

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 20 MAY 2021



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Shailaja's non-inclusion in line with CPM's position, says Kerala CM Vijayan



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US President Joe Biden's \$2tn infra plan includes rebuilding roads, bridges

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Barrymore regrets some H'wood decisions, says Woody Allen 'gaslit' her into working with him



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WINDOWS



Emma Stone arrives at the premiere for *Cruella* at the El Capitan Theatre in Los Angeles, California, on Tuesday. — AFP

Enfield to recall 2.37L bikes to fix faulty ignition coil

Pune: Royal Enfield, the motorcycle-making arm of Eicher Motors, on Wednesday said it will be recalling 2,36,966 motorcycles across some models due to defects in the ignition coil that can cause misfiring and reduce vehicle performance and in rare cases, cause an electric short circuit. This is the biggest recall announced by it since automakers started reporting recalls voluntarily in 2012. Royal Enfield is the world's biggest motorbike market, with a dedicated fan-following for its range of cruisers and classic-looking motorcycles. **Full report on Page 7**

ED files PMLA case against Kalra, others

New Delhi: The ED has filed a money laundering case against businessman Navneet Kalra and his associates for the alleged hoarding and black marketing of oxygen concentrators which were being anxiously scoured by those gasping for breath due to Covid. — PTI **Full report on Page 2**

Subsidy on fertiliser hiked by 140 per cent

New Delhi: In a major pro-farmer decision, the Centre on Wednesday hiked the subsidy on DAP fertiliser by 140%, costing the exchequer an additional ₹14,775 crore, in a bid to ensure the soil nutrient is available to farmers at old rates despite a sharp rise in global prices. **Full report on Page 3**

COUNTERPOINT



3-day package tour includes vaccination, immunity boosting food, sightseeing...

WEATHER

Max: 29°C
Min: 22°C
RH: 68%
Rain: 80%

Forecast: Rain

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha Ashtami till 12.17 pm
Star: Magha till 3.51 pm
Varjyam: 11.39 pm to 1.13 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.04 am to 10.55 am; 3.13 pm to 4.04 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
SUNSET TODAY 7.07 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.27 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.34 PM
MOONSET TODAY 1.20 AM

CYCLONE TAUKTAE: 46 DIE IN GUJ; 26 BODIES BROUGHT TO MUMBAI, 49 STILL MISSING

Modi conducts aerial survey of Guj, pledges ₹1,000cr assistance

Ahmedabad/Mumbai, May 19: In Gujarat, as many as 46 people have been killed due to Cyclone Tauktae across 12 districts, and in Maharashtra at least 26 personnel on board accommodation barge P305 that went adrift in the cyclone fury before sinking in the Arabian Sea off Mumbai coast are dead and 49 still missing, officials said Wednesday.

To assess the damage and destruction wrecked by Cyclone Tauktae, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday conducted an aerial survey of areas affected in Gujarat and adjoining Union Territory of Diu and announced an assistance of ₹1,000 crore for immediate relief work in Gujarat.

"Undertook an aerial survey over parts of Gujarat and Diu to assess the situation in the wake of Cyclone Tauktae. Central government is working closely with all the states affected by the cyclone," Mr Modi

tweeted afterwards.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) questioned why the Prime Minister did not visit cyclone-hit areas in Maharashtra.

Navy warship *INS Kochi* reached Mumbai on Wednesday

carrying 22 bodies and 125 of the 186 rescues from P305.

"Today PM Modiji is taking an ariel survey of #Cyclone Tauktae affected areas of Daman, Diu and Gujarat. Why not the same of the areas affected in #Maharashtra? Is this not clear cut discrimination?" Maharashtra minister and NCP's national spokesperson Nawab Malik asked in a Twitter post.

In Gujarat, 24 deaths were reported due to wall collapses during the cyclone, while six died after trees fell on them. Five each died because of house collapse and electrocution, four due to roof collapse and rest died due to a tower

Undertook an aerial survey over parts of Gujarat and Diu... Central government is working closely with all the states affected by the cyclone

— Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

PM Modiji is taking an ariel survey of #Cyclone Tauktae affected areas of Daman, Diu & Gujarat. Why not the areas affected in #Maharashtra? Is this not clear cut discrimination?

— Nawab Malik, NCP leader



Workers (above) restore an electricity line damaged by Cyclone Tauktate in Diu on Wednesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi (below) makes an aerial survey to review the situation and damage due to the cyclone in Gujarat and Diu.

— PTI



Delhi on 'orange' alert as very heavy rains likely

New Delhi, May 19: The IMD on Wednesday issued an orange alert for Delhi, predicting "heavy" to "very heavy" rainfall in parts of the capital with winds gusting up to 60 kilometers per hour.

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HC orders Fr Stan's medical exam by panel of expert docs

SHAHAB ANSARI

MUMBAI, MAY 19

The Bombay high court on Wednesday directed the dean of state-run JJ Hospital to form a committee of expert doctors to examine the health condition of Father Stan Swamy, the 84-year-old tribal rights activist who is under arrest in connection with the Elgar Parishad case. The court, hearing his bail plea on medical grounds, has sought his medical report on Friday morning.

A vacation bench of Justice S.J. Kathawalla and Justice S.P. Tavade said that the committee should have a neurophysician, an ENT (ear, nose, throat) specialist, an orthopaedic surgeon, general physician and any other doctor.

The bench ordered the superintendent of Taloja Central Prison to arrange to send Father Stan to JJ Hospital at 12 noon on Thursday and asked the JJ Hospital committee to submit their report by 11 am on Friday.

The judges also said if the jail has the facility of video conferencing, a virtual meeting shall be arranged to produce him before the court on May 21.

Father Swamy, arrested in October 2020 and currently lodged in the Taloja prison in Navi Mumbai, has approached the HC challenging a sessions court order that had rejected his interim bail plea on health grounds.

"He was taken to JJ Hospital, but no medical report has been given," Swamy's counsel Mihir Desai said.

CBI drags Mamata, minister into plea to shift Narada case

4 arrested still in custody, HC hearing today

RAJIB CHOWDHURI

KOLKATA, MAY 19

Dragging Trinamul Congress supremo and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, her Cabinet colleague Moloy Ghatak and party MP Kalyan Banerjee into its petition on the transfer of the Narada sting bribery case from the state, the CBI on Wednesday made them parties for allegedly "terrorising" its officers with threats for arresting four of their accused party leaders on May 17.

In its plea before the division bench of acting Chief Justice Rajesh Binal and Justice Arijit Banerjee of the Calcutta high court, the CBI submitted that the CM, after storming its anti-corruption branch office at Nizam Palace in central

Kolkata, sought "unconditional release of the arrested accused... while resisting their court production. She also used many derogatory and defamatory comments about the CBI and threatened the CBI officers present there (with) registering cases".

It claimed "a battery of lawyers" led by Mr Banerjee, Serampore MP, also "forcefully entered the CBI office and started heckling CBI officers and staff, including the head of branch, anti-corruption branch, CBI, Kolkata. The CBI officials were threatened with dire consequences. All this happened in presence of the Hon'ble Chief Minister of West Bengal".

According to the CBI, "The terror which was

Black fungus is declared an epidemic in Rajasthan

Jaipur, May 19: Mucormycosis (black fungus), which is primarily affecting people recovering from Covid-19, has been declared an epidemic in Rajasthan, officials said on Wednesday.

At present, the state has around 100 black fungus patients and a separate ward has been made at Sawai Man Singh Hospital in Jaipur for their treatment.

Mucormycosis has been notified as an epidemic in the state under the Rajasthan Epidemic Act 2020, according to a notification issued by state's principal health secretary Akhil Arora.

He said the step was taken to ensure integrated and coordinated treatment of black fungus and the coronavirus.

According to experts, people with diabetes are more prone to getting the infection. — PTI

S'pore fumes against Kejri, govt says he 'doesn't speak for India'

Sisodia to BJP: 'Prioritise children, not politics, or fixing image abroad'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
with agency inputs

NEW DELHI, MAY 19

Singapore on Wednesday summoned India's high commissioner there and lodged a strong protest against a recent tweet by Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal that claimed there was a Singapore variant of the coronavirus that was harmful for children, after which the high commissioner promptly told the Singapore authorities that the Delhi CM had "no competence to pronounce on Covid variants or civil aviation policy".

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar also swiftly "clarified" that "the Delhi CM does not speak for India". Lauding Singapore's sending of military aircraft with oxygen supplies recently to help India battle the second Covid wave, Mr Jaishankar, in a thinly

Irresponsible comments from those who should know better can damage long-standing partnerships. So, let me clarify — the Delhi CM does not speak for India.

— S. Jaishankar
External affairs minister

Vaccines would be available for adults as well as kids in the country had our ministry shown the same swiftness in procuring vaccines from other countries with which it reacted to Mr Kejriwal's statement

— Manish Sisodia,
Delhi minister

veiled barb at Mr Kejriwal, lamented that "irresponsible comments from those who should know better can damage long-standing partnerships". Singapore foreign minister Vivian Balakrishnan, who had lambasted Mr Kejriwal and asked him to "stick to the facts", thanked Mr Jaishankar for the clarification.

Mr Kejriwal's tweet earlier Tuesday, when he

called for a ban on flights from Singapore to India, had led to a furore in the city state, which is a key member of Asean and an important partner of India in the region with close ties to New Delhi.

Setting the record straight, MEA spokesman Arindam Bagchi tweeted: "Singapore Government called in our High Commissioner today to convey strong objection

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Israel says it has no 'time frame' for an end to Gaza hostilities

Biden urges 'significant de-escalation'

Washington/Gaza/Jerusalem, May 19: President Joe Biden stepped up the pressure on Israel to end 10 days of violent skirmishes with Palestinians, making clear in a call Wednesday with PM Benjamin Netanyahu that he expected significant de-escalation by day's end.

Mr Biden asked Mr Netanyahu to move toward the path to a ceasefire, according to a White House description of their conversation. There is pressure, too, on Mr Biden to do more, with more than 200 people killed in the fighting. Until Wednesday, Mr Biden had avoided pushing the American ally



Smoke billows following an Israeli airstrike on a house in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. — AFP

more directly and publicly for a ceasefire or conveyed such a level of urgency for ending Israeli airstrikes targeting Hamas in the

thickly populated Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, Israel said it was not setting a time frame for an end to hostili-

ties with Gaza as its military pounded the Palestinian enclave with air strikes and Hamas militants unleashed new cross-border rocket attacks.

Palestinian medical officials said 219 people had now been killed in 10 days of aerial bombardments which have destroyed roads, buildings and other infrastructure, and worsened the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Israeli authorities put the death toll at 12 in Israel, where repeated rocket attacks have caused panic and sent people rushing into shelters. — Agencies **More on Page 6**

Withdraw new policy, Centre tells WhatsApp

New Delhi, May 19: The government has ordered WhatsApp to withdraw its controversial new privacy policy, saying the changes undermine the sacrosanct values of privacy, data security and harms rights and interests of Indian citizens.

The ministry of electronics and IT shot-off a letter to WhatsApp on May 18 on the issue, sources said and warned that necessary steps in accordance with law will be taken if a satisfactory response was not received within seven days.

The ministry has taken a strong position on the matter, and made it clear

that it is not just problematic but also "irresponsible" for the messaging platform to leverage its position to impose "unfair" terms and conditions on Indian users, when many depend on WhatsApp to communicate in everyday life, according to the sources.

In the letter, the ministry has drawn attention of WhatsApp as to how its new privacy policy is a violation of several provisions of the existing Indian laws and rules.

In fulfilment of its sovereign responsibility to protect the rights and interests of Indian **Turn to Page 4**

SHORT TAKES

Press Council summons Delhi chief secretary

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

The Press Council of India has summoned the Delhi chief secretary for removing some journalists from a media group for raising certain questions. The summons have been issued on the basis of a letter by Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari, who had earlier raised the matter with the Editors Guild of India. The council in the notice said, a communication was received wherein Mr Manoj Tiwari, had raised his concerns and stated that recently when journalists of an english daily reported the misdemeanors and negligence of Arvind Kejriwal's Government, six reporters were deprived of any news inputs or materials. Their right to report is interfered with and curtailed by removing them from the media group of the Delhi Government. Since the matter prima-facie concerns free functioning of the press, the Press Council of India has viewed the matter with concern and taken suo-motu cognizance of the matter under Regulation 13 of Press Council (Procedure for Inquiry) Regulations, 1979, the notice stated.

Wife beats Lt. Col for refusing to buy luxury car, FIR filed

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

A lieutenant-colonel has accused his wife of assaulting him with a golf club and claimed it was because he refused to give her money to buy a luxury car. Police said an FIR was lodged at Delhi Cantonment police station under IPC section 325 (voluntarily causing hurt) on May 6 based on a complaint by the Lt-Col. According to the FIR, the alleged incident took place on February 12 at their home. According to police, the complainant has claimed his wife then left home, while he went to hospital where doctors diagnosed that he had suffered a metacarpal fracture on his right hand. A medico-legal case was registered by the Army Base Hospital authorities, police said.

■ Comment on new Covid strain part of CM's 'toolkit' to create anarchy: BJP

Kejri: Task force soon, to save children from Covid 3rd wave

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Wednesday that the Delhi government will form a special task force to protect children from the third wave of Covid-19. Meanwhile, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia defended Mr Kejriwal's comments about a "new" Covid strain in Singapore that is "very dangerous" for children and accused the BJP and its government of doing "cheap politics" over the issue.

He said the decision was taken at a meeting with officials. "If the third wave of Covid comes, then we have to be prepared in advance to fight it. In a meeting with the officials today took some important decisions. To create special task force to protect children from the third wave, better management of adequate beds, oxygen and essential medicines than last time," Kejriwal said in a tweet.

The statements and reactions of the BJP and Centre show that they are "concerned" about their "image" in Singapore and



If the third wave of Covid comes, then we have to be prepared in advance to fight it. In a meeting with the officials today took some important decisions.

— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi CM

not about the children in India, Sisodia charged in a press conference. "Kejriwal talked of Singapore strain and the children. The issue is not Singapore but children," he said.

Sisodia was referring to Kejriwal's tweet on Tuesday demanding that the Centre cancel all air services with Singapore,

Covid positivity rate down to 6.89%: Satyendra Jain

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

Delhi health minister Satyendra Jain said on Wednesday that Covid-19 positivity rate had gone down to 6.89 per cent and the pandemic situation was now better due to the ongoing lockdown in the city. He, however, refused to comment on when the lockdown will be lifted, saying that the citizens can't be at ease until the positivity rate comes

down to five per cent. "We have a positivity rate at 6.89 per cent. Delhi was reporting around 28,000 new Covid-19 cases before lockdown, now around 4,000 cases are being reported." The city has been under lockdown since April 19 in wake of an alarming surge in Covid-19 cases. Delhi continued to see a drop in Covid-19 cases with the city seeing 4,482 new cases in the last 24 hours.

that it is part of his "toolkit to spread confusion and anarchy." BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia charged Kejriwal with seeking political mileage at the cost of India's image with his "irresponsible" tweet and said the Delhi chief minister keeps making "hue and cry" over one issue or another so that nobody questions him on his "all-round failure" in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic in the city.

Delhi's max temperature for May dips to lowest since 1951

'Tauktae' impact: 24-hour rainfall in May highest since 1976

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

Delhi on Wednesday recorded a maximum temperature of 23.8 degrees Celsius, 16 notches below normal and the lowest in the month of May since 1951, as rain drenched the national capital under the impact of cyclonic storm 'Tauktae' and a western disturbance, the India Meteorological Department said.

Delhi also recorded 60 mm rainfall till 8:30 pm on Wednesday, the highest 24-hour precipitation in May since 1976. Delhi's maximum temperature during the day was less than that of Srinagar (25.8 degrees Celsius) and Dharamshala (27.2 degrees Celsius) up in the north. The rainfall in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, northern Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand is a result of interaction between the remnant of cyclonic storm 'Tauktae' and a Western Disturbance, the IMD said.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative figures for the city, recorded



A vegetable vendor caught in rain in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

31.3 mm rainfall between 8:30 am and 5:30 pm, the IMD said. It said moderate rainfall is likely in the national capital on Thursday too.

Even if no rainfall is recorded till 8:30 am on Thursday, it will still be the highest 24-hour rainfall in May since 2014, according to Met department data.

The capital had recorded 41.8 mm rainfall on May 22 in 2014. Najafgarh and SPS Mayur Vihar recorded 31.5 mm and 20 mm precipitation, respectively. Several other areas recorded light rainfall.

The incessant rains brought the maximum temperature down to 23.8 degrees Celsius at Safdarjung. The minimum temperature settled at 21.4 degrees Celsius, five notches below normal. "Today, Safdarjung recorded a maximum temperature of 23.8 degrees Celsius. This is the lowest maximum temperature since 1951," Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the IMD's regional forecasting centre, said. In between, a low of 24.8 degrees Celsius was recorded on May 13 1982, he said.

ED files money laundering case against bizman Kalra, associates

New Delhi, May 19: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a money laundering case against businessman Navneet Kalra and his associates

in a recent case of alleged hoarding and black marketing of oxygen concentrators which were being anxiously scoured by those gasping for breath due to Covid-19 infection, officials said on Wednesday.

The central probe agency took cognisance of a Delhi Police FIR that was filed on May 5 after policemen raided some restaurants and premises owned and linked to Kalra and recovered more than 500 of these life-saving machines from there.

Official sources said a criminal case under vari-

Khan Chacha owner's mobile phones sent for forensic test

New Delhi, May 19: The Delhi Police's crime branch has seized two mobile phones from businessman Navneet Kalra, who was arrested for alleged hoarding and black marketing of oxygen concentrators, sources said on Wednesday.

"The crime branch team probing the case has seized two cell phones from Kalra which have been sent to the

Forensic Science Laboratory for further examination," the sources said. As part of the investigation, the crime branch took Kalra to three restaurants in Delhi in connection with the case on Tuesday, police said. — PTI

ous sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) has been filed against Kalra and his associates

and the ED will probe the money trail in the matter. The agency, they said, will probe if the oxygen concentrators were ille-

1,300 O2 beds, 530 ICU beds added in 12 AIIMS for Covid-19 treatment

New Delhi, May 19: Starting from the second week of April, over 1,300 oxygen beds and about 530 ICU beds for Covid treatment have been added in 12 new AIIMS and the current availability of oxygen and ICU beds is about 1,900 and 900 respectively, the Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

There are currently 1,925 non-ICU oxygen beds and about 908 ICU beds, including ventilators at AIIMS, Bhubaneswar, AIIMS, Bhopal, AIIMS, Jodhpur, AIIMS, Patna, AIIMS, Raipur, AIIMS, Rishikesh, AIIMS, Mangalagiri, AIIMS, Nagpur, AIIMS, Raebareilly, AIIMS, Bathinda, AIIMS, Bibinagar and AIIMS, Gorakhpur.

So far, setting up of 22 new AIIMS has been approved under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana

■ CAPACITIES OF these new AIIMS to handle Covid cases are being reinforced by Government of India by way of allocations of additional equipment such as ventilators, oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders and essential drugs

(PMSSY), a central sector scheme, announced in August 2003. Out of these, six AIIMS at Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Jodhpur, Patna, Raipur and Rishikesh are already fully functional. In another seven AIIMS, OPD facility and MBBS classes have started, while in five more institutes only MBBS classes have started, the ministry said in its statement. "These regional AIIMS, set up or being set up under PMSSY, have played a very significant role in man-

agement of Covid since the beginning of the pandemic early last year. Their contribution becomes significant when seen in light of the fact that they serve areas where the health infrastructure is weak.

"True to their mandate, they have also admirably responded to the challenge of the second wave by expanding bed capacities for treatment for moderate and severe Covid patients," the ministry said.

Keeping in view the increased demand, Covid treatment facilities have been started from AIIMS at Raebareilly and Gorakhpur during April-May which has helped Uttar Pradesh to proactively serve patients of remote districts like Fatehpur, Barabanki, Kaushambi, Pratapgarh,

Sultanpur, Ambedkar Nagar, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Maharajganj, Kushinagar, Deoria, Ballia, Mau and Azamgarh.

Capacities of these new AIIMS to handle Covid cases are being reinforced by Government of India by way of allocations of additional equipment such as ventilators, oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders, besides other consumables such as N-95 masks, PPE kits and essential drugs which includes Favipiravir, Remdesivir and Tocilizumab. Being tertiary care centres, the new regional AIIMS also delivered other critical non-Covid health services to Covid patients such as those requiring dialysis or those with serious heart ailments, pregnant women, paediatric cases. — PTI

Covishield for 18-44 yrs will last only 2 days: Delhi govt

New Delhi, May 19: AAP MLA Atishi said on Wednesday that Delhi's stock of Covishield vaccine for the 18-44 age group will last only two days, beyond which the vaccination for this category will have to be halted.

In a vaccination bulletin issued online, she also said, "we will have to temporarily shut down nearly 350 centres, administering Covishield to 18-44 years group, after two days from now".

"On May 18, 1,05,357 doses were administered, out of which, 88,332 doses were given to those who received it for the first time. This has been a high figure post the walk-in vaccination of 45 and above age group in government schools. The second doses

accounted for 17,025," she said.

The immunisation of second doses to people has reduced because of the increased gap of 12-16 weeks between the first and the second dose of Covishield. After a few weeks, the immunisation of second doses might pick up pace, she added. Over 48 lakh doses have been administered in total, she said.

On the vaccine stock position for the 18-44 age group, Atishi said, stock of Covaxin is over, and Covishield stock will last only for two days, beyond which the vaccination for this age group will have to be halted.

"For those above 45 years, healthcare workers and frontline workers,

Covaxin's stock is left for one day, and Covishield's stock is remaining for three days. We have received 45,44,250 doses for this category out of which, 42,88,350 have been utilised. This means, 2,55,900 are still left with us. We are expecting another stock of Covishield for 45-plus group, to arrive in the next three days," she said.

Hence, it is being hoped that the immunisation of this category will continue. Covaxin's stock has not been committed by the Centre, but we are in talks with them to initiate its supply, as a lot of people are going to be ready to take the second dose of Covaxin in the coming days, the AAP leader said. — PTI

4 held for selling liquor at hefty prices posing as mediapersons

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

Four men were arrested on Wednesday in Delhi's South Extension area for posing as media professionals and allegedly selling liquor at high rates amid the lockdown imposed due to Covid-19, police said.

A case was registered against the accused - Amit Malik (36), Ram Ashish (25), Pawan Kaushik (41) and Mohit Baisoya (21) - at Kotla Mubarakpur police station and 42 beer bottles and 18 bottles of whiskey were recovered from their possession, they said.

Police said that Baisoya, an employee of Delhi Civil Defence, escorted his associates and would allegedly help

■ A RAID was conducted and the four men were apprehended near AIIMS underpass Ring Road when they arrived at the spot in a car with their liquor supply, police said.

them in their escape if stopped by the police while supplying liquor.

On Tuesday night, when a police team was patrolling in South Extension-1, Head Constable Satender received information that four persons were indulging in selling liquor at hefty prices due to the lockdown, a senior police officer said.

According to police, the four men would come in their vehicles to supply liquor to customers near an underpass close to AIIMS gate No. 2.

Subsequently, a raid was conducted and the four men were apprehended near AIIMS underpass Ring Road when they arrived at the spot in a car with their liquor supply, the police officer said.

When the police apprehended the accused, Baisoya obstructed police officials in discharge of their duties and tried to escape from the spot. All four of them scuffled with the police and also threatened the team, he said.

A fake media ID card carried by Malik was recovered, police said, adding that he has previously been involved in four cases including that of assault and eve-teasing.

A car and three scooters were also recovered, they said, adding that further investigation is underway.

Sunanda Pushkar case: Court defers order on framing of charges

New Delhi, May 19: A Delhi court on Wednesday adjourned for a month the order on framing of charges against Congress leader Shashi Tharoor in a case related to his wife Sunanda Pushkar's death in a luxury hotel here.

Special Judge Geetanji Goel deferred the pronouncement of order in view of the coronavirus pandemic for June 16.

The court had on April 12 reserved the order after hearing arguments from the counsel appearing for Delhi Police as well as Tharoor.

During the arguments, while police had sought

framing of various charges, including 306 (abetment of suicide), Senior Advocate Vikas Pahwa, appearing for Tharoor, told the court that the investigation conducted by the SIT completely exonerated the politician of all the charges levelled against him.

Pahwa sought Tharoor's discharge in the case, saying there was no evidence against him to prove the offence punishable under either section 498A (husband or relative of husband or of a woman subjecting her to cruelty) or 306 (abetment of suicide) of IPC. — PTI



Deserted roads at Azadpur during the ongoing Covid-induced lockdown in New Delhi Wednesday. — PTI

Man held for selling O2 cylinders for ₹1 lakh

New Delhi, May 19: A 47-year-old businessman was arrested here for allegedly selling oxygen concentrators, originally meant for distribution among the needy, for ₹1 lakh each, police said on Wednesday. The accused, Harminder Singh of Tilak Nagar, was arrested near Hotel Radisson, Paschim Vihar, in outer Delhi on Tuesday, they said. Six oxygen concentrators and as many stabilisers were seized from him, the police added.

Based on information received, a trap was laid near the hotel to nab Harminder Singh on Tuesday afternoon. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Parvinder Singh said, "As Harminder Singh arrived at the spot, Head Constable Om Prakash approached his vehicle posing as a customer and struck a deal for supply of an oxygen concentrator for ₹1,00,000 and paid a token amount to him," he said.

Six oxygen concentrators made in China, along with six voltage stabilisers, were found in his car, the DCP said. A case was registered and Harminder Singh arrested, he added.

During interrogation, Singh said he had friends in China who sent 22 oxygen concentrators to him to distribute to people in need, the DCP said.

"He distributed 16 oxygen concentrators to various organisations, but to make up for losses incurred in his own business, he planned to sell the remaining six at ₹1 lakh each," the officer said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Ex-CM Buddhadeb tests Covid positive

Kolkata: Former West Bengal chief minister and CPI(M) veteran Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has been infected by Covid-19 and his wife Meera and medical attendant have also contracted the disease. Their test reports came positive on Tuesday evening. While Mr Bhattacharjee, unwilling to take admission to a hospital, has been undergoing treatment in home isolation at his residence on Palm Avenue in Karaya of South Kolkata. His wife has been admitted to a private hospital in Alipore where she is being treated by a medical board. On Wednesday night, Mr Bhattacharjee's oxygen saturation slipped below 90 which however improved after he was administered external support. Sources said the family is keeping the option open for his admission to hospital if there is any deterioration. His condition was stable on Wednesday.

Maha: Elderly gets 2 different doses

Jalna: Three teachers posted at a vaccination centre in Maharashtra's Jalna district have been suspended for dereliction of duty after a probe revealed that a 72-year-old man was administered jabs of two different Covid-19 vaccines, causing a health scare, a Zilla Parishad official said on Wednesday. The senior citizen, a resident of Khandvi village, was administered the first dose of Covaxin on March 22 but instead of getting the second dose of the same vaccine, he was given the Covishield jab on April 30 at Shirti vaccination centre in Partur tehsil of the district, he said. The glaring lapse came to light after the recipient developed a rash on his body, accompanied by pains and fever. The victim's son approached the district health officer after he received two certificates, the official said. — PTI

K'TAKA FLAGS OFF 'ICU, OXYGEN ON WHEELS'

Bengaluru: Coming to the rescue of Covid patients in remote areas, the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation on Wednesday launched two projects — "ICU on Wheels" and "Oxygen on Wheels". These buses comprise oxygen system, patient monitor such as BP, oxygen amount, ECG, temperature, ventilator, emergency medicine system and generator system. Launching the buses, deputy chief minister Laxman Savadi, who holds the transport portfolio, said these buses were built in house by the KSRTC at an estimated cost of Rs 10 lakh and the department has borne the entire cost. According to him, more than 12 oxygen supply buses are already being operated by four Karnataka State Road Transport Corporations. These 12 buses are from Chitradurga, Chikkaballapur, Chikamangalur in Kalaburagi, Belagavi and Bengaluru. Two of these buses are equipped with ambulance type medical equipment. Mr Savadi said he has directed the transport corporations to provide "oxygen buses" in all the districts under public private partnerships in the backdrop of increasing Covid cases. He explained that public-private partnership and private hospital partnership were required to operate oxygen and medical equipment locally whereas the transport services were completely free. He said a Hyderabad volunteer has come forward to provide medical equipment to a large number of oxygen buses. — PTI

K'taka: ₹1,250cr package to those hit by lockdown

Bengaluru, May 19: As Karnataka is battling the second wave of the pandemic, chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Wednesday announced a over ₹1,250 crore financial package, to provide relief for those whose livelihood has been affected by Covid-19 induced lockdown.

He also said a decision will be taken on extending the current lockdown, a day ahead of it coming to an end on May 24. "Our government had given financial packages to various sectors during the Covid first wave. Despite that, as

the current restrictions have affected the livelihood of those in unorganised sector and farmers, to mitigate its impact, we are announcing a relief programme of over ₹1,250 crore," Mr Yediyurappa said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said the government was announcing the package despite the state facing financial constraints, and is standing by the people, during this difficult time. "We have done the best we can, within the current financial limitations, and will consider if anything needs to be done

MP govt notifies scheme for children orphaned by Covid-19

CM Shivraj hints at unlocking state in phased manner

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAY 19

The Madhya Pradesh government Wednesday issued notification to implement the scheme for rehabilitation of children orphaned by coronavirus pandemic in the state.

The state has issued guidelines to identify beneficiaries of the scheme, christened as "chief minister's Covid-19 public welfare programme (pension, education and ration)".

As per the notification, wards of the parents who succumbed to Covid-19 or post-Covid-19 complications during the period of March 30, 2021 to July 31, 2021 would be eligible for availing the benefits under the scheme.

A beneficiary will be granted a monthly pension of ₹5,000 till he or she attains age of 21 years and will given free education from standard one to PhD.

The state has declared to waive admission fees for higher and technical education of the beneficiaries, besides paying their tuition fees.

This apart, they will be provided a monthly maintenance allowance of ₹1,500 for 10 months dur-



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

ing their under-graduation and post-graduation studies.

An additional allowance of ₹500 per month would be granted to the beneficiaries during their post-graduation studies. However, children of families whose members are getting government pensions will not be eligible to avail benefits under the scheme as beneficiaries.

Meanwhile, chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan hinted at unlocking the state, which is under corona curfew till May 31, from June 1 in a phased manner.

Mr Chouhan said the fresh coronavirus cases as well as positivity rate have shown a declining trend in the state since the past few days.

The states on Tuesday reported 5,412 fresh cases taking the tally of cases to 7,42,718.

CBI books MDs of Iffco, Indian Potash Ltd

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

The CBI on Wednesday registered a case of corruption against U.S. Awasthi, managing director and CEO of the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO), former managing director of Indian Potash Limited Parvinder Singh Gahlaut and their sons, among others, for alleged irregularities in the import of fertilisers and claiming subsidies.

Immediately after registering the case, CBI sleuths conducted searches at 12 premises linked to Mr Awasthi and Mr Gahlaut in Delhi, Mumbai and Gurugram, sources said. The case pertains to the accused allegedly claiming higher subsidies from the government by importing fertilisers at inflated prices and receiving commission from the supplier through sham transactions, they said adding the fertilisers are supplied to farmers on which the government provides a subsidy to keep the prices reasonable.

The investigating agency has alleged that the accused, in order to cheat the government by claiming a higher subsidy, imported fertilisers and raw materials through Kisan International Trading FZE in Dubai (a subsidiary of Iffco) and other middlemen at highly-inflated rates.

"The inflated prices covered the commission meant for Awasthi and Gahlaut, which was transferred by the overseas suppliers to them through sham transactions involving the accused," sources said.

Covid hits Assam jails, tea gardens hard

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 19

Amidst the sharp decline in positivity rate in urban areas, the spread of pandemic in jails and tea garden areas of Assam has been the new area of concern for the health authorities who on Wednesday detected at least 52 Covid positive inmates in the Dibrugarh Central Jail.

The prison currently has 530 inmates. Out of them, 223 were tested for the infection. Over the past two days, 52 have been found to be Covid positive. Among those included top Ulfa-I leader Jibon Moran, who recently left the outfit due to health reasons and is in



Relatives perform the last rites of a Covid-19 victim in Guwahati on Wednesday.

judicial custody at the Dibrugarh prison.

There are 31 jails in Assam, including six Central jails and 22 district jails.

Pointing out that positivity rate in the state has seen a sharp decline from

9.2 per cent to 6.47 per cent in the last six days, sources said that the state on Tuesday recorded 5,835 fresh cases.

Admitting that Dibrugarh is among the districts worst affected in the second Covid wave,



Doctors treat a Black Fungus infected patient in the operation theatre of Jabalpur medical college.

— PTI
Mucormycosis infections being reported country-wide, he hoped. The health minister reviewed the Covid preparedness of the hospital during a meeting held with its doctors.

He reviewed the functioning of the Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plant facility which has been established in a record time. This is the third plant to be installed at the central government hospital in New Delhi after Dr RML Hospital and Lady Hardinge Medical

College, the statement said. The plant with a capacity of nearly 1 MT has been built by DRDO with assistance from the PM-Cares fund.

"Safdarjung Hospital will soon be equipped with another plant of 2 MT capacity, which further enhancing this capacity. Similarly, 1,051 plants are in the process of being established with the help of DRDO, CSIR and HITEC all over the country," Dr Vardhan was quoted as saying in the statement. — PTI

ing it to one hectare, he said. This will benefit about 69,000 farmers and may cost ₹69 crore.

A sum of ₹3,000 each relief will be given to auto, taxi and maxi cab drivers who have licence and have registered, benefitting nearly 2.10 lakh beneficiaries and it may cost ₹63 crore, he added.

Yediyurappa further said ₹3,000 each will be provided to labourers who have registered with Karnataka Building And Other Construction Workers Welfare Board, costing ₹494 crore. — PTI

Subsidy on fertiliser hiked by 140%

Farmers to get DAP at old rate of ₹1,200/bag ■ Central govt to bear all burden of price hike

New Delhi, May 19: In a major pro-farmer decision, the Centre on Wednesday hiked the subsidy on DAP fertiliser by 140 per cent, costing the exchequer an additional ₹14,775 crore, in a bid to ensure the soil nutrient is available to farmers at old rates despite a sharp rise in global prices.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, according to a PMO statement.

"Government is commit-

ted to improving the lives of farmers. Therefore, despite increase in global prices, we have decided to make available the fertiliser at old rate," Mr Modi tweeted in Hindi.

After urea, Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP) is the most widely used used fertiliser in the country.

"A historic decision was taken to increase the subsidy for DAP fertiliser from ₹500 per bag to ₹1,200 per bag, which is an increase of 140 per cent.With today's decision,

THE GOVT spends about ₹80,000 crore on subsidies for chemical fertilisers every year

farmers will continue to get a DAP bag for ₹1200," the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

Despite the rise in international market prices of DAP, it has been decided to continue selling it at the old price of ₹1,200 per bag, it said. "The Central government has decided to bear all the burden of price hike. The amount of

subsidy per bag has never been increased so much at once," it added.

The government spends about ₹80,000 crore on subsidies for chemical fertilisers every year. With the increase in subsidy for DAP, the government will spend an additional ₹14,775 crore as subsidy in the Kharif season of this year, it said.

In the meeting, the Prime Minister "stressed that farmers should get fertilisers at old rates despite the international rise in

prices", the statement said.

The PM also said his government is committed to the welfare of farmers and will take all efforts to ensure that they do not have to face the brunt of price rise, the PMO added.

Recently, global prices of phosphoric acid and ammonia have gone up by 60-70 per cent. So the actual price of DAP is now ₹2,400 per bag, which was to be sold by fertiliser companies at ₹1,900 after considering a subsidy of ₹500, it said. — PTI

C'garh Board declares Class 10 results on internal evaluation

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, MAY 19

The Chhattisgarh Board of Secondary Education on Wednesday announced Class 10th board results, declaring all the students found eligible to appear the exam successful.

The results were declared on the basis of internal evaluation of the students since the Class 10 exams this year was canceled due to Covid-19 pandemic.

"Candidates who could not attend the internal assessment were given minimum pass marks", Chhattisgarh education

minister Preme Sai Singh Tekma said while releasing the results online in Raipur.

The board has decided not to release the merit list this year.

The board has also done away with the provision of recalculation and re-evaluation for the internal assessments of the candidates and declared that the candidates who are not satisfied with their assessment results can appear for their division improvement in the upcoming examination.

While 96.81 per cent of candidates secured first division, 1.96 per cent of students scored second

division and 1.23 per cent of students passed with third division.

Out of the 4,67,261 students applied for this year's Class 10 board examinations being conducted by the state education board, 6,168 were rejected because their registration forms were found ineligible.

Meanwhile, the minister said the state government was yet to decide on conducting Class 12 board examination this year.

"We are keeping a watch on the move by the CBSE in this regard. We will take a decision accordingly," the minister added.

<h1 style="text-align: center;">NORTHERN RAILWAY</h1> <h2 style="text-align: center;">OPEN-E-TENDER NOTICE</h2>			
<p>The Sr. Divisional Engineer-III, Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites E-Tender for the following work.</p>			
Name of Work	Through turnout renewal by overriding/Thick web switches in the section of SSE/DLI, SSE/SSB & SSE/NDLS in the jurisdiction of Sr.DEN-III		
Approximate Cost of work	₹2.03,83,883.16 (Rs. Two Crore Three Lakh Eighty Three Thousand Eight Hundred Eighty Three & Sixteen paise only)		
Earnest Money to be deposited	₹0.00/-	Cost of tender document	₹0.00/-
Date & Time of submission of tender bid and opening of Tender	11.06.2021 @15:00 hrs.		
Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for participating in the e-tender system. For all terms and conditions please refer tender document. No manual offers are acceptable. • Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only. 			
<p>No.: 128-W/260/e-Tender Notice/NIT/05/2021-22/W-3 Dated : 19.05.2021</p>			
<h3>SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE</h3>			1071/21

NORTHERN RAILWAY				
INVITATION OF TENDERS THROUGH				
<u>E-PROCUREMENT SYSTEM</u>				
Tender Notice No. Anti cancer medicine			Date: 18.05.2021	
Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items :-				
S.N.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
01	82211026A	Inj. Pertuzumab 420 mg	40 Nos	08.06.2021
02	82212397B	Inj. Denosumab 120mg	243 Nos	08.06.2021
03	83211140	Inj. TDM-1 100 mg	69 Nos	08.06.2021
04	82211027	Inj. Cetuzimab 100 mg	530 Nos	08.06.2021
NOTE -1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details.				
2. No Manual offer will be entertained.				
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE				1067/21

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
TENDER NOTICE	
SRDEN/III/MB acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders against following tender bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids upto closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. Contractors are allowed to make payments against this tender towards tender document cost and earnest money only through online payment modes available on IREPS portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc. Manual payments through Demand draft, Banker's cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc. are not allowed.	
Tender No. Date	13-DRM-MB-21-22 Date :- 18.05.2021
Name of work	GIS mapping of Indian Railways Off track assets under Sr. DEN/III/MB
Tender Closing Date Time	08.06.2021 16:00
Advertised Value (Rs.)	8,95,608.90
Earnest Money (Rs.)	0.00
Tender Doc. Cost (Rs.)	0.00
Bidding Start Date	25.05.2021
Validity of Offer (Days)	20 days
Period of Completion	01 months
No. 75-W/2/3/WA/Publication DATED: 18.05.2021	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	
1064/2021	

SHORT TERMINATION/ SHORT ORIGATION OF TRAINS

The Izzatnagar Division of North Eastern Railway will undertake a traffic block on Rawatpur-Kannauj section for up-gradation work from 20.05.2021 to 14.06.2021. During this period following trains will be Short Terminating/Short Originating as under:-

SHORT TERMINATION/ORIGATION OF TRAINS			
Train No. & Name	Train to Short Terminate/ Originate at/from station	Train to Partially cancelled between Stations	Date of Cancellation (From Originating Station)
04724 Bhiwani - Kanpur Central Kalindi Express Special	at Farrukhabad Jn.	Farrukhabad Jn. - Kanpur Central	20.05.2021 to 14.06.2021
04723 Kanpur Central - Bhiwani Kalindi Express Special	from Farrukhabad Jn.	Kanpur Central - Farrukhabad Jn.	21.05.2021 to 15.06.2021

Note: 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.

For any kind of Information such as detailed Time-Table and Stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <http://www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

Visit RailMadad website:- www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in Download RailMadad app.

Please join us on

1068/2021

RailMadad Helpline No.
139

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KERALA MEDICAL SERVICES CORPORATION LTD (DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE, GOVT. OF KERALA) Head Office : Thycad, Thiruvananthapuram-14, (Telephone No. 0471-2945600, FAX No. 0471-2945647), E-mail : edrugs@kmscl.kerala.gov.in , website : www.kmscl.kerala.gov.in , CIN No. U24233KL2007SGC021616			
No.KMSCL/ED/142/2021		Date : 18.05.2021	
GLOBAL E-TENDER NOTICE			
Global Online bids are invited from manufacturers / importers / their Indian Partners on behalf of Department of Health, Govt of Kerala for the procurement of Covid-19 Vaccine for the year 2021-22.			
Sl. No.	Tender No. and Date	Tender Quantity	
1.	KMSCL/ED/C-VAC/2021/009 dtd. 18/05/2021	30 Million Doses	
		Date	Indian Standard Time
Pre-Tender meeting (Online)		25.05.2021	11.00 am.
Last date of online uploading of tender		02.06.2021	5.00 pm.
Date of technical bid opening		05.06.2021	11.00am.
Tenders shall be downloaded and submitted online through the e-tender portal www.etenders.kerala.gov.in .			
(Sd/-) MANAGING DIRECTOR (Tender Inviting Authority)			

SHORT TAKES

MLA TO VARDHAN: PROVE CLAIMS OVER 'GAUMUTRA'

Bhopal: A Congress MLA on Wednesday appealed to Union health minister Harsh Vardhan and the National Health Mission to scientifically prove Bhopal BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur's claim about the "gaumutra" (cow urine) protection against coronavirus. In his letter to Dr Vardhan, senior Congress leader P.C. Sharma said, "Pragya Singh Thakur is a senior BJP leader and MP from Bhopal. She stated that gaumutra cures the infection of lungs and the Covid-19. Her words must be credible". On Sunday, Ms Thakur told a function that the cow urine extract offers protection against lung infections and coronavirus. "Now the pandemic is spread in villages. It is apprehended that statements of Thakur will leave the villagers who have faith in 'Gau Mata' (the cow) confused and they will start tasking this medication (cow urine) ignoring the well-established treatment of allopathy", said Mr Sharma, who represents the Bhopal South-West Assembly constituency. The MLA said he wrote to Dr Vardhan and the National Health Mission commissioner, MP, to "remove this confusion and scientifically certify the 'gaumutra' claim made by Thakur". Thakur had said 'gaumutra ark' (cow urine extract) of a desi cow can keep people away from lung infections. — PTI

UP MINISTER SUCCUMBS TO CORONAVIRUS

New Delhi: Uttar Pradesh Minister of State for Revenue and Flood Control Vijay Kashyap died from coronavirus at a Gurgaon hospital on Tuesday. Kashyap (56), who was an MLA from Muzaffarnagar's Charthawal Assembly seat, died at Gurgaon's Medanta Hospital. He is the third UP minister who has succumbed to the virus. Last year, Uttar Pradesh ministers Kamal Rani Varun and Chetan Chauhan had died from the infection. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was devoted to public interest works. "The death of BJP leader and minister in the Uttar Pradesh government Vijay Kashyap ji is very sad. He was a leader connected to the grassroots and was always devoted to public interest works. My condolences to his family and supporters in this moment of grief. Om Shantii!" PM Modi tweeted in Hindi. Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath and state BJP president Swatantra Dev Singh too expressed grief over his demise. "Kashyap, an MLA from Charthawal, was a popular leader who discharged his duties diligently as a minister. In his death, people have lost their true well-wisher, Mr Adityanath said in a release. — PTI

AID TO AFRICA IS WITHOUT ANY CONDITIONS: MEA

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

Congratulating his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and China for assuming the presidency of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for this month, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar — in a veiled message to both African nations and Beijing — pointed out that Indian development support to Africa is "without conditionalities and in line with African expectations". The comment is significant, given China's enormous clout and aid to Africa. "Beyond the pandemic, Africa's recovery will be facilitated by partnerships that genuinely address its economic sustainability. India's approach was spelt out by the Kampala Principles enunciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018. In effect, India will respond to the priorities of Africa, as defined by Africans themselves. Our support is without conditionalities and in line with African expectations. This is visible in our 189 projects in 41 African countries being implemented under concessional loans," Mr Jaishankar said at the UNSC Open Debate on "Peace and Security in Africa: Addressing root causes of conflict while promoting post-pandemic recovery in Africa".

Odd stir at Raj Bhavan door irk Bengal gov

RAJIB CHOWDHURI |
KOLKATA, MAY 19

West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has now started taking serious offence to freak protests, even if it involves a herd of sheep, against him outside his palatial office-cum-residence Raj Bhavan in Kolkata.

Alleging "security breach," he sought a report from city police commissioner Soumen Mitra by 5 pm on Wednesday.

On Tuesday afternoon Suman Mitra, a member of Citizens Against Dirty Politics and Corruption demonstrated with a herd of sheep in front of the Raj Bhavan slamming the governor's indifference to the statewide Covid-19 pandemic.

Mr Dhankhar however argued, "...one male person along with a posse of half a dozen sheep blocked the North Gate of Raj Bhavan and posed for photos and videos before a large contingent of media persons while a large contingent of policemen stood watching this drama. No efforts were made to dissuade this male person from blocking the entry and egress to Raj Bhavan or for his personal checking to ensure safety and security of the Raj Bhavan premises."

He added, "This episode of serious security breach continued for quite some time in front of a huge police contingent and no efforts were seen to either ascertain the identity of this person, check his person for presence of any weapons,



Jagdeep Dhankhar

etc, or questioning him to ascertain his intentions or motives. Without taking any logical steps...this person was then allowed to leave the spot."

On May 17 a group of angry Trinamul Congress workers agitated at the gate of Raj Bhavan soon after the CBI, empowered by the Governor, arrested four of their accused party leaders in the Narada sting bribery case.

Mr Dhankhar claimed, "The security of the Raj Bhavan premises was breached with impunity near its North Gate... by certain unruly elements in front of a huge posse of policeman under Kolkata Police. The so-called demonstration by these lumpen elements continued unabated in the presence of a huge police contingent for over two hours from around 1.30 pm onwards. These persons shouted slogans against the constitutional head of state, and hurled unsavoury slogans denigrating the dignity and prestige of the Head of State. They also continuously blocked the access to the North Gate, threatening the safety of the high-security Raj Bhavan and compromising the security of His Excellency the Governor of West Bengal as well as his family members."

Minister's non-inclusion in line with CPM's position: CM Vijayan defends move to drop Shailaja

Thiruvananthapuram, May 19: K.K. Shailaja's omission from the new LDF Cabinet, which has caused a flutter, was in line with ruling CPI(M)'s position on giving new faces a chance, Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Wednesday.

His own continuation as chief minister for a successive term, after the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front swept the April 6 polls, was again in line with the party's decision, Vijayan told reporters.

The non-inclusion of Ms Shailaja, health minister in the outgoing LDF Cabinet, has set off a debate with many, includ-

ing celebrities backing her and demanding that she be reinstated in the ministry.

Ms Shailaja played a leading role in the state's fight against Covid-19, and was especially lauded for her handling of the pandemic in the first wave.

Mr Vijayan insisted that the state's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic was a collective effort.

On Wednesday, responding to a volley of questions on Ms Shailaja's exclusion, Mr Vijayan said he respects the opinion from various sections of society but stated that the party's policy was that new people should come.

He hailed the perform-

Gujarat: Crops decimated, mango, banana worst hit

Hundreds of mango trees uprooted, banana, coconut plantations destroyed

Ahmedabad, May 19: Cyclone Tauktae, which claimed the lives of 45 persons in Gujarat, has also caused a huge damage to standing summer crops, with the Kesar variety of mango that is mainly grown in the coastal districts of Gir Somnath and Junagadh, bearing its brunt along with the coconut and banana plantations in parts of the state, farmers said.

Coconut plantations in Junagadh, Gir Somnath, parts of Amreli and Bhavnagar, and banana plantations in Bharuch, Tapi, Vadodara, Anand and parts of Kheda, among other districts, were badly hit, in addition to other standing summer crops, they said.

Hundreds of mango trees were uprooted across Junagadh, Gir Somnath and Valsad districts, with nearly all the mangoes falling to the ground from the trees in the cyclone that made a landfall Monday night, the growers said.

Kirit Patel, who owns 75 acres of mango farm at Talala in Gir Somnath district, said that mango plantations in Junagadh and Gir Somnath districts, known for Kesar mangoes that are supplied across the country and also exported in large quantities, have suffered a massive damage due to the cyclone. "Nearly 40 per cent of Kesar mango trees have been uprooted, which is a huge damage, as a tree takes nearly 15 years for crop. Almost all the mangoes on the trees fell to the ground, and these unripe mangoes are of not much use to the growers," Mr Patel, who is also the Talala APMC chairman



Workers remove garbage from the Mahim beach in Mumbai in the aftermath of Cylone Tauktae on Wednesday.

— PTI

TAUKTAE CAUSES ₹100 CRORE LOSS TO ALPHONSO GROWERS

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, MAY 19

The world famous Alphonso mangoes in Konkan have been decimated by the cyclone Tauktae. The mango growers from this area have suffered a loss of over ₹100 crore as they faced a double whammy — an entire crop being destroyed and several trees uprooted due to the gusty winds and heavy rains of the cyclone.

The mango farmers from three districts — Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri and Raigad — in the coastal Konkan region had already suffered difficulties this season as the

and a BJP leader, said.

Valsad district, where both Kesar and Alphonso varieties of mangoes are grown, also suffered a massive damage, the growers said.

The situation of banana plantations has been no

different. Gusty winds destroyed the entire plantations of this fruit.

"There were 14,000 banana plants, out of which 9,000 were completely uprooted and destroyed," said one grower at Upleta in Rajkot district.

— PTI

1 dead, 3 injured as rains lash Rajasthan

Jaipur: One person died and three others were injured due to heavy rainfall and gusty winds after cyclone Tauktae hit Rajasthan, officials said on Wednesday. The cyclone arrived in the state on Tuesday night and its impact was seen in various far-flung districts of the state on Wednesday as well. Jaipur, Ajmer, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Kota and Bharatpur divisions recorded moderate to heavy rainfall on Wednesday, the meteorological department said. In the Veja area, located around 25 kilometers from Dungarpur district, a record 232 mm rainfall was registered in the past 24 hours due to cyclonic effect, it said.

— PTI

MP: 6 killed, 3 hurt in lightning strikes

Satna, MP: Six people were killed and three injured in two separate incidents of lightning strike during unseasonal rain and thunderstorm in Madhya Pradesh's Satna district on Wednesday. The lightning strikes under Majhgawa and Badera police station areas killed six people and injured three others, Satna SP Dharmvir Singh Yadav said. He said four persons were killed and three others injured when they were struck by lightning under the Badera police area. Two others were killed in Kailashpur village under jurisdiction of the Majhgawa police.

— PTI



K.K. Shailaja

ance of his colleagues in the outgoing ministry but said the party's decision was "not to grant any special exemption to anyone". "Many of the previous ministers did exemplary job in their portfolios. The party decided not to grant any sort of exemption to



Police personnel punish youth for ignoring Covid-19 safety guidelines at Jharia in Dhanbad district on Wednesday.

— PTI

S'pore fumes against Kejri

■ Continued from Page 1

to Delhi CM's tweet on 'Singapore variant'. High Commissioner clarified that Delhi CM had no competence to pronounce on Covid variants or civil aviation policy."

In response to Mr Jaishankar's statement that the "Delhi CM does not speak for India", Singapore foreign minister Vivian Balakrishnan tweeted: "Thanks @DrSJaishankar let's focus on resolving the situation in our respective countries and helping one another. Nobody is safe until everyone is safe." Mr Balakrishnan earlier attacked Mr Kejriwal, saying: "Politicians should stick to facts! There is no 'Singapore variant'."

The Singapore foreign ministry said in a statement: "MFA (Singapore's ministry of foreign affairs) regrets the unfounded assertions made on Facebook and Twitter by Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal that a variant of Covid-19 found in Singapore was particularly harmful to children and could cause a third wave of infections in India... There is no 'Singapore variant'. The strain prevalent in many Covid-19 cases in recent weeks is the B.1.617.2 variant, which was first detected in India."

This came after media reports said Singapore would close schools from Wednesday as the authorities there warned of new coronavirus strains like the one first detected in India that were affecting more children in the city state.

The AAP said Wednesday that the BJP and its government were more concerned about their image abroad than about children in India after the saffron party accused Mr Kejriwal of a serious violation of constitution-

al propriety. In a controversial tweet, Mr Kejriwal had on Tuesday urged cancelling all flights from Singapore with immediate effect, saying "a new strain" of coronavirus found there could reach Delhi and was "very dangerous" for children. BJP spokesman Gaurav Bhatia said: "Meddling in foreign policy matters, which as per the Constitution is not a state subject, amounts to a serious violation of constitutional propriety. Kejriwal has presented his toolkit of spreading confusion and anarchy and seems to be competing with the Congress in propagating lies and destabilising the country."

The Aam Aadmi Party fielded deputy CM Manish Sisodia and health minister Satyendar Jain to defend Mr Kejriwal. "Vaccines would be available for adults as well as children in the country had our foreign ministry shown the same swiftness in procuring vaccines from other countries with which it reacted to Mr Kejriwal's statement," Mr Sisodia said. He said the BJP government needs to prioritise children, instead of playing politics and "fixing its image" abroad.

Mr Jain too said there was a "different strain" of coronavirus spreading in Singapore. "There are many strains of coronavirus in India at present. Their presence is ascertained through genome sequencing. It is a different strain (in Singapore) indeed. Whether it is from Singapore, Delhi, America or London, what's important is that the strains are different," he told reporters.

Mr Sisodia said: "Mr Kejriwal talked about the Singapore strain and children. The issue is not Singapore but the safety of our children."

CBI drags Mamata, mantri

■ Continued from Page 1

created by and at the behest of the arrested accused persons by the Hon'ble Chief Minister herself remaining present outside the CBI office along with a well-engineered crowd of thousands of miscreants, and after ensuring media presence. All these efforts were a part of the larger and well thought of design to terrorise the investigating agency."

It also complained that Mr Ghatak, the state law minister, visited the special CBI court along with five other ministers and Mr Banerjee and "a very large crowd of people and remained in court premises throughout the day till the order of bail to the respondents was issued."

"This ensured a substantial terrorising effect not only upon the prosecution but also in the system of administration of justice. The effect of terror engineered outside the CBI office and outside the court was of such a magnitude that the CBI, as a responsible investigating agency, thought it prudent not to seek police custody remand on 17th

May 2021 though it wanted to for good and sufficient reasons."

Defence counsel Abhishek "Manu" Singhvi, however, informed the high court that the CBI did not avail of a "corridor with escort by cops" that was proposed by the Kolkata police for the court production of the four arrested — Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee. The accused, however, did not get any relief during the day since the hearing will continue on Thursday. Till then, they will have to spend another night in judicial custody.

Meanwhile, an FIR has been initiated against the CBI at Gariahat police station in south Kolkata for violation of Covid-19 lockdown norms under sections 166, 166A and 188 and 34 of the Indian Penal Code and 51(b) Disaster Management Act after Chandrima Bhattacharya, minister of state for health, lodged a complaint with the police alleging that the CBI had flouted lockdown norms while arresting the four Narada accused TMC leaders on May 17.

Corona cases drop in Delhi

■ Continued from Page 1

with any other serious general illness requiring hospitalisation or ICU care should also wait for four-eight weeks before getting the Covid-19 vaccine. There is no requirement for screening of the vaccine recipients by rapid antigen test (RAT) prior to Covid-19 vaccination. The health ministry further said an individual can donate blood after 14 days of either taking Covid-19 vaccine or testing RT-PCR negative, if suffering from Covid-19. Vaccination has also been recommended for all lactating women

while vaccination of pregnant women is still under discussion by the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI). So far 18.58 crore vaccine doses have been administered in the country since January 16. The new guideline on delay of vaccine after Covid recovery is expected to ease up more slots for those who are struggling to schedule vaccination, particularly in the 18-45 age group. Some states like Delhi, Telangana, Maharashtra, UP and Kerala are floating global tenders to procure vaccines.

Tauktae: 46 die in Guj

■ Continued from Page 1

collapse, an official said. As many as 30,000 structures including 28,430 kachcha houses, 74,493 electricity poles and 674 roads were damaged, 68,753 trees uprooted and power supply snapped in over 9,000 Gujarat villages.

From Amreli district in Gujarat's Saurashtra region, the worst affected in the cyclone that crossed the state coast as an extremely severe cyclonic storm on Monday night and completed landfall around 1.30 am Tuesday, 15 deaths were reported from.

In Maharashtra, a Navy spokesperson said the bodies were brought to Mumbai along with 125 of the barge P305 survivors. Forty-nine people who

were on barge P305 which sank on Monday are still missing.

Calling the victims "Brave Nature's Victims (BNV)", he said Navy personnel, battling extreme weather, have so far rescued 186 of the 261 people who were onboard barge P305 and also two from tugboat Varaprada. "Search and rescue operations are still on and we haven't lost hopes of bringing them ashore," he said. However, the chance of finding survivors is getting bleaker as the hours pass by, he added.

Warships *INS Kochi*, *INS Kolkata*, *INS Beas*, *INS Betwa*, *INS Teg*, P81 maritime surveillance aircraft, Chetak, ALH & Seaking helicopters are involved in the SAR operations.

— Agencies

Govt notice to WhatsApp

■ Continued from Page 1

citizens, the government will consider various options available to it under laws in India, the sources at the ministry said.

A raging debate had ensued after WhatsApp had said it will update its terms of service and privacy policy around how it processes user data and partners with Facebook to offer integrations across the social media giant's products.

WhatsApp had faced severe backlash over user concerns that data was being shared with parent company Facebook.

Earlier this week, WhatsApp told the Delhi high court that while its new privacy policy has come into effect from May 15, it would not start deleting accounts of those users who have not accepted it and would try to encourage them to get on board.

— PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

20 MAY 2021

Pinarayi springs surprises, Kerala gets new-look govt

One startling exclusion and a historic allocation of a portfolio in a brand new team with an old captain mark the formation of the ministry of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala, led by Pinarayi Vijayan. Seventeen of the 21 ministers in the new cabinet are freshers — the largest constituents, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India, which have 12 and four ministers each, have nominated all fresh faces as ministers except the chief minister who belongs to the CPI(M).

The LDF broke a 43-year-old history when it returned to power for a second consecutive term in the elections held on April 6 on the back of its performance in the last five years, four of which were marred by events unprecedented in the state's history — an epidemic, a pandemic which is at its peak even now, and two back-to-back floods. The hallmark of the first edition of the Pinarayi Vijayan government was that it left none to fend for himself or herself when faced with a calamity; the government and all its apparatus were there to fight the battle together with them. The government took upon

The party also points to its bitter experience in not experimenting with new crop of leaders in West Bengal and Tripura. Explanations apart, the new team will have to compete against the record of its predecessor...

itself the responsibility of protecting the dignity of human life and fought ferociously whenever it was challenged. The voters returned the favour at the hustings.

The CPI(M) had taken a calculated risk in the election when it chose not to field leaders who had completed two consecutive terms in the Assembly. This criterion ruled out from the contest several veterans such as finance minister Thomas Isaac and works minister G. Sudhakaran who had a record of sterling performance. And the gamble paid off — the electorate sided with the party which fielded new faces and the LDF won 99 seats in the

140-member Assembly, improving on its 2016 tally of 91 seats.

The CPI(M)'s decision to keep all the old faces in the previous ministry out led to the ouster from the new one of K.K. Shailaja, the health minister who led Kerala's fight against the epidemic Nipah and now, the pandemic Covid-19, and earned global recognition. The decision to drop Ms Shailaja shocked many and triggered angry reactions even by fellow travellers. Observers read inner-party dynamics in the decision but the CPI(M) explains it away saying it cannot give exception to one minister when there are one too many performers. The party also points to its bitter experience in not experimenting with new crop of leaders in West Bengal and Tripura. Explanations apart, the new team will have to compete against the record of its predecessor and prove its mettle; the electorate has its touchstones ready.

The allocation of the department of dewaswom, which looks after the Hindu public places of worship, to a senior leader who comes from the dalit community is hailed as historic as it is for the first time a dalit leader heads it after it was created in 1996. It sends out a message to Kerala society, which has started showing the signs of dissipating its renaissance spirit that the leftists cannot let it happen.

The LDF has taken the road less travelled by. What difference it will make is for its team to prove.

In Tauktae's path

The extremely severe cyclonic storm Tauktae has caused not only widespread damage all along the western coast from the tip of India to Gujarat but also affected normally secure barges allied to oil exploration. In fact, the loss of life may become the highest among those from ONGC stationed on Arabian Sea barges as many are still missing, which poses a huge challenge to the brave Indian Navy crew who are risking their lives in daring search and rescue operations in mid sea amid the turbulence caused by the storm. The toll may run to 100 or more considering Gujarat itself has lost at least 45 people on land even as coastal Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra have lost people as the states were in the path as the storm barrelled its way.

Weather events like annual tropical storms in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea are bound to get more severe as time passes as the phenomena are clearly linked to climate change caused by global warming, which is also known to raise sea surface temperatures. We may be somewhat more fortunate in the most modern era as forecasts of such storms are getting more accurate and are issued days in advance from a better equipped IMD, which also has free access to forecasts from international organisations and weather watchers on the web.

No tribute can be too high for personnel of the services and disaster response forces who are deployed in advance in the storm's path and help to mitigate the effects of supercyclones. Coastal infrastructure invariably takes the biggest hits, among them the ramshackle beach huts of Goa and film sets of Mumbai this time. With the Centre not known to be too generous or to come forward with timely disaster funds, it is largely up to the states to help vulnerable coastal communities and fishermen cope with the weather hazards. To make sturdier infra on the coast would, of course, call for great capital expenditure.

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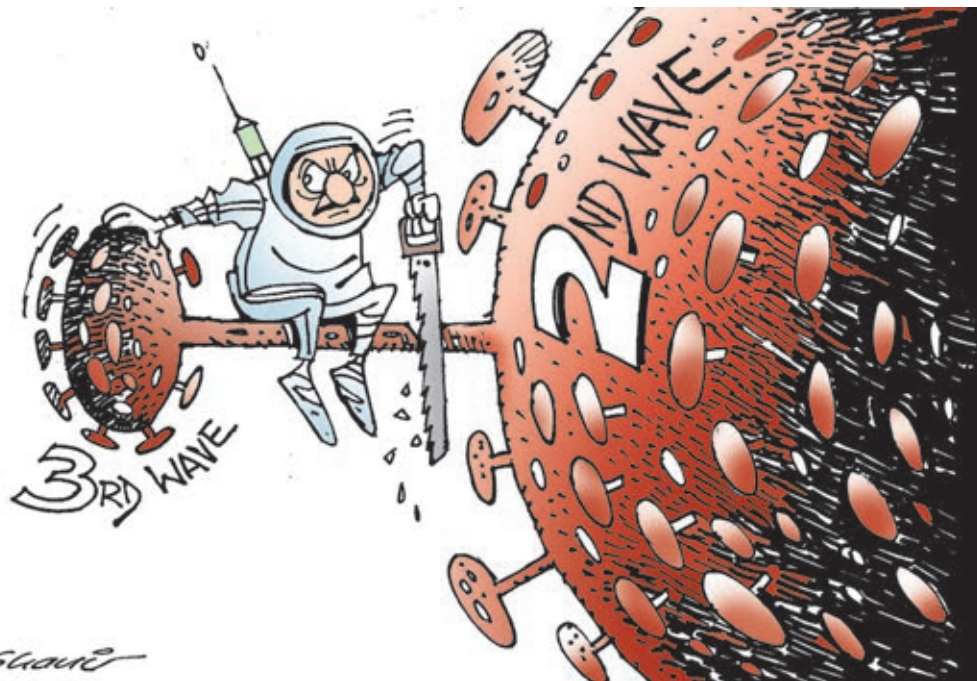
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Subhani



Imposed solutions in Mideast won't work



Syed Ata Hasnain

It is perhaps necessary to start with a description of the trigger which led to the escalation resulting in the current run of cross-border strikes in the Israeli-Palestinian standoff. This is important although we have seen much of the same in the past. What is also important is to get the bigger picture right. But first, we need to outrightly condemn the sheer lack of concern for the loss of civilian lives by both sides in the senseless conflict which has been in perpetuity in the Middle East. It is one of those conflicts in which one starts tracing history to lay blame but in reality can take no sides. Hamas is an organisation sworn to the use of unbridled violence and is never concerned about the misery it brings to its own people without even a positive hope in return. Israel justifies its use of overkill of counter violence because of its isolation in a sea of adversaries, where any evidence of its softness is perceived to play against it. It's a dilemma for us in India too as our interests lie with both sides and with peace.

The cause of the trigger reportedly was an attempt to evict a few Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah area in East Jerusalem where some Israeli settlers were to be housed; an old legal case was coming to judgment. This is not something unusual. However, it came in sync with another event involving sentiment and that was the imposition of the limit of 10,000 attendees at the Al Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem, the third of the holy sites of Islam. The Israeli police attempt to implement this rather harshly in the period of Ramzan led to violence and frayed tem-

pers. That spiralled more violence, which in turn led to the firing of missiles by Hamas from Gaza on Jerusalem and other Israeli cities, and a very strong response from Israel with threats of ground operations as well. It was the first time that this was happening after 2014, and many television serials such as Fauda have been made in the interim period through which the dynamics of this unfortunate conflict get to be better known. The seriousness can be gauged from the fact that ordinary Israeli Arabs and Jews have been making attempts at lynching each other in some cities.

In this decade so far, it's clear that the Palestinians have never been so alone, and Hamas ruling over their destiny has given them little hope of peace and stability. Fatah's moderation does not really count, and most Arab governments have been busy with Abraham Accords, virtually signing off on the Palestinian cause. The Trump administration's peace formula favoured Israel and Palestinian voices were never heard through the so-called "deal of the century", anchored by Jared Kushner, Donald Trump's son-in-law. Even the Palestinian capital offered in the accord is not East Jerusalem; it's a territory offset from it with the Shuafat refugee camp within. Building a capital is never a problem, but it's the angle of fairness and perception which Mr Kushner and Mr Trump had no time for. There were no responses from Palestinians then, possibly because of the known stance the Trump administration would take. The sentiments have all been there, the eviction of Palestinians from

Sheikh Jarrah and the police action at Al Aqsa mosque are just events which triggered emotions. Events in conflicts many times bring to a head some issues that then spiral out of control and that is exactly what is happening here.

Pent-up fury among Palestinians against Mr Kushner's peace formula probably erupted but could have been aided by external backing — the usual finger-pointing is towards Iran. Tehran actually has little to gain from this turbulence because it's in negotiations on the JCPOA with the United States in Vienna and needs no demonstration of its capability to play proxy games anywhere in the Middle East. The one trend to which all fingers appear to point as having a connection with the trigger is the political instability within Israel keeping Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on tenterhooks due to the political minority status of his government and the personal corruption charges which he is attempting to overcome through shenanigans such as appointing a loyalist as justice minister. These events have come to his rescue and the robust Israeli response and the casualties suffered by Israel have helped bolster a nationalistic fervour which Mr Netanyahu hopes will enable his Likud Party to retain power.

How does the conflict affect the international geopolitical environment? First, both Iran and Turkey, having already established a moral ascendancy over the Arabs by being critical of the Abraham Accords, chose to strongly condemn Israel's resort to violence against

civilian targets. It's the Arab nations for whom a major dilemma has been created, particularly those which have signed accords with the US and Israel — UAE, Sudan, Morocco and Bahrain being the four which did so; while the Saudis have a virtual accord without a paper to back it. Media analyses within the Arab world justified the stance as the creation of a road towards eventual peace with Israel, halting further annexation of Palestinian territory. The consternation created in the Islamic world by recent events will probably harden the internal conflict to the advantage of Iran and Turkey; Pakistan too has shown inclination towards them despite recent attempts at rapprochement with the Saudis through visits to Riyadh by Prime Minister Imran Khan and Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa.

So just as the world was thinking the Middle East had been quieted by US diplomacy and one of the core causes for discord between the Islamic and Western worlds had been set aside, we find an escalation that bears potential for serious rekindling of conflicts. It brings to light the fact that a conflict which has occupied the world's centre space for seven decades can't be artificially resolved without having on board all the stakeholders. President Joe Biden's administration seems to have been taken by surprise; perhaps enough analysis of the half-baked "deal of the century" was not done and the presumed stabilisation of the Middle East was taken at face value. It's not just physical conflicts but far more importantly it's the civilisational discord all over the world which bears potential for rekindling which could have serious consequences, including upon America's ambition of a reset in geopolitical priorities in the post-pandemic era.

A conflict which has occupied the world's centre space for seven decades can't be artificially resolved without having on board all the stakeholders

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps

LETTERS

STOP BRAIN DRAIN

As per the latest WHO Global Health Observatory Data, doctors available per 1,000 population in India are only 0.928 whereas this number is 5.28 for the UK, 2.6 for the US and 2.53 for the UAE. Plus, the medical profession is a human resource intensive one. The Covid-19 pandemic has opened a Pandora's box regarding institutional apathy to Indian healthcare. Doctors join the private sector or go abroad for the sake of lifestyle. The government is, therefore, expected to take proactive steps immediately to stop the brain drain of medical personnel by providing them with adequate salaries for a decent living.

Brij B. Goyal
Ludhiana

KEJRIWAL'S FAULT

THE INDIAN HIGH commissioner was summoned by the Singapore government on Wednesday "to convey strong objection to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's tweet on the "Singapore variant". External affairs minister S. Jaishankar exercised damage control by declaring that Mr Kejriwal does not "speak for India". Singapore and India have been solid partners in the fight against Covid-19. The Delhi CM must restrain himself and stop indulging in indiscretions in an effort to be more loyal than the king.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

BSY'S PROACTIVE STEP

THE KARNATAKA government's decision to set up paediatric Covid care centres in each district following fears that the third wave will hit children is a welcome step. The government will identify centres for the 0-6 and 7-18 age group affected by Covid-19 in each of the districts. While the "Fit Facilities" attached to Covid care centres would treat asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic children, Covid-19 hospitals would attend serious cases. Parents or extended family can stay at the facility. Other states would do well to emulate Karnataka's example.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

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

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Grassroots gap: Doctors intensify call for all-India medical service

The devastating Covid crisis has renewed demand for the creation of an Indian Medical Service along the lines of the all-India services such as IAS and IPS etc., at the earliest. The second wave of the epidemic has caught India's creaking health infrastructure on the wrong foot again. It has blown the lid off the "system", exposing the shortage of critical beds, oxygen, equipment and doctors and other medical staff.

Sources say that this demand has been raised on several occasions by several medical organisations including the Indian Medical Association (IMA), the Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA) and the doctors' association of the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

Those in the know say that recently FORDA has renewed the demand and written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking him to expedite the creation of a national medical service.

Interestingly, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare had also suggested that the government explore the possibility of setting up an exclusive service as part of the much-needed changes that have now become necessary to revamp the healthcare system. Will Mr Modi oblige?

C'GARH WHISTLEBLOWER FIGHTS LONE BATTLE

A district women and child development officer in the Mahasamund district of Chhattisgarh is on a crusade against departmental corruption. He has gone on a hunger strike for the government's inaction in a ₹30 lakh corruption case related to various state government schemes. Though the amounts appear small, it is the principle that matters for this champion of honesty in administration.

Sudhakar Bodele is demanding action against the departmental officers who were involved in the

embezzlement of funds of ₹30 lakhs in two schemes of the WCD department in Mahasamund district.

Mr Bodele has alleged that sub-standard material worth ₹20 lakhs was purchased between March 20-21 under the Chief Minister Kanya Vivah Yojana (CMKVY). He has also alleged irregularities of ₹10 lakhs under the Ready to Eat (RTE) scheme. Despite complaints, no action was taken against the guilty staff, the WCD officer complained.

Earlier the officer brought the matter to the knowledge of the district collector. Despite promises when no action occurred, then he asked for permission and a place to go for a hunger strike. When the officer was not granted permission, he sat on a hunger strike at home.

All eyes are on how the government responds to Mr Bodele's "tactics". Watch this space for updates.

EX-BABU 'INDISPENSABLE' FOR MVA GOVT

It is common practice with state

governments, but when the Maharashtra government decided to reappoint IAS officer V.K. Gautam, who retired last month as additional chief secretary in charge of irrigation as an officer on special duty (OSD) in the same department, it has not gone down well with other officers, serving as well as retired.

The rationale offered by the MVA government is that Mr Gautam had shown able leadership in the post and the government would continue to benefit from his experience and ability to handle large projects.

Sources say that the MVA government was actually keen on retaining Mr Gautam's services on a three-year contract as irrigation secretary. However, it could not do so since the post of secretary is a cadre post and cannot be made contractual to retain an IAS officer. So, it made him an OSD instead.

Mr Gautam's retention on a contractual basis seems to have upset

quite a few senior IAS officers, who see this as a wrong trend. It is also pointed out that Mr Gautam has an inquiry pending against him for alleged violation of rules as a member of the Commonwealth Games managing committee more than a decade ago.

But Mr Gautam is not the only senior official to have benefited. Chief secretary Ajoy Mehta after retirement has been hired as principal advisor to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO). Similarly, R Mopalwar who retired in 2018 is overlooking major road projects in the state and R.A. Rajeev is still heading MMRDA although he retired in February.

So, while retaining retired babus may be bad in principle, it is a widely prevalent practice and not just in Maharashtra.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherian@Twitter.com](#). Let's multiply the effect.

SHORT TAKES

SEARCH FOR MAN ON TERROR LIST IN BELGIUM

Brussels, May 19: The search for an armed man who is on a Belgian terror watch list because of his extreme right sympathies and who had threatened several people, including a top virologist, entered a second day on Wednesday.

Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne described the man as an "acute threat" and is known for his extreme right sympathies. Earlier this month, he had threatened several people, including Marc Van Ranst, one of the best-known virologists working on containing the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a Twitter message early Wednesday, Van Ranst said that "let one thing be clear: such threats do not make an impression on me." Authorities were centering their efforts to look for the man, who has a military background, in the northeastern part of Belgium in Limburg province. His name wasn't disclosed.

XI, PUTIN SEE LAUNCH OF NUKE ENERGY PROJECT

Beijing, May 19: Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Wednesday hailed the nuclear cooperation between the two neighbours as they virtually attended the groundbreaking ceremony of the biggest nuclear energy project to build four nuclear power plants in China costing about \$3 billion.

The ceremony, which was attended by the two leaders via a video link, was held to mark the first day of construction of power units No. 7 and 8 of the Tianwan Nuclear Power Plant, and No. 3 and 4 of the Xudapu Nuclear Power Plant. The Tianwan Nuclear Power Plant is located in the city of Lianyungang in eastern Jiangsu province. The Xudapu Nuclear Power plant is located in Xingcheng in northeastern Liaoning province. "This has been the biggest China-Russia nuclear energy cooperation project to date and represents the highest level of practical cooperation between the two sides," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian said.

1ST U.S.-RUSSIA MEET SINCE BIDEN TOOK OVER

Reykjavik, May 19: The United States and Russian foreign ministers are meeting in Iceland's capital Reykjavik on Wednesday evening to gauge the enormous gulf between the rival powers and confirm a potential summit between Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin.

Statements preceding the face-to-face talks on the sidelines of the Arctic Council meeting in Iceland do not bode well for the de-escalation of tensions that the two say they want, with relations at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken seemed to want to make the Arctic — a new geopolitical issue at the heart of the regional meeting Wednesday and Thursday in Reykjavik — a laboratory for cooperation focused on common challenges such as the fight against global warming.

But his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov issued a strongly worded warning.

CHINA PROTESTS U.S. NAVY'S TAIWAN STRAIT PASSAGE

Beijing, May 19: China on Wednesday protested the latest passage by a US Navy ship through the Taiwan Strait, calling it a provocation that undermined peace and stability in the region.

The US Navy's 7th Fleet said that the guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit on Tuesday in accordance with international law. The passage "demonstrates the US commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific".

"The United States military will continue to fly, sail, and operate anywhere international law allows," the Navy said in a statement. While the strait is in international waters, China claims self-governing Taiwan as its own territory and regards the US Navy's presence in the area as a show of support for the island's democratic government. In a statement on the Defence Ministry website, spokesperson for the Eastern Theater Command Col. Zhang Chunhui said the US actions were "sending wrong signals to the Taiwan independence" forces, disrupting and sabotaging the regional situation and endangering peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

Israeli airstrikes kill 6, level large family home in Gaza

Military: 52 aircraft hit 40 underground targets over a period of 25 minutes

Gaza City, May 19: Israeli airstrikes killed at least six people across the Gaza Strip and destroyed the home of a large extended family early on Wednesday. The military said it widened its strikes on militant targets to the south amid continuing rocket fire from the Hamas-ruled territory.

Residents surveyed the piles of bricks, concrete and other debris that had once been the home of 40 members of al-Astal family. They said a warning missile struck the building in the southern town of Khan Younis five minutes before the airstrike, allowing everyone to escape. The Israeli military said it struck militant targets around the towns of Khan Younis and Rafah, with 52 aircraft hitting 40 underground targets over a period of 25 minutes.

Gaza's Health Ministry said a woman was killed and eight people were wounded in those strikes. Hamas-run Al-Aqsa radio said one of its reporters was killed in an airstrike in Gaza City. Doctors at the Shifa hospital said his was among five bodies brought in early Wednesday. The fatalities included two people killed when warning missiles crashed into their apartment.

The latest strikes came as diplomatic efforts aimed at a cease-fire gathered strength and Gaza's infrastructure, already weakened by a 14-year blockade, rapidly deteriorated. The Palestinian territory is ruled by Hamas, an Islamic militant group.

US officials said the



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gestures as he presents a slideshow during a briefing to ambassadors to Israel at the Hakiry military base in Tel Aviv on Wednesday. — AFP

Biden administration was privately encouraging Israel to wind down its bombardment of Gaza. Egyptian negotiators also were working to halt the fighting, and while they have not made progress with Israel, they were optimistic international pressure would force it to the table, according to an Egyptian diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was discussing diplomatic efforts.

— AP

Anti-Semitism by Chinese TV: Israel

Beijing, May 19: Israel's Embassy in China is protesting what it describes as "blatant anti-Semitism" on a programme ran by the overseas channel of state broadcaster CCTV discussing the ongoing violence in Gaza and elsewhere.

In a tweet, the embassy said "we have hoped that the times of the Jew's controlling the world" conspiracy theories were over, unfortunately anti-Semitism has shown its ugly face again."

"We are appalled to see blatant anti-Semitism expressed in an official Chinese media outlet," the tweet said. Calls to the embassy were answered with a message saying it was closed on Wednesday and it wasn't immediately clear what it objected to in the three-minute segment. On the Tuesday *CCTV* broadcast, host Zheng Junfeng questioned whether US support for Israel was truly based

ROCKETS FIRED FROM LEBANON TOWARDS ISRAEL

Beirut, May 19: Lebanese security officials said several rockets were fired Wednesday from south Lebanon toward Israel, the third such barrage in the past week.

The Israeli military said it identified four rockets fired from Lebanon into northern Israel. One landed in an open area, two landed in the sea, and one was intercepted by aerial defences.

— AP

on shared democratic values, saying "some people believe that US pro-Israeli policy is traceable to the influence of wealthy Jews in the US and the Jewish lobby on US foreign policy makers."

— AP

Fighting: France seeks UNSC resolution

United Nations, May 19: China's UN ambassador says France is seeking a UN Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire between Israel and Palestinian militants who control Gaza.

Zhang Jun, the current council president, confirmed that France's UN Ambassador Nicolas De Riviere informed the cou-

ncil during the third round of closed consultations Tuesday on the conflict that a resolution was being prepared. The United States has blocked the UN's most powerful body, which is charged with maintaining international peace and security, from issuing a press statement calling for a halt to the violence, insisting that it would

not help diplomatic efforts to end the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Diplomats said the 14 other council members supported the statement proposed by China, Tunisia and Norway.

But Security Council press and presidential statements require approval of all 15 members. Resolutions, which are legally binding,

do not. They require at least nine "yes" votes and no veto by a permanent member. This would put the United States in the position of voting in favour, abstaining, or vetoing a cease-fire call.

Zhang told reporters that China, Tunisia and Norway "haven't given up our effort ... and that draft statement stays there on the

table, and we will continue to make our effort, making sure that the Security Council is fulfilling its mandate and responsibilities."

He said US President Joe Biden's support for a cease-fire is "consistent with what we are proposing in the Security Council," and China will support "all efforts facilitating the cease-fire."

— AP

CAR | FAN

US Prez's \$2 trillion infra plan includes rebuilding roads, bridges

Joe Biden lives his electric dreams

Dearborn, United States, May 19: Joe Biden, sporting aviator sunglasses, looked out from the driver's seat of Ford's new electric truck and delivered a presidential proclamation: "This sucker's quick." The battery-powered Ford F-150 Lightning is due to be unveiled on Wednesday as the auto giant's new big bet on the emerging electric auto market. But avid car enthusiast Biden not only got a sneak preview Tuesday — he managed a test drive.

Streaking across the enormous tarmac expanse of Ford's proving grounds in Dearborn, Michigan, with just a Secret Service agent in the passenger seat for company, Biden appeared to be living his dream. The pickup truck, almost silent, flashed across the hot, hazy surface before turning back to journalists accompanying the president.

At 78, Biden is the oldest person ever elected to the White House but at the wheel he acted more like a

giddy teenage driver.

The Lightning can hit 0-60 mph in about 4.4 seconds, he marvelled, prompting a moment of consternation among Ford executives who had wanted to keep details like that secret until launch day.

When queried by a journalist whether she could ask him a question about ongoing fighting in Israel, Biden snapped in a mock rebuke: "No you can't. Not unless you get in front of the car as I step on it." How fast had he managed

to go? Now that did interest him.

Biden said he'd show everyone.

"Ready?" Journalists, Ford executives and White House staffers hurriedly got out the way.

Biden floored the accelerator to disappear across the tarmac a second time.

Biden was racing around in a yet-to-be-sold Ford truck to promote his \$2 trillion infrastructure plan. In addition to rebuilding standard stuff like roads and bridges, Biden's pack-

age would pour \$174 billion into electric vehicle development.

Getting to Michigan required a 10-minute flight in a helicopter, 90 minutes of aviation fuel in Air Force One and 15 minutes riding in a gas guzzling motorcade comprising dozens of non-electric cars.

But Biden had no doubt about what the future should look like.

"We're at a great inflection point in American history," he said.

— AFP

Lebanese acting FM resigns over Gulf, IS remarks

Beirut, May 19: Lebanon's acting foreign minister stepped down on Wednesday amid a diplomatic row with Gulf Arab countries after he suggested in a TV interview this week that they had provided backing to extremists, helping the rise of the Islamic State group.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait summoned Lebanese ambassadors in their capitals to protest Chahel Wehbe's remarks during an interview with *Alhurra* news channel. They accuse Wehbe of violating diplomatic norms and making derogatory and racist statements.

In the interview late Monday, Wehbe said that "friendship and brotherhood countries" brought Islamic State militants to Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. When asked if he meant that Gulf countries financed IS, he retorted sharply:

"Financed by me then?" When a Saudi commentator interviewed along with Wehbe criticised Lebanon's president, the minister became agitated, saying that as a Lebanese, he couldn't accept being insulted by a "Bedouin" — a term he used derogatorily to describe

Gulf Arab nationals.

He walked out of the studio but returned to finish the interview. Wehbe's remarks came amid already tense relations between Lebanon and traditional ally Saudi Arabia. Only last month, the kingdom banned produce from Lebanon after unveiling a large shipment of amphetamine pills smuggled inside pomegranates.

Saudi Arabia is locked in a regional struggle with Shiite power Iran, the main ally of Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group. Riyadh and other GCC countries have imposed sanctions on Hezbollah. Lebanon's outgoing government resigned last August, following a massive explosion at Beirut's port that killed 211 people. Political disagreements have so far prevented the formation of a new government.

Wehbe said in a brief statement Wednesday that he had met with President Michel Aoun and asked him to relieve him of his duties, "out of concern that these comments be used to defame Lebanon and the Lebanese." It is not clear if a replacement would be named.

— AP

Congress okays bill to fight hate

Washington, May 19: Congress approved legislation Tuesday intended to curtail a striking rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, sending President Joe Biden a bipartisan denunciation of the spate of brutal attacks that have proliferated during Coronavirus pandemic. The bill, which the House passed on a 364-62 vote, will expedite the review of hate crimes at the Justice Department and make grants available to help local law enforcement agencies improve their investigation, identification and reporting of incidents driven by bias, which often go underreported. It previously passed the Senate 94-1 in April after lawmakers reached a compromise. Biden has said he will sign it.

"Asian Americans have been screaming out for help, and the House and Senate and President Biden have clearly heard our pleas," said Rep. Grace Meng, D-N.Y., who helped lead efforts to pass the bill in the House. To many Asian Americans, the pandemic has invigorated deep-seated biases that in some cases date back to the Chinese Exclusion Act of more than a century ago. President Donald Trump repeatedly referred to the virus, which emerged in Wuhan, China, as the "China Virus" or the "Kung Flu."

And as cases of the illness began to rise in the US, so too did the attacks, with thousands of violent incidents reported in the past year. Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., said it's painful for many to "open up the

NY AG SAYS TRUMP PROBE IS NOW CRIMINAL

New York, May 19: The New York attorney general's office said Tuesday that it is conducting a criminal investigation into former President Donald Trump's business empire, expanding what had previously been a civil probe.

"We have informed the Trump Organisation that our investigation into the company is no longer purely civil in nature," Fabien Levy, a spokesperson for Attorney General Letitia James, said in a statement. "We are now actively investigating the Trump Organisation in a criminal capacity, along with the Manhattan DA," Levy said.

James' investigators are working with the Manhattan district attorney's office, which has been conducting a criminal investigation into Trump and his company, the Trump Organisation, for two years. James and District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. are both Democrats.

— AP

OHIO PRIMARY: GOP VIES FOR DON'S BLESSING

Cincinnati, May 19: One candidate has been circulating a who's-done-more-for-Donald Trump scorecard. Footage of a waving Trump was dropped without context into a TV ad for another. A photo posted to Twitter gushes over the ex-president and his wife stopping by a third candidate's fundraiser just to say hello.

The US Senate primary in Ohio is still a year away, but Republican contenders already are working furiously to cast themselves as Trump's favourite in the open race. That work can be awkward and far from subtle. But it is a measure of how badly the candidates covet a Trump endorsement in a state the ex-Prez twice carried by 8 percentage-point margins. — AP

PHILADELPHIA PRIMARY: WIN FOR INCUMBENT

Philadelphia, May 19: Progressive Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner survived a challenge in the Democratic primary that pit his progressive reforms against growing concern over a rising tide of homicides and gun crimes.

Many pundits nationally saw the primary as the first referendum on whether a wave of prosecutors elected on promises of criminal justice reforms — measures like shorter probation and parole and a curtailing of cash bail that disproportionately keeps poor defendants confined pretrial — can survive a rising tide of gun violence and homicides across the country. He beat challenger Carlos Vega, who billed himself as a third option. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,902.64	-0.58
Nifty 50	15,030.20	-0.52
S&P 500*	4103.61	-0.59
Dollar (₹)	73.16	-0.15
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.69	0.04
Euro (₹)	89.40	-0.17
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,853.97	0.20
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.52	-3.19
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.975	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.630	-0.012

* As of 9:30 PM IST

NBCC, Suraksha submit revised bids for Jaypee

NBCC and Suraksha Group, which are in the fray to acquire Jaypee Infratech Ltd (JIL) through an insolvency resolution process, have submitted their revised bids and have also clarified issues raised by financial creditors. The companies have also improved their offers, which were submitted to the Committee of Creditors (CoC) on Tuesday. A meeting of the CoC will be held on May 20 to discuss the final resolution plan.

IOC net profit rises to ₹8,780 cr in March quarter



Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the nation's biggest oil firm, reported a better-than-expected net profit of Rs 8,781.30 crore in the March quarter, helped by a surge in refining margins as higher crude prices boosted the inventory value. Standalone net profit was at Rs 8,781.30 crore, or Rs 9.56 a share, compared with a loss of Rs 5,185.32 crore in the same period a year back, IOC chairman S. M. Vaidya said.

GST payers can now withdraw application

The CBIC has rationalised GST refund provisions, including giving option to taxpayers to withdraw application. It has amended the GST rules and has excluded the time period from the date of filing of refund application to the date of issuance of deficiency memo by the officer from the overall time limit to file refund application. Many GST refund applications are being returned on the grounds of deficiency.

JSW opens 1,000-bed Covid care hospital

JSW Group launched a 1,000-bed oxygenated Covid care hospital at Toranagallu in Ballari district of Karnataka. It was inaugurated virtually by Karnataka chief minister B S Yediyurappa. "This is one of the country's biggest Covid care facilities with a dedicated 4.8-km-long oxygen pipeline originating from its steel factory and supplying medical oxygen directly to the hospital for treatment of patients," JSW said.

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Defective ignition coil detected Enfield to recall 2.37 lakh bikes

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 19

Royal Enfield, the motorcycle making arm of Eicher Motors, on Wednesday said it will be recalling nearly 2.37 lakh motorcycles in India and various international markets due to defects in the ignition coil that can cause misfiring and reduce vehicle performance and in rare cases, cause an electric short circuit.

This is the biggest recall announced by the company since automakers started reporting recalls voluntarily in 2012.

Royal Enfield is an iconic brand in India, the world's biggest motorbike market, with a dedicated fan-following for its range of cruisers and classic-looking motorcycles.

Royal Enfield, the motorcycle maker, has issued a recall for 236,966 motorcycles specific to the Classic, Bullet and Meteor models.

"Of these, the company will call in Meteor motorcycles manufactured and sold between December 2020 and April 2021, and the Classic and Bullet manufactured and sold between January and April 2021," the company said in a statement.

These motorcycles will undergo inspection and replacement of the defective part, if required, it said.

The Chennai-based bike-maker says it has discovered a defect in the ignition coil that can in rare cases lead to an electric



The recall will apply to Meteor, Classic and Bullet model motorcycles sold in India, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia

short circuit.

"The defect was discovered during routine internal testing and the issue has been isolated to specific batches of material sourced from our external supplier between December 2020 and April 2021," the company said, adding that the issue is rare and does not impact all motorcycles manufactured during the period.

The recall will apply to Meteor, Classic and Bullet model motorcycles sold in India, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia, Royal Enfield said.

The mid-sized motorcycle maker also said the safety of its riders was of prime importance and "we are deeply committed to the duty of care to all our customers".

The company said it was committed to swiftly implement the recall action, and customers will be proactively contacted through respective local dealerships.

Royal Enfield claimed that it expects less than 10 per cent of the recalled motorcycles to need replacement of the defective part.

Royal Enfield service teams, and/or local dealerships will reach out to consumers whose motorcycle vehicle identification number (VIN) falls within the manufacturing period mentioned above, the company said.

We would like to reiterate that we have very stringent sourcing protocols and that all our motorcycles are rigorously tested to global validation standards of quality and durability, it said.

DRL in talks to make Sputnik V for other countries

Hyderabad, May 19: Dr Reddys Laboratories, which is in a pact with Russian Direct Investment Fund to sell 125 million people doses (250 million vials) of Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik V in India, is holding parleys with RDIF for acquiring rights for more countries, a senior official of the drug maker said.

Dr Reddy's which had received over two lakh vaccines from RDIF, recently soft-launched Sputnik V in India.

".. we are also in discussions with them (RDIF) about quantities and rights, assets permit for other countries.

"So this is the overall view that we have at this stage of Sputnik," CEO of Dr Reddys, Erez Israeli said in a recent earnings conference call.

In addition, there are discussions with RDIF for Sputnik light, a single dose vaccine for Covid-19 being developed in Russia as well as additional engagement for the future for India, Israeli further said.

Replying to a query, Israeli said the company hoped that the supply of 125 million doses would be accomplished within 12 months, if everything was in place.

A Dr Reddy's official had earlier said it expected to receive about 36 million doses of Sputnik V in two months.

—PTI

Adani Green to acquire SoftBank RE unit for \$3.5 bn

RAJESH KUMAR SINGH MAY 19

Adani Green Energy Ltd said it has agreed to buy SoftBank Group Corp's renewable power business in India, as it seeks to accelerate efforts to expand capacity.

The firm, controlled by billionaire Gautam Adani, signed pacts for the acquisition of a 100 per cent interest in SB Energy India from SoftBank and partner Bharti Group, according to a statement. The transaction gives SB Energy an enterprise valuation of \$3.5 billion (about Rs 25,500 crore), Adani said.

Adding the unit will help Adani Green meet a goal of having 25 gigawatts of renewable power capacity earlier than previously planned, as it targets a role as one of the world's largest suppliers of clean energy.



The firm has been seeking acquisitions to bolster its roster of assets, after being faced with delays in starting some large projects.

SB Energy has a portfolio of almost 5 gigawatts of solar and wind assets in India, of which 1.4 gigawatts are currently operational, according to Adani's statement. All projects are backed by 25-year power purchase

agreements with buyers. SoftBank holds an 80 per cent interest in SB Energy, with Bharti holding the remaining 20 per cent.

Bloomberg News reported earlier that Adani Green was in advanced talks for a deal.

SoftBank pursued a deal with Adani after talks to sell its stake to Canada Pension Plan Investment Board fell through. The Japanese mobile phone and investment company founded by billionaire Masayoshi Son had said in 2015 it planned to invest \$20 billion in the Indian renewables business along with partners.

The exit of SoftBank comes at a time when India has been courting foreign investors to fund its massive roll-out of clean energy.

—Bloomberg

E-way bill integrated with FasTag, RFID

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 19

In a move that will check GST evasion and help real-time vigilance of commercial vehicles, the e-way bill system has been integrated with FasTag and RFID.

"E-way bill system is successfully integrated with FasTag and RFID and details of commercial vehicle movements through the state and national highway tolls are received into the e-way bill system on a near real time basis. On an average 25 lakh goods vehicle

movements from more than 800 tolls are reported on a daily basis to the e-way bill system," the government said.

Based on the RFID information received, live vigilance report, RFID related report for e-way bill, of the vehicle and movement of vehicle between two dates will be available on the officer's mobile app.

The Live Vigilance report can be used by the vigilance officers to know the vehicles that have passed the selected tolls without e-way bills in the

past few minutes. Also, the vehicles carrying critical commodities specific to the state and have passed the selected toll can be viewed. Any suspicious vehicles and vehicles of EWBs generated by suspicious taxpayer GSTINs, that have passed the selected toll on a near real time basis, can also be viewed in this report.

RFID related reports can be used to know the tolls passed by the vehicles of a given e-way bill number and the last tolls that have been passed by any vehicle.

Companies cut debt amidst pandemic

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 19

In bad times, like the last financial year, corporates with high debt levels brought down their debt substantially to reduce financial cost to the companies to soften the pandemic blow.

Tata Steel, Bharti Airtel and others in the mid and small-cap space, like Orient Cement, 3i Info, Subex, Reliance Power, JK Tyre, Kesoram and Pioneer Embroideries brought down their debt, as per their fourth quarter and annual financial performance data.

Outstanding fourth quarter and FY21 financial performance of Tata Steel, riding on rising steel demand and steel prices, helped the company reduce a big chunk of its outstanding debt.

"Net debt reduced by Rs 10,781 crore in the fourth quarter and by Rs 29,390 crore in FY21," Tata Steel said while announcing the fourth quarter earnings report.



The company's consolidated net debt declined by more than 28 per cent in financial year 2020-21 to Rs 75,389 crore.

Similarly, telecom major Bharti Airtel reduced its borrowing by Rs 11,816 crore during FY2020-21 as per its annual performance declaration.

Orient Cement's total liabilities came down from Rs 1,789 crore on March 31, 2020 to Rs 1,506 crore as on March 31, 2021.

JK Tyres' total liabilities were down from Rs 8,864.11 crore to Rs 8,207.66 crore.

FLYING TAXIS COULD TAKE OFF IN EUROPE BY 2024: REGULATOR

KATHARINE GEMMELL & CHARLOTTE RYAN MAY 19

Electric flying taxis may be cleared for takeoff in European skies by 2024 or 2025, according to the region's top air-safety regulator.

Piloted craft that take off vertically could see commercial use carrying packages before passengers, Patrick Ky, executive director of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency, said in an online event on Wednesday.

Autonomous drones will take at least five more years, Ky said, with larger aircraft following.

EASA has just started to work with companies on how to address unmanned flight, the regulator said. The agency is working on a coordinated approach with the US Federal Aviation Administration and other international regulators.

With autonomous passenger transport, it's easiest to start with air taxi vehicles, "because we're looking at smaller scale aircraft," Ky said.

—Bloomberg

Flipkart grew strong, PhonePe 150% in March quarter: Walmart

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 19

Flipkart continued its strong growth in the March quarter while PhonePe grew more than 150 per cent, Walmart said in its quarterly update. However, considering the surge in Covid cases and localised restrictions in India, Walmart refrained from giving a fresh guidance on its sales for the second half of the year.

"In India, for the first quarter, Flipkart and PhonePe continued to experience strong growth, as annualised total payment value run rate at PhonePe grew by more than 150 per cent versus last year. At Flipkart, monthly active customers and users are key metrics, and we're performing well," C. Douglas McMillon, president, chief executive officer and director of Walmart in the company's earnings call.

"Our recent announcement of our intent to acquire Cleartrip, a leading online travel company, underscores our commitment to transform the customer experience through



digital commerce. Our growing base of customers means we need to continue to add new capabilities, including areas such as logistics and data storage. The recently announced partnership with Adani Group will help us do just that," he added.

Walmart's international operating income was strong, up more than 21 per cent in the quarter as better sales mix and fewer markdowns in certain markets benefited margins in addition to continued focus on expenses. In a constant currency, international sales growth was strong, increasing more than 5 per cent with

strength in India, Canada and China.

However, it acknowledged that certain international markets, including India, are negatively affected by a surge in Covid cases and hence the company was not issuing fresh guidance for the second half of the year.

"Certain international markets continue to be negatively affected by the resurgence in Covid cases and related government restrictions and operations, particularly in India and Canada. Given continued uncertainty, we're maintaining our original guidance for the back half of the year, and we'll update you as we gain clarity on key external variables related to the health crisis and their potential impact on our business and the global economy," said McMillon.

Walmart also said it will support India in its fight against Covid. "As it relates to Covid-19, the past several weeks have been more challenging in some countries. India, Canada, Chile and South Africa are priorities at the moment," it said.

TCS CEO Rajesh Gopinathan draws ₹20.36 cr package in FY21



Rajesh Gopinathan

New Delhi, May 19: Tata Consultancy Services CEO and MD Rajesh Gopinathan took home a pay package of about Rs 20.36 crore in 2020-21, according to the company's annual report.

In 2019-20, Gopinathan had received a total remuneration of Rs 13.3 crore.

According to TCS annual report for 2020-21, Gopinathan received Rs 1.27 crore in salary, Rs 2.09 crore in benefits, perquisites and allowances, and Rs 17 crore in commission.

TCS chief operating officer N. Ganapathy Subramaniam drew a pay package of about Rs 16.1 crore in the last financial year. This includes Rs 1.21 crore in salary, Rs 1.88 crore in benefits, perquisites and allowances, and Rs 13 crore in commission.

The increase in the managerial remuneration for the year was 55.22 per cent, the report said.

"Increase in the managerial remuneration for FY2021 is not comparable with FY2020 owing to decrease in remuneration of 15 per cent in FY2020 in view of the economic conditions impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic where in the directors had decided to moderate the executive remuneration for FY2020 to express solidarity and conserve resources," it added.

The average annual increase in salaries was 5.2 per cent in India. However, during the course of the year, the total increase is approximately 6.4 per cent, after accounting for promotions and other event-based compensation revisions. Employees outside India received a wage increase varying from 2 to 6 per cent, the report said.

—PTI

SAFETY | UPGRADE Quick Delete will remove last 15 mins of Search Google announces new privacy settings

New Delhi, May 19: Google has announced a slew of new features, including new privacy settings, AI tools and release of the first beta of Android 12 that will become part of its products over the course of the year.

Kicking off Google I/O 2021 in a virtual format from the Mountain View campus, Google CEO Sundar Pichai also announced additions to Google Workspace that will enable richer collaboration, especially in view of the pandemic that has driven enterprises across the globe to embrace remote working solutions.

Pichai and other Google executives laid out the roadmap for tools and fea-

tures that will be rolled out through the year across products like Search, Lens, Photos, Maps and Shopping among others.

For enhanced privacy, Google is introducing a new "quick delete" option that will help delete the last 15 minutes of Search history with a single tap from the Google Account Menu.

It is also introducing Location History reminders in Maps Timeline.

"Locked Folder" is a new passcode-protection feature in Google Photos where select photos can be saved separately and these photos won't show up as users scroll through their grid or in shared albums. The feature will be intro-



Sundar Pichai

duced to Google Pixel phones first, and more Android devices throughout the year.

Google has also announced new enhancements to its Password Manager, which helps users create, remember,

save and auto-fill passwords across the web. This will help easily change compromised passwords with Google Assistant; provide automatic, proactive notification of compromised passwords; and provide a new tool to make it easy to import passwords from files or other password managers.

The tech giant is also releasing the first beta of Android 12, featuring the biggest design change since 2014. The latest version includes features that give more transparency around which apps are accessing user data, and offers more controls so users can make informed choices.

—PTI

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 19

India was among the few countries that hich performed well in terms of trade in the March quarter against the lockdown hit corresponding quarter of 2020. India improved its export performance while bringing down export volatility, found a UN body.

"China, India, and South Africa have fared relatively better than other major economies during Q1 2021," Unctad said in its global trade update.

When compared to lockdown hit March quarter of 2020, India's merchandise exports grew 26 per cent and imports 45 per cent. Services exports grew 2 per cent and imports 14 per cent. Against the same



case of services, exports declined 3 per cent while imports grew 2 per cent.

In Unctad's last global trade update, India's imports had declined during all the months between January and September 2020, except February. Exports had grown only in February and September.

India improved both in terms of export performance and volatility in the December quarter compared to the June quarter of last year.

SHORT TAKES

Oz to host Afghans in historic Test

Melbourne: Australia's cricketers will play their first ever Test match against Afghanistan in Hobart later this year ahead of hosting the Ashes against England, officials announced Thursday. "We are also incredibly excited to welcome Afghanistan to our shores for a historic first Test match against Australia," said Cricket Australia's interim CEO Nick Hockley. The five-day match will be played at Hobart's Blundstone Arena from November 27, with Australia then facing England at Brisbane's Gabba ground in the first Test of the five match Ashes series beginning December 8. "The story of the Afghanistan team is one of the most uplifting in sport, and their record of three wins from their first six Tests prove they truly belong at this level," added Hockley. — *AFP*

Asia Cup put off due to pandemic

Colombo: The 2021 Asia Cup, which was shifted from Pakistan to Sri Lanka, was on Wednesday called off due to rising Covid-19 cases in the island nation. The Asia Cup, which was last held in 2018, was scheduled to be held in June but Sri Lanka Cricket CEO Ashley de Silva announced that it will be difficult for them to conduct the tournament. "Due to the prevailing situation, it will not be possible to play the tournament in June this year," De Silva said. The tournament was supposed to be hosted by Pakistan but since India were unlikely to travel there due to political tension between the two nations, it was shifted to Sri Lanka. With all the teams planning for their FTPs for the next two years, the continental showpiece might only find a slot after the 2023 50-over World Cup. — *PTI*

Chhetri returns as India off to Doha

New Delhi: Talismanic captain Sunil Chhetri made a return after recovering from Covid-19 infection as a 28-member Indian football squad leaves for Doha on Wednesday for the three upcoming matches of the joint 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup Qualifiers. The team will have a preparatory camp inside a bio-bubble in Doha before their first match on June 3 against hosts Qatar. After missing the two international friendly matches against Oman and the UAE on March 25 and 29, Chhetri is set to feature in the forthcoming games. FC Goa midfielder Glan Martins is the lone face to make it to the India squad for the first time, while the likes of winger Udanta Singh, Brandon Fernandes, Pronoy Halder and Abdul Sahal also made a return to the national team. — *PTI*

Time to move on from fiasco: Paine

Hobart: Cameron Bancroft has "cleared the air" with Australian bowlers after creating a flutter by hinting that all of them were aware of the 2018 ball-tampering plot in South Africa, Australia Test skipper Tim Paine said on Wednesday, "looking forward to moving on". The 2018 scandal was once again in spotlight after Bancroft recently stated that whether the Australian bowlers knew of the plan to use a sandpaper on the ball during the Cape Town Test against South Africa, was "self-explanatory." "I think they're frustrated that it keeps popping up but I think that's part and parcel for everyone who played in that Test match," Test skipper Paine said. — *PTI*

Ex-Odisha captain Prashant no more

New Delhi: Former Odisha cricket team captain Prashant Mohapatra succumbed to Covid-19 during treatment at AIIMS, Bhubaneswar on Wednesday, hospital sources said. Mohapatra (47), breathed his last at about 7.51 am despite all possible efforts by doctors, said AIIMS, Bhubaneswar superintendent Dr. S.N. Mohanty. Prashant's father Raghunath Mohapatra, Rajya Sabha MP and Padma Vibhushan awardee had also died of Covid-19 on May 9. — *PTI*

Back to bubble life

First batch of players reach Mumbai as quarantine begins for UK tour

New Delhi, May 19: Cricketers Ravichandran Ashwin, Washington Sundar, Mayank Agarwal, Mohammed Siraj and women's team captain Mithali Raj reached Mumbai on Wednesday to enter the bio-bubble before India's departure to the United Kingdom for the World Test Championship and women's series against England.

However, all those living in Mumbai, Pune and adjoining areas can join the team bubble on May 24 like men's team skipper Virat Kohli, his respective red and white ball deputies Ajinkya Rahane and Rohit Sharma, and women's team batter Jemimah Rodrigues.

Even KL Rahul, who is recovering from an appendicitis operation is in Mumbai and expected to join the bubble on May 24.

BCCI has deployed three charter flights — from Delhi, Hyderabad and Chennai — for both male and female cricketers.

PRASIDH AND SAHA GIVEN OPTION

Stand by pacer Prasidh Krishna and team's reserve wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha have both recovered from Covid-19 but the BCCI will allow them to spend some time at home and get rid of the weakness that is associated with the viral infection.

All those who are not in these three metro cities are supposed to take a private car and reach the destinations for their respective flights. A few who



Mayank Agarwal, Washington Sundar, R. Ashwin and Mithali Raj are in a charter flight to Mumbai.

— BCCI

wanted to fly commercial with their negative reports have been allowed. "Also the rule for boarding a charter flight is that even the driver of the private car needs to quarantine three days before the journey and have a negative RT-PCR report," said a source.

INDIA AWAIT PLAYING CONDITIONS

What happens if next month's World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand ends in a draw? Or a tie? Or worse, a washout?

The Indian cricket team

is eagerly awaiting a response to this and other questions concerning the 'Playing Conditions' for the marquee clash in Southampton from June 18 to 22.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is expected to release the 'Playing Conditions' in the 'coming days'.

"Since this is not another bilateral series Test match, we need to know about the playing conditions. There are three basic pointers that we need to know," a senior BCCI official privy to the Indian team's requirements said on conditions

of anonymity.

"What happens in case of a draw, tie or an eventual wash-out without at least one innings of both teams not being completed," he added.

"The ICC will be publishing the Playing Conditions in coming days. We can't put a date but I believe they will send it soon."

TEAM TO QUARANTINE IN SOUTHAMPTON

The Indian team, after reaching London, early next month is expected to leave immediately for Southampton where it will be in quarantine dur-

ing the England versus New Zealand Test match at the Ageas Bowl.

"Yes, India will be in Southampton only when New Zealand and England play the first of their two Tests. We expect ICC to give an idea of the duration of hard or soft quarantine in the next few days.

"Since it's an ICC event, the final notification needs to come from them," the source said.

The Indian team is hoping to train during its soft quarantine but negotiations are still on with regards to duration of quarantine. — *PTI*

EURO | FOOTBALL

BENZEMA GETS SURPRISE CALL FROM FRANCE

Paris, May 19: Karim Benzema was named in France's provisional Euro 2020 squad by Didier Deschamps on Tuesday, giving the Real Madrid striker a shock international recall after years in the wilderness over his alleged role in a blackmail plot. The 33-year-old has not played for France since October 2015, but is now set to line up alongside World Cup winners Kylian Mbappe and Antoine Griezmann at the delayed European Championship.

"So proud of this return to the France team and of the trust placed in me," Benzema said on *Twitter*.

— *AFP*

HUMMELS AND MUELLER BACK IN GERMAN SQUAD

Berlin, May 19: Germany head coach Joachim Loew on Wednesday named Thomas Mueller and Mats Hummels in the 26-man provisional German squad for the Euro 2020 finals, ending the pair's two-year exile. "Back again," Mueller, 31, posted on *Twitter* underneath a picture giving the thumbs up. Hummels, 32, also reacted, on Instagram: "I am glad to be back — I'm really up for the new chapter".

However, there was no recall for Bayern Munich defender Jerome Boateng, who was also axed in March 2019. — *AFP*

T20 | WORLD CUP

BCCI calls SGM to decide venue

New Delhi, May 19: The BCCI has called a Special General Meeting on May 29 to discuss the upcoming cricket season in India, including the T20 World Cup scheduled in October-November.

The notice sent by BCCI secretary Jay Shah for the meeting stated that there will be a "discussion on the upcoming cricket season in view of the pandemic situation prevailing in India".

Serious doubts have emerged over the hosting of the T20 World Cup in India with the second wave of Covid-19 sweeping through the country.

The SGM has been scheduled ahead of the ICC meeting on June 1 when

the game's governing body is likely to decide on the staging of the competition.

The ICC is expected to take a call depending on the Covid situation in India, which is grim at the moment.

The UAE has emerged as the back-up venue for the event after the IPL-14 had to be suspended halfway following multiple Covid-19 cases inside the bio-bubble. In its apex council meeting last month, the BCCI had shortlisted nine venues for the event — Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Dharamsala, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai. Domestic cricket will also be discussed in the SGM. — *PTI*

BCCI PROMOTES SHAFALI TO GRADE B, DROPS VEDA

New Delhi, May 19: Teen batting sensation Shafali Verma was on Wednesday promoted to Grade 'B' in the BCCI's annual contracts list as the cricket board reduced the number of contracted players from 22 to 19. The Grade 'A' which offers an annual retainer fees of ₹50 lakh once again comprised of three all-format players — T20 skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, her deputy Smriti Mandhana and leg break bowler Poonam Yadav.

The two notable names that were dropped from the 19-strong list are batter Veda Krishnamurthy and left-arm spinner Ekta Bist. The others, who were also dropped include Dayalan Hemlatha and spinner Anuja Patil, who featured in the last year's list. — *PTI*

Grade 'A' (₹50 lakh): Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana, Poonam Yadav. **Grade 'B' (₹30 lakh):** Mithali Raj, Jhulan Goswami, Deepti Sharma, Punam Raut, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Shafali Verma, Radha Yadav, Shikha Pandey, Taniya Bhatia, Jemimah Rodrigues. **Grade 'C' (₹10 lakh):** Mansi Joshi, Arundhati Reddy, Pooja Vastrakar, Harleen Deol, Priya Punia, Richa Ghosh.

Chelsea exact revenge

London, May 19: Chelsea are on course to qualify for the Champions League after a crucial 2-1 win against top-four rivals Leicester, while Brighton staged a superb fightback to beat champions Manchester City as fans returned to the Premier League on Tuesday.

Supporters have been allowed back into Premier League matches this week for the first time since December following the UK's easing of coronavirus restrictions.

Around 8,000 fans were at Stamford Bridge as Chelsea moved into the third place at Leicester's expense, while 7,900 saw Brighton's dramatic 3-2 victory against City.

There were 10,000 United fans at Old Trafford for their 1-1 draw with relegated Fulham and 8,000 at Southampton for their 2-0 defeat against Leeds.

Chelsea avenged Saturday's 1-0 FA Cup final defeat against Leicester to steal a march on the Foxes in the race for the top four.

Thomas Tuchel's side broke the deadlock in the 47th minute when Antonio Rudiger bundled home after a corner was unwittingly flicked on by Leicester's Luke Thomas.

Jorginho doubled Chelsea's lead with a 66th-minute penalty after VAR ruled Wesley Fofana fouled Timo Werner.

Kelechi Iheanacho set up a tense finale when the Leicester striker slotted home in the 76th minute.

But Chelsea held on and emotions ran high in stoppage-time after a brawl erupted featuring virtually every player and



Chelsea's Jorginho (right) celebrates after scoring a goal against Leicester City in their EPL match at Stamford Bridge in London on Tuesday.

— *AFP*

members of both teams' coaching staffs.

Chelsea will be guaranteed to finish third if they win at Aston Villa in their last game of the season on Sunday.

MANCHESTER CITY STUNNED

Joao Cancelo was sent off in the 10th minute after the City defender hauled down Danny Welbeck.

Phil Foden increased City's lead in the 48th

minute with a fine solo effort, only for Leandro Trossard to get one back moments later. Adam Webster equalised with a thumping header in the 72nd minute before Dan Burn grabbed the winner from close range four minutes later.

The return of fans to Old Trafford was peaceful despite fears of more angry protests against United's owners the Glazer family. — *AFP*

Some held up signs reading "Glazers Out" and chanted against the Americans, but the discontent was drowned out by songs of praise for Edinson Cavani in the 15th minute. Bruno Fernandes flicked David De Gea's long ball into Cavani's path and the Uruguayan striker, spotting Alphonse Areola off his line, lofted a gorgeous 40-yard chip over the Fulham keeper. — *AFP*

IOC offers Tokyo medical help amid call for cancellation

Tokyo, May 19: Confronted in Japan with some of the strongest medical-community opposition yet to the Tokyo Olympics, IOC President Thomas Bach offered on Wednesday to have added medical personnel available to help out when the games open in just over nine weeks.

Bach gave few details, speaking remotely at the opening of three days of meetings between the International Olympic Committee and local organisers. He said the help would come from various national Olympic

committees and be available in the Olympic village and sports venues.

In his 12-minute address, Bach attempted to assure the Japanese public and athletes coming to Tokyo that the IOC will hold "safe and secure" Olympics in the midst of the pandemic.

"For obvious reasons we cannot give them (athletes) every detail yet, but the most important principle is very clear: the Olympic Village is a safe place and the Olympic and Paralympic Games will be organised in a safe way," Bach said.

Bach said he anticipated more than 80% of those staying in the Olympic Village would be vaccinated. Reports locally say that Japan's Olympic delegation will begin getting vaccinated in June.

Between 1-2% of Japanese are fully vaccinated, and its unlikely that even the elderly population will be fully vaccinated before the Olympics end on Aug. 8.

Bach appeared to be responding to one of the strongest demands so far to call off the postponed Olympics.

The 6,000-member Tokyo Medical Practitioners' Association called for the Olympics to be canceled in a letter sent last week to Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, Olympic Minister Tamayo Marukawa, and Seiko Hashimoto, the head of the organizing committee.

The letter was made public this week on the group's website.

"We believe the correct choice is to cancel an event that has the possibility of increasing the numbers of infected people and

deaths," the letter said.

MCLROY, THOMAS EXCITED

Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy and second-ranked Justin Thomas are excited about golfing in the Tokyo Olympics, even with Covid-19 safety protocols limiting them from a normal Games experience.

And even third-ranked Spaniard Jon Rahm, who said the restrictions "don't make it easy" to choose to play in Tokyo, indicated Tuesday at the PGA Championship he would play and it would be

"amazing" to win a gold medal.

All three are ranked in position to qualify easily for the Olympic tournament on July 29-August 1, with Thomas in the top spot after top-ranked Dustin Johnson withdrew from consideration in March.

"I know I'd kick myself forever if I didn't do this," Thomas said.

World number seven McIlroy is set to play for Ireland despite such issues as not being able to bring his family or see other Olympic events.

"No, it's certainly not going to be the authentic Olympic experience that you would normally get, but it's the times that we're living in," McIlroy said.

"No different than when you go over and play a tournament in Asia anyway. You see the golf course and the hotel and that's sort of it."

McIlroy has the chance to do something he has never done before in the world of golf, and that unique opportunity makes it worth it to him.

— *Agencies*