



PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION



NETANYAHU AGAIN FAILS
TO FORM ISRAEL GOVT



XI'S LETTER



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MAHREZ FINDS
MANCUNIANS'
PATH TO GLORY



P9

P6

P10

P12

WEATHER

Partly cloudy sky with very light rain/thundershower. Temperature likely to be in the range of 38-24 degrees Celsius.

RAINFALL: Trace

RELATIVE HUMIDITY	Max. 74% Min. 28%
TEMPERATURE	Max: 40.5°C (+2) Min: 24.0°C (-1)
SUN RISES	SUN SETS
05:36 hrs	18:59 hrs
MOON RISES	MOON SETS
03:20 hrs	14:17 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Rickshaws stand idle due to lockdown, under Barapullah Flyover, in the Capital on Wednesday.

■ SUBRATA DUTTA

Oli govt loses majority: Nepal's embattled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli-led government on Wednesday lost majority support in the House of Representatives after the CPN (Maoist Center) led by Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" officially withdrew support to it. The move comes two days after Prime Minister Oli said he would seek a Vote of Confidence in the House on 10 May. ■ P9

MHA reminder to state: The home ministry dispatched a terse reminder to the West Bengal government on Wednesday to submit a detailed report on the post-poll violence in the state, warning it that the matter will be taken "seriously" in case it fails to do so, and asked it to take necessary measures to stop such incidents "without any loss of time".

Jaishankar delegation: Members of the delegation accompanying External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to the UK have tested positive for Covid-19, forcing the minister to take his remaining schedule in London including his attendance at a G7 gathering, in virtual mode. ■ P5

13 patients dead in TN hospital, oxygen 'glitch' blamed

CHENNAI, 5 MAY

A series of 13 deaths in a row in the Government Chengalpattu Medical College hospital near Chennai on Tuesday triggered allegations that the deaths were due to non-availability of oxygen. But officials strongly denied it.

Chengalpattu Collector A John Louis acknowledged that there was a "technical glitch" on Tuesday due to low pressure in the liquid oxygen tank. But he said there were 40 oxygen cylinders using which the patients were given oxygen and all the patients died due to their illness.

According to sources, starting 4 p.m. Tuesday a series of patient deaths were reported in three blocks, including in Medical ICU. Sources said that on Tuesday there was delay in refilling of oxygen.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Mr John Louis said, "On Tuesday there were 309 patients on oxygen support. The hospital oxygen intake per day is usually around 2.9KL but on Tuesday it went up to 4.5KL. The hospital oxygen capacity is 23KL. On Tuesday morning there was 1.4KL of oxygen and in the evening 5KL was filled. Also there were 40 oxygen cylinders kept ready to use in case there is a drop in oxygen pressure. These cylinders were used last night. I was personally monitoring it." He also clarified that among the deceased, only one was RT PCR confirmed Covid patient and others were suspected Covid patients and died due to various factors including age and other comorbidities.

Fresh curbs in WB: Local trains suspended, Metro curtailed

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 5 MAY

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee today announced suspension of local trains and curtailment of state-run transport and metro services by 50 per cent in Bengal from tomorrow, besides imposing a host of restrictions in all sectors to control the rapid spread of Covid-19 in the state.

"We are not going for a complete lockdown at the moment but we have decided to come up with additional restrictions so as to avoid all kinds of gatherings in order to con-

trol the situation. Wearing of masks is mandatory and strict action will be taken against people who flout this. Our advisory to the people of the state is to wear masks, maintain physical distance, wash hands and use sanitiser," said Miss Banerjee at a virtual Press conference in Nabanna after holding a meeting on Covid management with state officials following her swearing-in as the state's chief minister for a third term.

The new restrictions came even as Bengal reported 1,02 fresh Covid-19 cases and 103 deaths today, taking the total Covid case count to 9,16,635 and death toll to 11,847.

Movement of local trains will be suspended from tomorrow and state transport, including Kolkata Metro, will function at 50 per cent capacity. "We can't allow overcrowding in local trains. As it is, four to five lakh came from outside the state and spread the virus here," Miss Banerjee said.

According to government sources, the suspension of local trains will be for 14 days.

Miss Banerjee said that all markets, retailers and stand-alone shops will now function only from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. and from 5 to 7 in the evening. Shop-

ping complexes, gyms, cinema halls, beauty parlours and others have been ordered shut. Banks have been allowed to operate from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. while jewellery shops can remain open from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Home delivery of food and other commodities will be encouraged and government-run 'Sufal Bangla' stores will be increased, she said.

Miss Banerjee said attendance in all state government offices will now be 50 per cent and urged the private sector to allow employees to 'work from home' or follow a staggered work schedule.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday struck down the Maharashtra law granting quota to Marathas in admissions and government jobs, terming it as unconstitutional, and held there were no exceptional circumstances to breach the 50 per cent reservation cap set by the 1992 Mandal verdict.

The top court also refused to refer the Mandal judgement to a larger bench for reconsideration, saying it has been upheld time and again by its various verdicts.

A five-judge constitution

bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan concurred on three major issues, framed during the hearing, and said the MC Gaikwad commission report which was the basis for the Maratha quota did not highlight any exceptional circumstances for grant of reservation to the community.

Maha law for Maratha quota struck down as unconstitutional

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

With folded hands, we request the prime minister and the president to take an immediate decision on Maratha quota

UDDHAV THACKERAY
MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER

The bench also said that appointments made in government jobs and admissions in post graduate courses after the Bombay High Court verdict of 2019 upholding Maratha quota and September 9, 2020 order of the top court staying the implementation of quota will not be affected. The bench, by a majority of 3-2 also directed the Centre to notify a fresh list of Socio and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) and said till the time notification is issued the existing list will hold its place. The judgment came on a batch of pleas challenging the Bombay High Court verdict.

Dropping to 9.8 per cent under the 'moderate' scenario where infections peak in May, and falling to as low as 8.2 per cent under 'severe' scenario under which caseload would peak only in late June.

Das said the central bank sees the outlook as 'highly uncertain' and clouded with downside risks, but does not see a major change to inflation forecast.

"As the financial year 2020-21 (April 2020 to March 2021) - the year of the pandemic - was drawing to a close, the Indian economy was advantageously poised, relative to peers. India was at the foothills of a strong recovery, having regained positive growth, but more importantly, having flattened the infection curve. In a few weeks since then, the situation has altered drastically," he said.

RBI gives relief to small borrowers, loans to vaccine makers, hospitals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 5 MAY

SOFTENING THE BLOW



► Loan recast of up to two years will be available to individuals and small and medium enterprises that did not restructure their loans in 2020 and were classified as standard accounts till March 2021, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said.

Last year, the RBI had allowed banks to restructure loans of small borrowers by extending repayment period for up to 2 years.

This facility will be available to borrowers with a total exposure of Rs 25 crore. As much as 90 per cent of

the total borrowers will be covered by this restructuring, according to Indian Banks' Association.

Last year, the RBI had allowed banks to restructure loans of small borrowers by extending repayment period for up to 2 years.

Acquisition Programme (G-SAP) ~ India's version of quantitative easing ~ on May 20.

► Also announced was a special three-year long-term repo operation of Rs 10,000 crore for small finance banks (SFBs), and banks being allowed to maintain lower reserves for advances made to small borrowers.

vaccine manufacturers, importers/ suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices, with tenors up to three years at the repo rate.

In the present recast, banks have been allowed to restructure loans through means such as extending tenure or renegotiating interest rate.

Das said RBI will give Rs 50,000 crore of liquidity support to banks to lend to the healthcare sector, including

bonds under the Government Securities Acquisition Programme (G-SAP) ~ India's version of quantitative easing ~ on May 20.

Also announced was a special three-year long-term repo operation of Rs 10,000 crore for small finance banks (SFBs), and banks being allowed to maintain lower reserves for advances made to small borrowers.

Just as the economy appeared to be inching back to normalcy, India was hit by a second wave of infections in early April, prompting states and cities to restrict public movements and impose lockdowns, which have hit some businesses hard.

India added 3,82,315 virus cases over the last 24 hours to reach a total of 2.06 crore, while death toll rose by a record 3,780

to 226,188, health ministry data showed.

RBI has been meeting with bankers and shadow lenders (NBFCs) in recent weeks to discuss the economic situation, possible stress to balance sheets and credit flow in the system.

Bankers had reportedly asked the RBI for a three-month moratorium, particularly for retail and small borrowers.

S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday said the second wave of Covid infections may derail a strong recovery in Indian economy and credit conditions. It went on to project a lower than previously anticipated GDP growth rate in different scenarios.

Against 11 per cent GDP growth it had projected March, S&P Ratings saw growth rate

dropping to 9.8 per cent under the 'moderate' scenario where infections peak in May, and falling to as low as 8.2 per cent under 'severe' scenario under which caseload would peak only in late June.

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I appeal to all the three MLAs in the Hills to work for the people, irrespective of party affiliation

SHANTA CHETTRI, RAJYA SABHA MP, TMC

20,960 new cases, 311 deaths in Delhi amid raging viral storm

Capital's Covid positivity rate below 30 pc for 4th day; 91,859 active cases logged

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

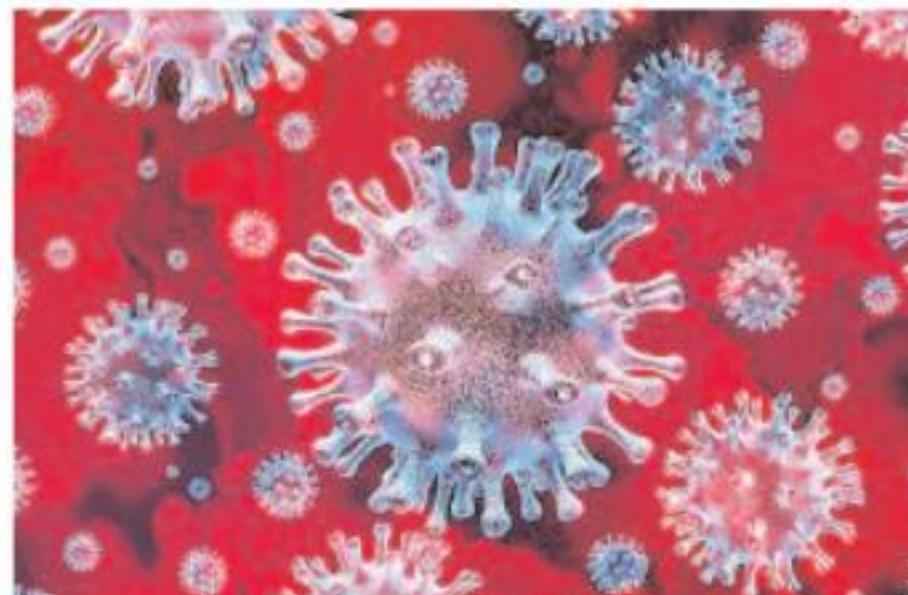
As it continues to be engulfed by an unprecedented public health crisis in the wake of a devastating Covid wave amid acute shortages of oxygen, hospital beds, and essential medicines, Delhi today recorded 311 coronavirus-related deaths and 20,960 infections

with a positivity rate of 26.37 percent, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

This is the fourth consecutive day that the city's Covid positivity rate has remained below 30 percent. The positivity rate had earlier soared even beyond the staggering 30 percent mark.

According to government data, Delhi registered a positivity rate of 26.73 on Tuesday, 29.56 per cent on Monday, 28.33 per cent on Sunday, 31.6 per cent on Saturday, and 32.7 per cent last Friday. On April 22, a positivity rate of 36.2 percent, the highest so far, was recorded.

Delhi had reported 19,953 Covid cases on Tuesday, 18,043 cases on Monday, the lowest since April 15, 20,394 cases on Sunday, 25,219 on Saturday, and



27,047 cases last Friday.

The city had logged 338 Covid deaths on Tuesday, 448 on Monday, the highest so far, 407 on Sunday, 412 on Saturday, and 375 last Friday, as per official figures.

Today's fresh cases were detected out of 79,491 tests, according to the health bulletin.

The tests included 62,767 RTPCR/ CBNAAT/ True Noses and 16,724 rapid antigen tests.

Delhi's coronavirus caseload has now shot up to 12,53,902, of which over 11.43 lakh patients have recovered. The city's Covid death toll has rocketed to 18,063,

the bulletin said.

The number of active cases in the city stands at 91,859.

Of the 21,528 Covid beds in various hospitals in the national capital, only 1,518 are vacant.

The containment zones across Delhi now stands at 47,704, the bulletin added.

The Delhi government's health department had not released its daily Covid bulletin yesterday. The department today said it was looking into the reasons why it was delayed.

Meanwhile, a day after Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal directed officials for a survey of the "Covid super-spreader spots" in Delhi, teams were

deployed in several districts for listing the crowded areas of the national capital, officials said today.

In view of a raging coronavirus storm in Delhi, Baijal directed the district magistrates (DMs) and deputy commissioners of police (DCPs) to conduct an intensive survey in their areas and identify the potential "super-spreader" sites.

The exercise is currently on the drawing board and will be put on the ground after discussions with the DCPs concerned with teams deployed to identify the super-spreader sites such as markets and densely populated areas, one of the DMs said.

The DMs and DCPs will identify places such as colonies, slums, markets and other crowded places in their areas that can potentially emerge as super-spreader spots once the lockdown is lifted. Delhi has been under a Covid-induced lockdown since 19 April, which has been extended till 10 May.

In some districts, surveillance teams have been deployed at dispensaries to keep a watch on the areas with a high number of Covid cases. The survey will focus on such areas.

'Grave urgency': HC asks Centre, Delhi government to together create O2 buffer, streamline its distribution

PTI

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the Centre and the Delhi government to work together to create the oxygen buffer and streamline the distribution process for which help of the armed forces can be sought as "there is grave urgency".

"You should start working together on it (creation of buffer). In a war when there is a common enemy, you unite against it," the court said while also making an observation that it appeared that the Delhi government has not taken steps for creation of a buffer of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) and for streamlining its distribution in the national capital.

An official from the Ministry of Defence, who later joined the proceedings, said she "sees no difficulty in enabling the Delhi government" to set up the tanks.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli also said it is for the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) to explore the various possibilities to create storage facilities for LMO and oxygen cylinders in the city.

It said the obligation to create an oxygen buffer fell on both the Centre and GNCTD as per the Supreme Court's April 30 order.

It asked Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Chetan



Sharma to seek instructions with regard to seeking aid from the armed forces for "setting up on a war footing storage tanks for LMO".

An official from the Ministry of Defence, who later joined the proceedings, said she "sees no difficulty in enabling the Delhi government" to set up the tanks.

Besides the help of the armed forces, the bench said the GNCTD may also take the assistance of the Delhi Technological University to prepare a blueprint for storage and distribution of oxygen in the city.

The observations and directions by the bench came after one of the lawyers present in the hearing said that large static cryogenic tanks for storing LMO are available and can be installed in the city

to create a buffer of the life saving gas.

The lawyer, Aditya Prasad, said that smaller tankers can pick up oxygen from the larger tanks and distribute it in the city and in this way Delhi need not fall upon other states or Centre for tankers to transport oxygen.

He said the tanks can be installed with the help of the Army. The court also noted that oxygen equipment INOX manufacturers such static cryogenic tanks and there may be others and it was for the Delhi government to explore all the possibilities for creating storage facilities for oxygen.

The bench asked the Centre and Delhi government to identify the necessary areas where such tanks can be safely installed and to also create a report on the aspect by Friday, May 7.

The court was hearing several pleas regarding the issues related to COVID-19 that Delhi is grappling with presently.

PIL in HC for priority to disabled in vaccination

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

A PIL in the Delhi High Court on Wednesday urged it to direct the Centre and Delhi government to treat persons with disabilities (PWD) on priority and make special provisions for vaccinating them against COVID-19 irrespective of their age.

A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh issued

notice to the Ministry of Health and Delhi government on the plea by two disabled persons.

In their plea, filed through advocates Siddharth Seem and Joyc, they have contended that the government's failure to make any special provision for ensuring priority to PWD in the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine, was a violation of the Constitutional mandate to give preferential treatment to such individuals.

Delhi government writes to CBSE for more time to compile Class 10 results

PTI

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The Delhi government on Wednesday urged the CBSE to review the timeline for compiling Class 10 board exam results since many of the teachers involved in COVID-19 duties and schools are being used as vaccination centres.

In a letter to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the government also cited the high positivity rate, the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the national capital and the lockdown imposed in the city till May 10.

The CBSE has said that the marks for Class 10 students will have to be submitted by schools by June 11 and the result will be declared by June 20.

"Keeping in view the ongoing sit-

uation, including its emotional ramifications, enforcement of lockdown and deployment of teachers for various duties, the competent authority of CBSE is requested to kindly review the Time Schedule... regarding Policy for Tabulation of Marks for Class X Board Exams 2021," the Delhi government said.

"Further, to assist the district administration, most of the teachers and other staff, including data entry operators and IT assistants of Delhi Government schools, are at the forefront of COVID-19 related duties," it said.

According to the letter, teachers are involved in conducting door-to-door surveys in COVID-19 hotspots and vulnerable areas, providing assistance with testing and contact tracing, monitoring the movement of bodies and ensuring timely disposal of calls for hear-

vans. They are also engaged in activities related to COVID vaccination.

The teachers are also assisting the government in the enforcement of COVID protocols and screening at airport, it said. The government said 76 of its schools have been designated as COVID vaccination centres.

In addition to that, there have been several instances wherein teachers and students or their family members have tested positive for COVID-19 or have lost their dear ones, it said.

Delhi recorded 311 COVID-19 deaths and 20,960 fresh cases that pushed the toll to 18,063 and the infection tally to 12,53,902.

The CBSE had on April 14 cancelled Class 10 exams and postponed Class 12 exams in view of the surge in COVID-19 cases.

Foreign aid meant for people, not to be kept in boxes:HC

PTI

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

equipment, received as aid, by the Centre and Delhi government.

He said that Lady Hardinge Medical College received around 260 oxygen concentrators when it did not require that much.

He said that such random and arbitrary distribution of the equipment may lead to a situation where it is not sent where it is actually needed. The bench

said the concern expressed by the amicus curiae "deserves consideration" and directed the Centre to verify the position on the ground with regard to distribution of foreign aid to various hospitals.

The court also asked the Centre to consider distributing the equipment to voluntary organisations like Gurudwaras and NGOs.

Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI
(Testamentary Intestate Jurisdiction)
Citation U/S 283, Indian Succession Act, 1925
In the matter of Test case No. 34/2021
Vaibhav Gupta
Petitioner
Versus
State of NCT of Delhi & Ors.
Respondents
To,
All Concerned
In the matter of estate of Late Smt. Sushma Gupta, w/o Mr. Kudeep Gupta, r/o B-1/151 Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110063.
Whereas Mr. Vaibhav Gupta

s/o Mr. Kudeep Gupta, r/o B-1/151 Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110063, has filed a petition under Section 278 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 for grant of Letter of Administration of Will dated 28/03/2018 of Smt. Sushma Gupta, deceased.

And whereas the aforesaid case is fixed for hearing on 31-05-2021 at 11:00 a.m. before the Joint Registrar (Judicial) of this Hon'ble Court. This citation is issued in terms of Section 283 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 for persons claiming to have any interest in the properties of the said deceased to come to this Court, file objections, if any and take part in the proceedings on the date specified above for the grant of Letter of Administration.

Given under my hand and
S. Assistant Registrar for Registrar Seal of the Court

PUBLIC NOTIFICATIONS

THE AGRI-HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF INDIA
1, Alipore Road
Kolkata - 700027
Notices are hereby given that the 201 AGM of the Society for the year ended on 31.03.2020 will be held on Saturday, 08.05.2021 at 11.00 a.m. on Zoom Portal.
By Order of the Council
Sandip Saha
Secretary

PTI
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

A PIL in the Delhi High Court on Wednesday urged it to direct the Delhi government designate at least five hospitals which will mandatorily cater to medical needs of children with special needs (CWSN), especially intellectually disabled, who may be infected with COVID-19 without insisting upon RTPCR reports, oxygen levels or CT scan results.

The plea by a lawyer has claimed that CWSN or persons with disabilities (PWD), especially

those who are intellectually disabled, or do not have voluntary muscle control, do not allow outsiders to carry out nasal swabs for RTPCR tests, nor do they lie still for a CT scan or measuring oxygen levels unless they are on general anesthesia in a hospital setting.

A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh issued notices to the Union ministries of Health and Social Justice and the Delhi government seeking their stand on the petition by advocate Anshuman Sahni.

Sahni, in the plea, has referred to various instances where parents of CWSN or PWD have been turned away by hospitals as they could not provide RTPCR test reports, oxygen saturation levels or CT scan results.

"Such children or persons have gone through enough trauma in the last one year being locked down or locked in due to the pandemic. They are already very stressed and highly disturbed that in a situation where they contract COVID-19, it is very difficult to check their SPO2 (oxygen) levels, put on an oxygen concentrator, take a nasal swab or do a CT scan unless they are on general anesthesia in a hospital setting," Sahni has said in his petition.

He has said that he is not seeking a direction to reserve beds exclusively for such individuals, rather he wants to designate five hospitals in the national capital where such children or persons with special needs may be taken for treatment and where they may not be denied admission simply for the reason that they were unable to provide their SPO2 levels or lung CT scan.

Such persons should be taken

into emergency and provided immediate medical care and they should not be refused medical treatment for any reason whatsoever, the petition has said.

Sahni has said it was "disheartening" to see parents of such persons or children trying to treat them at home without much luck.

"It is imperative that persons or children with special needs get medical attention in a hospital in an emergency situation so that they are not denied medical treatment for reasons stated above," the petition has said.

The Statesman

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The outcome of India-UK virtual summit and the agreements have marked transformation in ties.

BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER ALEX ELLIS
ON STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

india

THUMBNAILS



Farmers harvest wheat crop in the field on the outskirts of Jammu, on Wednesday. ■ AGENCY

Around 100 priests in Kerala test positive: Over 100 Church of South India priests were reportedly infected with Covid-19 after they attended an annual conference of the Church conducted at Munnar in Kerala's Idukki district, violating Covid-19 protocol. Two priests were reported dead after they attended the retreat at CSI Christ Church in April. The condition of five others is said to be serious. ■ SNS

Philipose Mar Chrysostom passes away: Former head of Mar Thoma Syrian Church and longest-serving bishop in India, Philipose Mar Chrysostom, 104, passed away at Kumbanad Fellowship hospital due to age-related ailments on Wednesday. He was honoured with Padma Vibhushan also. ■ SNS

Telangana govt rules out curfew

Chief secy Somesh Kumar claims Covid curve is flattening

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD, 5 MAY



Unlike Andhra Pradesh which has imposed a partial lockdown from today the Telangana government ruled out any possibility of a curfew even during the weekends claiming that the curve was flattening in the state and the situation was under firm control.

However, the experience of common citizens, struggling to get oxygen cylinders, ventilator beds and other crucial drugs for patients with moderate and severe symptoms, seem to suggest otherwise.

The High Court had suggested that the state should consider imposing a lockdown at least during the weekends but chief secretary Somesh Kumar said it would be of no use since Covid-19 cases have not come down in states where curfews have been imposed to tackle the spread of the virus.

The official claimed that the Covid curve was flattening in Telangana with the positivity rate declining in past 10 days. "We are totally in control. We have to think about people's

livelihood. We have to balance and if required the chief minister and the Cabinet will review but we believe there is no need for a lockdown," said the chief secretary.

While last year, chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao was in favour of lockdown, this year he has been against imposition of any kind of clampdown to tackle Covid-19 situation although the second wave is considered to be more deadly than the first.

In the absence of a full-time health minister after the departure of Eatala Rajender Rao who has recovered from Covid-19 is handling the health portfolio. The chief secretary's claim

of ample stocks and declining Covid-19 curve did not go down well with netizens, particularly those trying to get beds for near and dear ones on social media since the state has been known to under-report Covid cases and fatalities.

Kumar said the downward trend as well as the state government's outreach programme which is distributing Covid home kits would enable the state to tide through the crisis. He pointed out that the state which had 18,000 beds till last September has increased to 52,000 beds in the state.

There was also ample stocks of oxygen, critical drugs like Remdesivir and other consumables, claimed Kumar. He said often citizens are panicking after messages on social media leading to hoarding and artificial shortages.

The official also claimed the situation was much better than other states and Hyderabad is a medical hub with 33 air ambulances bringing in patients from other places, including Delhi. While the state requires 3.4 crore vaccines it has only 3.9 lakh vaccines pointing out that the Centre was still in control of the procurement.

Earlier, Miss Banerjee had advocated free vaccines for all in the country during her election campaign and after routing BJP threatened to launch an agitation over the issue. "At the very outset, I would again like to emphasise free vaccination for all. You may kindly recall my letter on 24 February 2021, wherein I had requested you to allow the government of West Bengal procurement of vaccine from designated points for providing vaccination for the people of the state free of cost. This has not been addressed," read her two-page letter.

Miss Banerjee emphasised four specific points. First, she requested universal immunisation for all in a transparent and time-bound manner.

"At present vaccine avail-

ability is too inadequate to provide eligible beneficiaries and government of India direction to extend vaccination above 18 years makes it unrealistic to achieve. So supply of vaccines is the core issue to address now," her letter read.

Second, she urged Modi to ensure availability of essential drugs including Remdesivir and Tocilizumab to states to meet their growing demand. "At least 10,000 doses of Remdesivir and 1,000 vials of Tocilizumab is the daily requirement of our state," she wrote.

Next, Miss Banerjee informed that the consumption of medical oxygen in Bengal has risen from 200 MT to 400 MT per day and it is likely to go up to 500 MT in the next seven days.

Sealed item rate tenders are hereby invited/re-invited on form 6 & 8 by the Executive Engineer, HPPWD Division Barsar on behalf of Governor of H.P for the following works from the approved and eligible contractors/firms enlisted in H.P.P.W.D. in the appropriate class so as to reach in this office on 28-05-2021 up to 10.30 A.M. and will be opened on the same day at 11:00 A.M. in the presence of intending contractors or their authorized representative. The tender application will be received in this office on 25-05-2021 up to 4:00 P.M. and tender form can be had from this office against cash payment [Non Refundable] on 27-05-2021 from 11:00 A.M. to 4:00P.M. The offer of the tender shall be kept open for 120 days.

Name of work No. 01:- BSP/2020/7 Repair & Maintenance of Health Sub Center building at Samtana (Sh:- C/O R/Wall & Boundary wall etc.) Deposit work Estimated Cost:- 3,55,716/- Earnest Money :- 7200/- Time :-One Month Cost of form:-350/-

Name of work No. 02:- BSP/2020/8 C/O Health Sub Center building at Jajri (Sh:- C/O Boundary wall) Deposit work Estimated Cost:- 2,21,400/- Earnest Money :-4500/- Time :-One Month Cost of form:-350/-

Name of work No. 03:- BSP/2020/9 C/O Health Sub Center building at Fagoti (Sh:- C/O Boundary wall i/c gate ,R/wall & P/L cement concrete pavement in path) Deposit work Estimated Cost:- 4,44,409/- Earnest Money :- 8900/- Time :-Two Month Cost of form:-350/-

Name of work No. 04:- C/O link road harizan Basti Beri Pahloo Kapariana km. 0/0 to 2/0 (Sh:- P/L soloing in km. 0/0 to 1/0) Under SCSP Head Estimated Cost:- 1,46,471/- Earnest Money :- 3000/- Time :-Two Month Cost of form:-350/-

Name of work No. 05:- A/R & M/O on Barsar Dhaneta road Km. 0/0 to 1/40 / Sh:- C/O U-Shape drain at KM. 3/780 to 3/930 & B/Wall at Km. 3/980 to 3/992) Estimated Cost:- 3,07,443/- Earnest Money :- 6200/- Time :-Two Month Cost of form:-350/-

Name of work No. 06:- Preparation of Detailed Project report i/c Plan-L Section,X-Section and Survey work for the Upgradation of road Badran Garli Usnar Kalan Nara Darkoti to Harsoor bridge km. 0/0 to 28/500 Under Nabard Head Estimated Cost:- 4,98,750/- Earnest Money :- 10,000/- Time :-Two Month Cost of form:-350/-

Name of work No. 07:- C/O link road to Harizan Basti Up Mohal Kardoh km. 0/0 to 2/500 (Sh:- C/O R/wall at Rd. 1/385 to 1/399.70) Under SCSP Head Estimated Cost:- 4,74,279/- Earnest Money :- 9500/- Time :-Two Month Cost of form:-350/-

Name of work No. 08:- C/O link road Harizan Basti Tillu Sher Hudu km. 0/0 to 1/900 (Sh:- P/L soling & M/T in km. 1/750 to 1/855) Under SCSP Head Estimated Cost:- 1,31,923/- Earnest Money :- 27000/- Time :-One Month Cost of form:-350/-

Name of work No. 09:- A/R & M/O on Barsar Shahtali road km. 0/0 to 12/0 (Sh:- Repair of pot holes in between km. 8/0 to 11/240) Estimated Cost:- 4,28,463/- Earnest Money :- 8600/- Time :-Two Month Cost of form:-350/-

Name of work No. 10:- A/R & M/O on Barsar Dhaneta road km. 0/0 to 14/0 (Sh:- Repair of pot holes in between km. 6/300 to 12/00) Estimated Cost:- 4,89,674/- Earnest Money :- 9800/- Time :-Two Month Cost of form:-350/-

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

No.1:- The Earnest Money in the shape of National saving certificates /Time deposit Accounts/ Saving Account/ FDRs in any of the post office/ Nationalized Bank in duly pledged in favour of the Executive Engineer Barsar must be accompanied with the application.

The tender document shall be accepted in Two Covers.(Cover-1 shall contain EMD and Cover-2 shall contain application and other documents.

No.2:- Conditional tenders and the tenders received without earnest money will outrightly be rejected.

No.3:- The contractor shall accompany his enlistment/ renewal order, G.S.T. No. with latest clearance return and EPF No. with latest clearance return with his application for obtaining the tender documents.

No.4:- Executive Engineer Reserves the right to reject the tender without assigning any reason.

No.5:- The work will be completed by the contractor within the stipulated period.

No.6:- Tender forms will not be issued to those contractors who are not registered under HPGST Act-1988 and GST & photo copy of individual PAN No. allotted to them attached with their application at the time of applying for tender documents. Application will not be entertained without aforesaid documents.

No.7:- The contractor firms are required to insert the rate of each item in words as well as in figures failing which Executive Engineer reserves the right to accept / rejects any overall tender.

No.8:- The tender shall be issued to only those contractors/firms who are found eligible suitable and competent.

No.9:- The tender forms shall be issued to eligible contractor depending upon their past performance and work experience which shall be duly evaluated by the technical evaluation committee.

No.10:- The Tender forms of soling ,wearing and tarring shall be issued only to those contractors who will produce proper documents of ownership of required machinery and completion certificate of similar work issued by the concerned Executive Engineer also required & tender forms for Mastick Asphalt wearing course shall be issued only to those contractors who will produce ownership document/bills of equipments i.e. Tar Boiler, Mastic Cooker & Generator 62kv .

No.11:- contractor /firm having necessary documents past adequate experience shall be preferred.

No.12:- Contractor who have failed to start /complete the work in hand with in reasonable time shall not be issued tender forms.

No.13:- One contractor should not have more than two major works in hand at a time.

No.14:- If 28-05-2021 happens to be holiday the tender shall be opened on next working day at 11.00 A.M.

Executive Engineer,
Barsar Divn.HPPWD,
Barsar

Mamata sworn in, vows to fight Covid-19, violence

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 5 MAY

es my guests and that of Governor's."

After taking oath, she reiterated that her first priority was to address the Covid-19 situation of West Bengal and informed that she had scheduled a meeting at 12.30 pm in Nabanna.

She vowed to take stringent action against those behind political violence that has fomented turbulence across the state.

Miss Banerjee arrive at Raj Bhavan at 10.45 am.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankar came to the hall and national anthem was played.

Dhankar administered her the oath of office and secrecy at a low-key ceremony at Raj Bhavan held amid the vicious second wave.

The chief minister today apologised to the masses and her party leaders for being unable to invite them to her swearing-in ceremony who helped her triumph in the poll battle.

"There is Covid restriction and I could only invite 50 guests but that too comprises

Officers removed by EC reinstated

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 5 MAY

Nirajnayan as DGP and transferred Virendra as on 10 March, and on 1 March Shamim was replaced by JagMohan.

DME East Midnapore Smita Pandey has been transferred to the post of secretary, IT and Electronics department with additional charge of managing director, West Bengal Electronics Industry Development Corporation (WEBEL).

Javed Shamim has been reinstated as ADG (law and order) and the incumbent Jag Mohan has been transferred as director of civil defence.

The EC had appointed

I think she should take appropriate steps to curb the violence."

Miss Banerjee's Cabinet will be expanded on 9 May, the birth anniversary of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, TMC sources said.

Apart from senior TMC leaders like Partha Chatterjee and Subrata Mukherjee, poll strategist Prashant Kishor, who played a key role in TMC's victory, and Banerjee MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee were present.

TENDER

HP.PWD KANGRA NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed item rate tenders on form 6 & 8 are invited by the Executive Engineer, Kangra Division, HP: PWD, Kangra on behalf of the Governor of Himachal Pradesh from the approved and eligible contractors/firms enlisted in HPPWD in the appropriate class for the work mentioned below on 20.5.2021 up to 10-45 A.M. and will be opened on the same day at 11-00 A.M. in the presence of intending contractors or their authorized representatives. The tender forms can be obtained from his office on cash payment (non refundable) on any working day from 18.5.2021 to 19.5.2021. The applications for issue of tender forms accompanied with enlistment letter/ or renewal letter and the earnest money in the shape of National Saving Certificates/Saving Account/Time deposit Account in any of the Post Office in Himachal Pradesh duly pledged in favour of Executive Engineer, Kangra Division, HPPWD, Kangra.

The conditional tenders and the tenders received without earnest money will summarily be rejected. The offer of the tender shall be kept open for 120 days.

Work No.1:- C/O Health Sub Centre building at Naushera (SH:- Balance work of Building E/Wall, Plastering, Painting WS & SI etc.) Estimated cost: Rs. 167909/- Earnest Money Rs. 4000/- Time Limit One Month Cost of tender 350/-

Work No.2:- C/O Link road from Rehu to Boru Sarna km.0/00 to 6/780 (Stage-II) (SH:- C/O R/Wall from RD.4/450 to 4/460 & 4/463 to 4/478 and drain 3/920 to 4/000 & metalling tarring 4/705 to 1/780) Estimated cost: Rs. 475875/- Earnest Money Rs. 10000/- Time Limit Three Month Cost of tender 350/-

Work No.3:- C/O Link road from Rehu to Boru Sarna km.0/00 to 6/780 (Stage-II) (SH:- C/O R/Wall from RD.4/690 to 4/697 & Drain 4/620 to 4/725 & metalling tarring 4/585 to 4/690) Estimated cost: Rs. 482841/- Earnest Money Rs. 10000/- Time Limit Three Month Cost of tender 350/-

Work No.4:- C/O Bridge Balia Tatwani road (SH:- C/O 2.00mtr span slab culvert at RD.0/500) Estimated cost: Rs. 492049/- Earnest Money Rs. 10000/- Time Limit Three Month Cost of tender 350/-

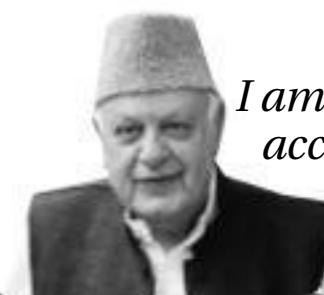
Work No.5:- Improvement/Widening of Bhanala to Pucca Tiya road (SH:- P/L interlocking tiles at RD.2/680 to 2/820, 3/00 to 3/070, 4/200 to 4/205) Estimated cost: Rs. 493020/- Earnest Money Rs. 10000/- Time Limit Three Month Cost of tender 350/-

Work No.6:- Improvement/Widening of Bhanala to Pucca Tiya road (SH:- P/L interlocking tiles at RD.4/205 to 4/350, 4/700 to 4/770, 4/770 to 4/774) Estimated cost: Rs. 490738/- Earnest Money Rs. 10000/- Time Limit Three Month Cost of tender 350/-

Work No.7:- Balance work of building Mahila Mandal Kunai Pathik Swala G.P. Nagarpatt (SH:- C/O Protection wall P/L Tiles and Railing) (Deposit work) Estimated cost: Rs. 124556/- Earnest Money Rs. 2500/- Time Limit One Month Cost of tender 350/-

Work No.8:- C/O Pucca Path from Shiv Mandir to House of Sh. Saran Dass Sharma, House No.1 Mohal (SDP/2020/773) (SH:- C/O Interlocking tiles paver block at RD.0/00 to 0/05) Estimated cost: Rs. 105355/- Earnest Money Rs. 2500/- Time Limit One Month Cost of tender 350/-

Work No.9:- Construction and improvement/widening of Shahpur Kiari Chatter road at km.0/00 to 8/00 (SH:- C/O U-shape drain RD.4/265 to 4/370 &



I am sure Bengal, under her conscious leadership, will continue to accelerate on the front of development and growth

NATIONAL CONFERENCE CHIEF FAROOQ ABDULLAH
CONGRATULATING WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE FOR HER THIRD TERM IN OFFICE

THUMBNAILS



A Covid positive child receives free oxygen provided by a Sikh organisation in Ghaziabad on Wednesday. ■ AGENCY

Woman jumps on funeral pyre of father: In a tragic incident, a 34-year-old woman sustained severe burns in Barmer after she jumped on the funeral pyre of her father, who died after contracting Covid-19, police said on Wednesday. The daughter was pulled out of it by people, she sustained around 70 per cent burn injuries. She was rushed to a nearby hospital then, referred to Jodhpur for treatment, they said. ■ PTI

First death from Covid in commando force NSG: Country's federal counter-terrorist commando force National Security Guard (NSG) reported its first coronavirus linked death on Wednesday when a senior commander succumbed to the infection, officials said. ■ PTI

N440K variant fades: The N440K variant of coronavirus, which wreaked havoc during the first wave of the pandemic in the country is diminishing and likely to disappear soon, scientists at CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) said. ■ PTI

Fine for violating mask rule: The civic authorities in Mumbai have collected fines to the tune of over Rs 54 crore in the last one year from 26,87 lakh citizens who violated the Covid mask rule in public places during the pandemic, an official said on Wednesday. ■ PTI

RAJ BUILDWELL PRIVATE LIMITED
41A, Ring Road, Lajpat Nagar IV, Captain Gaur Marg, New Delhi 110024 Phone No: 011-43178844, Website: www.llcinfra.com
PUBLIC NOTICE
Whereas, we Raj Buildwell Private Limited are in the process of undertaking of development of a Colony in sector 71, over an area measuring 10.85 & 2.7875 (2.775) acres, located in Sector 71, Village Fazilpur Jharsa, Gurugram in accordance with the LOI granted for a Affordable Plotted Colony vide Memo No. LC-4204+257-JE.(VA)-2021/3760 dated 17.02.2021 by Director, Town & Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh.
And whereas, the layout plan / Zoning Plan earlier approved at the time of grant of license for the said colony is now proposed to be revised on account of request made by Raj Buildwell Private Limited for migration of license No. 15 of 2013 dated 13.12.2010 (for GSI colony no. 11/3/2/4-12/12, 15/2/7-14, 16/1/1-6, 6/9-8/12/2/ (6-3), 10/2/6-13), 10/1 (8-9), 10/1 (34), 11/5(0), 12/1/1-12/1, 12/2 (1-7), 20/1 (7-12), 12/3-19, 10/2 (4-16) & License No. 27 of 2010 dated 18.03.2010 (for IT Park colony) for 2.7875 Acres of land in Khasa nos. 11/3/2/2 (3-12), 4/7-11, 5/7-12 & 12/1/1 (3-12), Sector-71, Village Fazilpur Jharsa Tehsil & District Gurugram for grant of license under Deen Dayal Jan Awas Yojna, 2016.
And whereas, the office of Director, Town & Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh has in-Principle approved the layout plan and grant of license office Memo No. 11121 dated 05.05.2021 & has required seeking of objection against the revision of layout plan and grant of license under Deen Dayal Jan Awas Yojna, as a pre-condition for allowing such revision in the layout plan.

Accordingly, vide this public notice objections are hereby invited from any of the allottees in the said colony on the proposed revision of the in-Principle approved layout plan of the said colony. A copy of the earlier approved layout plan / Zoning Plan bearing no. DG/TCP 3786, dated 13.04.2013 & the layout plan now in-Principle approved, bearing drawing no. DTCP 7783 dated 03.05.2021 available for perusal on our website: www.llcinfra.com. The said layout plan can also be perused at the office of District Town Planner (Planning) Gurugram & Senior Town Planner, Gurugram within 30 days of the publication of this notice, failing which it shall be assumed that there are no objections to the proposed revision, failing in the in-Principle approved layout plan.

MP BJP president VD Sharma, Union minister Prahlad Patel, MP home minister Narottam Mishra and other ministers of TMC government and office bearers of the TMC sat on the dharna at the BJP State Headquarters here.

EC commits its faith in free media, says it does not endorse any restriction on media reporting

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The Election Commission of India on Wednesday announced that it's committed to its faith in free media and does not endorse any restriction on media reporting.

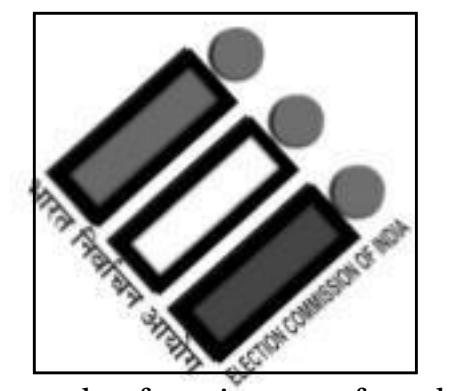
In a clarification, the Commission stated, "The Commission as a whole and each one of its members and in strengthening electoral democracy in the country. The Commission was unanimous that

before the Supreme Court there should not be any prayer for restriction on media reporting."

The Commission was responding to a news report that the poll panel's plea in the Madras High Court to gag the media from reporting oral observations of judges and its subsequent Special Leave Petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court against the high court's "murder charges" remark were not unanimously approved by the poll panel.

A senior functionary said the EC had moved the top court against the oral observations made by the Madras High Court. The functionary pointed out that a case was filed against senior EC officials in West Bengal following the observations made by the high court.

When asked whether there was unanimity in the Commission when it asked the Madras High Court to restrain media from reporting oral observations by the bench,



another functionary referred to a portion of the press statement which said that "The Commission always has appropriate deliberations before any decisions are taken."

This indicates a difference of opinion on the issue.

"The EC has taken note of recent narrative relating to its position in relation to the media. The Commission has also come across certain press reports in the same regard. In the context of involvement of the media, the Commission wishes to clarify that it stands sincerely committed to its faith in free media," it stated.

It said the EC was unanimous that before the Supreme Court there should not be

any prayer for restriction on media reporting.

The EC's approach on the collaboration with media is that of a natural ally and remains unchanged, the poll watchdog said.

It said the media plays a vital

role in reinforcing transparency from the very beginning of the election process till the end, including transparent coverage during all processes, campaigning and from polling station level to counting. "EC's approach on the collaboration with media is that of a natural ally and remains unchanged," it stated.

The EC's approach on the collaboration with media is that of a natural ally and remains unchanged, the poll watchdog said.

'We get a sense the world is with us in Covid travail'

Jaishankar welcomes goodwill from across the world as sense of solidarity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 5 MAY

External affairs minister Jaishankar on Wednesday described the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic as an all consuming challenge posed by a virulent strain of coronavirus and welcomed the enormous goodwill from countries around the world as a sense of solidarity in diplomacy.

Jaishankar, who is in the UK on a four-day visit to participate in the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers Meeting as a guest minister, admitted that India's health system stands exposed but that there is a focussed plan to ramp up the vaccination programme and address the country's needs beyond the immediacy of the pandemic.

"We feel in India at a moment of great travail a sense that the world is with us," he said, in a live virtual event entitled Does India have a plan? From survival to revival as part of the Global Dialogue Series organised by UK-based media house India Inc Group and the Indian High Commission in London.

"We will get through this. But there is a larger lesson out of all of this. There is a sense of solidarity. I feel it here in London from the G7 because almost all the countries have been through exactly what we are going through. They feel for you."

This pandemic is truly not just a game-changer, it's a thought changer. I see a solidarity in diplomacy today

'India-China relations going through a very difficult phase'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 5 MAY

India's relationship with China is going through a "very difficult phase" but recent discussions have yielded positive results in terms of easing the flow of logistics during the pandemic in the country, external affairs minister S Jaishankar.

During a virtual session here, Jaishankar was asked about India-China relations and the outcome of his recent discussions with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi.

"The last conversation was significantly focussed on the Covid pandemic and my discussions were essentially that Covid is something bigger and it is in our mutual interest to work together to deal with it and that's



what Foreign Minister Wang Yi told me as well," said Jaishankar.

The minister said Indian companies ordering supplies from China were encountering difficulties and his message to the Chinese minister had been that the best support they could offer would be to ease that process.

"After our conversation, things did move. Some of our airlines immediately got their approvals. The chain is flowing, which is very laudable," he said.

recent weeks.

"There were repeated advisories going out and public health teams sent out. There was a move to ramp up oxygen production. The reality unfortunately was, as the numbers came down there was an amount of public confidence. This is genuinely not a blame game, but don't think anyone in the country can say we kept our guard up all the time, the minister said.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to say we

shouldn't have allowed gatherings of any kind. But there are times when we need to pull up our socks and put the blame game aside. We are a deeply democratic and political country and in a democracy, you can't have elections. Elections are sacrosanct," he said.

In reference to the country's healthcare infrastructure, he added: "The healthcare system stands exposed. It is very clear that for 75 years, we have under-invested in health."

In fact, it is that realisation which is why the Prime Minister was pushing for Ayushman Bharat. We had reached a stage where the Prime Minister genuinely believed that we cannot leave our people to the vagaries of the private practitioners, however good they may be."

On the central theme of the discussion, Jaishankar stressed that India has not one but many plans to move the country towards revival mode.

This second wave is a test of fire we have to come through, but the economic foundations are strong. We will carry the reforms process forward, he said. Yes, we have a plan in the sense that we are responding to the immediacy of the second wave oxygen, medicines, healthcare support systems but the plan beyond that is to expand vaccinations. Vaccination is the way out of Covid. It's not a silver bullet but it's as close as anybody can come to it, he said.

India has not just one but many plans and our job is to get them all done, he added.

Guj Opp MLAs seek HC nod to spend MLALAD funds on Covid

AHMEDABAD, 5 MAY

Nearly all the Opposition legislators in Gujarat have petitioned the High Court to allow them to utilise their entire MLAs' Local Area Development (MLALAD) funds on health infrastructures in their constituencies. As many as 66 Congress MLAs and the lone independent legislator, Dalit rights activist Jignesh Mevani have moved applications in the Gujarat High Court seeking its permission to utilise their entire grants of Rs 1.50 crore each for setting up health facilities in their constituencies.

These pleas by the MLAs in the High Court come in the wake of reports about government and private hospitals being unable to cope with the rush of Covid-patients. They have complained to the High Court that the government has till now allowed them to spend only Rs 25 lakhs each from their MLALAD funds.

The joint petition by these 66 MLAs have pleaded that their entire funds, totalling Rs 99 crores, be used for Covid related health services such as supply of Remdesivir injections, purchase of ventilators and other equipment so that primary health centres and community health centres can be upgraded to operate as Covid care hospitals.

Only Rs 25 lakhs from the MLALAD funds being allowed by the state government for spending in each constituency is insufficient, the joint petition by 66 Opposition legislators told the High Court. ■ SNS

CORONA WORRIES

Corona curfew imposed in Himachal till 16 May: Himachal Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to impose corona curfew from 7 May to 16 May (mid-night) after the state recorded the highest single day spike in Covid cases (3,824) and deaths (48) in the past 24 hours. This was decided in the Cabinet meeting under the chairmanship of chief minister Jai Ram Thakur in which Covid situation was reviewed, a state government official said. "The Cabinet expressed concern over the sharp surge in the number of Covid-19 cases in the state and decided to impose Corona curfew in order to break the virus chain." ■ SNS

Cabinet approves allocation of additional foodgrain: Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved allocation of additional foodgrain to nearly 79.88 crore beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Phase III for another two months—May and June. The allocation of 5 KG food-grain free of cost to the beneficiaries is likely to cost Rs 25,332.90 crore—Rs 36789.2/MT for rice and Rs 25731.4/ MT for wheat, said a senior officer of the Food and Public Distribution Ministry. The idea behind additional allocation of food grains was aimed to ameliorate the hardships faced by poor due to economic disruption caused by Coronavirus. No poor family would suffer on account of non-availability of foodgrains due to disruption in the next two months, the Ministry said. ■ SNS

Indian delegation in London self-isolates after 2 test +ve

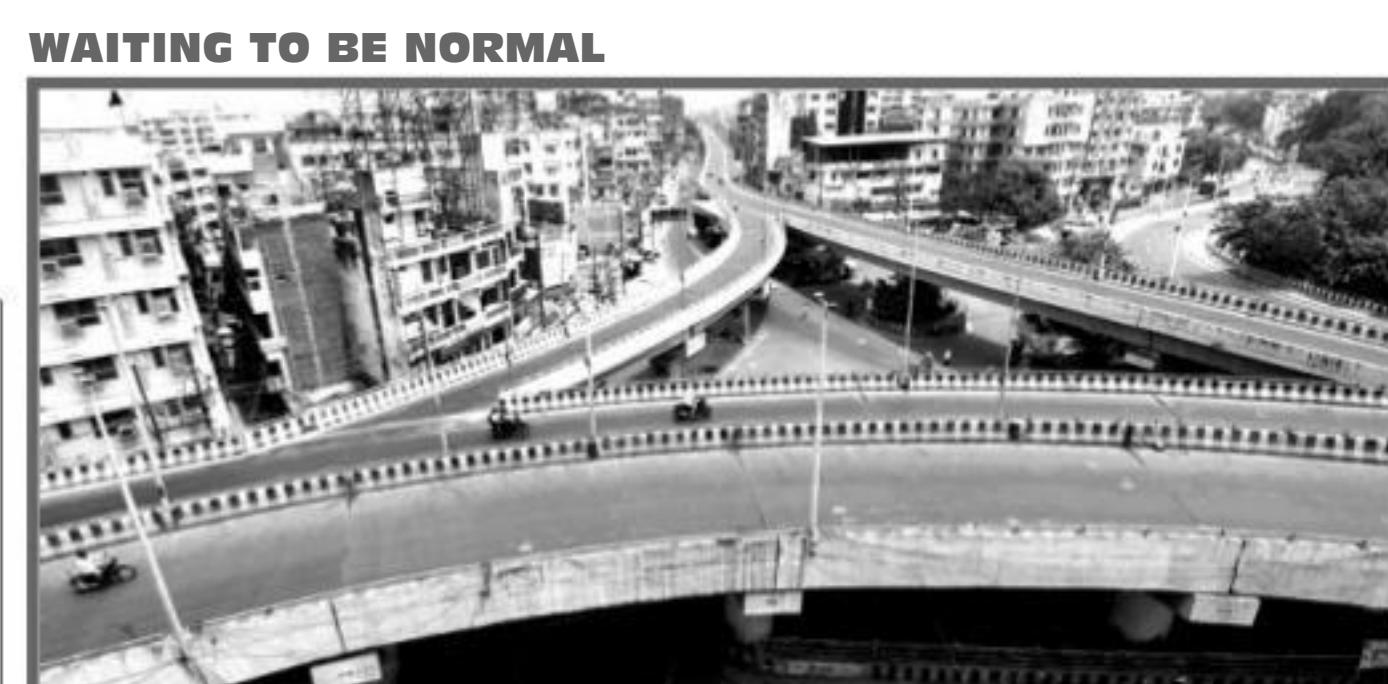
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

An Indian delegation in the UK for the G-7 ministerial meeting led by external affairs minister S Jaishankar, has been forced to self-isolate after two of its members tested positive for coronavirus.

"Was made aware yesterday evening of exposure to possibly Covid positive cases. As a measure of abundant caution and also out of consideration for others, I decided to conduct my engagements in the virtual mode. That will be the case with the G-7 meeting today as well," Jaishankar tweeted.

Although India is not a G-7 member, it is among the few countries that have been extended personal invitations by the United Kingdom. The meeting was described as "Covid-secure talks" ahead of the G-7 summit in Cornwall in June. It is understood that two members of the Indian delegation were found to be Covid positive yesterday from PCR tests as part of Public Health England's pre-testing programme.

However, their identity is not known. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has so far not commented on the development.



MP BJP stages dharna against post-poll violence in Bengal

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
Bhopal, 5 MAY

The BJP staged a dharna at Bhopal today against the post-election incidents of violence being reported from West Bengal, and demanded that the President intervene in the matter.

MP BJP president VD Sharma, Union minister Prahlad Patel, MP home minister Narottam Mishra and other ministers of TMC government and office bearers of the TMC sat on the dharna at the BJP State Headquarters here.

V D Sharma alleged that workers and 'goons' of Trinamool Congress (TMC) were targeting BJP workers in Bengal. Sharma alleged that BJP workers were being murdered and women workers raped. He also charged that all this was being done as part of political vendetta.

The BJP leaders on the dharna also accused West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of deliberately turning a blind eye towards the violence being carried

Mamata's victory a watershed moment for country: Farooq

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 5 MAY

National Conference chief and a sitting MP, Farooq Abdullah on Wednesday described Mamata Banerjee's landslide victory against BJP in the Assembly elections as a "watershed moment for the country". Congratulating Banerjee on taking oath as West Bengal chief minister, Abdullah said "Mamata ji has resisted the incitement and won a tough and decisive battle facing all odds against her. It is a watershed moment for the country. It is the victory of the people of Bengal, and the victory of democracy," he said.

The NC president said: "I am sure Bengal, under her conscious leadership, will continue to accelerate on the front of development and growth. I wish her all the best for her third term in the office. I'm sure she will serve the people of Bengal with much greater enthusiasm and dedication."

He said TMC's victory in

West Bengal is the first step towards reclaiming the country's democracy, secularism, and the spirit of federalism. "It is a beginning of the waning of the communal juggernaut and 'my-way-or-the-highway' brand of politics, with the people of Bengal firmly indicating that the people of the country still hold the reins," he said.

The NC president said: "I am sure Bengal, under her conscious leadership, will continue to accelerate on the front of development and growth. I wish her all the best for her third term in the office. I'm sure she will serve the people of Bengal with much greater enthusiasm and dedication".

The people of Bengal have

matter so that BJP workers and leaders in Bengal could get protection from the violence.

The party clearly rejected the ideology of communal polarization, the party said.

"The performance of the CPI (M) and the Left has been very disappointing. People's urge to defeat the BJP led to a sharp polarisation between BJP and TMC, squeezing out the Sanjukta Morcha. A serious self-critical review of these results will be undertaken by the Party to draw lessons," the politburo said.

The party has hailed the resounding victory of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala. It thanked the people of Kerala for re-electing it to form the next government.

This has happened after more than four decades that an incumbent government has been re-elected. The LDF's results are better than in the last assembly elections.

The people of Kerala have

extended the period of following earlier announced cancelled trains has been extended as per the details given below:-

CANCELLATION OF SPECIAL TRAINS

Train No. & Name</

Xi's letter

There seems to be a thaw in the frosty equation between India and China, and it is to be hoped that the overture from Beijing shall be sustained. President Xi Jinping's letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the first such communication between the two in the aftermath of last year's pandemic and the border crisis. Not that the tension on either side of the frontier has ebbed; yet the subtext of the letter is profoundly critical for the people of India, now struggling to cope with the deadly resurgence of the second wave of Covid-19. Pre-eminently, Mr Xi has offered China's support to address the potentially mortal recurrence with the death toll and the number of afflictions increasing each day. His message was followed by a telephone call on Friday from China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, to his counterpart, Mr S Jaishankar. Mr Wang had also sent a message to Mr Jaishankar the day before Mr Xi's letter to the Prime Minister, offering China's support.

Altogether, therefore, it was a calibrated diplomatic build-up at the highest level. "I am very concerned about the recent situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in India. On behalf of the Chinese government and people, as well as in my own name, I would like to express sincere sympathies to the Indian Government and people," Mr Xi said in the message. "Humanity is a community with a shared future. Only through solidarity and cooperation can countries around the world ultimately defeat the pandemic." China's President has spoken at the peak of the health emergency not the least because the resurgence after exactly a year has been far deadlier than last year's outbreak. "The Chinese side stands ready to strengthen cooperation with the Indian side in fighting the pandemic and provide support and help in this regard. I believe that under the leadership of the Indian Government, the Indian people will surely prevail over the pandemic," was Mr Xi's assurance. Covid knows no frontier. Nor for that matter should humanitarian assistance which ought to move across borders... in the truest sense of the Nobel prize committee's dictum ~ Medicines Sans Frontières. What must inspire optimism on this side of the fractious frontier is that the assurance has been followed through by the establishment in Beijing. This can be contextualised by the Chinese foreign minister's statement that "anti-pandemic materials produced in China are entering India at a faster pace to help the country fight the epidemic".

Orders for oxygen concentrators, ventilators and other medical supplies are being sourced from China, although there are some complaints of predatory pricing. Eight hundred oxygen concentrators had been flown in from Hong Kong some days ago and China had, since April, "supplied more than 5,000 ventilators, 21,569 oxygen generators, over 21.48 million masks and around 3,800 tons of medicines to India" according to Chinese customs data. It is the spirit of the give-and-take amidst the border crisis that ought now to transcend the festering frontier and the frequent meetings of Generals.

Israeli bus missed

Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has missed the bus. The midnight deadline that was given him to form a new coalition government after a bout of political uncertainty has expired. He had initiated the essay to forge a coalition nearly a month back after the fourth inconclusive general election in two years, but the deadline ended at midnight on Wednesday (22:00 GMT). The fizzle deepens the chronic instability in Israel and intensifies the ferment in the fractious Middle East in the larger canvas. It now devolves on President Reuven Rivlin to decide on whether he will ask some other political leader to forge a coalition; yet the likelihood of the country going to the polls again cannot be readily ruled out. That eventuality would mean the fifth general election in two years. This would be a blow for Mr Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving leader; but after the inconclusive result of the last general election in March, it is an outcome that was widely predicted. It is possible that President Rivlin could now give another member of parliament 28 days ~ the same timespan that was allotted to Mr Netanyahu ~ to try to put in place a new government. It could be Yair Lapid, whose centrist Yesh Atid party came second to Netanyahu's right-wing Likud in the last vote. He will face a challenge to bridge wide ideological differences between the parties he could ask to join a coalition. If a nominee called upon by the President is unable to put together a government, constitutional certitudes in Israel suggest that the Head of State can ask Parliament to select a candidate. If it cannot, Israel will hold another election. The country's political uncertainty has few parallels in the region, and arguably within the comity of nations.

More accurately, a prolonged stalemate in Israel has been deepened by Netanyahu's ongoing trial for corruption, a charge that he has denied. His rivals have argued that he should not remain in office while facing criminal charges. Could this be the primary reason why his efforts to form a coalition were reduced to a fizzle? Which party will concur with an allegedly corrupt Likud party leader to lead the coalition, in itself an improbable quantity? There is little doubt that the Prime Minister of Israel is facing a crisis on two fronts ~ the corruption case and now his failure to forge a coalition. The timing is anything but propitious, but circumstances have traditionally influenced the political narrative in Jerusalem and Palestine. Mr Netanyahu is Israel's longest-serving leader, having led five governments since 1996. The last, which saw him share power with the then main opposition party to help tackle the coronavirus pandemic, collapsed in December, leading to the elections in March.

At death's door ~ I

A catastrophe is looming all over and people are dying in the streets unable to find room in the hospitals. Decades of neglect and underfunding are showing up, exacting a heavy toll and causing terrible human suffering and misery. Delhi looks like a pestilence-stricken city, left to its own fate with no functional administration or government visible anywhere



The day after our Health Minister had triumphantly proclaimed in early March that it was the 'endgame' for Covid-19 in India, I took my first dose of a vaccine that was buttressed by a second dose one month later. No, I didn't give up the mask or start hugging people in the streets, but felt assured of being reasonably safe despite the surging number of infections in Delhi and elsewhere. Then on 10 April, my wife tested positive and the next day, I myself. Being below 60, she had just registered herself for vaccination but did not have the time to take the shot before Covid struck with all its ferocity.

In early March, Covid was indeed showing a waning trend everywhere, with only about 12,000 cases being reported, making everyone throw caution to the winds. Schools and places of entertainment started reopening, and huge election rallies were held in the election-bound states led by the Prime Minister and Home Minister ~ especially in West Bengal where the BJP was locked in a deadly and bloody contest with the ruling TMC ~ without the least concern for masks, social distancing or Covid-appropriate behaviour, while a compliant Election Commission, whose duty it is to restrain politicians who are not particularly known for responsible behaviour, looked the other way.

Leaders and politicians across the political spectrum, who should have led by example to enforce responsible behaviour, did just the opposite, with wanton abandonment of their Constitutional duties to protect the lives of citizens above everything. In West Bengal where elections were being held in eight phases, the rate of spread of the virus was among the fastest in the country in April.

When governments and institutions fail in their duties, it is the Courts that usually remind them ~ but the Hon'ble judges were busy with other pressing things, forgetting that protecting the lives of citizens was their most pressing duty at all times. Only now when the whole country has become like a veritable hell are they waking up.

How one wishes that the observation of the Hon'ble Madras High Court that the Election Commission should be "put up on murder charges for being the most irresponsible institution" had come a tad earlier!

Allowing the virus to circulate unchecked increased the risk of emergence of deadly new strains no vaccine has yet been developed to protect against. It was then the infections and casualty figures started sky-rocketing ~ by April 13, India was adding 3.2 lakh cases every day ~ a number that later crossed 4 lakh, with daily fatalities spiralling above 3500.

In Delhi, dysfunctional governments ~ both at the Centre and in the UT ~ abdicated their responsibility and left citizens to their fate, while bodies of the victims continued piling up at graveyards and crematoriums, with makeshift funeral pyres being put up in parking areas and pavements outside the crematoriums. Hospitals are woefully short of beds, medicines, ventilators, ICU facilities, oxygen, doctors and health workers; fresh admissions are being refused.

And when people, unable to find oxygen, medicine and beds for their near and dear ones are giving voice to their anguish on social media, instead of addressing these severe deficiencies in the healthcare administration, shameless governments in states like Maharashtra, Haryana and UP are booking them under the IPC, Disaster Management Act and Epidemic Diseases Act, forcing the Supreme Court to warn them of contempt of court for clamping down on free speech of citizens. As a friend wryly remarked, there is practically no government either at the Centre or in the States, but only when you say this, you realise there is one.

Meanwhile in Haridwar, the Mahakumbh was attracting lakhs of pilgrims who were welcomed instead of being chided, with the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand asserting that corona would be wiped out by "Ma Ganga's blessings". The entire nation was apparently under the spell of selective amnesia and forgot completely about the super-spreader events like the last year's Tablighi Jamaat gathering.

It was only after the exit of the second largest Akhada, Niranjani Akhada, from the Kumbh following the death of the head of the Nirwani Akhada from Covid

that the PM called for a "symbolic pilgrimage"; even then some 25,000 people were allowed to take the ritual "Shahi Snan" on April 27. In Uttarakhand, the number of active cases has increased seven-fold since the beginning of April ~ so much for "Ma Ganga's blessings"!

That also brought home the ridiculousness of our insular Atmanirbhar Bharat agenda. Complacency always leads to shortsightedness which in turn leads to disaster. "With made-in-India solutions, we controlled the spread of the virus and improved our health infrastructure," PM had declared in late January, "Our vaccine research and production capacity have given a shield not just to India but to many other countries in the world."

The "Made in India" vaccination campaign in fact got nowhere ~ and when foreign vaccine manufacturers like Pfizer-BioNTech sought permission for emergency use of their vaccines in India, in its misplaced pride, the Government cold-shouldered them, citing absence of 'local trials'. The result was that by mid-April only 1.3 crore Indians had received a full double dose. At the daily 20 lakh jabs as being administered at present, it would be

well into late 2022 before all adults could be vaccinated. Even though India is the largest vaccine manufacturer in the world, and was indeed exporting the AstraZeneca Covishield vaccine to many countries till March, it could inoculate barely 10 per cent of its adult population with a first dose.

While during January-March, India had shipped 64 million doses of vaccines to the world, it could only supply 1.2 million doses during the first half of April before putting a ban on its exports. Swallowing false pride and mindless obsession with *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, now the government is fast-tracking approvals for half a dozen foreign vaccines, but with the crisis seemingly out of control, it is too little, too late.

A catastrophe is looming all over and people are dying in the streets unable to find room in the hospitals. Decades of neglect and underfunding are showing up,

exacting a heavy toll and causing terrible human suffering and misery. Delhi looks like a pestilence-stricken city, left to its own fate with no functional administration or government visible anywhere. One wonders why when the virus was spreading like hellfire, the expected shortages in oxygen, drugs and ICU beds could not be anticipated or procurements fast-tracked as is being done now.

On April 25, more than 350,000 new cases were reported ~ the highest in any country thus far since the beginning of the pandemic. From only 9 per cent of global caseload in March, India now accounts for some 38 per cent of the global cases, and the numbers even seem to lack credibility. As per estimates made by John Hopkins University, Imperial College, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation and The Economist, because of the low testing rate outside cities, the actual caseload is probably 5 to 30 times more. The shortages in vaccines, drugs and oxygen will probably be addressed within a few weeks, but not before hundreds of lives, young and old alike, are lost and millions forced to go through a trauma that will leave a permanent scar upon their lives. Though luckily so far, India's death rate has remained among the lowest in the world, there is no guessing how much worse it may get and how long it would take before the present lethal spread starts ebbing and slowing. Positivity rate in Delhi and West Bengal now is over 30 per cent, and in the country as a whole, above 25 per cent.

Even getting tested now poses a huge challenge, with reports taking 3-5 days. No one knows who will get infected and who will survive. There are reports of people who had once occupied powerful positions in the government and society who have died being unable to secure admission in any hospital, just like ordinary people. All this has made little change to the demagoguery and pretension of politicians and empty rhetoric of ministers and bureaucrats who have no clue about how to handle the situation. The purpose of this article is not to criticise the government or our institutions, but only to share the agony and trauma that one goes through when people in positions of power and authority fail in their duties and leave citizens to their fate.

(To be concluded)

between the TMC and BJP camps, the CPI-M and the Congress ~ which had formed a front against both ~ were sent crashing. The BJP received a licking that is likely to haunt it for long. This result will surely make a mark in Indian politics in the coming days as "brand Modi" is under a question mark now. The result clearly shows that the women voters of Bengal have voted against the BJP brand of masculinity, with the Prime Minister teasing the woman CM of Bengal in open rallies. The Congress and the Left need to review their political stances if they want a comeback from zero.

Yours, etc., Shovanl Chakraborty, Kolkata, 4 May.

TACKLING NAXALITES

SIR, Apropos Harsha Kakar's thought-provoking article under the caption "New

strategy needed to handle Naxalites" (13 April), there is no denying that Central forces require to be restructured and rebuilt, making them an effective force capable of fulfilling their role and tasks. Admittedly, despite claims by the DG CRPF, intelligence was an abject failure, as reports stated that the police forces were in the dark about the nature of the weapons used by the Naxals. It is surprising that deserted villages along the route, a clear indicator of dangers lying ahead, did not trigger alarm bells and induce a re-thinking in movement pattern of Central forces and thus failed to cater for contingencies. If the Naxal and extremist forces get the villages empty before the operation started, it seems clear that the down-trodden and deprived sections of the people like the Dalits and Adivasis inhabiting the region had

STOP SPREADERS

SIR, Elections are won and lost, the vanquished go underground but the victors celebrate with fanfare. Against the present Covid backdrop the "Covidiot" or superspreaders rampage the streets forgetting Covid protocols. This has been witnessed in television footage from across the country. The election commission still remains inactive. No one has been nabbed under the Epidemic Control Act, nor any law-enforcing authority punished. Let the apex court step in and take some measures.

Yours, etc., Basudeb Dutta, Santipur, 2 May.

been neglected economically by the ruling dispensation for years together with their socio-economic grievances piling up against the concerned authorities with no signs of wake-up call for a pretty long-time. The undernourished and ill-fed cool people seem to be more friendly with the so-called Naxal who befriend them in times of hunger and poverty, as help from the concerned authorities in the ruling dispensation is hard to come by. Hence, mere revamping of the CAPFs and making them an effective buffer against the extremists and Naxalites is to live in a fool's paradise unless correspondingly the socio-economic grievances of the deprived local people like the Dalits, Adivasis are redressed in a sustained drive rather than sporadically in selective pockets to suit the local administration's convenience.

Yours, etc., Arun Kumar Bhaduri, Kolkata, 14 April.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

A defeat that will haunt

SIR, This is in response to your incisive editorial "Singular triumph" (*The Statesman*, 4 May). The spectacular Assembly election results of West Bengal mark the resounding defeat of the majority communist brand of politics mounted full scale with resourcefulness, energy and the apparent misuse of state institutions by the rulers at the Centre.

But Mamata Banerjee fighting with her back to the

wall, beat back the challenge from the Prime Minister and Home Minister with panache and ground connect. In 2011, Ms Banerjee had become CM by despatching the CPI-M led Left Front which had been entrenched for three decades. In 2021, after being the incumbent for 10 years, she sent the politics of majoritarian communalism to the cleaners. In this election, which saw cent per cent polarisation



between the TMC and BJP camps, the CPI-M and the Congress ~ which had formed a front against both ~ were sent crashing. The BJP received a licking that is likely to haunt it for long. This result will surely make a mark in Indian politics in the coming days as "brand Modi" is under a question mark now. The result clearly shows that the women voters of Bengal have voted against the BJP brand of masculinity, with the Prime Minister teasing the woman CM of Bengal in open rallies. The Congress and the Left need to review their political stances if they want a comeback from zero.

Yours, etc., Shovanl Chakraborty, Kolkata, 4 May.

TACKLING NAXALITES

SIR, Apropos Harsha Kakar's thought-provoking article under the caption "New

TARINI MEHTA AND
ABHIROOP CHOWDHURY

The Himalayan region is torn between competing interests. It is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. It is the cradle of the river systems of Asia. The Ganga, Indus, Brahmaputra and Amu Darya all originate in the Himalayan glaciers. The Himalayan region also contributes to economic development of the Himalayan countries through hydropower. The construction of hydropower projects is continuing despite scientific evidence warning of dire consequences. Will we heed the warning of the recent Chamoli disaster?

While the need for development initiatives cannot be denied, the pathway of development should not compromise the environment. Environmental impact assessments can enable a fully informed and unbiased decision regarding a project. Unfortunately, their effectiveness as an environmental decision-making tool has been greatly reduced in recent years.

Environmental impact assessments should be participative, transparent, unbiased, rigorous, provide complete information regarding all impacts and have a robust follow-up mechanism. They should also present alternatives regarding the design and construction of the project and its location. This will then lead to rule-based decision making, enabling the decision-maker to ensure No Net Loss of biodiversity. However, environmental clearances tend to be granted based on EIAs that lack, downplay and very often even hide key information.

There are now over 300 hydropower projects in different stages of planning and construction in India's Himalayan river basins. If all dams are constructed, the Indian Himalayas would have one of the highest average dam densities in the world, with dams constructed in 28 of the 32 major river valleys. There would be one dam for every 32 km of river channel. When you add to this the fact that each of India's neighbours is also planning to build hydropower projects in the Himalayan region, the scale of potential environmental impacts becomes dramatic.

The Indian government is pushing hydropower development in the Eastern Himalayas. The extent and manner in which this development is being planned will be ecologically catastrophic. This region is a treasure trove of endemic biodiversity, which is

Disaster looms for eastern Himalayas



under serious threat due to anthropogenic interventions. Fifty-four percent of the nation's threatened mammals, 68 percent of endangered birds and 63 percent of endangered reptiles are found in this region. Several iconic and endemic mammals, such as clouded leopards, reside in the lush forests of the North East. Their population is now fragmented and dwindling. According to the World Wildlife Fund, the habitat of the clouded leopard has been decreasing at a rate of 10 per cent per year since 1997. The Namdapha flying squirrel is listed in 'IUCN's 'critically endangered' category and is on the verge of extinction. There have been no sightings of this species in its habitat since 2002.

The ever-increasing anthropogenic pressure and the pandemic-

induced conservation crisis are pushing the unique species of the North East to the brink of extinction. Increasing construction of hydropower projects will make matters worse.

EIA studies in India are conducted in a project-specific manner. Cumulative impacts of hydropower development, as well as the impacts of upstream and downstream projects, are not considered at the scoping stage and are not included in the formulation of the Terms of Reference of the EIA. The lack of clear policies on conducting cumulative impact assessments encourages project proponents and EIA consultants to avoid an ecosystem approach. In the absence of such an approach, a complete survey of the likely impacts on flora and fauna is ignored.

In the North East, indigenous communities have been working to protect the region's biodiversity. The Lepcha community has been at the forefront of trying to save the Himalayan Kanchenjunga landscape. Kanchenjunga is considered by them to be the 'Mother Mountain'. They have been protesting the construction of hydropower projects on their sacred rivers in Dzongu, the Lepcha reserve bordering the Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve. Dzongu is sacred to the Lepchas, as is the Teesta which flows through it.

Other indigenous communities have also been contesting hydropower development in their home regions. Where are their voices in the government's development plans and policies? It is well known that public

consultations are poorly conducted in EIA studies and the views expressed by members of local communities are not taken into account. Weak public participation is not merely a procedural flaw; it violates environmental democracy.

Destruction of Himalayan biodiversity will strongly impact the lives of people in India, as well as across Asia. The critical importance of this region for climate, water and food security must be considered paramount while designing development policies and programs.

The writers are respectively, Associate Professor of Environmental Law and Environmental Science and co-directors of the Environmental Law and Science Advocacy Forum, Jindal School of Environment and Sustainability, O.P. Jindal Global University.

Nepal's democracy in crisis

AJAYA BHADRA KHANAL

It has been a toxic combination of incompetence, arrogance and greed. As if announcing elections at the peak of a pandemic were not enough, political leaders gathered thousands of people from the outskirts and crowded them in big cities in meaningless displays of power. The big rallies and social interactions intensified until the pandemic reached a tipping point, killing thousands of people.

On the other side, the governments have failed to continue the vaccination drive, manage Covid-19, or bolster the health sector. Nepal's political circus, which began at the centre, has now spread to the provinces. Political instability, borne out of complete disregard for democratic principles and values, has reached epidemic proportions in Nepal. In summation, Nepal's politics has failed its people. In fact, the greatest threats to Nepal's economy, democracy, and well-being of its people are the political parties.

We can assess the performance of the political parties and the status of our democracy in several ways. For example, we can look at the ability of the parties to deliver the fruits of democracy to the peoples or look at the way they represent the people's voices. We can also look at the status of fundamental rights and freedoms, or adherence to democratic values and the rule of law.

Here, I will briefly discuss the ability of parties to represent and deliver on people's aspirations and how the public has so far perceived



their performance.

While the Nepali state has become strong, the people have become weaker and unable to receive the benefits.

The state of disarray and chaos exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic may appear counterintuitive to this claim. However, the Nepali state's ability to raise taxes (and extract from the people) has grown in recent years. For example, in the last 6 years, the tax to GDP ratio has increased from around 16 per cent to 21 per cent. It is similar to that of high-income countries, but unlike them, most of the taxes are indirect (more than 65 per cent).

Similarly, Nepal's security and rule of law institutions have become stronger. Nepal's foreign policy has also become more independent, to the extent that the Nepali state can now take stands against countries like India, the US, and China.

The only issue, however, is the use and abuse of such a strong state. Arrogant and incompetent leadership has meant that the strength of the state has been used and misused to serve vested interests rather than deliver the fruits of democracy to its people. In the absence of democracy, who controls the powers of the state and for what ends, has become a critical question. Undoubtedly,

many of Nepal's institutions designed to deliver services to the people have become hollowed out and weak.

One evidence of this is public perception. According to a recent nationwide opinion poll conducted by Sharecast Initiative Nepal, a growing number of people believe that the country is heading in the wrong direction. Such pessimism is more prevalent in the urban areas (50 per cent) than in rural areas (40 per cent). What is more worrying is that the number of people feeling this way has increased by 16 per cent in the last year.

The 'fruits' of democracy that people prioritise are employment, poverty reduction, control of inflation, control of corruption, political stability, health and education. People also want roads, especially in the Sudurpashchim Province.

The operation of a democratic system is unthinkable without political parties. Political parties are the medium through which people are represented. However, if perceptions of the people are to go by, Nepal's democracy is in crisis. According to the poll, about 76 per cent of the people believe that political parties do not represent their interests.

More than three-fourths of the people believe that the parties have failed to represent them. What could be worse?

The primary cause of the current unfavourable situation is political parties and their leaders. About 60 per cent of the people do not trust the political parties and their leaders. However, a positive sign is that the people trust their ward representatives more than their provincial or national representatives. People are

happy with the local governments and the federal system and think these entities can improve their livelihood.

The political circus being enacted by political leaders and parties in the last few months have again reinforced people's belief that they are the biggest threat to Nepal's democracy, federalism and national interests.

Politicians are obsessed with power because it provides them opportunities for extraction, corruption, and abuse of state powers.

Nepal's younger generation is frustrated by the political instability and failures of the state. However, the availability of jobs overseas and remittance have helped cushion the eruption of discontent back at home. The contribution of remittance to GDP has allowed more space for politicians to continue exercising their excesses and incompetence.

Another outcome of misgovernance and political infighting is that the younger generation is becoming less interested in politics. While 63 per cent of Nepali people claim that they are not interested in politics, this figure is much higher for the younger generation.

Of course, there are solutions to these problems and ways in which civil society and citizens can check the performance of political parties. The first step, however, is to recognise that Nepal's democracy is in crisis. The relation between the people and the parties is reaching a breaking point. We must restore this fundamental character of democracy and look for means that does not rest solely on an already flawed electoral system.

The Kathmandu Post/ANN

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The recent announcement of several deaths among the workers at the Radium Institute in London adds to the significance of a recommendation which is made in the report of that Institute for last year, that no nurse or attendant who habitually applies radium apparatus should work continuously for more than three months, and that this period should be followed by a change of occupation or a rest for another three months. It also advises that all the workers should have at least two clear holidays a week to be spent in the open air. The same precautions seem to be necessary in the case of workers with the X-rays. Many of the early workers with X-rays suffered from an irritation and inflammation of the skin which in some cases developed into cancer, and precautions were adopted for the protection of the skin by wearing leather aprons or complete suits. It has become evident, however, that both radium and the X-rays may have a harmful effect on the blood, causing a severe form of anaemia. A Memorial Fund has been raised in memory of Sir James Mackenzie Davidson, who himself suffered from the effects of the X-rays, and it is proposed that the fund should be used for the foundation of an establishment for research and teaching in radiology, for the benefit of the engineer and the metallurgist as well as the doctor.

NEWS ITEMS

RAILWAY STRIKE IN BURMA

Rangoon, May 5

Railway strike reports from Meiktila show considerable dislocation of the train service between Myingyan and Thazi. All local trains have been cancelled, and mails overdue are being brought to Meiktila by motor cars from Thazi. Passengers have been held up at all stations, and the ice supply from Mandalay has ceased, none being available locally. This is causing great inconvenience to all, owing to the excessive heat. There will be a meeting this morning in the office of the Development Commissioner, when Mr. P.D. Patel, representing the strikers, will present the men's case. The strikers allege they are acting under orders, and dare not return to work without sanction from the headquarters of the strikers at Insein.

POLICE FORESTALL GANG OF DACOITS

An encounter between the police and a gang of dacoits took place yesterday at Jafala village, within the limits of the Khargpur police station. At midnight about thirty men, armed with swords and lathis, attacked the house of Beni Madhav Ghosh with a view to committing a dacoity there, but Deputy Superintendent Maulvi Yakub Ali Khan, Inspector S.N. Dhole and Sub-Inspector Abdul Banki, with a posse of armed constables and chowkidars, had surrounded the house before the dacoits appeared on the spot. The police challenged the dacoits and a hot scuffle ensued. The gang beat a hasty retreat, carrying away with them several of their comrades who were injured.

HOW A BOYCOTT WAS AVOIDED

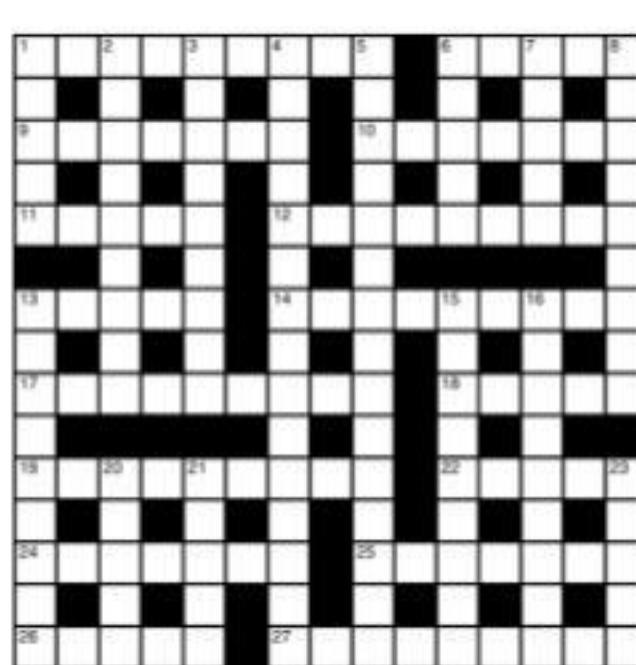
Rangoon, May 5

At Dubern's Ice Factory, Sule Pagoda Road, a crowd waiting for ice supplies became impatient. It is stated that a clerk pulled the beard of an aged Moslem, who rushed into the street denouncing the insult. A large crowd assembled and threats are alleged of boycotting the factory and attacking the employees. During the commotion some budmashes gained access to the back premises and threw some blocks of ice on the road. Eventually the crowd dispersed on the arrival of the police. It is asserted that the matter was referred to Mouli Abdulla Misri, who ordered that the aggrieved Moslem should slap the face of the factory clerk, and that on receipt of an apology and compensation the threat of boycott should be withdrawn.

ALLEGED FALSE MEDICAL CERTIFICATE

In connection with a case in which Ali Mahomed was charged with assaulting a constable of the Railway police at Sealadah, a qualified doctor, B.D. Chatterji, medical practitioner of Nimbollah Street, appeared before Mr. I.J. Cohen, Honorary Magistrate at Sealadah, to show cause why he should not be prosecuted for granting a false medical certificate to the accused man recommending rest. The doctor said he did not examine Ali Mahomed but gave a certificate of ill-health after hearing a statement made by the accused man's father as to his condition. The Magistrate warned and discharged the doctor. Ali Mahomed's father was asked to show cause why he should not be prosecuted for producing a medical certificate on his son's behalf, knowing it to be false.

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

ACROSS

- 1 Noblemen poison wine (9)
- 6 Credit card finally found in marketplace on return (5)
- 9 Canadian politician impolite in letter to Mitsotakis? (7)
- 10 Clergyman pockets a pill (7)
- 11 Place in Surrey for one needing meat (5)
- 12 First off, replace outside toilets and relax (4,5)
- 13 At home adult takes exercise, being unfit (5)
- 14 Lumpy old bed aunt moved out of bedroom initially (9)
- 15 Religious teacher from Chartres regularly ignored (9)

DOWN

- 18 Jesus? Not right (9)
- 18 Singers from church knocked back port (5)
- 19 Expert breaks into stately mansion at first? That's easy (2,7)
- 22 One's driven up river on island (5)
- 24 State aid put back into local area (7)
- 25 Smart outfits laid in with gold will get admirers (7)
- 26 Build playground in vacated establishment (5)
- 27 Bag with tea in, and sweetener (9)
- Jesus? Not right (9)
- Singers from church knocked back port (5)
- Expert breaks into stately mansion at first? That's easy (2,7)
- One's driven up river on island (5)
- State aid put back into local area (7)
- Smart outfits laid in with gold will get admirers (7)
- Build playground in vacated establishment (5)
- Bag with tea in, and sweetener (9)
- Joint account's closing in difficult situation (5)
- Run out with disgusted expression over players getting plastered (9)
- Having painful joints, he tucked into drink with a spasm (9)
- English composer Sullivan worked with him, a wag (7,8)
- Extremely subtle documentaries broadcast 4's work (8,2,5)
- Lark Ascending enthrals a South African village (5)
- As before, not all recommend it totally (5)
- Resignation is more certain to involve split (9)
- Dish in Venice, starter of toasted carrot (9)
- One may replace Yale lecturer with hick, most foolishly (9)
- Piece of wood that will make 8? (3-2-4)
- Father and daughter kept in trim (5)
- Love role displaying creative style (2,3)
- Once more offend Amber? (5)

NO 28904

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



Businesses and households are learning to adapt to lockdown measures and the dent to demand will be moderate as compared to last year.

SHAKTIKANTA DAS
GOVERNOR, THE RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

THUMBNAILS

CCI orders probe against Tata Motors: The Competition Commission has ordered a detailed probe against Tata Motors for alleged abuse of dominant position with respect to dealership agreements. The order has come on two complaints filed against Tata Motors, Tata Capital Financial Services Ltd and Tata Motors Finance Ltd (opposite parties). The Competition Commission of India (CCI) observed that the complainants are primarily aggrieved that Tata Motors has imposed unfair terms and conditions in the dealership agreement for commercial vehicles in abuse of its dominant position in contravention of the provisions of Section 4 of the Competition Act. Section 4 pertains to abuse of dominant position.

PTI

Tata Steel profit: Tata Steel on Wednesday posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 7,161.91 crore for the quarter ended March 2021, mainly on account of higher income. The company had reported a net loss of Rs 1,615.35 crore in the year ago quarter, Tata Steel said in a BSE filing. During January-March 2021, the company's total income jumped to Rs 50,249.59 crore from Rs 37,322.68 crore earlier. Total expenses rose to Rs 40,052 crore from Rs 35,432.42 crore in the January-March period of fiscal 2019-20, the BSE filing said.

PTI

New fund offer: PPFAS Mutual Fund on Wednesday announced the launch of Parag Parikh Conservative Hybrid Fund. The scheme aims to generate regular income through investments, predominantly in debt and money market instruments. It also seeks to generate income and capital appreciation by investing a certain portion in equity, equity-related instruments, and real estate investment trusts / infrastructure investment trusts, according to a Press release issued by the company.

SNS

Vivo phone: Smartphone maker Vivo has expanded its camera and design focused V series with the launch of all new Vivo V21 in the country. Priced at Rs 29,990 (8GB+128GB) and Rs 32,990 (8GB+256GB), the device will be available with immediate effect on Flipkart, Vivo India e-store and all offline partner retail stores across the country, said a Press release issued by the company.

SNS

Safex purchase: Safex Chemicals India Ltd on Wednesday announced the acquisition of Mumbai-based chemical maker Shogun Organics for an undisclosed amount. The acquisition will provide Safex a platform to backward integrate the agrochemical technical segment and enter the home-care and agrochemical technical manufacturing segment, the company said in a statement.

PTI

2nd Covid wave may derail economic recovery: S&P

It sees GDP growth falling to 9.8% under 'moderate' scenario and 8.2% under 'severe' scenario

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The second wave of Covid infections may derail a strong recovery in the Indian economy and credit conditions, S&P Global Ratings said today projecting a lower than previously anticipated GDP growth rate in different scenarios.

S&P, which in March had seen Indian economy growing by 11 per cent in the fiscal year to March 2022, saw GDP growth rate dropping to 9.8 per cent under "moderate" scenario where infections peak in May, and falling to as low as 8.2 per cent under "severe" scenario under which caseload would peak only in late June.

Just as the economy appeared to be inching back to normalcy, India was hit by a second wave of Covid-19 infections in early April, prompting states and cities to restrict public movements and impose lockdowns, which have hit some businesses hard.

OUTLOOK FOR GDP

We look at two scenarios at how this might play out across sectors. Our severe scenario holds that new infections peak in late June 2021. Our second, moderate scenario posits that infections peak in May. Our moderate scenario suggests a hit to GDP of about 1.2 percentage points. This means full-year growth of 9.8 per cent for fiscal 2022 (the year ending 31 March 2022). In the severe scenario, the hit is 2.8 percentage points, with growth of 8.2 per cent.

S&P GLOBAL RATINGS

India added 382,315 Covid-19 cases over the last 24 hours to reach a total of 2.06 crore, while death rose by a record 3,780 to 226,188, health ministry data showed.

"India's second Covid wave may derail a strong recovery in the economy and credit conditions," S&P Global Ratings said in a note, adding the spiralling new infections, which account for almost half of the world's cases, has overwhelmed the health system in the country.

The possibility of more local lockdowns being imposed to curb the spread may thwart what was looking

like a robust rebound in corporate profits, liquidity, funding access, government revenues, and banking system profitability, it said.

"We look at two scenarios at how this might play out across sectors. Our severe scenario holds that new infections peak in late June 2021. Our second, moderate scenario posits that infections peak in May," it said.

"Our moderate scenario suggests a hit to GDP of about 1.2 percentage points. This means full-year growth of 9.8 per cent for fiscal 2022 (the year ending 31 March 2022). In the severe scenario, the hit

is 2.8 percentage points, with growth of 8.2 per cent."



As per official estimates, Indian economy contracted 8 per cent in the 2020-21 fiscal, which ended on 31 March 2021.

S&P, which currently has a "BBB-" rating on India with a stable outlook, said the depth of the Indian economy's deceleration will determine the hit on its sovereign credit profile.

The Indian government's fiscal position is already stretched. The general government deficit was about 14 per cent of GDP in fiscal 2021, with net debt stock of just over

90 per cent of GDP.

"India's second wave has prompted us to reconsider our forecast of 11 per cent GDP growth this fiscal year. The timing of the peak in cases, and subsequent rate of decline, drive our considerations," said S&P Global Ratings Asia-Pacific chief economist Shaun Roache.

Last month, another global rating agency Fitch had projected India's economic growth in current fiscal at 12.8 per cent, while Moody's Investors Service too had said that the second wave of Covid infections presents a risk to India's growth forecast, but a double-digit GDP growth is likely in 2021, given the low level of activity last year.

S&P said rated Indian companies are going into this second Covid wave with much improved operating and liquidity conditions than they did going into the first wave, last year.

"As such, we expect the credit profile of Indian corporate entities to be resilient to the second Covid wave," the rating agency said.

Extend support to developing countries: Sitharaman to ADB

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

India today asked multilateral lending institutions like the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to extend support to developing countries to prevent the Covid-induced health crisis from turning into a full-blown economic catastrophe.

Observing that poverty has been reduced over the years but in 2020 an estimated 78 million people were pushed back into extreme poverty, and inequality aggravated, she said ADB rose to the occasion by delivering early and rapid support to the region, first through a comprehensive Covid response programme to help counter the severe macroeconomic and health impacts, and later coming up with a vaccine support package.

"We face an unprecedented global crisis today. The world economy contracted last year, threatening a severe development setback and hindering DMCs progress towards achieving 2030 Sustainable Development Goals," she said. She thanked the ADB for being with India in providing timely financial support for Covid and non-Covid projects.

Reserve Bank's decision well-timed: Industry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The RBI's decision on supporting small businesses and priority loans to Covid-related health infrastructure are well-timed and propitious as the pandemic is posing new challenges for the economy, according to industry.

The RBI on Wednesday allowed certain individual and small borrowers more time to repay debt and allowed banks to give priority loans to vaccine makers, hospitals, and Covid-related health infrastructure as it announced support measures to cushion the pandemic's blow on the economy.

Industry chamber CII said that opening of on-tap liquidity of Rs 50,000 crore till 31 March 2022 for healthcare sectors is

encouraging as the healthcare and allied sectors are facing tremendous stress of increased demand, supply constraints, and liquidity scarcity.

"At a time when the pandemic is posing new challenges for the economy, the well-calibrated first tranche of measures announced by the RBI today pertaining to supporting the small businesses and incentivising lending to the healthcare sector is indeed well-timed and propitious," it said in a statement.

Hailing the decisions, the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (Fieo) said that it will help in expanding the health infrastructure in the country, which is in distress due to increasing coronavirus infection.

"The federation together stands with the government

in all its efforts to control the surge in Covid-19 pandemic and support the economic growth of the country," it added.

Apparel Export Promotion Council (Aepc) chairman A Sakthivel said these are timely measures to prop up the much-needed Covid-related healthcare infrastructure in India. The loan restructuring, he said, will be a timely help for many MSMs (micro, small & medium enterprises).

Associam said that these are important confidence-building measures by the RBL.

"The targeted policy response and easy credit promised to the entire healthcare value chain, in the government and private sector including the vaccine manufacturers, are the most apt measures at this point of time" it said.

Nod to divestment in IDBI Bank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The Cabinet today gave in-principle approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank in line with the Budget announcement earlier this year.

The Central government and LIC together own more than 94 per cent equity of IDBI Bank, currently the promoter of IDBI Bank with management control, has a 49.21 per cent stake.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the strategic sale of IDBI Bank, an official statement said today.

The extent of respective shareholding to be divested by the Central government and LIC shall be decided at the time of structuring of transaction in consultation



with the RBI, it said.

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman while presenting the Budget 2021-22 had announced the privatisation of public sector banks (PSBs) as part of a disinvestment drive to garner Rs 1.75 lakh crore.

"Other than IDBI Bank, we propose to take up the privatisation of two public sector banks and one general insurance company in the year 2021-22," she had said.

Insurance giant LIC had completed the acquisition of 51 per cent controlling in IDBI Bank in January 2019.

"LIC's board has passed a resolution to the effect that LIC may reduce its shareholding in IDBI Bank Ltd through divesting its stake along with strategic stake sale envisaged by the government with an intent to relinquish management control and by taking into con-

ideration price, market outlook, statutory stipulation and interest of policyholders," the statement said.

This decision of the LIC board is also consistent with the regulatory mandate to it to reduce its stake in the bank, it added.

The bank was put under the PCA framework in May 2017, slapping curbs on expansion, investments and lending.

The Mumbai-based lender also turned profitable on an annual basis after five years as it reported a standalone profit of Rs 1,359 crore for 2020-21 fiscal as against a loss of Rs 12,887 crore in FY20.

Sensex snaps three-session losing run

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 5 MAY

The BSE Sensex darter up today after three days of losses after the RBI unveiled a slew of measures to support the economy facing headwinds due to the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Banking, pharma and IT stocks led the rebound, even as a depreciating rupee capped the gains, traders said.

The 30-share BSE index jumped 424.04 points or 0.88 per cent to close at 48,677.55 points.

RBI STEPS BOOST STOCKS

► BSE benchmark the Sensex darter up on Wednesday after three days of losses after the RBI unveiled a slew of measures to support the economy facing headwinds due to the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

► Banking, pharma and IT stocks led the rebound, even as a depreciating rupee capped the gains,

Finance, Asian Paints and HUL, slipping up to 1.75 per cent.

Earlier in the day, the RBI allowed certain individual and small borrowers more time to repay debt and allowed banks to give priority loans to vaccine makers, hospitals, and Covid-related health infrastructure as it announced support measures to cushion the pandemic's blow to the

economy.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das also said the central bank will buy Rs 35,000 crore of bonds under the Government Securities Acquisition Programme (G-SAP) - India's version of quantitative easing - on 20 May. The RBI also allowed banks to dip into their floating provisions to set aside money for bad loans.

"Domestic equities

rebounded mainly supported by financials, IT and pharma. Notably, announcement of liquidity supports by the RBI Governor to tackle the challenges coming from second wave of Covid-19 crisis aided financials to rebound," said Binod Modi, head strategy at Reliance Securities.

While elevated Covid-19 cases in several states and rising number of deaths are matters of concern, visible modest decline in new cases in many states including Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat offers comfort, he added.

Sectorally, BSE healthcare, bankex, basic materials, metal and IT indices rallied up to 3.06 per cent, while realty was in the red.

Broader BSE mid-cap and small-cap indices rose up to 1.05 per cent.

On the global markets front, US stocks wobbled after treasury secretary Janet Yellen

Petrol, diesel prices up for 2nd day in row

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

Petrol and diesel prices were raised for the second day in a row as state-owned fuel retailers resumed daily rate revision after a more than two-week long hiatus during assembly elections in states like West Bengal.

Petrol price was increased by 19 paise per litre and diesel by 21 paise a litre, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

Petrol in the national capital now costs Rs 90.74 a litre and diesel comes for Rs 81.12 per litre.

Rates have been increased across the country and vary from state to state depending on the local incidence of taxation (VAT).

Oil companies had on Tuesday resumed daily price revision in line with cost after

ending an 18-day hiatus. Prices were on Tuesday hiked by 15 paise per litre for petrol and 18 paise on diesel.

In two days, more than half of the 67 paise a litre reduction in petrol and 74 paise per litre cut in diesel prices effected between 24 March and 15 April, has been wiped out.

Oil marketing companies, who have in recent months resorted to unexplained freeze in rate revision, had hit a pause button after cutting prices marginally on 15 April. This coincided with electioneering hitting peak to elect new governments in five states, including West Bengal.

No sooner had voting ended, oil companies indicated an impending increase in retail prices in view of firming trend in international oil markets.

Rolls-Royce, HAL sign MoU for collaboration

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Rolls-Royce today signed a memorandum of understanding to establish packaging, installation, marketing and services support for Rolls-Royce MT30 marine engines in India. Through this MoU, the two companies will expand their long-standing partnership and work together in marine applications for the first time, according to a HAL release.

R Madhavan, chairman and managing director, HAL, said that the two companies were now looking forward to leveraging HAL's IMGT division's work experience on

Services sector growth at 3-month low

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

India's services sector activities eased to a three-month low in April, as the rise in business activity was constrained by the pandemic and sentiment towards growth prospects faded, a monthly survey said today.

The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index fell to 54 in April from 54.6 in March, the slowest increase in output in three months. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"The PMI results for April showed a more resilient economic performance for the service sector than expected given the escalation of the Covid-19 crisis in India.

REPORT CARD FOR APRIL

► The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index fell to 54 in April from 54.6 in March, the slowest increase in output in three months.



We emphasised our readiness to facilitate direct dialogue between the Palestinians and Israelis in order to resolve all fundamental final-status issues.

FOREIGN MINISTER SERGEY LAVROV
ON THE ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, THURSDAY 06 MAY 2021

09

Oli govt loses majority after Maoists withdraw support

Oli had previously announced he would seek the Confidence of parliament on 10 May

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KATHMANDU, 5 MAY

Neepal's embattled Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli-led government on Wednesday lost majority support in the House of Representatives after the CPN (Maoist Center) led by Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" officially withdrew support to it.

The party submitted a letter to this effect to the Parliament Secretariat, informing about its decision to withdraw support to the government, according to a senior leader of the party, Ganesh Shah.

Chief Whip of the Maoist Center Dev Gurung handed over the letter to officials at the Parliament Secretariat, he said.

After handing over the letter Gurung told the media persons that the party decided to



withdraw support to the Oli government as the government had breached the Constitution and the government's recent activities have posed threat to democratic procedures and national sovereignty.

After the withdrawal of support, the Oli government has lost its majority in the House of Representatives.

The decision of the Maoist party to withdraw support to

the government comes two days after Oli announced that he will seek a vote of confidence in Parliament on May 10.

The Maoist Center has a total of 49 lawmakers in the lower house.

Since the ruling CPN-UML has a total of 121 lawmakers, Prime Minister Oli is short of 15 lawmakers to save his government in the 275-member House.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Oli on Wednesday visited the residence of main Opposition leader Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba at Budhanilkantha, 10 km North of Kathmandu, to seek his support to save the government.

The two leaders discussed the latest political developments in the country, according to sources close to Nepali Congress.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 last year after President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10 at the recommendation of Prime Minister Oli, amidst a tussle for power within the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Oli's move to dissolve the House sparked protests from a large section of the NCP led by his rival 'Prachanda', also a co-chair of the ruling party.

In February, the apex court reinstated the dissolved House of Representatives, in a setback to embattled Prime Minister Oli who was preparing for snap polls.

A five-member Constitutional bench led by Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher JBR annulled the government's decision to dissolve the lower house of Parliament and ordered the government to summon the House session within the next 13 days.

Oli repeatedly defended his move to dissolve the House of Representatives, saying some leaders of his party were attempting to form a "parallel government".

As many as 13 writ petitions were filed at country's apex court seeking the restoration of the lower house of Parliament.

Netanyahu again fails to form Israeli govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

JERUSALEM, 5 MAY

Beleaguered Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is Israel's longest-serving prime minister, has failed to meet a midnight deadline of forming a government, giving his rivals a chance to end his uninterrupted stint at the helm of politics since 2009.

Netanyahu, 71, who is facing trial on a series of graft charges, was tasked by President Reuven Rivlin to put together a government on April 6 following inconclusive polls, the fourth in the last two years.

The mandate given by Rivlin to Netanyahu to form a government expired on Tuesday at midnight with no breakthrough in coalition talks, prolonging the country's political stalemate.

His Likud party emerged as the single largest party in the 120-member Parliament but did not have the necessary 61-member support to form a government. Likud had won 30 seats in the general election in March.

While tasking Netanyahu with the responsibility of forming the government, Rivlin said that he was doing so reluctantly and also mentioned his "moral dilemma" given the court proceedings and lack of enough support for the Likud leader.

Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing.

President Rivlin's

spokesman in a statement said: "Shortly before midnight, Netanyahu informed the President's Residence that he was unable to form a government and so returned the mandate to the president." Rivlin on Wednesday contacted the parties represented in the Knesset (Israel's unicameral parliament) on the continuation of the process of forming a government.

The President met with Yesh Atid party's chairman, Yair Lapid, and Yamina party's chairman, Naftali Bennett.

Both Lapid and Bennett reiterated their desire to be given the mandate to form the next government, press releases from the Presidency said.

The Blue and White party, headed by Defence Minister Benny Gantz, has recommended that Lapid be granted the Presidential mandate to form a government, a spokesperson for the party said.

Rivlin now has three days to decide whether to hand over the mandate to another lawmaker or to pass it on to the Knesset to give it a chance to find at least 61 lawmakers who can agree on a candidate to lead the next coalition government.

Netanyahu failed to persuade Bennett to join him in a power-sharing agreement that would have seen the pair take turns as prime minister. Bennett had dismissed the offer, saying that even with his support Netanyahu could not muster a majority.

SOCIAL PROBLEM



An Indonesian officer escorts Russian influencer Leila Se, after she posted a video defying a mandatory mask-wearing with some imaginative makeup on her social media. ■AGENCIES

Venezuela to form election board

CARACAS, 5 MAY

Venezuela's National Assembly named two opposition stalwarts, including a formerly jailed activist, as election officials Tuesday, the latest move by President Maduro to seek improved relations with the US.

It is the first time that the Venezuelan opposition will have two seats on the five-person National Electoral Council, which oversees elections in the South American country. Guaidó is among the opposition coalition who have rejected coexistence with Maduro.

US report: Taliban will likely curtail Afghan women's rights

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, MAY 5

US intelligence agencies are warning that any gains in women's rights in Afghanistan made in the last two decades will be at risk after US troops withdraw later this year.

An unclassified report released Tuesday by the Director of National Intelligence says the Taliban remain broadly consistent in its restrictive approach to women's rights and would roll back much of the past two decades' progress if the group regained national power. It's the latest US warning of the consequences of the Afghan withdrawal now underway, two decades after an

American-led coalition toppled the Taliban. Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Sunday that there would possibly be some really dramatic, bad possible outcomes for Afghan forces left on their own to counter the Taliban, but also noted, We frankly don't know yet. And

CIA Director William Burns told Congress in April that the American ability to collect and act on threats will diminish.

President Joe Biden has set a September deadline for US forces to withdraw. While Biden and his top officials have stressed that they will not end their engage-

ment with Afghanistan or advocacy for human rights, the US has also openly warned of gains for the Taliban, which has been locked in an insurgency with coalition and Afghan forces and already controls swaths throughout the country. After the US-led invasion toppled the group that had hosted Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network that democratic governance and respect for human rights in Afghanistan became a Western priority.

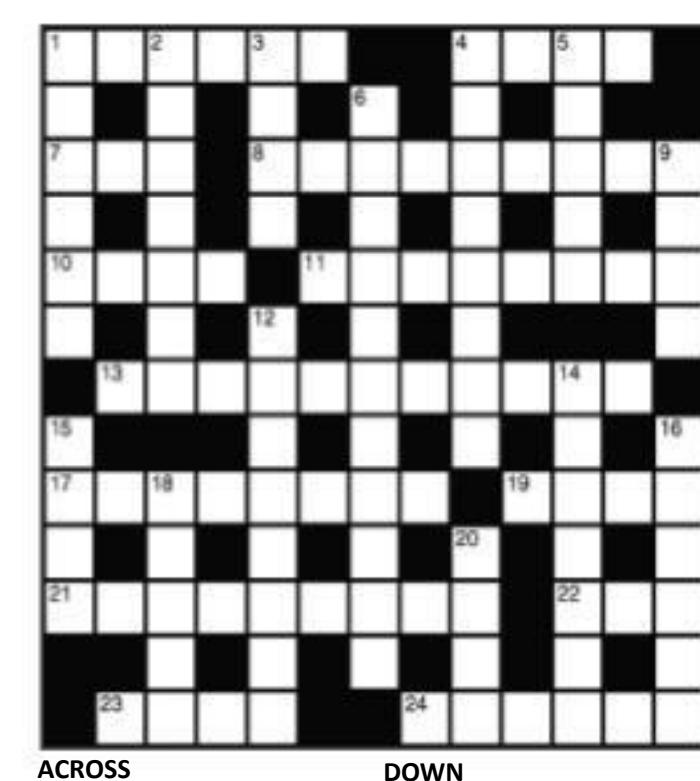
Two-thirds of Afghanistan's population is 25 years old or younger, with no memory of Taliban rule. While Afghanistan remains one of the world's worst countries for women,

particularly in rural areas where little has changed in generations, Afghan women now serve in Parliament, go to school and run businesses.

But there are persistent fears that, as the US has negotiated with the Taliban on an exit from Afghanistan, women will be stripped of rights or once again be forced to wear the burqa, the all-encompassing symbol of Taliban rule. The Taliban last month issued a statement promising that women could serve their society in the education, business, health and social fields while maintaining correct Islamic hijab, referring to the Arabic word for veil.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1. Obelus (6)
4. Lacking feeling (4)
7. Body of water (3)
8. Tend (4,5)
10. Impolite (4)
11. Imprison (8)
13. Natural ability (8)
19. Choose (4)
21. Indigestion (9)
22. Relatives (3)
23. Votes in favour (4)
24. Verse (6)

DOWN
1. Certify, 13 Portraitist,
4. Botched, 17 Worthy,
7. So far, 19 Outcome,
9. Rapture, 20 Occur,
10. Clove, 22 Repel,
11. Hills, 23 Splurge,
12. Skewer, 23 Enemy,
13. Skewer, 24 Haste,
14. Small jewellery item (7)
15. Hairpins, 16 Thin (6)
17. Ripe, 18 Sapid (5)
18. Ring of light (4)

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



By arrangement with The Independent
Figures in parentheses denote
the number of letters in the words required

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1. Were, 12 Certify, 13 Portraitist,
3. Coarse, 17 Botched, 19 Outcome,
(Workhorse), 20 Occur, 22 Repel,
9 Rapture, 20 Occur, 23 Splurge,
10 Clove, 23 Enemy, 24 Haste,
11 Hills, 23 Skewer, 24 Forgo.

DOWN
1. Abandon (6)
2. Make joyful (7)
3. Slippery fisher (4)
4. Biblical vessel (5,3)
5. Type of element (5)
6. Music format (7,4)
9. Skin eruption (4)
12. Bed part (8)
14. Small jewellery item (7)
15. Hairpins, 16 Thin (6)
17. Ripe, 18 Sapid (5)
18. Ring of light (4)

**8 Merchant-dise, 14 Outcome,
15 Russ, 16 Mrs., 17 Boogus,
18 Haste, 19 Forgo.**

10 Forgo, 11 Deter, 12 Repel,

**13 Skever, 14 Small jewellery item (7),
15 Hairpins, 16 Thin (6), 17 Boogus,
18 Haste, 19 Forgo.**

20 Forgo.

By arrangement with The Independent
Figures in parentheses denote
the number of letters in the words required

NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

22586262, 22585007

RAILWAY INQUIRY

General Inquiry 139

Toll Free Nos. 1800112511

SMS Inquiry Nos. 57886,

54959, 5676747

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

ISBT (General Inquiry):

23868836, 23865181

Haryana Roadways 23861262

City Office 43513185, Call Cen-

tre 09910383338,

18001803838, Reservation

43513186; Indigo Airlines Air-

port 011-25671580; Terminal I-

B 25671576, Palam Road

25671579, 18001803838

JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry

and Reservation 39841111

EMIRATES Flight Inquiry and

Reservation 3373377

U.P. Roadways 23868709

FLIGHT INQUIRY

AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and

Reservation 18001801407

INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi

City Office 43513185, Call Cen-

tre 09910383338, 18001803838,

Reservation 25656421/25656431

Indigo Airlines Air-

port 41528181

Air Canada Flight Inquiry and

Reservation 23466262 (City)

25652294 (Airport)

Kuwait Airways Flight Inquiry and

Reservation 23354373

Instructions Make a 2 to 7 letter word from the letters in each square.

Add points of each letter, using scoring system. Add points of each letter word. Add points of each letter word. Add points of each letter word.

All Judd's words are 5-letter words. All Judd's words are 5-letter words. All Judd's words are 5-letter words. All Judd's words are 5-letter words.

Use the Official Scrabble Dictionary (Merriam-Webster's Official Scrabble Dictionary).

Use the Official Scrabble Dictionary (Merriam-Webster's Official Scrabble Dictionary).

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Use the Official Scrabble Dictionary (Merriam-Webster's Official Scrabble Dictionary).

Use the Official Scrabble Dictionary (Merriam-Webster's



The EU is planning to tighten the foreign investment rules in the bloc to make sure that local producers and industries are no longer undercut by non-EU investors that have faced slacker rules up to now.

INTERNAL MARKET COMMISSIONER THIERRY BRETON

REVEALING EU PLANS TO TIGHTEN FOREIGN INVESTMENT WITH EYE ON CHINA

WEATHER

CITY	MAX	MIN
SINGAPORE	29°C	25°C
HONG KONG	26°C	20°C
TOKYO	18°C	12°C
LONDON	17°C	9°C
DUBAI	30°C	25°C
SAN FRANCISCO	13°C	04°C
NEW YORK	10°C	07°C
MOSCOW	16°C	09°C

S=sunny, CL=clear, H=hazy, R=rainy...

THUMBNAILS



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifts off from pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. AP

Bulgaria election: Bulgaria is likely to hold another election on 11 July after the largest three parties in parliament gave up on attempts to form a coalition government. President Rumen Radev said that he expects a new electoral commission to be appointed by 11 May, when he would dissolve parliament, and call a new election. AP

Germany bans Muslim grp: The German government banned a Muslim organisation that it alleged had supported "terrorism globally with donations." The money the organisation collected went to welfare projects but also to groups such as the Syrian al-Qaida affiliate known as the Nusra Front, the Palestinian group Hamas and al-Shabab in Somalia. AP

Ndrangheta suspects held: A joint Italian-German police investigation into the Ndrangheta organised crime group led to the arrests of 31 people accused of drug trafficking, money laundering and systematic tax evasion on the part of Italian pizzerias and restaurants in Germany, authorities said. AP

Ardern marriage plans: New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern plans to marry her partner during the southern summer. In an interview on the Coast radio breakfast show, Ardern said she and Clarke Gayford have finally set a date for their wedding after announcing they were engaged two years ago. AP

Crew members test +ve: Fourteen crew members of a cargo ship that sailed to Durban from India have tested positive for Covid, South Africa's Transnet National Port Authority has said on Wednesday. A spokesperson from Transnet said the cause of a chief engineer's death aboard the ship was heart attack and not Covid. PTI

FDA to approve vaccine for 12-15 age group

Officials hopeful extending vaccination to kids will drive down caseload

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MISSION (US), 5 MAY

After more than a year of fretting over her 13-year-old son with a rare liver disease, Heather Ousley broke into tears when she learned that he and millions of other youngsters could soon be eligible for the Covid vaccine.

This day is the best day in the history of days!!! I love this day!!! she texted, joining other parents and educators in welcoming the news that the Food and Drug Administration is expected to authorize Pfizer's vaccine by next week for children ages 12 to 15.

Ousley, who is president of the school board for the 27,000-student Shawnee Mission School District in Kansas, plans to get her 13- and 15-year-olds promptly vaccinated and then celebrate with ice cream. They have been learning from home with their younger brother since the start of the outbreak.

Pfizer is also anticipating that the FDA will endorse use of its vaccine in even younger children sometime this fall. And results are expected by the middle of this year from a U.S. study of Moderna's shots in 12- to 17-year-olds.

Officials are hoping that extending vaccinations to children will drive down the nation's caseload even further and allow schools to reopen with minimal disruption this fall. It could also reassure parents and teachers alike.

They all pulled through, and Cooper and his parents have all since been vaccinated. But his mother can't wait for her 15-year-old, Reece, and 12-year-old, Tucker, to get their shots so their brother is as protected as possible.

Our personal situation, it feels like more security around Cooper with a compromised immune system," Robin Perry said. It's just being part of the solution. That's what excites



► 40 per cent of parents surveyed by the National Parents Union planned to get their children vaccinated immediately, 21 per cent eventually and 24 per cent never.

► Pfizer in March released preliminary results from a study of 2,260 US volunteers ages 12 to 15, showing there were no cases of Covid among fully vaccinated children compared with 18 among those given dummy shots.

then thinking about what this means for all of our kids in the district, Ousley said.

Pfizer in March released preliminary results from a study of 2,260 US volunteers ages 12 to 15, showing there were no cases of Covid among fully vaccinated children compared with 18 among those given dummy shots.

In New York's Erie County, a prom-themed vaccine clinics were held this past weekend, including one with a tropical feel where health care workers wore grass skirts and 16- and 17-year-olds went home with gift bags of masks and hand sanitizer. Similar efforts are expected to draw in 12- to 15-year-olds.

Dan Domenech, executive director of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, said the anticipated authorization to vaccinate children would help make parents feel more comfortable to send their children back to classrooms and ease concerns among some teachers.

And then, too, they want to get out and do more things. Keri Rodrigues, a co-founder of the education advocacy group the National Parents Union, said she rushed out to get vaccinated after becoming eligible but has more trepidation about immunizing her oldest son, who is 13.

me the most. It's an added level of protection. Maybe you can take a deeper breath.

Educators have already embraced vaccines for students 16 and up, with some scheduling vaccine clinics during school hours and danging prize drawings and other

efforts are expected to draw in 12- to 15-year-olds.

You are starting to see more and more of them wearing them down below their nose because they are just tired of it," she said.

"And then, too, they want to get out and do more things. Keri Rodrigues, a co-founder of the education advocacy group the National Parents Union, said she rushed out to get vaccinated after becoming eligible but has more trepidation about immunizing her oldest son, who is 13.

► Canada authorizes Pfizer for age 12 to 16: Canada's health regulator has authorised Pfizer's Covid vaccine for ages 12 to 16, a person familiar with the decision told the Associated Press on Wednesday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak ahead of the upcoming announcement. Kids had side effects similar to young adults, the company said. AP

Domenech said.

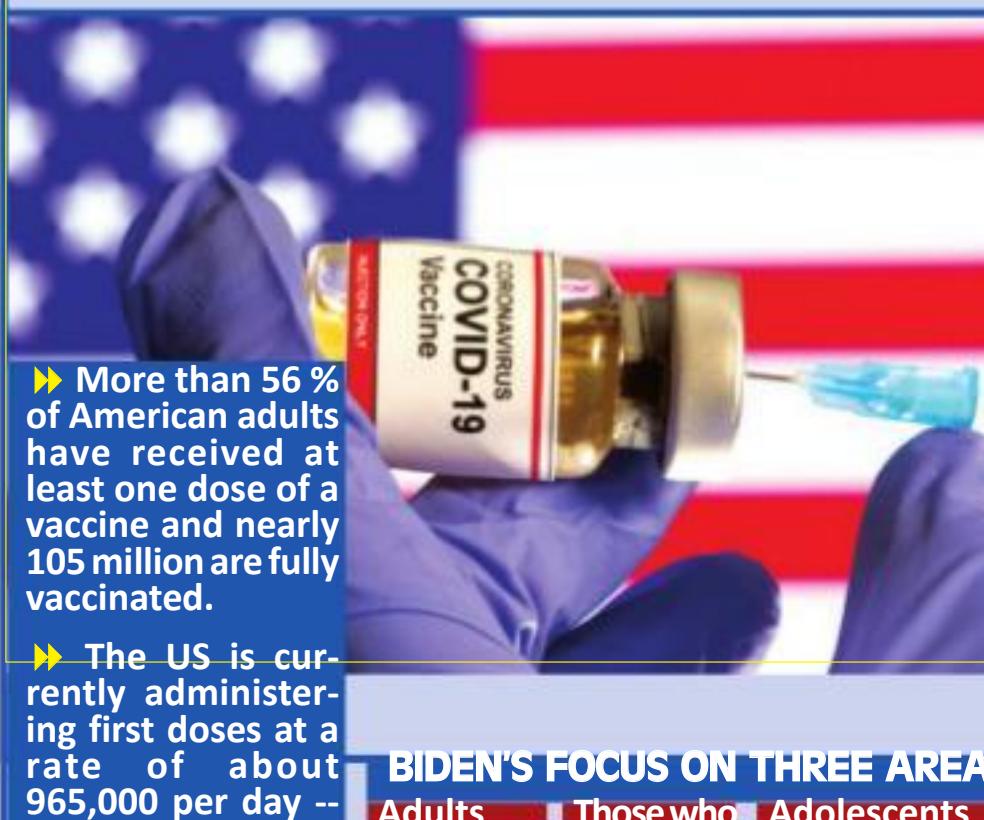
Schools were very pleased when the CDC came out with the 3-foot spacing as opposed to the 6-foot spacing, because that immediately allowed them to have more students in school at one time. This will have a similar effect, he said. If now you can have a significant population of your students in middle schools and high schools vaccinated, that makes it even safer for greater numbers of students to be in school. Seventy-four-year-old Pat Shepard, a retired Spanish teacher from Lincoln, Nebraska, who has worked as a substitute during the outbreak, is eager to see eligibility expand, saying students are increasingly resisting wearing masks.

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"And then, too, they want to get out and do more things. Keri Rodrigues, a co-founder of the education advocacy group the National Parents Union, said she rushed out to get vaccinated after becoming eligible but has more trepidation about immunizing her oldest son, who is 13.

BIDEN AIMS TO VACCINATE 70% OF ADULTS BY 4 JULY

Biden's goal equates to delivering at least the first shot to 181 million adults and fully vaccinating 160 million. Demand for vaccines has dropped off markedly nationwide, with some states leaving more than half their available doses unclaimed.



► Officials said Biden's vaccination target would result in a significant reduction in cases heading into the summer.

► The Biden administration is shifting the government's focus toward expanding smaller and mobile vaccination clinics to deliver doses to harder-to-reach communities.

► It is also spending hundreds of millions of dollars to try to boost interest in vaccines through education campaigns and greater access to shots through community organizations that can help bring people to clinics.

► Creative efforts to make it easier and more fun to get vaccinated, such as grocery stores offering discounts to shoppers who come to get shots and sports leagues that hold promotions to get fans vaccinated.

► Biden urged states to administer at least one dose to adolescents by July Fourth and work to deliver doses to pediatricians' offices and other trusted locations, with the aim of getting many of them fully vaccinated by the start of the next school year.

BIDEN'S FOCUS ON THREE AREAS

► Data from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention shows Louisiana's vaccination rate is well behind most states.

► About 27% of state residents are fully vaccinated while 32% have received at least one dose of the vaccine, according to the state health department.

► The White House previously resisted efforts to distribute vaccine by mail.

► You do need to get vaccinated...Even if your chance of getting seriously ill is low, why take the risk? It could save your life or the lives of somebody you love. The light at the end of the tunnel is actually growing brighter and brighter

JOE BIDEN

WTO mulling temporary IP waivers for vaccines

ASSOCIATED PRESS
GENEVA, 5 MAY

Ambassadors from World Trade Organisation countries on Wednesday resumed discussions on trade rules protecting the technological know-how behind Covid vaccines amid growing pressure on rich nations to relax them as a way to help poorer countries fight the pandemic.

The WTO's General Council was taking up a temporary waiver for intellectual property protections that South Africa and India first proposed in October. The idea has gained support in the developing world and among some progressive lawmakers in the West.

Some proponents saw more hope for the proposal after US President Joe Biden's top trade official, Katherine Tai, said last month that gaping inequities in access to vaccines between developed and developing countries were "completely unacceptable, and that mistakes made in the global response to the HIV pandemic mustn't be repeated."

The argument, part of a long-running debate about intellectual property protections, centers on lifting patents, copyrights, and protections for industrial design and confidential information to help expand the production and deployment of vaccines during supply shortages. The aim is to suspend the rules for several years, just long enough to beat down the pandemic.

No consensus -- which is required under WTO rules -- was expected to emerge from the ambassadors' two-day meeting on Wednesday and

Oz PM stays firm on ban on flights from India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE, 5 MAY

A defiant Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Wednesday stood firm on his decision to halt flights from India in a bid to curb the Covid infections and a possible third wave of the deadly contagion, saying positive cases have started to come down as a result of the pause.

The Australian government, for the first time in history, recently imposed a ban on its citizens from returning home, if they have spent time in India up to 14 days before flying back.

The government threatened to prosecute them with a possibility of five years of jail term or a penalty of \$50,899.

The move triggered a backlash with several lawmakers, doctors, civil societies and businessmen criticising the govt

COVID FIGHT



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it will enable the government to get Australian residents and their immediate families back on repatriation flights.

"We're already starting to see, as a result of the pause, the incidence of those cases at Howard Springs (quarantine facility) starting to come down. We've got a bit more distance to travel there, Morrison said.

This was a necessary step to ensure that we can help more Australian citizens and residents get home, and at the same time, bring them home safely in a way that did not risk a third wave here in Australia," he said, adding that a "good progress" was being made towards restoring repatriation flights.

Morrison said he was not worried about the travel ban, asserting that the backlash would not impact the government's relationship with India.

"There is a partnership effort with India to support them as they deal with this terrible crisis," he said, adding that India is a great friend of Australia.

Morrison said humanitar

ian support which includes oxygen containers, masks and respirators had already left Sydney and was now on its way to India.

On Tuesday, Morrison said

that the possibility of a prosecution was "pretty much zero", indicating that it could be reviewed before it is due to be lifted on May 15.

Australian stuck in India sues Morrison govt

MELBOURNE, 5 MAY

A 73-year-old Australian, who is stranded in India since March last year, has filed a lawsuit before a Sydney court against the federal government for banning flights from India and threatening to prosecute those attempting to enter the country with the possibility of a jail term and a penalty of \$50,899.

Morrison said he was not worried about the travel ban, asserting that the backlash would not impact the government's relationship with India.

"There is a partnership effort with India to support them as they deal with this terrible crisis," he said, adding that India is a great friend of Australia.

Morrison said humanitar

Madrid's anti-lockdown leader revitalises Spanish right

MADRID, 5 MAY

A skeptic of sweeping pandemic lockdowns vowed Wednesday to use her party's victory in a regional Madrid election to remain as a counterpower to the left-wing coalition of Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

Isabel Diaz Ayuso's Popular Party nearly obtained an absolute majority in the legislative assembly of the wealthy region. The election's outcome opens a fresh chapter in Spain's volatile politics by putting conservatives back in the race to control the national government.

The win is going to be a stimulus and a change of cycle," Diaz Ayuso told Spanish station EsRadio the day after the Popular Party won 44% of the vote in the regional election, more than the total secured by all of its center-to-left rivals.

We will continue here being the counterweight and the counterpower that are needed (against Sanchez)," she said.

The Popular Party won 65 of the Madrid Assembly's 136 seats on Tuesday, more than twice the number it won in the previous election two years ago. The far-right Vox party won 13 seats - one more than in 2019 - to give the right wing 20 more seats than the 58 picked up by Sanchez's Socialists, the anti-austerity United We Can party and More Madrid, an upstart party that echoes the rise of the European Greens and becomes the opposition leader. Vox has offered support to Diaz Ayuso, whose victory reduces the need to form a coalition government.

Citizens, the center-right liberal party that was the junior partner in the regional government until Diaz Ayuso called the snap election two months ago, collected less than 4% of the vote and lost all of its 26 Madrid Assembly seats. Citizens was once seen as a possible hinge-party to form governments with the left and the right, but it is now fighting for relevance. AP

Facebook board upholds Trump suspension

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO, 5 MAY

Former President Donald Trump won't return to Facebook — at least not yet.

The social network's quasi-independent Oversight Board voted to uphold his ban from the platform after his account was suspended four months ago for inciting violence that led to the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol riot. But in a statement, it faulted Facebook for the way it made the decision and called its "indefinite" suspension of Trump unreasonable and unworkable.

The board said Facebook sought to avoid its responsibilities by applying "a vague, standardless penalty" and then referring the case to the board to resolve. "Indefinite penalties of this sort do not pass the international smell test," oversight board co-chair Michael McConnell said in a conference call with reporters. "We are not cops, reigning over the realm of social media." The



board agreed with Facebook that that two of Trump's Jan. 6 posts "severely violated" the content standards of both Facebook and Instagram.

"We love you.

literary

A riveting read

Somdatta Mandal's meticulous translation and compilation of 'Kobi' & 'Rani' can well be regarded as her magnum opus... A review

SANJUKTA DASGUPTA

Editor and translator Somdatta Mandal's bilingual title 'Kobi' & 'Rani' brings together much awaited translations of several fascinating volumes that are an integral part of Tagore studies. Mandal has translated with skill and ease the memoirs and correspondences of Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis and Rabindranath Tagore. The volume includes English translations of two memoirs by Mahalanobis, whom the poet, all her loved ones and acquaintances called "Rani". The translated travel narratives are titled *With the Poet in Europe (Kobir Shongey Europey)* and *With the Poet in the South (Kobir Shongey Dakshinatrey)*. Also, along with translations of the selected 60 letters (*Path O Pather Prante*) that Tagore had written to Mahalanobis, three other articles on Tagore by Mahalanobis are included in this volume.

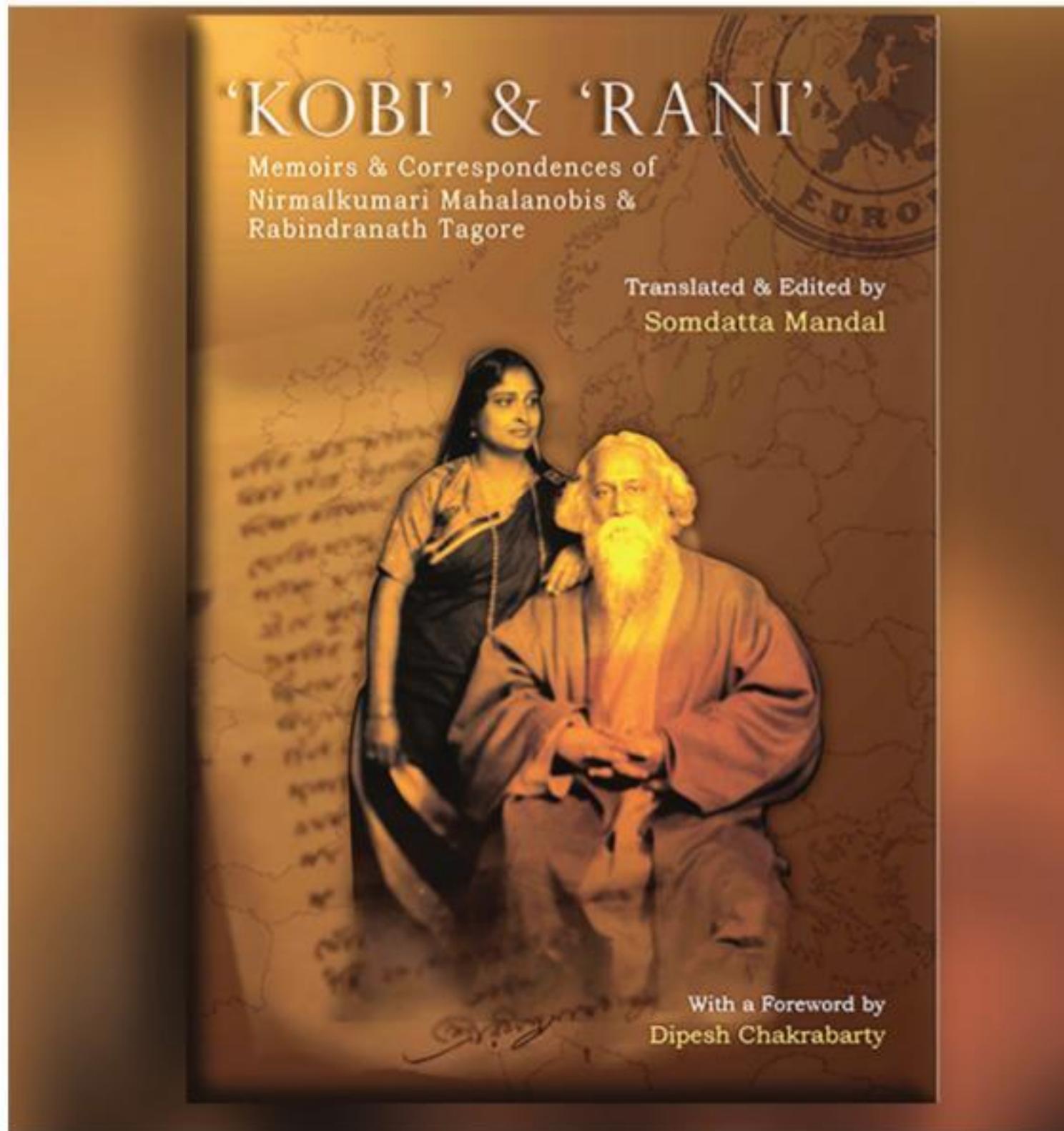
Mahanobis and her husband, the celebrated statistician Prasanta Mahalanobis, accompanied Tagore when he visited Europe in 1926. The most significant experience of the tour was Tagore's invitation to visit Italy. Referring to it, she stated, "We didn't know whether it was from the University of Rome or from Mussolini". The poet met then Prime Minister of Italy Benito Mussolini at a garden party. Tagore told Mussolini that he was interested in meeting the famous philosopher Benedetto Croce. The poet and the philosopher did meet and Croce familiarised Tagore about the oppression of the fascist regime spearheaded by Mussolini.

The memoir carries fascinating details about Tagore's initial support to Mussolini, which was published in leading Italian newspapers. Later, as the poet realised that he had stepped into a well-engineered trap, he published several rejoinders.

Interestingly, Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis' memoir on the Europe tour was published in 1969, almost 43 years after the tour and about 28 years after the poet's death in 1941. In fact, the preface to her memoir, written by her husband states candidly that her wifely, presumably caregiver, responsibilities led to the delay in publication of the memoir.

When Mahalanobis accompanied her husband and Tagore on the trip she was 26 years old. Her memoir was published when she was 69. As a feminist reader, I am unable to ignore the starkly gendered explanation for the delay in publication offered by her distinguished husband, who wrote, ".in fact, it is because of my carelessness and procrastination that her writing was not completed. That is why there is no limit to the shame and regret in my mind. That this forty-three-year-old story is finally going to be published today makes part of my mental regret disappear. Today my mind is in a pleasant mood."

The memoir itself, referred to as "The Text" by the editor, begins in a casual, unassuming style with Mahalanobis' excitement about a trip to Europe with Tagore. The micro details in the text are riveting. The very second page refers to bullock carts being used in Alipore for transporting luggage, though simultaneously telephones seem to be readily in use in urban



homes. The memoir is not just about reminiscences about the poet's experiences, if read carefully it is also autobiographical, as the pages unravel how a young wife juggles her diverse chores on the journey without expressing annoyance or self-pity.

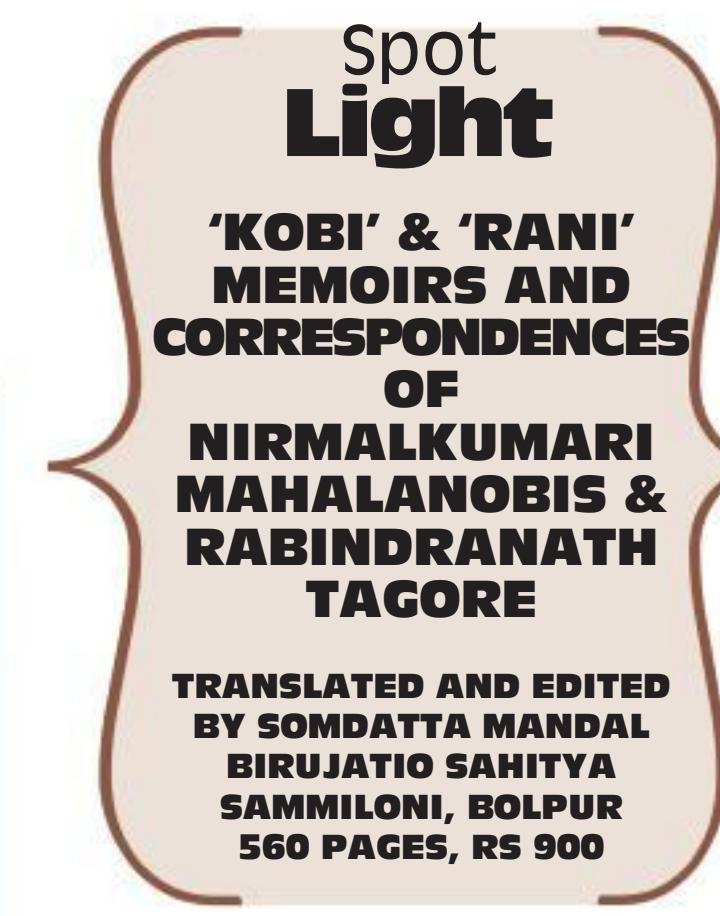
The alert and pleasant disposition of Mahalanobis is manifest in every page of the memoir. She does not resort to any pretentious platitudes yet her intelligent mind notices and records every mood swing of the poet, his body language, his effusive sense of wit and humour, and his deeply reflective discourse that makes him so exceptional. From the narratives and Tagore's own letters we are able to create in our minds the image of an empathetic, cultured, educated and intelligent Bengali *bhadramahila*, a genteel gentlewoman in all senses of the term.

In an affectionate acknowledgement of Mahalanobis' role as caregiver throughout the long seven-month trip, the poet wrote in his introduction to the volume of letters addressed to her, that, "By submitting all the unexpected problems to be resolved by her, I had shamelessly spent my days in peace while receiving a lot of care and nursing from her." In a more jocular mode, the poet made the gendered distinction of role stereotypes as he wrote, "She had to rectify all the problems that two inexperienced

male travellers created while making proper arrangements for travel."

Furthermore, in her article *Om Pita Nohosi* in which she described Tagore's interpretation of certain *shlokas* from the *Upanishads*, Mahalanobis also digresses into personal recounting of how the poet teased her about being a "girl", when he said, "You always keep on saying that you want to be born a girl again and again. Oh, what intelligence you have! After being born a girl once haven't you understood how much you have been deprived? This is what is known as femininity."

Mahanobis further added Tagore's more serious reflections on womanhood, as he elaborated, "For women personal relationships are so important that they are never satisfied with any abstract ideas. That is why they are not mad like men to run behind great ideals. But if they love someone, they can easily leave everything for him, serve him with full vigour, and if necessary do not hesitate to give up their lives." This essay provides an intriguing viewpoint about Tagore's responses about the roles and responsibilities of women, their exhibiting a mysterious source of inner strength, the obsessive passion of women in love, which the poet considered to be repulsive as he stated, "she always tries to cling to her loved ones according to her own



wishes and addiction."

However, though Tagore's opinions about the collective psyche of women may create the impression of male chauvinism, contradicting that impression of pomposity in his letter to Mahalanobis, Tagore wrote in a mood of self-introspection, "Even today I cannot consider myself as someone very important." This is followed by a scathing ironic one-liner, "In this matter, I agree with many people back home." Then in a more reflective mood he concluded the short letter as he observed, "One day our stories will also disappear under the layers of lost history, but as long as they are aboveground and, in the light, we can create some noise. There is a long time left in front of us before we become totally quiet."

Mahanobis' memoir about the tour to South India with the poet in 1928 was published in 1956, that is, 38 years after the poet's death. This inordinate delay in the publication of the two memoirs seems odd. Could there have been some hesitation about bringing into the public domain sensitive political and social issues that the poet engaged in, as they perhaps ran the risk of public remonstrances? One needs to remember that those trips were undertaken during volatile times in the world's history and turbulent politics in colonial India, with Mahatma Gandhi leading the freedom movement. Thereafter too, the post-Independence, post-colonial India had its own political tensions, so the Mahalanobis couple may have felt the publication of the apparently innocuous memoirs could lead to misinterpretation or even deliberate misreading.

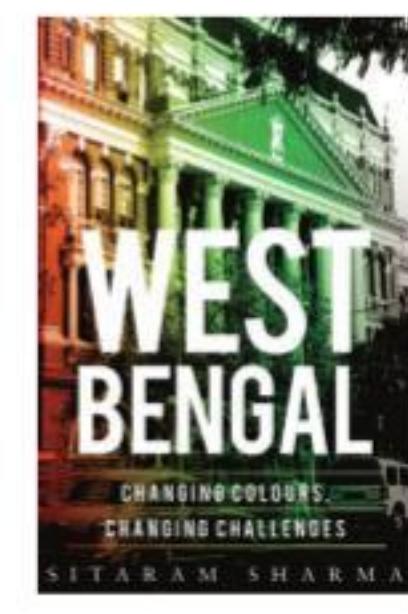
While in Madras, the poet was invited by British writer and activist Annie Besant to spend a few days in her house. It was a rich experience, but Mahalanobis complained that the absence of electric fans caused great discomfort and eventually a table fan was brought in for the poet. Also in Pondicherry, the description of the poet being lifted by a crane from the ship is hilarious. Her amusement becomes obvious as she writes, "It was very difficult to visualise the picture of Rabindranath Tagore being dangled in mid-air by a crane. The poet himself also had a good laugh."

Mandal deserves all praise for translating meticulously into English these riveting memoirs as well as Tagore's letters to Mahalanobis, and the three essays: 'Kobi' & 'Rani' can well be regarded as Mandal's magnum opus, till date.

The reviewer is a former professor of English, Calcutta University

BOOKS RECEIVED

In-depth analysis

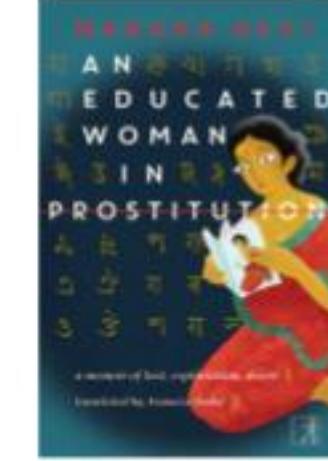


WEST BENGAL: CHANGING COLOURS, CHANGING CHALLENGES
BY SITARAM SHARMA
RUPA PUBLICATIONS, NEW DELHI
NON-FICTION, 210 PAGES, RS 295

On 13 May 2011, Mamata Banerjee, leader of the All India Trinamul Congress, defeated the Left Front to become the state's first female chief minister. It was her rallying cry of *poriborton*, and her slogan *Ma, Mati, Manush* (Mother, Earth, People), which captured the imagination of people and led to her landslide victory, ending the decades-long dominance of the Left.

Sharma, journalist, diplomat and author, attempts to lucidly unravel the cause-and-effect links through a careful exploration of the turbulent world of Bengal politics – from the partition of Bengal in 1947 to the Leftward swing in the 1960s-70s, the gradual downfall of the Communist Party culminating in the Singur-Nandigram incident, and the final blow, in 2011, when Banerjee came to power – in this powerful and incisive exposition of the current affairs of West Bengal.

Layered narrative



AN EDUCATED WOMAN IN PROSTITUTION
BY MANADA DEVI
TRANSLATED BY ARUNAVA SINHA
SIMON & SCHUSTER, NEW DELHI
MEMOIR, 168 PAGES, RS 399

Manada, Maani *didi*, Feroza Bibi, Miss Mukherjee – the jostling identities of the beguiling and charming protagonist as she glides through a life that can be seen as exploitative, yet also, curiously empowering and honest. Manada's fascinating life story takes her from her wealthy cosseted upbringing to a life of debauchery and prostitution after she elopes with her married lover when in her mid-teens. She is capable, attractive and doesn't ask for pity as she struggles with illness, poverty and abandonment, but ensures that she emerges relatively unscathed and carves a niche for herself in her profession.

Weaving together multiple strands, looking beyond ideas of morality and accusations, we are presented a life of immense beauty and endurance, which is both grand in its scope and deeply intimate in its portrait.

Sinha is an award-winning translator of Bengali fiction, non-fiction and poetry into English.

Explosive conclusion



THE WRATH OF THE HELLFIRES
BY SHATRUJEET NATH
JAICO PUBLISHING HOUSE, MUMBAI
FICTION, 536 PAGES, RS 499

Shukracharya's plan to break the unity of Vikramaditya's Council has borne bitter fruit. Friends have become sworn enemies, and brother has turned against brother, setting Avanti on the path to self-destruction.

Even as Vikramaditya prepares to counter a Hun invasion, a rebellion brews within Ujjayini, while a devious conspiracy is hatched to humiliate him. Alone and abandoned by those dear to him, fighting to protect his people, trying his best to keep his promise to Shiva, will the samrat rise one last time to defend his love, his city and his honour?

Nath is the creator of the series *Vikramaditya Veergatha*, a four-book mytho-fantasy arc. This is the last of the series.

KRISHNAN SRINIVASAN

Of much interest and importance

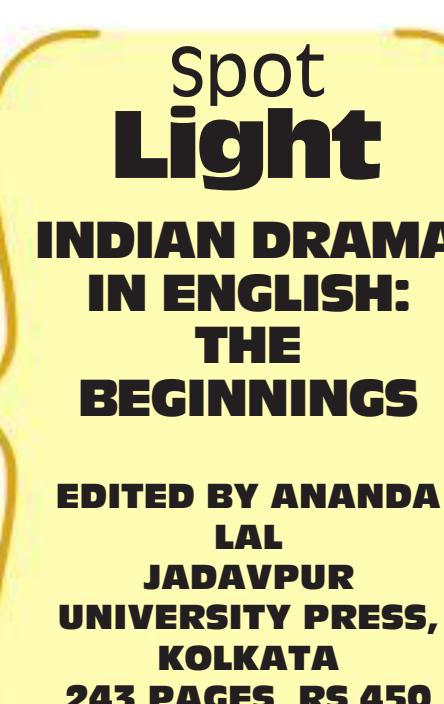
Ananda Lal has performed a valuable service to the history of Indian drama and literature by bringing examples of the earliest texts in the English language to a general readership... A review

This remarkable study by Jadavpur University professor Ananda Lal, after painstaking archival and antiquarian research, traces the background of three pioneering texts of original plays in English by Indians in the 19th century. They were *The Persecuted* (1831) by K M Banerjee, *Rizia* (1849) by Michael Madhusudan Dutt and *Kaminee* (1874), author unknown. The plays were sadly never performed on stage, evidently because they represented dissenting and minority opinion at the time, and would not have been considered "box office".

Banerjee's *Persecuted* was the commencement of Indian drama, written and set in Calcutta, and the other two authors were also resident in the city. Prasanna Kumar Tagore established the Hindu Theatre at Narkeldanga and later theatres, including the original Jorasanko, seem to have staged William Shakespeare in English and from 1850, Bengali language productions. Banerjee, polymath who wrote the play aged 18, belonged to the Hindoo College *avant garde* circle around Henry Derozio and questioned traditional Hindu society, putting their beliefs into practice by flaunting their taste for alcohol and beef. Hounded by the orthodox, Banerjee was obliged to abandon his family home and eventually found shelter with a missionary where he embraced Christianity.

Derozio died the same year as the publication of the play in the East Indian Press, where it caused a sensation. Lal speculates that possibly Banerjee's purposes were well served by publication rather than performance. A strange irony was that Banerjee, now ordained, converted the only son of Tagore of the Hindu Theatre, the result being that the son was similarly disinherited.

While Lal issues a disclaimer about the quality of the three plays, there is much about them that have both interest and value for the reader, though all are in the preachy minimum-movement style that endures to this day on the Indian stage. *The Persecuted* is powerful and acerbic – "Hin-

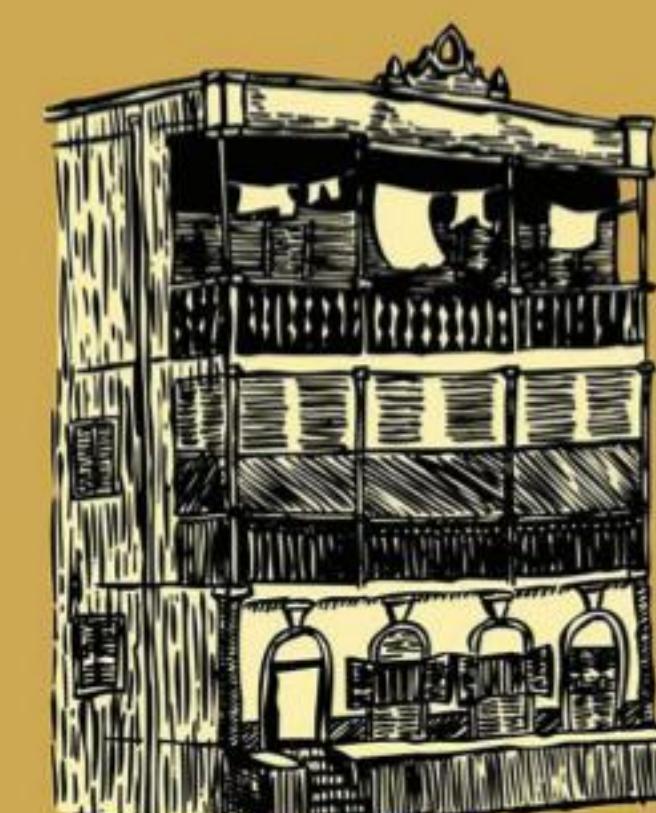


Lal believes its ending was rushed, as was *The Persecuted*. It was published in the Brahmo Samaj daily *The Indian Mirror* under Keshub Chunder Sen and deals with widow marriage and conversion to Christianity. With the Hindu Windows' Remarriage Act of 1856, the Metropolitan Theatre was established in 1859 and ready to cover the emancipation problems faced by young widows. The play depicts a teenage widow whose promising future is denied by a conservative father, and condemned to "the tremendous curse (of) perpetual widowhood". The open-ended nature of the ending, perhaps rushed, perhaps deliberate, is distinctly modern.

Also modern is the text of the play compared to the other two, despite the all-pervasive influence of Shakespeare and multiple classical allusions. One is startled at a character saying, "I had better skedaddle," archaic now but commonplace 50 years ago. "Brahminical bigotry... monstrous religion" is again the arch villain, with Hindu orthodoxy lamenting the "affected English swagger of

Indian Drama in English The Beginnings

The Persecuted • Rizia • Kaminee



Edited by Ananda Lal

"Young Bengal" and a reference to Brahmo Samaj "trying by a process of eclecticism to concoct a pure system of theology". The outraged father who rejects a proposal of marriage for his widowed daughter cries, "I would rather see her die!" Classical allusions with an abundance of debt to Shakespeare and the use of Latin and French is as jarring as the use of Aristotelian syllogism in *Persecuted*, but such tropes were clearly considered *sine qua non* as evidence of learning. Lal's annotations and introductory passages are illuminating and greatly enhance understanding of the texts. He has performed a valuable service to the history of Indian drama and literature by bringing these examples of the earliest texts in the English language to a general readership.

The reviewer is India's former foreign secretary





WRONG MOVE

La Liga officials have decided on a probe to find out whether Covid-19 protocols were broken during a lunch attended by Barca players at Lionel Messi's (photo, left) house. Messi hosted a team meeting at his residence on Monday to begin preparations for this weekend's crunch fixture against Atletico Madrid.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Kaushik ill: Former India hockey player and coach M K Kaushik has tested positive for Covid-19 and admitted to a nursing home. The oxygen saturation level of the 66-year-old, a member of the 1980 Olympics gold-medal winning Indian team, keeps fluctuating.

Padukone recovering: Former All-England champion Prakash Padukone is likely to be discharged from a Bengaluru hospital where he is slowly recovering from his Covid-19 infection. All the members of the Padukone household got infected last week.

MacGill misery: Former Australia cricketer Stuart MacGill was allegedly kid-napped and released in Sydney last month. Four men have been arrested after investigation into the incident. MacGill was held for about an hour on 14 April after being forced into a vehicle.

Bangla worry: The Bangladesh Cricket Board is in contact with Shakib Al Hasan and Mustafizur Rahim after the suspension of the Covid-19-affected Indian Premier League, where they were playing for Kolkata Knight Riders and Rajasthan Royals, respectively.

Pak league: A decision on the completing the Pakistan Super League - whether to hold it in Karachi or the United Arab Emirates - will be taken at a meeting of the Pakistan Cricket Board which is expected to be held this week, according to Karachi newspaper Dawn.

Madrid Open: US Open champion Dominic Thiem cruised into the third round of the Madrid Open with a comfortable 6-1, 6-3 win over American Marcos Giron. Thiem was in control from the start at the "Magic Box" centre court in what was his first match since March.

Strycova retires: Barbora Strycova, a former top-ranked doubles tennis player and Wimbledon singles semi-finalist, has retired. "I have always had enormous love for this amazing sport. All the pain, tears, great moments and sweat were worth it," she said.

City search: The International Tennis Federation is seeking a new host city for the finals of the Billie Jean King Cup. Formerly the Fed Cup, after Budapest backed out because of Covid-19 concerns. The Hungarian capital was due to host the 12-nation tournament.

McLoughlin dies: Alan McLoughlin, who famously scored a goal to send Ireland to the 1994 World Cup in the USA, has died of cancer. He was 54. Born in Manchester, England, McLoughlin represented Ireland between 1990 and 1999, making 42 appearances.

Chelsea decision: Chelsea have announced supporters will be allowed to attend board meetings from July after the club's involvement in the failed European Super League plan. Chelsea were one of the teams who signed up to the Super League, only to pull out later.

New address: Roma have appointed former Tottenham Hotspur manager Jose Mourinho head coach on a three-year contract starting with the 2021-22 season. The decision comes after the club said coach Paulo Fonseca would leave them after the current campaign.

IPL show stopped and way to homeland strewn with hurdles

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The Indian Premier League's foreign contingents were to start leaving for home today, a senior Indian cricket board official has said following the tournament's abrupt suspension due to the Covid-19 crisis in the country.

Several top international cricketers are scrambling to return home after the Twenty20 tournament was suspended indefinitely yesterday.

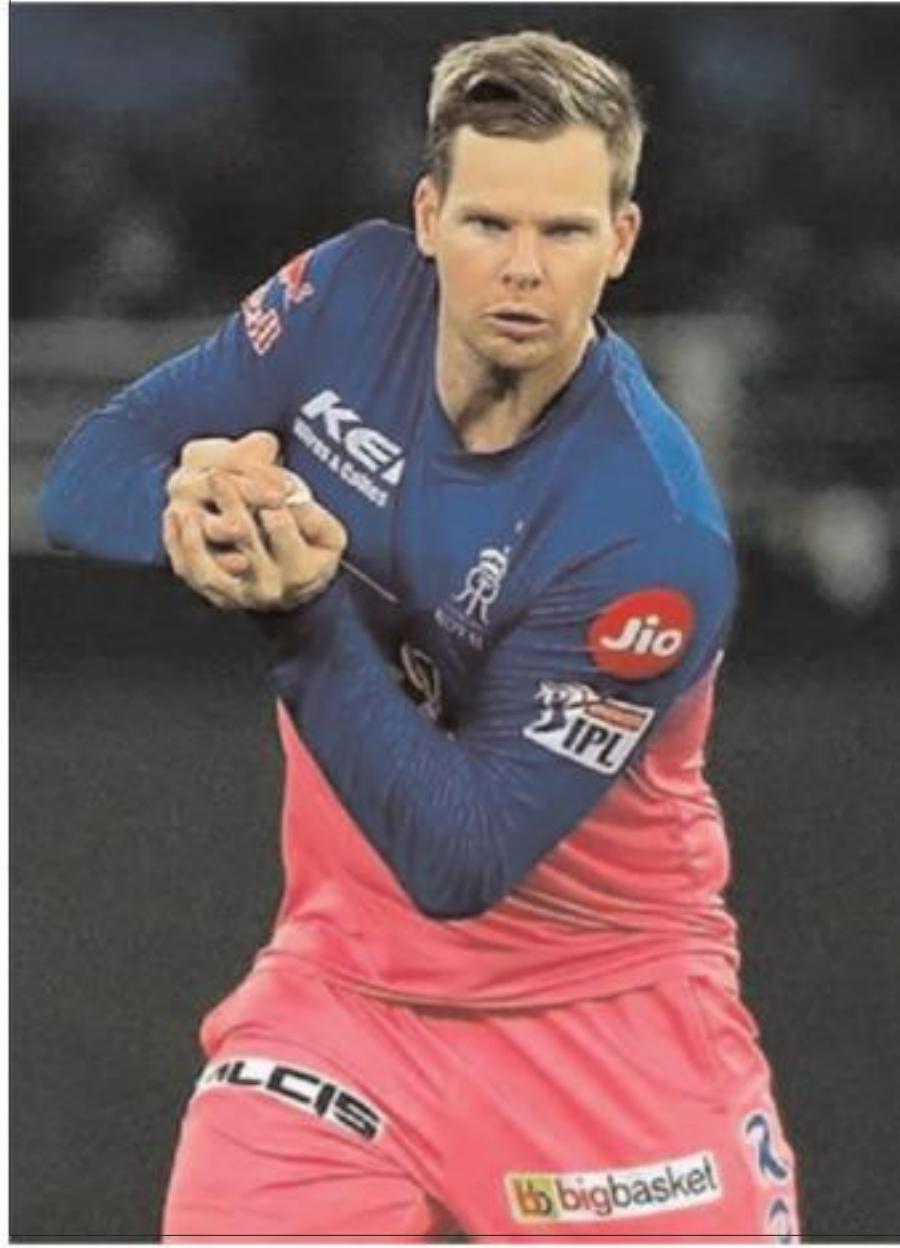
"We have been working on their travel plans in consultation with their boards so that each of them reaches home safely," the Board of Control for Cricket in India official said, requesting anonymity. "Some of them will return home tomorrow." IPL chairman Brijesh Patel said the league would facilitate a smooth passage for all the foreigners. "Franchises will make their arrangements to send them back. We will extend whatever help is required," Patel said.

His assurance notwithstanding, existing travel restrictions make it a complicated process for many, especially the 40-odd Australian contingent, including 14 players, in India.

Australia has banned travellers from India, including its own citizens, from entering the country until 15 May. Cricket Australia could not bring good news for the likes of Steve Smith (in photo) and David Warner in a statement with the Australian Cricketers' Association.

"CA and the ACA respect the decision of the Australian government to pause travel from India until at least 15 May and will not seek exemptions," it said. The Australian board said it was "in direct contact" with the BCCI "to ensure the safe accommodation and repatriation of Australian players, coaches, match officials and commentators back home to Australia."

ESPNcricinfo reported that some of the Australian contingent might head to the Maldives and wait there until they got the go-ahead to return home. Hyderabad player and Australia opener Warner shared on his Instagram page a sketch of his family by his daughter with the message:



"Please daddy come home straight away. We miss you a lot and love you."

Former Test player and commentator Michael Slater, stranded in the Maldives, had

earlier criticised the ban on arrivals from India, saying Australia's prime minister Scott Morrison had "blood" on his hands.

Britain added India to its travel "red list" last month, which means the English contingent would have to quarantine for 10 days in a hotel. The England and Wales Board said it was in touch with the English contingent "as arrangements are put in place for them to return home safely." It said: "The ECB... thanks the BCCI for its commitment to do everything in its powers to arrange for the secure and safe passage of all those taking part in the competition."

The South African cricket board said it was making arrangements to bring back its players and support staff from India. The BCCI had forged ahead with the league despite fierce criticism for staging it in a country where coronavirus infections had surged past 20 million.

The eight-team IPL, with an estimated brand value of \$6.8 billion, is the richest Twenty20 league and attracts many of the best players from around the world to India. As

blesses were compromised. They could have returned there. Yes, it is easy to say that with hindsight. And India clearly did feel they were through the worst of the virus when they decided to stage this year's competition," Hussain said.

According to the former England captain, the players would have been aware of what was going on in the country and there was no choice but to call off the tournament after the positive tests.

"There was no option other than to call off the Indian Premier League. Not after the bio-secure bubbles had been breached in so many places. Enough was enough. This has become far bigger than a game of cricket. The players are not stupid nor insensitive. They would have been fully aware of what has been going on in India. They would have seen on their TVs people pleading for hospital beds and oxygen. They would have

seen unused ambulances waiting outside cricket grounds and wondered whether it was right for them to carry on playing. And they would have been uncomfortable," said Hussain.

At long last, chance for Dhankar to earn his Olympic berth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SOFIA (BULGARIA), 5 MAY



Handed an opportunity to qualify for the Tokyo Games at the fag-end of his international career, veteran wrestler Amit Dhankar (in photo) would go all out when he hits the mat along with 11 other Indians at the World Olympic Qualifiers, starting tomorrow.

The 32-year-old Dhankar is a three-time Commonwealth champion but missed the big-ticket events because he struggled to go past Yosephwar Dutt in the 66kg category for most of his career.

His last big performance was a silver-medal shown in the 74kg segment at the 2019 Asian Championship held in Xian, China. His hopes to make the cut for the Tokyo Games were dashed when he lost in the trials but since national champion Sandeep Singh Mann came a cropper at the Asian qualifiers in Almaty, the national federation gave Dhankar a chance

to compete in Sofia. Dhankar had finished second in the trials.

It is the last chance for all the wrestlers in the world to qualify for the rescheduled Tokyo Games.

As many as seven Olympic medalists will be in the fray in different categories in this event, where the two finalists will make the cut for the Games.

Dhankar would be desperate to make the most of the chance but his journey could be hard as the 74-kg bracket is packed with major wrestlers, including Rio Olympics bronze medallist Soner Demirtas

from Turkey, world champion Hetik Cabolov from Serbia and Slovakia's European champion Tajmuraz Salkazanov.

Adding to the challenge will be the African champion from Nigeria, Ogbonna John, Asian champion from Kyrgyzstan, Arsalan Budazhapov, and the European champion from Belarus, Mahamedkhabin Kadzimahamedau.

Dhankar is agile on the mat but his rivals are superior by craft and that is what is going to make a difference.

The other freestyle Indians wrestlers in fray are 2018 CWG champion Sumit Malik (125kg), who recently got married, and Satywart Kadiyan (97kg). Malik had a great chance to qualify from the Almaty event but squandered the opportunity. He still is India's best hope in this category and it won't be a surprise if Malik sneaks through.

In the women's competition, Seema Bisla (50kg) will be India's best bet. Ever since Vinesh Phogat moved to the 53kg category, Bisla has shown promise. Winning a bronze medal at the recent Asian Championship must have boosted her confidence.

Nisha (68kg) and Pooja (76kg) have also just started their journey on the senior circuit at international level and will only gain by competing.

Pooja does not give up easily and won bronze at both Asian events in Almaty recently.

Among India's Greco-Roman wrestlers, all eyes will be on hard-working Asian champion Gurpreet Singh (77 kg). Sachin Rana (60kg), Aashu (67kg), Sunil (87 kg), Deepanshu (97 kg) and Naveen Kumar (130 kg) complete the team.

Six Indian wrestlers have so far qualified for the Tokyo Games. In (men's) freestyle, Ravi Dahiya (57kg), Bajrang Punia (65kg) and Deepak Punia (86kg) made the cut, while Vinesh Phogat (53kg), Anshu Malik (57kg) and Sonam Malik (62kg) qualified in women's category.

Hamilton and Verstappen to resume title fight in Barcelona

MADRID, 5 MAY

The race for the Formula One title has quickly become a two-man show, and it's not expected to change when the circuit goes to Barcelona this weekend.

Both Red Bull and Mercedes are expected to continue to dominate with Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen separated by eight points after three races.

The picture is starting to clarify. Red Bull and Mercedes are the two standout teams, and Lewis and Max are the two standout drivers," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said.

"If we get a pretty standard Barcelona, I think you'll get the four races and we can see where our strengths and weaknesses are. But what we can see is it's incredibly tight."

Hamilton, the four-time defending champion with Mercedes, has the edge over Verstappen after winning the season-opener in Bahrain and last week's race in Portugal.

but for the time being, we'll take it one step at a time."

Hamilton and Verstappen finished in the top two positions in the first three races. Verstappen could easily be in the lead had it not been for track limit violations that cost him some points.

"The whole track limit debate is just frustrating," Horner said.

"It's been brutal for us across the first three events. So it's been pretty expensive for us."

The violations cost Verstappen the win in Bahrain and also hurt him in qualifying in Portugal. He also was stripped of the point for fastest lap because of the limits.

Hamilton's and Verstappen's teammates have yet to come close to them. Mercedes driver Valtteri Bottas earned the pole in Portugal but has struggled in the races. He is already 37 points off the lead, while Red Bull driver Sergio Perez is 47 points back. AGENCIES

Mahrez strikes twice to book City's Champions League final berth

Manchester City 2
Paris Saint-Germain 0 (4-1 aggregate)MARK CRITCHLEY
MANCHESTER, 5 MAY

Di Maria seeing red.

Last week's first leg and second half turnaround in Paris provided City with two away goals, a slender advantage and a platform on which to build, even if they had not killed the tie off when facing 10 men after Idrissa Gueye's dismissal. Mbappe's absence helped, nevertheless, with a calf problem picked up in the weekend's victory over Lens keeping him out of the starting line-up.

A hard and practically horizontal Manchester haul led the Etihad pitch with a white coating in the hours leading up to kick-off but,

even though the officials were forced to conduct a brief pitch inspection, there was very little chance of this city having a second game called off at short notice in the space of two days.

Still, the conditions made the early stages difficult for both sides and City survived an early scare when Abdou Diallo's unpredictable cross struck Oleksandar Zinchenko's arm, according to referee Bjorn Kuipers. The City bench begged to differ, insisting that it had hit his shoulder and demanding a review. One glance at the pitchside monitor and they were saved.

If Kuipers' initial, blatantly incorrect decision had stood and the penalty had been converted after just six minutes, it would have been game on, Mbappe or no Mbappe. Instead, City tightened their grip on the tie. Mahrez, scorer of the decisive free-kick in Paris, applied the finish from a narrow angle but in-keeping with Guardiola's unique methods, this goal was all about the goalkeeper.

Along ball out from the man between the posts used to be known as 'route one' but Ederon's part in the opener was more sophisticated than that. Starting outside of his own box, he drew PSG's press towards him, exchanged a one-two with Ilkay Gundogan then sprayed a raking pass into the space that City's visitors had vacated, where Zinchenko was waiting to break into space.

When it came, Mahrez took it. It was a stunning counter-attack, the type that City rarely get to execute given their dominance in possession, but they did not look out of practice. Starting in their own half, Kevin De Bruyne laid the ball off for Foden. A dribble and another one-two carried them to the edge of the penalty area, streets ahead of PSG's retreating defence, who had ignored Mahrez's free run at the far post. Foden picked him out for the simple finish.

A response was inevitable. The opening goal of last week's first leg will have momentarily flashed before Guardiola's eyes when Marquinhos rose

decidedly turned against them. Di Maria cost himself a possible appearance in the final but in truth, any prospect of that had already long gone. His stamp on Fernandinho while the City midfielder retrieved the ball for a throw-in was petulant in the extreme and spoke of a side losing their heads.

Perhaps all that was missing for City was a crowning moment. Foden, their boy wonder, thought he was about to provide it when his shot from the edge of the area on the break beat Navas but, alas, it struck the base of the far post. It would have been the ideal moment to cap off a historic night in this club's history, their greatest in European competition outside of the 1970 Cup Winners' Cup win. But of course, after this famous victory, their greatest night of all may be just around the corner.

Manchester City: Ederson, Walker, Stones, Dias, Zinchenko, Silva, Fernandinho, Gundogan, Mahrez, De Bruyne, Foden. Substitutes: Ake, Sterling, Jesus, Aguero, Steffen, Laporte, Rodri, Torres, Mendy, Cancelo, Carson. Paris Saint-Germain: Navas, Florenzi, Marquinhos, Kim pembe, Diallo, Herrera, Paredes, Di Maria, Verratti, Neymar, Icardi. Substitutes: Kehrer, Mbappe, Rafinha, Pereira, Rico, Kean, Sarabia, Kurzawa, Draxler, Bakker, Dagba, Randriamamy.

THE INDEPENDENT

New address: Roma have appointed former Tottenham Hotspur manager Jose Mourinho head coach on a three-year contract starting with the 2021-22 season. The decision comes after the club said coach Paulo Fonseca would leave them after the current campaign.

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