

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI WEDNESDAY 26 MAY 2021



SPORT | 8

Mohali's hockey stadium is renamed after Balbir Singh Sr to mark his death anniversary

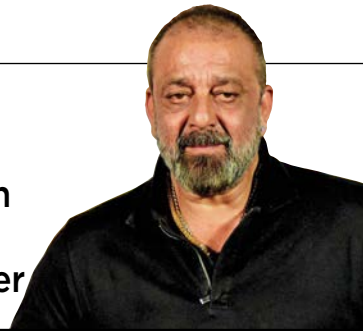


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Biden & Putin will hold face-to-face summit in Geneva on June 16

DELHI AGE | 11

In an emotional post on Instagram, Sanjay Dutt pays tribute to his father



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WINDOWS

CISF chief Subodh Jaiswal is named CBI's new director

New Delhi: Director general of the of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and former Maharashtra DGP, Subodh Kumar Jaiswal, was on Tuesday appointed the new director for the CBI, country's premier investigation agency. The government notification came on Tuesday evening after a series of meetings between Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Chief Justice and Opposition leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury. Mr Jaiswal, a 1985-batch IPS officer of Maharashtra cadre, is currently serving as the chief of the CISF. He has earlier held the positions of Mumbai police commissioner and the Maharashtra DGP. He has also held Central posts and has had long stints in the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). **Full report on Page 4**



Britain's Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, leaves after attending an event to open a new hospital in Kirkwall, Scotland, on Tuesday. — AFP

IPL may start in 3rd week of Sept in UAE

New Delhi: The postponed Indian Premier League will resume tentatively on September 18 or 19 in the UAE with as many as 10 double-headers expected to be played during a three-week window, a senior BCCI official said. The final might be held on October 9 or 10. **Full report on Page 8**

COUNTERPOINT



Covid vaccines and medicines? You are late... the mafia has taken them all!

WEATHER

Max: 39°C
Min: 24°C
RH: 22%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha Purnima till 4.44 pm
Star: Anuradha till 1.15 am
Varjyam: 7.41 am to 9.05 am
Durmuhurtam: 11.47 am to 12.39 pm
Rahukalam: Noon to 1.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 7.11 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.25 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 7.14 PM
MOONSET TODAY 5.07 AM

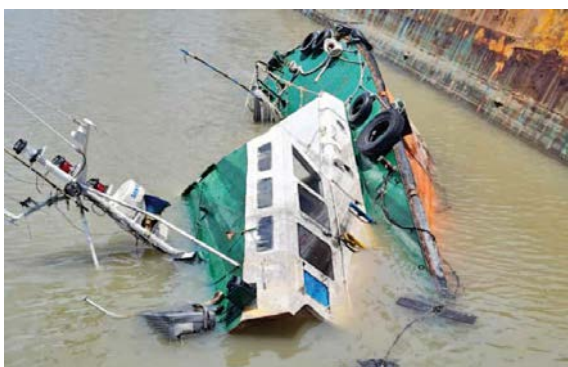
■ Lakhs evacuated in Bengal & Odisha ■ Kolkata airport to shut today
■ Army columns deployed ■ Trains halted ■ Mamata at control room

Tornado strikes, slight shift in cyclone course

RAJIB CHOWDHURI and AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
KOLKATA/BALASORE, MAY 25

A day before the “very severe” Cyclone “Yaas” makes its landfall and strikes mainly two states in eastern India, a tornado hit two districts of West Bengal on Tuesday, leaving two persons dead due to electrocution and injured several others, while damaging several houses. Eleven lakh people were evacuated to safer places in West Bengal, while in Odisha at least two lakh people were evacuated.

It was also found Cyclone Yaas had slightly changed its course; and will now have its landfall at Dhamra, in Odisha's Bhadrak district, at 5.30



A fishing trawler is seen half-capsized after a spell of pre-cyclone gusty winds lashed Dhamra port area in Odisha's Bhadrak district on Tuesday.

am on Wednesday, instead of Balasore. Heavy downpours and squally winds lashed the coastal districts both states. In the midst of a raging pandemic, those who are Covid-positive are being placed in separate cyclone shelters. In Kolkata, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has stationed herself at the control room at Nabanna, the state secretariat, for the next two days to lead her government's relief and

rescue operations. The Indian Army has deployed 17 relief columns of soldiers in 10 districts of the state.

The tornado struck two districts — Hooghly and North 24 Parganas — located on both sides of the Hooghly river on Tuesday afternoon. The two victims — Swapan Das Baul (40) and Kamal Majhi (21) — are from Pandua in Hooghly districts. They were out of their homes then.

The director-general of the India Meteorological Department, Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, said Tuesday evening: “The storm will further intensify in the next 12 hours and turn into a very severe cyclonic storm. It will have its landfall near Dhamra in Odisha's

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NARADA CASE

S-G told: ‘Withdraw, or we’ll pass orders on merits’

SC allows CBI to withdraw plea

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed the CBI to withdraw its appeal against the Calcutta high court order directing the house arrest of four leaders, including two West Bengal ministers and a Trinamul Congress MLA, in the Narada bribery case.

A vacation bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and B.R. Gavai took note of the fact that a five-judge bench of the

Calcutta high court was already hearing the Narada bribery case and permitted solicitor general Tuahar Mehta, appearing for the CBI, to take back its appeal and raise all the grievances there before the high court.

The CBI had earlier assailed the conduct of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee in staging a dharna outside its office at Nizam Palace in Kolkata and complained about the presence of state law minister Moloy Ghatak at the special CBI court where four TMC leaders arrested in the Narada sting tape case were produced.

The vacation bench gave the investigative agency and all other parties the liberty to raise all the issues before the five-judge bench hearing the plea for the grant of interim bail to the four TMC leaders. The court in its order said it had not expressed any view on the merits of the case.

The CBI had on May 17 arrested West Bengal ministers Subrata

Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim, TMC MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata mayor Sovan Chatterjee over the Narada case.

The CBI withdrew the petition after the court told the solicitor general to either withdraw it or they will pass an order on merits. All through the hearing that lasted nearly one hour, the court repeatedly asked what the investigative agency wanted from the court.

“We want to know: what do you want from us,”

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Add ‘manipulated media’ tag to tweets of 11 mantris: Cong

Toolkit row: 2 Cong leaders get Delhi Police notice to join probe

AGE CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The Delhi Police on Tuesday served notices to two Congress leaders in connection with the probe into a complaint about the alleged “Congress toolkit” matter even as the Congress once again wrote to Twitter asking them to flag tweets by 11 Union ministers referring to the alleged “Congress toolkit” as “manipulated media”.

The letter, written to Jim Baker, Twitter's deputy general counsel and vice-president (legal), and Vijaya Gadde, lead for legal, policy and trust and safety, by Congress'

◆ The letter written by Cong leader Randeep Singh Surjewala carried the URLs of the specific tweets by the ministers which the Congress demanded to be marked under “manipulative media”

communications chief and general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala says, “The subject matter of the forged Toolkit document was created by certain BJP leaders to gain undue and wrongful political advantage by spreading potentially dangerous, false and fabricated material through their Twitter handles against the Indian National

Congress and its leaders”.

The letter carried the URLs of the specific tweets by these ministers which the Congress demanded to be marked under “manipulative media”.

The Union ministers against whom the Congress has sought action are Giriraj Singh, Piyush Goyal, Smriti Irani, Ravi Shankar Prasad, Prahlad Joshi, Dharmendra Pradhan, Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, Thawarchand Gehlot, Harsh Vardhan, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. The letter also said, “The forged,

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Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and US secretary of state Anthony Blinken during a joint press conference in Jerusalem on Tuesday, days after an Egypt-brokered truce halted fighting between the Jewish state and the Gaza Strip's rulers Hamas. Mr Blinken will also travel to Ramallah for talks with Palestinian Authority chief Mahmoud Abbas. ■ Report on Page 6 — AP



The sea turns extremely rough in the Bay of Bengal as waves hit the coast ahead of Cyclone Yaas' landfall at Digha in West Bengal's East Midnapore district on Tuesday evening. — PTI

■ States still cautious ■ No decision yet on CBSE exam dates

Daily cases below 2L first time in 40 days; relief for Delhi too

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The daily fresh Covid-19 cases, for the first time in 40 days, fell below two lakhs on Tuesday, with the Union health ministry terming this as an “encouraging sign” as new cases were 1.96 lakh along with 3,511 deaths. The active caseload too has fallen to 25.86 lakhs and the daily positivity rate has come down to 9.54 per cent.

“The active cases have decreased since its last peak on May 10, 2021. A net decline of 1,33,934 is witnessed in the last 24 hours,” said health ministry officials as India's daily recoveries continue to outnumber the daily new cases for the 12th consecutive day. In the last 24 hours, close to 3.27 lakh recoveries were registered, taking the national recovery rate to 89.26 per cent.

Delhi, the nation's capital, that has borne the second wave's brutal brunt of the second wave

‘Sputnik V reliable like Kalashnikovs’

New Delhi: Russian vaccines are reliable like Kalashnikov rifles since they are based on technology used for decades, Russian deputy chief of mission Roman Babushkin said on Tuesday, telling reporters that supplies of the Russian Sputnik V Covid vaccine to India are going on as per contractual obligations and that Russia is studying very carefully new requests for the vaccines from various Indian state governments and Indian firms. **PAGE 3**

between April and May, is now witnessing huge relief as the detection of new cases fell to 1,568 on Tuesday and the positivity rate declined to 2.14 per cent. However, 156 deaths still remain an area of concern though hospitals are now seeing less serious patients, and of the

25,035 beds, only 7,872 are occupied. However, patients in ICUs and on ventilators or on oxygen support are still high.

Despite a slide in cases, the states continue to show caution. Assam on Tuesday extended curfew in urban areas till June 5. As per new orders, all shops, commercial establishments and offices — both government and private — will shut down by 1 pm on all days.

The second wave has also left the fate of CBSE students in suspense. Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal “Nishank” had asked state education ministers to give suggestions on the holding of CBSE Class 12 exams. Delhi's deputy CM and education minister Manish Sisodia has urged the Centre to vaccinate students before the exams. “If we cannot vaccinate school students, we advise that the board exams be cancelled this year. The result can be declared based on their

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Hunt on for Choksi as he goes missing in Antigua

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Fugitive diamantaire Mehul Choksi has reportedly gone missing in Antigua where he has been staying since January 2018.

According to reports, Mr Choksi, who had taken citizenship of the Caribbean island nation of Antigua and Barbuda, was seen driving in the southern area of the island on Sunday. Later, his vehicle was found but there was no trace of him, reports said. A local news agency in Barbuda quoted commissioner of police Atlee Rodney as saying that the police are “following up on the where-

abouts of Indian businessman Mehul Choksi”, who is “rumoured” to be missing.

Mr Choksi and his nephew Nirav Modi are wanted for allegedly siphoning off Rs 13,500 crore of public money from the state-run Punjab National Bank (PNB), using letters of undertaking. The CBI, which is probing the PNB scam, on Tuesday contacted the Antigua embassy in India following reports alleging that Mr Choksi was missing.

While Nirav Modi is in a London prison and is contesting extradition to India, Mr Choksi took the citizenship of Antigua in 2017.

UK seeks 150% whisky duty cut, 125% on cars as trade talks loom

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Britain on Tuesday said it wants India to remove tariffs by up to 150 per cent on whisky and 125 per cent on British-made cars, as the British government kickstarted its preparations for negotiations for a trade deal with India that are likely to begin later this year, possibly in autumn. The UK on Tuesday launched a 14-week consultation on an “India trade deal to seek views from the public and businesses to ensure a deal is tailored to UK interests”.

Britain's international trade secretary Liz Truss, who kicked off the preparations, said: “We're firing the starting gun on a free trade deal with India — the world's largest democracy, fifth biggest economy, a nation of 1.4 billion people and a huge market for British goods like whisky, cars and services. We want an agreement that pushes new frontiers in industries of the future and helps us build a greener, more innovative and more services-led economy that will deliver higher-paying jobs across the country.”



Ebrahim Raisi

candidate of the seven hopefuls, with opinion polling previously showing his anti-corruption campaign drew Iranian support. He's also believed to be a favourite of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But perhaps most

notable was who Iran's Guardian Council barred from running. Chief among them was former Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, a conservative who allied with Mr Rouhani in recent year. Mr Larijani had been positioning himself as a pragmatic candidate who would back Mr Rouhani's signature 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. That accord is now in tatters as diplomats in Vienna try to negotiate a return of both Iran and the US to the agreement. — AP **■ More on Page 6**

Iran's top judge, 6 others to fight June prez poll, Rouhani men out

Dubai, May 25: Iran named the hardline cleric running its judiciary and six others Tuesday as approved candidates in its June 18 presidential election, barring prominent candidates allied to its current President, Hassan Rouhani, amid tensions with the West over its tattered nuclear deal.

The announcement carried by state television puts judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, who is linked to mass executions in 1988, in the dominant position for the upcoming vote. He's the most-known

SHORT TAKES

25 dengue cases recorded in Delhi till May 22

New Delhi: Twenty-five dengue cases have been recorded in Delhi till May 22 this year, the highest in the January-May period since 2013, according to a report released by the south civic body on Monday. Eight cases of malaria and four of chikungunya were also registered during the same period, the report stated. Cases of vector-borne diseases are usually reported in Delhi between July and November. The period may stretch till mid-December. According to the report released by the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC), the nodal agency for tabulating data on vector-borne diseases for the national capital, 25 cases of dengue have been recorded till May 22 this year. While no cases were recorded in January, two were recorded in February, five in March, 10 in April and eight in May, it said. No deaths have been reported in the city due to dengue so far this year, it added. — PTI

HC allows woman to abort her 23-week fetus

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Tuesday allowed a woman's plea seeking termination of her 23 weeks pregnancy after All India Institute of Medical Sciences said the twin fetus she was carrying did suffer from abnormalities and once born would face long term developmental issues. The medical board of AIIMS also told the court that the termination procedure would be "reasonably safe" at the present stage of gestation of the pregnancy. In view of the board's report, Justice Rekha Palli allowed the woman to terminate her pregnancy and disposed of her plea. The woman, in her plea, had sought permission for abortion as her twin foetus suffered from 'dandy walker malformation', a rare congenital brain abnormality. The court had asked AIIMS to constitute a board, examine the woman and submit a report by May 24 after the petitioner and her husband said that after 24 weeks of gestation, abortion would not be advisable.

Covid: BHEL saves many lives by supplying oxygen

New Delhi: BHEL has been working on war footing to do its bit as the country and fellow citizens battle Covid-19 pandemic. BHEL's plants, located at Bhopal and Haridwar, have responded to the situation with all possible resources at their command for supplying medical oxygen in and around their vicinity. BHEL Haridwar was having a capacity to produce 24,000 CuM oxygen per day for captive use through internal pipelines. Seeing the acute shortage of medical oxygen in the country during mid-April, the plant created cylinder filling capacity for over 3,000 cylinders per day in a record time of just one week along with putting in the entire logistics & manpower, working day and night for handling over 3,000 cylinders a day. This plant has so far filled almost 55,000 cylinders (over 3,00,000 CuM) of medical oxygen for meeting requirements of hospitals and district authorities, PSUs, armed forces in Uttarakhand, UP as well as Delhi NCR, thus saving thousands of lives in this crisis.



Despite acute shortage of vaccine in the national capital, BJP councillor in east Delhi's Kishan Kunj Himanshi Pandey is helping 45 plus people get vaccinated with Covaxin. "Around 30 people are getting jabbed everyday at our dispensary. Not only people from our ward but from other parts of Delhi are also coming here to get their dose," Pandey said.

■ 2.80L PSV badge holders, 1.90L permit holders eligible for the scheme

Delhi govt disburses ₹5K aid to 1.5 lakh auto, taxi drivers

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The Delhi government on Tuesday disbursed financial assistance of ₹5,000 to 1.5 lakh drivers of para-transit vehicles like auto rickshaws, taxis and e-rickshaws, etc. Earlier this month, the AAP dispensation had decided to extend its scheme of one-time financial assistance to cover e-rickshaw owners. Delhi transport minister Kailash Gahlot had said on Sunday that his department approved more than 1.55 lakh cases for one-time financial aid of ₹5,000 to each para-transit vehicle driver during the Covid-19-induced lockdown.

"Financial assistance of ₹5,000 to auto, taxi drivers is being deposited in their bank accounts. The amount will be credited to the accounts of 1.51 lakh auto and taxi drivers by this evening," chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said in a tweet. Delhi currently has over 2.80 lakh PSV badge holders and 1.90 lakh permit holders who are eligible to apply for the scheme and the Delhi Transport Department has already made necessary budgetary provisions for the same.

Para-transit vehicle drivers who have a driv-



Financial assistance of ₹5,000 to auto, taxi drivers is being deposited in their bank accounts. The amount will be credited to the accounts of 1.51 lakh beneficiaries

— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi CM

ing license and PSV badge that are valid as on February 1, 2020 are eligible to receive the financial assistance.

Delhi recorded 1,568 fresh cases of coronavirus and 156 fatalities on Tuesday, while the positivity rate came down marginally to 2.14 per cent, according to the daily health bulletin.

This is the third day in a row when the daily cases in the national capital have remained below 2,000. According to the latest health bulletin, the

Vaccination for 18-44 group suspended for 2nd day: Govt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The vaccination drive at 35 centres in north Delhi, including hospitals like Bara Hindu Rao, Mrs Girdhar Lal Maternity and Rajan Babu, has been put on hold allegedly due to lack of supply of Covaxin jabs have forced the Delhi government to get jabbed from private hospitals at expensive rates.

In her address during a presser on Tuesday, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s senior leader and MLA Atishi presented the vaccination

bulletin through a video address and stated: "Today, the only way for youth to get vaccinated is by paying heavy prices in private hospitals, due to shortage of Covaxin supply. For the second day, no vaccination for youth in Delhi's government schools, they have been forced to get jabbed from private hospitals at expensive rates."

The senior AAP leader further said that no Covaxin available for second doses for those in 45+ age category, while the Covishield left for 13 days to tide through.

20; rising to 306 fatalities on April 22.

On May 2, the city registered a record 407 deaths, according to the official data.

A total of 73,406 tests, including 47,494 RT-PCR tests and 25,912 rapid antigen tests, were conducted a day ago, according to the health bulletin on Tuesday.

The number of cumulative cases on Tuesday stood at 14,19,986. Over 13.7 lakh patients have recovered from the virus so far.

Hindu College professor dies due to Covid

40 DU staffers succumb to coronavirus till date

New Delhi, May 25: Delhi University's Hindu College lost one of its professors to coronavirus on Tuesday, its principal Dr Anju Srivastava said. Dr CL Jonwal (43), was a zoology professor, who succumbed to the virus in the early hours on Tuesday at AIIMS.

He was promoted to the post of associate professor on March 30, and is survived by his wife and a daughter, aged 12, and a son, aged 5. His wife is an ad-hoc teacher of mathematics in the varsity.

Jonwal was a key member of the Covid-19 task force in college and had arranged hospital beds and oxygen for many of his colleagues.

Dr Anju Srivastava said, "I am not able to come to terms with it. He joined the college in 2006 and was very bright and committed to his work. We were able to arrange a bed for him in AIIMS but we lost him. He was initially admitted to a hospital in Alwar."

The department also held an online condolence meeting for him. Jonwal had written on Facebook about how the varsity should set up a Covid care centre for its staffers.

At least 40 staffers of the varsity have succumbed to the virus till now.

— PTI

Publicise Covid info like 'hum do hamare do' campaign: HC

'Helpline nos. should be there in newspapers everyday'

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The Delhi high court on Tuesday stressed on the need to spread awareness among the public about the Covid-19 pandemic through advertisements more frequently saying it could be done on the lines of the hum do hamare do campaign for family planning as it worked very well.

The high court said there is a need to keep on bombarding valid information on the public in relation to Covid-19 and directed the Centre and Delhi government to undertake publishing all relevant helpline numbers and information through audio, video, and print medium continuously to educate people.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said there is a lack of continuous and adequate publicity of the most relevant and genuine information to the public at large and gave an instance that various helpline numbers have not been broadcast as frequently and efficiently as it should have been done.

Covid helpline toll free number is 1075, Covid helpline Delhi is 011-22307145, child helpline is

1098, and senior citizen helpline is 14567

1098, and senior citizen helpline is 14567.

The court further said, "We direct the Centre and Delhi government to undertake publication of all relevant helpline numbers and information through all audio, video, and print medium on a continuous basis as frequently as possible so as to educate people on facilities created by the state for testing and treatment of Covid-19 as well as other issues like mental health and issues arising in the society on account of the pandemic."

It said Doordarshan and All India Radio (AIR) are the mediums of the Central government, which should give advertisements there daily.

When one of the Centre's advocates said they have been broadcasting various programmes relating to Covid-19 on DD, the bench said it was talking about continuous bombardment of advertisements and helpline numbers.

"In newspapers, one does

not find these inserts on a daily basis. These things should be there in the papers everyday," the bench said.

The court's observation came after the amicus curiae said that if the government could consider publicising the helplines and other data in newspapers more, it would be helpful.

Delhi government's counsel said they are advertising it and will do it more now.

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday said that the Delhi government should expeditiously finalise its policy for providing ration to poor people, especially destitute women and disabled children. Justice Rekha Palli expressed hope when the government said that its policy to provide food to the poor was underway and would be finalised soon.

"It is hoped that the respondent (Delhi government) will take expeditious steps to finalise the policy, so that people like the petitioners here, including helpless women and disabled children, do not starve for want of food," the court said.

The submission by the government came after the court expressed its anguish over the delay.

No ex-gratia after husband died on Covid duty, woman tells HC

New Delhi, May 25: A woman has moved the Delhi High Court claiming that her husband was posted with the CATS during Covid-19 last year and succumbed to the virus but the Delhi government denied her the ₹1 crore ex-gratia promised to kin of the officials who died on the pandemic duty.

Justice Rekha Palli issued notice to the Delhi government and sought its stand on the woman's plea who has contended that according to an office note of the Centralized Accident and Trauma Services (CATS), her husband was discharging Covid duties, but the Revenue department was of

the view that he was not. The revenue department rejected the proposal sent by CATS recommending payment of ex-gratia and her appeal against that before the Lt Governor was also rejected

the view that he was not.

The revenue department rejected the proposal sent by CATS recommending payment of ex-gratia and her appeal against that before the Lt Governor was also rejected. In her plea, the woman has said that her husband was an accounts officer in the Delhi Subordinate Accounts Service Cadre and he was sent on deputation to CATS

in 2018. After the Covid-19 outbreak, from February 8 to April 20, 2020 he was assigned the charge of administrative officer and head of office at CATS in addition to his normal duties as disbursement officer; the petition has claimed and added that he was discharging COVID duties even after April 20, 2020.

In May last year, the Delhi government decided to grant ₹1 crore to kin of those who succumbed to the virus while on Covid-19 duty. The petitioner's husband was detected as Covid positive in June last year and he succumbed to it in July last year, the plea has said.

— PTI

'Vaccinate or cancel Class 12 board exam'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia Tuesday reiterated his demand of "vaccination or cancellation" in his suggestions sent to the Central government on conducting class 12 board exams.

Sisodia, also Delhi's Education Minister, recommended the tabulation of results taking into account the marks students scored in class 10, class 11 and assessment during class 12 so far.

In a letter to Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, Sisodia said if experts suggest against giving Covishield or Covaxin jabs to class 12 students, the Centre government should procure Pfizer vaccine which has been approved for children above the age of 12 years.

"If Centre and state government get on the task together all class 12 students and teachers involved in the

examination process can be vaccinated within three to four weeks," he added.

"If the government feels it's not feasible to vaccinate students at present then I strongly advocate that the exams should be cancelled and results should be tabulated as per scores obtained in last three years by students — class 10, 11 and 12.

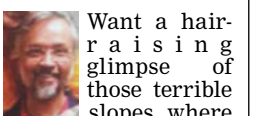
Sisodia has also noted in his letter that the government should call a high-level meeting next month to start discussing the examination format for the 2022 exams.

"We should start preparations already for next year keeping all circumstance in mind," he said.

The Central government had sought detailed suggestions from all state and Union Territories by May 25 following a high-level meeting on conducting the class 12 board exams which were postponed in view of the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic.

Everest book by climber in aid of Covid orphans

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25



Want a hair-raising glimpse of those terrible slopes where Aditya Gupta's Bangladeshi mountaineer's heroic death inspired homegirl Arunima Sinha to complete her climb in a stranger's honour? What is it like to look down on multiple 6,500 and 7,000-plus metre peaks, all part of the southern view from the summit? With 350 stunning images spread over 250 pages, mountaineer and entrepreneur Aditya Gupta's 7 Lessons from Everest is a unique photographic offering that aims to raise ₹1 crore for children orphaned in the Covid-19 pandemic.

With India's society and government having no social security, they are a talking point.

The IIT Roorkee graduate's The Rug Republic, a home decor brand, has joined hands with CRY (Child Rights and You) to organise this effort. Every time someone donates ₹4,000 or more to CRY, The Rug Republic will send the person the coffee table book. Also, every purchase made of 7 Lessons from Everest gets directly donated to CRY. Donors can directly transfer the money to CRY using the links available on 7lessons-fromeverest.com.

Congress leader Choudhary Kalyan Singh passes away

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Congress leader and Indira Gandhi loyalist, Choudhary Kalyan Singh, has passed away. He was nominated as a metropolitan councillor in 1972 and went on to win the elections to the council from Ghonda constituency in 1978 and 1983 as well. An influential leader of the Gujar community, Singh held important positions in government and other organisations like the DDA, APMC, Delhi Agricultural Marketing Board (DAMB). He was also a member of the Backward Commission and Transport Authority in Delhi.

There was no legislative assembly and the

Metropolitan Council was the highest elected body of Delhi till 1993. The important functionaries of the institution of Metropolitan Council were: Administrator, Presiding Officers, Leader of the House, Leader of the Opposition, Whips, Members, and Secretary.

Singh was known to be a kind man of simple thoughts. He is survived by three sons and three daughters. His eldest son, Shailendra Choudhary, is currently serving as National Media Coordinator for the Indian National Congress. Many senior leaders offered their condolences to the bereaved family.

Opp. intensifies campaign to recall top Lakshadweep official after row

Kochi, May 25: Opposition parties on Tuesday stepped up their campaign seeking recall of Lakshadweep administrator Praful Patel for alleged carrying out 'anti-people' reforms in the islands, while the BJP defended him, as the Kerala high court stayed an order of the administration.

CPI(M) veteran and Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan described reports from Lakshadweep as quite serious. In a tweet, he said Kerala has a strong relationship with the islands and condemned "devious efforts" to thwart it.

The Lakshadweep administration suffered a setback as the Kerala high



Praful Patel

court on Tuesday stayed its order directing the assistant public prosecutor (APP) to attend pending legal works of various government departments, instead of carrying out his duties in the courts there.

The court granted the stay on a PIL by an islander Mohammed Saleem challenging the administration's directive to the APP posted in Andrott and Amini islands, to attend to legal works of several departments, including preparation of chargesheet to help the police.

Lakshadweep is under the jurisdiction of the Kerala high court. The petitioner alleged that the order was a rampant abuse of power and an absolute failure of the justice delivery system, particularly in the criminal justice system of Lakshadweep.

During the hearing, the high court orally told Counsel for the administration that the affairs in Lakshadweep were being noticed by it. The court's observation came amid protest by islanders seeking recall of Patel.

The anti-BJP parties have alleged that Patel unilaterally lifted restrictions on the use of alcohol in the Muslim-majority islands, banned beef products, cit-

ing Animal Preservation and demolished fishermen's sheds built on the coastal areas, saying they violated the Coast Guard Act.

Leaders of Opposition parties, Mr Vijayan and AICC general secretary K C Venugopal also came against the administration's reform measures.

"News reports from Lakshadweep are quite serious. Challenges imposed on their lives, livelihoods and culture cannot be accepted. Kerala has a strong relationship, a long history of cooperation with LD. Unequivocally condemn devious efforts to thwart it. Perpetrators should desist," Mr Vijayan said in a tweet. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Covid-hit ex-Bengal CM condition worsens

Kolkata: Former Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was admitted to a private hospital in South Kolkata on Tuesday morning after his health condition worsened as his oxygen saturation level dropped drastically in the wee hours of the day while remaining under treatment at his residence. Infected by Covid along with his wife Meera Bhattacharjee and their attendant, the CPI(M) veteran was earlier undergoing treatment at home on Palm Avenue ignoring the doctors' advice to take admission to a hospital. His wife who was admitted to Woodlands Hospital returned home after her recovery meanwhile. Though Mr Bhattacharjee's condition improved recently, it started deteriorating after his oxygen saturation dropped below 90 late on Monday night, according to his family sources. At around 11.30 am on Tuesday the ex-CM was rushed to Woodlands Hospital and was wheeled into the intensive care unit.

DRDO Covid hospital likely in Bengal

Berhampore: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), a premiere establishment of the defence ministry, is likely to build a 500-bed hospital for Covid-19 patients in Murshidabad of Bengal. Congress leader in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, informed this on Tuesday. He had urged PM Modi personally about the facility to be set up by the DRDO on the sidelines of their meeting, on Monday evening, to select the next CBI chief. The Berhampore MP later claimed that the PM assured him that he would try his best to build the hospital very soon.

Punjab: Teen beaten for meeting girl

Chandigarh: A 17-year-old boy was allegedly thrashed and his head shaved by a group of people after his female friend went to meet him at his house in Punjab's Muktsar district, police said on Tuesday. The incident took on Monday when the victim's 16-year-old friend visited his house in Ravidas Nagar, Malout town, they said. When the girl's family got to know, they took her back to their hpeople after his female friend went to meet him at his house in Punjab's Muktsar district, police said on Tuesday. The incident took on Monday when the victim's 16-year-old friend visited his house in Ravidas Nagar, Malout town, they said. When the girl's family got to know, they took her back to their home, police said, adding, people in the locality later attacked the boy. A video capturing the incident was posted on social media. Police said they rescued

GOVT NODS FOR CONSULATE IN MALDIVIAN CITY

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved the opening of a new consulate in the Maldivian city of Addu, in reflection of the importance India attaches to its ties with the strategically located island nation. The government said the opening of the consulate will help augment India's diplomatic presence in the Maldives and make it commensurate with the "existing and aspired level" of engagement. India's decision to expand its diplomatic presence in the Maldives comes amid China's consistent efforts to increase its influence in the island nation. "The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the opening of a new consulate general of India in Addu City, Maldives in 2021," an official statement said. Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region and occupies a central and special place in the prime minister's vision of SAGAR — 'Security and Growth for All in the Region'. Currently, India is developing projects worth \$2 billion covering a large number of areas like ports, roads, bridges, water and sanitation systems as well as socio-economic development. It said the momentum and energy in the bilateral relationship reached "unprecedented levels" under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi and President Ibrahim Solih. — PTI



(Clockwise) Indian Armys Eastern Command spearheads response for rescue and relief operations in West Bengal in preparations for cyclone Yaas. A railway worker ties a train with its tracks using chains as part of preparations for cyclone at Shalimar Station in Howrah. Members of NDRF team click pictures from the beach of a rough waves in the Bay of Bengal. Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee with governor Jagdeep Thakur visits the control room set up to monitor the situation of cyclone Yaas at Nabanna in Kolkata on Tuesday. — PTI



Rlys moves 680tn O2 from 3 states

New Delhi, May 25: Indian Railways moved 680 tonnes of oxygen from Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand in the last 12 hours in anticipation of Cyclone Yaas which is likely to hit the region soon, the national transporter said on Tuesday. Severe cyclonic storm Yaas is likely to make landfall near Dhamra Port in Odisha's Bhadrak district early Wednesday morning, the IMD said. Oxygen Expresses moved 680 tonnes of oxygen relief from Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand in the last 12 hours before the cyclone gets stronger. Eight Oxygen Expresses have moved from the region, a statement from the Railways said.

The country's major liquid medical oxygen (LMO) generation plants are based in this region and are now proving to be the source of the life-saving gas for other states for

supply to hospitals during the Covid pandemic.

So far, the Railways has delivered more than 17,239 tonnes of LMO in more than 1,042 tankers to 14 states since it started operations last month.

Providing relief to oxygen starved states, so far, 263 Oxygen Express trains have completed their journey while two more loaded trains with more than 134 tonnes of LMO in eight tankers are currently on the run.

Amongst the southern states, delivery of LMO to Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana crossed 1,000 tonnes each via the Oxygen Express trains.

Oxygen relief by Oxygen Express trains reached out to 14 states -- Uttarakhand, Karnataka,

Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Telangana, Punjab, Kerala, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Assam. — PTI

Russian envoy: Sputnik V reliable like AK-47 rifles

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Russian vaccines are reliable like Kalashnikov rifles since they are based on technology used for decades, Russian deputy chief of mission (DCM) Roman Babushkin said on Tuesday, informing reporters that the supplies of the Russian Sputnik V Covid vaccine to India are going on as per contractual obligations and that Russia is studying very carefully new requests for the vaccines from various Indian state governments and Indian companies.

The Russian DCM was speaking to news agencies after an aircraft landed from Russia with vials of antiviral drug Remdesivir along with other medicines used in the fight against Covid.

While India has already approved the use of the Sputnik V double-dose

► **THE RUSSIAN DCM** was speaking to news agencies after an aircraft landed from Russia with vials of antiviral drug Remdesivir along with other medicines used in the fight against Covid.

► **THE SPUTNIK V** double-dose vaccine is already a shot in the arm for India, which is looking to vaccinate its 1.3 billion population as quickly as possible in the wake of the deadly second wave of the Covid virus that battered the country.

vaccine, the Russian DCM also said that the third phase clinical trials are ongoing for the Sputnik Lite single-dose vaccine, adding that its potential use in India also would help vaccinate a large number of people in a short period of time. The Sputnik V double-

Power lines cut, villagers bank on feature phones

AKSHAYA KUMAR SHAHO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 25

As the very Severe Cyclonic Storm 'Yaas' on Tuesday advanced towards the Odisha coast, the power distribution companies in coastal Odisha districts on Tuesday stopped supply in sensitive areas fearing collapse of electrical structures that may cause loss of human and animal lives. The snapping of the power came as a major concern for the people living in the coastal villages as many of them found their smartphone batteries nearly exhausted.

What worried them most is that not many of them got any immediate alternative to charge their drained batteries.

"After a few hours, the cyclone will make landfall. However, the power utilities have disconnected supplies as a precautionary measure. Our smartphones have nearly

Cyclone: Paradip port suspends operations

Paradip, May 25: Paradip Port Trust suspended its operations from 2 pm on Tuesday as part of safety measures in view of the impending severe cyclone 'Yaas', which is likely to cross Odisha coast on May 26, an official said. At least 12 vessels proceeded down to the deep sea so as to avoid the path of the storm, he said, adding that all the trucks, dumpers and large cargo handling equipment in the port area will be taken to a safe zone. — PTI

run of batteries. Now, we are completely dependent on our feature phones as batteries of these devices last long - at least for 3-4 days," said Sudam Patra, a journalist based in Balasore. During cyclone Amphan on May 20, 2020, Sudam and his journalist

friends reported every angle of the event to their respective offices through the feature phones.

Kalyani Barik, a health worker, and her friends bought feature phones a couple of days ago so as to ensure that they remain accessible to people in distress during the cyclone and the aftermath to provide them seamless healthcare services. While diesel power generators have been banned for use by private houses as they would cause back current flow during restoration of electric lines post the cyclone, such machines were installed at cyclone shelters and important government and private establishments for emergency use. The state government has provided satellite phones to senior officers, relief and rescue teams for uninterrupted communication with district headquarters and the state administration in Bhubaneswar.

Bengal, Odisha move over 12 lakh people

'Yaas' is likely to intensify into 'very severe cyclonic storm'

Kolkata/New Delhi/Bhubaneswar/Ranchi/Patna: Cyclone Yaas intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm on Tuesday evening, India meteorological department director-general M. Mohapatra said, even as the states of West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand aggressively evacuated over 12 lakh people to storm shelters by late evening.

The IMD also issued a red-coded warning alert to the Odisha and West Bengal coasts. "The severe cyclonic storm 'Yaas' (pronounced as 'Yass') over northwest and Bay of Bengal intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm," Mohapatra said. 'Yaas', which was positioned 160 km south-southeast of Paradip in Odisha and 240km south-southeast of Digha in West Bengal over north-west and adjoining west-central Bay of Bengal on Tuesday evening, is likely to gain a maximum speed of 155 kmph to 165 kmph gusting to 185 kmph during landfall, the met department said.

"It is very likely to cross north Odisha-West Bengal coasts between Paradip and Sagar Islands close to north of Dhamra and south of Balasore, in the morning hours of Wednesday, the 26th May as a very severe cyclonic storm," the cyclone warning division of the IMD added.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee said that her administration has evacuated over nine lakh people from coastal districts to safe shelters.

The Odisha government, on the other hand, said it

'Measures in place to protect DRDO's missile testing facilities in Odisha'

Balasore/Bhubaneswar, May 25: The Integrated Test Range of DRDO has taken various measures to protect its facilities at Chandipur and Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha, which are likely to be affected by cyclone 'Yaas', an official said on Tuesday. A scientist at the Regional Meteorological Centre, Bhubaneswar earlier in the day said that landfall will most likely be between Dhamra and Chandbali in Bhadrak district. The ITR of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has three missile launch pads at Chandipur and one launch complex at Abdul Kalam Island, besides two separate mission control rooms and block houses. The island, known for its strategic location for test-launching of all long-

has moved over 3 lakh people from vulnerable coastal areas to safety.

Special relief commissioner of Odisha, P.K. Jena, said that over 2.10 lakh people residing in kutcha houses in low-lying areas have been moved to cyclone shelters. The highest number of evacuees are from Balasore district (74,132), followed by Bhadrak (73,103).

Around 5,000 pregnant women expecting delivery by June 1 have been admitted to hospitals, a health official said.

Also, 404 rescue teams including 52 from the NDRF, 60 from the Odisha

range missiles, is 80 nautical miles (110 km) from the ITR, and more likely to be impacted by the cyclone, the official said.

The control room and block house, however, have been designed to withstand wind speeds up to 400 km, sources said.

"We have prepared for the very severe cyclonic storm, and are implementing the standard operating procedures prepared by DRDO. We are ready to face any eventuality," Milan Kumar Pal, the spokesperson of the ITR facility, told PTI.

While the safety of critical installations has been ensured, vital equipment are stored inside laboratories, he said. The DRDO had launched the missile testing facility in 1982 as a project under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP). — PTI

Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF), 205 Fire service teams and 86 groups of tree-cutters have been deployed in the vulnerable districts, he said.

Andhra Pradesh chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has asked Collectors of the three north coastal districts to be on a high alert as Yaas crosses over into neighbouring Odisha.

The chief minister conducted a videoconference with Collectors of Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram and Srikakulam districts and reviewed the situation. — PTI

ANDHRA PRADESH STATE CIVIL SUPPLIES CORPORATION LIMITED
REGD. OFFICE: Sri Sai Towers, Door No: 10-15/21, 4th & 5th Floor, Acharya Nagar, Beside Sina Company, Bandar Road, Kanuru, Vijayawada - 520 007.
Ln.No.: PDS/PI/21263/BRF/2020-21 Dated: 25.05.2021

SHORT TENDER NOTICE
EMPALEMENT OF SUPPLIERS THROUGH AP e-Procurement e-Reverse AUCTION PLATFORM FOR SUPPLY OF 1500 MTS OF FORTIFIED RICE KERNELS (FRKs) WITH THREE (3) MICRO NUTRIENTS (IRON, FOLIC ACID AND VITAMIN B12) IN 20KG BAG TO APSCSCL FOR FORTIFICATION OF BOILED RICE TO BE DELIVERED TO FCIL.

Andhra Pradesh State Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd., invites tenders for appointment of Manufacturers/Suppliers for supply of 1500 Mts of Fortified Rice Kernels (FRK) for boiled rice. For registration, interested Manufacturers/Suppliers of FRKs from all over India may visit <https://tender.approcurement.gov.in> or www.apscscl.in to view and download tender documents at free of cost.

The details and procedure for obtaining Digital Signature Certificates are mentioned in website <https://tender.approcurement.gov.in> or in contact the help desk of procurement portal, Phone numbers: 08645-246370/71/72/73/74.

Last date for online registration and completion of Formalities for the e-Reverse auction shall be up to 5.00 pm of 01.06.2021 and the tentative date of online e-auction through e-procurement auction platform would be on 03.06.2021.

Sd/- VC & MANAGING DIRECTOR

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
TENDER NOTICE	
Sr. Divisional Mechanical Engineer, Northern Railway, DEMU-Shed., Shakurbasti, for and on behalf of President of India, invites E-Tender for the under noted work:	
Tender No.	25867/1DLS58
Name of work	Provision For House-Keeping, Cleaning, Waste Management of steam loco shed Rewari along with provision of consumable material for Steam Loco Shed Rewari for period of Four Years
Approximate cost	Rs. 84,12,967.92/- including GST @18%
Earnest money	Rs. 0.00 (Vide Rly. Bd. letter no. 2020/CE-I/CT/3E/IGCC/Policy 30.12.2020)
Bid Security Declaration in lieu of Bid Security	Yes
Completion period of the work	04 years
Cost of tender document	Rs. 5,900/- with GST @18% (Note: It should be in the form of net banking or gateway only. Note: FDR not be accepted as EMD for tender invited on IREPS as per Railway Board letter no. 2015/CR-ICT/5/1 dated 31.08.2016)
Date and time for submission of tender and opening of tender	Upto 15:00 hrs. on 14.06.2021. Opening of Tender at 15:00 hrs.
Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender can be seen	Above tender is available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in
No.:	25867/1DLS58 Dt.: 24.05.2021 1118/2021
Serving Customers with a Smile	

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of rail passengers that the timings of the following Special Trains will be revised due to speed enhancement/operational requirements as under:-

02425/02426 New Delhi - Jammu Tawi - New Delhi Rajdhani Superfast Special Train							
TRAIN NO. 02425				TRAIN NO. 02426			
Existing Timings	Revised Timings	STATIONS		Existing Timings	Revised Timings		
ARR.	DEP.	ARR.	DEP.	ARR.	DEP.	ARR.	DEP.
---	21:10	---	20:40	New Delhi	05:00	---	05:55
01:16	01:26	00:28	00:38	Ludhiana	00:05	00:15	01:40
03:40	03:42	03:10	03:12	Pathankot Cantt	21:32	21:34	23:05
---	---	Pass	03:42	Kathua	---	---	22:26
05:45	---	05:00	---	Jammu Tawi	---	20:10	21:25

Days of Run: 02425 from New Delhi from 28.05.2021 and 02426 from Jammu Tawi from 29.05.2021

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table and stations en route etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

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1123/2021

SHORT TAKES

FARMERS STIR:
SIDHU HOISTS
BLACK FLAG

Chandigarh: Congress legislator Navjot Singh Sidhu on Tuesday put up a black flag at his house in Punjab's Patiala district in support of the farmers protesting against the Centre's three farm laws. Hoisting the Black Flag in Protest ... Every Punjabi must support the Farmers !!, said Sidhu in a tweet. In a short video clip posted on his Twitter handle, Sidhu, who was accompanied by his wife Navjot Kaur Sidhu, said the flag is a sign of rejection of the farm legislations. He said Punjab is fighting against the three black laws which will completely destroy the farming community. Farmer bodies have given a call to observe May 26 as a black day to mark six months of the agitation against the laws. Farmers have been camping at the Delhi borders since November last year, demanding the repeal of the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella body of over 40 protesting farmer unions, on Friday had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging for the resumption of talks. Several rounds of talks between farmers and the government have failed to break the deadlock over the legislations. — PTI

SECURITY CAMPS
RESTRICT C'GARH
NAXAL MOVEMENT

Raipur: The establishment of security camps in Naxal-affected areas of Bastar district has restricted Naxal movement and rapidly paved the way for the development the region, said the Chhattisgarh government on Tuesday. "Securing a befitting reply to the Bastar Naxalites, the security forces had decided to establish their security camps in interiors of dense forests and previously unapproachable mountainous areas. These camps have been set up after perusing a careful chalked-out strategy where each camp can have access to others in times of distress. The establishment of these advanced camps has restricted the smooth movement of Naxalites in these areas. The manifold growth of security forces has proved to be a setback for the Naxal movement," Taran Sinha, commissioner, public relation department, Chhattisgarh, said in a release. Apart from that, Sinha said that the grievances of remote villages are now reaching the district administration promptly. "This has further improved the grievance resolving mechanism of the district," the commissioner said.

SC allows CBI to
withdraw plea

■ **Continued from Page 1** Justice Saran asked the S-G in a poser on what was the prayer of the CBI before the top court. Sensing the mood of the court, Mr Mehta urged the court to adjourn the matter and take it up on Friday (May 28). After giving an opportunity to the S-G to consult his team, the court in the resumed hearing gave him two options: either withdraw the case or the court would pass orders after considering the matter on merit. The court said after the matter was considered by a five-judge high court bench, they will have the benefit of the views of five learned judges of the Calcutta high court. As Mr Mehta focused on the dharna by Mamata Banerjee outside the CBI office and the presence of the state law minister at the special CBI court in the course of his arguments spread over 45 minutes, Justice Saran told him that you have two sets of people — one who are accused and the others who are not — and you can't interfere with the liberty of accused people merely on the acts of others. "You can take action against those who you feel subverted the law", the court told the S-G, and added: "We don't want to mix the liberty of a citizen (arrested TMC leaders) with the acts of other persons (chief minister and state law minister)."

■ SC stays Allahabad HC order granting anticipatory bail over fear of death due to Covid
Fear of death not grounds for pre-arrest bail: SC

New Delhi, May 25 The Supreme Court Tuesday stayed sweeping directions issued by Allahabad High Court, which had granted anticipatory bail to an accused in a cheating case observing that apprehension of death due to COVID-19 infection can be a valid ground for granting the relief. The top court said that courts shall not consider the directions issued by the High Court on May 10 for grant of anticipatory bail to accused in other cases.

A vacation bench of Justices Vineet Saran and B R Gavai said, "sweeping directions have been

made, we therefore direct the same to be stayed and the courts shall not consider the directions to grant anticipatory bail to accused in other cases and must consider merits of each case. The bench appointed senior advocate V Giri, as amicus curiae in the matter to assist it on the larger aspect whether COVID can be a ground for grant of anticipatory bail. The top court was hearing an appeal filed by the Uttar Pradesh government challenging the High Court order of May 10. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Uttar Pradesh government

said that this accused (Prateek Jain), who was granted anticipatory bail till January 2022, has 130 cases pending against him. He said that this order has been relied on in many other cases in which the accused have been seeking anticipatory bail. The bench said, We understand that you are aggrieved with the sweeping directions passed by the court. We will issue notice in the matter". The top court sought reply from Jain and said if he does not appear on the next date of hearing it may consider cancellation of his bail.

■ **THE HIGH court** had on May 10 said, If an accused dies on account of the reasons beyond control when he could have been protected from death by the court, the grant or refusal of anticipatory bail to him would be an exercise in futility

It listed the matter for further hearing on first week of July. On May 18, the top court had agreed to hear the appeal filed by the state government. The high court had on May 10 said, If an accused dies on account of the reasons beyond control when he could have been pro-

ected from death by the court, the grant or refusal of anticipatory bail to him would be an exercise in futility. Hence, an apprehension to death on account of reasons like the present pandemic of novel corona virus can certainly be held to be a ground for grant of anticipatory bail to an accused. It had directed that in case of his arrest, Jain shall be enlarged on anticipatory bail for the limited period till January 3, 2022. It had observed that "extraordinary times require extraordinary remedies and desperate times require remedial remedies". "Therefore, the

apprehension of an accused being infected with novel coronavirus before and after his arrest and the possibility of his spreading the same while coming into contact with the police, court and jail personnel or vice-versa can be considered to be a valid ground for grant of anticipatory bail to an accused, it had said. The high court had imposed conditions including that the petitioner shall not obstruct or hamper police investigation and shall not leave the country without prior permission from the trial court concerned. It had said that the Supreme Court recently

passed several directions to decongest prisons across India amid the Covid-19 pandemic. "The observations and directions of the apex court show concern about the overcrowding of jails, and in case this court, ignoring the same, passes an order which will result in overcrowding of jails again, it would be quite paradoxical," it had said. "Counsel for the state has not given any assurance of protection of the accused persons, who are in jail and may be sent to jail, regarding their protection from contracting the infection of novel coronavirus," it had observed. — PTI

Covid-19 vaccines,
medicines being
smuggled to Nepal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), the border guarding force for the Indo-Nepal border, has further intensified patrolling along the entire border following reports that critical medicines, vaccines, oxygen concentrators and other medical equipment were being smuggled from India to Nepal to be sold at a whopping profit there in wake of the Corona pandemic. There were intelligence reports suggesting that some organised criminal gangs operating along the Bihar and Uttar Pradesh borders of Nepal were taking advantage of the pandemic and were involved in smuggling of medicines and other medical equipment from India. Following this additional troops were deployed in the border areas and SSB was now very closely monitoring the situation there. Even the local police of border districts of Bihar and UP were assisting central forces in

this increased vigilance. The home ministry has issued strict instructions to law enforcement agencies to take stern action to check black marketing or smuggling of essential medicine and medical equipment both within the country or to neighbouring countries also. Intelligence reports had also cautioned the ministry that some Chinese made medical equipment, particularly oxygen concentrators, were being smuggled into India through the Nepal route and were being sold at exorbitant prices in the country. "Cases have come to light from different states that Chinese-made oxygen concentrators have been smuggled into India using the Nepal route and then sold at a huge profit. This came to light during the Khan Market case also. Deployment has been increased along the vulnerable points and patrolling has been further intensified to stop this trend," a senior SSB official said.



Army personnel distribute relief material among transgenders amid Covid-19 restrictions at a park in Srinagar on Tuesday.

— PTI

Maha ends home isolation
for patients in 18 districts

BHAGWAN PARAB
with agency inputs
MUMBAI, MAY 25

The Maharashtra government has decided to stop home quarantining of Covid-19 patients in 18 districts where the positivity rate is high and all active patients in these areas would be admitted to Covid care centres, health minister Rajesh Tope said here on Tuesday. Of 36 districts in the state, Satara, Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, Osmanabad, Beed, Raigad, Pune, Hingoli, Akola, Amravati, Kolhapur, Thane, Sangli, Gadchiroli, Wardha, Nashik, Ahmednagar and Latur have above-average positivity rates, as per the health department data. Ordinarily, asymptomatic patients or those who have mild symptoms of coronavirus infection are advised home isolation. The state has 3,27,000 active Covid-19 cases and the recovery rate has improved to 93 per cent. The case positivity rate - proportion of positive cases in tested samples - is



A doctor attends to a patient suspected to have been infected with mucromycosis at NMMC Hospital in Navi Mumbai on Tuesday.

— PTI

around 12 per cent while the case fatality rate is 1.5 per cent, Tope told reporters here. But the positivity rate in 18 districts is higher than the state average, he said. The state government has also decided to focus on contact tracing and testing instead of general testing of people. Those who are in contact with Covid patients will only be tested across the state. "We have to avoid random testing of people and testing has to be done in focused manner. Once a

person tests positive for coronavirus, all high and low risks persons, who may have come in contact with the patient, should be tested. The district collectors have been instructed to carry out focused testing rather than the random testing in large numbers," said health minister Rajesh Tope. There has been a drop in coronavirus patients in Maharashtra in recent days with Tuesday recording 24,136 new cases, while 36,176 patients recovered.

Jaishankar meets UN chief, discusses vaccine solutions

YOSHITA SINGH
UNITED NATIONS, MAY 25

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday held a comprehensive in-person meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and discussed the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and underlined the importance of finding an "urgent and effective" global vaccine solution to fight the deadly disease. In his first face-to-face interaction with the UN chief since India entered the UN Security Council as

a non-permanent member in January this year, Mr Jaishankar also deliberated on regional challenges in India's neighbourhood and said that the counter-terrorism and radicalisation remain priorities for the entire region. "A warm & comprehensive meeting with UN Secretary-General @antonioguterres. Discussed the Covid challenge, underlining the importance of finding urgent & effective global vaccine solutions. Critical to ramp up the vaccine supply chain to ensure greater production



S. Jaishankar

& fairer distribution, Mr Jaishankar tweeted shortly after the meeting that lasted almost an hour. Mr Jaishankar's meeting with Mr Guterres comes at

a time when India is reeling under an unprecedented second Covid-19 wave. According to a statement issued by the Permanent Mission of India to the UN, the Secretary-General expressed solidarity with the government and the people of India in their efforts against the recent wave of Covid pandemic. Mr Jaishankar appreciated the efforts of the Secretary-General to facilitate Vaccines for All. He and Mr Guterres discussed the need to ramp up global vaccine production through expanded

supply chains. "This was imperative to ensure fairer distribution of vaccines globally in the coming days. The proposal by India and South Africa for TRIPS waiver of vaccine patents can also contribute to greater production and more equity," the statement said. In a series of tweets, Mr Jaishankar said he also exchanged views on climate action. "Greater resources are essential for larger ambitions. Financing will determine our seriousness and credibility," he said. — PTI

Tornado strikes

■ **Continued from Page 1**

Bhadrak district. The windspeed at the time of landfall will most likely be 155-165 kmph, gusting up to 185 kmph." Dr Mohapatra also said the cyclone would be accompanied by high tidal surges ranging from 2 to 4.5 metres in Dhamra and two metres in Kendrapara and inundate coastal areas. On Tuesday evening, Kolkata Airport announced that it suspended flight operations from morning to evening on Wednesday. Several trains that were to run in the cyclone-prone areas have been cancelled by the South Eastern Railway on Tuesday and Wednesday. In a Tuesday evening briefing, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee said: "A tornado is happening in some pockets as a prelude to the cyclone. It lasted for around a minute but damaged 40 houses partly in Halishahar and Bijpur. Four-five persons suffered minor injuries. The tornado hit Chinsurah in Hooghly too. The two persons who lost their lives at Pandua were electrocuted. Around 11 lakh people have been evacuated so far to our relief centres of around 4,000 units at the block, panchayat and state level." Earlier, the Trinamul Congress chief, who spent the entire day and night at Nabanna when Cyclone Amphan had struck the state on May 20 last year, said: "All of us will stay at the state secretariat tonight and tomorrow to monitor the landfall, which is likely to happen by 12 pm on Wednesday, and act accordingly. Do not worry. We are guarding you." Eastern Command spokesman Wing Commander Mandep Huda said: "The Indian Army is

spearheading the Army relief effort in West Bengal for preparations for Cyclone Yaas, which is scheduled to make landfall in the general area bordering West Bengal on May 26, on requisition and in close coordination with the state government of West Bengal." In Odisha, meanwhile, the impact of the cyclonic storm began to show on Tuesday in coastal districts and adjoining areas as they experienced heavy rainfall and intermittent squally wind activities. Port city Paradip in Jagatsinghpur recorded 155.5 mm and Chandabali in Bhadrak district registered 97 mm rain. Similarly, Puri reported 40 mm downpour under the influence of a cyclonic storm. State capital Bhubaneswar and Cuttack along with other coastal districts like Kendrapara, Balasore and adjoining areas like Jajpur, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj district also experienced heavy downpours. Reports from Rajnagar in Kendrapara district and Bhadrak said several kutcha houses were damaged in the squally wind. Thousands of acres of agriculture and horticulture crops were also damaged in the rains. The "great danger signal 10" was hoisted at Paradip port. The collectors of most sensitive districts like Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Balasore, Bhadrak have already started evacuating people residing in vulnerable areas to cyclone centres. Indian Navy personnel along with Air Force and Navy aircraft have also kept on standby to carry out relief and rescue operations. Coast Guard personnel have also been pressed into service in all the coastal Odisha districts.

Add 'manipulated media' tag...

■ **Continued from Page 1**

fabricated material and the claims made under the #CongressToolkitExposed by various ministers are identical to the material that has already been marked as 'manipulative media' by Twitter." A senior Delhi police officer, meanwhile, confirmed that notices were served to Congress social media head Rohan Gupta and party spokesperson M.V. Rajeev Gowda in connection with the probe. "These are not fresh notices. These notices were served around eight-nine days ago based on a complaint received from the Congress. They were asked to join the probe so that it could help us in carrying out the investigation forward," the officer said. A preliminary inquiry into the complaint is still being carried out by the Delhi Police's Special Cell team and no FIR has been registered yet, officials said. On Monday, the Delhi Police's Special Cell sent a notice to Twitter India in connection with the probe, asking it to share information based on which it had classified a related tweet by BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra as "manipulated media", officials said. On Monday evening, police teams descended on the microblogging site's offices in Lado Sarai in Delhi and in Gurgaon but found them empty as Twitter has had work-from-home since March 2020. The BJP has accused the Congress of creating a "toolkit" that seeks to tarnish the image of the country and Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the handling of the Covid pandemic. However, the Congress has denied the allegation and claimed that the BJP is propagating a fake "toolkit" to

defame it. Last week, Twitter labelled as "manipulated media" tweets by BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra and Gajendra Singh Shekhawat on the alleged "toolkit", saying that it "may label Tweets that include media (videos, audio, and images) that have been deceptively altered or fabricated". Delhi police PRO Chinmoy Biswal said, "It appears that Twitter has some information which is not known to us and on the basis of which they have classified it (Patra's tweet) as such. This information is relevant to the inquiry. The Special Cell, which is conducting the inquiry, wants to find out the truth. Twitter, which has claimed to know the underlying truth, should clarify." The government had earlier asked Twitter to remove the "manipulated media" tag, saying that the social media platform cannot pass judgment when the issue is under investigation. BJP leaders, including Mr Patra, have posted numerous tweets to attack the Congress over the purported "toolkit". On May 19, the Congress lodged a police complaint seeking registration of cases against BJP chief J.P. Nadda, Union minister Smriti Irani, BJP general secretary B.L. Santosh and Mr Patra over the alleged forgery of documents. The Chhattisgarh unit of the Congress' students wing NSUI also lodged a complaint against Mr Patra and former chief minister Raman Singh for allegedly "forging" the letterhead of the AICC research department and printing "false and fabricated" content on it. On the basis of the complaint, a case has been filed against Mr Patra and Mr Singh at the Civil Lines police station in Raipur.

Daily cases below 2L

■ **Continued from Page 1**

performance in the last two years. A "Plan B" can be prepared for students disagreeing with it," Mr Sisodia said at the meeting. Punjab education minister Vijay Inder Singla too rooted for vaccination of students before the exams and said exams in only selected subjects should be held. Meanwhile, Bharat Biotech said regulatory approvals for Covaxin are in process in over 60 countries and emergency use authorisations have been obtained in 13 countries, with more to follow. "Application for Emergency Use listing has been submitted to WHO-Geneva and regulatory approvals are expected by July-September 2021," Bharat Biotech said in a statement. This comes amid news that Covaxin is not among the vaccines that was approved by WHO for international travellers. On domestic production

of its vaccines, Bharat Biotech said Covaxin had reached 30 cities in 30 days. Several states facing an acute shortage of vaccines have started shopping abroad though the Centre said over 1.77 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccines are still available with the states and UTs. Brihanmumbai municipal commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal said that Mumbai has got eight bids in response to the BMC's Global Expression of Interest for procurement of one crore vaccine doses. "Out of these, one bid is for Pfizer/AstraZeneca and the remaining seven bids are for Sputnik. The time period has been extended by a week to enable various bidders to submit a complete set of documents in support of the bids as prescribed under BMC's Global Expression of Interest. Any additional bid shall also be entertained," Mr Chahal said.

More vacation benches

■ **Continued from Page 1** so passed, the matter could not be deleted by the Registry under any circumstances. Mr Singh also mentioned that only two courts are functioning during the present vacation despite the fact that there has been a huge rise in pending cases due to

the pandemic and a large number of matters are awaiting hearing. Oral mentioning is a convention by which lawyers short-circuit the long-winded filing procedures and make a direct appeal to the CJ, who is the court's administrative head and master of roster, for early hearing.

THE ASIAN AGE

26 MAY 2021

Vaccines: Fix schedule, focus on procurement

Several state chief ministers are now a frustrated lot, what with their unsuccessful attempts to procure Covid-19 vaccines from the global market. Some of them have demanded that the Union government procure and distribute the doses to them. This is a demand the Centre must consider a top priority as the information from the field on vaccination is thoroughly disappointing.

It's a fact that India launched the world's largest vaccination programme in January but its pace has been on a downward slide as it has progressed. As of now, India has been able to fully vaccinate only around five crore people while it has administered at least a single dose to 19 crore people. Latest reports say that the average number of weekly administration of doses has fallen below one crore, almost a third of the figures one month ago when the drive was at its peak. Of this, almost half is being done by the state governments with the vaccines they procured from the market. However, several states, including Maharashtra and Delhi, have closed down their vaccination camps opened for

The stand of the foreign manufacturers exposes the specious argument advanced by the apparatchiks of the ruling dispensation that the government was following the demand raised by the states for decentralisation of vaccination

people aged between 18 and 44 years; several others have complained that the Centre's supply of vaccine for those aged 45 and above is dwindling and the entire vaccination programme is now on a crawl. The story, in short, is that the programme is gasping for breath at a time it has to pace at full throttle. This is an unfortunate mess the government has created, and the government alone can clean it up.

The first step towards this end is for the government to take charge of vaccine procurement instead of making the state governments scour the international market with their limited experience and resources. That is made necessary for another reason, too: several prominent vaccine manufacturers have made it clear to them that they have no plans to do business with state governments or private companies and will deal directly with national governments. This stand of the foreign manufacturers also exposes the specious argument advanced by the apparatchiks of the ruling dispensation that the government was following the demand raised by the states for decentralisation of vaccination. It cannot be that the Union government is completely unaware of such setbacks. One fails to understand why the Centre makes state governments waste precious time competing unsuccessfully with one another at a juncture when they must be engaged in fighting the virus on the ground.

The government must not only take over the procurement process but also announce a proper schedule with definite milestones in the number of vaccinations to be administered before the third wave hits the nation. The schedule must be convincing in that it must specify how and when the government plans to procure the vaccine, whether from within the country or abroad and how it plans to reach the last man.

It will be too risky for this nation to think that it can ward off a third wave of the pandemic with an ostrich-like attitude. It must act, instead.

Freedom of speech in peril

The ruling party BJP and the Union government seem bent upon escalating the "Toolkit" issue through its proxy, the Delhi Police, with its big-footed and ham-handed ways of investigation. But this is only a small part of a larger pattern of official India operations to regulate digital content and which aim at not only muzzling criticism but to erase it altogether from popular social media platforms.

An even bigger issue lies ahead as major social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are yet to comply with a May 25 deadline when government's new IT rules heralding a new digital ethics code, a three-tier supervisory system and a grievance redressal mechanism were to kick in. The very foundations of freedom of speech and expression are in peril as India tries to turn social media intermediaries, which post the contribution of individuals, into legally liable entities as "publishers" of content.

The police raids on Twitter offices in and around the capital New Delhi on Monday were clear attempts at intimidation and come in the wake of a clumsy attempt at counter propaganda by a prominent national spokesperson of the BJP, who had been adjudged to have manipulated media in making allegations against a person with avowed links to a major Opposition party.

Twitter may only have been responding to complaints from the Congress about certain tweets ascribed to persons with links to the party. Twitter has the technical capabilities to judge whether there was media manipulation in those tweets but the Delhi police put out a pedantic defence of its action on the grounds that the matter is under investigation and hence Twitter should not have been pro-active in judging the posts by BJP representatives.

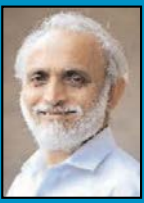
As the BJP indulges in a blame game in these distracting side-shows while attempting image management, the country is being deprived of consolidated efforts against the second wave of the coronavirus. The perception is the battle against the pandemic is being progressively lost as evidenced in the shortage of medical oxygen, hospital beds and critical drugs even as mortality rates have risen though positivity rates are dipping.

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Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr



As the Covid-19 pandemic rises, it's crucial to get 'numbers' right

Looking at the Covid-19 infection numbers which rose steadily from 33,610 in April 2020 to 1,82,143 in May, 5,66,840 in June (these were also the months of a total national lockdown) to 16,38,870 in July, 36,21,245 in August and peaked at 62,25,763 in September, it is evident the increase was at an alarming rate. In the same period, deaths due to Covid-19 rose from 1,075 to 97,497. While the total infections figure remained high, there was a monthly decline in new infections afterwards. For example, total infections in September were 26,04,518, in October 19,11,356, in November 12,94,572, in December 8,34,983. The lowest monthly rise was in January 2021, compared to December 2020: 4,79,509. It declined further to 3,50,548 from February-end to March-end this year.

There was a spurt in the numbers between the end of March and the end of April: 66,13,641. It seems the gap between the first and second waves was too short. There was no room for declaring the Covid-19 ended either at the end of January or end of February as there was just a decline in numbers but the monthly figures remained substantial.

They show Covid-19 was still raging. Again, the decrease in infections can't be attributed to the phased vaccination programme rolled out on January 16. The infection was moving along a trajectory of its own and the vaccination on its own. Somewhere the two trajectories should reach a point in future, either at the end of this year or sometime in 2022, or even later, when the infections must touch zero and the vaccinations should be at a permanent peak.

When the first wave receded in January-February this year, and the second wave surge became evident in April, the interpreters of Covid-19 numbers made the error of believing things were getting better. It's not just the issue of learning from the pattern seen in other countries that there was an imminent second wave. The first wave numbers didn't flatten enough for even a robust optimist to turn one's back on the pandemic. It's unnecessary to attack Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team for getting the Covid numbers for January/February wrong. The false glimmer of hope created by the receding first wave was a natural

one. Caution would have dictated that the fall in number of infections, however encouraging, wasn't good enough to believe that the trouble had ended.

For long we have believed numbers are sure indicators, that they don't deceive. Most of the time and in most contexts the belief in numbers is justified. But this turns out to be a simplistic assumption when we are dealing with biological phenomenon. It's indeed a matter of debate whether viruses are biological creatures. Though population genetics brings mathematics and biology quite close, we have seen that mathematical models for the coronavirus, especially Covid-19, has been a non-starter.

The infection rates and the fatality rates can serve in inferring some kind of mathematical modelling, but it's unlikely to help in predicting the patterns of the spread of infection or the rate of fatality in a definitive sense. This poses problems for epidemiologists and for governments to manage an epidemic. So, the Covid-19 infection rates in India and in the world which the different dashboards are displaying are signs of how things happened

but the numbers on these dashboards can't be used to predict the future behaviour of Covid-19. The fluctuating graph doesn't point to either the end of the pandemic or its unrelenting course. The infection and fatality figures might just stop blipping on these dashboards. But this cannot be taken to mean that it's all over, or if it comes back against it will be easy to predict its patterns.

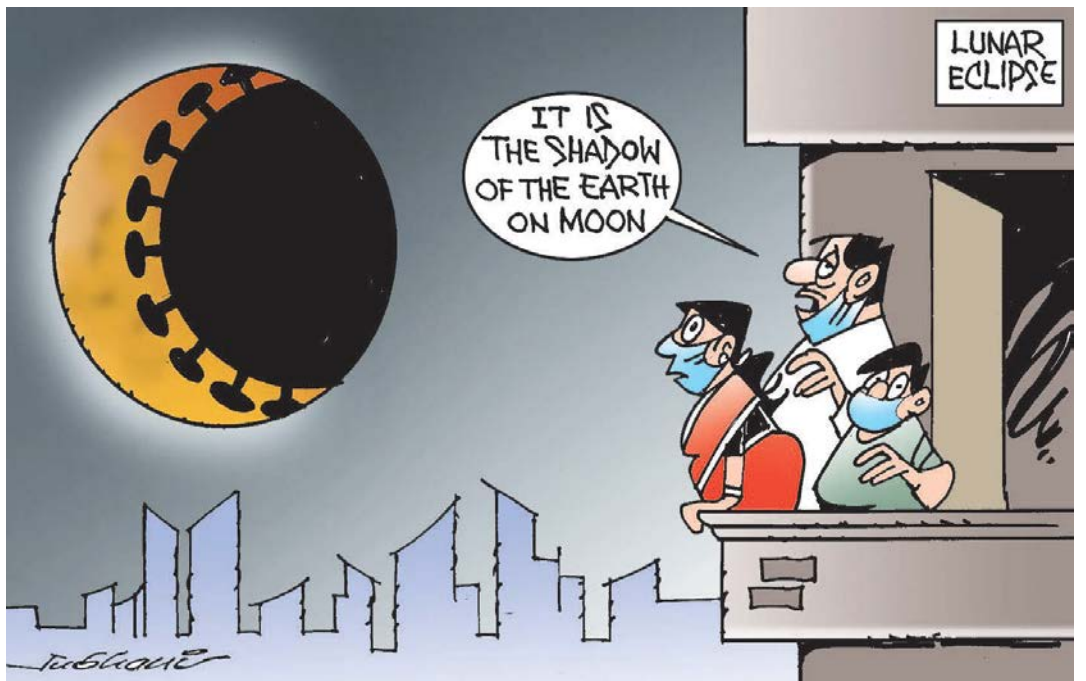
The weapons at our disposal to deal with a pandemic like Covid-19 are the vaccines and therapeutic drugs, which need to be modified constantly as mutations emerge in the virus. It's a constant battle, and of course it's not all chaos. There's a certain stability which allows doctors and researchers to work with vaccines and drugs. Even if you succeed in containing Covid-19 and some other similar coronaviruses, the dangers of other pandemics are not ruled out. And with every new menace, you must fight with whatever we have on hand, including drugs that worked earlier and may not work now, and vaccines which were successful may not do the job this time around.

This uncertainty is bad news for

political leaders as they are quite keen on defeating opponents and they love to celebrate victories. The Covid-19 pandemic is proving to be a party-pooper for them. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath are all hell-bent on defeating Covid-19, but their naivety in the matter is not amusing. The medical emergency gives them plenty of opportunity to prove their leadership skills like issuing orders, the one thing leaders enjoy the most. But dealing with a pandemic is a long-drawn affair. It's not just about issuing orders. All that one can succeed is either to contain and minimise its impact, and deal with reconstruction work to undo the destruction it has caused. There is no room for loud and vulgar war cries of victory. Meanwhile, the numbers will need to be tracked as meticulously as possible because they can help in a limited way to deal with the pandemic. But there will be no magical patterns and solutions in the numbers.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

Subhani



Hubris, narcissism and moment of 'hamartia'



Mohan Guruswamy

The Greeks had words for every personality frailty. In the present case three of these words are of relevance to us: (1) Hubris; (2) Hamartia; and (3) Narcissism. Hubris is described in the dictionary to simply mean "excessive pride or self-confidence; arrogance". Hamartia is usually an

artifice in Greek drama that initiates a "movement of spirit" within the protagonist to commit actions which drive the plot towards its tragic end. Narcissism is the pursuit of gratification from vanity or egotistic admiration of one's idealised self-image and attributes. The term originated from Greek mythology, where a young man named Narcissus fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. In the drama of Narendra Modi today, we see quite a bit of the hubris and overweening narcissism, both fatal flaws. The question before us now is whether this is the moment of hamartia which will drive the plot to its tragic end?

The sin of hubris has been a continuing theme that has captured the imagination of historians, philosophers and theologians alike. The Biblical saying "pride cometh before the fall" applies equally well to Ravana, the great king of the Rakshasas whose long years of penance secured him the favour of Brahma, who rendered him invulnerable to the gods and demons alike. We know what happened to him. We, the lesser Hindus, also know that it's not necessary to be a tyrant in order to attract the malefic attentions of the gods. Bali, the celebrated *daitya*, rose to such an eminence that

Indra and the other gods had to seek the intervention of Vishnu, who once again obliged the devas by consigning Bali to *patala*, or the nether-world.

On April 19, 1959, Cuba's Fidel Castro paid his first post-revolution visit to Washington and met then vice-president Richard M. Nixon for three and a half hours. Following this meeting Nixon appraised him thus: "The one fact we can be sure of is that he has those indefinable qualities that make him a leader of men. Whatever we may think of him, he is going to be a great factor in the development of Cuba and possibly in Latin American affairs generally." In October that year, President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorised a plan to overthrow Castro.

The plan called for the landing in Cuba of a force of Cuban émigré fighters armed and trained by the CIA. This force was then meant to storm its way inland, releasing in its wake a popular upsurge that would topple Castro, just like he did the dictator Fulgencio Batista. Fortunately for Castro, Bay of Pigs, the place chosen for the landing, suffered from two crucial disadvantages. The beach was close to Castro's favorite holiday home and hence had a Cuban military unit garrisoned on it. The shallow waters of the bay also concealed shoals that required the landing force to wade ashore from a great distance, making them sitting ducks. That is precisely what happened. As US warships watched helplessly, President John F. Kennedy realised that he was led up the path and the CIA's urgent pleas for US air strikes would strip whatever was left of the fig leaf of innocence donned by the

The PM then went on the push his luck a bit further by claiming that India, as the world's largest vaccine producer, would assume the charge of saving the world! He even announced that this was a turning point in India's economic history...

United States. He abandoned the landing force to its fate. The few who survived ended up in Cuban jails. When asked what went wrong, JFK's national security adviser McGeorge Bundy replied: "Hubris!"

In February 1961, Robert McNamara, a brilliant Harvard MBA and a former head of Ford Motor Company, took over as the US defence secretary. He took with him an equally brilliant team of systems analysts who were to transform the way the US fought its wars in the future.

The systems analysts quantified everything. Every weapons system ordered was subject to a cost-benefit analysis. Even military results were quantified in terms of "area pacified" and "body count".

When Clark Clifford, who took over from McNamara as defence secretary, topped up all the "body count" figures of the war, he found it had exceeded all intelligence estimates of enemy combatants by over half! When he asked: "Why are we then still fighting?", President Lyndon Johnson knew that he too was led up the path. Some years ago I met Robert McNamara at a seminar on the Cuban missile crisis organised by Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. I asked him how he had got it so wrong. He replied with one word: "Hubris".

In 1987, Indian troops went into Sri Lanka at the invitation of the two warring parties to impose an agreement midwifed by

then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. When the LTTE reneged on it, the then Indian Army Chief, Gen. Krishnaswamy Sundarji, assured the government that he would be able to eliminate or disarm the LTTE in just a few weeks. We know what happened. It continues to be sad chapter in the Indian Army's history. It even cost Rajiv Gandhi his life. The question that baffles is how is it that the Indian Army ended up fighting a group that was fostered and supported by the Indian government? And what made the Indian Army think that it would be able to wipe out its onetime protégé in just weeks, if not days? Hubris?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on January 28 this year, virtually addressing the World Economic Forum's Davos Dialogue, had declared India as one of the countries that had successfully controlled the coronavirus. He said: "India took a proactive public participation approach and developed a Covid-specific health infrastructure and trained its resources to fight Covid." He went on to declare "mission accomplished", very much like President George W. Bush had declared atop an aircraft-carrier off the coast of Iraq. He then went on the push his luck a bit further by claiming that India, as the world's largest vaccine producer, would now assume the charge of saving the world! He even announced that this was a turning point in India's economic history and that India was once again poised for greatness.

Was this his moment of "hamartia"? Will this take us to the denouement or the final part of a play, film or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are resolved and the theatre ends?

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

HURRY TO MARRY

Private airline SpiceJet finds itself on a sticky wicket for allowing a sky wedding on one of its chartered planes amidst the second wave of the pandemic. Pictures showed the bride and the groom exchanging garlands on a jam-packed plane in blatant violation of Covid-19 norms. The wedding party performed the rituals as the aircraft hovered over Madurai Meenakshi temple. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has not spared SpiceJet, derostering the crew and promising deterrent action. But will the airline make the erring passengers pay, or will they be allowed to get away with their follies?

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

LALA RAMDEV

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Act against those thrashing docs" (May 25). Ramdev's remarks against allopathy, saying that lakhs of patients have died due to these medicines, are objectionable. The statement disrespects the corona warriors and hurts the sentiments of the country. It is time action is taken against unscientific, fake claims under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

CURB CHARLATANS

INDIAN MEDICAL knowledge is deep and ancient and its savants are few. We do owe it to ourselves to delve in and perpetuate this rich heritage that is not given to most nations. Sadly, parvenus in this field have leveraged it for cultivating cults and, worse, vote banks. Modern era governments would err if they ignore this trend and soft pedal on correctives. We are uniquely placed in deriving insights from the vast cornucopia of our traditional medicine to steer and evolve future medical sciences.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

BAD DREAM STOPS GUIDE FROM CLIMBING EVEREST

Kathmandu, May 25: A record-holding Sherpa climber halted his attempt to scale Mount Everest for a 26th time because of a bad dream but plans to try again next year.

Kami Rita already reached the summit of the world's highest mountain for a record 25th time earlier this month but stopped his most recent climb more than halfway to the top. He was making (the 26th) attempt and had reached up to Camp Three "but the weather turned bad and I had a really bad dream," Rita said on return to Kathmandu on a helicopter from the mountain on Tuesday. "The gods were telling me not to go and because I really believe in God, I decided to return," he said but would not elaborate on the dream. Sherpas believe Everest to be a goddess and have a religious ceremony before stepping on the mountain to make their climbs.

TWO CHILDREN AMONG 18 KILLED IN PERU

Lima, May 25: Two children and 16 adults were shot dead in a remote coca-growing area of Peru, the armed forces said Monday, blaming the attack on members of the Shining Path guerrilla group.

The killings late Sunday risk inflaming tensions amid a polarized campaign for the presidency between leftist Pedro Castillo and his rival from the right, Keiko Fujimori. The villagers were mowed down at San Miguel del Ene in a coca-growing valley where members of the Maoist Shining Path group operate, according to the joint command of the armed forces. The head of the police counter-terrorism unit, General Oscar Arriola, said the dead included 10 men, six women and two children.

The armed forces command blamed the attack on fighters led by guerrilla leader Victor Quispe Palomino, or Comrade Jose. A specialised terrorism unit has been tasked with investigating the killings.

GUAM CAN PURSUE \$160M DUMP CLEANUP LAWSUIT

Washington, May 25: The Supreme Court says the US territory of Guam can pursue a \$160 million lawsuit against the federal government over the cost of cleaning up a landfill on the island.

The justices on Monday unanimously overturned a lower court decision that had said Guam had waited too long to pursue the claim. The case before the justices involves a long-running dispute over the Ordof Dump on Guam. The lawsuit says the Navy built the dump during the 1940s and then deposited toxic military waste there before turning over control to Guam in 1950.

Guam operated the dump for decades. The US has said Guam "vastly expanded" it and "failed to provide even rudimentary environmental safeguards." In 2002, the government sued Guam over pollution from the dump. Guam ultimately agreed in 2004 to close the dump and take steps to stop pollution from the dump, among other things. In 2017, Guam sued the United States, arguing that it's responsible for some of the costs of the cleanup.

POPE PRAYS FOR ITALY CABLE CAR MISHAP SURVIVOR

Rome, May 25: Pope Francis offered prayers Tuesday for "little Eitan", the lone survivor of the cable car disaster in northern Italy that left 14 people dead when the cabin plunged to the ground after the lead cable snapped and the emergency brake failed to engage.

Francis sent a telegram to the local bishop offering his condolences to the families of the dead who, he said were "tragically lost while immersed in the marvels of creation".

Prosecutors have said they are investigating why the lead cable of the Stresa funicular snapped Sunday while it was bringing sightseers up to the Mortarone peak overlooking Lake Maggiore in Italy's Piedmont region. They have said the emergency brake on the supporting cable didn't engage, events that sent the cabin reeling back down the line until it pulled off, crashed to the ground and rolled over down the mountainside until it came to rest against some trees.

Five-year-old Eitan Biran, an Israeli citizen living in Italy, was the lone survivor and was hospitalized in Turin with several broken bones. Pope Francis offered particular thoughts for Eitan.

Mali's ex-coup leader dismisses Prez, PM

EU leaders condemn kidnapping of civilian leadership

Bamako, May 25: Mali's former coup leader Assimi Goita fired the president and prime minister of the transitional government Tuesday but promises to still hold new elections next year.

The move came a day after the two leaders were arrested by the military following their announcement of a cabinet reshuffle. Goita said the president and prime minister had acted without consulting him.

President Bah Ndw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane lead an interim government that was installed under the threat of regional sanctions following a putsch in August, and the detentions on Monday raised fears of a second coup.

Two senior officials, who declined to be named, said that soldiers had taken Ndw and Ouane to the Kati military camp on the outskirts of the capital Bamako. Their detentions followed a sensitive government reshuffle earlier on Monday that was designed to respond to growing criticism of the interim government.

The military kept the strategic portfolios it controlled during the previous administration in the reshuffle. But two coup leaders — ex-defence minister Sadio Camara and ex-



In this file photo taken on September 22, 2020, Colonel Assimi Goita (C), President of CNSP (National Committee for the Salvation of People) addresses the press during the ceremony of the 60th anniversary of Mali's independence in Bamako, one day after announcing that the transitional presidency would be assigned to a retired colonel, Bah Ndw, 70 years, ephemeral Minister of Defence in 2014.

security minister Colonel Modibo Kone — were replaced. Coup leaders and army officers have wielded significant influence over the government, casting doubts on a pledge to hold elections by early next year.

The reshuffle came at a time of growing political challenges in the capital Bamako and pressure to stick to the deadline for promised reforms.

Speculation of a coup swirled around Bamako late on Monday, but the city remained relatively calm. Briefly reached by phone before the line cut, Prime Minister Ouane said that soldiers "came to get him". EU leaders condemned what they called the "kidnapping" of Mali's civilian leadership, said council president Charles Michel. "What happened was grave and serious and

we are ready to consider necessary measures," he told reporters after a summit of the bloc's 27 leaders, describing events as "the kidnapping of the president and the prime minister". Earlier, a joint statement by the United Nations, African Union, Economic Community of West African States, the European Union and the United States condemned the arrests.

Biden, Putin to meet June 16

Washington, May 25: President Joe Biden will hold a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin next month in Geneva, a face-to-face meeting between the two leaders that comes amid escalating tensions between the US and Russia in the first months of the Biden administration.

The White House confirmed details of the summit on Tuesday. The two leaders' meeting, set for June 16, is being tacked on to the end of Biden's first international trip as president next month when he visits Britain for a meeting of Group of Seven leaders and Brussels for the Nato summit.

"The leaders will discuss the full range of pressing issues, as we seek to restore predictability and stability to the US-Russia relationship," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement announcing the summit.

Biden first proposed a summit in a call with

Putin in April as his administration prepared to levy sanctions against Russian officials for the second time during the first three months of his presidency. White House officials said earlier this week that they were ironing out details for the summit. National security adviser Jake Sullivan discussed details of the meeting when he met with his Russian counterpart, Nikolay Patrushev. The Kremlin, in its own statement announcing the meeting, said that the presidents will discuss "the current state and prospects of the Russian-US relations, strategic stability issues and the acute problems on the international agenda, including interaction in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic and settlement of regional conflicts." The White House has repeatedly said it is seeking a "stable and predictable" relationship with the Russians.

HUMAN ERROR LED TO MALAYSIA TRAIN CRASH

Kuala Lumpur, May 25: A collision between two light rail trains in Kuala Lumpur that injured more than 200 people was caused by a train driver's negligence, according to a preliminary investigation, Malaysia's transport minister said Tuesday.

A fully automated metro train carrying 213 passengers collided Monday night with a vacant train that was being driven manually in a tunnel near the Petronas Towers, the world's tallest twin towers. It was the first major crash for the 23-year-old metro system. Pictures on social media after the collision showed bloodied passengers, some lying on the floors of carriages strewn with shattered glass.

"Preliminary investigations found that the accident was caused by the negligence and carelessness of the train driver ... who was driving in the wrong direction," said Transport Minister Wee Ka Siong.

Lanka cargo fire: India sends help

Colombo, May 25: India has dispatched two Coast Guard vessels and an aircraft to help the Sri Lankan Navy douse the flames on a container ship that caught fire off the coast of Colombo last week, amid intensified efforts by the coastal command to extinguish the fiery wreckage.

The 25 crew members — of Philippine, Chinese, Indian and Russian nationality — on the ship have been rescued. Official sources said at least five Indians were among the crew rescued. The cargo vessel, 'X-PRESS PEARL', was

carrying a consignment of chemicals and raw materials for cosmetics from Hazira in Gujarat to Colombo Port. It caught fire 9.5 nautical miles from the coast here where it was anchored outside the port of Colombo on May 20.

The Indian High Commission in a tweet on Tuesday said, "Help on way! Responding promptly as ever to the request by Sri Lanka, India dispatches ICG Vaibhav, ICG Dornier and Tug Water Lilly for fighting the fire". A major operation was launched to

extinguish the flames of the ship.

A special team of the Sri Lankan Navy, Sri Lanka Ports Authority and Marine Environment Protection Authority reached the fire-hit container ship on May 21.

Officials said a loud explosion was heard on Tuesday morning, possibly the fire remains in the sub sections of the vessel where a load of nitric acid is stored.

The Navy, in a statement released on Tuesday, confirmed the forthcoming Indian assistance. The fire

Iran Prez vote okays 7 but bars Rouhani allies

Dubai, May 25: Iran named the hard-line cleric running its judiciary and six others Tuesday as approved candidates in its June 18 presidential election, barring prominent candidates allied to its current president amid tensions with the West over its tattered nuclear deal.

The announcement carried by state television puts judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, who is linked to mass executions in 1988, in the dominant position for the upcoming vote. He's the most-known candidate of the seven hopefuls, with opinion polling previously showing his anti-corruption campaign drew Iranian support.

He's also believed to be a favorite of Iran's 82-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But perhaps most notable was who Iran's Guardian Cou-

ncil barred from running. Chief among them was former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, a conservative who allied with Rouhani in recent year. Larijani had been positioning himself as a pragmatic candidate who would back Rouhani's signature 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. That accord is now in tatters as diplomats in Vienna try to negotiate a return of both Iran and the US to the agreement. Larijani seemingly signalled he wouldn't fight the decision.

"I have done my duty before God and the dear nation, and I am satisfied," Larijani wrote on Twitter. "Thank you to all those who expressed their gratitude and I hope you will participate in the elections for the promotion of an Islamic Iran."

Also barred was former

hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's senior Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri, a reformist. Ahmadinejad ignored a warning from Khamenei in 2017 and registered, only to be rejected then as well by the Guardian Council, a 12-member panel under Khamenei. During an earlier session of parliament Tuesday, lawmaker Ahmad Alireza-beigi described Ahmadinejad's home as being "under siege" by security forces since the day before.

He also warned that the decision would suppress turnout. Iran's theocracy since its 1979 Islamic Revolution has based its legitimacy in part on turnout in elections. State TV quoted Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, the spokesman of the Guardian Council, as saying "only seven" had been approved.

FLIGHTS AVOID BELARUS AIRSPACE, EU MULLS CURBS

Moscow, May 25: Belarus' isolation deepened Tuesday as commercial planes avoided its airspace, the European Union worked up new sanctions, and a senior UN official said he was concerned for the welfare of an opposition journalist arrested in Minsk after his plane was diverted there, apparently on the orders of the country's longtime strongman.

After his detention, Raman Pratasevich was seen in a brief video clip shown on Belarusian state television late Monday, speaking rapidly to say that he was confessing to some of the charges authorities have levelled against him. The spokesperson for the UN's human rights office, Rupert Colville, said Pratasevich's appearance was likely not voluntary and that he seemed to have bruising to his face, though it was difficult to tell from the footage. The 26-year-old journalist and activist was arrested Sunday after Belarusian flight controllers told the crew of a Ryanair jetliner he was aboard that there was a bomb threat against the flight and ordered it to land. A Belarusian MiG-29 fighter jet was scrambled to escort the plane in a brazen move by President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled the country with an iron fist for over a quarter-century. The diversion and arrest elicited widespread shock and fury, and EU leaders took unusual swift action in response at a summit Monday.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (C) talks with Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, upon arrival at Tel Aviv Ben Gurion Airport, on Tuesday.

Blinken: US will aid Gaza without helping Hamas

Jerusalem, May 25: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken vowed Tuesday to rally international support to aid Gaza following a devastating war there while keeping any assistance out of the hands of its militant Hamas rulers, as he began a regional tour to shore up last week's cease-fire.

The 11-day war between Israel and Hamas killed more than 250 people, mostly Palestinians, and caused widespread destruction in the impoverished coastal territory. The truce that came into effect Friday has so far held, but it did not address any of the underlying issues in the conflict, something Blinken acknowledged after meeting Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu.

"We know that to prevent a return to violence, we have to use the space created to address a larger set of underlying issues and challenges. And that begins with tackling the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza and starting to rebuild," he said. "The US will work to rally international support

US TO UPGRADE RELATIONS WITH PALESTINE

Jerusalem, May 25: Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced Tuesday that the US would reopen its Consulate General in Jerusalem — a move that restores ties with Palestinians that had been downgraded by the Trump administration. The consulate long served as an autonomous office in charge of diplomatic relations with the Palestinians. But former US President Donald Trump downgraded its operations and placed them under the authority of his ambassador to Israel when he moved the embassy to Jerusalem.

around that effort while also making our own significant contributions. He added that the US would work with its partners to ensure that Hamas does not benefit from the reconstruction aid."

US security aid to Pak still suspended

Washington/Islamabad, May 25: US President Joe Biden has continued his predecessor Donald Trump's policy on suspending security assistance to Pakistan and there is no clarity if the administration will change its stance in the future, the Pentagon has said.

Former US president Trump suspended all security assistance to Pakistan in January 2018, arguing that he was not satisfied with Islamabad's cooperation and role in the fight against terrorism.

"At this time, the US security assistance to Pakistan is still suspended. I will not get into speculating one way or another about if or whether that will change going forward," Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said at a news conference on Monday. He was responding to a question on if the new Biden administration has reviewed the policy of the previous Trump administration and if there are any changes in it or if this issue was on the table during talks with the Pakistani leadership.

Earlier in the day, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke with Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa to discuss shared regional interests and objectives, Kirby said. "During the call, the secretary reiterated his appreciation for Pakistan's support to the Afghanistan peace negotiations and expressed his desire to continue to build on the United States-Pakistan bilateral relationship," he said.

"I reiterated my appreciation for the US-Pakistan relationship and my desire to continue to work together to further regional security and stability," Austin said in a tweet. A day earlier, US National Security Advisor Jek Sullivan met his Pakistani counterpart Moed Yusef in Geneva. "Both sides discussed a range of bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest, and ways to advance practical cooperation. They agreed to continue with the conversation," spokesperson of the National Security Council Emily Horne said.

LIMITED | SUCCESS

Debate causes sharp divisions in a New Hampshire town

Push to review 2020 US ballots spreads

Atlanta, May 25: Six months after Donald Trump's loss, conspiracy theorists and Trump backers are continuing their push for repeated examinations of ballots and finding limited successes. A Georgia judge last week awarded a group the chance to review mail ballots in a large Georgia county that includes Atlanta.

Officials in a rural Michigan county have expressed interest in a review of their voting machines. A similar debate has caused

sharp divisions in a New Hampshire town. In some cases, the efforts have been inspired by an audit of the votes in Arizona's Maricopa County, an elaborate exercise engineered by the GOP-led state Senate. The efforts are unlikely to yield any new revelations about President Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election. The votes have been counted — and often recounted — and certified by local officials.

Still, the lingering debate and legal wrangling

have propelled suspicions and advanced debunked theories. And their sometimes misleading conclusions have been amplified by Trump, whose false allegations of election fraud sparked the push.

The profusion of audits alarms election experts, who note that the Arizona audit has set a troubling new precedent of third-party, partisan review of the ballots, long after elections are over.

"This is bad enough to see it happen once," said

Eddie Perez, an expert on voting systems at the OSET Institute, said of Arizona, but seeing it elsewhere in the country is "dangerous for democracy." The audits are serving a clear political purpose in firing up the Republican Party's base. At a rally outside Phoenix last week featuring GOP Reps. Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene, references to the Arizona audit drew much more enthusiastic applause than even immigration, normally the top hot-but-

ton issue on the right in the border state.

In a statement Monday night, Trump criticised Republican Party leaders for not doing more about "what went on" in November. He cited the ballot reviews underway and promised "more to follow". The Arizona audit has been cited as a template for the others, although each is distinct. In Arizona, the Republican-controlled state Senate subpoenaed more than 2 million ballots.



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,637.53	-0.03
Nifty 50	15,208.50	0.07
S&P 500*	4,195.16	-0.05
Dollar (₹)	72.78	0.26
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.19	-0.04
Euro (₹)	89.19	0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,025	102 0.21
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.62	0.23
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.579	-0.029

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Grain output to rise 2.66% to record 305.43 mt

Foodgrain production is estimated to rise 2.66 per cent to a new record of 305.43 million tonnes in the current crop year 2020-21 (July-June) from 297.5 mt last crop year, on better output of rice, wheat and pulses, the agriculture ministry said in its third advance estimates. Rice production is pegged at a record 121.46 mt against 118.87 mt last year. Wheat production is to increase to a record 108.75 mt from 107.86 million tonnes.

BB's US partner submits Covaxin Master File to FDA



Ocugen, Bharat Biotech's US partner for Covaxin, has submitted a "Master File" to the US FDA prior to seeking an emergency use authorisation in that country. The company is currently evaluating the clinical and regulatory path for Covaxin in the US, including obtaining Emergency Use Authorization from the US FDA, Ocugen said in a recent regulatory filing. Ocugen has submitted key information and data to date.

Clarios sells 10% stake in Amara Raja Batteries

Clarios ARBL Holding LP offloaded a 10 per cent stake in Amara Raja Batteries for a little over Rs 1,276.34 crore, through an open market transaction. The shares were sold at an average price of Rs 747.22. Clarios held a 24 percent stake in Amara Raja, as of March 2021. Morgan Stanley Asia, Integrated Core, and Ghisallo Master Fund LP picked up the shares. After the bulk deal, Amara Raja shares plunged 6.43 per cent.

Triumph drives in Bonneville Bobber at ₹11.75 L

British premium motorcycle brand Triumph Motorcycles has launched the updated version of Bonneville Bobber in India priced at Rs 11.75 lakh (ex-show-room). The 2021 Bonneville Bobber comes with enhanced engine performance, technology and equipment. "The Triumph Bobber has always had a demand among Indian customers and due to this we decided to bring the Bobber back after a gap of one year.

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RBI may step in as rupee outdoes peers Re makes strong comeback in May

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 25

After tumbling in April, the rupee has rebounded this month to become Asia's top-performing currency on positive global cues and fall in daily Covid cases with several states planning to ease restrictions in June, which would help revive economic activities.

The rupee has climbed 1.5 per cent against the dollar in May to beat all its regional peers as the country's daily infections declined rapidly after touching a record high. However, experts said they expect the central bank to step in to limit the rupee's gains, as a strong rupee hurts exporters at a time when the Covid pandemic has hit the economy hard.

The rupee on Tuesday appreciated 19 paise against the dollar to settle at 72.77, as the appetite for riskier assets improved after US Federal Reserve officials attempted to soothe concern over high inflation. Foreign banks may continue to sell the US dollar on account of foreign fund inflows for MSCI's rebalancing of domestic stocks, which is expected to fetch about \$1.35 billion by the end of this week.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the domestic unit opened at 72.85 against the dollar and registered an intraday high of 72.75. It witnessed a low of 72.87. The



rupee finally closed at 72.77 against the American currency, registering a rise of 19 paise over its previous close. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.23 per cent to 89.632.

Abhishek Goenka, founder and chief executive officer at India Forex Advisors, said, "The rupee is slightly on a stronger note but we don't expect it to appreciate a lot as the central bank and the government will not be very comfortable with a strong rupee that hurts exports."

"The RBI has not been so active on the buy dollar side because there is enough liquidity in the system and it cannot infuse more liquidity in the system to buy dollars. Also, the RBI cannot do a sell-buy swap and push the dollar purchases forward since the forward premiums are already very high at 5.4 per cent," Goenka added: "Time

and again the communication by the US Fed that the inflation will be transitory and reassurance that they will not increase the interest rate soon has also weakened the dollar globally which is also impacting the dollar-rupee. The real effective exchange rate is close to 120 which is normally seen as upper band. On the downside, we don't expect the rupee to go below 72.5 and on the upside we don't expect it to go above 74.5-75 in the next three months.

The rupee also has the benefit of offering Asia's highest carry returns. The rupee had tumbled to the lowest in nine months in April as daily coronavirus infections surged above 3 lakh, triggering the unwinding of up to \$50 billion in carry trades, according to Bloomberg.

However on Tuesday, the daily count of Covid-19 cases in the country fell below the 2-lakh mark after about 40 days, according to the government data.

E-COM PLAYERS ONCE AGAIN IN HIRING MODE

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 25

With most of the key cities going into lockdown, e-commerce players are once again in a hiring mode.

In the past three months, over March-May 2021, Flipkart has hired 23,000 people across the country in various capacities.

"The growing demand for e-commerce services across the country as people continue to remain indoors to fight the virus has necessitated a ramp-up of our supply chain, creating thousands of employment opportunities. All new hires will be covered with our health-care and wellness initiatives," said Hemant Badri, senior vice-president, supply chain at Flipkart.

Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and executive vice president, Teamlease Services, said, "Most of the e-commerce companies, especially e-grocers and those delivering essential products, have been hiring for the past couple of months.

This is the sector which is still fully operational during the lockdown. They do need more people for delivering, packaging and managing warehouses with increased demand. More-over, when existing staff fall ill, they need people to get the job done."

Most of the hiring has been happening for last-mile delivery and warehouses.

Centre mulls stimulus package to aid growth

SIDDHARTHA SINGH MAY 25

India is preparing a stimulus package for sectors worst affected by a deadly coronavirus wave, aiming to support an economy struggling with a slew of localised lockdowns, people familiar with the matter said.

The finance ministry is working on proposals to bolster the tourism, aviation and hospitality industries, along with small and medium-sized companies, the people said, asking not to be identified as the deliberations are private. The discussions are at an early stage and no timeline for an announcement has been decided, they said. A finance ministry spokesman declined to comment.

The latest wave of Covid-19 infections has made

India the global hotspot for the pandemic and has decimated travel since the second wave picked up in March even though Prime Minister Narendra Modi has refused to implement a strict nationwide lockdown

The finance ministry is working on proposals to bolster the tourism, aviation and hospitality industries, along with SMEs

like last year's. With nearly 200,000 cases daily many local governments - including Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, India's most industrialised states - have imposed curbs against the spread of the virus.

That has prompted many economists to cut their forecasts for the financial year that began April 1, as rising unemployment and dwindling savings among consumers dim the chances for double-digit growth.

Flagging growth prospects put the onus on policy makers to support activity, especially once the virus caseload eases. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who said last month she's monitoring the economy in a "very detailed fashion," has held discussions with economists in recent days about a stimulus package, the people said.

In April, the finance ministry eased rules for capital expenditure by government departments to try to boost spending in the economy. — Bloomberg

BPCL may sell part stake in IGL, Petronet

AMMAR ZAIDI NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Privatisation-bound Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) may sell a part of its stake in Petronet LNG and Indraprastha Gas (IGL) to shed its promoter status to obviate the need for its new owner to make open offers for the two gas companies, sources said.

BPCL holds 12.5 per cent stake in Petronet, India's largest LNG importer, and a 22.5 per cent stake in city gas retailer IGL. It is a promoter of both the listed companies and holds board positions.

As per the legal position evaluated by the Depart-

ment of Investment and Public Asset Management (Dipam), which is running the process for sale of government's entire 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL, the acquirer of BPCL will have to make an open offer to the minority shareholders of Petronet and IGL for acquiring 26 per cent shares, three sources said.

This is because BPCL is a promoter of the two companies and since there is a change in ownership of the promoter firm, an open offer is triggered under Sebi (Substantial Acquisition of Shares and Takeovers) Regulations, 2011.

A way out could be for BPCL to sell a part of its

shareholding in the two firms and shed the promoter status, thereby, obviating the need for open offers, sources said.

BPCL, however, is not in favour of selling the stake, as giving up the promoter status and directorships will mean substantial value erosion for the company.

But the thinking in the government is that the open offers for Petronet and IGL may deter bidders who are mostly eyeing BPCL's oil refining assets and 22 per cent share of the fuel marketing business it commands, sources said.

BPCL spokesperson refused to comment. — PTI

Commodity surge threatens earnings

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 25

Rising commodity costs could affect India Inc's earnings profile and put an end to the benign interest rate regime from early next year.

"There will be adverse impact on auto, consumer goods, consumer durables margins. However, higher commodity price could also lead to earnings uptick in the metals, cement, oil & gas sectors. The IT sector would broadly remain insulated from commodity inflation."

"Earnings in the non-

commodity basket may be adversely impacted given the weak demand backdrop to widespread lockdowns," said a report by Motilal Oswal.

The rise in prices comes amid the Covid second wave that restricted economic activity. With uncertainty in the demand environment, it would be challenging for companies to pass on the rising commodity costs.

"In a constrained demand environment, due to broad based lockdowns and macro uncertainty, corporates would be reluctant to pass on the higher

input prices to consumers and would first exercise other P&L levers to manage margins," the report said.

The construction sector is already feeling the pinch. The rise in prices of steel bars along with cement has added fuel to the construction budget crisis. Also the prices for plastics, man-made polymers and resins, used in everything from piping to insulation, have been rising rapidly over the past few months.

"The rise in raw material prices over the past few months is due to a combination of factors, includ-

ing unprecedented demand, multiple acts of force majeure, and the inevitable interruption of supply chains caused by the Covid-19 pandemic," said Jayesh Rathod, ED, The Guardians Real Estate Advisory.

"In the last three months the iron prices have increased by Rs 20,000 per tonne, which is almost a 50 per cent increase in the iron prices. Apart from this, copper and aluminium prices have also increased which has impacted the construction cost," said Ashok Mohanani, president, Naredco Maharashtra.

Jaypee Associates wants CoC to consider its offer

New Delhi, May 25: Jaiprakash Associates Ltd, the erstwhile promoter of bankrupt-Jaypee Infratech, has said its settlement proposal without any "haircuts" should be considered by the creditors' panel, which is set to take a call on two existing resolution plans for the company this week.

Currently, state-owned NBCC and Suraksha Group are in the race to acquire Jaypee Infratech

Ltd (JIL), which went into insolvency proceedings in August 2017.

In a letter to JIL's interim resolution professional (IRP) Anuj Jain, the chairman of Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) Manoj Gaur has urged him to consider JAL's settlement offer, which was submitted before the Supreme Court in 2019.

Asserting that JIL has more assets than liabilities, Gaur has also claimed

that lenders would not be entitled to exercise their rights on loan guarantors if the realty firm is sold at a "throw away price".

The committee of creditors (CoC) and homebuyers are scheduled to meet this week to discuss whether more time should be given to NBCC and Suraksha to submit their revised and final bids for JIL.

Urging that JAL's offer should be placed before the CoC, Gaur said the settle-

ment of total liability of Rs 9,783 crore to secured financial creditors is proposed to be done by way of upfront payment, land swap and long terms debentures with a total value of about Rs 12,500 crore.

For homebuyers, he said that JAL would deploy funds for home construction to the tune of Rs 1,650 crore, out of which Rs 400 crore would be upfront.

— PTI

RAISING REVENUE

Tax could cover auto, paper, cement, power & petchem sectors

Indonesia may tax the rich, top polluters

GRACE SIHOMBING & ARYS ADITYA MAY 25

Indonesia seeks to cast a wider net to tax more high-income individuals and top polluters in a bid to replenish its state coffers.

The finance ministry presented the proposals, which could be part of key reforms this year, to a parliamentary commission this week. The government needs to collect more revenue to sustain spending while keeping its vow to bring budget deficit back within the 3 per cent of GDP legal limit, from 6 per cent last year.

"The goal of this tax

reform is not just revenue collection but the sustainability of the state budget," said finance minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati. "The whole world is also accelerating its revenue collection in the midst of soaring budget deficits and debt ratios. This is a response that must be done with caution."

Here are the tax changes under study:

Carbon tax: Taxing carbon emissions will help Indonesia curb greenhouse gases while raising funds for green state investments and social welfare programs, Indrawati said. The government could use existing taxes such as excise,



motor vehicle and fuel taxes to enforce it, or it could create an entirely new levy through a carbon tax.

The tax could apply to emission sources like fossil fuels, motor vehicles and factories, as well as carbon-intensive activities such as those in the pulp and paper, cement, power generation and petrochemical industries.

Income tax: Indonesia

could add a new 35 per cent income tax bracket for individuals earning more than 5 billion rupiah (\$349,000) year. Taxpayers are currently grouped into four brackets, with rates ranging from 5-30 per cent. The country is poised to see the world's fastest growth in ultra-high net worth individuals in the next five years.

Digital tax: Indonesia is finalising the formula to tax digital companies and impose levies on electronic transactions. The government has issued a law stating that taxes could be imposed on companies with significant economic presence in the country, but it hasn't set out regula-

tions for the tariff or how it would impose and calculate it.

Tax amnesty: Indonesia could take another stab at a tax amnesty programme, following a 2016 programme that uncovered 4.813 trillion rupiah (\$336 billion) in undeclared assets. Taxpayers who have undisclosed assets as of the 2019 tax year might be able to settle their past obligations at current income tax rates without any sanctions. However, those who failed to disclose their assets during the first tax amnesty period in 2016 will have to pay income tax above the highest tax amnesty rate.

— Bloomberg



Bob Chapek

Disney introduced Disney+ Hotstar in India last year. That service, which features cricket matches and other local content, now accounts for 30 per cent of Disney+'s total subscriber count of 103.6 million globally. In April, meanwhile, Disney announced plans to close a number of its sports networks in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong.

Chapek said the closures going forward will depend on contracts the company has in individual markets. Consumers are increasingly choosing to watch content online, and Disney wants to stay ahead of the trend, Chapek said.

"We don't want to be on the back end of that wave," he said. "We want to be on the front end of that wave."

— Bloomberg

GOVT URGED TO SELL SUBSIDISED EDIBLE OIL THROUGH PDS

New Delhi, May 25: Trade body SEA has counselled the government to distribute edible oils at subsidised prices through the public distribution system (PDS), in a bid to give relief to the poor from the rising edible oil prices.

The Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA) has also suggested the government to curb speculative trading of oilseeds and edible oils on the commodity bourses and insist on compulsory delivery contracts.

That apart, the Mumbai-based trade body said the Centre should freeze tariffs at lower levels, reduce agri-cess on imports and revisit customs duty reduction measures.

In a letter to food secretary Sudhanshu Pandey, SEA president Atul Chaturvedi said: "Last few months we have witnessed unprecedented price increase not only in edible oils but in practically all commodities across the world. Reasons for the unprecedented increase have been discussed umpteen times."

Chinese buying, stimulus money, la Nina weather problems in palm and soya producing areas, labour problems in Malaysia due to Covid-19, aggressive bio-diesel thrust in Indonesia and renewable fuel from soybean oil in the USA and Brazil, etc, are some of the major reasons, he said.

To tackle the price rise in the short-term, the SEA president said the government should "subsidise" edible oils by Rs 30-40 per kg through PDS. The port-based refineries have adequate spare capacity across the coastline of India for this purpose."

The central government distributes only foodgrains at subsidised rate of Rs 1-3 per kg via PDS to over 80 crore beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act.

The SEA also recommended a freeze of tariff value on edible oils at lower levels. "Our back of envelope calculation says \$200 per tonne reduction in tariff value would give relief of around Rs 5,000 per tonne."

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Govt to open 143 Khelo India spots

New Delhi: The Sports Ministry has decided to set up 143 Khelo India centres across seven states with a total budget of ₹14.30 crore in its bid to nurture talent at the grassroot level. These centres will be set up in Maharashtra, Mizoram, Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. Each centre will be entrusted with one sports discipline. The Khelo India centres have been launched by the Sports Ministry in partnership with state governments to ensure the availability of grassroot-level infrastructure across the country. "It is our endeavour to make India one among the top 10 countries in the 2028 Olympics. To fulfil this goal we need to identify and nurture a large number of talented sportspersons from an early age," Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said in a statement. — *PTI*

Pep is England's Manager of Year

London: Manchester City's Pep Guardiola has been named manager of the year by England's League Managers' Association, it was announced on Monday. Guardiola steered City to the Premier League title and League Cup this season and this Saturday the Spaniard's side will bid to be crowned kings of Europe for the first time when they face English rivals Chelsea in the Champions League final in Porto. Former Barcelona and Bayern Munich manager Guardiola topped a poll where the other leading contenders were Leeds' Marcelo Bielsa, Norwich's Daniel Farke, Chelsea women's manager Emma Hayes, West Ham's David Moyes and Leicester's Brendan Rodgers. — *AFP*

Flick to replace Loew after Euro

Berlin: Outgoing Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick will succeed his former boss Joachim Loew in the Germany dugout after Euro 2020, the German Football Association (DFB) announced on Tuesday. "It's all gone surprisingly quickly, but I am very happy to be Germany coach from the autumn," said Flick, 56, after signing a three-year contract to succeed Loew. "I am hugely excited, because I see the class of players, and especially young players, which we have in Germany." Flick, who was assistant coach to Loew when Germany won the 2014 World Cup, has long been the favourite to take over from Loew, who will leave the job after 15 years in charge later this year. — *AFP*

Honda ready for Mugello challenge

Italy: The MotoGP World Championship returns to the Autodromo Internazionale del Mugello for round six of the 2021 season, Marc Marquez and Pol Espargaro ready for their next challenges. With a wet and wild French GP behind them, the Repsol Honda Team have regrouped and are ready to do it all again at the Italian Grand Prix. Having been unable to race in Mugello in 2020 due to the global pandemic, 2021 marks a welcome return to the iconic Italian circuit. 2019 produced a thrilling battle with Marquez taking second by just 0.043s after an intense race with Danilo Petrucci and Andrea Dovizioso. Marquez arrives in Italy buoyed by his showing in France, leading the race and lapping faster than the leaders despite suffering a fall.

Bucks bash up Miami Heat

Los Angeles: The Milwaukee Bucks produced an exhibition of three-point shooting to crush the Miami Heat as the Denver Nuggets bounced back to level their NBA first round playoff series with victory over Portland on Monday. Bryn Forbes erupted for five threes in the first half and Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 31 points to give the Bucks a resounding 132-98 win over last year's NBA Finals runners-up. — *AFP*

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IPL BACK TO GULF

League likely to start on Sept. 18 with 10 double-headers in 3 weeks

New Delhi, May 25: The postponed Indian Premier League will resume tentatively on September 18 or 19 in the UAE with as many as 10 double-headers expected to be played during a three-week window, a senior BCCI official said on Tuesday.

The final might be held on October 9 or 10. The three-week window will be enough for the league to complete its remaining 31 games for the season, a win-win scenario for all the primary stakeholders including the BCCI, franchises and broadcasters.

The IPL was postponed on May 4 after multiple Covid-19 cases inside its bio-bubble came to light. "The BCCI has spoken to all the stakeholders and the likely start could be between September 18th to 20th. Since September 18 is a Saturday and 19 a Sunday, it is more likely that you would want to re-start it on a weekend date," the official said on conditions of anonymity.

"Similarly, October 9th or 10th will be the final as it's a weekend. We are finalising the itinerary and there will be 10 double headers and seven evening matches along with four main games (two qualifiers, one eliminator and the final), which completes the list of 31 matches," the source added.

The Indian team's last Test match against England is set to finish on September 14 at Manchester and on the next day, the whole team (save Hanuma Vihari and Abhimanyu Easwaran) will be flown to UAE in a chartered flight for a "bubble to bubble" transfer.

"The Indian team and the English players who will be available will fly in the same charter flight from Manchester to Dubai. Similarly, the West Indies players will also fly in after completing the Premier League engagements. There will be three-day quarantine for players arriving from Britain and

NASEEM OUT OF PSL FOR BREACH OF COVID RULES

Karachi, May 25: The Pakistan Cricket Board has barred fast bowler Naseem Shah from playing in the remaining matches of Pakistan Super League in Abu Dhabi for breach of Covid-19 protocols before departure from the country.

The Board has released Shah of Quetta Gladiators from isolation in Lahore after arrived at the designated hotel with a non-compliant RT-PCR test result.

"As such, the fast bowler will not be travelling to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 26 May and is now out of the competition," the PCB said in a statement.

The 19-year-old Shah has appeared in nine Tests.

The PCB had asked all the players travelling in chartered flights from Karachi and Lahore to assemble at the team hotels on May 24 with negative reports of RT-PCR tests taken not more than 48 hours prior to their arrival. — *PTI*



the Caribbean."

INDIA'S T20 SERIES VS S. AFRICA CANCELLED

The BCCI has decided to cancel India's T20 series against South Africa scheduled in September, which was a build-up to the side's World T20 preparations.

"The series can't be held and in any case there can't be any better preparation for the T20 World Cup than playing a high intensity tournament like IPL. Since the T20 World Cup will start within a week or 10 days after completion of the IPL, the SA series can only be held at a later date.

"There is a chance that India might play extra games when they tour South Africa early next year," the source said.

The India home season also had a two Test series against New Zealand in November and the dates of which could be shifted depending upon when the T20 World Cup ends.

— *PTI*

Covid-recovered Seifert all praise for 'safe' IPL bubble

Auckland, May 25: New Zealand cricketer Tim Seifert's world stopped for a moment and heart sank when he tested positive for Covid-19 during the now suspended IPL but the wicket-keeper said he never felt vulnerable inside the tournament's bio-bubble.

Seifert, however, insisted that his Covid-19 ordeal will not deter him from travelling to India again for future assignments, including the T20 World Cup to be held later this year.

"I got pulled aside and told I'd tested positive and my heart sank straight away when everyone left. I was the only overseas player basically still left in India out of the whole tournament. That's when things got a little bit real," an emotional Seifert told the *New Zealand Herald*.

"The world stops a little bit, I just couldn't really think what was next and that's the scary part of it — you hear about things, and I thought that was

Mumbai, May 25: India captain Virat Kohli, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma and head coach Ravi Shastri joined the England-bound squad's bio-bubble on Tuesday as it began its eight-day hard quarantine along with the women's team here.

The Indian women's team members also entered their eight-day hard quarantine at the Grand Hyatt in Mumbai located near the international airport.

The teams are expected to fly out on June 2 after all the playing and non-playing members return three negative RT-PCR results.

The men's team will first take on New Zealand in

● **The Indian women's team members also entered their eight-day hard quarantine at the Grand Hyatt hotel in Mumbai located near the international airport.**

The World Test Championship final against New Zealand from June 18 before a full series against England. The women are scheduled to take on the hosts in one Test, three ODIs and as many T20 Internationals starting June 16.

"Wriddhiman and Prasidh Krishna joined the bubble two days back

after recovering fully from Covid-19. Mumbaikars like Virat, Rohit and coach Shastri have all now joined the bubble," a BCCI source confirmed.

It is learnt that approval for allowing the players' families is still awaited but the BCCI is hopeful that it would be done soon.

"We can't have our players being away from their families for three months and that too in a bubble. That's never great for mental health," the source said.

The negotiation on quarantine duration once the side reaches England is still on and the hard quarantine (confined to hotel rooms) could be shortened. — *PTI*

MOTHER-SON IN CENTURY STAND, TAKE TEAM HOME

London, May 25: Former England women's cricketer Arran Brindle said she was as "proud as punch" of her son after the pair shared a match-winning century stand in a club game.

Brindle made 134 international appearances for England from 1999-2014, with the 39-year-old scoring unbeaten hundreds in both Test and one-day international formats.

But on Sunday, a player shortage meant she found herself playing for Owmyb Trojans — a team she coaches — in the third division of the Lincoln and District League in central England.

They dismissed their opponents, Nettleham CC's Academy XI, for 141, with Harry Brindle, Arran's 12-year-old son, taking four wickets.

The mother and son duo then combined to chase down Nettleham's score, sharing an opening stand of 143 in 32.3 overs to secure a 10-wicket win. Harry scored an unbeaten 32 while his mother finished 94 not out. — *AFP*

Sushil may lose WFI contract

New Delhi, May 25: Arrested in a murder case, double Olympic-medallist Sushil Kumar is set to be dropped from the Wrestling Federation of India's annual contracts list along with Pooja Dhandra on account of non-performance when the body holds a review meeting next month.

The meeting between the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) and sponsors Tata Motors was to be held in 2020 but was put on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A WFI source said the decision to drop Sushil is purely based on performance and has nothing to do with his arrest for his alleged involvement in the murder of a fellow wrestler, Sagar Dhankad, at the Chhatrasal stadium.

"It is clear that Sushil and Pooja have not done anything notable since they were offered contracts. They will not make the cut when the review meeting is held next month," a WFI source said. The WFI had taken a leaf out of BCCI's book to offer central contracts to its players in 2019. About 150 wrestlers had got one-year contracts which are subject to review.

Sushil was promoted to ₹30 lakh Grade A contract after initially being placed in Grade B that gave the

● **Sushil Kumar was promoted to ₹30 lakh Grade 'A' contract after initially being placed in Grade 'B' that gave the wrestlers an annual remuneration of ₹20 lakh.**

wrestlers an annual remuneration of ₹20 lakh. Pooja was also placed in Grade A.

Sushil could not win any medal in the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta and also bowed out of the 2019 World Championship with a close first-round defeat. He has not competed since then.

The 2018 World Championship bronze-medallist Pooja too has lost her place in the 57kg category. She did not compete in 2020 and her last medal-winning performance came in July 2019 when she won a silver at the Grand Prix of Spain.

When contacted, WFI Assistant Secretary Vinod Tomar did not confirm exclusion of the two wrestlers but hinted such a step cannot be ruled out either. "All decisions will be made at the meeting only. But one thing is sure that sponsors' money will not be distributed for nothing. We have to utilise the money wisely," Tomar said. — *PTI*

HOCKEY STADIUM NAMED AFTER BALBIR SINGH SR

Chandigarh, May 25: The Mohali International Hockey Stadium was on Tuesday officially renamed after the legendary Balbir Singh Sr on the occasion of his first death anniversary.

The renaming was officially announced at a tribute ceremony held here to remember the three-time Olympic gold medallist, who died at the age of 96 on May 25 last year.

One of the country's most accomplished athletes, the iconic centre-forward was the only Indian among 16 legends chosen by the International Olympic Committee across modern Olympic history during the 2012 London Games.

"The Mohali International Hockey Stadium has been dedicated to the memory of Padma Shri Balbir Singh Sr in a formal ceremony at the hockey stadium on Tuesday on the first death anniversary of the legendary sportsperson," Punjab Sports Minister Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi said.

Sodhi said from now on the stadium would be known as "Olympian Balbir Singh Senior International Hockey Stadium." — *PTI*

Thapa secures 5th successive medal

ASIAN | BOXING

● **Shiva Thapa prevailed in a lop-sided clash to set up a showdown with defending champion and top seed Bakhodur Usmonov of Tajikistan.**

Games bronze-winner Mohammed Hussamuddin (56kg) went down to Uzbekistan's reigning world champion Mirazizbek Mirzahililov in a fiercely-fought quarterfinal.

The Indian boxer lost 1-4 after giving the top-seeded defending champion quite a fight.

Mirzahililov, who is also the Asian Games champion, was caught off guard by Hussamuddin's powerful counter-attacks on more than one occasion.

However, the Uzbek's assured footwork and precisely-placed straights for a majority of the bout, helped him seal it in the end. — *PTI*

COVID-19 POSITIVE MILKHA SINGH CLINICALLY STABLE

Chandigarh, May 25: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh is "clinically stable with decreasing oxygen requirement" as he fights Covid pneumonia, the hospital where he is being treated said on Tuesday.

Milkha was on Monday admitted to the Intensive Care Unit of Fortis hospital in Mohali. The 91-year-old tested positive for the virus last Wednesday.

"Mr Milkha Singh is clinically stable with decreasing oxygen requirement," the hospital update read.

He was diagnosed with "Covid pneumonia" on Monday after his admission.

Earlier Milkha's golfer son Jeev had said that the decision to hospitalise him was a precautionary measure. Milkha is suspected to have contracted the infection from house helps who had tested positive for the virus. — *PTI*

US virus travel warning won't hurt Games

Tokyo, May 25: A new US travel warning for Japan over virus risks will not affect this summer's pandemic-postponed Olympic Games, the Japanese government and Tokyo 2020 organisers said Tuesday.

The US State Department advisory released Monday urges citizens to avoid travel to Japan, where the borders are already closed to almost all foreigners.

It cites government health advice, as well as "secondary factors such as commercial flight availability, restrictions on US citizen entry, and impediments to obtaining Covid test results within three calendar days".

The advisory comes with less than two months until the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics, which were postponed last year as the pandemic took hold. Japan's government said the measure would not affect the Games.

"It is our understanding that there is no change to the US position to support Japan's effort to hold the Olympic and Paralympic Games," government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told a regular briefing. He added that Japan

● **The US State Department advisory released on Monday urges citizens to avoid travel to Japan, where the borders are already closed to almost all foreigners.**

organisers would "do their best to prepare for the Olympics whose priority is safety and security". The US Olympic and Paralympic Committee also said it remained confident that safety measures and frequent testing for athletes and staff "will allow for safe participation of Team USA athletes this summer".

A State Department spokesman said Washington understood "the careful considerations that the Japanese government and the International Olympic Committee are weighing

had been told the decision was "not related" to the plans of the US Olympic delegation. Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto said she "didn't think it would impact the Games", adding the

organisers would "do their best to prepare for the Olympics whose priority is safety and security".

The US Olympic and Paralympic Committee also said it remained confident that safety measures and frequent testing for athletes and staff "will allow for safe participation of Team USA athletes this summer".

A State Department spokesman said Washington understood "the careful considerations that the Japanese government and the International Olympic Committee are weighing

as they prepare for the Tokyo Olympics this summer".

"President Biden proudly supports the US athletes who have trained for these Games and will be competing in the best traditions of the Olympic spirit," he said.

Japan has seen a relatively small coronavirus outbreak, with around 12,000 deaths overall.

But the country has been battling a fourth wave of infections that prompted the government to impose states of emergency in several places including Tokyo. — *AFP*