

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SATURDAY 8 MAY 2021



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Sonowal and Himanta called to Delhi to talk about Assam CM issue



**SPORT | 6**  
Cavani makes Europa League history as Man United reach final



**DELHI AGE | 9**  
Virushka start Covid fundraiser, hope to raise ₹7cr in 7 days

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## WINDOWS



Britain's Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, during a visit to meet staff at Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel, in east London, on Friday. — AFP

## Cops seize over 100 O2 concentrators from Delhi eateries

**New Delhi:** The Delhi police conducted raids at two restaurants in the national capital and recovered over 100 oxygen concentrators, used for treatment of Covid patients, officials said on Friday. Ninety-six oxygen concentrators were recovered from Khan Chacha restaurant and nine were seized from Town Hall restaurant, both situated in the Khan Market area. The recovery comes after the arrest of four men from Lodhi Colony area on Wednesday for allegedly indulging in black marketing of oxygen concentrators. — PTI  
Full report on Page 2

## WhatsApp scraps deadline on policy

**New Delhi:** WhatsApp has scrapped its May 15 deadline for users to accept its controversial privacy policy update and said not accepting the terms will not lead to deletion of accounts. WhatsApp had faced severe backlash over user concerns on data sharing. — PTI  
Full report on Page 7

## 'News of Chhota Rajan death wrong'

**New Delhi:** The Bihar jail administration on Friday said that the news of gangster Chhota Rajan's death is "wrong". Rajan was found Covid-19 positive in the Bihar jail on April 22 and admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences on April 24. — PTI

## COUNTERPOINT



He is staying in a bio-bubble these days!

## WEATHER

Max: 37°C  
Min: 26°C  
RH: 30%  
Rain: Nil  
Forecast: Mostly sunny

## ASTROGUIDE

**Plava:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Chaitra Bahula Dwadasi till 5.22 pm  
**Star:** Uttarabhadra till 2.48 pm  
**Variyam:** 4.08 am (Sunday)  
**Durmurtam:** 5.50 to 7.32 am  
**Rahukalam:** 9 am to 10.30 am  
**SUNSET TODAY 7.00 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.35 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 3.49 AM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 4.04 PM**

## 'Call all-party meet on Covid immediately' Poll results very disappointing for Cong: Sonia

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Congress President Sonia Gandhi, lashing out at the Narendra Modi government while addressing a Congress Parliamentary Party meeting on Friday, said: "I say this categorically — India is crippled by a political leadership today that has no empathy for people. The Modi government has failed the people of our country." Mrs Gandhi said the government must urgently call an all-party meeting on the Covid-19 situation in India and added: "The Modi government has abdicated its fundamental responsibilities and duties towards the people, the Centre has ignored warnings and alerts from the EGOM, National Task Force and the parliamentary panel."

Mrs Gandhi termed the Congress' losses in the recent Assembly polls as "very disappointing". Adding that the Congress Working Committee will meet soon to review the Assembly poll results. "Most unfortunately, our own performance in all the states was very disappointing and if I may say, unexpectedly so," she said while concluding her speech. "The CWC is meeting shortly to review the results but it goes without saying that we as a party collective must draw the appropriate lessons from this setback in a spirit of humility and

**I say this categorically — India is crippled by a political leadership today that has no empathy for people. The Modi govt has failed the people of our country**

— Sonia Gandhi, Cong chief

## Rahul: Lockdown inevitable due to failures of Centre

**New Delhi:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the government's alleged failures have made another devastating national lockdown almost inevitable, and called for providing financial and food support to the most vulnerable.

In a letter to PM Narendra Modi, he suggested that the government should not be concerned about the economic impact of the lockdown as the human cost of the spread of the virus would have tragic consequences for the people.

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honesty," she added. The virtual parliamentary meeting was attended by its MPs and senior office-bearers.

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## EC's lawyer resigns, says his 'values not in consonance' with poll body

**New Delhi, May 7:** A lawyer, who has been representing the Election Commission (EC) before the Supreme Court, has resigned from the panel of advocates of the EC, saying his values were not in consonance with the present functioning of the poll body.

Advocate Mohit D. Ram was a panel counsel for the EC in the Supreme Court since 2013.

"I have found that my values are not in consonance with the current functioning of the EC; and hence I withdraw myself from the responsibilities of its panel counsel before the Supreme Court."

"I undertake to ensure smooth transition of files, NOC and 'vakalat-namas' in all pending matters with my office," he said in the resignation letter.

Meanwhile, Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, in a draft affidavit which he planned to file in the Madras high court and later in the Supreme Court, said that deferring some phases of the recently-held Assembly polls due to the coronavirus pandemic could have led to a situation where holding the remaining phases under President's Rule would have triggered sharper criticism about the poll panel favouring one party against another.

In the draft affidavit, which could not be filed due to procedural reasons, Mr Kumar also offered to quit. — PTI

## Modi will meet all EU leaders today at virtual summit

**Lisbon, May 7:** Holding big international gatherings is on top of the list of things not to during during a pandemic, but the European Union's 27 leaders and their large entourage of diplomats and advisers gathered in person at Porto, Portugal.

Friday for two days of talks, sending a signal that they see the Covid-19 threat on their continent waning. In a late addition to their agenda, the EU leaders will also discuss Thursday's US proposal to share the technology behind Covid-19 vaccines.

On Saturday, they will also take part in an unprecedented meeting, via videoconference, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as India needs more help with a devastating second wave virus surge, and to smooth the path to an elusive bilateral trade deal.

Plans for a face-to-face EU-India summit in Porto fell through after Mr Modi cancelled his trip due to the Covid-19 surge at home, but it will be the first time an Indian leader will participate in a meeting with all the EU's leaders.

Saturday's virtual meeting will cover trade, climate change and help with India's Covid-19 surge. Some European Union countries have already rushed medicine and equipment to India. India and the EU spent six years trying to negotiate a free trade deal before giving up in 2013. — AP

## Supply 700 MT O2 to Delhi every day, don't push us to be coercive, govt told

After giving Delhi its quota on Wed, didn't give full quota on Thurs ■ SC refuses to interfere with K'taka HC order

PARMOD KUMAR  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

In a stern message, the Supreme Court on Friday told the Centre to continue supplying 700 MT oxygen every day to the national capital as per its May 5 order, and to not push it to take coercive actions.

A top court bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and comprising Justice M.R. Shah took umbrage over the Centre not supplying Delhi with 700 MT oxygen as ordered by it on May 5, 2021, after the Delhi government informed the court that it did not get 700 MT oxygen on Thursday as ordered by it.

Making it clear that they mean "business" and



A patient waits for admission outside a hospital in Kolkata on Friday.

don't want to be "coercive", an apparently irked Justice Chandrachud said, "It has to be supplied and we don't want to be coercive. You proceed and arrange the oxygen." Cautioning the Centre

— PTI

## '3rd wave can be handled if stringent, right steps taken'

VINEETA PANDEY  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

India on Friday scaled yet another height in terms of single-day Covid-19 cases with 4.12 lakh new detections and 3,980 fatalities in the last 24 hours. Rising number of infections continues to grip the population in fear which is still struggling hard to find hospital beds and oxygen to survive this second wave of pandemic. As per reports, the current wave is expected to peak by June end and

thereafter there may be some respite. Dr K. Vijay Raghavan, chief scientific advisor, said on Friday that the third wave of the pandemic can be handled if stringent, necessary steps are taken on time.

Two days ago Dr Raghavan had said the third wave was "inevitable given the high levels at which this virus is circulating". He, however, did not give a timeline of the third wave. But on Friday he clarified that the third wave may not take place every-

where in the country if sufficient precautions are taken. "The pandemic has different peaks and falls across the country. The only condition for third wave waves is the presence of a susceptible population. If we take strong measures, the third wave of Covid-19 may not happen at all places or even anywhere. It depends much on how effectively Covid guidelines are implemented at the local level, in the states, districts and in the cities

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■ ₹2K aid for ration card holders; milk price cut ■ Free Covid treatment

## Stalin gets cracking as TN's new CM

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR  
AND D. SEKAR  
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Tamil Nadu's new chief minister M.K. Stalin, who was sworn in along with his ministers here on Friday, passed five orders relating to people's welfare on his first day in office, thus setting in motion the process of delivering on the promises his DMK party made during the campaign, besides appointing a chief secretary and four secretaries in his office.

Paying relief of ₹2,000 as a first instalment to families holding ration cards, reducing the price of Aavin milk by ₹3 per litre, making travel free for women in city buses, launching a department to look into the complaints of people gathered during the campaign and providing insurance cover for those taking treatment in private hospitals were the orders passed.

All the measures were



Newly-sworn in Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin does his first signature at his office in Chennai on Friday. — PTI

promised to the electorate as part of the DMK's manifesto. Family card holders will be paid ₹2,000 now as part of the ₹4,000 payment to ameliorate their livelihood problems wrought by the continuing coronavirus crisis.

Aavin milk, produced by the government milk cooperative, will cost Rs 3 less from May 16, thus lessening the financial burden of families and all women, those working

and studying included, would be able to travel free of cost in ordinary fare city buses all over the state from Saturday.

For the newly launched department, "chief minister in your constituency", which will address the grievances of the people, received through complaints dropped in the boxes kept at various places across the state during the "Stalin in your

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■ Leader severely wounded in bomb blast ■ Cops treating it as terror attack

## Maldives ex-Prez 'critical' after multiple surgeries

**Male, May 7:** The Maldives Speaker of Parliament and former President, Mohamed Nasheed, was in critical care on Friday after being severely wounded in a bomb blast outside his home, hospital authorities said, in what police are treating as a terrorist attack.

Nobody has claimed responsibility for Thursday's explosion in the capital Male that has revived security concerns in the Indian Ocean islands, known for luxury resorts but which have also faced political unrest



Mohamed Nasheed

and Islamist militant violence. Mr Nasheed, the Maldives first democratically elected President who is now Parliament Speaker, had previously warned about militants

infiltrating the Islamic country. He was getting into his car when the blast occurred.

Local media said the explosion was caused by a device planted on a motorcycle parked near his car.

Doctors operated to remove shrapnel from Mr Nasheed, who was now in critical condition in intensive care, ADK hospital said.

"Over the course of the past 16 hours he had life-saving surgery on injuries to his head, chest, abdomen and limbs," the hospital said in a statement.

## Puducherry's CM sworn in, BJP to be part of Cabinet

**Puducherry, May 7:** AINRC leader N. Rangasamy was sworn in as the chief minister of Puducherry at a brief ceremony held at Raj Nivas on Friday and will lead a coalition government of BJP members in his Cabinet.

While Karnataka is the lone southern state with the BJP in the ruling saddle, its induction in the UT Cabinet allows the saffron party expand its footprint, vis-a-vis power in the region.

Incidentally, it fared well in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, where it won four Assembly seats in the Dravidian heartland in the April 6 polls.

BJP's A Namassivayam is tipped to be deputy chief minister. — PTI

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## SHORT TAKES

Shootout at Palam:  
Man arrested,  
accomplice flees

**New Delhi:** The Delhi Police on Friday arrested a person, however, his accomplice managed to flee during a shootout in Palam area, officials said. The accused persons are involved in a murder case of a woman in southwest Delhi's Sagarapur area, they said. On Wednesday, complainant Sabran Kaur, a resident of Main Sagarpur, reported that she received a call from her nephew Veer (12) who informed that two persons shot his mother Jyoti, a senior police officer said. Kaur reached the spot and found that two men were having pistols in their hand. They pointed the weapon towards Kaur, threatened her of dire consequences and fled away, the officer said. They had already shot Jyoti who later died. Thereafter, a case was registered under relevant sections at Sagarpur police station, they said. During investigation, it was found that the accused came on a motorcycle to commit the crime. They left the bike in Mahavir Enclave area of Palam, the officer said. "Later, a trap was laid at that place to nab the accused persons. On Friday around 12:30 pm, they came back to take the motorcycle. When police were apprehending them, the accused attacked police. During scuffle, one of them identified as Chetan Panday managed to escape," Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Ingit Pratap Singh said. However, another accused person Rahul, a resident of Nangloi Road, Najafgarh received bullet injury and was apprehended, police said, adding that the reason behind the incident is yet to be ascertained.

Plea to provide 3  
meals a day at  
shelter homes

**New Delhi:** A PIL in the Delhi High Court on Friday urged it to direct the urban shelter improvement board, DUSIB, and the Delhi government to provide three meals a day to the homeless in all the shelter homes in the national capital during the prevailing pandemic and the resultant curfew. A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeeet Singh issued notice to the Delhi government and the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) seeking their stand on the plea by Bandhua Mukti Morcha (BMM). BMM, which is a registered organization working for the marginalized people in the country, has sought implementation of DUSIB's October last year decision, taken in its 29th Board meeting, to provide three meals a day in the shelter homes. Delhi government standing counsel Santosh K Tripathi, however, told the court that the three meals a day scheme was discontinued last year itself and only two meals are being provided now. — PTI

No lack of oxygen now at Covid  
care centre in south Delhi: ITBP

**New Delhi, May 7:** Oxygen supply at the 500-oxygenated bed Covid care centre in south Delhi has been "normalised" and there is no lack of the life-saving gas for patients there, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) said on Friday.

This for the first time that a comforting development of adequate oxygen supply has been reported from the facility since it was opened about two weeks ago on April 26.

Official sources said while the full sanctioned 6.55 metric tonnes of medical oxygen for the centre was yet to be received, improvisations are being done by deploying some oxygen concentrators and sending oxygen cylinders on a truck to refill them from a BHEL plant situated about 230 kilometres away in Uttarakhand's Haridwar district.

This Delhi government facility, called the Sardar Patel COVID care centre (SPCCC), is located in the Radha Soami Beas campus in south Delhi's Chhattarpur area and the medical wing and doctors of the border guarding force have been entrusted by the Union government to run it.

"Oxygen supply at the cen-

■ Number of cases below 20,000 for 4th time in 5 days

Delhi records 341 deaths,  
over 19K Covid-19 cases

**New Delhi, May 7:** Delhi recorded 341 more coronavirus deaths and 19,832 new infections on Friday, while the positivity rate remained below 25 per cent for the second consecutive day, the Health Department said.

This is the fourth time in the last five days that the number of new cases remained below 20,000.

There are 91,035 active cases and over 11.83 lakh people have recovered, according to a health bulletin.

The infection tally rose to 12,92,867 with 19,832 new cases on Thursday. There were 19,133 more infections on Wednesday.

The positivity rate stood at 24.92 per cent, a bit higher than 24.29 per cent a day ago.

The death toll rose 18,739 after 335 more people succumbed to the pathogen. On Wednesday, 311 people died from the virus.

Of the 22,097 hospital beds for coronavirus patients in the city, only 2,175 are vacant. As many as 50,425 patients are in home isolation and the number of containment zones is 50785, according to the bulletin.

A total of 1,14,657 beneficiaries were vaccinated on Thursday, out of which 80,306 were those who got their first dose, the bulletin stated.



Union health minister Harsh Vardhan inspects a newly installed oxygen generation plant installed at RML Hospital to review preparedness amid rise in number of Covid-19 cases in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

A batch of lawyers have written to the Bar Council of Delhi (BCD) seeking assistance of ₹1 crore for legal practitioners facing financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdown.

The letter addressed to the BCD Chairman by Dwarka Court Bar Association (DCBA) President Y P Singh, stated that advocates are infected and facing acute problems of finance due to the suspension of work in High Court and the subordinate courts.

Your good office is requested to grant Rs one crore for advocates of DCBA as immediate relief

to the victim of the family to survive or to meet their financial emergency, it stated.

The association said that Rs 15 lakh, announced by the BCD earlier was too little and was yet to be disbursed.

DCBA is in need of the fund collected by BCD for welfare of the Advocates registered with DCBA, it asked the parent organization of advocates in Delhi.

According to an office order dated April 23, High court, as well as the subordinate courts are taking up only extremely urgent matters filed in 2021, through video conferencing mode. — PTI

1.84L people in  
18-44 age group  
vaccinated in 4  
days: Sisodia

**New Delhi, May 7:** As many as 1.84 lakh people in the 18-44 age group have received the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine since the inoculation of this category started on May 3, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said on Friday.

According to Delhi government's health bulletin, 1,14,657 beneficiaries were vaccinated in the last 24 hours, of which 80,306 received their first dose. "In Delhi 1.84 lakh youth have got the 1st dose of vaccine, in first 4 days of 18-45 yrs age group opening. In total 38.88 lakh people have got the vaccine in all age groups till yesterday evening," Sisodia tweeted.

The Delhi government had earlier said the entire population of the capital can be vaccinated in three months, but only if adequate doses are available.

The total number of coronavirus cases in the national capital stands at 12,92,867 while 18,739 fatalities have been reported till now. — PTI

Khan Chacha restaurant owner on the  
run after 100 O2 concentrators seized

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

After busting a gang involved in black marketing of oxygen concentrators, the Delhi Police are now on the lookout for Navneet Kalra, who owns Khan Chacha Restaurant and Town Hall restaurant, both situated in the Khan Market area, where over 100 oxygen concentrators were recovered by police during the raids on Friday morning. Sources said that Kalra is the mastermind of the gang. Police said that Kalra's mobile is switched off and he is absconding.

According to the police, 96 oxygen concentrators were recovered from Khan Chacha Restaurant and nine were seized from Town Hall restaurant.

Kalra who is a friend with the entire Indian cricket team and often questioned for his alleged links with bookies, has gone underground. Whatsapp messages about his impending arrest are also doing the rounds in Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

The recovery of over 100 oxygen concentrators comes after the arrest of four men — Gaurav, Satish



Navneet Kalra

Sethi, Vikrant and Hitesh from south Delhi's Lodhi Colony area on Wednesday for allegedly indulging in black marketing of oxygen concentrators.

After their arrest the police had recovered 419 oxygen concentrators that were meant to be sold in black market. The accused were produced in court and one day police custody was taken.

On Wednesday, a police team was on round when Nege Ju Restaurant and Bar, owned by Kalra, was found open. A man was found working on a laptop at the restaurant who was later found taking online orders for oxygen concentrators, police said.

Police had searched the restaurant premises and recovered 32 boxes of oxy-

gen concentrators, one box of thermal scanner and one box containing N 95 masks.

"After verification, it was found that the owner of the restobar was Kalra and an First Information Report (FIR) under sections of the Essential Commodities Act and Epidemic Diseases Act was registered against the four men identified as Gaurav Singh, Satish Sethi, Vikrant and Hitesh, all residents of Delhi. They were subsequently placed under arrest," said Atul Kumar Thakur, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South district adding that Hitesh was the manager of the place.

"During interrogation, the accused disclosed about their warehouse at the Khullar farm in Chhatarpur area, following which a search was conducted and 387 more units of oxygen concentrators were recovered which were being sold at exorbitant prices in black market," said the DCP.

Invoices of these oxygen concentrators were recovered. MRP stickers displaying a price of ₹69,999 per concentrator were also recovered. "With further seizure of 105

#OxygenConcentrator from Khan Chacha & Town Hall, 2 upscale restaurants in Khan Mkt, total 524 seized from #blackmarketers Owner Navneet Kalra, also owns Dayal Optical, is on run. Manager; 3 staffers arrested by #DelhiPolice SouthDist. Further raids on," Delhi Police said in a tweet.

Police said that Matrix Cellular is one of the companies which was involved in importing the machines from China and the cost of these concentrators was between ₹16,000 to ₹22,000. Some of them were five liters and some of nine liters, police said.

One Gagan Duggal is the owner of the company and he is also under investigation. "Navneet Kalra is a partner of Dugal in this venture and was instrumental in driving up prices by black marketing for ₹12,000 to ₹70,000," said a source. They were importing the concentrators from October last year and when the demand was increased in February 2021, more oxygen concentrators were imported by them and stored at different restaurants, police said.

Delhi govt  
to create  
oxygen pool  
in all dists

**New Delhi, May 7:** The Delhi government on Friday appealed to citizens to donate oxygen cylinders to a "common pool" being created in each district to supply the life-saving gas to Covid-19 patients in home isolation and meet the emergency needs of hospitals.

A bus depot of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) in each district will serve as the hub, it said.

Residents can donate cylinders into the central pool by either contacting the DTC cluster depot at Rajghat on 011-23270718 or register on "Covid Donation" on https://delhi.gov.in, the government said.

Patients in home isolation can contact the concerned district magistrate for empty or filled cylinders, an official said.

Filled cylinders will be provided in lieu of empty ones. — PTI

Ambulance owner charges over  
₹1L to ferry Covid patient, held  
Hospital guard held for selling  
Remdesivir at inflated price

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

A 29-year-old ambulance owner, who is also an MBBS doctor, was arrested for allegedly charging over Rs one lakh from a person to transport a Covid patient to Ludhiana in Punjab from Gurgaon, police said on Friday.

The accused has been identified as Mimoh Kumar Bundwal, a resident of Dashgarha Village, Inderpuri, they said.

The patient's family member told reporters in Ludhiana that as ambulances were not readily available, they somehow managed to contact one Delhi-based operator who agreed to take the patient to Ludhiana but demanded ₹1.40 lakh initially.

However, he agreed to charge ₹20,000 less after being told that the family had the oxygen stock with them.

An amount of ₹95,000 was paid to the ambulance operator as advance while the remaining ₹25,000 was paid immediately upon



Construction work underway as part of the Central Vista Redevelopment Project at Rajpath in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

■ Minister asked to be present on next hearing

Plea in HC alleges oxygen  
hoarding by politicians

**New Delhi, May 7:** A plea alleging hoarding of oxygen by political leaders came up for hearing before the Delhi High Court which on Friday sought AAP MLA Imran Hussain's reply on the claim of distributing oxygen to public for Covid-19 patients.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli issued notice on the plea to the Delhi government and Hussain, a Cabinet minister, who was directed to be present in the hearing on Saturday.

The high court said it will have to be seen from where the MLA was getting oxygen as even gurdwaras are distributing it.

He may be getting it from Faridabad, you can't really have a problem if he is not eating away from the allocated source and he has arranged his own cylinders, the court said.

The petitioner's counsel showed a Facebook post referring to distribution of oxygen by Hussain and contended that there is hoarding at the back.

Delhi government counsel said whether it is BJP leader Gautam Gambhir or AAP MLA Imran Hussain, strictest possible action will be taken if any violation is found out.

Gambhir had earlier tweeted that some of the crucial medicines for Covid-19 patients were available at his offices and those in need, can take it from there.

He had also tweeted he has arranged oxygen concentrators and those in need can take it. — PTI

Man arrested for  
cheating on pretext  
of arranging plasma

**New Delhi, May 7:** A 31-year-old man was arrested for allegedly cheating people on the pretext of arranging plasma for treatment of COVID-19 patients, police said on Friday.

Sunny, a resident of Nangloi, was apprehended on a complaint filed by Guneet Singh Jaggi, they said.

Jaggi told police that a woman, who was known to him, was undergoing treatment for COVID-19 at the Max Hospital in Saket and she needed plasma, a senior officer said.

The complainant got a contact number of a person on social media who could arrange the plasma, police said.

Jaggi contacted the person and he demanded Rs 50,000 for arranging the plasma and asked him to deposit the amount in a bank account, police said. The complainant transferred Rs 10,000 in the account. However,

▶ The person, identified as Sunny, has cheated more than six persons to the tune of ₹1 lakh, police said. Police recovered a mobile phone and ₹29,460 cash from his possession. They also froze a bank account containing ₹62,000.

after receiving money, the person switched off his mobile, they said.

"Police obtained bank account details of the person, identified him and apprehended the accused from near Paharganj," Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Ingit Pratap Singh said.

The person was identified as Sunny and he has cheated more than six persons to the tune of Rs 1 lakh, police said. Police recovered a mobile phone and Rs 29,460 cash from his possession. They also froze a bank account containing Rs 62,000. — PTI

Delhi govt to  
organise mass  
vaccination for  
mediapersons

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

The Delhi government will organise a mass Covid-19 vaccination drive for mediapersons, an official said on Friday. The vaccination camps will be organised at the offices of the media houses and the cost will be borne by the government, he said.

The government will seek details of employees from their respective organisations. After getting the details, the health department will proceed, he added.

The move comes at a time when people are facing difficulties in booking vaccination slots.

The Press Council of India on Thursday had reiterated its recommendation to the Centre and state governments that journalists be included in the category of "Covid warriors" and also given insurance cover.

In a statement, the print media watchdog had commended the governments of Odisha, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh who have considered journalists among "frontline workers for their hard work in this pandemic situation" and have extended financial help to them. — PTI

Chhota Rajan's  
death news  
'wrong', say  
Tihar admin

**New Delhi, May 7:** The Tihar Jail administration on Friday said that the news of gangster Chhota Rajan's death is "wrong". Rajan was found COVID-19 positive in the Tihar Jail on April 22 and admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) on April 24.

"News of death of Tihar jail inmate Rajendra Sadashiv Nikalje @ Chhota Rajan s/o Sadashiv Nikalje is wrong," Director General (Prisons) Sandeep Goel said.

Rajan, 61, is lodged at the high security prison since his arrest after deportation from Bali in Indonesia in 2015. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Sr. journo S.N. Singh dies after testing +ve

**Noida:** Veteran journalist Shesh Narayan Singh passed away on Friday while undergoing treatment for Covid at a government hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida, officials said. The 70-year-old journalist was admitted to the Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) after being diagnosed positive for coronavirus, a hospital official said. Paying his tribute, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Singh will always be remembered for his contribution to journalism. His demise is extremely painful, the PM said. Other senior leaders, including Union ministers Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah, also paid rich tribute to Shesh Narayan Singh. Gautam Buddh Nagar Police commissioner Alok Singh and Noida MLA Pankaj Singh took to Twitter to pay their homage to the veteran journalist. — PTI

## 4 killed in lightning strike in C'garh

**Korba:** Four members of a family were killed, while two others injured after being struck by lightning in Chhattisgarh's Korea district, police said on Friday. The incident took place on Thursday evening, when the victims, including three sisters, were at their paddy field near Bichhli village under Kelhari police station area, an official said. The deceased include Jailal Khairwar (45), his two daughters Pramila (20) and Subhadra (15) and son-in-law Bhupendra (25), he said. Khairwar's son Surajbhan and daughter Budhi sustained burn injuries in the incident, the official added. On being alerted, a police team rushed to the spot and bodies were sent for post-mortem, he said, adding that the injured are undergoing treatment at the district hospital in Baikunthpur. — PTI

## Odisha's reports over 12,238 cases in a day

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha on Friday reported the highest ever single-day spike of over 12,000 Covid cases. As many as 12,238 fresh cases of coronavirus infections were detected in various districts, pushing the state's total caseload to 5,12,400. The state also recorded 19 deaths, the highest ever single-day casualty. The deceased included a 29-year-old woman. Sundergarh district recorded an all-time high of 2073 cases whereas Khurda reported 1828 cases. Of the total fresh cases, 6914 were reported from quarantine centres while remaining 5324 were local contact cases. A total 50,799 samples were tested on Friday. With the detection of fresh 12,238 Covid cases, the state's tally of active cases surged to 86,950.

## SHILPA SHETTY'S HUSBAND, KIDS TEST POSITIVE

**Mumbai:** Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty on Friday announced that six of her family members, including husband Raj Kundra, son Viaan-Raj and daughter Samisha, have tested positive for coronavirus. In a statement posted on her official Instagram page, the 45-year-old actor said her parents-in-law and her mother have also contracted the virus. "The last 10 days have been difficult for us as a family. My parents-in-law tested positive for Covid-19, followed by Samisha, Viaan-Raj, my Mom, and lastly, Raj. They've all been in isolation in their rooms at home as per the official guidelines and have been following the doctor's advice," Ms Shetty said. Besides her family, two members of the actor's in-house staff also tested positive and they are currently being treated at a medical facility, she added. Ms Shetty said all the members of her family are "on the road to recovery", while she has tested negative for the disease. "All safety measures have been followed as per protocol, and we're grateful to the BMC and authorities for their prompt help & response. "Thank you for all your love & support. Please continue to keep all of us in your prayers. Please mask up, sanitise, stay safe; and whether Covid positive or not... Still stay positive, mentally," she added. — PTI



Shilpa Shetty

## Jabs must be given to states for free: Bengal to SC

State seeks direct 100% procurement of doses from vaccine manufacturers

**New Delhi, May 7:** The West Bengal government moved the Supreme Court on Friday seeking directions to disband Phase-III vaccine policy of the Centre and adoption of uniform policy of procuring 100 per cent doses of Covid from vaccine manufacturers which can be equitably distributed to all the states and Union territories for free decentralised distribution. The state government also sought setting aside of the differential pricing mechanism for Covid vaccines and capping the price for Covid vaccines at a uniform price of ₹150 per dose. The intervention application has been filed by the state government in the pending matter taken suo motu by the top court for ensuring distribution of essential supplies and services during the pandemic.

It sought directions to the Centre to place a single bulk order for Covid vaccines on a war footing basis on both domestic and foreign manufacturers to ensure universal coverage at the shortest possible time frame. The state government claimed that it is yet to receive its allocated share of vaccines from the union government despite a commitment from the Centre that it would be supplied four lakh doses of Covid vaccines by May 5, 2021. The government of West Bengal is yet to receive these 4 lakh doses as of May 6, 2021, the application said, adding that there are reports that on account of vaccine shortages and uncertainty over vaccine availability, States such as Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Assam,

**THE STATE** government also sought setting aside of the differential pricing mechanism for Covid vaccines and capping the price for Covid vaccines at a uniform price of ₹150 per dose.

Tripura, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and UT of Chandigarh had to postpone the scheduled roll out of Phase-III of the Covid-19 immunization program. It said that the State government was also unable to commence phase-III of the vaccine roll out on account of vaccine unavailability; the ongoing inoculation process for those above 44 years of age is however continuing at different medical facilities depending on the availability of vaccines. The instant application is being filed pray-

ing for urgent directions from this Court inter alia directing the Government of India to procure Covid-19 vaccines and distribute the same to the States and Union Territories across India in an equitable manner and within the earliest possible time frame; The other directions prayed for in this application are also necessary for achieving universal coverage within the shortest possible time frame, the plea said. The state government said that at present, there is an acute shortage of Covid-19 vaccines for achieving universal coverage in India and the Centre must take urgent steps on a war footing basis to ensure that Covid-19 vaccines are made available to the States for free decentralized distribution to the masses without any further delay. — PTI

## HC orders C'garh govt to continue vaccination

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, MAY 7

Chhattisgarh high court on Friday directed the Bhupesh Baghel to resume adult vaccination drive as soon as possible to save lives of people. The Chhattisgarh government has a couple of days ago postponed the drive to vaccinate people aged between 18-44 until a policy to decide quota for the three economic classes, 'Antyodaya', below poverty line (BPL) and above poverty line (APL), is finalised as per the earlier directive by the high court. The court however took

cognizance of the state government's decision to pause the adult vaccination drive, describing it wrong and unfair and ordered an immediate resumption of the drive in the state, according to Anumeh Srivastav, counsel for former MLA Amit Jogi, one of the petitioners in the case. "The government has to ensure that a maximum number of people are vaccinated every minute to protect the lives of the people", the court observed in its interim order. The court also granted the state government a week's time to frame the fresh adult vaccination policy.

## Govt's failures made lockdown inevitable: Rahul writes to Modi

**New Delhi, May 7:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the government's alleged failures have made another devastating national lockdown almost inevitable, and called for providing financial and food support to the most vulnerable. In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he suggested that the government should not be concerned about the economic impact of the lockdown as the human cost of the spread of the virus would have tragic consequences for the people. "Your government's lack of a clear and coherent Covid and vaccination strategy, as well as its hubris in declaring premature victory as the virus was exponentially spreading, has placed India in a highly dangerous position: today the disease is growing explosively. "It is currently on the verge of overwhelming all of our systems. GOI's failures have made another devastating national lockdown almost inevitable," he told the Prime Minister. India has seen a record number of 4.14 lakh fresh Covid cases and around 4,000 deaths in the last 24 hours. Mr Gandhi said it is critical that our people are prepared for such an eventuality of a lockdown. He has been demanding that the government provides ₹6000 in the accounts to each poor family to tide over the crisis. "To prevent a repeat of the manifold suffering caused by last year's lockdown, the government must act with compassion and provide critical financial and food support to our most vulnerable people," he said, adding that it must be also ready with a transportation strategy for those who will require it. The former Congress chief said that when the Covid tsunami continues to ravage our country unabated, the people of India must be your foremost priority in such unprecedented crisis. — PTI

## MP: Free Covid treatment to poor

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, MAY 7

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday launched Mukhyamantri Upachar Yojana providing free treatment to Covid-19 patients belonging to the economically weaker section of society. As per the scheme, the Ayushman Bharat cardholders would be provided free corona treatment in both government and private hospitals. The state government has designated some private hospitals to treat such patients free of cost. The government would bear the cost of treatment. The state government has prepared a package for the private hospitals to treat the Covid-19 patients who are beneficiaries of Ayushman Bharat Yojana. The economically backward people who are not included in the Ayushman scheme can also avail of the free treatment facility by producing their income certificates certified by a



Shivraj Singh

gazetted officer.

Around 2.42 crore people in the state would be benefitted by the free Covid treatment scheme.

The state government has designated 579 hospitals as Covid hospitals in MP.

The state government has appointed nodal officers for each private hospital in the state to facilitate admission of the Covid-19 patients belonging to poor families under the free treatment scheme.

As many as 395 ICU beds, 13,224 oxygen beds and 20,601 isolation beds are currently available in government hospitals in the state. Similarly, total 3,760 beds have been reserved for Covid patients in the private hospitals in the state. — PTI

## Covid-19: No mass prayers in J&amp;K on last Fri. of Ramzan

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, MAY 7

Jumat-ul-Vida, or the last Friday of the Muslim fasting month of Ramzan, was observed on a subdued note in Jammu and Kashmir with no congregational prayers held in Srinagar's historic grand mosque, the Hazratbal Shrine, or any other major place of worship of the Union Territory (UT) in view of the worsening Covid-19 situation. The namaz was restricted to the residences and small gatherings took place in local mosques with the worshippers maintaining social distancing, wearing face masks, and following other Covid-19 necessitated standard operating procedures (SOP) and guidelines. Srinagar with other parts of predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley and also most parts of Jammu region remained under strict lockdown on the ninth consecutive day on Friday. The J&K government had initially decided to bring eleven out of twenty districts of the UT under an 84-hour strict lockdown from the evening of April 29. But later, the curfew-like restrictions were extended to other nine districts as well and the lockdown period has been stretched to May 10 as daily Covid-19 cases and deaths have risen alarmingly in the UT. The authorities said that 50 more people died from Covid-19 on Friday, raising the toll to 2,612 whereas the number of positive cases has reached 2,06,954. As many as 284 Covid patients died in the past week alone.

## Complete lockdown in Kerala

GILVESTER ASSARY THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 7

Kerala, on Friday, reported 38,460 new cases of Covid even as the active cases in the state crossed the 4 lakh mark.

With the new cases showing an alarming increase over the past two weeks, the state has enforced total lockdown from May 8 to May 16. As many as 1,44,345 samples were tested in the last 24 hours and the test positivity rate was 26.64%. The administration has shut the borders of the district from Friday night. At present, 10.50 lakh people are under observation, of which 10.20 lakh are under home or institutional quarantine. The state also reported 54 deaths on Friday, taking the toll to 5,682.

Public and private transportation will be off the roads and those who wish to travel during this period will have to obtain a travel pass from the police.

## Jaishankar faces criticism for photo without mask

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Criticism in the social media has begun over external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar and Indian high commissioner to the UK Ms Gaitri I. Kumar for not wearing a mask while seated in a room during a virtual meeting in London with British foreign minister Dominic Raab earlier on Thursday evening.

Photos of the meeting were tweeted by the EAM himself. There was no official response to the criticism. The photos showed four others seated in the room, all presumably Indian diplomats, who



were however masked.

The meeting had taken place after media reports from London that two members of the official Indian delegation for the G-7 meeting in London had reportedly tested Covid positive on Wednesday while the EAM had reportedly tested negative. Soon after that, MR Jaishankar had then tweeted that he had been informed on Tuesday evening about "exposure to possible Covid positive cases" and that he would now attend the G-7 meeting in virtual mode out of "abundant caution and also out of consideration for others".

## Govt: Hospitals, Covid centres can accept cash payments of over ₹2L

**New Delhi, May 7:** The government on Friday allowed hospitals, dispensaries and Covid care centres to accept cash payments in excess of ₹2 lakh from patients or their kin till May 31. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) issued a notification saying such entities would be required to obtain PAN or Aadhaar of the patient and the payee and also the relationship between them. "The Central government ... hereby specifies Hospitals, Dispensaries, Nursing Homes, Covid Care Centres or similar other medical facilities providing Covid treatment to patients for the purpose of Section 269ST of the Income-tax Act, 1961 for payment received in cash during April 1, 2021, to May 31, 2021, on obtaining the PAN or Aadhaar of the patient and the payee and the relationship between the patient and the



A health worker checks all supportive instruments to treat patients inside a room at Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata on Friday.

payee....", the CBDT said. Nangia & Co LLP Partner Shailesh Kumar said in the present situation, various hospitals/nursing homes have been demanding payment in cash for treatment of Covid. However, income tax law does not permit cash payments beyond ₹2 lakh as per Section 269ST. "Considering the extraordinary pandemic

situation, where saving life of people is most important, considering the genuine hardship of people, the Government has issued present notification allowing people to make cash payment for treatment of Covid even beyond this limit. "The notification is applicable for all cash payments made on/after 1st April 2021 till 31st May 2021," Mr Kumar added. — PTI



A groom wearing face masks in view of Covid outbreak during his marriage procession amid COVID-induced lockdown in Gurugram on Friday.

## 3rd wave fear: Maha to have Covid-19 task force for kids

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, MAY 7

The Maharashtra government has decided to set up a paediatric task force to prepare for the third wave of novel coronavirus infections. In addition to this, the state government will set up Child Covid centres (CCC), state health minister Rajesh Tope informed on Friday. According to experts' opinion, the third

wave may impact teenagers and children more than the earlier two waves of Covid. Mr Tope said that the task force would chalk out a plan to treat the children below the age of 18 years of age. Necessary beds, suitable paediatric ventilators and other required infrastructure would be prepared for the children, he said. "In view of the Centre's warning of the third wave,

we are setting up a paediatric task force," Mr Tope said. The paediatric task force would give their suggestions on how to treat and take care of small children below 18. "Children need different ventilators, beds and other medical equipment," he said. The minister also said that chief minister Uddhav Thackeray held a discussion with the paediatricians and specialists via video conferencing.

## APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that one unidentified dead body of male **Name:** Unknown, **S/o:** Unknown, **R/o:** Unknown, **Age:** 38 Years, **Complexion:** Black, **Height:** 5' 6", **Face:** Long, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Brown colour T-Shirt and white colour lower, who was found in the area of PS: Bawana, Delhi. In this regard a case DD No. 98A Dated 25.04.2021 has been registered at P.S. Bawana, Delhi.



Any person having any information or clue about the above deceased may kindly inform to the undersigned on the following address or telephone nos.

**Sd/- SHO**  
**P.S: Bawana, Delhi**  
**Tel.: 011-2775 2534**

DP/1019/ON/2021

## REDUCTION IN FREQUENCY OF SPECIAL TRAINS

It is notified for the information of passengers that Railways have decided to reduce the frequency of following Special Trains as per details given below:-

Train No.	From	To	Days of Operation	Revised Days of Operation	Dates of Revised Frequency
01221	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T)	H. Nizamuddin	Daily	Tue, Sat (Bi-Weekly)	07.05.2021 to 29.06.2021
01222	H. Nizamuddin	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T)	Daily	Wed, Sun (Bi-Weekly)	08.05.2021 to 30.06.2021
02919	Dr. Ambedkar Nagar	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	Daily	Mon, Wed, Fri (Tri-Weekly)	07.05.2021 to till further advice
02920	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	Dr. Ambedkar Nagar	Daily	Wed, Fri, Sun (Tri-Weekly)	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02957	Ahmedabad Jn.	New Delhi	Daily	Sun, Tue, Fri (Tri-Weekly)	07.05.2021 to till further advice
02958	New Delhi	Ahmedabad Jn.	Daily	Mon, Wed, Sat (Tri-Weekly)	08.05.2021 to till further advice

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

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

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## SHORT TAKES

## Mob roughs up cops in Maha dist

**Pune:** A group of people allegedly manhandled some police personnel at Sangamer town in Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district after the latter rebuked them for gathering at a place despite the Covid-19 restrictions, an official said on Friday. The incident took place in Mughalpur area of the town on Thursday evening, following which police registered an offence against 10 to 15 people, he said. "The police personnel had spotted the mob on a street, following which they rebuked its members and tried to disperse the crowd. However, some of the people manhandled a couple of policemen. After the incident, some more people came to the spot," said Manoj Patil, Superintendent of Police, Ahmednagar. "A case has been registered against 10 to 15 people under relevant Sections of the IPC. — PTI

## 2 held with heroin worth ₹100cr in TN

**Chennai:** Over 15 kg of heroin worth ₹100 crore was seized at the airport here on Friday and two Tanzanian nationals were arrested in this connection, said a top Customs official. Acting on inputs from DRI that some drug was being smuggled into India from Africa, the customs department detained a 46-year-old woman and her 45-year-old associate for interrogation, said Customs Commissioner Rajan Chowdhry in a press release. Since the two were evasive in their replies during interrogation, the sleuths examined the baggage and recovered the drug. The heroin was concealed in packets and some spicy powder was sprinkled to camouflage the smell emanating from the narcotic, he said. The seizure was one of the biggest made by Customs in recent times, he said. — PTI

## Rural polls: Wrong winners declared

**Gorakhpur, UP:** An FIR has been registered against a government official deputed as additional returning officer in the Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls for allegedly giving winning certificates to candidates who lost, an official said on Friday. ARO Virendra Kumar has been booked for cheating, forgery and fraud on a complaint from Returning Officer Sunil Kumar, a senior police official said. On Wednesday night, there were incident of arson in Nai Bazar police outpost by the supporters of the candidates who alleged that they was not declared winner due to fraud committed by the official. The police has arrested 18 people and lodged four separate FIRs in connection with vandalism and arson of the police outpost. — PTI

## NIA SEEKS URANIUM INFO FROM MAHA ATS

SHAHAB ANSARI  
MUMBAI, MAY 7

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has sought detailed information from the Maharashtra ATS about the seizure of over seven kg of natural uranium worth about Rs 21.30 crore. The ATS had arrested two persons on Wednesday night and seized 7100 kg uranium from them. According to an NIA officer, the agency has not yet taken a decision on whether it will take over the investigation or not. However, since the matter is sensitive the central probe agency has sought details of the case from the ATS. Following this the ATS on Friday gave a copy of the FIR to the NIA and provided necessary information related to the case. After the two arrests, the DIG ATS Shivdeep Lande had said that in order to ensure if the seized substance was uranium it was sent to Bhabha Atomic Research Center (Barc) at Trombay for analysis and after examination the officials there had confirmed that the seized material was natural uranium of more than 90 per cent purity and it was highly radioactive and was harmful for human life. He had also stated that the ATS was trying to find out source from where the uranium was acquired. Both the arrested accused have been remanded to the ATS custody till May 12.

## BENGAL VOILENCE Victims want their daughters to leave state, says rights body

## Women getting rape threats: NCW

**New Delhi, May 7:** An NCW team visiting West Bengal to take stock of the post-poll violence has found that many women are receiving rape threats and want their daughters to leave the state as police is not taking effective steps for their protection, women's rights body chairman Rekha Sharma said on Friday. Victims are unable to voice their complaints due to the fear of backlash, she said in a statement.

After the third straight convincing victory for the ruling Trinamul Congress (TMC), led by chief minister Mamata Banerjee, in the Assembly election, West Bengal has witnessed a number of violent incidents since Sunday, when the results were announced.

Taking suo moto cognisance of videos purportedly showing women being beaten in Nandigram constituency, the National Commission for Women had on Tuesday announced that it will send a team to the state for further inquiry into the matter.

"The team received information about many stranded victims, who left their homes because of violence, are currently forced to stay in a shelter home. The team was informed by the victims that they were physically assaulted and their homes were vandalised and set ablaze by TMC goons," the NCW statement said.

"The complainants told the team that they have been receiving rape and threat calls every day. The women also said that they are not being provided any protection by the police or state authorities. The women said that they have left the elderly in their homes and are worried about their safety," it said.

The shelter homes that these people are staying in have no facilities. The victims complained that they are not being provided with any medical facilities, healthy food or even clean drinking water, it added.

The NCW team headed by Sharma talked to many women who said they were worried about the safety of their daughters and wanted them to leave the state for their safety, according to the statement. — PTI



Newly-elected MLAs of various political parties, not following social distancing norms, wait to collect certificates during their oath ceremony inside the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in Kolkata on Friday. — PTI

## BJP to boycott Speaker's poll, not to attend House

**Kolkata, May 7:** West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh Friday said that party legislators will boycott the election for the Speaker in West Bengal assembly and its newly elected lawmakers will not attend the House till the post poll violence in the state is controlled.

The Speaker's election is slated for Saturday.

The BJP lawmakers will not attend the Assembly in protest against the post poll violence, he said.

"We will not attend the Speaker's election tomorrow. We will also not attend the sessions of the House," Mr Ghosh told reporters at the state

Assembly.

He also said, "We will not come to the assembly till our MLAs get full protection ... We will only come when our MLAs will be able to walk alongside our workers".

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee had on Thursday said that 16 persons — both from Trinamul Congress and the BJP and — one from the ISF had lost their lives in the post poll violence in the state. The results were declared on May 2.

"We will expect that the government will take initiative to stop the violence and compensate those affected in the violence,"

Mr Ghosh added.

Ms Banerjee had on Thursday announced that family members of each of those killed in the violence after the eight-phase election in the state will be given Rs 2 lakh each by the government as compensation.

A four-member fact finding team of the Union home ministry is visiting the state to look into the reasons for the post poll violence. They met the chief secretary, home secretary and director general of police at the state Secretariat and met governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday seeking a report on the violence. — PTI

## Post-poll clashes well-conspired: RSS

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Condemning the "gruesome post-poll violence" in West Bengal, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Friday said it appears to be "well conspired" and is against the spirit of democracy. The RSS also asked the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamul Congress to "effectively establish rule of law", act against the culprits and instill a feeling of safety and confidence among the affected people.

The RSS also reminded

the ruling party of its duty in containing the post-poll violence unleashed against the Opposition party members, in particular the BJP. It claimed that the state administrative machinery was "completely passive" and "remained mute spectators" during the violence and the "rioters seemed not to be afraid of anything".

In Bengal, the anti-social elements active in this abhorring violence, "misbehaved with women folk in the most barbaric and despicable manner, brutally killed innocent people and torched houses", the

Sangh's general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale said in a statement.

He also claimed that as a result of unabated violence, thousands of people, including a large number from the scheduled castes and tribes, were forced to go in search of refuge to save their lives and honour.

"It is our considered opinion that this post-poll result violence is contrary to the Bharatiya tradition of co-existence and respect to the opinion of all, as also it is totally opposed to the very spirit of democracy and one peo-

## MHA team seeks report from gov

**Kolkata:** A four-member team of the Union home ministry, tasked with looking into reasons for the post-poll violence in West Bengal, met Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar at the Raj Bhawan on Friday.

The team, led by an additional secretary of the ministry, had arrived in the state on Thursday and held meetings with the chief secretary, home secretary and the DGP at the secretariat, officials said.

The team visited several places in South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas districts on Thursday and spoke to family members of the deceased and locals, they said. — PTI

## HC wants report on law and order

**Kolkata:** A five-judge bench of the Calcutta high court, taking cognisance of a PIL that claimed life and liberty of people in Bengal are in danger owing to post-poll violence, asked the state government on Friday to file an affidavit in three days, apprising it of the present law and order situation.

The bench directed advocate general for the state, Kishore Dutta, to specify in the affidavit the names of areas where violence broke out, and the steps taken to prevent or control the same. The PIL would be heard again on May 10. — PTI

## Poll results very disappointing...

■ Continued from Page 1

The Congress has been repeatedly attacking the government for the last couple of weeks over its "mismanagement" of the Covid-19 crisis, which has been spiralling in the country, with a serious lack of medicines, oxygen, cylinders, hospital beds, ventilators and vaccines. Referring to the letters written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi by Dr Manmohan Singh, the former PM, and by Rahul Gandhi, the Congress president said all these helpful initiatives had fall-

en on deaf ears as the government has made no meaningful response and continues to behave as if it alone has all the answers. Mrs Sonia Gandhi also demanded that meetings of the standing committees be held immediately: "The situation brooks no delay. Tackling this crisis requires able, calm and visionary leadership. The nation is sinking under the weight of the Modi government's indifference and incompetence. This is a time for us to steel ourselves and rededicate ourselves in the service of our

people."

Hitting out at the Central Vista redevelopment project in New Delhi, she said the Modi government allocated thousands of crores for non-essential projects that have nothing to do with the people's well-being. She was also critical of the government's vaccination policy and said: "The Modi government's inequitable vaccination policy will exclude millions of dalits, adivasis, other backward classes, as well as the poor and the marginalised."

## Give 700 MT O2 to Delhi

■ Continued from Page 1  
Chandrachud, Justice Shah said, "You have to supply 700 MT oxygen every day till we further order."

In another jolt to the Centre, the court refused to interfere with the Karnataka high court order directing the Centre to supply 1,200 MT oxygen to the state.

The SC said that the HC cannot remain silent when people are dying in the state.

In a bid to present a larger picture which needs a pan India approach, solicitor-general Tushar Mehta told the court that the entire system would collapse if all high courts start passing orders on oxygen supply in their states. However, the court said that it was not oblivious to the difficulties being faced by the Centre but they (court) also have to think what will happen if the requirement of oxygen in a state is not met.

## Sonowal, Sarma called to Delhi to discuss CM issue

**New Delhi/Guwahati, May 7:** Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma were on Friday called to New Delhi by the BJP central leadership, apparently to discuss about the leadership issue of the next government, five days after the saffron party-led alliance emerged victorious in the assembly elections, sources said.

Mr Sonowal, who belongs to Assam's indigenous Sonowal-Kachari tribals, and Mr Sarma, the convenor of the Northeast Democratic Alliance, are expected to have a meeting with BJP president J.P. Nadda, Union home minister Amit Shah, BJP general B.L. Santhosh and others on Saturday, they said.

However, it is immediately not known whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be present in the meeting, they added.

"Sonowal and Sarma will leave for New Delhi on Saturday for discussions on the formation of the next government," Assam BJP spokesperson Rupam Goswami said.

The meeting with Mr Nadda is scheduled at



Sarbananda Sonowal



Himanta Sarma

10.30 am, party sources said.

The BJP is also yet to hold a meeting of its parliamentary board, which normally decides key issues like who will be the chief minister of a state.

The BJP had not announced a chief ministerial candidate before the March-April polls in Assam.

In the 2016 elections, the BJP had projected Sonowal as its chief minister and won the election, forming the first saffron party government in the Northeast.

The BJP has been maintaining that it would decide who would be the chief minister of Assam after the elections.

In the results announced for the 126-member Assam assembly last Sunday, the BJP won 60 seats and its alliance partners AGP 9 and UPPL six seats. — PTI

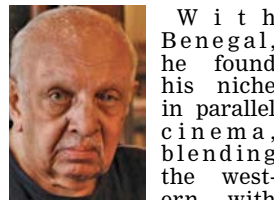
## Veteran composer Vanraj Bhatia dead

**Mumbai, May 7:** Veteran music composer Vanraj Bhatia died in Mumbai on Friday after a brief illness, a former colleague said.

The 94-year-old virtuoso, who scored the music for Shyam Benegal classics like *Ankur* and *Bhumika* and TV series *Yatra* and *Bharat Ek Khoj* (Discovery of India) lived alone at his apartment at the Rungta Housing Colony on Napean Sea Road.

After graduating from the Elphinstone College here, he trained in western classical music in London and Paris.

On returning home, he joined the advertising world, working for a phenomenal 6,000 ad jingles, most famously the La laala refrain for a soap endorsement filmed by a waterfall.



With Benegal, he found his niche in parallel cinema, blending the western with the Indian classical idiom. He created the soundtracks for Aparna Sen's 36 Chowringhee Lane and Kundan Shah's Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro.

His last work was an opera titled Agni Varsha which was performed in New York.

Among the awards he won are the National Award for Best Music for Govind Nihalani's TV series Tamasha and also the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award.

He received India's fourth-highest civilian honour, the Padma Shri in 2012. — PTI

## Stalin gets cracking

■ Continued from Page 1  
constituency" campaign, Shilpa Prabakar Satish was appointed as special officer.

The department, coming directly under the CM, will make efforts to solve the problems of the people within 100 days. Mr Stalin had assured people that their grievances would be redressed in 100 days after he took office when collecting the complaints.

The fifth order passed related to the government settling the medical bills of people undergoing treatment for Covid-19 under the Tamil Nadu Government Insurance Scheme. This would help those going to private hospitals during the pandemic.

Besides these orders, the appointment of a new chief secretary for the state and four secretaries to the CM's office were also issued. Transferring Rajeev Ranjan out to Tamil Nadu Newsprint and Paper Ltd as chairman and managing director, the government named V. Irai Anbu as the new chief secretary. Mr Irai Anbu, who was earlier additional chief secretary and director of Anna Institute of Management and director-general of training, took charge immediately and attended the meeting presided over by the chief minister in the evening to discuss the Covid-19 situation with the district collectors through video conferencing.

## '3rd wave can be handled

■ Continued from Page 1  
everywhere," Dr Raghavan said. Several states and UTs have imposed strict lockdowns to break the chain of transmission. Goa Friday announced a 15-day curfew from Sunday during which only essential services, including medical supplies, will be allowed while grocery shops will be allowed to remain open only from 7am-1pm.

The Centre has said it has so far provided more than 17.35 crore vaccine doses to states/UTs and more than 90 lakh doses are still available with states/UTs to be administered. It added over 10 lakh doses in addition will be received by the states/UTs in the next three days.

The Centre has decided to deploy AYUSH professionals to boost availability of medical personnel to

fight Covid-19. The Union health ministry said AYUSH doctors are institutionally qualified professionals, well-trained in various aspects of medical care and have proven their competence in various Covid-19 management roles in different institutions across the country. States/UTs have trained nearly 1.06 lakh AYUSH professionals in different aspects of Covid-19 management, and 28,473 professionals have been deployed for Covid-19 activities.

The Prime Minister Thursday spoke with the chief ministers of Manipur, Sikkim and Tripura on the Covid-19 situation. He had spoken with the CMs of Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Telangana besides the lieutenant-governors of J&K and Puducherry in this regard.



## THE ASIAN AGE

8 MAY 2021

## Vaccines: IP waiver fine, but tech transfer crucial

The warning by the principal scientific advisor to the Union government that a third wave of the pandemic Covid-19 is in the offing and the Supreme Court's assessment that the government needed to finalise a formula for the allocation, supply and distribution of oxygen in a scientific manner before the wave hits the nation bind the government into pulling up its socks to fight the pandemic. The decision of the United States administration to support a joint move by India and South Africa to waive patent for vaccines for the pandemic could add to its preparedness.

Most experts were of the view that the pandemic would stage a second coming after it started waning in the fourth quarter of last year but the government planned little or nothing for it. The Niti Aayog and the parliamentary committee for health and family welfare had flagged the increased use of medical oxygen during the first wave and wanted the government to streamline its supply and distribution mechanism. But the government had chosen to ignore most of them with the cumulative result that patients in their thousands choke and some die across India.

**The fresh thinking on the patent regime on Covid vaccines does not offer immediate relief but the government must do everything possible to get the technology transferred here and production increased in the shortest possible time**

The government that had cleared two vaccines, one developed indigenously, and then launched the "world's largest vaccination drive" in the beginning of the year did little to augment their production with the result that other nations now scour their vaults to export the jabs to the "world's vaccine factory". This is almost the same in the case of life-saving anti-viral drugs, too. The government did nothing to improve the healthcare infrastructure in the interregnum, with the result that only a percentage of the patients get decent medical attention with proper care.

A repeat of the heart-wrenching scenes that several parts of the country now witness is totally unacceptable and the Union government must lead from the front the defensive actions against the third wave. It has presented and got passed a budget earmarking ₹2.23 lakh crores for the health ministry, which marked a 137 per cent hike compared with the previous year, in the light of the pandemic. This should be reflected in the preparatory work, which should also see an improvement in the infrastructure. The government must, as the court wanted, make a realistic assessment of the projected requirements of the medicines and auxiliary materials and start sourcing them from within the country or abroad.

The fresh thinking on the patent regime on Covid vaccines does not offer immediate relief but the government must do everything possible to get the technology transferred here and the production increased multi-fold in the shortest possible time. Three vaccine manufacturing units in the public sector — those in Kasauli, Coonoor and Guindy — have stopped working for want of regulatory compliance for more than a decade and the government must ensure that they are back in action at the earliest; the fourth one in Chengalpattu requires only a minor effort to start production. The time for the Narendra Modi government to pluck the lowest hanging fruits is long over; it must now face tougher challenges.

## Stalin era begins

Among Tamil Nadu's 10 chief ministers from Rajaji to Edappadi K. Palaniswami there were giants like Kamaraj, Karunanidhi, MGR and Jayalalithaa who brought in welfare schemes to benefit a cross-section of people from students to the poor and disadvantaged. The burden of expectation on Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin is, perhaps, at an apogee, especially considering the circumstances rendered dire by a sweeping pandemic. The expectations may have been lower when Edappadi took over in 2017 but in terms of tackling the coronavirus health crisis he also set an example of a leader backing a proficient set of administrators.

To Stalin's credit he has started off on a good note, first acknowledging political elders before putting together his Cabinet thoughtfully. Having waited patiently for his turn when he also revealed a statesmanlike side to his personality in not trying to take advantage of the situation during Edappadi government's existential crisis, Stalin has swung into action, signing Covid-19 relief measures and women's welfare. In taking on the job with executive decisiveness straightaway, Stalin has shown himself to be a seasoned politician who also eschewed glitzy shows in triumphalism. He has also kept off introducing into his Cabinet his kin, including his son who was so prominent at the hustings.

Having worked for his party DMK for decades, Stalin must be well aware of collective responsibility and that is reflected in the quality of ministers he has chosen for key tasks. While keeping faith with elders who were among his father's loyalists, his choice is apt of former Mayor Ma Subramanian as health minister at a time when the virus is throwing up record numbers and the state has to look into oxygen availability among preparatory measures. Tending to finance will be Palanivel Thiagarajan, with his rich experience as a former investment banker and there are other key ministers to look after education, etc. The mixture of the old and the new Cabinet is a promising enough sign as the Stalin era begins.

## THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY  
Editor in Chief

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Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings

"I lived in glass houses,  
— but confess I had no stones  
I stepped out of those kitchens  
— and rattled those marrow bones  
I stood in the ruins of the church  
— the one with the broken spire  
O Sage, O Saint, O soothsayer  
— O blessed prophetic liar!"

— From *The Love Song of Wrodo K. Gumby-Hara* By Bachchoo

## Is Carrie, UK's First Girlfriend, the real driver of BoJo's govt?

We live in enlightened times, my friend... witness the fact that Boris Johnson has moved his girlfriend into 10 Downing Street, the official residence of Britain's Prime Ministers.

This is perhaps an honest if unconventional move. Boris announced his engagement to 32-year-old Carrie Symonds before their baby boy was born. So, Ms Symonds went from being a former adviser on his staff and lover to "First Girlfriend".

I call it a relatively honest, if not permanent, setup as former Prime Ministers have had unacknowledged mistresses while living in Downing Street with their wives. There was the confessed dalliance of John Major

with one of his ministers and then the alleged one-night stand of Tony Blair with Rupert Murdoch's wife Wendy Deng — and others going back further into history.

Ms Symonds, having moved into Downing Street, has proved to be a different fettle of kitsch. Recent Prime Ministers with kids have found the flat above the official rooms of 10 Downing Street constraining and have spread themselves to a connected upstairs flat of the adjoining 11 Downing Street. What the Chancellors of the Exchequer, whose right it is to live in Number 11, have thought of this I don't know, but that's now a matter for Rishi and Mrs Sunak. Perhaps gratitude for being appointed supplants territorial discomforts.

Carrie was very rude about the décor of the flat she inherited from previous PM Theresa May, saying she was appalled by its furniture and wallpaper, calling it a "John Lewis nightmare". She commissioned a designer named Lulu Lytle to refurbish and refurbish the place. I am no expert on interior décor, but pictures of the redecorated flat and Ms Lulu's handiwork are, for me, the best definition of

that elusive word "kitsch" that I have ever seen.

The redecoration cost £200,000. So why, when the world is in the throes of a deadly plague, am I devoting space to this idiocy? Because it is now alleged that some Tory donors had paid for this extravagance, and that makes BoJo beholden to these benefactors on the principle that there is no such thing as a free lunch. This scandal, the significance of which is yet to be established, may cause BoJo to be found guilty of lying to Parliament about the settlement of the redecoration bill, thus breaching the ministerial code — a matter for resignation.

Now the commentariat, even in right-wing BoJo-supporting publications such as *The Spectator*, are getting worried about the influence of the "First Girlfriend" in the affairs of the country. Her bad taste in décor and the consequent threat to BoJo's office, it is a fact that she has packed the staff and advisory phalanx of the PM's office with her friends and people she agrees with politically.

Her overseeing several of these crony appointments had led to the resignation of the previous Svengali adviser, Dominic Cummings, who after his ejection

from Downing Street is taking his revenge by leaking damaging information to the press on BoJo's dealings. For instance, there was the leak of a phone and text correspondence between tax-dodging Singaporee Sir James Dyson and BoJo in which the PM asked for the manufacture and delivery of ventilators for the Covid crisis and agreed to Dyson's demand to waive the taxes his employees would have to pay. The meanness of billionaires, even when discussing the alleviation of a world health crisis, is unfathomable. Couldn't Dyson have paid the tax from his profits? Can the PM really step in and, with Chancellor Sunak, waive taxes on a select band of people?

Ms Symonds is accused, apart from crony appointments of interventions in policy areas that affect the country, decisions that very many Conservatives and people in government are convinced that BoJo would not have taken had it not been for her prevalent influence. The contention is that if Ms Symonds wants to influence or dictate policy, for instance on green issues to which she is commendably dedicated, she shouldn't do it through the conjugal bed, but through the ballot box.

She allegedly caused BoJo to interfere in a parliamentary-sanctioned cull of badgers. He banned the cull which environmentalists now say has disastrously decimated the hedgehog population.

Her trivial influence was demonstrated when she insisted that BoJo interrupt and leave an important scientific meeting on Covid to demand that he immediately get in touch with *The Times* to refute a story in the newspaper that Carrie's affection for their dog Dilyn had cooled since she insisted on adopting him. Not a shaggy-dog story!

The criticisms of Ms Symonds' unconstitutional influence has been characterised by her supporters in the press as the grumblings of "old-school, sexist Tory dinosaurs who are afraid of intelligent women".

As an anti-Tory dinosaur and no supporter of Dominic Cummings or his hypocritical revenge and as someone who has never had — or has had through vast experience to overcome — a fear of intelligent women, I beg to disagree. BoJo was elected on some particular policies and democracy demands that he concentrate on those and not on the concerns of an unelected paramour.

Subhani



## Heal at home first, then try to be a global leader



K.C. Singh

While India was distracted by the macabre events in and outside hospitals in Delhi and other major cities as patients gasped for breath, and some even died as the oxygen ran out, minister for external affairs S. Jaishankar headed to London for a meeting of G-7 foreign and development ministers earlier this week. Also invited, besides G-7 members, were the ministers of South Korea, South Africa and the chair of Asean. Mr Jaishankar had just met US secretary of state Antony Blinken and his host, British foreign secretary Dominic Raab, when some members of his delegation tested positive for Covid-19. What could represent his government's mishandling of the coronavirus' second wave than this international embarrassment?

The G-7 meeting, preparatory to the summit later this year, issued a long joint statement. US trade representative Katherine Tai set the scene by announcing on its eve that the United States supported the Covid-19 Trips waiver at the World Trade Organisation. Its preamble begins by recognising the "critical juncture" at which stand "our people, our planet, our security and our future prosperity". This holistic approach is most welcome as it recognises the connection between pandemic elimination, future pandemic avoidance, climate change centrality and the world's prosperity depending on global interdependence.

Then it addresses the themes of continuing relevance, if the G-7 nations have to retain their moral advantage over the Chinese model of single party rule favouring economic over political and humanitarian rights. It asserts that democracy "is under pressure globally".

The pandemic is of course the immediate challenge. New technological challenges also lurk over the horizon. The seven nations reiterate their commitment to strengthen open societies, shared values, a rules-based international order, free and fair trade and the free and secure flow of capital. It concludes that "liberal democracy and free and fair markets remain the best models".

Before coming to the specifics of relevance to India, this broad template should be read carefully by the Indian government. Much of its actions in the second year of the Narendra Modi government's second term do not tally with this vision. Mr Jaishankar, even when overseas, has become a flag-bearer for the current Hindutva model, precursor to the RSS' Hindu Rashtra dream. Reflexive intolerance to criticism, having his ministry flail at the likes of pop star Rihanna and climate icon Greta Thunberg for supporting the farmers' agitation in India, ill behove India as a model for democratic governance. While the pandemic prevails, India may get a pass, but it won't be for long.

On Covid-19, the US agreeing to support the Covid-19 Trips waiver is a big success for India and the developing world. The G-7 statement, while conceding in para 2 that "global collaboration" is required, changes its tune in para 62. It states that to enable equitable global access to Covid-19 vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics (VTDs), they promise to work with industry "to encourage and support on a voluntary basis and on mutually agreed terms, including licensing, technology and knowhow transfers, contract manufacturing, transparency and data sharing". Then they recommit more assistance to the global vac-

cine-sharing programme Covax.

Although since October 2, 2020, when India and South Africa introduced the Trips waiver at WTO, as India's former permanent representative to the UN in New York Syed Akbaruddin tweeted, 60-plus nations have co-sponsored and 100-plus nations extended support to it in the 164-member body. The G-7 statement shows residual resistance in Europe, which may slowly dissipate as the US draft gets circulated and perhaps amended to reflect corporate interests. In any case, it means two things — a waiver is not coming soon enough to help the developing world this year; and India has to take the lead in compelling indigenous manufacturers to voluntarily waive Trips cover and share their intellectual property to put moral pressure on the foot-draggers at WTO. However, so far, the Indian government is headed in the reverse direction by putting half the vaccine production in the market for states and the private sector to haggle over. The CEO of a major hospital chain in Gurgaon claimed on television that he was offered vaccines by intermediaries at higher prices. Will the Indian government now end up with a controversy of its own making?

However, past experience shows that the US throwing its weight behind a proposal generally gets European compliance. Germany and Switzerland may be the last holdouts. In the meanwhile, India requires to focus on two things — normalising access to hospitals by ramping up beds with oxygen, ICUs, etc. The supply of oxygen must take into account not only escalated hospital needs but also the moderately ill who are self-

isolating at home. Also, to address vaccine supplies as the government has compounded the confusion by opening-up vaccinations for the 18-plus age group just as the supply has dried up. Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawala abandoning his factory, alleging threats and making gratuitous statements from his lair in London needs deft handling. In any case, the US has now released raw material for 20 million vaccines, which he needs to put in vials promptly.

What may yet negate the pharmaceutical industry's greed is the desire of Russia and China to play the Good Samaritans, as part of their counter-West strategy. Not coincidentally, two-thirds of the G-7 statement has them in the cross-wire. One or the other figures directly in the paras relating to Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific, Myanmar or Taiwan, the entry of which to WHO has been endorsed. They also are the objects of themes like a rules-based order to human rights and freedom of religion, as indeed democracy. So, the news that Russia is starting mass production of a single-dose Sputnik vaccine comes as great relief. India also needs to be more proactive internationally in tying up contracts with emerging vaccines like a new RNA based product of Cure Vac, Germany, the final results of which are awaited in mid-May, which unlike Moderna and Pfizer can be stored in fridges. There is also the US-supported initiative between Baylor College of Medicine and the Hyderabad-based Biological E for a safe, effective and affordable vaccine. Its production does not start till later this year. This has the potential to inoculate the world.

The moral for India is that a government which cannot prioritise between a looming health emergency at home and its political and religious interests will hardly be viewed as a global leader in fighting pandemics, or anything else. Our slogan has to be to heal at home first — politically and health-wise.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

**What may yet negate the pharmaceutical industry's greed is the desire of Russia and China to play the Good Samaritans, as part of their counter-West strategy**

## LETTERS

## HEED G-23

During a meeting with Congress MPs on Friday, May 7, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi said that the party's performance in the recently concluded elections to four states and a Union territory was "very disappointing". Instead of continuing as interim chief of the Congress party, Mrs. Gandhi should heed the G23 leaders' concerns and encourage the party to elect another leader to resurrect Congress as a vibrant, viable political force that holds the government of the day accountable.

Sankar Paul  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

## ALAGIRI'S GESTURE

WHILE RUMOURS WERE afoot that the BJP is trying to woo M.K. Alagiri, the elder brother of M.K. Stalin kept his cards close to his chest and then disappointed his temptors. This despite the fact that he had earlier commented that Stalin can never become the chief minister of the state. It seems in deference to the wishes of his immediate family members, he did so. Now he has unhesitatingly sent his greetings and good wishes to Stalin and established his decent reputation.

Bidyut K. Chatterjee  
Faridabad

## TWIN TRAGEDIES

COVID-19 HAS claimed two more victims in the shape of sitarist and exponent of the Jaipur-Senia tradition, Debu Chaudhuri, and his son and disciple, Prateek Chaudhuri. The two had long and illustrated careers. Padma Bhushan Debu Chaudhuri composed Raga Bishweshwari as a mix of Raga Malkauns and Raga Kanhra along the Carnatic melakarta of Raga Charukeshi. To say that the second wave has devastated India is an understatement.

Priyanka Mathur  
New Delhi

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com. Else send to *The Asian Age*, 219, Deendayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi: 110002.



## SHORT TAKES

NIGERIA: 10  
KILLED, STUDENTS  
ABDUCTED

**Lagos:** Ten people including two police officers have been killed and a number of students abducted in Nigeria's southeast, police said on Friday, in a region where separatist tensions are on the rise.

Dozens of security operatives have been killed during attacks by gunmen on checkpoints, police stations and prisons in the region in the past few months.

On Thursday, gunmen stormed Obosi police station in Anambra state but were engaged in a gunbattle by police officers on duty.

"Two police operatives paid the supreme price," state police spokesman Ikenga Tochukwu said in a statement, adding an investigation was under way to identify the perpetrators.

He said the gunmen also set part of the police station and two vehicles ablaze before fleeing.

29 PEOPLE FOUND  
FROM SEMITRUCK  
IN TEXAS

**San Antonio:** More than two dozen people were recovered from a big rig that was stopped near San Antonio, including one person who was taken to a hospital, a police official in Texas said.

A passerby called police Thursday to report a suspicious semitruck along Interstate 10, east of San Antonio, Lt. Jesse Salame told reporters. A San Antonio Park police officer initiated a traffic stop. As the officer approached the vehicle, the back door swung open and several people ran out, Salame said.

Authorities made contact with 29 of the people who had been in the semitruck. One person was taken to the hospital to be treated for dehydration, San Antonio Fire Department spokesperson Joe Arrington said. The traffic stop is being investigated for possible human smuggling, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement told KSAT-TV in a statement.

ISRAELI TROOPS  
KILL 2, INJURE 1  
PALESTINIAN

**Jerusalem:** Israeli troops shot and killed two Palestinians and wounded a third after the men opened fire on a Border Police base in the occupied West Bank on Friday, police said.

They said the three attackers opened fire on the base near the northern West Bank town of Jenin. The Border Police and an Israeli soldier opened fire in response, killing two of the men and wounding a third, who was evacuated to a hospital.

The violence comes at a time of heightened tensions over east Jerusalem, where dozens of Palestinians are at risk of being evicted following a long legal battle with Israeli settlers. Palestinian protesters have clashed with police there on a nightly basis in recent weeks.

On Thursday, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian suspected of carrying out a drive-by shooting earlier this week in the West Bank that killed an Israeli and wounded two others.

GERMAN SPY  
AGENCY TO CHECK  
ISLAMOPHOBIA

**Berlin:** German intelligence services said on Wednesday that they would widen their surveillance of the Islamophobic protest movement Pegida in its home state of Saxony, as the group had become a "extremist" and "anti-constitutional".

While Pegida had previously attracted "heterogeneous" support and taken "moderate" positions, it had developed "an increasingly right-wing extremist orientation" Saxony's domestic intelligence agency LfV said in a statement.

"By regularly offering right-wing extremists a platform to propagate anti-constitutional ideologies, this movement acts as a hinge between extremists and non-extremists," said agency president Dirk-Martin Christian. He added that "all people and activities" within the group would now be put under surveillance, with the exception of those merely taking part in peaceful demonstrations.

Pegida, which campaigns against what it calls the "Islamisation of the West", was born in October 2014 with xenophobic marches every Monday evening.

## EU drug regulator taps new Covid pill

Begins accelerated authorisation process for sotrovimab to prevent deaths, hospitalisation

**London, May 7:** The European Medicines Agency says it has begun an accelerated authorisation process for an experimental Covid treatment made by GlaxoSmithKline and Vir BioTechnology.

In a statement on Friday, the EU drug regulator said it had started a rolling review of sotrovimab, based on early results from an ongoing study into whether the treatment can prevent hospitalisation or death in people who don't yet have severe Covid-19. But EMA said it had not yet received the complete data and cautioned that "it is too early to draw any conclusions about the benefit-risk balance of the medication."

Although the EMA has given the green light to four vaccines, there are few licensed treatments for the Coronavirus, especially any that might prevent people with mild Covid-19 from progressing to severe disease. Sotrovimab is a monoclonal antibody, a lab-produced antibody that is intended to stimulate the immune system by reducing the ability of the Covid's spike protein to enter the body's cells.

— AP

UK HEALTH DEPT  
WORRIED ABOUT  
INDIAN VARIANT

**London, May 7:** Health authorities in England are believed to be especially concerned about one strain out of three Indian variants they have been tracking since last month.

According to a report based on leaked data by the BBC, Public Health England (PHE) is said to have recommended the B.1.617.2 version of the Indian variant to be classed as Variant of Concern (VOC) as it appears to spread more quickly than two other identified subtypes of the Indian variant.

— PTI



French President Emmanuel Macron arrives for an EU summit at the Alfandega do Porto Congress Center in Porto, Portugal, Friday. European Union leaders meet for a summit in Portugal, sending a signal they see the threat from Covid-19 on their continent as waning amid a quickening vaccine rollout. Their talks hope to repair some of the damage the Covid has caused in the bloc, in such areas as welfare and employment.

— AP

Australia: Travel ban on India  
returnees only till May 15

**Melbourne, May 7:** Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Friday said that the travel ban on Australians returning home from Covid-hit India will not be extended beyond May 15 and repatriation flights will commence soon.

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

The government threatened to prosecute them with a possibility of five years of jail term or a penalty of 66,000 Australian dollars (USD 50,899).

The government's order on the matter is set to expire on May 15. Following the National Security Committee on Friday, Morrison agreed it saw "no need to extend it beyond that date".

— PTI

## OZ MIGHT CLOSE BORDERS TILL 2022

**Sydney, May 7:** Australia is likely to remain shut to visitors until late 2022, the country's trade and tourism minister said on Friday, as another global Covid surge smashed hopes of a quick reopening.

Minister Dan Tehan said a wave of cases on the Indian sub-continent showed Australia's near blanket ban on arrivals was still essential to keep

the country Covid-free.

Since March 20, 2020, Australians have been barred from travelling overseas and a hard-to-get individual exemption is needed for foreign visitors to enter the country. It is "very hard to determine" when borders could reopen, Tehan told Sky News, "the best guess would be in the middle to the second half of next year".

— AFP

## VACCINE MUST FOR SAUDI WORKERS

**Riyadh, May 7:** Saudi Arabia said on Friday that employees will only be allowed to return to their workplace in person once vaccinated against Covid.

Vaccination will become a "mandatory condition" for the face-to-face return of public and private sector employees, the ministry of human resources and social development

said in a statement, urging workers to "begin the process" to get a jab.

The health ministry said it has administered more than 10 million Covid-19 vaccine doses, in a country with a population of over 34 million.

The kingdom has reported more than 423,000 Coronavirus infections.

— AFP

## N-talks intensify in fourth round

**Vienna, May 7:** World powers held a fourth round of high-level talks on Friday in Austria aimed at bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran, with both sides signalling a willingness to work out the major stumbling blocks.

The talks began in early April and Russian delegate Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted following Friday's meeting that "the participants agreed on the need to intensify the process." "The delegations seem to be ready to stay in Vienna as long as necessary to achieve the goal," he wrote. The US pulled out of the landmark 2015 deal in 2018 after then-President Donald Trump said the pact needed to be renegotiated.

The deal had promised Iran economic incentives in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, and the Trump administration reimposed heavy sanctions on the Islamic republic in an unsuccessful attempt to bring Tehran into new talks. Iran reacted by steadily increasing its violations of the deal, which is intended to prevent



Deputy Secretary General/Political Director of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Enrique Mora (left) leaves the Grand Hotel Wien after the closed-door nuclear talks with Iran in Vienna on Friday.

— AFP

vent the country from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Iran began enriching uranium to a greater purity, stockpiling more than allowed and beginning to use more advanced centrifuges in an attempt to pressure the world powers

remaining in the deal — Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China — for economic relief. U.S. President Joe Biden says he wants to rejoin the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, but that Iran needs to return

to compliance. Iran, which insists it does not want to produce a nuclear bomb, has said it is prepared to reverse all of its violations but that Washington must remove all sanctions imposed under Trump.

— AP

## BUG | INVASION Insects have taken over social media, newspapers even before parks, gardens

## US braces for cicada wave after 17 years

**Washington, May 7:** Some are waiting for their arrival with trepidation, others are curious what they might taste like. Americans are swapping tips on how best to weather the storm when billions of cicadas soon emerge after 17 years underground.

Before invading parks and people's gardens, the insects have already conquered the airwaves, social media and newspapers, especially in parts of the eastern, central and southern United States

where "Brood X" is due to emerge.

Billions of cicada nymphs that have been living underground since 2004 will burst out of the soil, shed their skin, mate, lay eggs and then die, all against the backdrop of the deafening noise that males make to attract females.

The last time they emerged, George W. Bush was the US president, Facebook had just been created and Athens was getting ready to host the

● **LAST TIME** they emerged, George W. Bush was the US president, Facebook had just been created and Athens was getting ready for Olympics.

Summer Olympics.

So when will the swarm arrive?

Hard to say, as it depends to some extent on weather conditions, and in particular the temperature of the soil. Expected cooler temperatures could delay their emergence until mid-

May — or they could pop up any day now.

Residents have been watching for signs of their arrival for weeks, sharing photos of the tunnels the cicadas have dug to make their way to the surface when ready to briefly face the world.

Tim Pfeiffer has taken to tweeting about the insects. The 28-year-old, who lives in the Washington suburb of Silver Spring, Maryland posted videos of a few bugs that had appeared ahead of the

CHINA OPENS ITS  
SIDE OF EVEREST  
FOR -VE CLIMBERS

**Beijing, May 7:** China has opened Mount Everest's northern slope to a few dozen mountaineers who will be tested for the Coronavirus and must keep their distance while ascending the world's highest peak.

Both Nepal and China closed the mountain to foreign climbers last year because of the pandemic. Nepal has allowed in foreign climbers this season despite a surging Covid-19 outbreak, and at least one climber, a Norwegian, confirmed last month he had contracted the virus.

Nepal mountaineering officials have denied any outbreak on the mountain, citing only altitude sickness and other ailments common in the cold, harsh, low-oxygen environment where climbers stay in close quarters. This week, the Himalayan nation halted all flights as part of a strict lockdown.

— AP

US adds warplanes  
for Afghan pullout

**Washington, May 7:** The US has deployed a dozen additional warplanes to bolster protection of American and coalition troops making a final withdrawal from Afghanistan as Taliban insurgents step up pressure on Afghan government forces, top Pentagon officials have said.

General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said F-18 attack planes have been added to a previously announced package of air and sea power, including the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier in the North Arabian Sea and six Air Force B-52 bombers based in Qatar, that can be called upon as protection for withdrawing troops. Also part of that previously announced package are several hundred Army Rangers.

US officials said before the withdrawal began that they expected the Taliban to attempt to interfere, even as the insurgents continue pressuring government

forces, especially in Helmand and Kandahar provinces in southern Afghanistan. "There continues to be sustained levels of violent attacks" by the Taliban against Afghan security forces, Milley said, speaking alongside Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin at a Pentagon news conference. He said there have been no attacks against US or coalition forces since they began pulling out of the country on about May 1, and he described the Afghan forces as "cohesive," even as speculation swirls around Kabul's ability to hold off the Taliban in the months ahead.

Both Milley and Austin, a retired Army general, are veterans of the war in Afghanistan. "They're fighting for their own country now, so it's not a foregone conclusion, in my professional military estimate, that the Taliban automatically win and Kabul falls, or any of those kinds of dire predictions," Milley said.

— AP

"Get a face shield, wear a cap, carry a fly swatter, keep your windows up while driving," advised one person.

Another user had the following advice for cyclists: "Pedal slow and use wide tires, those squished cicadas on the bike trail are mighty slick." It is important to remember that cicadas pose no real threat to humans, except for the high annoyance factor — and the even higher gross-out potential.

— AFP

US favours freer  
flow of vaccine  
components

**Paris, May 7:** The new US position in support of lifting patents on Covid-19 vaccines has taken attention away from an equally significant change by Washington, which plans to open up trade in the raw materials used to make them.

After having recently taken heat for blocking such exports, Commerce Secretary Katherine Tai said Wednesday that the US government would "work to increase the raw materials needed to produce those vaccines".

The assertion was hidden at the bottom of the statement unveiling Washington's remarkable reversal of its position on Covid-19 vaccine patents, which coincides with a shortage of doses in emerging and developing nations as cases surge in some countries.

Long legal and economic policy debates likely lie ahead about waiving vaccine patents, particularly at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Meanwhile, the difficulties faced by some laboratories in obtaining components to manufacture vaccines look set to stymie the drive to ramp up production.

Two labs have recently spoken out about their difficulties, laying the blame at Washington's door.

Germany's Curevac said it could not secure supplies of certain materials from the United States.

Several days earlier, India's Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, called on U.S. President Joe Biden to step in.

"Respected @POTUS, if we are to truly unite in

● **THE ASSERTION** was hidden at the bottom of the statement unveiling Washington's remarkable reversal of its position on Covid-19 vaccine patents, which coincides with a shortage of doses in emerging and developing nations as cases surge in some countries.

beating this virus, on behalf of the vaccine industry outside the US, I humbly request you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the US so that vaccine production can ramp up," the company's president Adar Poonawalla wrote on Twitter.

There is no actual embargo on exporting vaccine components. Instead, Biden, like his predecessor Donald Trump, invoked the Defense Production Act — which normally concerns wartime — to confront the pandemic.

While it does not explicitly ban exports, it puts the US government first in line to buy certain products made in the country.

US officials have previously played down the possible effect of the law on global vaccine production.

"There's just more global manufacturing happening everywhere in the world than suppliers can currently support," a US official told a White House briefing late last month on condition of anonymity.

— AFP

CONSERVATIVES  
STRIKE EARLY  
BLOW IN UK

**London, May 7:** Britain's governing Conservative Party has won a special election in the north of England town of Hartlepool, dealing a big blow to the main opposition Labour Party, which had held the parliamentary seat since its creation in 1974.

The victory for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's party, announced on Friday morning, provides further evidence that the Conservatives are making ground in parts of the country that have been Labour strongholds for decades. The results of Thursday's election showed the Conservative candidate Jill Mortimer winning with 15,529 votes, or nearly 52 per cent of the vote. The Labour candidate, Paul Williams, only received 8,589 votes, or around 29 per cent of the vote.

Over the coming couple of days, results from an array of elections in Britain will be announced. On what was dubbed Super Thursday, around 50 million voters were eligible to take part in scores of elections, some of which had been postponed a year because of the pandemic that has left the UK with Europe's largest coronavirus death toll.

At stake is the make-up of devolved governments in Scotland and Wales and the next mayors for England's big cities, including London and Manchester. Thousands of council members, police commissioners and other local authorities are also seeking seats. No elections took place in Northern Ireland. The election result that could have the biggest UK-wide implications is Scotland, where the governing Scottish National Party is looking for a renewed mandate.

— AP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49206.47	0.52
Nifty 50	14823.20	0.67
S&P 500*	4,234.60	0.78
Dollar (₹)	73.51	0.36
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.30	0.33
Euro (₹)	88.76	0.11
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,185.47	1.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.29	0.29
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.015	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.545	-0.016

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Sovereign rating to stay for next two years: S&P

S&P Global Ratings said India's credit rating would be retained at the current level for the next two years, and the country will see a slightly faster pace of growth in the next couple of years that will support its sovereign rating. Speaking at a webinar, Andrew Wood, director-foreign and public finance ratings, S&P Global Ratings, said, "India's rating remains stable on a 'BBB-' rating. We do not expect there to be a change."

Carlyle sells 4% stake in SBI Life for ₹3,900 crore



Private equity firm Carlyle Group divested 4 per cent stake in SBI Life Insurance for over Rs 3,900 crore through an open market transaction. According to bulk deal data available with the BSE, Carlyle Group, through its entity CA Emerald Investment, sold 4.1 crore shares, amounting to 4 per cent stake, of SBI Life for Rs 3,936 crore. The shares were offloaded at an average price of Rs 960.

HDFC net up 31% in Q4, interest income falls

Mortgage lender HDFC reported a 31 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 5,669 crore for the fourth quarter against Rs 4,342 crore a year ago. Total income on a consolidated basis more than doubled to Rs 35,754 crore from Rs 16,632 crore. Interest income fell to Rs 10,879 crore from Rs 11,391 crore. For the full year FY21, the net profit was down at Rs 20,488 crore against Rs 22,826 crore in FY20.

Cams lists on NSE to broaden investors base

Chennai-based Computer Age Management Services (Cams), India's largest registrar and transfer agent of mutual funds, got listed on the NSE. Cams shares were first listed on the BSE on Oct. 1, 2020 after the IPO. Since NSE Investments was a shareholder in Cams prior to the IPO, though they exited completely during the IPO, this prior shareholding precluded the listing of the company's shares on NSE then.

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■ Banks have to disburse loans in 30 days

Quick on-lending of health fund ordered

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 7

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said that banks seeking funding from its special Rs 50,000 crore 'on-tap-term liquidity facility' to on-lend to Covid-related healthcare services, should do so within 30 days from the date of availing of the funds from it. The banks will have to ensure that the amount borrowed from it should at all times be backed by lending to the specified segments till the maturity of the scheme.

The RBI early this week announced a Rs 50,000 crore liquidity window to banks under priority-sector lending to augment Covid-19 healthcare infrastructure to help raise treatment capacity, and availability of medicines and medical equipment in India. Loans under the scheme, for tenures up to 3 years, are available to banks at the repo rate till March 31, 2022. Such loans would also be classified under priority sector.

Consequently, banks are expected to extend these loans below current interest rates for companies engaged in health care activities. These include makers and suppliers of vaccines and drugs; hospitals; pathology labs; suppliers of oxygen; makers of emergency medical equipment; logistics firms; and Covid-19 patients.

According to Crisil Ltd, hospitals could be among the biggest beneficiaries as

₹10K-CR WINDOW FOR SFBs OPENS ON 17TH

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 7

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said that it will conduct the first auction for special three-year long-term repo operations of Rs 10,000 crore for small finance banks (SFBs) on May 17.

With an aim to soften the impact of the Covid second wave on small borrowers, the RBI this week announced a special long term repo operation (SLTRO) window for small finance banks and allowed classifying on-lending by small finance

banks to microfinance as priority sector lending. The special liquidity window to the tune of Rs 10,000 crore to SFBs, through SLTRO will be available at the repo rate. This Rs 10,000 crore facility is to be deployed for fresh lending with a maximum ticket size of Rs 10 lakh per borrower and would be available till October 31, 2021.

The RBI said it will conduct one auction for SLTRO each month. The unutilised portion of notified Rs 10,000 crore will be carried forward in each subsequent auction until fully utilised.

the incremental funding can potentially increase bed capacity in the country by 15-20 per cent. "As many as 354 Crisil-rated companies with aggregate bank exposure of Rs 40,000 crore will be eligible for such loans. Though pharmaceutical firms account for 68 per cent of rated bank exposure, hospitals at around 24 per cent of rated exposure are likely to avail majority of the funding available," said the rating agency.

The borrowing cost of hospitals rated by Crisil are 10.5-11 per cent and the new loans taken for expansion under this RBI scheme could be 300-350 basis points cheaper, leading to substantial interest

savings.

Subodh Rai, chief ratings officer, Crisil Ratings said, "Increased availability of funds at low cost will incentivise hospitals to augment beds, oxygen storage, ICUs and critical medical equipment. Even if half of the funding available is used to add hospital beds through brownfield expansion, it will mean about 5 lakh incremental beds, or 15-20 per cent of India's current capacity."

In comparison, for entities in other health care related sectors such as pharmaceuticals, the capital requirements for enhancing production capacity of critical Covid-19 related drugs is not very high.

LIC RELAXES CLAIM SETTLEMENT REQUIREMENTS

Mumbai, May 7: Keeping in mind safety of its customers amid the Covid second wave, state-run Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) on Friday announced a slew of relaxations in claim settlement requirements, making the process hassle-free.

In settlement of death claims, where death has occurred in a hospital, instead of municipal death certificates, claimants can provide alternate proofs of death, like death certificate, discharge summary/death summary containing clear date and time of death issued by government/ESI (Employees' State Insurance) /armed forces/corporate hospitals and counter-signed by LIC class I officers or development officers of 10 years standing.

This has to be submitted along with a cremation/ burial certificate or authentic identifying receipt issued by the relevant authority, an LIC release said.

In other cases, municipal death certificate will be required as earlier, it said.

The insurer has also allowed submission of documents in any nearby LIC office for due maturity/survival benefit claims.

For annuities with return of capital options, production of life certificates is waived for annuities due up to October 31, 2021, besides accepting life certificates sent through email in other cases, the release said.

— PTI

WHATSAPP SCRAPS MAY 15 DEADLINE FOR PRIVACY POLICY

STUTI ROY & MOUMITA BAKSHI CHATTERJEE NEW DELHI, MAY 7

WhatsApp has scrapped its May 15 deadline for users to accept its controversial privacy policy update and said not accepting the terms will not lead to deletion of accounts.

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

A WhatsApp spokesperson said no accounts will be deleted on May 15 for not accepting the policy update.

"No accounts will be deleted on May 15 because of this update and no one in India will lose functionality of WhatsApp either. We will follow up with reminders to people over the next several weeks," the spokesperson said in an emailed response to a query on Friday.

The spokesperson added that while a "majority of users who have received the new terms of service have accepted them", some people have not had the chance to do so yet.

But the company neither clarified the reason behind the decision nor divulged the number of users who have accepted the terms so far.

In January this year, WhatsApp had informed users about the changes in its terms of service and public policy through an in-app notification.

— PTI

India's Covid relief comes to \$302 per capita: ADB

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 7

India's over \$410 billion Covid-19 relief package ranks as the second biggest among Asia's developing countries, but this, when translated to per capita relief, slips many places down the ladder.

Among ADB's developing members, the top three packages are those of China at \$2.3 trillion, India at \$412 billion and the Republic of Korea at \$248 billion.

However, the per capita package in India is a low \$302 against \$15,629 in Singapore, \$4,799 in Republic of Korea, \$2,528 in Malaysia, \$1,658 in China and \$1,208 in Thailand.

"If we look at ADB's developing members, we see large countries such as India or Indonesia with seemingly small packages per capita of \$302 and \$426, respectively," the Asian Development Bank said in its study.



ly," the Asian Development Bank said in its study.

However, whether a package on a per capita basis is adequate to address the Covid-19 pandemic is a difficult question with no easy answer. It depends on the government's objectives, both with respect to the pandemic and other economic objectives like fear of running a fiscal deficit and how it perceives the situation, it added.

India allocated 38.6 per cent share of its total package for liquidity support, which includes short-term lending to the

private sector, regulatory adjustments to liquidity requirements and foreign exchange operations. India's actions included increased short-term repurchase agreements (0.1 per cent of GDP), variable-term repurchase agreements (0.5 per cent of GDP) and special refinancing facilities for rural banks, housing finance companies and small enterprises (0.2 per cent of GDP).

Among ADB developing members, China and India allocated the largest amounts to direct income support to households and individuals at \$1.3 trillion and \$194.4 billion, respectively.

In India direct income support makes up 10.9 per cent of the total package. Other actions implemented by India include subsidies for businesses, investments in health institutions and programmes for the agriculture sector.

IMF to revisit India's growth forecast

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 7

Considering the recent surge in Covid cases, the IMF will be revisiting India's growth forecast in July. The fund finds that the downside risks predicted by it are now materialising.

The IMF, in its April World Economic Outlook, had envisaged an economic recovery in India, with growth projected at around

12.5 per cent in FY22. "The recent upsurge in Covid-19 cases implies that downside risks, which we had also spoken of at that time, are materialising. So, we are following these developments very closely, and we will be revisiting that growth forecast in our World Economic Outlook update, which will be forthcoming in July, so not too far off in the distance, but we will be looking at that again," IMF spokesman

Gerry Rice told reporters. While making the growth forecast in April, IMF's chief economist Gita Gopinath had said that Covid-19 still posed a downside risk.

"We're all watching what is happening in India with concern. And I think really what the economic impact will be will really of course depend on the path of the pandemic and how long this serious situation goes on for," said Rice.

Patents: Pharma has limited legal options

IAN LOPEZ & TINA DAVIS MAY 7

A potential World Trade Organization waiver of patent and trade secret protections for Covid-19 vaccines would leave pharmaceutical companies with limited legal avenues to recover costs.

The US on Wednesday expressed support for a temporary waiver, sending shares in several vaccine makers down the next day. The issue now faces thorny negotiations at the WTO, where several members, including Germany, have opposed efforts to skirt intellectual property rights. They say it would complicate production and make companies less likely to respond in the future.

The proposed waiver is intended to ramp up the production and export of vaccines and medicines to stem the pandemic's surge in the developing world. It would let countries obtain know-how and forge compulsory licenses without facing blowback in the form of trade complaints and sanctions from other nations.

Still, some vaccine producers, like Moderna Inc and Pfizer Inc, might sue the US to recoup some of their losses, said Matthew Howell, an intellectual property attorney at Alston & Bird in Atlanta. If the manufacture of the vaccine is done in the US, under the government's authorisation, there are avenues for compensation in American courts.

That's not always the case in other countries, particularly in less developed nations.

EVEN WITH WAIVERS, EXTRA VACCINES MAY BE A YEAR AWAY

JAMES PATON & TIM LOH MAY 7

The US-backed effort to waive patent protection for Covid-19 vaccines, even if successful, is unlikely to narrow a yawning gap in access to life-saving shots anytime soon.

The proposal faces weeks of difficult negotiations and intense pushback from the pharmaceutical industry. And if it were to be approved at the World Trade Organization, it could take a year or more to meaningfully increase supplies, vaccine specialists said.

"The short answer is no, it's not going to make any big difference," said Klaus Stohr, a former World Health Organization official who helped mobilise governments and drug-makers to prepare for pandemics. "Patents are not the real hurdle. It's the

understanding of complex technology."

The Biden administration won plaudits from health advocacy groups for backing what they describe as an important step toward achieving equitable access to vaccines, and the European Union and China signalled willingness to take part in the debate. However, German Chancellor Angela Merkel appears opposed to the proposal.

"The limiting factor for the production of vaccines are manufacturing capacities and high quality standards, not the patents," a German government spokeswoman said in an email.

Even if companies diverted resources and know-how in a "full-blown technology transfer," it wouldn't make a difference before the middle of 2022, said Stohr, a former

executive at drugmaker Novartis AG. Countries with ample supplies could help more quickly by committing to increased exports and publishing when and how much they can share, Stohr said.

To boost production, the priorities should be addressing a lack of key materials and components needed to make vaccines, adding manufacturing lines and more sharing of expertise to support technology transfers, said Rajeev Venkayya, president of Takeda Pharmaceutical Company's vaccines business.

"It's important for the world to be focused on the more complex issues of scaling up manufacturing rather than spending time on patents," said Venkayya, who worked in the Bush administration to develop a US pandemic flu plan.

— Bloomberg

CYBER | RISKS \$1.3 tn fund hires self-taught persons without a formal education

Norway fund in desperate search of cyber experts

LARS ERIK TARALDSEN MAY 7

Norway's sovereign wealth fund is widening its recruitment net to include people without college degrees as it searches for the brightest minds to protect its \$1.3 trillion portfolio from growing armies of hackers.

Nicolai Tangen, the Oslo-based fund's CEO, says he

occasionally picks up the phone himself to "encourage good candidates to apply," as part of the recruitment process. The kinds of attacks the fund encounters are "more and more sophisticated. The powers we're up against are huge," he said. "There's a lot of money in this fund, so it's a precious target."

Hackers attempted to breach the fund's systems



more than 1,000 times in 2020, representing a doubling from the previous year, Tangen said in an interview.

The 54-year-old CEO says

he's also interested in talking to ethical hackers.

The focus on cyber security has prompted the fund to rethink some of its traditional recruitment requirements. "In general, we're more open than we used to be," said Ada Magnaes, head of HR. Now applicants won't be expected to have the kinds of university or college degrees normally needed

to get past the screening process.

She says Norges Bank Investment Management – the fund's official name – has already hired people in Singapore and New York who were "without a formal education, practically self-taught."

"They've got exactly the mindset and the attitude we're looking for," she said.

— Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Abid, Azhar put Pak in command

**Harare:** Centuries by Abid Ali and Azhar Ali put Pakistan in a strong position on the first day of the second Test against Zimbabwe on Friday. Abid (118 not out) and Azhar (126) put on 236 for the second wicket before tall fast bowler Blessing Muzarabani brought Zimbabwe back into the match by taking three wickets with the second new ball. Pakistan had reached 268 for four at the close. Abid and Azhar came together with the total on 12 in the eighth over and ground down the Zimbabwe bowlers before Azhar edged Muzarabani to gully in the last half hour of the day. Azhar's dismissal was followed by a second failure in the series for Babar Azam, who drove Muzarabani to point after scoring two. — *AFP*

**Brief scores: Pakistan 268/4** (Azhar 126, Abid 118 n.o., Muzarabani 3/41) vs Zimbabwe.

## Nadal beaten in Madrid quarters

**Madrid:** Rafael Nadal lost 4-6, 4-6 to Germany's Alexander Zverev in the Madrid Open quarterfinals on Friday, casting doubts over the Spaniard's form ahead of this month's French Open. Nadal has now fallen early in two clay-court Masters tournaments ahead of the Grand Slam in Paris, after going out in the Monte Carlo quarterfinals last month before winning in Barcelona. Even in Barcelona, however, Nadal needed to save a championship point to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final. World number two Nadal is hoping to clinch a 14th Roland Garros title and record-setting 21st major in the French capital. Zverev's impressive straightsets win at the Caja Magica earns him a meeting with Dominic Thiem in Madrid semis, in what will be a repeat of last year's US Open final, which was won by Thiem. — *AFP*

## Laureus awards for Rafa, Osaka

**Seville, Spain:** Tennis players Rafael Nadal and Naomi Osaka picked up the Laureus Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year awards on Thursday with football star Mo Salah and Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton also recognised. World number two Nadal claimed his fourth Laureus award as he was recognised for his 13th French Open and record-equalling 20th major. Osaka, who won the US Open for the second time and has four majors, is now a two-time Laureus winner. "Winning the French Open and equalling the 20th Grand Slam of Roger Federer has been an unforgettable moment," said Nadal. "It means a lot to equal my great rival, but at the same time, my great friend," he added. — *AFP*

## Hazard sorry for upsetting Real fans

**Madrid:** Eden Hazard apologized to Real Madrid fans after he was seen laughing and joking with Chelsea players following the team's elimination in the Champions League. A video of the Madrid forward having fun with his former teammates after Madrid's loss on Wednesday attracted a lot of attention in Spain, upsetting fans who loudly complained against him on social media. Hazard was one of the Madrid players who performed poorly in the 2-0 defeat in London. "I am sorry. I have read lots of opinions about me today and it was not my intention to offend the Real Madrid fans," Hazard said on Instagram. — *AP*

## Live on TV

## FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** Leeds United vs Tottenham Hotspur from 5 pm; Sheffield United vs Crystal Palace from 7.30 pm; Manchester City vs Chelsea from 10.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1

**Italian League:** Inter vs Sampdoria from 9.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD; Fiorentina vs Lazio from 12.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

## FORMULA ONE

**Spanish GP:** Qualifying session from 6.25 pm Star Sports Select 2

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## Pat bats for safety

Says if India is unsafe for T20 World Cup, shift to UAE is ideal

**Male (Maldives), May 7:** Australian pace spearhead Pat Cummins believes if hosting the ICC T20 World Cup amidst raging Covid-19 pandemic is a "drain on Indian resources" or is "unsafe", it would be prudent to shift it to the United Arab Emirates.

The postponement of Indian Premier League after multiple cases of Covid-19 inside the bio-bubble has led to a big question-mark on whether the marquee ICC event should be held in India where a third wave is expected around that time.

"If it's going to be a drain on resources or it's not going to be safe, then I don't think it's right to play it over here. That's the first question which needs to be answered," Cummins was quoted as saying by the Age newspaper.

Cummins said cricket authorities should check with Indian government and do what's best.

"It probably too early to say. It's six months away. The priority should be for cricket authorities to work with the Indian government to see what's best for the Indian people," Cummins said.

Cummins feels hindsight always provides better perspective like many who feel that IPL could have been held in UAE this time also.

"The IPL in the UAE last year was brilliant, it was really well run, but millions of people were saying it should have been played in India, so what do you do? You can see both sides. They set up this tournament with all the best advice."

Cummins has a lot of empathy for what the country is currently facing. "Around the hotel there is less staff and when you hop in the bus to go to training there is normally a few hundred people waiting. There's no one out there now and no crowds at games." — *PTI*

## HAMILTON TOPS 2ND PRACTICE, VERSTAPPEN 9TH

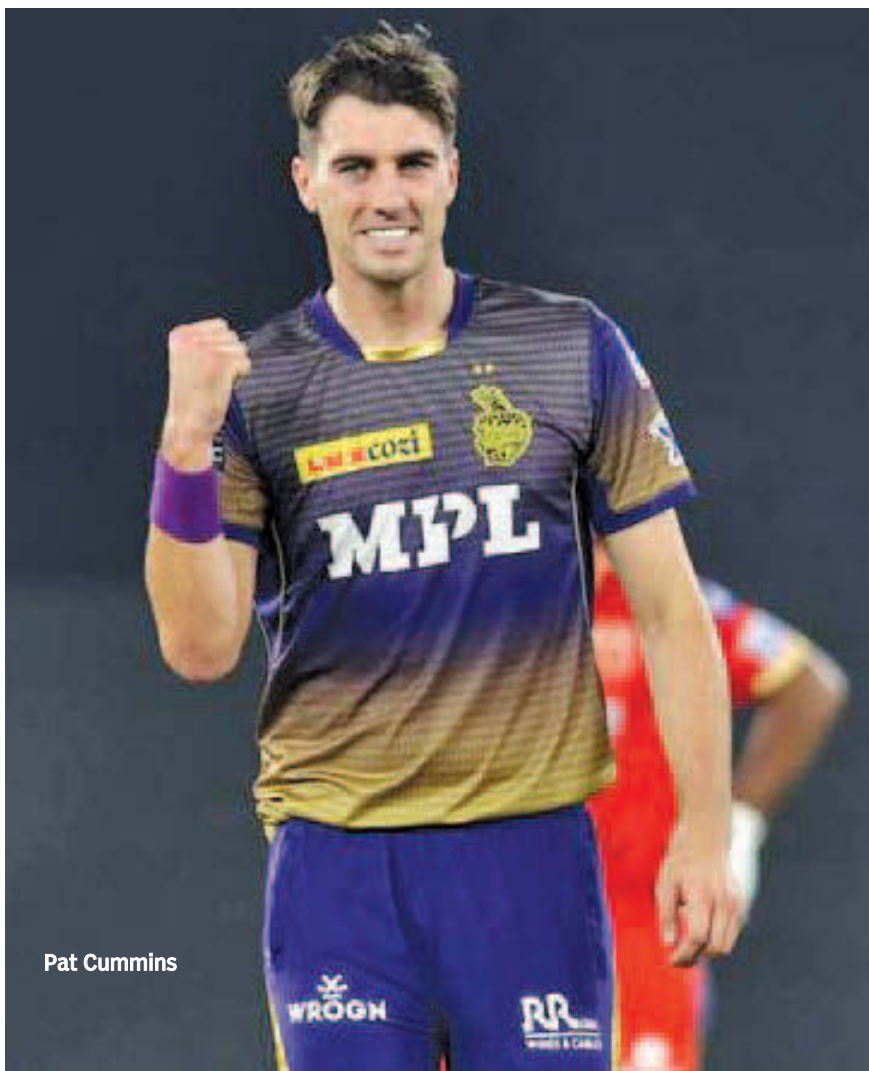
**Montmel (Spain), May 7:** Lewis Hamilton looked poised to continue his dominance of the Spanish Grand Prix after clocking the fastest time during the second practice session on Friday.

Formula One leader Hamilton had a flying lap of 1 minute, 18.170 seconds. Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas was .139 seconds behind Hamilton after the Finn set the fastest time in the first practice session.

Red Bull driver Max Verstappen, seen as the main challenger to Hamilton's reign as world champion, finished only ninth fastest at .615 off the pace. Verstappen missed some time on the track while his team worked on the car, and his last lap was cut short when he damaged the right tip of his front wing.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc had the third-best time, followed by Alpine pair Esteban Ocon and Fernando Alonso, who is back in Spain for his first race since 2018.

Only eight points separate Hamilton from Verstappen at the top of the standings after they finished 1-2 in the first three races. — *AP*



Pat Cummins

## Morris "relieved" after leaving bubble

**Johannesburg, May 7:** South Africa and Rajasthan Royals all-rounder Chris Morris is "relieved" to be safely back home after witnessing "chaos" unfold once Covid-19 cases in the IPL bio-bubble came to light.

Morris, along with his 10 other South African players have reached home, after the IPL was suspended following six cases of Covid-19 — four players and two coaches from three different teams.

"Look, obviously I'm relieved," Morris, who is currently undergoing a 10-day mandatory quarantine at home, told *iol.co.za*.

Morris said they came to know about the Covid cases in Kolkata Knight Riders — Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier — on Sunday night.

"The moment we heard that, when players are testing positive, inside the bubble, then everyone starts asking questions. The alarm bells definitely

started going off for all of us," he said. "By Monday when they postponed that game (between Kolkata and Royal Challengers Bangalore), we knew the tournament was under pressure to continue."

The Twenty20 league was suspended after Sunrisers Hyderabad's wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha and Delhi Capitals' Amit Mishra tested positive on Tuesday.

"I was chatting to our team doctor, whose room was across the hallway from my mine in the hotel, and Kumar (Sangakkarra, the Royals' head coach) came around the corner, and drew his finger across his throat, and then we knew it was over," said Morris.

"And then it was chaos! The England guys especially were panicking because they needed to isolate in hotels in England first, and apparently there weren't any rooms." — *PTI*

relieved," Morris, who is currently undergoing a 10-day mandatory quarantine at home, told *iol.co.za*.

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"The moment we heard that, when players are testing positive, inside the bubble, then everyone starts asking questions. The alarm bells definitely

## VIRAT-ANUSHKA DONATE ₹2cr IN COVID-19 FIGHT

**New Delhi, May 7:** India captain Virat Kohli and his actor wife Anushka Sharma have donated ₹2 crore to a fund-raising project, which will raise a total of ₹7 crore to support the country's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. The two are raising money through crowd-funding platform Ketto.

"...Virat Kohli and Bollywood superstar Anushka Sharma are aiming to raise ₹7 crore for Covid relief in India," a press release from the celebrity couple stated.

"They are kickstarting a fundraising campaign #InThisTogether on the crowd-funding platform Ketto and are putting ₹2 crore for this initiative."

The campaign will run for seven days on Ketto and the proceeds will be directed to ACT Grants, the implementation partner which will work towards providing oxygen, medical manpower, vaccination awareness and tele-medicine facilities all through the pandemic and the amount. — *PTI*

## Emery gets Arsenal revenge

**London, May 7:** Villarreal will face Manchester United in the Europa League final after the Spanish side held out for a 0-0 draw at Arsenal on Thursday to prevent a clean sweep of European finalists for Premier League sides.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang twice hit the post for Arsenal, but a 2-1 aggregate defeat means the Gunners will miss out on Champions League football for the fifth consecutive season.

Edinson Cavani scored twice for United, who progressed 8-5 on aggregate despite a 3-2 defeat away to Roma.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men will aim to end a four-year trophy drought when they take on Villarreal in Gdansk on May 26, three days before Manchester City face Chelsea in the Champions League final on May 29.

Sitting ninth in the Premier League, Arsenal's season was hinging on Europa League glory for Champions League qualification.

But former Gunners' boss Unai Emery got revenge for his sacking after just 18 months as Arsene Wenger's successor by leading Villarreal to their first European final.

Emery won this competition three times with Sevilla and also took Arsenal to the Europa League final in his only full season in charge at the Emirates.

The Spaniard was criticised for his cautious approach after taking a 2-0 lead inside the first-half in the first leg, allowing Arsenal back into the tie through Nicolas Pepe's penalty. — *AFP*



Manchester United's Edinson Cavani (left) celebrates after scoring against Roma in their Europa League semifinal second leg in Italy on Thursday.

## SPANISH TITLE RACE ENTERS CRUCIAL PHASE

**Madrid, May 7:** Gerard Pique said in any normal season this weekend would decide La Liga's champions but even he admitted this time there are no guarantees.

On Saturday afternoon, Barcelona face Atletico Madrid at Camp Nou and on Sunday, Real Madrid play Sevilla at Valdebebas, Spain's frenzied title race coming to a head in a criss-cross of first against third and second versus fourth.

When it is all over, there will be three games left and Atletico could be five points clear or Real Madrid and Barca may be first and second, level on points, with Atletico just a single point behind.

In terms of the table, only an Atletico victory might feel definitive, and even then only if it is followed by Sevilla winning away at Real, the two most unlikely results combining to leave Atletico's chasers needing an incredible swing in the final three games. — *AFP*

## ENGLAND | TOUR

## No Hardik, Jadeja makes comeback

**New Delhi, May 7:** Hardik Pandya was not considered for selection as "he is still not in a position to bowl", while a fit-again Ravindra Jadeja made his way back to a 20-strong Indian squad announced on Friday for next month's World Test Championship final against New Zealand and a five-match series against England.

Along with Jadeja, batsman Hanuma Vihari and senior pacer Mohammed Shami also walked back into the side after missing the home series against England due to injuries.

All three had endured injuries during the away series against Australia earlier this year when India recorded one of their best triumphs.

Hardik, who was with team during the home series against England but did not play, has not been picked because he is not fit enough to do the job with the ball. He can play as a specialist batsman in the shorter formats but has to bowl for a place in the Test team.

"Hardik Pandya is still not in a position to bowl. The experiment of selectors to keep him during England and prepare him with bowling workload has failed miserably. He will henceforth not be considered for Test cricket," a BCCI source said.

The selectors also picked four standby players — Abhimanyu Easwaran, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, and Arzan Nagwaswalla, the BCCI stated in a press release.

## INDIA SQUAD

Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (Captain), Ajinkya Rahane (vice-captain), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Shardul Thakur, Umesh Yadav, KL Rahul (subject to fitness clearance), Wriddhiman Saha (wicket-keeper; subject to fitness clearance).

Opener Easwaran and pacer Avesh Khan were also with the team during the England series while the extra pace did it for IPL regular Prasidh Krishna and Gujarat left-arm fast bowler Arzan Nagwaswalla, who had a stellar 2019-20 season. He is the only Parsi cricketer currently playing at the first-class level in India.

The 23-year-old left-arm pacer has 62 first-class wickets to his credit in 16 matches that he has played since his debut in 2018.

K. L. Rahul, who underwent a surgery after being diagnosed with appendicitis, and Wriddhiman Saha, infected with Covid-19 during the recently-suspended IPL, have been included subject to fitness.

Out-of-form spinner Kuldeep Yadav and pacer Navdeep Saini have been left out of the squad, which is expected to depart for England for the twin assignments in the third week of this month. — *PTI*

## INDIAN ROWING TEAM BOOK OLYMPIC BERTH

**New Delhi, May 7:** Indian rowers Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh qualified for the Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event after finishing second in the final race of the Asia/Oceania Continental Qualifying Regatta in Tokyo on Friday.

Another Indian, Jakar Khan finished fourth in the men's singles sculls final which offers five Olympic quotas but he missed out as a country gets only one qualifying spot from this regatta.

The top three qualify for Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event.

"A country can qualify in only one boat from this regatta and since Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh had finished second in men's lightweight double sculls, they will qualify," Rowing Federation of India president Rajlaxmi Singh Deo said.

## 'NO ATMOSPHERE OF OLYMPIC BUILD-UP'

The Olympics open in Tokyo on July 23 but Arjun said the Games will be unlike any previous edition if they happen.

"It is less than 80 days for the Olympics but it is weird, there is very little Olympic atmosphere building up. The streets are empty, no people, very few vehicles, though we are told there is lockdown going on," Arjun said from Tokyo. — *PTI*

## Seema &amp; Sumit seal Tokyo spots

**Sofia (Bulgaria), May 7:** Seema Bisla on Friday became the fourth Indian woman wrestler to qualify for the Tokyo Games by reaching the final of the 50kg competition even as Sumit Malik settled for a silver medal after conceding his final bout due to a knee injury at the World Olympic Qualifiers, here.

Seema booked an Olympic berth for herself after a close 2-1 win over European Championship bronze medallist Anna Lukasiak of Poland, showing tremendous defensive skills in the semifinal.

After giving away a point on passivity, Seema pulled off a quick take down in the first period for a 2-1 lead, which she kept till the end to earn the quota.

She will now fight for gold against Ecuador's Lucia Yamileth Yezpez Guzman on Saturday.

The 29-year-old is the fourth Indian to qualify for the Games after celebrated Vinesh Phogat (53kg), Anshu Malik (57kg) and Sonam Malik (62kg). It will be first time that four Indian women wrestlers will compete in the Olympics. In the 2106 edition, three Indian women wrestlers had competed.

Nisha (68kg) and Pooja (76kg), however, failed to win quota after losing their respective bouts.

Meanwhile, Malik, who had become only the fourth



Sumit Malik

men's free style wrestler to qualify for the Olympics, did not take the mat for his 125kg gold medal fight against Russia's Sergei Kozyrev, the 2018 Youth Olympic champion, due to injury.

National coach Jagminder Singh said that Malik had injured his right knee during practice at the national camp a few weeks back and competed only because an Olympic quota was at stake.

"There is a minor ligament injury and we did not aggravate it since he had already locked the Olympic quota. He had competed in Almaty last month (Asian Championships) and Olympic qualifiers) with this injury," he said.

"This was one last chance to get the quota, so he competed. He came here without much practice and winning four bouts was remarkable. — *PTI*

## Saina, Srikanth's Olympic hopes take hit

**New Delhi, May 7:** The Malaysia Open Super 750 tournament, one of badminton's last two Olympic qualifying events, was on Friday postponed due to a recent Covid-19 surge in the host country, dealing a severe blow to the qualification hopes of India's Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth.

The \$600,000 event was scheduled to be held in Kuala Lumpur from May 25 to 30. "All attempts were made by the organisers and BWF to provide a safe tournament environment

for all participants, but the recent surge in cases left no choice but to postpone the tournament," Badminton World Federation said in a statement.

"BWF can confirm the rescheduled tournament will no longer take place in the Olympic qualifying window. New tournament dates will be confirmed at a later date."

The decision came as a huge setback for London Olympics bronze-medallist Saina and men's star Srikanth in their bid for

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Srikanth's qualification for the Tokyo Games hinged on the Kuala Lumpur event followed by the Singapore Open (June 1-6).

In light of the new development, Badminton Association of India on Friday reached out to the world body, seeking clarity on the qualification scenario for its shuttlers.

"It's really unfortunate that the crucial qualifier had to be postponed in this way but that is the time we live in now," BAI General Secretary Ajay

Singhania said.

"Though four of our players have already qualified and there are few more including Saina and Srikanth who can still make it. I have reached out to BWF Secretary Thomas Lund asking for clarity on the future course of action."

With Singapore suspending all flights from India, it will be a difficult task for the Indian players, including Saina and Srikanth, to travel to the country for the last qualifier. — *PTI*