

on Sunday



IAF's Suryakiran aerobatic display team completes 25 years

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I was framed by Sachin Vaze, alleges car designer Dilip Chhabria

Page 8



Remains of 215 children found at former school site in Canada

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BCCI decides to resume IPL in UAE during September-October

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NEARBY



Kalra gets bail in oxygen concentrators case

NEW DELHI
A Delhi court on Saturday granted bail to businessman Navneet Kalra in the oxygen concentrator black marketing case, saying he has clean antecedents. CMM Arun Kumar Garg directed him not to contact the customers to whom he sold the machines.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

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MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES
CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGE 4

Ripples from Yaas and surging tides devastate the Sunderbans

Unprecedented damage calls for policies geared to climate change

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

For people in the ecologically fragile Sunderbans, life revolves around battling high tides daily and cyclones regularly. But every cyclone throws up new challenges to the Sunderbans and its inhabitants – something the people had not imagined, and policy makers are not prepared for.

Over just the past three years, the Sunderbans, which is home to close to five million people, has been battered by four tropical cyclones – Fani (May 2019), Bulbul (November 2019), Amphan (May 2020) and Yaas (May 2021). On each occasion, the region has suffered damage be-

cause of gale winds and breached embankments, leading to ingress of sea water.

The intensity of the gale winds has ranged from 100 kmph to 150 kmph during each of the cyclones.

Experts say the solution to the perennial problem lies in long-term planning, adopting strategies that will minimise the impact of climate change, and disaster management suited to the region.

Unprecedented surge

When the State administration launched a massive evacuation drive earlier this week on May 24 and May 25, little did the residents know that though Cyclone Yaas



New challenges: Over just the past three years, the Sunderbans, which is home to close to five million people, has been battered by four tropical cyclones. ■ GETTY IMAGES

made landfall about 200 km south of the Sunderbans in Odisha, it would inundate large areas of the estuary. The cumulative effect of the

full moon tide on May 26 and the cyclone led to the overflowing and breach of embankments in large areas of the Sunderbans.

While the India Meteorological Department had predicted a storm surge of 2 m above the astronomical high tide level, water in the river

and bay swelled due to full moon tide. As a result, on May 26 morning as Cyclone Yaas made landfall, large areas were inundated.

Under water

Three days after the cyclone, several areas of Sunderbans remain inundated, forcing people to huddle in cyclone shelters or spend days on embankments.

"The entire island with a population of 3,500 people is flooded. I have spent the past three days in the rescue

Sunderbans.

Ghoramara is one of the islands that has been sinking due to rising sea levels, where a few dozen houses and acres of land go under water every year.

Even so, the residents were not prepared to see the entire island under water. Ms. Sajera Bibi said the devastation caused by Yaas has been the most severe, something she has not seen in the past 40 years.

"Our relatives in Sagar are telling us to leave this place and move there. But how can we go when water is all around," she asked.

Sagar Island, the biggest island of the Sundarbans chain and site of the famous Gangasagar Mela during Makar Sankranti, has also suffered damage.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

GoM to study relief for COVID essentials

It will give report to GST Council by June 8

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Saturday constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) to examine possible waivers of GST levies on essential COVID-relief material, including vaccines, even as industry expressed concerns on the delay over such a critical decision amid the second wave of the pandemic.

Meghalaya Chief Minister



Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma, left, is the Convener of the GoM, which includes Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar. ■ FILE PHOTOS



Conrad Sangma has been designated as the Convener of the eight-member GoM, which includes the Deputy Chief Ministers of Gujarat

However, it may take longer for any possible relief to fructify as implementation of the group's recommendations would need approval from the Council.

Uday Shankar, president, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), said "a quick decision" on reductions in GST rates on COVID related essentials will help India attain self-sufficiency in this hour of need. "At this juncture, we cannot afford to lose further time," he said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Daily struggle



Never-ending lines: Migrant labourers and homeless people queuing up to collect free food packets from volunteers outside the Sacred Heart Cathedral Church in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR (SEE ALSO PAGE 2)

Chidambaram for CAG audit on vaccine production

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Saturday demanded a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)-driven audit of vaccine production and supply in the country to unravel the "mystery of missing vaccines" before public anger hits the streets.

In a separate Facebook post, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra alleged that the oxygen shortage that the country had seen last month and earlier this month was a result of the Narendra Modi government's "lack of planning, incompetence and a 700% increase in the export of oxygen in 2020".

Delhi reports 956 fresh COVID-19 cases, lowest in over two months

CM says global tender floated for vaccines, no fruitful outcome

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 956 new COVID-19 cases over 24 hours, taking the total to 14,24,646, stated a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Saturday. This is the lowest number of single-day cases since March 22, when the city reported 888 new COVID-19 infections.

A total of 122 deaths were reported over 24 hours, pushing the toll to 24,073.

1.19% positivity rate

As many as 80,473 tests were conducted in a day, the health bulletin said. The test positivity rate (TPR) in Delhi fell to 1.19%, meaning only one out of 100 persons was testing positive for the virus. The TPR was as high as 36%

on April 22 and has been coming down since then.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said the Delhi government had floated a global tender to procure COVID-19 vaccines to tide over the shortage of doses in the Capital. He said this is not the time for "petty politics" over vaccine procurement.

"We have filed a global tender for vaccines. We are making all efforts from our side but till now the outcomes have not been very fruitful. From what I have understood, all the big vaccine manufacturing companies of the world want to deal directly with the Central government and are communicating directly with it," he said.

The Chief Minister made the comment after visiting

the government's drive-through vaccination centre at Chhatrasal Stadium where citizens above 45 years of age will be vaccinated for free.

The Delhi government has started a drive-in vaccination facility here at the Chhatrasal Stadium. People can come here in their cars, motorcycles, even on foot and get vaccinated. Vaccination is free at this centre. Right now this has been initiated for those above 45 years because there is no vaccine for those below that age," Mr. Kejriwal said.

The Chief Minister added that the vaccination drive for those in the 18-45 age group will be started as soon as adequate doses arrive.

SISODIA TARGETS CENTRE ▶ PAGE 3

Withdraw transfer order of Chief Secy., Mamata tells Centre

Chief Minister terms order unconstitutional, says let him work for West Bengal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Describing the Union government's order to transfer West Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay "as unconstitutional, unilateral" and a result of political vendetta, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday urged the Centre to withdraw the order.

"I appeal to you to withdraw this letter and allow him to work for the people of the State. I will appeal to you Prime Minister, Home Minister do not indulge in political vendetta when it comes to IAS and IPS officers," Ms. Banerjee said.

She also claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah were trying to create problems for her government at every step as they were yet to come to terms with the BJP's defeat



I feel insulted and humiliated, but they should not insult my officers. What was his (Mr. Bandyopadhyay's) fault?

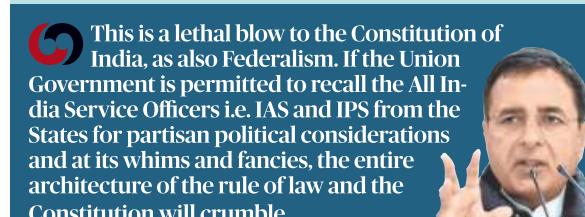
It was supposed to be a PM-CM meeting. Then later it was revised with the presence of Central Ministers, Leader of Opposition and the Governor.

MAMATA BANERJEE, WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER



I have no word to criticise the way the West Bengal Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary insulted the Prime Minister.

SUVENDU ADHIKARI, BJP MLA



This is a lethal blow to the Constitution of India, as also Federalism. If the Union Government is permitted to recall the All India Service Officers i.e. IAS and IPS from the States for partisan political considerations and at its whims and fancies, the entire architecture of the rule of law and the Constitution will crumble.

RAHDEEP SURJEWALA, CONGRESS SPOKESPERSON

in the Assembly election.

Hours after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee did not participate in the review meeting on Cyclone Yaas chaired by the Prime Minister, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet attached the State's top bureaucrat to the Centre.

Referring to photographs of empty chairs at the Prime Minister's meeting, Ms. Banerjee said she spoke to him for several minutes, which was not photographed and circulated. "Since last night, so many political leaders

made unjust comments to tarnish my image, the image of my government," she said.

The Chief Minister also raised the issue that the Leader of Opposition was not present when the Prime Minister visited Gujarat or Odisha.

"It was supposed to be a PM-CM meeting. Then later, it was revised with the presence of Central Ministers, Leader of Opposition and the Governor," Ms. Banerjee pointed out.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Shifting of Bandopadhyay draws flak

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Opposition on Saturday criticised the Centre's move to shift West Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay.

The Congress described it as "an attack on federalism" that would result in "anarchy". Its general secretary and chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the "abrupt, malicious and unilateral" recall of Bengal's top bureaucrat was an "unpardonable attack on the Constitution that has shocked the nation's conscience".

In a statement, he said, "This is a lethal blow to the Constitution of India, as also federalism. If the Union government is permitted to recall the All India Service Officers from the States for partisan political considerations and at its whims and fancies, the entire architecture of the rule of law and the Constitution will crumble".

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

New cases dip to 1.6 lakh over 24 hours

Immunisation increases with 1.4 lakh more vaccine doses administered

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

India recorded 1,60,857 new COVID-19 cases and 3,482 new deaths till 9.50 p.m. on Saturday. The country has so far reported a total of 2,78,89,185 cases and 3,26,017 deaths.

Tamil Nadu reported 30,016 new infections, followed by Kerala (23,513) and Karnataka (20,628).

Maharashtra's fatalities include backlog deaths that were missed out in the previous reports.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Manipur and Ladakh. The

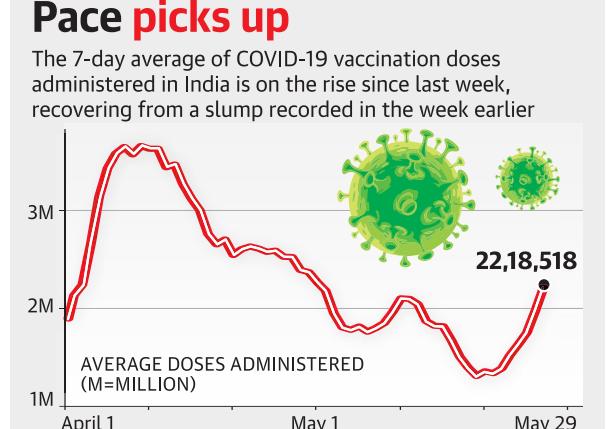
data are sourced from the respective States' health bulletins.

Around 20.8 lakh samples were tested in the country on Friday (the results for which were made available on Saturday), which is around 9,500 more tests

than those conducted on Thursday.

India's average daily test positivity rate (positive cases identified for every 100 tests) continues to decline. It was 8.4% on May 28, compared to 12.5% recorded a week earlier.

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGE 7



Over 30.6 lakh vaccine doses were administered in the country in the 24 hours ending 8 a.m. on Saturday, which is 1.4 lakh doses more than what was recorded in the previous 24 hours. It is also 1.6 lakh more doses than what was recorded during the same period a week ago.

Vaccine slump ends
The 7-day average of COVID-19 vaccination doses administered has been consistently rising since last week, recovering from a slump recorded in the week earlier.

Kalra gets bail in O₂ concentrators case

Court directs him to not tamper with evidence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Saturday granted bail to businessman Navneet Kalra in the oxygen concentrator black marketing case, saying he has clean antecedents and will not tamper with the evidence.

During a recent raid amid the second COVID wave, 524 oxygen concentrators were recovered from Khan Chacha, Town Hall and Nege & Ju restaurants owned by Mr. Kalra in the national capital.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Arun Kumar Garg has directed the accused not to contact the customers to whom he had sold the concentrators and not to tamper with evidence or influence the witnesses.

Mr. Kalra, who is accused of black-marketing the critical medical devices, has also been directed to join the investigation as and when called by the police and furnish personal bond and two surety bonds of ₹1 lakh each.

"Apparently accused is having clean antecedents, in as much as, no previous involvement of the accused in any criminal case has been reported. No purpose will be served by keeping the accused behind bars," stated the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate.

Further, the judge stated that there is no material supporting the "bald averment" of the prosecution that Mr. Kalra may influence the witnesses.

Since all the relevant documents have already been seized from Kalra's possession, there is no substance in the plea of the state that the accused may tamper with the evidence, the 23-page court order stated.

The magistrate, however, said that prima facie the accused was involved in commission of offences such as cheating under the Indian Penal Code and other sections under the Essential Commodities Act, both of which are punishable with imprisonment up to seven years.

'AAP govt. letting ration go to waste'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

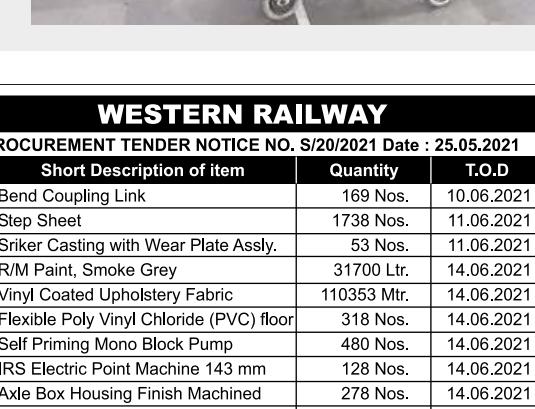
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday accused the Delhi government of letting ration provided by the Centre for free distribution among the poor go to waste in an attempt for "low political gains".

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta alleged wheat and rice sent by Centre was kept at different schools so that it could be distributed to the needy in the vicinity of such schools but, specifically at a south Delhi school, ration weighing 700 quintals had been allowed to rot. "It

clearly shows CM Arvind Kejriwal is indulging in low-level politics to defame the Modi government by ensuring this ration does not reach beneficiaries. A lot of this ration is rotting at several places in the city. There should be an inquiry," Mr. Gupta said.

Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri accused the Delhi government of being "anti-poor". "It is shocking that free ration for the poor is not reaching them despite being provided by the Centre on time. There must be a high-level probe in the matter," he demanded.



WESTERN RAILWAY					
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE NO. S/20/2021 Date : 25.05.2021					
S.N.	Short Description of item		Quantity	T.O.D	
491	Bend Coupling Link		169 Nos.	10.06.2021	
492	Step Sheet		1738 Nos.	11.06.2021	
493	Slriker Casting with Wear Plate Asly.		53 Nos.	11.06.2021	
494	R/Paint, Smoke Grey		31700 Ltr.	14.06.2021	
495	Vinyl Coated Upholstery Fabric		110353 Mtr.	14.06.2021	
496	Flexible Poly Vinyl Chloride (PVC) floor		318 Nos.	14.06.2021	
497	Self Priming Mono Block Pump		480 Nos.	14.06.2021	
498	IRS Electric Point Machine 143 mm		128 Nos.	14.06.2021	
499	Axle Box Housing Finish Machined		278 Nos.	14.06.2021	
500	Hex Head Bolt with Split		47 Nos.	14.06.2021	
501	Brake Block L Type		2736 Nos.	14.06.2021	
502	Air Brake Hose Coupling		3300 Nos.	14.06.2021	
503	Protective tube complete Asly.		3505 Nos.	14.06.2021	
504	Stopper assembly for pin		6891 Nos.	14.06.2021	
505	Anchor link bracket		409 Nos.	14.06.2021	
506	Hex Head Bolt with Split		5366 Nos.	14.06.2021	
507	Set of Labyrinth and Bearing Cap		115 Set	14.06.2021	
508	Locking Plate for CTRB		103880 Nos.	14.06.2021	
509	Bolster Liner 15X31D0X8 mm, thick		14452 Nos.	14.06.2021	
510	Wedge for Casnub Bogies		1049 Nos.	14.06.2021	
511	Axle box helical spring		397 Nos.	14.06.2021	
512	Slriker Casting with Wear Plate		18000 Nos.	14.06.2021	
513	Coupler Body with Shank Wear Plate		30 Nos.	14.06.2021	
514	Shank Wear Plate for Upgraded High Tensile CBC		14100 Nos.	14.06.2021	
515	Universal Lock Lift Lever Connector		3618 Nos.	14.06.2021	
516	Knuckle Thrower for Upgraded High Tensile CBC		4163 Nos.	14.06.2021	
517	Upgraded High Capacity Draft Gear		308 Nos.	14.06.2021	
518	Lock Lift Lever Hook for Upgraded High Tensile CBC		10341 Nos.	14.06.2021	
519	Cross Bar		501 Nos.	14.06.2021	
520	Polyurethane Packing Washer		2472 Nos.	14.06.2021	
521	Door way Cross Bar Pressing with Back Plate & Packing Piece		603 Nos.	14.06.2021	
522	Packing Plate 12 mm Thick for Height Adjustment		3108 Nos.	14.06.2021	
523	APM Device		12 Nos.	14.06.2021	
524	PVC Flooring Sheet		1496 Nos.	15.06.2021	
525	D.L.Sheet-3MM Blue Shade		12385 Nos.	15.06.2021	
526	Copper Catenary Wire 65Sq.mm		141240 Mtr.	15.06.2021	
527	Copper Contact Wire Jointless, 107 Sq.mm		128750 Mtr.	15.06.2021	
528	Air Brake Hose Coupling		3100 Nos.	15.06.2021	
529	Stopper for Rotating Spring Seat		200 Nos.	15.06.2021	
530	Clevis		18 Nos.	15.06.2021	
531	Poly Ring (Donuts)		11983 Nos.	15.06.2021	
532	Coronary Tray Consist of 13 Items.		1 Set	15.06.2021	
533	Yoke Pin for Upgraded High Tensile CBC		96 Nos.	16.06.2021	
534	Internal Combustion Engine Oil Grade SA-E40		34230 Ltrs.	16.06.2021	
535	Collar for Direct Mounted Roller Brg.		1800 Nos.	17.06.2021	
536	Safety Strap Complete		2403 Nos.	17.06.2021	
537	Set of Susp. Spring (Helical) of WAG-7		10 Set	17.06.2021	
538	R-Charger		380 Nos.	17.06.2021	
539	Ring for Direct Mounted Roller Bearing		150 Nos.	18.06.2021	
540	Top Side Bearer Liner		3622 Nos.	18.06.2021	
541	Toggle for Upgraded High Tensile CBC		2113 Nos.	18.06.2021	
542	Safety Loop for Uncoupling Rod		5309 Nos.	18.06.2021	
543	Rotary Bottom Operated Articulated Lock Assly. Components		250 Nos.	18.06.2021	
544	Flexible Hose Assly.		54 Nos.	18.06.2021	
545	Centre Pivot Top for BLC Wagon		172 Nos.	18.06.2021	
546	3 Types of Metallic Self Expanding Biliary Stent		13 Nos.	18.06.2021	

Corrigendum:- Please visit www.reps.gov.in for corrigendum issued to following Tenders: Sr.No. 364 (K Type High Friction Composite Brake Block) of Tender Notice No. S/17/2021 dt/05/05/21 due on 20.05.2021 is postponed to 10.06.2021.

Regarding detailed notice EMD, Purchase restrictions and detailed tender conditions, please visit website www.reps.gov.in and www.wr.indianrailways.gov.in.

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor UT of Jammu & Kashmir

DIPK-2163/21

SD/-
Executive Engineer,
(JSD) PHE Division Awantipora,

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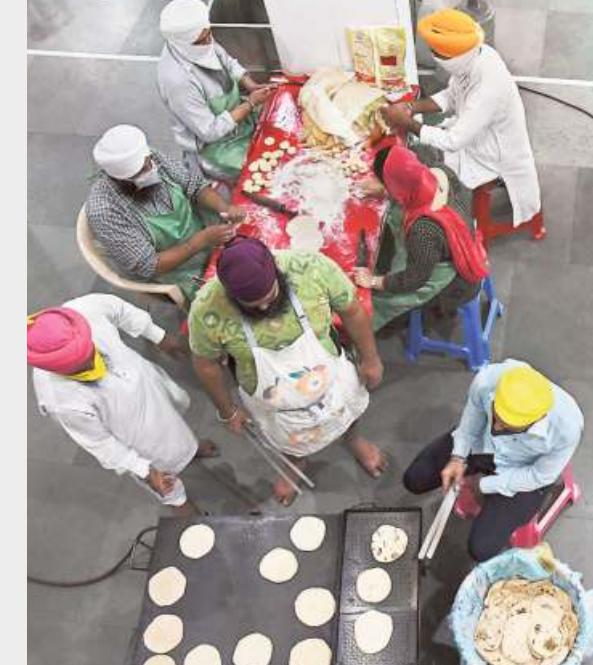


Volunteers preparing and distributing food to the needy across the Capital.

PHOTOS BY SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR, V.V. KRISHNAN

Feeding the needy

Hundreds of individuals and volunteer groups have been working round the clock during the pandemic and lockdowns providing free food. The beneficiaries include thousands of migrant labourers stuck in the city without a job and family members of COVID-19 patients who have to spend days outside hospitals to make sure their loved ones get proper treatment



Man held for cheating over 200 traders with fake payment app

He used Paytm clone to dupe people into thinking money was transferred

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A 21-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly cheating over 200 shopkeepers using a Paytm clone, making the victims believe he paid them, the police said on Saturday.

DCP (South-West) Ingit Pratap Singh said the accused has been identified as Kunal Sharma alias Sonu from Uttam Nagar.

The case came to the fore when a general store owner in Palam Village, Ramesh Kumar, complained to the police that on May 20, a man came to his shop to buy

refined oil for ₹2,560.

During payment, the man allegedly told the victim that he is not carrying cash and asked if he accepted payment via Paytm.

Next, Mr. Kumar gave him his Paytm QR code for scanning. The accused used Mr. Kumar that his mobile phone camera was broken, and he would pay him using the victim's number on Paytm.

"Then the accused took the shopkeeper's mobile number and entered it in the spoof app. Next, a notification similar to that of Paytm flashed on the accused's mobile screen which he showed to

the police.

The man and his wife were in the hospital also recuperating from the virus when the crime took place. The police have arrested two persons – Azad (34) and Shahzad (24) – both residents of Meerut – in connection with the case.

The man and his wife were in the hospital also recuperating from the virus when the crime took place. The police have arrested two persons – Azad (34) and Shahzad (24) – both residents of Meerut – in connection with the case.

On April 28, the man – who works in Muscat – complained to the police that his parents' house had been burgled. On reaching the spot, the police found the house ransacked.

The victim called the police, saying he, his wife and his father were undergoing treatment for COVID at a hospital. He also said his mother died a few days ago due to COVID. During treatment, his father also passed away, an officer said.

On May 21, after recovering from the virus, he went to the house and listed the number of things, which had been stolen. His father's engagement ring, a pair of earrings, old currency and ₹1.5 lakh cash were missing from the house.

"They are gone. I had gifted the

earrings to my mother after I got my first salary in 2007. It is not the things that matter but the memories attached to the belongings. The thieves also stole ancient coins of my great grandparents," he said.

DCP (North) Anto Alphonse said during the probe, two persons were seen in CCTV footage carrying two bags. With the help of technical and human intelligence, Azad was arrested and when interrogated, he allegedly told police that he sold some of the stolen articles to Shehzad who was subsequently arrested.

The police claim to have recovered pieces of gold and silver from the accused. "I am happy with the help from police. They have recovered a lot of items and I hope my parents' belongings are in it," the victim said.

The two accused in police custody.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medalist and Padma Shri awardee Sushil Kumar was an inspiration for many budding wrestlers at the Chhatrasal Stadium in north-west Delhi.

Among them was Sagar Dhankar, a 23-year-old, who was bludgeoned to death at the stadium on May 4 by Sushil Kumar and other wrestlers at the stadium.

If Mr. Kumar was moving backstage in the wrestling arena as an administrator, Sagar had a promising career ahead and would have learnt wrestling tactics from Mr. Kumar, who was an Officer on Special Duty at the stadium.

The relationship between the two, according to other wrestlers at the stadium, was that of a teacher and a disciple, leaving many shocked as to how the ties between them turned so bitter.

Just like home
Mr. Kumar's friends, who requested anonymity, said that the stadium was like a home to the Olympic medallist over the past two decades and the only thing he spoke about was wrestling and coaching young wrestlers to qualify for national and international events.

"The May 4 incident has damaged Sushil's image that he earned over the years by winning two Olympic medals consecutively. His achievements can never be matched or compared, but the brawl that night has ended everything for him. Sagar was trained by Sushil but God knows what happened that night," said a friend of Sushil.

He added that Mr. Kumar's life was going smooth. He had opened a school and other businesses were being run by his family members so that he could concentrate in wrestling and never detach himself from Chhatrasal Stadium.

Events of the night when Sagar



Sushil Kumar after his arrest in the wrestler's murder case; (bottom) victim Sagar Dhankar's family showing the medals won by him.

■ PTI, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



A tale of reverence and betrayal



The relationship between Sushil Kumar and Sagar Dhankar, according to other wrestlers at the stadium, was that of teacher and disciple, leaving many shocked as to how the ties between them turned so bitter

"We never expected this could happen. It is beyond our imagination. Sagar used to respect Sushil and had always obeyed his orders. We have no clue what tension was growing between them and what were they involved in," said the man, who wished not to be named.

Mr. Kumar's coach

and father-in-law Satpal Singh, who is a 1982 Asian Games gold medallist, was the brain behind making Chhatrasal Stadium, a best wrestling stadium in the country. Both of them had a good hold on akhaaras from

where they used to hunt the best talent and train them in the stadium.

"In his entire career from junior level to the Olympic Games, Sushil Kumar has won 29 gold medals, six silver and six

bronze medals. He was a gifted player with some extraordinary capabilities that made him a world-class player. After he won a silver medal in the 2012 Olympic Games, he last fought in the 2014 Commonwealth Games at

Narendra

After completing his Class 10, Sagar completely engaged himself in wrestling and participated in the junior-level national tournament. He won several medals and represented the country at men's national and international events," said Mr. Narendra.

He added that because of Sagar's outstanding performance, the latter got admission in Chhatrasal Stadium where he got an opportunity to learn wrestling tactics from Sushil Kumar. He al-

Court extends Sushil's police custody by 4 days

Officers sought seven days' remand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

police for four days only," Metropolitan Magistrate Mayank Goel said.

The police had sought Mr. Kumar's custody for seven days.

Mr. Kumar and his accomplices allegedly assaulted wrestler Sagar Dhankar and two of his friends Sonu and Amit Kumar on the intervening night of May 4 and 5. Sagar succumbed to his injuries later.

The international wrestler was arrested, along with co-accused Ajay Kumar, on May 23 from Outer Delhi's Mundka. He was evading arrest and had been on the run for nearly three weeks.

Mr. Kumar was produced before the court on Saturday at the end of the remand period.

"In the interest of justice, I deem it appropriate to allow the application of the

court's order," said the court.

The court had earlier sent the accused to six days' police custody for interrogation.

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THE HINDU CLASSIFIEDS

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LIFE MADE SIMPLE

THE HINDU MATRIMONIAL

BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

COSMOPOLITAN

30/156, GRADUATE in Nursing working in Indian Army (Officer) seeks suitable groom. Army officer preferred. Caste no Bar, 7549764264

ELITE FAMILY Naidu uthiradam 4 magaram 23Feb1990/165,Fair, MBBS Dr, TN Govt Chennai seeks Dr, Govt class-A officer, Business Groom any FC/BC, 9841743266

RESPECTABLE BUSINESS banija family of 4 members seeking alliance for their well educated and family oriented daughter 28/5'4 Ph.D, M.Tech, Grade-A PU Chd. Currently working with Hindustan Unilever as scientist & Tech manager having diverse packages. Looking for a well educated groom, hailing from well cultured industrialist/professional family. Reply with biodata/horoscope, photograph to: 872901800, 9886040330 Hima@88@icloud.com

SEEKING A POM, well settled in India or abroad, cosmopolitan, under 35, for a good looking working Muslim girl, 30+, married and separated in 3 months. Religion no bar, Call 9326524252.

DIVORCEE

DELHI BASED upper middle class Punjabi Brahmin family seeks sm4 divorcee issueless daughter oct, 88 born, height - 5 feet slim good looking BA BEd from well settled boy decent family, m. 8826115834 7838958119

SEEKING A christian born-again, well-educated settled groom for a believer girl, divorced, 41yr, 5'3",Ph.D., Asst.Prof (IIT), 870533777

DOCTOR

SC, AGE 31, Fair, MBBS, MD, Doctor, Chennai. Seeks Doctor, B.E in MNC or Any Govt. 9710840909, 7845089996

NAIDU-KADAKAM PHD-MBBS qualif., 29/5, Fair, Chennai. Seeks suitable groom(Doctor only) MBBS/MD/MS/DM/MCH. 9283103568, 8941024544

ENGLISH

A well settled Christian family from AP is looking for a committed Christian Groom below 32yrs, and working in senior management level for their beautiful Daughter 26yrs MBA Language and caste not an important criteria. No Mediators. Please contact on WhatsApp: 9866268791 (or) finnysamuelceetam@gmail.com.

MALAYALAM

PARENTS of a well-educated IAS, Nair girl, 32, seeks alliance. We are looking for professionals with established career graph and progressive thinking. Caste no bar. Contact : 9072347116.

PASIGHAT SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED
PASIGHAT, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

NOTICE INVITING E-Tender

The Chief Executive Officer, Pasighat Smart City Development Corporation Limited, Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh invites on behalf of Chairman, PSCDCL, Pasighat, AP online item rate bids on two bid system for the following work(s)-

1.NIT No.: PSCDCL/NIT-03/2020-21/25, Name of work: Construction of Smart Road (Phase-I & II) and Storm Water Drains (Phase-I) under Pasighat Smart City Mission with Operation and Maintenance (O&M) for Five years after one year of Defect Liability O&M for drainage work is excluded. Estimated Cost: Rs.97,96,01,538/- EMD:Rs.97,95,015/- (For APST) and Rs.1,07,95,015/- (For Non-APST). Period of completion: 15(Fifteen) Months & Last date and time of submission of bid:18/6/2021 at 1000 hrs.

2. NIT No.: PSCDCL/NIT-03/2020-21/26, Name of work: Pasighat River Front Development under Smart City Mission, Pasighat. Estimated Cost: Rs.98,171,957/- EMD: Rs.98,171,957/- (1% for APST) and Rs.19,63,440/- (2% for Non-APST). Period of completion: 9(Nine) Months & Last date and time of submission of bid:18/6/2021 at 1000 hrs.

The bid forms and other details can be obtained from the website <https://arunachaltenders.gov.in>.

Sd/-
Chief Executive Officer
Pasighat Smart City Dev. Corp. Ltd
Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh.

DIPR /ARN/00540-42/21

WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY

E-TENDERING TENDER NOTICE
No. DYCE-C1-BPL-05-2021

Dated 26.05.2021

E-Tender on behalf of the President of India acting through Deputy Chief Engineer (Construction)-I, West Central Railway, Bhopal for the following work (Single Packet system):- Tender No.- DyCE(C)-1/BPL/05/2021. Brief Description - Linking of track & dismantling of existing track in connection with diversion of railway line between km 1200/6- 1207/2 between Biyavra Rajgarh - Pachor road sectionon Guna-Maksi line due to construction of Mohanpura dam.

Approx. tender value (Rs.)- 335.56 lakh, Earnest Money (Rs.)- Nil. Due date of Closing of tender - 22.06.2021 at 15.00 hrs.

Completion Period - 06 (Six) months including harvest & monsoon period. The complete information of above E-Tender is available on <http://www.ireps.gov.in> and also placed on the Notice Board of office of the DyCE(C)-1/West Central Railway/Bhopal. Tenders other than in the form of e-bids shall not be accepted against above tender.

Corrigendum, if any issued in connection with tender, will be available on above mentioned website.

Dy.Chief Engineer(Constrn.)-I
West Central Railway, Bhopal

करोना का है दूसरा,
तो दीकारण जरूर करना।

THE HINDU
DISCLAIMER: Readers are requested to verify and make appropriate enquiries to satisfy themselves about the authenticity of any advertisement before responding to any published in this newspaper. THG PUBLICATION LTD. and its publishers and printers of this newspaper does not vouch for the authenticity of any advertisement or advert or for any of the advertiser's products or services. The Publisher & Owner, Publisher, Printer, Editor, Director, Employees of this newspaper/ company held responsible/liable in any manner whatsoever for any claims and/or damages for advertisements in this newspaper.Sr. No. (1) E-Tender No. DRM-ENG-G
BSP-T-18-21-22, Date : 24.05.2021

Work : Left over works for "Provision/ Repair of Store/ Rec room, Ladies Toilet & other ancillary works in the Engineering Sub-ordinate office, Sr. DEN/Co-ord/office, Sr. DFM office, Sr. DPO office, Sr. DME office, CAO/ Construction office and other offices of Bilaspur Settlement under the jurisdiction of Sr. DEN/ Settlement/ Bilaspur.

Tender Value : ₹ 91,33,634.27/- Completion Period : 12 Months.

Start Date of Submission of Tender: From 11:00 hrs. on 01.06.2021. Last Date of Submission of Tender : Upto 11:00 hrs. on 15.06.2021.

The complete information of above e-Tender Notices is available over website <https://www.ireps.gov.in>.

Bids other than e-bids shall not be accepted against above Tenders & tender document uploaded in website on dated 24.05.2021.

Div. Railway Manager (Engg.)

CPR/10/34 S.E.C. Railway, Bilaspur.

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IN BRIEF



Vairamuthu declines ONV literary prize

CHENNAI
Tamil lyricist Vairamuthu on Saturday said he was "returning" the ONV literary prize. This comes in the wake of criticism against the grant of the award to the songwriter, who has been accused of sexual harassment by several women. The award was instituted in the memory of Malayalam poet late O.N.V. Kurup. Mr. Vairamuthu said he was declining the honour as he did not want the jury to face embarrassment. PTI

Three tonnes of ganja seized, two arrested

VISAKHAPATNAM
The police arrested two persons and seized nearly three tonnes of ganja while they were allegedly transporting it in a van at Sabbavaram in Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh, on Saturday. The seized ganja is estimated to cost about ₹50 lakh. The police said the accused were from Bihar. Last week, the Sabbavaram police arrested three persons while they were allegedly transporting 2,645 kg ganja, worth about ₹2.5 crore.

No leadership change in Karnataka, says Joshi

HUBBALLI
Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Pralhad Joshi on Saturday said there is no question of leadership change in Karnataka as the Chief Minister's position is not vacant and Y.S. Yediyurappa is functioning efficiently. The MP from Dharwad, whose name is being speculated as one among the probables to replace Mr. Yediyurappa, said no discussions involving him had taken place. He said the focus now should be on managing the COVID-19 pandemic and not leadership change. PTI

Pick-and-drop facility for jab beneficiaries

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

A pick-and-drop facility will be rolled out for the physically challenged people eligible for the vaccine by the Rewari administration from this coming week to ensure full coverage under the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Emergency vehicles

Deputy Commissioner, Rewari, Yashendra Singh, said travel and other support would be provided to all physically challenged persons above 18 years so that they do not miss out on vaccine.

All Deputy Commissioners and Civil Surgeons in the State would implement this outreach programme.

Those persons requiring assistance would be transported to nearby camp sites and back home in the I12 Emergency Response Support System vehicles provided to the Deputy Commissioners for this purpose.

The Kolkata doctor who finds house visits 'relaxing'

What if the patient was my father or mother? I advise accordingly, says Dr. Chel

BISHWANATH GHOSH
KOLKATA

At a time when seeing your neighbourhood general physician or a specialist in the nearest hospital for a non-COVID-19 ailment is challenging enough, to have a doctor examining you in the comfort of your home is nothing short of a luxury. It's a luxury that a growing number of families in Kolkata's Salt Lake City feels entitled to – all thanks to a medical practitioner who, in fact, finds house visits relaxing.

"Once I examine a patient, the family's worries are put

Chennai ahead of Bengaluru in virus fight

Study says difference between the two cities in managing the pandemic's second wave is stark

LAIQAH A. KHAN
BENGALURU

The two mega cities of south India – Bengaluru and Chennai – may be separated by barely 350 km from each other, but the difference in COVID-19 mortality between the two cities, particularly in the second wave, has been quite stark.

During the 90-day period between February 25 and May 25 this year, Bengaluru Urban recorded 7,397 COVID-19 deaths while Chennai registered 2,401, which is only about a third of the cases in country's IT capital. This, despite the Tamil Nadu Assembly polls held on April 6.

According to a comparative analysis carried out by Project Jeevan Raksha, a public-private initiative by Proxima, a management consulting firm, with technical support and guidance of the Public Health Founda-



The battle is on: Municipal workers waiting to get vaccinated at a school in Bengaluru. ■ AP

tion of India (PHFI), Bengaluru also added positive cases and active cases at a faster pace than Chennai.

If the total positive cases in Bengaluru raced to 11,31,496 on May 25 from 4,04,628 on February 5, at a scorching moving growth rate of 180%, Chennai's total cases reached 4,87,691 on May 25 from 2,35,005 on February 25, at a moving growth rate of 108%.

Active cases in Bengaluru went up to 2,19,551 on May 25 from 3,887 on February 25, while the corresponding numbers for Chennai were 47,553 on May 25 and 1,780 on February 25.

One year ago, on May 25, 2020, the number of people dying due to COVID-19 in Bengaluru was 10 while in Chennai 87 had died, recalled convenor of Jeevan Raksha Mysore, Sanjeev.

But, a year later, 11,863 people had died in Bengaluru urban while in Chennai the figure stood at 6,546. He said Bengaluru compared with Chennai in terms of "population and ecosystem".

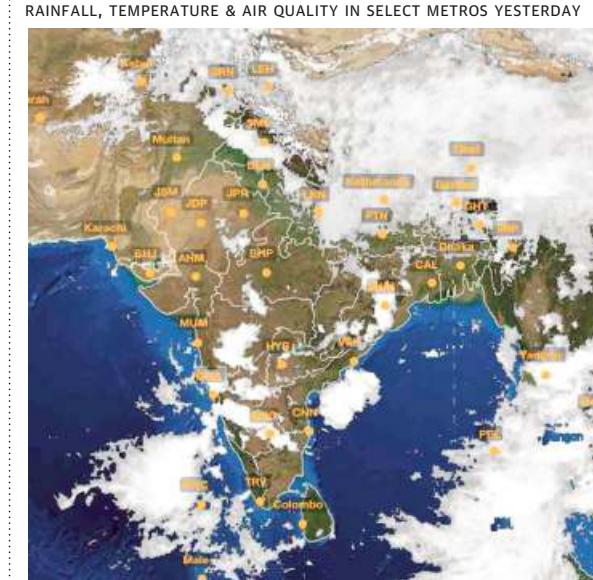
Infrastructure in place
Citing the reasons for difference in pandemic management in the two cities, Mr. Sanjeev said the Tamil Nadu government had recognised

that critical medical infrastructure and resources were needed and equipped the city to manage the surge. Also, Tamil Nadu is the only State in India to stick to 100% RT-PCR, the gold standard for COVID-19 testing, ensuring both "quantitative" as well as "qualitative" testing in Chennai. But in Bengaluru, the number of tests were reduced when the cases surged, he pointed out.

"Our study has indicated that one in every five persons who died due to COVID-19 in Bengaluru Urban succumbed on the day of hospitalisation itself," Mr. Sanjeev said, adding that fear of exorbitant hospitalisation charges was pushing people to delay treatment.

"Another major issue in Bengaluru is the interference and highhandedness of local politicians in the administration," said Mr. Sanjeev.

WEATHER WATCH



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP, INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Thunderstorms with lightning likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Konkan & Goa, Rayalaseema, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Lakshadweep

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...36.5...	26.6	15...	Kozhikode	...31.5...	24.0	...
Ahmedabad	...38.5...	27.4	27.4	Kurnool	...38.7...	27.4	...
Aizawl	...1...	18.6	18.6	Lucknow	...28.8...	22.4	...
Altafabad	...29.1...	23.6	23.6	Madurai	...38.2...	27.0	...
Bengaluru	...31.9...	21.0	15...	Mangaluru	...29.1...	23.8	...
Bhopal	...40.8...	28.4	28.4	Mumbai	...34.1...	28.6	...
Bhubaneswar	...35.9...	29.3	21.4	Mysuru	...33.0...	21.4	...
Chandigarh	...37.3...	29.1	26.6	New Delhi	...31.8...	22.2	...
Chennai	...40.0...	29.3	22.2	Port Blair	...30.9...	25.2	...
Coimbatore	...33.8...	23.6	23.6	Puducherry	...39.0...	26.0	...
Dehradun	...41...	22.5...	19.7	Pune	...36.5...	24.5	...
Gangtok	...42...	22.5...	15.1	Raipur	...42.4...	29.2	...
Goa	...2...	31.7...	25.6	Ranchi	...34.2...	24.1	...
Guwahati	...35.0...	26.4	26.4	Shillong	...26.0...	16.5	...
Hubballi	...29.0...	23.0	20.4	Shimla	...30.2...	20.4	...
Hyderabad	...39.6...	26.6	26.6	Srinagar	...30.7...	14.4	...
Imphal	...32.0...	20.4	20.4	Thiruvananthapuram	...0.5...	24.7	...
Jaipur	...6...	42.2...	26.4	Tiruchi	...40.1...	28.0	...
Kochi	...13...	30.6...	24.8	Vijayawada	...40.8...	30.2	...
Kohima	...26.8...	17.2	17.2	Visakhapatnam	...35.4...	29.8	...
Kolkata	...35.5...	28.0	28.0				

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	22	45	34	...55	...71	■■■■■
Bengaluru	...5	37	73	...50	...46	■■■■■
Chennai	76	...6	35	...51	...61	■■■■■
Delhi	22	22	59	...59	...107	■■■■■
Hyderabad	...68	18	42	...70	...70	■■■■■
Kolkata	10	18	18	...76	...102	■■■■■
Lucknow	...4	27	34	...36	...49	■■■■■
Mumbai	...192	60	72	...71	...71	■■■■■
Pune	...28	88	...53	...55	...55	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	12	33	40	...50	...124	■■■■■

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Sirsa, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 281, indicating unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Gadag, Karnataka recorded a healthy AQI score of 15

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reducing lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

NORTH & EAST

Farmers to observe June 5 as 'Sampoorna Kranti Divas'

Samyukt Kisan Morcha calls for burning copies of farm laws

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI



Farmers holding black flags during their ongoing protest against new farm laws, at Singhu border. ■ FILE PHOTO

Positivity rate coming down in Uttar Pradesh

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

The positivity rate for COVID-19 in Uttar Pradesh in the last 24 hours has come down to 0.8% while the recovery rate stood at 96.10%, the State government said on Saturday. The overall positivity rate stood at 3.5%, Amit Mohan Prasad, Additional Chief Secretary, Health, said.

So far, 34.24 lakh people have got both doses of vaccine while 1.42 crore received the first dose, according to official figures.

In May, the positivity rate has been 5.5%, he said.

SEARCH FOR MISSING



Lovely Kumari

General public is hereby informed that a girl namely Lovely Kumari, D/o: Ashish Ram, R/o: H. No. 472/485, Plot No. 24-25, Gali No. 1, 1st Floor, Chisti Chaman, Gulabi Bagh, Delhi has been reported missing since 14.12.2020 at 02:00 PM from the above Address. In this regard FIR No. 269/2020 dated 15.12.2020 U/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Gulabi Bagh, Delhi. The description of missing girl is as under:

Name: Lovely Kumari, **Age:** 15 Years, **Height:** 5'0", **Complexion:** Fair, **Face:** Oval, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing:** Red Suit and Sandal in feet.

If anyone has any information about this missing girl please inform P.S. Gulabi Bagh, Delhi.

Web: <http://cbi.nic.in>, **Email:** cic@cbi.gov.in

Ph.: 011-24368638/24368641, **Fax:** 011-24368639

SHO Police Station Gulabi Bagh, Delhi

DP/904/N/2021 Ph: 011-23651692, 8750871634</b

FROM PAGE ONE

Ripples from Yaas devastate Sunderbans

The sea water from the site where the devotees take a holy dip surged several kilometres inland crossing the Kapil Muni temple.

Namita Jana, who resides in the Dhablat Shibpur area in the southeastern part of the Sagar Island, says the entire area looks like a desert of mud. "We do not know whom and where to seek help and how to tell people of the situation in which we are living," she said.

Not only the western part of Sunderbans that faces Bay of Bengal but large parts in Gosaba and Sandeshkhali block, in the eastern part of the delta remain under water three days after the cyclone and the high tide.

Sanjay Mondal who operates a tourist boat "Sunderban Safari" said there is a scarcity of drinking water because of inundation.

Once the sea water enters the islands, not only are dwelling units destroyed but the crops are inundated and land cannot be cultivated because of the salinity, even the fish in the ponds die.

Engineering shortfall

During the administrative review meetings carried out to assess the impact of the cyclone, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee stressed on a permanent solution for the Sunderbans and low-lying coastal areas.

"We repair the embankments every year and then a cyclone comes, and we have to repair it again. It is likely putting money in the water," she said.

"Sunderbans has em-

Withdraw transfer order of Chief Secretary: Mamata

Chief Minister also said that the BJP leadership is unable to digest its electoral defeat.

"Why are you (Modi) behaving in this manner with Bengal? We have won a landslide victory – is that your only worry? You tried your best... but they (people) voted for us and they ousted you. Please accept the mandate of the people," she said.

The Chief Minister said that the West Bengal government had sent a letter on May 10 to the Centre requesting a three-month extension for Mr. Alapan Bandopadhyay who is to retire on May 31, so he could continue.

(With inputs from PTI)

Shifting of Chief Secretary Bandopadhyay draws flak

"If the head of bureaucracy in a State, the Chief Secretary, will be summarily removed by the Union government, why would any IAS or IPS officer, whether a District Magistrate or a Secretary or a Police Officer listen to and follow the orders of the State government or implement any policy or programme devised by the State? This would lead to complete and total anarchy in the country," he stated.

Former Union Minister Jairam Ramesh tweeted that "this move in the middle of a pandemic and the aftermath of a devastating cyclone, shows how they are still licking their Bengal wounds post-elections."

The Aam Aadmi Party, however, avoided taking a position.

GOM to study relief for COVID essentials

He added that FICCI has been pressing for zero rating of healthcare services for two years to cope with the pandemic's impending waves and had hoped for a positive decision from the Council this time.

Kerala's new Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal, along with other Opposition-ruled States' Ministers had demanded tax cuts on COVID-related supplies, has been included in the GoM, along with his Telangana counterpart T. Harish Rao.

The group's terms of reference include ascertaining the need for tax breaks on items ranging from CO-

VID-19 treatment drugs, testing kits, oxygen-related equipment to PPE kits, N95 masks and sanitisers. Vaccines are taxed at 5%, while the GST levied on most other COVID-essential items is 12% or 18%. Delhi's Deputy CM Manish Sisodia had said on Friday night that BJP Finance Ministers opposed the demand for making COVID essentials tax-free 'tooth and nail' at the GST Council's marathon meet held on Friday. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said the decision to form a GoM was taken after protracted deliberations with varying viewpoints'.

U.S. will soon decide on vaccine issue: Jaishankar

Regulatory, legal, commercial and supply-side aspects are under discussion, says External Affairs Minister

SIRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON D.C.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed a range of issues on Friday including COVID-19 vaccine procurement, India-China border issues (according to the U.S.), climate change, the Quad and the bilateral relationship. Discussions around vaccine procurement for India and issues – such as indemnity for vaccine manufacturers – are still being resolved.

"I'm not going to get into the very specific angles of what was discussed, but certainly, vaccine manufacturing, procurement, delivery – the larger question of how we can cooperate together both bilaterally and on the larger Quad context were covered today," Acting Assistant Secretary Dean Thompson – who was present at the meeting – said in response to a question from *The Hindu*. Both he and Mr. Jaishankar addressed the Indian press separately after the bilateral meeting.

Asked whether there was

a discussion on the allocation of vaccines from the U.S. stockpile, Mr. Jaishankar said the topic came up but did not get into details.

"The issue came up at a conceptual level. But, you know, my understanding is that in the coming days, or weeks, the U.S. will obviously make its decisions," he said. The Biden administration has committed to sharing 60 million AstraZeneca doses and 20 million additional vaccine doses with the rest of the world by the end of June. American officials have said they will work with COVAX – an international effort to equitably distribute vaccines – in arriving at the allocation.

Expanding vaccine manufacturing in India, Mr. Jaishankar said, was one of the goals of his visit to Washington. In a tweet on Friday, he said his meeting with Mr. Blinken and team "also focused on Indo-U.S. vaccine partnership aimed at expanding access and ensuring supply".

Resolving issues around U.S. demands for indemnity



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, right, with Minister S. Jaishankar at the State Department in Washington. ■ AP

and early Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) were central to Mr. Jaishankar's agenda in Washington, *The Hindu* had reported.

However, regulatory, legal, commercial and supply-side aspects were still under discussion, the Minister told members of the Indian press on Friday.

"These [discussions] are going on between the companies concerned and ... the authorised people in India."

Summarising his trip, Mr.

meeting, the two Foreign Ministers delivered brief remarks to the press, with Mr. Jaishankar thanking the U.S. and the Biden administration for its solidarity and support to India "at a moment of great difficulty" for the country. Conveying India's appreciation to the U.S. for its assistance was also an objective of the trip, he said later.

Mr. Blinken noted – as U.S. officials have repeatedly done – that India helped the U.S. last year, when it was in the throes of the pandemic.

On whether the issue of indemnity for foreign vaccine manufacturers had come up during his meetings with industry representatives on Thursday, Mr. Jaishankar said they did not and were being discussed at other levels.

"These won't be conversations at my meeting, which is a larger gathering with people... because these are very focused conversations and those conversations are taking place with the facilitation of the embassy, between the regulators and the authori-

ties on the Indian side, and these companies," he said, adding that his business meetings were about what kind of lockdown was happening in India and its impact.

Asked during a briefing with the Indian press at the Indian Embassy about Rahul Gandhi's view that vaccine diplomacy had not worked for India, Mr. Jaishankar said he did not want to get into it. "I'm not here to exchange political polemics. I don't do that when I leave the country. And I expect other people to understand that," he said.

India-China border

At their bilateral, the two sides had also discussed "the India-China border, the coup in Burma, and continuing support for Afghanistan," according to Mr. Thompson.

"...We continue to watch the situation very closely and hope that everything can be resolved peacefully as things go forward," he said.

Mr. Blinken also confirmed that the India-China border was discussed.



Proud moment: Offshore Patrol Vessel Sajag being commissioned into the Coast Guard. ■ ANI

Recall of Chief Secretary unprecedented'

There is a custom that an officer will not be deputed against his/her will'

VIJAYITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

On May 28, the department of personnel and training (DoPT) under Ministry of Personnel directed that West Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay report to its office at North Block in Delhi by 10 a.m. on May 31. The order came hours after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee allegedly skipped a review meeting on Cyclone Yaas with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Kalikunda. Ms. Banerjee has refuted the allegation saying she handed over a detailed report on cyclone to the Prime Minister and after seeking his permission thrice, she proceeded to another meeting at Digha with Mr. Bandyopadhyay.

The order read that the appointments committee of the Cabinet has approved the "placement of services" of Mr. Bandyopadhyay as per provisions of the Indian Administrative Service (cadre) Rules, 1954 with the Government of India with "immediate effect."

The ACC is headed by the Prime Minister, and Home Minister Amit Shah is the other member.

The 1987 batch IAS officer has never been on Central deputation and is to superannuate on May 31. Earlier, on the request of the State government, Centre had approved three-month exten-

sion in service to the officer, top bureaucrat in West Bengal.

What is the rule cited by DoPT?

The DoPT order said that the ACC has approved Mr. Bandyopadhyay's transfer to Delhi under Rule 6(i) of the IAS (cadre) Rules, 1954. The said rule pertains to "deputation of cadre officers."

It says that a cadre officer may, with the concurrence of the State governments concerned and the Central government, be deputed for

EXPLAINER

service under the Central government or another State government.

It however adds, "provided that in case of any disagreement, the matter shall be decided by the Central government and the State governments concerned shall give effect to the decision of the Central government."

When were the rules framed?

After the All India Services Act, 1951 came into existence, the IAS cadre rules were framed in 1954.

The said rule on deputation giving more discretionary powers to the Centre was added in May 1969.

What has been the practice so far?

Before any officer of All India Services (AIS) is called for deputation to the Centre, his or her concurrence is required. The Establishment Officer in DoPT invites nominations from State governments. Once the nomination is received, their eligibility is scrutinised by a panel and then an offer list is prepared, traditionally done with the State government on board. Central Ministries and offices can then choose from the list of officers on offer. AIS officers are recruited by the Centre and they are lent to States. The publication of offer list on DoPT's website was discontinued by the government in 2018 amid reports that not many State government officers were willing to come to Centre for deputation.

Is the current order one of its kind?

According to Vappala Balachandran, former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, the order is not only "unprecedented" but also vindictive.

"Legally speaking it is the Centre that holds ultimate control. But there is also a custom that an officer will not be deputed against his/her own will. This order is unilateral and an awkward

step, unbecoming of the Central government especially after they gave due extension. This officer superannuates on May 31, if he refuses to join, can the Centre exercise its right on a retired officer?" Mr. Balachandran asked. Earlier in December 2020, the Home Ministry had attached three Indian Police Service (IPS) officers of West Bengal cadre – Rajeev Mishra, Praveen Kumar Tripathi and Bhola Nath Pandey – but the State government did not relieve them. The attachment order came after the cavalcade of Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) president J.P. Nadda was attacked in Diamond Harbour area. Home Ministry is the cadre controlling authority of IPS officers.

What if the officer refuses to comply with the order?

The All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969 are not clear on the punishment in such cases. But Rule 7 says the authority to institute proceedings and to impose penalty will be the State government while he or she was "serving in connection with the affairs of a State." The case is peculiar as Mr. Bandyopadhyay retires on May 31 and is not on deputation to the Central government. The Chief Minister can write to the Centre to reconsider its decision.

'Coast Guard will get more responsibilities'

Doval commissions OPV 'Sajag'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Observing that the Coast Guard plays an important role in supporting neighbouring countries in the Indian Ocean Region, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval on Saturday said that the force will have greater responsibilities in the years to come as India's maritime zones expand to include entitlements in the extended continental shelf.

Mr. Doval made the comments after virtually commissioning the Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) 'Sajag' into the Indian Coast Guard. This is third of five OPVs indigenously designed and built by the Goa Shipyard Limited.

Mr. Doval also said that

this lean and visible service plays a critical role in anti-smuggling and anti-narcotics, both nationally and internationally, a Coast Guard statement said.

In his address, Mr. Doval said that the concept of forming the Coast Guard was conceived after the 1971 war, when it was assessed that maritime borders are equally vital as land borders, the statement said. "The blueprint for a multi-dimension Coast Guard was conceived by the visionary Rustamji Committee even as the United Nations Convention of the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) was being negotiated and India's assets off Mumbai high were growing," the statement quoted Mr. Doval as having said.

When Nehru wanted globe-trotter diplomats in print

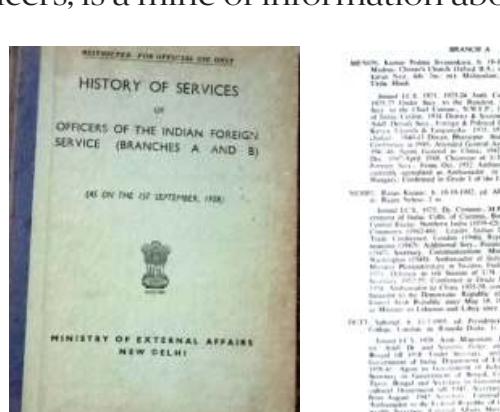
The rare directory, with biodata of IFS officers, is a mine of information about the policies of the government of that time

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

In 1958, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru decided to publish a 'Statement of Services of Officers of Branches A and B of the Indian Foreign Service'. The document is "Restricted for Official Use Only". The first volume, however, is unique as it consisted of officials who were hand-picked by Nehru personally for the IFS.

The volume is a mine of information about the policies of the government of that time. At the time of publication, the MEA had Haribans Rai Bachchan as an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) for promotion of Hindi in the works of the Ministry. Bachchan, who is known for his literary works as well as for being the father of actor Amitabh Bachchan, was recruited in December 1955. It mentions that Haribans Rai Bachchan could read, write and speak in Hindi and Urdu. He left a comfortable job at the Allahabad University and was persuaded by Nehru to join the MEA.

The volume is rare to come across and is found only in limited number of libraries and in personal collections. Writing the Preface, Menon acknowledged that he might have left out some colleagues by mistake and



The cover and the first page of the volume, published in 1958.

requested them to submit relevant details with the Under Secretary (FSP) for inclusion in the next issue. Thus began an annual publication, which gives details of globe-trotting diplomats of India. The document is "Restricted for Official Use Only". The first volume, however, is unique as it consisted of officials who were hand-picked by Nehru personally for the IFS.

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who served in ambassadorial positions in Washington DC and Moscow by that time.

Among the personal details, it is the section about Ramchandra Dattatraya Sathe that draws attention to a bygone era of Indian diplomacy. Till 1950, India, continuing with imperial practice of the past, maintained a consulate at Kashgar. Sathe, who joined the MEA after serving in the Army, was posted at Kashgar as Consul General in November 1948. Next year, the People's Republic of China was born, and

PN Haksar went on to serve as a close advisor to Indira Gandhi during the 1971 war. However, the Haksars were overpowered by the Menons and Nairs, who appear to be the most numerous in IFS

top order at that time.

The directory begins with Kumar Pedma Sivasankara Menon or KPS Menon Sr and contains at least 11 diplomats from the Menons of Kerala. Subimal Dutt, the Foreign Secretary from 1955 who served during the Suez crisis, is on the first page.

It also shows the level of language skills possessed by Indian diplomats during the 1940s and the 1950s. While most people chose Spanish, French and Russian as foreign language, there were a few who spoke Burmese, Arabic, Bahasa Indonesian as well. Jayantananu Bandyopadhyay of the 1956 IFS batch, who later became the author of a popular book on Indian foreign policy, specialised in Kishwahili.

The volume was published on September 1, 1958.



Leho Ram Boro •

₹10 lakh corpus fund for every child orphaned by COVID-19

Educational assistance and health cover to be part of special PM-CARES scheme

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Saturday announced a special "PM-CARES for Children" scheme for all those orphaned due to COVID-19. It will include a corpus of ₹10 lakh for each child till he or she reaches the age of 18.

The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Children who have lost both parents or the lone surviving parent or their legal guardian or adoptive parent due to COVID-19 will be supported under the scheme.

The Women and Child Development Ministry has said that there are a total 577 COVID-19 orphans identified across the country.

When a child turns 18, he or she will draw a monthly stipend from the corpus of ₹10 lakh in order to meet expenses for personal needs and higher education. On reaching the age of 23, the child will get the entire ₹10 lakh, according to an official statement.

The government will also assist such children with school education. They will be given admission in the

Timely support

Students can be enrolled in Kendriya Vidyalayas or private school with govt. taking care of expenses

Students of 11-18 years can be enrolled in Sainik Schools or Navodaya Vidyalayas

Health insurance cover of ₹5 lakh

Corpus of ₹10 lakh per child to be created

Monthly stipend will be offered from corpus after 18 years of age

Lump sum to be disbursed once the age of 23 is attained

nearest Kendriya Vidyalaya or in a private school as a day scholar.

If the child is admitted in a private school, the fees will be paid from the PM CARES Fund as per norms under the Right To Education Act, 2009. PM CARES will also meet the expenses on uniform, text-books and notebooks.

Residential schools

Children in the age group of 11-18 will have the option to study in a residential school under the Central government such as Sainik School

and Navodaya Vidyalaya. These children will also be supported in their higher education through either scholarship equivalent to the tuition fees or educational loans where the interest will be paid by the PM CARES Fund.

All children will be enrolled as a beneficiary under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme with a health insurance cover of ₹5 lakh, where the premium amount will be paid by PM CARES till a child turns 18.

The government has also announced measures to help

The Centre has announced a comprehensive financial aid package for children orphaned during the pandemic



— AFP

the families who have lost the sole earning member due to COVID-19.

Help for kin

The pension scheme of the Employees State Insurance Corporation is being extended. The scheme is applicable from March 24, 2020 to March 24, 2022.

Similarly, insurance benefits under the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme (EDLI) under the Employees Provident Fund Organisation will be available, according to a press statement.

Clear GST confusion: tax experts

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

The government needs to urgently resolve the confusion over the GST rate to be levied on oxygen concentrators imported for personal use, tax experts said on Saturday.

"The notification bringing down the rate from 28% to 12% for personal imports has been quashed and the relief of exemption given by the High Court seems to be only in case of free imports for personal use as gifts," said Abhishek Jain, partner (indirect taxes) at EY India. "The government must quickly resolve this anomaly created by the Delhi High Court judgment," he said.

"For individuals, this seems to be the interpretation as the High Court has quashed the notification itself," said Pratik Jain, partner, Price Waterhouse & Co., LLP. "Hopefully, the Group of Ministers of the GST Council on COVID essentials' tax rates will look into the issue and provide relief," he said.

Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj said on Friday that the judgment meant concentrators received as "gifts" from abroad would not be taxed.

CoWIN data show rise in vaccination

Positive trend seen in last five days



Nearly 30 lakh doses were administered on Friday.

record 4.5 million doses being administered on April 5. Beginning May 24, there has been an increase with doses again reaching over 2 million. For most of May, it averaged about 1.5 million. The government increased the interval between two shots of Covishield to 12-16 weeks on May 13.

From May 17, there has been a widening gap in those who have got one dose and those getting their second dose. On average 1.5-2 lakh second doses have been given since May 17, whereas numbers of those who have got the first dose jumped from 1.5 million to 2.8 million as on Friday.

The ratio of registrations to doses administered now stands at 6.5:1, which was an 'alarming' 11:1 a week before, said R.S. Sharma, Chairman, Empowered Group on Technology and Data Management on Friday.

Provide rations to sex workers: Gauhati HC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Gauhati High Court has directed the authorities of Cachar district in Assam's Barak valley to provide rations to sex workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. An order was issued to the district Deputy Commissioner and the secretary of the District Legal Services Authority on May 28.

Hearing a petition filed by Debajit Gupta, the Bench of Chief Justice Sudhanush Dhalia and Justice Manash Ranjan Pathak cited a September 2020 Supreme Court observation that sex workers have a right to live with dignity.

The Deputy Commissioner informed the court that the sex workers and their families have already been identified since a project is being run by the National AIDS Control Organisation.



P. Chidambaram

actual production so far, we should be told what has been supplied date-wise and to whom?"

Welcoming announcements made by corporate companies to vaccinate their employees, their families and business partners, he said, "State governments are not able to get supplies from any manufacturer – domestic or foreign. So, from where do the corporates expect to get their supplies?"

"The proper thing to do is direct a CAG driven full-scope audit of capacity, production, despatch, supply and customers' lists of the two domestic manufacturers. Better unravel the mystery of the missing vaccines now before public anger over shortage of vaccines pours into the streets," he added.

Chidambaram for CAG audit on vaccine production, supply

The mystery of missing vaccines is deepening every day'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Saturday demanded a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)-driven audit of vaccine production and supply in the country to unravel the "mystery of missing vaccines" before public anger hits the streets.

In a separate Facebook post, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra alleged that the oxygen shortage that the country had seen last month and earlier this month was the result of Narendra Modi government's "lack of planning, incompetence and a 700% increase in the export of oxygen in 2020".

In tweets, Mr. Chidambaram said, "The mystery of the "missing vaccines" is

deepening every day. The

statement of Bharat Biotech about the 'lead time' required to produce a batch of vaccines has added to the confusion. We understand that 'capacity' is one thing and 'production' is a different thing. What we would like to know is the actual quantity produced so far by the two domestic manufacturers. Once we know the

At the helm



Steering relief: Volunteers of Kashmir Welfare Trust, a non-governmental organisation, prepare packets of food and dry rations for distribution among boatmen and those living on houseboats on the Dal Lake in Srinagar on Saturday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Cong. seeks action against BJP MP

Party flags reports linking Tejasvi Surya and uncle to profiteering

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday asked for a police case to be registered against Lok Sabha member and BJP leader, Tejasvi Surya, and his uncle, BJP MLA Ravi Subramanya, and their disqualification as lawmakers for allegedly demanding cash for vaccines at a private hospital in Karnataka.

"Scandalous & Shocking! This is BJP's Profiteer from Adversity. People are dying of shortage of #vaccine & BJP leaders are making money of their misery. Can



Tejasvi Surya

their be a bigger crime, Mr. Modi?" Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala posted on Twitter.

Addressing a virtual press conference, Congress press spokes-

person Pawan Khera referred to an audio clip that was circulated in the local media where the BJP MLA's name cropped up.

"In those audio recordings, supervisor of a private hospital clearly tells member of the public that per vaccination he will have to pay ₹900 and not a penny less. The supervisor also tells this gentleman on telephone that ₹700 of this ₹900 have to be given to Mr. Ravi Subramanya, BJP MLA from Basavangudi, Karnataka, and uncle of Tejasvi Surya," alleged Mr. Khera.

ARMY INSTITUTE OF NURSING, GUWAHATI CORRIGENDUM

Reference to the original advertisement published in the newspaper on 14th April 2021. Scheduled date i.e. 27th Jun 2021 for conduct of online Admission Test is hereby postponed. Fresh date will be notified in due course of time.

Army Institute of Nursing, Guwahati extends the dates for submission of online applications for admission into B.Sc(Nursing)

Course are as under-

(i) Till 15th June 2021 - Without late fee

(ii) From 16th June 2021 - With late fee Rs 100/- to 30th June 2021

For other details, Please visit AIN website www.ainguahati.org

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No. Tender ID Items

1. 2021_KMML_423762_1 For the supply of 7.5 KVA UPS

2. 2021_KMML_423754_1 For the supply of High purity Liquid Argon

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Dazzling the skies: Suryakiran aerobatic display team completes 25 years

It has done more than 600 displays across India and south east Asia

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

The Suryakiran aerobatic display team of the Indian Air Force (IAF), which has enthralled crowds across the country with their hair-raising manoeuvres with their aircraft in red and white, has just completed 25 years.

The team currently has 13 pilots and is led by Group Captain Anoop Singh.

Disbanded once

"Suryakiran", which means "rays of the sun" in Sanskrit, was raised in May 27, 1996, at the IAF air base in Bidar, Karnataka, with six Kiran MkII trainer aircraft.

"In March, the team flew a very special "75" formation with 17 aircraft to com-



Star attraction: The Suryakiran aerobatic team flying over Chennai to commemorate 50 years of the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

It carried out its first display on September 15, 1996 for the golden jubilee celebrations of the Air Force Ad-

ministrative College in Coimbatore.

However, the team was disbanded in 2011 after the

Aero India show due to shortage of training aircraft in the IAF and was resurrected in 2015 on advanced jet

trainer Hawk Mk-132 aircraft. The team was built up to a nine-aircraft team in quick time in 2017, the officer observed and added, "We got smoke pods in 2020 and commenced display with smoke."

At Aero India 2021, the Suryakiran teamed up with the Sarang helicopter display team in the world's first-ever integrated display of nine aircraft and four helicopter teams. Their first foreign display was for the Sri Lankan Air Force Day in Colombo in 2001 and the most recent was to commemorate the 20th Sri Lankan Air Force Day.

Rigorous selection

All the pilots of the Suryakiran team are qualified flying

instructors and belong to the fighter stream of the IAF selected through a rigorous selection process at a ratio usually around 1:10. "They all have a high level of experience and proficiency on various frontline fighter aircraft," the officer stated.

The Suryakiran team firmly believes in "excite the ordinary, impress the knowledgeable, and frighten no one", said Wing Commander Venu Nambisan (retd.), a former AN-32 navigator and Suryakiran team administrator.

"Not once, but twice," said Wg. Cdr. Nambisan, who was part of the legacy team and part of the core team which resurrected the team on Hawks later. "A rare privilege indeed," he said.

This team, which has been the brand ambassador of the IAF, is also the 52 squadron of the IAF and is the youngest fighter squadron with the motto "Always the Best".

IN BRIEF



13 more Collectors can grant citizenship

MHA notification will benefit minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan

VIJAYA SINGH

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has empowered 13 more District Collectors in Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab to grant citizenship certificates to applicants belonging to six minority communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

The latest notification is a reiteration of similar orders issued in 2016 and 2018 and is not related to the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) that is yet to come into effect.

The CAA, passed in 2019, seeks to grant Indian citizenship to six undocumented communities that came to India till December 31, 2014.

The May 28 notification intends to benefit legal migrants (who entered on passport/visa) from the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who have already applied for citizenship under Section 5 (by registration) and Section 6

(naturalisation) of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

The only way the CAA could have helped the legal minority migrants is in fast-tracking their applications as it reduced the mandatory requirement of 11 years aggregate stay in India to five for citizenship.

Since the rules for the CAA are yet to be framed, a minority applicant from the three countries, even if he or she came in 2014, becomes eligible for citizenship in year 2025. But many have been residing in India for more than 20 years on long-term visas (LTV). An LTV is a precursor to citizenship.

The applicants will have to apply online and the citizenship certificate will be provided after security check by the Central agencies and the State police.

Under the existing system, minority communities from the three countries who entered India before December 31, 2009, may or may not choose to provide a copy of their passports but they have to provide the date



Hindu refugees, who migrated from Sindh province of Pakistan, displaying their passports in Ahmedabad. ■ PTI

of the visa and may upload the visa document in place of the passport while applying for citizenship.

The Home Secretaries of Punjab (except Jalandhar) and Haryana (except Faridabad) have also been given such powers.

Central subject

Citizenship is a Central subject and the Home Ministry periodically delegates powers to the States through gazette notification under Section 16 of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

Indian citizenship can be acquired on eight grounds - based on registration made by a person of Indian origin, by a person married to an Indian, minor child, whose parents are registered as citizens of India, by a person whose either parent was a citizen of Independent India, overseas citizens of India, by naturalisation and registration of a child at an Indian consulate.

The fresh notification grants the power to Collectors of Morbi, Rajkot, Patan and Vadodara in Gujarat; Durg and Balodabazar in Chhattisgarh; Jalor, Udaipur, Pali, Barmer and Sirohi in Rajasthan; Faridabad in Haryana and Jalandhar in Punjab. These are the areas

where the population of such migrants are concentrated.

In 2011, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government decided to give LTVs to hundreds of Hindus and Sikhs who came to India claiming religious persecution in Pakistan. Many came on pilgrim visa and continued to stay here after the expiry of the papers. According to data, the LTVs granted to Pakistani Hindus from 2011-2014 stood at 14,726.

Though there has been no exact numbers of such migrants who came to India on LTV or any other type of visa, officials estimate the number to be around two lakh.

There are around 400 Pakistani Hindu refugee settlements in Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Jaipur.

The MHA informed a Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Citizenship Amendment Bill in 2018 that 31,313 persons belonging to minority communities (Hindus - 25,447, Sikhs - 5,807, Christians - 55, Buddhists - 2 and Parsis - 2) were given LTVs on the basis of their claim of religious persecution. LTV is a precursor to citizenship.

Vaze, business associates framed me, says Chhabria

Car designer writes to Maharashtra CM

ALOK DESHPANDE

MUMBAI

Celebrity car designer Dilip Chhabria, who was arrested by the Mumbai Police in an alleged dual car registration scam in December 2020, has claimed in a letter addressed to the Maharashtra Chief Minister and the Home Minister that his business associates and Sachin Vaze framed him in the case and demanded ₹25 crore as extortion money when the jailed former policeman headed the Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU).

The police claimed that the accused's company, DC Designs Pvt. Ltd, had allegedly taken loans from non-banking financial companies by posing as customers who wanted to purchase the company's DC Avanti sports car.

Three FIRs were filed against Mr. Chhabria: two by the CIU and one by the Economic Offences Wing.

On May 17, Mr. Chhabria filed a police complaint, in which he named former business associates Kiran Kumar, and Sayed Afaaq;

Dilip Chhabria another complainant Indermal Ramani; policemen Mr. Vaze, Riyaz Kazi, and Prakash Howal; and comedian Kapil Sharma for conspiring to frame him in the case.

The police claimed that the accused's company, DC Designs Pvt. Ltd, had allegedly taken loans from non-banking financial companies by posing as customers who wanted to purchase the company's DC Avanti sports car.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Chhabria, who is out on bail after spending nearly four months in jail, said he has sought an appointment with the top political leaders in the State government and will be presenting to them documents on how he was framed by the police and his former business partners.

Two civilians killed in JK& militant attack

Srinagar
Two civilians were killed in a suspected militant attack in Anantnag district on Saturday. The incident took place around 8 p.m. at Paray Jabilipora in Bijbehara. "After the attack, both civilians were rushed to a nearby hospital where the doctors declared one as brought dead," a police spokesman said. The other person was referred to another hospital but he died on the way.

Doctor couple shot dead in broad daylight in Bharatpur

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

In a sensational broad daylight murder, two motorcycle-borne assailants shot dead a doctor couple travelling in their car on a busy road in Bharatpur town of Rajasthan on Friday.

The police suspect it to be a case of revenge killing, as the doctors were earlier arrested in connection with a murder case and were at

present out on bail.

The couple, Sudeep Gupta, 46, and Seema Gupta, 44, faced charges of burning alive a woman and her six-year-old son in 2019. Sudeep was allegedly in an illicit relationship with the woman.

The accused who murdered the couple were stated to be the woman's brother and cousin.

The assailants were identified based on CCTV footage

of the incident. The footage showed the duo stopping the couple's car and shooting them at point-blank range.

Sudeep died on the spot, while Seema succumbed to her injuries at the hospital, the police said.

The police said efforts were on to arrest the accused, who were identified as Anuj Kumar and Mahesh Kumar.

Kashmir, was

CBI arrests 4 Bhopal FCI staffers in bribery case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested four officials of the Food Corporation of India's Bhopal division in a bribery case.

The accused were identified as divisional manager Harish Hinonia, manager (accounts) Arun Shrivastava, manager (security) Mohan Parate and assistant Kishore Meena.

"Searches at six places in Bhopal led to

the seizure of about ₹3.01 crore in cash, gold jewellery weighing 387 gm, and 670 gm silver items. A part of the cash was allegedly kept in different envelopes, with bundles of notes bearing names, dates and other details.

Some cash was kept in a heavy safety vault concealed in a wooden almirah," said an official. The agency also seized a diary containing records of suspect financial transactions.

The NIA charged two Hizbul Mujahideen over-ground workers on Saturday in a case related to a criminal conspiracy to carry out terror attacks at different places in Uttar Pradesh and other parts of the country.

The chargesheet against Nisar Ahmad Sheikh, 52, and Nishad Ahmad Butt, 42, residents of Kishtwar, Jammu

and Kashmir, was filed before the National Investigation Agency special court in Lucknow under various Sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the IPC, the probe agency said.

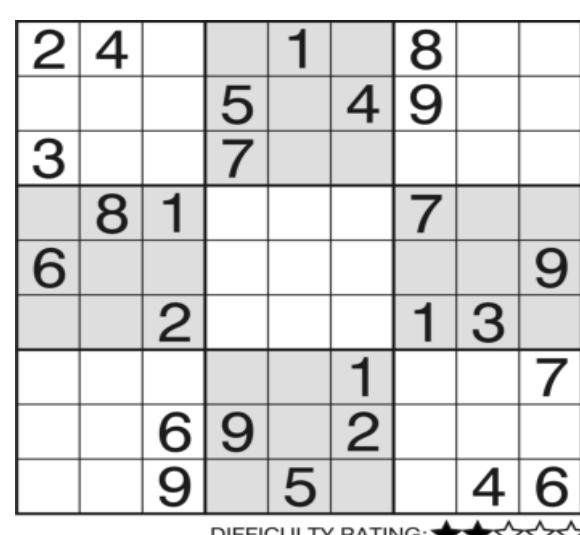
A case was first registered in Lucknow on September 12, 2018, against Kamruj Zaman and others relating to a criminal conspiracy by Hizbul-Mujahideen cadres to carry out terror incidents, it

said. The NIA had re-registered the case on September 24, 2018 and taken over the investigation, it said.

He said the NIA had earlier filed a chargesheet against arrested Zaman and absconding accused Osama Bin Javed on March 11, 2019.

Javed was later killed in an encounter with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district on September 28 that year.

SUDOKU



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★



Lt. Nikita Kaul. ■ ANI

Lt. Nikita Kaul, wife of officer killed in Pulwama, joins Army

Northern Command chief puts stars on her shoulders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

JAMMU

Twenty-seven months after she lost her husband in an anti-insurgency operation in south Kashmir's Pulwama, 29-year-old Nitika Kaul on Saturday donned the Army uniform after completing one-year rigorous training in Tamil Nadu.

Army's Northern Commander Lt. Gen. Y.K. Joshi pipped the stars on her shoulders at a simple ceremony held at the Officers Training Academy, Chennai, and wished her best of luck for future endeavours.

Lieutenant Kaul, originally a resident of Kashmir, was married to Major Vibhuti Shankar Dhoundiyal for just nine months when the news of him making the supreme sacrifice for the nation during a gunfight with Jaish-e-Mohammad militants turned her world upside

Kaul cleared the Short Service Commission (SSC) exam and interview last year and officially joined the Indian Army as an officer at the ceremony presided over by Lt. Gen. Joshi, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Udhampur-based Northern Command.

"#MajVibhutiShankarDhouniyal, made the Supreme Sacrifice at #Pulwama in 2019, was awarded SC (P). Today his wife @NitikaKaul dons #IndianArmy uniform; paying him a befitting tribute. A proud moment for her as Lt Gen Y K Joshi, #ArmyCdrNC himself pips the Stars on her shoulders!" the PRO Udhampur tweeted.

Lt. Kaul, who presented a brave face during the last rites of her husband at his home town Dehradun, had left her job with a multinational company in Delhi to join the Army.

SRMIST and *The Hindu* host webinar on experiential learning

Republicans block Capitol riots probe

Displaying loyalty to Trump, GOP foils bid to create 9/11-style panel to investigate the violence

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

Senate Republicans blocked creation of a bipartisan panel to investigate the deadly January 6 attack on the Capitol, displaying continuing party loyalty to former President Donald Trump and firm determination to shift the political focus away from the violent insurrection by his GOP supporters.

The Senate vote on Friday was 54-35 – six short of the 60 needed – to take up a House-passed Bill that would have formed an independent 10-member commission evenly split between the two parties.

Call for support

It came a day after emotional appeals for the commission from police who fought the mob, the family of an officer who died and lawmakers in both parties who fled Capitol chambers in the worst attack on the building in two



Stain on democracy: Supporters of Donald Trump scaling the west wall of the U.S. Capitol in Washington on January 6. • AP

centuries.

The Republicans were mostly but not totally united: Six voted with Democrats to move forward. Eleven Senators – nine Republicans and two Democrats – missed the vote, an unusually high number of absences for one of the highest-profile votes of the year. At least one of the missing Republicans would have voted in favour of consi-

dering the commission, according to his office.

The GOP opposition means that questions about who should bear responsibility for the attack could continue to be filtered through a partisan lens – in congressional committees – rather than addressed by an outside, independent panel modelled after the commission that investigated the Septem-

ber 11, 2001, terror attacks.

"The investigations will happen with or without Republicans," declared Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy, one of the Republicans who voted to move forward. "To ensure the investigations are fair, impartial and focused on the facts, Republicans need to be involved."

Avoiding reprisals

The vote was in part a GOP attempt to placate Mr. Trump, or avoid his reprisals, as he has kept a firm hold on the party since his defeat by Democrat Joe Biden. The former president told his supporters to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat before the siege and continues to falsely say he won the election – claims shouted by his supporters as they stormed the building. Trump called the commission legislation a "Democrat trap."

Friday's vote – the first



Mass testing: Residents lining up for COVID-19 testing in Liwan District of Guangzhou on Wednesday. • AP

Vietnam detects new hybrid variant

REUTERS
HANOI

Authorities in Vietnam have detected a new coronavirus variant that is a combination of the Indian and U.K. COVID-19 variants and spreads quickly by air, the Health Minister said on Saturday.

After successfully containing the virus for most of last year, Vietnam is grappling with a spike in infections since late April that accounts for more than half of the total 6,713 registered cases. So far, there have been 47 deaths.

"Vietnam has uncovered a new COVID-19 variant combining characteristics of the two existing variants first found in India and the U.K.," Health Minister Nguyen Thanh Long said in a statement.

"The new variant is very dangerous," he added.

The Southeast Asian country had previously detected seven virus variants: B.1.222, B.1.619, D614G, B.1.1.7 – known as the U.K. variant, B.1.351, A.23.1 and B.1.617.2 – the "Indian variant".

Online newspaper VnExpress said Mr. Long had described the new variant as a hybrid of the Indian and U.K. variants.

"The new one is an Indian variant with mutations that originally belong to the UK variant," Mr. Long was quoted as saying, adding that authorities would soon announce the name and detailed characteristics of the newly discovered variant.

Most of the latest infections in Guangzhou are believed to be linked to a 75-year-old woman who was found May 21 to have the variant first identified in India, state media say. Most of the others attended a dinner with her or live together.

That infection spread to the nearby city of Nanshan, where one new confirmed case and two asymptomatic cases were reported Saturday after people from Guangzhou were tested, according to *The Global Times*.

Grade schools were told

Chinese city locks down area amid virus surge

Hundreds of residents being tested

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIJING

The southern Chinese city of Guangzhou shut down a neighborhood and ordered its residents to stay home on Saturday for door-to-door coronavirus testing following an upsurge in infections that has rattled authorities.

Guangzhou, a business

and industrial centre of 15

million people north of

Hong Kong, has reported 20

new infections over the past

week. The number is small

compared with India's thou-

sands of daily cases but

alarmed Chinese authorities

who believed they had the

disease under control.

Spreading fast

The spread of infections was "fast and strong," the official *Global Times* newspaper cited health authorities as effect on June 3.

Further U.S. moves on Belarus could target "those that support corruption, the abuse of human rights, and attacks on democracy," Ms. Psaki said.

The White House also issued a "Do Not Travel" warning for Belarus to U.S. citizens, and warned American passenger planes to "exercise extreme caution" if considering flying over Belarusian airspace.

Meanwhile, economic

sanctions against nine Belarusian state-owned enter-

prises, reimposed by Wash-

Sri Lanka faces marine disaster after ship fire

Plastic waste piling up along coast

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka faces an unprecedented pollution crisis as waves of plastic waste from a burning container ship hit the coast and threaten to devastate the local environment, a top environment official warned Saturday.

Thousands of Navy ratings using mechanical diggers scooped tonnes of tiny plastic granules on the beaches that had come from the Singapore-registered *MV X-Press Pearl* that has been smouldering on the horizon for ten days.

Sri Lanka's Marine Pro-

tection Authority (MEPA) said the microplastic pollution could cause years of ecological damage to the Indian Ocean island.

"This is probably the worst beach pollution in our history," MEPA chairman Dharshani Lahapandura said.

The tiny polyethylene pellets threaten tourism beaches and fish-breeding in shallow waters.

Fishing has been banned along an 80 km stretch of coast near the ship that has been burning for 10 days despite an international fire-fighting operation.

Remains of 215 children found in school

Institution was created to help assimilate native children into Canadian society

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KAMLOOPS

The remains of 215 children, some as young as 3 years old, have been found buried on the site of what was once Canada's largest indigenous residential school – one of the institutions that held children taken from families across the nation.

Chief Rosanne Casimir of the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc First Nation said in a news release that the remains were confirmed last weekend with the help of ground-penetrating radar.

More bodies may be found because there are more areas to search on the school grounds, Ms. Casimir said Friday.

In an earlier release, she called the discovery an "unthinkable loss that was spoken about but never documented at the Kamloops Indian Residential School." It



Dark chapter: A new building at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia, circa 1950. • REUTERS

was the once the site of Canada's largest residential school.

Rampant abuse

From the 19th century until the 1970s, more than 1,50,000 First Nations children required to attend state-funded Christian schools as part of a programme to assimilate them into Canadian society. They

were forced to convert to Christianity and not allowed to speak their native languages. Many were beaten and verbally abused, and up to 6,000 are said to have died.

The Canadian government apologized in Parliament in 2008 and admitted that physical and sexual abuse in the schools was rampant.

Many students recall being beaten for speaking their native languages; they also lost touch with their parents and customs.

Indigenous leaders have cited that legacy of abuse and isolation as the root cause of epidemic rates of alcoholism and drug addiction on reservations.

A report more than five years ago by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission said at least 3,200 children had died amid abuse and neglect, and it said it had reports of at least 51 deaths at the Kamloops school alone between 1915 and 1963.

"This really resurfaces the issue of residential schools and the wounds from this legacy of genocide towards Indigenous people," Terry Teegee, Assembly of First Nations regional chief for British Columbia, said on Friday.

ELSEWHERE



Mali top court declares Goita as President

BAMAKO

Mali's constitutional court on Friday named Colonel Assimi Goita, leader of the post-coup junta, as the country's transitional President.

Soldiers detained caretaker President Bah Ndaw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane on Monday, before releasing them on Thursday after they resigned. AFP

Indonesia frees Iran-flagged tanker

JAKARTA

Authorities said on Saturday that two oil tankers – the Iranian-flagged *MT Horse* and Panamanian-flagged *MT Freya* – were released after a four-month detention for illegally transferring oil in Indonesian waters. AP

Philippines protests against China's 'illegal' South China Sea presence

This was 84th diplomatic protest since Duterte took office

REUTERS
MANILA

The Philippines has protested China's continuing "illegal presence and activities" near an island in the South China Sea held by the Southeast Asian nation, the Foreign Ministry said on Saturday.

Manila lodged the diplomatic protest on Friday over the "incessant deployment, prolonged presence, and illegal activities of Chinese maritime assets and fishing vessels" in the vicinity of Thitu island. It demanded its giant neighbour withdraw the vessels.

The Chinese Embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment outside business hours.

Tensions between Manila and Beijing have escalated over the months-long presence of hundreds of Chinese boats in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. The Philippines says it believes the vessels were manned by militia, while Beijing has said they were fishing boats sheltering from bad weather.

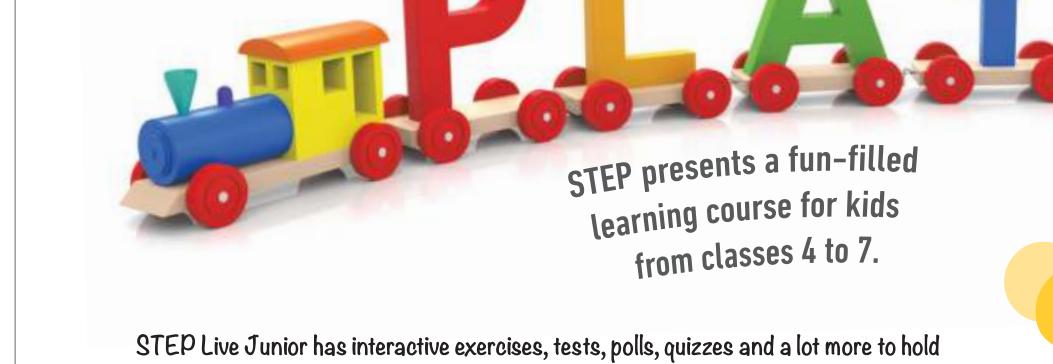
"The Pag-asa Islands is an integral part of the Philippines over which it has sovereignty and jurisdiction," the Ministry said in a statement.

Thitu, known as Pag-asa in the Philippines, is 451 km from the mainland and is the biggest of the eight reefs, shoals and islands it occupies in the Spratly archipelago.

China has built a mini-city with runways, hangars and surface-to-air missiles in the Subi Reef about 25 km from Thitu. This was at least the 84th diplomatic protest the Philippines has filed against China since President Rodrigo Duterte took office in 2016.

An international tribunal that year invalidated China's expansive claim in the South China Sea, where about \$3 trillion worth of ship-borne trade passes annually. Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have competing claims to various islands.

Mr. Duterte shelved the favourable ruling in exchange for pledges of billions of dollars of Chinese aid.



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SNAPSHOTS



Beat depression

Studying 840,000 people, University of Colorado Boulder and the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard researchers showed that a person's propensity to sleep at a certain time was tied to depression risk. The study published in *JAMA Psychiatry* finds that waking just one hour early cut major depression risk by 23%. It is unclear if those who normally get up early would benefit from waking even earlier.



Dark filaments

A new map has been published of dark matter in the 'local sheet' - a region spanning the Milky Way and local galaxies, those in the Virgo cluster and the local void (a relatively empty region in the local group). The study published in *The Astrophysical Journal*, also showed up new structures, including filaments that connect galaxies. Studying these dark matter filaments can shed light on future of the Milky Way.

'The goal of vaccines is to prevent severe disease and deaths'

R. PRASAD

After approving Covishield vaccination with a four-six-week interval between two doses despite evidence showing higher protection when the gap was more than 12 weeks, India changed the interval to six-eight weeks on March 22 when shortage of vaccines became apparent. With shortage of vaccines becoming more acute since then, on May 13, India once again changed the gap between two doses to 12-16 weeks even as highly transmissible variants were widespread in India. Dr. Gagandeep Kang, Professor of Microbiology at CMC Vellore explains the implications of the changes made in the midst of the second wave.

India approved Covishield with an interval of four-six weeks between two doses despite the MHRA approving AstraZeneca with 4-12 weeks gap and JCVI approving a 12-week prime-boost interval. What was the Indian drug regulator's rationale for deciding the second dose schedule four-six weeks after the first dose?

The Indian regulator's rationale for deciding the second dose schedule at an interval of four to six weeks was based on what had been done in the clinical trials that were conducted in India.

A paper in *The Lancet* based on a pooled analysis of four randomised trials found vaccine efficacy reached 82.4% when the second dose was given 12 weeks after the first but only about 55% when given less than six weeks after the first dose. So why did India not increase the interval between two

world data from those settings.

According to a May 24 preprint, in the UK, the effectiveness of a single dose of AstraZeneca/Covishield was only 33.5% against the B.1.617.2 variant and 51.1% against the B.1.1.7 variant. After the second dose, the protection increased to 59.8% against the B.1.617.2 variant and 87.9% against the B.1.1.7 variant. With the B.1.617 and B.1.1.7 variants being the most prevalent in India should we not be reducing the gap between two doses especially since the protection against B.1.617 from the first dose is just 33.5%?

I think it is important to emphasise that the report from the UK which shows variant specific protection is only against all symptomatic infection and does not consider severe disease. Since the goal of vaccines is to prevent severe disease and deaths,

doses to 12 weeks in early February?

In my opinion India should have increased the interval between two doses to 12 weeks in February. However, the committees that decide on policy for India were clearly unconvinced that a 12-week gap was supported by evidence.

What evidence was available for India to change the interval between two doses to six-eight weeks on March 22?

From the clinical trials and the real-world evidence that was available by mid-March there was no data that distinguished between specifically periods up to eight weeks and those beyond eight weeks.

On May 13, the government changed the interval between doses to 12-16 weeks based on real-life evidence. But even in the UK the interval was only up to 12 weeks. So where did the government get real-life evidence to change it to 12-16 weeks?

As far as I am aware, the only data that is available beyond a period of 12 weeks is the data from the phase-3 clinical trials. Spain and Canada had proposed longer intervals, but I am not aware of real-



Gagandeep Kang ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

either from India or from the UK we should be generating the data that tells us how well vaccines are performing with a single dose against severe disease. The UK decision on shortening the interval is not based on available evidence but does rely on the fact that they have immunised all adults with the first dose and have supplies to be able to vaccinate their population with the second dose.

Since the B.1.617.2 variant is fast-spreading in the UK, the government has reduced the gap between two doses to eight weeks in those over 50 years and the clinically vulnerable population. Under these circumstances, what is the justification for

India to increase the interval between doses to 12-16 weeks?

There are two ways to make a decision. One is to have data to support the decision. Currently no country has data to inform how well vaccines work with an eight-week gap. In fact, given that India was the only country to have a six-eight-week gap between doses from March, and in above 60 years, we could potentially be able to provide that data to the world.

The second way to make a decision is to model different scenarios that can be varied for predicted vaccine performance against variants and use that to decide whether

and what policy change is required. I assume the UK did this.

I am not aware that we have any data or any model that states that the decision was incorrect.

How much real-world data are available to support a gap of 12-16 weeks for Covishield when B.1.617 variant is widespread?

None

Though the first dose of Covishield has 51.1% against the B.1.1.7 variant, the second dose increases the protection to 87.9%. Since B.1.1.7 variant is widespread in India, is it correct to increase the gap between two doses?

Against severe disease, a single dose of Astra-Zeneca vaccine has 80% protection. If the goal is to prevent severe disease, then it makes sense to use available doses to immunize more people with a single dose. For me, in the absence of evidence of performance of a single dose against severe disease due to B.1.617.2, I would be reluctant to change at a time when we still have intense transmission, and the opportunity to modify disease severity in a larger population with a single dose.

Is the logic of partially

protecting more people with a single dose than increasing the level of protection in fewer people correct given that the first dose is only 33.5% protective against the B.1.617.2 variant, which is the most prevalent in India today?

Once again, these data are for all symptomatic infections. We have not reached a stage in vaccination where we are trying to prevent all disease or all infection.

Will a partially protective (33.5%) single dose lead to the generation of vaccine escape variants?

No. . Protection is not measured at the level of the individual, but at the level of the population. Vaccine escape variants could be generated in persons in whom the virus can continue to replicate and mutate in the presence of antibodies.

Considering the shortage, can people already infected receive two doses at 12-16 weeks while the rest get it at 8-12 weeks interval?

Previously infected people have some protection, we do not know yet whether they might be equally protected with just a single dose. However, for the programme to vary schedule based on history of infection is difficult.

IIT Mandi researchers reveal key SARS-CoV-2 protein structure

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CThis virus has 16 non-structural proteins (NSP1–NSP16), of which the NSP1 plays a vital role in the pathogenicity

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, Mandi (IIT Mandi) in Himachal Pradesh have revealed the part of structure of a key protein in COVID-19 virus, which helps in understanding its mode of action, its role in the spread and severity of the disease and development of antiviral therapeutics. The findings have been published in *Current Research in Virological Sciences*.

"One route to neutralising any virus is to attack its proteins. Such an approach holds true for the COVID-19 virus as well, and scientists across the globe are involved in studies to elucidate the structure and functions of these proteins to understand the viral disease and develop drugs that are effective against the virus," said Rajanish Giri, Assistant Professor of Biotechnology, IIT Mandi.

This virus has 16 non-

structural proteins (NSP1–NSP16), of which the NSP1 plays a vital role in the pathogenicity

structural proteins (NSP1–NSP16), of which the NSP1 plays a vital role in the pathogenicity (ability to cause disease) of the virus.

The NSP1 disrupts the proteins of the host cell and suppresses its immune functions. Its importance can be understood by the fact that it is also called the 'host shutoff factor'. Earlier in 2020, we have shown through bioinformatics studies that NSP1 C-terminal region has intrinsic disorder propensity between 0.4 to 0.5 scales – very close to borderline of intrinsic disorder prediction.

"However, without experimental studies we were not sure that this 13-180 amino acid region is actually an intrinsically disordered protein. The other members of the team include IIT Mandi research scholars Amit Kumar, Ankur Kumar and Prateek Kumar, along with Neha Garg from the Banaras Hindu University.

The researchers have shown the dynamic changes in the conformation of the IDR of the NSP1, in response to its surroundings, due to hydrophobic and electrostatic interactions between the protein and the environment.

The researchers have

ASWATHI PACHA

With extremely cold winters and pleasant summers, the State of Uttarakhand is home to the Western Himalayan temperate forests which harbour a large number of endemic bird species.

A new study that analysed these natural oak-dominated forests and modified forests has noted that there was a drastic loss of bird species in all modified landscapes.

The researchers studied an area of about 1,285 square kilometres between the altitudes of 1,700 and 2,400 metres. Six major land-use types which included natural oak forest, degraded oak forest (lightly used), lopped oak forest (intensively used), pine forest, agricultural cultivation area and sites with buildings were studied.

The results showed that there was a low diversity of species in monoculture areas and urban sites. They also noted a drastic loss of pollinator birds and insecti-

vores in the degraded forests, monocultures and urbanised sites. The results were published recently in *Global Ecology and Conservation*.

Habitat guilds

Ghazala Shahabuddin, first author of the paper from the Centre for Ecology, Development and Research, Dehradun, adds: "We also noticed strong decline in some of the habitat guilds in the areas that experienced land-use change."

Habitat guilds are groups of bird species that have common habitat preferences. For instance, forest specialists include species which forage and breed only in dense protected oak forests at this altitude, while forest generalists can adapt to modified habitats such as orchards and degraded forests.

The researchers noticed that many of the species that dropped out of the modified land areas were recognised



Low diversity: The researchers noted a drastic loss of pollinator birds and insectivores in the degraded forests, monocultures and urbanised sites. ■ RAJKAMAL GOSWAMI

Science, Bengaluru.

They also noted that two species (rufous-bellied woodpecker and greater yellow-nape) showed great potential as indicators of forest quality as they were most likely to be found in dense canopied forests with larger and taller trees on which they preferred to forage.

"With tourism and other anthropogenic activities increasing in the region, we are witnessing rapid invasion by non-native species. One would not expect to see pigeons and Black Kites in these altitudes, but with increasing concrete urban ghettos, these birds have become a common sight now," adds Rajkamal Goswami who was associated with the Centre for Ecology, Development and Research, Dehradun, while carrying out the field surveys. He is currently working with the Ashoka Trust for Research and the Environment (ATREE) and is one of the authors of the paper.

Our inheritance from the Neanderthals

Modern humans acquired varying skin, hair colour, immunity from them



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. BALASUBRAMANIAN

While people like me, in their eighties, use the wrist watch to know the time of the day, today's 'hip' youngsters, typically clad in blue jeans with pre-planned rips at the right place and a watch carrying facilities that not only tell the time but also the right tweets, movies and music of the present day. Compared to them, people like me are museum pieces. But when I challenge some of the more 'knowledgeable' among them, about how early this technological advance has come about, they proudly point out that right here in India, there is the Qutub Minar and its Iron Pillar in Delhi, both from the Iron Age.

Modern humans

'Modern' humans have populated the earth from long before the Iron Age, for some 300,000 years, cohabiting Mother Earth along with other pre-human hominins.



Decoding history: Modern human population in the Bacho Kiro cave region had interbred with the 'locals' and produced a cross-bred group of people ■ GETTY IMAGES

CNeanderthals arose about 430,000 years ago and did not evolve in Africa, as *Homo sapiens* did.

move a few milligrams of powder, from which DNA is extracted and sequenced. Sometimes, you don't even need the fragment, dwelling places like caves have extractable DNA in their sediments! Notable driving forces behind all these technical and intellectual advances in this field include the Swedish geneticist Svante Pääbo and the biochemist Johannes Krause. 'Modern' humans interbred with the locals in these regions. Recently a thigh bone of such a cross-bred individual was found in Bulgaria first, more than 50,000 years ago and left their stone tools. Next came modern humans in two or more waves, and littered the cave with beads and stones about 45,000, and then 36,000 years ago.

Compete or co-operate Did they compete with us *Homo sapiens*, or was there cooperation? Answers to such questions have come, one fragment at a time, from studies on the genetics of populations from Asia and Europe in places where migration brought the species face to face. The techniques for these analyses are also advancing rapidly – all you need today is a bone fragment or, even better, a tooth – these are drilled to re-

they are connected to present-day East Asians and Native Americans. The descendants of these Eurasian cave dwellers appear to have packed up and moved eastward, finally enduring the hardship of crossing an ice-age Bering Strait, and the luxury of visa-free travel, into the Americas.

Conferring immunity

Further studies on the genomes of the Neanderthals themselves allow a comparison with those of modern humans (see reference above) and give us a glimpse of the genetic changes in the DNA sequences of the two. The chunks inherited from Neanderthals were whittled down to 2%, but what advantages did these newly acquired genes confer on humans? Having adapted to colder regions for 400,000 years, the Neanderthals gave us out-of-Africa humans variations in skin and hair colour better suited to the cold, as well as adaptive variants for metabolism and immunity – to help better adjust to strange new food sources and to unfamiliar disease-causing viruses in the new environment.

Genetic connections Tracing the genetic lineages of these four individuals, it is somewhat surprising that no traces are to be found among today's Europeans. However,



Question Corner

Resisting worms

Do worms have an immune system? How do they fight infections?

Roundworms (*Caenorhabditis elegans*) are animals that lack dedicated immune cells. But they are constantly under attack from viruses and fungal parasites called microsporidia.

Researchers from the U.S. have now decoded the complex dynamics that are involved in how these organisms sense an infection. The paper published last month (*Plos Pathogens*) notes worms can sense changes in their metabolism and then unleash protective defenses, even if they don't directly sense the pathogens.

The team studied an important biological pathway in the worms – the purine metabolism



Roundworm. ■ GETTY IMAGES

pathway. The results suggest that the host has developed ways to sense the theft of purine metabolites. It seems that when these key cellular building blocks are stolen by the pathogen, the host senses this theft to mount an immune response to the pathogen, explains first author Eileen Tellez in a release. The team adds that studying worms can also shed light on some purine-related compound mutations seen in human diseases. Lead author Emily R. Troemel added in a release that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's important to study these questions of immunity in lots of different systems to build new tools so that we can learn how to prevent and treat infections.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

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AND-NDE



SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Serosurvey learnings

Does the knowledge of the extent of exposure to COVID-19 help to plan for the next wave? Why is the ICMR unlikely to launch a fourth study any time soon?

JACOB KOSHY

The story so far: Since the pandemic began in 2020, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) conducted three countrywide serosurveys to measure the spread of infection due to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The third one (from December 17-January 8) showed that 21.5% of the population had been exposed to the virus. Up to May 23, India has been able to fully vaccinate only 3% of the population and only 10.9% had received one dose. There are indications that the ICMR is unlikely to immediately undertake a fourth national serology survey to estimate the extent of exposure to the coronavirus since January this year.

Why are serology surveys important? Serology surveys take blood samples from participants and measure antibodies to check past exposure to the virus. From about 10 days after infection, antibodies grow to sizeable numbers in most patients. As some studies show, they start to decline after five to six months. Researchers are more interested in a class of antibodies called Immunoglobulin G (IgG), that persist the longest and latch onto the coronavirus to prevent them from proliferating and so their longevity and numbers are proxies to immunity against future infection. Because the SARS-CoV-2 virus is new, there is uncertainty on how long these antibodies actually last. Serology surveys are thus a crude measure of what proportion of a population is likely to be protected from a second infection; this can be used by planners to decide on future health-care capacity and opening up the economy.

How many serology surveys have been conducted so far? The ICMR has conducted three national serology surveys since May 2020 and found that the exposure to the virus was several times that reported by confirmed cases. The third serosurvey that measured the spread of infection from December to early January found that 21.5% of India's adult population and 25% of those between 10-17 years old may have been infected. Before that in August-September, it was 7% and the first survey, May-June 2020 estimated infection rate at 0.73%. The ICMR survey spanned 70 districts, across 21 States, that were meant to include high and low prevalence of the infection as well as the spread of the infection in rural and urban India and enrolled about 28,000 individuals. Subsequent surveys were conducted in the same districts but included those from 10-17 years as well as health-care workers. There have also been several city specific surveys in Pune, Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai – sometimes several rounds – to assess spread among various districts. Many of these surveys, at least before the second wave struck, appeared to suggest that over 50% of the population in urban clusters may have been exposed to the virus.

The three surveys showed that large parts of the country were unexposed to the virus and hence at risk of infection, as the second wave underlined

Why is the ICMR not likely to conduct a fourth serology survey? India's devastating second wave began around mid-March amidst a vaccination programme that prioritised health-care and front-line workers, and senior citizens. The antibodies that are triggered after a SARS-CoV-2 virus infection are structurally indistinguishable from those after one is vaccinated. However, studies do show that those vaccinated after being exposed to the virus have much higher levels of antibodies than those vaccinated. Add to it the complication of waxing and waning antibody numbers. Dr Balram Bhagava, Director General, ICMR, told *The Hindu*, "Serosurveys lose their scientific relevance once vaccination starts in the population."

In theory it could be possible to adjust for this by eliminating those who have been vaccinated from the survey. However, health officials claimed that due to the vicious second wave, hospitals and health-care infrastructure in several districts were overwhelmed by dealing with the surge in cases. A serology survey is a logically demanding exercise as detailed interviews need to be undertaken with participants, trained phlebotomists have to be available and dedicated laboratories have to earmarked to analyse the blood work. This would require extensive inputs from the districts. Apart from the infections, the focus at the regional level should be on vaccination, and by all accounts, India is struggling to keep up with demand. Only 10.9% of the population has got a single dose in spite of nearly 20.4 crore vaccines having been administered. It is quite possible that the ICMR might consider a future survey when the situation is more amenable.

Can serology surveys reveal more than just exposure?

Surveys provide information on the questions they are designed to ask. Tellingly, the second serology survey did point to an increase in infections in rural India. These surveys showed that large parts of the country were unexposed to the virus and hence at risk of infection – as the second wave underlined.

The specific blood-analysis tests, called assays, can be used to check if antibodies produced by the body are targeting the spike region of the coronavirus or an inner envelope containing its genetic material called the nucleocapsid. The antibodies against the spike are believed to be more relevant to preventing future infections and hence a better proxy for immunity. They can also thus provide inputs for improving vaccines.

The Centre-WhatsApp tussle over new IT rules

How has the Government of India responded to the tech giant's lawsuit over privacy issues?

SRIRAM SRINIVASAN

The story so far: On May 25, Facebook's messaging platform WhatsApp moved the Delhi High Court against India's new Information Technology rules. May 25 was the deadline for IT intermediaries to comply with the new rules, the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 (<https://bit.ly/3yOTNwo>), notified in February.

What is WhatsApp's problem with the new rules? Under the new rules, a "significant social media intermediary providing services primarily in the nature of messaging shall enable the identification of the first originator of the information on its computer resource as may be required by a judicial order..." This is the rule WhatsApp finds problematic.

To simplify, a significant social media intermediary, as per the new norms, is a social media intermediary which has more than 50 lakh registered users. WhatsApp, which reportedly has close to half a billion users in India, is a significant social media intermediary. It is also a service "primarily in the nature of messaging". The rules, therefore, require WhatsApp and those offering messaging services and having a user base of over 50 lakh to be able to trace 'problematic' messages to their originators. The requirement is one of traceability, and WhatsApp is opposed to it.

Why is WhatsApp opposed to traceability?

WhatsApp's messaging system is end-to-end encrypted, which means, in its own words, "only you and the person you're communicating with can read what's sent, and nobody in between, not even WhatsApp". This has been the case since 2016. The encryption protocol that it uses is one that was developed by Open Whisper Systems, which is well known for its Signal app.

Traceability, according to WhatsApp, is a threat to user privacy.

In its blog, titled 'What is traceability and why does WhatsApp oppose it?' (<https://bit.ly/3i28lml>), it argues that traceability would end up "breaking the very guarantees that end-to-end encryption provide". It says, "In order to trace even one message, services would have to trace every message." The reason it says this is because there is no way to know what a government would want to investigate in the future.

A WhatsApp spokesperson has been quoted in *The Hindu* as saying that: "Requiring messaging apps to 'trace' chats is the equivalent of asking us to keep a fingerprint of every single message sent on WhatsApp, which would break end-to-end encryption and fundamentally undermine people's right to privacy."

Further, in its blog, WhatsApp has said that traceability violates human rights. It says, "Innocent people could get caught up in investigations, or even go to jail, for sharing content that later becomes problematic in the eyes of a government, even if they did not mean any harm by sharing it in the first place." This, it says, could pertain to cases where people shared something just out of concern or for checking its accuracy.

WhatsApp also says traceability doesn't work. It gives an example: "If you simply downloaded an image and shared it, took a screenshot and resent it, or sent an article on WhatsApp that someone emailed you, you would be determined to be the originator of that content." And that is why it reckons that "tracing messages would be ineffective and highly susceptible to abuse".

Even without traceability, WhatsApp says, "We respond to valid requests by providing the limited categories of information available to us, consistent with applicable law and policy. We also have a team devoted to



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WhatsApp claims traceability will end up breaking the guarantees end-to-end encryption provide. The government of India says it is committed to the right of privacy of citizens but that it is also responsible for ensuring national security

Technology, Stanford Internet Observatory, Electronic Frontier Foundation, and Internet Freedom Foundation to bolster its point.

What, for example, are the types of information shared by WhatsApp under a legal process?

In the U.S., for instance, WhatsApp, under different requirements of law, may be compelled to share the name, start date of the service, last seen date, IP address, email address, numbers blocked by the user, 'about' information, profile photos, group information, and address book.

How has the Government of India responded to this?

Electronics & Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has said the government "is committed to ensure the Right of Privacy to all its citizens but at the same time it is also the responsibility of the government to maintain law and order and ensure national security."

A release by the Ministry of Electronics and IT elaborates on two legal points related to the traceability requirement. The first is regarding reasonable restrictions, or the conditions that could trigger a traceability order by a court. The release says, "No Fundamental Right, including the Right to Privacy, is absolute and it is subject to reasonable restrictions." A traceability order shall only come about, as Rule 4(2) states, "for the purposes of prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution or punishment of an offence related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order, or of incitement to an offence relating to the above or in relation with rape, sexually explicit material or child sexual abuse material, punishable with imprisonment for a term of not less than five years".

The second legal argument is about the test of

assisting law enforcement 24/7 with emergencies involving imminent harm or risk of death or serious physical injury. We consistently receive feedback from law enforcement that our responses to requests help solve crimes and bring people to justice."

WhatsApp has also cited the pro-privacy arguments of organisations such as Mozilla, Access Now, Internet Society, Center for Democracy and

proportionality, the cornerstone of which, as the release says, "is whether a lesser effective alternative remedy exists". The traceability measure will be a measure of "last resort", according to the release, which cites the rule in this regard. The rules further state that "in complying with an order for identification of the first originator, no significant social media intermediary shall be required to disclose the contents of any electronic message, any other information related to the first originator, or any information related to its other users".

The Ministry has also criticised WhatsApp for making "no specific objection" to this requirement till date. The release says, "Any operations being run in India are subject to the law of the land. WhatsApp's refusal to comply with the guidelines is a clear act of defiance of a measure whose intent can certainly not be doubted."

It also makes a reference to another issue where WhatsApp and the government have a difference of opinion. It says, "At one end, WhatsApp seeks to mandate a privacy policy wherein it will share the data of all its users with its parent company, Facebook, for marketing and advertising purposes. On the other hand, WhatsApp makes every effort to refuse the enactment of the Intermediary Guidelines which are necessary to uphold law and order and curb the menace of fake news."

The Ministry release also refers to a communiqué issued by the governments of the U.K., the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Canada in 2019. What did the communiqué say?

While welcoming strong encryption as a means of safeguarding user privacy, the communiqué, however, said, "We are concerned where companies deliberately design their systems in a way that precludes any form of access to content, even in case of the most serious crime. This approach puts citizens and society at risk by severely eroding a company's ability to identify and respond to the most harmful illegal content... Tech companies should include mechanism[s] in the design of their encrypted products and services whereby governments, acting with appropriate legal authority, can obtain access to data in a readable and usable format."

How long has the traceability debate in India been going on?

Antony Clement Rubin vs Union of India was one of the recent prominent cases where the question of traceability was discussed (there were other similar cases as well). This came up initially in the Madras High Court as a petition to link users' Aadhaar number with their social media accounts. The Supreme Court of India eventually took over the case but not before technical solutions on tracing the originator were heard. WhatsApp has maintained all along the impossibility of traceability coexisting with end-to-end encryption. The last hearing in this case was in early 2020.

Probing the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 virus

Why have some scientists revived the laboratory leak theory over the zoonotic spillover hypothesis?

G. ANANTHAKRISHNAN

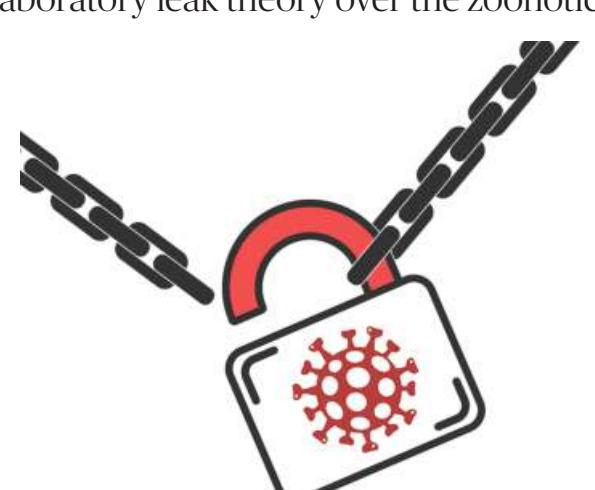
The story so far: On May 14, a group of 18 scientists, most of them from the U.S., led by David A. Relman, published a letter (<https://bit.ly/3yLAcgx>) in the journal *Science*, calling for further investigation to determine the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their reasoning was that in spite of a lot of scientific progress in "understanding the causative agent, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), its transmission, pathogenesis, and mitigation by vaccines, therapeutics, and non-pharmaceutical interventions", more work needed to be done. This was necessary because the two theories on the origins – the virus could have been accidentally released from a laboratory or it was the result of a spillover from some animal species to humans – both remained valid. The novel coronavirus was first reported from Wuhan, a Chinese city hosting a laboratory conducting virus research, and the Program for Monitoring Emerging Diseases (PROMED) notified pneumonia of unknown cause in the city on December 30, 2019. The city's Huanan wet market was associated with many of the earliest cases.

What have U.S. intelligence agencies been asked to do?

Since the call issued by scientists, U.S. President Joe Biden, on May 26, ordered an investigation by intelligence agencies into the origins of the virus (<https://bit.ly/3uY4Yps>). The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has also acknowledged that more work needs to be done on the lab leak theory, although a WHO team that visited Wuhan thought a leak to be the least likely hypothesis. Kristian G. Andersen, a professor at the Department of Immunology and Microbiology at the Scripps Research Institute in the U.S., and his colleagues have hypothesised that the virus emerged from natural mutations.

Why has the demand for a fresh inquiry arisen? WHO's governing forum, the World Health Assembly, mandated the Director-General in May 2020 to conduct an inquiry into the origin of SARS-CoV-2, and a joint probe was carried out by WHO and China in January–February 2021. Since there was no conclusive evidence for either hypothesis – natural spillover or lab leak – there were apprehensions when the report leaned in favour of the animal origin hypothesis, describing it as "likely to very likely", and stated that a laboratory incident was "extremely unlikely".

Responding to the report, Dr. Tedros said he did not



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see the investigation as being extensive enough, and went along with the view that more studies were necessary. "Although the team has concluded that a laboratory leak is the least likely hypothesis, this requires further investigation, potentially with additional missions involving specialist experts, which I am ready to deploy," he informed WHO Member-States at a briefing on the report in March this year (<https://bit.ly/3fyR7M2>).

One of the researchers who signed the letter to *Science*, Marc Lipsitch, argued that neither laboratory origin, nor natural origin had been ruled out. There was no positive evidence available from the inquiry. He was particularly concerned that the lab leak possibility had been given inadequate attention by the WHO team, and, in fact, treated as a "conspiracy theory". Understanding the origin of the virus was important to both increase safety in laboratories undertaking biological research, and to prevent pandemics of animal origin.

What is the basis for the natural origin hypothesis? Based on its study of possible natural origins, the Joint WHO-China study report (<https://bit.ly/34sVPV7>) identifies a SARS-related coronavirus in a (horseshoe) bat (SARS-CoV; RaTG13) to which the SARS-CoV-2 virus has 96.2% genomic similarity. The novel coronavirus is less similar, by comparison, to the genome of viruses that have caused other epidemics such as SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome). Again, the higher infectivity of SARS-CoV-2 is attributed to peculiarities that it contains in the form of unique insertion of four amino acids in its spike protein that makes it more efficient than the virus causing SARS,

WHO's chief feels that more studies are necessary. According to experts, understanding the origin of the virus is important to increase safety in laboratories undertaking biological research, and to prevent pandemics of animal origin

for instance. Kristian G. Andersen, who wrote about the "Proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2" along with his colleagues in *Nature* (March 17, 2020; <https://go.nature.com/3i2oClg>), concluded that natural selection on a human or human-like host appeared to facilitate optimal binding of the spike protein of the novel coronavirus with ACE2 receptors. "This is strong evidence that SARS-CoV-2 is not the product of purposeful manipulation," the authors wrote.

Their arguments are based, among other things, on genetic differences between the viruses: while the RaTG13 in bats is extremely similar to SARS-CoV-2, the receptor binding domain (RBD) of the spike – the RBD protein binds to the ACE2 receptor – actually is divergent for the two, with the former appearing less efficient. Again, some coronaviruses found in pangolins in China are similar to SARS-CoV-2 in the RBD, showing that the optimised spike protein for efficient binding with human-like ACE2 may have resulted from natural selection. It could be hypothesised that while no direct link could be identified to a progenitor virus for the one that has paralysed the world, the process by which the virus could adapt itself to spread among intermediate animals and then humans was a natural one.

It is also possible that a progenitor virus was acquired by humans, and it became more efficient at transmission as it spread among humans during an undetected phase. Dr. Andersen examined the possibility that there could have been an inadvertent release of SARS-CoV-2 from a laboratory, but argues that no progenitor virus with very high genetic similarity for such an experiment has been described, and the changes to the virus to transmit efficiently would have involved its repeated passage through cell cultures or animals with similar ACE2 receptors, which have not been described either.

What does stand out in the present crisis is the emerging call for a global framework for safe biological laboratory research, and more insight into related coronaviruses, animal hosts, mutations, and pathways by which novel viruses infect humans.

LAKSHADWEEP

Between the sea and a hard place

The new administrator's proposals, including a beef ban and a Goonda Act, have triggered widespread protests among the islanders

S. ANANDAN

In December 1961, Jawaharlal Nehru despatched a fighter pilot-turned-civil servant to a tiny group of islands located southwest of mainland India in the Arabian Sea with the 'challenging' mission of steering it into the modern era.

Moorkoth Ramunni, who took over as the fourth administrator of the Union Territory of Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi islands formed in 1956, quickly won the hearts of minds of the islanders. He walked with the people, accustomed himself to their ethos, marvelled at the atolls surrounding the tiny landmasses and spent several nights on their sprawling sandy beaches.

The island chain witnessed a new dawn as Ramunni brought in some path-breaking reforms. Land was apportioned between tenants and landlords, with the tenants receiving three quarters of a parcel. At village meetings held in the glow of kerosene lamps, historic decisions were taken, including the one to float cooperative societies for marketing island merchandise such as coir, copra and fish. The relocation of the Dweep administration office to Kavaratti from Kozhikode, then Calicut, gave momentum to the administrator's initiatives to eradicate leprosy and to set up schools.

"To improve their means of livelihood, he introduced them to tuna fishing using live bait which was until then not known to the islanders

except those of Minicoy," recalls Ali Manikfan, 83, marine researcher and ecologist from Minicoy. When Ramunni left the archipelago in the summer of 1965, he took a slice of it with him. So much so, that his home in Thalassery near Kannur was named after the smallest of the islands in the chain, Bitra.

Sixty years later, the same islands that embraced Ramunni and his reforms are up in arms against a host of proposed policies by another administrator, a political appointee. A 'Save Lakshadweep' campaign is gaining strength and the Chief Ministers of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, among others, have pledged their support to it.

Myths, ballads, facts

The archipelago's early history is anchored in a sea of

■ K.K. MUSTAFAH

about its discovery is one about a search party for a king who went missing while on a voyage to Mecca accidentally spotting these isles. "A Kolathiri king is believed to have sent people, mostly farmers, from north Kerala to settle down here. They came under the rule of the Arakkal family in Kannur whose origins are mired in local legends. There's this tale about a Muslim rescuing a drowning princess who subsequently marries him, taking away with her suzerainty over these isles and Kannur," says M. Mullakkoya, former secretary of the Lakshadweep Sahitya Kala Academy and a resident of Kiltan island.

The islanders fell on bad times as the Arakkal family's interest was predominantly in filling their coffers using their *karyakars* (revenue collection agents) on these islands. When an Arakkal king tried to monopolise coir trade by asking the islanders to only sell it in Kannur, the Amini group of islands revolted and sought the help of Tipu Sultan, who entered into a pact with Arakkal and se-

cured rights over the Amindivi group of islands. However, when Tipu fell in the battle of Seringapatam in 1799, this group came under the British rule. Meanwhile, the Arakkal family, which remotely governed the Laccadive and Minicoy islands, fell into a debt trap laid by the British and the inability to pay off debts and the tribute forced it to forfeit control over these islands to the British in early 20th century.

In an island chain with over 96% of Muslim population, the advent of Islam is traced to the legend of a saint named Ubaidulla, who landed following a shipwreck on the shores of Amini in AD 7. On the Androth island, the largest in the group with just 4.9 sq. km. area, is a tomb in his name. News of India's Independence came to the islands about three months later. The southwest monsoon was raging and the ships remained at berth. When the islanders who left for the mainland after mid-September returned, they broke the news of India's freedom triggering celebrations, recalls Dr. Mullakkoya.

The British system of hav-

ing two separate collecto- rates – Malabar for the Laccadive group and Mangalore for the Amindivi group – continued till 1956 when it was all united to form the Union Territory. It was renamed Lakshadweep in 1973. If Ramunni had laid the foundations of a modern Lakshadweep, Omesh Saigal, who was administrator in the early 1980s, cut through bureaucracy to bring helicopter service mainly for evacuation of seriously ill patients to Kochi for medical treatment.

The tourism potential of these emerald islands, 36 in total with an estimated population of about 70,000 people on the 10 inhabited islands and with vast lagoons covering 4,200 sq km area, dawned on the administration in the 1980s when Bengalaram island was leased out to a hotel chain. The arrangement, though an international hit, ran into rough weather some 20 years later with the government taking over the reins following litigation that went up to the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, tourism societies formed in all islands ensured that the UT, a notified Scheduled Tribes (ST)

district with outsiders' entry limited by permits, conducted tourism in keeping with the ethos of the people and a ban on alcohol was fitting.

Coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Independence, then administrator Rajeev Talwar brought a 'Kochi-Agatti-Goa-Agatti-Kochi' daily flight to further boost tourism. The Lakshadweep Development Corporation Ltd (LDCL), formed in the late 1980s, also began operating passenger ships and cargo barges.

Local elections

Though a Panchayat Regulation was notified in 1994 and the maiden local elections were held three years later, powers have largely remained with the administrator. The role of the district planning committee chaired by the collector and the sole MP as one of its members is to draft a development plan.

In 2015, following a Supreme Court order, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change notified an integrated island management plan (IIMP), which sought to enhance the productivity of the UT with-

out compromising on its coral reef ecosystem or the people's customs.

Life in the UT was peaceful and at a languid pace, free of COVID-19 for nearly a year, thanks to a quarantine stipulation for inbound travellers in Kochi when in December 2020, a new administrator, a former BJP leader named Praful Khoda Patel, set foot on Kavaratti following the demise of the incumbent. In one stroke, he reversed its success against COVID-19 – the UT has seen over 7,000 cases since – and proposed a slew of draft pieces of legislation ranging from a beef ban, a law to cut back the powers of elected representatives of panchayats, an arbitrary Goonda Act regardless of the low rate of crimes in the UT and a law for the creation of a land development authority with sweeping powers for eviction.

The UT is in the throes of an unprecedented agitation now with appeals for the repeal of these proposals and recall of the administrator resonating across the country. "It's a life and death situation for us," says an islander.

ROMAN PROTASEVICH

Plucked from the sky

The dissident journalist was arrested after his plane was force-landed in Minsk

G. SAMPATH

On May 23, Roman Protasevich, a 26-year-old Belarusian journalist, boarded a Ryanair flight from Athens, Greece, to Vilnius, Lithuania, with his girlfriend Sofia Sapega (23), a Russian law student. The flight, with 123 passengers on board, was scheduled to land in Vilnius in two hours and 50 minutes. But it would only reach its destination more than seven hours later, with six passengers missing.

When the plane was over Belarusian air space, flight controllers informed the pilot that there was a bomb threat. They ordered him to make an emergency landing in Minsk, the capital of Belarus. When the pilot hesitated, a MiG fighter jet was despatched to "escort" the aircraft to Minsk. When the plane landed, KGB agents – the Belarusian secret service still goes by the old Soviet name – whisked away Mr. Protasevich and Ms. Sapega. After an interminable wait, the flight finally took off for Vilnius without Mr. Protasevich, Ms. Sapega, and four suspected KGB agents who had boarded the plane in Athens.

It has since emerged that the 'bomb threat' – the ostensible reason for the emergency landing – was a ruse to divert the aircraft so that the Belarusian regime could arrest Mr. Protasevich, a prominent dissident. Reacting sharply to what has been described as a "state-

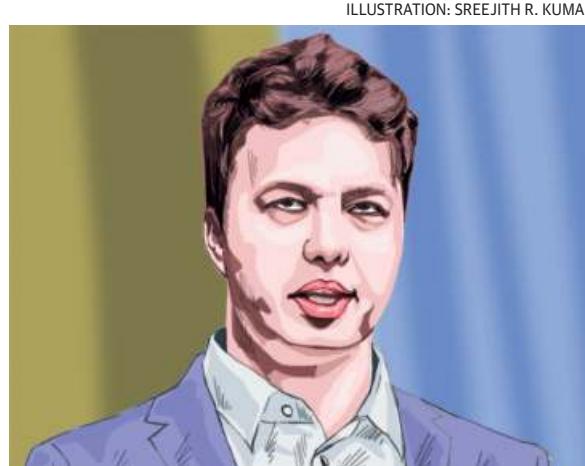


ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

sponsored hijacking", the European Union has banned Belarusian airlines from EU air space while ordering EU-based airlines to boycott Belarusian air space. Economic sanctions are likely to follow.

The whole operation was carried out on the orders of President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus for 27 years. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mr. Lukashenko became the first President of independent Belarus in 1994. He has been "re-elected" six times. His victory in the most recent elections, held last year, provoked mass protests. Mr. Lukashenko unleashed a brutal crackdown that saw more than 35,000 people arrested, media muzzled, and Opposition activists either jailed or driven to exile. Mr. Protasevich has been active in anti-Lukashenko politics since his teens, going to jail at the age of 17. After studying

journalism at the Belarusian State University, he worked as a news photographer. In 2019, fearing for his life, he took political asylum in Poland. He started working for Warsaw-based Nexta, a Belarusian news channel on the Telegram platform. He has been instrumental in documenting and sharing with the world the protest movement against Mr. Lukashenko.

Peaceful protests
Mr. Protasevich's channel also helped in organising peaceful demonstrations against the Lukashenko regime by sharing details such as the date and time of protest meetings. His visit to Athens was for an economic conference where he also met Belarus' Opposition leader and Lukashenko's erstwhile opponent in the Presidential elections, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya. It was for all these activities that Belarus last November branded Mr. Protasevich a



'terrorist' and issued a warrant for his arrest.

Following his mid-sky capture, and in what has become standard procedure followed by the Lukashenko regime to discredit its critics, Belarusian authorities put out a video that shows Mr. Protasevich 'confessing' to his role in organising "mass riots" in Minsk. His family members say he has been coerced into it, and point to the bruises on his face. In another video, Ms. Sapega, who is not known to have been politically active, is seen "confessing" to running a Telegram channel that "publishes personal information about officers in the Interior Ministry".

Mr. Protasevich's detention has provoked international outrage. Western governments, including the U.S., have called for his immediate release and an international probe into the "hijacking". Belarus, however, seems unlikely to yield, given the backing it enjoys from Russia. For the Kremlin, Belarus is a critical counterweight against what it views as Western overreach in Ukraine and Crimea. This instance of Belarus violating international law and civil aviation norms to silence a dissident is expected to further alienate Belarus from the West and tighten Russia's grip over a country ruled by a man often described as 'Europe's last dictator'. As for Protasevich, under Belarusian law, he faces 10-15 years in jail, if not the death penalty.

SUBODH KUMAR JAISWAL

The chief investigator

A host of high-profile corruption cases are awaiting the new CBI Director

DEVESH K. PANDEY

After taking charge as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Director on May 26, Subodh Kumar Jaiswal has been busy holding back-to-back meetings with senior officials of various departments to get a feel of the challenges lying ahead of him over the next two years. This is his first stint with the agency. Mr. Jaiswal is the second officer from the Maharashtra cadre to head the CBI after Mohan Ganesh Katre, who held the post from February 1985 to October 1989.

Born on September 22, 1962, Mr. Jaiswal completed his schooling in Dhanbad, which is now in Jharkhand. He completed graduation in English from DAV College in Chandigarh and Master's in Business Administration from Panjab University, before clearing the UPSC examination at the age of 23 in 1985.

Mr. Jaiswal had served as Superintendent of Police in Gadchiroli, Aurangabad and Osmanabad, and supervised several anti-naxal operations. He subsequently held the posts of Deputy Inspector-General in-charge of a Special Investigation Team, Additional Commissioner of Police (Anti-Terrorism Squad, Mumbai) and Inspector-General of Police (Amravati Range).

Mr. Jaiswal spent 16 years in Central deputation. He served the Close Protection Teams of the Prime Minister during his six-year tenure



ILLUSTRATION: J. A. PREMKUMAR

with the elite Special Protection Group (SPG). He also worked with the Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) in various capacities from June 2008 to 2018. He rejoined the Maharashtra Police and was appointed as Mumbai Police Commissioner in July 2018 and then the State Police chief in February 2019.

During the Maha Vikas Aghadi government, Mr. Jaiswal differed with the political dispensation on the issue of transfer and postings. He sought a no objection from the State government for another Central deputation and then took over as the Director-General of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) on January 8, 2021.

Limiting factor
While Mr. Jaiswal comes with a unique blend of experience in the fields of spycraft, administration and investigation, many see his long deputation with agencies like the SPG and the

charges against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh.

In a large number of cases, domain knowledge is required for efficient supervision. Therefore, the CBI chief has to be open to seeking expert opinion. "A majority of the important cases land up at the Director's table for a range of decisions, like who all to prosecute, while the others get decided at the level of DIG or IG. The Director should be able to scrutinise the investigation reports within a short span of time and also ensure through his immediate deputies that the investigation is conducted objectively, professionally and concluded in a time-bound manner," said retired IPS officer Navneet R. Wasan, who had served the CBI as a joint director.

As the CBI chief, Mr. Jaiswal would be required to coordinate with the legal wing to ensure that prosecutions are done properly. In order to address the quality manpower issue, he would have to persuade capable officers to join the agency on deputation and, at the same time, also get the process of their appointments expedited. Another key responsibility of Mr. Jaiswal would be to strengthen international cooperation for cases involving cross-border crimes and pending extradition/deportation requests. However, right now, the most important task at hand would be to quickly build a team he can rely upon.

Petrol price exceeds ₹100 in Mumbai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Petrol price on Saturday crossed the ₹100-a-litre mark in Mumbai after the 15th increase in fuel prices this month.

Petrol price was raised by 26 paise and diesel by 28 paise, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

The increase – 15th this month – took petrol and diesel prices to fresh all-time highs.

The price of petrol, which had already crossed the ₹100-mark in several cities in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, breached the psychological barrier in Mumbai on Saturday.

Petrol now costs ₹100.19 a litre in Mumbai and diesel is priced at ₹92.17.

Industry laments inadequacy of GST compliance relaxations

'Overall expectation was a complete waiver of late fees for pandemic-hit months'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The GST compliance relaxations announced on Friday to help businesses cope with the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic need to be enhanced to provide meaningful relief to firms hit by the ongoing severe disruption, industry representatives contend.

Following the GST Council's meeting, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an amnesty scheme for late fees on small businesses' pending returns from July 2017 to April 2021, and lower interest rates for tax payment delays for the months of March to May this year, among other measures.



Badly hit: Industries such as hospitality and travel also require some relaxation to sustain, say representatives. ■ AFP

"About 89% of the GST taxpayers constitute small tax payers, so tax payers can now file their pending returns and avail the benefits of the amnesty scheme with reduced late fee," she had said. "late fees have also been

rationalised, so that it's not too high or too low for some," she added.

Industry body FICCI said the amnesty scheme to reduce the late fee would provide some relief to the small taxpayers, but it would re-

commend 'a waiver from the late fees and interest' too.

"While the announced relaxations are a welcome relief to the pandemic ridden businesses, the overall expectation was a complete waiver from payment of late fees, especially for the months where the pandemic had disrupted business since early 2020," said Sandeep Jhunjhunwala, Partner, Nangia Andersen LLP.

Industries hit hard due to COVID such as hospitality and travel also require some relaxation to be able to sustain themselves, said Shweta Walecha, director at Lakshmikumaran & Sridharan Attorneys.

"The council has not discussed such issues."

"We are gradually resuming production operations following all COVID-19 guidelines [set] by the respective State governments," said president and CEO Atsushi Ogata.

"While there are visible signs of recovery, we will continue to monitor the situation very closely."

Biden's big budget comes with a modest growth outlook for an ageing country

At \$6 trillion, the outlay is about 50% higher than pre-COVID federal spending

REUTERS

President Joe Biden's first budget proposal comes with a big price tag – at \$6 trillion, roughly 50% higher than pre-COVID-19 federal spending – but, at least for now, projects a relatively modest long-term lift to the economy, likely reflecting concerns about the ageing U.S. population.

The administration's spending blueprint for the fiscal year ending in September 2022 would increase spending on infrastructure, education and combating climate change.

But it comes with forecasts for near-term growth



Joe Biden

that do not reflect the rapid improvement in the economy so far this year.

With the help of \$1.9 trillion in additional stimulus spending approved earlier this year, the economy grew

at an annualised rate of 6.4% in the first quarter, a pace projections from both the Survey of Professional Forecasters and Federal Reserve officials see persisting through the year.

By contrast, the Biden budget pegs growth this year at just 5.2%. Council of Economic Advisers Chair Cecilia Rouse said forecasts underlying the budget were locked down in early February, assumptions administration officials plan to revisit later this year.

Also notable is the rapid deceleration in growth expectations after next year, to between 1.8% and 2% each

year from 2024 through 2031.

Economists said the Biden projections likely factor in two systemic headwinds to a prolonged run of above-trend growth: the country is ageing rapidly, and the workforce is not growing.

The Census Bureau in 2017 estimated that 20.5% of the U.S. population would be 65 or older by 2030, compared with about 16.8% at the start of this decade.

"These are very solid numbers in light of those demographic realities," said Julia Coronado, president of analysis firm MacroPolicy Perspectives.

BoB posts loss in Q4 as it shifts to new tax regime

Lender's FY21 net profit surges 52%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Bank of Baroda (BoB) reported a standalone net loss of ₹1,046.5 crore for the quarter ended March 31.

The bank had posted a net profit of ₹506.6 crore in the year-earlier period. For the fiscal year 2020-21, the bank reported a 52% rise in net profit to ₹829 crore.

"The bank moved to a new tax structure thus reporting a loss of ₹1,047 crore because of DTA (deferred tax asset) reversal.

"Excluding the impact of the change in the tax regime, the bank would have reported a profit after tax of ₹2,267 crore in Q4FY21 and ₹4,143 crore in FY21," it said

HMSI restarts production, to aid dealers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) said it had resumed production across its manufacturing plants in the country.

It has also announced financial support for authorised dealers who were under complete lockdown.

As per the initiative, HMSI will bear the full interest cost of the dealer's inventory under lockdown for 30 days or more.

Millennials – those in the age group of 25-40 years – are on average taking loans of ₹6,000 and the loan demand has peaked exponentially in small towns and rural regions in the wake of the second wave of COVID-19. Demand for loans had surged in tier 2, 3 and 4 cities during the first wave as well.

'Second wave sees loans for millennials rising 20%'

Chennai women top list: Smartcoin

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

About 20% more millennials borrowed to meet COVID-19 related emergency healthcare expenses and other financial commitments during April compared with a year earlier, according to Smartcoin Financials, which analysed data generated by its lending app.



more than 17,000 pin codes across India. It has a loan book of ₹500 crore and has disbursed in excess of three lakh loans to more than one lakh borrowers.

The April 2021 loan count analysed by the firm showed Tamil Nadu's contribution was highest at 9%, and has gone up to 10% so far in May, indicating a demand surge.

Lack of insurance cover
The number of women borrowers in Chennai were found to be higher at 15%, as compared with 9% in the rest of India.

Medical/hospital needs took up the largest chunk,

22%, among reasons indicated for availing of loan in April, followed by bill payment (9%), house rent (7%), education fees (7%) and EMI payments (7%). Overall national figures reflected a similar order of priority for availing of loans.

Currently, the need is to address the increasing requirement of payments by the working class that is not covered under insurance plans, the firm said.

In the pre-COVID period, the demand for loans intended for medical requirements were at 18% and in August-September 2020 the number went up to 28%.

Divi's Labs net rises 29% on higher income

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Drugmaker Divi's Laboratories reported consolidated net profit rose 29% to ₹502 crore for the quarter ended March.

It came on the back of total income increasing 24% to ₹1,811.7 crore.

For FY21, the net profit rose 44% to ₹1,984.3 crore. Total revenue increased 26% to ₹7,032 crore. The company has declared a dividend of ₹20 a share.

As per a statement, during the fiscal, a capex programme, with an estimated investment of ₹400 crore, for fast-tracking a custom-synthesis project was introduced. A part of the project has got completed and became operational.

SPORT

‘Car sales to rebound two years after COVID shock’

Vaccination pace crucial: M&M CEO

REUTERS
NEW DELHI

India's Mahindra & Mahindra expects it will take at least another two years for car sales to return to their pre-pandemic peaks, but a slow pace of vaccinations could hurt recovery prospects, its chief told Reuters.

Battered by the pandemic in 2020 and an economic slowdown in 2019, passenger vehicle sales in India fell to 2.7 million units in the last fiscal year – their lowest level in six years and well below the peak of 3.4 million units in fiscal year 2019.

Mahindra CEO Anish Shah said sales would rebound by fiscal year 2023 if a majority of the population is inoculated and new CO-



VID-19 cases ease, helping the economy recover.

"Getting back to full normal is going to depend on vaccinations... (else) we will always have the fear of the next wave coming in and disrupting things again," said Mr. Shah.

India has recorded 28 million cases so far, second only to the U.S. Yet, only about 3% of 1.3 billion people have been fully vaccinated.

INTERVIEW | RAMESH RAMANATHAN

Lockdown changed customers' holiday patterns'

We are managing to keep our head above water with collections from members: Sterling Resorts chief

N. ANAND

Sterling Holiday Resorts Ltd. is planning to double the number of rooms in the next four years to 4,800, says chairman Ramesh Ramanathan. Excerpts:

What has been the impact of the pandemic on business?

down, to improve, but not rapidly.

Will FY22 be any better?

From October 2020 to March 2021, occupancies continued to grow, but not to previous levels. Still, we made a profit due to various cost-control and productivity-enhancement measures initiated by us. We were in a comfortable position and reported profit despite occupancy being at 50% to 55%. Normally, occupancy level would have been over 65%.

We expect the coming months, after lifting of lock-

tions in a more efficient way. We are taking up digitisation across our properties and this has helped us to be more positive in this period and perform better.

On impact of the lockdown on the hotel industry...

presently closed. We are betting on the next nine months of uninterrupted business and that depends, on which States are opening up for business and when.

What is the biggest learning from the pandemic?

The pandemic has taught us a big lesson, especially in terms of running the opera-

once normalcy sets in.

What is the proposed capital expenditure for FY22?

We are going to follow an asset-light model and so [there will be] no major capex for the current year. We will be entering into management contracts with property owners who will provide inventory and infrastructure. Employees, except general manager and CFO, will be from our side.

On expansion plans...

Right now, we have 2,400 keys (rooms) in 35 resorts. Our vision is to have 4,800 keys through 60 to 70 resorts. But this pattern will change,

Bajrang Punia to train in Russia

Plans to spar with champion grapplers to prep for Olympics

WRESTLING

S.Y. SARANGI
KOLKATA

Bajrang Punia is confident that his decision to skip the Ranking Series tournament in Poland in order to train in Russia will give him some much-needed sparring with world class wrestlers.

Bajrang, the World No.1 in men's freestyle 65kg category, underlined the importance of good training ahead of his maiden Olympics.

"I cancelled Poland because I needed training more than anything else. The National camp is not going on and training is not happening (due to the pandemic). My ranking is good. When we fight for a medal, it is important how much we have trained," Bajrang said during an online press con-



Getting ready: Bajrang will skip a tournament in Poland to hone his skills in Russia ahead of the Tokyo Games ■ FILE PHOTO

ference, facilitated by the Sports Authority of India, on Saturday.

Elite gathering
"I will train in Vladikavkaz, where (Zaurbek) Sidakov (74kg World champion) is training. The 2016 Olympics champion (in 65kg) Soslan

Iniyan ends Gukesh's run to take the lead

CHESS

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

In what was seen as the virtual title-decider, involving two teenage Grandmasters, P. Iniyan pulled off a win over a previously-unbeaten D. Gukesh in the 14th round to snatch a half-point lead in the AICF World Cup qualifier on Saturday.

With three rounds to go, the race for the lone World Cup berth is among three youngsters – Iniyan (10.5 points), Gukesh (10) and Raithiv (9.5) – while second seed S.P. Sethuraman (9) has a slim chance.

Decisive round

Effectively, the picture should get clearer at the end of the 15th round on Sunday morning, when Iniyan takes

Rithvik and Gukesh clashes with S.L. Narayanan.

The day's results firmly shut the door on three other leading seeds – B. Adhiban, Surya Shekhar Ganguly and Narayanan – after they suffered more reverses. Deep Sengupta beat Adhiban, Aditya Mittal stopped Ganguly, who in turn, defeated Narayanan.

Laibatuhsaihi (64kg), Pooja Rani Bohra (75kg) and Anupama (+81kg) will also aspire to be continental champions when they take on Kazakh Milana Safranova, Uzbek Mavluda Movlonova and Kazakh Lazzat Kungeibayeva respectively.

Sanjeet, Amit Panghal (52kg) and Shiva Thapa (64kg) will also fight in the finals on Monday.

Four Indian women boxers look for gold

SPORTS BUREAU DUBAI

Four Indian women, including six-time World champion M.C. Mary Kom, will look to land the gold in the finals of the Asian boxing championships here on Sunday. Mary's 51kg title clash with Nazym Kyzaibay of Kazakhstan will be eagerly awaited.

Laibatuhsaihi (64kg), Pooja Rani Bohra (75kg) and Anupama (+81kg) will also aspire to be continental champions when they take on Kazakh Milana

TV PICKS

Roland-Garros: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 2.30 p.m.; SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 3.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Jemimah to play for Northern Superchargers

MUMBAI
India batter Jemimah Rodrigues will be representing the Northern Superchargers in the inaugural edition of The Hundred. Speaking at BBC's *Stampd* podcast, Jemimah said: "I am really looking forward to The Hundred. Something new, something different. I have played for the Yorkshire Diamonds and my team is the Northern Superchargers." ANI

Indian team to stay in 'managed isolation': ICC

DUBAI
The Indian team will stay in "managed isolation" before the World Test Championship final against New Zealand, the ICC announced on Saturday but did not mention the exact period of hard quarantine upon reaching UK. World's top two Test teams will fight it out at the Hampshire Bowl in Southampton from June 18-22. While New Zealand is already in England, the Indian team will arrive in the UK on June 3 after competing a 14-day quarantine period in India. PTI



WTC final: India to sport retro jersey

NEW DELHI
Virat Kohli-led Indian cricket team will be donning a retro jersey in the upcoming World Test Championship (WTC) final against New Zealand. All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja shared the photo on Twitter and he captioned the post as: "Rewind to 90's #lovingit #India." The sweater donned by Jadeja has a blue V-neck border, that used to be a regular feature in the longest format till the 90s. ANI

Banthia-Rai pair finishes runner-up

MONASTIR (TUNISIA)
Siddhant Banthia, seeded fourth with Ajeev Rai of New Zealand, was beaten 6-4, 6-4 in the doubles final by third seeds Jeremy Beale and Thomas Fancutt of Australia in the \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament here on Saturday.

Milkha stable, wife's oxygen requirement increases

CHANDIGARH
Doctors treating Milkha Singh said on Saturday that his condition remained stable but the oxygen requirement of wife Nirmal Kaur rose marginally days after being admitted in a hospital with COVID-19. Milkha and wife continued to be closely monitored by the doctors.

BCCI confirms IPL's resumption in UAE

To seek extension of time from ICC to take an appropriate call on the hosting of T20 World Cup

CRICKET

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), on Saturday, decided to move the suspended Indian Premier League (IPL) to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in September-October and authorised office-bearers to buy more time from the International Cricket Council (ICC) for finalising the T20 World Cup venue.

"The BCCI announced to complete the remaining matches of IPL 2021 in UAE considering the monsoon season in India in the months of September-October this year," Jay Shah, BCCI secretary, said in a statement released after Saturday's Special General Meeting (SGM).

"The SGM further authorised the office-bearers to seek extension from ICC to take an appropriate call on the hosting of ICC T20 World Cup 2021."

The Hindu understands that IPL chairman Brijesh Patel and IPL chief operating



Positive vibes: The defending champion Mumbai Indians will hope the change in venue inspires the team to the pinnacle again. ■ FILE PHOTO: SPORTZPICS/BCCI

officer Hemang Amin are awaiting clearance from UAE authorities to leave for the Gulf and start dialogue and preparation for IPL's return to its last year's venue.

Only viable option

The office-bearers are understood to have stressed the September-October window and UAE as the venue being the only viable option for completing the IPL, sus-

pended on May 4 due to COVID-19.

While the BCCI is looking at the window between Sept. 20 and Oct. 10 for pulling off the IPL, the Caribbean Premier League final is scheduled on Sept. 19. Besides, England and Australia have international commitments.

"When we raised concerns about overseas players' availability, the president (Sourav Ganguly) in-

formed the house that the BCCI is consulting other boards and stressed that the IPL will go ahead with who-soever is available," a member who attended the meeting said.

Many representatives were bemused when the resolution about the IPL cited "monsoon" as the reason instead of COVID-19 outbreak. "It was understandable con-

sidering the desperation to

Compensation package to be delayed

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

BCCI treasurer Arun Dhumal has said that the delay in announcing details of a compensation package for all stakeholders of domestic cricket is not due to lack of will.

"It's not that we don't want to do it. The AGM had decided it in principle. There are several hurdles in its implementation, so now we need to get all the State associations involved."

The process will start very soon and we hope to

come up with a formula that is satisfactory to all the players and officials," Dhumal told *The Hindu* on Saturday.

Last December, the BCCI AGM had decided to form a committee to devise a package due to curtailed domestic season owing to the pandemic.

Since then, domestic cricketers and others involved – men and women, umpires, match referees, scorers and video analysts – have been virtually left in the lurch, with many struggling to make ends meet.

As part of the preparation for the WTC final, the Kiwis played a three-day team intra-squad game here. The global governing body has also allocated June 23 as a reserve day to make up for any lost time during the regular days of the final.

Nadal chasing record 21st Major

Iga Swiatek has the form to defend the women's crown

History beckons

- Rafael Nadal will be gunning for a record-breaking 21st men's singles Grand Slam title and a record-extending 14th French Open crown. He is tied with Federer on 20 in the all-time Slam tally
- Swiatek will aim to become the first French Open women's singles champion to defend the title since Henin (2006 & 2007). The last woman to achieve the feat at any Slam was Serena (2016, Wimbledon)
- Serena will make yet another attempt to tie Margaret Court's record of 24 Majors. The American has been chasing it since winning the 2017 Australian Open
- Federer will be playing his first Grand Slam match since the 2020 Australian Open semifinal loss to Djokovic
- Osaka, the reigning Australian and US Open champion, will look to better her best-placed finish in Paris until now, the third round (2016, 2018, 2019)
- Djokovic, who has won 18 Majors, will look to pull within one trophy of Nadal and Federer
- Teen sensation Coco Gauff will be seeded at a Major for the first time in her career. The 17-year-old is the 24th seed and is on a career-best ranking of 25

RAFAEL NADAL

MEN 4-Thiem vs Andujar | 5-Tsitsipas vs Chardy | 6-Zverev vs Otte

SUNDAY'S PICKS

2-Osaka vs Maria Tig | 3-Sabalenka vs Konjuh | 11-Kvitova vs Minnen

Tomar shoots 1172

SHOOTING

SPORTS BUREAU
OSIJEK (CROATIA)

Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar shot 1172 in men's rifle 3-position event in the MQS section of the European shooting championship here on Saturday. The 20-year-old Tomar had a series of 395 in kneeling, 392 in prone and 385 in the standing position. Sanjeev Rajput shot a total of 1162, with 392 in kneeling, 391 in prone and 379 in standing section.

Henrik Larsen of Norway topped the qualifiers with 1186. He had a series of 398, 399 and 389 in kneeling, prone and standing positions respectively. There were 28 who shot 1170 or more.

Coaches to join Indian team

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Pistol coaches Pavel Smirnov and Ronak Pandit left for Zagreb, Croatia, on Saturday to join the Indian shooting preparing for the Olympics in that country.

Smirnov could not accompany the team earlier owing to a delay in getting a visa, while Pandit and other coaches Samareh Jung and Jaspal Rana were also unable to leave for various reasons. "Jaspal and I are waiting for the visa and will join the team next week," said Jung.

The Indian team has been competing in the MQS section of the ongoing European championship at Osijek, to get more competitive exposure. There will be a World Cup at the same venue in June.

Korda claims maiden Tour title

TENNIS

REUTERS
PARMA

Sebastian Korda beat local favourite Marco Cecchinato 6-2, 6-4 to win the Emilia-Romagna Open in Parma and claim his maiden title on the ATP Tour.

It was also the first triumph for an American on European claycourts since Sam Querry's success at Belgrade in 2010.

Son of former World No. 2 Petr Korda, Sebastian joined

Ramanathan Krishnan and Ramesh Krishnan, and Phil Dent and Taylor Dent as the third father-son pair to win tour-level singles titles in the Open Era.

Meanwhile at Belgrade, Novak Djokovic enjoyed success at his own tennis centre when he won the Belgrade Open with a 6-4, 6-3 win over Slovakian Alex Molcan in Saturday's final but his performance left a lot to be desired ahead of the French Open.

It was Djokovic's first tri-

umph since he clinched his 18th Major at the Australian Open in February. Since then, he has endured patchy claycourt season, including a last 16 exit at the Monte Carlo Masters.

The results (finals):

At Belgrade: ATP Belgrade Open: Novak Djokovic bt Alex Molcan 6-4, 6-3.

At Parma: ATP Emilia-Romagna Open: Sebastian Korda bt Marco Cecchinato 6-2, 6-4.

At Strasbourg: WTA Strasbourg International: Barbara Krejicikova bt Sorana Cirstea 6-3, 6-3.

FIRST MATCH

June 13

vs North Macedonia, 9.30 p.m.

Bucharest

ALL ABOUT AUSTRIA

COACH Franco Foda

ONE TO WATCH Christoph Baumgartner

DID YOU KNOW? It is more than three decades since Austria's last victory at a major finals, beating the United States 2-1 at the 1990 World Cup

DEFENDERS: David Alaba, Aleksandar Dragovic, Marco Friedl, Martin Hinteregger, Stefan Lainer, Philipp Lienhart, Stefan Posch, Christopher Trimmel, Andreas Ulmer

MIDFIELDERS: Julian Baumgartlinger, Christoph Baumgartner, Florian Grillitsch, Stefan Ilsanker, Konrad Laimer, Valentino Lazaro, Marcel Sabitzer, Louis Schaub, Xaver Schlager, Alessandro Schopf

FORWARDS: Marko Arnautovic, Michael Gregoritsch, Sasa Kalajdzic, Karim Onisiwo

KEY PLAYER Marko Arnautovic | Austria has had difficulties unlocking defences in recent years, but in China-based Arnautovic it has a forward who invariably finds the key

COMPILED BY S.V. SRIRAM | SOURCE: UEFA/AGENCIES

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NZ heads to London for Test series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SOUTHAMPTON

After acclimatising to the conditions in Southampton, which will host the World Test Championship (WTC) final against India next month, the New Zealand team travels to London for the two-match series against England.

New Zealand is scheduled to play England in two Tests, in London and Birmingham, starting June 2, following which it will face India in the WTC final from June 18 to 22 at the Rose Bowl here.

"The New Zealand team travels to London today," the New Zealand Cricket (NZC) wrote on its official Twitter handle on Saturday.

As part of the preparation for the WTC final, the Kiwis played a three-day team intra-squad game here. The global governing body has also allocated June 23 as a reserve day to make up for any lost time during the regular days of the final.



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