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NEARBY



Record foodgrain exports amid hunger, says group

NEW DELHI

The record export of foodgrains at a time of widespread hunger and distress due to COVID-19 exposes "the government's apathy towards the people", according to the Right to Food Campaign. The advocacy group has called for the universalisation of PDS for at least six months.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

Won't limit functions till new data law: WhatsApp

NEW DELHI

Facebook-owned WhatsApp has told the government that it will not limit functionality for users in the coming weeks, but will continue the current approach of reminding users about the update until "at least the forthcoming Personal Data Protection law comes into effect".

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8

HC seeks report on drugs purchase by Gambhir

NEW DELHI

The Delhi HC on Monday directed the drug controller to give a status report on its inquiry on how politicians such as BJP MP Gautam Gambhir were able to buy COVID drugs in bulk amid crisis. "Is that responsible behaviour," the court asked.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Odisha, Bengal grapple with evacuation ahead of cyclone

Yaas will cross coast by May 26 noon; 10 lakh to be moved to safety: Mamata

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

As the storm system Yaas heads towards the north Odisha-West Bengal coast, several thousand people are set to be evacuated from the coastal districts of both States. Officials of the Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) in Kolkata said on Monday that the very severe cyclonic storm will make landfall by Wednesday.

G.K. Das, Deputy Director and head of the RMC, said, "The cyclone will cross on May 26 noon as a very severe cyclonic storm. It is likely to make landfall between the Paradip Coast in Odisha and Sagar Island in West Bengal, close to Balasore in Odisha."

Mr. Das predicted that at the time of landfall, wind speed in the districts of north Odisha and Purba Medinipur in West Bengal would be about 155 to 165 kmph, gusting at 185 kmph.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the State was in the process of evacuating about 10 lakh people to cyclone shelters.

"We have about 4,000 cyclone shelters, where people who are being evacuated will be given shelter to minimise the loss of lives. Twenty of the 23 districts will be affected by Yaas."



Staying secure: Fishermen moving their boats to safe places near the Chandrabhaga beach in Odisha on Monday. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

Mamata alleges discrimination

After a virtual meeting with Amit Shah to review preparedness for Cyclone Yaas, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed dissatisfaction over the allocation of relief funds to the State. ▶ PAGE 8

"We have kept stock of relief materials at blocks. Control rooms are working round the clock in districts, blocks and even in municipalities," Ms. Banerjee stated. The Chief Minister said

Flight activity likely to be hit

The Airports Authority of India has said Cyclone Yaas is likely to hit operations at the Bhubaneswar, Kolkata, Jharsuguda and Durgapur airports. Others like Ranchi, Patna and Visakhapatnam will be on alert.

power back-up had been provided at hospitals. About 51 teams of the State Disaster Response Force had been posted at several strategic places in the State.

Wind speeds over coastal

'Must ensure zero casualty'

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday said collective efforts of all the stakeholders to deal with Cyclone Yaas can ensure zero casualty. He said the Centre and the States were working together for relief.

areas in North and South 24 Parganas during landfall are likely to be 90 km-100 km, gusting 120 km at the time of the landfall.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

+ Hospitals' ICU occupancy tells a serious COVID tale in Delhi

Non-ICU patients reduced by 58% while ICUs saw drop of 11%

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

The sharp dip in COVID-19 cases in the Capital is reflected in the discharge of patients from general COVID wards of hospitals in the past few days, but not in those occupying ICU beds. On May 10, the number of patients on ICU beds was 5,403, a figure that dropped to 4,798 – over 11% – on May 22.

According to Delhi government statistics, the cumulative tally of active COVID-positive cases recorded a decline of 67%, plummeting from 83,809 to 27,610 between May 10 and 22, and the number of non-ICU patients reduced by over 58% from 12,740 to 5,226.

More and more COVID-19 patients are being discharged from hospitals on a daily basis indicating the steady de-

parture of the second wave of novel coronavirus infection from the Capital. But the thousands of seriously ill among them who continue to occupy ICU beds have emerged as a cause for concern. According to doctors, this indicates both the virulence of new variants as well as the severity of lung damage suffered by COVID patients who contracted the infection in the second wave.

'More younger patients'

"During the second wave we have come across more younger patients than older ones. Much damage to the respiratory system along with issues such as sepsis and multiple organ failure have been noticed in patients, which necessitates their need for intensive care," said Dr. Survankar Datta of AIIMS.

"There are also instances where they have returned to Bengaluru because of post-COVID complications given the damage to their lungs," he said.

Kaleidoscope effect: A rainbow-coloured halo was seen around the Sun in the morning in Bengaluru on Monday. This is an optical phenomenon that occurs when light interacts with ice crystals in the atmosphere. ■ MURALI KUMAR K

Colourful skies



DGCA derosters crew after wedding in skies

Rituals were performed as the aircraft hovered over Madurai Meenakshi temple

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A wedding in the skies has invited the wrath of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

On Monday, it suspended the crew of a SpiceJet chartered plane after a wedding ceremony aboard the aircraft, over Madurai, in violation of COVID-19 norms. The airline has been ordered to file an FIR against the errant passengers.

Pictures viral on social media showed the bride and groom exchanging garlands surrounded by relatives and camerapersons. Many could be seen without masks.

The wedding rituals were performed as the aircraft hovered over Madurai Meenakshi temple in the presence of over 160 relatives – aviation website flightra-



In deep waters: The couple getting married on-board a chartered flight from Madurai on Monday. ■ ANI

dar24 shows the plane circling above the temple.

"We have derostered the crew and directed the airline to lodge a complaint against

those not following COVID-19 appropriate behaviour with relevant authorities. We will take strict action," a DGCA official said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Delhi Police officials visit Twitter office

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Special Cell on Monday visited the office of Twitter in the national capital in connection with a probe over the alleged "Congress toolkit".

While confirming the presence of Special Cell officers at Twitter's office in Lado Sarai, a source said that the officials currently did not have a warrant for a search.

Last week, the Congress was clearly briefed on COVID-19 guidelines to be followed and denied permission for any activity on board. The approval for this flight was taken as a joy ride for the wedding group, the airline said in response to a query on the incident.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

New land regulations spark protests in Lakshadweep

Extensive powers vested with development body

S. ANANDAN
KOCHE

Discontent is simmering in the verdant environs of the Lakshadweep group of islands over a slew of regulations introduced by the new administrator Praful Khoda Patel in the first five months of his tenure, which have also seen the archipelago lose its treasured status of being a 'COVID-free region'.

COVID-19 affected Lakshadweep after the stipulation for mandatory quarantine of Dweeb-bound travellers in Kochi was done away with under Mr. Patel's orders. As a result, the remote island chain has 6,847 cases as on May 24. Consequently, the 10 inhabited islands of the Union Territory have been

Bent, not broken: A view of Lakshadweep island in wake of Cyclone Tautkai. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



The most recent of these is the creation of a Lakshadweep Development Authority (LDA) with extensive powers, including eviction of land owners.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

A N D E

IIT-D centre to study light properties

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, on Monday announced that it will be setting up 'Optics and Photonics Centre' to study the fundamental properties of light and harnessing them in practical application.

The institute's Board of Governors has given its approval for the new centre that will seek collaboration with establishments like the Defence Research and Development Organisation, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Department of Atomic Energy, Indian Council of Medical Research. Joby Joseph, co-ordinator of the centre said, "The centre will play a pivotal role in the near future development of photonics-based quantum technologies, for next generation computing, etc."

BCom student arrested in Remdesivir cheating case

Efforts on to arrest another accused

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 20-year-old student was arrested for allegedly cheating a man of ₹36,000 on the pretext of providing him Remdesivir injection required for treatment of COVID-19 patients, the police said on Monday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) S.K. Meena said that the accused has been identified as Sagar Chaurasia, resident of West Patel Nagar and is a BCom final-year student.

Money transfer

The police said that they received a complaint from a Dabri resident stating that he was in need of Remdesivir injection for a relative and got in touch with Ajay through social media. The accused promised to deliver the said drug for ₹36,000 and was asked to transfer

₹18,000 in his bank account as advance and then another ₹18,000. After the money was transferred, the phone was switched off.

During investigation, the bank account and call detail records of the alleged mobile were analysed following which accused Sagar Chaurasia was arrested.

During interrogation, he allegedly told the police that he used to act on one Akram Khan's orders. He said Khan used to introduce himself as Ajay to people on social media and cheated several in the pretext of providing loan. Taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, he started cheating people on the pretext of providing them Remdesivir injection and oxygen cylinders, Mr. Meena said.

The police said that efforts are being made to arrest Khan.

Court seeks report on Gambhir buying COVID-19 drugs in bulk

Drug Controller of Delhi govt. told to probe similar allegations against AAP MLAs

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday directed the drug controller to give a status report on its inquiry on how politicians such as BJP MP Gautam Gambhir were able to buy COVID-19 drugs in bulk amid shortages.

Responsible act?

"Mr. Gautam Gambhir must have done it to genuinely help the needy. Let us be clear about it. But the issue is, is that a responsible behaviour? Should he not have realised that medicines are in shortage for others?" a Bench of Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Jasmeet Singh remarked.

The High Court also directed the Drug Controller of Delhi government to probe



BJP MP Gautam Gambhir

into allegations of procuring and hoarding medical oxygen made against AAP MLAs Priti Tomar and Praveen Kumar.

Want prescription?

On Mr. Gambhir, the HC wanted to know how he was able to procure 2,343 strips of Tab Fabiflu when the drug was in such short supply in the city. The court also queried how a chemist was able

to entertain such a

prescription.

"We want to see the prescription," the High Court said, adding that a chemist is supposed to dispense medicines only to patients. "A chemist is not a bulk supplier.. he has undertaken a retail sale which has to be to a retail customer," it said.

"Mr. Gambhir must have done it with best of intentions. He has been a national player... We are sure he had good intentions. But the way he has gone about it, he has actually done a disservice, unintentionally may be," the court observed.

Plea on FIR

The HC's direction came while hearing a petition seeking lodging of an FIR against politicians who alleg-

edly were able to procure COVID-19 drugs in huge quantity.

The Delhi police, in its status report, stated that 2,628 strips of Tab Fabiflu was bought by Gambhir Gambhir Foundation through one Manish of Garg Hospital. While 2,343 strips were distributed to patients, remaining 285 strips were deposited with Delhi government's Director General of Health Services for distribution.

Taking note of the report, the court said it needed to be probed how these medicines were distributed to several patients or attendants by Dr. Manish. It also noted the DCP concerned have collected the supporting documents in relation to the case.

The High Court will hear the case again on May 31.

Two held for selling black fungus drug

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 46-year-old man and his driver was arrested for allegedly selling anti-fungal drug Amphotericin, used for treatment of mucormycosis, at an exorbitant rate, the police said on Monday.

The suspect, Rajnish Shrivastava, whose firm 'AmbuSmith Inc.' deals in trading of medical equipments and ambulance modification, brought these injections from Lucknow and sold them in Delhi at a higher price. His driver, Murtaza Khan (36), also helped him in this business, the police said.

In a complaint at Saket police station, two students stated that while they were trying to arrange Amphotericin-B for a patient, they came in contact with Shrivastava, who was selling it at ₹11,300 per injection, about 36 times the MRP.

The complainants, who are members of a WhatsApp group that helps in arranging medicines for patients suffering from COVID-19 and black fungus, informed the police that Shrivastava had agreed to deliver 20 injections for ₹2.60 lakh.

A police team waited near Max Hospital at Saket and 2 p.m. The accused called the complainants at Hauz Rani traffic signal near the hospital for delivery of the injections, DCP (South) Atul Thakur said.

The accused tried to escape but the team apprehended them, the DCP said. Twenty injections were recovered from their car.

'Nobody dying for want of marriage certificates'

Centre asks HC to take up pleas seeking recognition of same-sex marriages at a later date

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Monday told the Delhi High Court that it was caught up with the COVID-19 situation and "nobody is dying because they don't have marriage certificate" while seeking adjournment of a bunch of petitions, seeking recognition of same-sex marriage.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, cited a circular of the High Court asking courts to take up only urgent matters during the pandemic while seeking ad-

journment of the petitions.

The Solicitor General said all law officers are working on issues which concern COVID-19 while urging the High Court to take up the petitions seeking recognition of same-sex marriages at a later date.

Mr. Mehta also raised the issue of a roster of the Division Bench which will be hearing the bunch of petitions.

Taking note of the submission, the court adjourned the hearing in the case for July 6, by which the Centre can seek clarification on the roster issue.

Earlier, the Centre had opposed any changes to the existing laws on marriage to recognise same-sex marriage saying such interference would cause "a complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws in the country".

"Living together as partners and having a sexual relationship by same-sex individuals is not comparable with the Indian family unit concept of a husband, a wife and children which necessarily presuppose a biological man as a 'husband', a biological woman as a 'wife' and the

children born out of the union between the two," the Centre had argued.

The court is seized of three separate petitions by same-sex couples seeking to declare that the Special Marriage Act (SMA) and Foreign Marriage Act (FMA) ought to apply to all couples regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation.

A fourth petition on the subject was also filed by four individuals who too claimed that the denial of same-sex marriage was a denial of rights guaranteed under the Constitution.

Sushil Kumar spends first night in lock-up on the floor

Wrestler has been arrested in a murder case, will be taken to Chhatrasal Stadium to recreate crime scene

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medallist wrestler Sushil Kumar, who has been sent to six-days police custody in connection with a murder case, spent his first night in the lock-up on the floor with only a blanket for his comfort.

"As per procedure, before putting him in the lock-up he was thoroughly frisked. He was asked to remove any ornaments, as well as his belt and shoes. No outside food was allowed to him. He ate food from the police mess. He was quiet and not interactive. After the paperwork, he was handed over to the Crime Branch at 3 a.m. for further investigation," said a police officer.

A senior officer said that during interrogation, they asked Mr. Kumar about his rivalry with the victim, 23-year-old wrestler Sagar Dhankhar, and what led him to beat Sagar and

Olympic wrestler Sushil Kumar and an accomplice were arrested near Mundka metro station on May 23. ■ AFP

others. He was also questioned about ownership and background of the property that was the cause of the brawl.

"He answered several questions but remained quiet when asked about people who helped him after the incident when he was evading arrest, as well as the whereabouts of his phone

and the CCTV video recordings, which he allegedly took from Chhatrasal Stadium after the brawl," said the officer.

The scooter that was recovered from him during the arrest belongs to a sportswoman.

He stayed at her house on Saturday. On Sunday morning, he took her scooter to meet a con-

tact to borrow some money, said the officer.

The police said that Mr. Kumar and his accomplice Ajay will be taken to the stadium to recreate the scene of the crime for investigation purpose. "We will counter him with electronic evidence that establishes his role in the crime. The video of the brawl that was purportedly shot to create terror among wrestlers will also be shown to him to identify the other accused involved in the crime.

"We have also discovered the role of Haryana-based gangster Sandeep alias Kala Jathedi in the crime. We have to establish the role of each person during investigation," said the officer.

On May 23, Delhi Police, while seeking his custody, had stated in court that Mr. Kumar and his accomplices thrashed the victims "like animals" as he wanted to "establish his terror" in the area. After the brawl, he

took away the recordings of + CCTV in the stadium.

He was Officer on Special Duty (OSD) at the stadium and he had access to the CCTV room.

Railway may suspend him
Meanwhile, the Delhi government has written to the Railway Board regarding the FIR lodged against Mr. Kumar.

Once we receive the letter, then we will take action and he will be suspended, said Northern Railway spokesperson.

A senior commercial manager with the Northern Railway, Mr. Kumar had been on deputation with the Delhi government since 2015 and was posted as an OSD at Chhatrasal Stadium.

His deputation was extended in 2020 and Mr. Kumar had applied for an extension for 2021 as well which had been rejected by the Delhi government and he was sent back to his parent cadre – Northern Railway

Take action to protect Bhalswa lake from pollution, says NGT

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Delhi Chief Secretary to convene a meeting and take remedial action to protect the Bhalswa lake against pollution and encroachment.

The green panel has also directed the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) to monitor water quality data of the lake periodically and put it in public domain.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel said, "It is an undoubted mandate of law to maintain the waterbodies in their pristine glory. Waterbodies perform important ecological functions. Not only do they add to the aesthetics, they help in water conservation, sustaining aquatic life and maintaining micro climate."

"Clean environment being part of right to life and also being part of directive principles of state policy, the State authorities have the duty to protect the work amidst the pandemic."

The bench said that the Delhi Chief Secretary was directed to hold a meeting with representatives from the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Delhi Jal Board, Delhi Tourism and Transport Development Corporation and North Delhi Municipal Corporation to take remedial action in accordance with law.

Pull up your socks, act on mosquito infestation'

HC seeks response from authorities

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday expressed concern about controlling mosquito infestation in the city. It observed that control measures have taken a "back seat" in the Capital, noting that if the situation is not controlled immediately, the rise in vector-borne diseases could lead to more problems and complexities amidst the pandemic.

A bench of Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Jameet Singh initiated a suo motu public interest litigation (PIL) on the issue of mosquito infestation and directed the Delhi government and municipal corporations to respond to the work amidst the pandemic.

The court said the government must pull their socks on this issue. "If it [vector-borne diseases] is not contained urgently, with the ongoing pandemic, the rise of vector-borne disease could lead to problems and complexities."

A municipal worker fumigates a house. ■ FILE PHOTO

Noting that every year there is a surge in vector-borne diseases such as dengue and chikungunya, the court said that this issue need not aggravate this year as the city was already facing the pandemic.

The court said the government must pull their socks on this issue. "If it [vector-borne diseases] is not contained urgently, with the ongoing pandemic, the rise of vector-borne disease could lead to problems and complexities."

Reply to plea challenging GNCTD Act, HC tells govt.

Two more pleas have raised same issue'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday asked the Centre to respond to a petition filed by an AAP member challenging the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Amendment Act, which increases the powers of the Lieutenant-Governor.

A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said it has already issued notices to the government on two previous pleas on the same issue.

The previous pleas were filed by a lawyer and another by a law student.

In the earlier petitions on the issue, the petitioner has argued that the Act would lead to confusion among the citizens as to who would be taking decisions for the Capital. It argued that vesting of powers in the L-G "would not be in harmony with the republican system of government".

The petition has sought that the Act, which came into force from April 27, be declared as unconstitutional and quashed.

Date and Time for Downloading of Bidding Documents :

From 01.06.2021 (09:00) to 07.06.2021 (12:00)

Last date and Time of Online Bid Submission including Scanned copy of Bid Security, cost of Bid Document (Rs.10,00,000.00 for Bids costing more than Rs. 50 lakh and Rs. 5000 for Rs. 50 lakh to Rs. 15 lakh) from a Scheduled Commercial Bank and scanned copy of Affidavits.: 07.06.2021 up to 15:00 Hours

Last date and Time for Submission of document in hard copy (original documents such as Bid Security, Cost of Bid document and Affidavits): 09.06.2021 up to 15:30 Hours

Online Bid Opening Date and Time : 09.06.2021 at 15:30 Hours

Place, date and time of Pre-Bid Meeting:- Office of Respective Works Circle, RWD : 04.06.2021 from 15:00 hours

The cost of package and earnest money is indicative and the actual amount of earnest money will be as per uploaded BOQ.

Time allowed for completion of each package is 12 months, including rainy season.

If the size of the package is greater than 10 Crore then Construction / Time of completion shall be enhanced from 12 Months to 18 Months.

Details of tender related information can be viewed/ downloaded from the website http://pmgsytendersbih.gov.in. Interested Bidders will have to register with their DSC (Digital Signature Certificate) in the web site http://pmgsytendersbih.gov.in.

For future details please visit website state.bihar.gov.in/pdbihar

Engineer-in-chief

Rural Works Department, Bihar, Patna

PR. 001440 (RWD) 2021-22

नोवल कोर्सों के संबंध में विस्तृत ज

Timings**DELHI**

TUESDAY, MAY 25

RISE 05:26 SET 19:11

RISE 18:02 SET 04:24

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26

RISE 05:26 SET 19:12

RISE 19:15 SET 05:08

THURSDAY, MAY 27

RISE 05:26 SET 19:12

RISE 20:26 SET 05:58

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 36 21
Safdarjung 36 21
Palam 37 21**Delhi Pilm Today**
37°C Rise in day temperature.
Dry weather with mainly sunny sky expected. A hot day likely.**Delhi Pilm Tomorrow**
38°C Dry weather would continue. Light winds during day with mainly sunny sky likely.© Copyright Skymet Weather 2019
All rights reserved.**Capital sees 1,550 cases, 207 deaths****STAFF REPORTER**
NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 1,550 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, taking the total cases to 14,18,418, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Monday. Also, 207 deaths were reported and the total number of deaths stood at 23,409.

A total of 61,506 tests was done during the period, the bulletin said. Of the total cases, 13,70,431 people have recovered and there are 24,578 active cases.

The test positivity rate (TPR) was 2.52%, which means about six out of 100 people taking COVID-19 tests are positive. The TPR was 36.2% on April 22, but since then, it has stayed below it. A decrease in positivity is a good sign, as per experts.

Meanwhile, 39 children below the age of 12 were admitted at Lok Nayak Hospital during the second wave of the infection till May 22, according to the hospital spokesperson.

Also, a drive-through vaccination centre will be opened at Vegas Mall in Dwarka, by Chief Minister on Wednesday, said Aakash Healthcare.

According to a government bulletin, there is no vaccine left for the 18-44 age group. Also, Covaxin stock will last for less than a day for vaccinating people above 45, healthcare and front-line workers.

"How come vaccines are not available for the State governments, but is available at private facilities, who are inoculating people at very high costs of ₹850-1,250? At ₹1,000 per dose of vaccine, a family of five would have to spend ₹10,000 on vaccines. There are homes in Delhi who have a collective income of ₹10,000 a month. How can they afford this?" AAP leader Atishi asked.

Ms. Atishi said that not getting Covaxin on time can create problems.

Draw up a centralised vaccine procurement policy: Sisodia

He asks Centre to green-light Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer vaccines

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Monday requested the Central government to not take vaccination as a "joke" and to give approval for Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, and Pfizer vaccines and buy these vaccines for citizens of the country.

Mr. Sisodia also wrote a letter to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan urging the Central government to come up with centralised vaccine procurement and allocation policy to "prevent any further loss of life".

'Ready to pay price'
He also said that Delhi is ready to pay the price for the vaccines and experts have warned that the next wave is likely to affect children the most.

"Scarcity of vaccines is ubiquitous all over the nation. In fact, districts in ma-



'No vaccination' message displayed at a dispensary in Daryaganj on Monday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

ny States have not received vaccines at all and even the ones that had vaccines are now shut due to shortage. The Central government is fully responsible for this dearth of vaccines that the nation is currently facing. It has failed in its vaccine management completely," the AAP Minister said in a video statement earlier in the day.

He said that when the Del-

hi government raised the de-
mand for vaccines, the Central government only provided four lakh doses and asked the State to float a global tender. "We reached out to Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson. Moderna and Pfizer told us that they are exclusively speaking with the Central government and will not distribute vaccines to any State governments," he said.

Mr. Sisodia questioned

what the Central government was doing when other countries were eyeing procurement of vaccines and passing advance orders.

"According to some statistics, the US and European Union ordered 70 crore vaccines in November 2020 itself. Today, the US has enough vaccines to vaccinate all citizens of the country. Britain gave approval for Pfizer in December, but we were sleeping then and we are sleeping now also. Britain has acquired enough vaccines to vaccinate 75% of its population in January itself but our government is busy vilifying States instead," he said.

The Minister said that it is time the Central government understood the gravity of the situation and procured vaccines from global companies. "It's time to rise above petty politics and think about the safety of our citizens," he added.

CM asks Centre to import Moderna, Pfizer vaccines

Kejriwal inspects depot for oxygen cylinders from China

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said COVID cases had dipped significantly and the second wave had also waned but the Delhi government continued to make preparations to tackle an imminent third wave.

Third wave

Requesting the Centre to import vaccines, Mr. Kejriwal said both Moderna and Pfizer had refused to sell vaccines directly to State governments.

"Now the cases are reducing significantly. For the country, this is the second wave but for Delhi, this is the fourth wave. This time, in the last week of April, around 28,000 cases were recorded but now they have come down to 1,500. The infection rate had reached 36% in the last week of April, which is now 2.5%," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"It seems that this wave is subsiding but there has been no laxity in the efforts by the

Delhi government. We have already started preparing for the next surge in cases – the third wave," he added.

Mr. Kejriwal on Monday inspected an oxygen depot in west Delhi's Mayapuri where around 6,000 oxygen cylinders imported from China are to be stored of which 4,400 have been received and the remaining are expected within 2 to 3 days.

Mr. Kejriwal said the government was preparing depots of 2,000 cylinders each at three locations.

"We faced a lot of challenges in importing these 6,000 cylinders from China as I understand that no such big consignment has been imported in India during this pandemic. Both HCL and Give India Foundation have donated for this, and we are very grateful to them for the same," he added.

The Delhi government, he said, had talked to representatives from Pfizer and Moderna with both stating that

they would communicate with the Centre directly.

There were a lot of COVID vaccines in the International market such as Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, Pfizer and the Centre should talk to them and import vaccine doses, he said.

"We talked to Moderna, we talked to Pfizer and talks concluded within 2-3 days, so why can't this be the case that the Central Government calls, invites and talks to these companies and I think within 3-4 days deals and agreements can be made with all the companies. Why is the work not being done with urgency?" he asked.

"I am happy that Bharat Biotech is willing to share its formula with everyone. The Centre should call, invite and talk to all 16 [vaccine manufacturing] companies and formally order and not request them that these 16 companies will start their production within the next few days," he also said.

'Delhiites being looted due to govt. negligence'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday alleged that the average Delhi citizen was cheated and looted by hospitals in the past 15 months due to alleged mismanagement and negligence of the Delhi government.

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta, Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri and spokesperson Richa Pandey Mishra alleged that the Delhi government had been patronising a "nexus" both overtly and covertly.

"When the pandemic was setting its feet fast in the Capital and the matter about private hospitals fleecing people in the name of treatment came to the fore, at the intervention of Centre, the State government issued a circular fixing rates for beds in these hospitals," Mr. Gupta said.

Delhiites are facing COVID-19 on the one hand, black marketing in the name of treatment on the other. Oxygen concentrators were selling at ₹1.5 lakh to ₹2 lakh per piece. Similarly, oxygen cylinders, which should be refilled for just ₹350 to ₹400, were being refilled for ₹5,000 to ₹30,000," Mr. Bidhuri alleged.

Delhi govt. begins study to find effect of double mutant strain

Decision was taken after an increase in cases of the new variant of COVID-19 in the Capital: official

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has started calling up about 2,550 people, who had tested positive for COVID-19, to understand the impact of mutations and variants of concern of the virus on people and vaccines, especially the double mutant strain, a senior Delhi government official said.

Of the about 2,550 people, around 1,600 were detected to be infected with mutations and variants of concern during genome se-

quencing. The rest had tested negative for any of the mutations and variations of concern.

"The idea is to mainly understand the effect of the double mutant on people, whether it is more deadly, infectious, or causing more reinfections. By collecting information from both groups of people, ones who were affected by variants and mutations of concern and others,

The government has not officially announced any details about the commencement of the study.

The decision to do the study was taken with an increase in double mutant strain of the virus (B.1.617) observed in Delhi, as per officials.

Questions asked

People are asked whether it was the first or the second time they were infected, whether it was a severe infection or not and other questions to understand

how the double mutant strain of the virus is affecting people.

People are also asked whether they had taken the vaccine before getting infected. If yes, then whether they had taken both shots. For instance, if a large number of people who were infected by the double mutant strain of the virus say they got infected even after taking the vaccine, then it will show that vaccines are not working that well against it. But we have just started the process now and can't say anything

right now," the official said.

The government started calling up people over phone from Friday and the process is expected to be completed this week. The data compiled by the Delhi government will then be analysed by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

Variants of concern

The mutations and variants of concern that are being studied include the U.K. variant, the double mutant strain, and the South African variant.

'Nothing wrong with Delhi govt. order putting all doctors in one category'

Notification deals only with COVID management duties: HC

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday remarked that there was nothing wrong in the Delhi government's decision allowing all doctors and medical staffers to function in a single category, irrespective of the differences in their seniority and specialisation, in treatment of COVID patients.

Justice Rekha Palli was of the view that the May 16 notification appeared to be dealing only with COVID management duties of doctors.

"What is the problem with this? What is your ego issue in this? I don't see anything wrong in this. I am sorry a doctor is coming to court like this," the judge



Act which came into force on April 27.

The petitioner-doctor was aggrieved by the notification as it put allopathic and non-allopathic doctors as well as junior and senior residents in one category for treating COVID patients.

Delhi government said the idea behind the notification was to ensure every ward was manned during the pandemic and only the authorised doctors can administer medicines or provide treatment.

The court has listed the case for further hearing on May 27.

The doctor posted at GTB Hospital said that the notification would "severely cast its negative impact on the treatment of the patients."

L-G orders purchase of drugs for black fungus

'Need robust screening, treatment'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal has asked for real time assessment and review of the requirement of drugs related to mucormycosis or black fungus treatment at Delhi hospitals. He has also directed for their immediate procurement.

According to government sources, any additional and prospective logistical requirements in hospitals with regard to treatment of mucormycosis should also be addressed at the earliest, the L-G directed.

"He has advised that a robust and effective system should be put in place across hospitals - government and private - for proper screening, diagnosis, re-

porting and treatment of the disease," sources said.

This, the L-G directed, should include the availability of essential drugs and healthcare facilities in accordance with the protocol and guidelines in place on the subject as issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), the Centre and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

"Simultaneously, in larger public interest, steps may also be taken to disseminate information about the infection and its prevention and cure amongst the general public to avoid any situation of panic, the L-G has directed. He has also sought an action taken report in this regard," sources said.

Gap in demand, supply of black fungus drug: HC

'Look into possibility of importing it'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday said there was a "wide gap to bridge" between demand and supply of medicine - Amphotericin B - used for treating black fungus, which is primarily affecting COVID-19 recovered people.

A Bench of Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Jasmeet Singh said drastic steps are required, including exploring the possibility of importing the medicines to tide over the current requirement.

The High Court was informed by senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing the Delhi government, that on May 21 there were around 200 cases of Mucormycosis (black fungus) in

the Capital, but the number has jumped to 475 as on Monday.

During the hearing, the Centre's counsel indicated the expected supply of the medicine stock in May and June, early delivery of its import and ramping up of production. The Centre's counsel acknowledged that there was gap between the demand and supply, but due to the present situation, the capacity for production whether in India or abroad, is "being stretched to the limit".

The court has directed the Centre to submit a status report with all the relevant details and listed the issue for hearing on May 27.

INTERVIEW | RITU SAXENA

'Those who have beaten COVID-19 must focus on mental health, eat well'

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

Deputy Medical Superintendent of Delhi government's LNJP Hospital, Ritu Saxena, says people who have recovered from COVID-19 must eat a well-balanced diet and exercise regularly in order to fully recuperate from the disease

What should people do after recovering from COVID-19? How much time does it take to recuperate?

After recovering from COVID-19, people should try to keep their mental health strong. What we find is that the disease has a psychosocial impact on the person's health. Also, concentrate on good nutrition. After any major illness, the body becomes

weak. So, we have seen many patients getting bacterial infections after recovering and they are coming to the hospital with UTI or other infections. Exercising is also very important. If it was a very severe case of COVID-19, then the patient may take months to recuperate. If not, the patient recuperates in 15-20 days.

What type of exercises should people do?

Some people, who suffered a severe infection, get very weak during the illness and are not able to do any physical activity. Those who have mild symptoms should continue physical activity such as taking a stroll in an isolated area – even when they are positive. Also, they

should do breathing exercises such as *pranayam*. Once they have recovered, they should go to open areas and do stretching, yoga, and continue with the breathing exercises. Take it light in the beginning and exercise as per the body's demand. If you are feeling comfortable, then you can slowly increase intensity.

What type of foods should people eat after testing negative?

During COVID-19, many people suffer loss of taste and smell. So, once they have recovered, they want to indulge in sweets and junk food. They think they should do what they could not during the illness. People should not do this. Avoid take-out

and junk food. You should eat fruits, vegetables, milk, and a lot of fiber – basically a healthy diet. You should also take *nibu pani* [lemon water], tender coconut water etc. for vitamin C and stay hydrated.

Any medicine or supplements?

People are taking all sorts of supplements. If you are</div

IN BRIEF



Alert me if hospitals overcharge: Shivakumar

BENGALURU
Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shivakumar on Monday appealed to people to notify him if hospitals are found overcharging for COVID-19 treatment and not adhering to the Supreme Court norms that have capped costs. He urged people to tag him on Twitter and Facebook.

Two die after suspected consumption of sanitiser

ALAPPUZHA
Two persons were found dead at Chavady in Alappuzha district of Kerala on Monday. According to the Kuthiathode police, Bajju, 52, and Stephen, 47, died after allegedly consuming hand sanitiser. The friends were found dead at their respective houses. All liquor outlets in the State have been shut in view of the lockdown.

Conditional bail for Sangam Dairy duo

VIJAYAWADA
The Andhra Pradesh HC granted bail to former MLA and Sangam Dairy chairman Dhulipala Narendra Kumar and its managing director P. Gopala Krishnan on Monday on the ground that both had contracted COVID-19 and the prosecution was able to get most of the required documents. They have been charged with committing irregularities in the dairy.

Central teams conduct study on herbal remedy

NELLORE
The teams constituted by the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences, New Delhi, on Monday conducted field-level studies extensively on the herbal preparation made by Ayurvedic practitioner B. Anandaiah at Krishnapatnam here, in Andhra Pradesh, touted as a COVID-19 cure.

Gangster, 11 aides sentenced to death

They were found guilty of murdering drivers and looting trucks on Chennai-Kolkata highway in 2008

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
ONGOLE

A court here on Monday awarded the death sentence to gangster and serial highway killer Md. Abdul Samad, alias Munna Bhai, and 11 of his accomplices who were found guilty of dacoity and murder in three cases, considering them among the rarest of rare cases.

Additional district and sessions judge-cum-family court judge G. Manohar Reddy sentenced four other accomplices of Munna Bhai, who waylaid trucks on the Chennai-Kolkata highway in 2008 and escaped with the vehicles and the goods in them after murdering the occupants, to life imprison-



Gangster Md. Abdul Samad and accomplices being brought to a court in Ongole, A.P., on Monday. ■ KOMMURI SRINIVAS

ment. Initially, police were clueless about the disappearance of several fully loaded trucks and their drivers on the expressway.

Prakasam police achieved a breakthrough after an intense probe, which took them to various States, including Tamil Nadu, Bihar

and West Bengal.

The judgment in the cases would be sent to the Andhra Pradesh High Court for confirmation.

The sentences

In the first case, Munna Bhai and nine of his accomplices were sentenced to death on two counts under Section 396 of the Indian Penal Code, and five others to life imprisonment for offences under Sections 396 and 120-B of the IPC.

In the second case, the main accused and 11 others were sentenced to death on two counts for offences under IPC Section 396. The main accused and 15 others were sentenced to undergo

life imprisonment for offences under IPC Sections 396 and 120-B. In the third case, the main accused and eight others were awarded death penalty on two counts for offences under IPC Section 396. Accused 1 to accused 15 were also sentenced to undergo life imprisonment for offences under IPC sections 396 and 120-B.

In the fourth case, the main accused was sentenced to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of ₹5,000 for offences under the Arms Act. Four of his accomplices were also sentenced to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment and ₹5,000 fine and three months' simple imprisonment.

5,000 Indians may get chance for Haj pilgrimage

Saudi Arabia has announced stringent COVID-19 norms

ABDUL LATHEEF NAHA
MALAPPURAM

India is likely to be permitted to send 5,000 pilgrims for this year's Haj in Saudi Arabia amid tight regulations in view of the second wave of the pandemic.

Saudi Arabia has announced that only 60,000 people will be allowed for the Haj to be held in July with COVID-19 protocol. While 45,000 of them will be from other countries, 15,000 will be domestic pilgrims.

Central Haj Committee officials indicated that they expected about 5,000 pilgrims from India. However, a State-wise break-up of the pilgrims could not be given.

"It will be too early to say how many pilgrims from Kerala will be allowed this



Pilgrims circling the Kaaba in Makkah last July. ■ REUTERS

year. Last year, no pilgrim from our country could go as the Haj was curtailed in view of the pandemic. This time we are waiting with our fingers crossed," said Kerala State Haj Committee Chairman C. Mohammed Faizy.

Saudi Arabian government used to allow one in 1,000 Muslims from India to

perform Haj every year. Accordingly, 1.75 lakh pilgrims from India had performed Haj in 2019. About 11,000 of them were from Kerala under the government's supervision. As many as 2.5 million pilgrims from around the world had gathered in Makkah in 2019.

Age restrictions

Haj Committee officials said that Saudi Arabia this year would not permit people below 18 years of age and above 60 years of age. "Only those who are in good health will be allowed," said Mr. Faizy.

Those who were hospitalised for any disease in the last six months will not be allowed for Haj. Pilgrims will have to maintain two-metre physical distancing.

Kerala Assembly to elect Speaker today

LDF has fielded M.B. Rajesh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Election of the Speaker of the 15th Kerala Legislative Assembly will take place on Tuesday.

The Left Democratic Front has fielded Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s M.B. Rajesh, who represents the Trithala constituency in Palakkad district, for the post.

The United Democratic Front (UDF) has fielded Congress legislator P.C. Vishnunadh, elected from the Kunara constituency in Kollam district, as their candidate.

Two sets of nominations were filed for Mr. Rajesh by the LDF and one set for Mr. Vishnunadh by the UDF on Monday.

All the nominations are valid and the election will commence on Tuesday



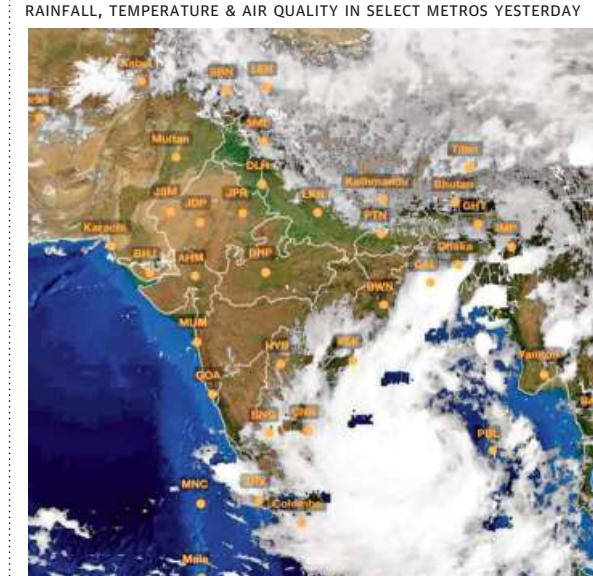
M.B. Rajesh

when the House meets at 9 a.m. with pro-tem Speaker P.T.A. Rahim in the chair.

Two makeshift booths will be set up behind the Speaker's chair.

Once the results are announced, the new Speaker will be escorted to the Chair by the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition to assume charge. Of the 140 seats in the Assembly, the LDF has 99 legislators and the UDF 41.

WEATHER WATCH



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Tuesday: Heavy/very rainfall likely at a few/isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Thunderstorms with lightning likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Bihar, central Maharashtra, Konkan & Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...-38.7...	27.0	...	Kozhikode	...-34.2...	26.2	...
Ahmedabad	38.4...	27.7	...	Kurnool	12...	31.7...	23.8
Aizawl	0.4...	32.3...	22.6	Lucknow	...-37.0...	26.2	...
Altahabad	...-38.4...	26.0	...	Madurai	...-40.2...	26.5	...
Bengaluru	...-31.7...	22.0	...	Mangaluru	...-31.7...	23.6	...
Bhopal	...-39.2...	26.0	...	Mumbai	...-33.8...	27.6	...
Bhubaneswar	...-36.0...	27.8	...	Mysuru	...-33.9...	21.0	...
Chandigarh	...-38.6...	24.7	...	New Delhi	...-36.0...	21.2	...
Chennai	...-35.4...	28.4	...	Patna	...-38.8...	25.7	...
Coimbatore	2...	34.1...	24.3	Port Blair	73...	27.6...	23.8
Dehradun	...-35.2...	20.2	...	Puducherry	...-35.7...	26.2	...
Gangtok	...-26.6...	18.0	...	Pune	1...	36.3...	23.4
Goa	6...	32.9...	24.7	Raipur	...-40.5...	28.6	...
Guwahati	...-37.9...	26.6	...	Ranchi	...-34.6...	23.5	...
Hubballi	...-29.0...	23.0	...	Shillong	0.1...	28.7...	18.0
Hyderabad	0.2...	38.9...	25.5	Shimla	15...	24.4...	11.6
Imphal	...-32.5...	21.4	...	Srinagar	...-22.8...	8.8	...
Jaipur	...-38.0...	23.4	...	Thiruvananthapuram	10...	33.4...	24.4
Kochi	...-32.0...	25.6	...	Tiruchi	...-38.1...	27.8	...
Kohima	...-26.2...	15.2	...	Vijayawada	...-36.4...	27.0	...
Kolkata	...-35.9...	27.4	...	Visakhapatnam	...-33.2...	28.6	...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Yesterday

CITIES	SO.	NO.	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE	
Ahmedabad	26	45	19	60	78	■■■	In observation made at 4.00 pm - Bhopal.
Bengaluru	.6	26	44	61	68	■■■	Rajasthan recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 273 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 20
Chennai	54	18	163	35	40	■■■	
Delhi	.9	23	44	215	143	■■■	
Hyderabad	.3	76	23	64	90	■■■	
Kolkata	10	19	22	111	83	■■■	
Lucknow	13	12	21	217	203	■■■	
Mumbai12	14	50	128	■■■	
Pune20	56	88	108	■■■	
Visakhapatnam	12	66	38	109	136	■■■	

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

NORTH & EAST

Hisar administration withdraws cases registered against farmers

Defying the lockdown, a large number of them had protested during CM's visit



Farmer leaders addressing the gathering in Hisar on Monday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

president Gurnam Singh Charuni; Bharatiya Kisan Union (Rajewal) president Balbir Singh Rajewal; All-India Kisan Sabha, Haryana, vice-president Inderjit Singh; and AIKS, Punjab, general-secretary, Major Singh Punnuwala, among others, were present.

Earlier, defying the lockdown, a large number of farmers, including women, travelling in tractors, multi-purpose vehicles and mini-trucks, started assembling at

Krantiman Park in Hisar around noon from across the State, despite attempts by the police to prevent them from entering the city.

Condemning the police action against the farmers, Mr. Rajewal said those in power had forgotten that they were the representatives of the people and the attack on the farmers in Hisar was an attack on the entire farming community. He also made an appeal to the farmers to maintain peace and calm to make this movement a success.

Mr. Charuni said the farmers had gathered seeking the withdrawal of the cases registered against them and demanding action against the police officers for pelting stones at the farmers. He said the administration should also book the CM for violating COVID-19 protocols during the inauguration of the hospital on May 16.

43 doctors die in Bengal in second wave

Doctors' forum calls it 'unacceptable and alarming' seeks immediate vaccination

BISHWANATH GHOSH</b



Character challenge

The Centre's directive to Twitter to remove 'manipulated media' tag on posts is illegal

The Government of India's directive to microblogging platform Twitter that it remove the label 'manipulated media' from certain posts shared by functionaries of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), including Union Ministers, has no legal leg to stand on. But it reveals that the Government of India is willing to go to any lengths to empower BJP functionaries to tarnish political opponents and misinform the public. The BJP functionaries circulated on Twitter what they called a 'toolkit' prepared by the Congress to disparage the government. The Congress has filed a police complaint that the BJP functionaries forged a document that does not exist. It has also written to Twitter to permanently suspend the accounts of those who circulated the forged documents. There is indeed a document that the Congress prepared on the opportunity costs of the Central Vista project for its internal use. The one circulated by the BJP leaders included additional pages on COVID-19. The BJP has failed to provide the digital footprint, or the copies, of what it calls the COVID-19 toolkit. There is no evidence that the Congress has done anything in the toolkit which was supposedly prepared in May; but the toolkit proposes courses of action that have already happened in April, an analysis by fact-checking platform AltNews has revealed. Toolkits are meant to be about coordinating future actions on social media, and not cataloguing past events. When challenged on facts, a BJP propagandist revealed the identity of a woman who was involved in the Central Vista research, leading to her bullying by cyber mobs.

Twitter has not complied with the Centre's directive, and at least six handles of BJP functionaries now have posts with the tag 'manipulated media'. The reasoning behind the directive, in the absence of any legal provision to cite, by the Government of India is baffling. It has argued that the labelling was a "prejudged, prejudiced and a deliberate attempt to colour the investigation by local law enforcement agency". By this metric, a private company must allow what it has determined as problematic content, until a state agency concurs. Twitter has a publicised policy that it may label tweets that include media that have been deceptively altered or fabricated. It could use its own mechanism or use third party services to make that determination. Twitter is a private entity whose relationship with users is guided by its terms of services. The IT Act that empowers the government to regulate content does not give it the power to order the removal of a label. Additionally, the government move raises serious concerns regarding arbitrary censorship and transparency. The Centre's desperation to control any discussion on its failures, and shift the focus on to the Opposition is leading to such situations that embarrass a democracy. Rather than intimidate a private company, the BJP and the Centre should discipline its functionaries into more civility and truthfulness in their engagement with critics.

Losing time

Puducherry needs a full-fledged government as coronavirus cases rise

The delay in the formation of the Ministry in Puducherry does not appear to be merely because Chief Minister N. Rangasamy was indisposed for some days. He took charge on May 7 before taking ill; he has now recovered from COVID-19, but there is no word on Cabinet expansion. The delay is a reflection of the uneasy relationship between Mr. Rangasamy's N.R. Congress, and its ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has been paying special attention to the Union Territory to become a major force. On the face of it, the delay is because of the Chief Minister's hospitalisation and his home quarantine, which was over on Sunday (May 23). But his illness did not come in the way of the Centre making three BJP members nominated legislators of the Assembly. One reason that is holding up Ministry formation is the BJP's demand for the Deputy Chief Minister's post and a few ministerial berths, as stated by Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G. Kishan Reddy, one of the point persons of the BJP for Puducherry. But it was evident that Mr. Rangasamy was not too enthused by the national party's proposals. A few days before assuming office, he was on record to say that there was no precedent of Puducherry having had a Deputy Chief Minister, but would consider the matter if the Centre created such a post. However hard it may be for him, Mr. Rangasamy has to contend with the reality that the BJP's strength in the Assembly is just one short of his party's 10, after the nomination of the three MLAs. Lieutenant Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, on May 21, appointed K. Lakshminarayanan as the pro-temp Speaker of the Assembly, paving the way for the early swearing-in of MLAs.

However, what bothers the people of the Union Territory – it has a population of about 12.5 lakh (2011 Census) – is that there is no full-fledged elected government in place during a raging COVID-19 pandemic. Between May 8, the day after Mr. Rangasamy became Chief Minister, and May 24, the number of active cases went up by 2,250; the total number of active cases stood at 15,835 on Monday. In this period, the toll rose by almost 50% and as on Monday, 1,382 persons have died since the outbreak of the pandemic. Puducherry does need a vibrant and imaginative Health Minister to beat the virus. This is also an opportunity for the N.R. Congress and the BJP to set aside their differences and show that they have genuine concern for the welfare of the people by forming the Council of Ministers at the earliest. This is no time for procrastination.

A September exit, Afghanistan at the crossroads

While the U.S.'s withdrawal will end its 'forever war', peace depends on what future steps the country's stakeholders take



VINAY KAURA

In conflict resolution diplomacy involving multiple stakeholders, sometimes the venue becomes as important as the agenda of peace talks. The fragile Afghanistan peace process has been in disarray as the Washington-desired conference to be hosted by the United Nations in Istanbul, Turkey – earlier scheduled for late April-early May – remains suspended due to the reluctance of Afghan's Taliban. Turkey had to announce the postponement of talks until the end of Ramzan. Now there is some hope of breaking the impasse as the Taliban have expressed an openness to attend the Istanbul summit with the rider that the final outcome will be achieved in Doha. Although it gives an impression of the Taliban snubbing Turkey, the real issue regarding Afghan peace, however, should be: 'what' is to be done, and not 'who' does it or 'how' it is done.

An American calibration

The Istanbul conference is being calibrated by the Biden administration with its plans to completely withdraw from war-torn Afghanistan. Rejecting the Pentagon's preference for a conditions-based exit, United States President Joe Biden is insistent on withdrawing the troops on September 11, even without any power-sharing deal between the warring parties.

With the rising level of violence, prospects of negotiating peace in Afghanistan seem bleak. Since the announcement of an exit date, Afghanistan continues to witness deadly attacks across its provinces. For instance, multiple blasts outside a girls school in Kabul recently was the worst terror attack in Afghanistan in a year. However, while adopting a tough posture, the Taliban have nonetheless kept the space open for engagement

with the Afghan government. After a long pause in peace talks, they met in Qatar on May 14, the second day of a three-day ceasefire.

Consensus still eludes the Taliban's real motives. According to conventional wisdom, by indulging in arbitrary acts of violence the Taliban are demonstrating that they are capable of seizing by military force what is not offered to them on the negotiating table. It would, however, be more prudent to believe that there exists a gulf in the views of the field commanders, who would like to wait it out for the U.S. to depart as there is little value in making concessions during the talks, and the Taliban leadership, who may feel the urgency to resume negotiations than completely abandoning them for fear of losing the international legitimacy they enjoy at the moment.

Pakistan's emergence

Being the Taliban's chief patron, Pakistan is the most important player in the Afghan conflict. After months of negotiations, the U.S.-Taliban deal was signed in February 2020, and Pakistan took full credit for it. Unlike his predecessor, Mr. Biden has not set timelines, upping the ante for many stakeholders.

As the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan for almost two decades had kept Washington reliant on Rawalpindi for operational and other support, Pakistan not only treated the U.S. as its geopolitical pawn but also smartly mobilised this factor against India. With the disappearance of this lethal dependence, Pakistan faces an uphill task in conducting a viable Afghan policy. Therefore, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi's latest phone call to the U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken should be seen in this context. Expressing Pakistan's desire for "close economic cooperation, enhanced regional connectivity and common vision for a peaceful South Asia", the crux of Mr. Qureshi's discussion was in laying stress on the need for "responsible withdrawal" of foreign forces, clearly indicating fear of a pyrrhic victory.



No one knows better than Pakistan's Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa that Pakistan cannot keep America invested in its country on military, economic, and societal fronts without partnering with the U.S. to ensure a smooth transition of power in Kabul. But western-backed and Taliban-opposed Kabul government's relations with Pakistan continue to be characterised by deep hostility and mistrust. Despite a recent goodwill trip to Kabul by Gen. Bajwa, accompanied by the chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Lt.-Gen. Faiz Hameed, to assure the Afghan leadership of Pakistan's support for an "inclusive power-sharing arrangement", Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani has accused Pakistan of running "an organized system of support" for the Afghan Taliban.

Dealing with the President

An essential element of Mr. Biden's plan is to make Mr. Ghani agree to dissolve his government and set up a new governing system that would include the Taliban, which could finally decide the future distribution of power and changes to the Afghan Constitution. But Mr. Ghani refuses to step down for an interim regime to take over, insisting that a new government should emerge through elections in which he promises not to run. Mr. Ghani is seen as a figure who has deepened divisions among an already fractured Afghan political elite, besides failing miserably to wean the Pashtuns away from the Taliban. Ever since his controversial re-election, rival contenders for power are increasingly attacking his legitimacy, challenging his motivations and grounds of support. On the con-

trary, the Taliban continues to display a large measure of cohesion, despite reports of its fragmentation. Without an immediate ceasefire, a tough summer awaits the Afghan security forces.

Mr. Ghani could have had his way had Pakistan been the Taliban's only patron. The Taliban now draw support from a wide variety of regional powers, including Russia, China and Iran. However, these countries too want the insurgent group to moderate its position. China, which has earned notoriety of being the free rider in Afghanistan, seems confused as to the American exit looms large. Despite public rhetoric of asking the U.S. to leave, the Chinese policy makers have become more comfortable over the years with America's military presence in Afghanistan which has suppressed many terrorist groups which threaten China directly or Beijing-friendly regimes in Central Asia.

Finally, India and Pakistan
The strategic competition between Washington and Beijing, China's growing rivalry with India, and New Delhi's tense relationship with Islamabad are some of the factors which will certainly affect the situation in Afghanistan as the U.S. leaves the country. Thus, any reduction in tensions between India and Pakistan, irrespective of who plays the mediator, will have an indirect stabilising effect on Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan has a direct stake in the success of peace talks because it is aware of the negative fallout of another cycle of violence in Afghanistan – unconstrained refugee flows and terror attacks inside its territory. It remains to be seen how border fencing along the controversial Durand Line can minimise this negative fallout.

While the September 11 exit would bring the U.S.'s "forever war" to an end, it is unlikely to result in peace if Afghan stakeholders show their utter inability to take the process forward. But if the path of negotiations is either abandoned or accepted half-heartedly, it will be impossible to stop Afghanistan's descent into chaos and civil war.

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The scale of Gujarat's mortality crisis

Analysis of excess deaths from the civil registration system spotlights the systematic obfuscation in official statements



AASHISH GUPTA &
MURAD BANAJI

By all accounts, the mortality impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been exceptionally large. Crematoria, burial grounds, and, in some places, even riverbeds are full. Tragically, almost everyone has lost at least one person close to them. Given this reality, few people have much faith in official COVID-19 death counts. How many COVID-19 deaths are going uncounted? Could indirect effects of the pandemic, for example through economic distress and disruptions to health care, be contributing to a surge in mortality?

Registration data insights

These key questions, being asked for over a year, are even more pertinent now. In Gujarat, reports of overburdened crematoria and lengthy lists of obituaries indicate a severe crisis. Mortality figures from the civil registration system in Gujarat, reported recently by the Gujarati newspaper, *Divya Bhaskar* (<https://bit.ly/3oNdnjw>), provide some insight into the scale of the mortality crisis.

To provide some context, official COVID death counts largely reflect deaths in hospitals, of patients with confirmed COVID-19, where COVID-19 is listed as a cause of death. Deaths where doctors do not write COVID-19 as a cause of death on the hospital death certificate are missed. Additionally, government "death audit commit-

tees" may choose to omit deaths of patients with confirmed COVID-19 from official tolls, citing co-morbidities as the main cause of death. Finally, deaths at home, whether of those who were tested or not, and whether test results were positive or not, are largely missed by the system.

In contrast, India's civil registration system is supposed to register all deaths – COVID or not, at home or in a hospital. Civil registration has been improving, and across India about 86% of all deaths were registered in 2018. In Gujarat, civil registration is considered to be complete by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (<https://bit.ly/3wtlAhx>).

Divya Bhaskar reported that during a 71-day period between March 1, 2021 and May 10, 2021, there were 1.23 lakh deaths registered in Gujarat. In the corresponding period in 2020, there were around 58,000 registered deaths. This suggests a large increase in mortality in 2021.

Year-wise comparison

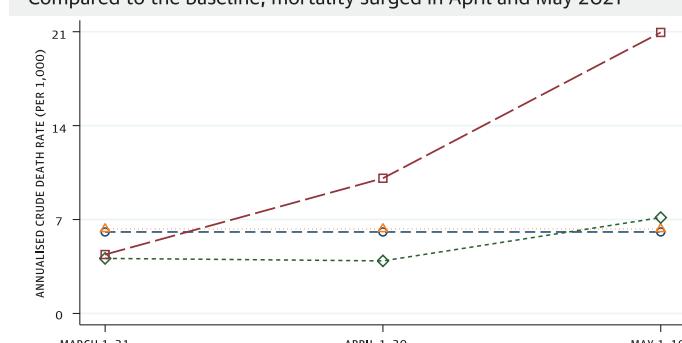
However, 2020 was also a pandemic year, and the early days of the pandemic saw a very harsh lockdown. This likely prevented or delayed many deaths from being registered. Considering this, we compared registered deaths in Gujarat in 2021 to estimates of baseline mortality from previous years.

The Sample Registration System, a continuous demographic survey, provides estimates of crude death rates in Gujarat until 2018. For the period 2015-2018, mean crude death rates were 6.075 deaths per 1,000. Taking Gujarat's projected population in 2021, about 6.98 crore, we would expect about 82,500 deaths in a

year. The financial and emotional crises which a huge majority of students must have gone through over the last year. Lakhs of families have seen their earnings plummet or have gone through the trauma of coming close to or losing a family member. Moreover, there are questions about

The rise in mortality

Compared to the baseline, mortality surged in April and May 2021



Note: Baseline rates for 2015-18, from the Sample Registration System (SRS) and the Civil Registration System (CRS), are similar. Baseline SRS and CRS crude death rates assume that there is no seasonality in deaths. Rates for 2020 and 2021 are calculated from the projected population for those years, and death counts recorded by the CRS, as reported by *Divya Bhaskar* (on May 14, 2021). It is likely that the 2020 death counts are an undercount because of the lockdown imposed then and associated disruptions. It is also likely that the 2021 death rates will increase as deaths that happened in these months slowly get registered. Still, the 2021 death rates show large increases in mortality.

71-day period. Using registered deaths between 2015-2018 for this calculation reveals a similar estimate.

The 1.23 lakh registered deaths in Gujarat during March 1-May 10, 2021 were thus 50% higher than expected from baseline estimates. Moreover, the current COVID-19 wave may have caused delays in registration – the scale of the mortality surge could be even greater.

Thus, in a little over two months, there were at least 40,000 "excess deaths" over and above what we expect from previous years' data. This is around 10 times Gujarat's official COVID-19 death count during this period of around 4,200 deaths.

The increase in excess mortality mirrors the timing of the rise in recorded COVID-19 deaths, which rose sharply through most of April. This can be seen in the

graph of annualised crude death rates. But we cannot assume that all Gujarat's excess deaths are COVID-19 deaths. Some may reflect overwhelmed health-care facilities or worsening economic conditions.

In fact, there is some evidence for possible indirect effects.

The *Divya Bhaskar* report documents that 20% of the deaths that were registered were among people less than 25 years of age. This is an increase in both absolute and relative terms compared to 2018, when about 15% of deaths were below the age of 25. Because young people are less vulnerable to severe COVID-19, and because child mortality is especially sensitive to disruptions in health care, this suggests an increase in indirect mortality.

Even factoring in a possible increase in indirect mortality, the data strongly suggest that the great

majority of COVID-19 deaths in the State have gone uncounted. This is consistent with large mismatches observed between numbers of COVID-protocol cremations and recorded COVID-19 deaths.

The work of journalists in Gujarat demonstrates the value of looking at mortality records from civil registration to examine the extent of the crisis. In addition to Gujarat, civil registration is complete in 15 States and Union Territories. Many people work hard to collect this data, and many more wait in government offices to report the deaths of their family members. The least governments can do is to make this data available so that we can better understand the scale of India's COVID-19 crisis.

Unreliability of official counts

In summary, data from the civil registration system in Gujarat shows large increases in mortality, consistent with multiple accounts of the unreliability of official COVID-19 death reporting in the State. These official death counts are used to make claims about low infection fatality rates and low overall mortality. Analysis of excess deaths from the civil registration system highlights the systematic obfuscation in such official statements.

Ultimately, Gujarat's civil registration system death counts reinforce what we already know – that an unprecedented tragedy is unfolding. And that the government's response has been severely lacking.

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Murad Banaji is a Senior Lecturer in Mathematics at Middlesex University London

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.

Board examinations

Holding board examinations in the near future is an insensitive idea (Page 1, "Centre, majority of States opt to hold Class 12 board exams, May 24"). While the risk to the health of students cannot be discounted, governments also need to take into

account the financial and emotional crises which a huge majority of students must have gone through over the last year. Lakhs of families have seen their earnings plummet or have gone through the trauma of coming close to or losing a family member. Moreover, there are questions about

the online teaching-learning processes and the huge disparities in bridging the digital divide. It would be far better to leave it to students and their families to make this important decision on an individual basis. This crisis also provides us a reason to reflect upon the obsession

with and need for centralised board exams. Finally, the compulsory holding of exams may be an attempt by the government to justify the fees which the boards have charged and collected even in such distressing times.

FIROZ AHMAD,
New Delhi

While students of Class 12 are busy preparing for their examinations keeping in mind the existing pattern, any new changes now are bound to affect them in an adverse way. Students are in agony now and any extreme and new moves will only add to their trauma. The Union

government has also given States just three days time for their suggestions. Is this time sufficient? States need to be aware of the plight of students across India before sending in their feedback.

</div

A single global tender for vaccine procurement

The scramble by the States is destined to be inequitable and inefficient and portrays lack of coordination



CHANDRAKANT LAHARIYA & SOHAM D. BHADURI

With only 20 million vaccine shots available for the entire month of May for the 600 million people aged 18-44 years in India, many State governments have resorted to floating global tenders for COVID-19 vaccines. This situation is another example of political promises being made without sufficient planning. It also points to a lack of political will to find sustainable solutions; inadequate coordination between States and the Union government; and a focus on optics during a public health emergency of unprecedented magnitude. Each of these is an indictment of the response to the pandemic in India. If not now, when can the Indian state be more responsive and responsible?

Incoherent on all fronts

There are many cons of the Liberalised and Accelerated Phase 3 Strategy of COVID-19 Vaccination, which began on May 1. We discuss them in this article, particularly in view of the scramble among States at the international stage as a result of this strategy.

First, was the new liberalised strategy primarily intended as a fire-fighting measure in view of limited vaccine supply or as a stable, long-term measure? Reducing Central government monopsony can theoretically increase production. However, it is unlikely to manifest quickly enough to aid in successfully preparing for a third wave through vaccination, especially in the presence of limiting factors like reduced raw materials, which the government has itself admitted to. Supplies are projected to achieve substantial levels only by August 2021. However, considering that past announcements of vaccine production have not met the timelines, can we be assured of even that? Without any increase in supplies, expanding eligibility to the 18-44 years age group will only spread vaccines thinly, which makes little epidemiological and operational sense.



A senior citizen at a vaccination centre in Delhi's Lajpat Nagar on May 13. ■
MOORTHY R.V.

If it is intended to be a long-term and stable measure, it would exemplify an imprudent and inequitable vaccination strategy by any nation in the face of an unprecedented national emergency.

Second, uniform vaccine prices for all States can prevent exploitation of possible economies of scale. Leaving prices to an oligopolistic market favours unhealthy competition among States. The new vaccination strategy has now forced States to compete in an unfavourable international market, which negates any success at curbing domestic competition. States will have to procure doses at higher rates than a single national purchaser would. As a result of the new strategy, each vaccine dose will be costlier in India than in any other part of the world, until prices come down substantially. Making State governments pay higher prices for the vaccines essentially increases government expenditure, though the burden now has shifted to the States. Overall, the current approach is destined to be highly inefficient on all fronts for a country that is short of resources. The concomitant inequity is self-explanatory.

The solution is to boldly revisit the policy and use the limited vaccine supply for the adult high-risk and vulnerable group, identified as per the target population. This can be a State-specific decision led by subject experts without interference from the political circle. Don't give false hopes to the rest, which can only lead to disillusionment, further diminish trust in government promises and compound other problems. Reconsider opening vaccination for the 18-44 years age group in August 2021, when vaccine supply is likely to stabilize. This can be done earlier if adequate supplies become available.

The current scramble by States on the international stage is not only destined to be inequitable and inefficient, but also propagates a discordant image for a country which, until late, boasted of extending humanitarian aid by exporting vaccines. It only behoves the Central government to bear the costs and provide vaccines to the States. However, the bare minimum that the Central government can do now is to coordinate with the States and on behalf of all the willing States, float a single global tender for vaccine procure-

ment. This is unlikely to yield much as most vaccine manufacturers hardly have any spare capacity for the next few months, but a single powerful purchaser is more likely to tip the balance in India's favour, apart from accomplishing obvious efficiency and equity gains. The benefits of being the single purchaser are not alien to the current government – the Centre's own flagship healthcare programme, the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, is an exemplar of such benefits.

More specifically, on vaccination, the Centre-State division of labour has traditionally been one where the Centre procures vaccines and the States administer them. It was effective vaccine delivery that helped the state deal with the public health problem of polio. The Central government procured the vaccines and States dealt with delivery. An emergency is the worst hour to abruptly disturb this equation and saddle the States with additional procurement responsibilities. The fact that the federal government has provided vaccines free to all even in the United States, which is a poster child of laissez-faire and arguably, an inspiration behind many of India's recent health policy pronouncements, should be an eye-opener.

A rights-based approach

Article 21 of the Constitution is often interpreted as embracing the right to health. The rights-based approach in health in operational terms connotes accessibility, availability and affordability, and the significance of these magnifies multifold during an emergency of the proportions we are seeing today.

In recent times, various Indian courts have looked at COVID-19 vaccines and services from a rights-based approach. A health emergency comes largely within the purview of the Central government. It demands that the government act responsibly to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are accessible, available, and affordable. It is never too late to take corrective measures.

Chandrakant Lahariya has done extensive work on the vaccination programme of India, is a public policy and health systems expert and the co-author of 'Till We Win: India's Fight Against The COVID-19 Pandemic'; Soham D. Bhaduri is a health policy expert and Chief Editor of 'The Indian Practitioner'

Expanding the scope of POCSO

Reforming the law is necessary to account for the reporting of historical child sexual abuse



MANRAJ SHUNMUGASUNDARAM

Over the last nine years, India has sought to "protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography" through the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO). But POCSO has not been without controversy or deficiency. Recently, the Supreme Court had to injunct an interpretation of 'skin-to-skin contact' given by the Bombay High Court. Another fundamental defect of POCSO is its inability to deal with historical cases. With growing international jurisprudence around these issues, and in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, India must revise its legal and procedural methods to deal with historical child sexual abuse.

Historical child sexual abuse

Historical child sexual abuse refers to incidents that are reported late. Historical abuse is not just confined to institutions but also includes intra-familial abuse where it is difficult for the child to report the offence or offender at the earliest point in time. It often takes time for the child to recognise and comprehend the gravity of what transpired and become confident to report the offence. At first glance, this may seem to run counter to the established principle of criminal law: that every act of crime must be reported at the earliest and any delay in filing the complaint dilutes the efficacy of the prosecution's case.

Provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) prohibit judicial magistrates from taking cognisance of cases beyond a specific time period. Cases involving child sexual abuse not amounting to rape as defined under Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and prior to the enactment of POCSO in 2012, would presumably be classified under the lesser, and somewhat frivolous, offence of outraging the modesty of a woman (Section 354 of the IPC). As such, any reporting of an offence, under Section 354 of the IPC, more than three years after the date of incident would be barred by the CrPC. Such a scenario renders historical reporting of child sexual offences which took place before 2012 legally implausible. This presents an insurmountable legal barrier against the registration of historical child sexual offences which took place before 2012.

While the limitation provisions were incorporated into the CrPC to avert delayed

prosecution, the circumstances around child sexual abuse cannot and must not be viewed in the same manner as other criminal offences. Therein lies a compelling case to allow delayed reporting and prosecution with regard to incidents of child sexual offences. It is also now understood that delays in reporting sexual abuse after a considerable passage of time from the date of offence may be due to factors such as threats from the perpetrator, fear of public humiliation, and absence of trustworthy confidant. Another theory, proposed by Roland C. Summit, Professor of Psychiatry, is the accommodation syndrome – where the child keeps the abuse as a secret because of the fear that no one will believe the abuse, which leads to accommodative behaviour. As such, with growing research and empirical evidence pointing to behaviour justifying delayed reporting, there is a need to amend the law to balance the rights of the victims and the accused.

One of the major drawbacks of delayed reporting is the lack of evidence to advance prosecution. It is believed that there would be less than 5% chance for gathering direct physical and medical evidence in such cases. India, in particular, suffers from a lack of procedural guidance as to how to prosecute historical cases of child sexual abuse. In contrast, the U.K. has issued detailed Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse under the Sexual Offences Act of 2003 to assist the police in such cases.

Need to review the law

Also, in 2018, an online petition based on the plea of a child sexual abuse survivor gathered tremendous support. The survivor-petitioner, Purnima Govindarajulu, had unsuccessfully tried to register a complaint against her abuser after a delay of more than 40 years. After having failed to get traction with the police, she had launched an online campaign to raise awareness. Consequently, the Union Ministry of Law and Justice, at the request of the then Minister for Women and Child Development, clarified that no time limit shall apply for POCSO cases. Though this was a welcome clarification and would help strengthen the POCSO jurisprudence, it still fails to address the plight of children who were victims of sexual abuse before 2012. There is an urgent need to reform and revise our laws to account for various developments such as historical reporting of child sexual abuse. At the very least, the Union government must frame guidelines to direct effective and purposeful prosecution in cases which are not covered by the POCSO.

Manraj Shunmugasundaram is Advocate and Spokesperson, DMK. This article was written with inputs from Sasi Varadharajan, Advocate

Muslim politics: Which way now?

The decisions of Muslim voters could contribute to the making of an anti-Hindutva politics

SHAIKH MUJIBUR REHMAN

The results of the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and earlier Delhi offer insights into the fresh churning in Muslim politics in India owing to the perpetuation of Hindutva politics. When the Asaduddin Owaisi-led All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) won five seats in the Bihar Assembly election in 2020, some secular voices interpreted it as a reflection of the party's growing national footprint. They also saw it as a threat to Indian secularism as they saw the party's advancement as a new trend of Muslims voting for Muslim parties in post-Partition India.

But in the recent West Bengal election, AIMIM fielded seven candidates and drew a blank. In Bihar, the AIMIM received just 1.24% of the vote share and in Bengal, only 0.02%.

A persisting myth

In Bengal, it was argued that the Indian Secular Front, formed by Abbas Siddiqui, a cleric of the prominent Furfura Sharif, was going to be a spoiler for the Trinamool Congress by giving an advantage to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). However, a vast chunk of the Muslim votes went to the Trinamool, including from the traditionally loyal Muslim voters of the Congress and Left parties. Mr. Siddiqui's party fought 27 seats and managed to win only one. Once again, the myth that Muslim voters are blindly loyal to Maulanas or the clergy was busted.

These results have established once more that Muslim voters are exceptionally politically savvy and secular in their electoral preferences. This myth that Muslim voters are swayed by Maulanas, however, has a long history. It acquired national prominence when the Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid, Abdullah Bukhari, appealed to Muslim voters to vote against Indira Gandhi in 1977. He appealed to voters to vote for her in 1980, which saw her return. Ever since then, nearly all the tall leaders of major ruling parties in New Delhi such as the Gandhis, V.P. Singh, Deve Gowda and even Atal Bihari Vajpayee have given credence to this myth through their gestures. In the 2004 parliamentary election, the Shahi

Imam of Jama Masjid, Ahmed Bukhari, urged Muslims to vote for the BJP, which backfired. But the myth continues to have its own life, and fatwas are delivered at the behest of various parties.

Politics of counter-polarisation
In Assam and Bengal, Muslim voting behaviour was clearly dictated by the politics of counter-polarisation leading to the closing of ranks among Muslim voters as a response to the politics of polarisation.

In Assam, Muslim voters endorsed the 'grand alliance' led by the Congress and the All India United Democratic Front. In Bengal, Muslim voters emulated the Muslim voters in Delhi who chose to abandon the Congress in favour of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) believing that Arvind Kejriwal would demonstrate his secular credentials once elected. However, Mr. Kejriwal's conduct during the Delhi riots and later has led many to believe that he is anything but a closet secularist. The decision of most Muslim voters to move away from the Congress in Delhi and from the Left and the Congress in Bengal, on the one hand, and stay with the Congress as part of the 'grand alliance' in Assam and with the Left in Kerala, on the other, does not imply that they consider the Trinamool or AAP as being more secular than the Left or Congress. In their reasoning of the politics of counter-polarisation, Muslim voters hope to send an unambiguous message that parties like the Congress or the Left, while seeking future alliances, need to factor in the greater threat that Hindutva poses to their security and welfare instead of simply seeking to save their electoral turf. If they do not, they better face decimation.

There is a fair chance that Muslim voters in Uttar Pradesh will emulate the voting wisdom of their counterparts in West Bengal. Given the colossal failure of the BJP government in dealing with the second wave of the pandemic, their decisions could contribute to the making of an anti-Hindutva politics.

Shaikh Mujibur Rehman teaches at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and is the author of the forthcoming book, Shikwa-e-Hind: The Political Future of Indian Muslims



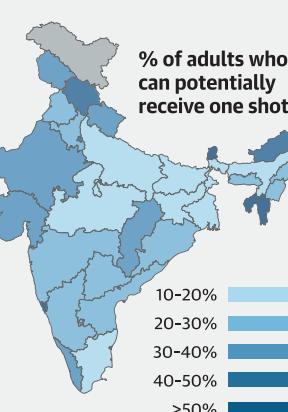
DATA POINT

Full use of limited supply |

The Centre has supplied* over 21 crore vaccine doses to the States until 8 a.m. on May 24. This is enough to administer a single dose to only about 22.4% of India's adult population. The States continue to utilise over 90% of the doses supplied by the Centre, indicating a high demand for vaccines. However, due to inadequate supply, only close to 4.5% of adults have received both the doses. **By Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Sumant Sen**

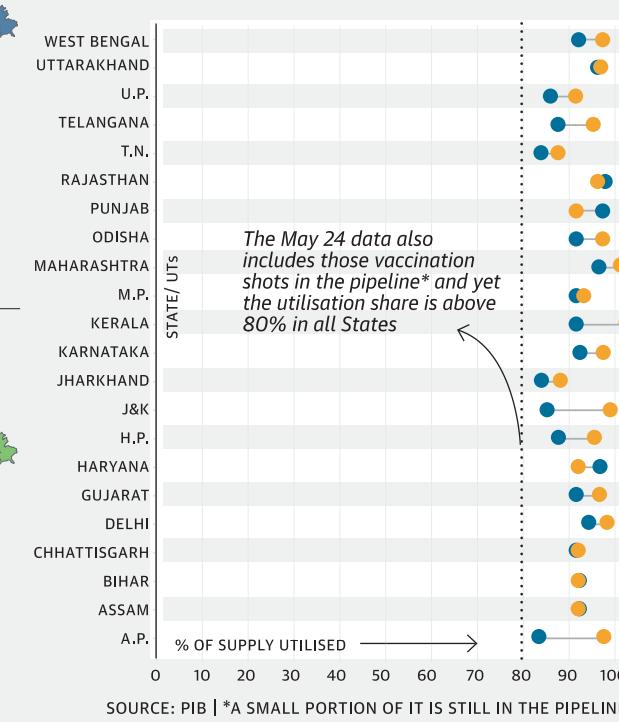
1. RATE OF SUPPLY

The map depicts the doses received by the States from the Centre, by May 24 as a % of the adult population. The figures stood at 12.7% for U.P. and 15% for Tamil Nadu while it was 34% for Gujarat and 38% for Chhattisgarh. The 21 crore vaccine doses received till May 24 are enough to vaccinate only 22.4% of adult population



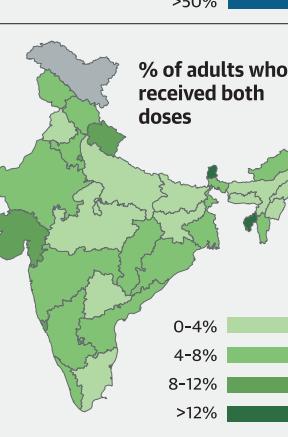
2. UTILISATION |

The chart depicts the doses administered by major States as a % of doses received from the Centre as of May 24 and May 11. In no State did the utilisation % drop below 80%. Overall, 91.4% of the 21 crore doses supplied to all the States/UTs have been utilised as of May 24



3. DOUBLE DOSE

Only 4.4% of adults have been administered both the doses of the vaccines with the 21 crore doses received. The map shows the State-wise % of adults who received both the doses by May 24. The darker the colour, the higher the number who received both the doses



SOURCE: PIB | *A SMALL PORTION OF IT IS STILL IN THE PIPELINE

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 25, 1971

PM's talks with DMK leaders

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, today [New Delhi, May 24] sounded the DMK in Parliament on a compromise solution for the controversial issue of the use of Hindi nomenclature for Central Ministers. The new proposal mooted by Mrs. Gandhi when she met Mr. K. Manoharan and Mr. Era Sezian, Leader and Deputy Leader respectively of the DMK Parliamentary Party this afternoon, envisages the use of English nomenclature with Roman script in brackets in parliamentary documents. The DMK leaders did not commit themselves to the proposal. Mr. Manoharan will consult the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Mr. Karunanidhi, and then convey his party's reaction to the new proposal. It appears that the

FROM PAGE ONE

Odisha, Bengal grapple with evacuation

Similarly in Kolkata, Howrah and Hooghly, the wind speed would be about 70 to 80 km gusting 90 km. Along with heavy rain, the IMD has issued a storm surge warning.

The coastal areas of the State, including Kolkata, witnessed rainfall, accompanied by gusty winds, since Sunday evening. The IMD has predicted heavy rainfall in the coastal areas of the State on May 25.

The Indian Coast Guard has deployed 16 ships and 3 aircraft a day on an average across the deep waters of the Bay of Bengal and along the coast. As a part of preventive measures, it has ensured the safe return of 254 boats that were out at sea and alerted various mer-

chant vessels in transit and 77 vessels at anchorage till today.

Over a dozen of teams of the National Disaster Response Force have been deployed in the coastal areas of the State. Its officials held a meeting with senior officers of the Kolkata police during the day.

The Odisha government said it had mobilised disaster response forces and evacuated people from low-lying areas ahead of the cyclone. However, the government is facing twin challenge of shifting large number of people to safer places and following COVID-19 guideline. Additional cyclone shelters have been identified for COVID-19 patients.

Migrant workers may just want to go home, says SC

Mr. Bhushan said 24 crore people had been pushed under the poverty line. States like Delhi and Uttar Pradesh should provide migrants cooked food in government schools.

"People are dying because of lack of food and health. Yes, the situation is worse than last year... Rickshaw pullers, vendors and other categories of unorganised workers are starving," he stated.

He pushed for the court

to direct the States to evolve a cash transfer mechanism to help these destitute workers stay alive.

"Ultimately, the money will come back into the economy. These people will use the cash to buy food and essentials... our growth rate is -20%," he said.

Justice Bhushan said any such cash transfers would be based on separate policies of individual States, and the court could look into the issue.

Covaxin: govt. reviews process to get WHO nod

ICMR and Bharat Biotech are partners in developing the vaccine as well as the clinical trials.

When asked, MEA officials said the meeting was an "internal discussion" that had been convened with a view to "assessing" whether BBIL required any assistance in pushing through its application.

However, they declined to comment on just what the role of the government would be in the WHO's technical processes, which do not involve diplomats or political inputs.

According to the sources, government and BBIL representatives also discussed their forays into other markets, which include 11 countries that have granted Covaxin regulatory approval and "11 companies in 7 countries" that have expressed an interest in technology transfer and production of Covaxin.

In addition, BBIL said it is in the "final stages of sub-

mission" for Covaxin's regulatory approvals in Brazil and Hungary, and in negotiations with the American Food and Drug Administration (US-FDA) to conduct Phase-III clinical trials in the US as well.

While officials conceded that it was a long shot to expect that the U.S. or European countries would themselves promote the Indian-made vaccine as a part of the bouquet of vaccines gaining global approval, they said it was important that Covaxin be included in the discussions as countries decide on opening up international entry policies based on vaccinations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, members of the cabinet and many senior government officials have all received Covaxin shots, and could be amongst those affected if travel restrictions are actually placed in the future on the basis of WHO-approved vaccines.

DGCA derosters crew after wedding in skies

In a statement, SpiceJet said a travel agent had asked for a chartered flight for a group of passengers for a joy ride after their wedding.

They were informed about COVID-19 guidelines and refused permission for other activities onboard, the airline said.

The agent and the guest passengers were briefed in detail, both in writing as well as verbally, on social distancing and safety norms to be followed as per COVID-19 guidelines both at

the airport and onboard the aircraft throughout the journey. The group was repeatedly briefed on the safety norms to be followed by the operating cabin crew and advised to follow the protocols laid down by DGCA including restrictions on photography and videography.

Despite repeated requests and reminders the passengers did not follow Covid guidelines and the airline is taking appropriate action as per rules," the airline added.

Delhi Police officials visit Twitter office

A top Delhi police official told *The Hindu* that they had asked Twitter in India to join the investigation in the "toolkit case" since the popular social media site had tagged Mr. Patra's tweet as "manipulated media".

"Our contention is that

since they have tagged it as 'manipulated media', they know something about the case. We have been asking Twitter in India to join the investigation, but they asked us to contact their parent company in the United States," the official said.

Mamata alleges discrimination at CMs' meet on Cyclone Yaas

Shah reviews preparedness; cyclone is expected to hit coastal States on May 26

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday reviewed the preparedness for Cyclone Yaas with the Chief Ministers of Odisha, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh and the Lieutenant-Governor of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The cyclone is expected to hit the coastal States on May 26.

After the virtual meeting, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed dissatisfaction over the allocation of funds for cyclone relief to the State.

Speaking to presspersons at the State Secretariat, she said Odisha and Andhra Pradesh had been allocated ₹600 crore as an advance, while West Bengal had been allocated only ₹400 crore.

"I told Amit Shahji why this discrimination. West Bengal is a bigger State and with a higher population



Drawing up a blueprint: Union Home Minister Amit Shah reviewing the preparedness to tackle Cyclone Yaas. ■ PTI

density. I could not understand the logic behind this allocation," she said.

She had raised the points at the meeting, Ms. Banerjee added. "The Home Minister said he will speak later since these are based on science. I did not press on the issue further... I am aware of political science, was not very sure of the science he was referring to," she added.

The State had no issues

with funds being allocated to sister States, but West Bengal should not be deprived, Ms. Banerjee said.

The Chief Minister said during Cyclone Amphan, despite Central teams visiting the State, the Centre did not allocate the necessary funds. After Yaas, the State would conduct the necessary survey and once again place its requirement with the Centre, she said.

Mr. Shah asked the States to make adequate power backup arrangements in all COVID-19 hospitals, laboratories, vaccine cold chains and other medical facilities, and ensure adequate stock of all essential medicines and supplies in hospitals amid the likely disruption of the movement of vehicles.

He also asked the States to ensure the safety of oxygen generation plants.

A Union Home Ministry statement said, "He advised them to make advance planning for keeping a buffer stock of oxygen for two days and movement of oxygen tankers to allocated States, so that in case of any disruption, supply to allocated States is not impacted... Also emphasised the need to make necessary arrangements for safety of power plants to ensure uninterrupted power supply to hospitals and health facilities".

Group seeks probe into post-poll violence in W.B.

Calls for a SIT probe monitored by SC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

whelming majority of civilian deaths resulting from political violence were the result of what should be understood as serious acts of commission and omission of the law and order enforcement machinery of the State, or, in the worst case scenario, induced 'State Terror', it said.

Noting that law and order was a State subject, they said the State government under Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee must act in accordance with the Constitutional mandate to maintain it and curb violence with an iron hand to ensure peace and tranquillity.

Former Delhi High Court Chief Justice B.C. Patel, former Bombay High Court Chief Justice Kshitij Vyas, former Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) chief Sanjeev Tripathi, former Punjab Director-General of Police (DGP) P.C. Dogra and former Jammu and Kashmir DGP S.P. Vaid were among the signatories.

"It is clear that the over-

High-powered panel meets to choose next CBI Director

Three Indian Police Service officers have been shortlisted

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

A high-powered committee, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice N.V. Ramana and Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, met on Monday to finalise the choice of the next Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

Three Indian Police Service (IPS) officers – V.S. Kumudi (1986 batch), Kumar Rajesh Chandra (1985) and Subodh Jaiswal (1985 batch) – have been shortlisted from a list of 109 officers that included four batches (1984-1987) of the IPS.

The meeting, that took place at the Prime Minister's official residence, lasted for 90 minutes.

Chief Justice Ramana is learnt to have insisted on following the rule of law as per the various guidelines laid down in previous Supreme



Narendra Modi

Court judgments. Mr. Chowdhury dissented over the selection procedure and submitted his dissent in writing, according to a source.

At short notice

The source claimed that the government had sent the complete dossiers of 10 shortlisted names to the Opposition leader at around 1 p.m. in the afternoon. Another 6 names were sent barely two hours before the meeting.

These shortlisted names included Y.C. Modi, a 1984-batch IPS officer from the

Assam-Meghalaya cadre who is currently the Director-General of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and Rakesh Asthana, a Gujarat cadre officer heading the Border Security Force (BSF). Both the officers are considered to be favourites of the ruling dispensation.

Though their names were discussed, the source said, they were not considered on technical grounds as an officer considered for the post of the CBI Director should not have less than six months for retirement.

Chief Justice Ramana insisted on sticking to the laid down rules, and the Prime Minister did not insist on any name, claimed the source.

Mr. Chowdhury is learnt to have argued that the high-powered committee should have done the shortlisting instead of the Department of Personnel and Training and told the government "not to take the committee for granted".

Narada case: CBI goes to SC against HC order

HC refers case to a five-judge Bench

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

HC refuses CBI plea to adjourn Narada case

KOLKATA

The Calcutta High Court on Monday refused a prayer by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to adjourn the Narada case and a Bench decided to have the next hearing on Wednesday.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, representing the CBI, prayed for an adjournment, citing that the agency had filed a special leave petition (SLP) before the Supreme Court on the May 21 orders issued by the High Court.

in its opinion over vacating a stay given by it on the bail granted by a CBI court to the four political heavyweights.

The Bench, also comprising Justice Arif Jit Banerjee, finally directed that the leaders, placed under judicial remand so far, would remain in house confinement for now. Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, representing the CBI, had pleaded for a stay on the execution of the order.

Jaishankar, Blinken will discuss COVID'

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his American counterpart Antony Blinken will discuss COVID-19 relief, multilateralism and the Quad during the Minister's visit to Washington this week, according to the U.S. State Department. Mr. Jaishankar is on a visit to New York and Washington D.C. from May 24 to 27.

"The Secretary [Mr. Blinken] looks forward to meeting Minister Jaishankar during his visit and to discussing a broad range of issues, including COVID-19 relief, efforts to strengthen Indo-Pacific cooperation through the Quad, enhanced U.N. and multilateral cooperation, and a range of other shared regional security and economic priorities," a statement from a State Department spokesperson said on Monday.

Mr. Jaishankar will also meet U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Will not limit functions till new data law: WhatsApp

Will continue current approach, it says

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA
NEW DELHI

Facebook-owned WhatsApp has told the government that it will not limit functionality for users in the coming weeks, but will continue the current approach of reminding users about the update until "at least the forthcoming Personal Data Protection law comes into effect".

WhatsApp has said this in its response to the notice by the Government of India asking the platform to withdraw the controversial update to its privacy policy. The government had sought a response within seven days, warning of steps "in consonance with law" in case of failure of a satisfactory response.

Highest priority

"We have responded to the Government of India's letter and assured them that the privacy of users remains our highest priority. As a reminder, the recent update does not change the privacy of people's personal messages.

Its purpose is to provide additional information about how people can interact with businesses if they choose to do so," a WhatsApp spokesperson said.

The spokesperson added that WhatsApp will not limit the functionality of how the platform works in the coming weeks. Instead, it will



Privacy of users remains our highest priority, the platform said. ■ REUTERS

continue to remind users from time to time about the update as well as when people choose to use relevant optional features, like communicating with a business that is receiving support from Facebook.

"We hope this approach reinforces the choice that all users have whether or not they want to interact with a business. We will maintain this approach until at least the forthcoming PDP law comes into effect," the spokesperson added.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT, in the May 18 notice, had told WhatsApp that deferring the May 15 implementation deadline does not absolve it from "respecting the values of informational privacy, data security and user choice for Indian users". As per the government, WhatsApp's updated privacy policy was a violation of several provisions of the existing Indian laws.

Islanders seek withdrawal of land norms in Lakshadweep

Laws are out of sync with the social, environmental realities'

S. ANAND
KOCHE

A slew of regulations introduced by the new administrator Praful Khoda Patel of the Lakshadweep group of islands has sparked discontent among its inhabitants.

Islanders have pointed out that the legislation are out of sync with the social and environmental realities of the archipelago. Mr. Patel, a BJP leader and former Home Minister of Gujarat, is the first political appointee as Administrator, a post mostly held by retired civil servants. The creation of the Lakshadweep Development Authority (LDA), with extensive powers, including eviction of landowners, is widely read as having been pushed by the real estate lobby and against the interest of the islanders.

"We hope this approach reinforces the choice that all users have whether or not they want to interact with a business. We will maintain this approach until at least the forthcoming PDP law comes into effect," the spokesperson added.

The regulation empowers the government, identified as the administrator, to constitute Planning and Development Authorities (PDAs) to plan the development of any area identified as having

"bad layout or obsolete development". An authority thus created would be a corporate body with a government-appointed chairman, a town planning officer and three "expert" government nominees besides two local authority representatives.

The islanders opposing the plan have pointed out that the ecologically fragile islands are tiny and thickly populated. "What sort of highway or tram-way you are planning to construct in that area?" asks Koya Arafa Mirage, lawyer and leader of Nationalist Youth Congress.

One of the petitions seeking the withdrawal of the regulation says the legislation vests extensive powers with the authority, allowing it to prepare comprehensive development plans for any area and relocate people.

Penalise those who fleece affected: NGO

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

An NGO, Distress Management Collective, has approached the Supreme Court to penalise profiteers who fleece those affected by COVID-19.

APPEAL

I am Deepika aged 13 years suffering from Rhabdomysarcoma. Kindly help me to combat this disease as I require Rs. 12,00,000/- towards Autologous Bone Marrows Transplantation at Meenakshi Mission Hospital & Research Centre, Madurai. Donations sent by Ch/D.D. favouring Meenakshi Mission Hospital & Research Centre, Madurai will be acknowledged. The donations sent through Ch / D.D. / NEFT Transfer & GOOGLE

INTERVIEW | SITARAM YECHURY

'People want secular forces to come together against the BJP'

Except Assam, where the difference of vote between BJP and secular parties was minuscule, in other States the BJP has come a cropper, says CPI(M) general secretary

SOBHANA K. NAIR

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury speaks on the joint Opposition efforts on COVID-19 and farm laws, and says it is for parties such as the BSP and the AAP and the Chief Ministers of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to answer why they are not standing with the rest of the Opposition against the government. He cast aside the fears that Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will overshadow the party.

On the question of the pandemic and the three farm laws, the Opposition parties have issued four joint statements since December last year. Could you talk us through the efforts to bring everyone on board?

■ During the course of the first wave, 21 parties had a virtual meeting following which we came up with a joint memorandum suggesting measures that the government must immediately take – including direct cash transfers and free food for the vulnerable sections. The government, of course, has never responded to any of our letters whether written jointly or individually. Steps that ought to have been taken last year were not taken and we are paying the price for it. On the questions of

saving people's lives and their livelihood, there is a commonality between the Opposition parties. In the time of the pandemic where physical consultations can't take place, it takes a little longer to reach out to every one either through virtual meetings or phones. But in my mind, it is absolutely necessary for the parties to come on one platform to hold the government accountable.

The BSP, which was a signatory to the joint Opposition letter of May 2 urging the government to streamline distribution of medical oxygen, has not been a signatory to the two later letters. Overall, they have been erratic about their participation in the unified Opposition effort. The AAP on the other hand

has never been part of any of these efforts. Is it the AAP and the BSP's reluctance or is it the reluctance of the rest of the Opposition parties to bring them on board?

■ It is for the BSP and the AAP to answer this question. The BSP signed the May 2 letter and then the U.P. local body elections came and didn't sign the subsequent two letters. It is for them to answer on why they stayed away. It is similar for the AAP. In fact, the Chief Ministers of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have not been part of any of these efforts. We want every Opposition party to join in, especially when the country is going through this COVID catastrophe.

We also must remember that the Indian economy was already on a downslide before the pandemic. With the onset of the pandemic, there has been immense loss of livelihood. To counter that, the government should have taken measures such as direct cash transfer and free food, which every other country in the world has done.



We want every Opposition party to join in, especially when the country is going through this COVID catastrophe

Will these efforts be limited to joint letters or will we have some sort of a coalition come together for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls scheduled for next year?

■ The U.P. polls are still some time away and a lot of water will flow in the Ganga before that. Unfortunately, there are bodies also floating in the Ganga because of the misadministration of the Narendra Modi government at the Centre and the Yogi Adityanath government in the State. Lessons have to be learnt from the results of the

recent Assembly polls. Except for Assam, where the difference of vote between the BJP and the secular parties was minuscule allowing the BJP to scrape through, in all the other States the BJP has come a cropper. Look at the results of the local body elections in U.P. and Gujarat. It is writing on the wall – people want the secular forces to come together against the BJP.

The CPI(M) claimed that all the Ministers from the first Pinarayi Vijayan Cabinet were changed as part of a policy decision, but couldn't the party make an exception for former Health Minister K.K. Shailaja?

■ The decision on who to include and exclude from the Cabinet was taken by the State committee. And it was a unanimous decision. K.K. Shailaja's contribution in managing the pandemic is widely accepted and appreciated within Kerala, within the country and across the world. But remember she was also a first-time Minister in the outgoing Cabinet. The exception would not have

worked for two reasons. First it is not a correct position to take and second it is not workable. If you were to make an exception for Shailaja, then what about Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac. He too was very successful and responsible for developing the alternative Kerala development mode. Also what about PWD Minister G. Sudhakaran, who was equally efficient. And there are many such examples. Even in my case, the two-term rule for the Rajya Sabha was strictly adhered to despite a lot of outcry. Once you make an exception then that becomes the rule. And as far as promoting women leaders is concerned, the outgoing Cabinet had two women Ministers and this time we have three.

There is a fear that Brand Pinarayi Vijayan will tower over the CPI(M) overshadowing the party. Your comments.

■ Such thinking can only emerge from parties that have a high command culture that turned to accept a supreme leader. And this

is true for most political parties. The CPI(M) has an entirely different style and method. We are a party with a vibrant inner-party democracy. For us it is the collective view of the general secretary to go with the collective view. And that is not just in my case, there are many other precedents including the often quoted example of Jyoti Basu who didn't become PM despite support of then general secretary comrade Surjeet because the party collectively felt that it would be wrong. Only those who don't understand how the party works raise these questions.

What is the future for the party after total annihilation in West Bengal?

■ A review is under way for all the States, not only Bengal, which will throw up its own conclusions. Our objective in Bengal was to rally all the secular forces. The Indian Secular Front, though headed by a certain person with a certain past, had in its leadership marginalised classes, dalits, tribals. We go by what the party stands for.

SC irked by absence of migrant database

Provision of food for labourers need not wait until completion of registration, says court

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

The government's delay in completing a national database to identify and register migrant workers in order to provide them benefits in times of dire need stood out like a sore thumb in a Supreme Court hearing on Monday.

"We impress upon the Central government and the State Government(s) to complete the process of registration of organised workers at an early date so that unorganised workers are able to reap the benefit of different schemes of the Centre and the States which, without proper registration and identity card, seems to be difficult to implement on the ground," a Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and M.R. Shah noted in its order.

The court acknowledged the submissions made by ad-



Tough times: Migrant workers waiting to go to their native places from New Delhi early this week. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

vocate Prashant Bhushan that such a database would have made it easier for the government to identify and provide essentials such as food and dry rations to stranded migrant labourers during the second wave of

the pandemic.

"The direction [for the database] was issued by this court in 2018...Your process is very slow. We are not satisfied. We will pass orders on this," Justice Bhushan addressed Solicitor General

Tushar Mehta, for the Centre.

Mr. Bhushan, who represents activists seeking urgent measures to provide food and life support for migrant workers, said: "People are dying... 24 crore people have been pushed below the poverty line. The situation is worse than last year... Government has said they have not been able to even put up a portal for the registration of workers".

Cash transfers

Many of these destitute workers required immediate cash transfers to purchase essentials.

Justice Bhushan said, "A uniform national data grid of migrant workers, in which both the Centre and States provide inputs should be there. This would ensure that benefits meant for migrant workers reach them

and no other."

The court asked the government to clarify what steps it had taken under the Code of Social Security of 2020.

During the hearing, Justice Shah pointed out that many of the workers would be illiterate and unable to register online. It was a welfare government's obligation to reach out to the workers, their employers and contractors.

The Labour Ministry, Mr. Mehta said, had started work on the database. He assured the court that he would talk to the Labour Secretary and get the necessary information on its status.

Mr. Bhushan interjected to say that the immediate handing out of dry rations and cooked food, however, during the second wave in May and June of 2020, or any other alternative

Provide food, rations to stranded workers: SC

Court asks States to file affidavits

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday ordered States across the country to distribute dry rations to stranded migrant workers without ration cards and run community kitchens for them.

"Let all States file affidavits indicating the mechanism by which the dry ration should be distributed to those migrant workers who do not possess a ration card," a Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and M.R. Shah directed.

The court left it to the discretion of individual States to utilise either the Centre's Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme, which was implemented for giving dry rations to migrant workers in May and June of 2020, or any other alternative scheme.

The Bench held it was the responsibility of the States and Union Territories to run community kitchens for migrant labourers "who have lost their employment and are in need of two meals a day".

The Bench directed that "wide publicity" should be given about the various wel-



Give publicity about the welfare schemes for migrant workers, the Bench said.

fare schemes for migrant workers, including locations of community kitchens, so that needy persons would benefit.

The court however, refused a plea to direct States to provide direct cash transfers to migrant workers, saying this was a matter of policy concerning individual States or UTs.

The order came on submissions made by advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for some activists, that the number of community kitchens in Delhi had reduced this year. Cash transfers were restricted to construction workers in the National Capital. He said dry rations were not provided to stranded migrant workers

Won't arrest Param Bir: Maharashtra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on May 24 agreed before the Bombay High Court to not arrest former Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh till June 9 in a case filed against him.

Senior advocate Darius Khambaria, appearing for the Maharashtra government, told a Division Bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and N.R. Borkar that the State would not arrest Mr. Singh provided he withdrew his petition before the Supreme Court seeking the same relief.

The court said it was available as a vacation court for one week and all arguments in this case needed to be heard at length, therefore, the matter was heard by a regular Bench. The matter was posted for June 9. The court was hearing a petition filed by Mr. Singh seeking to quash an FIR filed against him. "The FIR refers to an event of 2015 and is belatedly registered after having failed to pressurize him to withdraw his complaint against former Home Minister Anil Deshmukh," the petition stated.

Record foodgrain exports amid hunger, says group

It exposes the government's apathy'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The record export of foodgrains at a time of widespread hunger and distress due to COVID-19 exposes "the government's apathy towards the people", according to the Right to Food Campaign. The advocacy group has called for the universalisation of the public distribution system (PDS) for at least six months, noting that the quantity of exported grain could have been used to provide 25 crore people with rations for a year.

The surge of COVID-19, spread to rural areas and lockdowns in most parts of the country have led to severe economic distress, especially among informal sector workers, said the Right to Food Campaign's statement, issued on Monday. It said the situation was worse than in 2020, due to the large number of households now dealing with illness and high healthcare expenses on top of a year of job losses and declining wages.

The Centre's relief scheme, PMGKAY, only provides additional free grain for two months for those who already have ration cards. The food security crisis facing informal sector workers, many of whom do not have ration cards, has been "completely invisible", said the statement.

"The government's



The advocacy group has called for universalisation of the PDS for six months.

apathy towards people has been thoroughly exposed by the fact that this year has seen record exports of foodgrains." Noting that over 13 million tonnes of non-basmati rice and more than two million tonnes of wheat were exported in 2020-21, the Campaign said this could have been used to give 5 kg grain per month to 25 crore people for a year. In fact, rice was exported at ₹27 per kg, lower than the FCI's economic cost of ₹37 per kg, it said.

Foodgrain stocks in FCI's warehouses stand at a record high of 100 million tonnes.

"It is becoming quite apparent that the government does not care about filling the stomachs of the hungry and is happy to rather export the grains or use them for other purposes [like it was done for ethanol production last year]," said the campaign.

'90%-95% of mucormycosis patients are diabetics on steroids'

Early detection key to tackling condition, says AIIMS chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

"Mucormycosis is not a communicable disease and 90%-95% of patients that we have with us currently are diabetics who were on steroids. We are also seeing the fungus early on in COVID patients which is proving to be a challenge," Randeep Guleria, Director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, said on Monday.

Dr. Guleria, speaking at the Health Ministry press conference, added that early detection and hygiene were key to tackling the virus.

"Mucormycosis is one of the general fungal infections being seen in recovering or recovered COVID-19 patients. The number of cases being reported is increasing, but it is not a communicable disease, meaning it does not spread from one person to another, like COVID-19 does," he said.

'Not correct term'

Dr. Guleria also said it is better not to use the term black fungus while talking of mucormycosis, as it leads to a lot of avoidable confusion.

"Black fungus is another family; this term got associated with mucormycosis due to the presence of black dots among the culture of white fungal colonies. In general, there are various types of fungal infections such as candida, aspergillus

, cryptococcus, histoplasmosis and coccidioidomycosis. Mucormycosis, candida and aspergillosis are the ones observed more in those with low immunity," he said.

"Many patients taking treatment at home, who were not on oxygen therapy, have also been found to get infected with mucormycosis. So there is no definite link between oxygen therapy and catching the infection," Dr. Guleria clarified.

Stating that the anti-fungal treatment is long drawn over many weeks, Dr. Guleria said that was proving to be challenging for hospitals, since COVID-positive patients and COVID-negative patients who catch mucormycosis need to be housed in separate hospital wards. Surgery also needs to be done judiciously since aggressive surgery for mucormycosis can have adverse outcomes for COVID patients.

"Maintaining proper hygiene is very important for diabetic patients since chances of opportunistic infection is very high in such patients. Those using oxygen concentrators should ensure cleaning of humidifiers regularly," he said.

Post-COVID issues

"Besides this, even among those recovering we are seeing symptoms including chronic fatigue, joint pains, headaches, brain fog, cough etc. for anywhere from 4 to 12 weeks. As our knowledge of the virus is growing, doctors are able to help the recovering patients who need to keep an eye-out for any post-COVID symptoms."

He added that difficulty in concentrating, insomnia and depression are other signs to watch out for.



Close watch: Doctors checking eyes of patients suspected to have been infected with mucormycosis in Thane. ■ PTI

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IN BRIEF

**Vaccination is key but Centre doesn't care: Rahul**

NEW DELHI
Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Monday said vaccination is the key to controlling the pandemic but the government of India does not seem to care. The Congress leader was critical of the vaccine procurement policy and said the Centre should procure the vaccines and ask the States to distribute them to ensure that they reach every village. "Why doesn't the Central government understand this simple fact?" he asked on Twitter.

Pfizer also refuses to send vaccine to Punjab

CHANDIGARH
The Punjab government said after Moderna, Pfizer had also refused to send its vaccine directly to the State as, according to its policy, the company only dealt with the Government of India. Pfizer, in its communication, said, "Our supply agreements at this time are with national governments and supranational organizations with allocation of doses and implementation within the country being a decision that governments take based on relevant health authority guidance."

Autopsy reveals injuries on body of Unnao vendor

LUCKNOW
The autopsy report of a Unnao vegetable vendor, who died after being beaten up by the police for alleged violating lockdown norms, has revealed over a dozen contusions on the body. The police have arrested a homeguard and a constable on charges of murdering Faisal in the Bangera area of the district. While the autopsy report suggested he died of a head injury, he had a dozen injury marks on his back.

Bank employees left in the lurch, say kin of deceased staffers

They complain that the government and the banking organisations have not done enough to protect these frontline workers from COVID-19

DAMINI NATH
THARUN BODA
NEW DELHI/VIJAYAWADA

was clear who was to be blamed. Her husband, she said, was the branch manager of a public sector bank in Agra and had been going to work despite having dia-

"The government is to blame. This disease was there last year too. They knew the dangers. Everyone visits banks so they should have protected the employees... My husband is just a number for them. But we have lost the sole earner of our family, the head of our family," she said.

Her husband fell ill during the second wave when medical infrastructure was overwhelmed, leaving patients and their families in the lurch.

"If he had got a hospital bed with the required treatment in time, he would



Risky affair: Customers at a bank branch in Peddavadaguru, Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

have been saved," she said, recounting the ordeal of going from one hospital to another, looking for the life-saving oxygen and equipment needed.

While Shiv Shankar did get a hospital bed and the senior staff of his bank helped the family, Ms. Chaudhary thinks it was all too late.

worked at a public sector bank in Kampur. He tested positive on April 16 and was admitted to a hospital.

Ms. Tandon said her father was discharged from hospital on May 2 and soon after she observed he was bleeding from his nose, the right side of his face had swollen and he had trouble seeing.

"Now I see on TV that these are symptoms of black fungus. He had diabetes for the past five years but it was under check with medicines. He only started using insulin in the hospital because of COVID. But when they discharged him, they didn't tell us to continue insulin and his sugar shot up. He had a silent heart attack and died on May 6. I don't have any proof of this. This is what I assume happened.

each other," Ms. Ramya said.

Ms. Ramya graduated recently and was looking for a job. "Due to the pandemic, there were not many openings. My father's higher officials at the bank helped complete the formalities and also came forward to help me find a job," she said. Ravindra Kumar had undergone heart surgery.

As the grieving families are left picking up the pieces, Mr. Venkatachalam of the AIBEA said the families should be given preferential and speedy consideration for employment on compassionate grounds. "They have been facing grave emotional and physical risk. They are highly dejected and anxious. Banks must think out of the box to protect their employees," he said.

On-site booking allowed for 18+

COWIN feature enabled only for government vaccination centres now

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



Building immunity: A person in the 18-44 age group getting vaccinated in New Delhi on Monday. ■MOORTHY R.V.

On-site registration and appointment for COVID-19 vaccination is now being enabled for the 18-44 age group on CoWIN, a statement issued by the Union Health Ministry on Monday said.

However, this feature was being enabled only for government COVID vaccination centres (CVCs) now and would not be available for private CVCs.

They should publish their vaccination schedules exclusively with slots for online appointments, it stated.

In case of sessions exclusively organised with online slots, towards the end of the day, some doses may still be left underutilised in case the online appointee beneficiary

ies did not turn up on the day of vaccination due to any reason, it noted.

"In such cases, on-site re-

gistration of a few beneficiaries may be necessary to minimize the vaccine wastage. Also even though CoWIN

provides for features such as registration of up to four beneficiaries with a mobile number, facilitated registration and appointments through applications, such as Arogya Setu and Umang, people requiring facilitated

cohort's facility and those without access to Internet or smart phones or mobile phones may still have limited access for vaccination," the Ministry said.

Decision of States, UTs

This feature would be used only upon the decision of the respective State/Union Territory governments to do so.

"State/UT must decide on opening of on-site registrations/facilitated cohorts' registration and appointments for 18-44 years age group based on the local context just as an additional measure to minimize vaccine wastage and for facilitating vaccination of eligible beneficiaries in the age group 18-44 years," stated the release.

'COVID fatalities being shown as due to lung, heart disease'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court said death certificates of those who died of COVID-19 often did not reveal that fact.

"The death certificates of persons who die from COVID in hospitals show the reason as lung or heart problem or something else... Whatever has happened should be reflected in the death certificate for the families to get any benefits in the future. Death certificates have to show the reason as COVID," Justice M.R. Shah addressed Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, for the Union government, on Monday.

Justice Shah is part of a bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan hearing separate pleas to direct the government to grant an ex-gratia compensation of ₹4 lakh each to the families of people who lost their lives to COVID-19.

Justice Shah urged the government to frame a uniform policy for issuing death certificates in COVID-19 cases in a transparent manner.

The court scheduled the next hearing on June 11, giving the government time to file its response.

Advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal, who is a petitioner, said under Section 12 (iii) of the Disaster Management Act, ex-gratia compensation of ₹4 lakh was payable to families of disaster victims. The COVID-19 pandemic is a disaster.

"People will have to run from pillar to post if any compensation is to be given to the kin of COVID-19 victims. It is not fair to the family if the actual reason for death is COVID and the death certificate shows another reason," Justice Shah said.

The court scheduled the next hearing on June 11, giving the government time to file its response.

Advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal, who is a petitioner, said under Section 12 (iii) of the Disaster Management Act, ex-gratia compensation of ₹4 lakh was payable to families of disaster victims. The COVID-19 pandemic is a disaster.

Over 3,200 new deaths recorded

Country reports over 1.84 lakh new COVID-19 cases; positivity rate stands at 12.7%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

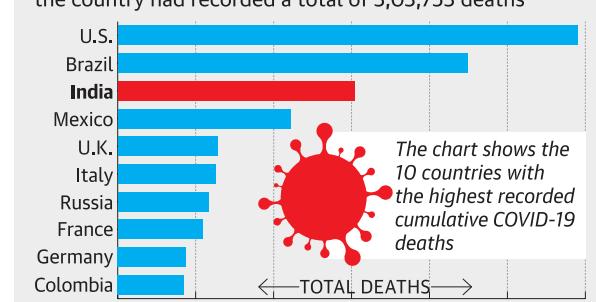
India recorded 1,84,830 new COVID-19 cases and 3,224 new deaths till 9.40 p.m. on Monday. The country has so far reported a total of 2,69,36,641 cases and 3,06,977 deaths.

Tamil Nadu reported 34,867 new infections, followed by Karnataka (25,311) and Maharashtra (22,122). Maharashtra recorded 592 new casualties, followed by Karnataka (529) and Tamil Nadu (404). Maharashtra's fatalities include backlog deaths which were missed in the previous reports.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from

High burden

On Sunday, India became only the third country in the world to register 3 lakh COVID-19 deaths. Till May 23, the country had recorded a total of 3,03,753 deaths



Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Jharkhand, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, and Ladakh. The data are sourced from the

health bulletins of the respective States.

Over 19.28 lakh samples were tested in the country

on Sunday (the results for which were made available on Monday), which is around 1.96 lakh fewer than those tested on Saturday. However, it is 3.55 lakh more than those tested on the previous Sunday (May 16). India's average daily test positivity rate (positive cases identified for every 100 tests) continues to decline. It was 12.7% as on May 23 compared with 18.2% recorded a week before.

Only 9.43 lakh vaccine doses were administered in the country in the 24 hours ending 7 a.m. on Monday, which is over 6.61 lakh doses fewer than what was recorded in the previous 24 hours.

AI pilots seek better compensation

They demand schemes that are on a par with other PSUs, private airlines

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

They have been on the front line of the country's battle against COVID-19 while transporting masks, ventilators, vaccines, international aid as well as repatriating stranded Indians from around the world, and while doing so they have lost many colleagues in the line of duty.

Air India's pilots have now written to the management expressing their despair at the lack of a suitable compensation scheme during illness or death accusing it of "indifference and borderline neglect".

Bangalore flight on April 15. On his arrival, he began to complain of COVID-19 like symptoms. Five days later, his test results confirmed the infection. Over the next 20 days, he fought for his life in a Mumbai hospital but eventually lost his battle.



The pilots accused Air India of "indifference and borderline neglect".

A pilot friend, who did not want to be identified, said his family was likely to be handed over a cheque for ₹10 lakh, which is paltry. The airline had introduced the scheme last year for deaths due to COVID-19.

In a letter to the airline's top brass, the Indian Pilots Guild (IPG) has demanded compensation schemes in case of death that are on a par with other Public Sector Undertakings and private airlines. "The need of the hour is to immediately provide a befitting compensation to our colleagues who have already paid the ultimate price," the IPG wrote to Chairman and Managing Director of Air India Rajiv Bansal on Saturday. They have urged that the airline "mend this dismaying gap in the company's HR policy so that we may know that our loved ones will be looked after by our company should the worst happen to one of us."

The letter cites the example of IndiGo, which offers ₹5 crore to the next of kin in the event of a death, and ₹3.4 crore if a pilot is declared permanently medically unfit. To make matters worse for pilots at Air India, they have been facing delays for past several years in payment of flying allowances that make up 75% of their take-home salary.

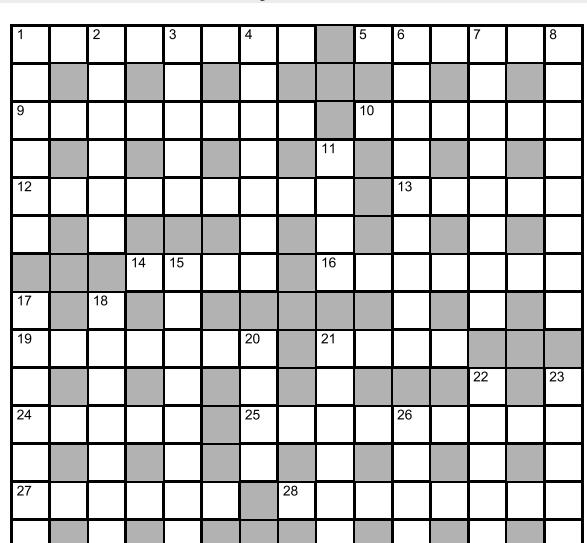
TH CROSSWORD + 13256

(set by KrisKross)

Display keystrokes of genius.

Type your answers into our online grids!

@ <https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn>

**ACROSS**

- 1 A new stamp I designed, helping to identify unwanted mail (4-4)
- 5 When discussing failure, is more relaxed (6)
- 9 Oldster tailored clothes – a set of exercise clothes (8)
- 10 Entertainer at hotel – one with spirit (6)
- 12 Engineer answers a riddle at last, demonstrating knowledge (9)
- 13 You would love to be shot by him (5)
- 14 Doctor dies in the middle of the month (4)

16 Self-destruction of team, reportedly, after losing final set in match (7)

19 Feed egg to one about to enter a water body (3,4)

21 Youngster's casual shirt with name (4)

24 Squeal angrily, missing school match (5)

25 Entrance Lords with the smashing, captivating hundred on debut (9)

27 Game is rigged – it indicates bias (6)

28 Australian native agreeable about accepting a transplanted organ (8)

29 Relief coming to a stop after leader quits (6)

30 Celebrities – a common sight in crowded restaurants? (8)

■ DOWN

1 Bright girl taken in by a cunning male (6)

2 Unfortunate dismissal over a poor grade (3,3)

3 Wine from Corso Avenue (5)

4 Location of diamonds in a deck (7)

6 KrisKross has to chase career / job etc. in the end (9)

7 Outline of first sketch by sibling : "Horse climbing" (8)

8 Tower of gifts? (8)

11 Calls for some desks and counters (4)

15 Lady dines sloppily, showing gluttony perhaps (6,3)

17 Report completed in lock-up (8)

18 Unfortunate result of people breaking rules (8)

20 Food in park after cycling (4)

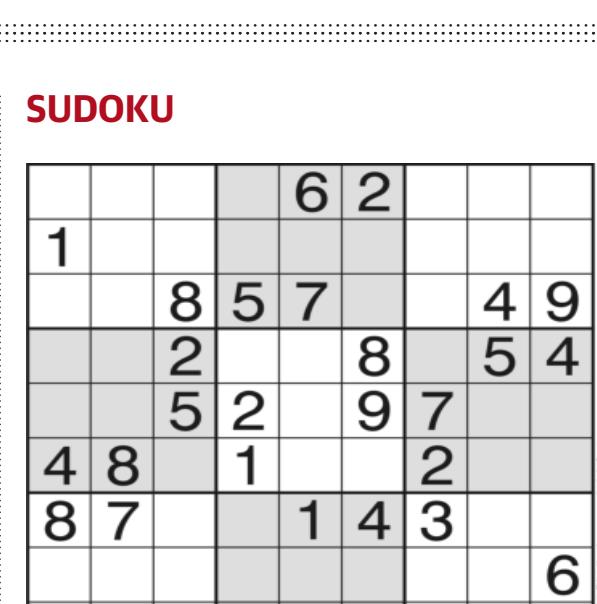
21 Too darn windy – could be a storm (7)

22 Author in the end opens pink pen (6)

23 Bill wears accessories (3-3)

26 Character in Athens, 27, surprisingly lacking energy (5)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13255

P	O	W	S	T	E	R	I	N	G

<tbl_r cells="10" ix="5" maxc

Wuhan lab staff fell sick in Nov. 2019: report

This comes on the eve of key WHO meeting, and may boost calls for a wider probe into virus origins

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

Three researchers from China's Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) sought hospital care in November 2019, a month before China reported the first cases of COVID-19, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on Sunday, citing a U.S. intelligence report.

The newspaper said the previously undisclosed report – which provides fresh details on the number of researchers affected, the timing of their illnesses, and their hospital visits – may add weight to calls for a broader investigation into whether the COVID-19 virus could have escaped from the laboratory.

The *Journal* said current and former officials familiar with the intelligence expressed a range of views about the strength of the re-



Origin tracing: A file photo of researchers at work in the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Hubei province. ■ AP

port's supporting evidence, with one unnamed person saying it needed "further investigation and additional corroboration."

China denies report

The first cases of what would eventually be known as COVID-19 were reported at the end of December 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the advanced labora-

tory specialising in coronavirus research is located.

Chinese scientists and officials have consistently rejected the lab leak hypothesis, saying SARS-CoV-2 could have been circulating in other regions before it hit Wuhan, and might have even entered China from another country via imported frozen food shipments or wildlife trading.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, said on Monday that it was "completely untrue" that three members of staff at WIV had fallen ill.

"The U.S. continues to hype up the lab leak theory," he said. "Does it care about traceability or is it just trying to distract attention?"

The *Journal* report came on the eve of a meeting of the World Health Organization's decision-making body, which is expected to discuss the next phase of an investigation into the origins of COVID-19.

Asked about the report, WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said that the organisation's technical teams were now deciding on the next steps. He said further study was needed into the role of animal markets as well as the lab leak hypothesis.

A U.S. National Security

Council spokeswoman had no comment on the report but said the Biden administration continued to have "serious questions about the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, including its origins within the Peoples Republic of China."

"We're not going to make pronouncements that pre-judge an ongoing WHO study into the source of SARS-CoV-2, but we've been clear that sound and technically credible theories should be thoroughly evaluated by international experts," she said.

A joint study into the origins of COVID-19 by the WHO and China published at the end of March said it was "extremely unlikely" that it had escaped from a lab.

But China was accused of failing to disclose raw data on early COVID-19 cases to the WHO team.

Myanmar's Suu Kyi defiant in first comments since coup

She made her first court appearance after her detention

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NAYPYIDAW

Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Monday voiced defiance as she made her first court appearance since being detained in a coup, vowing her ousted political party would live on.

Myanmar has been in uproar since the February 1 putsch, with near-daily protests and a nationwide civil disobedience movement. More than 800 people have been killed by the military, according to a local monitoring group.

The junta has threatened to dissolve her National League for Democracy – which swept elections in 2020 – over alleged voter fraud.

The Nobel laureate – who has not been seen in public



Aung San Suu Kyi. ■ FILE PHOTO

since the coup – sounded "healthy and fully confident" during the 30-minute meeting, her lawyer Min Min Soe said.

"She wishes her people to stay healthy as well as affirmed the NLD will exist as long as people exist because it was founded for people."

Ms. Suu Kyi has been hit with a string of criminal

charges including flouting coronavirus restrictions during last year's election campaign and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies.

There have been weeks of delays to Ms. Suu Kyi's legal case and her lawyers have struggled to gain access to her.

The next hearing was set for June 7, Mr. Min Min Soe said, adding she had also met with former President Win Myint, who was ousted and detained along with Ms. Suu Kyi.

As the lawyers left the compound in Naypyidaw, police arrested a legal representative of senior NLD figure Myo Aung, lawyers said.

There was a heavy security presence in the capital, an AFP correspondent said.

"With the arrival of reinforcements, the enemy has

Afghan security forces, Taliban clash near Kabul

37 checkpoints captured: insurgents

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MIHTARLAM

Afghan forces clashed with Taliban fighters in a provincial capital about 120 km from Kabul, officials and witnesses said, prompting the Defence Minister to take charge of a counter-offensive.

Violence has soared in Afghanistan since U.S. forces began their final pull-out on May 1, as the insurgents press on with a campaign to seize new territory.

Fierce fighting erupted on Sunday on the edge of Mihtarlam, a city of around 14,000 people and the capital of Laghman province.

At one point Defence Minister Yasin Zia took personal charge in the field, officials said.

"I'm not sure which part of the city is safe now," he told AFP.

sustained heavy blows," Gen. Zia, a former Army Chief of Staff, said.

The Ministry said at least 50 Taliban fighters were killed in overnight fighting.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP the insurgents captured 37 security checkpoints on the outskirts of the city.

Both sides frequently exaggerate their successes and minimise losses.

Fighting continued in some parts of Mihtarlam on Monday, with hundreds of people displaced.

A student, who gave just his first name Zabihullah, said he went to school after government forces assured him they had control, but had to flee when fighting resumed.

"The equipment and the verification and the monitoring activities that we agreed

Assailant stabs soldier, civilian in Jerusalem

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JERUSALEM

An assailant stabbed two young Israeli men before being shot dead by police at a tram station in Jerusalem on Monday, Israeli police said.

"Attacker shot and killed," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said.

Hadassah medical centre said it was treating two men in their 20s for stab wounds. Both were in moderate condition and one was identified by the Army as a soldier.

There was no immediate confirmation of the assailant's identity. The incident happened a short distance from Sheikh Jarrah, which saw weeks of protests against the planned expulsion of Palestinians from their homes.

Blinken off to West Asia to push peace talks after Gaza ceasefire

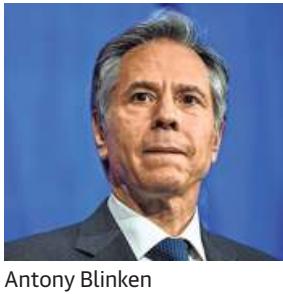
He will meet the leaders of Israel and Palestinian Authority

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

Secretary of State Antony Blinken is heading to West Asia to press the Israelis, Palestinians and regional players to build on last week's Gaza ceasefire by laying the groundwork for an eventual resumption in long-stalled peace talks.

President Joe Biden announced Mr. Blinken would depart on Monday for a short visit to Israel, the West Bank, Jordan and Egypt for what will be the Biden administration's highest-level in-person meetings on the crisis that erupted earlier this month.

Mr. Blinken's primary goal will be to shore up the ceasefire in the hope that it



will hold, discuss an urgent infusion of humanitarian assistance into Gaza, stress the need for an end to intra-communal violence within Israeli cities and lay the preliminary groundwork for a return to peace talks, according to a senior State Department official.

In a statement, Mr. Biden said Mr. Blinken will work

with regional partners to ensure "the coordinated international effort to ensure immediate assistance reaches Gaza."

While Mr. Blinken will meet with the leaders of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Jordan, he will not see anyone from the militant Hamas movement that runs Gaza. Hamas is a U.S.-designated "foreign terrorist organisation," and contacts between American officials and the group are banned. That means the U.S. must rely on third countries like Egypt and Qatar to pass messages to Hamas.

Blinken said Sunday that the behind-the-scenes effort led by Mr. Biden paid off, securing a truce after 11 days.

Virus killed 1,15,000 health workers: WHO

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

At least 115,000 health and care workers have died from COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, the WHO chief said Monday.

At the opening of the World Health Organisation's main annual assembly, Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed the sacrifices made by health workers around the world to battle the pandemic.

"We estimate that at least 115,000 health and care workers have paid the ultimate price in the service of others."

Nepal urges U.S. to provide vaccines on 'priority' basis

It asks for a share from surplus doses

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

Nepal on Monday urged the U.S. to provide vaccines on a "priority" basis, according to an official statement.

In a telephonic conversation with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali asked for a share of the surplus Oxford-AstraZeneca doses that the U.S. intends to distribute among the developing countries, according to the statement.

Minister Gyawali conveyed the gratitude of the Government of Nepal to the United States for the gener-

ous COVID-related cooperation, which helped scale up the national capacity to address the pandemic. Commending the U.S. leadership in garnering collaborative response against the global pandemic, the Foreign Minister requested the Deputy Secretary of State to accord due priority to Nepal during the distribution of surplus vaccines among the developing nations," the official statement said.

This comes two days after Nepal received the first emergency support from the U.S., which included ventilators, protection gears and oxygen cylinders.

Boris Johnson sets wedding date: report

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his fiancee Carrie Symonds have set a wedding date for next year after delaying plans due to the pandemic, *The Sun* tabloid reported on Monday.

Mr. Johnson will be only the second Prime Minister ever to marry while in office, following Robert Jenkinson in 1822. The couple have set "save the date" cards for July 30 next year.

Ms. Symonds, 33, former head of communications for the Conservative Party, gave birth to their son Wilfred in April last year.

E-Tenders are invited from reputed and experienced Contractors for the following tender:

Tender Name	Tender Fees	Last date & time for Bid Submissions
Design, Manufacture, Supply, Testing and Commissioning of Two No. of Standard Gauge Wagons (Well Type), Carrying Capacity - 30 T for Ahmedabad Metro Rail Project Phase-I	INR 25,000/-	15:00 Hrs on 09.07.2021
Tender Notification No.: GMRC/GD & AD/MP-L9R/2021		

Interested bidders are requested to visit <https://gmrc.nprocure.com> for eligibility criteria, applying/downloading the tender document. Any alterations in Eligibility Criteria cum Qualification Requirements, and terms of the Tender Document, or any amendment to the Tender Document, etc, will be uploaded on <https://gmrc.nprocure.com> and GMRC's Website www.gujaratmetrorail.com without any obligation or press notification or other proclamation.

Sd/- Managing Director GMRC, Gandhinagar

KERALA MEDICAL SERVICES CORPORATION LTD.

(Department of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of Kerala)

THYLA, Kozhikode, Kerala-673004

Tel: +91-944564-2945/500 Fax: 2945647

Website: www.kmscl.kerala.gov.in

CIN No. U24233KL2007SGC021616

No. KMSCL/EP/7278/2021 Dated : 24.05.2021

e-TENDER NOTICE (Running Contract)

Online bids are invited for the supply and installation of the following equipment for various Government healthcare institutions across Kerala

Sl. No. Tender No. Description Online Pre-Bid Meeting Last date of Online submission

1. T407/2021 Supply and installation of Oxygen Generator System on turnkey basis 500LPM, 1000LPM, 1500LPM, 2000LPM. N.A. 01.06.2021 03.00 p.m.

2. T408(R)/2021 Air Conditioner various Types, Sample Homogeniser 5L, Insulin Pump with Integrated CGMS, Oxygen Cylinder (B) with Trolley, Ventilator, CPAP (Non Invasive), Auscultation Trainer, ENT and Ophthalmic Examination Head, Reagent Rental Contract Fully Automated Immunohematology Analyser on Reagent Rental Contract, Model B, Reagent Rental Contract - Fully Automated Immuno Hematology Analyser

N.A. 07.06.2021 05.00 p.m.

State Public Sector undertakings and MSMEs registered in the State or registered outside the state satisfying the policy of Government of India are exempted from remittance of tender document cost and EMD subject to the submission of valid documents, provided all the offered products are manufactured by them. Tender documents and all other information related to tender and bidding process can be downloaded from the website www.tenders.kerala.gov.in.

Sd/- Managing Director (Tender Inviting Authority)

DIPR/1548/Tender/2021

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Material Description Due date

212213 Procurement of Maize based Native Starch (In Jumbo Bags) for Unit- I 07.06.2021

212213 Procurement of Liquid Chlorine 08.06.2021

212213 Procurement of Sodium Silicate - Alkaline 09.06.2021

Terms & conditions, Specifications, Qty, Tender

MARKET WATCH

	24-05-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	50,652	-0.22
US Dollar	72.96	-0.18
Gold	48,015	0.04
Brent oil	68.01	2.18

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	766.55	-2.65
Asian Paints	2819.20	-13.30
Axisc Bank	741.15	10.25
Bajaj Auto	4142.30	16.75
Bajaj Finserv	11166.80	-98.35
Bajaj Finance	5602.90	-28.85
Bharti Airtel	526.80	-4.15
BPCL	472.85	11.80
Britannia Ind	3379.10	-56.65
Cipla	931.25	4.35
Coal India	148.90	1.70
Divis Lab	4097.20	17.30
Dr Reddys Lab	5272.15	55.70
Eicher Motors	2551.20	28.90
Gasim Ind	1370.75	-1.10
HDFC Tech.	932.80	2.15
HDFC	2540.90	22.85
HDFC Bank	1509.95	12.65
HDFC Life	670.25	-0.45
Hero MotoCorp	2900.45	16.05
Hindalco	389.30	-0.50
Hind Unilever	2336.55	-25.70
ICICI Bank	647.35	4.90
IndusInd Bank	1004.75	-11.25
Infosys	1348.05	-6.45
Indian Oil Corp	109.45	5.15
ITC	211.50	2.45
JSW Steel	681.45	-16.75
Kotak Bank	1757.00	-0.65
L&T	1443.25	25.20
M&M	810.00	-8.95
Maruti Suzuki	6871.60	56.95
Nestle India Ltd.	17360.30	-136.80
NTPC	112.90	0.05
ONGC	113.05	0.30
PowerGrid Corp	231.00	3.05
Reliance Ind	1985.65	-16.90
SBI Life	962.50	-6.75
State Bank	412.05	10.85
Shree Cement	26909.35	-713.30
Sun Pharma	690.95	0.55
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	640.10	-9.60
Tata Motors	311.85	-1.25
Tata Steel	1092.00	-21.10
TCS	3081.50	1.00
Tech Mahindra	983.70	3.20
Titan	1520.75	-17.60
UltraTech Cement	6562.40	-75.20
UPL	789.35	9.50
Wipro	514.90	2.20

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	72.76	73.08
Euro	88.85	89.25
British Pound	102.82	103.28
Japanese Yen (100)	66.81	67.10
Chinese Yuan	11.32	11.37
Swiss Franc	81.06	81.42
Singapore Dollar	54.69	54.96
Canadian Dollar	60.34	60.60
Malaysian Ringgit	17.54	17.64

Source: Indian Bank

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on May 24

CURRENCY TT BUY TT SELL

US Dollar 72.76 73.08

Euro 88.85 89.25

British Pound 102.82 103.28

Japanese Yen (100) 66.81 67.10

Chinese Yuan 11.32 11.37

Swiss Franc 81.06 81.42

Singapore Dollar 54.69 54.96

Canadian Dollar 60.34 60.60

Malaysian Ringgit 17.54 17.64

Source: Indian Bank

SAT stays SEBI order in Yes Bank AT-1 bond case

NEW DELHI

The Securities Appellate Tribunal has granted an interim stay on a SEBI order slapping a penalty of ₹25 crore on Yes Bank in a case of mis-selling AT-1 bonds. PTI

FDI flows crossed \$81 bn in FY21

Equity investments rose 19% to \$60 bn; software topped the chart with 44% share

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Foreign direct investment (FDI) flows into India grew 10% in 2020-21 to touch a record \$81.72 billion, with FDI equity inflows rising 19% to almost \$60 billion, the Commerce and Industry Ministry said on Monday.

Singapore emerged as the top investor with almost a third of all investments, followed by the U.S. which accounted for 23% of FDI and Mauritius from where 9% of the capital flows originated.

FDI equity flows from the U.S. tripled during the year compared with 2019-20, while investments from the U.K. surged 44%.

Sharp growth

However, the sharpest growth among the top 10 FDI-origin countries was recorded from Saudi Arabia.



Dollar power: As much as 94% of the FDI equity flows into Gujarat was routed to the infotech sector. • G.P. SAMPATHKUMAR

Investments from the oil-rich nation jumped from a mere \$90 million in 2019-20 to \$2.8 billion last year.

Top FDI destination

Gujarat was the top FDI destination in FY21, accounting for 37% of the foreign equity inflows, followed by its traditional industrial rival Maharashtra that got 27%.

Karnataka accounted for another 13% of the equity investments, indicating that the rest of the country got a disproportionately less 23% of foreign equity capital.

"Computer software and hardware has emerged as the top sector during 2020-21 with about 44% share of the total FDI equity inflow followed by construction (in-

India Cements posts ₹71.6 cr. net

Expecting pent-up demand, prices are holding well, says MD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

India Cements Ltd. (ICL) reported standalone net profit of ₹71.6 crore for the quarter ended March 31, compared with a loss of ₹11 crore a year earlier.

Total income grew to ₹1,461.44 crore compared with ₹1,169.92 crore in the fourth quarter of the previous year.

"Our performance has been creditable given that we operated only at 50% capacity for whole year," said vice chairman and managing director N. Srinivasan, who was reappointed as MD for five years effective May 26, subject to approvals.

"Capacity utilisation rose from 35% in Q1 to 77% in the fourth quarter," he added.



N. Srinivasan
He pointed out that the company had repaid debt of about ₹550 crore during the year. "We reduced both inventory and receivables."

For FY21, ICL recorded ₹222 crore in net profit (₹35.5 crore loss) on a total income of ₹4,460 crore (₹5,085 crore). The company declared a dividend of

₹1/- per share for FY21.

On localised lockdowns, he said, "In the west and north parts of India, there is relaxation taking place and gradual relaxation in the middle of June is expected in the south also."

On the outlook for the current fiscal, he said, "We are expecting pent-up demand. We hope to generate more [sales], prices are holding; volumes may be better than last year." He added that the company was aiming to repay ₹600 crore of debt this year.

He also said that input cost pressures may persist this year but the costs could be passed on to the market. "We raised the price per bag by ₹10 in May. In June, it may go up by a similar amount."

REUTERS

LONDON

Oil prices rose on Monday as a potential snag emerged in reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that could add more oil supply,

while Goldman Sachs said the case for higher prices remained even with increased Iran exports due to a rise in demand. Brent crude oil futures for July were 1.4% higher at \$67.34 a barrel by 1215 GMT.

The speaker of Iran's parliament said on Sunday its monitoring deal with the U.N. nuclear watchdog had expired. European diplomats had said failure to extend it would plunge talks on the 2015 Iran nuclear deal into crisis.

Individuals and companies importing oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders, regulators and rakes are looking for exemptions or credits on these medical devices as in most of the cases, the imports are in public interest or for donation to State governments and NGOs," said Abhishek Rastogi, who is arguing wris on these issues in the Bombay and Delhi High Courts.

PTI

Jain said providing GST concessions and exemptions to COVID vaccines, and other

refunds for several exporters including gems and jewellery and IT sectors are stuck, which must be processed quickly which will infuse liquidity and also give an impetus to our exporters," said Siddharth Surana, adviser, strategy and business transformation, RSM India. "The gems and jewellery industry in our view has over ₹1,000 crore stuck in past accumulated input tax credits and due to backlog in refunds," Mr. Surana said.

"The council should consider reducing the GST rate for composition dealers, including the special rates for restaurants [presently at 5% with no input tax credit] and travel and tour operators for the period from April to September 2021," he suggested.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Grasim Industries Ltd. of the Aditya Birla Group reported consolidated net profit for the fourth quarter grew 14% from a year earlier to ₹1,715 crore on strong operational performance, the company said. Consolidated revenue rose 26% to ₹24,399 crore. Last year, profit after tax (after extraordinary items) included reversal of deferred tax liability, it said.

For FY21, consolidated net profit dropped 2.4% to ₹4,305 crore. Revenue rose 1.6% to ₹76,398 crore.

The board has recommended a dividend of ₹5 and a special dividend of ₹4 per equity share for FY21. The outflow on account of the di-

vidend would be ₹592 crore.

For FY22, the company has a capital expenditure plan (excluding paints and fertilizer) worth ₹2,604 crore

and retention of skilled resources and this scenario has resulted in increased demand for temp staffing, including that of freshers.

According to HR experts, most tech firms are expected to be stung by high attrition levels in FY22. "Attrition is purely a supply by-product and companies will find it tough to retain people when the job market is flush with vacant positions," said B.S. Murthy, CEO, Leadership Capital, a recruitment firm.

For the quarter ended

March 2021, most tech firms in the country reported an average attrition of 12-15%.

However, both TCS and HCL reported a significantly lower attrition of 7.2% and 9.9%, respectively, while Cognizant led the attrition tally with 21% in Q4.

chain. As a result, temp role hiring for freshers and others too has seen a rise in recent months.

Suchitra Dutta, executive director at ISF, said

Citing a recent report, ISF said the expectations to enlist freshers among organisations had increased from 6% in 2020 to 15% in 2021. Also, the tech sector has been the top recruiter for freshers at 24%. However, the tech industry's biggest challenge

would be talent sourcing

and block-

chain.

There is a sudden surge in demand for digital skills, especially around artificial intelligence, data science, cloud computing, information security and block-

chain.

While actively hiring across engineering, customer and marketing teams, it is also making engineering investments in technologies such as GPT-3 and scaling core engineering efforts to support customer demand, Fireflies said in a statement.

CM

YK

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IN BRIEF

Ankita begins well in French Open qualifiers

NEW DELHI Ankita Raina notched up a hard-fought 3-6, 6-1, 6-4 win over higher-ranked Arina Rodionova in the first round of the women's singles qualifiers at the French Open on Monday. The 28-year-old Indian, ranked 182nd, showed nerves of steel as she bounced back from a set down to beat the Russia-born Australian Rodionova, ranked 168th, in a thrilling rain-affected three-setter. PTI

BCCI to donate 2000 oxygen concentrators

MUMBAI The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Monday announced that it will donate 2000 oxygen concentrators to boost India's efforts in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. A BCCI statement hoped that "this initiative will reduce the havoc unleashed by the pandemic".

Pandya brothers involved in COVID-19 relief work

VADODARA The Pandya brothers — Hardik and Krunal — are doing their bit to help those suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic, dispatching oxygen concentrators to the centres dealing with the crisis. "These new batch of oxygen concentrators are being dispatched to COVID centres with prayers in our hearts for everyone's speedy recovery," tweeted Krunal. Hardik said that the battle against the pandemic can be won by working together. PTI

NZ's IPL contingent joins team's training



Williamson. ■ FILE PHOTO

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SOUTHAMPTON**

The New Zealand players involved in the now-suspended IPL-14, including skipper Kane Williamson, have joined the team's training session for the upcoming two-match Test series against host England, New Zealand Cricket (NZC) said on Monday.

The IPL contingent comprising Williamson, Kyle Jamieson, Mitchell Santner, team physio Tommy Simsek and Chris Donaldson, the national team's strength and conditioning coach, arrived in the UK last week from the Maldives, where they stopped over after their departure from India.

"Back together! In positive news the IPL contingent have joined team training for the first time today. In not so positive news the team are training inside again," the BLACKCAPS tweeted.

Vidit and Abhimanyu pull out of AICF's online selection event

CHESS

**RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI**

Hoping to qualify for next month's chess World Cup by virtue of his high world ranking, Grandmaster Vidit Gujrathi withdrew from the AICF online selection tournament for the World Cup on Monday.

The pull-out of Vidit and fellow GM Abhimanyu Puranik reduced the field to 17 players. The winner of the event will grab India's lone qualifying spot for the World Cup, scheduled from July 10 to August 6, at Sochi (Russia).

"Given my rating, I should make the list of those direct-

Phil Mickelson — fabulous at fifty

Defies age to win PGA Championship, the oldest to win a Major

GOLF

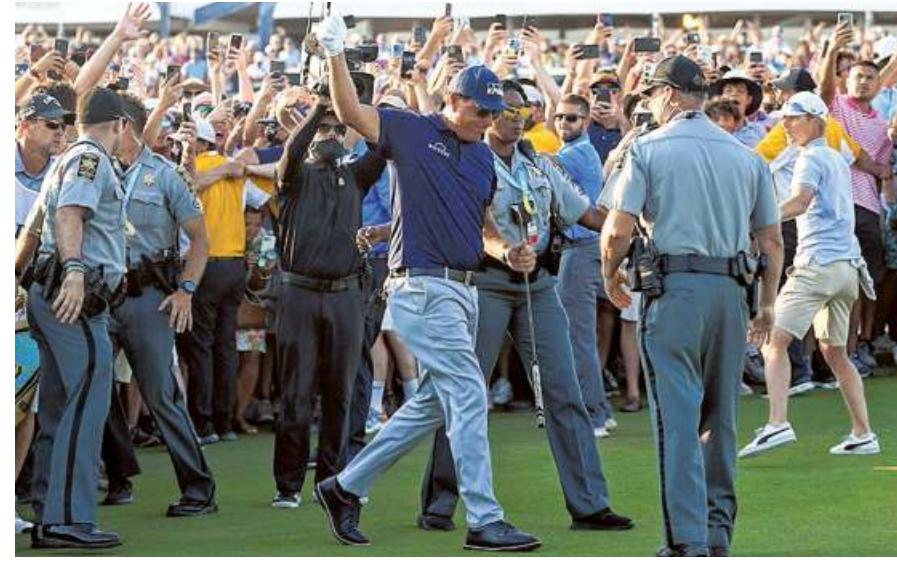
**REUTERS
KIAWAH ISLAND (USA)**

Phil Mickelson blocked out the distractions and kept his mind quiet in front of a raucous gallery to win the PGA Championship by two strokes on Sunday and become golf's oldest Major winner at the age of 50.

Mickelson battled through strong winds, shrugged off a few poor shots and kept calm amid suffocating pressure to record a one-over-par 73 at the Ocean Course, holding his nerve with Brooks Koepka and Louis Oosthuizen breathing down his neck.

In collecting the sixth Major of his career, and first since the 2013 British Open, Mickelson surpassed Julius Boros as the oldest Major winner. Boros was 48 when he won the 1968 PGA Championship.

"This is just an incredible feeling because I just believed that it was possible



Frenzied swarm: Phil Mickelson is shepherded through a throng of fans by security personnel after his victory. ■ AFP

but yet everything was saying it wasn't," said Mickelson, who is now the only player to have claimed PGA Tour victories 30 years apart.

"And I hope that others find that inspiration.

"It might take a little extra work, a little bit harder

effort to maintain physicality or maintain the skills but, gosh, it is worth it."

When Mickelson's approach shot safely found the green at the final hole a wild scene ensued as fans raced to follow one of the game's all-time greats up the fairway and completely enveloped him in a frenzied swarm.

Mickelson, who also won the tournament in 2005, later acknowledged he had been a little unnerved by the experience, while fellow competitor Brooks Koepka said he was "dinged" by spectators in

■ Phil Mickelson (50 years, 11 months, 7 days) replaced Julius Boros (48y, 4m, 18d), who won the 1968 US PGA Championship, as the oldest winner

■ Mickelson is now the only player to have claimed PGA Tour victories 30 years apart

the crush.

Mickelson's great rival Tiger Woods was quick to congratulate him.

"Truly inspirational"

"Truly inspirational to see @PhilMickelson do it again at 50 years of age. Congrats!!!!!!," the 15-time Major champion tweeted.

Oosthuizen (73) and Koepka (74) finished in a share of second place while European Ryder Cup captain Padraig Harrington (69), Ireland's Shane Lowry (69), Englishman Paul Casey (71) and Harry Higgs (70) were a further two shots back in fourth place.

Milkha hospitalised, condition stable

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH**

Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh, who has tested positive for COVID-19, was on Monday hospitalised, with his son and ace golfer Jeev Milkha Singh saying that it was a precautionary measure.



Milkha Singh. ■ FILE PHOTO

care of the doctors there. He is a strong man, always positive and will recover soon," added the golfer, who reached here on Saturday from Dubai after his father tested positive.

None of the other family members, including Milkha's wife Nirmal Kaur, returned a positive test.

"Wishing a speedy recovery to Flying Sikh Milkha Singh who has been admitted in hospital in Mohali for COVID-19 treatment. Get well soon, sir!" Punjab CM Capt. Amarinder Singh tweeted.

It's important to play session by session in England: Gill

Feels that when there's cloud cover, the ball swings more

CRICKET

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI**

Australia. We have been playing well overseas and I feel we can't be better prepared for this final.

"As an opener, I feel I should be able to play session by session not just in England, but overseas in general," said Gill told India TV.

"It is very important to play session by session. In England, whenever there is cloud around, the ball swings more and when the sun is out, it gets easier to bat. It is important to assess those conditions as an opener," he said.

Talking about the quarantine protocols in place now, Gill said: "It is very hard, you are in a room for 14 days and there is not much to do.

"We are given workout schedules, we do that. We try to keep ourselves busy

watching movies and spend some time on the i-pad, but it is very hard," said Gill, who has played seven Tests so far.

Gill has been with the Test squad since 2019, but got his big break with the Boxing Day Test at the MCG in December last year.

Asked about the time he spent with the team and the chats he has had with skipper Virat Kohli and opening partner Rohit Sharma, Gill said: "Virat bhai tells me to play fearlessly.

"He speaks about mindset a lot... that you have to be in a good frame of mind when you go out to bat. He also shares his experiences.

"When I am batting with Rohit bhai, we usually discuss where the bowlers will bowl, what the situation is like and when to take a risk."

Has BCCI 'located' the money Tuskers owe us, asks Hodge

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE**

Former Australia batsman Brad Hodge on Monday cheekily enquired if the BCCI has been able to "locate" the money that the now-defunct Kochi Tuskers Kerala owed him for representing it in the 2010 edition of the Indian Premier League.



Brad Hodge. ■ FILE PHOTO

Played 14 games
The 46-year-old had played 14 games for KTK, scoring 285 runs at an average of 35.63. He was bought by Tuskers for \$425,000 at the 2010 auction.

"Players are still owed

35% of their money earned from 10 years ago from the IPL representing Kochi Tuskers. Any chance the BCCI could locate that money?" Hodge tweeted.

Going by Hodge's tweet, Tuskers seem to owe the Australian more than \$127,000.

Hodge was reacting to a report published in the *Telegraph* about the Indian women's team not receiving its share of \$550,000 ICC prize money from the BCCI.

It must be noted that Kochi Tuskers was expelled after just one season for defaulting on its annual payment in 2011.

Hussamuddin eases past Sabrykhan

ASIAN BOXING

**SPORTS BUREAU
DUBAI**

Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Mohammad Hussamuddin gave India a fine start by defeating the 19-year-old rising Kazakh boxer and Boxam tournament gold medallist Makhmud Sabrykhan in a 56kg first round bout on the opening day of the Asian boxing championships here on Monday. Hussamuddin, 27, defeated Sabrykhan 5-0.

Against the taller Sayyarkhan, southpaw Hussamuddin mixed his body and head shots well. With the Kazakh showing more aggression in the second round, Hussamuddin maintained a safe distance, looking to counterattack.

The Indian gave a good account of himself in a heavy exchange of punches in the final round to emerge winner.

Hussamuddin will take on top seed Mirazibek Mirzahalilov of Uzbekistan in the quarterfinals on Tuesday.

World championships bronze medallist Simranji Kaur (60kg), Sakshi Chaudhary (54kg), Jasmine (57kg) and male boxer Sanjeet (91kg) will figure in quarterfinal bouts on Tuesday.

Olympic-bound boxer Simjavit will face Uzbekistan's Raykhona Kodirova, two-time World youth champion Sakshi will meet Ruhal Haqazrova of Tajikistan and Boxam silver medallist Jasmine will be up against Mongolian Oyunsetseg Yesugyan.

Second-seeded Sanjeet, who received a first round bye, will meet Jasur Qurbanov of Tajikistan.



Big responsibility: Gill says it's vital to assess the conditions as an opener. ■ FILE PHOTO

Nortje and Markram among nominees for player of the year

CSA AWARDS

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JOHANNESBURG**

Pacer Anrich Nortje and batsman Aiden Markram were among the names nominated for Cricket South Africa's (CSA) player of the year award, with the fast bowler featuring in the ODI as well as the Test list.

Limited-overs captain Temba Bavuma and top-order batsman batsman Rassie van der Dussen have been nominated in the men's player of the year category.

Markram, Nortje, Bavuma were joined by Test skipper Dean Elgar in the nominations for the Test player of the year award.

David Miller, all-rounder Andile Phehlukwayo and van der Dussen have been nominated for the ODI award, besides Nortje.

The nominees for T20 cricketer of the year award are Janneman Malan, Markram, spinner Tabraiz Shamsi and van der Dussen.

All-rounder Shabnim Ismail led the nominees for the women's cricketer of the year award, a nomination list which also included hard-hitting batter Lizelle Lee, leg-spinning all-rounder Sune Luus and opener Laura Wolvaardt.

CSA also approved a new award named after one of its greats: the Makhaya Ntini Power of Cricket award.



Nortje. ■ FILE PHOTO



Markram. ■ FILE PHOTO

Laura Wolvaardt.

The nominees for women's T20 player of the year are Anneke Bosch, Tazmin Brits, Ismail and Luus. In the women's ODIs player of the year list, the nominees are Ismail, Marizanne Kapp, Lee and Laura Wolvaardt.

Second-seeded Sanjeet, who received a first round bye, will meet Jasur Qurbanov of Tajikistan.

Vidit and Abhimanyu pull out of AICF's online selection event

CHESS

**RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI**

Hoping to qualify for next month's chess World Cup by virtue of his high world ranking, Grandmaster Vidit Gujrathi withdrew from the AICF online selection tournament for the World Cup on Monday.

The pull-out of Vidit and fellow GM Abhimanyu Puranik reduced the field to 17 players. The winner of the event will grab India's lone qualifying spot for the World Cup, scheduled from July 10 to August 6, at Sochi (Russia).

"Given my rating, I should make the list of those direct-

ly seeded for the World Cup," said Vidit when contacted on Monday.

"I have been playing the World Cup for the past three editions.

"After qualifying from the Asian championship, I have made it twice in succession on my rating. So I have reasons to be confident of making it one more time," said a confident Vidit.

Elaborating the reason for his withdrawal from the Indian qualifying tournament, Vidit said: "After deliberations with those who know more about the qualification process, I thought it would be unfair to play the qualifying event and spoil someone's chances of getting the available World Cup quota."

With the withdrawal of two players, the round-robin tournament will now see 17 rounds, with one player getting a bye in each round.

On the opening day, there will be three rounds, followed by four rounds each on the next two days. The last two days will see three rounds each.

He has endured a roller-coaster clay court season

TENNIS

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BELGRADE**

Novak Djokovic celebrated his 34th birthday this weekend at the Belgrade Tennis Centre which carries his name but with one eye on Roland Garros where he intends to shine.

The World No. 1 is top seed at the pre-French Open event in the Serbian capital before heading to Paris where he seeks a second career triumph.

"We are working so that I reach my maximum, that everything is perfectly adjusted in Paris, where I want

to shine," Djokovic said at a news conference on Sunday.

Djokovic, who turned 34 on Saturday, has endured a roller-coaster clay court season. He lost in the third round at the Monte Carlo Masters before reaching the semifinals when Belgrade staged its first event of the spring in April.

He then lost the Rome Masters final last weekend to Rafael Nadal, the 13-time champion at Roland Garros.

"It brings me mental serenity and the joy of being able to prepare at home for one of the most important tournaments of the year," said Djokovic.

IN BRIEF

**Harry Kane wins Golden Boot**

LONDON Tottenham Hotspur captain and striker Harry Kane won the Premier League Golden Boot for the third time. Kane registered 23 goals in the 2020-21 season, finishing ahead of Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (22 goals). "Delighted to win these awards! Not possible without the team and staff throughout the season," tweeted Kane. ANI

**Aguero close to Barca deal: Guardiola**

LONDON Sergio Aguero is close to agreeing a move to Barcelona that would unite him with fellow Argentine superstar Lionel Messi, according to Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola. The 32-year-old forward is set to leave the Etihad as a free agent after Saturday's Champions League final against Chelsea. AFP

Arsenal misses out for first time in 25 years

LONDON Arsenal missed out on qualifying for European competition for the first time in 25 years after finishing eighth in Premier League season following a 2-0 win over Brighton on Sunday. Arsenal had to settle for an eighth-place finish for the second season in a row. AP



Napoli president confirms Gattuso's exit
MILAN Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis on Sunday confirmed that coach Gennaro Gattuso will leave the club after failing to qualify for the Champions League. "Dear Rino, I am happy to have spent almost two seasons with you," De Laurentiis wrote on Twitter. "Thanking you for your work, I wish you success wherever you go. A hug to your wife and children too. Aurelio De Laurentiis." AFP

Lille pips PSG to win French title
MONACO Lille upset the odds to win its first French championship in 10 years, edging defending champion Paris Saint-Germain by one point as an enthralling title race ended. PSG had to better Lille's result, but Lille won 2-1 at Angers on Sunday and PSG won 2-0 at Brest. Victory gave Lille a fourth French crown and stopped PSG from sealing a record-equalling 10th to join Marseille and Saint-Etienne. AP

Milan back in CL after eight years

Juventus squeaks through while Napoli misses out narrowly

EURO LEAGUES

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MILAN

Seven-time European champion AC Milan is back in the Champions League after an eight-year break. And Juventus also narrowly qualified on the final night of Serie A.

Two penalties from Franck Kessie on Sunday helped Milan to a 2-0 win at Atalanta, which had already claimed a top-four spot along with Serie A champion Inter Milan.

Juventus won 4-1 at Bologna with two goals from Alvaro Morata plus scores from Federico Chiesa and Adrien Rabiot.

Still, Juventus needed help and got it when Hellas Verona held Napoli to a 1-1 draw, leaving Napoli in fifth place.

Amir Rahmani had put Napoli ahead on the hour mark but Davide Faraoni quickly equalised for Verona.

When Juventus' game finished a few moments earlier, Bianconeri players watched

**On top:** Inter Milan players celebrate with the Serie A trophy after their final match of the season on Sunday. AP

the final moments of the Napoli-Verona match on the touchline before they could celebrate.

Roma came back from two goals down against Spezia for a 2-2 draw to take seventh place and a spot in the new Europa Conference League for incoming coach Jose Mourinho.

The results: Serie A: Inter Milan

5 (Young 8, Eriksen 44, Martinez 55-pen, Perisic 64, Lukaku 71) bt Udinese 1 (Pereyra 79-pen); Sassuolo 2 (Kyriakopoulos 10, Berardi 78-pen) bt Lazio 0; Spezia 2 (Verde 6, Pobega 38) drew with Roma 2 (El Shaarawy 52, Mkhitaryan 85); Torino 1 (Bremer 29) drew with Benevento 1 (Tello 72).

Napoli 1 (Rahmani 60) drew with Hellas Verona 1 (Faraoni 69); Bologna 1 (Orsolini 85) lost to Juventus 4 (Chiesa 6, Morata 29, 47, Rabiot 45); Atalanta 0 lost to AC Milan 2 (Kesbie 43-pen, 90+3-pen).

Sampdoria 3 (Quagliarella 20, Colley 44, Gabbiadini 64) bt Parma 0; Crotone 0 drew with Fiorentina 0; Cagliari 0 lost to Genoa 1 (Shomurodov 15).

LaLiga: Granada 0 drew with Getafe 0; Sevilla 1 (Gomez 90+2) bt Alaves 0.

Former F-1 boss Mosley no more

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON

Max Mosley, the former president of motor sports' world governing body the FIA, has died aged 81, ex-Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone announced on Monday.

Mosley became FIA president in 1993 after serving in previous administrative roles in motor sport, including within Formula One.

He served three terms as president before standing down in 2009. Ecclestone told the PA



Max Mosley. FILE PHOTO

news agency: "Max was like family to me. We were like brothers. I am pleased in a way because he suffered for too long."

Shapovalov to miss French Open

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PARIS

Canada's World No. 15 Denis Shapovalov withdrew from the Roland Garros due to a shoulder injury on Sunday.

"I am saddened to share that after consulting with my medical team I have made the difficult decision to withdraw from Roland Garros," the 22-year-old wrote on Instagram.

"Unfortunately, my shoulder has been bothering me over the last few weeks and, while all medical tests look good, it is for the best to play it safe and rest."

HI inducts new umpires, technical officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

first half, rallied to jump ahead by 17 points early in the fourth quarter.

Devin Booker recorded 34 points, eight assists and seven rebounds to lead Phoenix Suns to a home victory over Los Angeles Lakers in the Western Conference first-round series.

The results: 76ers 125 bt Wizards 118; Suns 99 bt Lakers 90; Hawks 107 bt Knicks 105; Memphis 112 bt Jazz 109.

A total of 60 judges (21 female and 39 male) have been added to the list, besides 66 umpires (16 female and 50 male).

Grizzlies stun Jazz

**Fired up:** Grizzlies forward Dillon Brooks, who scored 31 points, is thrilled after the upset win against Jazz. AP

Dillon Brooks scored 31 points and Ja Morant added 26 to lead the No. 8 seed Memphis Grizzlies to a huge 112-109 road upset win over the No. 1 Utah Jazz here on Sunday night in the first round of the Western Conference playoffs.

The young Grizzlies fell behind by 14 points in the

first half, rallied to jump ahead by 17 points early in the fourth quarter.

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A total of 60 judges (21 female and 39 male) have been added to the list, besides 66 umpires (16 female and 50 male).

Asiad gold is long jumper Neena's new goal

Jakarta silver medallist plans return to competitions next year

ATHLETICS

STAN RAYAN

KOCHE

It's almost two years since long jumper V. Neena took part in a national competition but it looks like nothing has changed. The 2018 Asian Games silver medallist, now the mother of a three-month-old baby girl Alexandra Jo Pinto, feels that she is very fortunate.

"We did not have any competition the whole of last year because of the lockdown and this year, I've just missed a few. I'm very lucky that way," said Neena, in a chat with *The Hindu*, on Monday.

"I think I've added some 10kg, I've been trying to lose that first. My plan is to come back to national competitions next year," said Neena whose personal best (6.66m)

**Back to basics:** Neena will soon start training with her husband, former sprint hurdler Pinto Mathew. FILE PHOTO

in the recent Federation Cup too.

Strong fight

"But when I come back next year, I expect a lot of young girls to give me a strong fight. There is Ancy Sojan and also Anju George's trainee Shaile Singh," said Neena, who is employed with the Railways.

She has started working on her fitness at her home in Kozhikode and will soon start training with her husband, former sprint hurdler Pinto Mathew, at Pala.

"I'm very comfortable with Pinto, the training timings can be very flexible too," she explained.

Despite the break, Neena feels that motherhood comes with many advantages too. "They say, one gets stronger after delivery, it's a new experience for me, I want to see how it works."

came in 2016. Incidentally, Vietnam's Bui Thi Thanh, who won the Asiad gold, also took a break last year to prepare for motherhood.

Priyanka Kerkeeta and Rintu Mathew took the top two spots, ahead of Neena, at the 2019 Ranchi Open National, her last competition before the break. The two maintained the same order

Ronaldo's feat

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MILAN

Cristiano Ronaldo made more history on Sunday becoming the first player to finish the season as top scorer in three major leagues – England, Spain, and Italy.

The 36-year-old scored 29 goals this campaign, five more than second-placed Belgian Romelu Lukaku for

champion Inter Milan.

The Portuguese striker was top scorer in England with Manchester United in 2008, and three times in Spain with Real Madrid, 2011, 2014 and 2015. Ronaldo scored 21 goals in his first season after joining Juventus in 2018 and 31 in 2019 when he finished behind LaLiga's Ciro Immobile's 36.

Divij & Smith pair bows out

INDIANS ABROAD

SPORTS BUREAU

BELGRADE

Divij Sharan and John-Patrick Smith of Australia were beaten 6-4, 5-7, [10-6] by Andre Goransson and Rafael Matos in the doubles pre-quarterfinals of the €511,000 ATP tennis tournament in Belgrade on Monday.

In the WTA event in France, Karman Kaur Thandi was beaten 2-6, 6-4, 6-2 in the second and final qualifying round by Diane Parry of France.

Karman had beaten Zheng Qinwen of China in the third set tie-break in the first round, which assured her of 12 WTA points.

The results: €511,000 ATP, Belgrade: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Andre Goransson (Swe) & Rafael Matos (Bra) bt John-Patrick Smith (Aus) & Divij Sharan 6-4, 5-7, [10-6].

€189,708 WTA, Strasbourg: Qualifying (second and final round): Diane Parry (Fra) bt Karman Kaur Thandi 2-6, 6-4, 6-2; First round: Karman bt Zheng Qinwen (Chn) 6-3, 4-6, 7-6(1).

Boost for Indian women's football

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Endeavouring to send the women's national team to the 2027 FIFA World Cup, the All India Football Federation has charted a detailed plan in this regard, which has been "endorsed and supported" by both the Sports Ministry and Sports Authority of India.

"We have laid a detailed plan for the (current) U-18 girls in our attempt to qualify for the 2027 World Cup. The plan has been endorsed and supported by the Sports Ministry and Sports Authority of India.

"We want to carry this message to all girls who aspire to play the sport, that the football federation stands by them," Das said.

grateful," AIFF general secretary Kushal Das said.

Last December, AIFF president Praful Patel had said the AIFF is hoping for the women's team to qualify for the 2027 World Cup. Supporting his view, the sports ministry had asked the AIFF to prepare a "concrete and actionable" roadmap to work towards the team's qualification in the 2027 edition of the world's biggest football event for women.

"We have laid a detailed plan for the (current) U-18 girls in our attempt to qualify for the 2027 World Cup. The plan has been endorsed and supported by the Sports Ministry and Sports Authority of India.

who had won gold in the World Cup Final in China and the World Cup in Brazil in 2019, had a series of 106.0, 105.2, 103.8, 104.6, 105.8, 105.0.

Elavenil was 0.4 point short of the topper in the regular event, Ziva Dvorsak of Slovenia.

Apurvi shoots 627.8
Former world No. 1 and world record holder, Apurvi Chandela, who had also won two World Cup gold medals in 2019, before the world was gripped by the pandemic, returned a score of 627.8 as her series

not be eligible to contest the finals and shoot for medals.

The 21-year-old Elavenil,

had won gold in the World Cup Final in China and the World Cup in Brazil in 2019, had a series of 106.0, 105.2, 103.8, 104.6, 105.8, 105.0.

World Championship silver medallist Anjum Moudgil shot 624.7 as her scores dipped in the third and sixth series.

Modest show
In men's air rifle, Divyansh Singh Panwar (628.1), Deepak Kumar (627.4) and Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar (625.0) had a modest performance. Sheng Lihao of China topped among the MQS shooters with 30.5.

In the regular event, Vladimir Maslennikov of Russia was the topper with 631.8.

Elavenil Valarivan puts up big score

SHOOTING

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The reigning World No. 1 Elavenil Valarivan gave a glimpse of her readiness to shoot big scores in women's air rifle with a tally of 630.4 in the MQS section of the European championship in Osijek, Croatia, on Monday.

With the Indian Olympic team based in Zagreb in preparation for the Olympics, the team chose to utilise the European championship to have a taste of competition, even though the Indian shooters would

not be eligible to contest the finals and shoot for medals.

The 21-year-old Elavenil,

had won gold in the World Cup Final in China and the World Cup in Brazil in 2019, had a series of 106.0, 105.2, 103.8, 104.6, 105.8, 105.0.</p