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B.R. Gavai will not hear
Param Bir Singh's plea

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Scribe Kishorchandra
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Biden raises ceasefire,
civilian toll during call
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AB de Villiers will not
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NEARBY



COVID deaths: Kejriwal pledges ₹50K ex gratia

NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said his government will provide ₹50,000 ex gratia to every family that has lost a member due to COVID-19 and an additional ₹2,500 per month if the deceased was the sole breadwinner. He also promised free education and financial assistance to children who lost both parents.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Three held for killing foreigner near IGI Airport

NEW DELHI

Three persons have been arrested for allegedly killing a Kenyan national near Indira Gandhi International Airport, the police said on Tuesday. The accused have been identified as Virender Singh (33), Gopal Singh (34) and Dilbagh alias Billu (35), all residents of Rangpuri Village. The victim, Jama Said Farah, was planning to return home.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

OPPORTUNITIES ▶ PAGE 5

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13 dead as Tauktae batters Gujarat; 90 missing from barge

Navy rescues 320 from two vessels; Ahmedabad inundated after heavy rain

DINAKAR PERI
JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The severe cyclonic storm Tauktae that entered Saurashtra early on Tuesday, whipping up winds close to 180 kmph, has reduced in intensity and lay about 35 km west of Ahmedabad late in the evening, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Rain is expected to continue in Gujarat and Rajasthan for the next 24 hours as the storm further weakens into a "depression" near Jodhpur by Wednesday.

At least 13 people were killed in Gujarat as the storm wreaked damage on roads, power lines, trees and buildings. The Navy and the Coast Guard have so far rescued 320 people on board two barges in the Arabian Sea, near Mumbai.

Over 16,000 houses were damaged, and more than 40,000 trees and over 1,000 poles uprooted due to the cyclonic storm in Gujarat, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani said. Many areas of Ahmedabad were inundated after the city received 75.69 mm of rain between 6 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Ninety persons were still missing from Barge P-305



Long road to normalcy: Farmers trying to put up an electric pole at Kodinar village, near Una, Gujarat, where Cyclone Tauktae made landfall on Tuesday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

which sank 35 nautical miles from Mumbai amid rough seas. Till Tuesday evening, 183 survivors from the barge as well as all 137 persons on board another barge, the *Gal Constructor*, were rescued.

Naval ships *INS Beas*, *Betwa* and *Teg* joined *INS Kochi* and *Kolkata* in search and rescue operations (SAR) for Barge P-305, which went adrift off Heera oil fields in the Bombay High area on Monday with 273 onboard, a Navy spokesperson said.

"SAR has also been augmented with a P-8I aircraft and na-

val helicopters," he stated.

Gal Constructor went adrift due to engine trouble and ran aground about 48 nautical miles north of Colaba Point. "The crew have been airlifted and safely transferred to the nearby Wadra beach," the Coast Guard said.

The Navy spokesperson said SAR efforts were in progress off the coast of Gujarat for three other ONGC vessels – Support Station (SS)-3, Great Ship *Aditi* and drill ship *Sagar Bhushan*, which are 15-20 nautical miles

southeast of Pipavav Port.

The Army has activated six rescue and relief teams for operations in Diu.

Working overnight, the road between Gir and Dhu, which was blocked at many places due to fallen trees, debris and damaged electrical wires, along with poles, was cleared by Army teams. This restored movement of essential supplies, medical support and civil traffic to aid cyclone relief in the Union Territory, the Army said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Vaccination lag in rural India points to a looming crisis

Only about 15% have been immunised outside urban areas

VIGNESH RADHAKRISHNAN
CHENNAI

Even as the second COVID-19

wave shows signs of easing, the spread of cases in rural areas and the relatively lower vaccination numbers there points to a burgeoning crisis. During the first wave (which peaked in September 2020), the COVID-19 cases started piling up in urban areas initially and spread to rural areas (including semi-rural ones) constituting 65% of all cases.

The second wave also followed a similar pattern. The split was 52%-48% in urban/semi-urban vs rural/semi-rural areas in March 2021 and by mid-May, the estimated case load split was 65% in rural/semi-rural areas vs 35% in urban/semi-urban areas.

These percentages are also skewed due to the lack of adequate testing facilities in many parts of rural India.

Adding more cause for concern is the fact that the rise in registered cases has not seen a concomitant increase in vaccination in rural areas. While more than 60% of cases were from the rural and semi-rural districts, only an estimated 12%-15% of inhabitants have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by May 14.

In contrast, an estimated 30% of residents in urban and 19% in semi-urban areas have received at least one shot. In terms of being fully vaccinated (both doses), only an estimated 2.6% of rural residents received them by May 14, even as an estimated 7.7% of urban dwellers had received both doses.

Vaccination helps

Data from some States show that the daily confirmed cases have decreased among the vaccinated higher age groups, while the infections among the non-vaccinated

continue to rise during the second wave. Experts have also said that vaccines effectively prevent severe disease even if a vaccinated individual gets infected.

The lower vaccination numbers in semi-rural and rural areas suggest that the impact of the pandemic will be more severe there, as is being reported anecdotally from ground reports in several parts of north India, in particular.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGE 10

Shailaja, other veterans dropped from Kerala Cabinet

CPI(M) defends policy as aimed at rotating responsibility

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) State committee in Kerala on Tuesday dropped high-profile Ministers K.K. Shailaja, Kadakkappally Surendran and A.C. Moideen from the new Pinarayi Vijayan Cabinet. The CPI(M) has nominated Ms. Shailaja as the party's whip in the next Assembly.

Ms. Shailaja's non-inclusion in the Cabinet has raised several eyebrows. The Health Minister in the outgoing Ministry was seen as the face of Kerala's fight against the Nipah virus and later the COVID-19 pandemic. Her handling of the crisis saw Ms. Shailaja post a historic win of 60,000 votes over her rival from Mattannur in Kannur.

Ms. Shailaja, however, de-



endorsed the previous government's efforts to help them in a crisis, and this was reflected in the 2021 poll.

Ms. Shailaja said the person to hold the Health portfolio would do a better job and build on what the previous LDF government had achieved in the sector. The party was paramount. And she had merely answered its call to duty. The former Minister said she would focus on her constituency and continue to perform the tasks entrusted to her by the CPI(M).

The CPI(M) nominated Mr. Pinarayi Vijayan as the legislature party leader and consequently Chief Minister-designate. The party also tasked him with assigning the portfolios.

She said the people had

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Life in ruins



Picking up the pieces: A Palestinian youth looking for salvageable items amid the rubble of the Kuhail Building, which was destroyed in an early morning Israeli airstrike on Gaza City on Tuesday. ■ AFP (REPORT ON PAGE 11)

Silence shrouds Dadri villages near Delhi as families grapple with loss

Residents say the Uttar Pradesh government failed in providing adequate testing, primary healthcare, emergency facilities and vaccination

JATIN ANAND
DADRI

The fear of infection keeps residents inside their homes. Conversations about the mounting death toll among young people add to the fear in this clutch of villages in the semi-urban belt of Dadri tehsil, a short distance from Delhi, in Gautam Budh Nagar district.

Outsiders are asked to sanitise their hands before a conversation can begin. Villager after villager told this reporter that "two to four" deaths were happening in their villages on a daily basis.

Some villages, they claimed, had recorded upwards of 20 deaths over the past 10 days. Their allegation – no arrangements for testing, primary healthcare, emergency hospitalisation or vaccination have been made by the Uttar Pradesh government



In mourning: Baipura resident Virender Singh showing a picture of his wife Savitri, who succumbed to COVID-19 after a week of treatment. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

ment despite repeated requests.

Anees Khan, a resident of Shaheri village, told this reporter that he had lost two family members and hoped

he wouldn't lose another. "My father and my uncle, both COVID positive, succumbed to the disease in a 10-day period. Now their mother, my daadi, is strug-

gling with the disease," he said.

"There is just one private hospital here, which is taking the entire load of COVID patients from multiple villages

located in the area. Leave alone arrangements for testing or emergency health care, the government did not even carry out a sanitisation drive in our village," Mr. Khan claimed.

At least one or two deaths were taking place every day in Baipura village, according to local social worker Mahavir Nagar, who lost a 50-year-old sister-in-law and a nephew in his 20s to COVID-19.

No testing

"No one from the government has come and there is no testing; if there is, no one has told us about it. Look around you, except us residents, the only other thing that walks these streets is not the administration, but death," he said.

"My wife, Savitri, got fever and had to be taken to a priv-

ate hospital in Greater Noida. I had to make calls and finally arrange for her oxygen on my own but for what? She had been in hospital from May 8 to 15 when she passed away," Mr. Nagar's nephew, Virender Singh, said.

At Sadulapur village, the local doctor ran away due to increasing number of infections and daily deaths, according to resident Bhupender Singh Nagar.

"The situation is so bad that one house has witnessed three cremations in four days. Other houses have seen the deaths of boys aged 17 and 18. The village is as deserted as it is now almost all day long. People are afraid to step out," he said.

"Ten days ago, there was at least one death every day but no testing camps have been set up. Even sanitisation drives are being done through private service providers or, sometimes, by teams of residents who use buckets," said Ratipal Nagar from Milak Lachchi village.

Adityanath) didn't pay us a visit when he came for a tour of the district on Sunday," his father Jagat Singh alleged.

Most villages, residents said, were left with no alternative but to take the health and safety of their fellow citizens into their own hands.

They have ensured strict adherence to wearing masks on the street, restricted the movements of their children, encouraged the use of hand sanitisers both at home and outside, and also pooled resources for crowd-funded sanitisation drives.

"There have been four deaths in our village so far but no testing camps have been set up. Even sanitisation drives are being done through private service providers or, sometimes, by teams of residents who use buckets," said Ratipal Nagar from Milak Lachchi village.

CBSE extends deadline for Class X results

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Tuesday extended the deadline for schools to submit Class X exam results to June 30, citing COVID-19.

On May 1, the CBSE notified a policy for tabulation of Class X results based on internal assessment by schools, with the deadline for submission of marks as June 5 and for internal assessment marks out of 20 on June 11. The CBSE said that it would declare the results by June 20. On Tuesday, however, the Board extended the deadline to submit the marks and internal assessment marks to June 30. It said the other dates in the schedule would be decided by the Result Committee.

A N D N E

HC disposes of plea to waive clinical trials

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday declined to entertain a petition seeking waiver of clinical trials of foreign vaccines and priority in vaccination to those who have already taken the first dose.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said the relief sought in the petition by a lawyer seeking priority in vaccination for those who have already received the first dose of the vaccine cannot be given "just for the asking".

"If everyone is given priority, question would be who will come next in line. The government has its own priorities," the court remarked.

"We see no reasons to entertain the writ petition. Concerned respondent authorities may treat the petition as a representation and decide it in accordance with the law, rules, regulations and government policy applicable to the facts of the case," the HC said.

Vaccination for Tihar inmates aged 18-45 begins

Over 100 prisoners receive first dose

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Vaccination of age group 18 to 45 started at Tihar prison complex on Tuesday, a jail official said, adding that over 100 inmates received their first dose of vaccine.

Director General (Prisons) Sandeep Goel confirmed the development.

Prison officials said that 1,472 persons over the age of 45 have been vaccinated so far in the three prison com-

Lockdown extension adds to the woes of dispirited daily wagers

Most of them are dependent on NGOs or borrow from relatives and neighbours

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

What started as a week-long lockdown in the city, has now stretched to a month. Several daily wagers complained of difficulties in managing households with the extended lockdown period.

With no work and lack of resources, several families are now either dependent on foodgrains being distributed by NGOs or are having to borrow from relatives and neighbours, they said.

Dry ration

Subodh Bind, a street vendor said, "I have been out of work for the last month. Due to the lockdown, our stalls have remained non-functional and there has been no income. Several others in our area, who are rickshaw pullers or labourers have been affected in the same manner."

Mr. Bind added that with the help of NGOs, dry ration has been distributed among



People queue up to collect food being distributed near ISBT in New Delhi on Tuesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

his JJ cluster neighbours.

"There are over 250 families in my area and till now, we have provided dry ration like wheat, salt, oil and rice to around 82 families who are in dire need. During the 2020 lockdown, we were also getting cooked meals. However, this time the focus is only on dry ration. The situation is so bad that everyone is saying that they need ration but we are distributing among the extremely needy first," said Mr. Bind.

For several others, depending on relatives and neighbours for assistance has been the only way out during this crisis.

Rakha Devi, a resident of the Pul Mithai area said, "My husband is a labourer and we were completely dependent on the daily wages that he received. With the lockdown imposition, we have lost out on the wages completely. I have four children. How are we supposed to run the household? We tried to

use some money from the little savings we had but how long can that last? Now I am dependent on my brother who has arranged dry ration for our family. We are under immense pressure right now."

The uncertainty over how long the current situation will persist has also left many wondering about the future course of action.

Kaushalya Devi, who works as a house help said, "This is the second time in a year that my husband, a daily wager, is completely out of work. I am worried that if this lockdown extends further, then some of my employers might not pay me my salary. We are already under extreme financial distress and the uncertainty over when things will return to normal is worse. I have already bought essential items on credit and am worried that I will end up owing a lot of money to the shopowner soon."

Remnants of Tauktae to hit Delhi today

'Orange' alert issued; thunderstorm and squall likely

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Indian Meteorological Department on Tuesday said that the remnants of the very severe cyclonic storm "Tauktae" is likely to interact with an approaching western disturbance and bring heavy to very heavy rainfall over Delhi and adjoining areas on May 19.

"Thunderstorm with lightning and squall [speed reaching 50-60 kmph] very likely at isolated places over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Rajasthan along with

heavy to very heavy rainfall," the bulletin issued by the IMD read.

On Tuesday, it was an overcast day in the Capital with the maximum temperature settling at 30.8 degrees Celsius which was nine degrees below normal for the season and the minimum settling at 26.8 degrees Celsius which was normal for the season.

While weather stations at Palam and Lodhi Road received traces of rainfall, the weather station at Safdarjung which is the official reading of the Capital re-

ceived 0.1 mm of rainfall.

The weather department has issued an "orange" warning for the Capital on May 19 according to its impact-based forecast and has warned of waterlogging and traffic disruptions.

The forecast for May 19 reads, "Generally cloudy sky with moderate rain/thundershower accompanied with squall/gusty winds with heavy rain at isolated places. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be around 30 and 23 degrees Celsius respectively."

Sources said that a "book of accounts" has been recovered which has details of transactions of oxygen con-

3 held for killing foreigner near IGIA; victim was planning to return home

He had come to India for treatment two weeks ago

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Three persons have been arrested for allegedly killing a Kenyan national near Indira Gandhi International Airport, the police said on Tuesday.

DCP (IGI Airport) Rajeev Ranjan said that the accused have been identified as Virender Singh (33), Gopal Singh (34) and Dilbagh alias Billu (35), all residents of Rangpur Village. The victim has been identified as Jamsa Said Farah.

The police said that on Monday, they received a call regarding a body lying near Centaur Hospital. The police found a phone near the body and called the on last dialled number. "The call was received by one Manoj Sahu who was a travel

agent. The travel agent then sent a copy of the deceased's passport which helped in his identification," Mr. Ranjan said.

The police then found out that he had booked a flight through him from Delhi to Somalia. The travel agent then informed Farah's daughter Jena who then called the police and stated that her father had come to India two weeks ago for treatment of a heart disease.

Immigration clearance
"Due to the pandemic, his treatment was deferred. Hence, he was going back to his country via Somalia on Monday. However, he was denied immigration clearance at IGI Airport due to non-availability of Somalia

visa and was off loaded by the airlines," the officer said.

Farah then came out and took a cab, using an aggregating application, for a hotel in Mahipalpur. That was the last she heard from him. The daughter also shared the cab's registration number. With the help of the registration number, the police arrested the owner of the vehicle, Virender.

He allegedly told the police that he and his friends Gopal and Dilbagh were in the taxi when the victim boarded. They had an altercation with Farah over the fare and the accused thrashed him and threw him on the street. They also took his valuables and luggage so his identity could not be ascertained.

Kalra taken to Khan Market as part of probe

'Book of accounts' being examined

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

As part of the probe, businessman Navneet Kalra on Tuesday was taken to Khan Market where oxygen concentrators were found hoarded in his restaurants and at his office in Okhla.

Sources said that his movement was being tracked from the time his employees were first arrested. The police claim to have learnt that when raids at Khan Chacha, Town Hall and Dayal Opticals in Khan Market, Negi & Ju in Lodhi Colony, and at his office in Okhla for the purpose of collection of evidence.

Sources said that a "book of accounts" has been recovered which has details of transactions of oxygen con-

centrators which is being examined. They also said that Mr. Kalra couldn't give a satisfactory response when asked about why action was not taken when people complained of faulty oxygen concentrators.

Justice Subramonium Prasad declined to entertain the plea saying "let the law take its own course". The judge also refused to interfere with the observations made by a Sessions court here while dismissing Mr. Kalra's bail plea, saying the Supreme Court has already laid down the law with regard to observations made by courts.

Kalra's plea for quick decision on bail denied

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday rejected a plea seeking for an expeditious decision on the bail plea of businessman Navneet Kalra arrested in connection with alleged black-marketing of oxygen concentrators.

Justice Subramonium Prasad declined to entertain the plea saying "let the law take its own course". The judge also refused to interfere with the observations made by a Sessions court here while dismissing Mr. Kalra's bail plea, saying the Supreme Court has already laid down the law with regard to observations made by courts.

Court denies anticipatory bail to Olympic medallist

Sushil Kumar wanted in murder case, judge says allegations against him serious

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Tuesday refused to grant anticipatory bail to absconding Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar in the murder case of a wrestler, saying that he is prima facie the main conspirator and allegations against him are serious in nature.

Additional Sessions Judge Jagdish Kumar denied the relief to Sushil Kumar against whom a case of murder, abduction and criminal conspiracy has been registered.

Wrestler Sagar Rana died while two of his friends Sonu and Amit Kumar were injured after they were allegedly assaulted by Sushil Ku-



Sushil Kumar

mar and other wrestlers on May 4 night, at the stadium premises in the Capital.

While dismissing Sushil Kumar's pre-arrest bail, the judge noted that "the allegations against the accused are serious in nature. From the perusal of record of investi-

gation so far, it reveals that prima facie the accused is the main conspirator".

Further, the judge said, "The investigation is still going on and some of the accused persons have not been arrested. The NBW [non-bailable warrant] has already been issued against the accused."

In the plea, the sportsman showed his willingness to join the investigation and provide a "true and correct picture of the incident" to help the investigating agency reach a logical conclusion.

Sushil Kumar further claimed to have no connection with the alleged firing that took place during the brawl, adding that the firearm and vehicle found at the place of the incident do not belong to him.

High Court seeks govt.'s stand on GNCTD Act plea

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday asked the Centre to respond to a plea seeking to strike down the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Amendment Act which increases powers of the Lieutenant-Governor.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh issued notice to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the office of Lieutenant-Governor seeking their stand on the plea by a lawyer.

The petition has argued that the Act would lead to confusion among the residents 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".

It has said that the L-G already had "overriding powers in the matters of land, police and services" and by the latest amendment to the GNCTD Act, he now has authority over all legislations passed by the Delhi Assembly.

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT Annexure "A" INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

The Executive Engineer, HPWD Division Gohar (HP) on behalf of Governor of H.P., invites the item rate bids, in electronic tendering system from the eligible class of contractors registered with HPWD for the works detailed in the table.

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated Cost (in Rs.)	Starting Date for downloading Bid	Earnest Money (in Rs.)	Deadline for submission of Bid
1.	Construction of Additional Accommodation for Govt. S.S.S. Building at Chail Chowk Chacholi Distt. Mandi HP-Sh- C/o Three rooms with stair case in (Ground floor)	20,40,156/-	20.05.2021	40,900	27.5.2021
2.	C/o Science lab Building at GSSS Kanaid in Tehsil Sundernagar Distt.Mandi HP. (SH-C/o Site Development Building Portion W.S. & S.I.)	01,01,25,046/-	20.05.2021	203000	27.5.2021

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website WWW.hptenders.gov.in

Executive Engineer,
Gohar Division, HPWP Gohar-175029

On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh

HP / 0840/21-22

Annexure-A

PRESS NOTICE TO BE ISSUED FOR PUBLICATION IN NEWSPAPERS FOR E-TENDERING

The Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division, Paonta Sahib invites tenders on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh from approved eligible contractors for the following work(s) through e-tendering process:-

JOB No. 1

Name of Work: C/o 12 Nos (9 Nos) T/wells for Village Pipliwal, Paruwal, Patwon, Subkhara, Gondpur, Taruwala, Dharamkot & Jhaba Basti in Tehsil Paonta Sahib, Distt. Sirmour (HP) (Sh- Drilling, Lowering, assembling and development of 4 Nos Tubewells (1 No. for village Shubhkhera 125 Mtr, 01 No. for Village Dharamkot 100 Mtr. and 2 Nos. for Taruwala & Gondpur 60 mtr each).

Estimated Cost: - ₹ 4,185,354/-

Earnest Money: - ₹ 70,300/-

Cost of Tender: - ₹ 800/-

Time of completion: - Six (6) Months.

Last date of filing/ uploading the tender through e-tendering 25/05/2021 up to 11:00 AM.

JOB No. 2

Name of Work: Providing Drinking Water Facility to INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT (IIM), SIRMOUR (HP) (SH- Drilling, Lowering, Assembling and

Development of 02 Nos. T/well 125 mtr. Deep)

Estimated Cost: - ₹ 28,062/-

Earnest Money: - ₹ 60,425/-

Cost of Tender: - ₹ 400/-

Time of completion: - Six (6) Months.

Last date of filing/ uploading the tender through e-tendering 25/05/2021 up to 11:00 AM.

The tender forms and other detailed conditions can be downloaded from the website or from office of above Executive Engineer up to date specified above.

Timings	
DELHI	
WEDNESDAY, MAY 19	
RISE 05:29 SET 19:08	
RISE 11:34 SET 00:41	
THURSDAY, MAY 20	
RISE 05:29 SET 19:08	
RISE 12:35 SET 01:21	
FRIDAY, MAY 21	
RISE 05:28 SET 19:09	
RISE 13:37 SET 01:58	

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 31 27
Safdarjung 31 27
Palam 31 27

Delhi Pilm Today
30°C Few spell of moderate rain and thundershower with moderate winds likely at some places with mainly overcast sky.

Delhi Pilm Tomorrow
32°C A pleasant morning and comfortable day. Rain and thunderstorm with cloudy sky may occur over the areas during morning.

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IN BRIEF

3 held for giving fake RT-PCR test reports

NEW DELHI

Three employees of a lab in west Delhi have been arrested for allegedly providing fake RT-PCR test reports in the Capital. DCP (Shahdara) R. Sathiyasundaram said the accused are all employees of Dr. Lal Chandani Lab in Punjabi Bagh.

Virus hit every family but Central govt. officials living in ivory towers, says HC

It was hearing a plea about Sputnik V

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday remarked that COVID-19 has not spared even a single family while the Central government's officers are living in "ivory towers" oblivious of ground realities.

"It is like a raging fire and nobody is bothered...No one is applying their mind. The virus has not spared any single family. Your (the Centre) officers are living in ivory towers," a Bench of Justice Manmohan and Justice Navin Chawla remarked.

The court was of the view that the manufacture of Sputnik V vaccine in India with the collaboration of Panacea Biotech with Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) should be seen as an opportunity to ensure there is no vaccine shortage.

"Every day you [Centre] are castigated by each and every court and still you are not awake...God bless this country," the court said.

It posted the case for further hearing on May 31.

Next hearing

During the hearing, Additional Solicitor General Balbir Singh, representing the Centre, argued that Sputnik V's manufacture by the company will not benefit the India as it will be global supply by RDIF.

It posted the case for further hearing on May 31.

the positivity rate peak on April 22, when it was 36.2%.

Singapore refutes reports

Reacting to reports about a new strain, the Singapore Health Ministry stated: "There is no truth whatsoever in the assertions... There is no 'Singapore variant'. The strain prevalent in many cases in Singapore in recent weeks is the B.1.617.2 variant, which originated in India."

Stating that it was important the government shares

in Singapore is said to be very dangerous for children. It could reach Delhi in the form of a third wave. My appeal to the Central government: 1. Cancel all air services with Singapore with immediate effect 2. Work on vaccine alternatives for children on a priority basis," Mr. Kejriwal tweeted.

Delhi has over the past month been reeling under the second wave of COVID-19 infections that saw

the positivity rate peak on April 22, when it was 36.2%.

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Stating that it was important the government shares

C Balak Ram Hospital was declared a COVID-19 hospital... But without any order the hospital was told to stop taking patients

DURGESH PATHAK
AAP leader

that could rescue the people. They have around 3,400-3,500 beds in Delhi. We held numerous press conferences, only after that were 300-

400 beds reserved for COVID-19 patients. Even in that, they didn't allow admission in half of the beds," the AAP leader said.

A cruel joke

"Balak Ram Hospital, which they declared would be a COVID-19 hospital and 150-200 beds were reserved for such patients. But without any order, without any information, the hospital was told verbally to stop CO-

₹50,000 ex gratia to families that lost member to COVID-19, says CM

Kejriwal promises education, financial aid to children who lost parents to the virus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said the government will provide ₹50,000 ex gratia to every family that has lost a member due to COVID-19 and an additional ₹2,500/month if the deceased was the sole breadwinner.

The government has also promised free education and financial assistance to children who have lost both their parents.

Ration to non-cardholders

It said it would also provide free ration to poor people in the Capital who do not have a ration card.

"Due to COVID-19 and the lockdown, many homes are facing financial difficulties. People have lost their loved ones and sometimes, the sole earning member. I know many children who have lost both their parents. We have been thinking about a plan on how to help people overcome this difficulty and have come up with four steps to

provide relief during this tough time," Mr. Kejriwal said in a digital address. He added that the measures will be passed by the Delhi Cabinet in the next few days.

Mr. Kejriwal said the 72-lakh people in the Capital, who have a ration card, will get 5 kg ration every month from the State government as well as an additional 5 kg ration under the scheme by the Prime Minister.

"The Central government has fixed a quota for ration

Relief effort

Decisions taken by the Delhi government for COVID-19 relief

- Ex gratia of ₹50,000 to be given to families that lost a member due to COVID
- Families that lost sole breadwinner to get an additional ₹2,500 per month
- Each child who lost parent/parents to COVID to get ₹2,500 per month till the age of 25. They will also be provided with free education
- Govt. to give ration to those who don't have a card



People receive free ration in Vishwas Nagar. ■ FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

card, the Delhi government will provide ration to them as well if they demand. They do not need to submit any income certificate," Mr. Kejriwal said.

Providing details about the pension scheme for children, the Chief Minister said: "All those children who have lost both their parents or a parent to COVID, will be given ₹2,500 per month till the age of 25. They will also be provided with free education."

Offering his condolences to all those who have lost loved ones due to COVID-19, Mr. Kejriwal said it was his duty to take care of the two-crore people of Delhi that were his family during these troubled times.

On where the government was getting the money to finance the four COVID-19 relief measures, Mr. Kejriwal said the people of Delhi had elected a government that was working efficiently and had saved money by avoiding unnecessary expenditure.

City reports over 4K cases, test positivity dips to 6.8%

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 4,482 fresh COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, taking the tally to 14,02,873, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Tuesday. Also, 265 deaths were reported in 24 hours, taking the toll to 22,111.

A total of 65,004 tests were done in a day, the bulletin said. The test positivity rate (TPR) was 6.89%, which means that around seven people out of 100 taking COVID-19 tests are positive for the virus.

The last time the TPR was less than this was on April 7, when it was 6.1%.

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. TPR should be ideally below 5%.

Also, out of total of 24,305 beds, 40.75% were free as on Tuesday evening. Of the total cases, 13,29,899 people have recovered and there are 50,863 active cases.

Oximeter for patients

The government on Tuesday directed officials to make sure that every COVID-19 patient, who is under home isolation, has a pulse oximeter.

People are currently not being inoculated with the second dose of Covishield as the Centre has increased the gap between the first and the second dose, said AAP leader Atishi.

Delhi doesn't have stock of Covaxin to inoculate people in the age group of 18-44 and Covishield stock for the age group will last only for three days, as per an official bulletin.

Food rights group welcomes free ration move

Activist says govt. must act with urgency as city enters fifth week of lockdown

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

While terming Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's announcement of free ration to non-cardholders as a "welcome move", Anjali Bharadwaj of the Delhi Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan said the government must act with urgency as the city already in the fifth week of lockdown.

Referring to the e-coupon

details of the scheme soon, Ms. Bharadwaj said: "It is a welcome move, but the government must act with urgency. We are virtually in the fifth week of lockdown. Even today when the announcement was made, the details of the scheme were not shared. We have been getting so many SOS calls and it is practically impossible to help so many people."

Referring to the e-coupon

system, which was implemented last year during lockdown for non-ration cardholders, Ms. Bharadwaj said:

"By the government's own admission there were 60 lakh people who were catered through the e-coupon system. But initially, it was said that one had to register online, which became difficult as the poor do not have access to smartphones. It was after we approached the

Delhi High Court that it was ordered that help desks had to be set up."

"So, it is very important that while working out the scheme this time, the government ensures that it is easy to access for the needy. A recent Supreme Court order also states that distribution of ration should be done on the basis of self-certification and identification proof is not asked for..." she said.

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2nd Extension Notice

Tender extension notice for NIT No. 303/PR/JBVLN/20-21 the date extension for above NIT is available on the site www.jharkhandtender.gov.in

Revised Date and Time for Bid Submission and Technical Bid Opening is as follows :

Sl. No.	Items	Date & Time
1	Name of Work	Supply, Installation, Operations and FMS of AMI System for consumers having load above 10 KW in JBVLN. Estimated cost Rs. 20Crors(Rs Twenty Crores)
2	Last Date and Time for receipt of Bids	01.06.2021 at 04:00 PM
3	Date and Time for Opening of Technical Bids	01.06.2021 at 06:00 PM

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Deputy CM questions PM's live telecast

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Tuesday questioned the live telecast of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interaction with officials on the COVID-19 situation.

"The statement of the Prime Minister in today's meeting was telecasted live. In a previous meeting, there was an objection that CM Arvind Kejriwal's live telecast had broken the protocol. Today's protocol allowed for live broadcast? How would it be known which meeting can be live telecast and which cannot be," Mr. Sisodia said in a tweet in Hindi. Interacting with DMs at a meeting on Tuesday, Mr. Modi said they were free to innovate to suit their local requirements and asked them to share their feedback about any change in policy.

THE HINDU

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IN BRIEF



Telangana selects 16 PHCs for drone testing

HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has selected 16 primary healthcare centres (PHCs) spread around Vikarabad area hospital for pilot testing the ambitious 'Medicine from the sky', the first-of-its-kind project involving delivery of medicines through multiple drones.

Scheme offers aid during fishing ban, says A.P. CM

GUNTUR

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has said that the 'YSR Matsyakara Bharosa' scheme will aid fisher families during the annual fishing ban. The State credited ₹119.88 crore into the bank accounts of 1.19 lakh fishermen on Tuesday.

Andhra MP undergoes medical examination

He is now in the Military Hospital

RAVI REDDY

HYDERABAD

Rebel YSRCP MP from Narasapuram K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, who was arrested by the AP CID and later shifted to the Military Hospital, Secunderabad, underwent medical examination under the supervision of a three-member medical team of Army doctors and a judicial officer appointed by the High Court of Telangana on Tuesday.

A defence press release said: "In pursuance of Supreme Court's order, Kanumuri Raghu Ramakrishna Raju was brought to Military Hospital Secunderabad on night of 17 May 2021 and was admitted after procedural

Plea against Kerala swearing-in event



It accuses State govt. of 'flouting' COVID-19 norms

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

An activist has filed a petition in the Supreme Court accusing the Kerala government of "flouting" COVID-19 norms by organising the swearing-in ceremony of the newly-elected LDF government under Pinarayi Vijayan on May 20 before a gathering of over 500 invitees in Thiruvananthapuram, which is already under "triple lockdown".

"The government of Kerala, which on one end is enforcing lockdowns and forcing common public to confine themselves to the four walls of their homes, give up their livelihood and other pleasures, is on the other hand spending huge amounts from the State Exchequer for organising a sup-

er-spreader public event to show its strength and celebrate its victory in the recently held election," the petition filed by activist K.M. Shajahan, represented by advocate Usha Nandini V., said.

'Clear abuse of power'

The swearing-in ceremony would be a case of the fence

itself eating the crops. The "reckless act" was a "clear abuse of power", the petition said.

Politicians in power themselves scorned lockdown norms while appealing to the public to observe COVID-19 protocols. It was a case of creating two classes of citizens, it stated.

Sweet tidings: Pinarayi Vijayan cutting a cake to celebrate the LDF's win in the recent Assembly poll. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

High Court moved against physical swearing-in

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

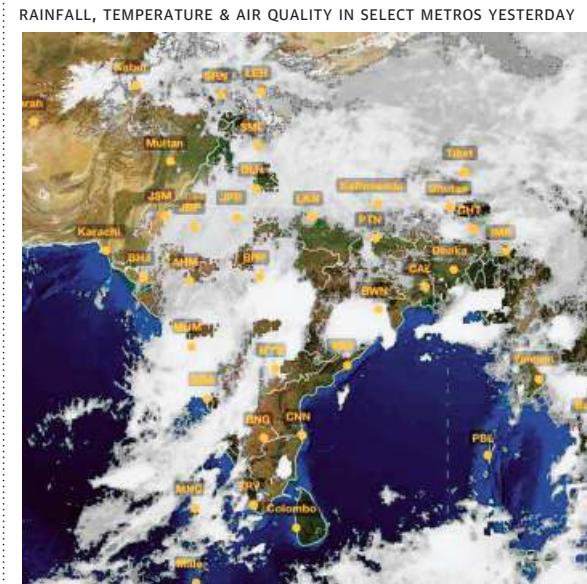
KOCHI

A public interest petition was filed before the Kerala High Court on Tuesday against the physical swearing-in ceremony of the Left Democratic government led by Pinarayi Vijayan with the participation of 500 people at the Central Stadium in

Thiruvananthapuram, in violation of the COVID-19 protocol.

In its petition, Chikitsaneethi, an organisation based in Thrissur, claiming to work for protecting the health rights of citizens, sought to prohibit the physical swearing-in ceremony on May 20.

WEATHER WATCH



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

Forecast for Wednesday: Heavy/heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Assam, Manipur, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Thunderstorms with lightning/gusty wind likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Bihar, Vidarbha, coastal Andhra Pradesh, coastal Karnataka, Kerala, Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Islands

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	36.7	28.4	Kozhikode	—	32.0	23.6
Ahmedabad	14...	25.8	25.0	Kurnool	—	37.9	27.0
Aizawl	—	28.9	20.6	Lucknow	0.1...	30.6	25.6
Altahab...	—	30.7	24.3	Madurai	0.6...	40.3	26.0
Bengaluru	—	33.1	21.6	Mangaluru	7.8...	29.4	24.1
Bhopal	1.5...	35.9	23.0	Mumbai	230.3...	31.6	23.0
Bhubaneswar	—	39.4	28.0	Mysuru	—	34.0	18.3
Chandigarh	—	32.7	27.7	New Delhi	0.1...	30.8	26.8
Chennai	—	35.7	29.6	Patna	0.4...	35.2	26.8
Coimbatore	—	34.5	24.1	Port Blair	2...	32.7	27.1
Dehradun	—	31.2	23.3	Puducherry	—	35.0	27.2
Gangtok	53...	19.8	16.6	Pune	1.2...	33.2	24.1
Goa	8...	30.2	25.6	Raipur	—	39.6	29.4
Guwahati	—	30.2	22.9	Ranchi	—	37.6	24.4
Hubballi	—	29.0...	23.0	Shillong	6.5...	34.5	17.6
Hyderabad	5...	35.6	22.8	Shimla	—	27.8	19.9
Imphal	3.5...	36.5	20.4	Srinagar	—	25.8	11.9
Jaipur	3...	24.2	21.0	Thiruvananthapuram	9...	32.8	24.8
Kochi	9...	32.4	24.6	Tiruchi	29...	39.2	24.8
Kohima	—	25.0	15.0	Vijayawada	—	38.0	28.4
Kolkata	—	39.3	28.7	Visakhapatnam	—	37.0	28.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	12	39	28	33	51	■■■
Bengaluru	.8	60	81	21	43	■■■
Chennai	15	3...	8	211	—	■■■
Delhi	.7	9	24	76	122	■■■
Hyderabad	—	64	11	22	35	■■■
Kolkata	10	19	18	47	47	■■■
Lucknow	.9	36	77	146	129	■■■
Mumbai	.1	1	41	90	64	■■■
Pune	.6	17	54	46	66	■■■
Visakhapatnam	16	34	26	14	31	■■■

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Yamunagar, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 200 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Haldia, West Bengal recorded a healthy AQI score of 21

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

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

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

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

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

Cyclone impact: Mumbai records highest ever 24-hour rain in May

Sea-facing safety wall, iron gates, footpath near Gateway of India suffer damage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Mumbai received 230 mm rainfall due to the cyclonic storm Tauktae, with a weather expert claiming it to be the highest 24-hour downpour in May in the recorded history.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Mumbai centre, the Santacruz observatory recorded 230.3 mm rainfall in the 24-hour period ending at 8.30 a.m. on Tuesday. Besides, the Colaba observatory recorded 207.6 mm rain during the same period.

As per the IMD's calculations, rainfall above 204.5 mm is considered extremely heavy. "Mumbai (Santacruz): 230 mm in last 24 hrs due to cyclone effect, this is the highest 24hrs rain in Mumbai in May in the recorded history. #CycloneTauktae," Vineet Kumar, a researcher on cyclones in

the north Indian Ocean at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune, tweeted on Tuesday.

The IMD's head SID, climate research and services at Pune, K.S. Hosalkar, retweeted Mr. Kumar's post.

Gusty winds and heavy showers lashed Mumbai and its neighbouring areas on Monday when the very sev-



Garbage abounds: A safety wall from British era collapsed due to Cyclone Tauktae at the Gateway of India on Tuesday. • PTI

The main structure of the historic monument did not suffer any damage, but a portion of the footpath near it caved in, they said.

Huge tidal waves in the Arabian Sea threw heaps of garbage at the monument.

A Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation official said they picked up four trucks of garbage from the premises of the monument.

"A number of basalt stones near the Gateway of India has got dislodged in the impact of the cyclone and a small portion of the footpath there caved in," the official said. The area has been barricaded and the stones collected for repairs, he said.

Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar visited the monument on Tuesday and reviewed the damage caused on the premises and the cleanliness work undertaken there by the civic body.

The cyclonic storm damaged a sea-facing safety wall and iron gates near the iconic Gateway of India and some jetty stones in the vicinity also got dislodged in its impact, civic officials said on Tuesday.

The complainant, Dhaval Kanji Sota, owns a shop in the grain market of APMC. On May 5, the accused, identified as Amrish Badiyani, came to his shop and introduced himself as a member of the International Association for Human Value, an organisation run by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. Mr.

BMC extends deadline for global tenders for vaccines

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has extended the deadline for its global tenders for COVID-19 vaccines till May 25, after the civic body failed to get any response. The original deadline was May 18.

The BMC had on May 12 issued global tenders to procure 10 million COVID-19 vaccine doses from international market in a bid to speed up the inoculation drive in the city. Presently,

Man cheated trader of ₹8.62 lakh worth foodgrains, held

RAINA ASSAINAR

NAVI MUMBAI

The APMC police have arrested a 45-year-old man who cheated a trader of foodgrain kits poor people in Mumbai and he needed 2,000 such kits.

From May 7 to May 9, the trader provided 1,500 kits and the accused kept delaying the payment saying that the organisation would be paying the whole money at one go.

"We traced the accused to Vashi on Monday and arrested him," an officer from APMC police station said.

Badiyani further claimed that during the lockdown, his organisation had taken up the task of distributing free foodgrain kits poor people in Mumbai and he needed 2,000 such kits.

From May 7 to May 9, the trader provided 1,500 kits and the accused kept delaying the payment saying that the organisation would be paying the whole money at one go.

"We traced the accused to Vashi on Monday and arrested him," an officer from APMC police station said.

THE HINDU

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GENERAL



Stormy start

Accurate forecasts and resilience-building hold the key to handling severe cyclones

Millions of people wearied by the onslaught of the coronavirus have had to contend with a furious tropical cyclone that has left a trail of death and destruction before making landfall in Gujarat. Cyclone Tauktae swelled into an extremely severe cyclonic storm, dumping enormous volumes of water all along the west coast, and caused loss of life in Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat, before weakening overland. To thousands who had to be evacuated to safe locations, this year's pre-monsoon season presented a double jeopardy, caught as they were between a fast-spreading virus variant and an unrelenting storm. Many coastal residents would have felt a sense of *déjà vu*, having gone through a similar experience last year, when the severe cyclonic storm, Nisarga, barrelled landwards from the Arabian Sea, pounding Alibaug in Maharashtra as it came ashore. The cyclones in both years spared densely populated Mumbai. The twin crises have, however, strained the capacities of multiple States, especially the coastal ones, although the impact of the storm was considerably mitigated by disaster response forces. Once again, the value of creating a trained cadre, supported by the defence forces in rescue and relief work, is seen. The heralding of the 2021 monsoon season by a cyclone comes as another reminder that the subcontinent is at the confluence of more frequent, extreme weather events originating in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea every year.

How well India is prepared to handle cyclones depends on developing greater expertise in forecasting and disaster mitigation, and crafting policies to increase resilience among communities. Last year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) launched an impact-based cyclone warning system from the October-December season designed to reduce economic losses by focusing on districts and specific locations, and incorporating such factors as population, infrastructure, land use and settlements. The IMD also claimed that its accuracy of forecasts, for instance, in plotting landfall location, is now better. Together with ground mapping of vulnerabilities, this is a promising approach to avoid loss of life and destruction of property. The importance of precise early warnings cannot be overemphasised, considering that the Arabian Sea has emerged as a major source of severe cyclones, and their intensity is aggravated by long-term rise in sea surface temperatures linked to pollution over South Asia and its neighbourhood. Climate-proofing lives and dwellings is a high priority now, a task that warrants a multi-sectoral approach: to build sturdy homes of suitable design, create adequate storm shelters, provide accurate early warnings, and ensure financial protection against calamities through insurance for property and assets. Governments must rise up to the challenge.

Delete and control

The ICMR must assess evidence and be very specific with recommendations on treatment

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has finally dropped its espousal of convalescent plasma therapy (CPT) as treatment for moderate COVID-19 in its latest guidelines. In its guidelines of April 22, CPT was already on its last legs, with the advisory recommending that it is advisable only in early moderate disease, or within seven days of symptoms. These updates flow from periodic reviews of medicines and treatment protocol by a task force of doctors and experts of the ICMR. Practising doctors are not legally bound to follow these recommendations to the T but are expected to circumscribe their treatments within the guidelines. Last year, the ICMR, in one of the definitive clinical trials in the world, demonstrated that CPT neither saved lives nor improved patient outcomes but was equivocal about it in public. This gave leeway to some States, particularly the Delhi government, which openly disavowed the ICMR's findings, encouraging several doctors to put the onus on hapless caregivers to source such plasma from those who had recovered from the illness. The clamour for plasma had birthed its own kind of ecosystem. There were apps designed to connect donors to recipients, an inevitable black market, and, if the plasma did not seem to be working, the tendency was to blame the quality of plasma rather than recognise the futility of the treatment.

Last week, it took a letter by a clutch of concerned public health professionals to India's Principal Scientific Adviser as well as results from a trial, published in *The Lancet*, spanning around 11,000 patients – that again found no benefit – to demote CPT. Further evidence is emerging that CPT may be contributing to the evolution of coronavirus mutations that, together, may have been the final nail in the coffin. However, this is not the end of the road for treatments with limited scientific basis finding a mention in the ICMR guidelines. Hydroxychloroquine and the anti-parasitic drug, ivermectin, continue to find a place for the treatment of mild disease despite a specific mention of "low certainty of evidence". There is an argument that doctors, battling a disease that has so far defied a predictable treatment regime, cannot always observe the necessary clinical equipoise. Unlike doctors on the frontline, a collective of experts like the ICMR taskforce, has the comfort and the distance to dispassionately assess evidence and be very specific with its recommendations. Publicising these at regular intervals serves to educate the public about the evolving nature of treatment and be better prepared as future patients and caregivers. This will work better towards easing the pressure on doctors as well as in improving trust in systems that are designed to offer the best possible expertise.

Tracking the pandemic's rural march

States, especially in the north, are facing the brunt of the second wave, made worse by their poor health infrastructure



HIMANSHU

When the first wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic hit the country, the central government imposed the strictest lockdown for almost two months. For most of the migrants stuck in urban areas without incomes, jobs and food to survive, the only escape was to walk back to the rural areas where they came from. Migrants walked back thousands of kilometres to return to rural areas not because the villages were best equipped to deal with the pandemic but primarily because it provided them protection from hunger and starvation. During the second wave now, it is the rural areas which are bearing the brunt of the pandemic with most cases being reported from rural areas. And, unlike last time, there is nowhere to go.

Estimates versus the reality
The second wave was expected at least based on past experience of other countries and of earlier pandemics but also because most scientists predicted it given the changing nature of the virus and the pandemic. However, unlike the last time when it was largely in urban areas, this time it has spread to villages. Also, in contrast to the previous episode, it has spread this time to the rural areas in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha – States which remained largely unaffected by the spread of the pandemic during the first wave. Most of these States are those with a low availability of health professionals and a lower level of health infrastructure. The result has been a much higher level of infections and deaths. Stories of bodies float-

ing in rivers or left buried on the banks are being reported from both Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. While these are stark visuals of the nature of impact that the pandemic has caused on infections and deaths resulting from the infections, these are all estimates; gross underestimates of the actual reality in the rural areas in many of these States.

Neglect of primary care
The scale of the misery inflicted by the pandemic was expected in most of these States, where the existing health infrastructure has been found lacking. But what made it worse was also complete apathy and a lack of governance in improving the health infrastructure despite knowledge of the second wave of the epidemic.

As in the latest report of the Rural Health Statistics 2019-20 (<https://bit.ly/3hAKHNC>) released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), not only are these States which figure among the States with the worst health infrastructure but are also ones where the situation has worsened over the years. Compared to 10,337 functioning subcentres in rural Bihar in 2005, only 9,112 subcentres were functioning in 2020. The number of community health centres declined during the same period from 101 in 2005 to only 57 in 2020. Despite population growth, during the same period, the number of primary health care centres increased marginally to 1,702 in 2020 compared to 1,648 in 2005.

The situation in Uttar Pradesh, another large State, is no different with the number of primary health centres declining from 3,660 in 2005 to 2,880 in 2020. While the number of community health centres increased from 386 to 711 during the same period, subcentres increased only marginally, from 20,521 in 2005 to 20,778 in 2020. The situation with regard to the availability of health profes-



GETTY IMAGES

sions is not very different, with most States witnessing a worsening situation. For example, only 29% of specialists were in place in the community health centres in Uttar Pradesh as against the requirement based on official norms.

Compared to the norm, Bihar reported the highest shortfall in availability of subcentres, at 58%, followed by Jharkhand, at 44%, and Uttar Pradesh, at 41%, as on July 1, 2020. Similar numbers in the case of primary health care centres were 73% for Jharkhand, 58% for West Bengal, 53% for Bihar and 51% for Uttar Pradesh.

Avoidable events

Given the state of the rural health infrastructure, it was obvious that the pandemic would lead to catastrophic outcomes once the rural population was exposed to the virus. The lack of governance in this case is not the state of health infrastructure that the State governments inherited but the failure to contain the spread of the pandemic despite the knowledge of the state of rural health infrastructure. This failure to estimate the scale of the havoc created by the pandemic was obvious in the case of the central government – steps were not taken to contain the spread along with augmenting the rural health infrastructure and there were decisions such as prolonged electioneering in some of the States. West Bengal, which has seen the fastest rise in cases, was witness to the longest period of electioneering this time, with no precautions such as social distancing.

ing in place. Similar adventurism in the case of Uttar Pradesh saw hundreds of polling officials getting infected and passing away due to the pandemic during the conduct of local body elections in the State. The Maha Kumbh organised in the middle of the pandemic, with millions of devotees participating, further added to the spread of the infection with devotees returning to rural areas in different States. All of these were eminently avoidable, with the resources used to augment and strengthen the rural health infrastructure.

Judiciary and the state

While all these created the perfect breeding ground for the pandemic to spread to rural areas, the severity of the infections was also a result of the misgovernance of State governments. This bordered on ignorance of the level of severity to outright denial and complete apathy of the health and humanitarian crisis unfolding in the respective States. In most cases, the judiciary at the level of High Courts has stepped in to fill the vacuum created by an absent state. The judicial intervention of the Allahabad High Court last month directing the State government to impose lockdowns in Uttar Pradesh was in turn challenged by the State government in the Supreme Court. Attempts to voice concern over the state of health infrastructure and the spread of the pandemic by helpless citizens was countered with threats of legal action by the Uttar Pradesh government until the Supreme Court stepped in.

Instead of expanding testing and contact tracing, attempts were made to restrict testing and report a lower number of infections, leading to a sense of complacency within the State administration. The reality in rural areas of most of these States is worse than what is being released to the public through official estimates.

This is true for the number of deaths which by all measures appears to be much higher than official statistics. The absence of testing and treatment infrastructure has left the rural population at the mercy of private health providers; a large majority of the population has been left unable to avail the services of private health-care providers. The slow pace of vaccinations in rural areas despite the vulnerabilities has only contributed to the rise in infections and thousands of deaths which could have been easily prevented.

Aggravating rural distress

Rural areas provided refuge to the majority of the migrant population which had lost jobs and incomes during the first phase. It also helped the economy revive given that rural areas were largely unaffected. However, this time round it is the rural areas which are facing the worst of the pandemic as well as economic distress. Rural wage data as well as data on rural non-farm income available from official and private surveys point to a dismal economic scenario. While many have lost their primary income earner, even for those who managed to recover, it has come at the cost of huge private health expenditure. Many are likely to fall into a debt trap with the usurious rate of interest from the private money lenders pushing them into chronic poverty. For the rest, the loss of jobs and income has come at the cost of depleted savings. Rural areas are not just staring at the worst of the pandemic but also at prolonged economic distress.

While the pandemic with its uncertain nature is certainly responsible for it, the blame must equally lie with the government, both at the State as well as central levels, for its failure to anticipate and prevent the thousands of deaths.

Himanshu teaches Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University

The czar of brinkmanship must seek peace

Russia and the other players in the Ukrainian crisis need to be prudent enough to resolve chronic tensions



TATIANA BELOUSOVA

The recent stand-off between Russia and Ukraine has again captured headlines in the international news media. This geopolitical situation appears to be complex due to the indirect involvement of its multiple stakeholders, including the United States, Turkey and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Increased tensions between Ukraine and Russia can be viewed as a continuation of the unresolved conflict of 2014. Since then, the 'illegal annexation of Crimea' has become a buzzword in international politics, and Russia has been constantly painted as an aggressor and a hostile power. In addition to this, the country has been criticised for its involvement in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting with Ukrainian troops.

From the beginning of April 2021, Moscow has allegedly deployed thousands of troops as well as tanks and artillery near Ukraine's eastern border. It has also mobilised troops in the annexed Black Sea region of Crimea. This was enough to send a shock wave among the political elite in Ukraine, forcing them to appeal to the US and NATO and ask for an intervention, if needed.

How dangerous can this be-

come in the short term, and to which extent is the fear-mongering of the Ukrainian administration justified by the real situation on the ground?

NATO, U.S. response

On April 13, 2021, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg invited Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba to the NATO headquarters for a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission on the security situation in Ukraine. Mr. Stoltenberg said, 'Russia's considerable military build-up is unjustified, unexplained, and deeply concerning.' He underlined that NATO would continue to provide significant political and practical support to Ukraine. In turn, Mr. Kuleba made a strong statement that 'the mistakes of 2014 must be avoided this time, so that Russia cannot catch anyone by surprise'.

Besides powerful rhetoric from NATO, Ukraine seems to be desperate to receive more commitments and concrete actions. Dealing with Russia, a powerful and unpredictable neighbour, forces Kiev to rely on NATO/U.S. military support if Russia is to continue with its provocations. The question though is how far the NATO alliance can go in its support, given that Ukraine has not yet obtained membership. In June 2020, NATO recognised Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner, along with Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, and Sweden. This partnership aims to maintain and deepen cooperation between countries that have made significant contributions to the NATO-led missions and operations.

The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has also used the current tension as an opportunity to push for NATO membership, arguing that 'this is the only way to end the war in Donbas'.

Notably, the U.S., under the new administration, has taken a more resolute stance towards this conflict, unlike the predecessors of the U.S. President, Joe Biden.

Mr. Biden seems to be less apprehensive about provoking Russia and is ready to support Ukraine militarily, if the need arises. The recent visit of the U.S. Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken, to Kiev indicates the U.S.'s foreign policy priorities. The underlying rhetoric of this visit was to support the 'independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine'.



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It is worth recalling that Turkey has not acted in synchrony with Russia during several conflicts, e.g., in Syria, Libya, and, most recently, in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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Planning for future waves of the pandemic

India needs to enhance the surveillance system, vaccinate quickly, and reprioritise healthcare services



GIRIDHARA R. BABU

The failure to plan and prepare for multiple waves of COVID-19 in India has resulted in the despair and helplessness we are seeing today. Since more waves are expected, what lessons can we learn from the present in order to plan for the long term? This article speaks of the challenges and the road ahead.

Surveillance strategy

First, while it is easy to blame modellers for failing to predict waves, the reason why they are not able to do so is that clear data are unavailable. There is unreliable testing and under-reporting of cases and deaths even now. This does not instil confidence in any of the modellers to come up with realistic estimates. Under-reporting and manipulated data inputs can only provide faulty projections. The Central and State government should use real-time data by encouraging reliable reporting and initiating standardised definitions. This is the time to have a standardised definition of how many cases are expected per million population. Instead of admiring the efforts of administrations in the areas that have fewer cases, efforts should be made to detect the minimum number of cases, to instil confidence in people that the surveillance system works in the state. This can only be done through the syndromic approach of identifying suspect cases and through a reliable testing strategy which does not change when there is a surge in cases.

The COVID-19 trajectory in other countries shows that there will be multiple waves in India. In Japan, the health system is crumbling during the fourth wave. Identifying impending waves is very important in mitigating a catastrophe. India missed building containment and mitigation measures while Maharashtra was seeing a surge in cases during the second wave. This lesson should be incorporated into plans for future waves. A strong surveillance system reporting the minimum number of cases will thus provide reliable early markers of an impending wave. Re-



A health worker administers a COVID-19 vaccine to a woman in Noida on May 18. ■ PTI

view mechanisms should be strengthened to detect the outbreak in the initial stages and extinguish it before the pandemic spreads to other areas. Concurrent genomic sequencing in real-time in the fixed proportion of samples will give us an idea of the likelihood of the variants causing several outbreaks. If the outbreaks in Kerala, Punjab, and Maharashtra were noticed from the results of genomic sequencing, India could have advocated for local lockdowns in high-burden areas and imposed severe restrictions to stop the wide spread of the second wave. We can prevent the adversities of future waves by relying and acting on the inputs of a strong surveillance system.

Vaccinating the population

Next, through vaccination, we can turn the story around. India can emerge as the world's biggest exporter of vaccines in addition to helping citizens in the country. The Central government should proactively reach out to all the vaccine manufacturing firms in the west and invite them to collaborate with Indian firms under the 'Make in India' programme. India needs to fast-track the manufacturing of all vaccines which have been approved for use by various regulatory authorities through

a single-window clearance. India can become a soft superpower if it facilitates faster manufacturing by helping the Indian industry. This is not an unrealistic ambition as the country has already proved how it can scale up testing facilities within a short period of time. At this stage, there needs to be greater impetus in stepping up manufacturing and coverage of vaccines. Not many countries in the world have the wherewithal to manufacture their own vaccines if India cannot cater to the vaccination needs of its own citizens and that of the world.

With newer variants of concern emerging, it is important to update the vaccines depending on how the virus changes. This provides a clear case and a good business opportunity for setting up manufacturing facilities in both the public and private sectors. Vaccines might be the shot in the arm for our economy. Greater financial allocations, stepping up systems to expand vaccination, applied research, enhancing effective communication, and monitoring effectiveness will solidify India's role in the future for preventing and managing pandemics.

Since 2009, the World Health Organization has declared six public health emergencies of international

concern, including COVID-19. In the near future, India has to have a system that can respond to newer pandemics in the making. We cannot build reactive systems for each wave and each pandemic. Nearly 60% of known infectious diseases and up to 75% of new or emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic in origin. Respecting the boundaries of animals and preserving the ecosystem in its natural form is important in order to prevent future pandemics. Therefore, the country needs to adopt the 'One Health' agenda in its entirety and ensure that environmental health and animal health are given similar priority as human health.

Robust public health workforce

The rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 shows us the importance of timely and efficient public health responses. We can only fight better when we have a battle-ready public health workforce. Unfortunately, our health systems are collapsing. Doctors and nurses have to bear the burden mainly because of a depleted or absent public health workforce. It is an essential to hire front-line workers in public health who can engage in surveillance and contract-tracing, and mobilise people for primary health-care services, including vaccination. The front-line public health workforce is particularly absent in urban areas, while critical care capacity (oxygenated beds, ICUs) is limited in rural areas. Irrespective of the urban-rural divide, the country needs to reconfigure the health systems to ensure that one Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) worker is hired for every 1,000 people, an Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and nurse practitioner are hired for every 5,000 people and a hospital with at least 100 beds, including beds with emergency and critical care services, caters to a population of 30,000-50,000.

It is time to have plans for pandemics. We need to improve the health system and public health and regularly review plans to ensure that we prevent future disasters. For now, it is important to have enhanced surveillance to detect and contain future waves, expand vaccination, and work towards building a robust pandemic preparedness plan.

Giridhara R. Babu Professor and Head, Life Course Epidemiology at the Indian Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru

Repoliticise urban planning

The Tamil Nadu government should reclaim the lost political vision in city planning



A. SRIVATHSAN

In the last few decades, Tamil Nadu, the most urbanised among the major States, has lost its political vision in city planning. Housing policies and urban planning have been presented as a techno-bureaucratic exercise, preventing the political leadership from taking ownership and responsibility. In the process, the citizens find their needs unrepresented. With large urban projects on the anvil and the third master plan for Chennai on the drawing board, it is time for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government to repoliticise planning and adopt a vision consistent with its people-friendly promises.

Planning of the past and present

For long, the State government stood apart with its innovative planning practices. In 1948, it produced a comprehensive housing report and impressive solutions for the housing shortage. As early as the 1960s, it created a comprehensive plan for Chennai. It set up the Slum Clearance Board in 1971, the first of its kind in India. The then DMK government adopted a radical policy to make the State slum-free. The iconic photograph of then Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi taking a boat ride in the rejuvenated Cooum is a telling example of how urban development projects remained an essential part of the political agenda. Former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa supported solar-powered greenhouse schemes for the rural poor. State leadership directly associated itself with planning policies, and building liveable cities was central to political action.

What changed over time? First, policy-makers depoliticised planning and presented it as a mere technical exercise of allocating resources such as land and money. They deployed what political scientists Matthew Flinders and Jim Buller describe as 'institutional and preference-shaping tactics' to achieve this. Institutions were created to give experts a longer rope, reduce political interference, and avoid short-term considerations in planning. However, they are meant to function within the parameters set by the elected political leadership. This appears increasingly absent in Tamil Nadu.

As Flinders and Buller point out, using the 'preference-shaping tactic', institutions create a choiceless situation by offering the opinions of experts as the only solution. They exclude contesting views from public discussion. There is no political moderation of expert-driven agendas. While theorists

may argue that depoliticisation improves efficiency, on the ground, as planning and policies keep failing, the credibility of politicians erodes significantly.

A telling example of depoliticised planning is the Tamil Nadu Affordable Urban Housing and Habitat Policy, 2020. It thrives on ambiguity and opaqueness. It has reduced state role and allows the market to take care of low-income housing without providing any information on shortage, household incomes, and affordable housing prices. It remains silent on the numbers of households that cannot afford the housing supplied by the market. On the contrary, early plans, such as the 1948 report, offered empirical evidence, transparent assessment, and a clear political agenda. That report acknowledged that 75% of the population in Chennai belonged to the low-income group with an income of ₹50 or less a month. These families could not afford houses built by the market at the cost of ₹5,000. The government then took full charge of providing housing for lower-income households. Similarly, in 1971, the government admitted that the Housing Board had failed to deliver since it had diluted its mission by focusing on higher-income groups. The government created a separate board and invested its resources in low-income housing.

In contrast, current policies do not disclose the conditions of housing and cities. They do not clearly commit to keeping the sale price of low-income housing within the affordable range in private projects that avail themselves of financial support from state-supported shelter funds. The case of the third master plan for Chennai appears no different. The activities have commenced without any political framework. Will the government agree if the planners again propose a market mechanism to allocate land use and resources? What outcomes do they want the plans to achieve?

The way forward

As economist Allan Drazen explains, the government must acknowledge the divergent sets of interests and choose the mechanism to negotiate them. Only political leadership can offer a widely accepted framework. The government must take ownership and ensure specific outcomes. The possibilities are merging the Housing Board, which increasingly functions as a developer, with the Slum Board; pooling all land and resources and using them only for low-income housing; enforcing wider consultation; moving away from conventional land use planning; and adopting strategic urban design projects to make spaces for people and safe streets.

A. Srivathsan is a Professor at CEPT University. Views are personal

Engage with U.S. progressives

India should note that it was the progressives who pushed the U.S. to back the TRIPS waiver

K.V. PRASAD



It is tempting to surmise the shift in the U.S.'s approach on providing COVID-19-related aid to India as well as on the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver on COVID-19 vaccines, drugs, therapeutics, and related technologies as being driven by the Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership with New Delhi. But it is more than just that. The development was a result of the determined push by some sections of the political and business class, civil society, and Indian Americans. Besides them, the progressives in the Democratic Party made a big difference.

President Joe Biden called Prime Minister Narendra Modi in late April expressing the U.S.'s determination to be with India in its most difficult hour. To reduce the negative perception over Vice President Kamala Harris' tepid response to the crisis in India, the administration arranged for her to address a diaspora event where she brought up her Indian roots and lamented over the deteriorating situation in the country.

The responses by these top leaders to assuage the Indians and Indian Americans came at a time when a section was seeking to underscore New Delhi's past folly of banking on Washington in times of need.

Urging Biden to act

Among the progressives who urged the President to act soon were Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and Congressman Rohit 'Ro' Khanna, the Democratic vice chair of the Congressional India Caucus.

Incidentally, while Ms. Jayapal's comments on human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir annoyed New Delhi earlier, Mr. Khanna urged the Indian government to maintain democratic norms and allow peaceful protests by farmers, at a meeting of the leadership of the India Caucus with Indian Ambassador to the U.S., Tarun Singh Sandhu. Irrespective of these positions, the progressives saw the aid and TRIPS waiver through a different prism.

To contextualise the role of progressives, days ahead of the May 5 decision of the Biden administration on the TRIPS waiver, 110 members of the U.S. Congress wrote to President Biden urging him to support the waiver. The signatories included Ms. Jayapal, Mr. Khanna, and Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi who represents Illinois. At the same time, Senator Bernie Sanders and nine other Senators made a similar plea to the White House. Thus, the Biden administration's decision on the waiver and the vaccines, characterised as courageous by many, was a result of the push by the progressives.

Joining in this effort, the co-chair of the Congressional India Caucus, Brad Sherman, and over 50 colleagues wrote last week to President Biden seeking supply of specific items amid concern that as long the virus persists in India "there is the potential for additional variants that could pose a threat to a vaccinated America". The overall approach is to work with India in its battle against the second wave and prepare for subsequent ones.

Not to be ignored

The outreach by Mr. Sandhu and his South African counterpart to members of the U.S. Congress on the waiver notwithstanding, it is evident that the progressives have a grip on policymaking. Its members' pronouncements on other issues that India finds unacceptable could happen again. But India will have to remain engaged with this section instead of offering a cold shoulder as it did in the recent past. As the adage goes, all politics is local.

K.V. Prasad is a journalist and former Fulbright-APS Fellow with the U.S. Congress



DATA POINT

Taking its toll |

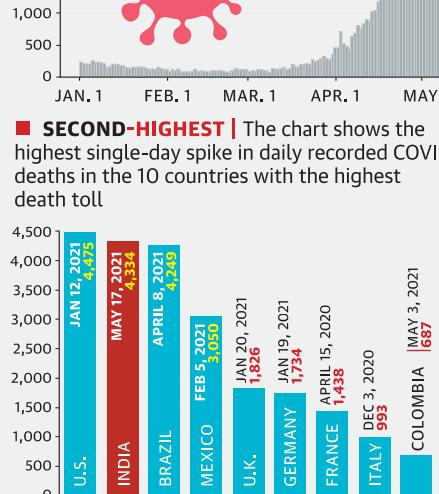
India registered its highest single-day spike of COVID-19 deaths on Monday. Even as the daily case count shows signs of a decline, daily recorded fatalities due to the virus continue to rise. Maharashtra continues to register the highest share of the country's new deaths, though deaths have sharply reduced. The share of States such as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to the death count are on the rise. Among countries with the highest death toll, India is now behind only the U.S. in the highest single-day spike parameter. By Sumanth Sen

FATALITIES SPIKE |

As many as 4,334 new deaths were recorded in the country on Monday.

Daily recorded deaths have crossed the 4,000-mark in only eight instances since the beginning of the pandemic in India and all of them were after May 6, 2021.

SECOND-HIGHEST | The chart shows the highest single-day spike in daily recorded COVID-19 deaths in the 10 countries with the highest death toll.



CHANGING HOTSPOTS |

The table lists the share (%) of recorded new COVID-19 deaths in the 15 high-burden States. For instance, between May 1 and 17, Maharashtra accounted for 20.4% of the country's new deaths, while Karnataka accounted for 10.2%. While Maharashtra's share in new deaths has decreased significantly since mid-April, Karnataka's and Tamil Nadu's share have increased sharply in May.

State	Feb. 1-15	Feb. 16-28	Mar. 1-15	Mar. 16-31	Apr. 1-15	Apr. 16-30	May 1-17
Maharashtra	33	44.8	44.5	42.8	39.6	25.8	20.4
Karnataka	3.5	4.8	4	4.2	4.8	6.4	10.2
Delhi	2.8	1.3	2	2	5.5	12	8.5
T.N.	4.9	5.3	3.2	4.1	2.5	2.8	5.9
U.P.	3.2	1.5	1.4	1.6	5.9	8.2	7.8
WB	4.2	2.6	1.6	0.8	1.3	2.3	3.1
Punjab	6.5	9.3	15.7	18.9	7.5	3.5	4.6
Chhattisgarh	5.3	4.3	3.7	6.7	11.2	8.4	4.9
A.P.	0.7	0.5	0.9	0.8	1.2	1.7	2.2
Gujarat	1	0.7	0.9	2.3	4.9	5.6	3
M.P.	2	1.9	1.5	2.4	3.3	3.3	2.2
Rajasthan	1.1	0.5	0.2	0.7	2	3.2	4
Haryana	1.5	0.7	1.7	1.9	1.6	2.4	3.9
Kerala	17.9	14.8	12.4	5.3	2.1	1.2	1.8
Uttarakhand	2.5	0.9	0.7	0.3	0.8	2.2	3.6

SOURCE: COVID19INDIA.ORG, OUR WORLD IN DATA

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 19, 1971

Diplomatic drive to expose Pak. guilt

FROM PAGE ONE

13 dead as Tauktae batters Gujarat

Six additional Army teams which have been staged forward to Junagarh have now moved to Amreli.

As many as 35 Gujarat talukas received more than one inch of rainfall, with Bagasara taluka receiving 9 inches of rainfall, Gir Gadha 8 inches, Una 8 inches, Savarkundla 7 inches and Amreli 5 inches. Rajula, Khamba, and Babra talukas each received 5 inches of rainfall, Chief Minister Rupani said.

An official of the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC) confirmed three fatalities due to the cyclone, one each from Rajkot, Valsad and Bhavnagar. M Rajeevan, Secretary,

Ministry of Earth Sciences tweeted that the forecast for Tauktae, of the cyclone's trajectory and speed, matched what was observed. He, however, warned of another storm brewing in the Bay of Bengal around May 23.

Rox Mathew Koll, climate scientist, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune tweeted that Tauktae was the first 'Extremely Severe Cyclone' (characterised as with winds over 220 kmph) to reach close to Mumbai in 130 years and to impact all the five States on India's west coast.

(With inputs from PTI)

Vaccination lag in rural India points to crisis

Even the reported cases from rural India are an under-estimate because of the lack of adequate testing facilities.

The latest available district-wise data from all States reveals a high rural-urban disparity in testing levels. In urban districts of Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai, cumulatively, more than 500 tests have been conducted for every

1,000 inhabitants. This is a conservative estimate as the figures are based on the 2011 population. Also, this figure would have increased further in the second wave.

Whereas in the rural districts of Gadchiroli (Maharashtra), Tirupathur (Tamil Nadu) and Chamarajanagara (Karnataka), less than 50 tests have been conducted cumulatively for every 1,000 inhabitants.

Shailaja, other veterans dropped from Cabinet

The party has included two women legislators in the next Cabinet. They are former Thrissur Mayor R. Bindu and Veena George. Ms. Bindu is the wife of CPI (M) acting State secretary A. Vijayaraghavan. The party has proposed M.B. Rajesh for the Speaker's post.

Democratic Youth Federation of India president and Mr. Vijayan's son-in-law P.A. Muhammad Riyas gets a Cabinet berth. The other Ministers-designate are M.V. Govindan, K. Radhakrishnan, K.N. Balagopal, P. Rajeeve, V.N. Vasavan, Saji Cherian and V. Sivankutty.

Former Excise Minister T.P. Ramakrishnan is the secretary of the CPI(M) legislature party.

The CPI(M) had signalled a generational shift by withdrawing many high-profile Ministers, including Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac, Industries Minister E.P. Jayaram and Public Works Minister G. Sudhakaran, from the electoral arena. Mr. Vijayan also indicated that it would be his final term as Chief Minister.

The CPI State executive nominated J. Chinchu Rani, P. Prasad, K. Rajan and G.R. Anil as Ministers.

HC to hear plea on Narada arrests today

The stay on the interim bail and the review petition will both be heard by the Calcutta High Court on Wednesday.

The four leaders were taken to the Presidency Correctional Home in the city in the early hours of Tuesday. Later in the day, Mr. Mukherjee, Mr. Mitra and Mr. Chatterjee were admitted to the Woodburn Ward of State-run SSKM Hospital.

In its order staying the interim bail, the Calcutta High Court had pointed out that "This court has been called upon to deal with an extraordinary situation where the Chief Minister of the State can sit on a dharma outside the office of the Central Bureau of Investigation along with her supporters, which had investigated the case and was to present a

chargesheet in court against the accused who are senior party leaders of the party in power in the State, some of them being Ministers."

However, sections of the TMC leadership, including family members of those arrested said there was no dharma at the CBI office by the Chief Minister.

Priyadarshini Hakim, the daughter of Minister Firhad Hakim while referring to the court order, said there was no dharma outside the CBI office on Monday. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had arrived at Nizam Palace on Monday, but she went to the CBI office at 15th floor and was there for about six hours. The Chief Minister neither said anything to the media persons nor on social media about the Narada arrests, she pointed out.

'Congress spreading false narrative against SAD leaders'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Former Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia on Tuesday accused the ruling Congress party of spreading false narrative against senior SAD leadership in the police firing cases of 2015 post satrile protests in Faridkot district.

"Contrary to the Congress party's falsehoods, inquiry reports of both Justice Ranjit Singh Commission and the Special Investigation Team filed by officer Kunwar Vijay

Pratap never blamed the then Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal or Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal in the cases," he said at a press conference.

"In fact, both reports categorically refused to indict them for either the firing or the sacrifice incidents in question. Nowhere in the reports' recommendations is either Parkash Singh Badal or Sukhbir Badal found guilty of any wrongdoing on the allegations levelled against them by their political opponents."

Chief Insolvencies and Companies Court (ICC) Judge Michael Briggs handed down his judgment in favour of the banks to declare there was no public policy

that prevented a waiver of security rights, as argued by Mr. Mallya's lawyers.

At a virtual hearing, July 26 was set as the date for final arguments for and against granting a bankruptcy order against the 65-year-old Mr. Mallya, after the

Waqf Board seeks probe into Barabanki mosque demolition

Demanding restoration, it says administration's action is 'patently illegal'

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board on Tuesday condemned the demolition of a mosque in a tehsil compound in Barabanki district by the administration, terming it a "patently illegal and high-handed action" and demanded its restoration. The Barabanki administration, without making a reference to any mosque, said an "illegal residential complex" was found situated opposite the Sub-Divisional Magistrate's (SDM) residence in the Ramsanehi ghat tehsil compound, and legal orders issued by the SDM court were executed on the ground on May 17.

The administration allegedly carried out the demolition of the mosque in the name of removing encroachment, the board said.

The Sunni Waqf Board said it would approach the Allahabad High Court for the restoration of the mosque

CThis act is against law, a misuse of power and utter violation of the clear orders dated April 24 passed by the High Court

ZUFAR FARUQI
Sunni Waqf Board chairperson

and a high-level judicial inquiry, and seek action against the "guilty officers".

Sunni Waqf Board chairperson Zufar Faruqi said the mosque, the Waqf Masjid Gaareeb Nawaz Al Maroof Tehsil Wali, situated near the tehsil compound in Ramsanehi ghat, was 100 years old.

"This act is against law, a misuse of power and in utter violation of the clear orders dated April 24 passed by the High Court," Mr. Faruqi added.

He was referring to a general order issued by a Division Bench of the court on April 24, barring demolitions and other action in the

State till end of May. Any orders of eviction, dispossesion or demolition, already passed by the High Court, district court or civil court, if not executed till the date of passing of this order shall remain in abeyance for the period till May 31, the Bench of Acting Chief Justice Sanjay Yadav and Justice Prakash Padia had said in view of the upsurge in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adarsh Singh, District Magistrate (DM), Barabanki, said on March 15 a notice was issued to the opposite parties over the ownership of the said structure and they were provided opportunity for a hearing. Following the notice, those living in the compound fled from there and the "structure in question" was seized by the tehsil administration from the security point of view, said the DM.

The managing committee of the mosque challenged the validity of the notice is-

sued by the tehsildar of Ramsanehi ghat through a writ petition in the HC and submitted that they were faced with "imminent danger of a demolition of mosque".

The HC on March 18, while disposing of the writ, said, "...considering the fact that the notice has been given to the petitioners only for the purpose of seeking documentary evidence, and not for demolition, nothing needs to be proceeded any further in this writ petition, which is disposed of finally with a direction that the petitioners shall be permitted to file reply to the said notice dated 15th March, 2021 within 15 days from today, in addition to the reply already filed by them."

The DM Mr. Singh said that in sequence to the HC order in the writ and disposal of the counter statement of the opposite parties on April 2, it was "proven" that the "said residential construction" was "illegal".

Row over faulty ventilators escalates

58 of the 150 devices received were faulty, says Maharashtra medical college

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

The row over allegedly faulty ventilators provided to Maharashtra under the PM-CARES fund escalated further on Tuesday with the Aurangabad Government Medical College stating that 58 of the 150 Dhaman III ventilators received from Jyoti CNC were faulty and could not be used.

The Congress, a coalition partner in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the State, has demanded action from the State government against the company for risking the lives of patients by providing faulty medical equipment and also an audit of all ventilators provided under the PM-CARES fund.

According to the college, 58 ventilators supplied by Jyoti CNC were sub-standard, adding that the company had not installed another 37 ventilators.

"Around 100 ventilators came on April 12 and was installed on the same day. A report to the District Collector was given on April 12 itself that these ventilators are not suitable for use for extremely critical COVID patients. On April 18, Jyoti company's technicians installed another 25 Dhaman-III ventilators, which were returned by the ICU [intensive care unit] on April 20 due to serious errors found in them," said the college's report.

On April 23, the technicians were called again, but they could repair only two

malfunctioning, two more technicians visited the college on May 13 and 14. However, the report said, "Two ventilators they had repaired broke down again and then these technicians went away without giving service report."

Maharashtra Congress general secretary Sachin Sawant alleged that the ventilators given to private hospitals for temporary usage on condition that patients would not be charged for them had also been rejected by them.

"This proves that our demand for a joint audit by the Centre and the State government, and an inquiry by the State government is completely justified," Mr. Sawant said.

After an uproar over the

which, however, failed again. On the same day, 55 more ventilators were distributed in other districts such as Hingoli, Beed, Osmanabad and Parbhani. The technical committee of the college submitted an inspection report on May 6.

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After an uproar over the

PM Modi speaks to DMs of 46 districts

Local innovations in larger strategies to arrest the spread of COVID-19 are welcome, he says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday spoke to the District Magistrates (DMs) of 46 high-COVID-19-burden districts in the first of two interactions, telling them that local innovations to larger strategy were welcome and that the Centre was to provide a fortnightly schedule of vaccine supply to streamline vaccination and prevent wastage.

The interactions via video-conference with 46 DMs from eight States in the presence of their Chief Ministers, including Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Delhi, went on for over two hours. Union Home Minister Amit Shah conducted the meetings, where the DMs shared their experience on combatting COVID-19.

Mr. Modi said there were three main weapons to check the contagion: delineating local containment zones, aggressive testing and giving correct and accurate information to the local populace, especially in terms of



Grim situation: A health worker transferring a COVID-19 victim's body onto an ambulance at a mortuary in New Delhi on Tuesday. • AFP

availability of medical resources, such as hospital beds. There was also a need to crack down on black marketing of medicines and equipment.

Learn from others'

"If you feel there is a need to tweak or innovate upon strategies set up at the State or Central levels, please go

ahead, and if they work, do not hesitate to share [them] with me or my office. Learn from places where the infection curve is showing a downward trend," Mr. Modi said.

He noted that the spread of the disease was towards rural areas. From last year's experience, it was plain that villages had their systems to

implement control measures, and carry on agricultural work as well. "This should be helped along," he said.

He asked for empathy from local administrations in implementing local lockdowns, and to pay attention to ease of living issues.

"Even if one person from the local administration gets

in touch with a patient or his family, the mental strength of that family to fight the disease goes up," the Prime Minister pointed out.

Oxygen plants

"Through PM-CARES, we have decided to set up an oxygen plant in every district and my request to all DMs is to prepare in advance for the rapid setting up of such plants, as demonstrated in Chandigarh and other places," Mr. Modi said.

The Prime Minister also stressed the need to remove vaccine hesitancy. The Central government was making every effort that a fortnightly supply schedule for vaccines to various States be provided to streamline supply and prevent wastage, he said.

"The DMs are our field commanders in fighting the coronavirus pandemic; it is you who implement the strategies on the ground," he noted.

The next round of interactions will be with the DMs of 54 districts from 10 States on May 20.



Vaccine doses were sent to several countries earlier this year.

said. "Around the same time, many other countries in the world were facing a crisis ... Our government extended support wherever possible during this period.

It is this spirit that had initially led to cooperation between countries when the virus first emerged in the beginning of 2020," said the SII, adding that the cooperation also formed the basis for getting access to technology and aid for healthcare.

"We must also understand that this pandemic is not limited by geographic or political boundaries ... Further, as part of our global alliances, we also had commitments to COVAX, so that they could distribute the vaccines globally..." said the SII. Another factor was India being among the world's two most populous countries. "A vaccination drive for such a large population cannot be completed within two-three months, as there are several factors and challenges involved. That said, it would take two-three years for the entire world population to get fully vaccinated," the SII said.

"The SII has delivered more than 200 million doses though we received EUA [Emergency Use Authorisation] two months after the U.S. pharma companies. If we look at total doses produced and delivered, we rank amongst the top three in the world. We continue to scale up manufacturing and prioritise India. We also hope to start delivering to COVAX and other countries by the end of this year."

SC notice to Bengal in plea on 2 BJP workers' killing

They died in post-poll violence

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought a response from the West Bengal government on a petition seeking a CBI or SIT (special investigation team) probe into the murder of two BJP activists in the violence after the victory of Mamata Banerjee-led All India Trinamool Congress in the Assembly election.

A Vacation Bench of Justices Vineet Saran and B.R. Gavai issued the notice to the government on the joint petition filed by Biswajit Sarkar and Swarnalata Adhikari. Biswajit is the brother of Abhijit Sarkar, one of the two victims. Swarnalata is the widow of Haran Adhikari. They were represented by senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani.

The Bench scheduled the next hearing on the issue of a court-monitored investiga-

tion by an independent agency on May 25.

Mr. Jethmalani argued "total inaction" and even "subversion" of the investigation on the part of the State administration and the police. "The murders happened on the same day the Assembly election results were declared. The police stood idly ... The investigation into the crimes needs to be transferred to the CBI or a SIT and requires court monitoring," he submitted.

He said Sarkar was dragged outside his house and "murdered" on May 2. There were eyewitnesses, the petitioners claimed.

The petition alleged that there was "indiscriminate" killing of innocent people in the State after the poll results by the "vengeful" ruling party.

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'State panel's decision to drop Shailaja'

CPI(M) leadership chooses not to criticise Cabinet selection in Kerala

SOBHANA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI

The central leadership of the CPI(M) on Tuesday chose not to criticise the decision to drop K.K. Shailaja from the Cabinet in the second term of the Pinarayi Vijayan government, putting the onus instead on the State committee.

As the Health Minister, Ms. Shailaja had gained international acclaim for her handling of first the Nipah outbreak and later the COVID-19 pandemic. She will now take charge as the party whip in the Assembly.

Party general secretary Sitaram Yechury told *The Hindu*, "The decision concerning elected CPI(M) MLAs and formation of the Cabinet are matters decided by the party's State committee. The State committee discussed the issue and came to a unanimous decision."

Polit Bureau member Brinda Karat also took a similar line. "In our party, the de-

cision to choose the Ministers is the prerogative of the State committee. And it is for them to give an explanation and answer the questions which are being raised by their decision

BRINDA KARAT
CPI(M) LEADER

Karat, berated the media for trying to reduce the party's historic victory solely to the personality and role of Mr. Vijayan. The victory, the editorial said, "is the result of both individual and collective efforts".

Outside the party, there are only a few even within the larger Left family who find merit in the decision to drop Ms. Shailaja. CPI(ML) Polit Bureau member Kavita Krishnan said the decision was baffling and other than subjective interests that were at play, nothing else explained it. She asked, "Why would you change an able

Health Minister in the middle of a pandemic?"

CPI(ML) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya tweeted, "Old CM, New Cabinet! Internationally acclaimed health minister #KKShailaja is missing in Kerala cabinet. What's really happening? We read in *People's Democracy* about the 'collective' element in LDF's rare successive Kerala win, did we miss something?"

Annie Raja, general secretary of the National Federation of Indian Women associated with the CPI, called the decision deeply disappointing. "There are two aspects. One, their logic that Shailaja teacher has to be replaced because none of the old faces have been retained is flawed. Affirmative action has to be taken for gender justice. Second, the CPI(M) has not increased its tally of women Ministers. Last time around also, they had two, and this time, too, they have the same number," she said.

Mr. Singh had moved the Supreme Court alleging that the departmental enquiries against him were part of a conspiracy to frame him for levelling allegations of corruption against Anil Deshmukh, who resigned as Maharashtra Home Minister. He urged the top court to shift the enquiries to another State.

"My brother [pointing to Justice Gavai] cannot hear the case," Justice Vineet Saran, the lead judge on the Bench, informed senior advocate Puneet Bali, who appeared for Mr. Singh.

Justice Gavai also made it clear that he would withdraw from hearing the petition.

"In that case, we are recording in our order to list the case before another

+

Bench," Justice Saran said.



Justice B.R. Gavai

'Witch-hunt'
Mr. Singh claimed there was a "witch-hunt" on against him. He said he was facing threats of multiple enquiries and probes unless he withdrew his complaint against Mr. Deshmukh.

Mr. Singh asked the court to direct an investigation into the alleged conspiracy against him.

In March, the court refused to intervene in a petition filed by Mr. Singh for a CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) probe against Mr. Deshmukh.

The top court had instead asked Mr. Singh to approach the Bombay High Court with his plea for an investigation by an independent agency.

Delhi HC stays trial in INX Media case

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday stayed the trial court proceedings in the CBI's INX Media corruption case involving Congress leader P. Chidambaram and his son Karti Chidambaram.

Justice Suresh Kumar Kait sought response from Mr. Chidambaram and other accused in the case on the agency's plea challenging a March 5 order of the trial court directing the supply of certain documents to the accused.

The CBI challenged the special judge's order to the extent that it directed the agency to allow inspection of the documents kept in 'Malkhana' by the accused and their counsel. The agency said the order reflected an intrusion into its investigative process. If accused persons were allowed to inspect documents available at the 'Malkhana', the same would subvert the probe and there was every likelihood that they may tamper with the evidence available.

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The case relates to an FIR registered by the CBI in 2017 against alleged irregularities in the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) clearance granted to INX Media for receiving overseas funds to the tune of ₹305 crore in 2007 when Mr. Chidambaram was the Union Finance Minister.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The police in Manipur's capital, Imphal, booked journalist Kishor Chandra Wangkhem and political activist Erendro Leichombam under the National Security Act (NSA) of 1980 over their Facebook posts allegedly deriding the death of State BJP president S. Tikendra Singh.

The duo was arrested on May 13 after the BJP leader died of COVID-19. Referring to his death, both had commented that cow urine and dung were not cures for the infection.

Their arrest was based on a complaint filed by Manipur BJP general secretary P. Premananda Meetei and vice-

cial media head Rohan Gupta, also named Union Minister Smriti Irani and BJP's organising secretary, B. L. Santosh.

The complaint mentioned that the leaders had "forged, fabricated and manufactured the said documents on the letterhead of AICC Research Department and printed such material on the same, which has the potential of creating communal disharmony, civil unrest in the country".

Congress spokesperson

and lawyer Aman Pawar said if the Delhi Police did not register an FIR based on the complaint, they would approach a court under Section 156 of the Indian Penal Code. The party also talked about approaching social media companies to debar these BJP functionaries for allegedly spreading "fake news".

Earlier, Mr. Patra had said that the Congress had instructed its social media volunteers to use the term "Modi strain" or "Indian

strain" for the mutant variant, refer to the Kumbh Mela as a super spreader event, and to respond only to help appeals that tagged the Youth Congress.

Congress spokesperson

Pawan Khera said in a press conference that the "toolkit" is the most predictable diversionary tactic adopted by the BJP to change the media narrative. "The one that concerns the Prime Minister is protecting his false image and he can work 24 hours in a day to protect it."

gance and Justice Alliance, a political party whose candidate in the 2017 Manipur election included rights activist from Sharmila.

Mr. Wangkhem was re-

leased in April 2019 after being detained for over four months under the NSA for allegedly derogatory comments against the BJP-led government in the State and using expletives while referring to Chief Minister N. Ben Singh.

A sedition case was filed

against Mr. Leichombam in July 2020 over a Facebook post in which he was allegedly critical of the State's titular king Sanajaoba Leishemba after his election to the Rajya Sabha as a BJP member.

Both Mr. Wangkhem, 41, and Mr. Leichombam, 40, were arrested twice earlier on charges of sedition and for criticising the government. The latter is the founder of the People's Resur-

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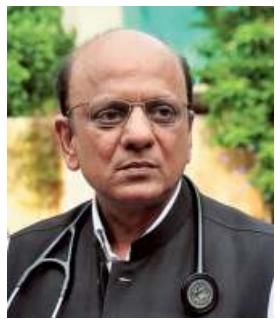
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Ex-IMA head K.K. Aggarwal passes away

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

K.K. Aggarwal, 62, former national president of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) and Padma Shri award winner, passed away from complications related to COVID-19 at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences on Monday night.

"Even during the pandemic, he made constant efforts to educate the masses... through numerous educational programmes," a statement shared on his Twitter account said.

HC seeks govt. response on mucormycosis

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court has said it was not aware of any protocol devised by the Central and/or the State government to combat mucormycosis, commonly known as the 'Black Fungus' disease, and wanted the State to apprise the court on the issue.

Electoral bonds worth ₹695 cr. sold during the recent elections

+ It's the highest for any Assembly poll since scheme launch

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The State Bank of India (SBI) sold electoral bonds worth ₹695.34 crore from April 1 to 10, when the Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, West Bengal, Assam and Kerala polls were in full swing, says an RTI reply by the bank.

The amount sold was the highest-ever for any Assembly elections since the scheme started in 2018, according to the numbers provided in the reply.

All but ₹2,000 of the bonds sold in the 16th phase of the scheme were encashed. Predictably, the sale shot up during the elections in comparison to the previous tranche in January when bonds worth ₹42.1 crore were sold, it said.

The highest amounts were sold at the Kolkata branch (₹176.1 crore), followed by

98% of India still at risk, warns Health Ministry

'The virus hasn't got tired, so we cannot relax just yet'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Over 98% of India's population continues to be vulnerable or susceptible to COVID-19, said Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Health Ministry, on Tuesday, adding that so far only 1.8% of the total population of the country had been affected.

"Despite the high number of COVID cases reported so far, we have been able to contain the spread to under 2% of the population. But with the majority still vulnerable, we cannot let our guard down and hence continued focus on containment is critical. The virus hasn't got tired so we don't have the option to relax just yet," he said.

Releasing data, Mr. Agarwal said that from the 17.13% of the total COVID-19 case load reported on May 3, India's current status stands at a reduced 13.3%.

"Currently, eight States have more than 1 lakh active COVID-19 cases and 22 States have more than 15% case positivity. Maharashtra, U.P., Delhi, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have shown a decline in COVID-19 cases and a decline in positivity. There are 199 districts showing a continued decline in COVID-19 cases and positivity in the last two weeks," he said.

NITI Aayog, Member (Health) V.K. Paul, who also addressed the conference, said that the COVID-19 curve was stabilising in India.



Tracking the virus: Over 18 lakh samples were tested across the country on Monday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ganisation (DRDO) for adding it to the COVID-19 treatment protocol.

The drug has received emergency use authorisation from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).

Relying to a question about a COVID-19 virus variant found in Singapore, which could be more harmful to children, Dr. Paul said that it was being looked into.

"We are examining the report about this particular variant. Regarding COVID-19 among children, so far, the knowledge that we have is that most of them are asymptomatic, and it is reassuring that they don't get serious infections. Meanwhile, we are keeping an eye on variants found in Singapore," he said.

Trials for children

Dr. Paul noted that Covaxin had received approval for Phase II/III clinical trials in the two-to-18 age group. "And I have been told that trials will begin in the next 10-12 days," he said.

He added that the COVID-19 National Task Force would examine the drug 2-deoxy-D-glucose ('2-DG') developed by the Defence Research and Development Or-

Highest single-day toll recorded

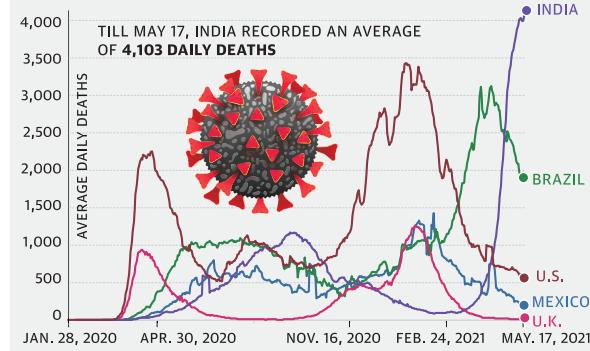
India registered 4,334 deaths on Monday

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

India recorded 2,62,829 new cases and 3,841 new deaths as at 9.30 p.m. on Tuesday. The country has so far reported 2,54,90,929 cases and 2,82,592 deaths.

Tamil Nadu reported 33,059 infections, followed by Kerala (31,337) and Karnataka (30,309). Maharashtra recorded 679 new casualties on the day, followed by Karnataka (525) and Tamil Nadu (364).

Rising fatalities | Among the five countries with the highest recorded COVID-19 death toll, daily fatalities are rising only in India



from the respective States' health bulletins.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Jharkhand, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh and Lakshadweep. The data is sourced

tally of highest COVID-19-related deaths in a single day (4,249). Only the U.S. (4,475) has recorded more deaths in one day than India.

Around 18.69 lakh samples were tested on Monday (the results for which were

made available on Tuesday), which is around 2.96 lakh more tests than those conducted on Sunday. The average daily test positivity rate (positive cases identified for every 100 tests) continues to decline. It was 22.7% on May 9 and came down to 17.6% as on May 17.

Around 15.1 lakh vaccine doses were administered in the 24 hours ending 7 a.m. on Tuesday, which is 8.19 lakh doses more than what was recorded in the previous 24 hours. However, it is 9.3 lakh doses less than what was recorded in the same period, one week ago. As on May 17, the average daily vaccination rate was 16.77 lakh which is significantly lesser than the average daily doses given as on April 17 which was 30.03 lakh.

New naming system for virus variants

The initiative, similar to how hurricanes are labelled, seeks to remove stigma

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The World Health Organization (WHO) would unveil a system of naming coronavirus variants drawn from the way tropical storms are named, WHO Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan says.

"The new naming system should go live soon – yes, it will be names like hurricanes. This is so as not to stigmatise and de-incentivise countries from making their sequencing results public. It will also be easier for the lay public to remember rather than these complicated lineage numbers," she said in an email to *The Hindu*.



Soumya Swaminathan
combination of letters and names that point to the relationships between different variants.

India's Health Ministry, in the aftermath of B.1.617 that was popularly called the 'Indian variant', issued a press release decrying the media's use of the name.

The dilemma of having names that don't stigmatise places but also are amenable to popular use has to an extent been solved by the system of naming hurricanes, or tropical cyclones. The World Meteorological Organisation leaves it to countries that surround a particular ocean basin to come up with names.

Odisha govt. extends lockdown till June 1

It had announced a lockdown from May 5 to 19

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Tuesday extended the lockdown by another two weeks with stricter restrictions till June 1. It had announced a lockdown from May 5 to 19.

"The timely lockdown has helped the State government put a brake on the rate of growth of COVID-19 cases. In the past 15 days, cases have remained static, though the daily spike in cases is above 10,000," said Suresh Chandra Mohapatra, Chief Secretary, announcing the lockdown extension.

Cases have started to come down in many western districts, especially bordering Chhattisgarh, following the lockdown, he stated.

"Keeping the development in mind, the government decided to extend the present lockdown by two weeks. The lockdown will remain in



Streets wear a deserted look during the lockdown in Bhubaneswar on Tuesday. ■ PTI

force till 5 a.m. till June 1. The existing weekend shutdown would continue."

There would be complete shutdown on weekends, starting from 6 p.m. of Fridays till 5 a.m. of Mondays.

Stricter one

"We have made the second lockdown stricter. The six-hour window between 6 a.m. and 12 for buying essential goods from Monday to Friday has been reduced to four hours from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m.," he said.

"Our objective is to ensure that people don't come out unless there is extremely

duced manpower.

"Offices in private and corporate and civil society sectors shall work with reduced manpower preferably at 33% of their staff strength. Such offices shall encourage work from home for their staff," says the guideline issued by the government.

During the lockdown, vaccination and testing activities would be allowed to go on. The law enforcement agencies have been asked to enforce the lockdown strictly and impose fine on those who would be found flouting the protocols.

Participation in marriages had been brought down from 50 to 25. Community feasts had been completely prohibited. No one could organise feasts in other social functions such as cremation and thread related ceremonies. The host could give food in packets in the take-away manner.

Agriculture, construction, finance and construction sector activities have been allowed to carry on with re-

People told to say 'all is well' to Bihar CM

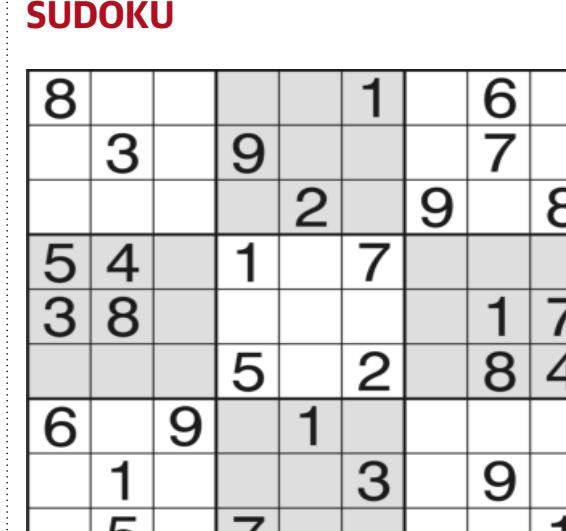
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

A day after Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar took a virtual tour of community kitchens for the poor during the COVID-19 pandemic, a video that showed officials tutoring people on what to say went viral on social media.

District officials at the Hajipur community kitchen in Vaishali district were seen telling a middle-aged beneficiary to say "Sab badhiya hai (All is well)" to Mr. Kumar, during any interaction.

In another video, officials at the Bagha community kitchen in Begusarai district set up restaurant-like facilities, with covered chairs, table-cloths, and food served by people wearing plastic gloves. However, a day later, the tables and chairs looked bare, and children were seen serving food.

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13250

T	C	P	S	V	W	F
R	E	A	L	F	I	R
H	E	S	P	O	L	N
E	P	O	L	N	N	N
O	P	O	L	N	N	N
P	O	O	L	N	N	N
E	P	O	L	N	N	N
N	P	O	L	N	N	N
N	P	O	L	N	N	N

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

No. SS580 Date: 13/05/2021 www.mightyleaves.com

FAITH

Birth of Vamana

Lord Narayana is born to Aditi and sage Kashyapa, after Aditi's diligent observance of payo vrata. Srimad Bhagavatam describes His appearance at the time of birth, said Kidambi Narayanan in a discourse. He was born with four hands, holding the conch, discus, mace and a lotus flower. He was dark-hued. He had a lotus-like face. He had earrings in his ears. The Srivatsa could be seen on His chest. His arms were adorned with bangles. His shoulders had ornaments too. He had on His head, a crown studded with gems. He had anklets on His feet. He was wearing the vanamala. The flowers in this garland attracted bees, which were buzzing around the flowers. He also had the Kaustubha. He was born in the month of Sravana. His star was Sravana. The muhurtha in which He was born was known as Abhijit. The titi was Dwadasi. This Dwadasi is known as Vijaya Dwadasi.

He was born during the waxing phase of the moon. When He was born, musical instruments could be heard. Apsara damsels danced. Gandharvas sang. Kinnaras, Suparna (Garuda), Yakshas, sages and devas all gathered in joy, and danced and sang. Flowers fell on Aditi's ashram. Even as Aditi and Kashyapa were watching their son, He assumed the form of a Brahmachari. Sages performed upanayana for Him. Surya taught Him the Gayatri. Brihaspati gave the sacred thread. Kashyapa gave the girdle known as maunji, made of munja grass. The moon gave him the danda (the staff). Aditi gave Him a loin cloth. Brahma gave Him a kamandalu (water jar). The Saptarishis gave Him darbha grass. Kubera gave Him the bhiksha vessel. Bhiksha was given to Him by Uma Devi. After His Upayana, Vamana did a homa, after cleaning the place, and placing darbha grass in the four corners of the chosen place. He then did samita daana.

TH CROSSWORD + 13251

(set by Incognito)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9				10			
11				12			
13			14				15

Death toll climbs as Gaza conflict rages

In Jerusalem and West Bank, Palestinians hold 'day of anger' protests and clash with Israeli forces

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

GAZA CITY

Heavy air strikes and rocket fire in the Israel-Gaza conflict claimed more lives on both sides on Tuesday as tensions flared in Palestinian "day of anger" protests in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank.

The UN Security Council was to hold an emergency meeting amid a diplomatic push to end the fighting, a day after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Israel would "continue striking at the terrorist targets".

Israel's intense bombing campaign has killed 213 Palestinians, including 61 children, and wounded more than 1,400 people in Gaza in more than a week of fighting against Islamist group Hamas, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza. The death toll on the Israeli side rose to 12 when a volley of rockets Hamas fired at the southern Eshkol region killed two Thai nationals working in a factory and wounded several others, police said.

Israeli strikes that again



Fierce confrontation: Israeli troops firing tear gas shells at demonstrators during a protest against Israeli occupation in the West Bank town of Bethlehem on Tuesday. ■ AFP

sent fireballs, debris and black smoke into the sky have levelled homes and multi-story towers, cratered roads and left two million Palestinians in the enclave desperate for reprieve.

"They destroyed our house but I don't know why they targeted us," said Nazmi al-Dahoud, 70, of Gaza City,

who remained shocked by what he called "a terrifying, violent night".

The humanitarian crisis deepened in the impoverished strip, from where Hamas has launched nearly 3,500 rockets at Israel since May 10.

But a convoy of international aid trucks that started

rolling into Gaza through a border crossing from Israel, Kerem Shalom, was halted when Israel quickly shuttered it again, citing a mortar attack on the area.

The UN Security Council session, the fourth since the conflict escalated, was called after the United States, a key Israel ally, blocked adoption

of a joint statement calling for a halt to the violence on Monday for the third time in a week.

Humanitarian disaster

The conflict risks precipitating a humanitarian disaster, with the UN saying nearly 40,000 Palestinians have been displaced and 2,500 have lost their homes.

Fighter jets have hit what the Israeli military dubs the "metro", its term for Hamas's underground tunnels, which Israel has previously acknowledged run in part through civilian areas.

Israeli fire has battered crucial Gaza infrastructure, causing blackouts and prompting the electricity authority to warn on Monday it only had enough fuel left to provide power for another two to three days. A strike Monday knocked out Gaza's only Covid-19 testing laboratory, the Health Ministry said, and the Qatar Red Crescent said a strike damaged one of its offices in the enclave.

Biden raises ceasefire, civilian toll in call to Netanyahu

ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Joe Biden expressed support for a ceasefire between Israel and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers in a call to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but he stopped short of demanding an immediate stop to the eight days of Israeli airstrikes and Hamas rocket barrages that have killed more than 200 people, most of them Palestinian.

Mr. Biden's carefully worded statement, in a

White House readout on Monday of his second known call to Mr. Netanyahu in three days as the attacks pounded on, came with the administration under pressure to respond more forcefully despite its determination to wrench the U.S. foreign policy focus away from West Asia conflicts.

Mr. Biden's comments were open-ended and were similar to previous administration statements of support in principle for a ceasefire. That's in contrast to

demands from dozens of Democratic lawmakers and others for an immediate halt by both sides. But the readout of the call to the Israeli leader showed increased White House concern about the air and rocket attacks – including Israeli airstrikes aimed at weakening Hamas – while sticking to forceful support for Israel.

The U.S. leader "encouraged Israel to make every effort to ensure the protection of innocent civilians", the White House said. An ad-

mistration official familiar with the call said the decision to express support and not explicitly demand a ceasefire was intentional. While Mr. Biden and top aides are concerned about the mounting bloodshed and loss of innocent life, the decision not to demand an immediate halt to hostilities reflects White House determination to support Israel's right to defend itself from Hamas, the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity. Separately, the U.S., Is-

rael's top ally, blocked for a third time on Monday what would have been a unanimous statement by the 15-nation U.N. Security Council expressing "grave concern" over the intensifying Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the loss of civilian lives. The U.S. rejection killed the Security Council statement, at least for now. White House press secretary Jen Psaki and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the U.S. was focusing instead on "quiet, intensive diplomacy."

U.S. against militarisation of the Arctic

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

REYKJAVIK

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday that Washington wanted to avoid a military build-up in the Arctic, a day after Russia defended its military activities in the strategic region.

"We have concerns about some of the increased military activities in the Arctic. That increases the dangers or prospects of accidents... and undermines the shared goal of a peaceful and sustainable future for the region," Mr. Blinken told a press conference in Reykjavik.

"What we need to avoid is a militarisation of the region," Mr. Blinken said on the eve of an Arctic Council meeting of Foreign Ministers on Wednesday and Thursday where he will meet his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov.

U.S. to send 80 mn vaccines abroad

The additional doses will include AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna and J&J vaccines

SRI RAM LAKSHMAN

WASHINGTON

The U.S. will send at least an additional 20 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, in addition to the 60 million AstraZeneca vaccine it has already committed, to other countries, President Joe Biden said on Monday. The additional doses will include not just AstraZeneca but also Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson's vaccines.

"Rampant disease and death in other countries can destabilise them – those countries – and pose a risk to us as well," Mr. Biden said during remarks at the White House. "New variants could arise overseas that could put us at greater risk and we need to help fight the disease around the world to keep us safe here at home, and to do the right thing of helping other people. It's the right thing to do. It's the smart

thing to do. It's the strong thing to do," he added.

While the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are being used in the U.S., the AstraZeneca vaccine has not been approved. A stockpile of 60 million doses is awaiting safety clearance by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). If received, it will be shipped abroad in its entirety. Although the Biden administra-

tion has not released a plan on how it will apportion the vaccines across countries, India is expected to receive a significant share of these.

Enough vaccines

Mr. Biden said the U.S. would have secured enough vaccines for itself by the end of June. "The United States will share at least 20 million of those doses, that extra supply with other countries," he added.

Mr. Biden said, "This means over the next six weeks, the United States of America will send 80 million doses overseas."

Mr. Biden said the 80 million doses represent 13% of the country's vaccine production (by June-end) and that the U.S. will be donating more than Russia and China, which had donated 15 million doses, according to him.

"There's a lot of talk about Russia and China influencing in the world with vaccines," Mr. Biden said. "We will not use our vaccines to secure favours from other countries," he added.

Mr. Biden also announced a new milestone in the U.S.'s fight against COVID-19: a decline in COVID-19 cases in all 50 States for the first time since the pandemic started. Mr. Biden also said those who do not get vaccinated would end up "paying the price".



Strong defence: A U.S. health worker arranging syringes with the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines. ■ REUTERS

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thing to do," he added.

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Myanmar Internet a virtual battlefield: report

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BANGKOK

Myanmar's military rulers are seeking to limit access to the Internet to an internal network of only "whitelisted" sites to quash opposition to their seizure of power, according to a report by the International Crisis Group.

It likened the Internet to a "virtual battlefield" where the military is struggling to gain an edge because it lacks technological capacity, while social media companies such as Facebook have banned military officials and many government agencies.

The report released on Tuesday noted a narrowing of the leeway for online dissent and abuses of social media to spread hatred toward minority Muslim people in western Myanmar's Rakhine under Aung San Suu Kyi's elected govern-

ment, which was ousted in a February 1 coup. Since then, authorities have imposed nightly Internet outages and sought to limit access to social media platforms.

International telecoms companies such as Norway's Telenor and other businesses have protested the moves, which they say are crippling business activity.

Many tech-savvy young people are involved in the civil disobedience movement against the coup and the military lacks the sort of capabilities that China has developed over the past several decades, enabling it to police the Internet and ban access to certain sites, the International Crisis Group reported.

The details regarding tenders and the participation in the e-procurement process can be obtained by logging in to <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in> For further details contact the undersigned office during working hours.

BWSSB invites tenders from eligible registered tenderers for the following works.

Sl. No.	Name of the Work	Amount put to tender (Rs.)	EMD (Rs.)	Date: 17.05.2021
1.	Providing Sewer System to Happy Garden Layout, Bhoo Samartha Layout, Medahalli surrounding area, Origin Layout, Nagarjuna Layout, Brundavan Layout of Ward No. 53 of BBMP, K.R. Puram under GBWASP.	897.84 Lakhs		
2.	Brundavan Layout of Ward No. 53 of BBMP, K.R. Puram under GBWASP.	13.47 Lakhs		
3.	Providing Water Supply to Happy Garden Layout, Bhoo Samartha Layout, Medahalli surrounding area, Origin Layout, Nagarjuna Layout, Brundavan Layout of Ward No. 53 of BBMP, K.R. Puram under GBWASP.	734.68 Lakhs		
4.	Brundavan Layout of Ward No. 53 of BBMP, K.R. Puram under GBWASP.	11.10 Lakhs		

Last date and time for receipt of tenders will be on 17.06.2021 upto 15.00 Hrs. Date of opening of tenders on 19.06.2021 at 16.00 Hrs.

The details regarding tenders and the participation in the e-procurement process can be obtained by logging in to <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in> For further details contact the undersigned office during working hours.

Sd/-
Chief Engineer(WWW-110V)

DIPR/DDU/JA/382/2021-22
STAY PROTECTED FROM COVID-19, NO CARELESSNESS UNTIL THERE IS A CURE.



Sri Lanka's China-backed tax haven clears final hurdle

Top court rejects pleas challenging Port City Bill

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COLOMBO

A Chinese-funded tax-free enclave billed as Sri Lanka's answer to Dubai and Singapore cleared the final legal hurdle on Tuesday as the Supreme Court in Colombo ruled it could go ahead with only minor tweaks.

Fighter jets have hit what the Israeli military dubs the "metro", its term for Hamas's underground tunnels, which Israel has previously acknowledged run in part through civilian areas.

Israeli fire has battered crucial Gaza infrastructure, causing blackouts and prompting the electricity authority to warn on Monday it only had enough fuel left to provide power for another two to three days. A strike Monday knocked out Gaza's only Covid-19 testing laboratory, the Health Ministry said, and the Qatar Red Crescent said a strike damaged one of its offices in the enclave.

Completed in 2019 has doubled the size of Colombo's financial district by adding 269 hectares. Under the proposed legislation expected to be passed by Parliament, the Port City will be administered by a commission with unprecedented powers to fast track investment approvals. It transactions within the Port City will be denominated in foreign currency and all salaries earned by any worker will be tax-exempt.

The largest single foreign investment in Sri Lanka is one of several massive Asian infrastructure projects funded by China as Beijing increases its regional footprint. Sri Lanka's top court rejected 19 petitions challenging the "Colombo Port City Economic Commission" Bill and approved the \$1.4-billion project subject to minor amendments which the government immediately said

Bangladesh arrests scribe under Official Secrets Act

Islam is known for unearthing graft

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DHAKA

A journalist in Bangladesh known for her strong reporting on official corruption was arrested on charges of violating a colonial-era Official Secrets Act which carries a possible death penalty, authorities said on Tuesday.

Rozina Islam, a senior reporter for the leading *Prothom Alo* newspaper, allegedly used her mobile phone without permission to photograph documents related to government negotiations to buy coronavirus vaccines while she waited in the room of an official involved in the process, according to case documents seen by The Associated Press.

Rozina Islam

being taken to prison on Tuesday. ■ AFP

of the Ministry of Health, said her sister, Sabina Parvin.

Her family said she was physically and mentally harassed while being held.

Sensitive documents

Ms. Islam was then handed over to police and faces charges under the Penal Code and Official Secrets Act for alleged theft and photographing of sensitive state documents, said Harun-or-Rashid, an Additional Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

The charges carry a possible death penalty, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists said in a statement.

Blasphemy carries the death penalty in Pakistan. A Punjab Governor in Islamabad was shot and killed by his own guard in 2011, after he defended a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, who was accused of blasphemy.

She was acquitted after spending eight years on death row and left Pakistan for Canada to join her family after receiving threats.

ODISHA CONSTRUCTION CORPORATION LIMITED BHUBANESWAR, ODISHA, PIN:751012, Tel No.(0674) 2562020, e-Mail: theoccltd@odishaconstruction.com GSTIN - 21AAC02571K2ZM

e" Procurement Notice No.-02 /OCL/2021-22 (on-line)

MARKET WATCH

	18-05-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	50,193	-1.24
US Dollar	73.05	0.23
Gold	47,833	0.60
Brent oil	69.17	-0.35

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	775.90	+21.70
Asian Paints	2821.80	+39.05
Axisc Bank	711.65	+2.40
Bajaj Auto	4067.20	+202.80
Bajaj Finserv	11396.80	+147.45
Bajaj Finance	5688.75	+258.65
Bharti Airtel	536.35	-13.30
BPCL	448.45	+4.80
Britannia Ind	3525.45	+18.20
Cipla	884.40	+3.20
Coal India	146.45	-1.70
Divis Lab	4023.95	-19.30
Dr Reddys Lab	5215.45	+34.85
Eicher Motors	2571.85	+87.50
Grasim Ind	1392.40	-1.45
HCL Tech	931.60	+9.45
HDFC	2502.85	+16.40
HDFC Bank	1476.70	+36.45
HDFC Life	666.70	+0.40
Hero MotoCorp	2906.95	+52.20
Hindalco	402.10	+9.15
Hind Unilever	2374.25	+2.00
ICICI Bank	633.20	+9.60
IndusInd Bank	974.55	+18.10
Infosys	1340.00	+10.60
Indian Oil Corp	105.55	+3.55
ITC	210.05	+2.55
JSW Steel	717.45	+3.05
Kotak Bank	1755.10	+10.95
L&T	1417.30	+30.55
M&M	797.70	+44.15
Maruti Suzuki	6811.10	+93.25
Nestle India Ltd.	17180.60	+142.65
NTPC	112.10	+0.55
ONGC	116.10	+1.85
PowerGrid Corp	233.10	+4.70
Reliance Ind	1987.95	+27.60
SBI Life	968.45	+4.80
State Bank	382.25	+0.85
Shree Cement	27474.70	+146.45
Sun Pharma	690.80	+3.65
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	653.00	+0.30
Tata Motors	332.45	+11.35
Tata Steel	1180.00	+29.15
TCS	3088.80	+19.05
Tech Mahindra	970.75	+17.40
Titan	1539.25	+70.95
UltraTech Cement	6653.00	+120.65
UPL	769.40	+1.35
Wipro	508.05	+8.25

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	72.85	73.17
Euro	88.93	89.32
British Pound	103.35	103.81
Japanese Yen (100)	66.81	67.11
Chinese Yuan	11.34	11.39
Swiss Franc	81.06	81.45
Singapore Dollar	54.77	55.02
Canadian Dollar	60.49	60.78
Malaysian Ringgit	17.64	17.74

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Canara Bank posts ₹1,010 cr. Q4 net profit

Canara Bank reported fourth quarter net profit of ₹1,010 crore as against a net loss of ₹6,567 crore in the corresponding year-earlier period. The bank also posted a net profit of ₹2,557 crore for FY21 over a net loss of ₹5,838 crore in the previous year. Gross non-performing assets (NPAs) stood at ₹60,288 crore as of March 31, while net NPA was ₹24,442 crore.

Cyclone-hit mobile users can switch operators

Telecom operators said intra-circle roaming has been initiated in States impacted by Cyclone Tauktae. This will allow mobile subscribers to switch their service provider in case their native service provider has been affected. "Intra-circle roaming has been initiated so that mobile phone users can easily switch between TSPs in case their native TSP is affected," said S.P. Kochhar, DG, COAI.

Credit Suisse to add 1,000 IT staff in India

Credit Suisse on Tuesday said it has plans to hire more than 1,000 information technology employees in India this year to fuel the Swiss bank's digital aspirations. The new hires would comprise developers and engineers who have capabilities in cybersecurity, data analytics, cloud, API development, machine learning and artificial intelligence, the firm said.

Air traffic declines 27% in April: DGCA report

Domestic air-passenger trips in April registered a decline of 27% compared with the previous month at a time when various parts of the country witnessed a surge in COVID-19 cases. According to DGCA's monthly report, domestic carriers together registered 57.25 lakh travellers in April compared with 78.22 lakh in March. Passenger load factor also showed a declining trend.

GST Council to mull COVID relief: Govt.

Finance Ministry tells court it is receptive to citizens' needs, has already offered significant duty relief

VIKAS DHOOT

NEW DELHI

Requests for relief from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on critical COVID-19 materials will be placed before the GST Council at its May 28 meeting, the Centre told the Delhi High Court, which had asked it to consider exempting the GST levied on oxygen concentrators imported for personal use.

Stating it had an 'open mind' on all tax relief requests, the Finance Ministry, in a counter affidavit filed before the Bench of Justices Rajiv Shukla and Talwant Singh on Tuesday, argued that merely levying a reasonable GST rate on oxygen concentrators cannot be considered a violation of the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

"If the argument of the petitioner is accepted, then it



Fair play: The petitioner in the case is a senior citizen receiving a concentrator as a gift from a nephew abroad. ■ PTI

will lead to absurd consequences and interpretations, wherein citizens will seek exemption from property tax, since housing is an essential facet of Right of Life... or exemption from taxes on several food items since Right to Food has been held by the Supreme Court to be a

part of Right of Life under Article 21," the Ministry submitted to the court.

Judgment reserved

The Court, which reserved its judgment following Tuesday's proceedings assisted by Amicus Curiae Arvind Datar, had asked the Centre to

drop the GST levy temporarily till the pandemic subsides. The petitioner in the case, a senior citizen getting a concentrator as a gift from a nephew abroad, had invoked Article 21 to challenge a May 1 notification that levied 12% GST on such imports from 28% earlier.

Parity to deter misuse'

"Significant relief has already been provided on personal imports of oxygen concentrators with reduction of duty incidence from 77% to 12%," the Ministry said, adding that tax parity between commercial and personal imports would prevent misuse of the latter route.

"It is felt that any person importing concentrator for personal use or has sources for receiving such supplies in gifts would be in better position to afford the nominal

12% GST as compared to others who source it through commercial channels," the Ministry said, urging the Court to dismiss the petition. Since GST rates and general exemptions are prescribed on the recommendation of the GST Council, all the representations seeking GST relief shall be placed before the Council at its next meeting, the Ministry said.

"The government is receptive to the needs of the citizens... The government has an open mind to all these requests (for tax relief and exemptions) and it would intervene for further concession, as necessary, in the present unprecedented and very dynamic situation to provide relief to the public, particularly those who are not in a position by themselves to afford the COVID relief supply," the Ministry added.

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De Villiers won't come out of retirement: Cricket South Africa

Says discussions with AB have concluded and he has decided 'once and for all'



It's final: de Villiers is not eyeing a return and has decided to move on, according to the South African board. ■ FILE PHOTO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JOHANNESBURG

Cricket South Africa on Tuesday announced that AB de Villiers won't be coming out of international retirement ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup in India, saying that he has decided "once and for all" that his mind will not change.

CSA said that "discussions with AB de Villiers have concluded with the batsman deciding once and for all, that his retirement will remain final." The statement was reportedly made after CSA announced the team for a tour of the West Indies.

Tuesday's statement gave no further details of events or discussions that led to de Villiers' decision.

Surprise

In May 2018, de Villiers had announced his retirement from international cricket.

He played 114 Tests, 228 ODIs and 78 T20Is before announcing his surprise retirement.

However, last month the 37-year-old versatile cricketer said it would be "fantastic" to make an international comeback ahead of the T20 World Cup.

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to be held in India in October-November.

Victor Mpitsang, convenor of selectors, said: "There has been a lot of speculation, especially given how he has been playing in the IPL. Mark Boucher was very clear that he was having conversations with AB."

"Obviously he would always add value in whatever format he was playing, especially in a T20 World Cup, but I have not spoken to him personally and I have to respect the fact that he retired from international cricket."

Received death threats after 2011 WC: du Plessis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis has revealed that he and his wife received death threats after a mix-up with AB de Villiers led to the latter's run out during their 2011 World Cup semifinal defeat to New Zealand.

"It makes you introverted towards people and you put a shield up. All players go through this and it forces us to keep our circles very small."

"It's why I've worked so hard on creating a safe space within our camp," he added.



Faf du Plessis...testing times a decade ago. ■ GETTY IMAGES

became very personal. There were some very offensive things said that I won't repeat," du Plessis was quoted as saying by *ESPNcricinfo*.

"It makes you introverted towards people and you put a shield up. All players go through this and it forces us to keep our circles very small."

"It's why I've worked so hard on creating a safe space within our camp," he added.

Saha tests negative, available for Eng. tour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha has recovered from COVID-19 and will be available for India's tour of England next month.

Saha has reached his home in Kolkata after completing a fortnight-long quarantine at a Delhi hotel. He was picked for the England-bound squad subject to fitness.

The 36-year-old was among the players who con-



tracted the virus during the IPL. Saha needs another negative RT-PCR test before he joins the pre-departure bio-bubble in Mumbai.

BCCI paying quarantine bill of Australians: CA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SYDNEY

The BCCI is footing the bill for the 14-day quarantine of Australian IPL players, who have arrived here from Maldives, Cricket Australia interim CEO Nick Hockley said on Tuesday. The players had to spend 10 days in Maldives

due to a ban imposed by the Australian government on travellers from COVID-ravaged India till May 15.

Hockley said the BCCI has kept its promise and funded the whole operation. "Yes," said Hockley when asked if BCCI was paying for the mandatory quarantine.

'End this rumour-mongering, it has gone on too long and it is time to move on'

The four Australian bowlers — Cummins, Hazlewood, Starc and Lyon — deny knowledge of ball-tampering in the 'Sandpapergate' episode

REUTERS
SYDNEY

The four Australia bowlers who played in the 'Sandpapergate' Test against South Africa in 2018 issued a statement on Tuesday denying any knowledge of ball-tampering and calling for an end to "rumour-mongering" and "innuendo".

Three years after the infamous scandal plunged Australian cricket into crisis, it reared its head again following a suggestion that responsibility for the affair might run deeper than the three players punished for it.

Trigger point
Cameron Bancroft, who was banned for scuffing the ball with a piece of sandpaper

during the third Test against South Africa in Cape Town in March 2018, lit the fuse last week with a cryptic comment in a newspaper interview.

"Obviously what I did benefits bowlers and the awareness around that, probably, is self-explanatory," the batsman told the *Guardian*.

Cricket Australia (CA) issued a request to Bancroft for any "new" information he might have but the idea that other players would have been aware what was going on at Newlands has found fertile ground in the Australian media.

In response, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon issued a statement say-



United we stand: Miffed at the constant insinuation in the 'Sandpapergate' issue, Aussie bowlers Hazlewood, Cummins, Starc and Lyon have come up with a statement pleading that the chapter be closed. ■ TWITTER

ing they were disappointed to see their integrity questioned by some journalists and past players in recent

days. "We have already answered questions many times on this issue, but we feel compelled to put the key

facts on the record again," the statement said.

"We did not know a foreign substance was taken

onto the field to alter the condition of the ball until we saw the images on the big screen at Newlands."

Former Australia captain Michael Clarke expressed incredulity that the bowlers would not have known about the ball tampering, and ex-wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist as well as England seamer Stuart Broad also weighed in on the matter.

"To those who, despite the absence of evidence, insist that 'we must have known' about the use of a foreign substance simply because we are bowlers, we say this," the bowlers' statement continued.

"The whole thing was so badly handled, it was a joke," he told *The Age* newspaper.

"But eventually the whole truth, and nothing but the

truth, will come out and I know the whole truth."

Smith and Warner, who unlike Bancroft have re-established themselves in the Test side since their bans, returned to Sydney from the Indian Premier League via Maldives on Monday to start two weeks of quarantine.

No new information

Local media reported on Tuesday that Bancroft, who is playing county cricket in England, had already replied to CA saying he had no new information about the scandal. "We respectfully request an end to the rumour-mongering and innuendo," the bowlers concluded. "It has gone on too long and it is time to move on."

Robinson and Bracey named for NZ Tests

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

Gloucestershire wicket-keeper-batsman James Bracey and Sussex seam bowler Ollie Robinson were named in England's Test cricket squad for the first time on Tuesday for next month's two-match series against New Zealand.

Bracey has scored 478 County championship runs this season at 53, while Robinson has taken 29 wickets at 14.

Bracey and Robinson were touring reserves for England's winter Test programmes in Sri Lanka and India, and were part of the extended squads for last year's behind-closed-doors series against West Indies and Pakistan.

The squad: Joe Root (Capt.), James Anderson, James Bracey, Stuart Broad, Rory Burns, Zak Crawley, Ben Foakes, Dan Lawrence, Jack Leach, Craig Overton, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, Dom Sibley, Olly Stone and Mark Wood.

Hetmyer, Russell return to West Indies squad



Hetmyer ■ FILE PHOTO



Russell. ■ FILE PHOTO

Indian women to play a Test in Australia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Indian women's cricket team is set to play a Test in Australia after playing one in England next month.

India, which plays its first Test in seven years from June 16 in England, will play another one during the tour of Australia. They will also play ODI and T20I matches Down Under.

India last played a Test against Australia in 2006. "England and Australia

are the two teams that still play Tests and going forward you will see a Test slot in when they visit India or when India tour the two countries," a BCCI official said.

The Indian squad assembles in Mumbai on Wednesday ahead of the UK tour comprising a Test in Bristol, followed by three ODIs and as many T20Is. The team will quarantine for two weeks before flying out to UK with the men's team.

In the decisive set, the top-seeded Federer forced a service break and led 4-2 before Andujar rallied. The former saved two match points on his serve, but the third ended with a wayward forehand under pressure on the baseline.

Andujar put his hands to his head after clinching victory and exchanged an almost apologetic smile with Federer at the net. "Please follow the rules and take precautions. This virus is very dangerous," she added.

Federer crashes out at Geneva

Loses to Andujar in his first match on clay in two years

GENEVA OPEN

ASSOCIATED PRESS
GENEVA

Roger Federer lost his comeback match after two months away, falling to Pablo Andujar 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in the second round of the Geneva Open on Tuesday.

Federer's first match on clay in almost two years kept him on court for almost two hours in only his second tournament since the 2020 Australian Open. The past 15 months have included two surgeries on his right knee.

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The 39-year-old Federer

and 35-year-old Andujar were playing each other for the first time on the Tour.

Before going on court, Federer was a spectator for part of the ATP Tour debut of perhaps the best prospect in Swiss men's tennis since his own rise in the 1990s.

With Federer watching some of the match, 18-year-old Dominic Stricker beat former U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic 7-6(5), 6-2 in the first round. The Swiss left-hander,

who served nine aces, broke Cilic's serve four times and was broken twice.

The results:

Second round: Pablo Andujar bt Roger Federer 6-4, 4-6, 6-4;

First round: Marco Cecchinato bt Stefano Travaglia 6-3, 3-0,

ret'd.; Feliciano Lopez bt Daniel Altmaier 7-6(6), 6-4; Marton Fucsovics bt Henri Laaksonen 7-5, 7-5; Ilya Ivashka bt Fernando Verdasco 7-6(5), 6-4; Pablo Cuevas bt Reilly Opelka 7-6(5), 6-2; Dominic Stricker bt Marin Cilic 7-6(5), 6-1; Fabio Fognini bt Guido Pella 6-2, 6-2.



Striking back: Andujar reeled off four games in a row, from 2-4 in the final set, to turn the tables on Federer. ■ AFP

History repeats itself: first for the men, then for the women



BETWEEN WICKETS

SURESH MENON

In his letter of resignation from the Committee of Administrators, Rama-chandra Guha emphasised the bane of the 'superstar' culture in Indian cricket. It was no surprise. Captains have decided whom they want as coaches, senior players have often been a law unto themselves, and former players have sometimes wielded an unhealthy influence. So it shouldn't come as a shock when similar charges are laid at the door of women's cricket too. Perhaps it has

something to do with our sporting DNA.

Raman's letter

In his letter to the President of the Board of Control for Cricket in India following his removal as head coach, Woorker Ram- an said, "If some people in the system have been highly accommodative to the extent of being seemingly obsequious to an accomplished performer for years on end — and if that performer feels constrained to adhere to the culture — then I would leave it to you to decide if the coach was asking for too much."

That's a roundabout way of putting it, but the message is clear: there's a superstar culture here, and we should do something about it.

Fifth coach in four years

Ramesh Powar is the fifth head coach in four years (he was also the third); four

were sacked owing mainly to player pressure. In this period, India made it to the final of two World Cups — the ODI (2017) and T20 (2020).

Yet if there is some insecurity in the team, it is partly owing to this musical chairs with coaches, partly because there have been no annual contracts since September 2020, and mainly because the BCCI has done little to clear the uncertainties.

The BCCI, which took over the administration of the women's game in 2006, has raised its profile but fails to bring it to the passion and seriousness which it brings to the men's game.

When Powar was first removed from his post, Madan Lal was quoted as saying: "If you keep removing coaches, it would be better to keep a dummy who listens and acts according to the players. The coach is part of the team and takes

decisions which should be abided by the team."

Madan Lal is now part of the Cricket Advisory Committee that removed Rama after a short period in the job.

The last woman head coach Poornima Rau was sacked in 2017. She had this to say in a recent interview: "Put the players in their places...Whoever these superstars are, they just build a wall around them, have agendas, there is a constant bickering within the team."

Culture issue

Tushar Arothe, who succeeded Rau, said later, "There is a lot of politics in women's cricket. What I have seen from very close quarters in the team is that, there is a lot of appeasement going on. I think the blame falls on former women players. Also, it is about the culture in

the team. If a player doesn't get along well with the coach, the latter is changed at their behest. Former players should strictly stay away..."

As coaches came and went, the team culture has remained the same. And it has been ignored.

Interestingly, Powar was replaced in December 2018 after a public spat with current ODI captain and legend of the Indian game, Mithali Raj who accused him of bias. Powar said Raj had been blackmailing the team by threatening to retire if she wasn't asked to open the batting. As is usual in such cases, the question

TV PICKS

Premier League: Star Sports 3, 10.30 p.m.; & SS Select 1&2 (SD & HD) & Star Sports 3, 11.30 p.m. & 12.45 a.m. (Thursday).

IN BRIEF



Serena falls to Siniakova in second round

Former World No. 1 Serena Williams crashed out of the WTA tournament on Tuesday, losing 6-7(4), 2-6 to Czech Katerina Siniakova in the second round on Tuesday. The 39-year-old American, currently ranked eighth in the world, had been given a wild card to play in Parma after her early exit from the Italian Open, where she had also lost in the second round. Serena fired five aces but also made seven double faults as she struggled with her serve. Siniakova broke the American three times in the second set as she wrapped up the match in one hour and 37 minutes. AFP

Ankita-Buzarnescu duo crashes out

BELGRADE
Ankita Raina and Mihaela Buzarnescu of Romania were beaten 6-3, 4-6, [10-5] by Belarus' Lidziya Marozava and Andreea Mitu of Romania in the doubles pre-quarterfinals of the \$235,238 WTA tennis tournament here.



Kolesnikov breaks own world record

BUDAPEST
Russian swimmer Kliment Kolesnikov improved his own world record in the 50m backstroke. The 20-year-old touched in 23.93s during the semifinals of the European Championship on Monday. That was 0.07 quicker than his previous mark set at the last Euros in Glasgow three years ago. AP

Top boxers for Asian meet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA
The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Tuesday announced full strength men and women squads for the Asian championships to be held in Dubai from May 24 to June 1.

The squads: Men: Vinod Tawar (49kg), Amit Pangal (52kg), Mohammad Hussamuddin (56kg), Varinder Singh (60kg), Shiva Thapa (64kg), Vikas Krishan (69kg), Ashish Kumar (75kg), Sumit Sangwan (81kg), Sanjeev (91kg) and Narendra (+91kg). Women: Monika (48kg), M.C. Mary Kom (51kg), Sakshi (54kg), Jasmine (57kg), Simranjit Kaur (60kg), Lubratalsai (64kg), Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), Pooja Rani (75kg), Saweety (81kg) and Anupama (+81kg).

Tough times, but we are ready for the task'

Trying to follow the protocols specified to us by our coaches, says India midfielder Anirudh Thapa

FOOTBALL

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA
KOLKATA

The news of human suffering and death caused by the pandemic is having a traumatic effect on the minds but, as a professional footballer, one has to stay focused on giving his best for the country.

Big challenge

Anirudh Thapa, a key midfielder of the Indian National team, said this while adding that the news of losing close ones to COVID-19 is creating an atmosphere of despair all around. This remains a big challenge every player who has got a call-up to represent his country in the upcoming 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup qualifiers in Qatar.

The National team is flying off to Doha on Wednesday to play the remainder of the



Bracing up: We are focused on staying fit and prepared for the upcoming assignments, says Anirudh Thapa. ■ FILE PHOTO

qualifiers — which are against host Qatar (June 3), Bangladesh (June 7) and Afghanistan (June 15).

"The last few weeks have

been difficult with the COVID situation because the infections are increasing and we keep getting news that some of our close ones have

passed away. It is difficult to focus because there is a fear that we and our family members might also get infected with the virus. Everyone is concerned about that and we are trying to stay focused and follow the protocols specified to us by our coaches," Thapa said during an interaction.

Thapa, who is considered one of the best midfielders currently in business, said the players picked by head coach Igor Stimac for the upcoming assignment have been kept mentally fit by special modules created by the strength and conditioning coach Luka Radman (popular with the players as Professor).

"What he (Stimac) is now trying to do is find the best players for each position. That is the reason why he gave debut to so many players in the last round of friendlies India played in Dubai."

sending us in the group in order to stay fit and keep ourselves ready for the upcoming assignments," Thapa said.

When asked about the reason behind India's recent 6-0 debacle against UAE in a friendly in March, Thapa said it may have happened because Stimac was testing the youngsters ahead of the big assignments.

"We were all aware that we had the matches in June and we kept preparing for it in the confines of our home. We were following the programmes that Professor was

"We were all aware that we had the matches in June and we kept preparing for it in the confines of our home. We were following the programmes that Professor was



Amul
Eat for health!

daCunha/AB/741

NRAI gets into Esport

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), in collaboration with the Mobile Premier League (MPL), will release a mobile version of non-violent shooting game, with ISSF style trap and skeet formats, on August 15.

This venture has been triggered by the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) collaboration with five international sports federations — baseball, cycling, rowing, sailing and motorsport — to launch the inaugural Olympic Virtual Series (OVS) in the run-up to the Tokyo Games.

"We welcome the IOC's move to introduce virtual Esport versions of real world physical sport."

"We are sure this will encourage people to take up these sports virtually and potentially chart a way for them to emerge as champions in the physical sport," said NRAI president Raninder Singh.

Welcoming the drive, Ganesh Narang said: "Technology is increasingly playing an important role in improving player performances, and amplifying the experience. This initiative will critically increase fan awareness about competitive sports."

BWF to vote on proposed five-game scoring system

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Replacing the current three-game format with a best-of-five scoring system will once again be put to vote by the Badminton World Federation at its AGM on Saturday.

The Frenchman, who also won the 1991-92 First Division title with Leeds United, retired in May 1997 aged 30.

"I am very happy and very proud," Cantona told Premier League website.

2014 for the first time but it didn't receive the support.

The 11x5 system, couldn't gather enough votes during last year's AGM. This time, a joint proposal to amend the Laws of Badminton relating to the Scoring System" came from Badminton Indonesia and Badminton Maldives.

Vemuri Sudhakar succumbs to COVID

Gopi Chand and others condole the death of the well-known official

BADMINTON

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD



Vemuri Sudhakar, a respected badminton official across the world, succumbed to COVID-19 here on Tuesday. He was 70 and is survived by wife and two daughters.

Sudhakar officiated in three Olympics (1992-2000) besides many World championships, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and many national champions for close to four decades.

Dronacharya S.M. Arif, who shared a special bond with Sudhakar, called it a huge personal loss.

"I always shared my thoughts not just on the

expressed their condolences.

"A much loved, revered and respected figure in the Indian badminton fraternity left us this morning. A colossal figure in the badminton circuit in Hyderabad, he passed on his wisdom to several upcoming players and officials," Gopi said.

"Sudhakar leaves an unparalleled legacy of integrity, honesty and commitment to the sport of badminton, and he will remain irreplaceable in the hearts of those who knew and loved him," he said.

Senior BAI official and former AP Badminton Association secretary K.Ch. Puntnaiah Choudhary said Sudhakar was largely

responsible in ensuring there is a pool of qualified technical officials by conducting various seminars and clinics.

Former national doubles champion Manoj Kumar, who broke the news to the media, said he missed a personal friend.

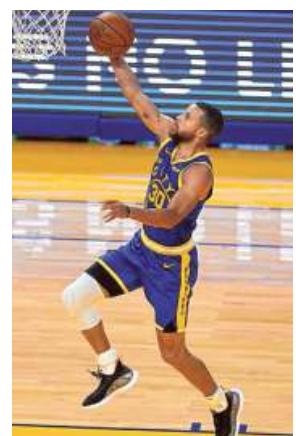
"Right from my playing days, he has been a great friend and guide," Manoj said.

Former World championship women's doubles bronze medallist G. Jwala — who Sudhakar wrote to, calling her his "favourite child" from the hospital bed — said the badminton fraternity lost a gem. "It is the end of an era. We miss you uncle," a visibly emotional Jwala said.

James touts Curry for MVP

Warriors star showcased all-round game through the season

NBA



Curry...what a season! ■ AP

record,' instead of just saying who had the best season that year. And Steph has had, in my opinion, the best season all year."

Curry's performance in 2020-21 was an important return to elite form after he missed most of 2019-20 with a broken hand.

James admitted he thought Curry, the 2015 and 2016 MVP, was a long shot at best to win the award.

"Obviously I don't think Steph is going to get it ...That's another conversation," James said. "But in my eyes, he's played the best basketball all year round."

Jokic tipped to win
Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic is the betting favourite for the award, and 76ers' Joel Embiid believes he has a case, too, despite missing a chunk of the season with a knee injury.

"We get caught up in the records sometimes," he continued. "We get caught up in the records sometimes," he continued. "We get caught up in the records sometimes," he continued. "We get caught up in the records sometimes," he continued.

"I mean, just look at what

he's done this year," James said of Curry. "I don't know anything else if you're looking for an MVP. If Steph is not on Golden State's team, what are we looking at?

"We get caught up in the records sometimes," he continued. "We get caught up in the records sometimes," he continued. "We get caught up in the records sometimes," he continued.

"I mean, just look at what

Manas Dhamne trains with Riccardo Piatti

He has the potential to become a world-class player, says Vasudevan

TENNIS

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Manas Dhamne is thrilled to be training with one of the leading coaches of the world, Riccardo Piatti, in Italy.

But, he is disappointed that he has to withdraw from the Indian team for the Asia-Oceania World junior tennis event in Kazakhstan in June.

"Manas felt sad as the Kazakh travel did not work out," said dad Manoj Dhamne.

After training for a week last year with Piatti, who has coached Novak Djokovic, Ivan Ljubicic, Richard Gasquet and Milos Raonic among others, Dhamne had to wait for long to return to Italy owing to the pandemic.

S. Vasudevan, a member of the Indian team that reached the Davis Cup final



In safe hands: Manas Dhamne, with mother Nikita and Vasudevan, at Biel. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

in 1987, helped Dhamne to get to Switzerland, train for a week, play an ITF junior tournament and then move to the Piatti base.

"Tennis-wise he has a great potential to become a world-class player. He beat an 18-year-old in the ITF junior event in Sierre.

"He is for sure in great

fully and brings it on the pitch. He hits the ball very clean and can also accelerate well. He is already very big for a 13-year-old," said Peter Frey of the academy, which has good coaches and "world-class fitness trainers".

Dhamne did use many months of waiting time to compete in the ITF junior tournaments in India, apart from finishing runner-up in the National under-18 championship.

The high standards of physical fitness, demanded by tennis in Europe, will take some time for Dhamne to acquire.

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