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### NEARBY



#### Revisit circular capping rates for treatment: HC

NEW DELHI  
The Delhi High Court on Friday directed the city government to "revisit" its June 2020 circular capping per-day package rates for COVID-19 treatments in private hospitals at ₹18,000, saying "hospitals will run at a loss" in the current scenario.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

#### Court says situation in Punjab, Haryana critical

CHANDIGARH  
The Punjab and Haryana High Court on Friday asked the Centre to consider reorientation of the supply of oxygen from various plants in such a manner that the allocated quantity reaches Punjab and Haryana before there is a shortage. It noted that the situation in the two States and Chandigarh seems critical.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4



## We mean business: SC to Centre on Delhi's quota

Apex court tells govt. to supply 700 MT of oxygen every day

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

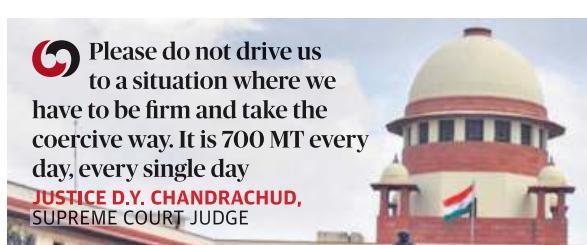
The Supreme Court on Friday underlined the obligation of the Union government to comply with the order to supply 700 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen to Delhi "every day", saying "we mean business".

A Bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah warned the Centre of forcing the court into taking "coercive action" against it by renegeing on its promise in court to supply 700 MT of oxygen to Delhi, which is battling a devastating second wave of COVID-19.

The court's comments came soon after senior advocate Rahul Mehra submitted that Delhi had received 86 MT of oxygen till 9 a.m. and another 16 MT was in transit.

The court referred to a tabulated chart detailing the Centre's "comprehensive plan" for the allocation, supply and distribution of oxygen to the national capital.

"You start by saying 700 MT and then as you go on, you bring caveats about containers coming in etc... We



JUSTICE D.Y. CHANDRACHUD,  
SUPREME COURT JUDGE

are not container drivers here. We want 700 MT every day and we mean business," Justice Chandrachud addressed Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre.

Justice Chandrachud said he and Justice Shah had a discussion before the hearing on the issue and agreed that the court in its previous orders intended that Delhi should get 700 MT every day.

"We did not mean that you supply 700 MT on one day. We meant you do it every day until we further examine the modalities. Please do not drive us to a situation where we have to be firm and take the coercive way. It is 700 MT every day, every single day," Justice Chandrachud emphasised.

Mr. Mehta said he would

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 3 & 10

convey the court's observations to the authorities concerned during the day.

#### May 5 directive

On May 5, the Supreme Court ordered the Centre to burn the midnight oil and prepare a "comprehensive plan" for the supply of 700 MT of life-saving oxygen to Delhi on a daily basis.

The plan submitted by the Central government had to identify the sources of supply of oxygen to Delhi; the provisions for transport and logistical arrangements, including distribution points for oxygen.

The court had noted that the lack of oxygen was causing "tremendous anxiety" in the Capital.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Karnataka HC judicious in ordering oxygen: SC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday upheld a Karnataka High Court order of May 5 directing the Union government to supply 1,200 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen every day to the State.

A Bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah described the interim order of the High Court as a "careful, calibrated and judicious exercise". The top court pointed out that even the Karnataka government had projected a need for 1,800 MT of oxygen if the number of cases climbed to 3.95 lakh.

In the cases, the Bench noted, had gone up to 4.95 lakh on May 5, and the minimum requirement was 1,100 MT.

"Hence, the High Court order shows an extraordinarily well-calibrated approach... *Prima facie*, the government is under an obligation [to provide the oxygen]," Justice Chandrachud addressed Solicitor General Tushar Mehta.

An official release said the

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

DMK president M.K. Stalin, 68, was on Friday sworn in as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Governor Banwarilal Purohit administered the oath of office and secrecy to Mr. Stalin and 33 Ministers on the lawns of the Raj Bhavan.

In keeping with Dravidian rationalist tradition, the DMK leader, who took oath as "Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin", and his Cabinet colleagues took their oaths invoking their "conscience".

Soon after assuming office at Fort St. George, the new Chief Minister signed five files to implement major promises made in the DMK's election manifesto.

These included offering ₹4,000 as COVID-19 relief to family cardholders, free travel on city buses (ordinary) for women and a reduction in the retail price of Aavin milk by ₹3 per litre from May 16. In a sign of continuity, Mr. Stalin signed the files with Karunanidhi's foundation pen.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Chief Minister ordered the implementation of a financial assistance of ₹4,000 to each of the 2.07 crore rice ration card holders across the State in view of the pandemic-induced hardship. The assistance would be provided in two instalments and the first instalment of ₹2,000 would be given in

With a 33-member team, T.N. CM keeps key poll promises



T.N. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin greeting Governor Banwarilal Purohit in Chennai on Friday. ■ S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

May. The State government would incur an expenditure of ₹4,153 crore towards this.

Mr. Stalin announced that COVID treatment in private hospitals would be covered for beneficiaries of the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Second wave declining, third can be prevented: scientist

VijayRaghavan calls for strict guidelines

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

India can avoid a third COVID-19 wave, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India K. VijayRaghavan said on Friday, stressing that, "If we take strong measures, the third COVID wave may not happen in all the places or indeed anywhere."

Dr. VijayRaghavan's statement comes just two days after he said, "Third COVID wave is inevitable in India given the high levels of virus that is circulating. But it is not clear at what time scale this phase 3 will occur."

Speaking at a Health Ministry press conference, Dr. VijayRaghavan said prevent-



Distress signals: A COVID-19 patient waiting for admission outside a hospital in Visakhapatnam on Friday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

ing a third wave depends on how effectively the guidelines are implemented and followed. "Infections rise when the virus has the opportunity to infect humans."

Responding to a question on when the second wave, which has already infected lakhs and killed thousands,

STATES TOLD TO GIVE PRIORITY TO SECOND DOSE ▶ PAGE 10

will ebb, Dr. VijayRaghavan said it has already started declining in some places. The number of cases and the positivity will decline, and there will be a lag in hospitalisation and mortality, he added.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

## Hefty hospital bills lead to rush at usury dens

Kin of patients pawn every bit of gold in their hands

ABHINAV DESHPANDE  
HYDERABAD

Jyothi, a 35-year-old homemaker from Old Alwal, could not pull herself together when doctors at a private hospital asked for ₹1.2 lakh to treat her COVID-positive husband.

She found herself helpless with no savings from the meagre income of her husband, an autorickshaw driver. The amount was needed urgently for three doses of Remdesivir, which the doctors said would cost at least ₹30,000 each.

The hapless woman had no option but to pledge her



mangalsutra (wedding necklace) and the little gold she had.

"I was crying all the way to the nearby pawnbroker, who said he would give only ₹1 lakh at an interest of 2.5% a month. I pleaded with him to give ₹1.2 lakh, but he reiterated his terms and refused relatives as she nurses her husband back to health.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Finance Ministry not for lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The second COVID-19 wave, which is spreading fast beyond the worst-affected districts of the country, could dent economic activity till June and expanding the vaccination pace was the "need of the hour", the Finance Ministry said on Friday.

It indicated that it was not in favour of a national lockdown. The Ministry said the policy response was in sync with the 'global experience' and included localised micro-containment measures, State-specific movement restrictions, mobilisation of health supplies and ramping up of health facilities.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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# Vaccine woes: citizens complain of glitches in government portal

Many turn to social media platforms, mobile apps, friends in NCR to book slots

SHINJINI GHOSH

NEW DELHI

A week into the vaccination drive for people in the 18-44 age group, several of those trying to book appointments complained of glitches on the online portal. They alleged that the booking process was tedious with available slots "vanishing" within seconds.

Deepika Bhatia, a teacher said: "After months of waiting, when the government announced vaccines for the 18+ category, I thought that finally, it was our turn to feel safe. But soon I realised the ground reality. I have been trying to book an appointment since April 28 but all in vain. Vaccine day comes with more than the shot, including the frustration that one goes through while finding a centre. As soon as you hit 'confirm', they show a message that the centre is fully booked."

She said one can't do much when it comes to choosing a centre, which is nearby.

"Several of the ones which I tried booking were still restricting it to 45+ age group. Searching for slots using the CoWIN portal was cumbersome and so my second choice was sites developed by third parties even though one would still require to visit the government portal, which would always be fully booked within a fraction of a second," she added.

Like Ms. Bhatia, several others said they turned to updates on social media and other mobile apps, which send alerts on slots opening up in each district.

Ayanti Ghosh, a public relations executive, said: "The



People wait to get vaccinated at Dada Dev Hospital, Dwarka, on Friday. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

**• The govt. portal most of the times doesn't show any empty slots as they vanish within seconds of opening. One has to be really on the website for hours to be able to find a slot...**

AYANTI GHOSH  
Public relations executive

government portal most of the times doesn't show any empty slots as they vanish within seconds of opening up. One has to be really onto the website for hours to be able to get lucky to find a slot. After three days of such an intense process, a friend told me about this app where immediate alerts were being sent for empty slots. It was through those alerts that I managed to book a slot in one of the government schools."

Describing the process as "infuriating," Barathi Nakkeeran, a researcher, said: "I had been trying to book an appointment since the day the portal opened up. It was

infuriating as, by the time we reached the page after logging in, the slots would get filled. After a few days, I got to know about links on social media that were updating the slots. It was through one such update that I finally managed to book a slot in a school in Chattarpur. However, there have even been instances when despite the notification, by the time we reached the page, the slots were all booked."

#### Long distances covered

Due to the restrained availability of vaccines, people are also traveling across NCR in order to get the jab.

Andrew Lu, a 37-year-old media professional from Noida, said he was not able to find an available slot for the first dose of the vaccine in Noida or Gautam Budha Nagar district.

"I was able to book a slot in Najafgarh – about 50km from where I live. My friend had informed me about the available slots at the place. The process was quite smooth and because of the lock-

down, there was no traffic on the roads," he said.

Gurugram resident Arani Chaudhuri said he had to travel to Lajpat Nagar for the vaccine due to the unavailability of slots in the vicinity.

"The only hurdle was that I had to travel to Lajpat Nagar. Other than that, the process was smooth. One has to keep checking the portal at various times of the day. I got a slot in the fourth attempt," said Mr. Chaudhuri.

Anupama Dhawan from Indirapuram arranged a jab for her 80-year-old father at a Central government hospital in the Capital after she was turned away from a private hospital in Ghaziabad where she was scheduled to receive her first dose and her father his second.

"We had an appointment but when we reached according to our time slot we were asked to return because there was no stock available. Both of us then travelled to Delhi the next day and got vaccinated. The process was smooth," she said.

Ghaziabad resident Sushant Kumar (name changed) said he had to ask his elder brother, a media professional, to "pull some strings", so he could get his jab on time.

"My brother arranged a shot for me by making some requests; I went to a school in the New Delhi district and got vaccinated earlier this week. I am a bank employee and need to go to office on a daily basis using public transport and hence I wanted to get vaccinated as earlier as possible," he said.

(With inputs from Damini Nath, Jaideep Deo Bhanji and Jatin Anand)

The lockdown rules in Delhi this year might resemble the ones in 2020, but there is a significant difference – there is traffic on the roads with most people out taking care of COVID-19 patients or arranging supplies for them.

Last year, the roads were deserted, police barricades were put up at regular intervals checking for an e-pass and there was no public transport.

# 'Lockdown 2021 less stringent than last year'

People now out on streets to make medical arrangements for COVID-19 patients

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The lockdown rules in Delhi this year might resemble the ones in 2020, but there is a significant difference – there is traffic on the roads with most people out taking care of COVID-19 patients or arranging supplies for them.

Last year, the roads were deserted, police barricades were put up at regular intervals checking for an e-pass and there was no public transport.



The police said unlike last year, inter-State movements not restricted this time ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

reasons have not been fined.

And inter-State movement is also not restricted. So, people from NCR are also visiting Delhi for medical reasons," said a senior officer.

Many feel there is self-discipline among people this year. "I have never been stopped in the four to five times I have stepped out. I feel the lockdown is less stringent than last time because the police also realise the helpless situation and how many people are out on the road to coordinate oxygen and medicine for their

loved ones," said Sayan Kundu, a development researcher.

Ritu Singh had to pick up medicine, which was in short supply, from a friend in North Delhi and deliver it to another friend in Dwarka.

She said she was prepared with the prescriptions and other details to share with the police if she was stopped but said it was a smooth journey.

"When the weekend curfew started, there were many volunteers on the road checking for passes. But

now, I think everybody in Delhi is scared and not roaming around unnecessarily," Ms. Singh said.

In other parts of the NCR, checks have been more stringent. Police barricades at borders and checkpoints on main roads have been put in place across Noida and Greater Noida with checking round-the-clock. The lockdown in the district, which was initially supposed to be in effect till Thursday, was extended till Monday. "The market has been shut since last week and only medical shops are being allowed to open," said Pradeep Suryavanshi, a businessman based in Noida's sector 18.

"A checkpoint has been made on the main road right near the metro station overlooking the market where e-passes are checked. I had to pick up some documents from my office yesterday [Thursday], but was asked to return from the checkpoint because I didn't have an e-pass," he added.

## IN BRIEF

### High Court petition on compensation

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday asked the AAP government to treat as a representation a PIL seeking compensation for the families of those patients who died due to shortage of oxygen. An HC Bench directed that the representation be decided in accordance with the law, rules, regulations and government policy applicable to the facts of the case. The court also asked the government to keep in mind its priorities, availability of funds and such other relevant factors while taking a decision.

# 105 more oxygen concentrators seized from city eateries, search on for owner

SAURABH TRIVEDI

NEW DELHI

the instance of accused Hitesh, who was arrested on Thursday. "A total of 523 oxygen concentrators have been recovered till now," said an officer.

He said the concentrators were recovered during raids at restaurants in Lodhi Colony on Thursday and Khan Market on Friday. They said Navneet Kalra, the owner of the eateries – Khan Chacha, Town Hall and Nege Ju – from where the concentrators have been recovered. "His phone is switched off. We are going through details

to identify his role in the case," said the officer.

Police said the managing director of Matrix Cellular Services Gourav Khanna for his alleged involvement in the case. DCP (South) Atul Thakur said in a follow-up raid, they have recovered 105 more concentrators from Town Hall and Khan Chacha restaurants in Khan Market at

police said the concentrators were recovered during raids at restaurants in Lodhi Colony on Thursday and Khan Market on Friday. They said Navneet Kalra, the owner of the eateries – Khan Chacha, Town Hall and Nege Ju – from where the concentrators have been recovered. "His phone is switched off. We are going through details

## Man held for cheating patients' kin

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

## Two arrested for black marketing of Remdesivir +

Injections and medicines recovered



STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A tuition teacher and a security guard were arrested for black marketing of Remdesivir injections, in two separate incidents on Friday, police said.

The accused identified as Sunny, a resident of Nangloi, had cheated seven such victims and obtained ₹1 lakh.

A few days ago, a woman who was tested positive and admitted to Max Hospital, Saket, was in need of a plasma donor. Guneet Singh Jaggi, the complainant's relative, got a contact number of a person on Facebook who could provide plasma donor. As he was in dire need, he contacted the man, who demanded ₹50,000 for arranging the plasma. But after ₹10,000 was transferred into his account, he started ignoring calls and messages of the complainant before switching off the phone. The accused was later held with the help of technical surveillance, said the police.

According to police, on Thursday, information was received about a person coming near Nangloi Metro Station to deliver Remdesivir injections at exorbitant price. A trap was laid and the accused was apprehended. The accused was identified as Prahlad Kumar, a resident of Rohini Sector-7. Three Remdesivir injections were recovered from his possession.

Interrogation revealed that Kumar has been working as a security guard at Agrasen International Hospital, Sector-22, Rohini for the last two years. The accused, who was posted at the COVID ward of the hospital, used to steal the injections lying on the bedside tray of patients while they were asleep. He came to deliver three injections at ₹20,000 each, police said.

Similarly, in south-east district, a tuition teacher was arrested for allegedly overcharging COVID-related medicines, police said. The accused has been identified as Abhishek Pruthi, a resident of Govindpuri. He is a private tuition teacher, they said.

On Tuesday, Kalkaji police got information that one Abhishek Pruthi is demanding higher rate for Remdesivir injection. During investigation, a raid was conducted and the accused was nabbed from his residence. Pruthi disclosed that his family members had become COVID positive and at that time, he had purchased COVID related medicines. After his family members recovered, he decided to earn money by selling these at higher rates, police said.

On Tuesday, Kalkaji police got information that one Abhishek Pruthi is demanding higher rate for Remdesivir injection. During investigation, a raid was conducted and the accused was nabbed from his residence. Pruthi disclosed that his family members had become COVID positive and at that time, he had purchased COVID related medicines. After his family members recovered, he decided to earn money by selling these at higher rates, police said.

## Ensure food security to migrants, daily wagers: NGO writes to CM

It alleges ration not distributed to shops in May

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan (DRRAA) on Friday wrote to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, urging him to ensure food security for migrants, daily wagers, and other vulnerable groups who do not possess ration cards.

In the letter, the DRRAA said: "Over the last few days, on account of the continuing lockdown, the condition of daily wagers, migrant workers, residents of slums – who do not possess ration cards – has become even more precarious. In such a scenario, it is inexplicable why the government has not revived the e-coupon scheme, under which last year 60 lakh people who did not possess ration cards were provided free foodgrains." The DRRAA has also demanded that the distribution of foodgrains to ration cardholders be started immediately without delay for May.

"We are shocked to note that despite the first week of May coming to an end, ration distribution for the month has not started in any of the ration shops [70 audited by DRRAA]. This is alarming as Delhi is in the third week of lockdown. Those who have lost their livelihood are dependent on the foodgrains provided under the PDS to feed



The DRRAA has demanded that distribution of foodgrains to ration cardholders be started immediately without delay for May. ■ FILE PHOTO

themselves and their families," the letter read. The DRRAA also said setting up 250 hunger relief centres as compared to 2,500 last year was not enough to address the problem.

#### DRRAA suggests

"Start an effective hunger helpline. Give wide publicity to the helpline to record all SOS requirements of food and ration and make provision to address the same. Provide rations to all needy persons who do not possess a ration card by reviving the e-coupon scheme under the Mukhya Mantri Corona Sahayata Yojana, or initiating other programme or schemes for this purpose," the letter said.

"We are shocked to note that despite the first week of May coming to an end, ration distribution for the month has not started in any of the ration shops [70 audited by DRRAA]. This is alarming as Delhi is in the third week of lockdown. Those who have lost their livelihood are dependent on the foodgrains provided under the PDS to feed

## HC seeks govt. response on plea for 3 meals/day in shelter homes

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

scheme was discontinued last year and only two meals are being provided now. "Most of the workers staying at shelter homes don't have any documents. Some are inter-State migrant workers, who don't have a Delhi-based ration card. Therefore, the workers have little means to feed themselves and their children," the plea said.

"In the shelter homes, people are reported to be sick. However, the isolation centres which were running in 2020 have been closed," BMM said.

Additionally, the petition sought directions to "provide soaps, detergents, hand sanitizers, handwash and masks to urban homeless in all shelter homes in the national capital and also medical aid".

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday issued notice to the Centre and Delhi government on a plea seeking to vaccinate all Class X and Class XII students – who would be appearing for board exams in the 2020-21 session.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh asked the Ministries of Health and Education and the Delhi government to respond to the plea by three lawyers.

HC told that Class X exams cancelled, Class XII postponed



ment's Standing Counsel informed the court that the Class X board exams have been cancelled and that of Class XII postponed.

The court was hearing a plea by advocates Jyoti Aggarwal, Sanjivani Aggarwal and Pradeep Suryavanshi. The plea said as per news reports the new strain of COVID-19 affecting youngsters the most and hence, the students appearing for the exams need to be vaccinated on an urgent basis if the examinations cannot be held online.

**Timings****DELHI**

SATURDAY, MAY. 08	
RISE 05:36	SET 19:01
RISE 03:50	SET 16:05
SUNDAY, MAY. 09	
RISE 05:35	SET 19:02
RISE 04:19	SET 16:58
MONDAY, MAY. 10	
RISE 05:34	SET 19:02
RISE 04:48	SET 17:50

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	37	22
Safdarjung	37	22
Palam	37	22

**Delhi Pali Today**

39°C Easy morning and hot day with occasional partly cloudy sky. Light to moderate surface winds likely during day.

**Delhi Pali Tomorrow**  
40°C Rise in day temperature. A hot day with partly cloudy sky. Chances of thunder clouds development at few places.

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**Precious commodity:** COVID-19 patients getting free oxygen at a gurdwara in Indirapuram on Friday; patients on oxygen support at the same facility. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

**THE HINDU**

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**IN BRIEF****Protests against closure of vaccination centres**

**NEW DELHI**  
State BJP chief Adesh Gupta, Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, and BJP Delhi MLAs on Friday staged a protest outside Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence against the closure of vaccination centres run by municipal corporations by the Delhi government. Mr. Gupta said that the Delhi government had, over the last two days, shut down 45 of the 137 such centres without prior notice.

**BJP distributes PPE kits, oximeters, steam machines**

**NEW DELHI**  
BJP leader Vijay Goel on Friday handed over 1,000 PPE kits to North Delhi Municipal Corporation Mayor Jai Prakash and East civic body Mayor Nirmal Jain for the protection of civic body employees. Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta and Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, launched a mobile 'O2 van service' for the needy. Meanwhile, BJP distributed equipment like oximeters, sanitizers, masks, PPE kits and steam machines in Delhi.

**Delhi zoo sends samples of animals for test****PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

Three days after eight Asiatic lions in Hyderabad tested positive for COVID-19, the Delhi zoo on Friday said it has sent samples of some animals, including a lion, to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute in Bareilly "as a precautionary measure".

Zoo Director Ramesh Pandey said all protocols are being followed as per the guidelines of the Central Zoo Authority.

"We are vigilant and doing the needful. Samples of some animals, including a lion, have been sent to IVRI. Nothing adverse has been informed or reported so far. Detailed reports are awaited," he said in a statement.

"The animals have not shown any COVID-19 symptom. Samples have been collected as a precautionary measure," Mr. Pandey said, without elaborating.

Sanitisation drills at the zoo have been going on since the pandemic began last year.

"After COVID-19 phase, the zoo went through avian influenza sanitisation drills and now all protocols are being followed for SARS-CoV-2," he said.

India has four designated COVID-19 testing centres for captive animals, of which the IVRI is one.



A COVID-19 patient at Lok Nayak Hospital in New Delhi on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ed and brought to a realistic level so that hospitals are able to follow it," the High Court said.

"You have to realistically revisit this... if you are to implement this circular at this time, at ₹18,000, hospitals will actually run at loss," the court added.

The court's direction came while hearing a plea of a lawyer who raised the issue of overcharging of beds by private hospitals. The lawyer argued that there are hospitals in Delhi, which are advertising COVID packages with exorbitant charges. He said that as per the June 20, 2020 circular of the Delhi government, ₹18,000 includes everything. "Every hospital I called told me that they are charging ₹50,000 to ₹60,000 per night," the la-

wyer said.

"I can show a bill where a hospital is charging ₹30,000 per day for an ICU package, over and above they are charging for oxygen, BiPAP, gloves.

The circular of Delhi government says that it has to be ₹18,000, including eve-

rything," the lawyer said.

As per the circular, the per-day rates, including the cost of PPE, in hospitals accredited by NABH are ₹10,000 for isolation bed, including supportive care and oxygen; ₹15,000 for ICU without ventilator; and ₹18,000 for ICU with ventilator.

For the same, the rates in non-NABH accredited hospitals will be ₹8,000, ₹13,000, and ₹15,000 respectively.

The High Court said that the rates has to be made uniform.

**'Hoarding' of oxygen cylinders: AAP MLA gets notice****STAFF REPORTER**

**NEW DELHI**  
The Delhi High Court on Friday issued notice to AAP MLA Imran Hussain on a petition seeking an inquiry into alleged hoarding of oxygen cylinders and arbitrarily distributing it free to COVID-19 patients.

The court also ordered Mr. Hussain to be present in court during the hearing on Monday.

The direction came while hearing a plea by one Vedansh Sharma who showed a Facebook post made by the official page of the Delhi Aam Aadmi Party on Wednesday relating to free distribution of oxygen cylinder from party office.

The Facebook post said that Mr. Hussain will be providing free oxygen from his party office at Ballimaran here, the plea said, adding that he is hoarding oxygen cylinders at a time when Delhi is in crisis.

The bulletin said that there are currently 91,035 active cases in the Capital with 50,425 patients under home isolation.

The cumulative figures since the pandemic started stand at 12,92,867 cases with 18,739 deaths and 11,83,083 recoveries.

A total of 1,14,657 beneficiaries was vaccinated in 24 hours out of which 80,306 were those who got their first dose.

The total number of beneficiaries vaccinated so far stands at 36,66,694,

**A glimmer of hope as fresh cases remain below 20,000**

Positivity rate stays below 25% for second consecutive day

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

**NEW DELHI**

The Capital recorded 341 deaths and 19,832 new COVID-19 cases on Friday. A health bulletin released by the Delhi government said that 79,593 tests were conducted over a 24-hour period with a positivity rate of 24.92%.

The positivity rate was below the 25% mark for the second consecutive day. After staying above the 30% mark for 12 days, the positivity rate fell below the 30% mark on May 2, providing a glimmer of hope that the number of cases were not rising.

This is the fourth time in the last five days that the number of new cases has remained below 20,000.

The bulletin said that there are currently 91,035 active cases in the Capital with 50,425 patients under home isolation. The cumulative figures since the pandemic started stand at 12,92,867 cases with 18,739 deaths and 11,83,083 recoveries.

out of which 8,09,738 have received both doses. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said 1.84 lakh people in the 18-44 age group had got their first dose since the inoculation of this category started on May 3.

**Bed availability**

The Delhi government also directed all healthcare facilities in the national capital treating COVID-19 patients to update the status of bed



People in the age group of 18-44 getting vaccinated in Mandawali on Friday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

**Virus spread**

Total number of COVID-19 cases	Total deaths
12,92,867	18,739
New cases in the past 24 hours	New deaths
19,832	341

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

availability on Delhi Corona App and website "as frequently as feasible".

The health department said that many hospitals are not updating status of different categories of bed availability regularly on the designated portal which was creating great hardship to the public who, in the absence of reliable information, are forced to spend time and energy in searching vacant beds and are subjected to harassment and agony.

"Medical Directors, Medical Superintendents and Directors of all such facilities are directed to update the status of beds on the portal and Delhi Corona App as frequently as feasible, but not later than two hourly", the health department said.

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**Bed availability**

The Delhi government also directed all healthcare facilities in the national capital treating COVID-19 patients to update the status of bed

production capacity of 40 tonnes and will further help in improving Delhi's oxygen situation, he said.

The Delhi government, he said, had to prepare long-term plans and build the capacity of oxygen storage on a very large scale in the city as well as create a special storage capacity for oxygen.

At the meeting, the government stated, the officials concerned told Mr. Kejriwal that the biggest difficulty at present was supplying oxygen and that the companies doing so should be asked to supply oxygen at the earliest.

The Chief Minister, according to the government, expressed displeasure at pa-

**Delhi gets 577 MT oxygen against demand of 976 MT**

Need continuous supply: Raghav Chadha



Healthcare workers attend to patients in New Delhi on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

**Ensure all eligible people in Delhi get jab in next 3 months'**

Now that the Capital has received oxygen, no one should suffer due to shortage, Kejriwal tells officials

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

**NEW DELHI**

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday chaired a high-level meeting on the current situation of COVID-19 in Delhi where he directed officials concerned to ensure all eligible people in the city are vaccinated within the next three months.

The government said that at the meeting, Mr. Kejriwal told the officials that following the improvement in the situation of oxygen in Delhi, there should be no death due to oxygen shortage.

The government said that he also directed all District Magistrates to pay surprise visits to vaccination centres and relief camps in order to review the preparations for the convenience of the people.

"Now that Delhi has received oxygen, no one in Delhi should suffer due to shortage of oxygen. All the hospitals in Delhi should increase their beds and every



Arvind Kejriwal

review the preparations for the convenience of the people.

"Now that Delhi has received oxygen, no one in Delhi should suffer due to shortage of oxygen. All the hospitals in Delhi should increase their beds and every

DM should arrange new oxygen beds in their districts so that no deaths happen due to lack of oxygen," Mr. Kejriwal was quoted as having said at the meeting.

"The hampering of oxygen distribution has to be corrected so that there is no disruption in its supply. We have to try to prevent oxygen wastage and save as much oxygen as we can. If we can, we should save oxygen and return it to the Central government so that it can be used somewhere else," he also said.

The 48 oxygen plants coming up across Delhi, the Chief Minister said, should be installed immediately. These plants have an oxygen

production capacity of 40 tonnes and will further help in improving Delhi's oxygen situation, he said.

The district administration has reiterated the appeal to the retired doctors, medical students and nursing staffers to volunteer for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Dr. Garg said 100 applications were received, but only half of them had medical background.

He added that the eligibility of 20 of these volunteers was established and they were deputed for the treatment of the COVID-19 patients.

**6 liquid oxygen plants to be set up in Gurugram**

Three of these plants are likely to be operational by the end of the month

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

**GURUGRAM**

Six liquid oxygen plants will be set up in the district to improve supply of oxygen for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Three of these, including a 1,000 LPM oxygen plant at Gurugram's Sector 10 Civil Hospital, are likely to be operational by the end of the month.

This was disclosed by Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg in a virtual meeting of District Advisory Committee

on Friday.

Dr. Garg said the administration was making efforts to procure more oxygen concentrators till the time the plants became functional. He said around 50 concentrators were already arranged and another 250-300 would be procured in a week's time. Dr. Garg said the hospitals with more than 50 beds were directed to set up their own oxygen plants. He also informed that makeshift hospitals were being set up in the city and

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**Mr. N SELVA KUMAR**

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## Question mark over BJP MP's apology

STAFF REPORTER

BENGALURU

Bengaluru South BJP MP Tejasvi Surya revisited the south zone war room on Thursday, where he reportedly apologised and expressed regret for the inconvenience caused to those working there when he and three MLAs live-streamed their expose of the alleged bed allotment scam and read out names of 16 Muslim youth involved.

Two sources in the war room confirmed the development, though his office put out a tweet claiming that the apology was "fake news". The MP later retweeted this. However, according to sources in the war room, Mr. Surya said it had not been his intention to tarnish them.

Meanwhile, the 16 Muslim youth have been asked to stay away from work by their employers till the police clear their names.

# Digital divide curbs vaccine access

In Telangana, savvy urbanites book slots in rural PHCs while villagers can't register sans smartphones

RAVI REDDY  
R.AVADHANI  
HYDERABAD/ SANGAREDDY

urbanites swooping in as slots are unavailable in the city for 45/60+ citizens. High-end cars line outside the nondescript PHC as nurses step out to vaccinate beneficiaries seated inside the air-conditioned vehicles.

Akondi V.M. Rao, 63, and his wife Vasantha Lakshmi are typical of these beneficiaries, who drove from Manikonda in Hyderabad after days of searching for slots, running through lists of postal pin codes before they zeroed on Chinchod.

On the other hand, rural residents, many without access to smart phones and lacking the digital skills needed to book slots — many are unaware of the requirement — are left out of the crucial safety net.

"Some youth from Kam-

sampalle village in Shadnagar are helping a few villagers to register on the CoWIN app. When told by the PHC staff to register their names, the hapless villagers are forced



**Long queue:** People waiting to get vaccinated at the Chinchod Primary Health Centre on Friday. ■ P.V. SIVA KUMAR

to travel in autos to Shadnagar — the nearest town 23 km away — and search for an Internet kiosk to register their names paying ₹10 per head," said P.V. Siva Kumar of Hyderabad, who drove his wife B. Satyavani to the Chinchod PHC to get her second jab.

People like M. Shantamma, 80, of Chinchod were turned away by nurses from the free vaccination drive as she had not registered on the

CoWIN app. "We are uneducated, what do we know," wept the octogenarian as she bent to touch the feet of the nurse.

### Second jab

In erstwhile Medak district, those who have had their first jab are desperate to get the second one but to no avail.

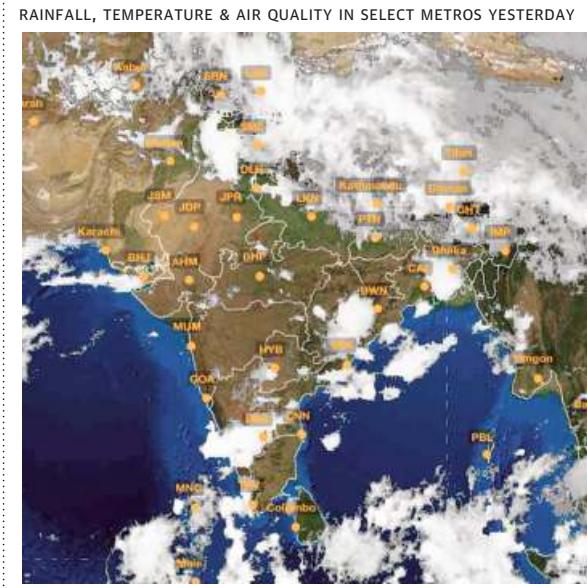
Mallikarjun, a teacher in Marepally of Sangareddy dis-

trict, made a futile bid to get the second dose of vaccination. It's 43 days since he got his first one but there are no slots available.

The plight of those who lack literacy is worse as many of them got their first jab on site but are now returning empty-handed everyday as there are no slots.

"There are several people in our village who got the first dose of the vaccine. Now, officials are asking them to register their names online. Many do not have smart phones. Several of them do not know how to operate even the keypad-based normal phones. For registration, they have to visit Mee Seva centres, which are at far-off places. Hence, many common people are not showing any interest in getting the second dose. They say that they will get vaccinated whenever the government offers it without any glitches," said Sudarshan of Teropl village.

### WEATHER WATCH



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP, INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)  
**Forecast for Saturday:** Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Sikkim, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal. Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty wind likely at isolated places over Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, central Maharashtra, Karnataka, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Lakshadweep

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...36.0...	24.0	...	Kozhikode	...34.6...	27.2	...
Ahmedabad	...42.3...	28.2	...	Kurnool	...39.6...	28.1	...
Aizawl	...27.5...	14.9	...	Lucknow	...34.4...	26.0	...
Althababad	...37.6...	24.2	...	Madurai	...35.4...	25.6	...
Bengaluru	...33.0...	22.6	...	Mangaluru	...33.2...	25.1	...
Bhopal	...40.9...	27.4	...	Mumbai	...34.5...	27.3	...
Bhubaneswar	...39.5...	27.0	...	Mysuru	...21.5	...	...
Chandigarh	29.2...	18.6	...	New Delhi	1...36.7...	21.7	...
Chennai	...36.8...	28.5	...	Patna	...34.8...	24.3	...
Coimbatore	...36.8...	25.2	...	Port Blair	...30.2...	26.5	...
Dehradun	...33.1...	18.8	...	Puducherry	...34.8...	26.2	...
Gangtok	17.8...	18.0...	12.5	Pune	...37.8...	24.0	...
Goa	...32.8...	28.0	...	Raipur	...39.0...	25.0	...
Guwahati	10...30.2...	22.0	...	Ranchi	9.6...35.4...	20.0	...
Hubballi	...33.0...	24.0	...	Shillong	5.6...23.4...	16.6	...
Hyderabad	...37.1...	25.1	...	Shimla	5...25.5...	14.9	...
Imphal	2...30.3...	15.2	...	Srinagar	...23.0...	13.2	...
Jaipur	0.6...38.5...	23.8	...	Thiruvananthapuram	...33.7...	26.2	...
Kochi	25...32.6...	24.0	...	Tiruchi	36.5...27.2	...	...
Kohima	3.8...20.6...	13.4	...	Vijayawada	0.6...38.0...	26.7	...
Kolkata	...36.3...	23.6	...	Visakhapatnam	...36.6...	27.2	...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	34	45	39	49	90	■■■
Bengaluru	6	21	24	59	54	■■■
Chennai	63	4.35	18	21	21	■■■
Delhi	4	30	40	42	249	■■■■■
Hyderabad	5	44	33	32	63	■■■■■
Kolkata	13	19	95	67	65	■■■■■
Lucknow	7	32	81	119	132	■■■■■
Mumbai	47	11	8	34	111	■■■■■
Pune	6	25	51	48	59	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	17	22	8	14	27	■■■■■

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Thane, Maharashtra recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 291, indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Puducherry recorded a healthy AQI score of 17

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

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** 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<sub>x</sub>:** 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.

**PM2.5 & PM10:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

## 2-week lockdown from May 10 in Karnataka

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

With the COVID-19 second wave wreaking havoc on Karnataka and the existing curfew measures proving to be not effective in containing the pandemic, the State government decided on Friday to impose a stricter lockdown for 14 days from May 10 (Monday) to May 24.

This time, the movement of people, especially on vehicles, will be more strictly monitored and curbed. The State government had already clamped a two-week curfew on April 27 and it was to end at 6 a.m. on May 12.

They shifted him to hospital on a two-wheeler

STAFF REPORTER

ALAPUZHHA

Two COVID-19 volunteers have been lauded for saving the life of a COVID-19 patient at Punnappa here on Friday.

All shops and commercial establishments, hotels, pubs, bars and industries would remain closed during the lockdown period. Essentials goods and services such as food, medicine, milk, fruits and vegetables would be available for four hours from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. Milk booths will be open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The patient, identified as a 37-year-old man from Ambalappuzha, reached the domiciliary care centre at



**Quick thinking:** Volunteers Ashwin Kunjumon and Rekha, who shifted the COVID-19 patient to hospital on a motorbike.

the College of Engineering and Management, Punnappa, run by the Punnappa North grama panchayat the other day due to lack of facilities at his home to quarantine himself. On Friday morning, he started to experience uneasiness and breathlessness. After being informed of his deteriorating health condition by other

tine himself. On Friday morning, he started to experience uneasiness and breathlessness. After being informed of his deteriorating health condition by other

# Maharashtra's COVID-19 toll nudges 75,000

State reports 54,022 new infections, taking active case tally to 6,54,788; 37,386 more patients discharged

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PUNE

Maharashtra's high fatality spike continued with the State recording 898 deaths on Friday — 385 of which occurred in the last 48 hours — to take the death toll to 74,413. The 'reconciled' figures, as per the State Health Department, included 199 deaths in the last week and the remaining 314 from an earlier period.

The State's active case tally, too, rose to 6,54,788 with just 37,386 patients being discharged against a surge of 54,022 new COVID-19 cases. The total cases have reached 49,96,758 while its cumulative recoveries have climbed to 42,65,326 with the recovery rate going up to 85.36%.

Pune district reported nearly 10,000 new cases to take its total case tally to 9,08,358.

Mumbai recorded 3,040



**In single file:** Essential workers queue up outside Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus in Mumbai to board local trains on Friday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

new cases to take its total tally to 6,71,125 while the active count has declined to 54,162. As many as 71 fatalities took the city's death toll to 13,651.

**No complete lockdown** While ruling out a total lockdown in Pune, district Guardian Minister and Deputy

Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Friday hinted at imposing more stringent regulations to deter violation of COVID-19 norms. Mr. Pawar was responding to the Bombay High Court's suggestion that the Maharashtra government consider imposing a complete lockdown in Pune.

He said that if adequate vials were not forthcoming from the Centre soon, then vaccines meant for the 18-44 age-group would have to be diverted to complete the second dose for senior citizens.

"Two days ago, we re-

ceived nine lakh vaccines for the 45-plus age-group of which eight lakhs have been consumed already. We now have hardly a few thousand left from this stock ... lakhs of anxious senior citizens are awaiting their second dose. Covaxin is in particular in short supply," Mr. Pawar said.

Stating that 45 days had elapsed since many senior citizens had taken their first jab, Mr. Pawar said that at least 4 lakh to 5 lakh people in the 45-plus age-group were awaiting their second dose of Covaxin alone.

"It is shameful that we

have to pass orders to make masks and helmets compulsory, as if it is only the duty of the administration and not the duty of the people. We therefore observe that the administration, which includes the police, shall strictly implement COVID-19 restrictions and ensure that people wear masks and helmets," the court said.

"It is shameful that we have to pass orders to make masks and helmets compulsory, as if it is only the duty of the administration and not the duty of the people. We therefore observe that the administration, which includes the police, shall strictly implement COVID-19 restrictions and ensure that people wear masks and helmets," the court said.

HC takes cognisance of news reports about people wearing masks below the chin



&lt;p



## Assam discord

The BJP's kind of identity politics is difficult to sustain over the longer term

A combination of welfarism, communalism and smart though daring alliances helped the BJP win a second consecutive term in Assam. The party and its allies, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), won 75 of the 126 seats in the State. A 10-party alliance, or Mahajot, around the Congress-AIUDF axis turned out to be no match for the BJP. A third front of Assamese nationalists, the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and Rajoij Dal, could win only one seat. The Congress and AIUDF have accused it of helping the BJP. The BJP performed well in Upper Assam, and the Barak Valley, though marginally weaker than its 2016 performance. With its newfound ally UPPL, the BJP outperformed the Mahajot, which had the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) as a constituent in the Bodo region. The AIUDF-Congress alliance swept Lower Assam, but overall, they ended up with a net loss by joining hands. The BJP campaign focused on the imaginary prospect of AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal becoming the CM, mobilising two variants of backlash – from the Assamese nationalists and Hindu nationalists. The alliance question posed a dilemma for both parties. They had to choose between the disadvantages of not having a partnership and having one. The AIUDF has now blamed the underperformance of the Congress in Upper Assam as the reason for their defeat; the irony is that the Congress faced the brunt there for its tie-up with the AIUDF.

The winners have their own curse. Communal polarisation in the State fanned by the acrimonious debate on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act has been further reinforced in the outcome. All eight Muslim candidates of the BJP, including a sitting MLA, lost. Of the 29 Congress MLAs, 16 are Muslims. The BJP has dismantled its minority cell in response to the outcome. The key strategist of the BJP, Himanta Biswa Sarma, who curated the party's agenda, spearheaded its welfare schemes, and managed its alliance, has a rightful claim for the CM's post. He is certainly more popular than the incumbent CM, Sarbananda Sonowal, in the 60-strong BJP legislature party. The BJP has managed to assemble the support from Assamese nationalists, and Hindu nationalists in a deft balancing act on the CAA, but that ambiguity is difficult to sustain. The party has also promised to revise the National Register of Citizens and exclude more 'illegal' residents from it. Assam is a border State, and it has numerous fault lines within its society. The BJP single-mindedly focused on the religious divide that earned it rich dividends. But a political order that excludes a third of the population in a systematic manner is no order at all. The BJP's victory is built on a deeply divisive and combustive agenda. Before it turns into a whirlwind of strife and chaos, the party must act with political wisdom and douse the fire it has lit.

## A difficult union

As Chief Minister of Puducherry, Rangasamy will find it difficult to keep ally BJP at bay

A change of guard in Puducherry, where governance and development took a backseat from mid-2016 due to continuing friction between the elected government and Raj Nivas, ushers in hope for its people. The electorate's frustration with the erstwhile Congress government was amply reflected with just two of its 14 candidates getting elected, as opposed to 15 last time. At the same time, All India NR Congress (AINRC) founder N. Rangasamy, who on Friday took oath as Chief Minister for the fourth time, has his task cut out, administratively and politically. For the first time he will be heading a coalition government with the BJP, whose cabinet composition is in the making. The people are looking forward to quality governance and public service delivery in the midst of the COVID-19 second wave. It would be safe to infer that the electorate had backed the AINRC-BJP alliance in anticipation that the cordiality between the Territorial administration and the Centre would yield dividends. Their expectations are legitimate as no less than Prime Minister Narendra Modi pitched to them the promise of making Puducherry the BEST (Business hub, Education hub, Spiritual hub and Tourism hub). But such acronyms are easier to coin than implement. There needs to be cohesive action from the allies to translate them into action.

That said, on the ground there are indications that more than the battered and fatigued Opposition, Mr. Rangasamy is likely to face challenges from his openly ambitious ally. The BJP has tasted political blood in the Union Territory that is for most parts geographically contiguous and linguistically aligned with Tamil Nadu, which the national party has set its sights on next. It is seeking its pound of flesh by demanding that its nominee be made the Deputy Chief Minister. Mr. Rangasamy's reservations in accommodating this demand are pronounced. The tiny territory has never had such a political post. The early disagreement between the allies has led to a delay in the swearing-in of the Cabinet. But it may not be easy for him to fend off the BJP. He would be conscious that the fragmented numbers thrown up in the election results leave the field open for manipulations to tilt the scales against him. In the 30-member House, the AINRC has 10 legislators, the BJP 6, DMK 6 and Congress 2. Independents account for 6 and indications are that three of them could lean towards the BJP. It will also not be long before the BJP appoints three nominated legislators who, thanks to a Supreme Court judgment, will have voting rights. Therefore, it would be a tightrope walk for the Chief Minister. Nonetheless, for the welfare of Puducherry, it would be best if the allies march on by focusing on governance without prioritising narrow, short-term political interests.

# The fig leaf of patent protection has to drop

The U.S.-supported patent waiver in the COVID fight has the potential to bring in much-needed global health equity



K. SRINATH REDDY

The decision of the President of the United States, Joe Biden, to support the India-South Africa proposal, seeking a waiver of patent protection for technologies needed to combat and contain COVID-19, comes as a shot in the arm for global health. The proposal that was placed before the World Trade Organisation (WTO) had been facing resistance from several high income countries including the U.S. administration. A change in the American position supporting a temporary waiver could act as a catalyst for building consensus in favour of that proposal when it comes up for fresh consideration at the WTO in June. However, the path ahead is not clear. While France and Russia have declared support, Germany has voiced its opposition.

### Predictable responses

Response to the proposal was divided during earlier debates at the WTO. While many low and middle income countries supported it, resistance came from the U.S., the United Kingdom, the European Union, Switzerland, Australia and Japan. A strange addition to this group was Norway, which usually supports initiatives that promote global health equity. On this occasion, it chose to shield patent rights. Since the WTO operates on consensus rather than by voting, the proposal did not advance despite drawing support of over 60 countries.

Predictably, the pharmaceutical industry fiercely opposed it and vigorously lobbied many governments. Right-wing political groups

in the high income countries sided with the industry. Microsoft co-founder and billionaire Bill Gates was strident in his opposition to patent waivers for vaccines, justifiably drawing ire from the public health community for a stance that was at great variance from his projected image as a messiah of global health. It appeared that patent rights would be doggedly defended even in the face of a devastating pandemic.

### Hollow reasons

Many specious reasons were offered for such a defence. It was argued that the capacity for producing vaccines of assured quality and safety was limited to some laboratories and that it would be hazardous to permit manufacturers in low and middle income countries to play with technologies they cannot handle. This smacks of hypocrisy when pharmaceutical manufacturers have no reservations about contracting industries in those countries to manufacture their patent-protected vaccines for the global market. The low labour costs in those countries are obviously so attractive that confidence in the quality and the safety of their products is high, so long as patents and profits are protected.

This amazing duplicity has been seen for years when multinational firms have subcontracted manufacture of patented products to industries with low production costs in developing countries. This has been true of pharmaceutical products, as it has been of branded consumer products and luxury goods. This fig leaf has to drop, at least in a pandemic.

The counter to patent waiver is an offer to license manufacturers in developing countries, while retaining patent rights. This restricts the opportunity for production to a chosen few. The terms of those agreements are opaque and offer

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



no assurance of equity in access to the products at affordable prices, either to the country of manufacture or to other developing countries.

It was also stated that developing countries could be supplied vaccines through the COVAX facility, set up by several international agencies and donors. While well intended, it has fallen far short of promised delivery. Some U.S. States have received more vaccines than the entire Africa has from COVAX. The trickle down theory does not work well in the global vaccine supply, just like its dubious application in economics.

Critics of a patent waiver say there is no evidence that extra capacity exists for producing vaccines outside of firms undertaking them now. Even before the change in the U.S.'s position, manufacturers from many countries expressed their readiness and avidly sought opportunities to produce the approved vaccines. They included industries in Canada and South Korea, suggesting that capable manufacturers in high income countries too are ready to avail of patent waivers but are not being allowed to enter a restricted circle. The World Health Organization's mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub has already drawn interest from over 50 firms.

Instead of arguing that capacity is limited, should not high income countries and other donors be

supporting the growth of more capacity to meet the current and likely future pandemics? They should learn from the manner in which India built up capacity and gained a reputation as a respected global pharmacy by moving from product patenting to process patenting between 1970 and 2005.

### China line, safeguards

Patent waivers are also dismissed as useless on the grounds that the time taken for their utilisation by new firms will be too long to help combat the present pandemic. Who can set the end date for this pandemic, when many countries have low vaccination rates and variants are gleefully emerging from unprotected populations? If the world boasts of the speed with which previously little known companies produced vaccines in record time in 2020, why not support others to develop that capacity through technology transfer? Efficacy and safety of their products can be assessed by credible regulatory agencies and the World Health Organization. Patent waivers will benefit by increasing access not just to vaccines but also to essential drugs and diagnostics. Surely, that will not take much time.

An argument put forth by multinational pharmaceutical firms is that a breach in the patent barricade will allow China to steal their technologies, now and in the future. The original genomic sequence was openly shared by China, which gave these firms a head start in developing vaccines. Much of the foundational science that built the path for vaccine production came from public-funded universities and research institutes. Further, what use is it to hold on to patents when global health and the global economy are devastated? Who will buy their precious products then?

The perennial argument, offered for defending patent protection, is that innovation and investment by industry need to be financially rewarded to incentivise them to develop new products. Even if compulsory licences are issued bypassing patent restrictions, royalties are paid to the original innovators and patent holders. They will continue to gain revenue, though not super profits. Pfizer's vaccine generated \$3.5 billion in revenue in the first quarter of 2021, while mostly reaching the arms of the world's rich. It expects \$15 billion sales this year. Moderna says it expects sales of \$18.4 billion in 2021. The incentive to protect profits is very strong indeed.

### Building on Biden's gesture

The World Trade Organization resolves debates by consensus and not by voting. The process may drag on, despite U.S. intervention. If Mr. Biden succeeds in driving consensus to provide a global thrust to combat a global threat, he will match Franklin D. Roosevelt's leadership in the Second World War. He does not have such an alliance in place now.

So, developing countries must take heart from his gesture and start issuing compulsory licences. The Doha declaration on TRIPS flexibilities permits their use in a public health emergency. National governments must be trusted to promote credible companies and not permit fly-by-night operators. High-income countries and multilateral agencies should provide financial and technical support to enable expansion of global production capacity. That will reflect both ennobling altruism and enlightened self-interest.

*Prof. K. Srinath Reddy, a cardiologist and epidemiologist, is President, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). The views expressed are personal*

## Rent issues as an ignored COVID stress point

The second wave has amplified the issue of rent which does not draw much attention as food and income support do



MEWA BHARATI & JUHI JOTWANI

As State governments have begun implementing weekend curfews and lockdown-like conditions amid the second wave of COVID, there is another issue that is emerging – rent crises within informal rental housing markets. For example, domestic workers in Jaipur, Rajasthan, have begun reporting to the Rajasthan Mahila Karmgar Union (RMKU) that landlords have only one line: "Pichli baar maaf kar diya tha, iss baar nahi karenge (The landlords say they will not be waiving any rent this time.)"

### Trauma returns

Meanwhile, reports of loss of livelihoods, in an eerie echo of 2020, have begun. In a crisis, the issue of rent does not get as much attention as food and income support do. Yet, the findings from a survey of 500 domestic workers in Jaipur by the RMKU and the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) showed that rent formed 40% of their average expenses in the first five weeks of the lockdown in 2020, was a majority component of debt post the lockdowns, and was a key component of the vulnerability of urban workers. This is not just true of domestic workers. Reports by the Stranded Work-

ers Action Network showed that fear of rent payments was one of the main reasons cited by migrants in their decision to leave cities and walk along highways.

It is imperative that we learn from the lessons of last year and protect the rental housing of informal workers early, effectively, and expansively. How should this be done? In February, we learnt crucial lessons from follow-up interviews with 76 domestic workers in Jaipur to see what had happened to rental housing through last year, and what lessons it offers for better protections this year.

### Unenforceable moratorium

On March 29, 2020, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs in an order (<https://bit.ly/3b9M6qu>) said, "Wherever the workers, including the migrants, are living in rented accommodation, the landlords of those properties shall not demand payment of rent for the period of one month." It was an order that largely failed. It was vague (was the rent to be waived or just deferred?); offered no relief to landlords (many of whom rely on rent for their own sustenance, not unlike their tenants); and unenforceable in a market with no written rent agreements. Further, there was no apparatus to monitor the enforcement of this order. In most cases, it was the tenants who had to negotiate with their landlords and request for leniency. When one of our interviewees, Meena (name changed) cited the state announcement to her landlord, she was told, "Yeh sab sunne ka hai, koi



maaf nahi karega (All of this is impractical, nobody will actually waive the rent.)"

Some landlords waived off rent for a month or two while others agreed to defer the rent. A few made no compromises and expected the rent to be paid on time, sometimes employing threats and coercion. Interviews show that domestic workers had to make difficult trade-offs, redirecting money reserved for necessary expenses such as food, school fees, and life savings to be able to pay rent and retain a roof over their heads. With pending rent and school fees worsening with no money coming in, many domestic workers had to borrow from informal moneylenders. Even in cases where the rent was deferred, it led to a piling up of debts for domestic workers who took more than a few months to get even a part of their jobs back. Some domestic workers borrowed from their employers, on the condition of paying it off with their work over the next few months, which meant a further paucity in income.

Rent is particularly pivotal for

workers who do not consider themselves migrants. For all the domestic workers we interviewed, returning to their villages was not an option. This was both because of their investments in decades of life in the city where, for many, their children were born, as well as the lack of jobs in the village, no skills for agricultural employment, and the absence of social ties. As Mangal (name changed) said, "Bachche yaha padayi karte hain, hum bhi shuru se yahin hai toh jaise ab gaany me kheti-baari ka kaam hui kuch nahi aata hai, toh me waahan baske karungi kya? (The children are studying here, we have always been living here since the start, we do not even know any farm work, so what will we do after settling there?)"

The only condition that renders such workers as "migrant" is their exclusion from the State programmes because they have not been able to get, for example, local ration cards despite years of trying. As Sindhu (name changed) narrates, "Hum toh na Bangla ka ho gaya naa Rajasthan ka ho gaya, hum toh aataanwaadi ho gaye naa? (We are neither of Bengal, or of Rajasthan, are we terrorists?) Rent anchors the lives workers have built; it must be seen as a key part of the urban social safety net, as critical as food and wage.

### Some solutions

First, a moratorium should be announced with clearer enforcement mechanism and a clear distinction between deferment and rent waivers. Working with worker

organisations and unions could greatly aid enforcement. Landlords should be offered means to access partial compensation for lost rent from the state shifting the onus onto them rather than on workers. Second, cash transfers being conceptualised by many State governments must treat rent on a par with food and income support. The amount of cash transfer for rent support can be estimated on the basis of the rental market conditions (₹2,500-₹3,000 being the average monthly rent among our respondents in Jaipur). Third, States can also aid workers through limited waivers on utility expenses. For example, the electricity bills and penalties charged on non-payment were quite a burden for domestic workers. Unlike rent, there was no negotiation possible for utility payments, with some workers reporting the need to borrow from landlords to pay electricity bills.

The second wave of COVID-19 has shown us the consequences of not preparing in advance. We cannot afford to not think ahead on the income and rent shocks that will follow this second wave as they did during the first wave. In doing so, urban safety nets must bring together food, income and rent so that no person should be forced to make an impossible choice between *roti* and *makaan*.

*Meva Bharati is the general secretary of the Rajasthan Mahila Karmgar Union (RMKU). Juhi Jotwani is a journalist and an urban fellow from the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS)*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Missing state

The immense loss of life and livelihoods being caused by the microbe in its second attack would certainly have been avoided had the political leadership been sensible in its policymaking (Editorial page, "Social murder and the missing state", May 7). The political mismanagement of failing to put in place all logistics to deal with the next wave touched a nadir due to a host of factors: focusing on a personality cult and building an image for the top leader becoming the most pressing concern of the government, a concentration of all powers in the PMO and a tendency to be guided by political

interests rather than the well-being of people. The events of the recent months show the political leadership being more interested in garnering votes and winning elections. If the culprit is not an apathetic and arrogant political leadership, what else is? N. RAVEENDRA BABU, Hyderabad

oxygen supply. The courts should ensure proper vaccine supply and pricing. When the West could be receptive to the plan of waiving patents rights and IPRs on the vaccines, why is our government recommending dual pricing? One hopes the judiciary acts here too. H.N. RAMAKRISHNA, Bangalore

going on for long is the adventurism of political parties in creating openings for the wooing of community-based votes or pandering to dominant communities that have already achieved social salience'. Nothing much was done about the creamy layer cornering opportunities deriving from reservations. The Centre and States should review the system with an intent to eradicate 'caste and reservation', which can disappear only simultaneously. P.R.V. RAJA, Pandalam, Kerala

(Editorial page, May 5), struck a chord. Our nation needs money to fight the COVID-19 crisis and to care for migrants. Just as we have run short of beds and oxygen, we should not run short of funds. Money should flow from temples, churches, mosques and other religious places; charity and donations should be in plenty to be given to the migrants. The Central government should bring in an ordinance to use the accounts of rich religious establishments for this. SASTHAMANI V., Coimbatore

transportation of coronavirus patients in the city of Nagpur. The State government has to step in to cap prices. Earlier, the Delhi government capped prices after the issue was brought to the Chief Minister's notice. There should be an interim presiding body to oversee ambulance services. Breaking of rules should mean the cancellation of the driving licence of the ambulance driver, cancellation of registration certificate of the ambulance, and impounding of the vehicle. SAURABH L. SUTAR, Nagpur, Maharashtra

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# An IT hub and its struggle for healthcare

In Bengaluru, poor preparation for the second wave has resulted in mismanagement in the allocation of beds, delays in testing, and oxygen shortage.

**Afshan Yasmeen, K.V. Aditya Bharadwaj and Chitra V. Ramani** report on the crisis engulfing a city once touted to be a popular medical tourism hub

**O**n the night of May 2, Sajidunnisa, 56, who had been diagnosed with COVID-19, developed acute respiratory problems. She experienced a rapid drop in her oxygen saturation levels. What followed was a harrowing 14 hours, as her family did the rounds of seven hospitals in Bengaluru desperately searching for a bed. They finally got her into the emergency room of a private hospital by which time her saturation levels had dropped to 40. Although she was administered oxygen, Sajidunnisa did not make it.

On the morning of May 3, 65-year-old Jayesh R. took a turn for the worse as his oxygen saturation levels dropped to 68. His family hired a private ambulance and went knocking on the doors of hospitals for an oxygenated bed. They watched helplessly as his saturation levels dropped further. He died in the ambulance four hours into the frantic search.

In both instances, the Bengaluru civic body's central hospital bed management system had shown that there were no oxygenated beds available.

Sushma G. recalled the lonely and terrifying six days she spent waiting to hear back from the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) war rooms, which allot beds to COVID-19 patients based on their position on the waiting list and severity of disease, about a bed for her brother. That call never came.

While Bengaluru's less-than-adequate public medical infrastructure is under severe stress with an exponential rise in cases, an alleged scam in the South Zone has also raised questions on the integrity of the bed allocation system in the city. All war rooms are currently under investigation by the Central Crime Branch police. So far, two doctors are among the four people who have been arrested and hospitals are under the scanner. The civic body has conceded that such cases may have occurred but may not be widespread.

#### Bed allocation racket

On May 4, Bengaluru South Member of Parliament Tejasvi Surya, with three BJP MLAs in tow, stormed into the BBMP South Zone war room and accused staff of blocking beds for cash. "As soon as a bed is released from the hospital, people in the control room block it in the name of some asymptomatic patients, only to later manually change it and allot it to a person who pays them. This ensures beds are always blocked to the full and are not available for the needy," alleged Mr. Surya, who live-streamed the 'exposé'.

Mr. Surya and the MLAs, while exposing the racket, made it a point to target 16 Muslim employees of a total workforce of 206. Citizens, political leaders in the Opposition and activists have criticised the BJP for communalising a problem at a time when the city is fighting a vicious second wave, with many calling for an apology or police action. Volunteers from minority communities and organisations such as Mercy Mission, spearheaded by Muslims and at the forefront of relief work from providing oxygen to cremating bodies, have expressed dismay at how the ruling dispensation continues to demonise the community.

Mr. Surya claimed victory of "reforming the system" and announced hours after his 'exposé' that the BBMP website was showing 1,500-odd beds as available. That claim was, however, misleading.

The bed allocation racket, which senior police and civic officials say is not as widespread as it is being made out to be, exposes the lack of preparedness and poor medical infrastructure in a city that wears its 'IT capital' tag with pride.

Given how oxygenated beds, ICU beds and ventilators are hard to come by, touts have entered the fray. They charge anywhere between ₹25,000 and ₹30,000 to find a bed, but their "business" is constrained by the dearth of beds. "Oxygenated and ICU beds are hard to come by. People are ready to pay up to ₹2 lakh to get an ICU bed, but even I am struggling to find one," said Dhanraj (name changed), a tout in the city. A social worker and her nephew who were arrested by the police in a sting operation for selling beds are suspected to have ties with war room staffers.

#### Caught on the back foot

Why is the health infrastructure in Bengaluru, once touted to be a popular medical tourism hub with affordable world-class facilities, crumbling during this second wave? Karnataka's highest case load per day so far has been 50,112 and deaths, 592.

As daily new cases rose from 210 on March 1 to 23,706 on May 6, and the number of deaths from four to 139 during the same period, the government was caught on the back foot. An inadequate number of ICU and oxygenated beds, scarcity of life-saving oxygen, and shortage of vaccines and drugs like Re-



Relatives and friends wait outside the Sumanahalli crematorium with the bodies of their loved ones in ambulances, during the weekend lockdown, in Bengaluru on April 25. (Below): Mass cremations take place at a crematorium ground between Magadi Road and Tumkur road in Bengaluru. ■ MURALI KUMAR K.



midesivir, Favipiravir (Fabiflu) and Tocilizumab have pushed citizens to despair, allowing touts and black marketeers to thrive.

Giridhar R. Babu, epidemiologist and member of the State's COVID-19 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which had sounded the alarm of a second wave last year, said a surge such as this, which is nearly five times higher than the first wave, simply cannot be managed by a system that was barely augmented to take on the pandemic. "In addition, a far more contagious variant has resulted in a high number of cases in a very short span of time. Adding to the woes is the complete mismanagement of the bed distribution system. This shows poor management and coordination by urban local bodies. Even today, mechanisms have not been evolved to cater to the critical care needs of the people of Bengaluru," he said.

However, according to officials from the State Health Department, Karnataka did ramp up its health infrastructure to increase its bed count to 1.20 lakh. With a population of nearly 7 crore, the bed to patients ratio is 1:583.

Compared to pre-COVID-19 days, the bed strength in public hospitals has also increased. While the number of general beds has risen from 37,817 to 42,584, oxygenated beds have gone up from 1,970 to 18,593. Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds have been ramped up from 1,054 to 3,190 and ICUs with ventilator beds (ICU-Vs) have more than tripled from 610 to 2,034.

In Bengaluru, 157 hospitals – government, private and medical colleges – have allocated a total of 6,002 general beds, 4,299 high dependency units (HDU), 591 ICUs, and 500 ICU-V beds. The numbers may seem impressive until you look at the demand, especially for ICU and ICU-V beds. As on May 5, 562 ICU and 494 ICU-V beds were occupied. For a brief time that day, the bed management system showed only 13 ICU-V beds as available, as per BBMP's records.

Officials claim that Karnataka and Bengaluru's infrastructure is much better in comparison to other States, but numerical comparisons are no solace to people running from one hospital to another looking for beds for their

friends or family members.

One of the biggest problems in providing affordable medical aid seems to be the high dependency on the private sector. Nearly 60% of the patients are treated in private hospitals, a trend that is playing out across the country. While the government is trying to make private hospitals hand over 75% of their total beds to government-referred COVID-19 patients, this is yet to happen. The beds ceded by the private hospital to the government are added to the government's database.

As on May 6, private hospitals had allocated 2,054 general beds, 1,554 HDU beds, 291 ICU beds and 174 ICU with ventilator beds. In private medical colleges, 3,578 general beds, 1,849 HDU beds, 146 ICU and 161 ICU with ventilator beds were made available for government-referred patients. As on Thursday, all ICU and HDU beds were occupied.

But numbers are also manipulated for profit, since private hospitals get paid far less for government-referred patients. In Bengaluru, BBMP health officers have found well-known hospitals attempting to "hide" beds by showing what is occupied when patients have either died or been discharged.

The BBMP's bed database is not foolproof either and it is not clear if it is by design or human error in an overwhelmed system. Last week, a 41-year-old COVID-19 patient who was isolating himself at home with his wife took a turn for the worse. As his oxygen saturation levels started to drop, he contacted the BBMP control room seeking a bed.

After several calls, he was sent an ambulance and asked to go to a private hospital in south Bengaluru. On arrival, he was told that there had been a "mistake" and that no beds were available. He waited in the lobby of the hospital for nearly two hours after which the hospital authorities asked him to wait outside in the ambulance. He was eventually allotted a bed at another private hospital in the opposite end of the city.

There have been multiple cases of patients being allotted beds only for them to arrive at the hospital and learn that there is none available. However, the system, which is currently being fine-tuned to weed out illegal sale of beds, does give patients an idea of the resources available.



Such a system did not even exist for private sector beds. It was only towards the end of April that the Private Hospitals and Nursing Homes' Association (PHANA) agreed to roll out a database so that citizens can monitor availability of beds in real-time. At the time, Dr. H.M. Prasanna, president, PHANA, told *The Hindu*, "The situation is so bad that, as president of the Association, I myself don't know where beds are available." The portal was yet to be updated at the time of going to press.

As the clamour for resources grows louder with each passing day, civic officials, legislators and even the police are inundated with requests for HDU and ICU beds. An opposition MLA said every morning his office sees a flood of people requesting him to get an oxygenated or ICU bed for a relative. "There are absolutely no beds. And how do I even prioritise among them? Why am I playing God here," he asked.

#### Confusion and testing delays

In thousands of instances, confusion begins even at the time of testing. When a person's COVID-19 test returns positive, he or she is assigned a patient identity or BU (Bengaluru Urban) number. A delay in this early stage of the process has a cascading effect as the identity number is essential for citizens to avail themselves of any health facility, be it an ambulance service or hospitalisation. With more people lining up to get tested, however, the pipeline choked, and laboratories, especially privately run facilities, started taking days to upload the results on the Indian Council of Medical Research website.

False negatives and people developing severe symptoms while still waiting for their report became a common problem. The Karnataka High Court directed all laboratories and testing agencies to provide RT-PCR test results within 24 hours, but the problem persists. The BBMP administration has repeatedly appealed to private laboratories to give the test results within 24 hours, but to no avail. Over the last few weeks, civic officials have issued show cause notices to over 20 such private laboratories and sealed over six for non-compliance.

Many, either because of the long wait for RT-PCR reports or a false negative report, have resorted to taking CT scans

despite high costs to ascertain infection. It was only a few days ago that the government took cognisance of this issue and decided to issue BU numbers for those who test positive on CT scans.

For Arvind, a taxi driver in Bengaluru, the change in rules came too late. When his mother-in-law suddenly started showing symptoms of COVID-19 and complained of breathlessness, he didn't have a BU number to get her hospitalised. He drove all night in his taxi from one hospital to another but couldn't get a bed. He took her home where she died. "I couldn't afford beds in high-end private hospitals," he said.

#### Shortage of oxygen

The government plans to augment Bengaluru's ICU bed count by 4,000. But many health experts point out that it may prove to be an exercise in futility when there is shortage of oxygen for the existing beds.

On May 4, two patients, including a 38-year-old mother of two children, died in the wee hours of Tuesday at Arigka hospital in Yelahanka, allegedly due to non-availability of oxygen. Hospital authorities said both patients had come in a critical condition and the families had been informed about the oxygen shortage. The previous day, 24 people died due to alleged oxygen shortage at a government hospital in Chamarajanagar, 170 km away from Bengaluru.

Hospitals sending out letters to patients' relatives to shift them out as they are running out of oxygen has become an everyday routine. Doctors and management of hospitals attribute the crisis to logistical issues in the oxygen supply chain. Health Commissioner K.V. Trilok Chandra corroborated this. "We are streamlining supply and addressing the logistical issues," he said.

Dr. Prasanna of PHANA said, "Quantity is not an issue, but the problem lies in the supply chain. With very few supply tankers, vendors are unable to visit hospitals two-three times a day for refilling."

Karnataka does not have a system in place for the storage and distribution of oxygen. Chamarajanagar, where the 24 patients died, has no manufacturing facility of its own and depends on Mysuru for supply. There is no State-monitored mechanism to ensure that each district is assured a certain quantum of supply depending on its need, and so the districts try and procure supply on their own.

On May 4, Dr. Babu, who also heads Life Course Epidemiology at the Public Health Foundation of India in Bengaluru, tweeted: "In a country where ice creams, chilled coke and chips reach villages, it is simply astonishing to believe that the industry cannot help in solving the logistic crisis of oxygen distribution. How many governments have reached out to industry for help or partnership?"

Unlike the previous year, the strain prevalent in the city is pushing more patients to hypoxia and hence the demand for oxygen is several times more, said a senior health official. As per Union government norms, the State placed a demand for oxygen in the range of 1,471 MTD to 1,791 MTD between April 30 and

May 5, but said a minimum of 1,162 MTD was absolutely necessary. However, the Union government first allotted only 300 MTD, increased it to 802 MTD and later 865 MTD. During an ongoing hearing of a PIL in High Court, the Centre offered to further raise it to 965 MTD. However, the Karnataka High Court ordered the Union government to allot 1,200 MTD for the next four days to the State and asked the State government to place new demand. The Union government appealed against it to the Supreme Court, which refused to interfere noting that the Karnataka High Court's order is a well-calibrated and thought-out one. "We will not keep the citizens of Karnataka in the lurch," the Supreme Court said.

#### How did it come to this?

TAC had on November 30 last year submitted a report to the government recommending that ICUs, ICU-Vs, oxygen, etc. be kept ready by the first week of January to meet levels that the city had witnessed during the first COVID-19 peak in October. More importantly, it recommended restricting mass gatherings like fairs and festivals, religious congregations and cultural events.

However, the State government, which had initially announced certain restrictions including night curfew during the New Year week (which was later rolled back), did not consider the report in toto. It waited for by-elections and urban local body elections to end before announcing stringent measures. Restrictions for cinema halls too were rolled back a day after the announcement.

If the report was taken seriously then and stringent measures were initiated early, the situation could have been controlled," said V. Ravi, TAC member and nodal officer for genomic confirmation of SARS-CoV-2 in Karnataka.

"Declaring elections was the biggest blunder. Elections could have been postponed considering the pandemic as a national medical emergency. However, the State followed a wait-and-watch policy and we are seeing the consequences," another expert said. Citizens wanted to believe that the worst was over and ignored the warning signs as neighbouring Maharashtra and Kerala saw cases rise.

As the death toll mounts in Bengaluru, furnaces in the 12 electric crematoriums are breaking down. The district administration has set up open crematoriums on the outskirts of the city with a capacity to burn more than 20 bodies at a time.

Another makeshift crematorium is coming up at the Mallipura landfill, where the civic body is working towards building a capacity to cremate 50 bodies at a time. At these open crematoriums, pyres burn simultaneously and the air shimmers in the haze of smoke and orange flames. Within Bengaluru, the silence in residential neighbourhoods observing lockdown is regularly broken by the wails of ambulances.

Experts have once again urged the government to finalise a plan for the long haul, one that will enable Bengaluru to withstand multiple waves of COVID-19.

## FROM PAGE ONE

## Karnataka HC judicious in ordering oxygen: SC

Mr. Mehta, who represents the Centre which has challenged the High Court order, said the issue was not about supply of oxygen to Karnataka.

## 'Pan-Indian issue'

"The Centre is not and cannot be averse to that. I am only sharing a concern about a national problem... This is a pan-India issue. If every HC starts 'judiciously' examining what amount of oxygen should be supplied, etc., where would it lead to... The Centre and State should decide the allocation of oxygen. If every HC starts entertaining petitions for allocation of oxygen under Article 226 [of the Constitution], COVID management would become unworkable. There will be a complete lack of pandemic management. This [oxygen] is not an unlimited source, we are trying to distribute it equitably to all," he argued.

Justice Chandrachud said the amount of oxygen required for Karnataka was not arrived at by the High Court on its own, but based on a discussion between the State and the Centre. Besides, the HC had not

precluded a resolution on oxygen allocation between the State and the Centre.

Justice Shah said the minimum requirement of 1,162 MT was fixed as per the norms arrived at by the government itself.

At one point, an exasperated Mr. Mehta said "we are then ready to give the entire supply [of oxygen] and let it be distributed through the High Courts".

Justice Chandrachud intervened at this point, saying the top court was considering the setting up of an allocation committee for supply of oxygen to the States equitably and as per their individual needs. "We are forming a committee and till then the HCs cannot shut their eyes," he said.

Justice Chandrachud said the judges, including Karnataka Chief Justice Abhay Oka and Justice Aravind Kumar, who passed the order in question, were human beings sensitive to what was happening around them. "They have seen the deaths in Chamarajanagar and Kalburgi... We are jointly in this," Justice Chandrachud assured Mr. Mehta.

The court suggested that the mention for an urgent hearing before the Delhi High Court Chief Justice on Monday could even be made jointly by the petitioners' lawyer, senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, and Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre.

The petitioners, Anya Malhotra and Sohail Hashmi, had moved the Supreme Court after the Delhi High Court adjourned the hearing of their case to May 17, ostensibly to "study" a judgment of the Supreme Court pronounced on January 5, allowing the Central Vista project.

The Supreme Court said that since the case was already pending before the High Court, it did not want to enter into its merits. However, the Bench said the case could be heard by the High Court "as early as possible".

**Humanitarian crisis**

Mr. Luthra said the workers were ferried by bus from Karol Bagh, Keerthi Nagar and Sarai Kale Khan. The work seemed to continue owing to a stringent deadline.

"But how can construction be an essential activity when there is a public health crisis on? We are in a posi-

sion that the caseload may peak by mid-May, and the HC keeps the case on May 17 to study a judgment? Please understand, this is a peculiar situation... HC adjourns to May 17 without notice... We are facing a humanitarian crisis. When human lives are concerned, government needs to protect." From April 1 to May 3, the positivity rate had 'shot up' from 3.57% to about 30%, he said.

Mr. Luthra referred to how many who were near and dear were affected by the virus. "Today when the health system is broken... People are not getting beds..." he said.

Justice Saran said, "We are conscious of it. A different Bench is seized of this is-

sue... Mr. Luthra, you can make comments about deaths, but we cannot, it may be taken otherwise..."

## 'Stop construction'

Mr. Luthra referred to a Disaster Management Authority circular, which had directed construction activities, except where labourers are residing onsite, to be stopped. He said the petitioners were only concerned with the work on the Rajpath, Central Vista and garden stretches and no other.

"The nation is considering a lockdown, IPL has been shut off. Despite the Centre's great efforts to supply oxygen, there is an unprecedented spread of infection. On May 17, we would have reached the peak..." he argued.

Mr. Mehta objected to the special leave petition filed against an order of adjournment by the High Court. "It sets a bad precedent... Our HCs are functioning under great constraints... There are severely factually incorrect statements being made," he submitted.

However, disposing off the case, the Bench asked the lawyers to take their arguments to the High Court.



Hardeep Puri

body else," he said.

It was only the contracts for the new Parliament building and the revamp of the Central Vista Avenue that had been awarded for ₹862 crore and ₹477 crore respectively so far, while the other components of the plan would be spread over many years.

The Minister said the Congress wanted to distract people "from monumental governance failures in their States by spreading lies".

He accused the Congress of hypocrisy, saying the party and its allies were also spending on new projects such as an MLA hostel in Maharashtra and a Legislative Assembly building in Chhattisgarh.

Congress leaders had raised the demand for a new Parliament building during the UPA government's rule, he added.

## Central Vista: SC tells petitioners to move HC for early hearing

Two Delhi residents raised concern over the project continuing amid a health crisis

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI



At full steam: Construction work under way at Rajpath in New Delhi on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPKAR

The Supreme Court on Friday highlighted the "extremely urgent" concern raised by two Delhi residents over the ferrying of labourers to the Central Vista redevelopment site and back amid a devastating public health crisis, and permitted them to approach the Delhi High Court Chief Justice on Monday with a request to hear their case as "early as possible".

"We hope and trust that upon such request being made, the High Court would consider the same appropriately and pass necessary orders," a Bench of Justices Vineet Saran and Dinesh Maheshwari recorded in its order.

The court suggested that the mention for an urgent hearing before the Delhi High Court Chief Justice on Monday could even be made jointly by the petitioners' lawyer, senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, and Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre.

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However, disposing off the case, the Bench asked the lawyers to take their arguments to the High Court.

## Substantial allocation for vaccination, says Puri

He defends Central Vista project

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry Hardeep Puri on Friday hit back at the Congress, saying the government had allocated nearly "twice the amount" of the ₹20,000 crore to be spent for the Central Vista project for the vaccination programme.

The government's decision to go ahead with the construction of a new Parliament and the Central Vista Avenue amid the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn the ire of the Opposition.

In a series of tweets, Mr. Puri said: "Congress's dis-course on Central Vista is bizarre."

"Cost of Central Vista is about ₹20,000 crore, over several years. Govt has allo-cated nearly twice that amount for vaccination! India's healthcare budget for just this year was over ₹3 lakh crore. We know our priorities."

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Hardeep Puri

body else," he said.

It was only the contracts for the new Parliament building and the revamp of the Central Vista Avenue that had been awarded for ₹862 crore and ₹477 crore respectively so far, while the other components of the plan would be spread over many years.

The Minister said the Congress wanted to distract people "from monumental governance failures in their States by spreading lies".

He accused the Congress of hypocrisy, saying the party and its allies were also spending on new projects such as an MLA hostel in Maharashtra and a Legislative Assembly building in Chhattisgarh.

Congress leaders had raised the demand for a new Parliament building during the UPA government's rule, he added.

## Centre must call all-party meet, says Sonia

This battle against COVID-19 has to be fought together as a nation, she says

SANDEEP PHUKAN

NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Friday urged the Union government to listen to suggestions offered by the States to bring the COVID-19 situation under control

At a meeting of all MPs of the party to discuss the second wave of the pandemic, Ms. Gandhi sought their views and pointed out that tackling the crisis required an able, calm and visionary leadership.

The nation was sinking under the weight of the government's "indifference and incompetence", she noted.

She said: "Let us be absolutely clear – the system hasn't failed. The Modi government has been unable to constructively channelise India's many strengths and re-

sources. I say this categorically – India is crippled by a political leadership today that has no empathy for the people. The government has failed the people of our country.

"You are all well aware of the very many letters Dr. Manmohan Singhji, former Congress president Rahulji, and I have written to the Prime Minister in a spirit of constructive cooperation, giving very pointed and practical suggestions for action. I have personally been in touch with our Chief Ministers. They too have spoken to the Prime Minister and other Ministers concerned about the seriousness of the situation in their States.

"Some of our colleagues have been regularly and quite effectively raising legi-

timate concerns and questions in the media. Unfortunately, these helpful initiatives have fallen on deaf ears. The government has made no meaningful response and continues to believe that it alone has the answers. The situation brooks no delay," she said.

The Congress firmly believed that fighting COVID-19 was not a "government versus us" battle but an "us versus corona" battle. This battle transcended political differences. This battle had

to be fought together as a nation, she said.

## Congratulates leaders

Ms. Gandhi congratulated the leaders who won in the recent Assembly polls.

She said: "Friends, in closing, may I on your behalf congratulate Mamataji and Thiru M.K. Stalin and the Left for their handsome victories. Most unfortunately, our own performance in all the States was very disappointing and if I may say, unexpectedly so. The CWC is

meeting shortly to review the results but it goes without saying that we as a party collective must draw the appropriate lessons from this setback in a spirit of humility and honesty.

"India is in the grip of a deadly health disaster. Thousands have died and millions are scrambling to access basic healthcare, life-saving medicines, oxygen, and vaccines. It is heartbreaking to see people battling for their lives in hospitals, on roads, waiting in vehicles, far too many for want of any medical help at all.

"The government's own empowered groups and its National Task Force for COVID-19 had warned it that a second wave was imminent and urged it to plan and prepare for it. In that spirit, as a first step, I believe that the Modi government must urgently call an all-party meeting on the COVID-19 situation."



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## IN BRIEF



ECI panel counsel quits, cites conflict in values

NEW DELHI

Mohit D. Ram, an advocate on record on the Election Commission of India's panel of counsel in the Supreme Court, on Thursday resigned from the position, citing a difference in values with the functioning of the Commission currently.

## NCW to submit report on West Bengal today

NEW DELHI

The three-member committee of the National Commission for Women (NCW) constituted to look into post-poll violence against women in West Bengal has returned from its two-day visit of the State. The panel is likely to submit its report to the Ministry of Home Affairs on Saturday. "We found the State police to be inactive," said Rekha Sharma, NCW chairperson.

## Court stays sacking of 252 Assam NRC workers

GUWAHATI

The Gauhati High Court has stayed the termination of 252 junior assistants who had been employed on contract for updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam. They were served the termination notice on March 26, three days after the Registrar General of India ordered the closure of the NRC office in Assam and declined to sanction any fund after March 31.

## Govt. must defer all polls: Ashwani Kumar

Former Union Minister Ashwani Kumar on Friday appealed to the Union government and all political parties to defer all elections in the country for one year or until such time when the pandemic can be controlled.

Born into a Kutchi business family in Mumbai, Bhatia started training in music from a young age. After his post-graduation from Elphinstone College in 1949, Bhatia studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London, where he graduated with a gold medal in 1954.

A legend in the music world, Bhatia leaves behind a prodigious legacy of compositions in films as varied as *Ajooba* and *Ankur*, television serials as well as about 6,000 jingles, including the famous *La Lalala* track for Liril soap that still strikes a chord and the ad for Dulux paint.

The composer's mastery is visible in the opening credits of the popular *Doordarshan* serial *Bharat Ek Khoj*, which begins with a shloka from the Vedas. "He provided the soundtrack of our childhoods in the 1980s and 1990s. With him, we have lost a legend," lyricist-writer Varun Grover said.

His last years were spent as a recluse, said industry insiders.

Bhatia started his professional journey by composing music for advertisements.

He made his cinema debut with director Shyam Benegal's first film *Ankur* in 1974. It was the beginning of one of the most fruitful collaborations in Hindi cinema music, including *Manthan* and *Mandi*. Bhatia went on to become the go-to composer for directors in the new wave of Indian cinema music of the 1970s and 80s.

## CJI nominates four

# Hindu consolidation pays off for BJP

	Voted for Mahajot	Voted for NDA	Voted for AJP-RD alliance	Voted for others
Hindus	19 (32)	67 (57)	7	8 (11)
Muslims	81 (77)	11 (6)	2	6 (18)
Others	36 (48)	48 (39)	9	7 (13)
Assamese Hindus	17 (24)	67 (64)	12	4 (11)
Assamese Muslims	65 (78)	24 (7)	7	4 (16)
Bengali Hindus	23 (31)	74 (63)	1	2 (6)
Bengali Muslims	89 (76)	8 (6)	1	3 (18)
Others	34 (53)	49 (33)	4	14 (12)

How communal were BJP and AIUDF according to Muslims and Hindus respectively

	"BJP is..."			"AIUDF is..."		
	Communal	Secular	Non-committal	Communal	Secular	Non-committal
Hindus	36	34	30	57	11	32
Muslims	62	17	20	25	53	22
Assamese Hindus	40	32	28	63	9	28
Assamese Muslims	61	18	21	40	39	21
Bengali Hindus	34	43	23	60	17	24

Most Hindus were satisfied with the Centre and the State government; most Muslims were not

	State government		Central government	
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Overall	58	34	56	38
Hindu	72	20	71	22
Muslim	36	55	32	61

Pro-incumbency sentiment was greater than anti-incumbency; Hindus and Muslims took opposite stands

	Another chance for the State government?	
	Yes (Pro-incumbency)	No (Anti-incumbency)
Overall	43	38
Hindu	62	18
Muslim	14	68

Those who looked at only Modi government's performance were more likely to have voted for the NDA

Whose work did voters give more importance to while voting?	Voted for Mahajot	Voted for NDA	Voted for AJP-RD alliance	Voted for others
Sonowal govt's work in Assam (16%)	32	54	3	11
Modi govt's work at the Centre (11%)	22	70	3	5
Both govt's work (33%)	26	63	5	6
Local MLA's work (8%)	79	10	1	10
Something else or non-committal (32%)	68	19	8	5

Note: All figures are rounded off and may not add up to 100

## Welfare measures not a decisive factor

## MANJESH RANA

Contrary to what was reported in some sections of the media, the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey data do not find welfare schemes to have been a decisive factor for the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) performance in the Assam Assembly election. The survey indicates that not many households benefited from the State's welfare schemes. This was seen when the names of at least nine schemes launched by the State were read out to the respondents – nearly half of the households said they had not benefited from any of them and about 42% said they benefited from a scheme or two.

However, among beneficiaries, the NDA enjoyed a

comfortable edge. The only schemes that had a fair amount of beneficiaries were the 'Orunodoi' (a fixed monthly sum to one woman in the household) and the 'Chah bagichar dhan puraskar mela' (financial aid to tea garden workers). About a quarter of voters (23%) claimed that the Orunodoi scheme was helpful to them; of those, 59% voted for the NDA, 27% more than *Mahajot*. Among non-beneficiaries of Orunodoi, NDA lagged by 9%. Further, among those who claimed to have received cash in their bank accounts, the NDA had an edge of 9% votes over the *Mahajot*, while among those who did not receive cash, it lagged by 7% votes.

The author is a researcher at Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi

Impact of schemes and direct cash transfers on the vote choice (%)

	Voted for Mahajot	Voted for NDA	Voted for AJP-RD alliance	Voted for Others
Not benefited from any scheme during last five years (48%)	49	39	4	8
Benefited from 1-2 schemes (42%)	42	47	5	6
Benefited from 3 or more (10%)	23	62	11	3
Received cash (self or a member of household) in the bank account from a govt. scheme during the last one year (45%)	41	50	3	6
Did not receive cash (55%)	46	40	7	7

Note: Figures are percentages and may not add up to 100 due to rounding

CM YK

## CAA, NRC evoke mixed sentiments

Though the law was not a priority for most voters, a majority of them opposed it

## MANJESH RANA

In both Assam and West Bengal, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) was a contentious issue. However, unlike in West Bengal, CAA faced bipartisan resistance in Assam, with calls for the cut-off date to be clocked back to 1971, as agreed in the Assam Accord of 1986. For the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the debate was centred on concerns around the process, rather than the concept itself. Just 3% of respondents in the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey mentioned CAA/NRC as the most important issue in the election. Almost one-third (30%) of respondents mentioned 'development' as the key issue.

While the CAA-NRC might not have come up as the most popular issue, a majority of voters (53%) opposed the CAA. There was a 10-percentage advantage to *Mahajot* among the ones against the law, while the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by 30% votes among those backing the CAA. Clearly, the NDA was successful in ensuring that CAA does not become a poll issue. As a result, even among opponents of the law, NDA polled 38% votes.

Even though opposition to CAA was high across both Hindus and Muslims, the latter were more likely to be against it, with 61% reporting opposition as against 47% of Hindu voters. Across ethnicities, Assamese Muslims recorded the highest opposition, with three-fourths (73%) against it, followed by Bengali Muslims (59%), Assamese Hindus (51%) and Bengali Hindus (40%). It's possible that the BJP

## Vote choice of supporters and opponents of CAA, NRC and NRC process

	Voted for Mahajot	Voted for NDA	Voted for AJP-RD	Voted for others
<b>CAA</b>				
Support (20%)	30	60	2	8
Oppose (53%)	48	38	8	6
Non-Committal (27%)	44	46	2	9
<b>NRC concept</b>				
Support (75%)	41	48	5	6
Oppose (10%)	51	29	10	10
Non-Committal (16%)	49	40	3	8
<b>NRC process</b>				
Satisfied (58%)	40	52	3	6
Dissatisfied (25%)	52	30	11	8
Non-committal (17%)	45	42	3	10

Note: Figures are percentages and may not add up to 100 due to rounding

## Stand on CAA, NRC, and NRC process by religion and ethnicity

	CAA		NRC concept		NRC process	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Overall	20	53	75	10	58	25
Religion						
Hindus	23	47	73	9	59	22
Muslims	15	61	74	13	56	31
Christians	17	65	89	3	72	19
Ethnicity						
Assamese Hindus	20	51	72	10	53	27
Assamese Muslims	11	73	86	9	73	21
Bengali Hindu	34	40	79	9	75	13
Bengali Muslims	16	59	74	12	53	34
Others	21	51	74	9	60	21

Note: Figures are percentages; the rest of the respondents were non-committal on each question

sensed the dissatisfaction among voters regarding the CAA and steered away from making it the poll plank.

In contrast, for the NRC, as high as three in four respondents reported support, as against one in 10 who op-

posed it. Overall, a large proportion of respondents, irrespective of religion, said they were satisfied with the way NRC was implemented in the State. Again proving to be a divider, among people who were satisfied with the process, the *Mahajot* trailed behind the NDA by 12% votes, while among those who recorded dissatisfaction, it enjoyed an advantage of 22% votes. The dissatisfaction was greater among Bengali Muslims (34%) and Assamese Hindus (27%).

Notably, over half (51%) of dissatisfied Assamese Hindus still backed the NDA, but among the rest, the votes were split between the *Mahajot* (19%) and the Assam Jatiya Parishad-Rajbari Dal (AJP-RD) alliance (25%), with the latter emerging as a more favourable choice while voting. The 'infiltrator/refugee' narrative of the NDA, particularly targeting the Badruddin Ajmal-led All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), a Congress ally, perhaps explains this shift to the AJP-RD front.

Two-thirds (63%) of respondents still consider foreigners' issue important, while 16% think that it has been blown out of proportion. This view was more prevalent among Assamese Hindus (75%) and Muslims (72%) than Bengali Hindus (52%) and Muslims (50%), strengthening the 'insiders-outsiders' debate.

A solution seems far, as only 39% of respondents thought that the issue can be resolved upon updating the N

# Vaccines bought first using PM CARES funds cost more

Current price, negotiated through bulk orders, may not be replicable: official

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ  
JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

The first lot of vaccines was procured by the Centre using PM CARES funds at a rate higher than the subsequent rounds paid for with budgetary allocations. *The Hindu* has learnt from the response to a Right to Information request by a transparency activist.

The Health Ministry response said that the initial 5.6 crore doses of Covishield were bought at a pre-tax price of ₹200 and one crore dose of Covaxin at ₹295, but Finance Secretary T.V. Somanathan said both vaccines were, in fact, bought at around ₹200 only.

## Many factors

This is higher than the ₹150 rate at which both vaccines are now sold to the Centre. Dr. Somanathan told *The Hindu* that bulk orders, advance payments and a lower demand situation had helped in negotiating for the lower rate, "which may not be replicable" for future orders by States or others.

The difference in cost in the vaccines paid for by budgetary allocations and by PM CARES, which the Centre says is a non-governmental fund, came to light in the Health Ministry's May 2 res-



**Patient wait:** As demand for vaccination rises, many States have said that they are facing a shortage of doses. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

ponse to an RTI query filed by Commodore Lokesha Batra (Retd). It said that initially the Government of India through PM CARES funds procured 5.6 crore doses of Covishield from the Serum Institute of India at the unit cost of ₹200 (plus 5% GST of ₹10) and one crore doses of Covaxin from Bharat Biotech at ₹295 (plus tax of ₹14.75).

This round of vaccines was initially aimed at frontline and healthcare workers, but offtake was relatively poor.

However, at present, Government of India through Union Budget has procured the COVID-19 vaccines (COVISHIELD 10 crores doses and COVAXIN 2 crores doses) at the unit cost of Rs. 157.50 including taxes (Rs. 150 + 5% GST), said the RTI response,

adding that an additional 11 crore doses of Covishield and 5.5 crore doses of Covaxin were also being procured at the ₹150 rate, in what it described as an "ongoing process".

Dr. Somanathan said that although the list price of the indigenously developed Covaxin was ₹295, the Centre had insisted that Bharat Biotech offer a discount to match the level of the foreign-developed, Indian-manufactured Covishield. Hence, both vaccines were bought at a price of approximately ₹200 per unit in the first round paid for by PM CARES funds, he said.

Asked for clarification, a Bharat Biotech spokesperson only pointed to Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan's

statement on January 12 that the company sold 38.5 lakh doses to the Centre at ₹295 per unit and gave 16.5 lakh doses for free as a special gesture, bringing the per unit price for a 55 lakh dose order to ₹206.

Adar Poonawala, CEO, Serum Institute of India, did not respond to a text message for comment on the differences in price.

## Much larger order

The second round of vaccines purchased through the Health Ministry budget came at the lower cost of ₹150 because it was a bulk order with a significant advance payment, said the Finance Secretary.

"The second round, which was entirely from the government, had two elements. One, it was a much larger order. It is common in all kinds of manufacturing, including in vaccines and drugs, that larger orders get smaller prices, because there is a commitment to a larger quantity, and we are saying we'll take this much at one go. And there was always a contemplation of and eventually, giving of an advance," he said. In contrast, payment was only made after supplies were delivered in the case of the initial PM CARES order.

## States told to give priority to second dose

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Health Ministry on Friday said State governments have been advised to prioritise beneficiaries due for the second dose for COVID vaccine and ensure timely completion of the recommended vaccination schedule.

State governments have been told to utilise supplies of vaccines in a 70:30 ratio for second dose and first dose respectively.

Regular review of coverage of COVID-19 vaccination drive should be undertaken to formulate and implement a strategy for such prioritisation and an effective communication strategy must be implemented for full two dose protection to all priority beneficiary groups," said the Health Ministry.

Meanwhile, NITI Aayog member V.K. Paul cautioned against the misuse of steroids and stressed the need to adhere to the treatment plan prescribed by doctors for COVID-19.

Speaking at a Health Ministry press conference, Dr. Paul said people displaying symptoms – fever, headache, body ache, sore throat, breathlessness etc – should consider themselves COVID positive unless tested otherwise and strictly follow isolation and treatment guidelines.

# Four-digit security code in CoWIN portal from today

The feature seeks to minimise data entry errors



**Key number:** The code will have to be shared with the health worker at the vaccination hub before taking the jab. ■ FILE PHOTO

In order to minimise errors and inconvenience caused to citizens registering for COVID-19 vaccination, the CoWIN system will introduce a new feature – a four-digit security code – in its portal from May 8, the Health Ministry has said.

"It has been noticed in some instances that citizens who booked their appointment for COVID vaccination through the CoWIN portal did not actually go for vaccination on the scheduled date but received a notification through SMS that a vaccine dose has been administered to them. Upon examination, it has been found to occur largely on account of the vaccinator

wrongly marking the citizen as vaccinated, an instance of a data entry error by the vaccinator," the Ministry stated.

This new feature will be applicable only for citizens who book online for a vaccination slot. The four-digit code will be printed in the appointment acknowledgement and will not be known to the vaccinator.

Before administering the vaccine dose, the verifier/vaccinator will ask for the four-digit code and enter it in the CoWIN system to correctly record the vaccination status.

their appointment and/or the registered mobile phone with appointment confirmation SMS, so that the security code can be furnished for easy completion of vaccination recording process.

It is also advised that the security code is furnished to the verifier/vaccinator before the vaccine dose is administered. "This is important as the digital certificate would be generated after the vaccine dose administration," said the Ministry.

Citizens should get a confirmation SMS after the process. "The confirmation SMS indicates that the vaccination process has been completed successfully and the digital certificate has been generated. If one does not get the confirmation SMS, one should get in touch with the vaccinator/ vaccination centre in-charge," it stated.

## IN BRIEF



### West Bengal seeks more oxygen

KOLKATA

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday urging that medical oxygen allocation for West Bengal be hiked to 550MT. Ms. Banerjee said the daily supply of medical oxygen produced in West Bengal to other States had been increased from 230 MT to 360 MT, while keeping the allotment for West Bengal constant at 308 MT.

### J&K doctors warned against talking to media

SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir administration has warned of action against doctors dealing with COVID-19 patients talking to the media. "All medical officers of the Kashmir division are enjoined upon to issue instructions to the staff to desist from media interactions, as it has been seen that contradictory and confusing messages are being circulated," Dr. Mushtaq Rather, Director, Health Services, said in an order.

## Rahul reiterates need for national lockdown

Congress leader writes to PM on 'COVID tsunami'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stating that a national lockdown had become "almost inevitable as the COVID tsunami continues to ravage the country unabated".

Assuring the Prime Minister of his party's support, Mr. Gandhi said various stakeholders must be taken into confidence so that "all can work together to safeguard India" since otherwise it could become a fertile ground for the virus to mutate and transform into a more contagious and dangerous form.

It was absolutely critical to track the virus and its mutations using genome sequencing as well as its disease patterns, assess the efficacy of all vaccines against all new mutations and be transparent about the findings to the rest of the world, he noted.



The government's "lack of a coherent COVID strategy, clear vaccination policy, hubris in prematurely declaring victory allowed the virus to grow exponentially and made India a dangerous place where the disease is growing explosively," he stated.

"I am aware that you are concerned about the economic impact of a lockdown. Inside and outside India, the human cost of allowing this virus to continue its march unimpeded will result in many more

tragic consequences for our people than any purely economic calculations your advisers are suggesting," he said.

To avoid a repeat of last year – when lakhs of migrant workers were forced to travel on foot – Mr. Gandhi suggested that the government should ensure a proper transportation policy and offer financial and food support to the vulnerable sections.

"The pandemic has demonstrated that our size, genetic diversity and complexity make India a fertile ground for the virus to rapidly mutate, transforming itself into a more contagious and more dangerous form. The double and triple mutant strains that we are currently grappling with are only the beginning. I fear. Allowing the uncontrollable spread of this virus in our country will be devastating not only for our people but also for the rest of the world," he observed.

## Single-day toll crosses 4,000 for the first time

3.95 lakh fresh infections reported in the country

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

India recorded more than 4,000 new COVID-19 related deaths for the first time on a single day, with 4,047 fresh fatalities as of 9.30 p.m. on Friday.

The country also recorded 3,95,013 new COVID-19 cases on Friday. India has so far reported a total of 2,18,79,357 cases and 2,38,113 deaths.

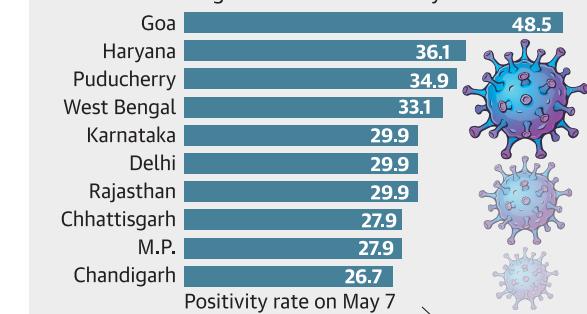
Maharashtra reported 54,022 infections, followed by Karnataka (48,781), and Kerala (38,460). Maharashtra also recorded 898 casualties, followed by Karnataka (592) and U.P. (372).

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Ladakh. The data are sourced from covid19india.org, an independent aggregator of daily figures.

About 24.59 lakh daily vaccine doses were administered in the country in the 24 hours ending 7 a.m. on

### High positivity

The graph depicts the positivity rate (no. of cases detected per 100 tests) in States with top 10 ratio on May 7. Goa had the highest rate in the country



Friday, about 4.4 lakh doses higher than what was recorded in the previous 24 hours.

However, the number of daily doses has been on a declining trend since mid-April. The seven-day average of daily doses administered by May 6 stood at 18.18 lakh, significantly lower than the 31.31 lakh recorded a month ago.

Nearly 18.26 lakh tests were conducted on Thursday (the results for which were made available on Friday), about one lakh lower than the previous day.

As of May 7, India's test positivity rate (cases/tests) is about 22.7%, which means that about one in five tests is turning positive.

According to the Health Ministry, positivity has exceeded 15% in 24 States, is between 5% and 15% in nine States, and less than 5% in three States.

## U.K. govt. labels variant a concern

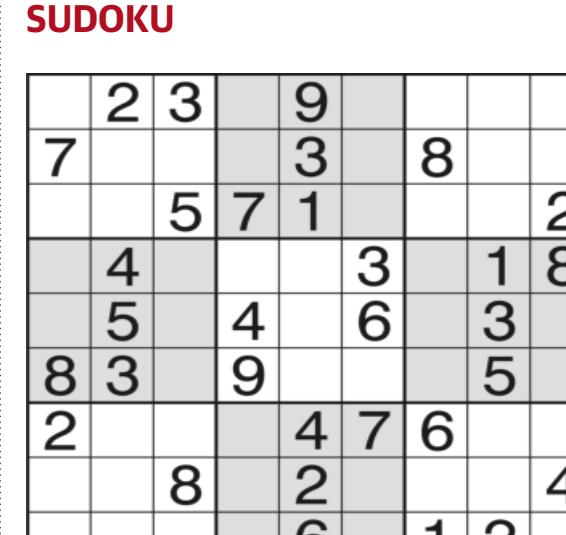
JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

Public Health England (PHE) has declared a coronavirus variant, closely related to the Indian Variant (B.1.617), as a Variant of Concern.

Dr. Anurag Agrawal, Director, Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, told *The Hindu* that an advisory group in India, INSA-COGR (India SarsCOV Genome Consortium), concerned with the genome details of Indian coronavirus variants, too had classified B.1.617 and all its sub lineages as VOC.

"Following a rise in cases in the U.K. and evidence of community transmission, PHE has reclassified VUI-21APR-02 (B.1.617.2), classified as a Variant of Concern (VOC), now known as VOC-21APR-02. This is based on evidence which suggests this variant, first detected in India, is at least as transmissible as B.1.1.7 (the Kent variant)," the U.K. government statement said.

## SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 13241

R E S U M E   B A R R A C K S  
N O L E O B H  
G O N D W A N A M A U R Y A  
W A Y U A J B  
T E X T E N U A T E D  
O N R Y I R  
G N A T T E T A S H O P S  
E E T R N A A  
S A N D S H O E R O S E  
T A A S D S  
W A S H I N G T O N D C  
T Y K M I O A  
B I O P S Y E X P O U N D S  
M E O N E R A  
H E A D B U T T D O T I M E

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

## FAITH

### Significance of mantras

Thirumoolar says that if one can understand the Vedas and tell others about them, one will experience joy. He says Lord Siva has given him a suitable body and the mental ability to comprehend the Vedas and to speak about them. Only those who know fully the inner meaning of Vedas and the Saiva Agamas can be said to live auspicious lives. By talking of the significance of Vedic mantras and their uses, Thirumoolar shows us the significance of his work, Thirumandiram, said R. Narayanan in a discourse.

Tholkappiyar, author of the grammar text Tholkappiyam, defines mantras. He says words that come from virtuous, knowledgeable persons are mantras. Thiruvalluvar in kural number 28 says the greatness of righteous people is evident from the mantras they give us. Thirumoolar says that the celestials and others recite mantras and worship Siva. (Thirumoolar refers to Lord Siva as Nandi). And just as the celestials recite mantras, so should his students. Although here Thirumoolar is addressing his students, his message is intended for the entire world. He wants everyone to have the benefits of chanting mantras and knowing their meaning.

Here it would be apt to recall what Sekkizhar says about Gnanasambandar. He says that Gnanasambandar composed his Namasivaya Padigam, so that the devas and those in this world could hear it. Sages like Thirumoolar are chosen by God to do good for the world. They do it through their deeds and words. Thirunavukkarasar was given the name Marulneekkiyar by his parents. When Marulneekkiyar was cured of his stomach ailment by Lord Siva, an asareeri voice announced that henceforth he would be called Navukkarasar. Navukkarasar not only composed verses in praise of Lord Siva, but he also undertook the work of cleaning temples.



## Charity spin

**Clooney Foundation for Justice:** Actor-director George Clooney, who turned 60 on May 6, shared his brand of comedy for a charity fundraiser. The sketch, highlighting his 'obsession' with *Ocean's Eleven* co-star Brad Pitt, was to promote the chance to hang out with him and wife, Amal, at Lake Como in Italy. The prize for one person and a friend is being auctioned on omaze.com.



## Talking point

**Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation:** After 23 years of marriage, Bill and Melinda Gates are going their separate ways. All eyes are on how the couple, who oversees the largest private foundation in the world – the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – is going to divvy up \$145 billion. The division could have a massive impact on what philanthropic causes get attention.

## SPIT TAKE

# The good old days

Comfort in nostalgia? Here's why you should stream *Satyam Sivam* with its high-octane thrills

KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI

Yesterday, as I was fighting the blues like everyone else in the country, I rediscovered *Satyam Sivam*, a Telugu film from the '80s, on YouTube. It stars both ANR and NTR (if you need to know who they are, you're from Uranus.)

I went straight to the climax. I know my way around this territory.

In a scene reflecting family values of the time, thespian Kaikala Satyanarayana is holding veteran actress Pushpalatha hostage (with a gun to her head) to escape from ANR. Satyanarayana and Pushpalatha are playing husband and wife, by the way. And ANR, 10 years older than his cinematic father, is playing their son. ANR also

happens to be gloriously blind. This is made evident by his stumbling around looking at the ceiling and grabbing a hapless Rati Agnihotri for support.

Now why would a man with a gun need a hostage if all he has to do is escape a blind man? ANR, you see, is a crack shot. And he can hit his target by 'seeing' with his ears. He proves his marksmanship a few minutes earlier by throwing a flower vase and shooting it. So wily old Satyanarayana is not taking any chances. He grabs his wife by the neck just as soon as she returns from the temple after performing an *archana* in his name.

Well, Satyanarayana, and a fairly co-operative Pushpalatha

(she has been estranged from her husband for many years, after all, and probably wants alone-time without a creepy, blind son who is older than her peering over their canoodling), make good their escape from their family home in a conveniently parked outdoor unit van. They head off in high speed in the direction of the docks. In the climax, it is mandatory for cast and crew of those times to head off to the docks, an abandoned factory or the villain's den in a convoy of

vehicles. But ANR has other plans.

A rope that has been tied to the luggage carrier on the van's roof snakes past him as the vehicle zooms off. ANR, still looking at the ceiling, grabs hold of it. And off he goes with the van. Dragged along the road horizontally, kicking and bleeding, you say? No! Why?

Because ANR has roller-skates on his feet. When did he put them on? Maybe when his mother was being strangled by



SREEJITH R KUMAR

his father a minute ago? Maybe they're built in? Maybe, unbeknownst to viewer, Pushpalatha bought them on her way to the temple and slyly passed them on to her blind son? Who cares.

Now we have a van zigzagging across the bewildered roads of Vizag with a blind ANR on skates attached to it. Multi-tasker Satyanarayana juggles driving and kidnapping duties with firing intermittently at his son who is holding on like a blind barnacle. There is some hardcore back-projection with ANR doing an equally hardcore impersonation of a vision-impaired man on skates powered by a runaway van.

Finally, one of the bullets gets the rope – *dishkiyaon* – and ANR is disengaged from the vehicle. Or is he?

From a nearby hill, the till-now absent other hero, NTR, espies this, and makes an entry like only he can. By diving on top of the van, grabbing the broken rope and keeping the chase alive...

I can't reveal any more.

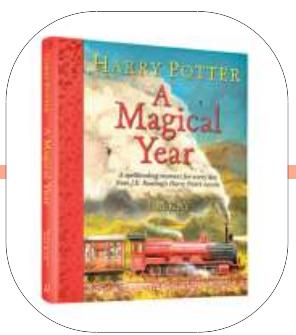
I suggest you watch this film. And every Amitabh Bachchan remake made in Tamil and Telugu with NTR, and Sivaji Ganesan doing the honours.

You'll realise how good life used to be.

**KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI** IS A SATIRIST. HE HAS WRITTEN FOUR BOOKS AND EDITED AN ANTHOLOGY.

## Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and launches around the world



### Art from Hogwarts

**Harry Potter fans** can look forward to a new book celebrating British illustrator Jim Kay's artwork on the series. Find colour illustrations, previously unseen pencil sketches and more in *Harry Potter - A Magical Year: The Illustrations of Jim Kay*. While the book will be released on October 5, pre-orders are open. bloomsbury.com, ₹1,399. Meanwhile, **Reese's [Witherspoon] Book Club** has announced a fellowship, LitUp, to support the works of unpublished women writers in the US. reesesbookclub.com



### A queer, black Hamlet

**Fat Ham** is a new play written by American playwright James Ijames. Described as a 'witty take' on Shakespeare's classic, the adaptation features a black family that runs a barbecue restaurant. There's comedy, karaoke and 'direct to camera' moments. While it was filmed on location, the play premiered online. Till May 23, ₹37. wilmatheatre.org. Closer home, talent platform The Mental Talkies has introduced **Indicast: Virtual Short Movies**, where short films by new and upcoming filmmakers will be screened. May 8. insider.in



### Learning curve

Actor Ricky Gervais drops his latest podcast, *Absolutely Mental*, on May 10. The paid-for 11-episode series will see Gervais asking neuroscientist and philosopher Sam Harris questions like, 'When does a baby start thinking?' \$14.99. absolutelymental.com. Meanwhile, Twitter has also launched a podcast, *I Wish I Knew*, which aims to bring listeners into the world of @TwitterResearch. Each episode will be co-hosted by a different pair of researchers.



### Rolls-Royce x Hermès

**Rolls-Royce Motor Cars** and Parisian luxury brand **Hermès** teamed up to create a one-of-a-kind car, the Rolls Royce Phantom Oribe. Commissioned by Japanese entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa, Rolls-Royce created a unique shade of Oribe Green for the two-tone colour scheme, while the interiors have Hermès' Enea Green leather finishing. Meanwhile, Instagram recently launched a 'zine', *Instagram Insider*, with the first issue, *Fashion & Beauty*, focussing on the people behind the crafts. about.instagram.com



### Vir Das continues

Stand-up comic **Vir Das** is back with his gigs from home to raise funds for Covid relief. When bookings opened for two shows on May 9, tickets were reportedly sold out in nine minutes and the booking website, www.virdas.in, crashed. Das has promised three more shows from May 12 to 14. Limited availability. townscript.com. In a similar vein, comic **Papa CJ's** autobiographical show, *Naked: A Comedian's Tale*, will be available to stream. May 14, ₹399 onwards. in.bookmyshow.com



### Mother's Day edit

For those keen on taking the **Mother's Day** (May 9) gifting up a notch, *Evoluzione* in Chennai is offering a curated Rest and Restore gift hamper at ₹7,447. It includes a rose quartz roller, aloe vera gel, and a scented sachet. 9840388026; courier available. If mums would prefer a libation instead, **Peekaboo Patterns**' Instagram page invites comments on how they kept their cool when their kids did something crazy during the pandemic. The best comments win a wine hamper. @peekaboopatterns



Swiss luxury watchmaker **Bovet** takes a sweet turn with a miniature painting artist. The dial of the **Miss Audrey Sweet Art** has sugar crystals coloured individually and placed on the dial one by one. Plus, the hands form a heart every hour when they come together. Meanwhile, watch enthusiasts can immerse themselves in the world of watchmaking as Swiss brand **Jaeger-LeCoultre** opened bookings for its first Discovery workshop this week. online-booking.jaeger-lecoultre.com.

# Will our celebrities please show up?

One expects involvement from celebrities and influencers with relief efforts because their fandom is the people

SANTU MISRA

Where are our celebrities? While regular people have been displaying extraordinary courage and ability during this crisis – verifying leads on oxygen, beds, plasma, and mobilising and taking action – Indian celebrities, for the most part, have stayed silent. But this is the time to show up!

International celebrities like podcast host Jay Shetty have raised a lot of money [\$36,88,981 in a virtual fundraiser on May 1]. And actor Priyanka Chopra is doing it relentlessly on Twitter, highlighting the situation in India and delivering an impassioned plea for people to donate, calling for action on supply of vaccines, and sharing a video with news clips capturing the true horror of the situation. To do something like this, you need guts. And persistence.

**Who's doing it right** Some are using their platforms effectively, like actor Bhumi Pednekar, and content creators Janice Sequeira and Kusha Kapila. They have been sharing leads

[and resources for beds, oxygen, plasma donors] and amplifying calls for help on Twitter.

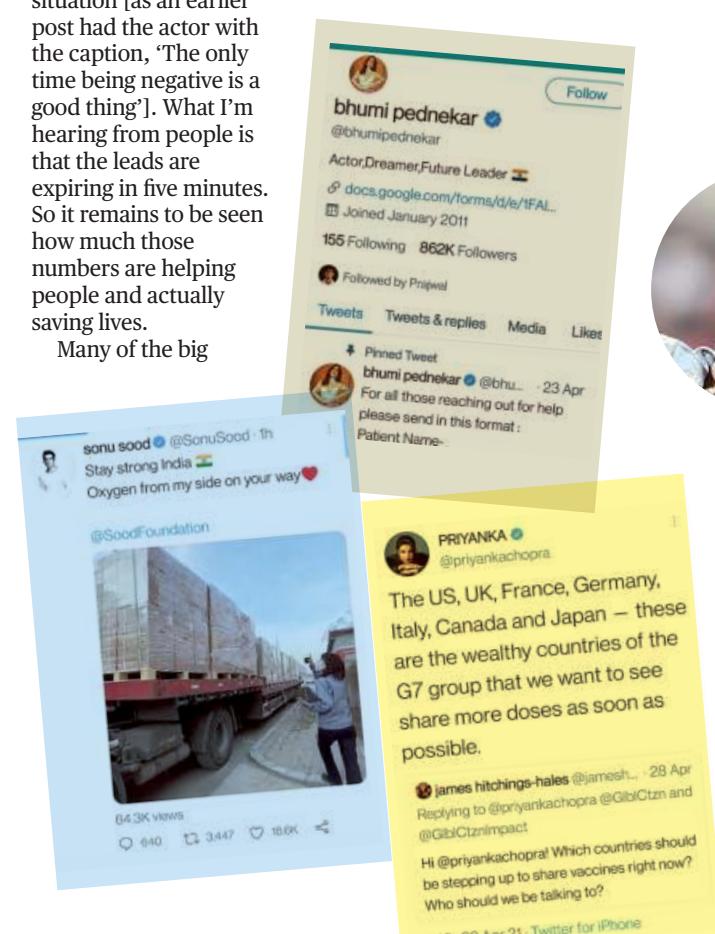
Actor Sonu Sood has been fantastic both last year and now. He's been raising multiple SOS calls and helping in real time on Twitter [and even via his phone number]. Actor John Abraham handed his social media accounts over to NGOs; that's one way of doing it.

Comedians like Mallika Dua and Srishtha Dugal have been using Instagram Stories to amplify requests and resources, while Vir Das has shared posts and tweets apart from having standup shows for Covid relief. However, as a community, there is scope for a lot more to be done.

**Toxic positivity** These days, many celebrities in India prefer to post pictures of themselves wearing masks and doing yoga... people don't

want to see that right now. Shilpa Shetty was trolled for this recently on Instagram. Alia Bhatt returned from the Maldives and the very next day announced that she was going to be amplifying leads in partnership with independent journalist Faye D'Souza. It felt like an avoid-backlash-and-react-quicky situation [as an earlier post had the actor with the caption, 'The only time being negative is a good thing']. What I'm hearing from people is that the leads are expiring in five minutes. So it remains to be seen how much those numbers are helping people and actually saving lives.

Many of the big

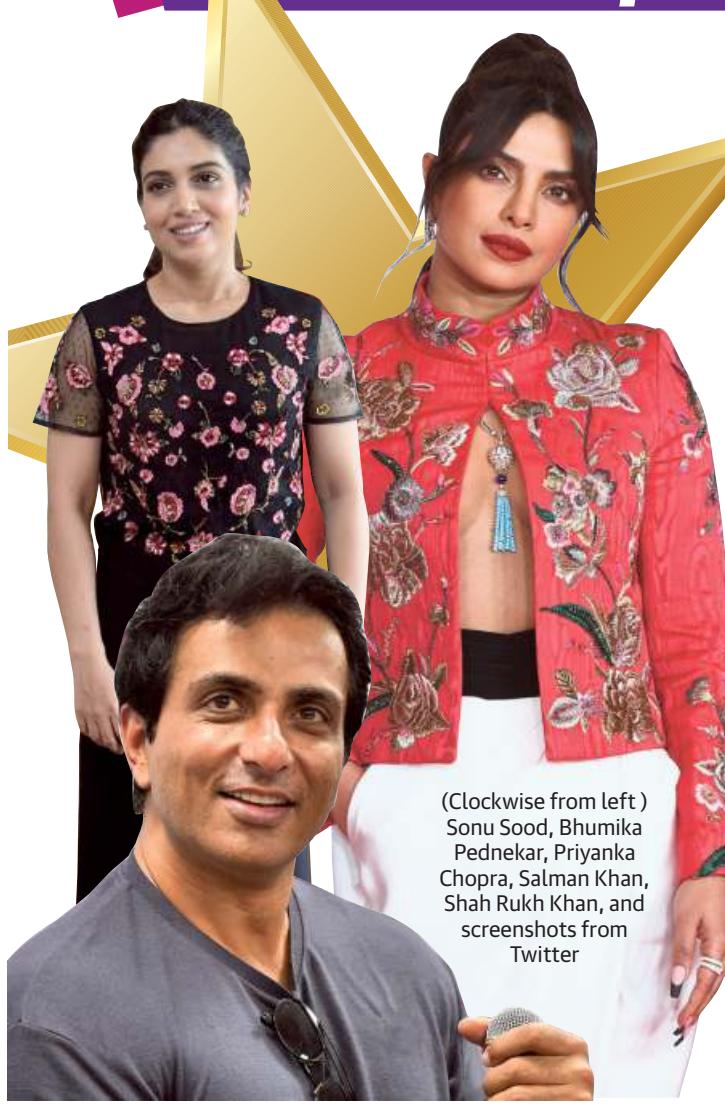


strong network to get leads and save people. Also, if, as a celebrity, they are making a donation, they should announce it. One donation will inspire thousands of people to donate. They should talk about how they are helping the cause.

There's the counter argument that some could be battling issues [stress, mental health challenges]. I read this beautiful quote that said, "You can't benefit from culture and you can't benefit from society at large without actually showing up for the real, tangible people who make that culture and society." This is the time to be present, if possible.

**Waiting for a sign** There is also the perception that [Indian celebrities] are waiting for a sign-off from the government to post anything Covid-related. For humanity's sake, they should use their influence now and support relief efforts. People will remember this period. And if they are lost [about how best to use their might on social media], there are always templates like Sood's and Pednekar's to follow.

**As told to Aparna Narain**  
Santu Misra is a New Delhi-based creative director known for incubating Next-Gen digital influencers.



(Clockwise from left)  
Sonu Sood, Bhumika Pednekar, Priyanka Chopra, Salman Khan, and Shah Rukh Khan, and screenshots from Twitter



## YOUNG BRANDS, BIG HEART

Homegrown fashion and accessory labels respond to the need of the hour and offer up to 100% of their proceeds to NGOs

VINITA MAKHija

We are in a time of crisis. While at any other time, fashion could have been an escape – eight LBDs to match your inner rage and helplessness, perhaps – it just doesn't work in the current scenario. Instead, amidst the pandemic chaos, young indie fashion brands have been leading the way with fundraising drives. With online sales actioned, proceeds are being donated to organisations working towards Covid relief.

"The last 15 months have been tough on young brands. Still, given how dire the situation in India is, help is help," says Gauri Verma of crafts-focussed brand, Jodi. Brushing aside questions on whether the 'me too' pressure has been a factor, Karuna Laungani, her partner, adds, "There will always be someone doing something first. What's important is one is not last."

### CLOTHES FOR A CAUSE

Most small brands function on cash flow business models. And the positive flow for these sales has been heartening. While Jodi managed to raise ₹18,75,400 – 50% of which has been donated to organisations like Hemkunt Foundation, Khalsa Aid and Mission Oxygen India – Olio Stories, a contemporary jewellery brand from New Delhi, raised ₹12,40,974 (6x of their initial target from a three-day sale).

"I understand that sales right now can feel like a marketing gimmick, but at the end of the day, people's lives will be saved [by what we collect]," says Rashi Agarwal Favier, of Raff, an ethical leather bags brand based in Pondicherry, that will be donating 50% from their May sales to Hemkunt Foundation, an NGO that is helping with oxygen and meal distribution. "Transparency about the contribution would be great, so it is not just about generating new orders."

### SENSITISING AND AMPLIFYING

And it's not just about the money. Delhi-based veteran



Urvashi Kaur, who is supporting *Karigars* via Dastakar and Crafts Council of India, says that "amplification pushes other brands, both small and big, to offer support and be part of a much larger conversation. It helps sensitise brands to be more proactive, and build a collective consciousness". For instance, up-and-coming brand Saundh, that focusses on Indian resort prints, worked with a Surat-based NGO to set up a 100-bed Covid treatment facility.

As Sounak Sen Barat of Bengaluru-based House of Three (who will be donating 100% of their own sales and that of partner brands to ACT Grants, Doctor For You and Hasiru Dala) says, "Money isn't the only thing that can resurrect us. Human effort is what's keeping our country's pulse ticking. Our hearts may be broken, but our spirits never will be." Here's to building back.



(Clockwise from above) Rashi Agarwal Favier, a Raff bag, designs from Urvashi Kaur, promos of Jodi and House of Three's Covid sales, rings from Olio Stories, and designer Kaur

### Pitching in

**MISHO:** Donating 100% of sales from their Mina snug cuffs to several charities.

**MEERA BY NANDINI:** The crafts-focussed bag brand is donating 100% of their sales (till May 9) towards Hasiru Dala's campaign to provide food and medical support to medical waste pickers

**VERANDAH:** Anjali Patel Mehta is donating 100% of profits (from sales till May 15) to Hemkunt Foundation, Covid Donors, Mission Oxygen, Mission Vayu, Legend Aid and Step Up.

**KHARA KAPAS:** Donating 100% of proceeds of a specially-curated collection to Hemkunt Foundation.

**BANSRI MEHTA DESIGN:** Donating 100% of sales from a capsule collection (till May 9) to Khana Chahiye and Goonj.



**Only two couture labels had expressed their support when this story went to print: Gaurav Gupta and Valaya. JJ Valaya, who has been "donating in my personal capacity to varied institutions", has promised 20% of his online sales to Hemkunt Foundation, Khalsa Aid and Give India.**

### FOOD SPOT

The Hyderabadi speciality on a warm 'holiday' afternoon deserves a nap after

## A lazy Sunday biryani



and cooked with yoghurt, was deliciously tender, and had taken in all the spices that it had been mixed with before being pan-fried. The chillies and curry leaves gave the dish a punch.

What surprised me was the *kaju sabzi*. I have never had this, but I am quite a cashew nut fiend and thought the dish sounded promising. It had a creamy sauce of roasted ground cashew, flavoured with onions and tomato.

I then went on to the biryani and *salan*. The *salan* – a mix of ground peanuts, sesame seeds and coconut – was nicely spicy, and went well with the biryani, which was hot, but had retained the flavours of the whole spices it had been cooked with. The rice was the way it should be in a good biryani – long and aromatic, and not sticking to one another like loyal members of a clan.

I was a little suspicious of the *doule ka meetha*, as it didn't look much like the famous Hyderabadi dessert and seemed a bit runny. But it turned out to be rather nice – there was the flavor of saffron in the sauce, and cardamom added to the taste of the bread that had been softened and soaked in thickened and sweetened milk. The sweet dish brought the curtain down on what was quite a nice meal.

I took the last spoonful of the *doule ka meetha* and sighed. What's in a name, I said to no one in particular.

*The writer is a seasoned food critic*

RAHUL VERMA

In the good old days when Sundays were Sundays, and not just any old day squeezed in between two other nondescript days, part of our holiday fun was in going to Andhra Bhavan for some Hyderabadi biryani, which was available only on Sundays. I loved its hot flavours and the plump egg in it. A couple of Sundays ago, I suddenly pictured that delicious golden rice with juicy pieces of meat in it and thought I needed to do something about this yearning.

I had earlier ordered from a place called Biryani Badshah, which had Andhra food on the menu. This eatery has branches and I tried out the outlet in Laxmi Nagar, which delivers through Swiggy and Zomato. There was some consternation about the name, a debate that we'd been having at home ever since I expressed a desire to order food from a Chinese restaurant called Shagun. But never judge an eatery by its name, I have always held.

So, the order was placed: Hyderabadi *dum* biryani with mutton (₹329), extra *salan* (₹15), *kaju ki sabzi* (₹209), chicken 65 (₹249) and *doule ka meetha* (₹99). I started my meal with the chicken 65, which has been an old

favourite ever since I first had it when a breakaway faction from Andhra Bhavan cooked it for us at some get-together long years ago.

Legend has it that chicken 65 was first started by Chennai's Buhari Hotel in 1965, though some said it was so named because it was cooked with 65 spices. Badshah's fare did not disappoint me. The chicken, marinated in



(Top to bottom) Hyderabadi *dum* biryani, Chicken 65, *kaju ki sabzi*

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



## A trucker's tale

Director Ivan Ayr's latest, *Milestone*, explores the life of a driver from Delhi, a city he closely associates with

ADITYA MANI JHA

Ivan Ayr's *Milestone* (Hindi name: *Meel Pathar*), which released on Netflix on May 7, has no background score. It is, therefore, full of sounds you hear on the road, on the kind of industrial-belt pathways the film is set in. The truck engine's spectrum of sounds, drivers checking up on each other (and on the possibility of police stoppages ahead) in the middle of a hectic evening, the banter overheard at a line hotel – it is authentic in the extreme, which is just one of the movie's many fine qualities.

*Milestone*, which premiered in the Orizzonti (Horizons) section of the 77th Venice International Film Festival in 2020, is the story of Ghalib (Suvinder Vicky), a truck driver going through a phase of existential despair. His wife recently died and he's dealing with a compensation claim from her family. Plus, there's the prospect of his bad back and advancing years conspiring to replace him with a younger, hungrier man called Pash (Lakshvir Saran). The film, edited and produced by Ayr, is distinguished by its character studies and its scenes of quietly powerful contemplation, where the audience is invited to make up their own minds about a man confronting his obsolescence.

### The name game

Speaking about the origin of the film's screenplay, Ayr says, "Some of my extended family was in the trucking business at one point. I'd heard many anecdotes from them, about the trials



(Top) a still from *Milestone*, and Ivan Ayr ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and tribulations of truck drivers. But since that was a long time ago, I wanted to see how things were like on the ground today, on the outskirts of Delhi, especially Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar [a prime commercial locality]," adding that he started scouting for locations in mid-2019.

Intriguingly, the two central characters in the movie are named after legendary poets – Ghalib and Pash. Is this a deliberate contrast between the narrative's overall bleakness and the flair and flamboyance associated with, say, the verses of Ghalib? Or was it just Ayr's version of a cinematic red herring? "I like to do visual poetry rather than having explicit poetry in my films," says the director about his second feature length film, after 2018's much-acclaimed *Soni*, based on a young policewoman, also in Del-

hi, who is working towards addressing crimes against women. "In an earlier draft of the screenplay, I was thinking of making the truck driver an aspiring poet, but I dropped the idea since it wasn't really being true to the rest of the script. So then it became a question of do I want to retain the names? In the real world, nobody talks about poetry so the names wouldn't matter at that level. It's a cynical idea but the names really are there just for people to wonder over."

### Casting a poet

Another poetic connection comes about through a minor character, a union leader who's helping labourers negotiate better wages for themselves. This young Bihar union leader is played by Aamir Aziz, the Delhi-based poet whose poem *Sab Yaad Rakha Jayegya* catapulted him to online fame last year, including a shout-out by Roger Waters (co-founder of the band Pink Floyd), who recited a translated version of the poem at a charity event in London.

Talking about this, Ayr says, "The casting of Aamir Aziz was not planned. When we reached out to him, he hadn't become as well-known as he is today. We wanted a young guy who could play a union leader from Bihar. He was involved with some theatre groups, one of which put us in touch with him. Back then, we had no idea that his poetry is so powerful!"

### The walls of Delhi

Ayr originally wrote the film back when he was in the US. He was imagining the truck driver in a place that's "like a melting pot". As such, immigration is a big part of the puzzle that *Milestone* poses in front of the audience. Nearly all the characters are struggling with literal or metaphorical displacement. He says, "When I adapted the story to Delhi, I didn't have any problems because the city, for me, is like a melting pot. People from all over the country come here to earn their livelihood, adapting to new cultures, blending in. So you have this neighbour who's Kashmiri, the wife is from Sikkim, Ghalib himself comes from Punjab. It's what I have experienced personally and I felt I could use that aspect of Delhi life in this story."

*Milestone* is now streaming on Netflix

Watch Ivan Ayr in conversation with Aditya Mani Jha on weekend.thehindu.com



MARKET WATCH		
Sensex	49206	0.52
US Dollar	73.51	0.36
Gold	47185	1.08
Brent oil	68.24	-0.48

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	767.75	26.95
Asian Paints	2551.65	2.60
Axis Bank	716.75	1.00
Bajaj Auto	3866.75	-74.45
Bajaj Finserv	11318.45	290.50
Bajaj Finance	5493.80	-35.00
Bharti Airtel	568.50	9.75
BPCL	443.15	9.15
Britannia Ind	3461.25	9.20
Cipla	882.90	-1.40
Coal India	136.85	2.25
Divis Lab	4029.10	-33.95
Dr Reddys Lab	5174.70	6.25
Eicher Motors	2417.15	-26.10
Grasim Ind	1449.60	1.70
HCL Tech	916.40	0.40
HDFC	2496.75	66.65
HDFC Bank	1414.75	13.85
HDFC Life	672.65	0.85
Hero MotoCorp	2860.80	-52.50
Hindalco	401.10	15.15
Hind Unilever	2411.20	21.20
ICICI Bank	607.10	-1.10
IndusInd Bank	926.20	1.25
Infosys	1352.55	-9.05
Indian Oil Corp	94.70	2.10
ITC	205.35	2.60
JSW Steel	756.95	27.15
Kotak Bank	1780.35	-7.90
L&T	1342.70	2.80
M&M	767.40	20.00
Maruti Suzuki	6703.05	36.40
Nestle India Ltd.	16761.35	43.75
NTPC	105.05	2.00
ONGC	111.45	1.20
PowerGrid Corp	214.55	-0.85
Reliance Ind	1931.75	0.75
SBI Life	1000.25	30.85
State Bank	358.25	2.70
Shree Cement	27840.00	103.80
Sun Pharma	679.45	0.05
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	629.00	-24.10
Tata Motors	302.75	1.50
Tata Steel	1182.35	81.45
TCS	3132.90	21.45
Tech Mahindra	980.95	3.00
Titan	1446.50	2.10
UltraTech Cement	6481.90	76.45
UPL	629.40	-3.60
Wipro	515.25	2.95

EXCHANGE RATES		
Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on May 07		
CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	73.31	73.63
Euro	88.52	88.91
British Pound	102.04	102.52
Japanese Yen (100)	67.15	67.45
Chinese Yuan	11.36	11.41
Swiss Franc	80.67	81.04
Singapore Dollar	50.57	55.32
Canadian Dollar	60.16	60.42
Malaysian Ringgit	17.82	17.90

Source: Indian Bank

# 'Almost half new cases rural, shots key'

SBI's researchers say economic activity has taken a severe hit as the spread of COVID infections widens

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The pandemic's second wave has spread far beyond the worst-hit cities, with almost half the new cases being reported from rural districts, and economic activity has taken a 'severe hit' SBI's economics researchers said in a report on Friday.

Red-flagging the slowing pace of vaccinations, which has fallen to an average 17 lakh per day from 28 lakh in April, State Bank of India's research team observed that vaccinations were the primary tool to reduce the severity of infections and India 'must vaccinate its people on a mission mode, even if it means suspending economic activity for a while after the second wave subsides'.

With daily cases of more



Main tool: India must vaccinate people on mission mode even if economic activity must be suspended, says SBI. ■ REUTERS

than 3.5 lakh in the past nine days, the share of the top 15 districts in total new cases had dropped sharply from 55% in March to just 26.3% in May, suggesting the spread of infections was now far more widely dispersed, SBI

group chief economic advisor Soumya Kanti Ghosh wrote.

Terming the increase in rural infections, flagged earlier by micro-finance lenders to the RBI, as 'worrying', Mr. Ghosh said the share of rural

districts in new cases had increased to 48.5% in May, from 36.8% in March.

#### 'Mid-August low'

"With the second wave and associated lockdown/restrictions, economic disruption is now clearly visible," the researchers wrote. "At least 20 States are now in lockdown... our business activity index which has been declining steeply since April, has dipped to a new low of 71.7," a level attained in mid-August 2020, they added.

Mr. Ghosh also observed that the case load was not directly related to people's movement, with cases having increased in Kerala, Bihar, Haryana and Uttarakhand even as mobility had declined in these States.

India's hopes of a healthy

rate of economic growth in 2021-22, after last year's sharp contraction, also now appear hard to realise, according to the researchers. On April 23, SBI had cut its GDP growth forecast to 10.4%, from 11%. Two weeks later, it is a 'little apprehensive' of the economy posting even double-digit growth.

"We had earlier revised our FY22 real GDP estimate... At that time, only a few States (like Maharashtra and Delhi) had imposed lockdowns and most of the States adopted night curfew only," the researchers noted. But the situation had altered completely, with 48 lakh new cases recorded since April 23, and the virus's extensive spread forcing almost every State to impose total or partial lockdowns.

## HDFC sounds caution on economy, Q4 net jumps

Board recommends ₹23 dividend

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Mortgage lender Housing Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (HDFC) reported standalone net profit for the fourth quarter surged 42% to ₹3,180 crore.

However, it sounded a note of caution considering the second wave of COVID-19 gripping the country.

"Since April, India has been witnessing an eruption of a second wave of infections," HDFC said in a filing.

"There continues to be a great deal of uncertainty on the duration and intensity of the second wave and the resultant impact it may have on the Corporation and the

overall economy."

For the fiscal ended March 31, it reported a net profit of ₹2,027 crore compared with ₹1,770 crore in the previous fiscal. However, the profit numbers were not comparable on account of one-time gains in FY20.

The board has recommended a dividend of ₹23 per equity share.

HDFC said demand for home loans remained robust owing to low interest rates, softer property prices, concessional stamp duty rates in certain States and fiscal incentives. During the fourth quarter, individual loan disbursements rose 60% year-on-year, it added.

## RBI sets up group to help review panel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Friday said an advisory group had been constituted to assist the second Regulatory Review Authority (RRA) which was set up by the central bank earlier this month to streamline regulations and reduce the compliance burden of regulated entities.

Headed by SBI Managing Director S. Janakiraman, the group will assist the RRA by identifying regulations, guidelines, and returns that can be rationalised. The advisory group's members include T. T. Srinivasaraghavan (former MD, Sundaram Finance).

## 'Move fast on TRIPS waiver for COVID-19'

Submit plan to begin talks: WTO Chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

WTO Chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has urged the proponents of the proposal for temporary waiver of certain provisions of TRIPS agreement for prevention and treatment of COVID-19 to submit the revised document "as soon as possible" so that text-based negotiations can begin.

Welcoming the statement of U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai on the issue, the Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has said she "warmly" welcomes Ms. Tai's willingness to engage with proponents of a temporary

waiver of the TRIPS pact to help combat the pandemic.

In October 2020, India and South Africa had proposed a waiver for all World Trade Organization (WTO) members on the implementation of certain provisions of the agreement in relation to the prevention, containment or treatment of COVID-19. The proposed relaxations are aimed at ensuring quick and affordable access to vaccines and medicines for developing countries.

There could be upside pressure on fiscal deficit as

## 'Pandemic won't impact India's rating for 2 years'

Health crisis may slow growth: S&P

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

India's sovereign rating will remain unchanged at the current level of BBB- for the next two years despite the potential adverse impact of the surging pandemic on its economy, said a top official at S&P Global Ratings.

The country would witness a slightly faster pace of growth in the next two years, effectively supporting the rating, he said.

"India's sovereign rating remains stable," said Andrew Wood, director, Asia Pacific Sovereign Ratings, S&P Global Ratings.

"We do not expect a change in rating level over the next two years."

"Of course, there are going to be some near-term ramifications for India's economy stemming from the severe second wave of COVID-19 and that may peep through into our sovereign credit metrics," he said.

Maintaining real GDP growth forecast at 11% for this fiscal, Mr. Wood said, "It is a baseline scenario with some downside risk. But, if we do see a number creeping lower, most likely it will not go too far in our current downside scenario."

He said India in all likelihood will have positive growth this fiscal year but there is potential for a lower rate of growth owing to the current health crisis.

However, "we would more likely see a slightly faster pace of growth in the ensuing two years." He said the second wave would not have any major impact on the government's fiscal position in a moderate downside scenario.

There could be upside pressure on fiscal deficit as



revenue generation could be weaker but the government's debt stock would remain roughly stable at just above 90% of the GDP.

"In the severe scenario, there could be more additional fiscal spending from the government and revenue growth would be weaker. This would mean that the debt stock would stabilise in the next fiscal," he said.

Earlier, S&P, in a report, stated that India's nascent economic recovery through March solidified government revenue. But the rapidly developing health crisis may derail this progress.

Record number of cases, limited healthcare system capacity and localised lockdowns would likely take a toll on household consumption and retail activity.

**Fiscal challenge**  
"The severity of the crisis is challenging the country's fiscal settings, which were already weak before COVID struck," said S&P.

"Our moderate scenario suggests a hit to GDP of about 1.2 percentage points," S&P said. "This means full-year growth of 9.8% for fiscal 2022. This compares with our baseline forecast of 11% growth for the period." In the severe scenario, the hit is 2.8 percentage points, with 8.2% growth, it added.

## Non-life insurers get + health boost in April

Private life insurers post 55% growth

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

Growing demand for health insurance, evident since the pandemic began last year, played a role in non-life insurers posting more than 22% year-on-year rise in gross direct premium underwritten to ₹17,310 crore in April.

Among them, standalone private health insurers posted a 55.6% increase to ₹1,259.2 crore, according to flash figures released by insurance regulator IRDAI.

General insurers, for whom too health insurance is the mainstay, reported a 19.6% rise to ₹15,946.5 crore. With the inclusion of the two specialised PSU insurers, the non-life insurers gross premium underwritten then rose 22%.

On the life insurance

front, the first year premium mobilised by the private insurers increased 55.2% to ₹4,882 crore. Their market share stood at 50%, the business statement for April revealed by IRDAI said.

Behemoth and State-owned Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) posted a 35.6% increase in the first year premium to ₹4,856.8 crore.

## Easier norms for start-up listing notified

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

With an aim to boost listing of start-ups, markets regulator SEBI has notified a slew of relaxations to norms, including reducing holding period for pre-issue capital and allowing discretionary allotment to eligible investors.

The changes have been made

# Jadeja, Vihari and Shami return

Hardik and Kuldeep omitted from India squad for WTC final and England Tests

## CRICKET

AMOL KARHADKAR  
MUMBAI

Having recovered from injuries they suffered in Australia, the trio of all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, middle-order batsman Hanuma Vihari and pacer Mohammed Shami has returned to India's squad for the World Test Championship final against New Zealand and the five-Test series in England.

From the squad that took England on at home in February-March, all-rounder Hardik Pandya and wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav have been omitted from a gruelling tour that will last almost four months.

Pacer Shardul Thakur, who was released for domestic duties during the home Test series, has expectedly returned to the squad.

### Provisional selection

The national selection committee, chaired by Chetan Sharma, picked the squad through videoconferencing on Friday. Two of the 20



**Back on the big stage:** Shami, Vihari and Jadeja are making a comeback from injury. ■ FILE PHOTOS

players – K.L. Rahul and Wriddhiman Saha – are selected provisionally and will have to clear fitness tests at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru before the squad's departure for England.

While Rahul underwent an appendicitis surgery last

week, Saha was diagnosed COVID-19 positive on Tuesday.

Jadeja, Vihari and Shami were among those who suffered injuries during the tour to Australia and missed the home season of international cricket. Speedster Umesh Yadav also was ruled out mid-

way through the Australia series but was recalled to the squad for the last Test against England in March.

When Hardik was recalled to the Test squad for the England series after more than a year, captain Virat Kohli had hoped his pace bowling will be handy in England. However,

a shoulder niggle resulted in Hardik having not bowled at all during the Indian Premier League, thus forcing the selectors to not consider him.

### Downswing

Kuldeep, on the other hand, has been on a downward curve over the last two years. Having disappointed in his only Test appearance in Chennai in February, Kuldeep's omission for the England tour was on the cards.

Besides the 20 cricketers, the selectors have also announced four stand-byes.

It isn't surprising that barring opening batsman Abhimanyu Easwaran, the other three are pacers as net bowlers will double up as net bowlers due to COVID-19 protocols.

While Avesh Khan has travelled with the squad earlier, Prasidh Krishna made his ODI debut in March. Gujarat left-arm Arzan Nagwaswalla is the other one.

It is understood that after serving a week-long isolation in Mumbai, the men's and women's squads will board the flight to England on June 2.

# Abid and Azhar put Pakistan in control

They notch up hundreds after the early dismissal of Imran Butt

## PAKISTAN IN ZIM

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
HARARE

Centuries by Abid Ali and Azhar Ali put Pakistan in a strong position on the first day of the second Test against Zimbabwe at the Harare Sports Club on Friday.

Abid (118 not out) and Azhar (126) put on 236 for the second wicket before tall fast bowler Blessing Muzarabani brought Zimbabwe back into the match by taking three wickets with the second new ball.

Pakistan was 268 for four at stumps.

Abid and Azhar came together with the total on 12 in the eighth over and ground



**Centurions:** Abid Ali and Azhar Ali put on 236 for the second wicket. ■ AP

down the Zimbabwe bowlers before Azhar edged Muzarabani to gully in the last half hour of the day.

Azhar's dismissal was followed by a second failure in

the series for Babar Azam, Pakistan's captain and star batsman, who drove Muzarabani to point after scoring two.

Muzarabani struck again

when first Test centurion Fawad Alam dragged a short ball onto his stumps after scoring five.

Zimbabwe started the day well, claiming the wicket of Imran Butt in the eighth over. Butt top-edged a pull to midwicket against left-arm opening bowler Richard Ngarava.

But Abid and Azhar settled in on an easy-paced pitch after seeing off some good bowling by Ngarava and Muzarabani.

Pakistan gave a debut to 36-year-old seam bowler Tabish Khan.

**The scores:** Pakistan 268 for four in 90 overs (Abid Ali batting 118, Azhar Ali 126) vs Zimbabwe.

**Toss:** Pakistan.

## Shooting WC in Croatia

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The International Shooting Spot Federation (ISSF) has announced that Osijek, Croatia, will host the last World Cup before the Tokyo Olympics.

The World Cup for rifle, pistol and shotgun has been scheduled to be staged from June 22 to July 3.

Osijek is all set to host the European Championship from May 20.

The Indian shooting team had opted to train in Croatia to prepare for the Olympics, so that it could also get a chance to compete in the European championship.

Now, the Indian team will have the bonus of another World Cup, after two had been cancelled. Delhi was the only World Cup for rifle and pistol this season, while shotgun is all set to have its third World Cup in Lonato, Italy.

# Nadal and Osaka take the top honours

Bayern Munich is the team of the year; Billie Jean King recognised

## LAUREUS AWARDS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
SEVILLE



Rafael Nadal with his fourth statuette. ■ LAUREUS



Naomi Osaka with her reward. ■ LAUREUS

moment," said Nadal. "It means a lot to equal my great rival, but at the same time, my great friend."

Osaka was recognised also for her anti-racism stance particularly at the US Open where she wore face masks bearing the names of Black Americans who died as a result of police clashes or were victims of racial injustice.

"Regarding my activism on the court, I think it is important to use my voice, because for me I feel like I often hold back a lot and worry about what people think of

me, but you know if you have a platform it is very important you use it," said the Japanese star.

Bayern Munich, winner of the UEFA Champions League and the Bundesliga, took the Laureus World Team of the Year Award.

**Salah gets award**

Liverpool and Egypt footballer Salah won the Sporting Inspiration Award for his support of various charities, many in his home town of Nagrig.

Hamilton was named the

inaugural winner of the Laureus Athlete Advocate of the Year award for his support for racial justice, wearing a Black Lives Matter helmet and black race suit and taking a knee at each GP.

Canadian snowboarder Max Parrot was one of the most emotional winners.

He received the Laureus World Comeback of the Year award after fighting back from cancer to win X-Games gold medals.

Tennis great Billie Jean King was honoured with the Laureus Lifetime Achievement award.

**List of winners:** Sportsman of the Year: Rafael Nadal; Sportswoman of the Year: Naomi Osaka; Team of the Year: Bayern Munich; Breakthrough of the Year: Patrick Mahomes; Comeback of the Year: Max Parrot; Sport for Good: KICKFORMORE by KICKFAIR; Lifetime Achievement: Billie Jean King; Athlete Advocate of the Year: Lewis Hamilton; Sporting Inspiration: Mohamed Salah; Sporting Moment of the Year: Chris Nikic.

# Seema pins a slot for Tokyo

## WRESTLING

SPORTS BUREAU  
SOFIA

A day after Sumit Malik became the seventh Indian wrestler to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics, Seema Bisla fetched another quota place for the country.

In the World Olympic Games qualifier here on Friday, Seema edged past European bronze medallist Anna Lukasiak of Poland 2-1 in a 50kg semifinal bout to be the fourth woman wrestler from the country to secure an Olympic slot.

Earlier, Seema, an Asian championships bronze medalist, beat Anastasiya Yanotava of Belarus 8-0 and 2018 Youth Olympics champion Emma Jonna Malmgren

of Sweden 10-2 in the quarterfinals to reach the last four.

### Malik's great show

Malik's power-packed performance earned him a 125kg freestyle berth in the Olympics on the opening day.

In the semifinals, Malik got past Pan American Games medallist Jose Diaz Robertti of Venezuela 5-0 convincingly to advance to the final and qualify for the Olympics. Malik won the silver medal on Friday due to an injury.

Nisha Dahiya (68kg) defeated Polish Natalia Strzalka 12-1 before losing to Mimi Hristova of Bulgaria 12-2 in the quarterfinals. Pooja (76kg) lost to Kamile Gaucaite of Lithuania 5-4 in the first round.

## BADMINTON

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM  
HYDERABAD

The Badminton Association of Malaysia and Badminton World Federation have jointly agreed to postpone the Celcom Axiatel Malaysia Open championship scheduled to start from May 25 to 30, according to a BWF release.

"All attempts were made by the organisers and the BWF to provide a safe tournament environment for all the participants, but the recent urge in cases left no choice but to postpone the tournament," it said.

The Malaysian and the Singapore Opens (the second one to follow imme-

dately after the first one) are the last two qualifying events for the Tokyo Olympics to be held this July.

### Qualifying window

Importantly, the BWF confirmed the rescheduled tournament will no longer take place in the Olympic qualifying window.

New tournament dates will be confirmed at a later date.

This is a big blow to the hopefuls from India including the London Olympics bronze medallist Saina Nehwal, former World No. 1 K. Srikanth and women's doubles组合 of Ashwini Ponnappa and N. Sikki Reddy.

"Yes, this is a huge blow to our chances. With the post-

ponement of Malaysian Open and the 21-day quarantine period mandatory for the Singapore Open starting on June 1, it is almost over for us," said Sikki Reddy, aiming to make her first appearance in Olympics.

Ashwini also felt disappointed as this move comes

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# Kohli and Anushka donate ₹2 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI



Kohli and Anushka... raising funds. ■ FILE PHOTO

The two are raising money through crowd-funding platform Ketto.

"Virat Kohli and Bollywood superstar Anushka Sharma are aiming to raise ₹2 crore for COVID relief in India," a press release from the couple stated.

"They are kickstarting a fundraising campaign #InThisTogether on the crowdfunding platform Ketto and are putting ₹2 crore for this initiative."

The campaign will run for seven days on Ketto and the proceeds will be directed to ACT Grants, the implementation partner which will work towards providing oxygen, medical manpower, vaccination awareness and tele-medicine facilities all

through the pandemic.

"We are going through an unprecedented time in the history of our country and our nation needs all of us to unite and save as many people as possible. Anushka and I have been shocked to see the human suffering since last year," Kohli said.

Kohli said that he and his wife had tried to help as many people as possible in their fight against the virus.

ACT Grants spokesperson Gayatri Yadav said, "Having strong voices like Anushka and Virat help drive fundraising efforts will go a long way towards helping us realise this goal."

# Hamilton quickest

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MONTMELÓ

Lewis Hamilton looked poised to continue his dominance of the Spanish Grand Prix after clocking the fastest time during the second practice session on Friday.

Hamilton had a flying lap of 1 minute, 18.170 seconds. Mercedes teammate Valterri Bottas, who set the fastest time in the first practice session, was .139 seconds behind while Ferrari's Charles Leclerc had the third-best time.

Red Bull driver Max Verstappen, seen as the main challenger to Hamilton's reign as World champion, finished only ninth fastest at .615 off the pace.

# Sathiyan preparing in right earnest

## TABLE TENNIS

K. KEERTHIVASAN  
CHENNAI

G. Sathiyan has started preparing with his sparring partner Anirban Ghosh at the Raman High Performance TT Centre here. For the next two months the Indian star paddler said he would be working on "small details" with the sole focus being to put up a better show in the Tokyo Olympics.

## TV PICKS

**Premier League:** SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., 7.30 p.m., 10 p.m. & 12.45 a.m. (Sunday)

**Formula One:** Spanish GP (Qualifying): Star Sports 3, 6.30 p.m.

**Serie A:** Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m., 9.30 p.m. & 12.15 a.m. (Sunday)

## IN BRIEF



Alonso unfazed by challenges on F1 return

BARCELONA  
Two-time world champion Fernando Alonso admits his return to Formula One has been a "challenge" but is "not worried" by his form with the marathon season still in its infancy. "I feel capable of driving better than ever, but that doesn't mean that you don't encounter difficulties by embarking on a new adventure," Alonso said on the sidelines of last week's Portuguese Grand Prix. AFP

**Wrestler Naveen Kumar tests COVID positive**

KOLKATA  
Greco Roman wrestler Naveen Kumar (130kg), who travelled with the Indian squad to Sofia, Bulgaria, to take part in the World Olympic Games Qualifier, has tested positive for COVID-19. "Naveen has been isolated from the rest of the squad. He was the only member to test positive for COVID. Other members of the Indian wrestling squad are safe," said a Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) official on Friday.

**Sumit Nagal loses in quarterfinals**

PRAGUE  
Top seed Norbert Gombos of Slovakia beat eighth seed Sumit Nagal 6-4, 6-2 in the quarterfinals of the €44,820 Challenger tennis tournament here on Friday. Nagal got 15 ATP points and €1,260.

**Brother of MacGill's girlfriend allegedly part of abduction**

SYDNEY  
The brother of Stuart MacGill's girlfriend Maria O'Meagher was allegedly a part of the abduction of the former Australia leg-spinner, as per latest media reports. On Wednesday, NSW Police arrested four men including Marino Sotiropoulos – brother of Maria. In an interview with *The Daily Telegraph*, Maria at first said her relationship with MacGill was over before saying she was not "close" to Sotiropoulos. ANI

**Hertha eases its relegation worries**

BERLIN  
Hertha Berlin climbed out of the Bundesliga's relegation zone on Thursday with a 3-0 win over visiting Freiburg in its second game following a coronavirus outbreak at the club.

**The result:** Hertha Berlin 3 (Platek 13, Pekarik 22, Radonjic 85) bt Freiburg 0. AP

**Three T20 WC European qualifiers cancelled**

DUBAI  
T20 World Cup sub-regional Europe Qualifiers, pathway tournaments to the 2022 men's showpiece event in Australia, have been cancelled due to COVID-19, the governing body ICC said on Friday. Finland was set to host their first ICC event with the Sub Regional Europe A and B qualifiers starting next month. PTI

**Bach's visit to Japan 'difficult': Hashimoto**

REUTERS  
TOKYO  
The International Olympic Committee head Thomas Bach's visit to Japan might be "difficult" given the expected extension of a state of emergency due to high numbers of coronavirus cases, Tokyo 2020 president Seiko Hashimoto said.

"I suspect that coming to Japan in the midst of this very severe situation would also be an emotional burden for president Bach," she said at a news conference held here on Friday.

# Arjun, Arvind qualify for Tokyo

Jakar Khan finishes fourth in the men's singles sculls final, misses out

## ROWING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Indian rowers Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh qualified for the Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event after finishing second in the final race of the Asia/Oceania Continental Qualifying Regatta in Tokyo on Friday.

Another Indian, Jakar Khan, finished fourth in the men's singles sculls final which offers five Olympic quotas, but he missed out as a country gets only one qualifying spot from this regatta. The top three qualify for Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event.

"A country can qualify in only one boat from this regatta and since Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh had finished second in men's lightweight double sculls, they will qualify," Rowing Federation of India president Raj-



Tokyo-bound: India's Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh (foreground) finished second in men's lightweight double sculls of the Asia/Oceania continental qualifying regatta. •AFP

laxmi Singh Deo told PTI.

"Jakar Khan finished fourth in men's singles sculls and unfortunately, he will not qualify for Olympics. Arjun Lal and Arvind Singh were better placed as they were second," she added.

Arjun Lal and Arvind will be the only Indian rowers in Tokyo Games which open on July 23 as the country will not participate in other Olympic qualifiers due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There is another Olympic qualifier in Italy but we

are not sending anybody due to the COVID-19 situation. So, this will be our only participation in the Olympics," Deo said.

A 14-member Indian team participated in the event held at the Sea Forest Waterway on Tokyo Bay.

## Should the Tokyo Games be held?

Vimal Kumar is all for having it, Baskaran says postpone

STAN RAYAN  
KOCHI

The Malaysian Open has been postponed, leaving badminton stars like Saina Nehwal and K. Srikanth shattered.

And last week, Indians were forced to miss the World Athletics Relays in Poland, an Olympic qualifier, as many European countries banned flights from India. There were also issues with the archers' travel plans to Lausanne for the World Cup Stage-2.

The Olympics are less than 80 days away but the coronavirus surge, travel restrictions and long quarantine have been left athletes restless and confused.

So, should the Olympics, which are scheduled to begin on July 23, be held?

"I'm all for having the Olympics. They come once in four years and a lot of hard work is involved," said former badminton international and coach Vimal Kumar.

"Only an athlete and people involved will know the pain a cancellation brings. I'm very confident the Japa-



V. Baskaran. •FILE PHOTO

nese will manage it with superior efficiency, without any issues. Those who are worried can stay away."

V. Baskaran, captain of the Indian hockey team that won gold at the 1980 Moscow Olympics, said the Games should be postponed to November-December.

"If they are unable to do that, they should cancel it. In a team game, what happens if one player tests COVID positive. Will they stop the whole team? Whatever it is, the life of an athlete is more important than anything else," he said.

Anju Bobby George, the lone Indian to win a World Championship medal in

2003 (long jump bronze), was undecided. "If you look from the athletes' angle, years of hard work will go waste if the Games are not held. But if you have an Olympics now, it will not be a fair event because many athletes may miss the event and sometimes athletes may catch COVID in Japan and may not be able to compete," she said. "So, am completely confused where to stand."

## Anas for it

"Having prepared so much for it and after having missed the World Relays, the Olympics should be held," said former Asian champion Muhammed Anas, the 400m National record holder. "Of course, even if it is held there could be problems since the situation is bad. If they are having it, they should have it with only athletes."

Asian champion Jinson Johnson feels that if the Olympics happen, it will remove all the uncertainty over next year's events like the Asiad and Commonwealth Games.

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## Man United hangs on to progress

Villarreal puts paid to Arsenal's hopes in the other semifinal

## EUROPA LEAGUE

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ROME

Manchester United has finally reached a major final under Ole Gunnar Solskjær.

An inspired goalkeeping performance by David de Gea ensured United was only beaten 3-2 by Roma in a wild second leg of the Europa League semifinals, allowing the English team to complete an 8-5 victory on aggregate.

It ended a run of four losses in the semifinals of major tournaments in the last 18 months for Solskjær, who is under pressure to win United's first trophy on aggregate.

Critical manager Yet Solskjær was critical of his team for giving Roma so many chances at the Stadio Olimpico to turn around a semifinal that looked over after United scored five second-half goals to win the first leg 6-2 last week.



Key performer: United had keeper David de Gea to thank for as he prevented Roma from causing an upset. •GETTY IMAGES

Unai Emery, meanwhile, is heading back to the Europa League final on May 26 – at the expense of the club that fired him last season.

Villarreal held Arsenal to a 0-0 draw in the second leg of its semifinal, which was enough to secure a 2-1 aggregate win.

Emery will be looking for his fourth Europa League tit-

le after winning three straight with Sevilla and then taking Arsenal to the final two years ago.

**The results (semifinals, second leg):** Roma 3 (Dzeko 57, Cristante 60, Telles 83-og) bt Manchester United 2 (Cavani 39, 68) (United wins 8-5 on aggregate).

Arsenal 0 drew with Villarreal 0 (Villarreal wins 2-1 on aggregate).

## Clippers sweep LA derby against Lakers

Curry excels as Warriors move up in Western Conference

## NBA

REUTERS

LOS ANGELES

Paul George scored 24 points as host Los Angeles Clippers completed a three-game season-series sweep of Los Angeles Lakers with a 118-94 win on Thursday.

The Clippers moved past Denver Nuggets by a half-game into the No. 3 spot in the Western Conference. Lakers and Trail Blazers are now tied for sixth place in the West.

Stephen Curry padded his NBA scoring lead with 34 points, including six three-pointers, as Golden State moved up a spot on the



Star player: Paul George top-scored for Clippers against city-rival Lakers. •AP

Western Conference playoff ladder with a 118-97 win over Oklahoma City in San Francisco.

Nikola Vucevic scored 29

points, shot 5 of 7 from behind the 3-point line and grabbed 14 rebounds as Chicago led wire-to-wire in Charlotte.

Russell Westbrook had 13 points, 17 assists and 17 rebounds to record his 180th career triple-double as visiting Washington defeated Toronto 131-129 in overtime.

Pascal Siakam tied his career-best with 44 points for Toronto.

Luka Doncic finished with 24 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists to lead host Dallas to a victory over Brooklyn.

**The results:** Detroit 111 bt Memphis 97; Indiana 133 bt Atlanta 126; Toronto 129 lost to Washington 131 (OT); Golden State 118 bt Oklahoma City 97; LA Clippers 118 bt LA Lakers 94; Charlotte 99 lost to Chicago 120; Dallas 113 bt Brooklyn 109.

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(YERMARUS THERMAL POWER STATION)  
CIN-U40101KA2009PLC049582

No.: SESP/ET/CA1/AGM(C)/YTPS/21-22/125 Dtd:05.05.2021

## BRIEF TENDER NOTIFICATION

(Through e-procurement portal only)

RTPS invites bids from reputed agencies for "Procurement of Sulphuric Acid" Last date & time for bid submission ; 13.05.2021, 16.00 Hrs. Date and time for opening of Technical bid : 15.05.2021, 16.30 Hrs. The brief bid notification and other details can be accessed from GoK e-procurement portal <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>

Further details can be had from the Superintending Engineer(E), RPCL, YTPS, Yermarus- 584 134. Raichur. Mobile : +91-9480682892, e-mail : [eprpcl@gmail.com](mailto:eprpcl@gmail.com), website : [www.karnatakapower.com](http://www.karnatakapower.com)

**KARNATAKA STATE MEDICAL SUPPLIES CORPORATION LIMITED ®**

Public Health Institute, Sheshadri Road, Opp S.J.P College, K.R Circle, Bengaluru - 560001. Email: [ad.kdls@gmail.com](mailto:ad.kdls@gmail.com), [md.kmscl@gmail.com](mailto:md.kmscl@gmail.com)

No: KMSCL/EQPT(2)/TND/BLOOD BAGS & KIT/05/2020-21 Date: 07/05/2021

## SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION

Ref: Short term tender Notification No. KMSCL/EQPT(2)/TND/BLOOD BAGS & KIT/05/2020-21 (IND-802) dated 07/05/2021.

Nation wide Tender is invited through e-Tendering system under KTPP Act 1999 and Rules 2000 for the following tenders:

**Short term tender for supply of BLOOD BAGS & KITS under KASAPS Programme (IND-802)**

The tenderers who have registered under e-Procurement department may participate through e-tendering system.

Details regarding specification, EMD, Terms and Conditions and other information is available in the website <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in> from 07/05/2021. The eligible tenderers shall submit their e-tenders under e-procurement platform for above mentioned tenders. Further information if any may be obtained from this office.

Sd/-  
Managing Director,  
KMSCL, Bengaluru

DIPR/DDU/Zen/R0-344/2021-22

COVID-19 - DON'T SPREAD RUMOURS, ACT RESPONSIBLY, AVOID INFECTION-NOT THE INFECTED.

Wear Mask      Follow Physical Distancing      Maintain Hand Hygiene

**Infrastructure Corporation of Andhra Pradesh Ltd.**  
Under the control of Infrastructure & Investment Dept.,

#RC. No.254/2, 4th Floor, AVSR Bhavan, Near My Mart, Chelasan Nagar, Penamalur Mandal, Kanuru, Vijayawada-520007, A.P. India.

Request for proposal for Selection of Retainer Consultant (Sole Firm) for providing Advisory Services for Development of Industrial Infrastructure, Including CFC's, Tiny Industrial estates, Flatted Factory Complexes under MSE-CDP, Ministry of MSME in the State of Andhra Pradesh

Notice No. INCAP/P/APMSME/Consultant/12/2020, Dt.07.05.2021

Infrastructure Corporation of Andhra Pradesh Ltd