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## NEARBY



Assam govt. to introduce cow protection Bill  
GUWAHATI  
Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi said the State government would introduce a cow protection Bill in the next Assembly session. Addressing the inaugural session of the 15th Assembly, he said the government would adopt a zero-tolerance policy for protecting the cow.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 5

## IMA demands strong action against Ramdev

NEW DELHI  
The Indian Medical Association has demanded that the Health Ministry take strong action against yoga guru Ramdev for allegedly misleading the public through his statements. It said Ramdev should be prosecuted under the Epidemic Diseases Act as his "untutored" statements are "a threat to people".

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8

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CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGE 4

# Over 2 lakh fresh cases in last 24 hours; TPR declines to 14.2%

More than 20 lakh samples tested across the country

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

India recorded 2,27,709 new COVID-19 cases and 3,392 deaths till 9.20 p.m. on Saturday. The country has so far reported a total of 2,65,15,789 cases and 2,98,849 deaths.

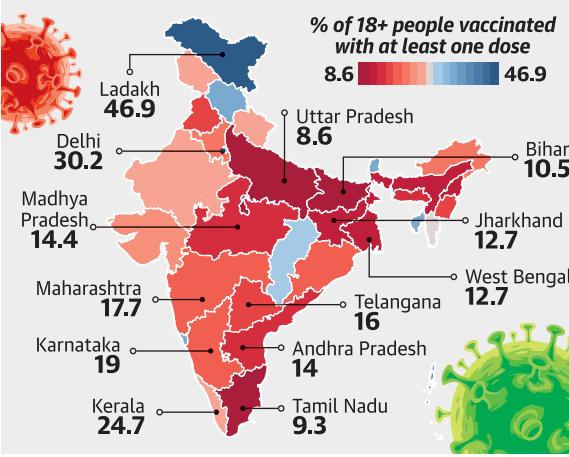
Tamil Nadu reported 35,873 new infections, followed by Karnataka (31,183) and Kerala (28,514). Maharashtra recorded 682 casualties over the past 24 hours, followed by Karnataka (451) and Tamil Nadu (448). Maharashtra's fatalities include backlog deaths which were missed in the previous reports.

As many as 20,66,285 samples were tested in the country on Friday (the results of which were made available on Saturday), the highest number of tests conducted in a single day in the country since the beginning of the pandemic.

This is the fourth instance when daily tests in India have crossed the 20 lakh-mark.

India's average daily test positivity rate (TPR or posi-

**Shot count** | Around 16% of India's adult population has received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine until May 21. In Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, fewer than 10% of the people aged over 18 have received at least one shot



## Centre giving priority to those above 45 for shot

The Central government's priority remains vaccinating those 45 years and above, said Member (health) of the NITI Aayog V.K. Paul. He was responding to a

tive cases identified for every 100 tests) continues to decline. It was 22.7% on May 9 and reduced to 14.2% as on May 21. However, not all the

question about Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's statement that Delhi will have to halt vaccination for the 18+ category due to depleted stocks. ▶ PAGE 7

States are following this declining trend.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

DELHI SEES 2,260 CASES ▶ PAGE 7

18 mn Sputnik doses to be on tap by August

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI

More than 18 million doses of the Russian vaccine Sputnik-V will be available for Indians by August, while Indian partners are expected to produce about 850 million doses of the vaccine by March 2022. In addition, the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) also hopes to cooperate in the production of a single-dose "Sputnik Light" in India once domestic permissions come through, said India's Ambassador to Moscow.

"Finally, more than 65%-70% of Sputnik vaccines used anywhere in the world will be from India," said D.B. Venkatesh Verma, Indian Ambassador in Russia, speaking to journalists in St. Petersburg on Saturday. He described a "three-phase process" for production and distribution of the Russian-developed vaccines in India.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

# 'Over 8 lakh migrant workers left Delhi on State-run buses'

Transport Dept. report credits govt. for 'timely coordination'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Over eight lakh migrant workers left the Capital for their respective hometowns during the first four weeks of the lockdown imposed in the city to contain the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic, says a report prepared by the Delhi Transport Department.

According to the report, which considered the period between April 19 and May 14, a total of 8,07,032 migrant workers left the city aboard buses; as many as 3,79,604 departed during the first week of the lockdown. The number reduced to 2,12,448 in the following week when the lockdown was extended for the first time. In the third week, it came down further to 1,22,490 and in the fourth week 92,490 migrant workers left Delhi on government-run buses.

The report, however, specified that "train travel" was the preferred mode of migrants this year as trains were operational unlike last year when they stopped running during the national lockdown imposed by the Centre in March. A lot of migrant workers also left in private buses and hired vehicles



Heading home: Migrant workers at Anand Vihar bus terminal after lockdown announcement in Delhi last month. ■ FILE PHOTO

which were not taken into account in the report.

The report sought to credit the Delhi government's "timely coordination" with transport authorities of neighbouring States such as Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand among others in assisting about eight lakh migrant workers in reaching their respective destinations "without any difficulty".

## 21,879 inter-State trips

According to the report, there were 21,879 inter-State bus trips during the four weeks of the lockdown, which began with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's first announcement of a week-

long curfew on April 19. The lockdown, which has been extended four times since then, is likely to continue till May-end, said government sources.

The report stated that the Delhi Transport Department learnt from "past experience" viz. the first surge of migrant workers leaving the city in March 2020. This year, the department prepared a plan for deployment of 500 cluster buses on inter-State routes under emergency and, it claimed, there were no complaints of overcharging as the buses were operated by State governments.

A CITY IN STASIS ▶ PAGE 2

# Gujarat emerges as a hotspot for mucormycosis in India

A total of 2,281 cases reported, the highest among all States

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
AHMEDABAD

With over 2,000 cases, Gujarat has emerged as the hot-spot for mucormycosis, or black fungus, which has already claimed more than 250 lives in the State.

According to the Centre, Gujarat has 2,281 mucormycosis patients, which is the highest for any State in the country.

After the cases rose significantly, the Gujarat government on Thursday declared the fungal infection, which has a high fatality rate, an epidemic under the provision of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1857.

According to government sources, the State has witnessed over 250 deaths so far directly attributed to the fungal infection. The highest number of cases have been



New epidemic: Mucormycosis-infected patients at the Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad on Friday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

reported from Ahmedabad, Surat and Rajkot.

The State government has set up special wards in the civil hospitals in Ahmedabad, Surat and Rajkot to deal with the cases. At the Ahmedabad Civil hospital, nearly all beds have been filled up as cases requiring urgent medical attention are rising.

In Rajkot, where more

than 500 cases of the fungal infection have been reported, the District Collector set up a special control room to distribute the life-saving drug Amphotericin-B in its liposomal form, which is in short supply. There is a scramble for the drug in Ahmedabad too, as the authorities have failed to procure it amidst the rise in cases.

## Bidding goodbye



Heart-wrenching: A family member breaks down while performing the last rites of a COVID-19 victim at the Nigambodh Ghat cremation ground in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ ANI

# Bengal politics comes full circle

BJP struggles to keep its flock together after Mamata's landslide victory

SHIV SAHAY SINGH  
KOLKATA

In the run-up to the West Bengal Assembly poll, defections were used by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a political tool and talking point as several leaders of the incumbent Trinamool Congress joined the saffron party. However, less than three weeks after the election results, politics in West Bengal has come full circle, with the BJP now trying to keep its flock together.

The political shift was evident within days with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee hinting that "doors are open" for those who want to return to the Trinamool Congress, less than 48 hours after her landslide victory.

While the BJP has managed to accommodate former TMC heavyweight and



Mamata Banerjee

former Minister Suvenu Adhikari by appointing him Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, the party is finding it difficult to deal with veterans like Mukul Roy, who have remained conspicuous by their absence at BJP meetings and events. "My fight would continue as a soldier of BJP to restore democracy in our State. I would request even

ly poll of 2021, a new realignment, particularly of opportunist elements, is bound to happen," he said.

**Security or surveillance?** After its defeat, the BJP, citing attacks and violence on party cadre, had accorded central security to its elected MLAs. However, a few of them have refused to accept central security, citing issues relating to logistics.

"I don't think I need central security at this point of time. There is no threat for me in the town I grew up in. Moreover, I use a two-wheeler for commuting and it is not possible for me to house the securitymen or provide vehicles for them," BJP MLA from Siliguri Sankar Ghosh told *The Hindu*.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

# Yaas may become a very severe cyclonic storm: IMD

It is likely to cross Odisha, Bengal coasts by Wednesday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Cyclone Yaas is likely to intensify into a "very severe cyclonic storm" and cross the Odisha and West Bengal coasts on May 26, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Saturday.

A low pressure area formed over the east-central Bay of Bengal and the adjoining north Andaman Sea on Saturday. "The low pressure area is very likely to concentrate into a depression over the east-central Bay of Bengal by tomorrow, May 23 morning. It is very likely to move north-northwestwards, intensify into a cyclonic storm by 24 May and further into a very severe cyclonic storm dur-



Precautionary measure: A policeman shooing people away from the beach in Puri on Saturday. ■ PTI

ing the subsequent 24 hours," the Meteorological department said.

The cyclonic system would continue to move north-northwestwards, intensify further and reach the

north Bay of Bengal near West Bengal and the adjoining north Odisha and Bangladesh coasts by the morning of May 26, it said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

## Nepal House dissolved, polls in Nov.

REUTERS  
KATHMANDU

Nepal plunged into fresh political turmoil on Saturday as President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved Parliament and fixed general elections in November, amid a worsening COVID-19 outbreak.

The surprise announcement comes after a presidential statement said neither caretaker Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli nor Opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba was able to demonstrate a majority to form government by the Friday deadline set by Ms. Bhandari.

"The President has dissolved the House of Representatives and ordered the first phase of general elections on November 12 and the second phase on November 19," a presidential statement issued after midnight said.

It said the decision was made on the recommendation of the Cabinet headed by caretaker Prime Minister Oli, whose December 2020 dissolution of Parliament sparked weeks of protests and was reversed by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional in February.

The opposition says Mr. Oli, who lost a vote of confidence this month, has no legal authority to recommend the dissolution of the Parliament.

Mr. Oli, 69, said fresh elections could end the political confusion. Elections could be held despite the pandemic, he told reporters on Friday.

On Saturday, he asked the Election Commission to initiate preparations for the elections and ensure fair and fraud-free polls in November.

Nepal is battling a deadly second wave of the pandemic and is reporting more than 8,000 new infections each day.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

A ND-NDE



## A city in stasis

Delhi is at the tail end of the fifth week of lockdown, initiated in light of the sudden surge in COVID-19 cases that incapacitated the city's health infrastructure. With fresh infections, deaths and test positivity dipping, will the lockdown continue?



1. Migrant workers returning to their hometowns during the lockdown 2. Homeless people sleeping on the sidewalk 3. A deserted Connaught Place 4. Residents taking part in subdued Id celebrations due to the restrictions in the city 5. People wait to refill oxygen cylinders in south Delhi's Bhogal 6. A fruit vendor makes his way across an empty street 7. Volunteers distributing free meals to relatives of COVID-19 patients outside Safdarjung Hospital 8. Children waiting to get a free meal in north-east Delhi's Tahirpur 9. Metro trains parked at a depot, all services have been suspended since May 10 10. People join a queue for food near Kashmiri Gate.

SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA, V.V. KRISHNAN, R.V. MOORTHY, SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

### WESTERN RAILWAY

E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE No. S/19/2021, Date 19.05.2021

Sr.No	Short Description of item	Quantity	T.O.D.
428	Locking Plate for Wheel and Axle	26522 Nos.	27.05.2021
429	Portable Operation Theatre Light	1 Set.	02.06.2021
430	D.Note No. T 7 B	4800 Nos.	04.06.2021
431	Cable Resistance Thermometer Sensor	7 Nos.	04.06.2021
432	Water Tank Complete Asly.	46 Nos.	04.06.2021
433	Equipped Hopper Asly.	167 Pairs	04.06.2021
434	Capacitor	21 Nos.	04.06.2021
435	Spring Plank for Casnub Bogie	118 Nos.	04.06.2021
436	Secondary Spring Outer	100 Nos.	04.06.2021
437	Brake Gear Shaft	320 Nos.	04.06.2021
438	Slack Adjuster	70 Nos.	04.06.2021
439	Anaesthesia Machine with Monitor	2 Nos.	04.06.2021
440	3 Phase Induction Blower Motor	229 Nos.	05.06.2021
441	ST Porcelain Insulator	1203 Nos.	05.06.2021
442	Grease shell GADUS	270 Kg	05.06.2021
443	High Capacity Thermoplastic Polyester Elastomer	2150 Nos.	07.06.2021
444	Double Acting hydraulic Shock Absorber	440 Nos.	07.06.2021
445	Silent Block	2056 Nos.	07.06.2021
446	Suspension Strap Complete	743 Nos.	07.06.2021
447	Brake Head Asly	384 Nos.	07.06.2021
448	UJ Clamp with Bracket	1120 Set	07.06.2021
449	Brake Gear Bushes	50292 Nos.	07.06.2021
450	Sub Kit POH-2B for Tap Changer No. 32	28 Set	07.06.2021
451	Pressure Switch -4 H3	21 Nos.	07.06.2021
452	Contactor for Time Relay	13 Nos.	07.06.2021
453	Side Frame Friction Liner	13123 Nos.	07.06.2021
454	Bogie Centre Pivot Top	1066 Nos.	07.06.2021
455	Bogie Centre Pivot Bottom	710 Nos.	07.06.2021
456	SMPS based IPS System	32 Set	08.06.2021
457	CC PU Side Bearer Pad Asly. (22NLB Bogies)	1273 Nos.	08.06.2021
458	CC PU Side Bearer Pad Asly. (22HS Bogies)	565 Nos.	08.06.2021
459	Epoxy Coat Red with Hardener.	958 Set	09.06.2021
460	Railway Signalling Cable (2CX2.5 Sq.mm)	47.20 KM	09.06.2021
461	Thickeren of Belt Tensioning Bracket	765 Nos.	09.06.2021
462	Brake Beam	26 Nos.	09.06.2021
463	Flap Door for BCNA Wagon	808 Nos.	09.06.2021
464	Flap Door Asly.	79 Nos.	09.06.2021
465	Oil Shell Corena	2642 Ltr.	09.06.2021
466	Set of Blower (Evaporator)	130 Set	10.06.2021
467	Hanger for Bogie Bolster Spring Supn.	7000 Nos.	10.06.2021
468	Foot Plate	200 Nos.	10.06.2021
469	Key Switch Simulation (Pos no 179)	4 No.	10.06.2021
470	Side Frame Key for CTRB	28359 Nos.	10.06.2021
471	Coupler Body with Shank Wears Plate	1500 Nos.	10.06.2021
472	Knuckle Pivot Pin	11920 Nos.	10.06.2021
473	Transition Screw Coupling	58 Nos.	10.06.2021
474	Lock Lift Rivet (Flat CSK Head) for CBC	3094 Nos.	10.06.2021
475	Set of PU Linings	3107 Set	10.06.2021
476	Distributor Valve	20 Nos.	10.06.2021
477	Vinyl Coated Upholstery Fabric	25492 Mtr.	11.06.2021
478	D. Note No. EE 52 B	2000 Nos.	11.06.2021
479	Non-Ignite Tape Plasticized PVC	80246 Mtr.	11.06.2021
480	Sealing Ring for Axle Box	103412 Nos.	11.06.2021
481	Packing Ring 254 ODX120 IDx13mm thick	9700 Nos.	11.06.2021
482	Nitrile Rubber O Ring	4000 Nos.	11.06.2021
483	Pipe connection	123 Set	11.06.2021
484	Lock Lift Rivet (Flat CSK Head)	4832 Nos.	11.06.2021
485	Knuckle for Upgraded High Tensile CBC	5338 Nos.	11.06.2021
486	Key Bolt with Nut, Spring Washer & 4 Dia.Spit Pin	84056 Nos.	11.06.2021
487	Centre Pivot Top	1333 Nos.	11.06.2021
488	Door Asly.	160 Nos.	11.06.2021
489	Flap Door Arrangement	320 Nos.	11.06.2021
490	Spare of APM	250 set	11.06.2021

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D-0121

For Principal Chief Materials Manager

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### NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

Tender Notice no. 04 of Year 2021-22

Tender open Tenders are invited by Divisional Railway Manager (S&T), N.E. Railway, Itzatnagar for and on behalf of the President of India for the following works:-

(1) Description of works : Comprehensive Annual Maintenance Contract of AmaraRaja make IPS for One years over Izzatnagar Division. Approx. Value : ₹ 94,49,604.08, Completion period : 12 Months.

(2) Description of works : Comprehensive Annual Maintenance Contract of Eldyne make Axle Counter for Two years over Izzatnagar Division. Approx. Value : ₹ 35,49,732.48, Completion period : 24 Months.

(3) Description of works : Comprehensive Annual Maintenance Contract of Crompton Greaves make Data Logger System Installed at 10 station of IZN Div for two years. Approx. Value : ₹ 12,75,018.90, Completion period : 24 Months.

(4) Description of works : Annual Repairing Contract of 25 watt and 5-Watt VHF sets for a period of 3 years over Izzatnagar Division. Approx. Value : ₹ 7,49,294.25, Completion period : 36 Months.

Date & time of closing of e-tender : 30.06.2021 at 11:00 Hrs. ● The tender can be viewed at website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. ● The tender/bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate & must have register on IREPS portal. All relevant papers must be uploaded at the time of participating in e-tendering. Sr. Div. Signal & Telecom, Engineer, Izzatnagar CPRO/Sig-08

About any passenger amenity complaint : SMS on Mobile No. 09794845955

Never travel on roof and foot boards."

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**Timings**

DELHI
SUNDAY, MAY. 23
RISE 05:27 SET 19:10
RISE 15:45 SET 03:08
MONDAY, MAY. 24
RISE 05:27 SET 19:11
RISE 16:52 SET 03:45
TUESDAY, MAY. 25
RISE 05:26 SET 19:11
RISE 18:02 SET 04:24

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	35	18
Safdarjung	35	18
Palam	34	19

**Delhi Palam Today**  
**36°C** A pleasant morning and very warm day likely to prevail with mainly sunny sky.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
**38°C** Rise in day temperature. Dry weather with mainly sunny sky expected. Day would turn hot.

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# CM appeals to Centre to increase vaccine quota

Kejriwal offers PM Modi four suggestions to tide over lack of supply, suggests distributing vaccines from abroad to States

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday appealed to the Centre to increase the vaccine quota for Delhi stating that vaccination centres for the 18-44 age-group had been shut down and vaccination halted due to the shortage of vaccines in Delhi.

Writing to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in this regard, Mr. Kejriwal made four suggestions to the Centre to tide over the lack of supply which included the distribution of international vaccines to States and the procurement of vaccine stock from nations that have more than they need.

"In the past 24 hours, only 2,200 cases have come up in Delhi. The infection rate has also declined in the past 24 hours and has come down to only 3.5%. But this does not mean that the dangers of COVID-19 have been stalled. It persists. We have to take every measure to save ourselves from the virus," he told a digital briefing.

"From today onwards, the vaccination drive for the youth has come to an end. The vaccines that the Central



A deserted vaccination centre in west Delhi on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

government sent for the youth have finished. I am extremely saddened by the fact that we have to close down the centres for vaccinating the youth due to the non-availability of the vaccines," he said.

Mr. Kejriwal said that Delhi needs 80 lakh vaccine doses every month in comparison to which the city had received only 16 lakh in the month of May and the Centre had further reduced the quota for it for the month of June. A letter received from the Centre, he said, stated

that the city would be issued 8 lakh vaccine doses in June.

Till now, he said, the Delhi government had administered a total of 50 lakh vaccine doses and needed 2.5 crore more to vaccinate all the adults in Delhi.

"At this pace, if only 8 lakh vaccines are provided every month, it will take 30 months to vaccinate all adults in Delhi. Till then no one knows how many waves and deaths due to COVID-19 will be witnessed. To save lives, we have to immediately increase the availability of

the vaccine in the country," he said.

#### Share formula

"For this, I have four suggestions. Firstly, Bharat Biotech which manufactures Covaxin is ready to give its formula to other companies. There are several vaccine-making companies in the country.

The central government should immediately invite all those companies and give them an order that all those companies should start rapidly making vaccines," he also said.

## 'Inoculation will halt if doses aren't replenished'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

were utilised; this number was 200 for beneficiaries in this category, five days ago, she said. On May 21, 48,628 doses were administered.

The total number of COVID vaccination doses administered so far is above 50 lakh of which 12 lakh beneficiaries are those who have received both the doses, she said.

to share these with India.

"The Government of India should plead for giving those vaccines to India. The fourth suggestion is that all foreign vaccine manufacturing companies should be immediately permitted to manufacture vaccines in India," he said.

"It is my request to the Central government that vaccines should be made available to Delhi as soon as possible. The maximum number of lives of the youth have been lost in the second wave," he said.

**Hold all-party meeting, BJP tells AAP govt.**

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Saturday expressed "serious concern" over the high mortality rate in the Capital and demanded that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal immediately convene an all-party meeting including, experts and scientists to discuss the action plan to deal with the impending third wave of COVID-19.

Mr. Bidhuri said the high mortality rate was a matter of serious concern and needed to be investigated.

"The death rate in Delhi was 1.62% while the national average was 1.27%. Delhi's death rate is the highest in the country and it also an indication of the poor healthcare infrastructure in the Capital," Mr. Bidhuri alleged.

"In addition to this, the continued rise in the number of black fungus cases in Delhi is also very disturbing. More than 200 cases have been discovered in Delhi. The Delhi government has not declared it as an epidemic," he alleged.

## Duty comes above mourning loved ones

'Have to return to work as city is still grappling with high number of infections'

**NIKHIL M BABU**  
NEW DELHI

Last year in May, Nirupma Attreya, 57, and her husband, both doctors, were on COVID-19 duty when they tested positive for COVID-19. Both were hospitalised.

The husband passed away on June 28.

"After his death, I was very scared about working. I'm still scared for my family, myself, and our son, who is studying in a medical college. I couldn't go back to duty for two to three months due to mental stress. My colleagues advised that I should resume work as it will be a good distraction and help me. Returning to work helped to a little extent. I still suffer from mental stress," Dr. Attreya, who works at a private hospital said.

Family members and friends of doctors, who passed away after contracting COVID-19, said that they are back to work at hospitals as it is part of their job.

**Fully vaccinated**  
They said that they knew about the danger and used to discuss it with their loved ones. Some of the doctors had taken both doses of the vaccine.

"Last year, my husband [Dr. Aseem Gupta] was very



Dr. Shekhar Agarwal and Dr. Amit Singh succumbed to COVID-19 on May 10 and May 13, respectively.

anxious about doing COVID duty. I was also on duty at that time and we used to discuss about it," she said.

Dr. Attreya, a radiologist, said that after getting back to work, the hospital has not been giving her COVID-19 duty. "I see patients and they could have COVID, but I'm not specifically working at a COVID ward. Maybe, people at the hospital think that I suffered a lot and that's why they are not putting me on COVID duty," she said.

She said that the current condition is very bad. "A number of good healthcare workers have passed away. Currently, even doctors could not get beds, oxygen, ICU beds with ventilators. A number of doctors passed away. The government should have given facilities

for all healthcare workers," Dr. Attreya added.

Dr. Atul Agarwal, 59, lost his brother Dr. Shekhar Agarwal, 68, who was the director of Sant Parmanand Hospital on May 10.

"He tested positive on April 21 and he was going to the hospital for work till that day. The last time I spoke to him was when he was being put on the ventilator. He told me that 'Atul, I'm tired. I'm opting for a ventilator,' Dr. Atul said.

"He was not afraid and used to go to the hospital every day and never took a day off. He was like the captain of the ship," he added.

When asked whether he has joined work, Dr. Atul said that he was still getting adjusted to the reality. "I will be joining work on Monday. I

won't stay away from work. I'm a doctor first. I can't say that I have lost my brother and I can't work. All healthcare workers should work at this point," he said.

Dr. Shekhar had taken his vaccination doses. "Unfortunately, we lost him. But everyone should get vaccinated," Dr. Atul said.

Dr. Amit Singh, 39, a suspected COVID-19 patient, died on May 13. Dr. Abhishek, a friend, who is also a doctor and had known him for years, said that both of them were doing COVID-19 duty and he was "shocked" when he heard the news.

#### Like a brother

"He was like a brother to me. A week before he died, he told me that he had mild fever and body ache. We used to talk about healthcare workers dying. He used to be like an elder brother to me and said that we are taking all precautions and have also taken both doses of the vaccine and it should be okay," Dr. Abhishek said.

He said that he went back to COVID-19 duty within days of Dr. Singh's death.

"We both are anaesthetists, and we are responsible for COVID ICU. Cases are high now, it is part of the job, and we have to do it," he added.

drainage problem impacts Kundli village and they have their own mechanism to deal with it. But since the administration is not doing anything, we might make this a better place to live," he said.

He said that raw material kept for langars including, tomatoes in bulk were destroyed. However, a few protesters brought more with them and distributed on Saturday.

#### Other diseases

Avtar Singh who runs the makeshift hospital at Singhu border protest site said that they first managed to save all the equipment quickly and then drained out the water. "It's not just COVID-19 which can infect people. There's also malaria and dengue which can spread here due to filth and stagnant water," he said.

Farmer leaders on Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking the government to resume talks but also maintained that the demands remain the same.

## 'Food, mattresses were floating in sewage water'

Protesting farmers at Singhu border share their harrowing experience due to rain

**HEMANI BHANDARI**  
NEW DELHI

As rain battered the Capital since Wednesday, protesting farmers, who have been lodged for the last six months at the Singhu border, spent their nights trying to clear the sewage water from their langar premises.

Sharing their experience since the last three days, Sukhwinder Singh Barwa from Roopar said that it's very tough for the last three days.

"We have been spending sleepless nights. There are drains on both sides of the road and the drainage system has proved to be a failure in this rain. Drains were overflowing and our food and mattresses were floating in sewage water," he said.

**Repair drainage system**  
He also said that youth at the protest site have gathered and are planning to repair the drainage system herein. "On Friday night and before that, we had to dig the drains and force the water off the roads. But a permanent solu-



Incessant rain in the Capital left the protest site at Singhu border submerged. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tion will be reached," he said.

"This was just a trailer. Monsoon hasn't even reached Delhi yet," he said.

Another protester, Bharpur Singh (38) from Patiala, said that the government – by maintaining silence – has prepared them for the worst. "The last three days with unpredictable rain is an eye-opener for us. We'll be better prepared for the monsoon," he said.

**Request dodged**  
Protesters said that they had written to the Sonipat administration regarding the water problem but they had dodged the request. "The

himself, along with hundred others, spent the night clearing the water off the roads and tents. "Garbage, filth and stagnant water submerged the entire place. All the mattresses and clothes were then cleaned and left to dry on Saturday," he said.

Farmer leaders on Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking the government to resume talks but also maintained that the demands remain the same.

## Kejriwal gives ₹1 crore to doctor's kin

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

He was 26 years old.

The government stated Mujahid contracted the infection while on duty on May 8. He was a resident of Mustafabad and is survived by his father Dr. Mujahidul Islam, mother Nasima Mujahid, brothers Imaduddin, Maaz and Hassan and sister Sidrah.

Mujahid was a junior resident doctor in the department of obstetrics and gynaecology at the GTB Hospital where he succumbed to COVID-19 on May 9 in a matter of a few hours.

"Like my son, Anas, sacrificed his life serving the people of the nation, I want that my other children to al-

so grow up to serve the na-

tion," his Dr. Mujahidul said.

"Late Dr. Anas was hard working and serving the people of Delhi at GTB hospital since the time Corona emerged in Delhi. While serving the patients and being on his duty, he succumbed to COVID... it is because of people like Anas that we are able to save lives and the Delhi government is able to fight the Corona pandemic," Mr. Kejriwal said.

He assured the family of any help in the future.

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IN BRIEF



Hearing only through video link: Karnataka HC

BENGALURU  
The High Court of Karnataka has issued fresh standard operating procedures (SOPs) making hearing only through videoconference mode in its Principal Bench in Bengaluru and all trial courts in talukas and districts in view of the COVID-19 surge and lockdown. Advocates and litigants will not be allowed in court halls. However, hybrid mode of hearing – physical and videoconference – has been allowed for advocates in the Benches in Dharwad and Kalaburagi.

Police beat up power staff in Telangana

HYDERABAD  
Police beat up power staff in Nalgonda town in Telangana while enforcing the lockdown, inviting the intervention of Energy Minister G. Jagdish Reddy and CMD of transmission and distribution corporations D. Prabhakar Rao. Similar incidents were reported from other parts of Hyderabad. The staff stopped power supply in some areas of Nalgonda town, particularly where the police stations are located, for a few hours in protest.

Elephant electrocuted in fields near Puttur

CHITTOOR  
The lone elephant, aged around eight, which was separated from the three-member group that entered the Nagarai plains after moving away from Tamil Nadu forests in January this year, was found electrocuted in a sugarcane field here in Andhra Pradesh on Saturday. The incident occurred near Subba Naidu Kandriga village of Narayananavanam mandal, 12 km from Puttur, close to the Chennai NH. Forest officials said it had come in contact with a transformer.

# Cong. signals generational shift in Kerala

After days, party names Satheesan as CLP leader

G. ANAND  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



On the road ahead: CLP leader V.D. Satheesan and Congress MP Hibi Eden, left, at a press meet in Kochi on Saturday. ■ PTI

The Congress on Saturday brought the curtains down on days of uncertainty by nominating V.D. Satheesan as the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) leader in Kerala. At one stroke, it also forcefully articulated a theory of generational change in the State unit. The 56-year-old leader is a five-time MLA from the North Paravur Assembly constituency in Ernakulam.

Kerala

Pradesh

Congress

Committee

(KPCC)

president

Mullappally

Ramachandran

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here.

Being the leader of the largest Opposition party in the Assembly, Mr. Satheesan will

also be recognised as the Leader of the Opposition by the Speaker in due course.

The post-poll reorientation of the party is likely to reflect in the make-up of the KPCC soon. More leadership changes are in the offing. For one, Mr. Ramachandran has

also opted to quit owning responsibility for the Congress defeat.

**Group fights set aside**

Mr. Satheesan succeeds Ramachandran. Non-partisan support of a greater part of the 21-member CLP

Party will have a new face'

New CLP leader V.D. Satheesan said the Congress and the United Democratic Front will have a new face in tune with the expectations of the people. "A generational shift is a natural phenomenon in any party. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) had implemented such a change. The Congress had witnessed generational changes earlier too," he said.

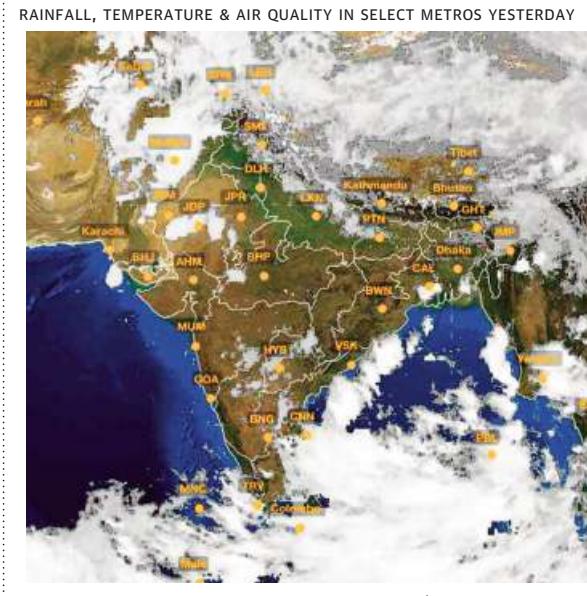
buoyed Mr. Satheesan's chances. It helped him break the constraints of factional politics. The new crop of MLAs who backed Mr. Satheesan wanted to imprint the party in Kerala with their perspective and character. They sought to push aside

decades of group wrangling and create a new landscape of collective political purpose moored to real issues that dog the people. Mr. Satheesan has signalled his focus on broader societal and economic concerns.

Mr. Satheesan's selection has also signalled a realignment in the Congress groups. He has arguably diminished Mr. Chenmithala's standing in the 'T' group and emerged as its future leader. At the same time, he has also ensured the support of 'A' group legislators despite former Chief Minister Oommen Chandy's alleged support for Mr. Chenmithala.

An insider said Mr. Satheesan's nomination had the imprimatur of Rahul Gandhi. The high command had stressed that workers require to coalesce around the political programme and not competing groups.

## WEATHER WATCH



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP, INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Sunday:** Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Kerala, Mahe and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty wind likely at isolated places over Rajasthan, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Telangana, central Maharashtra, Konkan & Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and Lakshadweep

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	... 32.8	27.8	22.2	Kozhikode	... 32.6	24.2	
Ahmedabad	... 36.3	26.3	21.1	Kurnool	0.4	36.1	24.6
Aizawl	... 29.9	18.6	12.1	Lucknow	... 36.1	25.1	
Aligarh	... 36.3	20.2	14.4	Madurai	... 36.6	25.4	
Bengaluru	26 ... 30.0	19.4	14.4	Mangaluru	0.7	31.0	24.4
Bhopal	... 34.0	27.4	21.1	Mumbai	... 34.0	27.8	
Bhubaneswar	38 ... 35.2	24.6	19.1	Mysuru	... 32.9	21.1	
Chandigarh	... 38.8	24.5	19.1	New Delhi	18.6	31.5	18.3
Chennai	11 ... 32.2	24.9	19.1	Patna	... 35.6	22.2	
Coimbatore	... 34.8	25.1	19.1	Port Blair	57 ... 29.4	23.6	
Dehradun	... 34.6	20.2	14.4	Puducherry	10.8	32.8	22.2
Gangtok	... 24.9	16.4	12.1	Pune	8 ... 33.7	22.9	
Goa	... 33.2	25.6	19.1	Raipur	... 39.4	26.6	
Guwahati	... 35.2	24.2	19.1	Ranchi	51 ... 32.5	20.6	
Hubballi	... 31.0	22.0	17.2	Shillong	... 27.2	18.3	
Hyderabad	... 38.2	25.5	19.1	Shimla	... 28.7	17.2	
Imphal	... 32.4	19.1	12.1	Srinagar	... 22.6	9.9	
Jaipur	... 37.2	22.8	17.2	Thiruvananthapuram	34 ... 30.6	24.3	
Kochi	2 ... 31.4	20.2	14.4	Tiruchi	9 ... 36.1	25.0	
Kohima	... 26.2	14.8	12.1	Vijayawada	88 ... 35.2	24.5	
Kolkata	... 37.6	28.8	21.1	Visakhapatnam	1 ... 36.0	27.4	

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>2</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	14	64	18	68	... 77	■■■
Bengaluru	.6	59	52	21	... 44	■■■
Chennai	15	9	18	269	... 269	■■■
Delhi	4	15	29	62	... 105	■■■
Hyderabad	.5	36	25	69	... 74	■■■
Kolkata	.3	14	32	76	... 60	■■■
Lucknow	4	27	72	60	... 104	■■■
Mumbai	... 33	15	103	106	... 73	■■■
Pune	... 35	78	73	73	... 73	■■■
Visakhapatnam	... 31	—	—	—	—	—

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Yamunagar, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 161 indicating a moderate level of pollution. Contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 17.

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■■ Moderate ■■■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

**NO<sub>2</sub>:** Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

**CO:** Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

**PM2.5 & PM10:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death people with heart or lung disease

# NORTH & EAST

## Assam to introduce cow protection bill

Governor underlines govt's commitment to protect satras



Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi addressing the Assembly session in Guwahati on Saturday. ■ PTI

Addressing the inaugural session of the 15th Assembly, he said the government would adopt a zero-tolerance policy for protecting the cow that gives "life-sustaining milk" and is considered a sacred animal. "I am happy to inform you that my government plans to introduce the cow protection bill in the next Assembly session. The proposed bill envisages imposition of complete ban on transport of cattle outside the State," he said.

The zero-tolerance policy would entail stringent punishment for those found transporting cattle outside

the namghars (prayer halls) and protecting the rights of the satras. A task force will be constituted to recover the lands of the satras and places of worship from illegal encroachments," he said.

**Grants to be given**  
"We will also continue to strengthen the satras by providing them grants-in-aid," he added.

his Assembly constituency.

Mr. Choudhary, however, did not elaborate on what caused anguish to him. He said Rajasthani Congress president Govind Singh Dotsara had spoken to him and it is now for him how he sorts out the issue. "I have sent my resignation and now the Speaker has to look into it. The party's State president talked to me and said it is a family matter... it is for him to sort out the issue," he said. The Gudhalamani MLA said his priority is fighting COVID-19 in his constituency.

**Weather fluctuations may trigger pest attack on sugarcane crops in U.P.**

State govt. asks officials to conduct on-site inspections

**Pests stop crop growth.**  
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

weather, various pests such as pyrra, grass hopper, fall armyworm and black bug infest sugarcane crop," said Commissioner, Cane and Sugar, Sanjay R. Bhoosreddy. These pests attack the sugarcane crop during weather fluctuations, he said.

Mr. Bhoosreddy said the black bug is mostly found in

the raton plant. The leaves of the affected plants turn yellow and brown spots appear, he said. "Its nymphs are found up to the middle of the leaflet of central leaf. Both adult and nymphs suck the juice of the leaves, which stops sugarcane growth and decrease yield and sugar content," he said.

The MLA, who was among the 19 legislators who had rebelled last year against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot under former Deputy CM Sachin Pilot's leadership, is also said to be dissatisfied with the government over the alleged stoppage of the developmental work in

I was anguished, says Rajasthan Cong. MLA

It is for Dotsara to sort out the issue'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA BARMER

Rajasthan Congress MLA Hemaram Choudhary on Saturday said he was "anguished" over some issues and that was why he sent his resignation to the Assembly Speaker.

The MLA, who was among the 19 legislators who had rebelled last year against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot under former Deputy CM Sachin Pilot's leadership, is also said to be dissatisfied with the government over the alleged stoppage of the developmental work in

## M.P. to ease COVID-19 'curfew' from

## FROM PAGE ONE

## Over 2 lakh new COVID cases in last 24 hours

Among major States, in Tamil Nadu both average daily tests and average daily TPR are increasing, suggesting that testing needs to be augmented to capture more infections.

In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the average daily TPR is showing signs of plateauing.

However, the average number of daily tests being conducted in these States has also reduced since the first week of May. This is not an optimal strategy for the

States as reported infections have been kept low due to low testing and an "artificial" peaking of cases has been depicted.

The average daily tests in Andhra Pradesh have increased marginally over the past few days.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Tripura and Lakshadweep. The data are sourced from the respective States' health bulletins.

## 18 mn Sputnik doses to be on tap by August

This includes ready-to-use direct exports, followed by bulk exports or what are called "fill and finish mode" and then a "transfer-of-technology" so Indian companies, most notably Dr. Reddy's Laboratories can produce the vaccine in India. "The Russian side has also proposed Sputnik Light for which the regulatory approvals are not completed. But once they are, they will be one more area of cooperation," Mr. Verma added, referring to the less effective, but easier to produce version of the Sputnik-V developed by the Gamaleya Lab in Russia, which could be used in conjunction with the other vaccines to try and deliver some measure of protection for a larger population.

According to the Indian

Ambassador, Russia has already shipped 2,10,000 Sputnik vaccines of a total of 3 million due to arrive in the month of May, followed by 5 million in June and 10 million in July. In August, RDIF is expected to transfer technology to India to start the manufacture here.

In addition, the government has already begun the process of vetting the Sputnik Light vaccine for clearances, and sources said a high-level meeting last week had taken a "positive view" of the single-dose vaccine, which has been shortlisted for further review.

In Russian clinical trials the Light version reportedly showed an "79.4%" efficacy as opposed to the Sputnik-V two-dose vaccine that claimed a "91.4%" efficacy, RDIF statements said.

## Nepal House dissolved, mid-term polls in Nov.

The move followed a notice from the Office of the President which said it could appoint neither Mr. Oli nor Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba as their claims to form government were insufficient.

With four lawmakers in the 275-member House of Representatives dismissed by their party after they chose to be part of another party, a prime ministerial candidate requires the support of at least 136 lawmakers to form government.

Interestingly, both Mr. Oli and Mr. Deuba had claimed the support of some lawmakers, whose names were included in both lists, according to Nepalese media reports. This is the second time the President has dissolved Parliament on the recommendation of Mr. Oli

following a political crisis.

She dissolved Parliament on December 20 but it was reinstated by the SC in February. Nepal's political crisis had taken a dramatic turn on Friday as Mr. Oli and the Opposition parties staked separate claims for the formation of government by submitting letters of support to the President.

Mr. Oli reached the President's Office and presented his list, a couple of minutes ahead of the Opposition leaders. He was the first to declare that he had the support of 153 lawmakers of the House of Representatives, a day after recommending to the President to initiate the process for the formation of a new government, citing that he does not have adequate support to go through another floor test.

## Bengal politics comes full circle

A crucial aspect of the BJP's rise in West Bengal is that the rank and file is full of leaders from other parties and the party will find it difficult to keep its flock together while in Opposition. Nearly 30 MLAs had joined the BJP, mostly from Trinamool Congress just months or even weeks before the Assembly polls. The BJP gave tickets to most of them, but many lost the elections. Since then leaders like former TMC Minister Rabib Banerjee, former MLAs Prabir Ghosal and Vaishali Dalmiya, have stayed away from

the public eye. On Saturday, four-term MLA Sonali Guha, who had joined BJP on March 8 after she was denied a TMC ticket, wrote an apology to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and requested that she be allowed to return to the party. "Just like a fish cannot stay out of water, I will not be able to live without you. 'Didi', I seek your forgiveness and if you don't forgive me, I won't be able to live. Please allow me to come back and spend the rest of my life in your affection," Ms. Guha wrote.

## 'Yaas may become a very severe cyclonic storm'

"It is very likely to cross West Bengal and the adjoining north Odisha and Bangladesh coasts around the evening of 26th May," the IMD added.

The April-May and the October-December periods are also known to witness cyclones.

# Six more bodies recovered from sunken barge

## Underwater search on for 9 missing crew

DINAKAR PERI  
NEW DELHI

**INS Makar** with sonar and **INS Tarasa** sailed out early on Saturday morning from Mumbai for carrying out the underwater search, he stated.

So far, 186 crew have been rescued and 49 bodies have been recovered from Barge P305, which sank 35 nautical miles off Mumbai with 261 crew on board on May 17 due to cyclone Tauttae.

As the low-pressure area in the North Andaman Sea is likely to intensify as cyclonic storm Yaas during the next 24 hours over the Bay of Bengal, moving in a north-westerly direction and likely to cross the coast between north Odisha and West Bengal around May 26, the Navy said it was closely monitoring the movement of the cyclonic storm.

"Search and rescue operations continue for the remaining crew. Underwater search for the wrecks of Barge P305 and Tug Varapradha using specialised teams and equipment is in progress," the Navy spokesperson said. Specialised diving teams onboard survey vessel



**Safe zone:** Rescued crew of Barge P305 on a naval ship off the Mumbai coast on Thursday. ■ PTI

clone 'Yaas', and are in constant liaison with the State administrations for rendering assistance as required," the spokesperson said.

As part of the preparedness, eight flood relief teams and four diving teams were prepositioned at Odisha and West Bengal to augment the

existing resources. Four naval ships are on standby with Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief blocks, diving, and medical teams to render assistance in the most affected areas along the Odisha and West Bengal coast, he stated.

Naval aircraft are kept ready

## How can only captain be responsible, asks BJP

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

A day after an FIR was registered against the captain and others of the Barge P305 that sunk in the Arabian Sea during Cyclone Tauttae, the BJP on Saturday questioned whether the captain was being made a scapegoat. "How can only captain be held responsible for this tragedy? The contractor

company should be held responsible. This company must face action for being responsible for homicide," said BJP leader and MLA Ashish Shelar.

Mr. Shelar claimed that the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) were playing politics by demanding the resignation of the Central Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

tions continue to relay warning for mariners and fishermen in the Bay of Bengal. "Coast Guard pollution and disaster response teams are on standby. Also maintaining close liaison with shipping, fisheries, oil handling agencies and State authorities," the Coast Guard said.

## Music director Raamlaxman passes away

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

Veteran music director Raamlaxman, best known for his work on Rajshri Productions' blockbuster movies — *Maine Pyar Kiya*, *Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* and *Hum Saath Saath Hain* — died due to a cardiac arrest. He was 78.

The composer, whose real name was Vijay Patil, passed away at his residence in Nagpur in the early hours of Saturday, his son Amar said.

"He had taken the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, Covishield, six days ago. There was no problem at that time... But when he came home he developed weakness. His parameters were dropping.

+  
Doctors were attending at home. He passed away at around 2 a.m. on Saturday. He had a cardiac arrest," Mr. Amar told PTI.

Patil, known to cinema aficionados as 'Laxman' of the composer duo 'Raam-Laxman', started his journey in films with Marathi actor-comedian Dada Kondke's 1975 film *Pandu Hawaldar*. He composed the music for the movie with his collaborator Surendra under the name Raam-Laxman.

Surendra passed away in 1976, but Patil continued to compose under the same name, slightly changing it to Raamlaxman.

Patil took his initial lessons in music from his father and uncle. He later studied music at the Bhatkhande Shikshan Sanstha.

In his over four decades-long career, he composed music for more than 150 films in Hindi, Marathi and Bhojpuri, and worked with directors such as Manmohan Desai, Mahesh Bhatt, G.P. Sippy, Anil Ganguly and Sooraj Barjatya. Some of his other memorable works are *Agent Vinod*, *100 Days*, *Anmol*, *Tarana*, *Pathar Ke Phool*, *Hum Se Badhkar Kaun*.

## Majority mark in RS to remain elusive for BJP

Party's performance in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly poll next year is crucial to maintain its current tally



A file photo of Parliamentarians in the Rajya Sabha in New Delhi. ■ PTI

of the Rajya Sabha in the second term of the Modi government.

**Impending losses**  
Major losses for the BJP will come from Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The BJP holds three out of the four seats that go to the polls in Andhra Pradesh after four TDP MPs joined the BJP in June 2019. These three seats will go to the ruling party YSR Congress.

In Rajasthan, too, where

the BJP holds all the four seats that fall vacant in 2022, the Congress has an opportunity. Dissension is already brewing in the State, with Congress leader Sachin Pilot once again raising the flag of rebellion. If the Congress is able to maintain order in its House, it could gain three seats in the Rajya Sabha. In Chhattisgarh, the BJP will lose one seat in the Rajya Sabha elections slated for June next year.

The BJP will gain one seat

each in Assam and Himachal Pradesh next June.

This makes Uttar Pradesh crucial for the BJP's strength in the Upper House. In July next year, 11 seats from Uttar Pradesh will fall vacant. As per the current tally, the BJP holds five of these, which includes two former Samajwadi Party MPs — Sanjay Seth and Surender Singh Nagar — who shifted their loyalties midway through their term. Without repeating its 2017 performance in the State, the BJP cannot hold on to these five seats.

In Punjab, if the current anti-BJP sentiment because of the three controversial farm laws prevails till the polls, the BJP will lose one seat. The BJP allies will also be affected — the AIADMK strength is expected to be curtailed after its defeat in the recent Assembly poll in Tamil Nadu. Currently, the AIADMK has six members and its political adversary, the DMK, seven.

The three RS seats from

the State that are currently vacant are expected to go to the polls any time soon. The DMK will win two of these three. In June next year, four Upper House seats from the State go to the polls. Out of these four, currently the DMK and the AIADMK have two each. DMK insiders sounded confident that they will easily win three of these. On the balance, the DMK is expected to go into double digits, outstripping the AIADMK.

There will be no significant change in the current Congress strength of 34, though it is expected to make gains in Rajasthan (3) and Chhattisgarh (1) on the basis of its current strength in the State Assemblies. It will lose one seat each from Assam, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. In Assam, two seats are falling vacant in April next year, including that of the current State unit President Ripun Bora. Out of these two, the Congress can hope to retain one.

## 'Age no barrier for students to foray into robotics'

It is not just fun but a necessity, point out experts

MADHUVANTI S. KRISHNAN  
CHENNAI

The SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST), in association with *The Hindu*, hosted two webinars yesterday, as part of the SRM Virtual Conclave for Career Guidance 2021.

The first, A Career in Robotics: Current Trends and Future Prospects, was moderated by Anand Venkateswaran. Opening the session, Prof. Sanjay Goel, Director, Institute of Engineering and Technology, JK Lakshmi Patel University, Jaipur, pointed out that robotics is not just fun, but a necessity. "We have a larger population that needs a better quality of life at a cheaper rate. If we want to be globally competitive

and relevant, we will have to adapt to this technology," he said, adding that robotics is becoming relevant in fields such as Farming, Healthcare, and Education.

Sneha Priya, co-founder and CEO, SP Robotics Work spoke about her foray into the field and said that there was no age barrier for students to take the plunge. Children of 12 years can be taught a mix of the mechanical, electronic, and programming aspects. "We expose kids to Robotics, AI, virtual reality, and programming to not only help them master their field of interest but also choose it."

One of the preferred ways of learning Robotics is through Mechatronics Engineering, which is an interdisciplinary and concurrent approach of designing systems, said R. Senthilnathan, Associate Professor, Department

of Mechatronics Engineering, SRMIST. He advised students who wanted to study Robotics to look for institutes with laboratory infrastructure, faculty who are roboticists, interdisciplinary curriculum that emphasised lab practice, student-driven robotics club, participation in competitions, and entrepreneurship incubation facilities among others.

The second session on Challenges for Entrepreneurship in the New Normal, moderated by Yashavini Rajeshwar, discussed upcoming trends and opportunities. Siddharth Chaturvedi, Executive VP, AISECT

Group, emphasised the importance of teaching entrepreneurship in school, as it helps hone collaborative and public-speaking skills, collect and analyse data, use social media as an advocacy tool, and solve complex problems that don't have a definitive answer. "Promote entrepreneurship culture in and around the campus by providing multiple platforms to budding entrepreneurs to improve upon their business models and be mentored by successful entrepreneurs," he urged.

Drawing from his own experiences, Hari Krishnan Nair, co-founder, Great Learning, stressed that this was the age of opportunity. "Entrepreneurship is a marathon, not a sprint. There are no shortcuts and overnight successes. You cannot do it by yourself. Teams build great companies; not

individuals. Apart from family, friends, look for existing support ecosystems such as technology cells, incubation centres, etc."

Ananth Kumar, VP, SRM Innovation and Incubation Centre, emphasised that failure was an integral part of entrepreneurship. Despite the many stories of school dropouts making it big, he said that formal education was important.

Whether learning happens online or offline, it will help reduce assumptions about the field. Take systematic steps with well-defined processes. Be open to asking for help to address concerns," he advised.

Both sessions ended with speakers taking questions from the audience.

Those who missed the webinars can view them at <https://bit.ly/2Rxvms> and <https://bit.ly/2SiROjn>.

## Pandemic-hit UPSC aspirants seek one more chance

Two groups of age-barred candidates approach Supreme Court for relief

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

Civil services aspirants, whose final attempt at the elite exams in 2020 was affected by the pandemic, have approached the Supreme Court again for a chance this year, citing the "most exceptional circumstances".

Two categories of UPSC aspirants have moved the apex court separately. The first are candidates who were unable to appear in the exam and take their last attempt," writ petitions filed by these aspirants, represented by advocate Samar Vijay Singh, said.

uation and lockdown. "The exam was scheduled to happen on October 4, 2020. However, on the day of exam they were directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, on account of the restrictive protocols and guidelines given by the State, which included mandatory quarantine, etc., the petitioners were unable to appear in the exam and take their last attempt,"

writ petitions filed by these aspirants, represented by advocate Samar Vijay Singh, said. A Bench led by Justice

A Bench on April 19 asked petitioners to serve copy of their pleas to the government side. A.M. Khanwilkar, on April 19, had asked these petitioners to serve an advance copy of their pleas to the government side through the central agency of the apex court.

The second group are aspirants, represented by advocate Ashutosh Ghade, who managed to take the exam on October 4.

In an intervention application before the apex court, they submitted that their preparation and final attempt at the exam in 2020 was severely affected by the pandemic. The four applicants led by Dr. Vishnu Shivaji Bulbule, a medical doctor based in Pune, said they had taken the civil services exam even as they worked in the frontlines of the pandemic as 'Corona warriors'.

They said while most aspirants had the luxury of another chance at the civil services exam and could afford to miss the 2020 one, last attempts, who had dreamed of joining the services to serve the country, were compelled to risk their health during the pandemic

CM

YK

and take the exam on October 4.

They have sought an "extra attempt in addition to their permissible attempts, so as to enable them to appear in the Civil Services Examination (CSE) for the year 2021-2022".

The aspirants have highlighted how the Supreme Court in an order on September 30 last year had asked the government to consider giving the last attempts of 2020, who would be age-barred in 2021, a one-time age relaxation for appearing in CSE-2021. They said the government and UPSC had not



## IN BRIEF



'Pause release of PM Kisan funds to Bengal'

KOLKATA  
West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging the Centre not to release any funds under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi without proper checking and verification of data approved by the State. "The beneficiary list verified by the State Government needs thorough checking & verification at the level of Union Government so that any genuine beneficiary is not excluded from the benefits," Mr. Ghosh said in a letter to the Prime Minister.

## NIA chargesheet against three Hizb militants

SRINAGAR  
The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday filed a chargesheet against three Hizbul Mujahideen militants for "providing logistics support and organising shelter for the terrorists involved in multiple terrorist incidents" in the Chenab Valley. An NIA spokesman said the chargesheet was filed before a special NIA court, Jammu, in a case related to the snatching of service weapon of the escort in-charge of the Deputy Commissioner, Kishtwar, in 2019.

## Workplace vaccination drive to be expanded

NEW DELHI  
The Centre on Saturday said that the vaccination drive at workplaces could be extended to all employees as well as their dependants and family members. The notification, issued by Vikas Sheel, Additional Secretary, National Health Mission, Health Ministry, stated that for vaccinating beneficiaries in industrial and private vaccination centres, the vaccine doses would have to be procured by private hospitals with which the employers tie up for the inoculation drive.

## Air India data breach may pose legal risk

Experts say the airline could face litigation, and there could be delays in the privatisation process

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The breach of passenger data at Air India may pose litigation risks for the airline that could further delay the privatisation process, warn experts, adding that the national carrier must prioritise efforts to contain the damage from the cyber attack by informing passengers about steps they can still take to prevent fraud.

In a press statement, the airline said that its passenger processing system, supplied by multi-national information technology company SITA, was a target of a sophisticated cyber attack on February 25. Nearly 45 lakh "data subjects" registered over a period of 10 years between August 2011 to February 2021 were affected around the world, including passengers of other airlines such as Singapore Airlines, Lufthansa, Cathay Pacific, United Airlines, among others.

The extent to which individual airlines were affected due to the cyber attack varied from one airline to another. Some airlines wrote to their passengers saying only passenger names and frequent flyer numbers were stolen. In the case of Air India, the theft pertained to "name, date of birth, contact information, passport information, ticket information, Star Alliance and Air India



Safety steps: Air India has said that it is investigating the data breach and taking security measures. ■ FILE PHOTO

frequent flyer data (but no passwords data were affected) as well as credit cards data (but no CVV data)."

## Note of caution

Experts recommend that Air India must prioritise alerting its customers and asking them to take specific preventive steps, says Sanchit Gogia, Founder, Greyhound Research.

"The focus ought to be on remedial and protective measures rather than on investigation alone. Air India should be releasing a public advisory either through e-

mails or SMSes asking customers to beware of dubious emails, SMSes or calls. Customers must be told to change their passwords and credit and debit cards immediately. This will go a long way in instilling confidence," says Mr. Gogia.

At the same time, there is no need to panic. "There is nothing much a hacker can do just by having a passport number in isolation. If you have safeguarded your email ids, and changed passwords, these measures will go a long way in curbing the steps to hack you."

So far, Air India has issued a notification on its websites for its passengers urging them to change their passwords.

The airline has said that it is investigating the data security incident and taking steps to secure the compromised servers besides engaging external specialists of data security incidents and liaising with credit card issuers.

In response to an e-mail query, SITA said on Saturday, "By global and industry standards, we identified this cyber-attack extremely quickly. The matter remains under active investigation by SITA. Each affected airline has been provided with the details of the exact type of data that has been compromised, including details of the number of data records within each of the relevant data categories, including some personal data of airline passengers."

## Narasimhan, math scientist, is no more

He won the Padma Bhushan in 1990

SUBASHREE DESIKAN  
CHENNAI

Mudumbai Seshachulu Narasimhan, a towering figure in Indian science, passed away on May 15 in Bengaluru; he would have turned 89 on June 7.

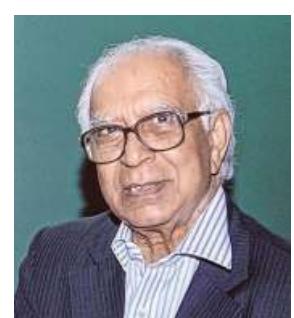
He was a world-renowned mathematician of extraordinary breadth and depth, who made fundamental contributions to diverse fields in mathematics such as algebraic geometry, differential geometry, representation theory and partial differential equations.

Born in 1932 in a family of agriculturalists in Tandarai village in northern Tamil Nadu, Narasimhan had a keen interest in mathematics from his school days. In an interview with mathematician Sujatha Ramdorai for *Asia Pacific Mathematics Newsletter*, he said that when he was 12, he was fascinated by Euclid and solving "riders," thinking for oneself.

When asked about the moments he cherished in his life, his answer was: "The best moments, I think, were the times I spent as a student with Father Racine, K. Chandrasekharan and L. Schwartz, which shaped my approach to mathematics and my mathematics career."

In Loyola College, Chennai, Father Racine, a Jesuit priest and a student of Elie Cartan, noticed the talent of young Narasimhan and asked him to take up higher studies in mathematics at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) in Mumbai, where a school of mathematics had just been founded by K. Chandrasekharan.

Narasimhan went to TIFR for his PhD in 1953 and among his co-students was C.S. Seshadri, with whom he went on to collaborate closely. Narasimhan and



Seshadri shot to fame in 1965 with the publication of the Narasimhan-Seshadri theorem, which makes a deep and unexpected connection between two different areas of modern mathematics.

This and the Harder-Narasimhan filtration (which was discovered later with German mathematician G. Harder) have been generalised and stand as fundamental examples of paradigms with wide applicability.

**TIFR career**  
Narasimhan was with the mathematics department at TIFR for the large part of his career. From 1992-1999, he was head of the Mathematics group at the International Centre for Theoretical Physics at Trieste, Italy, and then moved to Bengaluru, where he resided. He won the S.S. Bhatnagar prize in 1975, Third World Academy award for mathematics in 1987, Padma Bhushan in 1990, Fellow of the Royal Society and King Faisal International Prize for Science in 2006 (jointly with Simon Donaldson, Imperial College).

Narasimhan was married to Sakuntala Narasimhan, a musician, journalist and consumer advocate. Their daughter and physicist Shobhana Narasimhan is at JNCASR, Bengaluru, and son Mohan is a management professional in Bengaluru.

## Webinar on 'COVID-19 and children' on May 24

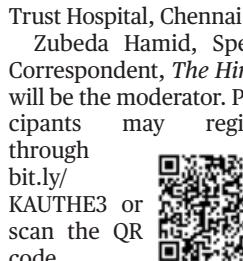
It will focus on precautions, treatment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

A webinar on "COVID-19 and children" will be hosted at 5 p.m. on May 24 as part of The Hindu Wellness series.

Presented by Kauvery Hospital, the webinar will focus on COVID-19 and its impact on children, precautions, treatment and the way forward on vaccination for children.

The panelists include D. Senguttuvan, Chief Consultant Pediatrician, and D. Suresh Chelliah, Senior Consultant Pediatrician, Kauvery Hospital, Trichy and Janani Sankar, Senior Consultant Pediatrician, Kanchi Kamakoti CHILD



Trust Hospital, Chennai.  
Zubeda Hamid, Special Correspondent, *The Hindu*, will be the moderator. Participants may register through [bit.ly/KAUTHE3](http://bit.ly/KAUTHE3) or scan the QR code.

## ULFA-I releases abducted ONGC employee in Nagaland

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I) on May 22 released an employee of the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation abducted from an oil rig in Assam a month ago.

An Army spokesperson said ONGC junior technician Rital Saikia was released at Lungwa village in Nagaland's Mon district on the India-Myanmar border. A joint team of army and State police escorted him to district headquarters Mon.

Five gunmen had abducted Mr. Saikia and two other ONGC employees from the oil rig in Charaideo district on April 21. Junior technician Mohini Mohan Gogoi



Safe at last: ONGC employee Rital Saikia being released at the border with Myanmar. ■ PTI

and junior engineering assistant Alakesh Saikia - were rescued after an encounter near the Myanmar border on April 24.

Following the encounter, the ULFA-I had said the Indian armed forces had in "all probability" killed the junior

technician. However, it transpired later that the outfit was keeping him hostage. Mr. Saikia was released two days after Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma appealed to ULFA-I "commander-in-chief" Paresh Baruah to release him.

## Odisha gears up to face cyclone Yaas

CM stresses on need to maintain COVID protocols

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha is gearing up to deploy 66 units of the State Disaster Rapid Action Force, 22 units of National Disaster Response Force and 177 fire service teams as cyclone Yaas is likely to hit the coast on May 26.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) bulletin, a low pressure area has formed over east-central Bay of Bengal on Sunday morning. The system may intensify into a cyclonic storm by May 24 (Monday) and further into a very severe cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours," says the bulletin.



Calm before the storm: Boats lined up in Puri safe from the turbulent sea and the impending cyclone. ■ PTI

sion over east-central Bay of Bengal by Sunday morning. The system may intensify into a cyclonic storm by May 24 (Monday) and further into a very severe cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours," says the bulletin.

Analysing the track of the system, the State government has forecast that 14 districts could be impacted.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik held a high level preparatory meeting attended by top officials and collectors and superintendents of police of the districts through video conferencing on Saturday.

"Odisha has expertise in managing disasters as it faces cyclone every year. The situation has got further complicated due to COVID epidemic. Considering the situation, the administration will remain fully prepared and ensure a flawless preparation process," said Mr. Patnaik.

## Hold off arrest of Param Bir Singh, says HC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Friday directed the Maharashtra government to not arrest former police commissioner Param Bir Singh till May 24 in the atrocities case filed against him.

A Division Bench of justices S.J. Kathawalla and SP Tavade heard all 61 matters listed before them till midnight and said, "Since we would cease to be vacation judges at the stroke of 12 a.m. so we adjourn the hearing to May 24."

The court was hearing a petition filed by Mr. Singh seeking to quash the FIR filed against him at Bazaar Peth Police Station Kalyan and it is also registered at Akola. The plea states, "The FIR refers to an event of 2015 and is belatedly registered after having failed to pressure him to withdraw his complaint against former home minister Anil Deshmukh."

## Control rooms and rescue shelters set up in West Bengal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday reviewed the disaster management preparedness for the impending Yaas cyclone.

"I have extensively reviewed the Disaster Management preparedness with regards to the impending Yaas cyclone today afternoon with all senior officers of relevant Central & State agencies along with DMs & SPs. All officials have been ad-

vised integrated command, advance planning & early evacuation from coastal & riverine areas to rescue shelters including cyclone & flood shelters, and to conduct relief and rehabilitation operations at the earliest," Ms. Banerjee said in a series of tweets.

The Chief Minister added that fishermen have been advised to return from the seas and pointed out that a "24x7 control rooms had been set up (Ph No - 1070 & 033-22143526)."

The low pressure that has formed over East Central Bay of Bengal is likely to concentrate into a depression over East Central Bay of Bengal, the Regional Meteorological Centre at Alipore said in a press statement on Saturday. "It is very likely to move north-northwestwards, intensify into a Cyclonic Storm by 24th May and further into a Very Severe Cyclonic Storm during the subsequent 24 hours," a statement from the Indian Meteorological Department said.

## Centre must act against Ramdev: IMA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Saturday demanded that the Health Ministry take strong action against yoga guru Ramdev for allegedly misleading the public through his statements.

In a statement, the Association said that Ramdev should be prosecuted under the Epidemic Diseases Act as "untutored" statements are "a threat to the literate society of the country as well as to the poor people falling prey to him."

"Ramdev deserves to be prosecuted for causing danger to the lives of many by making them believe to not to take the advice of allopathy doctors. If the Health Minister Harsh Vardhan is not taking suo moto action, we will be forced to resort to democratic means of struggle to propagate the truth to the common man and knock on the doors of the judiciary to get justice," the Association noted.

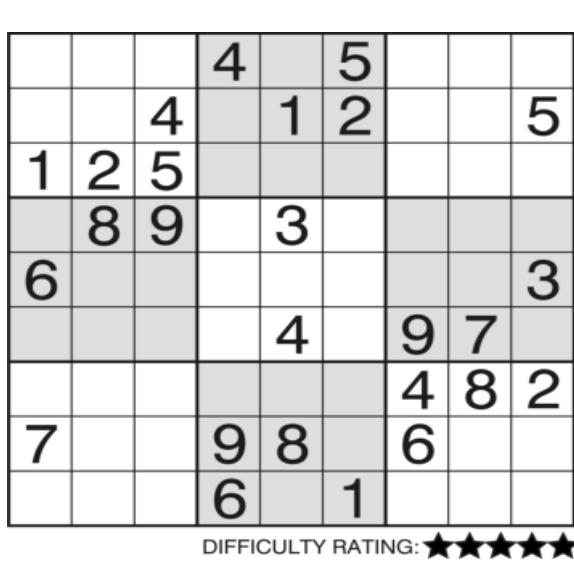
Stating that Ramdev is creating fear and frustration among the public, the IMA said that taking people for ransom and winning business by defaming scientific medicine are unpardonable offences.

The Association, citing a video circulating on social media, said Ramdev is seen saying that "allopathy ek aisi stupid aur diwaliya science hai..." (allopathy is such a stupid science)".

The yoga guru also says "lakhs of people have died after taking allopathic medicines," the Association said.

It alleged that Ramdev was trying to take advantage of the situation and is creating a sense of fear and frustration among the people at large.

## SUDOKU



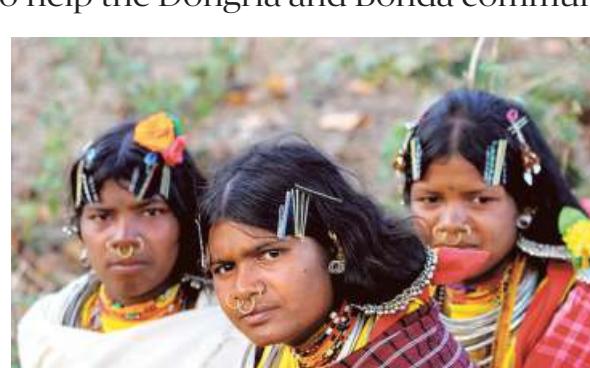
Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

2	8	5	3	9	7	6	4	1
7	6	3	2	4	1	8	5	9
9	4	1	6	5	8	3	2	7
5	7	2	1	6	9	4	3	8
3	9	8	4	7	5	2	1	6
6	1	4	8	2	3	7	9	5
1	3	7	5	8	4	9	6	2
4	2	9	7	1	6	5	8	3
8	5	6	9	3	2	1	7	4

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

## Call for action to protect Odisha tribes

Activists urge govt. to help the Dongria and Bonda communities fight COVID-19



At risk: The Dongria are a particularly vulnerable tribal group recently hit by COVID-19. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

masks, necessary medicines and vitamins.

They laid emphasis on upgradation of all primary health centres located in tribal areas on a war footing, and provisioning of manpower, medical equipment, medicines and other infrastructure.

More than 100 tribals among 10 out of 13 PVTGs have been affected by COVID-19.

Legislators of the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, too, appealed to the Odisha CM to take steps to prevent further spread of COVID-19 in tribal pockets and villages.

Meanwhile, the State Schedule Tribe and Scheduled Caste Development Department directed its field level functionaries that, in the absence of proper quarantine facilities at home for PVTGs

# Nepal's Opposition plans to approach SC

Leaders vow to counter President's 'unconstitutional and undemocratic' move to dissolve Parliament

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KATHMANDU

Nepal's President dissolved the House of Representatives on Saturday for the second time in five months and announced snap elections in November, rejecting both embattled Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and the Opposition alliance's claims to form a government, a move that will be legally challenged yet again.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari announced in an early morning statement that the House of Representatives has been dissolved in accordance with Article 76 (7) of the Constitution, ending a day of high-voltage political drama in the Himalayan nation, amidst the raging COVID-19 pandemic.

As per the Article, a date to conduct another election within six months must also be fixed. The President has called early elections pursuant to the Article, the dates



**Uncertainty ahead:** A file photo of K.P. Sharma Oli. ■ AP

being set for November 12 and November 19.

The announcement came after Prime Minister Oli in his last deal-sealing move on Friday midnight recommended the Office of the President to dissolve the 275-member House and announce dates for early elections.

Earlier, Mr. Oli and Opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba had staked separate

claims to premiership, both of which were rejected by the President, citing that none had adequate grounds for winning a vote of confidence.

"It has been noted that Prime Minister Oli counted those lawmakers as his supporters who extended support to the Opposition alliance, whereas the UML and JSP-N have forwarded letters stating action would be ta-

ken against those who had gone against the party to endorse the Opposition's claim," Ms. Bhandari said in a statement late on Friday.

The President's announcement plunged Nepal into further political crisis, a reminder of her December 2020 decision when she first dissolved the House at Mr. Oli's recommendation, a move that swayed the course of Nepali politics towards uncertainty.

The Supreme Court had annulled the duo's move in February.

Alarmed by the move yet again, the leaders of Nepal's Opposition alliance on Saturday decided to take all legal and political means to counter Prime Minister Oli and President Bhandari's "unconstitutional and undemocratic" move of dissolving the House.

In a joint statement issued at the end of a meeting called to discuss the matter, the Op-

position leaders expressed their commitment to "defend the constitutional rights of Nepali citizens achieved at the end of years of political struggle."

They appealed to all political and civil forces to condemn and stand against the Oli-Bhandari duo's "regressive, autocratic intentions". They condemned their move as "unconstitutional, undemocratic and arbitrary." The statement was signed by Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, CPN-Maoist Centre Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', CPNL leader Madhav Kumar Nepal, Chairperson of Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal Upendra Yadav and Vice-Chair of the Rastriya Jana-morcha Durga Paudel.

The Opposition alliance is devising a strategy to approach the Supreme Court with all its lawmakers on Sunday demanding to scrap the President's decision.

Saturday marked the first full day of a truce that ended the fourth Israel-Hamas war in just over a decade. In the fighting, Israel unleashed hundreds of airstrikes against militant targets in Gaza, while Hamas and other militants fired more than 4,000 rockets toward Israel.

More than 250 people were killed, the vast majority of them Palestinians.

Gaza City's busiest commercial area, Omar al-Muktar Street, was covered in debris, smashed cars and twisted metal.

A Palestinian official said an initial assessment showed at least 2,000 housing units were destroyed in the 11-day fighting. Naji Sarhan, deputy of Gaza's works and housing ministry, said that more than 15,000 other units were partly destroyed.

"We really didn't expect this amount of damage," said Ashour Sabeih, who oversees autonomous enclaves in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Hamas' popularity seemed to be growing as it positioned itself as a defender of Palestinian claims to Jerusalem.

The war has further sidelined Hamas' political rival, the internationally backed Palestinian Authority, which oversaw autonomous enclaves in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Hamas' popularity seemed to be growing as it positioned itself as a defender of Palestinian claims to Jerusalem.

The fighting began on May 10, when Hamas militants in Gaza fired rockets toward Jerusalem. The barrage came after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Heavy-handed police tactics at the compound and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers had inflamed tensions.

Mr. Abbas met on Saturday with Egyptian mediators, discussing the rebuilding of Gaza and internal Palestinian relations, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

An Egyptian diplomat said on Saturday that two teams of mediators are in Israel and the Palestinian territories to continue talks on firming up a ceasefire deal and security long-term calm.

The diplomat said discussions include implementing agreed-on measures.

Separately, a 130-truck convoy with humanitarian aid and medical supplies reached Gaza from Egypt on Saturday, according to a senior Egyptian official.

Over 2,000 housing units destroyed, says Palestinian official



**Show of strength:** Hamas members taking part in an anti-Israel rally in Gaza City on Saturday. ■ REUTERS

"The people want the president to leave."

Despite his weakened status, Mr. Abbas will be the point of contact for any renewed U.S. diplomacy, since Israel and the West, including the U.S., consider Hamas a terrorist organisation.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is to meet with Mr. Abbas and Israeli leaders when he visits in the coming week. Mr. Abbas is expected to raise demands that any Gaza reconstruction plans go through the Palestinian Authority to avoid strengthening Hamas.

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# Junta threatens to dissolve NLD over 'election fraud'

General will continue at helm after June as the military removes mandatory retirement age: reports

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

YANGON

Myanmar's junta has threatened to dissolve the political party of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi over alleged voter fraud in the 2020 election, an official said.

Union Election Commission chair Thein Soe said on Friday the investigation into November's election result was almost complete.

"What shall we do with the (National League for Democracy) party that (acted) illegally? Should we dissolve the party or charge those who committed this (illegal activity) as traitors of the nation? We will analyse and



Gen. Min Aung Hlaing

would allow Min Aung Hlaing to continue serving once he turns 65 this July.

On Thursday, local media reported the junta had removed a mandatory retirement age for generals, which

died as the military moved to crack down on protesters and dissent.

The coup and its aftermath have also seen a spike in clashes between the military and Myanmar's numerous ethnic rebel armies, sending tens of thousands of civilians fleeing their homes.

Ms. Suu Kyi was subsequently hit with a series of criminal charges, and her legal team has faced an uphill battle to get a private audience with their client.

The charges include flouting COVID-19 restrictions during last year's election campaign and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies.

The most serious charge alleges that she violated the country's colonial-era Official Secrets Act.

Ms. Suu Kyi is expected to appear in person in court Monday for the first time, after weeks of delays with her legal case.

NLD secured an absolute majority in Myanmar's election in November, in a poll disputed by the military-aligned opposition.

The Asian Network for Free Elections monitoring group has said "the results of the 2020 general elections were, by and large, representative of the will of the people of Myanmar."

We really didn't expect this amount of damage," said Ashour Sabeih, who oversees autonomous enclaves in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Having been in business for one year, Mr. Sabeih estimated his losses were double what he has made so far.

**Sticking points**

Both Israel and Hamas have claimed victory. There was a widespread expectation that the ceasefire would stick for now, but that another round of fighting at some point seems inevitable. Underlying issues remain unresolved.

**In Sri Lanka, Mandarin kicks up a row**

A plaque at a new library compound with Mandarin in the text triggers an uproar

MEERA SRINIVASAN

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's Attorney General's Department on Saturday removed a plaque at a recently opened library on its premises following social media uproar over the omission of Tamil, an official language, while including Mandarin in the text.

"The plaque made to declare open the Smart Library of the AG's Department, by an inadvertent omission did not contain the script in Tamil language, has been removed now and is being replaced with a new plaque," the public prosecutor's spokesperson said. The development comes following considerable Twitter backlash from users who shared the picture of the Attorney General - along with the Chinese Ambassador - unveiling the plaque, with text in Sinhala, English, and Mandarin. They questioned the exclusion of Tamil. Prominent Tamil legislators too raised the issue on social media.

Many in Sri Lanka see the

omission of Tamil in official signage as a reflection of the historic discrimination against the minority community, beginning with the infamous 'Sinhala Only Act' of 1956, one of the root causes of the country's more than three decade-old ethnic conflict. It was only after the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1987 that Tamil was also accorded the status of an official language. Despite the law, residents of the Tamil-majority north and east, and elsewhere, frequently point to the absence of Tamil in police stations and some government offices. "Exclusion of Tamil is certainly not new!" Tamil legislator M.A. Sumanthiran tweeted on Saturday.

Meanwhile, some Twitter users in Sri Lanka, including lawyers and journalists, questioned the inclusion of Mandarin in official signage. Responding to a journalist, the Chinese Embassy said: "It's an internal E-Library in the AG's Department, funded by the Government and

People of China. Chinese language is displayed as a kind gesture towards China, which is highly appreciated."

This was the second instance of the Chinese mission responding to tweets flagging Mandarin text in sign boards. Last week, Batticaloa MP Shanakiran Rasamickam shared on Twitter an image of a sign board of the 'Central Park' coming up at the China-backed Colombo Port City, with text in Sinhala, English and Mandarin, and said: "Tamil text is missing, that's alright! Soon Sinhala will be missing too. Hope Sri Lankans wake up at least then."

**Trilingual rules**  
The Embassy said in a tweet on the same day: "We noticed an interim sign in a JV building site not abiding by trilingual rules. Request raised. We respect all 3 official languages in Sri Lanka, and urge China companies to follow," sharing images of other Chinese-built structures that also included Ta-

mil text in their name boards. Mr. Rasamanickam said "the cat is really out of the bag". "The Chinese gov decides what goes on nameboards in SL...this really indicates how little control the SL Gov has over the situation," he tweeted. The MP also vehemently opposed the recently passed law governing the Port City and said the country had become "China".

Weighing in on the developments, Tamil Progressive Alliance leader and opposition parliamentarian Mano Ganesan said in a tweet that by dropping Tamil, the Chinese are "violating language law". In a subsequent tweet, he said the Chinese Embassy told him that the Board [at the Port City] was an old one and has been removed. "It appears Chinese learn to ignore Tamil from our Govt since GoSL's usage of Official Language Tamil is no better," said the MP, a former cabinet Minister for National Co-existence, Dialogue and Official Languages.

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His "new hybrid rice technology not only benefited China, but was also enthusiastically adopted in other

countries," read the citation from the World Food Prize Foundation, noting that "he and his research associates traveled to India, Vietnam, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the United States to provide advice and consultation to rice research personnel" and trained over 3,000 scientists from more than 50 countries.

Farmers around the world have benefitted from his techniques as hybrid rice spread throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas," the foundation said, adding that "the impact of Yuan's ingenuity has been felt beyond China's rice industry" as producers of other crops "successfully used the two-line breeding system for rice to explore similar systems for hybrid sorghum and rape-seed with increased yields."

His desire to experiment with rice was borne out of hardship. In 1960, when he was 30 years old, China was in the midst of a famine unleashed by Mao Zedong's

Yuan Longping's works revolutionised agriculture and ensured food security



Yuan Longping

"Great Leap Forward" policy in 1958 that devastated the agriculture sector and led to mass starvation and the deaths of millions.

**Stirred into action**  
"On a day in 1960, Yuan went outside of the school and came across two scrawny corpses lying on the side of the street," he once told State broadcaster CCTV. "The frames were so thin that they looked like skin being wrapped on skeletons. The scene deeply stirred Yuan, who felt that he must do something." Mr. Yuan told the channel, "Something as small as a grain can save a country, while it can also make a country fall."

China's rice production "rose by 47.5% by the 1990s, even as some five million hectares of erstwhile paddy land was shifted to cash crops such as vegetables, fruits, cotton, and rape-seed," said the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, which honoured him with a prize in 2001, adding that "as much as half of China's rice land is planted to Yuan's hybrids."



Singers Dhee and Arivu, right, in the 'Enjoy Enjaami' poster. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to learn about the struggles of this community, she recalls.

"I studied in Bengaluru for three years from 2008. The final war was raging [in Sri Lanka] and Tamil people in India were following it closely. At that time and even la-

ter, I noticed that whenever I raised the issue of Malaiyaha Tamils, they were not receptive. It was all about 'Jaffna Tamils,'" she says.

In her view, this was just another manifestation of the "indifference" to the community's concerns seen within Sri Lanka as well. "Tamils of the north and east tend to look down upon our people. Even if you look at Malaiyaha Tamils who migrated to the north and east, they face discrimination when it comes to land rights and housing."

Brought to Sri Lanka by the British to work in tea estates located in the country's scenic hill country, the Malaiyaha Tamil community's history is one of braving discrimination and oppression through two centuries, till

date. They were disenfranchised, rendered stateless, denied basic rights and yet, the 1.5-lakh estate workers, from the million-strong community, continue to toil in estates, fighting for fair wages and decent living conditions.

**Different struggles**  
It was not only the social hierarchy of different groups of minority Tamils within the island nation that relegated the Malaiyaha Tamils' issues to the background, but also one of politics, Ms. Muthulingham notes. "Whether it is here or in Tamil Nadu, an economic struggle is not considered as heroic a struggle as the one for civil and political rights," she says.

Arivu, in his talk, foregrounded the politics of

Tamils and their lives, but popular culture can have a wider reach, as Arivu and Dhee's song has shown, Mr. Thilakarajah says. "Enjoy Enjaami has a massive hit and with the fame it has brought, Arivu has been trying to advance his progressive politics, which is very commendable. The reference to Valliamma is significant, but for the stories of those like her, and of those who stayed back in Sri Lanka to come out in some detail, we need a full-length film on a character like that."

Telling such a story will also offer scope to zoom into how caste played out within Sri Lanka and among those who returned to India. "I feel there's a good film waiting to be made."

# 'Enjoy Enjaami' a welcome start, say Sri Lanka's Malaiyaha Tamils

'A spark' that could lead to greater awareness of Tamil community's

## SNAPSHOTS

**Tough fish**

Using genome sequences, researchers from McGill University have shown that the three-spined stickleback, can adapt to extreme climatic changes. Climate change is leading to habitat loss and temperature swings, and this finding can help scientists map out the population's evolutionary future. The group found the fishes rapidly adapted to changes happening in real time.

**Celestial history**

The merging of the Milky Way with a satellite galaxy Gaia-Enceladus is very significant in the Milky Way's history. Now, by estimating the ages of a bunch of red giants in our galaxy, researchers were able to show that this merger took place some ten billion years ago. By then, the Milky Way already had its own stars at the centre and those from the merger occupied the edges. This work was published in *Nature Astronomy*.

# Serum's supply to COVAX hit by India's poor planning

Serum Institute now has a hope of starting to deliver vaccines to the COVAX facility and other countries only by the year end

R. PRASAD

On August 15, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said three COVID-19 vaccines are in different stages of testing and that India is "ready with a plan for production" and has a roadmap ready to distribute the vaccines to "every Indian in the least amount of time". The Indian regulatory agency granted restricted use approval to Covishield and Covaxin on January 2 and January 3, 2021, respectively.

On August 7, a week before Mr. Modi's announcement, the Pune-based Serum Institute signed an agreement with GAVI and Gates Foundation to manufacture and deliver up to 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines for low- and middle-income countries as early as the first half of 2021. The supply was meant to be made to the COVAX facility.

On September 29, 2020, Serum Institute pledged to manufacture and deliver an additional 100 million doses, bringing the total number of doses to be delivered to the COVAX facility to 200 million, with an option to produce more.

To ensure assured supply of 200 million vaccine doses, the Gates Foundation provided \$300 million of "at-risk funding" to Serum Institute.

This came in two tranches of \$150 million when supply of 100 million doses was sealed and then an additional \$150 million funding in September 2020 when Serum agreed to supply 100 million more doses to the collaboration.

As per data shared by the government, Serum has exported 66.2 million doses to 95 countries as on April 21. Of these, only a paltry 19.8 million doses were supplied to COVAX. India gave away 10.7 million doses to 48 countries as a grant, while Serum sold 35.7 million doses to other countries as part of commercial contracts.

**Export ban issue**

But with the second wave raging across the country, India has stopped Serum from exporting vaccines either to the COVAX facility or to individual countries as part of the bilateral agreements already signed by Serum. The government has instead directed the company to make the vaccines available to Indians on priority.

On April 2, Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi clarified on the export ban issue. "Till now, we have supplied vaccines to more than 80 countries across the world and we

have already stated that our external supplies would be done keeping in mind our domestic requirements," Mr. Bagchi said. He then added: "At this time, I hope our partners understand that vaccines are primarily purposed for domestic consumption. I want to emphasize that we have not imposed any export ban on vaccines."

But contrary to the claims made by the government, on May 11, Serum was stopped from exporting five million doses to the U.K. despite an agreement with AstraZeneca in this regard. These doses

were to be used for vaccinating adults aged 18-44 years in India.

**Balancing needs**

Even on February 21, just days after cases started surging in Maharashtra, Serum gave the first indication that it would not be able to meet its global commitment of supplying 200 million doses to the COVAX facility by the first half of 2021. Adar Poonawalla, CEO of Serum tweeted:

"Dear countries & governments, as you await Covishield supplies, I humbly request you to please be patient, Serum Institute has

been directed to prioritise the huge needs of India and along with that balance the needs of the rest of the world. We are trying our best."

On April 7, Mr. Poonawalla was optimistic of resuming exports by June if the second wave waned quickly. But with the second wave appearing to have peaked just a few days ago, at least in a few States, Serum is going to miss the June target date too.

Going by a statement released on May 18, Mr. Poonawalla has been forced to shift the goalpost for exports once again. "We continue to scale

up manufacturing and prioritise India. We also hope to start delivering to COVAX and other countries by the end of this year," he said.

While the U.S. provided billions of dollars in funding to each vaccine manufacturer right in the beginning of vaccine development and testing and is now ensuring that it has enough vaccines to immunise 70% of adults by July 4, India provided funding only in April this year.

**Inordinate delay**

Only on April 19 did the government approve ₹3,000 crore in funding to Serum Institute

to carry out its agreement with COVAX

With Serum Institute's capacity to manufacture only 60-65 million doses per month and that of Bharat Biotech of about 10 million per month, completion of a large-scale expansion of production capacities months ago was essential if all the 300 million were to be vaccinated by July.

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With nearly 600 million more adults aged 18-44 now eligible for a vaccine, and any expansion of capacity likely to take a couple of more months, it is not sure when Serum Institute will even be able to meet its obligation towards COVAX and bilateral agreements.

Despite appropriating all

**Vaccine bottleneck**

Serum Institute has faced several obstacles to carrying out its agreement with COVAX



**Inordinate delays:** Only on April 19 did the government approve ₹3,000 crore in funding to Serum Institute

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With the second wave appearing to have peaked just a few days ago, at least in a few States, Serum may miss the June target date too.

## COVID-19 could become like common cold in future, study suggests

Over a decade, severity may decrease as populations collectively get immunity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The novel coronavirus responsible for COVID-19 could cause no more than common cold-like coughs and sniffles within the next decade, according to a study. The research, published in the journal *Viruses*, makes this likely prediction based on mathematical models that incorporate lessons learned from the current pandemic on how our body's immunity changes over time. "This shows a possible future that has not yet been fully addressed," said Fred Adler, a professor of mathematics and biological sciences at the University of Utah in the US. "Over the next decade, the severity of COVID-19 may decrease as populations collectively develop immunity," Adler said.

The study suggests that changes in the disease could be driven by adaptations of our immune response rather than by changes in the virus itself. Although the SARS-CoV-2 virus is the best-known member of the family, other seasonal coronaviruses circulate in the human



**Cold comfort:** A cold-causing relative of SARS-CoV-2 might have once been severe, giving rise to the 'Russian flu' pandemic in the late nineteenth century. • GETTY IMAGES

population, and they are less dangerous.

**The 'Russian flu'**

The researchers noted that some evidence indicates that one of these cold-causing relatives might have once been severe, giving rise to the "Russian flu" pandemic in the late nineteenth century. The parallels led the scientists to wonder whether the severity of SARS-CoV-2 could similarly lessen over time.

They built mathematical models incorporating evidence on the body's immune response to SARS-CoV-2. Analysing several scenarios and their versions set

up a situation where an increasing proportion of the population will become predisposed to mild disease over the long term.

"In the beginning of the pandemic, no one had seen the virus before. Our immune system was not prepared," Adler explained.

The models show that as more adults become partially immune, whether through prior infection or vaccination, severe infections all but disappear over the next decade, the researchers said.

Eventually, the only people who will be exposed to the virus for the first time will be children who are naturally less prone to severe disease, they said.

"The novel approach here is to recognise the competition taking place between mild and severe COVID-19 infections and ask which type will get to persist in the long run," said Alexander Beams, study first author and graduate student at University of Utah.

"We have shown that mild infections will win, as long as they train our immune systems to fight against severe infections," Beams said.

**New variants**

However, the researchers noted that the models do not account for every potential influence on disease trajectory. For instance, if new virus variants overcome partial immunity, COVID-19 could take a turn for the worse, they said.

The team also noted that these predictions will hold up only if the key assumptions of the models hold up.

"Our next step is comparing our model predictions with the most current disease data to assess which way the pandemic is going as it is happening," Adler added.

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A health worker collecting a swab sample of a person to test for COVID-19, in Mumbai on April 22. • PTI

## Identifying mutants

Why is genome sequencing crucial to track SARS-CoV-2 variants and has the Centre done enough?

JACOB KOSHY

**The story so far:** In early March, members of the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG), an advisory group to the Central government, warned of a new and contagious form of the novel coronavirus. Last week, Shahid Jameel, eminent virologist and head of INSACOG, resigned from his post unexpectedly. Though he did not cite the reasons for his exit, Dr. Jameel has been a critic of aspects of the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on data sharing, the emergence of new variants and their role in the second wave of infections.

### What is INSACOG?

INSACOG is a consortium of 10 labs across the country tasked with scanning COVID-19 samples from swathes of patients and flagging the presence of variants that were known to have spiked transmission internationally. It has also been tasked with checking whether certain combinations of mutations were becoming more widespread in India. Some of these labs had begun scanning for mutations in April 2020 itself, but it was not a pan-India effort. The institutes involved were those with expertise in genome sequencing and included laboratories of the Department of Biotechnology, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW). The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) under the MoHFW was tasked with coordinating collection of samples from the States as well correlating disease with the mutations. The work began in January by sequencing samples of people who had a history of travel from the United Kingdom and a proportion of positive samples in the community.

**What are the findings?**  
The aim of INSACOG was to sequence at least 5% of novel coronavirus samples. It has managed to study only 1%, primarily due to a shortage of funds and insufficient reagents and tools necessary to rapidly scale up the process

identified in India that were clubbed into a family of inter-related variants called B.1.617, also known as the 'double mutant' variant, primarily due to two mutations – E484Q and L452R – on the spike protein. These have been individually identified elsewhere but not together. However, there are many more mutations that contribute in different measures, in ways not fully understood, to the virus being able to adapt to human hosts.

The B.1.617 family was marked as an international 'variant of concern' after it was linked to a recent spike in cases in the United Kingdom. In March, it was linked to a spurt in cases in Maharashtra. But there is no evidence yet to show that the variant is associated with increased disease severity. INSACOG labs also found that the B.1.1.7 variant, which is marked by increased infectivity, is distinctly more prevalent in several northern and central Indian States in comparison to southern States.

### Beyond identifying patterns, why is genome sequencing useful?

The purpose of genome sequencing is to understand the role of certain mutations in increasing the virus's infectivity. Some mutations have also been linked to immune escape, or the virus's ability to evade antibodies, and this has consequences for vaccines.

Labs across the world, including many in India, have been studying if the vaccines developed so far are effective against such mutant strains of the virus. They do this by extracting the virus from COVID-19-positive samples and growing enough of it. Then, blood serum from people who are vaccinated, and thereby have antibodies, is drawn. Using different probes, scientists determine how much of the antibodies thus extracted are required to kill a portion of the cultured virus. In general, the antibodies generated after vaccination – and this was true of Covaxin, Covishield, Pfizer and Moderna jabs – were able to neutralise variants. However, there were fewer antibodies produced against the South African, Brazil and the 'double mutant' variant.

Antibody levels are not the only markers of protection and there is a parallel network of cellular immunity that plays a critical role in how vaccines activate immunity. The current evidence for most COVID-19 vaccines is that they have almost 75% to 90% efficacy in protecting against disease but less so in preventing re-infection and transmission.

**What are the challenges being faced by INSACOG?**  
Given that the novel coronavirus is spreading, mutating and showing geographical variations, the aim of the group was to sequence at least 5% of the samples. For many reasons, this has so far been only around 1%, primarily due to a shortage of funds and insufficient reagents and tools necessary to scale up the process.

While some of these issues can be explained as teething troubles, the INSACOG, in spite of being peopled by expert scientists, is ultimately an advisory group to the Central government and part of its communication structure. Warnings about emerging variants were not made public with sufficient urgency and the sharing of datasets, even within constituent groups of the INSACOG, was less than ideal.

# A jobs crisis in the second wave of COVID-19

How will the bleak employment conditions impact the recovery prospects of the Indian economy?

K. BHARAT KUMAR

**The story so far:** Hit by a relentless second wave of COVID-19 infections, India has seen localised lockdowns across several States. With activity restrained, job losses have climbed. This has dampened family incomes and consumer sentiment, setting the stage for lower-than-anticipated economic growth and belying the nation's hopes of racing back to activity this year on a low base last year.

### How have lockdowns affected jobs?

Among the first effects felt from a region's lockdown is the loss of jobs. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the unemployment rate was 6.5% in March but rose to around 8% in April, the month when several States began to prepare for or had already imposed lockdowns. With 73.5 lakh job losses in April, the number of employees (both salaried and non-salaried) fell from 39.81 crore in March to 39.08 crore in April for the third straight month. In April 2020, which was the first full month of the national lockdown last year, the unemployment rate had zoomed to 23.5%.

### What do the data indicate about unemployment in rural and urban areas?

At 7.13%, the rural unemployment rate for April 2021 is lower than the urban figure of 9.8%. The month of May has seen the rates rise further at the national level. As of May 21, the 30-day moving average for overall unemployment was 10.3%, with the relevant figures for urban and rural areas at 12.2% and 9.4%, respectively.

The labour participation rate (LPR) for April 2021, at 40%, remained lower than the levels seen before last year's lockdown. Labour participation helps measure the section of the population that is willing to take on jobs. Unemployment is a subset, which helps in giving a measure of those who are willing to take on jobs but are not employed.

Women tend to face a double challenge, with lower labour participation and a higher unemployment rate for females compared with males (for ages above 15). For the January-April 2021 period, urban female LPR was 7.2% compared with the urban male's 64.8%, while urban female unemployment was 18.4% against the urban male unemployment rate of 6.6%, CMIE data showed.

### How has the agriculture sector fared?

Agriculture was the saving grace during the first wave, but it is not so during the second one. April 2020 saw this sector being the only one to add jobs – the count of those employed in the agriculture sector had gone up by 6 million or 5% compared with the average count in FY20, according to CMIE data.

In April 2021, agriculture shed 6 million jobs compared to a month earlier. This figure ties in with reports of the hinterland being far more affected by the pandemic this year compared with last year.

Daily wage labourers and small traders saw a loss of employment in the order of 0.2 million in April. Some of these agricultural and daily wage labourers may have found work in the construction industry as the sector saw an increase of 2.7 million jobs during April. But, as the CMIE posits, most of the 6.2 million people released from agriculture and daily wages jobs could well have ended up remaining unemployed during the month. This is a clear indication that the jobs scenario is weakening even before recovering from last year's onslaught.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act data showed that April saw an uptick in the demand for jobs – 2.7 crore households signed up for work in April 2021, rising from 1.3 crore a year earlier – as reverse migration of labour picked up, resulting in availability of hands in the rural parts.

### Did the salaried class escape unscathed?

No. The cumulative loss of salaried jobs since the pandemic began is pegged at 12.6 million, according to CMIE data, and the trend continues with April 2021



Mounting concerns: Migrant workers in New Delhi leaving for Bihar on Thursday. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

The RBI's monthly bulletin published earlier this month acknowledged that the biggest toll of the pandemic's second wave was in terms of a demand shock – loss of mobility, discretionary spending and employment, besides inventory accumulation'

### Which States have been hit the hardest?

Haryana recorded the highest unemployment rate in April 2021 at 35%, as per CMIE data, followed by Rajasthan at 28%, Delhi at 27.3%, and Goa at 25.7%. Significantly, Gujarat, which, like the above States, also witnessed the ferocity of the pandemic's second wave, saw unemployment at an appreciably lower level of 1.8%.

### What are the economic consequences of rising unemployment?

Obviously, job losses have a telling effect on incomes. CMIE's managing director and CEO, Mahesh Vyas, said that 90% of Indian families have seen their incomes shrink over the course of the past 13 months. Loss of income naturally dampens consumer sentiment and lowers economic demand.

The RBI's monthly bulletin published earlier this month acknowledged that the biggest toll of the pandemic's second wave was in terms of a demand shock – loss of mobility, discretionary spending and employment, besides inventory accumulation'.

In an article titled 'State of the Economy' in the bulletin, RBI officials pointed out that aggregate demand conditions had been impacted, "albeit not on the scale of the first wave". They highlighted the fact that e-way bills, an indicator of domestic trade, recorded double-digit contraction at 17.5% month-on-month in April 2021, with intrastate and inter-state e-way bills declining by 16.5% and 19%, respectively.

This is an ominous sign for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections in the coming months. Collections in April 2021 were the highest-ever at ₹1.41 lakh crore since the new tax regime was introduced. The authors of the RBI bulletin article said the contraction in e-way bills could point "to a moderation in GST collections in coming months". However, despite the decline over March 2021, total e-way bills remained above the pre-pandemic baseline of February 2020, "indicating that domestic trade has remained resilient on the back of digitisation of sales platforms".

The RBI officials asserted that the second wave has so far had only a limited impact on industrial activity, citing

the 8.1% growth in electricity generation in April over the pre-pandemic base of April 2019.

### Would the situation improve if the current lockdowns were to end today?

Food insecurity is a key welfare issue in the months following an economic shock. A report from Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment, titled 'State of Working India 2021, One year of COVID-19', showed that on average, households lost about 22% of their cumulative income over eight months ended October 2020. Also, poorer households lost a larger proportion of their already low incomes. This not only led to increased poverty levels, the researchers said, but also that the ways in which households coped with this shock was by borrowing, largely from informal sources, selling assets, and cutting back on food consumption. This means that even after a lockdown is lifted and employment begins returning close to the earlier levels, consumer spending, the lifeblood of any economy, may remain muted.

The report cited a couple of surveys – the University's own 'COVID Livelihoods Phone Survey' (CLIPS) and Hunger Watch – to highlight the problem of the low-income population cutting back on food intake. The Hunger Watch survey showed that 66% of surveyed households had less to eat even five months after last year's lockdown.

The researchers argued that incomes lost during the months when economic activity is more severely affected "leave a long-term impact either as depleted savings or as incurred debt, which must be built back or paid back, by curtailing future consumption and investment". The CLIPS survey showed that the poorest households took the largest loans relative to their earnings.

### How are governments addressing these issues?

The Central government has announced that it will distribute 5 kg of rice and wheat for free to ration card holders across the country. Individual States have added to this. Bihar, for example, has announced that it would add an equal measure to the Centre's distribution from the State's resources for free distribution via the Public Distribution System. Tamil Nadu has announced a ₹4,000 handout per ration card and has begun distributing the first tranche of half that amount. Kerala has promised that no family would go hungry in the State. Last September, the Kerala government announced free food kits for 88 lakh families for four months; this May, it decided to continue with the distribution in view of the second wave.

Karnataka has announced a ₹1,250-crore relief package, through which farmers, auto, taxi and maxi cab drivers, construction workers and other informal sector workers will receive varying amounts in the form of a one-time dole.

# Vaccinating children and pregnant, lactating women

What is the view of experts on immunisation against COVID-19 for these sections and where does India stand?

SERENA JOSEPHINE M.

**The story so far:** Over four months after the COVID-19 vaccination drive was launched, India has administered around 19 crore doses of Covishield and Covaxin so far. But it is yet to open up vaccination for pregnant women and children. On May 19, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare accepted fresh recommendations from the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC) for vaccinating lactating mothers. The country is yet to study the safety and efficacy of the two existing vaccines in the paediatric population, with the Drugs Controller General of India recently giving the nod to Bharat Biotech to conduct clinical trials of Covaxin in the 2-18 years age group.

### Why should pregnant and lactating women be vaccinated against COVID-19?

"Vaccinating pregnant women against COVID-19 is extremely important. The second wave is worse than the first wave. The impact is more in terms of the overall numbers," said Dr. Jaishree Gajaraj, senior consultant, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, MGM Healthcare, Chennai, adding that based on observations by obstetricians in Chennai, roughly one in three pregnant women tested positive for COVID-19. "This is a high number, and it is important to do something to protect them as the disease burden in pregnancy is high," she said.

The Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI), in a statement last month, said protection should be extended to pregnant and lactating women. "The very real benefits of vaccinating pregnant and lactating women seem to far outweigh any theoretical and remote risks of vaccination," it said.

Pregnant women are a vulnerable population, said Dr. Gajaraj, adding, "There is some kind of immunological compromise in pregnant women. The disease could be severe, as we have noticed in the second wave."

For lactating women, FOGSI stated that there were no



known adverse effects on neonates who are breastfeeding. "In fact, there is a passage of protective antibodies to the child, which may be a beneficial effect."

### Do we have data to assess the risks or benefits?

According to the World Health Organization, while pregnancy brings a higher risk of severe COVID-19, at present, very little data is available to assess vaccine safety in pregnancy. There is no evidence that suggests vaccination would cause harm during pregnancy.

"To date, none of the clinical trials have included pregnant and lactating women for obvious reasons as no ethics board will give the nod. Preliminary information from the United States, which has been vaccinating since last year, is that the immune response has been good in pregnant women, irrespective of the type of vaccines. Antibodies were found in the umbilical cord and breastmilk that could give protection for the newborn," said Dr. Gajaraj.

### Can children be vaccinated?

Across the globe, several studies have begun to examine the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines in children. The United States has started vaccination for children above 12 years of age.

Dr. Rema Chandramohan, professor of paediatrics, Institute of Child Health and Hospital for Children, Chennai, said, "The paediatric population is less affected during this pandemic. Since adults are either infected or vaccinated, children will become vulnerable in the next wave. Initially, it was thought that children will not be affected due to the absence of ACE2 receptor in the lungs but we do see several children with the infection, who are mostly asymptomatic, and some with typical symptoms of COVID-19. There are two ways that COVID-19 presents in children – as viral fever and as a multisystem inflammatory syndrome. Vaccinating children against COVID-19, therefore, becomes necessary."

### How is it different from vaccinating adults?

"When a vaccine against COVID-19 for children is being

developed, the vaccine developer should keep in mind the effect of the vaccine on children, and how safe the vaccines are in children. The benefits should outweigh the risks to a great extent. There should be sufficient safety trials before rolling out the vaccines for children," said Dr. Chandramohan.

The results of trials abroad among 12-year- to 17-year-olds have demonstrated the safety of vaccines, said Dr. Chandramohan, adding: "We cannot extrapolate studies done in adolescents and adults as every aspect is different in children – the dose, weight of the child, muscle mass matters. We need to look at the minimal dose required which will give maximum benefit/response in addition to having minimal side effects and maximum safety profile in children to call it an effective vaccine."

### What lies ahead?

Vaccination of pregnant women is something that needs immediate attention. There are a lot of debates on the safety of vaccines in pregnancy. "Being a killed vaccine, there is no real expectation of adverse effects with Covaxin. There have been some reports of coagulation and blood clotting problems with Covishield, especially in the younger population less than 30 years of age. The rare occurrence of these adverse effects should not be a deterrent to offer the much-needed protection ... Concerns regarding the severity of COVID-19 infection in pregnancy far outweigh the remote possibility of side-effects," said Dr. Gajaraj. Noting that there was only a theoretical risk of adverse events, she said informed consent could be obtained from women before vaccination. "Usually, vaccines are avoided in the first 12 to 13 weeks of pregnancy due to organogenesis. Vaccines, including the flu shot, are generally given after 26 weeks to protect the neonates, too. But this is a pandemic, and we could give the vaccination at any time during the pregnancy to protect the mother."

"Once we have a vaccine for children, we should look at how it can be included in the vaccination schedule without interfering with the regular schedule. Coronavirus is highly mutated, and so, like influenza, children may need regular booster doses," Dr. Chandramohan noted.

ZHANG YIMING

# Ticking clock for China's tech giants

The resignation of ByteDance's billionaire CEO and the brain behind TikTok is only the latest in a booming tech sector now being reined in by the Chinese government

ANANTH KRISHNAN

**In focus**  
■ First Alibaba's Jack Ma vanished from the headlines and media attention since November when regulators put a stop to a \$35 billion IPO for the Ant Group, Alibaba's financial payments arm

■ In April, Colin Huang, China's third richest man with a \$55 billion fortune, who is behind the hugely popular group buying app Pinduoduo, announced he would step down

■ Zhang Yiming of ByteDance, which is facing its own regulatory problems over both control over data and content, happens to be the third big tech titan to now retreat from the limelight

The announcement, very much in keeping with how Zhang Yiming has functioned for much of his life as a Chinese tech titan, was understated and simple.

"The truth is I lack some of the skills that make an ideal manager," he wrote on May 20, announcing he was stepping down as CEO in an email to the employees of ByteDance, the extraordinarily successful \$180 billion tech giant – its short video app Douyin, known as TikTok outside of China, has become a global phenomenon – he founded in Beijing in 2012.

The news came as a shock both to his company and to China's tech community. But in one sense, it was not entirely surprising. His stepping down comes amid what is perhaps the most difficult period for China's Internet giants after a decade of relentless growth and expansion.

Companies including ByteDance, Alibaba and Tencent are now embroiled in a battle with regulators over issues ranging from anti-trust investigations to control over users' data. The tussle, to put it simply, is about cutting them down to size and giving the ruling Communist Party, which is incidentally set to mark its 100-year anniversary in July, a greater say in regulating a tech space that has so far been dominated by a handful of tech behemoths and their billionaire founders.

The most famous of them, Alibaba's Jack Ma, 56, has vanished from the headlines and media attention he

usually craves since November when regulators showed who was in charge by putting a stop, at the very last minute, to what would have been a world-record breaking \$35 billion IPO for the Ant Group, Alibaba's financial payments arm. In April, Alibaba was hit with a record \$2.8 billion fine for violating anti-monopoly laws. An apparently chastened Mr. Ma still continues to maintain a low profile, seemingly licking his wounds.

That same month, Colin Huang, 41, China's third richest man with a \$55 billion fortune – he is one place ahead of the \$48 billion-worth Mr. Ma on China's rich list, according to Forbes – who is

behind the hugely popular group buying app Pinduoduo announced he would step down. Mr. Zhang, 38, of ByteDance, which is facing its own regulatory problems over both control over data and content, happens to be seventh on the same rich list with a \$35.6 billion fortune, and the third big tech titan to now retreat from the limelight.

**Rise to the top**  
Mr. Zhang was born in Longyan, a small town in the southern coastal province of Fujian known for its Hakka culture. He headed north to Tianjin to attend university and to pursue his dreams of becoming a software engineer. A student by day, he helped classmates fix their computers on the side by night (which was how he ended up meeting his wife, according to a profile in the *South China Morning Post*).

He was more interested in becoming an entrepreneur than joining an established

player. His particular interest was in information and content, and finding the most efficient way to use technology to get people in China to read, listen and watch what they exactly wanted.

The end result of that jour-

ney was a news aggregator app called Jinri Toutiao ("today's headlines"), which uses AI to tailor content for in-

**Companies including ByteDance, Alibaba and Tencent are now embroiled in a battle with regulators over issues ranging from anti-trust probes to control over users' data**

dividual users. The app launched ByteDance as a major player in 2012. Nine years later, it is still among the most widely used news apps in China with some 200 mil-

lion users. Besides the AI powered curation, Jinri Toutiao grew in popularity among young Chinese for its appealing and punchy presentation of news, a world away from the still staid ways of many official media outlets.

The biggest success of ByteDance was, of course, TikTok, which introduced the company to the world. The company had launched a short videos app in China called Douyin, which became a cultural phenomenon with 600 million users. Its international version, TikTok, would take the world by storm, perhaps the first truly global success of any Chinese Internet firm, something that even Alibaba and Tencent could not accomplish.

TikTok, incidentally, is not available in China while Douyin cannot be used outside the country, an unfortunate consequence of China's "great firewall" of restrictions, thanks to which you now have an entire domestic tech ecosystem essentially

entirely cut off from the rest of the world – WeChat instead of WhatsApp, Youku and not YouTube, Baidu and not Google, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter too are all banned in China.

**Tech troubles**

If the e-commerce and digital payments space was being dominated by Alibaba and Tencent, ByteDance established itself in the content space. Another early success was an app called Neihan Duanzi, which became possibly China's first Reddit-like space where users would share jokes and memes, sometimes bordering on what would be unacceptable in China's heavily regulated media space where Communist Party censors maintain a tight grip.

That app too grew rapidly, amassing around 200 million users, before it was suddenly shut down in 2018 by the regulators for "vulgar" content. That same year, Jinri Toutiao also received a rap on the

knuckles and its app was temporarily removed. It was restored after Mr. Zhang had to make a grovelling public apology, promising to uphold "socialist core values". Neihan Duanzi was not allowed to return.

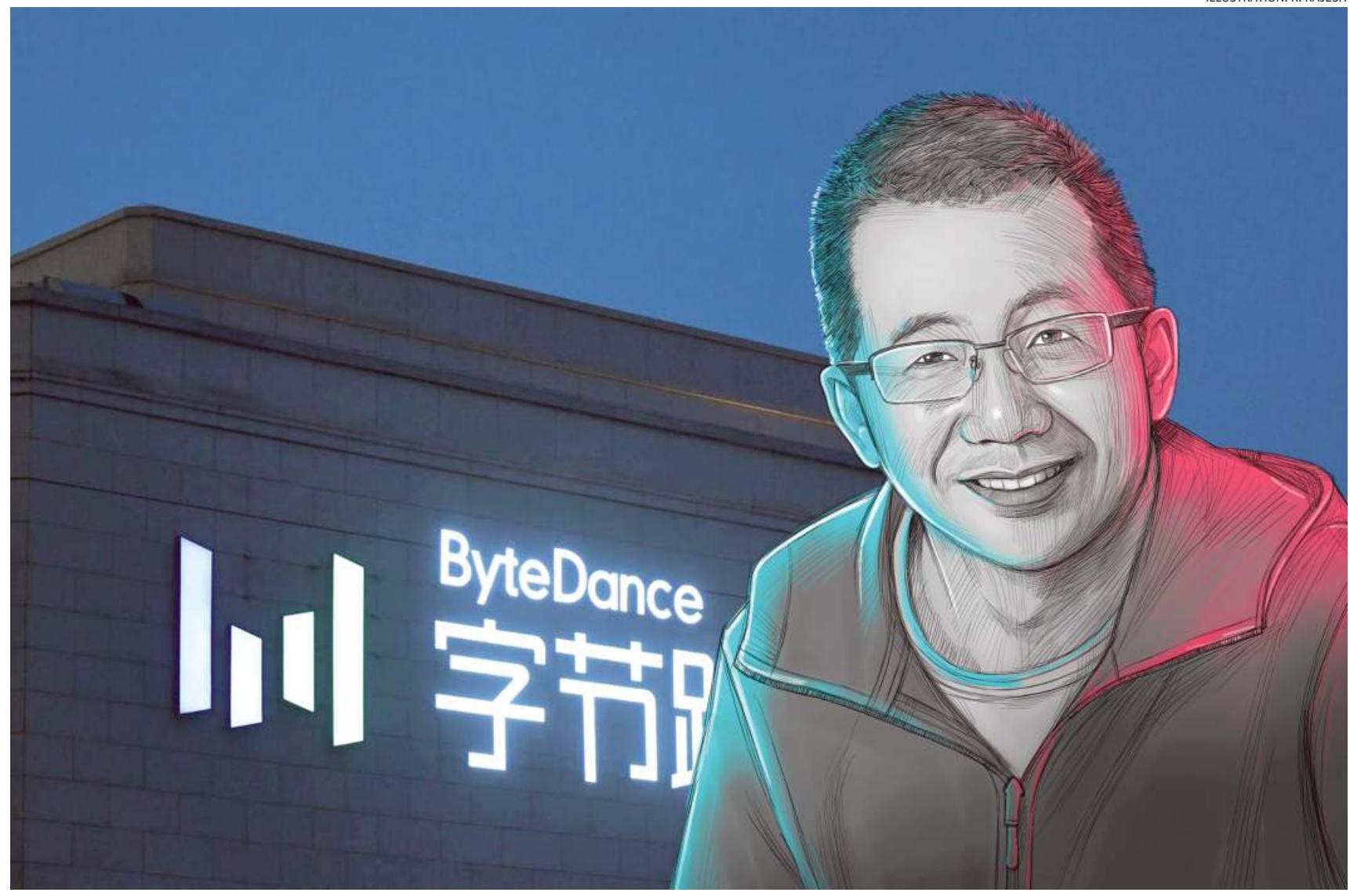
The troubles of 2018 were a prelude to even greater scrutiny that many of China's tech firms would come under. After the anti-trust probe targeting Alibaba, its great rival Tencent, which is behind WeChat, faced similar investigations. The Cyber-space Administration of China said this month it found 105 apps had violated laws over privacy and individual users' data. ByteDance was among them. The *South China Morning Post* reported this month that ByteDance "has been called in by authorities every few weeks."

Last month, the company was among 34 tech firms that made public pledges to follow anti-monopoly laws. Douyin, meanwhile, is facing unrelenting scrutiny for al-

legedly "improper" content.

As Mr. Zhang steps down, he will stay on as Chairman as he hands over daily duties – and, no doubt, the demands of continued compliance expected from regulators – to his college roommate and long-time partner Liang Rubo. Unlike Alibaba's Jack Ma, the low-key ByteDance founder, a practicing Buddhist, has generally preferred to stay out of the headlines. In his resignation letter on Thursday, he said he wanted to have less of the day-to-day responsibilities of a CEO and instead spend his time thinking long-term and "exploring new initiatives in education, brain disease research, and digitizing ancient books."

"I'm not very social," explained the creator of some of China's biggest social media platforms, saying that he, instead, preferred "solitary activities like being online, reading, listening to music, and daydreaming about what may be possible".



## NORD STREAM 2

# Treading the middle path

By lifting sanctions on the pipeline, Biden seeks to walk a tightrope on Russia

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

Blood is thicker than water, so the saying goes, and apparently that applies to natural gas and geopolitical allies too. Contrasting sharply with former U.S. President Donald Trump's attacks on NATO, the Biden administration has decided to stand down on sanctions slapped onto a company Nord Stream 2 AG, whose CEO and former East German intelligence officer Matthias Warnig is alleged to have links to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The reason? To avoid compromising Washington's relationship with Germany over the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a 1,230-km twin pipeline capable of doubling the capacity of extant channels transporting natural gas from Russia fields to Europe under the Baltic Sea.

While the latest half-measure highlights difficulties that President Joe Biden is facing in terms of adopting a hard stance toward Russia, the complexity of the geopolitics in play necessarily lends weight to a calibrated approach.

At stake are Washington's ties with multiple European allies, who are critical to maintaining the balance of power in a unipolar hemisphere. Firstly, the Russian pipeline seriously impacts Ukraine, through which Russian gas currently has to pass en route to Europe. In bypassing Ukraine with a direct pipeline to Ger-



many, Russia appears to be seeking to isolate the former from the broad swathe of Western Europe and render it less relevant in the energy ecosystem. This move gains additional salience in the context of the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula of Ukraine in 2014, following years of gas pipeline pricing disputes. In a similar vein, Poland and Slovakia also oppose Nord Stream 2, as they, along with Kiev, until now collected transit fees on gas flowing through their territorial boundaries.

A more direct beneficiary of the pipeline will be Germany, where concern has been rising regarding falling European gas production in recent times. On the one hand, it appears that fears that this pipeline, which is already 95% complete, will tip Europe into a captive situation with Russia might be unfounded. While Gazprom, the Russian government-owned oil and gas

giant that is a majority shareholder in Nord Stream 2 AG, is very much a key supplier for certain eastern and central European countries, Western European nations have obtained their gas supply from other countries, including Norway, Qatar, and African nations. At a broad level, the EU as such is seeking to tamp down on its reliance on natural gas in favour of clean energy.

**History of skirmishes**  
However, German lawmakers have made it clear to the country's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, that they disapprove of Russian heavy-handedness in dealing with domestic opposition to Mr. Putin, including the jailing of opposition politician Alexey Navalny in August 2020, and that outright support for Nord Stream 2 could undercut their concerns on allegations of human rights violation in this context.

From the perspective of

the U.S.-Russia relations, there is on the one hand the long history of what the U.S. considers to be the malign influence of Moscow on American politics and national security interests.

Seeking to impose punitive action for Russia's interference in U.S. elections, then President Barack Obama, in December 2016, ejected 35 suspected Russian intelligence operatives from the U.S. and slapped sanctions on Russia's two major intelligence services, the GRU and the FSB, a move that invited retaliation from the Kremlin.

Mr. Trump, however, appears to adopt a softer line toward cracking down on Moscow's apparent aggression abroad.

Now it has fallen to the Biden administration to tread the middle path, retaining a sharp focus on punitive sanctions against Moscow's most egregious actions abroad, while recognising the importance of Russia in areas of U.S. strategic interest. Such a path may not necessarily be easy to traverse. Notwithstanding the Merkel government's warm welcome of Mr. Biden's support for Nord Stream 2, Republican lawmakers lashed out at the White House for handing Mr. Putin a major political victory. Even Democrats appeared to differ, with Senator Bob Menendez, Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, denouncing the decision as one that has "created uncertainty in many corners of Europe".

## MOHAMMED DEIF

# The shadow commander

Hamas's military chief, who went underground years ago, has survived yet again

STANLY JOHNY

In early May, when the Israeli Supreme Court was expected to give a final ruling on the eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, Israel got a warning from one of its top enemies. Mohammed Deif, the head of Hamas's military wing Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, said in a rare public statement that Israel would pay a "heavy price" if it evicts Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah. This was the first statement from the shadowy commander, whom most Palestinians haven't seen, in seven years.

Deif's statement was the first indication that Hamas was ready to risk another Israeli attack over Jerusalem. The crisis escalated quickly. Palestinian protesters clashed with Israeli forces in East Jerusalem over Sheikh Jarrah. On May 10, immediately after Israeli troops stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque, Hamas issued an ultimatum to Israel to pull back forces from the compound. In the evening, Hamas launched rockets which were followed by Israeli airstrikes.

**The cat with nine lives**  
The Israeli military confirmed that they tried to kill Deif twice during the 11-day bombing, but failed. Deif has been on Israel's kill list at least since the early 2000s. In 2002, he lost an eye in an Israeli strike. In 2006, Israel struck a building in which Hamas leaders

had assembled. The attack seriously injured Deif, but he survived. In August 2014, after an initial ceasefire was announced following weeks of fighting, Israel carried out an airstrike targeting him. The attack killed Deif's wife and two children, but he escaped again. The escape earned him the nickname among the Palestinians, "the cat with nine lives".

Born in Khan Younis, Gaza, in the 1950s, Deif, whose real name is Mohammed Diab Ibrahim al-Masri, studied in Gaza's Islamic University, which was co-founded in 1978 by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Hamas's founder and spiritual leader who was killed by Israel in 2004. Yassin, the tallest Muslim Brotherhood leader in Gaza, was then running Mujama al-Islamiyaan, which Israel had recognised as a charity. Deif was an active member of the Brotherhood and when Hamas was founded, after the first intifada broke out in 1987, Deif

joined the new Islamist movement with zeal and vigour. During the intifada protests, he was briefly arrested by the Israelis. Having orchestrated several attacks in the 1990s, Deif rose through Hamas's ranks quickly. In 2002, at the height of the second intifada, he was appointed the head of the Qassam Brigades, after its leader Salah Shehadeh was killed by Israel.

At that time, the Brigades was not much of a force. Named after Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, an Islamic preacher who led violent resistance against British colonialists and Zionist settlers in historic Palestine and was killed in 1935, the Brigades was involved in attacks on Israeli troops as well as civilians. After Deif took over the Brigades, Hamas carried out a host of suicide attacks inside Israel. Israel holds him personally responsible for the deaths of many of its citizens.

The U.S. has also designated him as a terrorist. In 2015, the U.S. State Department said Deif "is known for deploying suicide bombers and directing the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers. During the 2014 conflict, Deif was the mastermind of Hamas's offensive strategy."

When Hamas emerged as a popular organisation within the Palestinian territories and showed signs of moderation and willingness to contest elections, Deif's focus shifted from terror tactics such as suicide bombings to building a semi-conventional military command structure with resources such as rockets and mid-range missiles. Hamas acquired much of its rocket capability under his command. Israel believes he is on a wheelchair. Hamas doesn't comment on his health. But they say Deif is fully in control of the Qassam Brigades. Among the supporters of Hamas, Deif has a cult status.

Both his enemies and supporters agree that he is the most influential voice within Hamas. "Deif is the decision-maker in Hamas... He believes every day they continue to fight is another achievement for them," Gen. Giora Eiland, a former Israeli national security adviser, once said. During the 2014 Gaza fighting, Deif issued an audio message. "The Zionist entity will not know security unless the Palestinian people live in peace," he said. For Hamas, these words make its rule book.



# First-time investors seen aiding stock market surge

In FY21, more than 14 million new demat accounts were opened, almost thrice the previous year's 4.9 million accounts

LALATENDU MISHRA

MUMBAI

A good part of the Indian stock market's rally over the past 14 months, even as the COVID-19 pandemic has shrunk economic activity and left millions without jobs, has been fuelled by a jump in first-time investors, according to equity analysts.

The widening disconnect between the equity market and the ground reality of strict lockdowns across most of the States and tens of thousands of deaths has done little to deter these investors who appear to have been drawn by the lure of quick returns.

The S&P BSE Sensex, which gained almost 2% to close at 50,540.48 points on Friday, has almost doubled since its pre-national lockdown low of 25,981.24 points

on March 23, 2020, having surged 94.5%.

In FY21, more than 14 million new demat accounts were opened, an almost threefold jump from the 4.9 million that were started in the previous year, a trend that has continued this fiscal. While ease of trading on new technology platforms, including mobile phone applications, has been a trigger, the lack of commensurate returns from real estate and debt instruments have also driven investors to the stock market, said the analysts.

**'Easy, lucrative'**  
"People are now idle and sitting with cash," said Ambareesh Baliga, an independent stock analyst. "Making money in the stock market has become easy and lucrative. Most of the new investors are



**Happy-go-lucky:** Young investors react to quotes on the digital screen outside the BSE in Mumbai. ■ FILE PHOTO

youngsters in the age group of 18 to 35. Students are borrowing money from parents and investing in a small way but quickly increasing their portfolio by making quick profits which they are reinvesting," he added.

According to Tanushree Banerjee, co-head, research, Equitymaster, most of the new investors were those who had ventured into stock markets with the expectation of making quick returns. "The sentiments in the

stock markets are currently driven by two factors: rate of recovery in corporate earnings and flow of liquidity," Ms. Banerjee said.

**'Could thwart recovery'**  
With the second wave having delivered in the RBI's words a 'demand shock' to the economy, it is hard to envisage companies continuing to deliver robust results and this could lead to downgrades in expectations, warned the analysts.

"Investors need to be careful about a few sectors, like the financial sector, where the second wave of the pandemic could thwart earnings recovery in the coming quarters," said Ms. Banerjee, observing that the average return on stocks, across market caps, in the past year, had been in the re-

gion of 40% to 50%.

## Stock picking

"Investors cannot afford to take such high returns for granted. They need to be very careful in their stock picking. Let's see how this experience pans out. It's not clear to me whether it will be good for all these new investors," she added.

According to Mr. Baliga most new investors don't do adequate research and just 'pick up any stock based on recommendations easily available on social media'.

"They do not know when to take profit home," he said. "Unfortunately, none of them has seen big losses, though they might have heard about it."

"So, when the bubble bursts, they will be looking at much bigger losses."

**Hero MotoCorp plans to restart units from May 24**

Firm to focus more on export markets

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The country's largest two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp on Saturday said it is gearing up towards a gradual resumption of operations by starting production at all its manufacturing plants in India from May 24.



"The company had already commenced single-shift production at three of its plants - Gurugram and Dharera in Haryana and at Haridwar in the northern hill State of Uttarakhand - on May 17," it said, adding the plants Neemrana in Rajasthan, Halol in Gujarat and Chittor in Andhra Pradesh, would also start single shift operations from May 24.

The Global Parts Centre (GPC) at Neemrana will also be operational from May 24.

"In addition to producing for the domestic market, these plants will also have enhanced focus on catering to the global business (GB) markets across the world," the company said. It will move to double-shift production gradually.

More than 90% of Hero MotoCorp employees above the age of 45 had already been vaccinated, according to the company.

Natco gets USFDA nod for 2 products

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Natco Pharma has received final approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) for abbreviated new drug applications (ANDA) for two products.

Natco said its anti-cancer drug Lenalidomide capsules had received final approval for 5 mg, 10 mg, 15 mg, and 25 mg strengths and tentative approval of the 2.5 mg and 20 mg strengths.

Natco also said marketing partner Breckenridge Pharmaceutical Inc. had received final approval for its ANDA for Everolimus tablets, indicated in the prophylaxis of organ rejection in kidney and liver transplantation.

## Elgi Equipments boosts capacity threefold to manufacture oxygen-plant compressors

Company diverting capacities meant for other products, says MD Varadaraj

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

COIMBATORE

Air-compressor manufacturer Elgi Equipments has increased the capacity to manufacture compressors for specific models of oxygen generation plants.

Jairam Varadaraj, managing director of Elgi Equipments, informed the media that the company had increased its capacity almost threefold for specific models that were in demand in the oxygen sector.

"We are diverting our capacities that are there for other products to this sector now," said Mr. Varadaraj.

"We are reaching out to customers and talking to



Jairam Varadaraj

them and taking their currency. So, it is a comprehensive approach," he added. "We continue our support to our subsidiaries because we cannot compromise on deliveries in the in-

"We are not looking at oxygen as a business opportunity. We are looking at it as a social responsibility," Mr. Varadaraj asserted.

"We are trying to supply as much as we can at a shorter period. Compressors are a key requirement for oxygen-generating plants. This demand is expected to settle down in another three to four months," he added.

On the overall results of the company for the last financial year, he said that the

international market because of the demand for oxygen in India." The company expects 10%-15% of its revenue for this quarter from the oxygen sector.

"The growth last year was because of the recovery of the economy and also because some sectors did very well. In terms of capital expenditure, last year Elgi had invested ₹15-20 crore. This year, though it had not been finalised yet, it was likely to be ₹20 crore to ₹25 crore.

The consolidated profit after tax for 2020-2021 stood at ₹102.49 crore, compared with ₹42.57 crore in the year-earlier period.

Hence the net profit for

the two periods are not comparable," the company said.

## Sundaram Home Finance mulls raising ₹2,500 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHENNAI

Sundaram Home Finance Ltd. (SHFL), a wholly owned subsidiary of non-banking finance company Sundaram Finance Ltd., is mulling to raise ₹2,500 crore to fund its growth plans, the firm said.

SHFL has declared its financial performance for the fourth quarter ended March 31. According to a statement, net profit stood at ₹36.60 crore.

The company registered a net profit of ₹82 crore during the corresponding period last year, including a one-time exceptional item of ₹459.38 crore from ₹389.60 crore. For the year ended March 31, the net profit was ₹191 crore against ₹218 crore.



D. Lakshminarayanan

The net profit for the full

year included the one-time exceptional item of ₹60 crore and the net profit for the two periods were therefore not comparable.

"To fund the growth plans, the company is looking to raise ₹2,500 crore this year through a mix of debt instruments and bank funding," the company said.

On the outlook, SHFL MD Lakshminarayanan Duraiswamy said, "There will be a momentary halt in the upward trend as we are likely to witness truncated housing sales and scrapped property projects. However, as the recovery of 2020 showed, the market is likely to emerge stronger."

+ INTERVIEW | MATHEW CHANDY

## 'We may double exports in FY22'

People taking sleep seriously now, says Duroflex MD

N. ANAND

*The five-decade-old Duroflex Pvt. Ltd., a sleep-solutions provider, has set its sights on achieving a turnover of ₹1,000 crore in FY22, tailoring its products for customer needs, says MD Mathew Chandy in an interview. Edited excerpts:*

How did you mitigate the challenges during FY21?

■ FY 21 was a blessing for us. Exactly, this time all our factories, shops and offices were shut. We had a lot of salaries to pay. We all had to work harder and much more together. We focused a lot more on doing smart work rather than hard work. FY21 was the best year ever and most profitable too.

The first quarter was a washout. By the third and fourth quarter, we were 25% above the previous fiscal in top-line. The sales run rate was 50% higher than FY20 and we ended with a turnover of over ₹600 crore. The pandemic was more of a vaccine for us than a virus. We made a lot of investments.

We bought a factory in Indore and expanded our footprint.

What was the learning from the first wave?

■ People have started taking health and wellness seriously and this pandemic has helped us to realise that sleep is more important than health. We take sleep very seriously and as a result, we put a lot of scientific and medical research into our products. We go far beyond our product. We communicate a lot about passion for sleep to our consumers. We are not selling a product, but promoting a healthy lifestyle.

How do you differ from your competitors?

■ Though we are 50 years old, we are a technology-led

company. We think and behave like a start-up. We have a lot of young energy. We like to experiment a lot, communicate a lot, use technology much more and are data driven. We have an old-school value, but with a new-age thinking.

We tailor our products like orthopaedic pillows, mattresses and anti-viral mattress and scientific sleep tracking, among others, for the customers.

What is your current capital expenditure plan for FY22?

■ We have set our eyes of reaching a top-line of ₹1,000 crore during the current fiscal and doubling it over the next three to four years. Last year, we had set aside ₹100 crore [for capital expenditure] of which ₹50 crore was spent on setting up a new unit in Indore.

They will be funded through internal accruals.

Your expansion plans...

■ Basically, we are a South-based company having three units in Hosur, one each in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, an export unit each in Kerala and Indore. We might add two or three more new units and also expand the capacities of existing ones.

One reason for capacity expansion is the rising export opportunity. Currently,

exports account for 10% of revenue and this will be doubled in FY22.

Due to cold war between China and the U.S., we are seeing requirement for mattresses and furniture from India

## TVS-E turns Q4 profit of ₹5.85 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHENNAI

TVS Electronics, a major player in electronic peripherals, has reported a net profit of ₹5.85 crore for the quarter ended March 31.

The city-based company had reported a net loss of ₹5.69 crore during the corresponding quarter last year. For the year ending March 31, net profit stood at ₹77 lakh as against ₹39 lakh registered a year earlier, TVS Electronics said in a BSE filing on Saturday.

Total revenue for the quarter grew to ₹72.61 crore, from ₹54.95 crore in the same quarter last year.

For the year ending March 31, total revenue slipped to ₹226.66 crore, from ₹264.05 crore registered in the same period last year, it said.

What is the market size for mattresses?

■ It is between ₹10,000-₹12,000 crore of which the organised sector accounts for ₹4,000 crore.

There about five-six reasonably-large players, 25 smaller players and a long tail of 65% unorganised players. In the South, we have a 25% market share and 15% nationally.

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## TV PICKS

**Archery World Cup:** Sony Six (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m. & 5.30 p.m.  
**Serie A:** Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m. & 12.15 a.m. (Monday)  
**F1:** Monaco GP: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m.  
**Premier League:** Star Sports 3 & SS Select 1 & 2 (SD & HD), 8.30 p.m.

## IN BRIEF



Ruud beats Shapovalov, clinches Geneva title

GENEVA  
Casper Ruud, playing in his first final of 2021, defeated Denis Shapovalov 7-6(6), 6-4 in the final of the Geneva Open on Saturday. The Norwegian third seed took an hour and 43 minutes to get past the second-seeded Canadian. This was Ruud's second Tour title after the Buenos Aires crown on clay in 2020.

**The result (final):** Casper Ruud bt Denis Shapovalov 7-6(6), 6-4.



Grizzlies oust Warriors to grab final seed

LOS ANGELES  
Ja Morant scored a team-high 35 points as the Memphis Grizzlies beat the Golden State Warriors 117-112 in overtime (OT) on Friday to grab the final seed in the NBA playoffs. Morant helped clinched victory with a spinning floater with four seconds left in overtime as the Grizzlies advanced to the playoffs for the first time in four years.

**Award for Hockey India**

LAUSANNE  
Hockey India on Friday won the prestigious Etienne Glichit Award in recognition of its contribution to the growth and development of the sport in the country. The awards was announced by the game's governing body FIH during the HockeyInvites virtual conference as part of its 47th FIH Congress which concluded with the FIH Honorary Awards. PTI

**WADA to use DBS technique**

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MONTREAL

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), on Friday, approved an innovative method of screening dried blood for banned substances which will be trialled for the Tokyo Olympics.

The decision marks a "very important step" in the fight against doping, its scientific director Olivier Rabin said, as the Dried Blood Spot (DBS) testing technique will ultimately strengthen WADA's capacity to track down cheaters.

To start with, it will be less intrusive for the athletes. Some samples are taken from the fingertip, from the earlobe, from the shoulder, from the thigh...

the other advantage of DBS is that from the moment you put it on a piece of paper, the liquid will dry and it stabilises the matrix... you have to put that in parallel with the increasingly elaborate doping strategies of certain athletes, who know very well how to use substances which stay a relatively short time in the body.

**Sravanthi's mother passes away**

HYDERABAD  
S.K. Suman, mother of former India women's cricketer Sravanti Naidu, passed away on Saturday afternoon, according to N. Vidya Yadav, former BCCI women's cricket convenor (South Zone).

# Leclerc takes pole despite crashing

Monegasque could face grid penalty; Verstappen alongside on front row; Hamilton only seventh

## MONACO GP

REUTERS  
MONTE CARLO

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc crashed to pole position at his home Monaco Grand Prix on Saturday, with rivals unable to better his time after red flags halted qualifying for Formula One's showcase race.

The 23-year-old smashed into the barriers with 18 seconds of the session remaining and faced an anxious wait to see if the damaged car can be repaired without incurring any grid penalties.

"With the crash, I don't know where I'm starting tomorrow," said Leclerc. "I'm not feeling well for now, I'm just waiting for the mechanics to open the gearbox."

**Chance for Verstappen**

Red Bull's title contender Max Verstappen was one of those who had to abort their final flying laps but the Dutch



**Zooming ahead:** Ferrari's Charles Leclerc in action during qualifying on Saturday. ■ REUTERS

driver stands to inherit pole if the Ferrari needs a new gearbox, triggering a grid drop.

"It was all going really well and the red flag ruined the

chance for pole," said Verstappen.

Mercedes' world champion Lewis Hamilton, who leads Verstappen by 14 points after four

races but had struggled through the session and in practice, qualified a distant seventh. "We go back to the drawing board now," said the seven-time world champion.

"There is a lack of grip, so that leaves you to overdrive the car and unfortunately it just didn't improve."

Ferrari boss Mattia Binotto said it was too early to know whether the gearbox was damaged. "We are worried but we are checking it," he said.

**Starting grid:**

**Front row:** Charles Leclerc (Ferrari); **Second:** Max Verstappen (Red Bull); **Third:** Valtteri Bottas (Mercedes); Carlos Sainz Jr (Ferrari); **Fourth:** Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes); **Fifth:** Sebastian Vettel (Aston Martin); **Sixth:** Sergio Perez (Red Bull); Antonio Giovinazzi (Alfa Romeo); **Sixth:** Esteban Ocon (Alpine); Daniel Ricciardo (McLaren); **Seventh:** Lance Stroll (Aston Martin); **Eighth:** Kimi Raikkonen (Alfa Romeo); **Ninth:** Fernando Alonso (Alpine); **Tenth:** Nicholas Latifi (Williams); **10th:** Nikita Mazepin (Haas); **Mick Schumacher (Haas).**

# Olympic-bound athletes get COVID vaccine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

As many as 148 athletes across all sports, including those who have qualified for the upcoming Tokyo Games, have already received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccination, according to the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

Out of these 148 athletes, 17 have got both the doses and 131 have received their first shot, IOA president Naina Devi Batra said.

These 148 include potential athletes who can make it to the Tokyo Olympics which is opening on July 23.

Besides this, 13 Tokyo Paralympic-bound athletes have got their first vaccine shot while two have received both doses. The Tokyo Paralympics opens on August 24.

The total number of athletes (including para-athletes), who have got at least their first dose till May 20, is 163.

Giving the 'vaccination status of Tokyo-bound Indian athletes and officials in the long list as on May 20', Batra said 87 officials have got single dose of COVID-19 vaccine while 23 are fully vaccinated.

More than 90 Indian athletes across sports have so far qualified for the Tokyo Olympics which was postponed from last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Olympic-bound shooters who are currently training in Croatia will be vaccinated there as they are expected to directly fly to Tokyo from there, the NRAI has said.

Some of them have already got their first jabs in India before departing for Croatia and they will get their second dose in that country.

Fencer Bhavani Devi also got her first jab at her training base in Italy while weightlifter Mirabai Chanu is expected to get her shots in the United States.

# Batra re-elected as FIH president

Defeats Belgium's Marc Coudron by a margin of just two votes

UTHRA GANESAN  
NEW DELHI

When Narinder Batra became the first Indian to head the international federation of an Olympic sport in 2016, it was a cakewalk. On Saturday, he retained the presidency of the International Hockey Federation (FIH) by the closest of margins and insisted he would work on improving his interactions with the rest of the national bodies.

Batra defeated Belgium's Marc Coudron 63-61 of the 124 votes polled during the 47th FIH Congress, held virtually due to COVID-19, to be re-elected till 2024.

It had been 68 out of 114 members last time. "Perhaps



Narinder Batra. ■ FILE PHOTO

I was unable to communicate my point of view properly. Almost 49% of the members wanted a change and now it is my duty to understand where I could not live up to their expectations and interact to ensure implementation of the listed priorities with everyone on board," he admitted in an interaction soon after.

**The priority**

"My priority is to grow the sport globally and to do that we need to constantly evolve with new formats and events. We need to enhance our financial stability.

"A well-developed revenue model is the key to achieve sustainable financial

growth," he added.

Asked about resumption of India-Pakistan hockey ties, Batra reiterated it would be a bilateral decision. "It is up to Hockey India and PHF and there are some political decisions as well," he said.

For a large part, however,

it was FIH CEO Thierry Weil who fielded questions on the sustainability of the sport and competitions in the coming cycle. "Many have asked about the viability of the Pro League but it will go on. Also, we will have the Nations Cup from 2022 as the perfect accompaniment to Pro League, making it an open tournament with promotion and relegation," Weil insisted.

Hoping that the remaining events through 2021 would be held as scheduled, Weil said he would personally support any move to relax age limits in case the Junior World Cup (scheduled in India in December) is postponed, although a decision can be taken only by the EB.

The tournament starts on Monday. It is the only major competition that the boxers will get before the Olympics.

The team reached Dubai on Saturday after being held up for over two hours in the flight, of which close to one hour was mid-air, because of a delay in the clearance of

# Boxers land in Dubai after confusion

Flight held up for over two hours due to delay in paperwork

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

paperwork which approved the team's arrival in Dubai.

"There was some confusion regarding the approval letter for the trip which was eventually sorted thanks to the intervention of the Indian Embassy in the UAE. The flight took a while to land," a source close to the team said.

The approval was required as the UAE has imposed a ban on flights from India in view of the heavy COVID-19 caseload here.

The women's team is being led by Mary Kom (51kg) and Amit Panghal (52kg), reached Dubai to compete in the Asian Boxing Championships, aboard an "air-bubble" flight, which had to stay mid-air longer than scheduled as administrative paperwork delayed its landing.

The tournament starts on Monday. It is the only major competition that the boxers will get before the Olympics.

The team reached Dubai on Saturday after being held up for over two hours in the flight, of which close to one hour was mid-air, because of a delay in the clearance of

# Tanwar tests positive, withdrawn

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Boxer Vinod Tanwar (49kg), who was in the squad for the Asian championships in Dubai, was withdrawn after he tested positive for COVID-19.

"With Tanwar's RT-PCR test turning positive, he has been asked to be in isolation," said a Boxing Federation of India statement.

# Indian team begins training



**Masked up:** The Indian football squad led by Sunil Chhetri tested negative for COVID and is now allowed to go ahead with its preparations. ■ PTI

evening, was under compulsory quarantine and waiting for the results of the RT-PCR tests before starting the preparatory camp.

The team, bolstered by the return of Sunil Chhetri, will have a preparatory camp inside a bio-bubble here before its first match on June 3 against host Qatar.

The other two matches are against Bangladesh

(June 7) and Afghanistan (June 15).

"Gearing-up for the challenges ahead. The #BlueTigers had their training first training session in Doha, Qatar last night," the AIFF said in a tweet.

India is already out of contention for a World Cup berth but is still in the reckoning for the 2023 Asian Cup in China.

# It will be a challenge: Arundhati

Says it is the dream of any pacer to play in England

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM  
HYDERABAD

India pacer Arundhati Reddy says her first tour of England will not only be exciting but also very challenging as it could provide her an opportunity to make her ODI debut.

The 23-year-old Arundhati Reddy, who has played in 23 T20Is and claimed 17 wickets since her debut in 2018 against Sri Lanka, said it would be a dream for any pacer to play in England where the conditions are expected to be bowler-friendly.

**Training hard**

"It also means you have to be consistent right through. Since, I have been training really hard and waiting for this moment, I am ready for the challenge of bowling to English batters on their home soil," Arundhati said in a chat with *The Hindu*.

India is already out of contention for a World Cup berth but is still in the reckoning for the 2023 Asian Cup in China.

"The preparations have been really good, thanks to Murthy Sir (R.S.R. Murthy). I bowled a lot in the open wickets to hit the 'spot' consistently," she said.

"The focus has been to be good both with bat and ball. I am confident my improved batting skills will come in handy," said the young pacer.

**Mithali an inspiration**

"With Mithali as captain, it is quite natural to be in the comfort zone. She has always been a huge inspiration and motivation for me and never hesitated to put things in a simple and effective manner to get the best out of me," said Arundhati, who idolises Jhulan Goswami and Jasprit Bumrah.

Any goals? "I want to be the best player for India and I will put in all effort for that."



Arundhati Reddy.

# 23 Russians allowed to compete as neutrals

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MONACO

World Athletics has declared 23 Russian track and field athletes eligible to compete under a neutral flag ahead of the Tokyo Olympics.

With their national federation under a doping suspension, Russians must apply for individual exemptions to gain "authorized neutral athlete" status after their drug-testing records have been vetted.

High jumper Mikhail Akinmenko and race walker Vasiliy Mizinov – both silver medallists from the 2019 world championships – were among the names on the list released Saturday by track's governing body.

A total of 27 Russian athletes have so far been declared to compete

internationally in 2021 as neutrals.

The other four include three-time world champion high jumper Mariya Lasitskene and world champion pole vaulter Anzhelika Sidorova.

No more than 10 Russian athletes, however, will be granted eligibility to compete at the Tokyo Olympics, under rules approved by the World Athletics council when it recently revived the authorised neutral athlete or "ANA" scheme.

Two applications for ANA status have so far been rejected by the World Athletics doping review board. Saturday's announcement did not identify them.

The Russian track federation, known as RusAF, has been suspended since 2015.

Lewandowski surmounts Muller's record

Leaves it to the very last minute to score 41st goal of the season

BUNDESLIGA

REUTERS  
MUNICH