the disease rose to 2,99,266, with 3,741 fresh fatalities, the ministry data updated at 8 am showed. Active cases further reduced to 28,05,399, comprising 10.57 per cent of total infec-

tions, while the nationwide Covid-19 recovery rate improved to 88.30 per cent.

The number of people who recuperated from the disease in the country surged to 2,34,25,467 while the case fatality rate stood at 1.13 per cent, the data stated. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, 32,86,97,937 samples were tested for Covid-19 up to May 22, with 21,23,782 samples tested on Saturday.

The 3,741 new fatalities include 682 from Maharashtra, 448 from Tamil Nadu, 451 from Karnataka, 218 from UP, 201 from Punjab, 182 from Delhi, 176 from Kerala, 154 from West Bengal, 134 from Uttarakhand, 118 from Andhra, 115 from Rajasthan, 103 from Chhattisgarh and 98 from Haryana.

A total of 2,99,266 deaths have been reported so far in India, including 87,300 from Maharashtra, 24,658 from Karnataka, 23,013 from Delhi, 20,046 from Tamil Nadu, 18,978 from UP, 14,208 from West Bengal, 13,089 from Punjab and 12,494 from Chhattisgarh. The health ministry said over 70 per cent of the deaths were due to comorbidities.

The Serum Institute of India has, meanwhile, disassociated itself from its executive director's statement that the government began the Covid-19 vaccination of multiple age groups without taking into consideration the available stock, saying this is "not the view of the company".

Sushil and associate held

Continued from Page 1 they murdered another wrestler. Carried rewards of ₹1L & ₹50K. Being produced in Court. #NoWrestlingWithLaw, Delhi Police posted on Twitter.

In court, seeking his custody for interrogation, the police also said the camera at the stadium was dismantled and Kumar took away the DDR of the place where the crime occurred. The police said the DDR needs to be recovered.

The case relates to the May 4 incident at the stadium in which wrestler Sagar Dhankar died and two of his friends, Sonu and Amit Kumar, were injured after being allegedly assaulted by Sushil Kumar and other wrestlers. The Delhi police had announced a reward of Rs 1 lakh for any information leading to the arrest of Sushil Kumar, who was on the run. Another reward of ₹50,000 was announced for Ajay Kumar's arrest.

Police sources revealed several criminals used to take shelter in a flat in the name of Sushil Kumar's wife. A wanted criminal named Sandeep Kala was also given shelter by Sushil.

A wrestler who sought anonymity told this news-

paper Sushil was afraid of being caught by members of Jhatedi gang after the incident. "Sushil contacted Jhatedi but the talks between them were inconclusive. Jhatedi had threatened to kill him and others involved in the incident," he said. He also claimed Sushil Kumar had kept Jhatedi in one of his flats in Delhi a long time ago.

A dispute emerged between Sushil Kumar and the gangsters of the Kala Jathedi gang after the Olympian asked the criminals to vacate the flat. After that, Sushil targeted Kala Jathedi's enemies and thrashed Sagar in Chhatrasal, due to which the young wrestler died. Jhathedi's nephew Sonu also used to live in the flat and was hurt in the Chhatrasal brawl.

After the murder, gangster Kala Jhathedi had threatened Sushil Kumar. Sushil tried to reconcile with the Kala Jathedi while he was absconding. Whether the reconciliation happened or not is not yet known.

The police said since the crime took place Kumar had travelled between Delhi, Uttarakhand, UP and Haryana while trying to evade arrest. The champion wrestler spent his first two days on the run,

May 5 and 6, at a yoga guru's ashram in Haridwar, sources said.

While on the run to evade arrest, the wrestler, being well aware about technology, often switched his mobile phone on and off and managed WhatsApp calls to connect with his aides. It is also suspected that he was helped by his friends and some gangsters to stay off the grid.

Earlier, a Delhi court refused to grant anticipatory bail to the Olympian, saying he was prima facie the main conspirator and allegations against him were serious. Non-bailable warrants were issued against him and six others just days after a look-out notice was issued against the wrestler.

The Delhi police filed an FIR under IPC Sections 302 (murder), 308 (culpable homicide), 365 (kidnapping), 325 (causing grievous hurt), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 341 (wrongful restraint) and 506 (criminal intimidation). It was also registered under Sections 188 (disobedience of order by public servant), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease), 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (common intention) IPC and various sections under the Arms Act.

12 Opp. parties back call for farm protest May 26

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 23

Eleven Opposition parties have extended their support to the nationwide protest call of May 26 by the Sanyukta Kisan Morcha as it marks the six months of protests to repeal the three farm laws. The SKM, a union of 40 farmers' outfits, had issued a call for "black day" to mark six months of the ongoing agitation against the Centre's three farm laws.

"We extend our support to the call given by the SKM to observe a countrywide protest day on May 26 marking the completion of six months of the heroic peaceful Kisan struggle," said the joint statement by the Opposition parties.

The joint statement is signed by Congress acting president Sonia Gandhi,

CITING A letter written by Opp. leaders to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 12, the statement says the Centre must repeal farm laws to 'protect lakhs of our annadatas becoming victims of the Covid pandemic'

former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray (Shiv Sena), Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin (DMK) and Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren (JMM).

Other signatories include former Jammu and Kashmir CM Farooq Abdullah (NC), former Uttar Pradesh CM Akhilesh Yadav (SP), Tejashwi Yadav of the

RJD, D. Raja of CPI and Sitaram Yechury of the CPI(M).

The joint statement demands the repeal of the three new farm laws. Citing a letter written by Opposition leaders to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 12, the statement says the Centre must repeal farm laws to "protect lakhs of our annadatas becoming victims of the pandemic".

In addition to the immediate repeal of the farm laws, the opposition leaders also demanded legal guarantees for MSP (minimum support price) of C2-50 per cent as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission.

"The Central government must stop being obdurate and immediately resume talks with the SKM on these lines," said the joint statement issued on Sunday.

6 militants killed in Assam firefight

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 23

In a major breakthrough, Assam police on Sunday shot dead six militants of Dimasas National Liberation Army (DNLA), a fledgling rebel outfit, in an encounter in Assam's Karbi Anglong district.

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told reporters that the Assam police has eliminated all the top leadership of the outfit in an encounter. He said that at least six militants were killed and two others have been critically wounded in the encounter.

The police said that the cadres were killed in Karbi Anglong district early on Sunday and a large cache of arms and ammunition was recovered from their possession.

Special director general of police G.P. Singh who is looking after the operations against the insurgent outfits in a social media post said, "In an early morning operation by the Assam police and Assam Rifles, six DNLA

terrorists were neutralized in Dhansiri area of Karbi Anglong. Large cache of arms and ammunition was also recovered."

The outfit was engaged in various extortion activities and recently shot dead a businessman in an extortion-related incident. A priest was also killed recently by the militants triggering chaos in the region.

Teams from Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao district police were involved in the operation.

The DNLA was formed in 2019 after the previous rebel outfits like the two factions of Dima Halam Daogah-Nunsia and Garlosa signed a memorandum of settlement with the centre and disbanded the organisations.

Another outfit Dima Jadi Naiso Army came into being in 2012, which is no longer active.

DNLA was demanding a "sovereign, independent Dimasas Nation" while the earlier outfits were mainly seeking a separate state of Dimaraji.

15 people, including cops, hurt in communal clash in Guj village

Gir Somnath (Gujarat), May 23: At least 11 people and some policemen were injured in a clash between members of two communities on Sunday in coastal Nava Bandar village in Gir Somnath district of Gujarat, police said.

Prima facie, a dispute over parking of fishing boats led to the incident, officials said.

Gir Somnath district superintendent of police Rahul Tripathi said members of two communities hurled stones at each other after an altercation over collision between some of their fishing boats.

He said at least 11 people and four police personnel were injured in the incident that occurred late afternoon. — PTI

Cyclone 'Yaas' set to hit May 26

Continued from Page 1 cyclone will be accompanied by squally winds with a velocity of 120 kmph to 165 kmph, gusting up to 185 kmph. It implies that "Yaas" will cause no less damage than "Amphan", which had hit the Odisha and West Bengal coasts on May 2, 2020, with a wind speed of 155-165 kmph and gusting up to 185 kmph.

The IMD has warned of "extremely heavy rainfall" in parts of seven Bengal districts, including Kolkata, and "heavy to very heavy rainfall" at a few places in five districts on May 26 due to the cyclone.

The Indian Air Force said it has kept one C-17 Globemaster, one IL-76, three C-130J Super Hercules, four Antonov-32s and two Dornier transport aircraft on readiness. "Additionally, 11 Mi-17V5 helicopters, two Chetaks

and three Cheetah helicopters, two Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters and seven Mi17 helicopters are also on alert for any eventuality," it said.

During the day, the IAF airlifted 21 tons of disaster relief equipment and 334 NDRF personnel from Patna and Varanasi to Kolkata, and from Arakkonam to Port Blair, utilising five C-130J aircraft. "This is in preparation for the approaching Cyclone Yaas, and the operations are ongoing since May 21. Till date, the IAF has airlifted 606 personnel and 57 tons of NDRF material for this purpose," it added.

In view of the weather forecast, the Mamata Banerjee government has relaxed its lockdown norms in some sectors for the protection of stock and other measures. It said: "All activities relating to

agricultural, horticulture and floriculture, including transport, storage and sale of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides shall be allowed. Rural development work shall be allowed."

The Odisha government on Sunday dispatched 18 NDRF teams to the coastal districts that are most likely to be affected by the cyclonic storm. Special relief commissioner P.K. Jena said seven NDRF teams were sent to Balasore district, four to Bhadrak, three to Kendrapara, two to Jajpur and one each to Jagatsinghpur and Mayurbhanj districts. Mr Jena himself went to the coastal districts to oversee cyclone preparedness.

"Due to the cyclonic effect, north coastal districts of Odisha are likely to receive heavy to extremely heavy rainfall," IMD director-general Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said.

Delhi lockdown for another week

Continued from Page 1 certain activities from May 31," he stated.

The chief minister said the Delhi government had made arrangements to vaccinate everyone in Delhi in three months but there was a shortage of vaccines in the country.

"It's being said a third wave of Covid-19 will arrive. But if everyone gets the vaccine, perhaps the third wave may not arrive," he said.

"We are preparing to vaccinate everyone at the earliest. We are talking to the Centre and the vac-

cine companies. I am myself talking to vaccine companies, foreign and Indian ones, on how to vaccinate the maximum people. We are ready to spend any amount from the budget to get the vaccines for the people of Delhi," he said.

THE ASIAN AGE

24 MAY 2021

Contain the 2nd wave, prepare for the third

There is good news from the field in the fight against Covid-19 — only 382 of the 718 districts in India have a test positivity rate of 10 or above. Considering that these numbers were disquieting in the beginning of the month, when 301 districts had a positivity rate of 20 per cent or higher, one must come to the understanding that the measures taken of late by most states have started delivering results. Several states are in lockdown, which have practically paralysed normal life and ground the economy to almost a halt. Certain states have no immediate plans to relax the lockdown norms. Tamil Nadu, for example, is going to tighten them, ordering the closure of even groceries and vegetable vends. The state wants its people to remain at home and step out only when it is absolutely necessary.

The daily caseload is also easing with the daily reports talk of three lakh infections or less, which is almost 25 per cent less than the figures at the beginning of the month. The death toll due to the pandemic, however, has shown no signs of easing: it has been hovering around 4,000 for the last two weeks and refuses to come down. Most experts and independent assessments doubt even these figures which say it could be easily three times the reported figures or more. It's a sad commentary on the priorities of India as a nation that has very little means to keep a tab on the deaths in such a way that the world believes us.

Every resource at its command and at the private sector must be put to use to ensure that none dies due to lack of care. India's defence forces are already in the field in a limited way and their services must be made available to more people.

mum now. Every resource at its command and at the private sector must be put to use to ensure that none dies due to lack of care. India's defence forces are already in the field in a limited way in the fight against the virus and their services must be made available to more people. Temporary and field hospitals must be set up in the villages and semi-urban areas where the lack of such facilities has a telling impact.

The nation must gear up for a third wave, and the best way to do it is to vaccinate as many people as possible. The government must roll out a universal vaccination programme and instead of waiting for the people to come forward and be part of it, it must deploy teams all across the nation to approach them and administer the vaccine. It must also retain whatever healthcare facilities it creates now, do a quick analysis on how to fill up the gaps and follow it up meticulously. The first wave was unexpected and hence the slips; but a repeat of the pathetic response to the second wave has no justification when the third one lands on us.

Too soon to call Nepal polls?

With the decision of Nepal President Bidya Debi Bhandari to dissolve the Pratinidhi Sabha or the House of Representatives on a fresh recommendation of embattled Prime Minister K.P. Oli on Saturday, and to order fresh elections in six months, our Himalayan neighbour is likely to be plunged in uncertainty at a time when the Covid pandemic is raging.

All things considered, in such a context, India's northern neighbour China, which has come to wield considerably more influence in Nepal under PM Oli than it did earlier, may be expected to be further emboldened to increase its leverage in Kathmandu.

With the military situation in eastern Ladakh far from resolved in spite of the disengagement in the Pangong Lake area which appears to have left India with the short end of the stick, and the Oli government having recently created a land boundary dispute with India at the tri-junction of Tibet, Nepal and India, the balance of advantage does seem to lie with China in eastern Ladakh which abuts Tibet.

PM Oli, on losing support in a confidence motion only very recently, was called by President Bhandari to try and put together a majority in four weeks time, but he chose not to try. Meanwhile, when political activities heated up and Nepali Congress leader and former PM Sher Bahadur Deuba submitted a list of supporting MPs drawn from different parties, he was not given a chance. Instead, Mr Oli was evidently encouraged to submit a list, too. With some names being common on the two lists, the President dissolved Parliament on the PM's recommendation and called for fresh polls.

The constitutionality of the move will be tested in the Supreme Court. But politically speaking, it would appear that the Opposition was not given a fair and transparent chance at government making after PM Oli threw in the towel. This could possibly lead to eruptions on the streets at a time when the spread of Covid is a matter of serious concern.

Not long ago, the top court had struck down the first dissolution of the House by the PM as unconstitutional. Will it accept a similar recommendation by him a second time after he has manifestly shown he no longer has a majority? The hurry shown by the President to dissolve the House will be viewed with concern.

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Kishwar Desai
London Diary



BBC on the mat
for Di interview...
Is Shakespeare
getting cancelled?

Decolonising Shakespeare? Well, it was only a matter of time before the Bard was going to be re-examined for racism. The Globe theatre has launched a series of seminars exploring whether there was racism underlying his plays. But as many of us already know from a reading of Othello ("the Moor") and others, that Shakespeare was writing for his times. Some speakers at the seminar did conclude that in many Shakespeare's plays White reflected beauty and goodness, while Black meant the opposite.

But rather than cancel Shakespeare, or break his statues, or rewrite him, the way forward could be to give a health warning before staging his plays. This is a time of churn: and just about all major writers of the past (including Enid Blyton) are being checked for political correctness. All-White characters are no longer acceptable either, in literature, theatre, cinema or even television news!

Undoubtedly, these kinds of seminars create a fresh understanding — but the jury is out there whether we censor the Bard or simply rewrite the bits that offend us

today. A discerning audience may now critically examine what we have taken for granted all this time. And since we have been so influenced by him, it might be worth looking at the language and the characters once again.

As the US begins to open its theatres and cinema halls, the UK has opened its pubs — a sign of better things to come, and of a successful vaccination drive. We cannot wait for the third week of June when at last the lockdown will be relaxed. But given that the last lockdown ended prematurely, there is a lot of betting on whether we may be wrong again. Because the one thing we can count on is that this virus will keep mutating and it will carry on attacking us while we fight back with fresh vaccines and medication. The war may not be over, ever, but in this round we are on the winning side, as the graph of the cases and deaths is plunging dramatically. We need to become grasshoppers and not ants — just rejoice for today because tomorrow will see a new lockdown. The experts are still divided on

the likelihood of a third wave. Last time it was the local home-grown Kent variant of Covid which scuppered our plans to re-open. (In Kent they don't mind that label, as it will be better to know the origin of the mutation, whenever the history of this virus is written.) This time it is the "Indian" variant and, by the way, we are not supposed to call it that. Far too many of us have been bombarded with emails and articles stating that it is unfair to call it the "Indian" variant. But to paraphrase Shakespeare — what's in a name? A virus by any name would kill as cruelly. The taming of the virus is what we are hoping for this summer.

But seriously, London life will be normal only when our famed cultural life — including pubs, cinema, cricket — will return. One more summer of home isolation would be unbearable — and like in the US, many are clamouring for the masks to be removed for those who are fully vaccinated.

That said let us get to the really important thing that matter to the locals: money. The Sunday Times list of the wealthiest

has just come out with fifty names. This is an annual announcement to read and gossip about as it makes you feel you know them. And of course — here too, we look out for the Indian variant, or the new normal, whichever you prefer.

Near the top are the Mittals and Hinduja Family (no surprises there). But among the ten names of the wealthiest is another that can truly stoke our pride — Kiran Mazumdar Shaw.

Of course, Covid has also helped to make fortunes for people who have found profits in difficulties. One couple is on the list because they were able to re-develop the old pyjamas for lounging around all day during the lockdown. And the man who was the fiftieth had an interesting story. Alan Mills had left school without success (as many billionaires have done — Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are dropouts from undergraduate colleges). He later took part in the famous TV show, *The Apprentice*, and had got a thumbs down. But he did not feel discouraged and went into insurance and is a billionaire in his 30s.



Subhani

Two years of Modi 2.0: Challenges & response



Ram Madhav

The 2014 mandate that catapulted Narendra Modi into the prime ministership of the world's largest democracy was essentially due to three factors — Mr Modi's personal charisma, the united grassroots efforts of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar cadre and the failures of the previous UPA-2 government headed by Dr Manmohan Singh. When the general election took place five years later, in 2019, the third factor was no longer there. Yet, the mandate that Mr Modi secured in the 2019 general election was even bigger than the 2014 mandate.

Mr Modi's charisma continued to be a factor. Under Amit Shah's leadership, the party organisation had also grown in strength and expanse. But the most important factor for the favorable mandate in 2019 was the five-year performance track record of the Narendra Modi government. Two qualities that distinguished Mr Modi's government in its first term were "decisive" and "hands on". Unlike his predecessors who largely stayed dormant, Mr Modi led from the front. He not only demonstrated courage in taking strong and decisive action, but also clearly showed that he was the boss.

As he began his second term after the landslide in 2019, the decisive and hands-on approach continued. The bill for the abrogation of triple talaq was introduced and passed in July. And in early August came the historic abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Constitution. Towards the end of the year, another big step was taken by passing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). In November the same year, the Supreme Court had delivered its final verdict on the Ram Jannabhoomi dispute allowing for the construction of a temple at the

site under question. Mr Modi did not waste any time in constituting a trust led by people not only dedicated to the cause but also involved in the temple movement for decades.

Speaking on the completion of the first 100 days of his Modi 2.0 government last year, Prime Minister Modi said that development, trust and big changes mark the performance during the period. That people have trusted the Prime Minister massively is beyond dispute. The country has overwhelmingly supported Mr Modi on all these issues. In the eyes of his core supporters, Mr Modi has acquired the stature of a supreme leader.

However, there are four areas in which the government faces major challenges.

Covid-19 pandemic: At a time when the government was preparing to embark on a major development drive with \$5 trillion GDP as the target, the country and the rest of the world were hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The strict measures like lockdowns together with the Prime Minister's continuous monitoring and engagement with the masses had helped in India successfully overcoming the deadly impact of the first wave of Covid-19. India also led in the manufacture of vaccines and their supply to many countries.

However, the deadly second wave has caught the country off guard. One important lesson that the coronavirus crisis has taught was the need for empowering grassroots institutions. The way forward is not hyper-centralisation, but "cooperative federalism".

Economy: As the government entered the second term, it moved fast on the reforms front. New and broad-based reforms in the agriculture and banking sectors, together with the

push to dispense with the public sector bulge, indicate the government's commitment to further liberalise the economy. The bold push for encouraging market forces to take the lead in the agriculture sector has led to some resistance from a section of farmers. For the long-term benefit of India's agriculture sector, these reforms are going to be a turning point for the farmers of the country.

At a time when the Indian economy was all set to take off, the pandemic struck, significantly crippling it. The second wave is going to further delay the recovery. However, the determination shown by Modi 2.0 to forge ahead with policies for greater liberalisation can certainly help in the process of economic recovery.

Security and foreign policy: One important area where Modi 1.0 came out with flying colours was security and foreign policy. On the foreign policy front, the first four years of Modi 1.0 had been a runaway success for the country, with Prime Minister Modi's and India's stature going up in the world.

However, Modi 2.0 started with mounting security and foreign policy challenges. While the Narendra Modi government has a strong and stable military security apparatus in place and is able to counter its recalcitrant neighbours like Pakistan and China effectively, its diplomatic endeavours need further sharpening. Indian diplomacy, right from the time of the nation's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, has had two undeclared priority commitments. These are Asian pre-eminence and non-alliance. Indian diplomacy

At a time when the government was preparing to embark on a major development drive with \$5 trillion GDP as the target, the country and the rest of the world were hit by the Covid-19 pandemic

must pursue these twin commitments vigorously. While India's relations with the United States have improved substantially under Mr Modi's government, it is imperative for India to pursue a policy of being a frontline state in its Asian neighbourhood.

Perception: The greatest challenge that the Modi 2.0 government faces is the perception challenge. Modi 1.0 saw Mr Modi himself aggressively pushing for a major image makeover for India through various initiatives. His initiatives at the UN, bilateral engagements with senior world leaders, the hosting of Bimstec and the African Leaders Summit have all helped in creating a positive perception about Mr Modi. There was a time when he was projected by many international magazines as an important global statesman.

However, in the last couple of years, the perception-related challenge has certainly become serious for the Indian leadership. Some interest groups like the radical left-liberal cabal, are in the forefront in the campaign of misinformation. The Indian response varied from "who-cares" smugness to innuendo-filled angry outbursts. Neither will help India address this perception challenge. India must step up its efforts to engage with global public and civilian institutions in a more proactive and constructive way in order to be able to address this perception challenge.

Despite these challenges, Prime Minister Modi continues to be popular with the masses primarily because of his direct connect with them and also because they see in him a leader genuinely and selflessly committed to the welfare and well-being of the country. In order to overcome all the challenges that lie ahead, Modi 2.0 needs to put greater focus on decentralism and cooperative federalism domestically and proactive engagement globally.

The writer has served as the national general secretary of the BJP and is a member of the national executive of the RSS

LETTERS

DON'T SPARE RAMDEV

The close proximity of Baba Ramdev to the corridors of power has enabled him to expand his business without hindrance and also to get away with comments which would have otherwise been subject to legal action. However, this time around he has gone too far by alleging that more people have died due to taking of allopathic medicines than lack of oxygen. Doctors who have been battling Covid-19 putting their lives at risk, led by the IMA which recently lost its chief to the disease, are fully justified in demanding action against him. It's time the government stops mollicoddling the Baba.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

OXYGEN LANGAR

SETTING AN EXAMPLE during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Behala gurdwara in Kolkata and the IHA Foundation are conducting an oxygen langar where any patient can come with their Aadhaar card and doctors present will check their blood oxygen level. If required, they will then be given an Oxygen cylinder for free. Anyone can avail the service no matter their faith.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

ADIEU LAXMAN

MUSIC DIRECTOR Raamlaxman proved that music can be magic with the success of *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (1994) even in an era of *dhishum dhishum* films. Before this, he stood out in *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989) and even won a Filmfare Award. His association with comedian Dada Kondke in Marathi cinema is celebrated; he will also be remembered for his numerous contributions in Hindi films for over two decades. Many do not know his real name was Vijay Patil. He took on the moniker, Raamlaxman, after his partner Raam (Surendra) died in 1976.

Bhagyendra Patel
New Delhi

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Bhagwan Thadani (May 23). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Diana, the Princess of Wales who died in 1997, continues to rule the front pages. Most of us remember the iconic TV interview she gave in 1995 to BBC correspondent Martin Bashir, which ultimately led to her divorce from Prince Charles, years later. It was one of the most-watched show, ever, for the BBC. Now it turns out that Martin Bashir had tricked her into giving the interview. He had shown allegedly fraudulent bank statements to Diana's brother, the Earl Spencer, claiming that pay-offs had been made for briefings against her, and thus the interview was arranged.

Her two sons William (Duke of Cambridge) and Harry (Duke of Sussex) have denounced the BBC for causing her death. BBC has also been placed on the mat, and its reputation has never taken such a hit. Who could have ever imagined this?

Kishwar Desai's latest book, *The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani, has just been published and she is the Chair of the Trust that set up the world's first Partition Museum in Amritsar*

SHORT TAKES

TROPICAL STORM ANA MOVES AWAY FROM BERMUDA

Miami, May 23: Tropical Storm Ana was moving away from Bermuda early Sunday after bringing rain and wind to the island in the Atlantic Ocean, forecasters said.

Ana was located about 340 miles (545 kilometres) northeast of Bermuda with maximum sustained winds of 45 mph (75 kph), the National Hurricane Center in Miami said in a 5 am advisory. It was moving northeast at 12 mph (19 kph).

Ana formed as a subtropical storm early Saturday, then transitioned to a tropical storm on Sunday, forecasters said. The hurricane center said it would weaken over the next 24 hours before dissipating on Monday.

No watches or warnings were in effect for the storm. It posed no threat to land. Ana was the first named storm in the Atlantic this year, though hurricane season doesn't officially start until June 1.

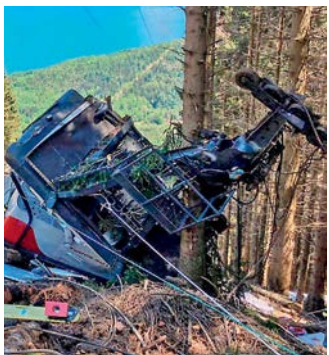
U.S.' TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS FOR HAITIANS

Washington, May 23: The Biden administration is allowing eligible Haitian nationals residing in the US to apply for a new 18-month designation for temporary protected status, reversing a Trump administration effort that had sought to end the special consideration.

In a statement Saturday, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas cited security concerns, social unrest, an increase in human rights abuses, crippling poverty and other problems in Haiti for the decision. After careful consideration, we determined that we must do what we can to support Haitian nationals in the United States until conditions in Haiti improve so they may safely return home," Mayorkas said. DHS initially designated Haiti for TPS in January 2010 in the aftermath of the 7.0-magnitude earthquake that devastated the country.

The designation was extended several times until the Trump administration announced in January 2018 that Haiti's TPS designation would end effective July 22, 2019. Several lawsuits challenging the termination have allowed the designation to remain in effect.

DHS said Saturday that the new TPS designation enables Haitian nationals residing in the US as of Friday as well as individuals without nationality who last resided in Haiti to file initial applications for TPS, so long as they meet eligibility requirements.



Rescuers work by the wreckage of a cable car after it collapsed near the summit of the Stresa-Mottarone line in the Piedmont region, northern Italy, Sunday. — AP

NINE KILLED IN ITALIAN CABLE CAR ACCIDENT

Rome, May 23: A mountaintop cable car plunged to the ground in northern Italy on Sunday, killing at least nine people and sending two children to the hospital, authorities said.

A photo of the wreckage taken by Italy's fire squad showed the crushed and crumpled remains of the cable car in a clearing of a thick patch of pine trees near the summit of the Mottarone peak overlooking Lake Maggiore.

At that location, the cables of the ski lift were particularly high off the ground, said Walter Milan, spokesman for the Alpine rescue service. The cause has not been determined. Milan noted that the cable line had been renovated in 2016 and had only recently reopened after coronavirus lockdowns forced the closures of ski lifts across

Italy. Mottarone reaches a height of 1,491 metres (4,900 feet) and overlooks the picturesque lake and the surrounding Alps of Italy's Piedmont region. The mountain features a small amusement park, Alpyland, that has a children's rollercoaster offering 360-degree views of the scenery. Many Italian ski areas feature mountain bike paths and hiking trails that are popular in spring and summer.

US-style digital visas in Britain

London, May 23: UK Home Secretary Priti Patel is set to unveil a new US-style digital visa regime at the country's borders in order to measure immigration levels in and out of the country, according to UK media reports on Sunday. The senior Indian-origin Cabinet minister is to confirm the so-called "streamlining" changes to the UK's immigration policy to "streamline" the way in which people come into the country on Monday.

The post-Brexit changes will include the border

being managed digitally, which the government says will be easier to navigate for businesses and allow for the first time to accurately count people in and out of the UK. "Our new fully digital border will provide the ability to count people in and out of the country, giving us control over who comes to the UK," Patel was quoted as saying in the *Observer*.

"Our new approach will make it easier to identify potential threats before they reach the border. The British people will have

confidence that the strongest controls are in place to keep them safe," she said. The UK Home Office hopes to make entry to the UK fully digital by the end of 2025.

It means people wanting to come into the UK without a visa or immigration status will have to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA), similar to the US system, with 30 million applications expected to be processed every year. As well as launching her latest immigration plans, Patel will

also focus on failings in the asylum system and the need to crack down on people smugglers.

Earlier in the week, she was filmed accompanying police as they arrested suspected ringleaders of a people smuggling gang that used minicab and lorry drivers to move migrants in and out of the UK. The British government has said that in the past 10 days, more than 140 foreign criminals have been removed from the UK, totalling more than 700 so far this year. — PTI



Palestinian volunteers clear the rubble in the Al-Remal commercial district in Gaza City, recently targeted by Israeli air strikes, on Sunday. — AFP

Israeli police allow Jews to visit flashpoint Jerusalem site

Jerusalem, May 23: Israeli police on Sunday escorted around 50 Jewish visitors to a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem where police actions in recent weeks had ignited protests and violence that triggered war in Gaza, according to the Islamic authority overseeing the site. The Waqf said police cleared young Palestinians out of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and barred entry to Muslims under the age of 45.

Muslims who entered were required to leave their IDs with police at the entrance. It said three Muslims were arrested, including a guard. Israeli police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said the site was open for "regular visits" and that police had secured the area to prevent "incidents", without elaborating. Israeli police had briefly clashed with Palestinian protesters after Friday prayers in an early test for the truce, which had taken effect hours earlier. The Waqf said Sunday it was the first time Jews had been allowed to visit the site since May 4, a week before the war broke out. The Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam. It sits on a sprawling hilltop in Jerusalem's Old City that is revered by Jews as their holiest site because it was the location of the biblical temples.

The site has often been the scene of Israeli-Palestinian violence and was the epicentre of the 2000 Palestinian intifada, or uprising. Israeli police repeatedly clashed with Palestinian protesters in the days leading up to May 10, when Gaza's militant Hamas rulers fired rockets at Jerusalem. — AP

Hamis defiant with military parade, top leader's appearance

Gaza City, May 23: Hundreds of masked Hamas fighters brandishing assault rifles paraded in Gaza City and the group's top leader made his first public appearance on Saturday, in a defiant show of strength after the militants' 11-day war with Israel.

Saturday marked the first full day of a cease-fire, and Egyptian mediators held talks to firm up the truce which ended the fourth Israel-Hamas war in just over a decade.

In the fighting, Israel unleashed hundreds of airstrikes against militant tar-

gets in Gaza, while Hamas and other militants fired more than 4,000 rockets toward Israel. More than 250 people were killed, the vast majority of them Palestinians. In Gaza City, residents began assessing damage. One of Gaza City's busiest commercial areas, Omar al-Mukhtar Street, was covered in debris, smashed cars and twisted metal after a 13-floor building in its centre was flattened in an Israeli airstrike. Merchandise was covered in soot and strewn inside smashed stores and on the pavement.

Municipal workers swept broken glass and twisted metal from streets and sidewalks. "We really didn't expect this amount of damage," said Ashour Subeih, who sells baby clothes. "We thought the strike was a bit further from us. But as you can see not an area of the shop is intact."

Having been in business for one year, Subeih estimated his losses were double what he has made so far. Drone video and photos showed some city blocks reduced to rubble, in between homes and businesses left standing. — AP

B'desh keeps ban on Israel travel

Dhaka/Jerusalem, May 23: Bangladesh on Sunday made it clear that it has dropped the phrase "all countries except Israel" from passport to maintain international standards of the document and there was no change in its decades-long policy of travel ban to the Jewish state. Bangladeshi passports earlier had a clause written on them that said "This Passport is valid for all countries of the world except Israel", but the government on Saturday decided to remove "except Israel" from it.

Israel welcomed Bangladesh's decision and called upon Dhaka to establish

diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv for the benefit of the people of the two countries. "Great news! #Bangladesh has removed the travel ban to Israel. This is a welcome step & I call on the Bangladeshi government to move forward and establish diplomatic ties with #Israel so both our peoples could benefit & prosper," Deputy Director General at Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Gilad Cohen tweeted. Hours later Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr A K Abdul Momen said that it "does not mean that there has been a change in Bangladesh's position" regarding Israel. — PTI

1 HELD IN ATTACK ON JEWISH MEN IN LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles, May 23: Los Angeles police on Saturday announced the arrest of a suspect in an alleged attack by a pro-Palestinian group on Jewish men outside a restaurant earlier in the week.

A police statement, which did not identify the man, said he was arrested on suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon late Friday at a residence outside the city of Los Angeles with assistance from a US Marshals Service task force. Increased bail was requested "due to the crime being motivated by hatred. The male is one of the primary suspects in the assault," it said. — AP

Nepal's Oppn to file writ petition

To protest dissolution of House by Prez

Kathmandu, May 23: Nepal's Opposition alliance on Sunday postponed the registration of a writ petition in the Supreme Court and will file it on Monday against the "unconstitutional" dissolution of the House of Representatives by the President. The Opposition parties, which had planned to register the writ on Sunday, put off the procedure until Monday, citing lack of adequate time.

According to a CPN-Maoist Centre leader, the petition will be filed at 10:00 am on Monday, *The Himalayan Times* reported. Leaders of the alliance on Sunday were engaged in conducting meetings and collecting signatures of the lawmakers from the Maoist Centre, the Nepali Congress, the Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal, Rastriya Janamorchha and Madhav Nepal faction of the ruling CPN-UML, it said. Although the signature collection campaign has not ended, more than enough people have signed up to prove a majority, the report quoted a Maoist Centre leader.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the 275-member House of Representatives on Saturday for the second time in five months and announced snap elections on November 12 and November 19 on the advice of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, heading a minority government. She rejected the bids of both embattled Prime Minister Oli and the Opposition alliance's claims to form a government. Oli and Opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba had staked separate claims to the premiership.

The announcement came after Oli in his last deal-sealing move on Friday midnight recommend-

Hold polls in one phase, EC to Oli

Kathmandu, May 23: Nepal's Election Commission has advised the government led by embattled Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli to conduct the mid-term elections slated for November 12 and 19 in a single phase to prevent the further spread of Coronavirus infections during electioneering. After a meeting with Prime Minister K.P. Oli on MSaturday, Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Kumar Thapaliya said it is Election Commission's constitutional duty to successfully conduct polls

once the date has been announced.

"We have abundant time for preparation and have suggested to the government to conduct the election in a single phase," Thapaliya was quoted as saying in a report in *My Republica*. In the meeting, the representatives of the Election Commission also suggested to the government to create a favourable political environment for elections, maintain peace and security, and prevent the spread of Covid-19 infections among others, it said. — PTI

ed the Office of the President to dissolve the House and announce dates for early elections. Alarmed by the President's step to dissolve the House yet again, the leaders of Nepal's Opposition alliance on Saturday decided to take all legal and political means to counter Oli and Bhandari's "unconstitutional, undemocratic and regressive" move.

The Opposition alliance blamed the President for making an assault on the Constitution and democracy in partnership with the PM, who had lost a trust vote in the House. The authorities in Nepal on Sunday tightened security around the Supreme Court building and government offices in view of the Opposition's decision to move the apex court on dissolution of the House. In a joint statement issued at the end of their meeting on Saturday, the

Opposition leaders said the President did not follow her constitutional responsibility of appointing a new prime minister based on the constitutional claim as per Article 76 (5) of the constitution with signatures of majority lawmakers. Instead, she sided with Oli with malafide intentions, maintain peace and security, and prevent the spread of Covid-19 infections among others, it said. — PTI

Social media photos show Dubai princess at malls

London, May 23: Photos on social media appear to show a missing Dubai princess who months earlier described herself in a video as being held against her will out at two major malls in the city-state.

Images published by a woman identified in British media as former Royal Navy member Sioned Taylor show Sheikhha Latifa bint Mohammed Al Maktoum at the Mall of the Emirates at a movie theatre there, as well as at a restaurant at Dubai Mall near the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building.

The photos corresponded to those locations, with the Mall of the Emirates image likely taken in May due to the film being advertised in it. Taylor did not respond to a request for comment. The government's Dubai Media Office did not acknowledge the release of the images. The photos' pedestrian captions belie the fact that United Nations experts and human rights activists had called on Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, to provide information on his daughter. Sheikhha Latifa, 35, had

tried to flee the country in 2018 only to be detained by commandos in a boat off India. Videos released in February by the BBC had Sheikhha Latifa describing herself as being in a villa that "has been converted into a jail". "I don't know when I'll be released and what the conditions will be like when I'm released," she says in one of the videos. "Every day I am worried about my safety and my life." The dramatic would-be sea escape and its aftermath intruded into the carefully controlled image. — AP

Diana interview: Shamed Bashir says sorry to princes

London, May 23: Martin Bashir, the BBC journalist who tricked princess Diana into giving an explosive interview, on Sunday apologised to Princes William and Harry but said claims linking his actions to her death were "unreasonable".

A report by retired senior judge John Dyson published on Thursday found that Bashir commissioned faked bank statements

that falsely suggested some of Diana's closest aides were being paid by the security services to keep tabs on her.

Bashir, 58, then showed them to Diana's brother Charles Spencer in a successful bid to convince him to arrange a meeting between himself and Diana and earn her trust.

Bashir told the *Sunday Times* he was "deeply sorry" to Diana's sons Pri-

nce William and Prince Harry. "I never wanted to harm Diana in any way and I don't believe we did," he told the paper.

But William said Bashir's actions and the interview had made "a major contribution" to the demise of his parents' relationship and "contributed significantly to her fear, paranoia and isolation" in her final years. — AFP

PAYING | TRIBUTES

Dangerous Woman tour crew also got tattoos of worker bees — the city's symbol

Ariana Grande remembers Manchester bombing victims

Los Angeles, May 23: Pop star Ariana Grande has paid tributes to the victims of the 2017's Manchester Arena bombing, which claimed the lives of 22 people.

The suicide bomber detonated an explosive device in the lobby of the arena on May 22, 2017, shortly after a concert by Grande. Over 800 people were wounded in the attack. Grande posted a message on her Instagram story, writing that the victims of the attack were always in

her thoughts and that the "anniversary will never be an easy one". "Although

grief is ever present and our relationship to it is constantly evolving and expressing itself in different ways every day, year round... I know that this anniversary will never be an easy one. Please know that I am thinking of you today. Manchester, my heart is with you today and always," she wrote.

The 27-year-old singer also shared an image with the names of the 22 people who were killed in the bombing. Since 2017, Grande has honoured the

bombing victims in numerous ways, including hosting a benefit concert two weeks later in June 2017, with proceeds going toward the British Red Cross and the support of victims and their families.

On an episode of her YouTube docuseries "Dangerous Woman Diaries", she shared a letter she wrote to fans after the attack. The singer and her Dangerous Woman tour crew also got tattoos of worker bees — the city's symbol. PTI



Flowers for victims of the bombings.

— AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,540.48	1.97
Nifty 50	15,175.30	1.81
S&P 500*	4,155.86	-0.08
Dollar (₹)	72.83	0.38
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.53	0.28
Euro (₹)	89.06	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,995.119	0.24
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.47	2.09
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.977	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.635	0.001

* As of 8:30 PM IST

IBA seeks refund of interest waiver from government

The Indian Banks' Association (IBA) has approached the finance ministry to refund the burden fallen on the banks' shoulders from the Supreme Court's March order which waived compound interest on all loan accounts above Rs 2 crore that opted for moratorium during March-August 2020. Loans below this got interest on interest waiver in November. The issue is being pursued by IBA, said S. Krishnan, MD, PSB.

Discoms' dues to gencos fall 3% to ₹78,379 cr in Mar.



Total dues owed by electricity distribution companies to power producers fell 3.4 per cent to Rs 78,379 crore in March 2021 as compared to the year-ago period, showing a reversal of discoms' growing outstandings. Outstanding dues of discoms towards electricity producers have been rising year-on-year and month-on-month for years. Distribution companies owed total Rs 81,116 crore to power generation firms in March 2020.

FPIs net sellers in equities by ₹6,370 cr in May

Overseas investors withdrew Rs 4,444 crore from Indian markets in May so far amid concerns over the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic and its possible impact on the Indian economy. As per depositors data, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) took out Rs 6,370 crore from equities but pumped in Rs 1,926 crore in the debt segment during May 1-21. This took the total net outflow to Rs 4,444 crore.

Gold saving funds see ₹864-cr inflow in April

Gold saving funds and gold exchange traded funds (ETFs) witnessed net inflows of Rs 864 crore in April amid uncertain economic environment in the wake of the second wave of Covid-19. The positive inflow is expected to continue in the financial year 2021-22 as the precious metal remains an under allocated asset in investor portfolios in these uncertain times, Chirag Mehta of Quantum Mutual Fund said.

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PMJJBY sales rise 48%, insurers seek premium hike

High demand for PM life insurance cover in FY21

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 23

The onset of the Covid 19 pandemic last year has led to a huge spurt in the sale of the government's low-cost term life insurance policy, namely the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY). In 2020-21, a whopping 3.31 crore people bought the cover, a rise of 48 per cent, taking the cumulative number of persons enrolled in the scheme to 10.27 crore as on March 31, 2021.

The low-cost insurance policy, targeted at unorganised sector workers, including self-employed, has been priced at Rs 330 for Rs 2 lakh annual term life cover and is linked to all savings bank accounts. It is renewable annually.

Over the prior three years to 2020-21, the scheme had growth rates between 11 per cent and 18 per cent. Around 1.04 crore people bought the term cover in 2019-20, a growth of 18 per cent, while 59 lakh people were covered in 2018-19, a growth of 11 per cent. A good 2.23 crore people had bought PMJJBY in 2017-18, a rise of 72 per cent.

However, despite having a low incidence rate/mortality rate of 0.2-0.3 per cent, the scheme continues to make losses for life insurers. As a result, only Life Insurance Corporation of India and very few private life insurers are offering the scheme



to their customers through their banking partners. An incidence rate or the mortality rate refers to the number of people who died out of the number of people enrolled in a given year.

Explains Amit Bhawan, assistant vice-president at Prudent Insurance Brokers, "Out of the total 3.31 crore people who bought the cover in FY21, the number of people who died were 62,166 that resulted in a claim outgo of Rs 1,243 crore against a premium of Rs 1,023 crore earned. So, the loss/claims ratio for insurers stand at 122 per cent in FY21. The average loss ratio for insurers in the last five years is Rs 139 which means as against a premium of Rs 100, insurers are on an average paying claim of Rs 139."

Ashvin Parekh, managing partner at Ashvin Parekh Advisory Services LLP, said, "Over 10 crore is quite a size-

On its own momentum							
Financial Year	Cumulative no. of persons enrolled	YoY enrolment	% Increase	Premium	Claims received (numbers)	Total amount of claims paid	Claims ratio (%)
2016-17	3.1			1,023	62,166	1,243	122
2017-18	5.33	2.23	72%	1,758	98,163	1,963	112
2018-19	5.92	0.59	11%	1,953	145,763	2,915	149
2019-20	6.96	1.04	18%	2,296	190,175	3,803	166
2020-21	10.27	3.31	48%	3,389	250,351	5,007	148

Figures in ₹ crore

able number of people covered. The enrolments have mostly come in 2020-21, which has largely to do with the Covid pandemic. With so many people getting covered, the government should give a choice to customers to enhance their coverage but increase the premium less than proportionately as it is targeted towards the lowest strata of the society."

Calls, text messages and questionnaire sent to LIC chairman M. Kumar did not elicit any response.

Heads of private life insurance companies told Financial Chronicle that in several meetings they have asked the government to increase the premium for the scheme.

Says R.M. Vishakha, managing director and chief executive officer at IndiaFirst Life Insurance, "PMJJBY is a very good scheme for social security, but the coverage needs to increase. Secondly, our loss ratio in the scheme

Man-made fibre exports dip, imports rise in FY21

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 23

Declining exports and increasing imports of man-made fibre and filaments in FY21 is a worry for the textile sector, which considers MMF a focus area to achieve a \$350 million export target for textiles.

MMF exports declined by 17.5 per cent to 1 million tonnes between April 2020 and February 2021. However, during the 11-month period, imports of MMF increased by 12.5 per cent to 542,000 tonnes. The fall in MMF outbound shipments was spread across almost all the varieties in a range of 6 per cent to 58 per cent. The shipments were affected mainly due to Covid-19 disturbances. The overall exports are estimated to have accounted for about 30 per cent of the total MMF production, as per the data from Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals.

However, the production itself declined by 2.6 per cent year-on-year to 2.4

million tonnes during the period April and January 2021. The fall in output was mainly due to an average decrease of 56.7 per cent in production during the first five months of FY21 because of Covid-19 disruptions.

Meanwhile, imports of polyester filament yarn (PFY) and other synthetic yarn increased by 70 per cent and 29.6 per cent, respectively. This, in turn, increased overall MMF imports during the period. A surge of 127.2 per cent and 121.7 per cent in imports of PFY and other synthetic yarn from China was primarily responsible for the overall growth in inbound shipments of these varieties. Yarn from China has become cheaper than domestic yarn, says Care Ratings. According to Rakesh Mehra, convenor, sub-committee on man-made fibre & yarn, Confederation of Indian Textile Industry, exports across the value chain were affected by the demand in key markets like Europe and the US.

The export of MMF ready-made garments also declined by 25.2 per cent in FY21. Aligning itself with the global textile market, India had started promoting MMF exports in the past couple of years. Promotion of MMF is also important in achieving the targeted textile exports to \$350 million by 2025.

The government announced a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme in November 2020 for the MMF segment and technical textiles for Rs 10,683 crore. Besides, a scheme of Mega Investment Textiles Parks has also been proposed in the Budget 2021-22 to enable the textile industry to become globally competitive and attract large investments.

"Increasing exports from around \$40 billion to \$300 billion in five years is quite ambitious without preferential and free trade agreements with key markets. Our exports have been hovering around \$40 billion for the past few years," said Mehra.

Cairn claim: India says never agreed to arbitrate tax dispute

New Delhi, May 23: India has challenged an international arbitration tribunal asking it to return \$1.2 billion to UK's Cairn Energy Plc on grounds that it had never agreed to arbitrate over a 'national tax dispute', the finance ministry said on Sunday.

In a statement, the ministry also refuted reports that the Government of India has purportedly asked state-owned banks to withdraw funds from foreign currency accounts abroad in anticipation of the potential seizure of such accounts on behalf of Cairn Energy.

While the government appointed a judge on the three-member arbitration panel and fully participated in the proceedings against India seeking Rs 10,247 crore in back taxes from Cairn, the ministry said the tribunal "improperly exercised jurisdiction over a national tax dispute that the Republic of India never offered and/or agreed to arbitrate."

India had seized and sold shares of Cairn in its erstwhile India unit, confiscated dividend due and withheld tax refunds to

G7 decision to cast shadow on Indian coal block auctions

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 23

The G7 decision to stop financing international coal power projects will raise questions about the investment risk related to coal auctions and put pressure on the government to stop increasing coal capacity, find experts.

The Group of Seven (G7) nations in their recent meeting agreed to stop financing international coal power projects by the end of this year. This decision can have serious implications on India's coal auctions and efforts to increase capacity.

"The G7 statement reinforces that the era of coal expansion is over - India will not secure any overseas assistance for new coal projects (mines or power plants) and will face increasing pressure to stop increasing its coal capacity and begin planning for an eventual phase-out," said Ashish Fernandes, lead analyst at Climate Risk Horizon.

"The global trend in coal divestment or exclusion policies means that new



coal plants in India are also increasingly unbankable, even if they were to get power purchase agreements to underpin commerciality at face value," said Tim Buckley, director, energy finance studies-South Asia, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

G7 financial support comes from Export Credit Agencies of these countries and direct financial institutions.

"The first round of private coal deposit auctions was lauded by the Indian government as likely to attract significant domestic and global investor interest from the likes of Rio Tinto, BHP and Peabody. But the government of India failed to

understand the implications of the recent global moves," he said.

Rio Tinto sold its last coal mine in 2018, having started to exit in 2014. BHP's last two thermal coal mines got zero interest in the market. Peabody is not interested in investing in Indian coal as its core US market volumes collapsed 30 per cent in 2020 and it is headed to its second bankruptcy. There were zero international bids in the first round of coal auctions, and the second round will garner a similar interest from offshore, said Buckley.

"Given that renewable energy now enjoys a significant cost advantage over coal, continued investment in the coal sector poses a serious investment risk in a cash-strapped economy. Indian government entities such as NTPC and PFC are still building and planning new coal projects that will not be competitive with renewables and risk locking the economy into a high cost, high pollution energy pathway," said Fernandes.

WTO'S TRIPS COUNCIL TO DISCUSS REVISED PROPOSAL OF IPR WAIVER

New Delhi, May 23: The Trips Council of the World Trade Organization will discuss a revised proposal submitted by 62 co-sponsors, including India, South Africa, and Indonesia, seeking patent waivers to manufacture Covid-19-related medical products, an official said. In October 2020, India and South Africa had sub-

mitted the first proposal suggesting a waiver for all WTO members on the implementation of certain provisions of the Trips Agreement in relation to the prevention, containment or treatment of Covid-19.

The agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, or Trips, came into effect in

January 1995. It is a multi-lateral agreement on intellectual property (IP) rights.

According to the revised proposal, the waiver should be in force for at least three years from the date of the decision on the matter. The co-sponsors have stated that the duration has to be practical for manufacturing to be feasible and viable. —PTI

JAYPEE INFRA RESOLUTION TAKES A MESSY TURN

New Delhi, May 23: Realty firm Suraksha Group on Sunday strongly objected to Jaypee Infratech creditors panel's move to consider fresh submissions by NBCC and warned of appropriate legal action against lenders as well as the interim resolution professional (IRP) if voting on the group's offer fails to materialise.

The Suraksha Group has conveyed its objections in a letter addressed to IRP Anuj Jain and the committee of creditors (CoC).

The development comes hours after the IRP called for a meeting of the CoC in the morning of May 24 to discuss state-owned NBCC's addendum to its resolution plan, which was rejected by the panel on May 20. The Suraksha Group's bid was also approved for voting on that day.

The meeting of the CoC will be from 10 am to noon on Monday, just two hours before the scheduled voting process on the Suraksha Group's offer will commence. The voting process will be on from noon on May 24 till 5 pm on May 27.

On May 20, the CoC approved Suraksha Group's bid and rejected NBCC's offer, saying it was not compliant with certain provisions of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and a Supreme Court decision in March this year.

However, Monday's CoC meeting is to discuss NBCC's addendum to its bid, which was submitted late on May 18.

Peeved over the proposed CoC meeting, the Suraksha Group said, "We wish to put on record strong objections to such actions to ratify and discuss the resolution plan of the other resolution applicant at this late stage..."

Listing out the reasons, Suraksha Group said it had submitted the resolution plan on May 18 within the stipulated timeline of 4 pm. NBCC's plan was submitted not only after stipulated timelines but also after opening and circulation of the Suraksha Group's plan to the CoC members. —PTI

MISSING | JAB Firm in talks with govts to build facilities for vaccine development and production

Covid loser Glaxo gets ready for next pandemic

SUZI RING MAY 23

GlaxoSmithKline Plc fell behind in the Covid-19 vaccine race, but now the drugmaker is working to make sure it's on the front lines of the next pandemic.

The British pharma giant is talking with the UK and other governments about building facilities to bring vaccine development and production onshore before the next crisis, said Roger Connor, its vaccines chief. The labs would offer a range of vaccine technologies to tackle deadly viruses of the future, he said in an interview. "When every government does their after-

action review from this pandemic, they'll start to think about manufacturing within their own boundary, or within their own region at least," said Connor. We want to "create in-country manufacturing and vaccine development capability for the future."

Glaxo's main R&D vaccine hubs currently are based in Belgium, Italy and the US, with manufacturing capacity globally, including the UK.

Despite being one of the world's largest vaccine companies by revenue, Glaxo wasn't among the frontrunners in developing a Covid-19 shot. Its sluggish effort disappointed some shareholders, and a decision by activist



investor Elliott Management Corp. to buy a significant stake in the company has increased scrutiny of its strategy.

Still, positive data from two vaccine trials last week—with partners Sanofi and Medicago Inc—suggest Glaxo may yet play a role in the pandemic effort.

The company is about to

undertake a huge restructuring, spinning off its consumer health division next year and leaving the biopharma and vaccines arms together. Connor describes the vaccines business as a "crown jewel" that has been undervalued, and its pandemic preparedness plans are one of the ways it can prove this.

"We've got one of the widest range of technology platforms of any vaccine company," he said. To prepare for a future pandemic, "you need to have fill-finish, you need to have bulk, you need to have technology choice, you need to have an R&D engine that connects very well to academia, to government monitoring of

virus evolution, and GSK brings all of those things."

Many countries were caught flat-footed last year when the coronavirus swept across the globe, leading to tensions over supplies and even export bans to keep shots and their ingredients at home. That's contributed to vast disparities in immunization rates between rich and poor nations around the globe.

A dosing error in Glaxo's trials with Sanofi last year set the drugmakers back by six months. Moreover, Glaxo's decision early in the pandemic to use its adjuvant technology—substances that enhance the immune response to vaccines—to partner with other drug-

makers rather than creating its own shot has drawn criticism. The company is now on track to have both the Sanofi and Medicago vaccines cleared for use by year-end, if the final trials are successful.

Glaxo and Sanofi plan to start advanced trials with more than 37,000 people in coming weeks, with multiple formulations of the vaccine to better protect against variants such as those first found in South Africa and India. The studies will predominantly be outside the US and focused on geographies with higher infection rates to give "every chance of making the trial successful," Connor said.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

21 die in China ultramarathon

Beijing: Twenty-one people running a mountain ultramarathon have died in the northwestern China after hail, freezing rain and gale-force winds hit the high-altitude race, a media reported on Sunday. After an all-night rescue operation in freezing temperatures involving more than 700 personnel, rescuers were able to confirm that 151 people were safe, out of a total of 172 participants. Twenty-one had died, according to the official *Xinhua* News Agency, which said the runners suffered from physical discomfort and the sudden drop in temperature. The runners were racing on an extremely narrow mountain path at an altitude reaching 2,000-3,000 meters (6,500-9,800 feet). The 100-kilometer (60-mile) race was held on Saturday in the Yellow River Stone Forest tourist site in Baiyin city. — *AP*

Crucial test awaits Indian pugilists

Dubai: A crucial test of preparations for Olympic-bound boxers, the Asian Championships get underway here on Monday with India aiming to better their record-shattering medal haul in the event's previous edition. A total of 19 Indian boxers — nine men and 10 women — will stake their claim for the top honours, which will also come with an unprecedented bonus of prize money this time. The boxers reached here on Saturday after a tumultuous few hours, which included a delayed landing and some confusion over approval paperwork. In addition, the team had to withdraw South Asian Games gold-medallist Vinod Tanwar's (49kg) name after he tested positive for Covid-19. — *PTI*

Tsitsipas blasts to title in Lyon

Lyon: World No.5 Stefanos Tsitsipas swept to the Lyon ATP clay court title on Sunday with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Briton Cameron Norrie. With a week to go before the prestige Roland Garros tournament the 22-year-old Tsitsipas lifted his seventh career title and his second red surface win this year. Tsitsipas lost in the Barcelona final to Rafael Nadal but landed the Monte Carlo ATP with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Russian Andrey Rublev. Playing with confidence and power Tsitsipas rampaged around the court with his shoulder length hair kept under a headband and lost just a single set all week, in the semis against Lorenzo Musetti. "I kept my objectives in mind and it worked," said Tsitsipas. "I'm going to rest up and get back to training for Roland Garros. It's the Grand Slam I adore the most," he said. — *AFP*

Biles makes an historic vault

Los Angeles: US gymnastics superstar Simone Biles returned to competition with a bang on Saturday, completing an historic vault to launch her final run to the Tokyo Olympics. The five-time Olympic gold medalist, who hadn't competed since winning five golds, including a fifth all-around title, at the 2019 World Championships, delivered on the vault she's been preparing — a Yurchenko double pike — at the US Classic in Indianapolis, Indiana. The vault, featuring a roundoff onto the springboard and back hand-spring into a piked double backflip, had never before been done in women's competition. Biles sailed through it with so much power that she over-rotated slightly and stepped back on the landing. — *AFP*

Middleton lifts Bucks past Heat

Los Angeles: Khris Middleton nailed a clutch two-pointer with less than one second remaining as the Milwaukee Bucks snatched a thrilling 109-107 overtime victory against the Miami Heat in their NBA Eastern Conference playoff opener on Saturday. Middleton kept his composure superbly to drain the decisive jump shot from 18 feet with just 0.5 seconds on the clock, handing the Bucks a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven first round series. — *AFP*

FALL FROM GRACE

Sports fraternity reacts to Sushil's arrest with shock & disappointment

New Delhi, May 23: There was lingering disbelief and considerable disappointment as the country's sports fraternity came to terms with Sushil Kumar's monumental fall from being one of India's greatest Olympians to an arrestee in a murder case. The stockily-built man, who used to be wrapped in the Tri-colour after winning medals for the nation, had his face masked by a towel and both hands held by Delhi Police's special cell officers on Sunday after being on the run for past many days.

Ironically, all this unfolded on World Wrestling Day.

He was evading a Non-Bailable Warrant for his alleged involvement in the death of a 23-year-old wrestler Sagar Dhankar during a brawl at the Chhatrasal Stadium, considered the cradle of Indian wrestling, made most famous by Sushil — India's only sportsperson with two individual Olympic medals.

Dhankar was the son of a Delhi Police constable and trained at the stadium before he died on May 5 because of the injuries he sustained in the brawl.

The chain of events has left the Indian sports fraternity shocked even though respect for Sushil's achievements remains intact. The 37-year-old is, to this date, India's only world champion in wrestling and a three-time Commonwealth Games gold-winner.

"What he has done for Indian sports is something that can never be taken away from him. That's all I want to say at this point. Let things be clearer. I don't want to comment more," boxing star Vijender Singh, who has been to two Olympic Games with Sushil, said.

Both Vijender and Sushil won historic



Wrestler Sushil Kumar (left) is escorted by police in New Delhi on Sunday.

— *PTI*

bronze medals at the 2008 Beijing Games. Vijender remains India's sole male Olympic medallist in boxing.

IMAGE WILL TAKE A HIT, SAYS SHARATH

Seasoned table tennis player A. Sharath Kamal, who is gearing up for his fourth Olympic appearance, conceded that Indian sport's image will take a hit. Kamal's limited interactions with Sushil have taken place during events as Olympians.

"If this has actually hap-

pened, it is unfortunate and reflects badly on Indian sport, not just wrestling," he said.

"He is one of the best athletes we have had. People look up to him. So if he has done what he has done, it will negatively impact not just wrestlers but athletes from other sports also."

UNFORTUNATE & SHAMEFUL: AJITPAL

Former hockey captain Ajitpal Singh, an Indian Olympic Association observer at the 2008

Olympics, recalled interacting with Sushil at the Games and said he still can't understand what exactly went wrong with the "polite" man.

"...it is very shameful and unfortunate. Being a role model Sushil should have led by example and never indulged in such a brawl. The sport gave him everything, money, fame," he said.

"I met him during the Beijing Olympics where I was an IOA observer and found him to be a very down to earth and polite

What he has done for Indian sports is something that can never be taken away from him. That's all I want to say at this point. Let things be clearer. I don't want to comment more.

— **VIJENDER SINGH**

Indian boxing star

guy. But having said that everyone needs to know how to handle fame."

Many other athletes also described Sushil as a simple person and were baffled by how things took such a turn. They preferred to keep their observations anonymous.

A prominent wrestling colleague of Sushil advised caution while forming opinions.

"Yes he has been arrested but only time and investigation will tell if he was involved or not. But definitely it has hurt the image of wrestling and sport in general. Let's see what comes out of the investigation," he said.

"He has two small children, think of the impact on them," added a top boxer who knew Sushil closely and still can't make sense of the developments.

Sushil has two sons from his marriage to his coach Satpal Maharaj's daughter Savi. The couple tied the knot in 2011.

It is not just his brethren in Olympic sports, Sushil was much admired in the cricketing fraternity too. A former cricketer, who has interacted with him at social events, would wait for more details before forming an opinion.

"He is still just an accused... But having said that, it's often about the company you keep once you attain a level. It is disappointing but if he is innocent he will certainly get justice," he said.

— *PTI*

BANGLADESH PIP LANKA IN COVID-HIT ODI

Dhaka, May 23: Spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz claimed four wickets as Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka by 33 runs in the first one-day international in Dhaka after a coronavirus scare on Sunday.

The ODI started on time after the news of three Sri Lankan team members — fast bowler Isuru Udana, all-rounder Shiran Fernando and bowling coach Chaminda Vaas — testing positive for Covid-19 cast a shadow over the game.

Udana and Vaas returned a negative result in a second test following initial positive results, but Fernando tested positive again and was put in isolation immediately.

Mehidy returned figures of 4-30 from 10 overs of his off spin to help bowl out Sri Lanka for 224 in the tourists' chase of 258. Number eight Wanindu Hasaranga hit a valiant 74 off 60 balls.

Mustafizur Rahman took three wickets with fellow fast bowler Mohammad Saifuddin claiming two.

Earlier Mushfiqur Rahim (84) and Mahmudullah Riyad (54) put on 109 runs for the fifth wicket to guide Bangladesh to 257-6 after they opted to bat at the start of the three-match series.

— *AFP*

Triumph over adversity

Spain, May 23: Diego Simeone said Atletico Madrid winning La Liga was a triumph of overcoming adversity after his team were crowned champions for the second time in seven years on Saturday.

Atletico beat Real Valladolid 2-1 to finish two points ahead of Real Madrid at the end of a draining season shaped by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"It's been a very hard year for us and for the world, difficult for every team and in such a tough season Atletico has come out as champions," said Simeone.

"That is symbolic, it speaks of the club and the team being made of something different, that in difficult moments, when everything seems impossible, with the pandemic and the injuries and without fans in the stadiums — with all this, our players gave it everything and they came out on top."

Luis Suarez scored the winner, his 21st goal of the season proving to be the one that clinched the title for Atletico, eight months after he was forced to leave Barcelona. "Suarez is a man of character. He's defiant, he's a goalscorer, a guy who after leaving an extraordinary club like Barcelona wanted to continue to show that he is among the best in the world," Simeone said.



Atletico Madrid's Luis Suarez celebrates with fans after winning the La Liga.

— *AP*

Suarez was in tears after his goal helped Atletico Madrid clinch the Liga title, thanking the club for rescuing him.

THANKS FOR OPENING DOORS: SUAREZ

The Uruguayan, who moved to Madrid from Barcelona in August, thanked "Atletico for opening their doors to me."

"I am filled with emo-

tions," the 34-year-old Uruguayan striker said after scoring in Atletico's 2-1 victory in Valladolid. He offered veiled criticism of his former club, who finished the season in third place.

"I had to live through a difficult situation, starting the season being under-appreciated and Atletico opened the door to give me the chance to show that I could still be a

force," Suarez said.

"That's why I'm always going to be grateful to this great club for trusting me," Suarez said through his tears.

"Many people have suffered with me, my wife, my children, every day," he said.

"I've been in football for so many years and I think this is the year they have endured the most."

— *AFP*

Liverpool, Chelsea secure CL spots

London, May 23: Liverpool and Chelsea seized the final two Champions League places in a dramatic end to the English Premier League season on Sunday, leaving Leicester heartbroken for the second consecutive campaign.

With Manchester City already guaranteed a third title in four years and Manchester United certain to finish second, the focus was on the battle for the final two places in

the top four.

Heading into the 38th and last round of fixtures, just one point separated Chelsea in third place from Leicester in fifth.

Two Sadio Mane goals gave Liverpool a 2-0 win at home to Crystal Palace while Thomas Tuchel's side were indebted to a late Leicester collapse against Tottenham at the King Power Stadium.

Chelsea lost 2-1 at Aston Villa but were saved by the 4-2 defeat for Brendan

Rodgers' FA Cup winners. Jamie Vardy ramped up the pressure on deposed champions Liverpool and Chelsea early on a see-saw afternoon, putting Leicester ahead from the penalty spot.

That meant, as it stood, Liverpool, playing in front of the biggest crowd at Anfield since they became English champions least season, dropped out of the Champions League qualification places.

But after an uncertain

start, Mane calmed nerves in the 36th minute and minutes later Harry Kane, possibly playing his final game for Spurs, levelled for the visitors at the King Power.

The key action took place at the King Power, where a Kasper Schmeichel own goal and two late Gareth Bale strikes turned the game around.

Leicester, forced to settle for a Europa League spot, also missed out on the top

four of the final day of last season when they were beaten by Manchester United.

West Ham also secured a Europa League spot by beating Southampton 3-0 while Fulham, West Brom and Sheffield United had already been relegated.

Argentinian Sergio Aguero scored two goals on his final appearance for Manchester City in their 5-0 romp against Everton.

— *AFP*

WORLD | T20

India women yet to get prize share

New Delhi, May 23: The Indian women cricketers, who made the final of last year's World T20 in Australia, will receive their share from the \$500,000 prize money by the end of this week, a senior BCCI official said on Sunday after it came to light that they are yet to be paid.

A report in the UK's *Telegraph* newspaper quoted an official from the Federation of International Cricketers Association (FICA) as saying that the BCCI is yet to disburse the runner-up prize money of the global event, which was held in February-March last year.

India were led by Harmanpreet Kaur at the marquee event, where they lost to Australia in the final. "The members of the Indian women's cricket team will be getting the share of their prize money by the end of this week. The transactions have been processed and I am expecting that they will receive their share very soon," the senior board functionary said.

Asked about the delay, he said: "We received the prize money amount late last year." The processing of players' payments in BCCI does take around three to four months for all teams (across age groups).

Reacting to a UK newspaper report, the BCCI said women's team will receive their share from the \$500,000 prize money by the end of this week.

However, since last year, the BCCI headquarters in Mumbai have remained shut due to the Covid-19 situation across the country leading to delay in payments all across.

"It's not just one payment for women. Whether it's the central contract of the men's team, international match fees, domestic fees of men and women, everything is taking a bit of time because of the prevailing situation," a former BCCI office-bearer, still associated with a state unit, said.

He further informed: "Even before the Covid situation worsened, the domestic season would end in March and the complete payments were only cleared by September."

"So, in this case you need to check when did BCCI receive the payments. If they received just after the tournament, then it's a delay but processing does take some time. And to the best of my knowledge, it's the same for both men and women."

— *PTI*

INDIA LIKELY TO STRUGGLE IN WTC FINAL, SAYS MONTY

New Delhi, May 23: Former England spinner Monty Panesar feels New Zealand will hold the edge over India in the World Test Championship final if conditions favour the pacers at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton. It is rainy and cold in the UK at the moment and if it stays that way for the WTC final starting from June 18, then it will be advantage New Zealand, feels Panesar.

"At the moment there is a lot of rain around. If the weather stays like this then it will be an interesting battle between the Indian and New Zealand seamers. The New Zealand batsman also play the moving ball better than Indian batsmen."

"So, that, that would be quite interesting to see if the ball is swinging and moving at some stage during the Test match, how the Indian batsmen, stand up to it compared to the New Zealand," Panesar said.

Panesar also expects the ICC to prepare a neutral wicket and not a green top as the WTC is supposed to be a good advert for the five-day game.

— *PTI*



Red Bull's Max Verstappen celebrates after winning the Monaco Grand Prix on Sunday.

— *AFP*

Monaco victory puts Max on top

Monaco, May 23: Max Verstappen capitalised on Ferrari pole-sitter Charles Leclerc's cruel last-minute withdrawal to win Sunday's Monaco Grand Prix and go top of the drivers' world championship for the first time.

Carlos Sainz for Ferrari took second with Lando Norris for McLaren completing the podium.

Red Bull's Verstappen displaced Lewis Hamilton at the top of the 2021 standings after the Mercedes world champion finished in seventh.

The Dutch driver pitched up in the Principality trailing Hamilton by 14 points, and leaves it four points ahead.

"It's so special to win. The first time for me on the podium here. It was all about looking after the

tyres. I was pretty much in control," said Verstappen after taking the chequered flag waved by tennis superstar Serena Williams.

Hamilton had a low key weekend, qualifying in seventh and finishing in seventh. His teammate Valtteri Bottas was in contention to pounce on any mistake by Verstappen.

But then his race came to an embarrassing end when a routine pitstop took a disastrous turn as a wheel refused to come off.

The Finn's frustration will have been nothing to the heartache Leclerc suffered just before the start when he reported a gearbox problem on his Ferrari. For the locally-born Leclerc it was a cruel end to his dream of winning his home grand prix.

— *AFP*