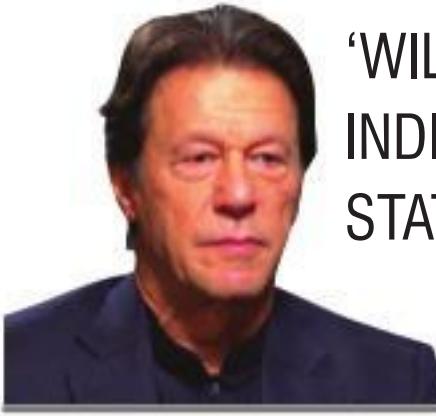




PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION



'WILLING TO TALK WITH INDIA IF KASHMIR'S STATUS RESTORED'



JOHNSON, CARRIE SYMONDS MARRY IN PRIVATE CEREMONY



SASIKALA HINTS AT EFFORTS TO REGAIN CONTROL OF AIADMK



Delhi reports 78 Covid deaths, lowest in one-and-a-half mths

Covid cases dip below 1K-mark for 2nd consecutive day, positivity rate stands at 1.25 pc

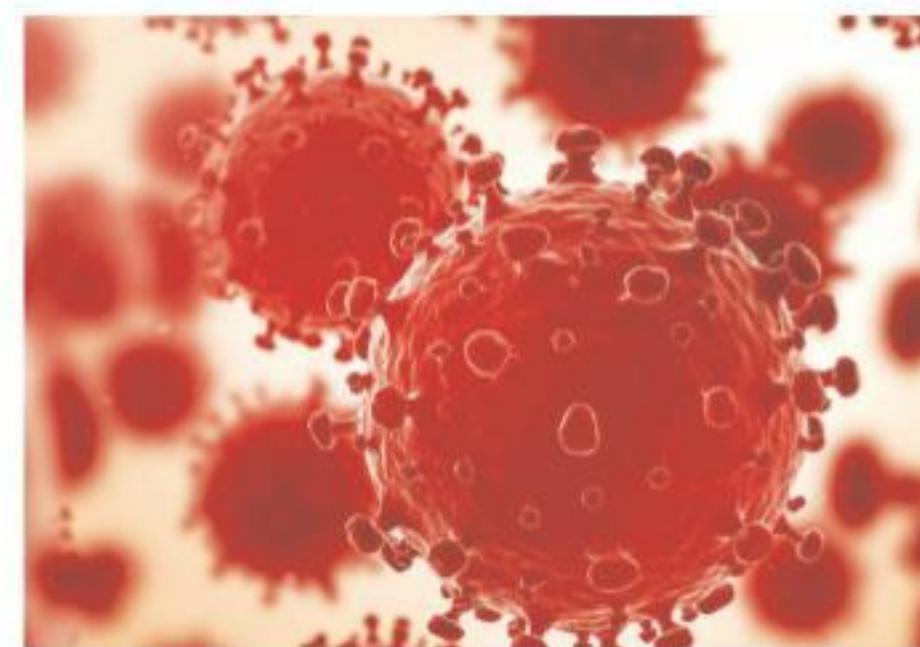
SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 30 MAY

Delhi today recorded 946 fresh coronavirus cases and 78 Covid-linked deaths while the positivity rate stood at 1.25 per cent, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

This is the first time in nearly a month-and-a-half that daily Covid deaths in the national capital have dipped below 100. The city had recorded 81 deaths on 13 April.

With the fresh cases and deaths, Delhi's cumulative Covid caseload rose to 14,25,000 and its death toll climbed to 24,151, the health bulletin stated. The fatality rate stood at 1.69 per cent, the bulletin said.

The city had yesterday reported 956 coronavirus cases and 122 Covid-linked fatalities.



ties while the positivity rate had then slumped to 1.19 per cent.

This is the second consecutive day today that the Covid cases count in Delhi has gone below the 1,000-mark since 22 March when the tally was 888. On 21 March, 823 cases were reported in the city.

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain had yesterday highlighted the point that the daily cases had dropped below the 1,000-mark even as he appealed to people to continue to follow the Covid safety norms.

Today's fresh cases were detected out of 75,440 tests,

the bulletin said.

There were currently 12,100 active cases in the national capital. As many as 5,300 Covid patients were undergoing treatment at hospitals and Covid care centres while 5,817 patients were under home isolation, it said.

According to the bulletin, 1,803 more patients recovered from Covid in the city over the last 24 hours, which took the total number of its recoveries to over 13.89 lakh.

Nearly 54,000 people were vaccinated in Delhi against Covid in a day. So far, 53.43 lakh people have been inoculated, including over 12 lakh who have received both doses of the vaccine, the bulletin added.

The national capital had last Friday logged 1,141 Covid cases and 139 fatalities while the positivity rate had stood at 1.59 per cent. It had reported 1,072 cases and 117 deaths

on Thursday when the positivity rate was 1.53 per cent.

Delhi's positivity rate had soared to 36 per cent in the last week of April at the peak of the raging Covid second wave.

Since April 19, both daily

cases and single-day deaths count had been spiralling in the city, with over 28,000 cases and 277 deaths recorded on April 20. On May 2, the city registered a record 407 Covid deaths, according to the official data.

However, the number of cases in the city has shown a downward trend and the positivity rate too has been dipping over the last several days.

Delhi had recorded 1,491 cases and 130 fatalities on Wednesday, 1,568 cases and 156 deaths on Tuesday, and 1,550 cases and 207 fatalities last Monday. The positivity rate last Monday was 2.52 per cent.

Delhi has 14-day stock of Covishield left for 45 plus age group: Atishi

PTI
NEW DELHI, 30 MAY

About 3.5 lakh Covid vaccines are available in Delhi for the 45 plus age group, including over 3 lakh doses of Covishield, which may last for 14 days, AAP MLA Atishi said on Sunday.

Even though the national capital received a fresh stock of 48,000 doses of Covaxin on Saturday, it is being kept for those requiring the second dose, she said.

"For the 45 plus age group, there are about 3.5 lakh doses available, including about 40,000 doses of Cov-

axin and 3.25 lakh doses of Covishield.

"The Covaxin doses are only being given to those who need the second dose, because there are many people who have taken their first dose and were waiting for the second dose. We have Covishield stock for another 14 days," Atishi said during the daily vaccination bulletin.

While the vaccination of the 18-44 years age group remained suspended for the seventh day, she alleged that the Delhi government was not receiving the vaccines while the private hospitals

were inoculating those in this age group by charging exorbitant rates.

She alleged that both the companies, Bharat Biotech

and Serum Institute, told the Delhi government that they can only send vaccines based on what the Centre tells them.

"When we approached both the companies to buy 1.5 crore vaccines, both the companies told us that they will only send as much vaccines based on what the Central government tells them," she said.

She added that vaccination for 18-44 group was only "available" at private hospitals, which are charging from Rs 900 to Rs 1,400 per dose".

"How is it possible that the

Delhi government which was vaccinating for free doesn't have a single vaccine dose but the private hospitals which are charging exorbitant prices for vaccination are doing so without any trouble," she said.

Delhi so far has vaccinated a total of 53,42,386 people, including 41,38,523 people who have received one dose of the vaccine.

"Over 12 lakh people have been vaccinated with both the doses, and more than 50 per cent people in the 45 plus group in Delhi have been completely vaccinated," Atishi added.

Classified

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RAJU BISTA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, DARJEELING

ON FRONTLINE HEALTH WORKERS DURING HIS VISIT TO THE NORTH BENGAL MEDICAL COLLEGE & HOSP

Capital

AAP: Covid-19 vaccines being diverted to pvt hospitals for BJP MLAs to earn huge commission

PTI
NEW DELHI, 30 MAY

However, the BJP's Delhi unit said AAP leaders, it seems, "are campaigning for highly priced foreign-made vaccines' manufacturers" and every time say recorded statements on vaccine shortage when Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India have assured normal supply in the next 10-15 days

gements, he alleged.

AAP's Atishi alleged that according to call records, the private hospital clearly stated that they are administering vaccines at expensive rates because they have to "feed" the MLA's office with huge commission.

"The call records also reveal that in order to get vaccine, people are being forced to get themselves registered at the MLA office just so that BJP politicians can earn their commission and fill their pockets," she said.

Atishi claimed that the BJP is indulging in a "vaccine scam" in these testing times at the cost of the lives of people.

"Vaccines which were supposed to be supplied to state governments are being diverted to private hospitals just so that BJP MLAs can fill their pockets with huge commissions," she claimed.

The state government which is immunising people for free is not getting any vaccines but private hospitals and private hotels are getting huge supply. What kind of a connivance is this of the Centre," Atishi asked.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said no doubt that there is a slight slow inflow of Covid vaccines but both Bharat

Biotech and Serum Institute of Indian have assured that supply will be normal in the next 10 to 15 days.

"Despite this reassurance by manufacturers one fails to understand that why every day AAP leaders like Atishi play their recorded statement on vaccine shortage and need for allowing import of foreign-made vaccines. It seems they are campaigning for highly priced foreign-made vaccines' manufacturers," he said.

"AAP leaders say that they want free vaccines but they campaign for import of highly-priced foreign vaccines which no government can provide for free," Kapoor said.

The Delhi BJP spokesperson said at press conferences, AAP leaders pretend to be against costly vaccines at highly-priced vaccination centres like malls, hotels and private hospitals.

"But every other day "we find Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his other ministers inaugurating such highly-priced vaccination Centres, Kapoor said.

"People want Atishi to answer if the AAP leadership is against costly vaccines, then why is the chief minister inaugurating such private centres," he said.

Dust storm hits parts of Delhi



Clouds hovering over the Capital on Sunday.

SUBRATA DUTTA

PTI
NEW DELHI, 30 MAY

Delhi witnessed a sudden change in weather on Sunday evening as a dust storm hit parts of the city.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the national capital is likely to receive rains late in the evening.

The maximum and minimum temperature in the city

was recorded at 38.2 degrees Celsius and 25.2 degrees Celsius, both two notches below the season's average, it said.

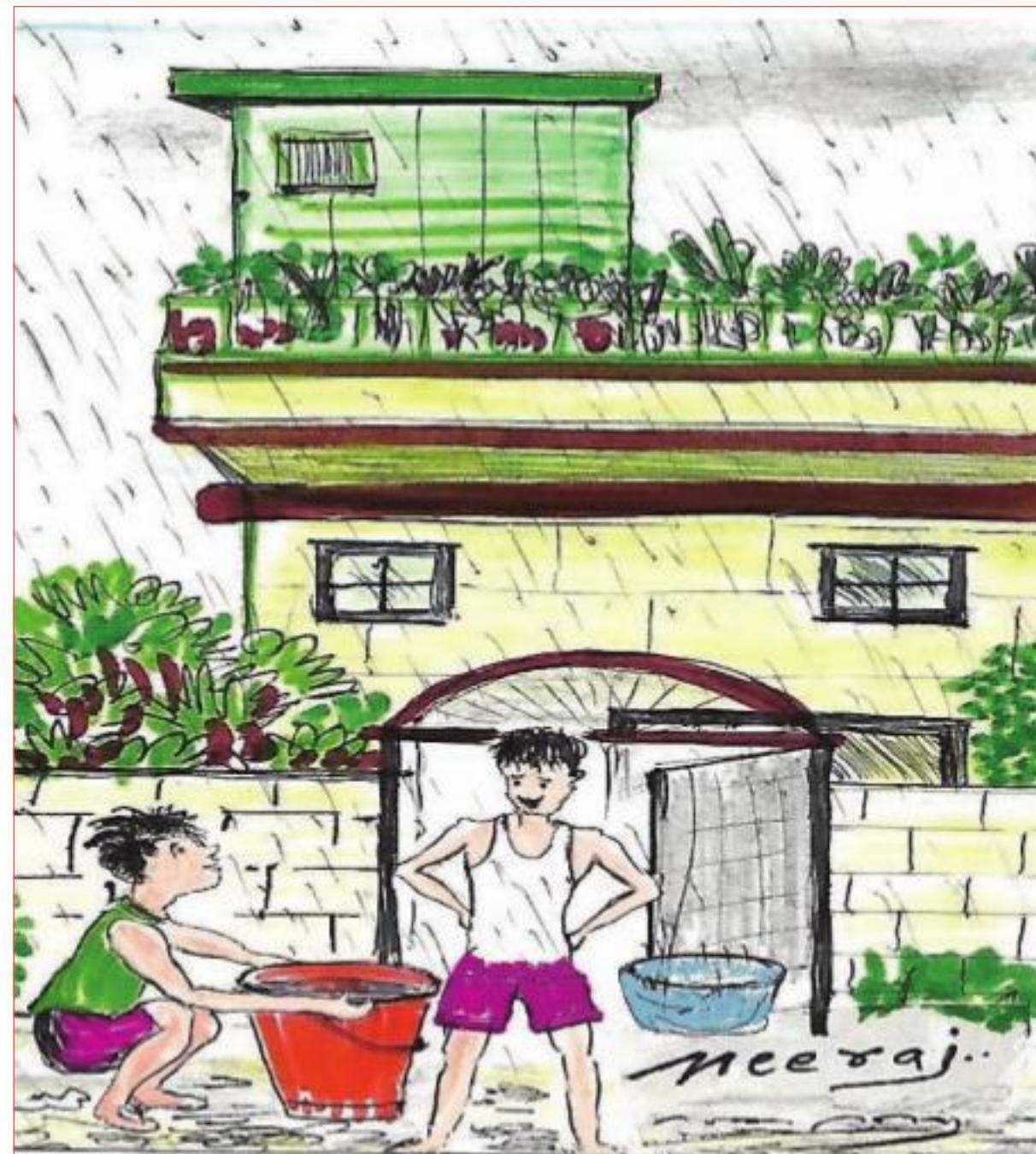
The relative humidity was recorded at 65 per cent.

The maximum and minimum temperature on Monday is expected to settle at 38 degrees Celsius and 27 degrees

Celsius, according to the IMD.

The air quality index (AQI) in the national capital was recorded at 103 this morning, according to Central Pollution Control Board data.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and



So far Delhi's summer has been cool. There were some hot days, but unexpected showers changed it all. There have also been no violent dust storms so far. Half of the summer is over. But nobody is celebrating. Delhi continues to live in fear of death. People are continuing to succumb to the deadly virus. A regular flow of data on Covid cases and fatalities continues to intrude people's minds. The Lockdown has continued for over a month. Even when it is eased, it will be difficult to shake off the Covid effect from one's mind, though it may give one a break. Delhiites may in fact find this a long-lost freedom. It can give them a chance to go round, and see their city again. One can't forget what happened during the Lockdowns, the recent ones. Administrative agencies may take comfort, occasionally, at the fall of numbers during a week or a fortnight. But that does not make much difference for people. They continue to live in fear and guilt. In spite of precautions, they do not feel safe and feel bad they could not do much to save others. A Lockdown break could free them from home-prisons and revive their spirits. They will see how the recent rains had washed the

roads that were their link with the rest of the world. The Delhiites had taken for granted the trees that stand on the city roads. These were always there to give them shade and fresh air. Under many of these trees they had enjoyed fruits sold by day-time fruit sellers, and watched squirrels squeaking non-stop for a bite of the leftovers. Stuck at home, they realise the absence of these avenue trees from their lives. If the Lockdown is relaxed, they know they will have the company of these trees again, and a part of their lives restored. The city has given its residents many joys and troubles. All of these have been part of their life. Stuck at home for indefinite periods, the city residents miss the small pleasures. Time was spent often bargaining at temporary markets near offices. There were jute bags, umbrellas, mobile chargers and a variety of hand tools available on the pavements. Whether one needed them for any immediate work or not, one did bargain to buy them. It was part of the normal life people lived. In their time spent between the bed rooms and the dining tables, people have almost forgotten about the kiosks offering fresh fruit juices, spicy 'alu chaat' and bread 'pakoras' near their offices. It was a different kind of life they

had. One could have tea in offices. But having tea with friends and colleagues at their favourite kiosks gave a different flavour. These were little joys that were part of their lives. One could make quick trips to banks and insurance offices. The ATMs were never more than a short distance away. A recent addition to this "public life" was paperback books and stationery items sold outside Metro entrances. There is no end to the street life one was part of in "normal" times. One took the daily Metro travel too as God-gifted. It is only during the home-stay that one realised that Metro had disappeared from their lives. They sometimes wonder how Delhi would have been without the Metro that offers comfortable journeys at relatively small expense. At home during the Lockdowns, life comprised of just sleeping, eating and working. One woke up to birds' chatter from trees just outside windows. By breakfast time, the birds took turns to visit the window ledges, looking for food. Watching the daily routine of the birds became a part of one's daily life. People saw the birds enjoying their freedom, while they felt caged in their homes, spending their days and nights waiting to hear when their cages would be unlocked.

Hospitals across the country are still overflowing with Coronavirus patients. The situation is so grim that many people who have medical health insurance policies and are paying huge annual premiums have been battling Covid-19 and other serious illnesses at home since they are unable to get admission in hospitals.

Now an advertising veteran has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighting the ordeal of lakhs of families who have been fighting Coronavirus and other serious illnesses at home as they do not have access to hospitals despite having medical health insurance policies that mandate some duration of hospitalisation for reimbursement of the medical expenses.

A resident of Gurugram, Ravi Aurora has sought changes in rules to allow policy benefits even if the costly treatment of the policy holder is done at home in place of hospital. Aurora comes from a celebrated family of war veterans and civil servants. He is the nephew of Bangladesh war hero, Gen Jagjit Singh Aurora.

His father Major S S Aurora had fought in Egypt and Italy during World War II. Aurora, his wife, daughter and daughter-in-law have been undergoing expensive Covid-19 treatment at home over the past month, ending up spending almost Rs seven lakhs from their own pockets. The health insurance company refused to reimburse their medical bills. In his letter to the Prime Minister, Aurora says, "I am asking the nation to stand by persons like me, whose generations have served the nation fighting at borders, and lakhs of others in this national emergency where the government and health insurance companies need to empathise with the people

and reimburse their home medical expenses." According to him, "The irony is that we are medically insured but the insurance companies say that – as per rules - we will be reimbursed only if we are hospitalised."

There are many who believe that medical insurance rules need to be

amended in view of the current extraordinary times to help the people fight the pandemic.

The government and the insurance regulator can surely help policy holders in such an exceptional situation. Major health insurance companies have reportedly not reimbursed

the medical bills of a large number of Covid patients, who could not avail of hospital treatment, oxygen or ventilators, and had to recuperate at home.

Despite having a health insurance policy, they are forced to pay from their pockets for expensive home treatment.

TAILPIECE

To advise someone, "Be positive!" sounds more like a curse in these days of Corona pandemic, an elderly lady quipped.

Contributed by: Ashok Tuteja, Deepak Razdan and Asha Ramachandran



HOST TALES

Ghosts and experimental tales about them have fascinated nearly everyone down the ages. Many believe in ghosts but rationalists tend to dismiss such tales, saying there is always an explanation to these phenomena. Almost all high-rise buildings and infrastructure, such as bridges,

have had an accident or two, where people have lost their lives. Their ghosts, many contend, are said to be haunting their place of death. An acquaintance, who works with a manufacturing company, narrated how rumours of a shrouded woman, who would occasionally make an appearance and play a merry prank on the employees. A couple of years ago, our

friend recalled, before the factory shut down due to Corona, during a night shift, faced with the need to quickly cool a component being manufactured, an employee in charge of stores was sent to fetch a pedestal fan. The store room was located in a separate building and the middle-aged man quickly made his way back, carrying the fan on his shoulder. At a particular point,

the fan suddenly started and began whirring in full earnest. The shocked man let go of the fan, screaming at the top of his voice that this was the work of the "shrouded woman". Our friend looked around and detected the culprit: a huge exhaust fan. He then showed his shivering colleague how as he walked past the exhaust, the fan started in the air draft!

India

Haryana govt extends lockdown till 7 June, relaxes some curbs

Khattar says colleges, schools, industrial training institutes will remain closed till 15 June

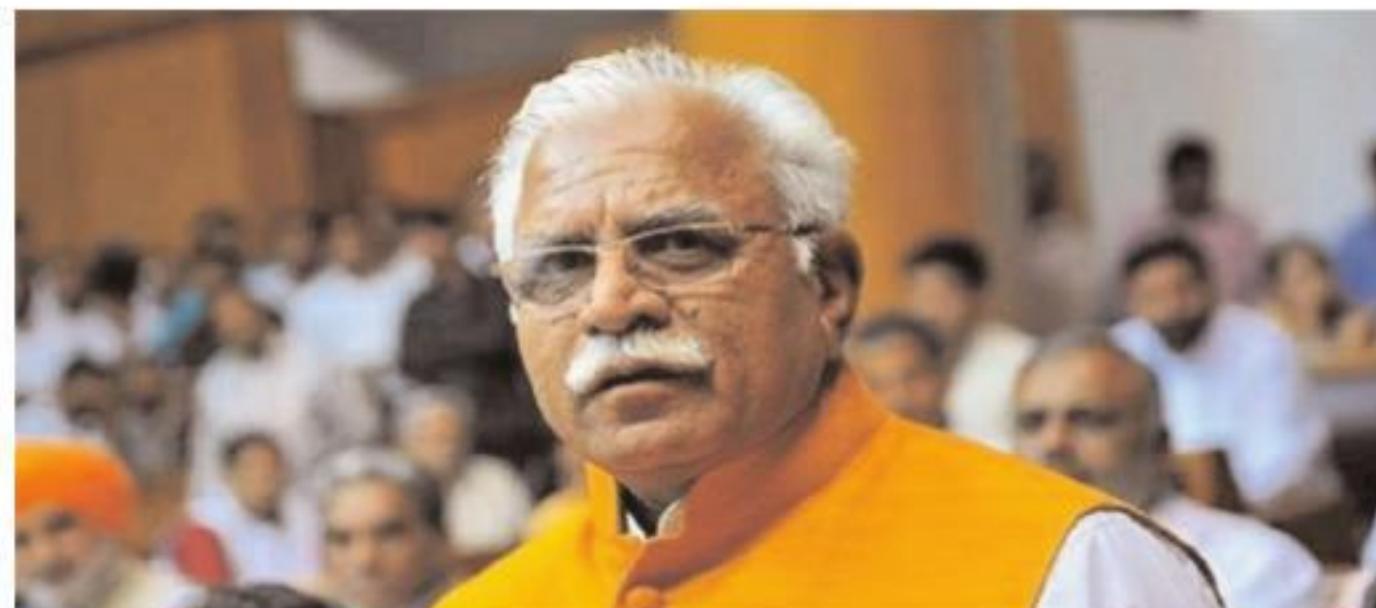
PTI
CHANDIGARH, 30 MAY

The lockdown to contain COVID-19 in Haryana has been extended by a week till June 7, the state government announced on Sunday, as it relaxed curbs imposed on shop timings and malls.

The state government termed the lockdown "Mahamari Alert/Surkshit Haryana (Epidemic Alert/Safe Haryana)".

Addressing a virtual press conference, Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said even though the COVID-19 situation has improved in the state, it has been decided to extend the "Mahamari Alert/Surkshit Haryana" lockdown till 5 am on June 7 with some more relaxations.

He said shops which were earlier allowed to open as per odd-even basis from 7 am to 12 pm will now be open from 9 am



to 3 pm.

"We had received representations from market associations after which we decided to change the timings. However, the shops will continue to open as per the odd-even system," Khattar said.

Malls will now be allowed to open from 10 am to 6 pm, subject to certain conditions, he said.

The number of visitors to be

allowed inside a mall will depend on the size of the structure, the chief minister added.

"For example, in a 1,000 square feet mall, 40 people will be allowed at a time, and if it has an area of 2,000 square feet, the number of people allowed at a given time will be 80," he said.

Those allowed entry can stay inside for a limited duration, and entry of others will be

already announced, the chief minister said. The daily corona curfew timing in the state will continue to be from 10 pm to 5 am, he added.

Replying to a question, the chief minister said that unlike last year's lockdown, when the state's revenue collections took a major hit, the impact on excise and GST collections due to the current lockdown has been marginal.

To contain the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Haryana, the state government had initially imposed a lockdown on May 3 for a week till May 10, which has now been extended four times. COVID-19 cases, positivity rate and the death count due to the disease have come down significantly following the imposition of the curbs.

The state government had also put several other restrictions in place, including the imposition of section 144 of the CrPC and a night curfew.

HP using IT to monitor panchayats' works

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 30 MAY

The Himachal Pradesh government is focusing on implementing e-services in the rural areas of the state for which 3,226 panchayats have been covered under digital umbrellas and that the information technology (IT) is being used to monitor panchayats' works.

A state government official said the HP Panchayati Raj department had won first prize at the national level under e-Panchayat in 2020 and second prize in 2021 for ensuring the optimum use of information technology to monitor the work of the panchayats.

"3,226 gram panchayats of the state are working online under the e-Panchayat portal through plan plus, geo tagging, area profile, priya software and National Asset Directory application.

The Parivar Register of Gram Panchayats has been made available online in all the panchayats and its copies are

being provided online to citizens," he said, adding it is helping in ensuring transparency, efficiency and accountability in panchayats functioning.

He said the state government had succeeded in creating immense economic activities, besides generating employment opportunities in the rural areas and uplifting the living standard of people in these areas. He stated that the government had recently constituted 412 new panchayats in view of geographical and administrative needs of the state and now there were 3,615 gram panchayats in the state.

"Internet facilities have been made available which has proved a boon in dissemination of information on a large scale till the last mile of rural areas.

As many as 598 general service centres have also been set up in the state to provide all IT related services under one roof at the panchayat level and 2,982 additional centers will be set up in the year 2021-22.

In the last 3 years, 26,500 representatives of PRIs and gram panchayat secretaries had been trained and panchayats had also been involved in creating awareness against social vices as well as creating awareness about environment and water conservation," he said. He stated that the state government has benefited panchayats directly from the funds received from the Centre government on the recommendation of 14th and 15th Finance Commission.

In the last three years, an amount of Rs 35.74 crore has been spent on construction and repair works of 671 panchayats ghar, besides, 1,339 Moksha Dham have also been constructed in the state.

He further stated that to give impetus to developmental works in gram panchayats, the 15th Finance Commission had made a provision of Rs 1,600 crore for panchayats in the year 2020-21, out of which the first instalment of Rs 214 crore had been received.

Congraps HP govt for 'ignoring' situation on border with China

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 30 MAY

Himachal Pradesh Congress chief Kuldip Singh Rathore on Sunday criticised chief minister Jai Ram Thakur for "ignoring" the situation on the border with China in Kinnaur

district and said Chinese have built roads and houses but the government has adopted a lacklustre approach on this serious issue.

Welcoming Thakur's tour to border areas in Kinnaur district, Rathore said if the government had taken steps to

dissolve tension on the border with China in the state earlier, the situation would have been different today.

He demanded that the chief minister issue a statement on ground realities as his visit was conducted under a secret plan and the people

of the state should be made aware of the real situation.

"Congress has raised the issue of Chinese indulging in construction works at the border near Kunu and Changantha areas in Kinnaur district which remained undetected by intelligence agencies. The

development came to light in August 2020 after a shepherd made a video of construction works being carried out by China and posted the video on social media platforms.

It is Shah, defence minister Rajnath Singh, the Governor and the CM in August

last year and had raised concerns on the developments on the Himachal border with China. Thakur's visit to the China border in Kinnaur district had led to concerns among the local population and the party had time and again raised the issue of

increasing vigil on borders in Lahaul Spiti, Kinnaur and Chamba districts, he said.

"China has almost completed construction of roads and houses near the border with Himachal Pradesh now and it may create a serious threat for people residing in

these areas. The government must take more pre-emptive measures and enhance intelligence gathering so that the people of the state don't face any issue in the future and their safety and security could be ensured," he added.



In this pandemic, BJP workers without being bothered about their wellbeing are standing with the people. But the Opposition has gone into lockdown and quarantined itself

TARGETING THE OPPPOSITION AND IMPLYING THAT ITS LEADERS ARE MISSING FROM THE GROUND.

india

THUMBNAILS



Slum dwellers wait to receive free ration on completion of seven years of PM Narendra Modi-led BJP government, in Bhopal on Sunday. AGENCEZ

Skeletons found in TN: As many as five skeletons have been found from the Valinokkam seashore at a village in Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu, prompting authorities to launch a probe. The village has a population of 500 fishermen. PTI

BJP activist stabbed: A BJP activist on Sunday suffered stab injuries when two groups of party activists clashed at Vadanappally in Kerala's Thrissur, police said. The activist was stabbed by a person said to have a criminal background in a hospital premises. PTI

WB: Uncertainty whether chief secy will comply with recall order

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, 30 MAY

Uncertainty prevails over whether state chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay, who has been recalled by the Central government, will report at the department of personnel and training, North Block, in New Delhi at 10 am tomorrow or not.

Sources at Nabanna said that the state government has not released Mr Bandopadhyay till this evening while the Centre has withdrawn their recall order as appealed by chief minister Mamata Banerjee yesterday.

Mr Bandopadhyay along with his wife visited the state secretariat this evening.

He is scheduled to attend a meeting with principal secretaries of all departments at Nabanna tomorrow morning to take stock of the cyclone relief and restructuring work and a review meeting that will be chaired by Miss Banerjee at 3 p.m.

Miss Banerjee had said yesterday that the central government has filed a caveat in court and if need be then they too will move the court against the recall order which was issued without taking consent of the state government or Mr Bandopadhyay.

However, neither the state government nor Mr Bandopadhyay responded on the matter till now.

Yesterday, chief minister Mamata Banerjee held a press conference and said it's an act of political vendetta by the Central government to summon the chief secretary on what was slated to be the day of his retirement to Delhi. She said on 24 May, the cabinet secretary already sent letter approving the extension for of Alapan Bandopadhyay as state chief secretary for three months as requested by the state government.

The chief secretary is heading the task forces set up to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and the effects of cyclone Yaas.

Former IAS and IPS officers like Jawahar Sarkar, Prasad Roy, and Ardhendu Sen condemned the Centre's order recalling Alapan Bandopadhyay.

While Mr Sarkar described it as unconstitutional, Mr Roy and Mr Sen said in view of the pandemic and the cyclone calamity, the chief secretary was given extension as many task forces were being headed by him. So it's sheer vendetta politics that he was recalled on the last day of his service.

KCR to extend T'gana lockdown for 10 days, ignores Owaisi's plea

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD, 30 MAY

Ignoring the plea from ally and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi the state Cabinet led by chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao today decided to extend the lockdown in Telangana for another 10 days but tweaking the relaxation hours for curfew to prevent over crowding of markets and allowing people to reach their homes safely.

The state also decided to follow the example of Kerala giving priority to the students going abroad priority in vaccination.

According to a statement issued by the chief minister's office the Cabinet decided to extend the lock down for another 10 days. "The Cabinet also decided to give relaxation during the lock down from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. For those going out an hour will be set aside to allow them to return home by 2 p.m. But lockdown will be strictly implemented between 2 p.m. and 6 a.m. next morning," read the statement.

The extension of the relaxation hours was done after it was observed that within the four hours markets were overcrowded as people rushed to complete their purchases. There were also reports of police high handedness as vehicles were seized by them from people rushing to return homes but caught in traffic.

Telangana had imposed the lockdown on 12 May for 10 days initially and it has now been extended twice. Health department officials claim that the number of fresh cases have been going down ever since along with the number of hospital admissions. However, AIMIM chief and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi who is against such blanket

lockdowns took to Twitter to plead with the chief ministers hours before the Cabinet meeting arguing against extending the lockdown any further. He wrote: "Strongly urge the Telangana chief minister to not extend lockdown. If the goal is to reduce crowding then we may consider evening curfews (6 p.m. onwards) or mini lockdowns for Covid clusters. But expecting 3.5 crore people to live for weeks with just a 4-hour lockdown relaxation."

He went on to point out that Covid-19 can be combated without going into a lockdown and added the only long term solution was universal vaccination.

YSR to inaugurate 14 new medical colleges

Andhra Pradesh CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will be laying the foundation stone for setting up 14 new medical colleges in the state in order to ramp up healthcare infrastructure in the state.

The state will set up 16 such new medical colleges in total in addition to the existing 11 ones which also lead to an increase of 2,000 medical seats, a significant number with only 30 per cent going to those paying fees. The medical colleges and teaching hospitals will offer facilities such as emergency, casualty diagnostic services as well as advanced intensive care units and 10 state of art modular theatres.

The state also issued orders for construction of multi speciality hospitals in tribal areas at five locations where 885 acres of land were acquired for medical colleges and multispeciality hospitals. Reddy completed two years in office and the government released a booklet on the welfare schemes he has introduced.

BJP observes seven years of Modi govt, distributes essentials to needy



BJP national president JP Nadda and MP Parvez Verma flag off Covid relief materials on completion of seven years of BJP government, in New Delhi on Sunday SNS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is leading the global campaign to eradicate coronavirus.

Meanwhile, BJP chief JP Nadda on Sunday said while crores of party workers serve people by helping them with Covid relief material, the Opposition has "quarantined" itself and works to lower the morale of the country during the pandemic. BJP leaders and workers are marking the seventh anniversary of the Modi government on Sunday by carrying out Covid prevention and relief

work in one lakh villages.

The BPI is observing the anniversary of its government at the Centre as "Seva Divas" and in view of the pandemic, the party has decided not to celebrate the day, but instead organise relief works under the campaign "Sewa Hi Sangathan Hai".

Crores of BJP workers are carrying out Covid prevention and relief works by distributing masks, sanitizers, food packets and spreading awareness about vaccines in villages, Nadda said.

Targeting the Opposition, Nadda said, "In this pandemic, BJP workers without being bothered about their wellbeing are standing with the people. But the Opposition has gone into lockdown and quarantined itself. It is visible only in virtual Press conferences or on Twitter."

MVA allies slam Modi govt on 7th anniv

The ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi in Maharashtra criticised the Modi government on its seventh anniversary, with Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut saying the BPI-led dispensation at the Centre needs to introspect on whether it has been able to fulfil the basic needs of people.

The Maharashtra Congress observed the completion of seven years in office of the Narendra Modi government as a 'black day' and accused the Centre of pushing the country into a "gorge" of Covid-19 crisis.

FRIEND IN NEED



A man feeding monkeys in Pushkar on Sunday. AGENCEZ

Monsoon onset delayed, to hit Kerala by 3 June: IMD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 30 MAY

The arrival of monsoon over Kerala is likely to be delayed by two days and it is now expected to make an onset over the state by 3 June, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Sunday.

IMD director general M Mohapatra said there is cyclonic circulation along the Karnataka coast which is hindering the progress of the southwest monsoon.

"The southwesterly winds could strengthen further gradually from June 1, resulting in likely enhancement in rainfall activity over Kerala. Hence the monsoon onset over Kerala is likely to take place around June 3," the IMD said. Due to strengthening of



lower level southwesterly winds, fairly widespread rainfall activity with isolated heavy falls are very likely over northeastern states during next five days.

The normal onset date for monsoon over Kerala is June 1. This marks the start of the four-

Storm uproots trees, disrupts power supply in Chandigarh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHANDIGARH, 30 MAY

A high-velocity storm swept the Union Territory of Chandigarh and its surrounding areas late Saturday night uprooting trees and disrupting power supply at many

places. The storm, with a wind speed exceeding 60 kmph, was accompanied by heavy rains, the weather office said on Sunday. Trees were uprooted and electric poles damaged in some places.

Some residents complained that power supply in

many southern sectors of the city remained disrupted for nearly 10 hours. Morning water supply was also disrupted in some parts of the city. In the morning, municipal corporation workers were seen clearing several roads of uprooted trees and branches. There were reports of a few vehicles getting damaged as trees or heavy branches fell on them during the storm. The sudden change in weather was caused by a weather system which had built up due to an upper air cyclonic pressure, a Meteorological Department said.

To the north, the storm caused damage to trees and power lines. Some residents complained that power supply in

Padmanabha Swamy Temple jumbo dead

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 30 MAY

An elephant, gifted by the erstwhile Travancore king Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma to the famed Sri Padmanabha Swamy shrine here, died following prolonged illness. The female jumbo, named Mathilakam Darshini alias Darshini, died on Saturday. It was believed to be aged between 55-58 years and was suffering from abdomen-related ailments for some time, sources here said. A darling of the devotees and the local people, the elephant had been a constant presence in various temple rituals especially during the annual 'arattu', the traditional procession in which the deity is taken for a holy bath.

TENDER

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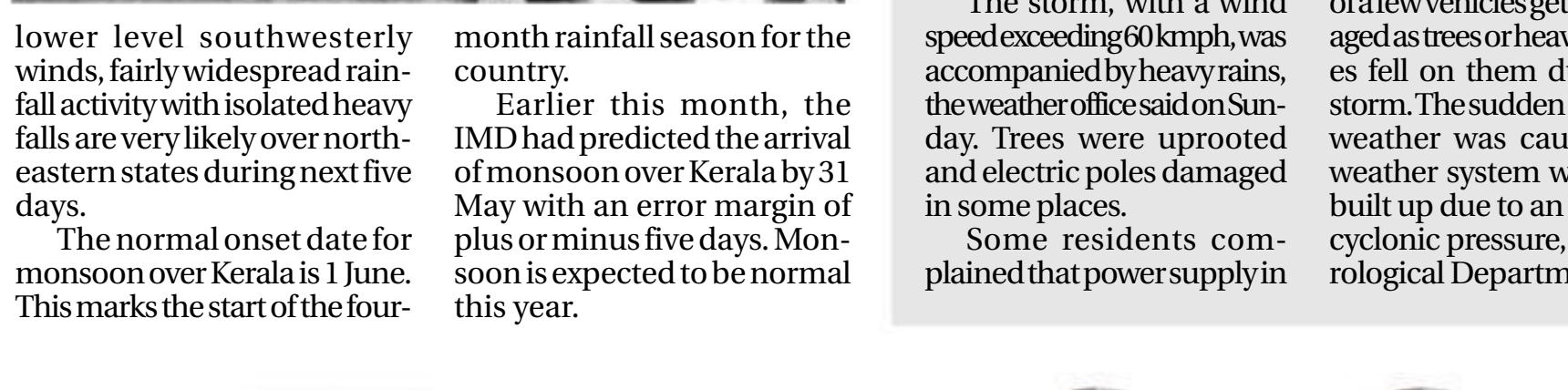
1) TPWODL/MN/O/SU/007- Rate Contract for Supply of Kit-Kat Fuse

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For detailed tender documents please visit our Tender section on website www.tpwesterodisha.com. Further details for participating in tender is given in the tender document.

All future correspondence regarding the tender, bid submission, bid submission date extension etc. will happen with participating bidders only through E-Tender system.

Sd/- Chief-Contracts and Stores



month rainfall season for the country.

Earlier this month, the IMD had predicted the arrival of monsoon over Kerala by 31 May with an error margin of plus or minus five days. Monsoon is expected to be normal this year.

Due to strengthening of

the southwesterly winds, fairly widespread rainfall activity with isolated heavy falls are very likely over northeastern states during next five days.

The normal onset date for monsoon over Kerala is June 1. This marks the start of the four-

month rainfall season for the country.

Earlier this month, the IMD had predicted the arrival of monsoon over Kerala by 31 May with an error margin of plus or minus five days. Monsoon is expected to be normal this year.

Due to strengthening of



On the one hand, the common man is disturbed due to Covid and declining income and on the other hand, the Modi government is causing inconvenience through high inflation

RAJASTHAN CHIEF MINISTER ASHOK GEHLOT

LASHING OUT AT THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OVER FREQUENT RISE IN FUEL PRICES AND INFLATION

The Statesman

NEW DELHI, MONDAY 31 MAY 2021

05

THUMBNAILS



Police personnel take part in a rally to make people aware on Covid-19 safety guidelines, amid lockdown in Jaipur, on Sunday.

AGENCIES

Covid-19: Smokers at high risk

Audit of over 100 deaths due to Covid-19 at Indore reveals almost 40% of deceased are smokers



ed in the South-East Asia region.

"We are the first-ever organisation in MP to win this honour and the only Civil Society to be awarded in the region this year," Sinha told The Statesman today.

Indore district administration's death audit found that the most number of deaths were of patients with comorbidities like diabetes and blood pressure, followed by those who were smokers.

"Studies by the Indian Council of Medical Research have found smokers were vulnerable to contracting Covid-19 and its serious complications," Sinha stated.

He said that according to data, at least 13 lakh persons die each year in India due to smoking and tobacco consumption while the worldwide annual deaths due to tobacco are around 8 million.

"In the present situation, smoking is riskier due to the increased vulnerability to Covid-19. Also, those who consume tobacco in other forms like *gutka* and *khatni* pose a further threat of spreading the corona pandemic when they spit in public places," Sinha pointed out.

"When it was found out that smokers were more likely to develop severe disease with Covid-19 compared to non-smokers, it triggered millions of smokers to want to quit tobacco," said Sinha.

"Commit to Quit will help create healthier environments that are conducive to quitting tobacco and will empower and support tobacco users on their journey to quit," Sinha expressed hope.

"Within 20 minutes of quitting, a person's heart rate and blood pressure improves, the carbon monoxide level in the body becomes normal within 12 hours, blood circulation increases and lung function enhances within 2-12 weeks of quitting, and coughing and shortness of breath also goes away," Sinha informed.



Sex workers wait to receive groceries and gas cylinders, distributed by Seva Bharti at GB Road, during Covid-induced lockdown in New Delhi, on Sunday.

AGENCIES

Plea in SC seeks 3-tier committee for dignified disposal of bodies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 30 MAY

ted that the bodies of Covid-19 affected persons are being buried on the banks of rivers. Sand covering the bodies is blown away by strong winds, exposing the decomposing bodies, said the plea filed through advocate Raj Kishor Choudhary.

The petition has arrayed the Centre, the National Mission for Clean Ganga, the governments of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and the pollution control boards of these two states as respondents.

The plea has sought directions to the authorities to immediately take appropriate steps to either conduct door-to-door Covid-19 test or organise medical camps for tests in such areas where bodies were found along the river banks so that infection may not spread to others.

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32 kids orphaned during pandemic in Delhi: DCPCR

NEW DELHI, 30 MAY

The Delhi Commission For Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) has identified 32 children who were orphaned during the pandemic in the national capital.

Ten more children have been identified who have lost their single parent to the viral disease, DCPCR chairman Anurag Kundu said.

He said a survey was started earlier this month to trace children in similar distress.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had on 14 May said the Delhi government will bear the cost of education and upbringing of children who were orphaned during the pandemic. The government has planned to give Rs 2,500 per month to such children, and a proposal is likely to be tabled before the Cabinet soon for approval.

DCPCR has come across many instances on social media where people with information about children orphaned were encouraging others to adopt them. PTI

CORONA BLUES



Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin wears a PPE kit before inspecting a Covid-19 centre during his visit to ESI hospital, in Coimbatore, on Sunday. On a visit to Erode, Tirupur and Coimbatore, Stalin flagged off 50 car ambulances for use in five zones of the city corporation for transporting Covid patients to hospitals.

■ AGENCIES

Prisoners in UP say it's safer & healthier in jail: Most people would do anything to get out of jail. But that's not the case with 21 inmates in nine prisons of UP who have written to authorities saying they don't want parole as staying incarcerated is 'safer and healthier' during the pandemic. "The inmates say health check-up is done regularly in jails. They get food on time. They say once they go out of the jail, they will have to struggle to make a livelihood," director general of jail administration Anand Kumar said. PTI

Mumbai mayor finds vaccines in normal fridge at hotel: Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar on Sunday conducted an inspection at a hotel in suburban Andheri and found several Covid-19 vaccines stored there in a normal fridge, in violation of the norms. The Covaxin doses found stored there have been sealed and an inquiry has been ordered. PTI

IIM-B launches 'donate a vaccine' fund-raising initiative: Alumni of IIM-Bangalore have launched the 'donate a vaccine' fund-raising initiative to donate one lakh vaccines for the country's urban and rural poor, as part of their recovery, rehabilitation and prevention plans for Covid-19. Union minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Dr Devi Shetty, Chair, IIM-B Board of Governors, jointly launched the initiative virtually on Saturday, to vaccinate people from the underprivileged sections of society, IIM-B said in a statement. PTI

50 people have died due to black fungus in Haryana: Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday said 50 people have died due to black fungus in the state so far, while 650 more are undergoing treatment for the infection in various hospitals. The Haryana government has made it mandatory for doctors to report any case of the disease to chief medical officer of district concerned. PTI

J&K begins unlock process: Initiating the unlock process, J&K government on Sunday announced suspension of the lockdown but the weekend and night curfew will remain in force. Chief secretary BVR Subrahmanyam ordered weekend curfew will be clamped on every Friday at 8pm and remain in force till 7am on Monday. Night curfew will remain in force from 8pm to 7am daily. All education institutions shall remain shut till 15 June. Meanwhile, Ladakh UT administration has extended lockdown in Leh and Kargil districts till 7 June. SNS

Naravane: Some countries portrayed Quad to raise 'unsubstantiated fears'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 30 MAY



Chief of Army Staff Gen MM Naravane has said that some countries have portrayed the Quad or Quadrilateral coalition as a military alliance to despite "unsubstantiated fears" despite no concrete evidence to back their claims.

Asserting that the Quad does not intend to become a military alliance, Gen Naravane said it is meant to be a plurilateral grouping delving into issues specific to the Indo-Pacific region.

The Quad comprising India, the US, Japan and Australia has been focusing on promoting shared democratic ideologies and ensuring a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific against the backdrop of rising global concerns over China's growing assertiveness in the region.

"The Quad neither intends nor attempts to be a military alliance. It is meant to be a plurilateral grouping which focuses on issues specific to the Indo-Pacific," he said in an interview.

China has been severely critical of the Quad, claiming that the grouping is aimed at containing it in the Indo-Pacific.

The government will decide on further action, including an appeal over the verdict, after examining the report.

Kerala HC on Friday quashed the state government order allotting scholarships for Muslim and Christian communities in 80:20 ratio has put the Left Democratic Front government in a tricky situation.

The government is yet to respond to the court order. Indications are that the LDF government will take extreme caution before taking a stand on demands for and against the court order.

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the other day had said: "What the High Court has said and what needs to be done in the wake of the verdict needs to be examined in detail".

According to sources, the tiger had strayed from the core forest area and was spotted near Harikhal Tiger Project, earlier this week. Forest department officials were keeping a close watch on the tiger which is said to be about 11 years old. This morning, the big cat was found

itarian assistance and disaster relief," he said.

In the first Quad summit in March, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden, Australian PM Scott Morrison and Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga vowed to strive for an Indo-Pacific region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion, in an apparent message to China.

Modernisation of Indian Army well on course:

The modernisation of the Indian Army is well on course, Gen Naravane said, dismissing apprehensions that the need for devoting more resources to guard the Line of Actual Control in the face of standoff with China in eastern Ladakh may starve the force of funds for buying new weapons and platforms.

Emphasising his point, Gen Naravane said 59 contracts worth Rs 21,000 crore have been concluded since last fiscal while a number of other capital acquisition proposals are in the pipeline. He said the modernisation drive has been going on without facing any difficulty and that required resources are being provided by the government.

The state government official said the protocol for the management of pediatric groups had been shared with the districts and the medical.

FINAL STEP



'Antim Pag' or final step posted by @indiannavy, at the Indian Naval Academy.

'Make Matuas citizens on priority basis'



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 30 MAY:

The Narendra Modi government issued a gazette notification on Friday empowering authorities in 13 more districts of states such as Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab, to grant citizenship to the minority communities hailing from the neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh under the existing rules.

where in India. Even I along with hundreds others were sent to jail in Assam for 19 months, when we demanded citizenship rights for Bengali refugees. Granting citizenship to minority communities especially for Bengalis, who are leaving elsewhere in India should be given on top priority basis to prevent injustice against them.

Under the CAA, people from six religions - Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Christians - from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan will be granted citizenship, if they arrived in India before 31 December 2014. The amendment to this effect, which was passed in December 2019, had triggered nationwide protests.

The Act was widely believed to be discriminatory against Muslims, and an attempt to define citizenship on the basis of religion in India.

The CAA was a key point in the BJP's manifesto in the recently-concluded state elections in West Bengal and Assam.

HC on minority scholarships: Kerala govt treads cautiously

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 30 MAY

Kerala High Court's order on Friday striking down the 2015 state government order allocating scholarships for Muslim and Christian communities in 80:20 ratio has put the Left Democratic Front government in a tricky situation.

The government is yet to respond to the court order. Indications are that the LDF government will take extreme caution before taking a stand on demands for and against the court order.

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the other day had said: "What the High Court has said and what needs to be done in the wake of the verdict needs to be examined in detail".

According to sources, the tiger had strayed from the core forest area and was spotted near Harikhal Tiger Project, earlier this week. Forest department officials were keeping a close watch on the tiger which is said to be about 11 years old. This morning, the big cat was found

The government will decide on further action, including an appeal over the verdict, after examining the report.

Kerala HC on Friday quashed the state government order allotting merit-cum-means scholarship at 80 per cent to Muslim community and 20 per cent to the Latin Catholic Christians and converted Christians.

Declaring that the state government orders in this regard could not be legally sustainable, a division bench of Chief Justice S Manikumar and Justice Shaji P Chaly directed the government to pass requisite and appropriate orders, providing merit-cum-means scholarship to members of the notified minority communities equally and in accordance with the latest population

census available with the State Minority Commission.

The LDF returned to power

in the recent Assembly elections

with the support of the Muslim and Christian communities.

To win over the

Muslims, the LDF used anti-CAA sentiments and allied issues and played up among Christians the issue of alleged discrimination in scholarship distribution. An anti-Muslim League sentiment had developed among Christians, which helped LDF get political dividends.

While the Christian organisa-

tions and various church-

s have welcomed the verdict,

it has left the Muslim organiza-

tions rattled. Church lead-

ers said the court order would bring equality in the distribution

of benefits to the minor-

ity communities. They have

urged the government to

implement the HC order with- out delay.

Indian Union Muslim Lea-

gue - largest political party repre-

senting Muslims in Kerala -

has urged the government to

appeal against the order.

Urging for separate scheme

for Christians, IUML na-

tional secretary E T Muhammed Basheer MP said: "The govern-

ment failed to present the

facts before the court. The schol-

ars started as a sequel to

Sachar Committee report

at the national level. A sche-

me meant for Muslims was

amended by LDF regime of

2006-11 to give a portion to

Latin Catholics and conve-

nected Christians. The govern-

ment should bring out sepa-

rate schemes for other minori-

Origin of Covid

More than a year after the pussyfooting by Donald Trump, the world is still rather ignorant about the origin of Covid-19. There is a scintilla of hope, therefore, when President Joe Biden orders intelligence officials to "redouble" efforts to investigate the origins of Covid-19, including the theory that it came from a laboratory in China. The need to clear the fogbound air is dire. And yet in the immediate aftermath of the US President's order, China has rejected the laboratory theory. In the season of the catastrophe, the ambience has been decidedly tilted with Beijing's immediate response ~ "Smear campaigns and blame shifting are making a comeback, and the conspiracy theory of 'lab leak' is resurfacing," its embassy in the US said in a statement on Thursday. Since it was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, more than 168 million cases of Covid-19 have been confirmed worldwide and at least 3.5 million deaths reported. Initially, Chinese authorities had linked the early cases to a seafood market in Wuhan, leading scientists to evolve the theory that the virus first passed to humans from animals. But recent US media reports have suggested growing evidence that the virus could instead have emerged from a laboratory in China, perhaps through an accidental leak. Rather than score brownie points in matters diplomatic, the matrix on either side of the Atlantic ought to be based on medical science. In what passes for relative transparency in the US government, the Biden administration has conceded that the American intelligence community is split on Covid-19's origins ~ it could be the lab or animal-to-human contact ~ and no one is near certain about it. That marks a decisive shift from the criticism of the lab theory by many in the media and politics last year, when Mr Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Senator Tom Cotton and others floated the idea. Mr. Biden has now seen through the rigmarole that has led the world, still less the United States of America, nowhere.

The afflicted have been driven faster to death rather than to the faintest knowledge about the origin of Covid-19. The comity of nations may never know the full truth about the virus' origins, particularly if China continues to be less than cooperative. Mr Biden is pledging a full investigation. However, if the United States finds conclusive evidence of a lab leak, it will mean more than just a few prominent figures having to eat crow and re-evaluate their trust in authoritative "conclusions". It could place very real strain on US-China relations for years to come. In a statement on Wednesday, President Biden said he had asked for a report on the origins of Covid-19 after taking office, "including whether it emerged from human contact with an infected animal or from a laboratory accident". He has now asked the groups to report back to him within 90 days. The sick and the dying as well as the next of kin are awaiting conclusions embedded in science.

Jimmy Lai

Embattled Hong Kong has turned the screws on a spirited pro-democracy activist yet again. It thus comes about that the island nation's media mogul, Jimmy Lai, has been sentenced to 14 months in prison for participating in an unauthorised assembly in 2019. At 73, he is said to be serving time for having participated in other demonstrations that year. He will serve part of his new sentence consecutively, which implies that Lai faces a total of 20 months in jail. Both the charge and the verdict have been carefully calibrated. The verdict has been pronounced as mainland China is increasingly cracking down on Hong Kong's rights and freedoms. Lai happens to be among 10 prominent activists who were sentenced on Friday for participating in an unlawful assembly on 1 October 2019. Others include Figo Chan, Leung Kwok-hung, known as "Long Hair", and Lee Cheuk-yan, who were sentenced to 18 months in jail. Leung and Lee are currently both in jail and will also serve their sentences consecutively. The sentence, therefore, is concordant with the agenda of mainland China towards its protectorate. At the sentencing on Friday, Judge Amanda Woodcock said she found claims by some of the defendants that their march on 1 October would be peaceful to be "naïve and unrealistic". The protests on China's national day witnessed major clashes between protesters and police, with the police chief later calling it "one of Hong Kong's most violent and chaotic days".

The tycoon faces at least two other charges imposed under the country's new national security law, which can carry a maximum term of life in prison. Lai is one of the most prominent persons to be arrested under the law, which criminalises secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces. It makes it easier to punish protesters, and in the event curtails Hong Kong's autonomy. Estimated to be worth more than \$1 billion, Lai made his initial fortune in the clothing industry and later ventured into media and founded Next Digital, which publishes Apple Daily, a well-read tabloid that is frequently critical of Hong Kong and mainland Chinese leadership. Earlier this month, authorities froze assets belonging to Lai, including his bank accounts and his stake of 71.26 per cent in Next Digital ~ estimated to be worth \$45 million. Quite obviously with Beijing's prodding, the screws were turned on Friday both on Lai and his financial assets. In his last interview with BBC before he was sentenced to jail, he said he would not give in to intimidation. "If they can induce fear in you, that's the cheapest way to control you and the most effective way and they know it. The only way to defeat the way of intimidation is to face up to fear and don't let it frighten you," he said. He has succinctly sized up Hong Kong's praxis ~ at the behest of China ~ against the movement for the restoration of democracy.

Scottish question

An independent Scotland is not easy. British law would require approval from Westminster, which depends on consent from Prime Minister Boris Johnson to hold a binding independence vote. Johnson is not keen to become the Prime Minister who lost Scotland



In the Scottish parliamentary election held in early May, the Scots voted just slightly less than half for a party in favour of secession from Britain. One wonders what is happening to the continent that gave birth to nationalism as an alternative to monarchy backed by religion as an ideology of governance. Until 1603 AD, England and Scotland were quite separate countries. It so happened that Henry VII's daughter was married to the then King of Scotland and their great grandson was King James VI of Scotland. Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, had no possible successor in England. Her nearest relation happened to be the Scottish James VI, Henry VII having been the Queen's grandfather. She approved of him and when she died James (as James I of England) moved to London and was crowned in 1603. He wished throughout his reign that the two countries be merged under a common monarch. But the English nobles did not agree; eventually, it was in 1707, in the reign of Queen Anne that the merger took place. Now after over three centuries they seem to be heading for separation.

Scottish desire to part ways with the UK enjoys the support of almost half its population, but in England this desire raises tempers. The English feel that the Scottish want independence because they dislike the English. This issue is a serious one that requires attention. At least in its social and political attitudes, Scotland seems to have become like a Scandinavian social democrat country. Scotland has a lot of oil, and wants to be like oil-rich Norway. Countries like Sweden and Denmark too, are seen as some sort of role models, where the state has a large welfare spending for its citizens.

But this is easier said than done. The UK has a parliamentary system. Nearly 90 per cent of its population is English. England is one of the most conservative places in the world. While the UK has deliberately created parliamentary seats to over-represent Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, England's share is 532 out of 650 seats. Plus, 40 MPs are from Wales, where the Conservative Party dominates. Northern Ireland has 18 seats, of which 11 are held by Unionist parties. The Unionists are effectively allied to the Conservatives, which means

more bad news. There is also a plan to redraw the parliamentary boundaries to give England its fair share of seats based on population. The picture becomes starker for Scotland.

A Scot can be elected British prime minister, but only with the support of the English, who do not have a history of supporting true socialists, although Britain has been voting Labour governments to office in the past. Gordon Brown, who was the Prime Minister of the UK before David Cameron, is a Scot. Scotland voted in 2014 to remain within the U.K. by a 10-point margin, but Brexit has changed outlooks. From the Scottish point of view,

ing unit to go its own way. Mother Russia would go its way. That cataclysmic event created 16 countries where only one existed, in both Europe and Asia.

A few years earlier, the two Germanies divided after World War II became one when the Berlin Wall fell to popular will. Yugoslavia followed soon after, breaking into seven countries; namely Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo. Thereafter in a few years Czechoslovakia peacefully separated into the Czech Republic and Slovakia to function as separate countries. Until 1918, some or all these were provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

As a result of the Empire's defeat in World War I, the League of Nations rearranged these nations. Catalonia or eastern Spain centered around Barcelona wishes to secede from Spain. In contradiction to these many separations, there is also a reverse trend of loose amalgamation. That began soon after the end of World War II when one by one several common communities of several European countries decided to come together. Under a European Coal and Steel Community, then European Economic Community, and then as a Customs Union the EEC and EEA merged in 1967. More and more joined these six or seven countries; like Denmark, Ireland and the UK, later Spain and Portugal.

The list kept getting longer. In 2002, the EU emerged with a common currency called the Euro and around the same time a common visa called Schengen was introduced. Two general elections to a European Parliament of 20 countries have also been held and EU parliamentarians attend its sessions at Brussels. Further ahead, the European Common Market too came about and finally the European Union with a common currency and a common visa became a reality.

One of the secrets of Europe's success on many fronts through the 18th, 19th and the early 20th centuries was nationalism, which was a successor of Christianity as

the only European country where such anti-EU sentiments can be found. With growing anti-immigration feelings thanks to the large numbers of migrant population from the countries of the Middle East, and their increasing stridency over issues like global terrorism, many European countries, notably France, Italy, Poland and Hungary and post-Brexit Britain pose a huge question mark over the very future of the European Union itself.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Deprived children

SIR, Apropos 'Stunted Children' (*The Statesman*, 16 May), it is sad that among the world's nations, India records the worst levels of child malnutrition despite having the largest anti-malnutrition programme. Reportedly, more than 100 districts make India home to the largest number of malnourished children. Statistics from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) reveal that 48 per cent or 61 million, under-five children in the country are stunted; 43 per cent or 53 million are under-weight, and nearly 20 per cent or 25 million are wasted with low weight for height.

Scientists say the initial 1,000 days of an individual's lifespan, from the day of conception till he or she turns two, is crucial for physical and cognitive development. But, more than half the women of child-bearing age are anaemic and 33 per cent are undernourished, according to NFHS



2006 statistics. Over the years India has become home to the largest number of malnourished children. Despite states with a high burden of malnutrition having the public distribution system in place to ensure the poor get food-

DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP

SIR, Despite a more than 200 MLAs of the TMC in the new West Bengal state legislature thanks to the dynamic and calculating leadership by the party supremo reducing the aspiring opponents of the BJP to a humiliatingly low position of a less than a hundred successful MLAs of the saffron party, the performance of the EC does not appear to have been brightened by the way the electoral process was conducted by it as rightly pointed out by Gautam Bhattacharya in his incisive article under the heading "A bus that the EC missed" (1 May).

Though there was an opportunity to tame the political parties in organizing mega mass-rallies and road shows etc., the EC seldom applied its mind to accept the challenge and instead made the process inordinately prolonged, leading to a virtual collapse of the public law and order in the state as in Sitalkuchi (Cooch Behar) where police firing was allegedly resorted to in control voters' crowds. Besides, the long-protracted electoral battle in the state where hardly any respect was a shame to appropriate observance of Covid protocol when people converged to enjoy the mega electorate rallies by the country's top political leaders and contributed to the spread of the Covid virus in the state in a threatening manner. The complacency and negligence of the Election Commission of India in failing to restrain the party organizers of such mega mass, however, high they may be in the political, is be nothing but indefensible.

Yours, etc., Arun Kumar Bhaduri, Kolkata, 3 May.

ICMR MUST ACT

SIR, This refers to 'Science vs quackery' (26 and 27 May). It is astonishing to know that the government has scant regard for scientific planning on health policy and instead promotes quackery that panders to the needs of the superstitious ho

grains at subsidised rates, frequent child deaths are reported due to malnutrition. According to the Registrar General of India, under-five mortality in India is 59 per 1,000 live births, which is one of the highest in the world. Also in 2012, Save the Children, the London based non-profit organisation reported that 1.83 million Indian children die every year before the age of five, and pinned malnutrition as the prime reason for the deaths. These findings indicate that India is dangerous by slipping into a vicious cycle of malnutrition.

Yours, etc., Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai, 27 May.

ICMR MUST ACT

polo. Prasanjit Chowdhury needs to be applauded for exposing the top leaders of the country for their role in seeking to control the pandemic through cow's excretion. Ramkisan Yadav aka Baba Ramdev is neither a qualified doctor of any branch of medicine nor the right person to comment on modern medicine. The guru turned business tycoon himself was admitted in an allopathic hospital in Dehradoon a few years back. The saddest part of the story is

the health minister himself launched his wonder drug "Coronil" claimed to cure Covid without verifying its credentials. Ramdev's business promotion by the highest government functionary betrayed his proximity to the powers that be. India has projected itself as a laughing stock before the world. The ICMR should act to take punitive measures against such a person.

Yours, etc., Dr Basudeb Dutta, Santipur, 27 May.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Young people with Covid-19

Even after recovering from infection with the novel coronavirus, some people suffer from the aftereffects for a long time. This can have serious impacts on their lives after returning to work or school. It is necessary to improve treatment and support systems. The aftereffects from Covid-19 vary, including fatigue, shortness of breath, headache, problems with smell and taste, and hair loss. In a follow-up survey of patients admitted to the National Center for Global Health and Medicine for novel coronavirus infection, half of them reported some symptoms after two months and 30 per cent after four months. Similar cases have been reported from all over the world, but the exact causes are not yet known.

When the Tokyo metropolitan government started a telephone consultation service at the end of March, it received more than 200 consultations in a month. This shows many people are troubled by aftereffects. About 30 per cent of those who sought consultations were young people in their 20s and 30s. In other countries, it has been reported that more than 90 per cent of the people who have developed aftereffects had mild symptoms at the time of infection. Some cases reportedly were asymptomatic, but

The Japan News later developed aftereffects. Young people were previously thought to have mild symptoms of infection and there were cases where prevention measures were insufficient. Above all, each person has to take thorough measures to prevent infection, such as avoiding eating and drinking with many people and conversing without wearing a mask.

It is important that people suffering from the aftereffects of the disease do not have to suffer alone. Some university hospitals have opened specialised outpatient sections, and some local governments have set up consultation centres to introduce medical institutions.

The central and local governments have to establish systems that allow people to continue receiving support even after their treatment and recuperation for the infection is over. Cooperation among various medical departments such as internal medicine, otolaryngology and dermatology is essential to deal with a wide range of symptoms.

IN MEMORIAM

GUPTA JOGENDRA NATH — In revered memory of a true renaissance man, an academic, a historian, and an archaeologist, who occupied a position of great eminence among literary figures of Bengal in the early twentieth century. He made his mark with his first historical work *Vikramapura Itihas* in 1909, followed by literary works on far-ranging eclectic variety of topics. Some of his works include *Bonger Mahila Kavi*, *Sadhak Kavi Ramprosad*, *Bharat Mahila* and *Mahapurush Bijoykrishna*. He wrote a large number of children's books as well, and brought out the well-known juvenile monthly *Kaishorak* and edited *Sishu Bharati*, a children's encyclopaedia in ten volumes. He was appointed Girish Lecturer of Calcutta University and received the University's Bhutan Mohni Medal. We lost him this day in 1964. — Rupa, Gautam (Delhi), Tanya (Washington DC).

YOGESH PRATAP SINGH AND
NANDITA BATRA

As a member of the World Health Organisation (WHO) community, India observes 'World No Tobacco Day' on May 31 every year to highlight the colossal health risks associated with the use of tobacco. Despite the fact that tobacco use causes more than 1.3 million deaths every year in the country, more than 28 per cent or nearly 270 million adults and 14.6 per cent youth (ages 13-15) use some form of tobacco which puts them at amplified risk of Covid-19 infection.

Reduction of deaths and illness due to tobacco is one of the Sustainable Development Goals fixed by the United Nations, so if we triumph the target by 2030, it will be a year to rejoice. However, to achieve this, we need to fortify our tobacco control regime. So, let's use this day as a launching pad to pass the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Amendment) Bill ("COTPA") Amendment Bill".

The first attempt to legislatively address the issue of tobacco consumption was made in 1975. The Act mandated statutory health warnings on packages and advertisements of cigarettes but did not apply to other tobacco products. Nor did it prohibit the consumption of tobacco by a particular class of people or at public places.

Subsequently, the Government of India enacted the "Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA)" and ratified the WHO-Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) with the ultimate goal to reverse the tobacco epidemic. COTPA mainly sought to protect non-smokers from involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke by making public smoking an offence. The Act also sought to protect minors (persons below 18 years of age) from being addicted and therefore criminalized the sale of tobacco products to minors.

However, the Act did not prohibit consumption of tobacco products but sought to empower consumers by educating them about harmful effects of tobacco consumption so that they may make informed choices. The Act accordingly made it mandatory to display written and pictorial warnings on packages. It also prohibited the advertisement of cigarette and tobacco products except at point of sale and on the package.

The COTPA regime was useful to a certain extent in defying the tobacco industry's tactics to advertise and pro-

Tobacco control regime needs stronger teeth

moted tobacco use in India. However, in spite of the Government's best efforts to effectively enforce the law and civil society's efforts to ensure that violations were adequately reported, the industry has been able to target, especially children, through indirect promotion tactics.

A report on Smokeless Tobacco and Public Health in India by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India records the need for a comprehensive ban on advertising of tobacco products. There are numerous examples of such advertisements where the brand name remains the same and products marketed are altered for the brand to impact the minds of consumers. According to WHO, tobacco companies are using media and sponsoring influencers to promote tobacco products especially to youth. It reports that globally, the tobacco industry spent over USD 9 billion in marketing and advertising and the world lost 8 million lives due to tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke.

In view of the increasing tobacco industry interference and circumvention of the law, there is an urgent need to further strengthen the law to prevent the tobacco industry from exploiting gaps in the legal regime which were discernible with the passage of time. Considering this call, the MoHFW drafted The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) (Amendment) Bill and now has put it in the public domain. However, it's been five months since comments were invited on the Bill but it is yet to see the light of the day.

There is an urgent need to ban all forms of surrogate advertising, brand extension and stretching. Advertisement of any tobacco trademark or tobacco brand should be prohibited to meet the recommendations under WHO FCTC Article 13 guidelines. The amendment proposes to fix liability even on the people who participate in tobacco advertisements and will lead to a ban on celebrity brand endorsements of tobacco products and companies.

While the COTPA prohibited public smoking, the provision for designated smoking places made it illusory. The



public was still passively exposed to smoke. Now the provision for designated smoking areas in public places like airports and hotels is sought to be removed. Smoking as well as tobacco use should be prohibited in public places since these give impetus to smoking in public places and often lead to violations and exposure to second-hand smoke. The ambit of section 4 must be expanded to ban use of all kinds of tobacco products in public places. This will help in reducing tobacco use burden and the risk of infectious diseases due to tobacco use induced spitting.

Tobacco companies indulge in CSR to build their image and gain access to policy makers and thereby influence and interfere in tobacco control policy making which is in violation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. Therefore, a clause in Section 5 may be added to expressly ban CSR activities by the tobacco industry and require deposit of the 2 per cent profit as required under the Company Act 2013 in the tobacco control fund managed by MoHFW.

There is also a need to prohibit not only sale but 'giving' of tobacco prod-

ucts to a minor in any way e.g. free gift, free sample including as research subject, survey, etc. Plain packaging of tobacco products has been successfully implemented in countries like Australia, France, and Ireland and hence similar provisions may be added in our law. Adding provision whereby "no person engaged in, or purported to be engaged in the production, supply, distribution and sale of cigarettes or any other tobacco products shall mention or use any ingredients or additives or flavorings in any form that can impart, intensify, modify or enhance the flavor, taste, palatability or increase dependence of cigarettes or any other tobacco products" will help in preventing promotion of tobacco products by prohibiting use of misleading terms and ingredients in such products or their packages.

In order to comply with WHO FCTC Protocol on Elimination of Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, ban on sale of duty-free export and import of tobacco and exclusive vendor licensing not only under existing laws but 'as may be prescribed' under COTPA as well is needed. Considering the state amend-

ments to COTPA in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Punjab, a provision may be added to ban hookah bars across the country. In line with the WHO FCTC Article 5.3 and the guidelines for its implementation, a provision should be added to restrict tobacco industry interference in the development and implementation of any tobacco control effort and imitative in the country. A code of conduct for all government stakeholders should be prescribed as adopted by the MoHFW.

We need concerted efforts by various stakeholders including synergy between the 10 ministries that control various aspects of the tobacco industry. The successful enforcement of COTPA, NTPC and FCTC would also require active engagement of civil society to increase peoples' awareness, solicit their support for the law and involve them in monitoring enforcement and reporting violations. The Draft COTPA (Amendment) Bill is a welcome step and if passed, will reinforce our pledge to fight the pandemic of tobacco.

The writers are, respectively, Professor and Assistant Professor of Law, NLU Odisha.

Beware of Music Lovers

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY



ILLUSTRATION: Debabrata Chakrabarty

I was in Japan when I needed to return to Washington for a week-long briefing. I stayed at a Virginia hotel that had so many Foreign Service officers staying with them that, as a courtesy, they ran a shuttle bus service to the State Department downtown. The bus took an hour to reach the office, making a quick stop at Rosslyn, where the Department had an ancillary office. I had the use of a rental car, but I thought it would be nice to sit back and be driven in a plush air-conditioned vehicle to the office, while I listened to music or sorted the mail on my phone.

The night before I had started on a large novel by Haruki Murakami curiously titled 1Q84.

Even in the light of the day, I couldn't let go the thought of Aomame, the beautiful, slender assassin who killed her victim by plunging a sharp syringe at the back of the neck at a moment of intimacy. So, at the last moment before boarding the bus, I placed the novel in my briefcase. A grave mistake, it was to prove my undoing.

There were quite a few colleagues on the shuttle bus. I would normally chat with them and exchange news of the countries they were assigned to. But Murakami's wizardry would not let me be normal. I quickly took a window seat at the back of the bus, opened the briefcase and took out 1Q84. In a moment I was immersed in the weird doings of Aomame and her strange associates. The bus, my colleagues, the Washington suburbs, indeed the whole bright universe

on that radiant summer day vanished from my mind.

I remember looking up briefly as the bus stopped at Rosslyn. Perhaps my body registered the immobility, but it was only for a second or two. I was drawn irresistibly to the book. I plunged headlong in the adventures of Aomame. The world disappeared again.

The disappearance must have been quite long. I don't know what made me look up from the book, but when I did, I noticed something strange. The bus was not going to the State Department in Washington, it was going in the opposite direction back to Virginia. It took me a minute or two to realize, to my discomfiture, that the bus had gone to the State Department, released all its passengers and was now traveling back. There was nobody on the bus, except me and the bus driver.

My first thought was that I had shamefully missed the first part of the briefing I was expected to attend. It was not a grievous loss, because there were ways of retrieving the information I had missed. My second thought was that I didn't want to miss the latter part of the briefing. I had to find a way to be in the State Department quickly. I could drive, or still take advantage of the shuttle service, if there was a second shuttle. Perhaps the driver could tell me if there was another shuttle. I looked at the driver at the front of the bus and knew instantly what had made me look up from the book finally.

The driver was driving the bus all right, but he was doing more. He was singing. Loud, full-throated singing, enough to wake up the dead. Clearly, he thought the bus was empty, as he could not see me in a corner on the last row. I sat stupefied at his musical enthusiasm. My knowledge of the opera is close to zero, but I realized he was singing a popular love song from Puccini's La Bohème, where the poet Rodolfo is offering to warm "la manina gelida," the cold little hand, of Mimi. He seemed more excited as he sang, and his voice rose another octave.

Then came the passage about a moonlit

night and beseeching Mimi to wait. The driver held the steering wheel with one hand, and the other hand went in an arc as he sang earnestly, "Aspetti, signorina." After that, his hands danced furiously as he sang passionately of his love, first his right hand and then his left, while he barely held the wheel with the inert hand.

As I watched mesmerized, he produced a cigar from his pocket, lit it with the lighter and puffed between the lines. I started getting a little concerned as he continued spiritedly with his song, all the time performing with his hand, which now held a lighted cigar. Deftly, he moved the cigar from one hand to the other, without pausing his hand gestures or the ditty.

We were nearing the hotel and the driver was reaching a crescendo with "stanza la speranza" when I got up from my seat and decided to approach the driver with my question about a second shuttle. As I approached the driver, I guess I became visible on the rear-view mirror, and the effect was more than dramatic. The driver was certain that he was alone and had been taking liberties with the rules about smoking and, possibly, singing. Seeing me suddenly appear out of nowhere, his singing stopped precipitously, the cigar fell from his hand, and he tilted aside with a groan, followed by a gurgling sound.

He looked terror-stricken and I quickly held him and asked if he was okay. He could barely nod. He had let go of the steering wheel and the bus stopped fortuitously after mounting the sidewalk. Fortunately, there was no vehicle behind us.

When, after seven minutes, the driver still seemed in no condition to drive the bus, it was my turn to do something illicit. Though I had no license to drive a commercial vehicle, I drove the bus slowly into the hotel parking lot.

Then I handed the key to the still-distracted driver and drove my rental car to the office.

The writer is a Washington-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com

NO 28928

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The results of the Ulster elections are slow in coming, but it is well worth while waiting for a day or two to see the effect of the system of proportional representation which is there being put to a practical test. Up to Thursday of last week the results announced showed that the Unionists had won twenty-one seats, the Nationalists two, and the Sinn Feiners only one. This would seem fully to bear out the Unionist anticipations of a decisive majority. Assuming, however, that the results first ascertained are those of the Belfast and neighbouring constituencies, it may be expected that the number of Nationalist and Sinn Fein successes will be increased when the returns come in from the western constituencies. The Unionists, however, appear to have established a very strong lead at the outset. This could hardly be regarded as a foregone conclusion for, though Belfast has always been a Unionist stronghold, the Nationalist section is not a negligible factor, and De Valera, the Sinn Fein leader, appears to have done his best to conciliate all classes of the electorate. The keen interest felt in the elections is shown by the estimates, as reported by our London Correspondent, that ninety per cent of the electors voted in Belfast, and ninety-five per cent elsewhere. In ordinary Parliamentary elections, from seventy to eighty per cent would represent a heavy poll.

NEWS ITEMS

BURMA RAILWAY STRIKE COLLAPSES

Rangoon, May 30

The railway strike has ended to all intents and purposes. It has been evident for the past few days that the strikers were weakening, and last Wednesday's meeting between Mr. Patel for the men and Mr. Glasscott for the railway, and the subsequent publication in the local press of the men's demands and the Agent's replies hastened the end of the deadlock. There was a wholesale unconditional return of the traffic and loco staff yesterday though it was impossible to take all the men back as some places have been filled. Today many idle locomotives will have been cleaned and got ready and many will be sent up-country to bring down the goods held up owing to the strike. The local service of trains will be extended today.

CASE AGAINST BUDDHIST MONK

Rangoon, May 30

In the Chief Court today, Justice Duckworth refused bail to Swami Permanand, a Hindustani Buddhist monk, whose appeal is pending in this court against a conviction and sentence of two years' rigorous imprisonment passed on him by the District Magistrate of Rangoon on a charge of being a member of an unlawful assembly under section 147 I.P.C. There was very strong evidence that appellant, clothed in a yellow robe, led the rioters on the night of May 6, but there was also evidence given on the defence side that appellant was at the time staying in the house of Maulvi Abdulla Misri. In his honour's opinion sufficient grounds for bail had not been shown by Mr. Ginwala for the defence.

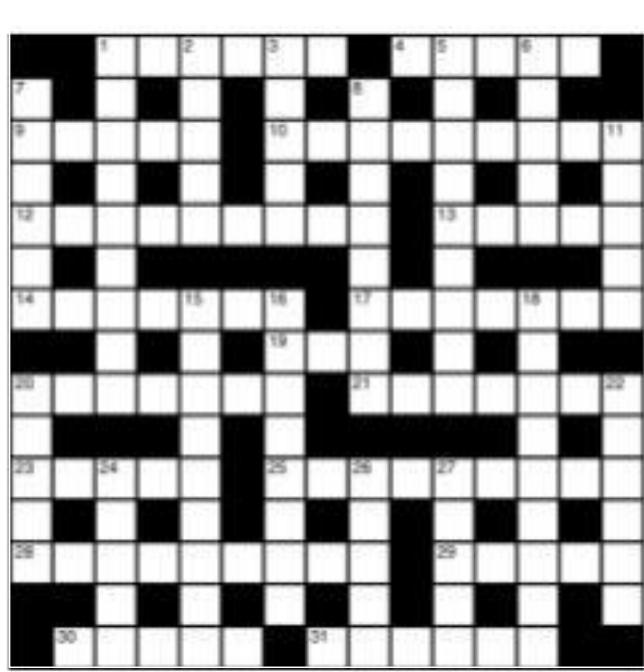
THEFT OF RS 35,000 ON THE RAILWAY

The theft of jewellery, to the total value of Rs 35,000 from the train which left Calcutta on Thursday last for Darjeeling, is reported. A resident of Calcutta and his wife (Mr. and Mrs. Mousell) were asleep in the train when, between Santahar and Siliguri, a suitcase was taken out of their compartment. The theory is that the thief got in at Haldibari, and when the train started he entered the carriage, picked up the suitcase and jumped from the train. The occupants of the carriage were awakened by feeling the draught through door which had been left open by the thief. The bulk of the valuables in the suitcase consisted of jewellery. A full description of the jewels etc. has been given to the police.

OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION IN INDIA

The Officers' Association (India) under the patronage of His Excellency the Viceroy, which is closely connected with Earl Haig's Officers' Association at Home, has already made substantial progress towards establishing itself in India and Burma. The foundations of provincial branches have already been laid and much hard work is being done by the Executive Committee at Simla in relieving cases of distress. The formation of this Association in India was timely. Hardly a day passes by without distressing cases of need being brought to the notice of the Honorary Secretary. The State has done much to assist in placing ex-officers and men on their feet but State aid must be supplemented by other assistance if the community as a whole are to fully discharge their debt to these gallant and self-sacrificing men.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 University dissertation's about down-and-out (6)
- 4 One tries to cause upset and turmoil - occasionally crossing line (5)
- 9 Optical illusion partly inverted colour (5)
- 10 One opens either end of Chubb-lock with small band (9)
- 12 Craft group catch heartless bully out? (5,4)
- 13 Bond's boss and assistant returned for films, TV etc (5)
- 14 Declined journalist on record - men become focus of smear (7)

DOWN

- 17 Mass conflict fractures defence (7)
- 19 Heard every instrument (3)
- 20 Lazy model, cast (7)
- 21 Approve funny red nose (7)
- 23 Furious, old Rover's losing power (5)
- 25 Perhaps Tommy Cooper's floundering with idea for trick, ultimately (4,5)
- 28 Random parking in ditch first and road after - this vehicle is South African (9)
- 29 Order tabbouleh twice - in retrospect, somewhat steep (5)
- 30 Gentle hit, initially, Billy Liar's out of print (5)
- 31 Who leads on the water boiler? (6)

DOWN

- 1 Force vehicle to speed up after Petty Officer left in charge (6,3)
- 2 Copper replaces one, making patrol complete (5)
- 3 Best phone company accepts ninety pounds (5)
- 5 Looked like Greeks regularly exploited space up top (9)
- 6 Oddly Lou Reed's drug free, touring India - it's brilliant (5)
- 7 Quiet film actor (6)
- 8 Likely for highly attractive sort to pick up student (8)
- 11 Share with journalist (5)
- 15 Outlaw speed bumps on bendy road (9)
- 16 Broadcast dramedy describing a Fantasy (8)
- 18 Publish landlord's overseas correspondence (3,6)
- 20 Consider speaker's approach (5)
- 22 On choppy seas, English surfer finally wipes out (6)
- 24 Disguise American by rolling tongue (5)
- 26 Daughter in prison, revealing bum (5)
- 27 Cold coin and compass (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



Now of course the situation is worse but there is more confidence in the businesses on how to manage it.

MARTIN SCHWENK
MANAGING DIRECTOR, MERCEDES-BENZ INDIA

THUMBNAILS

Bajaj Allianz Life settles claims: ajaj Allianz Life Insurance settled claims worth a total of Rs 700 crore in 2020-21, of which nearly 5 per cent were on account of COVID-19-related deaths, and the claims may go up in the current financial year, top company official said. In the financial year ended March 2021, the company had settled a total of 1,70,000 claims.

GST compensation: The compensation amount promised by the Centre is estimated to be higher than the Rs 1.58 lakh crore projected by the Centre, and a special session of the GST Council will be convened to discuss it, three opposition-led states said on Sunday.

Agri e-market: The CSC E-Governance announced the launch of an agri e-market place for agri services, mainly to help small farmers. The CSC SPV is a special purpose vehicle under the Ministry of Electronics & IT provides host of electronic services through its common service centres.

PTI

PTI

Experts feel RBI likely to retain benchmark interest rate

The repo rate was kept at 4 per cent, reverse repo rate at 3.5 per cent in the last MPC meeting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 30 MAY

Amid apprehensions over inflation and continued uncertainty with regard to the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Reserve Bank of India is likely to retain the benchmark interest rate at the existing levels at its upcoming monetary policy review, feel experts.

The next bi-monthly monetary policy review is scheduled to be announced on June 4, following the meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) beginning Wednesday. The meeting of RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das-headed rate setting panel is scheduled for 2 to 4 June.

The RBI had kept key interest rates unchanged after the last MPC meeting held in April. The key lending rate, the repo rate, was kept at 4 per cent and the reverse repo rate or the central bank's borrowing rate at 3.5 per cent.

The RBI's annual report, released last week, has already made it clear that "the conduct



of monetary policy in 2021-22 would be guided by evolving macroeconomic conditions, with a bias to remain supportive of growth till it gains traction on a durable basis while ensuring that inflation remains within the target".

The central bank, the report added, would ensure that system-level liquidity remains comfortable during 2021-22 is alignment with the stance of monetary policy, and monetary transmission continues unimpeded while maintaining financial stability.

In the assessment of the RBI, the evolving CPI inflation trajectory is likely to be subject-

ed to both upside and downside pressures. The food inflation path will critically depend on the temporal and spatial progress of the south-west monsoon in 2021.

"We are in for a long pause with open market operations as a tool that will be employed more frequently towards keeping the 10-year yields close to six per cent," said PwC India Leader (Economic Advisory Services) Ranen Banerjee.

Expressing a similar opinion, ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said that with the economic outlook remaining uncertain in light of the continuing pandemic, "we expect

the monetary policy stance to remain accommodative for a large part of 2021, until the vaccine coverage improves dramatically".

"We estimate the average CPI (Consumer Price Index) inflation to moderate to 5.2 per cent in 2021-22 from 6.2 per cent in 2020-21," she said.

Nayar added that nevertheless, it will remain well above the mid-point of the MPC's renewed medium-term target range of 2-6 percent, ruling out the possibility of further rate cuts to support economic activity and sentiment.

The government has retained the inflation target at four per cent with the lower and the upper tolerance band of two per cent and six per cent, respectively, for the next five years (April 2021-March 2026).

Moneyboxx Finance Controller Viral Sheth said that given the rising risk of inflation, "we expect status quo as far as policy rates are concerned in the upcoming monetary policy".

He also stressed that it is imperative for the RBI to ensure ample credit flow to the

rural economy. Setting up a special window for rural-focused and smaller NBFCs will help immensely, Sheth said.

He added that alternatively, the central bank should consider enhancing or relaxing the exposure limit of banks to non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), particularly smaller ones.

Indian Bank Managing Director and CEO Padmaja Chunduru said the MPC would be tracking inflation closely.

"Given that the economy is not yet opened up fully and the uncertainty around vaccination is still continuing, I think they will still retain the interest rate where it is," Chunduru said.

Andromeda and Apnapanisa CEO Swaminathan said inflation is a key concern ahead of the upcoming monetary policy review.

With petrol prices touching Rs 100 per litre, the common man has been affected by this, he said. "I expect the RBI to announce more steps to give our Covid-19-battered economy some room for much-needed growth."

is also scheduled this week, Mishra added.

"Expectations of state-wise unlocking due to declining Covid-19 cases are giving hopes of economic recovery."

"As the result of a decline in the Covid-19 second wave infection curve, the plausibility of further reopening of the economy has enlarged and consequently the market is expected to gain further momentum surpassing previous highs," said Geojit Financial Services Head (Research) Vinod Nair.

"The overall structure of the market remains positive as fresh Covid-19 cases continue to decline and investors are upbeat about unlocking of the economy in June which will help revive commercial activities."

"Going forward, likely announcement of phased withdrawal of state-level lockdowns in coming weeks and likely recovery in economic activities can potentially add to market sustainably in the near to medium term," Reliance Securities Head (Strategy) Binod Modi said.

This week marks the beginning of the new month also and a lot of important macroeconomic data and events are lined up," said Reliance Broking Vice-President (Research) Ajit Mishra.

He also added monthly auto sales numbers will also start pouring in from June 1. Importantly, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) review meeting

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Reconciling with history

Jute cultivation changed the demography of Assam during the colonial period, but its potential for sustainable development is still untapped across the North-east

KANGAN DUTTA

Given the long-standing "identity politics" of the North-east, demands have been made time and again to impose newer restrictions on the "influx" of migrants to the region, as if instruments such as the Inner Line Permit system could stop the movement of people. The role of the push factor, however, generated by a science and technology-driven and "market-led" development model is conveniently ignored even today. It inhibits a serious study of "the problem of migrants", let alone its resolution and that becomes apparent when one looks at the spread of jute cultivation in Assam and Tripura.

Jute is not a favoured crop as it is called *mora paat* in Assamese, meaning the fibre of a dead plant that resembles silk. Therefore, jute is possibly the only plant species associated with death. It might be due to "retting", or the practice of putting the harvested plant first in slow running water for 10 to 30 days to allow bacteria to dissolve the gummy materials holding the fibres together. Thereafter, the non-fibrous material is scrapped off in a process called "stripping" and the fibres are separated by beating the stem with a paddle. The separated fibres are then washed, dried, graded and sent off to mills.

The dried jute stick is an excellent fuel and since jute is a 120 days crop, it is grown only on land endowed with high annual rainfall of, at least, 1,000 mm, alluvial soil, high humidity and temperatures of 24-38°C. It is harvested in the monsoon months of July and August allowing a rice crop to be grown thereafter. Not only that, as jute fields need standing water, farmers release fish seeds and fingerlings to get a good catch of fish too.

Jute also does not require fertilisers or pesticides and thus, it is a cost-effective and versatile, albeit labour-intensive crop. It enables even small farmers to grow a food and cash crop on the same land that also provides fish and fuel. Jute cultivation, however, demands that farmers be "water-friendly".

It is interesting to note that though jute was introduced in Assam well over a century ago, indigenous people of the state never took to its cultivation. Indeed, I cannot recall any "indigenous" jute farmer of some standing during my long stints in the agriculture department of Assam. It might be due to several factors such as the origin of some ethnic groups in the South-east Asia hills that made them "water-unfriendly". They hence avoided jute farming, which was told to me "only water-borne people like immigrant Muslims (from Eastern



Bengal) could grow".

That said, the story of jute in the North-east, like in Bengal, is quite interesting. There is historical evidence of the use of jute fibres in ancient and medieval India, Egypt and the riverine regions of Africa, China, Vietnam and even Brazil. But the economic potential of this versatile plant was first realised only in 1830s Scotland when spinners at Dundee learned how to spin jute yarns by "modifying the power-driven flax machinery". Those "looms" facilitated the growth of jute factories in Dundee and a massive increase in demand followed, which only large-scale commercial cultivation of jute in India could meet.

The colonial government thereafter launched the experimental cultivation of jute along the East and West coasts where agro-climatic conditions were favourable. Results showed that the delta region of Eastern Bengal, especially Mymensingh, Rangpur, Pabna and Bogra (now in Bangladesh), were the most suited for jute strains. Brought from different parts of the world including Brazil, scientists released the strains after their tests found that they produced

the highest crop yield at the lowest cost.

It induced Scottish jute mill owners to set up factories in Bengal, starting with Rishra near Calcutta in 1855. By 1910, there were 38 companies exporting about a billion yards and 450 million bags of jute cloth. The industry then felt the need for expanding cultivation in areas close to factories along the Hooghly river to meet the rising international demand for jute products. One might say the golden fibre of Bengal heralded the first "Green Revolution" in India.

Western and Lower Assam districts with similar agro-climatic conditions were therefore the most obvious choice for expansion beyond Bengal. The task wasn't easy as jute had been grown in some parts of Goalpara for domestic use. Some zamindars did attract jute farmers there but they were mostly from the Mymensingh district as local farmers were not willing to move to the flood-prone lowlands or riverine islands called "chars", regardless of the incentives being offered by the zamindars.

It must be noted here that the erstwhile Goalpara, Sylhet and Cachar

districts were "transferred" to Assam when it was carved out of Bengal in 1874. It was made a chief commissioner's province mainly to promote tea, coal mining, and oil exploration, and therefore, jute was well within the overall colonial scheme of building an extractive economy. In 1898, F J Monahan, assistant director land records, Assam, suggested that there be an "influx" of East Bengali farmers to reclaim lands - a view endorsed by Henry Cotton, chief commissioner of Assam; the strong Calcutta-based British jute industry lobby, and the Bengal Chamber of Commerce.

Thus, opening the low-lying parts of Goalpara, Kamrup Nowong and Darrang districts to jute farmers from the neighbouring districts of Bengal was an outcome of state policy to promote the colonial mode of production rather than an organised move by hordes of migrants. In fact, measures like implementation of the "1928 Land Colonisation Scheme" of the Government of Assam covering the districts mentioned above, and extension of the railway system to link the potential jute areas to Calcutta were taken to induce East Bengali farmers to move to Assam. It was akin

to the way Tamil labourers moved to the Malay Peninsula then to start rubber plantations and tin mining. The Chinese followed them to run trade and business in the same century and for the same reason as in Assam - lack of local labour and skills.

If one looks at this narrative objectively, like tea, jute has a similar success story of scientific introduction of a new crop, farming techniques and processing that put Assam at the third rank among jute-growing states, only after Bengal and Bihar. It produced 1.6 million bales from about 70,000 hectares, which is enough to sustain 15 jute mills of standard size. Currently there are just two - one a co-operative jute mill at Silghat in Nagaon district while the other is in the private sector.

There is thus huge untapped potential to produce value-added diversified jute products, apart from gunny bags, Hessian, such as carpets, rugs, sandbags and geo-textiles for erosion and flood control. The post-pandemic world is certain to make stronger moves towards reduction of its carbon footprint in line with the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement. There is bound to be a huge shift towards using natural, biodegradable and breathable fibres such as jute in place of synthetics, which is already being seen in the rising demand for jute products in European Union countries.

Jute and the people who grow the crop or are associated with it are therefore assets and deserve institutional support especially in research and development as only a third of the estimated potential of jute in the North-east has been tapped. The present jute output of Meghalaya (87,000 bales), Tripura (11,00 bales) and Nagaland (40,000 bales) could be increased by bringing more land under jute. Thus, value-added jute products might as well become a major source of export from the North-east to member countries of the Association of South-east Asian Nations under the Centre's "Act East" policy.

There is no doubt that the crop has changed the economic and demographic profiles of all the districts it has touched. An outcome of the inexorable process of expansion of the colonial mode of production in Assam, the changes it has wrought are irreversible. It is time now for the North-east to reconcile demography with economic history and sustainable development as a step towards establishing the region's economic identity.

The writer is a retired IAS officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre and has served as a scientific consultant in the office of the principal scientific advisor to the Government of India

PLUS POINTS

Naga beekeeping



Beekeeping or bee farming is widely practised in Nagaland and is a growing trend, which has become a way of life for many in the state, says a report in the Dimapur-based *Morung Express*. This was in the Annual Administrative Report 2020-21 of the Nagaland horticulture department.

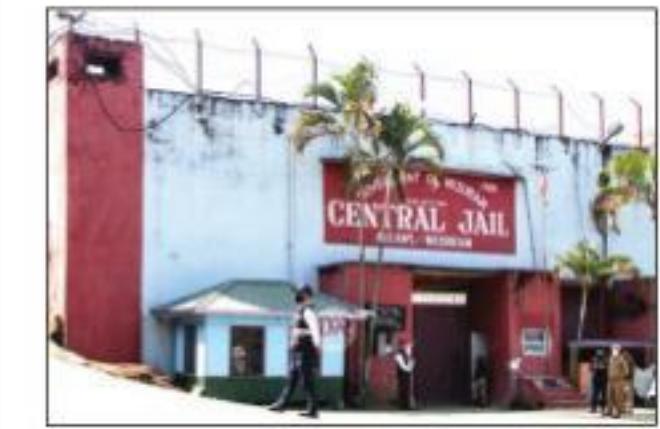
Beekeeping is an agro-based activity which was introduced in 2005 under the National Horticulture Mission for promoting cross pollination of horticultural crops, and since then, has been merged with the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture.

The AAR report stated that beekeeping is done mostly for honey production in the state and ensures supplementary income for farmers. In addition, bees do not compete with crops for resources and it does not require high capital investments, infrastructure or a lot of land.

While bees are reared mostly for their honey, their role in increasing crop productivity cannot be denied as all bees are pollinators. It is estimated that over 84 per cent of crops grown for human consumption are dependent on bees and other insects for pollination.

For encouraging beekeeping and enhancing pollination, 2,000 bee boxes and bee colonies, and 200 sets of beekeeping equipment would be distributed, covering all districts of Nagaland at an expense of Rs 48 lakh, the report stated.

Covid in Aizawl jail



The detection of Covid-19 positive cases in the overcrowded Aizawl Central Jail has created panic among inmates and staff members, says a report in the Guwahati-based *Assam Tribune*. So far, 24 inmates of Aizawl Central Jail, including a three-year-old girl, have tested positive for the virus, which is a cause of concern.

With no facilities for isolation in Mizoram's largest prison, all inmates are now in danger of contracting the virus, a jail official said. The source, who did not want to be named, said new inmates are quarantined for 15 days before they are put in prison. "After 15 days are over, they are sent to the wards without testing whether or not they are free from the virus," the source said.

Earlier, there was no screening of inmates. Those brought from court were sent straight to the wards without any screening till a few months ago, making other prisoners worried. He further alleged that PPE, masks and sanitisers were provided to the jail only after positive cases were found.

Aizawl Central Jail, which has a capacity for 328, currently houses 576 prisoners. In Aizawl district jail, there are 107 inmates against the capacity of 70. Other district jails are also said to be overcrowded.

Support for scribes



The Government of Assam has increased the monthly pension of journalists from the existing Rs 8,000 to Rs 10,000. State information and public relations minister Pijush Hazarika also announced that the government will provide a one-time financial assistance of Rs one to three lakh to the families of journalists in case of untimely deaths while performing their duties.

Recently, Hazarika held a meeting with a number of journalist associations of Assam at the Secretariat. In the presence of state information and public relations secretary Neera Gogoi Sonowal and its director Anupam Choudhury, among others, the minister requested the journalist bodies to advise the government in its mission to support media persons effectively.

PAYING THE PRICE FOR APATHY

Sikkim's already teetering healthcare sector is threatening to crumble in the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic

SHRADHA R CHHETRI

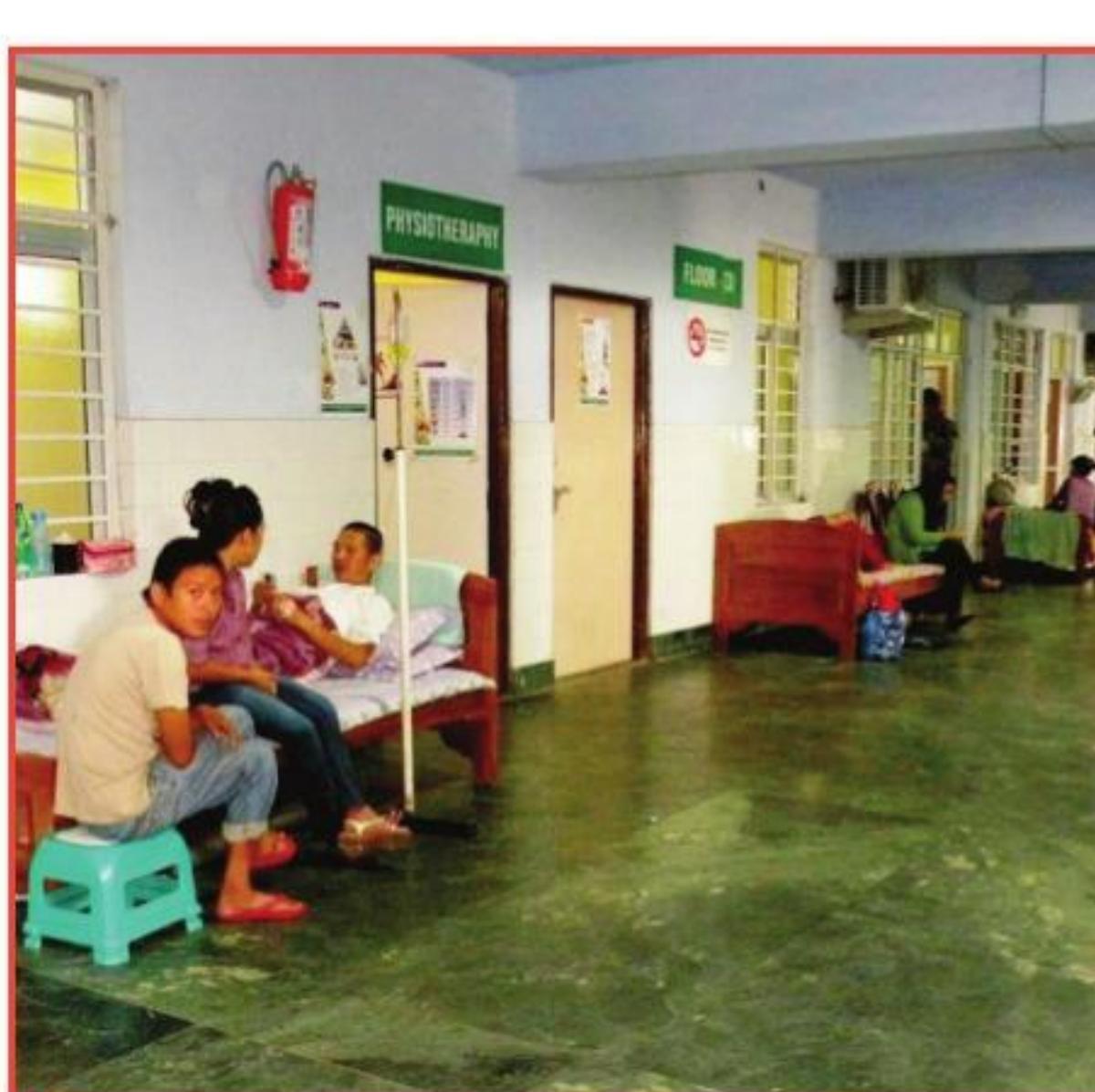
At a time when India is buckling under the weight of its crumbling healthcare infrastructure, it is unsurprising that oxygen supplies are almost non-existent in sub centres, primary health centres and community health centres of Sikkim.

To address this and the pressing issue of shortage of medical facilities for Covid-19 patients, Justices Meenakshi Pradhan and Bhaskar Raj Pradhan of the Sikkim High Court made some telling *suo moto* observations on public interest litigation. They stated that the number of beds allotted for Covid-19 patients at the Sir Thutob Namgyal Memorial Hospital in Gangtok and district hospitals elsewhere is "evidently woefully low" when compared to the daily number of positive cases that have been identified in Sikkim.

Apart from that, there are no intensive care unit facilities available in district hospitals and emergency arrangements for Covid-19 positive patients, said the Justices. They used the example of a 26-year-old woman who succumbed to the virus due to the lack of ICU beds and oxygen last month.

On 17 May, in a hearing conducted by the Sikkim HC, a division bench of the two judges pointed out the non-availability of testing labs due to lack of qualified manpower. Testing is halted on Sundays at STNM Hospital, but the management has argued for a day off, to rest and focus on sanitisation. It is a reasonable request but what isn't reasonable is the shortage of manpower, which should have been addressed by the state health department much earlier.

At another hearing of the HC on 25 May, the two judges questioned the "lottery for vaccination" system that



the Government of Sikkim had rolled out. The state government had informed citizens that booking a slot for vaccination would commence at 6 a.m. but despite many people logging in at the stated time, they couldn't find a slot. Later, several people took to social media to share their experiences of the unavailability of slots, especially those who lived in districts other than East Sikkim, where the state capital Gangtok is located.

In its reply, the state government said that they have ordered 11,000 doses of the vaccine from the Serum Institute of India. They also mentioned that vaccination centres have been set up in all four districts for those aged

45 and above. Still, only East Sikkim has begun administering vaccines to the 18 and above population.

The way things have played out, there seems to be a bias towards the capital in terms of various necessities and vaccination is one of them. Taking statistical records into account, East Sikkim has the highest record number of positive cases and the powers that be probably took that into account for their decision to vaccinate more people in the district.

Still, the South and West districts have been slowly seeing an increase in cases as they house a significant number of people in the 18-40 years age group. How soon will they get a

chance to be vaccinated? Won't chances of contracting Covid-19 decrease in the entire state if these areas were given the same amount of attention?

It must be mentioned here that Sikkim's healthcare has been struggling because of misplaced priorities for years as evidenced by an audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. In a Standalone Report of the C&AG, results of a Performance Audit of select district hospitals in Sikkim for the period of 2014-2019 have been prepared for submission to the Governor of Sikkim. It has been found that even before the pandemic started, there was inadequacy in terms of manpower and services in the state's healthcare sector.

For the report, the audit looked at three district-level hospitals, one PHC and one CHC. It was found that there are various areas of improvement that should be addressed immediately by stakeholders. It identified a shortage of manpower in departments like surgery, radiology and nursing, and excess in others like dentistry, radiography and lab technicians.

As I read the report, my eyes kept seeing the word "shortage" over and over - shortage of manpower, shortage of oxygen, shortage of PHCs, shortage of facilities and shortage of drugs. Then I remembered that the last time I had visited an emergency room at a hospital in Gangtok, I was asked to sit on the floor with an intravenous needle in my arm. Neither was I the only one there told to do so nor the youngest.

The report also noted that outpatient department services in many areas lacked a waiting area. If anyone goes to a district hospital in Sikkim, they will probably find patients and their attendants sitting cross-legged or squatting in the peripheries of the building. District hospitals have low

strength in numbers when it comes to human resource in both medical and paramedical staff and the gap hasn't been filled. If this gap widens over the years due to administrative negligence, the state will keel over when another deadly pandemic arrives.

Sikkim has a total of 184 medical centres and 1,500 hospital beds. As of 28 May, there are almost 3,800 active cases of Covid-19 in the state. Even if there is a need for a thousand people to be admitted into a Covid-19 ward, it must be kept exclusive to not spread the virus. But there are others who need those beds for a variety of other diseases.

If one adds the minuscule testing facilities (just two places), which are in Gangtok, Sikkim might be staring at a slow-burn problem. Even reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction testing is being given a rest on Sundays.

As part of the conversation around sectors like healthcare and education, the rural areas are often overlooked in a casual manner. As if they need not be given the accessibility that most people living in the capital have. The luckier ones can go down to Siliguri for treatment but most of Sikkim's population relies on the state's help.

Whenever a Member of the Legislative Assembly of the state promises that a particular area will become the next big thing because of a Smart City budget allocation and infrastructural plan, one recalls the absence of bare necessities in district hospitals. If a person with a life-threatening illness from West Sikkim district needs to access ICU facilities, they would have to drive to the capital, which is four hours away.

There are several problems that have needed attention for years but were dismissed time and again by whichever elected party was in power in Gangtok. Given these grim times, one wonders what is the point of praising healthcare and front line workers if they are overworked, understaffed and overwhelmed?

The writer is a freelance journalist based in New Delhi



ALL FOR THE GAME

Kevin De Bruyne (photo, left) fractured his nose and eye socket during Manchester City's Champions League final loss to Chelsea with less than two weeks before the start of the European Championship. The 29-year-old Belgian playmaker had to be replaced by Gabriel Jesus in the 60th minute on Saturday following a collision with Antonio Rudiger.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

2022 CWG Shooting, Archery Championships not yet ratified by IOA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 30 MAY

The Indian Olympic Association is yet to ratify the hosting of the 2022 Commonwealth Shooting and Archery Championships for the lack of an in-person meeting amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which might also make it "really difficult" to conduct these events.

IOA Secretary General Rajiv Mehta also said that it will be really difficult to host the two events, in Chandigarh, seven months from now given the severity of the COVID-19 situation and the pending vaccination of billions of people.

"We need a physical meeting of the Executive Committee or General House (of the IOA) to formally ratify the championships and plan

for them accordingly. But the pandemic has not allowed us to have a physical meeting so far," Mehta told PTI.

"Regarding the venue also, some in archery (association) want it in Delhi instead of Chandigarh. So, nothing has been decided and the pandemic has made it really difficult for us."

The Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) had in February last year agreed to add the medals from these two events to the final CWG tally one week after the conclusion of the event following India's threat to pull out of the Birmingham Games.

"The IOA members will need to discuss the feasibility of hosting these two events in January next year and nobody knows when this pandemic will get over," Mehta



said.

"I don't know how many Indians will be vaccinated in seven months from now. How many countries will send their athletes to India if the pandemic continues till then? The Commonwealth family has 72 countries and hosting two events is no joke."

"There is talk of possibility of a third wave and the precautions the people and the countries will have to take. Should we plan for two big international competitions during that time? These are

the things the IOA members will have to consider."

The CGF, when contacted by PTI, said, "ultimately, it will be a decision for the IOA and the relevant authorities in India to rule on whether the event can safely take place."

"We are very mindful of the impact the pandemic is having in India while the safety and security of Commonwealth athletes due to compete at the event will be a top priority for the CGF and the IOA."

Mehta said the CGF has not

told the IOA that the medals from the shooting and archery championships will not be added to the final tally of the 2022 CWG in Birmingham.

"These two events are to be organised, planned and financed by the national federations and the government, not by the CGF. The question is: should we go ahead and start planning in the middle of a pandemic and later find there are no takers?"

Scraping these two events may mean that India's medal tally in the 2022 Birmingham Games gets severely reduced as the country is used to a big medal haul in shooting.

Asked about such a scenario, Mehta said: "That was why we (IOA) had worked really hard to get these shooting and archery championships in India to have the

medals counted. But we had not anticipated this pandemic."

"Now, it is purely a question of feasibility as well as the health and safety of the athletes."

In July 2019, the IOA had proposed to boycott the 2022 Birmingham CWG for dropping shooting from the roster.

But, following a visit by CGF President Louise Martin and then CEO David Grevemberg in November last, the IOA withdrew its warning during the Annual General Body Meeting in December 2019.

While the cost for the shooting championship is to be met largely by the National Rifle Association of India (NRRI), the archery event would be funded solely by the Government of India.



Chelsea beats City to win Champions League

AGENCIES

PORTO (PORTUGAL), 30 MAY

As Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta cradled the European Cup before thrusting it into the air to the backdrop of fireworks, Pep Guardiola and his distraught Manchester City players stood way behind the winner's rostrum and looked on in anguish.

Champions League glory once again for Chelsea, nine years after its first title and just 123 days after manager Thomas Tuchel's season-changing arrival at the club.

Yet more misery in world soccer's biggest club competition for City and Guardiola, its genius manager whose overthinking proved costly once more.

Germany forward Kai Havertz's 42nd-minute goal earned Chelsea a surprisingly comfortable 1-0 win in Porto in the Champions League's third all-English final on Saturday.

That the last match of a club season heavily impacted by the coronavirus pandemic was settled by a goal

from Havertz felt apt, given he suffered badly after contracting the disease midway through his first year at the club having signed for nearly \$100 million.

He has recovered to play a big role in Chelsea's end to the season, and showed why the club made him the centerpiece of their \$300 million spending spree last offseason in the way he ran onto a through-ball by Mason Mount, rounded goalkeeper Ederson Moraes and rolled the ball into an empty net.

"I really don't know what to say," Havertz said. "I waited a long time for this."

As for his fellow German, Tuchel, he only had to wait one season to get over the disappointment of losing the 2020 final when in charge of Paris Saint-Germain. Fired by PSG in December, he was hired by Chelsea a month later to resuscitate a team that had lost its way and had dropped to ninth in the Premier League and has delivered a Champions League title four months later.

It was bailed as a tactical duel between Tuchel and Guardiola, two of the world's



most innovative coaches, and there was a clear winner.

Guardiola will surely regret tinkering with a settled team that had swept City to its first Champions League final and to the verge of another trophy treble, after winning

the Premier League and the English League Cup.

Starting without a striker was expected Guardiola has preferred that in the Champions League knockout matches but going without a specialist holding midfield-

er in Fernandinho or Rodri was a major surprise and destabilized City.

City lost its shape and its renowned composure. Seeking to win the Champions League for the third time as a coach and first since 2011,

Guardiola was guilty of over-thinking his tactics again in a big game as he was for City's quarterfinal eliminations at the hands of Lyon, Tottenham and Liverpool over the past three years.

"I did what I thought was the best decision," Guardiola said.

It was a decision that back-fired, though. Ilkay Gundogan, City's top scorer this season and a revelation in his attacking-midfield role, ended up dropping in as the anchor-man in midfield and he struggled to protect City's defense.

Indeed, for Chelsea's goal, Mount had so much time and space to thread a pass from inside his own half through the center of City's defense -- which was opened up by Timo Werner's decoy run -- for Havertz to run onto.

So, City's long, often-painful and lavishly funded journey to the summit of European soccer remains incomplete. The sight of its star midfielder Kevin De Bruyne coming off the field in the 60th minute, slightly wobbly and clearly concussed after a clash for heads with

Antonio Rudiger, just added to the pain and made a comeback even more unlikely.

Sergio Agüero came on in the 76th minute for his final appearance after 10 trophy-filled years at City, but the Argentine striker couldn't produce any late heroics this time.

City's players slumped to the ground at the final whistle as Rudiger sprinted the length of the field to celebrate with the nearly 6,000 Chelsea fans who made up the 14,110 attendance at Estadio do Dragao, a late replacement venue for the title match that was originally scheduled to be staged in Turkey.

Tuchel played with his daughters on the field. Christian Pulisic, who came on as a second-half substitute to become the first American player to feature in a Champions League final, posed with the trophy in a USA sweatshirt.

Mount burst into tears when he saw his father in the stands. What a team. Man City are you have seen what they did in the Premier League," Mount said.

It was such a tough game.

We got a goal and defended well the whole game. City never had the control Guardiola so craves and could easily be scored more on the counterattack.

Werner, who worked the channels well behind City's full backs, had already squandered two great chances before the goal, first mis-kicking from Havertz's cut-back and then shooting tamely at Ederson from close range.

In the second half, Pulisic ran onto Havertz's pass but slipped a shot just wide of the post.

That didn't stop Chelsea becoming the 13th multiple European champion, adding to its title from 2012 and Tuchel becoming the third straight German to coach a Champions League-winning team after Liverpool's Jürgen Klopp in 2019 and Hansi Flick at Bayern Munich last season.

It's a huge step to arrive in the final and it's an even bigger one to bite your way through and to make it all the way to the cup, Tuchel said.

It's a fantastic achievement.

Afterwin, Osaka skips news conference in Paris, as promised

AGENCIES

PARIS, 30 MAY

Naomi Osaka skipped her post-match news conference at the French Open on Sunday, as promised.

That didn't mean she avoided a question about her problems succeeding on red clay.

Osaka returned to Roland Garros after skipping the trip last time, turning in a mistake-filled 6-4, 7-6 (4) victory over 63rd-ranked Patricia Maria Tig at Court Philippe Chatrier on Day 1 of the Grand Slam tournament.

After the 2020 French Open was pushed to a September start with a limit of 1,000 spectators per day because of the coronavirus outbreak, things were closer to normal Sunday: It was a sun-kissed May day and more than 5,000 fans permitted, with a delay of only a week this year due to COVID-19 concerns.



While not quite back to its packed pre-pandemic self, Roland Garros did bubble with cheers and tennis.

Other results perhaps were more newsworthy: three-time major champion Angelique Kerber's third straight first-round loss in Paris, for example but the No. 2-ranked Osaka's actions after her match were of interest.

That's because she declared

As it turned out, Osaka did go ahead with that chat with former player Fabrice Santoro, who is hardly a journalist and kindly offered to help Osaka by carrying the flowers she was given by the tournament.

Santoro actually did raise the topic of the event's surface, noting that Osaka's Grand Slam titles only have come on hard courts.

She has won the Australian Open twice, including this year, and the U.S. Open twice, including last year. But she has never been past the third round at the French Open.

"I would say it's a work in progress," Osaka said about her game on clay. "Hopefully the more I play, the better it will get."

Osaka wrote in a Twitter post Wednesday that she was not going to participate in the standard back-and-forth with the media in Paris -- the sort of

thing athletes in various sports do as a matter of course. She framed it as a mental health issue, saying that it creates self-doubt to have to answer questions after a loss.

Players at Grand Slam tournaments are required to attend news conferences if requested to do so; refusing is punishable by fines of up to \$20,000, which is not much of a big deal to Osaka, the world's highest-earning female athlete thanks to endorsement deals totaling tens of millions of dollars.

French Open organizers didn't immediately respond to emailed questions about Osaka's press conference and whether she would be fined.

"It's her own choice. I think she's capable of making her own choices and obviously she will do always what's best for her," Tig said. "I think that's what's happening now. It's her choice of doing what she feels is best for her."

out in the men's finals. Pangal will square off against reigning Olympic and world champion Shakhobidin Zoirov of Uzbekistan. It will be a repeat of the 2019 world championship final in which the Indian had lost to set for silver.

Thapa will be up against Mongolia's Baatarsukh Chinzorig, who is the Asian Games silver-medallist.

Sanjeet will take on Kazakhstan's Vassili Levit, who is chasing his fourth gold at the continental showpiece.

Eight other Indians -- the Olympic-bound trio of Simranjot Kaur (60kg), Vikas Krishan (69kg), and Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), and Jaismine (57kg), Sakshi Chaudhary (64kg), Monika (48kg), Sweety (81kg) and Varinder Singh (60kg) -- secured bronze medals after semifinal losses.

Mary Kom signs off with silver medal at Asian Boxing Championships

AGENCIES

DUBAI, 30 MAY

Six-time world champion Mary Kom (51kg) signed off with a silver medal in the Asian Boxing Championships after going down in an intense final against Nazym Kyazibay of Kazakhstan here on Sunday.

Mary Kom lost in a split 2-3 verdict. It was her seventh medal in the tournament, the first being a gold that came way back in the 2003 edition.

Up against an opponent 11 years younger to her, the 38-year-old made an impressive start and clinched the opening round comfortably by relying on her sharp counter-attacks.

The intensity picked up in the second round and both the boxers showed aggressive intent. The Kazakh drew level

at this point with her jabs landing perfectly.

Mary Kom fought back in the final three minutes but that was not enough to get the judges' nod.

The Manipuri legend also won a prize money of \$5,000 for her campaign, while Kyazibay was richer by \$10,000.

Kyazibay is a two-time world champion and a six-time national champion.

On Monday, Amit Pangal (52kg), Shiva Thapa (64kg) and Sanjeet (91kg) will fight it

out in the men's finals. Pangal will square off against reigning Olympic and world champion Shakhobidin Zoirov of Uzbekistan. It will be a repeat of the 2019 world championship final in which the Indian had lost to set for silver.

Thapa will be up against Mongolia's Baatarsukh Chinzorig, who is the Asian Games silver-medallist.

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Personal equations don't matter when you're playing for India: Mithali Raj

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 30 MAY

Personal likes or dislikes don't matter when one is playing for the country, India's Test and ODI captain Mithali Raj said on Sunday, insisting that she and head coach Ramesh Powar have "moved on" from a bitter past to take the team forward.

Mithali and Co. are currently quarantining in Mumbai ahead of the UK tour, which is expected to provide a big push to the team's preparations for the ODI World Cup in New Zealand early next year.

The full-fledged series comprising India's first Test in seven years will also be Powar's first assignment as head coach. The

former India spinner returned to the role after being sacked following India's semifinal defeat in the 2018 World T20.

Mithali was controversially dropped from that game and relations between the two went south with both accusing each other of unprofessional conduct.

"You need to think about the bigger picture. That's how I am. There are so many things that have happened in the past, but I don't carry that baggage into my present or in the future."

In quarantine, the team has had multiple zoom calls discussing plans for the upcoming tour. Mithali said the World Cup is the primary goal at the moment and everyone is aligned with that.

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