

IN BRIEF

3 held for Remdesivir black marketing

Noida: The Noida Police on Thursday said they have arrested three people for allegedly selling an injection at black market rates to needy people amid its shortage due to increased demand in the wake of the Covid pandemic. Additional deputy commissioner of Police (Central Noida) Ankur Aggarwal said the accused were trapped by a special operations group (SOG) following inputs of black marketing of Remdesivir by them. "Five vials of Remdesivir injections were seized from their possession. The accused told the police during initial questioning that they sold a single vial at the rate of ₹37,000 to people in need of it during the pandemic," Mr Aggarwal said. Those arrested have been identified as Mohammed Parvez, Naeem and Nisaar and they were held near the NSEZ by officials of Phase 2 police station and the SOG, he added. According to officials, a single vial of Remdesivir, which is made by multiple pharma companies, is normally sold not beyond Rs 3,500, depending on the manufacturer. The trio has been booked under provisions of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, the IPC and the Epidemic Diseases Act and further legal proceedings are underway, the police said.

3 nabbed for selling fake oxygen cylinders

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has arrested three persons, including a woman, for allegedly cheating people on the pretext of selling oxygen cylinder, officials said on Thursday. The accused have been identified as Priyesh (27) and Yashika (26), both residents of Indirapuram (Ghaziabad), and Phagun (29), a resident of Dilshad Garden, they said. The matter came to light Monday after a person named Tushar Gupta reported that one of his Covid-19 positive relatives was duped when he called a mobile number circulating on WhatsApp for oxygen cylinders.

'Prisoners need to be released on bail'

New Delhi: A high powered committee constituted to decongest jails to prevent Covid spread has said there is a need to release prisoners on interim bail for 90 days or eight weeks parole in view of the "alarming" and "threatening" situation of the pandemic. The committee, headed by Justice Vipin Sanghi, observed that the entire country was "engulfed" in the second wave of Covid, which according to the medical and expert opinion is more virulent and fatal in comparison to the last year's strain and in a matter of few weeks has left everyone "gasping for air".

'AAP GOVT TO SET UP 48 OXYGEN PLANTS IN DELHI'

New Delhi: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said the city government will set up 48 oxygen plants, including 21 that are being imported from France, across the national capital to address the shortage of the life-saving gas. Mr Kejriwal inspected the installation of a new oxygen plant at the Satyawadi Raja Harishchandra Hospital. He said the plant can generate 330 litres oxygen, which can fill 50-60 cylinders, and if used directly, 33 patients can be treated 24x7, adding that it will help the 200-bed hospital. "Inspected the installation of the new oxygen plant at Satyawadi Raja Harishchandra Hospital. I want to thank the French govt for their support. We are setting up 48 such plants across Delhi to address the shortage of oxygen," the chief minister said in a tweet. Pointing out that Delhi has witnessed an acute shortage of oxygen in the last few days, he said on one hand, the city is taking the life-saving gas from the Centre and on the other hand, it is trying to produce as much oxygen as it can. A total of 48 oxygen plants will be installed across Delhi, of which 21 are being imported from France and the rest are manufactured in India. "Though these are small plants, I feel they will provide a lot of support to the entire system that is under pressure due to a shortage of oxygen," Mr Kejriwal said. — PTI

Charges for pvt ambulance capped at ₹1,500-4,000

1.3L people in 18-44 age group vaccinated in 3 days: Kejri

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MAY 6

Amid a raging Covid pandemic, the Delhi government on Thursday fixed charges levied by private ambulance services in the range of ₹1,500-₹4,000, with chief minister Arvind Kejriwal warning strict action against violators.

"It has come to our notice that private ambulance services in Delhi are charging illegitimately. To avoid this practise, Delhi govt has capped maximum prices that private ambulance services can charge. Strict actions will be taken against those who violate the order," Kejriwal tweeted.

According to new law, the maximum charge for PTA (Patient Transport Ambulance) will be ₹1,500 per call for up to 10 kilometres, followed by ₹1,00 per extra kilometres, it said.

For the BLS category, the maximum charge will be ₹2,000 per call for up to 10 kilometres followed by ₹100 per extra kilometres, said the order.

The maximum charge of ATS will be ₹4,000 for up to 10 kilometres and ₹100 per extra kilometre, it added.

Meanwhile, Mr Kejriwal also said around 1.30 lakh people in the 18-44 age group have been vaccinated against Covid since the inoculation of this category started on May 3.

He also said the entire population of the capital can be vaccinated in three months, but only if adequate doses are available.

"In the last three days, around 1.3 lakh people (in the 18-44 age group) have been vaccinated. I hope more will be vaccinated



A health worker drags an oxygen cylinder at a banquet hall converted into a Covid isolation centre in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

in the coming days. We want to increase the scale of vaccination, but there is a problem ... vaccine is in short supply," he said during a virtual press conference.

The chief minister said more than 35 lakh people have been vaccinated in Delhi so far. Of this, 28 lakh have taken the first dose, and over 7.5 lakh have taken both the doses, he said.

"As I had promised earlier, we can vaccinate the entire (population of) Delhi within three months if there's adequate supply. We will open up more centres if we get more doses in a timely manner," he said.

The chief minister requested all those aged above 18 to take the jabs compulsorily.

"At the end of the day, one has to get vaccinated. Vaccination is the only solution to this problem," he said.

Delhi records 335 deaths, over 19,000 cases in a day

New Delhi, May 6: Delhi recorded 335 Covid deaths in a day and 19,133 cases even as the positivity rate dropped below 25 per cent for the first time since April 18, according to Delhi health department on Thursday.

This is the third time in the last four days that the number of new cases remained below 20,000. Delhi had reported 20,960 cases on Wednesday, 19,953 on Tuesday, 18,043 on Monday, 20,394 cases on Sunday, 25,219 on Saturday, 27,047 on Friday, 24,235 on last Thursday and 25,986 on Wednesday last week.

At 24.29 per cent, the case positivity rate is its lowest since April 16,

when it was 19.7 per cent, according to government data. It was 24.6 percent on April 17.

The national registered a positivity rate of 26.4 per cent on Wednesday, 26.73 per cent on Tuesday, 29.56 per cent on Monday, 28.33 per cent on Sunday, 31.6 per cent on Saturday, 32.7 per cent on Friday and 32.8 per cent on last Thursday.

On April 22, a positivity rate of 36.2 percent, the highest so far, was recorded. The city had witnessed 311 deaths on Wednesday, 338 on Tuesday, 448 on Monday, the highest so far; 407 on Sunday, 412 on Saturday, 375 on Friday, 395 on last Thursday. — PTI

SC: Can't allow court to become ground of recrimination between Centre, Delhi

New Delhi, May 6: The Supreme Court on Thursday said it will not allow the top court of the country to become a ground of recrimination between the Centre and the Delhi government as they indulged in a blame game on the issue of allocation and supply of oxygen to the national capital. A bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah warned both solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, and senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing the Delhi government, and said everyone

should work in a cooperative manner.

"We are making it clear that this is not an adversarial litigation. We are not going to allow this constitutional court to become a ground of recrimination between two governments. We won't allow any recrimination to be made against Delhi government or the Central government. All we want is that everyone should work in a cooperative manner," the bench told Mr Mehta and Mr Mehra, claiming not to be adversarial, said the Centre did not

allocate the requisite amount of oxygen to Delhi even after the top court's direction, and that even on Thursday, the supply is not 700MT as per their estimates.

He said the Centre has tried to put the Delhi government in the dock in every affidavit they have filed before the courts, and he also claimed that other states such as MP and Punjab were given more oxygen than their demands.

At the outset, Mehta told the bench that the Centre has complied with the top court's order and instead

of 700 MT oxygen ordered, it had ensured a supply of 730 MT to Delhi on Wednesday for treating Covid-19 patients.

He said that a survey was conducted in 56 major hospitals of the city on May 4 and it found they had a significant stock of liquid medical oxygen. Mr Mehta said he is not blaming anybody, but added that unloading of oxygen tankers brought to Delhi is taking too long which is not ideal as these specialised vehicles need to be sent back for refilling to the eastern corridor. — PTI

DDMA: 14-day isolation must for those arriving from AP, Telangana

New Delhi, May 6: People arriving in Delhi from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana through any mode of transport will have to undergo 14 days of mandatory institutional quarantine, said an order issued by the Delhi government on Thursday.

However, those who have been administered both doses of any Covid vaccine or carry a negative RT-PCR test report not older than 72 hours prior to undertaking the journey, will be required to be home quarantined for seven days, it said.

The DDMA stated in

the order that a virulent variant of Covid is reported to have been found recently in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

The new strain of Covid has a shorter incubation period with high transmission rate and the progress of disease is much more rapid in this strain, it said.

Therefore, additional precautionary measures with respect to people coming from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to Delhi through flights, trains, buses or cars are required to be taken, it said.

"All persons arriving

from the state of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in NCT of Delhi by airlines, trains, buses, cars, trucks or any other mode of transportation shall have to undergo mandatory government institutional quarantine or paid quarantine for 14 days at facilities established by the concerned district magistrate," stated the order. Resident commissioners of concerned state bhawans will be responsible for ensuring the compliance of instructions for quarantine in case of those reaching there, the DDMA order said. — PTI



Vehicles ply during light rainfall in New Delhi. The National Capital witnessed a sudden change in weather with hovering dark clouds bringing light rain and gusty winds blowing on Thursday evening bringing the temperature down. — PTI

Don't be like an ostrich with head in sand: HC tells govt

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MAY 6

The Delhi High Court on Thursday said the existing medical infrastructure in Delhi was "exposed" and in "shambles" when put to the test during the pandemic and directed the Delhi government to provide facility for medical treatment as required by all residents of the national capital who are suffering from Covid.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli further said the government was behaving like an ostrich with its head in the sand if it was disputing that the medical infrastructure was not in shambles.

"Now you are behaving like the ostrich with its head in the sand. When you defend this situation, then you are not rising above the politics. We always call a spade a spade," the bench said to senior advocate Rahul Mehra, appearing for the Delhi government, when he argued that the court

may not say the medical infrastructure was in shambles. The bench said, "the existing medical infrastructure in the state is completely exposed... when it was put to the test and this court cannot turn away people like the petitioner by merely telling him that the state does not have the infrastructure to deal with his situation..."

To this Mr Mehra said, "The existing infrastructure is struggling, but the court may not say it is in shambles as that has a different connotation to it. In the absence of oxygen what could the infrastructure do. Hospitals were reducing beds due to lack of oxygen."

He said the government has taken several initiatives, like augmenting

beds by 15,000 and ICU beds by 1,200, which are in the pipeline and the oxygen is also coming in.

However, the bench said "No that is not right. It is not just oxygen. Is oxygen enough? If you have oxygen, do you have everything? Pipeline is pipeline. They are not there now".

The observations and direction came while hearing a 53 year old Covid patient's plea for an ICU bed with a ventilator as his SPO2 levels had fallen to around 40 and he was unable to get ICU beds anywhere.

The court said that it was the obligation of the state to provide sufficient infrastructure to protect the lives of the people and the same cannot be understated. "At the same time, we cannot lose sight of the fact that we are faced with a one in a century pandemic and even the most economically advanced countries found their infrastructure lacking to deal with the massive surge of Covid patients requiring hospitalisation," the bench said.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Northern Railway has decided to cancel the following Special Trains due to low occupancy, operational and other reasons as per the following details:-

CANCELLATION OF SPECIAL TRAINS	
Train No. & Name	Date from Cancellation
02001/02002 Habibganj-New Delhi-Habibganj Shatabdi Spl.	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02005 New Delhi-Kalka Shatabdi Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02006 Kalka-New Delhi Shatabdi Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02011/02012 New Delhi-Kalka-New Delhi Shatabdi Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02013 New Delhi-Amritsar Shatabdi Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02014 Amritsar-New Delhi Shatabdi Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02017/02018 New Delhi-Dehradun-New Delhi Shatabdi Spl.	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02029/02030 New Delhi-Amritsar-New Delhi Shatabdi Spl.	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02039/02040 Kathgodam-New Delhi-Kathgodam Shatabdi Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02045/02046 New Delhi-Chandigarh-New Delhi Shatabdi Spl.	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02055 New Delhi-Dehradun Jan Shatabdi Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02056 Dehradun-New Delhi Jan Shatabdi Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02057 New Delhi-Unna Himachal Jan Shatabdi Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02058 Unna Himachal-New Delhi Jan Shatabdi Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02263 Pune-Hazrat Nizamuddin Duronto Special	11.05.2021 to till further advice
02264 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Pune Duronto Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02265 Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Jammu Tawi Duronto Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02266 Jammu Tawi-Delhi Sarai Rohilla Duronto Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02401 Kota-Dehradun Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02402 Dehradun-Kota Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02433 Chennai Central-Hazrat Nizamuddin Rajdhani Spl.	14.05.2021 to till further advice
02434 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Chennai Central Rajdhani Spl.	12.05.2021 to till further advice
02441 Bilaspur Jn.-New Delhi Rajdhani Special	13.05.2021 to till further advice
02442 New Delhi-Bilaspur Jn. Rajdhani Special	11.05.2021 to till further advice
02445 New Delhi-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Exp. Spl.	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02446 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-New Delhi Exp. Spl.	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02455 Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Bikaner Jn. Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
02456 Bikaner Jn.-Delhi Sarai Rohilla Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02461 New Delhi-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Shri Shakti Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
02462 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-New Delhi Shri Shakti Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
04021 Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Jaipur Sainik Special Express	11.05.2021 to till further advice
04022 Jaipur-Delhi Sarai Rohilla Sainik Special Express	12.05.2021 to till further advice
04041 Delhi Jn.-Dehradun Festival Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
04042 Dehradun-Delhi Jn. Festival Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
04047/04048 Kotdwar-Delhi Jn.-Kotdwar Siddhabali Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
04505/04506 Kalka-Shimla-Kalka Rail Motor Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
04515 Kalka-Shimla Festival Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
04516 Shimla-Kalka Festival Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
04553 Delhi Jn.-Daulatpur Chowk Himachal Express Spl.	10.05.2021 to till further advice
04554 Daulatpur Chowk-Delhi Jn. Himachal Express Spl.	09.05.2021 to till further advice
04605 Yog Nagari Rishikesh-Jammu Tawi Express Special	10.05.2021 to till further advice
04606 Jammu Tawi-Yog Nagari Rishikesh Express Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
04609 Rishikesh-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Hemkunt Spl.	10.05.2021 to till further advice
04610 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-Rishikesh Hemkunt Spl.	09.05.2021 to till further advice
04639/04640 Sahibzada Ajeetsingh Nagar(Mohali)-Firozpur-Sahibzada Ajeetsingh Nagar(Mohali) Express Special	09.05.2021 to till further advice
22439/22440 New Delhi-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-New Delhi Vande Bharat	09.05.2021 to till further advice

Note: For any kind of information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website: www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in

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

Download RailMadad app.

RailMadad Helpline No.: 139

Please join us on [f](#) [t](#) [i](#)

NORTHERN RAILWAY
Your Convenience - Our Concern
Visit us at : www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in

"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"

SHORT TAKES

AMU Sanskrit prof dies of pneumonia

Aligarh (UP): Noted Sanskrit scholar at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) Prof Khalid Bin Yusuf has passed away after a brief illness, a university statement said here on Thursday. Prof Yusuf (60) was showing Covid-19 symptoms and had acute pneumonia, his family members said. He passed away on Wednesday night while being treated at a hospital, they added. Prof Yusuf was the first Muslim in India to earn a doctorate on Rigveda, as per the statement. AMU Vice Chancellor Prof Tariq Mansoor paid rich tributes to the departed scholar. During the past fortnight, 13 serving members from the teaching faculty at AMU who were either suffering from Covid-19 or showing symptoms of the infection have lost their lives. — PTI

Odisha: Over 10K Covid cases found

Bhubaneswar: Odisha on Friday Thursday recorded 10,521 new coronavirus infections, the highest ever single-day spike since the pandemic started last year. On May 1, 2021, the state had registered 10,413 new positive cases. With the detection of 10,521 new infections, the cumulative tally of Covid-19 cases in the state touched 5, 001, and 62. As many as 17 patients succumbed to the disease during the period. With this the total number of fatalities in the state rose to 2021. Of the new cases, 5945 were detected from quarantine centres while the remaining cases were local contacts. According to the state health department sources, 6176 patients have recovered from the disease since Wednesday morning, pushing the total number of recoveries to 416,403. — PTI

Plea in HC seeks Z+ cover for Poonawalla

Mumbai: A city based lawyer has filed a writ petition in the Bombay High Court seeking Z+ security cover for Adar Poonawalla, the Chief Executive Officer of the Serum Institute of India (SII), which manufactures the Covishield vaccine. Relying on news reports that Poonawalla left India due to pressure from powerful people for supply of vaccine Mane has urged the court to book people who threatened Mr Poonawalla. Advocate Datta Mane in his petition has stated that if vaccine makers feel unsafe, then it may affect vaccine production. His petition also stated that if Adar Poonawalla is out of India, due to fear of his life, then it will be a ship in a storm without its captain. It was also pointed out that Mr Poonawalla had been granted "Y" category security cover by the Union home ministry, however, the security granted seemed to be inadequate as Mr Poonawalla left the country after such security was granted.

COVID CODE OF CONDUCT

KERALA BOOKS 480 PRIESTS FOR NORMS BREACH

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 6

The Kerala police has registered cases against 480 priests belonging to Church of South India (CSI) on the charges of violating Covid-19 protocol by organising and taking part in a retreat in Munnar in Idukki district. The case was registered on the basis of a statement filed by the local tahsildar citing grave violation of Covid protocol. The five-day retreat was held in Munnar in Idukki district from April 13. The event turned out to be a super spreader with over 100 priests getting infected. Two vicars who, contracted the infection, died. Apart from receiving complaint from official, a section of priests and members of the church had also lodged a complaint with the government citing grave violation of norms. The priests were booked under the Kerala Epidemic Diseases Act and under section 269 of IPC. According to officials, CSI moderator and Bishop A. Dharmaraj Rasalam was also reportedly infected. Earlier chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan had stated that strict action would be taken in connection with the violation of Covid protocol.

'Antodaya': C'garh govt postpones vaccination

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, MAY 6

The Bhopesh Baghel government has postponed the adult vaccination drive in the state following objection by the Chhattisgarh high court to its vaccination policy prioritising "Antodaya" scheme beneficiaries.

The Chhattisgarh high court on Wednesday directed the state government to fix a reasonable ratio of allotment of vaccines to the "Antodaya" scheme beneficiaries belonging to below poverty line and persons belonging to above poverty line, while objecting to the state's vaccine policy of giving priority to the beneficiaries of the particular scheme.

"The state government has postponed the third phase of the Covid-19 vaccination drive until amendments are made to the state's vaccination policy following the development", the government's letter said.

The high court has also sought clarifications from the state government if the state's vaccination policy was in violation of constitutional rights of people and if the state cabinet endorsed the policy.

■ BJP MP Surya alleges hospital blocking beds in fake names

Raids after bed scam alert in B'luru

Bengaluru, May 6: Searches were carried out by police at the city corporation's Covid war rooms and data collected, in the backdrop of allegations of a scam in booking hospital beds for Covid-19 patients.

The development comes two days after BJP MP Tejasvi Surya alleged that hospitals here "blocked" beds in fake names to make money, at a time when Covid-19 cases were rising in Karnataka. Mr Surya said officials of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike "colluded" with private nursing homes and hospitals to block beds and reserve it for exorbitant fees. "Searches were conducted on Wednesday at eight zonal war rooms of the BBMP. Lots of data has

SC: Brace for '3rd wave', prepare O2 buffer stock

Experts say next pandemic wave will be dangerous for kids

New Delhi, May 6: The Supreme Court on Thursday said the country needs to be prepared for the third wave of Covid-19 which experts say could be more harmful, especially for children, and emphasised upon the need to create buffer stock of oxygen.

It asked the Centre not to reduce oxygen supply to Delhi from 700MT till further orders and ensure that rationalisation exercise is completed while taking into account the pan-India perspective.

The top court said that people in Delhi are dying despite efforts being made to treat Covid-19 patients and there is also no denying that many have lost their lives due to shortage of oxygen supply.

It made clear to the Centre and Delhi government that it would not allow the top court of the country to be a ground of recrimination between the two as both indulged in a blame game on the issue of allocation and supply of oxygen.

A bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said: We need to prepare for the third surge of Covid-19 which may have altogether different parameters. We have to be ready for that. We have been reading that some experts have said that the



A family member of a Covid-19 patient rests as he waits to refill a cylinder with medical oxygen in Ajmer on Thursday. — PTI

third surge will be more harmful especially to children.

"We understand children are more resilient as compared to elders but we have to also consider that they themselves will not go to hospitals and their parents will have to take them making them vulnerable."

The bench warned both solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for Centre, and senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing Delhi government, that the Supreme Court being the top Constitutional court of the country cannot be allowed to be a ground of recrimination. — PTI

Rahul: PM's failure may force full India curfew

New Delhi: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that the failure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and zero strategy of the Centre is pushing the country towards a complete lockdown. Mr Gandhi said he was against a total lockdown and urged the government to provide a financial package for the poor. "Last year's unplanned lockdown was a fatal attack on the people and that is why I am against a complete lockdown," he said. — PTI

Real-time court updates

part of press freedom: SC

The court ruled out any curbs on the media and counseled the high court to exercise caution and circumspection in making oral observation, in its judgment on a plea by the Election Commission complaining against the harsh oral observation made against it by the Madras high court in the course of the hearing of a plea seeking enforcing of Covid protocol in the just concluded assembly polls and the countering. The observations in question were made on April 26, 2021. The Election Commission was aggrieved with the oral observation attributing responsibility on the poll panel for surge in Covid cases and saying why it should not "be put up for murder charges".

Assuaging the Election Commission, the court said, "The remarks of the high court were harsh. The metaphor is inappropriate. The high court — if indeed it did make the oral observations which have been alluded to — did not seek to attribute culpability for the Covid-19 pandemic in the country to the EC. What instead it would have intended to do was to urge the EC to ensure stricter compliance of Covid-19 related protocols during elections."

Referring to the live streaming of the top court proceedings in USA, UK, International Criminal Court and recently by the Gujarat High Court, Justice Chandrachud speaking for the bench said, "It would be retrograde for this court to promote the rule of law and access to justice on one hand, and shield the daily operations of the high courts and this court from the media in all its forms, by gagging the reporting of proceedings, on the other."

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 6

Ruling that any gag on media from reporting court proceedings would be retrograde, the Supreme Court on Wednesday said that the internet has revolutionized the court reporting and open court hearing ensures that information relating to a court proceeding is available in public domain.

An open court proceeding ensures "public scrutiny" and "transparency."

Justice D.Y. Chandrachud heading a bench also comprising Justice M.R. Shah said that the high court should exercise a "degree of caution and circumspection" in making oral observations in the course of the hearing more so when party in question is another constitutional authority.

In another village of Umaria under Aron police station in the district, police last week arrested three healers who were taking gullible villagers for a ride by promising them to ward off 'corona ghost' to make them immune to Covid-19.

The three accused, Kalyan Singh Ahirwar, Ram Singh Ahirwar and Maheswar Ahirwar, were arrested under section 269 (negligently spreading infection), 270 (willfully spreading infection) and 188 (disobedience to

order promulgated by public servant) and Section 4 of the Epidemic Act, 1897, police said. In the village of Ganeshpur in Agar Malwa district, people took out a torch rally last fortnight to "drive out" corona from their village. The local youths ran around the village holding torches and chanting 'bhago corona bhago' (go corona go) slogans on the night of April 22 believing that the pandemic would be driven out by resorting to such superstitious practices.

MP junior docs call off strike after assurance

Bhopal, May 6: Junior doctors from six hospitals attached to government medical colleges in Madhya Pradesh on Thursday called off their strike after talks.

Earlier in the day, the doctors proceeded on an indefinite strike over their demands including better treatment facilities for their colleagues who contract coronavirus infection.

"We have called off our stir after assurances from Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang at a meeting," MP Junior Doctors Association (JUDA) president Arvind Meena said.

Sarang said the government told the doctors that this was not the right time to strike work in view of the pandemic.

"I am happy they heeded us. As they respected our advice, we are obliged. We are looking into their concerns," he told reporters.

The junior doctors who serve in Covid-19 wards were not part of the strike but they too would join in if demands were not met, their association had warned.

"Twenty-five per cent of junior doctors have been infected by coronavirus to date. We are demanding guarantee of bed allotment for the junior doctors who get infected," Meena had said earlier in the day.

Besides, latest Covid-19 treatment should be made available to them as the treatment protocol keeps changing every two months due to virus mutation, he had said.

"Most importantly, the state government should



Junior doctors of Gandhi Medical College raise slogans during their strike demanding for hike in their salaries in Bhopal on Thursday. — PTI

MP sees 12,421 new Covid-19 infection cases

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh on Thursday reported 12,421 fresh cases of Covid-19 and 86 fatalities that raised the tally of infections to 6,37,406 and the toll to 6,160, an official from the state health department said. At least 12,965 patients were discharged from hospitals in the last 24 hours, taking the count of recoveries in the state to 5,42,632, the official said. With the addition of 1,792 new cases, Indore's caseload went up to 1,21,694, while the tally in Bhopal rose to 99,639 after 1,584 persons tested positive, he said. Indore reported eight casualties that took its toll to 1,184 and fatalities in Bhopal rose to 776 after six patients died of the infection, the official said.

Indore and Bhopal are now left with 12,017 and 10,829 active cases, respectively, he said, adding that the state currently has 88,614 active cases. — PTI

provide treatment to junior doctors in the cashless mode. At present we have to incur the expenditure which is reimbursed after submission of bills," Mr Meena had said. Another demand of agitating doctors was that their one year's fee be waived as the academic session could not be held due to the outbreak of coronavirus last year. — PTI

Meanwhile, on Thursday, 450 Oxygen Cylinders, each of capacity 46.6 litres, landed in New Delhi from the UK while one Mobile Oxygen Generating Plant came from Germany.

Essential medicines from Bangladesh also reached.

India hails US support for 'trade waiver' on vaccines

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 6

Even as foreign aid continued to pour into the country this week (including 1.5 lakh vials of anti-Covid drug Remdesivir supplied by its manufacturer Gilead), India on Thursday welcomed American support for the joint India-South Africa initiative, which began last year at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), for the relaxation in the norms of the agreement on the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) in order to "ensure quick and affordable access to vaccines and medicines for developing countries".

New Delhi hoped that the waiver can be approved quickly at the WTO and that this will be "an important step for enabling rapid scaling up of manufacture and timely availability of affordable Covid-19 vaccines and essential medical products".

In a statement, the MEA said, "In view of the global health crisis and the need to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, India and South Africa proposed in WTO on 2nd Oct, 2020 a relaxation in the norms of the agreement on TRIPS, to ensure quick and affordable access to vaccines and medicines for developing countries. As a result of proactive outreach by India and other like-minded countries, the proposal has received the support of more than 120 countries. During his recent phone call on 26 April 2021 with the US President Biden, Prime Minister informed him about India's initiative at the WTO which was aimed at the benefit of humanity. We welcome the statement of the US government of 5th May announcing their support for this initiative."

Meanwhile, on Thursday, 450 Oxygen Cylinders, each of capacity 46.6 litres, landed in New Delhi from the UK while one Mobile Oxygen Generating Plant came from Germany.

Essential medicines from Bangladesh also reached.

India halts vaccine supply under Covax

Move 2 days before India-EU summit

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 6

India has "temporarily suspended" vaccine exports under the global Covax initiative and the European Union (EU) will "not put pressure" on New Delhi on that issue in view of the Covid situation in India, EU official sources said of discussion, amid a horrific second Covid wave that is battering India. The EU is already providing liquid oxygen, ventilators, medicines and other material that will be worth a total 100 million Euros to India. There will also be discussions on how to ramp up vaccine production and to ensure resilient supply chains. "Everyone has full understanding (of the Covid situation in India). No one will pressurise PM Modi to export vaccines at this stage," EU sources told this newspaper.

It may be recalled that India had been exporting millions of doses of vaccines in the past few months till a ferocious second Covid wave hit India. New Delhi is now focused on vaccinating the huge 1.2 billion Indian population.

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
1 st CORRIGENDUM	
Sub.: - 1 st Corrigendum to tender notice no.172-Sig/TW/NR/T-06 dated 12.04.2021 in connection with tender for the work of " Provision of OFC & associated equipments Phillaur-Lohian khas Sections of FZR Division." The following item of above tender notice may be read as under :-	
As per Original NIT	Revised as per this Corrigendum
Cost of Tender:- ₹ 2,59,69,360.32 (Two Crore Fifty Nine Lakh Sixty Nine Thousand Three Hundred Sixty and Paise Thirty Two only).	Tender No. 172-Sig/TW/NR/T-06 dated 12.04.2021 may be treated as cancelled.
Closing Date : 11:30 Hrs. on date 07.05.2021	
Date of Opening: 11:30 Hrs. on date 07.05.2021	
Tender Notice No.172-Sig/TW/NR/T-06 dated 12.04.2021 972/2021	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

SHORT TAKES

3 militants killed in Shopian encounter

Srinagar: Three militants recruited into Al-Badr outfit recently were killed in a gunfight with the security forces in a remote village of Jammu and Kashmir's southern district of Shopian on Thursday.

However, a fourth militant trapped with them after the security forces launched a cordon-and-search operation at Kanigam surrendered in response to an appeal from the uniformed men, the police said. Inspector-general of police (Kashmir range)

Vijay Kumar said that "repeated appeals" were made to all the four militants to lay down their weapons and surrender before the security forces but only one of them responded and three others who refused were killed in the subsequent encounter. The police identified the slain as Danish Mir, Muhammad Umar Bhat and Zaid Bashir Reshi—all residents of Shopian. It added that the trio had after turning down the surrender offer opened fire and also lobbed a hand grenade towards the search party, triggering the encounter. The officials said that after the J&K police's counterinsurgency Special Operations Group (SOG) along with the Army's 44 Rashtriya Rifles and the 178th Battalion of the CRPF laid siege to Kanigam and the presence of four Al-Badr militants in the village was established late Wednesday night, the families of all the trapped militants were brought to the site in a bid to persuade them to surrender.

2 guards abducted from Gail site

Ramgarh, Jharkhand: Unidentified miscreants abducted two security guards engaged by the Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL) at its project site in Jharkhand's Ramgarh district and released one later, a top police official said on Thursday. The other guard is still missing while a hunt to nab the culprits is on, Additional DGP (operation), R.K. Mallick said. "Two guards engaged by GAIL at its camp site at Betulkhurd under Gola police station were abducted on the night of May 3. The kidnapping seems to be the handiwork of some criminal gang for ransom," Mr Mallick told PTI. He said that the police were informed of the incident on Thursday. So far it appears that there is no involvement of any ultra outfit behind the incident but that police are investigating from all angles, he said. Ramgarh police said that hours after the abduction, one of the two guards was set free to inform company officials to contact the kidnappers. Deputy superintendent of police Sanjeev Kumar Mishra said that the police registered an FIR against unidentified miscreants on the basis of a written complaint — PTI

OXIMETERS AND SCANNERS AT U.P. 'GAUSHALAS'

Lucknow: Amid the surge in coronavirus cases, the Uttar Pradesh government is providing oximeters and thermal scanners for cows housed in the state's gaushalas'. That is what a government press release said. But an official later clarified that the medical equipment was meant for people who work at the gaushalas. A recent press release from chief minister Yogi Adityanath's office also said the state government has issued instructions to set up help desks in every district for the welfare of cows, taking forward its cow protection agenda. The government has issued instructions that all cowsheds must strictly follow the Covid-19 protocol, and made wearing masks and frequent thermal screening mandatory there. The press release on cowsheds said the gaushalas' will be equipped with all the medical equipment such as oximeters and thermal scanners for cows and other animals as well. "In view of the current Covid-19 situation, a total of 700 help desks for the welfare of cows have been set up across the districts of the state. With this, 51 oximeters and 341 thermal scanners have also been provided to ensure better animal care and testing," it said. The statement said stray cows in large numbers are being given shelter at the 'gaushalas' due to the efforts of the chief minister. — PTI

■ Cong claims the BJP govt underreporting cases to mask real death numbers
Obituaries flood dailies belying Guj death count

Ahmedabad, May 6: If any benchmark was needed for the growing menace of COVID-19 in Gujarat, one only has to open the obituary page of local newspapers.

With each passing day, the obituary columns are becoming longer and longer to the point that the daily Saurashtra Bhaskars Bhavnagar edition on Thursday set aside eight of its 16 pages for obituary notices.

The burgeoning death notices come amid apprehensions that the number of cases and casualties are being underreported for a variety of reasons.

Saurashtra Bhaskar, a popular Gujarati newspaper, carried 238 obituaries on Thursday, a quantum jump from just 28 two

months back on March 6. *Sandesh*, another leading Gujarati newspaper, says 12 coronavirus patients died on Wednesday in the Kheda district of Gujarat, while the state government data says only two Covid-19 patients died in Kheda on Wednesday.

Similarly, the *Gujarat Samachar* newspaper says 25 coronavirus patients died on Wednesday in Gandhinagar, a sharp contrast to the Gujarat governments claim that no one died due to the virus in Gandhinagar on Wednesday.

Opposition Congress claims that the BJP government in Gujarat is underreporting coronavirus cases to mask the real death count due to the



90 personnel, including anaesthesiologists, physicians, medical officers, nursing staff and paramedical staff been flown from various Naval Stations to Ahmedabad for Covid-19 duties.

— PTI

pandemic. "The Vijay Rupani-led government in the state is suppressing coronavirus death figures to hide the reality from the people," state Congress

spokesperson Manish Doshi said. Countering the allegations, the state government maintains that if a coronavirus patient with comorbidities dies, his death may not be attributed to the viral infection and every death is categorised as per the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines.

As per the state governments data released on Wednesday, Gujarat recorded 133 deaths due to Covid-19 during the preceding 24 hours.

This data is in stark contrast with the 141 obituaries published in two major Gujarati language newspapers on Thursday, 85 in *Gujarat Samachar* and 56 in *Sandesh*.

"The BJP government is hiding the actual death figures to cover up their failures in handling the pandemic. In many villages, the daily death toll is in

double figures while the government data shows single figures for the entire district," the state Congress spokesperson said.

Chief minister Vijay Rupani recently denied reports that the state government was hiding coronavirus fatalities.

"As per ICMR guidelines, if a comorbid patient dies then a committee of experts decides the primary and secondary causes of the death. If the committee identifies the main cause of the death as a heart attack then even though the patient was infected, such death is not counted as caused by coronavirus. This system is followed in the entire country," the chief minister had said. — PTI

BJP shares scribe's photo as slain party worker in Bengal

'Am alive, 1,300 km away', says journalist in video

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 6

A video released by the BJP on its social media platform of its members who were "victims of the post-poll violence" in West Bengal had to be pulled back as a photograph of one of the victims — Manik Moitro from Sitalkuchi — turned out to be that of a journalist.

The BJP had earlier shared the names of nine victims of post-poll violence in West Bengal, including Manik Moitro.

Attacking the TMC, BJP shared the 5.28-minute video on all its social media handles on Wednesday. Before it was taken down, the video had garnered over 12,000 views on the main @BJP4India Twitter handle.

The party had to pull back the video after the journalist tweeted that he was "living and hale and



Manik Moitro

hearty and around 1,300 km away from Sitalkuchi."

Also, Union minister V. Muralidharan's convoy came under attack in West Midnapore with the minister claiming that the attack was orchestrated by "TMC goons."

"The image of Mr Abhro Banerjee was erroneously included in the video while using an article by him as a source for the content," said a statement issued by the BJP, which also includ-

ed a hyperlink and an image link in its statement claiming that Manik Moitro "succumbed to his injuries in Sitalkuchi following violence instigated and inflicted by TMC members..."

Mr Muralidharan, who was in the state to take stock of the post-poll violence, posted a video on his social media when his vehicle was allegedly attacked by locals in Panchkhudi area of West Midnapore district. Some people could be seen throwing sticks and stones. However, the TMC claimed that it was a "spontaneous protest" by the people against the BJP.

"This cannot be the culture of Bengal. Women are being attacked. This is nothing but goondagardi. Even today my vehicle was targeted. I will give a report to the Centre in this regard," the minister told the media later.

■ Sena urges Centre to amend statute to make it possible
'Centre must pave way for Maratha quota'

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MAY 6

A day after the Supreme Court struck down Maratha reservation, the Shiv Sena on Thursday asked the political parties of Maharashtra to not use it as a political weapon. The party also urged the Modi government to intervene and make amendments in Indian Constitution to facilitate Maratha reservation.

Hitting out at the BJP, the Shiv Sena said that Maratha reservation is

not an issue to do politics on. "The opposition parties should understand that Maratha reservation is not a subject to do politics..." said the Sena in an editorial in its party mouthpiece *Saamana*. The Leader of the Opposition in Maharashtra Assembly and all the parties of MVA should unite and fight this battle by keeping aside the political differences, the party said.

The editorial also said that chief minister Uddhav Thackeray has, 'with folded hands' urged

▶ **THE LEADER** of the Opposition in Maharashtra Assembly and all political parties of the MVA government should unite and fight this battle by keeping aside the political differences, Shiv Sena said.

the Central government 'to take a decision on Maratha reservation'.

"The Apex Court has maintained that the state government does not have the power to extend reservation beyond 50 per cent.

Now, only the Centre has the power. The promptness with which the Centre took decisions in Shah Bano case, Atrocities Act and abrogation of Article 370 needs to be shown even in the case of Maratha reservation," it added.

Expressing disappointment over the Apex Court's decision, the Sena said that it was "unfortunate" that a law, which was found to be valid in the high court, got 'quashed' in the Supreme Court.

Tathagata called to Delhi as he targets 4 for Bengal loss

■ **Continued from Page 1** to incoming garbage from Trinamul. Now faced with abuse from party workers, they're staying put there, hoping the storm will blow over. These people have heaped the worst possible insults on ideologically driven BJP workers and devout swamymsevs who had been relentlessly working for the party since 1980s. Now those very people are suffering the worst persecution from Trinamulis."

He added: "But the KDSA won't go to their rescue, won't even exhort them to fight back. Instead, they are trying to draw comfort from having raised the BJP's tally from 3 to 77. A substandard, uninspired, mercenary bunch of people with no political insight, no analytical abilities, no sense of Bengali sensitivities. Education up to Class 8 and a fitter mistri's certificate. What do you expect?"

Mr Roy said: "Some ask why don't I blame the central leadership? A central leadership in a country of 1.3 billion has to be briefed by the state leadership, who are just clueless. Now I apprehend two exoduses from the state BJP. First of course is of the garbage

who came from Trinamul and will now go back. The second may be the old karyakartas of the BJP. Unless they see signs of reform within the party, they will also leave. And that will be the end of the party in West Bengal."

The TMC returned to power with a landslide victory last week, winning 213 seats in the 294-member House. The BJP won 77 seats.

After getting a call from a senior BJP leader in the national capital, he later posted: "I have been asked by the topmost party leadership to come to Delhi ASAP. This is for general information."

Earlier, on May 4, Mr Roy had questioned the BJP's ticket distribution to a number of celebrities and wastage of party funds after them.

He had named three such candidates — Tanushree Chakraborty at Shyampur; Srabonti Chatterjee at Behala West and Payel Sarkar at Behala East — who were seen celebrating Holi in the middle of the polls with a boat ride in the Hooghly at a party hosted by former minister and TMC candidate Madan Mitra, who however won at Kamarhati while the trio lost.

Didi says BJP ministers trying to incite riots

■ **Continued from Page 1** not be threatened by Un-Democratic forces. Our fight against perpetrators of violence will continue in Democratic means. Arrived at Debra to meet workers of @BJP4Bengal who have been brutally attacked, whose houses have been destroyed by TMC goons."

At Nabanna, Ms Banerjee said, referring to the troubled zones: "We have marked some areas as black spots where unrest is spreading after the BJP has won by trans-

ferred head injuries after saffron party workers beat them in an attack.

Ms Banerjee also offered jobs of home guards to one family member each of all five villagers killed in the paramilitary forces' firing at Sitalkuchi in the district during the elections.

Earlier, in New Delhi, while seeking a detailed report on the violence that erupted after counting on May 2, the MHA asked the state government to take steps to stop the violence without any delay. A second letter was sent by the

MHA on May 5, the day Ms Banerjee took the oath as CM. In his second letter on May 5, Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla said: "I remind you no report has been submitted despite my asking for details on the post-poll violence on May 3. Non-compliance of this second letter will be taken seriously."

On May 5, after taking the oath, Ms Banerjee had pointed out that the law and order machinery in the state was under the control of the Election Commission and hence

she could not be held responsible for it. She had claimed all police officers in key positions were also appointed by the Election Commission. The MHA had asked the chief secretary why adequate measures to stop the violence had not been taken so far: "There are fresh reports which suggest that post-poll violence has not stopped. Immediate measures should be taken to stop the violence and a report should be sent immediately," the home secretary said in his letter.

Kejri: Won't let anyone die

■ **Continued from Page 1** "If Delhi gets an adequate supply of 700 MT oxygen daily, it will be able to set up 9,000-9,500 beds in the city. The Delhi government will not let anyone die due to oxygen shortage in the city," Mr Kejriwal said.

The supply of adequate amount of oxygen for the first time has come after the most harrowing nightmare in Delhi that saw several deaths due to the shortage of oxygen. Many died in hospitals, on roads, pavements, in vehicles, at homes — either while waiting for oxygen cylinders and beds, or when supplies ran out at hospitals.

Amid the daily deaths, repeated SOS messages from individuals and hospitals, the courts lashed out at both the Centre and the Delhi government while ordering adequate supply of oxygen to

save lives of Covid-19 patients.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court said on Thursday that it will not allow the top court of the country to be a ground of recrimination between the Centre and the Delhi government as both indulged in a blame game on the issue of allocation and supply of oxygen to the national capital.

During the media briefing on Thursday, Mr Kejriwal said, "As the chief minister of Delhi, I would like to thank the Central government on behalf of the people of Delhi. I would also thank the Supreme Court and Delhi high court. It was because of their efforts that we were able to get 730 MT oxygen."

On Thursday, Delhi recorded 335 Covid-19 deaths in a day and 19,133 new cases even as the positivity rate dropped below 25 per cent for the first time since April 18. — PTI

PM reviews situation

■ **Continued from Page 1** and in Mumbai people complained that they were turned away from vaccination centres despite having taken prior online appointments.

Meanwhile, the Union government approached the Supreme Court against a Karnataka high court direction asking the Union government to allocate 1,200 metric tonnes of liquid oxygen to the state. Karnataka is facing an acute shortage of medical grade oxygen and 38 patients have already died due to lack of oxygen supply at various hospitals.

In view of rising cases, Kerala has announced a full lockdown from May 8 to 16 which will be more stringent than the partial ones. Indian Railways has suspended trains like Rajdhani and Durgam "due to poor occupancy". Meanwhile, there was an inter-

esting tweet from Indian Commercial Pilot's Association demanding vaccines given their risk level. "We want vaccines, not your attitude. We're sick of your stupid platitudes. So from longitude to latitude, we can serve the nation with gratitude," the tweet said. Ministry of civil aviation responded by saying it has issued guidelines to facilitate the vaccination program in a fast and efficient manner to ensure timely vaccination of the aviation community.

"As per the guidelines, all players in the Civil Aviation Sector would be advised to cover their personnel under the ongoing vaccination program. Guidelines further state that the organisations which have already made arrangements with government/private service providers for the vaccination to their employees may continue to do so," MoCA said.

J&K prisons' chief shifted a day after 'Sehrai' death

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MAY 6

A day after jailed septuagenarian separatist leader and chief of Tehrik-e-Hurriyat party, Muhammad Ashraf Khan 'Sehrai', died reportedly from Covid-19 in a Jammu hospital, the Jammu and Kashmir government

on Thursday removed senior IPS officer V.K. Singh as DGP prisons.

He has been replaced by Dr B. Srinivas, also a senior IPS officer who was posted as commandant general of J&K home guards, state disaster response force and CD. Srinivas will, however, continue to hold the additional charge of the post of director fire & emergency service, J&K, till further orders.

An order issued by the home department says that Mr Singh has been transferred and posted as commandant general HG/CD/SDRF, J&K, replacing Mr Srinivas. However, the authorities said that Mr Singh and Mr Srinivas have swapped their places and given new postings in a brief reshuffle in the police department which also sees the shifting of seven more IPS officers from their present postings and assigning them new "responsibilities".

Sehrai, a close confidante of separatist patriarch Syed Ali Shah Geelani, died in Jammu's government medical college hospital Wednesday, a day after he was shifted there from a jail of garrison town of Udhampur in critical condition.

According to the hospital authorities, the oxygen level of Sehrai who was suffering from multiple ailments had dropped to 63 on Wednesday morning and he breathed his last soon thereafter.

THE ASIAN AGE

7 MAY 2021

As she fights Covid, Mamata must check Bengal violence

On taking the oath as West Bengal’s chief minister for the third time on Wednesday, Mamata Banerjee went into top drive on the issue of battling the Covid-19 pandemic and the post-poll political violence in the state that had claimed 14 lives till then. Action on both began immediately, although she did say tackling Covid-19 was her “top priority”.

If not Covid, what else can it be for any major leader of significance? Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a notable exception. The news of the second wave reached him late. Even today, the trench warfare against Covid-19 is being waged by state governments, with the Centre lording it over as the distributor of charity imports of oxygen.

It is just as well, therefore, that Ms Banerjee prioritised the fight against the virus. It is noteworthy, though, that the Centre has a different priority. The PM telephoned governor Jagdeep Dhankhar to say the post-poll violence must be tackled urgently. The PM’s phone call is far from customary. It would have sufficed for the Union home secretary to call the state chief secretary.

The PM bringing himself into play is apt to be seen as a dog-whistle. BJP president J.P. Nadda rushed to Kolkata and staged a dharna. The notorious BJP IT cell went into overdrive with fake images that were called out by Alt News. An out-of-work ex-MP began lurid messaging on “Hindus” coming under even sexual attack.

In fact, a commission of inquiry will be needed to go into all aspects of the violence in the state in recent weeks, including the communal dimension. It will be found the dangerous process and the entire period of electioneering were co-terminous, and the post-poll violence was only the tailend of it. It is also incontrovertible, as Ms Banerjee noted, that for the past three months the state’s law and order machinery was under the control of the Election Commission.

With a popular government back in the saddle, the chief minister now can’t evade her responsibility. She must crack down on the troublemakers in all districts. It is not enough for her to say that the violence was mostly in constituencies where the BJP won. Attempts to communalise the situation with violence after a bitter defeat may be expected by bad losers, but triumphalist exuberance by the winners to showcase their prowess can’t be ruled out.

In Tamil Nadu, Ms Banerjee’s counterpart M.K. Stalin, the DMK chief, had his party supporters arrested for ransacking “Amma Canteens”, a symbol that recalls late AIADMK supremo J. Jayalalithaa. This show of “raj dharma” and neutrality in administrative affairs is a fine example to emulate.

In recent days, repeated direct and indirect calls from elements at all levels within the BJP to impose President’s Rule in West Bengal, using the post-poll violence as a pretext, it is self-evident that such posturing ridicules the saffron camp. In the real world, imposing Central rule is undoable after a stunning election. In fact, the BJP’s moves are no more than a desperate attempt by the defeated side to shore up the battered morale of the faithful.

Besides tackling the Covid-19 pandemic, and the very culture of political violence — which Ms Banerjee is now uniquely placed to root out after her stupendous win — dealing with the unemployment monster must engage Ms Banerjee’s attention without delay.

50% cap on quotas ideal

The Supreme Court has drawn a line in the sand in the matter of quotas. While striking down the reservation created for the Maratha community in Maharashtra, the court emphasised that the 50 per cent limit on total reservations cannot be crossed. This significant part of the ruling should help immensely in curbing the adventurism of political parties in creating openings for the wooing of community-based votes or pandering to dominant communities that have already achieved social salience. Also, in stretching quotas without end by quoting extraordinary circumstances, the states have been inclined to breach the 50 per cent, limit as Tamil Nadu (69 per cent) and Telangana (67 per cent) have done in extreme examples of reservation limits stretched unduly.

True emancipation lies in the creation of opportunities in education and jobs so that no community feels left out. In the midst of the pandemic, this might seem a huge challenge...

It is in perpetuating the principle of reservation, first thought of as a decade of social upliftment for disadvantaged people, that it has become an entitlement impelling movement beyond 50 per cent for those who, like dalits and SCs/STs, were historically denied by India’s rigid and reprehensible caste system. True emancipation lies in the creation of opportunities in education and jobs so that no community feels left out. In the midst of the pandemic, this might seem a huge challenge, but progress can be achieved only if reservation is supported for those who really need it. Welfare measures for all economically backward people will be of greater help.

The court’s stand on the inviolability of the 50 per cent limit set down in the Indra Sawhney verdict in 1992 might curb the rights of the states. The ruling that a single list of socially and educationally backward classes notified by the President of India alone will prevail, with states having only a recommendatory, role may prove contentious as it could lead to a further empowering of the federal at the cost of the regional. History does, however, suggest that neither the law nor the states have been able to do much about the creamy layer and their succeeding generations cornering opportunities stemming from reservations. In any event, breaching the 50 per cent ceiling will undermine the noble intentions of quotas for the most disadvantaged.

THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY
Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR
The Asian Age office is located at:
New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.
Published and Printed on behalf of and for
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.
London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.
RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



The case against quotas isn’t about meritocracy



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

The five-member Supreme Court Constitution Bench’s order quashing the Maharashtra law granting reservations in admissions to educational institutions and in government jobs for the Maratha community is quite a complicated ruling. It does not reject the idea of affirmative action, which is what many opposed to caste-based reservations of any kind want, nor does it approve the free run of reservations for different groups. The 50 per cent limitation on reservations pronounced in the 1992 Mandal ruling by a nine-member bench of the Supreme Court is indeed a compromise between the need for affirmative action and the need to set up a cutoff point. But it is not a rigid cut-off point, and there is room to accommodate groups which need affirmative action even if it means breaking the 50 per cent barrier.

In its May 5 verdict, the Supreme Court had spelled out various reasons for disallowing reservations for the Marathas. It said that the move breached the 50 per cent ceiling on reservations and that there were no compelling reasons to do so because the community was adequately represented in all government services. It made the additional observation that the states have no right to determine which group belongs to the backward class, and that this can only be decided by the Central government through the National Backward Class Commission. The state government can only make its recommendation to the Central government. All these issues pass muster legally, but

they do not close the possibility of discussion and the tenability of contrary and legitimate viewpoints.

It is but a truism that things are rarely if ever purely legal, and the politics of it all, and not always in the negative sense, cannot be brushed aside. It is on the political ground that the case of reservations for Marathas in educational institutions and government jobs will have to be assessed. And there would be sufficient arguments on the side of those favouring reservations for the Marathas, as well as of those who are opposed to it. And it is a moot point as where does the principle of equality figure in the middle of this political and social tussle.

A look at the three Articles of the Constitution related to equality show that the principle is not a simple one at all. Article 14 is about “equality before the law”, which means “equal protection of the laws”. And while Article 15 prohibits discrimination “on grounds of only religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them”, it says in Article 15(4) that this shall not “prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes”. And power of the State to make “special provision” is reiterated in Article 16, which is about “equality of opportunity in public employment”.

The ideal solution would be when there would not arise the need to make any “special provision” for certain sections of society which has been historically

unequal, not just in unthinking ways but in a deliberate and vicious manner. In Indian society, the battle lines have been shifting from that between traditional upper castes to the middle class, middle castes, and again to a battle between the newly empowered middle caste middle classes to the middle classes of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. There is the further complication of a battle between the middle classes of different middle castes seeking special provisions. It is not an easy thing for either the political leaders or for the judges to resolve the social disequilibrium.

The reservations issue poses a special dilemma for the Shiv Sena and the BJP, as both subscribe to conservative ideologies of different shades. The Shiv Sena’s belief in the Maharashtrian identity is not sufficient to tackle the demands of different groups like that of the Marathas. Similarly, the BJP’s Hindu identity, which seeks to overlook the clash of castes in the intra-Hindu framework, is of no help in facing up to the demand for reservations by the powerful middle class middle caste groups like the Patidars in Gujarat, the Marathas in Maharashtra and Jats in Rajasthan and Haryana.

It is quite easy to derive satisfaction from the discomfiture of the Shiv Sena and the BJP, but it does not help in resolving the basic challenge of delivering the terms of equality as enshrined in Articles 14, 15 and 16. What is needed is a debate across different

It is quite easy to derive satisfaction from the discomfiture of the Shiv Sena and the BJP, but it does not help in resolving the challenge of delivering the terms of equality as enshrined in Articles 14, 15 and 16.

sections of society about equality and how the fairness principle as spelled out by American political philosopher John Rawls can be applied. In a memorable passage from his classical treatise, *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls had stated: “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems. A theory, however elegant and economical, must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise, laws and institutions, no matter how efficient and well-arranged, must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust.”

This statement can serve as an ideal touchstone for discussions in the legislatures and courts, in universities and homes for debating the question of equality and how every individual and every section can have access to it. It will always remain a work in progress. There can be no permanent solutions. If today the Maratha community feels the need for reservations in educational institutions and government jobs, there must come a time through remedial laws that it will not suffer from those handicaps. It is a judgment call that the Marathas must take. Also, the leaders of the Maratha community must be able to decide as to who among the community really needs reservations. If every citizen has an equal right to education, and there are enough schools and universities for all, would there be a need for reservations? If there are enough jobs, would there be a need for reservations for government jobs for any community?

The BJP-led Central government can bring in the necessary legislation to break the 50 per cent ceiling in reservations, and all other parties would support it. But it does not provide a solution to the basic issue — education for all, and full employment.

The writer is a commentator and analyst based in New Delhi

LETTERS

LOSING THE PLOT

The tide is turning against the BJP. The ruling party at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh has performed poorly in the panchayat elections in the state, the holding of which claimed the lives of 706 teachers posted on poll duty at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Has the failure of the state government to provide support and healthcare, especially during the pandemic, got something to do with the verdict? Reports are coming in that many BJP supporters who have lost family members to Covid-19 are disenchanted.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

RUDE AWAKENING

THE MUCH-HYPED IPL bio-bubble has burst. The 2021 edition of the Indian Premier League has been suspended, even though the BCCI should have taken this call much earlier. It has decided to redeem itself by staging the T-20 World Cup, in October. But with the “third wave” of the coronavirus nearing, that too seems unlikely. The BCCI as well as all the other stakeholders have always put revenue and profits over everything else. It may perhaps be time to change that attitude now.

Chanchal Nandy
Durgapur

UNSUSTAINABLE

APPROPOS OF the news report “SC strikes down Maratha quota law” (May 6), the Supreme Court’s ruling to uphold the 50 per cent cap on all reservations is most welcome and a tight slap on the face of the political parties who are in the habit of using reservations in jobs and educational institutions as a tool to seek votes. The cap reflects an attempt to balance the State’s duty to try to correct historical injustices suffered by some groups with the right to equal opportunity for all citizens. Communities that are considered to be socially dominant have also begun to demand reservations. This situation is unsustainable.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

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

Jawed Naqvi



Will Cong, Left help or hinder Mamata’s effort to unite Opp?

It was a crucial make-or-break vote that P.V. Narasimha Rao faced when Mamata Banerjee was ushered into a packed and tense Lok Sabha in a wheelchair and helped to her seat. From the press gallery above, one could see her shaking with spasm under a woollen blanket that wrapped her. The fever from malaria ran high and she struggled to control waves of rigour that came with the affliction. Eventually, Rao won the trust vote with a narrow margin. She did her duty by the Congress and contributed in her way to the early economic reforms, which usually Rao and Dr Manmohan Singh are credited with.

Now, the tycoons her vote had helped become rich with India’s top-down neo-liberal policies were switching sides. Their money power was transferred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s BJP. All the loot one could imagine was thrown into the massive effort to dislodge Mamata Banerjee. She though was confidently plotting the fightback for a third term as West Bengal’s chief minister. Her secular resolve and populist economic priorities can be gleaned from her modest home surrounded by lower-middle-class

dwellings and shanties in a non-descript Kolkata district. The Trinamul Congress she set up was itself a critique of the Congress, which nurtured her as a youth leader but was beginning to be associated with wealth and pelf.

Trinamul means “grassroots” in Bengali, and her party’s name suggests her plain thoughts about her parent group. The results were out on May 2, the same day as Satyajit Ray’s birth centenary. Bengal has been shaped by Ray, Nazrul Islam and Tagore, by Vivekananda and Kali worship. For her to open her account in West Bengal, her worldview had to challenge the invincible Communist hegemony, much of it secured under Jyoti Basu’s watch. He had steered the state for most of the three decades of Left rule since 1977, a handy reward for steadfastly fighting Indira Gandhi’s Emergency.

After Basu retired, citing age, the party’s fortunes quickly melted with the economic chaos across India. The party evicted peasants from fields to make space for industry, a lesson they erroneously believed could be bodily lifted from China. If Nandigram and Singur were what the comrades saw as aspects of “socialism

with Bengali characteristics”, the move boomeranged, and Ms Banerjee pounced on the opportunity.

During much of the post-Basu rule, Communist priorities in West Bengal dovetailed with the core quests of the Vajpayee-Advani duo in Delhi. West Bengal’s Marxist CM and the BJP’s Union home minister found common cause, really two causes, in fact. They both desired to deal decisively with the Maoist challenge, and both harboured strong reservations about a real or imagined influx of people from Bangladesh. This worked as a wedge that eventually drove many Muslims away from the party, while alienating many who opposed harsh solutions to tackle the Maoists.

Marxist CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharya went a step further in his induced aloofness from a people he had no use for. He turned down a request from a fellow partisan in Delhi to help the Progressive Writers Association host an Urdu conference in Kolkata. “Do you want me to patronise another Partition?” he had exploded.

Sunday’s results saw the CPI(M) wiped out of West Bengal’s Assembly. Self-criticism and intro-

spection don’t seem to go well with the current crop of Leftists. They blamed their decline on state terror supposedly unleashed on the party by Ms Banerjee’s TMC. If that were true, why did the cadre switch en masse to the BJP? Did the Communists really hope to challenge the BJP had they succeeded in defeating Ms Banerjee in the recent polls? The election results showed how Left votes helped in the narrow defeat of Ms Banerjee in Nandigram.

This mindless game of revenge and short-sighted gambits to somehow crawl back to power has harmed the Left enormously. It has also dented the cause of Opposition unity that is urgently needed to arrest the erosion of India’s democracy under Narendra Modi. The party may learn from the DMK in Tamil Nadu, under whose umbrella it could win two seats in the southern state.

Ms Banerjee has periodically invited the Communists to join her struggle against the essentially anti-federal, anti-secular character of the BJP. This has also been the quest of Kerala’s Marxist CM Pinarayi Vijayan, who landed a record second consecutive term by defeating the Congress. Ironically, it’s these two

parties that are holding Opposition unity to ransom, as both display a marked inability to identify self-harm in their cherry-picking of friends and foes. The Marxists offer a terrible logic of being adversaries of the Congress in Kerala and its allies elsewhere. What kind of a national messaging does that invite? Was it a good idea for them to join hands against the TMC in West Bengal, granted that they at least benefited from being together in Tamil Nadu? Everyone has congratulated Mamata Banerjee on her fine victory against extremely heavy odds posed by the combined strength of India’s right, left and centre parties. She has shown them their place. A Shiv Sena leader called her the “Tigress of Bengal”. Arvind Kejriwal, M.K. Stalin, Akhilesh Yadav and Sharad Pawar, no small-time leaders, have greeted her with renewed hope to stall the march of fascism. The question is, will the Congress and the Left Front work with Ms Banerjee? Or will they persist with their misplaced zeal to inflict harm on themselves, and thereby on India’s struggling democracy?

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

INDONESIAN
LANDSLIDE DEATH
TOLL RISES TO 10

Medan, Indonesia: The death toll from a landslide at a hydroelectric dam project on Indonesia's Sumatra island has risen to 10, an official said on Thursday, as authorities called off a week-long search for victims.

A landslide triggered by heavy rains struck the Chinese-backed Batang Toru hydropower plant on Thursday last week, burying an estimated 13 people.

Employees were checking on the area over concerns that heavy rains could trigger landslides when the disaster struck. At least two children are among the victims. The body of a Chinese employee of the plant was identified on Wednesday.

Another Chinese employee narrowly escaped as he fled the scene.

ISRAELI AIR
STRIKES HIT
SOUTHERN SYRIA

Damascus: Israel carried out air strikes overnight in the southern Syrian province of Quneitra, Syrian state media and a war monitor said on Thursday, though there were no reports of casualties.

The strikes came a day after one civilian was killed and six others injured in similar attacks in the northwestern region of Latakia, a bastion of President Bashar al-Assad's Alawite minority.

Official news agency SANA said there had been "an Israeli attack led by a helicopter in one of Quneitra's zones" not far from the border with Israel. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported there had been "Israeli strikes".

The Britain-based war monitor, which relies on an extensive network of sources on the ground, said the strikes targeted the Syrian Army's 90th Brigade and regime military positions in north Quneitra, near the Israel-occupied Golan Heights.

UN: 155 MILLION
FACED SEVERE
HUNGER IN 2020

United Nations: At least 155 million people faced acute hunger in 2020, including 133,000 who needed urgent food to prevent widespread death from starvation — and the outlook for 2021 is equally grim or worse, a report by 16 organisations said on Wednesday.

The report, which focuses on 55 countries that account for 97% of humanitarian assistance, said the magnitude and severity of food crises last year worsened as a result of protracted conflicts, the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, and weather extremes that exacerbated "pre-existing fragilities."

The 155 million people faced "crisis," "emergency" or "catastrophe/famine" levels of food needs, an increase of around 20 million people from 2019, it said.

According to the report, two-thirds of the people in those crisis levels were in 10 countries — Congo, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, northern Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Haiti.

GUNMEN KILL
FORMER TV
PRESENTER, FLEE

Kabul: Gunmen killed a former Afghan TV presenter on Thursday as he was travelling in the southern city of Kandahar, a provincial official said, adding to fears for press freedom in the war-wrecked country.

Nimat Rawan was shot at noon, provincial spokesman Baheer Ahmadi said, by two assailants who were able to escape with his mobile phone. Security officials have told several other journalists in the area that extremists are targeting them as well, he added.

The killing heightens worries over the fate of Afghan journalists as US troops pull out. Many fear violence will spike and reprisals will be taken out against those who worked with foreign forces. Rawan was a former presenter for the well-known local channel *Tolonews*.

He had been working in the Finance Ministry's media office, media watchdog Nia said in a statement. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but it comes a day after the Taliban issued a threat to Afghan journalists it considered too close to US-backed security agencies.

EU ready to discuss Covid-19
vaccine patent scheme today

Move comes after US backs patent waivers for Covid-19 vaccines

Brussels, May 6: European Union leaders said on Thursday that in the wake of the US backing patent waivers for Covid-19 vaccine technology, the 27-nation bloc immediately will start discussing whether they should join such a move.

The leaders' first opportunity to mould a common view will come as soon as a two-day summit in Porto, Portugal, that starts Friday. While many insist that waiving patents would only go part way toward making vaccines available and likely in the midterm only, French President Emmanuel Macron said he "completely" supports opening up intellectual property protections for Covid-19 vaccines as "a global public good".

At the same time, Macron insisted that the immediate priority for wealthier countries should be first donating more vaccine doses to poorer countries.

EU nations have long insisted they were in the vanguard of helping the rest of the world obtain vaccines, and have looked with a weary eye at how the United States effectively banned such exports itself.

The move to support waiving intellectual property protections on vaccines under World Trade Organisation rules marked a dramatic shift for the United States, which had previously lined up with many other developed nations opposed to the idea floated by India and South Africa. While the EU did not echo the US position, it generally welcomed President Joe Biden's move.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that "we are ready to discuss how the US proposal for waiver on intellectual property protection for Covid vaccines could help" end the crisis. Von der Leyen said in a video address Thursday, though, that other issues should take center stage. "In the short run...we call upon all vaccine-producing countries to allow exports and to avoid measures that disrupt supply chains," she said. — PTI



Patients arrive to receive a dose of a Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination centre in a shopping mall of Belgrade on Thursday. Serbia's president said that his country would pay each citizen who gets a Covid jab before the end of May, in what could be the world's first cash-for-jabs scheme. — AFP

Oz's Victoria state to send
\$41 million help to India

Melbourne, May 6: The Australian state of Victoria on Thursday announced 41 million dollar worth of aid and medical equipment, including 1,000 ventilators, for India to assist it to curb the devastating second wave of Covid-19.

The donation will be made to the Commonwealth medical stockpile. "We are working with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to deliver this support to India as the country works to manage the second wave of coronavirus and treat those infected," according to an official statement.

"The 1,000 ICU Ventilators are currently owned by the Department of Health and will be donated to India for humanitarian purposes and the state was also preparing to send a range

of supporting equipment like connectors and humidifiers, with the total package valued at over 41 million Australian dollars. Announcing the support package, the state's acting Premier James Merlino said: "The situation in India right now is devastating and shows that the fight against this pandemic is not over — we have a responsibility to help where we can and that's exactly what we're doing." Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ros Spence said: "Our thoughts are with everyone impacted by this unfolding tragedy and we hope this package will go some way to addressing the challenges India is facing right now."

New Coronavirus cases and deaths in India hit a record daily high with 4,12,262 new infections and 3,980 fatalities being

reported, taking the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 2,10,77,410 and the death toll to 2,30,168, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

Expressing solidarity with India and the people, Kaushaliya Vaghela, the first Indian born MP elected to the Victorian Parliament, said "at this painful and difficult time, all Victorians stand side by side with our Indian community, both here and abroad." She said she had also expressed her concerns about India and requested the state government to support India and Australians in India during this crisis. "I stood up in Victorian Parliament to urge the federal government to explore all options possible to safely bring back Australians currently in India," she added. — AP

SRI LANKA BANS
TRAVELLERS
FROM INDIA

Colombo, May 6: Sri Lanka on Thursday announced that all arrivals from India will be banned with immediate effect due to the record rise in Covid-19 cases in the neighbouring country. Several countries like the UK, the UAE, Australia and Singapore have already banned travellers from India as well as other South Asian countries. The Civil Aviation Authority on Thursday said that travellers from India will not be allowed to disembark in Sri Lanka.

The decision has been taken as the coronavirus continues to spread rapidly in India. The Director General Civil aviation in a letter to the CEO of the national carrier Sri Lankan Airlines has said, "in accordance with instructions received from health authorities of Sri Lanka due to pandemic." — PTI

Macron endorses
share of vax tech

Paris, May 6: French President Emmanuel Macron is joining the Biden administration in saying that he backs the sharing of the valuable technology behind Covid-19 vaccines. But Macro is also insisting that the immediate priority for wealthier countries should be first donating more doses to poorer countries.

Speaking on a visit Thursday to a vaccine center, the French leader said he "completely" supports opening up intellectual property protections for Covid-19 vaccines. Macron said that "evidently, we must turn this vaccine in a global public good." But he also argued that even if patents are

waived, pharmaceutical companies in places like Africa aren't currently equipped to make Covid-19 vaccines and that donations of doses should be prioritized instead.

Macron claimed that the European Union is leading the way in vaccine donations and called for the United States and Britain to share more, too.

He said that "Europe is the most generous continent with the rest of the world," having exported 45 million doses, and expressed hope that "the British, the Americans and others will follow." He added that, "in the short term, this is what will allow us to vaccinate." — AP

Japan builds statue
with Covid-19 grant

Tokyo, May 6: A remote Japanese fishing town has sparked debate after spending coronavirus relief funds on a giant squid statue that cost nearly \$2,50,000 in a controversial bid to boost post-pandemic tourism.

The huge pink monument with its tentacles outstretched was unveiled in March by the coastal town of Noto in central Japan as a proud nod to its local delicacy.

It cost around 27 million yen (\$2,47,000) and was mostly paid for with a national tax grant to aid communities hit financially by Covid-19 restrictions.

Despite online debate over the merits of the public spending, local officials said they hoped the installation at a roadside rest stop would pique travellers' interest at home and abroad.

"Tourism in our town has been badly damaged by the coronavirus. We wanted to do something to support the local industries," including promoting squid fishing, an official at Noto town hall said on Thursday.

As well as the impact of Japan's border restrictions and calls to limit domestic travel in the past year, the town's economy has also been hurt by recent bad catches, he



A giant squid statue, built at a cost of nearly \$2,50,000. — AFP

added. Many people came to see the 13-metre (43-foot) monument this week during a series of public holidays, the official said, with children playing on it and adults taking quirky pictures for social media.

But some people online were less delighted by the 10-tentacled statue.

"This is too surreal. What is also unclear is why this qualified for the grant," one Twitter user wrote in Japanese.

"It is wrong to spend tax on a non-urgent, unnecessary item. The mayor and local politicians should pay for it," said another.

But others were supportive. "My daughter will go there for a picnic in autumn. I hope they will not take it away," one person tweeted. — AFP

CHINA HALTS
ECONOMIC DEAL
WITH AUSTRALIA

Beijing, May 6: China said on Thursday it had suspended an economic agreement with Australia, in an apparent tit-for-tat response to Canberra's scrapping a Belt and Road infrastructure pact and threat to undo a deal leasing Darwin Port to a Chinese company.

The China-Australia Strategic Economic Dialogue deal has been pulled "based on the current attitude" of the Australian government, China's National Development and Reform Commission said in a statement, blaming some officials of "ideological discrimination." Beijing will "indefinitely suspend all activities under the framework" of the agreement, the statement said. The Australian government has previously described the deal — designed to boost trade between both sides and introduce large Chinese investors — as one of the "premier bilateral economic meetings with China". — AFP

US downplays
post-Brexit deal

London, May 6: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has downplayed any prospect of an imminent trade deal with a post-Brexit Britain. In an interview with BBC radio broadcast Thursday, Blinken said any deal would take "some time" and that US President Joe Biden wants to ensure any trade agreement would benefit American workers and their families.

"Our trade negotiator just got on the job, so she's taking the time to go back and review everything that was discussed and that's going to take some time," said Blinken, who was in London in the early part of the week for the Group of Seven meeting of foreign ministers.

"We want to make sure that, whether it's with the United Kingdom or anyone else, any agreements reached are consistent with the principles that President Biden has established to focus on making sure that these

agreements really advance the wellbeing of our workers and their families. That's our focus." Blinken said the US's new trade negotiator, Katherine Tai, would be taking time to review the discussions that had taken place with the preceding administration of Donald Trump before progressing with the talks.

Trump had been a keen proponent of a trade deal with Britain, which formally left the economic orbit of the European Union at the start of this year. Now outside the EU, the UK can negotiate its own trade deals — previously, when within the bloc, the EU had negotiated trade deals on behalf of its members.

One of the main arguments of Brexit supporters in the runup to the referendum on Britain's membership of the EU in 2016 was the prospect of a swift trade deal with the US, the world's largest economy. — AP

French boats leave Jersey,
stand-off with Britain ends

Saint Helier, Jersey, May 6: French trawlers withdrew from waters around Jersey on Thursday after a protest over post-Brexit fishing rights that led to a brief standoff between British and French navy and coastal patrol boats.

The latest blow to cross-Channel relations was caused by angry French fishermen protesting over new fish licensing arrangements on the Channel island of Jersey following Britain's departure from the European Union.

At dawn, a flotilla of around 50 trawlers massed in front of the Saint Helier harbour on Jersey, a picturesque self-governing territory that is dependent on Britain for its defence.

Fears of a blockade prompted British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to send two royal navy gunboats to the area, with France following suit by sending two of its own coast patrol vessels.



French fishing boats return home following their protest in front of the port of Saint Helier off the British island of Jersey to draw attention to what they see as unfair restrictions on their ability to fish in UK waters after Brexit, on Thursday. — AFP

"We won't be intimidated by these manoeuvres," French Europe Minister Clement Beaune told AFP of the navy deployment.

Jersey lies just off France's northern coast

and its rich fishing waters were previously open to French boats before Brexit tore up the previous arrangements.

In the middle of the afternoon, after hours of

bobbing around while letting off the occasional smoke flare, the French trawlers began withdrawing.

— AFP

FIFTH TIME | LUCKY

Small fire erupts at base of 50 meter space vehicle, put out by sprinkle

SpaceX successfully lands Starship rocket

Washington, May 6: SpaceX successfully landed its prototype Starship rocket at its Texas base on its fifth attempt, a livestream showed.

The test flight represented a big win for Elon Musk's hard-charging space company after the last four tries ended in explosions.

"Starship landing nomi-

● The rocket dubbed SN15 took off from the Starbase in Boca Chica, southern Texas at around 5:25 pm.

nal!" tweeted Musk.

"Nominal" means normal in the context of spaceflight.

The execution wasn't quite perfect, with a small

fire engulfing the base of the 50 meter- (160 feet-) high space vessel shortly after landing.

SpaceX webcaster John Insprucker explained this was "not unusual with the methane fuel we're using," adding engineers were still working out design issues.

The flames were quickly put out with a water can-

non, footage showed.

Earlier, the rocket dubbed SN15 took off from the Starbase in Boca Chica, southern Texas at around 5:25 pm local time (2225 GMT), reached an altitude of around 10 kilometers (6 miles) and performed a series of flight maneuvers.

SpaceX was facing added pressure to succeed with

Wednesday's flight after NASA announced a version of Starship will be used as a lunar lander when the space agency returns humans to the Moon.

The \$2.9 billion contract is currently suspended after two rival companies, Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin and Dynetics, lodged a protest. — AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48949.76	0.56
Nifty 50	14724.80	0.73
S&P 500*	4,178.58	0.26
Dollar (₹)	73.77	0.20
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.64	0.06
Euro (₹)	88.86	-0.15
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,680▲439	0.94
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.36	-0.87
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.974	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.561	-0.023

* As of 8:30 PM IST

C19 resurgence bringing new challenges: Fitch

Fitch Solutions said while Covid-19 containment measures will weigh on India's ongoing economic recovery, the localised nature of restrictions means that the actual impact is likely to be much less severe relative to April-June 2020 when a strict nationwide lockdown was imposed. Fitch forecast real GDP to grow 9.5 per cent in 2021-22. Risks to this forecast are to the downside, it said.

BoE expects UK economy's best year since 1941k



The Bank of England has kept interest rates on hold as it forecast the fastest annual pace of growth for the British economy since early on in World War II, largely from the rapid rollout of vaccines. The Monetary Policy Committee said it will maintain the bank's main interest rate at 0.1 per cent, the lowest in the bank's 327-year history. The bank is now projecting economic growth of 7.25 per cent in 2021, instead of 5 per cent.

LIC to have five-day weeks from May 10

LIC will have five working days starting from May 10 since Saturdays have been declared as a holiday for the insurer. Pursuant to a notification on April 15, 2021, wherein the central government has declared every Saturday as a public holiday for LIC, all policy holders are informed that w.e.f May 10, all offices of LIC will work from Monday to Friday, it said. Office hours would be 10 AM to 5:30 PM, it added.

Revolt EV bikes' booking closed to meet demand

Electric bike maker Revolt Intellipcorp said it has received strong response for Revolt EV bikes and has stopped taking any fresh bookings owing to high demand. Due to over-booking, Revolt has suspended taking any fresh bookings on its website, the company said. It said it will re-open the bookings after meeting the current set of orders in hand. But it did not share the number of confirmed booking orders.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

■ Malaysia's IHH runs 34 hospitals in India Mitsui eyeing reins of Fortis parent IHH

SANGEETHA G with agency inputs CHENNAI, MAY 6

In a move that will help grab a large pie of India's private healthcare delivery infrastructure, Japan's Mitsui & Company is exploring a deal to take full control of Malaysian hospital group IHH Healthcare. IHH Healthcare runs 34 hospitals in India through Fortis Healthcare, Gleneagles Global Hospitals and Continental Hospitals.

The Malaysian group also has a presence in India's diagnostic market through Fortis subsidiary Religare Ltd.

According to a Bloomberg report, Mitsui & Company is exploring a deal to take a majority stake in Kuala Lumpur-headquartered hospital group IHH Healthcare and delist it from the stock exchanges of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Mitsui has reached out to Malaysian sovereign fund Khazanah Nasional, IHH's second largest shareholder, to pick up the latter's 26 per cent stake in the company. Mitsui has a 32.9 per cent stake in IHH Healthcare through a subsidiary. As of now IHH Healthcare is run as an independent company.

It may be recalled that IHH Healthcare acquired a 31 per cent stake in Fortis Healthcare in August 2018 in a \$1.1-billion deal, but could not make an open offer to acquire a 26 per cent more



stake in Fortis, owing to a Supreme Court stay order secured by Japan's Daiichi Sankyo over its disputes with the Singh brothers, the erstwhile promoters of Fortis.

As per the report, a few private equity firms have approached the Japanese trading house to team up on the potential transaction to buy out IHH's other shareholders.

Mitsui had raised its stake in IHH in 2018 to 32.9 per cent, after buying additional 15 per cent shares in the hospital operator from Khazanah. The Japanese firm is now the single biggest shareholder in the company.

IHH, which is listed on the stock exchanges of Malaysia and Singapore, has a market value of \$11 billion. IHH runs a total of 80 hospitals in 10 countries.

In India, IHH runs 34

hospitals, with 4,770 operational beds across Fortis Healthcare, Gleneagles Global Hospitals and Continental Hospitals. IHH had a 50-50 joint venture with Apollo Hospitals to operate Apollo Gleneagles Hospitals in Kolkata, but last December IHH entered into a share purchase agreement to divest its 50 per cent stake in this.

IHH, which has majority stake in Fortis Healthcare, plans to rebrand the Fortis chain as Parkway, the Malaysian healthcare chain owned by it, but this will now require permission from the Supreme Court.

Recently, IHH had also entered into a partnership with Bharat Biotech to provide Covaxin at its Gleneagles Global Hospitals in three locations in India—Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad.

IBM UNVEILS WORLD'S FIRST 2 NANOMETER CHIP TECHNOLOGY

New Delhi, May 6: Tech giant IBM on Thursday said it has developed the world's first chip with two nanometer (nm) nanosheet technology that promises to speed up access to the internet, longer battery life and faster processing time in applications.

Semiconductors are needed to run everything from computers to appliances and transportation systems to critical infrastructure.

According to IBM, the potential benefits of advanced 2 nm chips could include quadrupling of cell phone battery life, reduction in the carbon footprint of data centres, and drastically speed up a laptop's functions (including quicker processing in applications to assisting in language translation more easily and faster internet access).

The use of the new technology could also contribute to faster object detection and reaction time in autonomous vehicles like self-driving cars, it said in a statement.

The demand for increased chip performance and energy efficiency continues to rise, especially in the era of hybrid cloud, AI and the Internet of Things.

"IBM's new 2 nm chip technology helps advance the state-of-the-art in the semiconductor industry, addressing this growing demand. It is projected to achieve 45 per cent higher performance," it said. —PTI

Prime residential prices drop in top Indian cities

ANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 6

The coronavirus pandemic seems to have hit the country's prime real estate market relatively more compared to the trend in the global market. Indian cities figuring in property consultant Knight Frank's Global Prime Residential Index saw a drop in prices while prime properties became dearer in many key cities abroad.

While the global index moved up 4.6 per cent in January-March (Q1) 2021, all the Indian cities in the index—Bengaluru, New Delhi and Mumbai—slipped down the index, with the property prices declining.

Prime residential property prices in Bengaluru declined 2.7 per cent, Mumbai 1.5 per cent and Delhi 0.2 per cent in Q1 against the same quarter last year. Sequentially also prices dropped. Against Q4 2020, Bengaluru prices fell 1.6 per cent, Mumbai 0.6 per cent and Delhi 0.1 per cent.

Due to price drop, Bengaluru came down

THE KNIGHT FRANK PRIME GLOBAL CITIES INDEX Q1 2020			%	%
Rank	City	World regions	12-MONTH (Q1 2020-Q1 2021)	3-MONTH (Q4 2020-Q1 2021)
1	Shenzhen	Asia	18.9	6.7
2	Shanghai	Asia	16.3	8.5
3	Guangzhou	Asia	15.2	12.6
4	Vancouver	North America	15.2	6.3
5	Seoul	Asia	14.8	1.3
6	St. Petersburg	Russia & CIS	13.4	2.5
7	Los Angeles 1,3	North America	12.6	2.2
8	Moscow	Russia & CIS	12.4	7.3
9	Taipei	Asia	12.2	6.5
10	Miami 1,3	North America	10.2	2.4
11	Toronto	North America	10.1	5.3
32	Delhi	Asia	-0.2	0.0
36	Mumbai	Asia	-1.5	-0.1
40	Bengaluru	Asia	-2.7	-0.6
46	New York	North America	-5.8	-1.6

(Ranked by annual % change)

Source: Knight Frank Global Research

four places in the index from 40 to 36 while Mumbai fell from 36 to 35 and Delhi from 32 to 31.

During the January-March 2021 quarter, prices of top three cities in the index—Shenzhen, Shanghai and Guang-

zhou—appreciated 18.9 per cent, 16.3 per cent and 15.2 per cent, respectively, against the year-ago quarter. Against Q4 2020, prices of these cities moved up 6.7 per cent, 8.5 per cent and 12.6 per cent, in the same order.

STATES GET ₹9,870 CRORE AS REVENUE DEFICIT GRANT

New Delhi, May 6: The finance ministry on Thursday released the second monthly instalment of revenue deficit grant of Rs 9,871 crore to 17 states.

With the release of the second instalment, a total amount of Rs 19,742 crore has been released in the first two months of the current financial year as

Post Devolution Revenue Deficit Grant to the states, the ministry said in a statement.

The Centre provides such grant to the states under Article 275 of the Constitution.

The grants are released as per the recommendations of the Finance Commission in monthly

instalments to meet the gap in revenue accounts of the states post-devolution.

The 15th Finance Commission has recommended Post Devolution Release Deficit Grants to 17 states based on the gap between the assessment of revenue and expenditure of the state.

—PTI

Top pharma firms lobby for G-20 protection for patents

ALESSANDRO SPECIALE MAY 6

Representatives for the world's major pharmaceutical and medical companies are warning Group of 20 leaders that moves to weaken intellectual property rights protection will reduce investments and hurt innovation.

The warning comes in a report prepared for G-20 leaders by representatives of health and life-sciences companies, including Novartis AG, Sanofi FP, AstraZeneca PLC and Johnson & Johnson, and from organisations such as the OECD and Europe's EFPIA pharmaceutical industry association.

"No investment can be made or secured without proper intellectual property rights, that are fundamental and must be maintained to foster a life-sciences ecosystem that can deliver innovation and improve patient outcomes across the world," reads a draft report seen by Bloomberg.

The US gave its support for a waiver of intellectual property protections for Covid-19 vaccines that will

PATENT WAIVER TO HELP VAX MFG:GOVT

New Delhi, May 6: India on Thursday said temporary waiver of certain provisions of intellectual property rights under a WTO agreement would be an important step to enable scaling up of manufacturing and timely availability of affordable Covid-19 vaccines and essential medical products.

India and South Africa had on October 2 proposed in the WTO a relaxation in norms of the Trips agreement to ensure quick and affordable access to vaccines and medicines for developing countries.



Piyush Goyal

India welcomed the US government's support for this initiative.

"We welcome the US government supporting this initiative and joining 120 other countries working towards affordable Covid-19 vaccines," commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal tweeted. —PTI

be discussed by the World Trade Organization, setting the stage for potentially thorny talks over sharing proprietary know-how needed to boost global supplies of the life-saving vaccines.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen has also signalled readiness to discuss any

proposal that "addresses the crisis in an effective and pragmatic manner."

Business leaders say that the G-20 should share a "balanced international and local vision regarding an effective protection of intellectual property rights in health and life sciences," according to the draft. —Bloomberg

Framework for onboarding social enterprises suggested

New Delhi, May 6: A Sebi-appointed panel on Thursday suggested a detailed framework for onboarding social enterprises and non-profit organisations on the proposed social stock exchange.

Corporate foundations, political and religious organisations, among other entities should not be allowed to be on the bourse, the panel said as it listed out 15 broad activities that will make a social enterprise (SE) eligible to be onboarded on the exchange.

In its report submitted to Sebi, the panel, under the chairmanship of Nabard former chairman Harsh Kumar Bhanwala, also deliberated on aspects related to the ecosystem development, especially on social auditors.

SE eligible to participate in social stock exchange (SSE) should be entities non-profit organisation (NPO) and for-profit social enterprise (FPE) having social intent and impact as their primary goal. And, such intent is demonstrated through its focus on eligible social

objectives for the underserved or less privileged populations or regions, as per the recommendations.

The primacy is to be determined through application of three filters SE should be engaged in at least one of the 15 broad eligible activities; it should target underserved or less privileged population segments or regions; and SE should have at least 67 per cent of its activities qualifying as eligible activities to the target population.

The 15 broad areas of eligible activities included eradicating hunger; poverty, malnutrition and inequality; promoting health care, supporting education, employability and livelihoods; gender equality empowerment of women and supporting incubators of social enterprises.

Besides corporate foundation, political or religious organisations, the committee has recommended that professional or trade associations, infrastructure and housing companies should not be permitted on the exchange. However, it said

that entities in the affordable housing segment can be allowed.

Further, the panel has made certain recommendations for capacity building fund which will enable NGOs to navigate the SSE and its fundraising mechanism.

"These concepts of social auditors and capacity building fund are unique to fundraising for social enterprises in India, and would facilitate SSE in its activities," according to the report released by Sebi for public comment.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has sought comments from public till June 20 on the report.

The panel or the technical group (TG) was constituted by Sebi in September 2020 for developing framework to onboard NPOs and FPEs on the SSE, including defining for-profit social investing/enterprises, prescribing disclosure requirements related to financials, governance, operational performance and social impact.

—PTI

GOOGLE TO MOVE TO HYBRID WORK WEEK: PICHAJ



Sundar Pichai

New Delhi, May 6: Google will move to a hybrid work week, where most Googlers spend approximately three days in the office and two days "wherever they work best", according to a note by Google and Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai.

About 20 per cent of Google's workforce will continue to work remotely after its offices reopen later this year, while about 60 per cent Googlers will come together in the office for a few days a week, Pichai said.

"Since in-office time will be focused on collaboration, your product areas and functions will help decide which days teams will come together in the office. There will also be roles that may need to be on site more than three days a week due to the nature of the work," he added.

Pichai also noted that the company will offer opportunities for employees to apply for completely remote work (away from team or office) based on their role and team needs.

As per the financial details released in Q1 2021, Google has 139,995 full time employees worldwide. While Google doesn't disclose country-specific headcount, the company is estimated to have over 4,000 people in India.

"Before the pandemic, we had thousands of people working in locations separate from their core teams. I fully expect those numbers to increase in the coming months as we develop more remote roles...Taken together these changes will result in a workforce where around 60 per cent of Googlers are coming together in the office a few days a week, another 20 per cent are working in new office locations, and 20 per cent are working from home," he said. —PTI



SHORT TAKES

India's Oly-bound shooters get vax

New Delhi: Many shooters, coaches and officials from India's Olympic-bound contingent received their first dose of Covid-19 vaccine across cities on Thursday. The shooters were to get vaccinated before leaving for Zagreb, Croatia on May 11 to participate in the European Championship. "All the shooters have got vaccinated today. Some of them got their jab in Delhi while some in their respective home towns," a National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) source said. Some of the members of the Indian team have already got their first dose of the vaccine last month, including pistol ace Manu Bhaker and rifle shooter Anjum Moudgil. As far as the national shooting team's coaches are concerned, quite a few of them, including Smaresh Jung, Suma Shirur and Deepali Deshpande, had got themselves vaccinated last month. — PTI

Kadiyan, Malik reach quarters

Sofia, Bulgaria: Satywart Kadiyan and Sumit Malik kept the Indian hopes alive by reaching the quarterfinals but it was all over for Amit Dhankar, who was ousted from the World Olympic Qualifiers after losing his opening bout, here on Thursday. Dhankar lost his 74kg Qualification bout 6-9 to Moldova's Mihail Sava. Dhankar's defeat means that India will go unrepresented in the 74kg at the Tokyo Games. This is the last Olympic qualifying event and Satywart Kadiyan (97kg) and Sumit Malik (125kg) are still in the hunt. Kadiyan won his pre-quarterfinal 5-2 against Evan Amador Ramos from Puerto Rico. He led 3-0 in the first period, but a take-down move by his rival threatened his chances before the Indian got another two-pointer to win easily. — PTI

Indian archers to miss Swiss WC

Kolkata: India's Olympic-bound archers will not get to compete in the Stage 2 World Cup in Lausanne as their short-term visa application has been rejected by the Switzerland Embassy. India has been battling a second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic that has forced many countries to ban travellers from India. The Indian archers will now directly compete in the Stage 3 World Cup in Paris which will be the last Olympic qualification event for the Indian women's recurve team. The seven-day competition will begin on June 23. "Swiss Embassy did not allow any short term Visa and we had little time for the Stage 2 World Cup (May 17-23). Our focus is solely on the Paris World Cup now," Archery Association of secretary general Pramod Chandurkar said. The national federation may also seeking a relaxation in the 10-day quarantine rule for its archer when they reach Paris. — PTI

Bopanna in men's doubles last eight

Madrid: India's Rohan Bopanna combined with his Canadian partner Denis Shapovalov to stun top seeds Juan Sebastian Cabal and Robert Farah in straight sets and reach the men's doubles quarterfinals of Madrid Open Masters 1000 tournament here. This was the 41-year-old Bopanna's first win on the ATP tour in 2021. The Indo-Canadian duo won their round of 16 match 6-3, 6-4 on Wednesday. Bopanna and Shapovalov will take on German duo of Alexander Zverev and Tim Puetz in the quarter-finals. — PTI

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Europa League semifinal second leg: Roma vs Manchester United from 12.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, 3, HD, Arsenal vs Villarreal from 12.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C - 9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301. Editor - T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep.Rs. 20.00 per copy.

DEPARTURE GATES

Aussies fly out, New Zealand contingent leaves on Friday

New Delhi, May 6: The Australians flew off to Maldives, the South Africans headed home and the ones from New Zealand waited to be sent back on Friday as the suspended IPL's foreign cricketers bid adieu to India, hoping that the country recovers from the mayhem unleashed by a second wave of Covid-19 cases.

The 40-strong Australian contingent, except for a Covid-positive Mike Hussey, left for Maldives on Thursday to serve out the waiting period before they can board a flight to Australia once the travel restrictions end on May 15.

"We can confirm that Australian players, coaches, match officials and commentators have been safely transported from India and are en route to the Maldives," Cricket Australia stated in a press release.

"The Australians will remain in Maldives until the conclusion of the travel pause pertaining to flights from India to Australia," it added.

The IPL was suspended on Tuesday after four players and two coaching staff members from three different teams tested positive for Covid-19 inside the bio-bubble.

Of the 40 Australians involved in the league after three early pullouts, 14 were players, including mega-stars such as David Warner, Pat Cummins, and Steve Smith among others.

The 11 South Africans in the league boarded flights for Johannesburg as their country has not imposed any restrictions on travel from India, which recorded more than 4 lakh Covid-19 cases on Thursday and close to 4,000 deaths.

"My constant prayers is with the people from India to get through this. Pls Take care of yourselves," Proteas star Faf du Plessis, who turned up Chennai Super Kings, posted on Instagram.

The Cricket Australia thanked the BCCI for its assistance in ensuring that players were able to leave India within two



Mumbai Indians' Trent Boult and Chris Lynn.

● The 40-strong Australian contingent, except for a Covid-positive Mike Hussey, left for Maldives on Thursday to serve out the waiting period before they can board a flight to Australia once the travel restrictions end on May 15.

● Of the 40 Australians involved in the league after three early pullouts, 14 were players, including mega-stars such as David Warner, Pat Cummins and Steve Smith among others.

days of the league's suspension owing to Covid-19 cases inside its bio-bubble.

"CA and the ACA extend their sincere thanks to the BCCI for their responsiveness in moving the Australians from India to the Maldives...", the statement read.

On the wait-list were the Black Caps. Four members of their Test contingent, including captain Kane Williamson, will head for the United Kingdom on May 11 while the rest will make their way back home on Friday, the country's cricket board announced.

New Zealand are scheduled to play hosts England in a two-match Test series, beginning on June 2, before facing India in the World Test Championships final at Southampton from June 18.

"We've worked closely

with the BCCI and the IPL franchises on the various departure strategies and we're very appreciative of their support during what is, clearly, a very challenging time," New Zealand Cricket (NZC) chief executive David White said in a statement on Thursday.

Williamson, pacer Kyle Jamieson and spinner Mitchell Santner, as well as physio Tommy Simsek, will remain in a mini-bubble in New Delhi before departing for the UK, ahead of preparations for the Test series against England, and the WTC final against India.

There were 17 New Zealanders involved in the League, including 10 players.

NZC said May 11 is the earliest date it could obtain for the team's arrival in the UK.

However, pace spearhead Trent Boult will return home briefly to see

his family before joining the Test squad in early June, for the second match against England and the WTC final.

"...Boult will leave MIQ (Managed Isolation and Quarantine) on May 22 and will spend a week at home with his family, training at Mt Maunganui before departing for the UK in early June," NZC stated.

White said IPL players, support staff and commentators returning to New Zealand would adhere to all regulatory protocols, including pre-departure Covid-19 tests.

Those returning to New Zealand on Friday from India also include Stephen Fleming, Brendon McCullum, Kyle Mills, Shane Bond, Mike Hesson, Tim Seifert, Adam Milne, Scott Kuggeleijn and James Pamment.

— PTI

AFTER MOTHER, VEDA LOSES HER SISTER TO VIRUS

New Delhi, May 6: Indian women's cricketer Veda Krishnamurthy's sister Vatsala Shivakumar has died due to Covid-19, two weeks after her mother succumbed to the dreaded virus.

The 45-year-old died at a private hospital in Chikkamagaluru on Wednesday night.

The all-rounder, who has been helping others through her social media by amplifying their requests for aid, had lost her mother Cheluvamba Devi last month.

On April 24, the Bengaluru-based cricketer, who has represented India in 48 ODIs and 76 T20s, had tweeted about her mother's demise while also informing that her sister too was battling for her life.

— PTI

EX-RAJASTHAN PLAYER YADAV DIES OF COVID

Jaipur, May 6: Vivek Yadav, a former Rajasthan leg-spinner and a member of their Ranji Trophy-winning squad, died of coronavirus-related complications.

He was 36-years-old and is survived by his wife and a daughter.

Yadav breathed his last at a city hospital on Wednesday.

"Rajasthan Ranji Player and a dear friend...Vivek Yadav is no more. May his soul R.I.P. Thoughts and prayers with the family," former India opener Aakash Chopra tweeted.

Yadav was undergoing treatment for cancer and had gone to the hospital for his chemotherapy, where he was tested and returned positive for Covid-19. His health deteriorated before he lost his battle against the dreaded virus.

— PTI

Sri Lanka offers window for IPL

BY BIPIN DANI

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) is "keen" to help the Indian cricket board host the remainder of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

This offer has come at the time when former India captain Sourav Ganguly, who is now BCCI president, has said: "We have to speak to other boards and see if a window can be made available before the T20 World Cup".

"If we fail to complete the IPL, the loss will be close to ₹12,500 crore (\$340 million approximately) going by early estimates."

"Yes, we can certainly provide a window to host the IPL in the month of September," Prof. Arjuna de Silva, chief of the managing committee of Sri Lanka Cricket, speaking exclusively over the telephone from Colombo, said.

"We hear the UAE (United Arab Emirates) is one option for BCCI but Sri Lanka cannot be ignored for all reasons," he said. "We are planning to host the Lanka Premier League

We hear the UAE is also an option but Sri Lanka cannot be ignored for all reasons. We are planning to host the Lanka Premier League in July-August and the grounds and other infrastructure will be ready for the IPL in September.

— ARJUNA DE SILVA
SLC managing committee chief

(LPL) in July-August and the grounds and other infrastructure will be ready for the IPL in September," de Silva added.

Prof. de Silva's term is scheduled to be over this month after the SLC elections on May 20, but the offer will stand whoever comes into power.

The IPL teams have already hired the services of Sri Lanka's legendary cricketers — Kumar Sangakkara, Muthiah Muralitharan and Mahela Jayawardene in coaching roles.

COVID-INFECTED HUSSEY, BALAJI FLY TO CHENNAI

Chennai, May 6: Chennai Super Kings' batting coach Mike Hussey and bowling coach L Balaji have been flown into the city from Delhi in an air ambulance as they recover from Covid-19, a top franchise official said on Thursday.

Hussey and Balaji were among the prominent non-playing staff to test positive when the IPL was "indefinitely suspended" on Tuesday, following multiple Covid-19 cases inside the bio-bubble.

"We decided to bring Hussey and Balaji to Chennai by an air ambulance as we have better contacts here and wanted to ensure better medical facilities in case of any need," the CSK official said.

He further said the duo was "asymptomatic and doing fine."

The CSK official said Hussey would have to wait for a Covid-19 negative report to be able to leave the country.

"Hussey has to wait and get a Covid negative report before he can leave India. We will make arrangements for a charter when it is safe for him to fly," the official added.

While Hussey will have to wait, rest of the Australians participating in the IPL on Thursday left for Maldives to serve out the waiting period before they can board a flight to Australia.

The CSK official said the franchise made arrangements for the foreign players of the team to leave by charter planes.

The official also informed that CSK skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni would leave for his hometown Ranchi in the afternoon once all his team members head for their respective bases.

— PTI

Major blow for Saina, Srikanth

New Delhi, May 6: London Olympics bronze-medallist Saina Nehwal and men's star Kidambi Srikanth's last hopes of Olympic qualification hang in balance as the Indian government negotiates for their participation in the Malaysian Open amid a ban on flights from India in that country.

Following the postponement of the India Open (May 11-16), Saina and Srikanth's hopes of qualifying for the Tokyo Games hinge on the (May 25-30) Kuala Lumpur event followed by the Singapore Open (June 1-6).

In the wake of an unprecedented Covid-19 surge in India, Malaysia and Singapore have banned flights from the country effective April 28.

"The Sports Ministry, through the Ministry of External Affairs, has approached the Malaysian Government requesting to grant permission to the Indian Badminton Team to

travel to Malaysia to participate in the Malaysian Open scheduled from May 25 to May 30," the Sports Authority of India said.

"This is in light of a temporary travel ban that has been imposed by Malaysia on travellers from India, owing to the rising Covid-19 cases in India," it added.

After an initial request made earlier this week, the Indian High Commission in Malaysia "received information from the Malaysian Government that the travel of the team may not be possible immediately."

The tournament is one of the last events that contribute to Olympic qualification which ends on June 15. All top Indian singles and doubles players like P.V. Sindhu, Saina Nehwal, Kidambi Srikanth, Sai Praneeth, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty, Ashwini Ponnappa and Sikki Reddy are due to participate in this.

— PTI



Chelsea's Timo Werner (right) scores against Real Madrid in their Champions League second leg semifinal match at Stamford Bridge in London on Wednesday.

— AFP

Blues blank Madrid to set up all-English final

London, May 6: Chelsea set up an all-English Champions League final against Manchester City as goals from Timo Werner and Mason Mount beat Real Madrid 2-0 in a dominant display on Wednesday to seal a 3-1 aggregate victory at Stamford Bridge.

If anything, the scoreline flattered Madrid as the 13-time European champions had no response to Chelsea's greater strength and speed.

The Blues should have ran out far more convincing winners as they toyed with the tired visitors in the second half.

However, Werner's cushioned header into an empty net on 28 minutes after Kai Havertz's initial effort came back off the crossbar and Mount's tap-in five minutes from time were enough to seal their place in Istanbul on May

THE RESULT

Chelsea 2
(Werner 28, Mount 85)
Real Madrid 0
(Chelsea win 3-1 on aggregate)

29. "To never lose the concentration, focus and positive energy on the pitch — it was a huge performance and well deserved," said Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel, who has masterminded a huge turnaround in Chelsea's season since replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January.

Backed by Russian billionaire owner Roman Abramovich, Chelsea's £220 million spending spree last summer has been rewarded with a first Champions League final since they lifted the trophy for the only time in 2012.

"We never lost the hunger, the desire to defend," added Tuchel.

"In the second half we had even better structure to defend and it was a fantastic performance.

"We could have scored so much earlier and more to be safe, but it's no time for criticism now. It's a fantastic achievement and big congratulations to the team."

Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane welcomed back captain Sergio Ramos for the first time in six weeks, while Eden Hazard was handed a rare start in an injury-hit season on his return to Stamford Bridge.

But the Belgian was again a peripheral figure as Madrid's over-reliance on Karim Benzema to provide a goal threat was exposed.

"We needed to be better going forward," said Zidane. — AFP

Anti-Olympic petition gains tens of thousands of signatures

Tokyo, May 6: An online petition calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be canceled has gained tens of thousands of signatures since being launched in Japan only days ago.

The rollout of the petition comes with Tokyo, Osaka and several other areas under a state of emergency with coronavirus infections rising — particularly new variants. The state of emergency is to expire on May 11, but some reports in Japan say it is likely to be extended.

The postponed Olympics are to open in just under three months on July 23.

The petition is addressed to International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach, who has tentative plans to visit Japan later this month. He is expected to meet the Olympic torch relay on May 17 in Hiroshima, and perhaps also travel to Tokyo where small anti-Olympic are protests being planned.

Although 70-80% of Japanese citizens in polls say they want the Olympics cancelled or postponed, there is no indication this will happen. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Tokyo

organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto, and Bach have repeatedly said the games will go on as scheduled.

Organizers and the IOC unveiled so-called Playbooks last week, explaining rules for athletes and others to show how the Olympics can be held in the middle of a pandemic. Several test events have been conducted in the last few days, and organizers have reported few problems.

The Olympic torch relay has been crisscrossing Japan for a month. Organizers say that eight

● Although 70-80% of Japanese citizens in polls say they want the Olympics cancelled or postponed, there is no indication this will happen.

people working on the relay have tested positive for the virus.

The Tokyo Olympics have become a face-saving exercise for Japan, which has officially spent \$15.4 billion to prepare them. For the IOC, the Tokyo Olympics are critical since

73% of its income comes from selling television rights.

Organisers say the Olympics will be "safe and secure," though this has been challenged by local media specialists, and in an editorial last month in the British Medical Journal. It said mass events like the Olympics are "neither safe nor secure." Organisers say they will need 10,000 health workers to support the Olympics. They have also requested 500 additional nurses — a nurses' federation balked at the request — and 200 sports

medicine specialists.

The petition was organized by Kenji Utsunomiya, a lawyer who has run several times for Tokyo governor. It registered about 50,000 signatures in the first 24 hours after being launched. "Government policies are being set with the Olympics in mind, and measures to curb the coronavirus pandemic are being neglected," Utsunomiya told The Associated Press.

"Hospital are stretched thin, and some people are dying at home."

The headline in English

over the petition reads: "Cancel the Tokyo Olympics to protect our lives."

The petition suggests the Olympics cannot be held safely and says the games have drained finances away for other needs such as the rollout of a Covid-19 vaccine. "In order to host the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in July, we must devote a large number of medical professionals, valuable resources such as medical facilities and medical equipment, and various other resources," the petition says. — AP