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NEPAL GETS THE
COLD SHOULDER

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N KOREA WARNS US OF
'VERY GRAVE SITUATION'

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RAJASTHAN ROYALS
BEAT SUNRISERS IN IPL

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10 VIVACITY



KHELA ENDS IN MAMATA'S TRIUMPH

But Didi loses
Nandigram seat to
Suvendu Adhikari

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

WEST BENGAL (292)	
PARTY	SEATS WON
TMC+	214
BJP+	76
CPM+	1
OTHERS	1

voting percentage and number of seats compared with its performance in 2016.

Challenger BJP, which was expecting to form the Government with 200-plus seats, ended up winning just 70 seats while the Left-Congress-ISF alliance came at the distant third with one seat.

Curiously in 2016 elec-

tions, the Left-Congress alliance had won 77 seats and were defeated in 70 other seats by narrow margins of 150 to 4,000 votes.

The only unpleasant news in the jubilant TMC camp was the Bengal Chief Minister's loss to her former colleague and BJP rival Suvendu Adhikari who clinched the Nandigram seat defeating the Trinamool supremo by a wafer-thin margin of 1953 votes. The TMC has asked for a recount.

Mamata, however, smelled a rat in the entire proceedings wondering whether the trend in Nandigram could be differ-

ent from what it was in the rest of Bengal. She said, "I think there is a conspiracy... they did something to ensure my defeat... first they declared that I was winning and then they said that the server was down and then I was told that I had lost by a narrow margin... I think a game was played there in the last round of countings... I will go to the court challenging the counting process."

However, late on Sunday night the Election Commission of India rejected Mamata's allegation of conspiracy against her in Nandigram.

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Bengal saved democracy: Didi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Speaking to the media on her party's hat-trick in Bengal Assembly elections, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said that the two high points of her party's victory were: "it belongs to the people of Bengal and it saved India and its democracy," dropping sufficient hints that she would now turn towards Delhi bracing for the 2024 general elections.

She, however, evaded a question on the issue saying her pri-

ority was to fight the pandemic and save the people of her State. She said "I salute my nation, I salute my voters. Bengal has saved India."

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Left breaks 'second coming' jinx in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

KERALA (140)	
PARTY	SEATS WON
LDF	92
UDF	39
NDA	0
OTHERS	9

Interestingly, KT Jaleel, Minister for Higher Education (who was also the former chief of SIMI) who had to resign from the Government following strictures by Lok Ayukta, won from Thavanur constituency. The notable feature was the defeat of Mercykutty, the fisheries minister in the outgoing Government, from Kundara in Kollam district. Equally shocking was the defeat of Jose K Mani, son of late KM Mani, in his home turf of Pala.

Mani C Kappen, who walked out of the LDF over the front's refusal to part with the Pala constituency, defeated Jose Mani by a big margin of 11,000 votes.

Vijayan has succeeded where Marxist titans like EMS Namboodirippadu, EK Nayanar and VS Achuthanandan failed to return to power for a second consecutive term. Even Congress leaders too had failed in achieving this rare distinction in the State. "This is a victory of the people of the State. They wanted the continuation of the good works being done by this Government and that is why they chose to elect us back to power," Vijayan told the media in Kannur.

Continued on Page 2

TAMIL NADU (234)	
PARTY	SEATS WON
DMK+	159
AIADMK+	75
OTHERS	4

PNS ■ CHENNAI

After being in the Opposition for ten years since 2011, the DMK succeeded in wresting power in Tamil Nadu by scoring an impressive win in the Assembly election.

At the time of going to Press, the DMK led alliance was leading in 159 out of the total 234 Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu. The AIADMK-led front that includes the BJP, the PMK, and the Tamil Mania Congress is leading in 75 constituencies.

Political commentators like Sam Rajappa said the AIADMK aligning with the BJP has not gone down well with the people of Tamil Nadu and this is being seen as the main reason for the party's debacle.

"Jayalalitha after her experiences in 1998 and 2004 had

DMK sunrise! Stalin shows mettle



DMK president MK Stalin's son and party's youth wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin visits his grandfather and former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu late M Karunanidhi's memorial after he received the victory certificate, in Chennai on Sunday

PTI

dumped the BJP and had vowed that she would have anything to do with the Hindutva party. Edappadi and his deputy Panneerselvam antagonised the followers of Jayalalitha by aligning with the BJP," Sam Rajappa told *The Pioneer*.

Stalin thanked the voters

through his social media platform and has not come out of his residence.

"He is likely to make his first public announcement after the EC declares all results from the State," said a close aide.

The bye-election to Lok Sabha held at Kanyakumari fol-

BJP returns to power with fewer seats in Assam

ASSAM (126)	
PARTY	SEATS WON
BJP+	73
CONG+	52
OTHERS	1

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The ruling BJP-led alliance is set to make a comeback in Assam in the first Assembly election after the Citizenship (Amendment) Act was enacted with the declaration of results on Sunday, although winning less number of seats compared to the 2016 polls.

The alliance has won or is leading so far in 72 seats (48 wins and 24 leads) out of the 126 constituencies of the state and 64 seats are needed to get a simple majority.

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NDA wrests Puducherry

PTI ■ PUDUCHERRY

PUDUCHERRY (30)	
PARTY	SEATS WON
NDA	16
UPA	8
OTHERS	6

Rangasamy cheers as he annexed the seat with a margin of 5,456 votes over his immediate CPI rival K Sethu alias Sethu Selvam.

A Namassivayam of BJP emerged victorious from Mannadipet constituency after defeating his DMK rival A Krishnan.

Namassivayam, who shifted his allegiance to the saffron party in January this year after quitting the Congress, contested the April 6 poll from Mannadipet seat as BJP nominee.

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress has once again suffered major setbacks, faring poorly in all the States and drawing a blank in West Bengal. The party was expected to grab power in Kerala but it ended way behind the incumbent LDF.

In Assam also its performance was dismal.

Former Congress president R a h u l G a n d h i



We humbly accept the people's mandate. Sincere gratitude to our workers and the millions of people who supported us on the ground

RAHUL GANDHI

Cong loses polls, Rahul face

who campaigned in all the five States completely ignored disgruntled leaders and relied extensively on his own trusted lieutenants.

Leaders like Ghulam Nabi Azad who had wide knowledge of Tamil Nadu politics were not even consulted, leave aside asked to undertake a campaign.

A leader from the dissenting camp told *The Pioneer* that

Rahul will have to do a rethink on strategy and form a new team as he can't keep on losing elections after elections and expect us to keep our mouths shut.

"The party lost all the Assembly elections except in Tamil Nadu where the party is a junior partner to the DMK," the leader said. He pointed out that the election results particularly those of Assam and

Kerala where Rahul and his sibling Priyanka Gandhi campaigned extensively are not on expected lines.

Rahul said the party humbly accepts the people's mandate and it will continue to fight for its values and ideals. "We humbly accept the people's mandate. Sincere gratitude to our workers and the millions of people who supported us on the ground. We will continue to

fight for our values and ideals. Jai Hind," Rahul tweeted.

After Rahul side-lined all senior leaders like Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, etc, senior party leader Tariq Anwar was given a rehabilitation task in Kerala after he came back from NCP, and he managed the poll.

The Kerala loss is a personal setback to Rahul who is an MP from Wayanad there and his close aide KC

Venugopal also comes from the same State.

"Both in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the party should have given task to other senior leaders rather than just preparing a list of star campaigners from which many of them were not given a single meeting," confided a leader.

The crucial election in Assam was handled by Chhatisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and former Union Minister Jitendra Singh who had roped in a PR agency to manage the poll.

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Footprint beyond Bengal may not be easy for Didi

NAVIN UPADHYAY ■ NEW DELHI

On April 5, addressing a rally in Debanandapur in Hooghly district, Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee said, "I will win Bengal with one leg and in the future, will get victory in Delhi with two legs."

The reference was to the injury she suffered in one leg in Nandigram on March 10 that left her wheelchair-bound.

Mamata has fulfilled her first vow by registering a resounding victory. But despite the excitement her landslide win generated in the Opposition camp, it would be naive to think she could emerge as an acceptable face for the Opposition ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Not much should be seen in the warm greetings extended to her by the entire spectrum of the Opposition - Sharad Pawar, Lalu Prasad, Akhilesh Yadav, Omar Abdullah, Sanjay Raut, Mehbooba Mufti. After all, Mamata has given a bloody



TMC activists celebrate in Kolkata on Sunday

events showed that apart from a hand-holding coming together of Opposition parties in Bangalore, nothing ever happened to coalesce the Opposition parties into a cohesive force with a single unifying political and economic narrative. Instead of unity, the Opposition badly fell apart on the issue of the leadership and gave a complete walkover to Narendra Modi.

Mamata has exhibited a clear ambition to take on Modi at the national level. Her two-leg remark is a clear expression of this desire. Her letter to the Opposition leaders ahead of the second phase of the West Bengal polls is being seen as a clear indication that she would like to play a dominant role in unifying the opposition. In her letter, addressed to the majority of the Opposition parties except the Left, Mamata asked them to unite against the BJP's "one-party authoritarian rule" and proposing that they chart a plan of action after the ongoing polls.

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Oxygenated beds near O2 industries planned

Medical students to be roped in for Covid duty; Govt offers incentives

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday held a high-level review meeting of experts and officials to discuss among other things the possibility of usage of gaseous oxygen for medical purpose and conversion of nitrogen plants to oxygen plants to ramp up the oxygen supply in the country.

The meeting reportedly discussed inviting medical students, including final-year stu-

dents of MBBS, to help India battle coronavirus crisis amid a shortage of healthcare staff.

Sources said the Government may delay the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test and incentivising MBBS pass-outs studying for it to join Covid duty. The Government may also use the

services of final year MBBS and nursing students in Covid duty. According to sources, medical personnel on Covid-19 duty will be given preference in Government recruitment as well as a financial incentive.

The meeting also discussed tapping for medical use gaseous oxygen produced by industries like steel plants, refineries with petrochemical units, industries using rich combustion process, power plants etc.

The PMO said, "The strategy being used is to identify industrial units which produce gaseous oxygen of requisite purity, shortlist those which are closer to cities/dense areas/demand centres and establish temporary Covid care centres with oxygenated beds near that source. A pilot for 5 such facilities had already been initiated and there is good progress on this. This is being

accomplished through PSUs or private industries operating the plant & co-ordination of centre & state.

Continued on Page 2

Covid-19 IN INDIA

TOTAL CASES: 1,99,14,683 (+3,64,910)

DEATHS: 2,18,824 (+3,300)

RECOVERED: 1,62,77,092 (+2,95,154)

ACTIVE: 34,10,161

MAHA: 47,22,401 (+56,647)

KERALA: 16,38,779 (+31,959)

K'TAKA: 16,01,865 (+37,733)

UP: 13,13,361 (+30,857)

DELHI: 11,94,946 (+20,394)

CAPSULE

DU DEFERS FINAL YEAR EXAMS IN VIEW OF COVID

New Delhi: Delhi University has decided to defer final year examinations amid rising Covid cases, officials said on Sunday.

The final year and final semester exams were supposed to begin from May 15 but will now begin from June 1. They will be conducted online and held in open book format. Teachers have been given time till May 10 to submit question papers.

Covid job centres in 77 Delhi Govt schools set up for 18+ group

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Sunday released the list of Covid-19 vaccination centres for the people between 18-44 years. These inoculation centres have been set up on the premises of 77 Delhi Government schools situated in 11 districts of Delhi.

"The Government schools in Delhi are being prepared for a vaccination drive scheduled to begin on Monday, schools are being converted into vaccination centres in Delhi so that even if a lot of people show up to get their jabbed, the transmission of the disease is curtailed," a Delhi Government



official said.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday had informed that large-scale vaccination against Covid-19 for people between 18 and 44 years will start from Monday.

The Government official also said that preparations for the vaccination drive are underway.

Continued on Page 2

SC: No patient shall be denied hospitalisation, essential drugs for lack of local residential proof

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to formulate within two weeks a national policy on admissions to hospitals in the wake of the second wave of Covid-19 and said no patient shall be denied hospitalisation or essential drugs in any state for lack of local residential proof.

A three-member apex court bench, comprising Justice DY Chandrachud, Justice L Nageswara Rao and Justice Ravindra Bhat also directed the Centre and state governments to notify that any clampdown on information on social media or harassment caused to individuals seeking help on any platform will attract coercive action.

Continued on Page 2

MAHA ASSEMBLY BYPOLL

BJP wrests Pandharpur seat from NCP

By TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a setback to the ruling Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the Opposition BJP on Sunday bagged the Pandharpur-Mangalvedha Assembly seat in Maharashtra's Solapur district, by defeating the NCP in the by-polls.

As per the information made available by the Solapur district administration, BJP candidate Samadhan Autade trounced Bhagirath Bhalke of the NCP by a margin of 3733 votes.

Of the total 2,27,421 votes counted, Autade polled 1,09,450 votes, while Bhalke secured 1,05,717 votes in the by-polls.

The Pandharpur-Mangalvedha Assembly by-poll was necessitated by the death of sitting NCP MLA Bharat Bhalke owing to post-COVID-19 complications in November last year.

On its part, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) - of which the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress are constituents --- had fielded Bhagirath Bhalke, son of late NCP MLA Bharat Bhalke, as its candidate.

After the poll results were declared, the Opposition BJP workers celebrated the party's victory in the temple town of Pandharpur in western Maharashtra, defying the Covid-19 restrictions.

France delivers 28 tonnes of medical supplies to India

New Delhi: France on Sunday delivered to India 28 tonnes of ready-to-use medical supplies including eight large oxygen plants as part of the first phase of its solidarity mission to the country which has been grappling with record coronavirus cases.

The French embassy said each of the eight plants can continuously supply oxygen to a 250-bed hospital round-the-clock for a dozen years and that they produce medical oxygen from ambient air.

"The oxygen plants will be delivered to 8 Indian hospitals, 6 in Delhi, one in Haryana and one in Telangana, based on needs as identified by the Indian authorities," the French embassy said in a statement on Saturday. A special cargo flight brought the supplies to Delhi from France.

French ambassador Emmanuel Lenain said more supplies will come soon from France and that both countries stand together in this fight against the pandemic.

The embassy said the medical supplies were worth more than Rs 17 crore.

"We stand by India in these difficult times, just as India has always stood by France. In Spring 2020, when French hospitals were facing acute shortages, India provided life-saving help through the export of critical medical drugs," Lenain said.

"The French people have not forgotten. India has, in fact, been at the forefront of international cooperation against the pandemic, including through sharing its massive vaccine production capacity with the countries most in need," he said.

The French supplies also comprised 28 ventilators and 200 electric syringe pumps to be distributed to several hospitals to enhance their ICU capacities.

Spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs Arindam Bagchi said the assistance by France is a testament to the strategic partnership between the two countries.

"A testament to India-

France strategic partnership & friendship! 28 tonnes of medical equipment including 8 hospital-level oxygen generators and other medical supplies arrives from France. Deeply appreciate the support from France. Will bolster our oxygen capacities," he tweeted.

Separately, Belgium also sent 9000 vials of Remdesivir to India on Sunday.

The US on Saturday night sent to India a third flight that brought over 1000 oxygen cylinders, regulators and other medical equipment. Two American military aircraft on Friday brought to India large amounts of emergency medical supplies which included 423 oxygen cylinders with regulators, 210 pulse oximeters, 17 large oxygen cylinders, 8,84,000 Abbott rapid diagnostic test kits and 84,000 N-95 face masks.

As India battles a devastating second wave of coronavirus pandemic, several countries around the world are sending medical supplies to help it tide over the situation. **PTI**

Bihar reports 13,534 fresh Covid cases

Patna: Bihar has reported 13,534 new Covid cases in the last 24 hours, health officials said on Sunday. As per officials, Patna has registered a maximum of 2,748 Covid cases in the last 24 hours.

Besides, Vaishali has registered 805, West Champaran 652, Nalanda 611, Begusarai 659, Gaya 544 and Bhagalpur 535 cases in the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav has accused the Narendra Modi government of not providing adequate quota of medicines, oxygen and ventilators to Bihar. "You may have differences with Nitish Kumar but why are you taking revenge against the innocent people of Bihar. There are 5,000 Covid patients dying every day in the state and the crematoriums are also overcrowded. What kind of government this is? Devastations are all over the place," Yadav said.

"The state government has no control over the medical mafias. The life saving drugs are not available in the market. The mafias are selling life saving injections Remdesivir at Rs 50,000. Even Dexona tablets, Vitamin capsules are not available in the market. There is no regulatory authority in the state to check the menace," he added. **IANS**

Andhra Govt postpones Class 12 board examinations

Amaravati: The Andhra Pradesh government on Sunday decided to postpone the Class 12 board examinations conducted by the state board after the Andhra Pradesh High Court asked it to reconsider its decision to hold the board exams.

The state government has to submit an affidavit in this regard to the court by May 3.

Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh said, "In the view of Andhra Pradesh High Court's observation, we have decided to postpone the Class 12 board exams which were to begin from May 5."

"There is no centralised rule in place to conduct the board exams. Some states have conducted them while some haven't. We have made adequate arrangements for conducting the board exams in a safe manner keeping the safety of students and teachers on priority," the minister added.

Over the past few days, the opposition parties, particularly the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), students and parents, have been demanding the cancellation of the board exams on the account of rising Covid cases and deaths in the state. However last week, Chief Minister Y S Jaganmohan Reddy had categorically ruled out the cancellation of the examinations.

With several petitions filed seeking cancellation of the board exams on account of spiralling Covid cases, the Court heard the matter on Friday and directed the state government to submit an affidavit by May 3. **IANS**

Delhi University defers final year exams in view of rising cases

New Delhi: Delhi University has decided to defer final year examinations amid rising Covid-19 cases in the city, officials said on Sunday.

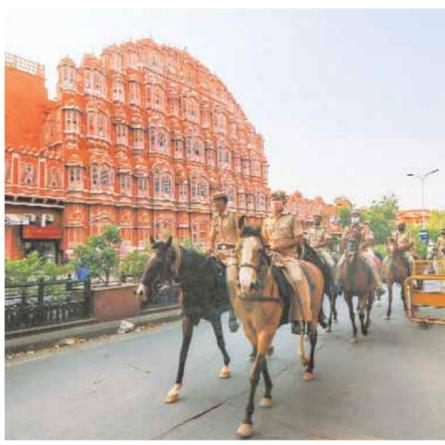
The final year and final semester exams were supposed to begin from May 15 but will now begin from June 1.

They will be conducted online and held in open book format. "We held a meeting on Saturday with all the heads of departments and deans. The meeting was chaired by the vice-chancellor. It was decided that the exams will be postponed to June 1," D S Rawat, Dean of Examinations, DU, said. Rawat said the decision on exams for intermediate semesters will be taken later.

He said the examination branch officials have been battling coronavirus and on Sunday morning two employees -- a section officer and a contractual staff -- succumbed to COVID-19.

When asked if the exams could be deferred beyond June 1, he said it would not be possible.

"Many students have got job offers and in order to accept them, they need to have their final results. Students have also applied to foreign universities and require results within a time frame," he said. Teachers have been given time till May 10 to submit question papers. Teachers and students have been demanding the deferment of exams and even cancellation.



Police personnel mounted on horses conduct a flag march during Covid-19 induced lockdown in Jaipur on Sunday **PTI**

BJP returns...

From Page 1

As per the latest results on the Election Commission website, the BJP won 35 seats and is leading in 22 others. Its ally, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), won eight seats and is leading in one, while the third constituency of the alliance, the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), bagged five seats and is leading in one.

On the other hand, the 'Grand Alliance comprising the Congress, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and eight other parties has won 24 seats so far and is leading in 28 others.

The Congress bagged 15 seats and has made progress in another 16, while its partners All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) won six and is leading in 10, the Bodoland People's Front (BPF)

won three and is leading in one, and the CPI(M) leading in one seat. In 2016, the BJP became the single largest party with 60 MLAs, while its allies AGP and BPF had won 14 and 12 seats respectively.

The ruling coalition also had the support of an Independent MLA. Some of the prominent winners this time are Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, NEDA convener Himanta Biswa Sarma, Speaker Hitendra Nath Goswami, BJP state chief Ranjeet Kumar Dass, AGP president Atul Bora, Congress legislature party leader Debabrata Saikia and jailed anti-CAA activist Akhil Gogoi. "The public has blessed us because of our good work," Sonowal said.

He retained the Majuli seat by defeating Rajib Lochan Pegu of Congress by 43,192 votes. In 2016, he had won by 18,923 votes.

SC: No patient shall be denied ...

From Page 1

"The Central government and state governments shall notify all chief secretaries, directors general of police, commissioners of police that any clampdown on information on social media or harassment caused to individuals seeking/delivering help on any platform will attract a coercive exercise of jurisdiction by this court.

The registrar (judicial) is also directed to place a copy of this order before all district magistrates in the country," it said in the order uploaded on the SC website late on Sunday night.

The bench, headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud, said till the formulation of a national policy by the Centre on admissions to hospitals, "no patient shall be denied hospitalisation or essential drugs in any state/UT for lack of local residential proof of that state/UT or even in the absence of identity proof."

The top court also directed the Centre to ensure that the deficit in the supply of oxygen to the national capital is rectified before May 3 midnight.

Prashant Kishor ...

From Page 1

He said the Trinamool's victory must be taken by other Opposition parties as a message that they too can stand up to the BJP and give them a contest. He also came down hard on the Election Commission, accusing it of being an "extension of BJP". From allowing use of religion by BJP to scheduling poll and bending rules, the EC did everything to aid the saffron party," he said.

On Sunday, Kishor's old tweet was trending with trends suggesting that the saffron party may not cross 100 seats.

"One of the key battles FOR DEMOCRACY in India will be fought in West Bengal, and the people of Bengal are ready with their MESSAGE and determined to show the RIGHT CARD - #BanglaNijerMeyekeiChay (Bengal Only Wants its Daughter)," Kishor had tweeted.

Reiterating an earlier prediction, he added, "PS: On 2nd May, hold me to my last tweet." On December 21, in his last tweet of 2020, he posted: "For all the hype AMPLIFIED by a section of supportive media, in reality BJP will struggle to CROSS DOUBLE DIGITS in #WestBengal. PS: Please save this tweet and if BJP does any better I must quit this space!" After the tweets, he had also challenged the BJP leaders to say on record that they will quit their positions if the party failed to get 200 seats. As his old tweets were trending, Netizens were quick to share screenshots of Kishor's tweet on December 21, in which he said that the BJP will struggle to cross double digits in Bengal. Some gave shared memes to laud the poll strategist's prediction level.

Oxygenated...

From Page 1

It is expected that around 10,000 oxygenated beds can be made available in a short period of time by making temporary hospitals near such plants," said PMO in a statement.

State Governments are being encouraged to set up more such facilities with oxygenated beds to deal with the pandemic. The PM also reviewed progress on setting up of PSA plants. He was informed that around 1500 PSA plants are in the process of being set up through contribution of PM CARES, PSUs and others. He directed officials to ensure speedy completion of these plants. "Considering the requirement of medical oxygen amidst the Covid-19 pandemic

situation, the Government of India explored the feasibility of conversion of existing nitrogen plants to produce oxygen. Various such potential industries, wherein existing nitrogen plants may be spared for production of oxygen were identified.

On deliberation with the industries, so far 14 industries have been identified where conversion of plants is under progress. Further 37 nitrogen plants have been also identified with the help of industry associations. A nitrogen plant modified for the production of oxygen can be either shifted to a nearby hospital or, in case it is not feasible to shift the plant, it can be used for on-site production of oxygen, which can be transported to hospital through specialized vessels/cylinders.

DMK sunrise! Stalin shows mettle

From Page 1

The winners in DMK include party supremo M K Stalin, his son Udhayanidhi and former Chennai Mayor M Subramanian. Though the opinion and exit polls had forecast a total routing of the ruling AIADMK, the party belied it all and managed to stay afloat with lead in 75 constituencies by 7 pm. The string anti-incumbency feeling against the Government resulted in some of the senior Ministers in the outgoing Edappadi Palaniswamy Government biting the dust. The fallen

Ministers include Ma Foi Pandiarajan, M C Sampath, and Rajendra Bhalaji. Counting of votes in Virudhachal has been held up after the DMK agents expressed reservations and objections about the functioning of the EVMs. This is the constituency from where Health Minister Vijayabaskar was seeking re-election. Edappadi Palaniswamy has taken an unassailable lead in his Salem constituency leaving his nearest rival far behind. Elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, some of the constituencies are seeing see-saw battles with

Coimbatore leading the table. Makkal Neethi Maiaam leader and cine actor Kamal Haassan is engaged in a battle of nerves against his BJP rival Vanathi Srinivasan. The counting resembles a tennis match with both taking leads in alternate rounds leaving the agents aghast. Though the Election Commission of India is yet to announce the final results of the poll, the whose who of Chennai that include top bureaucrats, police officers, business and media barons were seen making a beeline to the palatial residence of Stalin in Chennai.

Left breaks 'second ...

From Page 1

He said the LDF's victory was against great odds and the front had to face a lot of crisis on its way to victory. Vijayan taunted Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for spending lot of time, energy and resources in Kerala to get the LDF defeated and asked them to introspect whether what they have done was right. "The efforts of Sangh Parivar to set foot in this State will not work in Kerala. The earlier they understand it, the better. The results of the 2021 assembly election are a warning to them," said the Chief Minister.

"While we accept the verdict of the people, I would like to state that this is a result that has shocked Kerala," said Mullappalli Ramachandran, president, KPCC. He said the party would undertake a thorough analysis of the results to find out the factors that contributed to the rout. In the outgoing House, the LDF had 91 members but the front managed to increase its tally to 99.

Muslim League, the second biggest constituent in the UDF, said they accept the verdict.

Kerala's leading political commentators attributed communal polarisation to the LDF win. "The Muslims lined up behind the CPI(M) wherever the Muslim League was not strong. Consolidation of Muslim voters behind the CPI(M) is the sole reason behind the LDF's success," said P Rajan.

Jayshankar, advocate, Kerala High Court, a leading author and columnist, said the LDF retaining power was because of a hitherto unheard pro-incumbency wave. "The electorate saw the impressive work done by the Pinarayi Vijayan Government in countering the Covid-19 pandemic. People in the State felt the need for a strong and powerful government and they saw that leadership in Vijayan. The Congress was at its lowest ebb and was faced with many internal fightings," said Jayshankar.

Bengal saved democracy...

From Page 1

This is a victory of democracy, she said. "They said they would win 200-plus seats but they have been wiped out. Bengal has destroyed BJP's ego ... or else everyone has seen how the entire central government and its agencies had been used to finish us off.

"This is a victory of humanity the women, the youth, the minorities and all the section of people who want peace and harmony to prevail... who want peaceful co-existence and not feuds and

Cong loses...

From Page 1

Baghel, however, has earned appreciation within the party for his strategy in Assam for devising a campaign as per the locals needs. The party was so hopeful to get back in the State that one of its alliance partners AIUDF had moved out its contestants from Assam to Dubai and Malaysia to avoid poaching in case BJP fails to seek a majority. However, the Congress clearly failed to see the possibility of polarisation of Hindu votes after joining hands with the AUDE. It's obvious that the party lacked leaders capable of analysing the ground situation and giving proper feedback to

Footprint beyond Bengal may...

From Page 1

The three-page letter was addressed to more than a dozen non-BJP leaders, including Congress president Sonia Gandhi, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray, Aam Aadmi Party convener and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, DMK president MK Stalin, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti and NC president Farooq Abdullah.

Mamata's effort to unify the Opposition and lead it will conflict with the ego and ambition of a range of leaders, who are not ready to concede even an inch of their turf to forge a united front to take on the BJP. Regional parties want the Congress should not contest from those States where the grand old party has only a symbolic presence. This, they think, would prevent the division of the anti-BJP votes. The Congress is unlikely to agree to any such proposition that would further reduce its presence across the country.

Khela ends...

From Page 1

Nandigram apart, most TMC heavyweights, including veteran Ministers like Subroto Mukherjee, Firhad Hakim, Partho Chatterjee, Javed Khan, Arup Biswas, Jyotipriya Mulla, Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, Sadhan Pandey and sitting Mayor-in-council Debashis Kumar registered a comfortable victory over their rivals.

While Biswas defeated Union Minister and BJP candidate Babul Supriyo, Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay won from Bhawanipore the home turf of the Chief Minister herself defeating his BJP rival and TMC turncoat Rudranil Ghosh. Kumar defeated BJP's Subroto Saha a retired Lt General.

While the TMC made history of sorts winning about 50 percent of votes — the highest

Khela ends...

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In another historical first it is for the first time since Independence that the Left Front failed to find any representation in the State Assembly. The Left leadership however blamed their loss on the "completely polarized atmosphere" in which the elections were fought.

The BJP which secured 18 seats in 2019 Lok Sabha elections and had a lead in 126 Assembly seats securing 39 percent votes was down to about 34 percent votes winning only 70 seats this time round.

The BJP's loss comes notwithstanding the fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Shah addressed and shared 80 rallies between them besides senior leaders like JP Nadada, Rajnath

Khela ends...

Singh, Yogi Adityanath and Smriti Irani conducting numerous other rallies.

In what is being seen as a lesson learnt by the BJP national leadership that relied too much on the turncoats only three out of the 134 Trinamool defectors that were given safe-fron nomination could win the elections. The three such leaders are Mukul Roy, Suvendu Adhikari and Mihir Goswami.

Reacting to the TMC's landslide senior party MP Sougato Roy said "it was a foregone conclusion ... the way the central Government, its agencies and the BJP leaders from all over the country were campaigning against a single woman using all kinds of filthy languages against her ... this result was bound to happen... the people did not take this insult on Bengal lying down... this was a vote to preserve the Bengali asmita or pride."

Covid jab centres in 77 Delhi Govt schools set up...

From Page 1

As all the listed hospitals on the CoWIN website, who are administering Covid vaccines, will continue to do the same to the people aged 45 years and above, the vaccination for people below that age group will be done at the nearby government school.

Importantly, all listed schools would be coordinating with the nearby hospital and getting assistance in terms of Covid vaccines and medical attention.

Some of the schools officially listed in the document include KV Air Force Tughlakabad Sangam Vihar, Shaheed Hemu Kalani GSBV Lajpat Nagar, Govt. Girls Sr. Sec. School, 2 Uttam Nagar, Sarvodaya Kanya Vidhyala, Basaidarapur, Sarvodaya Vidhyala, Mansarovar Garden, Sarvodaya Bal Vidhyala, West Patel Nagar, Ishani Govt Girls School, Saket, Sarvodaya Vidhyalaya Sector 3 Rohini and many more.

Khela ends...

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City's Covid positivity rate drops to 28.33%

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Covid19 positivity rate in the national Capital has gone from 31.61 per cent to 28.33 per cent on Sunday as 20,394 new cases and 407 fatalities were reported in the last 24 hours.

Interestingly, as the daily positivity rate has decreased by 3.28 per cent, the recovery rate has also increased as 24,444 patients recovered, according to Delhi health department

While containment zones have been increased to contain the virus spread on the other side, testing was reported less, the new cases took the active caseload to 92,290 and cumulative positive cases tally to 1,194,946.

According to the health bulletin, the number of new cases reported has declined by around 5,000 as city registered 25,219 corona patients on Saturday, the less per cent in positive cases can be attributed to the decline in number of samples tested in the last 24 hours. 71,997 tests were done on Sunday in comparison to 79,780 on Saturday.

On Friday, Delhi witnessed a spike of 27,047 new coronavirus disease (Covid-19) infections and 375 deaths in the last



An under-construction temporary Covid Care Centre being prepared with beds and oxygen support, amid the ongoing second wave of coronavirus pandemic, at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib in New Delhi on Sunday

24 hours, according to the health bulletin.

The daily new cases witnessed a rise of 2,812 cases as the national capital reported 24,235 new Covid-19 cases and 395 deaths in the last 24 hours on Thursday, the Delhi health state authorities marked.

On April 27, the total covid19 cases per day was recorded 24,149, 381 deaths while 17,862 patients recovered, the positivity rate was 32.72 per cent.

To curb the virus spread, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal

on Saturday extended the lockdown period by a week.

As Delhi continues to struggle with high Covid cases and the resultant oxygen shortage, Delhi High Court on Sunday asked the Delhi government to ensure that oxygen cylinders, flow meters and medicines required for COVID-19 treatment are not sold above MRP.

"Those found hoarding and black-marketing medicines and equipment related to COVID-19 should be booked," the HC said.

Make relevant Covid info available, city Govt told

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cabinet Secretary on Sunday reviewed the Covid pandemic situation in Delhi with Chief Secretary and top officials of Delhi. He also stressed the need to make available all relevant information on Covid beds and other facilities/ medicine availability to the public, through dedicated websites/apps, on the basis of which people in need of such facilities/ medicines can approach the right place.

A single helpline should be created at the front end, to provide relevant clinical information to the needy people, and should be popularized; the helpline can be serviced through a dedicated and well-staffed call centre, suggested Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba.

He asked the Delhi Government to make all out efforts to lift their allocated oxygen, using all the means at their disposal; and also to ensure that the oxygen available to them is distributed rationally and in a transparent manner, so that there is no diversion or leakage. On the issue of adequate medical and healthcare human resources, he asked the Delhi Government to create flexible procedures to engage the services of retired medical professionals. Cabinet Secretary also asked for further



Family members of Covid-19 patients wait to fill their empty cylinders with medical oxygen outside an oxygen filling centre, at Bhogal, in New Delhi on Sunday

augmentation of testing facilities and timely availability of test results.

The meeting was attended by the Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Dr VK Paul, Member, NITI Aayog, senior officials of the Union Health Ministry, and Commissioners of Municipal Corporations of Delhi and Chairman, NDMC. Union Health Ministry officials stressed the need to restart the earlier practice of transparent electronic displays, at each hospital site, of the number of beds available in that facility for COVID patients. The Additional Secretary, Health also emphasized the need for setting up oxygen audit Committees in various hospitals and medical

facilities. Dr. V.K. Paul emphasized the seriousness of the present situation and recommended that small nursing homes and hospitals be roped in for augmenting the medical infrastructure of the Capital.

He asked for Covid Care Centres to be opened in hotels and similar places, as per the protocol. In order to supplement the 24x7 helpline of the Delhi Government, he recommended that the Delhi Medical Association be requested to offer around 50 doctors, who can voluntarily provide medical consultation to COVID-19 patients. The helpline/medical professional can provide guidance on use of medicines, oxygen concentrators and other medical facilities.

Convert Ayurvedic AIIMS into Covid19 facilities: Opp leaders

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

At a time when Delhi hospitals are faced with oxygen crisis, the Opposition leaders met the Union Minister of State (MOS) Home G Kishan Reddy and apprised him about the situation amid surge in Covid 19 cases and demanded to increase the Covid 19 sections in MCD run hospitals and Ayurvedic AIIMS at Badarpur should be converted into Covid19 facilities.

Reddy assured help when a Delhi BJP delegation lead by its president Adesh Gupta and Leader of Opposition (LoP) in Delhi Legislative Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Meenakshi Lekhi, Member of Parliament (MP) from New Delhi, Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Health Minister, Siddharthan, General Secretary, Ramesh Bidhuri, MP from South Delhi and Parvish Sahib Singh Verma, MP, West Delhi informed the grim situation of Government and private hospitals, a BJP leader who was part of the delegation said.

"The non-availability of medical advice for covid patients and oxygen is troublesome," Adesh Gupta said. "During the meeting, the

Delhi BJP General Secretary Harsh Malhotra party's Doctor Cell is now giving free advice to over 300 new Covid19 patients everyday

BJP leaders shared feedback from their constituencies about Government and private hospitals denying to admit the Covid 19 patients due to lack of oxygen and beds," he added.

Meanwhile, all parliamentarians in Delhi escalated relief work in their respective constituencies. BJP, MP Gautam Gambhir has arranged 200 oxygen concentrators which will be given free for use to people. Verma has set up 50 oxygen beds for people in his constituency. Lekhi is arranging Kitchen setups for feeding around 2000 people in her constituency. LoP Bidhuri has set up a community kitchen for poor at Badarpur.

According to Delhi BJP General Secretary Harsh Malhotra party's Doctor Cell is now giving free advice to over 300 new Covid19 patients everyday.

RSS leader's son, friend die in road accident

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

In a horrific road accident, son of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader Pawan Jindal and his friend were killed after their BMW car that they were traveling, rammed into a pillar of an underpass of DLF Phase-2 Rapid Metro Station on Golf Course Road around 2.30 am on Sunday.

According to the police the deceaseds have been identified as Gaurav Jindal (38) the son of RSS leader and his friend Sawan Khanna (37). Both were residents of Sector-15 in Gurugram.

"At the time of the accident the duo were returning from their friend's house located in DLF-1 to their house in Sector-15 and when they reached of



an underpass of DLF Phase-2 Rapid Metro Station on Golf Course Road the BMW reportedly being driven by Gaurav at a very high speed lost balance and hit the nearby underpass metro pillar and turned turtle three times and damaged the entire BMW" Assistant Sub-Inspector Praveen of DLF

Phase-2 police station, said.

A police officer privy with the matter said the BMW was such in high speed as after hitting the Rapid Metro underpass pillar the vehicle turned three times on the road which cause the entire BMW was damaged and carcass of the vehicle spread few distance on

the road and also a part of the rapid metro pillar was damaged.

The investigation officer Praveen said, "Soon after an information the police team reached the spot and somehow they managed to get the bodies out from the vehicle as Gaurav's body was cut into pieces while his friend Sawan was rushed to a private hospital where doctor's declared him brought died."

Preliminary investigation revealed that an over speed driving cause the accident. Whether the vehicle occupants were drunk or not it could be revealed after a detailed investigation.

The bodies have been kept in mortuary for an autopsy. Further probe is underway," said a senior police official.

Ambulance driver held for overcharging Covid victim

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up its action against greedy ambulance drivers charging high rates, the Delhi Police has arrested an ambulance driver for allegedly charging ₹14,000 to ferry the body of a Covid-19 victim from the hospital to the crematorium.

Police said Kandhi Lal was charging the exorbitant amount to ferry the patient for a distance of six kilometres.

According to Guriqbal Singh Sidhu, the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest district, on Saturday, after receiving a tip-off about the driver, the police laid a trap.

"The constable Mahesh called the ambulance driver



and asked him to ferry the body of a Covid patient to Nigam Bodh Ghat from NuLife Hospital," said the additional DCP.

"The ambulance driver said it would cost him Rs

Ambulance driver was charging ₹14K to ferry body of Covid-19 victim from hospital to crematorium

"A case was registered and 45-year-old Lal, a resident of Jamuna Bazar, was arrested. Efforts are being made to track down and arrest his accomplice," the additional DCP added.

On May 1, The Pioneer had reported that for a family to keep alive the loved one suffering from Covid-19 is a nightmare, but it's equally traumatic to arrange a mortuary van to carry his body.

First ambulances are not available, and if you are lucky to get one, it comes at an exorbitant rent. "The ambulance services were charging five times higher rates. They are charging Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000 for 5 to 8 kms," the newspaper stated.

3 held for beating, robbing man in Sangam Vihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested three men for allegedly assaulting and robbing a person in south Delhi's Sangam Vihar area. A few days after the incident, the victim succumbed to his injuries during the treatment at the local hospital.

The accused have been identified as Sunny (21), Ritik (20) and Mohammad Izaz (18), residents of Sangam Vihar.

According to Atul Kumar Thakur, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South district, one Azad was assaulted and robbed of his phone and Rs 1,000 cash around 11.15 PM on April 18 while he was returning

Victim succumbed during treatment at local hospital, say police

home from his brother's house.

"A case was registered under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) on April 19. Later, he died during treatment on April 25 and section 302 (murder) was also added in the case. On April 26, police analysed CCTV footage in which the accused men were seen," said the DCP.

"In the evening, one of

them was identified as Sunny. Police laid a trap near his house and arrested him. On his instance, his associates Ritik and Izaz were also arrested," said the DCP.

"On the instance of Izaz, the robbed mobile phone was recovered. They said that they were highly intoxicated at the time of the incident and they were going to purchase a cigarette," said the DCP.

"Meanwhile, the deceased's bike touched them, following which a verbal altercation ensued. While they were assaulting the victim, they thought of robbing him as no one else was there," the DCP added.

3 steal Remdesivir from G'gram hospital to sell at high price, held



STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Two male nursing staff, working in a leading private hospital in Gurugram and a woman, have been arrested from Sector-52 in Gurugram for allegedly stealing Remdesivir injections from the hospital and selling them illegally at a high price.

A teams of the Chief Minister's flying squad and Drug controller department had nabbed the culprits red



handed with five infections. "We have nabbed Chetan Kapoor, who has been working as staff nurse in Max Hospital in Gurugram his associate Nitin Jose who used to work in Narayana hospital in Gurugram as nursing staff and his wife Lima Oomen was also involved in the injections black market," Amandeep Chauhan, drugs controller officer, said.

He said they received information on Sunday that a gang was selling Remdesivir injections in Sector-52 area. "Our



team verified the details and came to know about Chetan. A trap was laid after sending decoy customers and the trio were arrested. Five Remdesivir injections were recovered from the possession of the culprits," he said. During questioning, Nitin said he was stealing injections from the hospital to earn quick money. "He roped in Chetan and asked him to sell the injections in the market. They were currently selling it for Rs 45,000 when we arrested them," an officer said.

MP Pravesh gives 25 oxygen concentrators to Tilak Nagar hosp

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Member of Parliament from West Delhi Pravesh Sahib Singh Verma has provided 25 heavy duty oxygen concentrators to South Corporation's run Tilak Nagar Colony Hospital.

On this occasion, Verma said that Delhi is reeling under the severe wave of Corona pandemic. Considering the situation, we all must come forward to help the citizens.

Verma said that these Oxygen concentrators will help in expanding health care facilities at the Hospital and will ensure better health services to the people.

He appealed private institutions/bodies to provide ICU

and ventilator facilities to SDMC's Hospital under CSR fund so people could have available medical facilities in a improved manner.

The BJP MP also assured that all possible help will be provided by him to the Hospital.

He also distributed fruits boxes for the patients. On the occasion, nodal officer of Tilak Nagar Colony Hospital Radha Krishan, RMS Dr Sweta Chhokra, Dr Hemant Kumar, Dr Bharat Bhushan and other senior SDMC officials were also present.

Nodal Officer of Tilak Nagar Hospital Radha Krishan said that health facilities are being improved at this Centre day by day.

Cops go extra mile to help distressed Delhiites

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a rapid surge in Covid-19 cases across the country, the Delhi Police is going an extra mile to help citizens in distress. The police are leaving no stone unturned to assist the citizens at the time of crisis.

"On Friday, the police station in Dwarka Sector 23 in Delhi received a call regarding the death of a Covid patient in his house. The condition of his family was also serious who were home isolated," said the senior police official.

"The deceased person was identified as SP Khare (69), a resident of Sector 22 in Dwarka. The Delhi Police arranged an ambulance to shift the dead body to RTR Hospital under Covid protocols," he said.

In another instance in Southwest district, a police control room (PCR) was received at Jaitpur police station

wherein the caller stated that his mother had died from breathlessness and neighbours are not helping in performing the last rites of her mother with the fear of Covid-19 pandemic.

"The police team rushed to the spot and found that a 50 year-old Krishna, a resident of Jaitpur Delhi, was dead. The police team arranged the vehicle for transportation of the deceased to the cremation centre. Further, Sub Inspector (SI) Shivraj and other police staff of Jaitpur police station helped the family to perform the last funeral rites of the body at cremation centre Molar Band Delhi," said Chinmoy Biswal, the Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Delhi.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Police also supplied oxygen cylinders to hospitals after SOS calls were received regarding the shortage.

"Information was received at Lajpat Nagar police station



regarding the shortage of oxygen cylinders in IBS hospital. The available stock would last only for two hours. There were 40 Covid patients on oxygen support under critical situation in the hospital," said Biswal adding that immediately, the police team arranged 22 oxygen cylinders from different locations in Delhi.

"Besides it, the regular supply of the oxygen for Vimhans and Moolchand hospital was

on the way from IONX Surajpur, Greater Noida. Two green corridors were provided by the police team of Lajpat Nagar police station from Greater Noida to Vimhans and Moolchand Hospitals. The team escorted oxygen tankers providing free passage to ensure the timely supply of oxygen to the patients," said Biswal.

"With the remarkable effort of Delhi Police, the oxy-

gen was made available well within time to save the life of 150 Covid patients at said three hospitals," Biswal added.

The Delhi Police on Sunday also provided food to needy in the city. In an instance, food was distributed by the police team to the needy persons of Sapera Basti, Indra Vikas Colony and Munshi Ram Colony, Mukherjee Nagar with the help of Nirankari Mandal.

2 sell oxygen concentrator for ₹ 1.65 lakh, arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested two men for their alleged involvement in black marketing oxygen concentrators, an equipment used for treatment of Covid patients. Police said that the accused were charging ₹1.65 lakh for an oxygen concentrator against its actual price of ₹31,000.

The accused has been identified as Anuj Minda (41), a resident of Ashok Vihar, and Gurmeet Singh (36), a resident of Rohini.

According to Guriqbal Singh, the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest district, on Saturday, Bharat Juneja, a resident of Kalkaji Extension, called the Ashok Vihar police station and told police that as his wife and mother were COVID positive and were in a



critical condition, he had purchased an oxygen concentrator from Minda at Rs 1.65 lakh.

"However, the machine was not in a working condition. During investigation, police found that Juneja purchased the concentrator by paying Minda Rs 1.45 lakh in cash at his home in Ashok Vihar on Friday," said the additional DCP. "When Juneja contacted Minda to tell him that the machine was not working, the

accused refused to change the machine and return the money," said the additional DCP.

"The police team arrested Minda and during interrogation he disclosed that he was engaged in black marketing of oxygen concentrators along with Singh.

Later, Singh was also arrested. One oxygen concentrator was also recovered," the additional DCP added.

BENGAL POLLS

BJP, TMC workers clash after results

Both hold each other responsible for violence

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The hate rhetoric and a feeling of intense animosity left behind by the senior leaders of TMC and BJP in the run up to the elections continued to take its toll on the common people with reports of violence coming in from various parts of Bengal.

Violence continued in the post poll scenario with the BJP being the main opposition party bearing the brunt of it all, sources said adding the winning Trinamool Congress cadres went on rampage in many areas while the State saffron leadership frantically appealed to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to hold back

her men. The BJP party office in Arambag was set ablaze on Sunday evening as the TMC moved towards. The house of a BJP booth agent at Bishnupur in Bankura district was burnt down, sources said.

The Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, however, blamed the BJP workers for unleashing violence saying the saffron workers had hit TMC Arambagh candidate Sujata Mondal and hit her on the head.

While BJP IT cell chief Amit Malaviya tweeted, "After results for West Bengal assembly came in, TMC goons burnt down BJP's party office in Arambagh..." asking "Is this what Bengal will have to suffer for the next 5 years?" reports of more violence came in from Siuri too where the alleged

TMC men attacked a BJP leaders house and torched a tractor parked in front of it.

Similarly reports of violence came in from other parts of Birbhum where the TMC and BJP men hurled bombs at each other in Dubrajpur block. BJP men were also attacked at Kultali and Canning area, sources said alleging the police were not acting to the complaints being filed.

Making a frantic appeal to Mamata Banerjee, State BJP vice president HP Majumdar said, "We congratulate the her Excellency the Chief Minister offer to give constructive cooperation to the government but we also hope that she would reign in her supporters and stop them from attacking our men just because they had worked for the BJP."

Covid norms violated as crowd flock counting centers

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW:

As the counting of votes for the Panchayat elections began in different districts of Uttar Pradesh, the Covid norms and Supreme Court directives were smashed to smithereens as people jostled with each other to enter the counting station while supporters gheraoed the centres forcing police to use force to disperse the crowd.

"There is complete violation of covid norms despite strict warning by the Supreme Court to conduct counting under covid protocol. People have crowded the counting centres and in some places police had to resort to lathi-charge to disperse the mob," a samajwadi party lawmaker Ujjawal Raman Singh told *The Pioneer* here on Sunday. Despite the state being under curfew, crowding at a massive scale was seen and covid-19 norms were flouted at various centres across Uttar Pradesh.

The State Election Commission (SEC) had said the candidates and their agents will be allowed to enter the counting centres only if they

UP PANCHAYAT POLLS



Supporters at the Varanasi Jagatpur Panchayat Election counting site in Varanasi on Sunday

have tested negative for COVID-19 in the 48 hours prior to the commencement of the counting process or taken both doses of the vaccine. The SEC said at every counting centre, a health desk will be established, where a doctor will be present with medicines. Those showing symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cold and cough will not be allowed at the counting centres.

"There was no one to check whether the agents were covid positive or negative. Many people managed to get fake covid negative certificate and entered

the counting centres thus exposing others to this deadly infection," Singh said.

Police lathi charge was reported from Muzaffarnagar, Lucknow, Bahraich, Meerut, Kannauj, Basti, Gorakhpur, Sonbhadra, Banda, Ferozabad and Mainpuri. In Pilibhit police had to intervene following clash between the candidates and counting officials at Puranpur Mandi Samiti counting centre.

As the news spread about chaotic situations at the counting centres across the state, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath

issued orders asking district magistrates not to allow crowding of people at the counting centres. "The covid protocol including social distancing norms should be followed," he said in his statement.

State Election Commission (SEC) officials here said that the counting process is underway but due to Covid norms, the announcement of the results would be delayed and the process may take close to 48 hours to complete.

Counting of votes for the panchayat polls in Uttar Pradesh began on Sunday morning, an official

The Supreme Court on Saturday had refused to stay the counting process. In a special urgent hearing on a holiday (Saturday), a bench of Justice A M Khanwilkar and Justice Hrishikesh Roy passed the order after taking note of several notifications and assurances of the SEC that the COVID-19 protocols will be followed at all the 829 counting centres across the state. The court directed that there will be a strict curfew in the entire state till Tuesday morning and no victory rallies will be permitted.

Orders on victory processions being flouted, EC tells political parties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Sunday told political parties that its ban on victory processions during and after counting of votes is being flouted, and asked them to restrain their workers from violating Covid-19 guidelines. The EC wrote to the heads of recognised parties about its instructions being ignored, amid reports of party workers holding celebrations in states where counting of votes is underway.

Videos from Kolkata have shown celebrations by Trinamool supporters in pockets of Kolkata and some rural areas. Hundreds of mask-less supporters, faces smeared in green, were seen waving flags outside the party office -- a dangerous situation in a state where Covid is threatening to spill out of control.

Similar celebrations were seen in rural areas. Celebrations were also held by supporters of the DMK in Tamil Nadu -- where the party is set to come back in power after a decade.

"It has been brought to the notice of the Commission that even after the directions and advisories already issued by the Commission to ban victory celebrations during counting day until the period of model code, at some locations in some states, the victory celebrations are being carried out today by the party workers and representatives in contravention of the Commission's directions," the poll panel said in its letter.

The Commission said it has expressed its displeasure on the failure of certain parties to abide by existing instructions and guidelines.

"...it is utmost necessary that you direct/guide your party representatives/followers with strictness to stop them to celebrate and show restraint in these challenging times and ask them to behave strictly in accordance with the EC's instructions and extant instructions on Covid issued by National and State disaster management authorities," the letter said.

Could not predict exact nature of 2nd wave: Scientists

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a move aimed to defend the Centre which is drawing flak for failure to foresee the Covid-19 havoc, a group of Indian scientists working on mathematical models to forecast the surge of coronavirus cases said on Sunday they could not predict the exact trajectory of the devastating second wave as the virus dynamics and its transmissibility changed substantially over time.

The scientists working on the SUTRA model said that they had cautioned in March about the second wave and their warnings were not ignored by the Government.

A statement issued by the Department of Science and Technology, and signed by IIT Kanpur Professor Manindra Agrawal, Integrated Defense Staff Deputy Chief Madhuri Kanitkar and IIT Hyderabad Professor M Vidyasagar, said mathematical models had pre-

dicted a second wave of coronavirus and its peak in the third week of April with daily cases of around 1 lakh.

Intriguingly, while the IIT scientists could not predict the sharp surge in cases, in July last year, researchers of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) had forecasted that "India might witness the worst of the coronavirus pandemic early next year if a vaccine remains elusive." Based on a recent study on testing and case data of 84 countries, comprising 60 per cent of the world population, they said that India might record 2.87 lakh coronavirus cases per day by February 2021.

The IIT scientists also rejected reports that the scientists working on the SUTRA model cautioned in March about the second wave, but that their warning was ignored. "This is incorrect," they said in the statement.

Last year, the government had formed a group of scientists, mathematicians and experts to forecast the surge of cases. They said the nature of the virus has been changing very rapidly, and in such a scenario, any prediction must be continually readjusted, sometimes almost daily.

"We are working closely with the government and our inputs have always been received positively. While we could not predict the exact nature of the second wave earlier, we continue our efforts to better estimate its future trajectory," they said.

They added that the government sought its inputs on April 2 when they predicted a peak would come around the third week of that month. "A meeting was called on April 2nd to seek our inputs by one of the very senior officers of the government coordinating the national pandemic response. We indicated that the SUTRA

model predicted the second wave to peak by the third week of April and to stay most likely around 1 lakh daily cases," the scientists said in the statement.

However, the daily figures actually reported were thrice the predicted numbers.

On April 15, India reported 2,00,739 cases, while it recorded 3,14,835 cases on April 22. Breaching its all previous records, the country hit a record daily high with over 4 lakh new infections on May 1.

"Clearly, the model predictions in this instance were incorrect because of the reasons below," they said, attributing the spike to virus dynamics and its transmissibility to change at a faster pace.

Mathematical models can also provide a mechanism to predicting alternate scenarios corresponding to various policy decisions such as non-pharmaceutical interventions, they added.

PHASE 3 OF VACCINATION DRIVE

2K take first dose of Covid jabs in 11 States on 2nd day of 18+ drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On the second day of the phase-3 of the nationwide vaccination drive covering age group 18-44 years that commenced from May 1, just 2,023 people received their first dose of Covid jabs in 11 States, taking the total beneficiaries to 86,023 till Sunday. Registration for the newly eligible population groups had commenced from April 28th which does not allow walk-in option for inoculation.

While majority of the States and UTs deferred the drive citing shortage of vaccines, a few vaccination centres in the government and private set up in around ten States inoculated the beneficiaries the first dose. These states are Chhattisgarh (987 beneficiaries), Delhi (1,472), Gujarat (51,622), Jammu and Kashmir (201), Karnataka (649),

Maharashtra (12,525), Odisha (97), Punjab (298), Rajasthan (1853), Tamil Nadu (527) and Uttar Pradesh (15,792).

A senior official from the Union Health Ministry said that the vaccination will gradually pick up as the vaccines will be made available to the States as per the number of registration.

Many States have alleged shortage of jabs that were forcing them to put off the drive. Moreover, said the officials, as elections results are out in the five States including Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, the authorities are now expected to focus on streamlining the inoculation process. Covaxin and Covishield vaccines are being given to the beneficiaries under the nationwide drive. Meanwhile, the cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 15.68 Crore on Sunday.

Cumulatively, 15,68,16,031 vaccine doses have been administered through 22,93,911 sessions, as per the provisional report till 7 am on Sunday, said the Union Health Ministry in a statement here.

These include 94,28,490 Healthcare workers (HCW) who have taken the 1st dose and 62,65,397 HCWs who have taken the 2nd dose, 1,27,57,529 Frontline workers (FLWs) (1stdose), 69,22,093 FLWs (2nddose), 86,023 beneficiaries under 18-45 age group (1st dose), 5,26,18,135 1st dose beneficiaries and 1,14,49,310 2nd dose beneficiaries more than 60 years old and 5,32,80,976 (1st dose) and 40,08,078 (2nd dose) beneficiaries aged 45 to 60 years.

As per the Ministry, over 29 crore tests have been conducted so far while the cumulative positivity rate has increased to 6.74 per cent.

DRDO team finalises hospital site in Jammu

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A high level team of DRDO officials finalised the location of the 500 bedded makeshift hospital for Covid-19 patients in Jammu near Yatri Niwas in Bhagwati Nagar area on Sunday. Despite expediting the paper work and raising logistics at war footing it will take at least another three weeks time to operationalise the facility.

After inspecting the location the DRDO team also attended a meeting with the Divisional Commissioner in Jammu.

During the meeting the DRDO officials projected their requirements and also discussed in detail the roll out schedule of the facility. According to official sources, the DRDO team briefed the officials of the UT administration about various aspects before launching the facility.

The DRDO is expected to

handover the infrastructure with 125 bedded ICU facility, to the UT administration soon after establishing it.

The work is likely to begin by May 7 and the facility will come up by May 20. The staff and team of doctors and paramedics required to run the facility will be provided by the UT administration.

On the other hand, 41 deaths due to covid 19 were reported across Jammu and Kashmir while 3571 fresh cases were detected taken the total caseload of active positive cases to 32421 on Sunday. According to the media bulletin issued by the Department of Information and Public Relations, "3571 new positive cases of novel Corona virus (COVID-19), 1150 from Jammu division and 2421 from Kashmir division were reported on Sunday. Also 41 COVID-19 deaths have been reported, 28 from Jammu Division and 13 from Kashmir Division.

Moreover, 1453 more COVID-19 patients have recovered and discharged from various hospitals including 605 from Jammu Division and 848 from Kashmir Division.

Meanwhile, the UT administration has also constituted a Crisis Management Group (CMG) to monitor the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation and take preventive, control and mitigating measures.

The 5 member CMG will consist of the Chief Secretary as Chairman, and FC (Finance), FC (Health), PS (Home) and PS (PWD). The PS to LG will be a special invitee. It will interact with other officers and medical specialists as necessary.

The CMG will meet daily, and more often if necessary, to Review the rapidly evolving COVID-19 in terms of cases, testing rates, positivity, mortality, recovery, hospital occupancy and other parameters.

Launch free mass vaccinations, appeal 13 Opp leaders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leaders of 13 Opposition parties, including former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda, on Sunday urged the Centre to launch a free mass vaccination drive across the country in view of the unprecedented surge in Covid-19 cases.

In a joint statement, they also called upon the Centre to ensure uninterrupted oxygen supply to all hospitals and health centres as they manage the staggering patient loads in view of the rising cases.

The signatories include Congress president Sonia Gandhi, NCP leader Sharad Pawar, Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray and TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee.

"In times of the uncontrollable surge of the pandemic across our country, we call upon the Central

government to focus all attention in ensuring the uninterrupted flow of Oxygen supplies to all hospitals and health centres across the country," they said in a joint statement.

"We call upon the Central government to immediately launch a free mass vaccination programme across the country," they added.

The opposition leaders said the budgetary allocation of Rs 35,000 crore for the vaccination programme must be utilised for this drive.

JMM leader and Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, DMK chief MK Stalin, BSP supreme Mayawati, National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav have also signed the statement, besides left leaders D Raja (CPI) and Sitaram Yechury (CPI-M).

Maha logs 669 new deaths, 56,647 cases

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a noticeable drop in the Covid-19 fatalities and infections, Maharashtra logged 669 deaths and 56,647 new cases, while 51,356 fully recovered were discharged from various hospitals in the state.

A day after as many as 802 people died of Covid-19 and 63,282 others tested positive in Maharashtra, the number of daily deaths dropped to 669, while the infections came down to 56,647.

With 669 new deaths, the total number of deaths in the state climbed from 69615 to 70,284. Similarly, with 56,647 infections, the total number of cases rose from 46,65,754 to 47,22,401.

As 51,356 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year went up to 39,81,658. The recovery rate in the state for the first time in several days rose from 84.24 per cent to 84.31 per cent.

The total "active cases" in the state

rose from 6,63,658 cases to 6,68,353 cases. The fatality rate in the state stood static at 1.49 per cent.

With 79 fresh deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai increased 13,215 to 3,294, while the infected cases went up by 3629 to trigger a jump in the infections from 6,52,368 to 6,55,997.

While Pune accounted for a maximum 1,09,254 "active cases" in the state, Nagpur stood second 72,503, followed by Mumbai with 61,436, Thane (50,569), Nashik (49,628), Chandrapur (27,841), Ahmednagar (22,761), Satara (20,458), Solapur (20,156), Beed (14,213), Jalgaon (13,895), Aurangabad (13,530), Parbhani (12,825), Bhandara (10,808), Latur (11,378), Buldhana (11,143), Osmanabad (8069), Nanded (7986), Nandurbar (6896) and Gondia (8589).

Of the 2,76,52,758 samples sent to laboratories, 47,22,401 have tested positive (17.08 per cent) for COVID-19 until Sunday.

Currently, 39,96,946 people are in home quarantine while 27,735 people are in institutional quarantine.

CRPF requests Railways Ministry to book 55 special trains for de-induction

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Following instructions issued by Union Home Ministry for de-induction of the Central paramilitary forces deployed on election duty in the recently-concluded Assembly polls, the CRPF has requested the Railways Ministry to book 55 special trains to move the personnel. As many as 1.07 lakh personnel of Central forces were deployed in the State on poll duties in the eight-phased elections.

Upon conclusion of the eighth phase of the polls on April 29, the Central paramilitary forces began de-inducting from the next day with movement of 33 companies on Friday.

As many as 612 companies are being deinducted and sent to their respective locations from April 30 to May 6 through special trains. The remaining 459 companies of Central Forces and State Armed Police are demobilised through road and splinter train coaches.

On April 30, a total of 33 companies

were moved followed by 87 companies on Saturday and 92 companies on Sunday. As per the plans, 111 companies will move back on Monday followed by 124 companies on Tuesday, 112 companies on Wednesday and 54 companies on Thursday, officials said.

A total of 1,017 companies of the Central paramilitary forces ans State Armed Police were deployed on poll duties in West Bengal.

While the Central Reserve Police Force was the lead force, other paramilitary forces like the Border Security Force (BSF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Sashastra Seema Bal besides State Armed Police of the State governments were also deployed in the State for poll duties.

A company of the paramilitary typically comprises 100 personnel and a battalion has a strength of 1,000 men.

The Home Ministry had ordered de-induction on April 29, the day the polling for the eighth phase ended in West Bengal.

MEA: In touch with foreign Embassies & responding to their medical demands

New Delhi: The Ministry of External Affairs on Sunday said it is in continuous touch with all foreign embassies in India and is responding to their medical demands, especially those related to COVID-19.

MEA Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said the response to medical demands of the embassies included facilitating treatment in hospital even as he urged all not to hoard essential supplies, including oxygen.

Earlier, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar hit out at Congress leader Jairam Ramesh after he said on Twitter that the youth wing of the Congress was attending to SOS calls from foreign embassies and wondered whether the MEA was sleeping. Ramesh also shared a video posted on Twitter by Indian Youth

Congress national president Srinivas B V that showed a mini pickup van entering the embassy of the Philippines in Delhi, carrying oxygen cylinders.

"The MEA checked with the Philippines Embassy. This was an unsolicited supply as they had no COVID cases. Clearly for cheap publicity by you know who. Giving away cylinders like this when there are people in desperate need of oxygen is simply appalling," Jaishankar tweeted. "Jairamji, MEA never sleeps; our people know across the world. MEA also never fakes; we know who does," he said in another tweet.

Srinivas tweeted the video with a caption "#SOSIYC members at Embassy of the Philippines in New Delhi." In his comments, Ramesh complimented

the Indian Youth Congress.

"While I thank @IYC for its stellar efforts, as an Indian citizen I'm stunned that the youth wing of the opposition party is attending to SOS calls from foreign embassies. Is the MEA sleeping @DrSJaishankar?," he tweeted.

Srinivas also shared a video of his team supplying oxygen cylinders to the New Zealand High Commission and thanked the IYC team for the quick relief. The New Zealand High Commission tweeted, "We are trying all sources to arrange for oxygen cylinders urgently for our appeal has unfortunately been misinterpreted, for which we are sorry."

In his statement, Bagchi said the MEA is responding to the medical demands by the foreign missions.

353 new cases, doctor among 2 die in Aligarh

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

The corona infection in Aligarh district has once again set a record. 353 people, including the station superintendent, were found corona infected. At the same time, 12 people, including a doctor, died in the district for the first time.

For the first time, a Physician doctor died of a corona infection in Aligarh. At the same time, the corona report of 353 people, including the station superintendent of Aligarh Junction, came positive. The doctor who died was AK Varshney (58) MD Physician whose clinic is present at Dubey Padav. At the same time, a professor of DS College also died in SJD Hospital. The total death toll was 12. Nine died in Deen

Dayal Hospital, two died in SJD, one died in Harduaganj. The patient's report was corona positive. The number of active patients has been increased to 2302, with 353 people newly infected. So far a total of 73 people have died in the official figures from Corona. The total number of infected in the district has reached 15996. At the same time, a total of 13621 patients have gone home after recovering. At the same time, the infection rate in the district has reached above two percent. The DM appealed to the people of Aligarh to together ensure our participation in the mass movement against Covid-19. Follow Covid compliant practices at all times, everywhere and encourage others to do the same.

MAMATA PROVES POLL PUNDITS WRONG

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Most of the pollsters and psephologists went wrong about the results of the West Bengal Assembly polls where the ruling Trinamool Congress registered a thumping majority.

Belying expectations of a tight contest, the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC candidates appeared galloping to victory and the party will easily form its third successive Government in the State. None of the exit polls and pollsters

predicted such a huge victory for Mamata Banerjee.

Exit polls were divided over the election outcome, with a few of them predicting a hung assembly and others giving an edge to either the TMC or BJP. A poll of nine exit polls shows that the state could be headed for a fractured mandate. According to the aggregate, the TMC would bag 141 seats while the BJP 138. The Left alliance will be a distant third with just 13 seats.

According to India Today-My Axis India, the BJP is like-

ly to win 134-160 seats in Bengal whereas Mamata Banerjee's TMC may come a close second with a win in 130-156 constituencies. The ABP C Voter exit poll, on the other hand, has predicted a clear majority for the TMC. The ruling party is likely to win 152-164 seats and the opposition BJP may secure 109-121 seats, it said. Republic CNX predictions leaned towards the BJP, predicted its win on 138-148 seats and TMC's victory on 128-138 seats. TV9-Polstrat and News 24 Today's

Chanakya, on the other hand, have predicted a clear majority for TMC followed by BJP.

According to pollsters, the BJP is set to return to power in Assam while the Congress would lag behind in the second position. While ABP C Voter and TV9 Polstrat have predicted a close competition between the two parties, giving an edge to the BJP, others, including India Today-My Axis India, Republic CNX, and News 24 Today's Chanakya, however, have said that the BJP would win on far more seats

than the Congress.

There have been instances when the exit polls have proved either completely or partially wrong and could not judge the public sentiment despite their ground research. Most of the psephologists and poll pundits proved wrong in the Bihar assembly polls in 2020.

In the Bihar Assembly polls 2020, the exit polls and psephologists proved wrong. They had predicted a massive majority for the RJD-Congress alliance. The India Today-Axis exit poll had projected 161 seats

for the RJD alliance and 91 for NDA, the CNN News 18-Today's Chanakya predicted 55 seats for the NDA and 180 for the Mahagathbandhan. However, the NDA won 125 seats to secure a simple majority in the 243-member Bihar Assembly.

The results of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election in 2017 had surprised everyone. While the exit polls had predicted a hung assembly with BJP emerging as the largest party, the NDA won over 300 seats securing a massive major-

ity. The ABP News-Lokniti Exit Poll had predicted 102-126 seats for NDA and 98-122 for SP-Congress. The Times Now-VMR Exit Poll had predicted 190-210 seats for the NDA and 110-130 for the SP-Congress.

In 2016, most of the exit polls predicted DMK's victory and gave around 95 seats to the AIADMK. The News Nation Exit Poll gave DMK-Congress alliance 114-118 seats and AIADMK 95-99 seats, India Today-Axis gave AIADMK 89-101, DMK-Congress 124-140

and 3-6 to others. Chanakya gave 140 seats to DMK alliance and 90 to the AIADMK. However, AIADMK returned to power with 136 seats.

In 2014, while most of the exit polls gave an edge to the BJP, they predicted that the saffron party would fall short of a majority. Also, none of the exit polls had predicted that the Congress would be reduced to a double-digit figure — just 44 seats. However, the BJP-led NDA secured a simple majority by winning above 300 seats.



TMC supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee after trends show her party's win in the State Assembly Election 2021, in Kolkata on Sunday



LDF activists celebrate party's winning trend during counting day of Kerala State Assembly polls in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday



DMK Party workers celebrate during the counting of Tamil Nadu Assembly polls result at their party headquarters, in Chennai, on Sunday



Activists of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) allied with BJP celebrate at AGP head office in Guwahati on Sunday

NO LEFT FRONT MLA FOR FIRST TIME IN BENGAL

PNS ■ KOLKATA

With most of its votes being gobbled up by the BJP and the Trinamool Congress the mighty Left Front of seven decades on Sunday was literally decimated to a nonentity in Bengal political kaleidoscope failing to win even a single seat.

The bleeding that had started in 2009 finally resulting in the downfall of Red empire in Bengal tended to continue till Sunday with the Front that had polled about 7.5 per cent votes in 2019 General Elections managing to muster just about 5 per cent votes this time round.

As a result for the first time since Independence, not a single Left candidate could go to the State Assembly.

The CPI(M) politburo however held the massive polarisation politics responsible for its debacle.

Even in the naxalite period and the Emergency the Left could manage to send a few MLAs to the State Assembly.

Among the notable leaders who lost the elections are Left legislature party leader Sujan Chakrabarty, politburo member Md Salim, JNU leader Aishe Ghosh, State DYFI president Minakshi Mukherjee who contested against the Chief Minister and Suvendu Adhikari at Nandigram, Siliguri MLA and former Minister and Mayor Ashok Bhattacharjee and sitting MLA Tanmoy Bhattacharya.

The Left Front had forged an alliance with the Congress, and newly formed Indian Secular Front of Muslim cleric Abbas Siddique.

On the Left's poor show political analyst BN Chakrabarty said while a large majority of its voters got confused about whom to vote --- BJP or TMC --- in a polarized situation. Hence a large number of them ended up voting for both the parties in a bid to stop the other.

Another senior Left leader requesting anonymity said, "the way Muslim-majority districts of Murshidabad and Malda — which have substantial Left and Congress votes — voted for the TMC it seems that the voters voted to save themselves from NRC or CAA... Maybe these voters would return to the Left after this dust of confusion settles."

Referring to the massive foothold at the Brigade Rally the befuddled leaders said "going by the Brigade rally — and ours was the biggest — it is strange that we lost like this ... not even a single seat! It is strange."

Didi O Didi, minorities shatter BJP's Bengal dream?

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

Despite a phenomenal increase in its electoral footprints in West Bengal, the BJP lost the bigger plot to the TMC with minorities, subaltern "Chotolok" (underprivileged) and women "largely" sticking with and voting for Mamata Banerjee and, in a way, saffron catcalls of "Didi O Didi" also did not go down well with the gender sensitive Bengali electorate.

The BJP's massive election machinery could not decisively breach the fort of Mamata as

it failed to build its own local cadre base and organisational structure and lacked presence in a number of booths to galvanise voters.

As BJP General Secretary and party's election-in-charge Kailash Vijayvargiya accepted post-poll results that its base in Bengal missed the required depth and "BJP middle-class voters in the last phases did not turn out due to Covid pandemic but that Opposition's went to Polling booth all-out".

The polarisation may have benefited the BJP to increase its seat across Bengal with a wide

section of "Bhadralok" (upper class) voting for it but it caused the "reverse polarization" too.

The TMC winning more seats than what it did in 2016 Assembly elections (211) also point to BJP's strategy boomerang and helping the TMC which en bloc garnered Minorities (Muslim votes) who moved out to vote in large numbers despite pandemic fears.

This apart, an about 4 per cent decline in BJP's vote share (37 per cent) from 2019 Lok Sabha poll's 41 per cent and TMC's 4 per cent rise in vote

share now (49 per cent) from 2016 Assembly poll's (44.9 per cent) clearly indicates that BJP could not garner much of "chotolok" (poor and underprivileged) and they too substantially voted for the TMC.

A section of the intermediate and upper castes voted for the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led BJP but the rest seemed remained firmly behind Mamata. The defeats of BJP MPs like Babul Supriyo and Lockett Chatterjee indicates BJP could not win its key urban voters, including the Hindi-speaking one, as much

as it aspired to.

In being able to increase its tally from three to over 70, BJP has taken the space of the Left (and the Congress). BJP leaders analyse their defeat in terms of the left and Congress 'gan-gin-up' and transferring their votes to the TMC to stop it capturing the Bengal. This is a reversal of what Left did in 2019 Lok Sabha poll, shifting its votes to the BJP with the latter winning 18 LS seats.

Modi's campaign in Hindi and part dour Bengali did generate popular interest and smile but it could not prove to be a

replacement for a true or an 'authentic' Bengali face as party's Chief Ministerial aspirant who could easily connect with the natives. Not having a Chief Ministerial face (like Cricketer Saurav Ganguly) or a regional satrap proved to be a big chink in the battle armour of the saffron party vis-a-vis Mamata Didi — the 'daughter of the soil' who often punched the BJP Central leaders as "outsiders" in her campaign speeches. The Modi-centric campaigning has a diminishing rate of return in Assembly polls.

Lastly but not the least, the catcalls like 'Didi o Didi' by Modi and 'Beramuda' comment of BJP State president Dilip Ghosh against Mamata proved to be a self-inflicting wound for the BJP. The shift of about 2.5 per cent of votes to TMC is just one reflection that Bengal voters do value gender sensitivities.

The manifold increase in BJP's seat share despite 4 per cent decline from 2919, nevertheless, establishes BJP as the main opposition in Bengal which is indeed a 'tectonic shift' in Bengal politics.

OPPOSITION CHEERS FOR DIDI! PM congratulates Mamata

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With Trinamool Congress giving a drubbing to the BJP in the West Bengal, Opposition leaders from across the country congratulated incumbent Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for her "stupendous" and a "great" victory on Sunday.

The Congress also congratulated Mamata Banerjee and as well the people of West Bengal for decimating the vicious divisive agenda as also money and muscle power of the BJP. "People's mandate is the final word in democracy. People of West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have given their democratic mandate for next five years. We accept the verdict with humility and a sense of responsibility," said AICC chief spokesman Randeep Surjewala.

The Congress and the Left had fought against Trinamool as well as the BJP in West Bengal and the alliance finished at single digit.

NCP chief Sharad Pawar termed it a stupendous victory and said let us continue our work towards the welfare of people and tackling the Pandemic collectively. Pawar's party NCP is in a coalition

Government with the Shiv Sena and Congress in Maharashtra.

Sources in couple of Opposition parties said Mamata will now have a big stake in forging the unity of Opposition against the might of Modi. "Congress president Sonia Gandhi is also fond of Mamata while others like Sharad Pawar, Akhilesh Yadav, DMK, BJD barring the Left parties will have no problem with Mamata. Hence she will emerge as the tallest leader amongst all as the grand old party is yet to come to terms with the current political situation," said a senior leader of a political party.

The leader also cited that TMC and DMK have emerged as two major force in political scenario of the country which will definitely look for a change in the next 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Akhilesh Yadav also congratulated Mamata Banerjee and her party and said "politics of hate stands defeated" in the state. Taking to Twitter, the former Uttar Pradesh CM said the "conscious public" have given a befitting reply to BJP's 'Didi o Didi' barbs.

"Heartiest congratulations to the conscious public, combative Mamata Banerjee ji and the dedicated leaders and activists of the TMC, who defeated the BJP's politics of hate in Bengal! This is a befitting reply to the insulting sarcasm 'Didi O Didi' from the BJP," Yadav said. His party's MP, Jaya Bachchan, had campaigned for the TMC in Bengal.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had addressed Banerjee as 'Didi o Didi' and said that her defeat in Nandigram was certain.

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti also lauded the TMC on its performance in the West Bengal assembly polls, saying people have rejected disruptive and divisive forces. In a tweet, the former Jammu & Kashmir CM said, "Congratulations to Mamata on their splendid victory today. Kudos to the people of West Bengal for rejecting disruptive & divisive forces". She also took the opportunity to appreciate TMC leader and Rajya Sabha member Derek O'Brien on the success of party in West Bengal.

NCP leader Omar Abdullah also took to Twitter to congratulate Mamata Banerjee. "Heartiest congratulations to Mamata Banerjee

and TMC for the remarkable victory in West Bengal. The BJP and a thoroughly partisan Election Commission threw everything including the kitchen sink at you & you prevailed. All the best for the next five years," tweeted Omar. Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party leader, Arvind Kejriwal and Jharkhand CM Hemat Soren termed Mamata's retaining Bengal with a landslide victory.

"Congratulations Mamata didi for landslide victory. What a fight! Congratulations to the people of WB," he tweeted. Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut said except for Puducherry and Tamil Nadu, there will be no change in political scenario in the other states.

"We have to compliment Mamata didi that she accepted the BJP's challenge and contested only from one seat. It is not easy to defeat Mamata, even though the BJP worked hard and put in a lot of investment to defeat her," the Rajya Sabha member said.

Raut also said the Shiv Sena was confident that Banerjee would win. He said everyone was now more worried about the rising COVID-19 numbers than the political numbers.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday congratulated Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee for her party's victory in the West Bengal Assembly election saying his Government will continue to offer cooperation to the State dispensation.

In a tweet, Modi said, "The Centre will continue to extend all possible support to the West Bengal Government to fulfil people's aspirations and also to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic."

In another tweet, the Prime Minister said, "I would like to thank my sisters and brothers of West Bengal who have blessed our party. From a negligible presence earlier, BJP's presence has significantly increased."

"BJP will keep serving the people. I applaud each and every Karyakarta for their spirited effort in the polls," said the Prime Minister

While Senior BJP leader Rajnath Singh also congratulated TMC leader for her third-time successive victory in Assembly poll in West Bengal, BJP State-in-charge Kailash Vijayvargiya claimed that all Opposition parties, including

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre will continue to extend all possible support to the West Bengal Government to fulfil people's aspirations and also to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic

I would like to thank my sisters and brothers of West Bengal who have blessed our party. From a negligible presence earlier, BJP's presence has significantly increased

BJP will keep serving the people. I applaud each and every Karyakarta for their spirited effort in the polls

the Left and the Congress had joined hands to defeat the BJP.

BJP's IT cell chief and party's deputy-in-charge Amit Malviya said poll results are "huge jump for the party which had only three seats in 2016 in the Assembly and brought about an ideological shift in Bengal with the BJP turning a major pole in state's bi-polar politics."

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh was one of the first BJP leaders to congratulate Banerjee, DMK leader MK Stalin and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

"Congratulations to DMK leader, Thiru MK Stalin on his party's victory in Tamil Nadu assembly elections. I extend my best wishes to him," said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. He also wished Pinarayi Vijayan on his victory," Singh said.

"Congratulations to Chief Minister of Kerala Pinarayi Vijayan on his party's victory in Kerala Assembly elections. My best wishes to him for his next tenure," he added.

Rajnath congratulate Banerjee for her win in Assembly poll. "Congratulations to the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee Didi on her party's victory in West Bengal assembly elections. My best wishes to her for her next tenure," said Rajnath Singh.

As about victory of the BJP in Assam, he said Modi government's "policies led to BJP victory in Assam."

"The pro-people policies of Narendra Modi-led Govt & the state Govt under Sarbananda Sonowal have once again helped the BJP in winning assembly elections in Assam. Congratulations to PM Modi, CM Sonowal, Adhyaksh JP Nadda & karyakartas on BJP's impressive victory in Assam," said Defence Minister.

No room for other unrecognised regional parties in Bengal, TN

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Assembly election results in West Bengal make it amply clear that there is no space for unrecognised regional parties of other States in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. In all, 11 regional political parties contested the Assembly polls have managed to get less than one per cent of the total vote share in the State and their vote share is less than NOTA, (None of the Above), an option which enables the

voter to officially register a vote of rejection for all candidates who are contesting, is more than these parties.

In Tamil Nadu, 15 regional political parties have got less than one per cent of the total vote share.

At least ten parties' vote share is "zero per cent" of the total vote share.

Buoyed by winning 5 of the 20 seats it contested in the 2020 Bihar State polls and retain 44 seats in the high-octave Hyderabad civic polls,

Asaduddin Owaisi-led All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) which contested in Itahar, Jalangi, Sagardighi, Bharatpur, Malatipur, Ratua and Asansol has failed to dent the Muslim votes in Bengal. Bahujan Samaj Party also failed to dent dalit votes as they preferred to go with the Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress. Voters of Tamil Nadu also rejected Owaisi as it got "zero per cent" of the total vote share in the State.

According to the Election Commission data, NOTA got 1.09 per cent vote share in the State.

All India Forward Bloc got 0.59 per cent; AIMIM (0.02 per cent); AJSU (0.06 per cent); Bahujan Samaj Party (0.36 per cent); CPI 9 0.25 per cent; CPI (ML)(L) (0.02 per cent); IUML (0.00 per cent); Janata Dal (United) (0.02 per cent); Lok Janshakti Party (0.01 per cent); NPEP (0.1 per cent); RSP (0.22 per cent) and others 3.82 per cent.

In Bengal, wherein Left Front-have significant presence during agitation and protests against the ruling Government, it has minuscule presence when comes to voting.

The Left Front -- a coalition of communist parties -- was in power for 34 years in Bengal, and was considered invincible until 10 years back, showed pathetic performance. "Lorai, lorai, lorai, chai, lorai kore bachte chai," (Fight, fight, fight, we want to live fighting)

-- the war cry of the Communists in Bengal no longer resonates in Bengal now.

"The basic reason for this is they have lost connect with the masses, which is reflected in their declining vote share in the state assembly.

The Left Front's unruly championing of labour rights ensured the flight of capital as strikes, gheraos and cussed trade unions became the order of the day. Today, Left leaders in Bengal are still living in the

past," said a school principal of Matia Burz area in Kolkata. The Congress has managed to get only 2.91 per cent vote share of the total vote.

In Tamil Nadu, AIMIM has got (0.00 per cent), AITC (0.00 per cent), BSP (0.24 per cent), BJP (2.88 per cent), CPI (1.51 per cent), CPI (M) (0.71 per cent), CPI-ML (L) (0.01 per cent), DMDK (0.41 per cent), IUML (0.38 per cent), JD (S), LJP, NCP, NPEP, RJD, SHS, and SP (0.00 per cent), each vote share.

Who said what

I thank the people for saving the country, for saving its communal harmony. I am proud of Bengal

MAMATA BANERJEE



Congratulations to Mamata on their splendid victory today. Kudos to the people of West Bengal for rejecting disruptive & divisive forces

MEHBOOBA MUFTI

Heartiest congratulations to Mamata Banerjee and TMC for the remarkable victory in West Bengal... All the best for the next five years

OMAR ABDULLAH



Heartiest congratulations and good wishes to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for good performance of TMC in the West Bengal Assembly elections. Also heartiest congratulations and good wishes to Shri Stalin of Tamil Nadu, to Shri Vijayan of Kerala and to Shri Sonwal of Assam

MAYAWATI



It's a day of disappointment for many of my friends and colleagues in @INCKerala. You fought a good fight. The energy and commitment I've seen from you is the party's greatest strength... We must not be disheartened. There is work ahead to renew and revive our party, and to serve the people

SHASHI THAROOR



People's mandate is the final word in democracy. People of West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have given their democratic mandate for next five years. We accept the verdict with humility and a sense of responsibility

RANDEEP SURJEWALA



The pro-people policies of Narendra Modi-led Govt & the state Govt under Sarbananda Sonowal have once again helped the BJP in winning assembly elections in Assam. Congratulations to PM Modi, CM Sonowal, Adhyaksh JP Nadda & karyakartas on BJP's impressive victory in Assam

RAJNATH SINGH



We humbly accept the people's mandate. Sincere gratitude to our workers and the millions of people who supported us on the ground. We will continue to fight for our values and ideals. Jai Hind... People of Tamil Nadu have voted for change and we will, under your leadership, prove to be a confident step in that direction. Best wishes

RAHUL GANDHI





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Comeback time

India's image has taken a severe beating globally. It's time to show the world our true mettle

Ravaged by COVID-19, scandalised by foreign media and treated as a pariah by the world, which has cut all air links with New Delhi fearing the spread of the contagion, India faces a unique challenge that may have few parallels in its post-Independence history. It's one thing to face a period of economic slowdown, a bout of some epidemic, foreign aggression or domestic turmoil, and quite another to confront a challenge of this magnitude. Due to rising cases and mounting deaths, it's but natural that foreign media will turn its focus towards India after the end of the chaotic Trump era in the US. As long as Trump was in the saddle, he gave more than enough for the news-hungry media to dine and sup, but now that the US has managed to control the pandemic and the White House is no longer a source of media entertainment, the global newshounds have enough free time to shift their focus to another happening zone — India. With grim stories of patients dying on the pavements and being cremated in canine crematoriums, hospital running out of beds and oxygen cylinders and Remdesivir fetching as much as 10-fold its basic price in the black market, the media has more than it could ask for. The matter has been made worse by the *Tughlaqi* diktats issued by some States to crack down on sharing of information on social media. Even the Mahakumbh and Assembly elections provided a perfect cocktail of religion and politics to the foreign press.

The sceptics may call the foreign media coverage biased and conspiratorial but the fact remains that the Western press, by nature, has a tendency to turn even a dull menu into a spicy fare. Why would they miss the opportunity when they have all ingredients, and more. In a relatable narrative, dozens of countries have cut links with India and asked their citizens to return home. With its failing health infrastructure and chaos, India is today seen as an untouchable land. It is the same country which, in the pre-Corona days, had emerged as a challenger to the world's superpowers. But Corona has quickly turned the perception on its head. While much of the debate in foreign media is focused on the so-called absence of governance, what has been overlooked is that the man on the street is equally responsible for the spread of the virus. It's obvious that we Indians follow protocols or guidelines only when these are enforced with the application of punitive measures. It's important to note that our leaders have also failed to set an example in self-discipline, but that's nothing new. But now that India faces a serious image crisis, the leaders and the common man must come together to take tangible steps and change this perception. Forging a strong political unity would go a long way in sending the right message to the world community. It's time for the parties to realise that the nation is bigger than their political goals — they, and they alone, can mobilise the masses to fight this perception battle that has tarnished our image in the global arena.



People march past the City Hall during the traditional May Day rally in Madrid, Spain

PTI

In third, but slow

Hiccups greet the vaccination drive's latest phase, which is poised to gather steam later this month

The much-awaited third phase of the anti-COVID inoculation drive for all adults sputtered to life on May 1. Ironically, at a time when India seemed to have got over its vaccine hesitancy — if the rush to register on the Co-WIN app is anything to go by — the Governments were unable to provide the citizens the shots they need to beat the virus. As a result, despite the alacrity shown by young India to get the job, the drive has begun in fits and starts. While States like Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat began inoculating a lucky few, some States announced vaccination for different age groups also (such as for those above 35 years) while others told the people not to line up outside vaccination centres as they have not received enough stocks of the shots. Chief among the latter were Delhi, Odisha, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab, who plan to launch the drive later this month. In the meantime, the Centre, trying its best to save face, has assured the people that the campaign will soon be operational across India as "any new exercise takes time to pick up pace".

Even though the Union Health Ministry remains upbeat about the vaccine supply and 1,50,000 doses of the Russian-made Sputnik V landed in Hyderabad on May 1, this is just a drop in the ocean and in no way comforting. The million-dollar question is how many months will it take to inoculate all Indian adults? Of our 138 crore population, the 0-14 age group share is 26.16 per cent, 15-65 age group is 67.27 per cent and 6.57 per cent are more than 65 years old. What an uphill task lies ahead can be gauged by the fact that ever since the inoculation drive began on January 16, we have been able to fully vaccinate only two per cent of our citizens and 11 per cent have got just one dose. So, in order to be able to cover all the adults, India will have to administer 6.5 million doses per day till the end of this year. This is a big task, but do we have any other choice? Maybe it is time to listen to top US epidemiologist Anthony Fauci, who suggests ramping up vaccine production in India and a total lockdown for a few weeks to stop the surge. But not for six months like last year, because our economy cannot afford a body blow like that again. It may be worthwhile to listen to him. We don't have anything more to lose, do we?

Nepal gets the cold shoulder

Lurching from one crisis to another, the Oli-led unfocused Govt has lost the plot both at home and on the foreign policy front



RISHI GUPTA

A common element in Nepalese politics has been the uncertainty and unpredictability of political moves. These moves are often far removed from national welfare and have severely damaged its diplomatic endeavours. The KP Oli-led incumbent Government has neither been able to focus on domestic priorities nor bothered about strengthening its foreign policy. While Nepal is witnessing a surge in COVID-19 cases and panicking to manage the supply of vaccines from India and China, the country is experiencing diplomatic isolation.

Diplomatic isolation: Nepal's absence at the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, the BOAO Forum meet in China and the Climate Summit convened by the US has sparked a debate whether this Government is serious on the foreign policy front. While Nepal is yet to assure India of greater cooperation, China seems to have given a second thought to blindly relying on Oli to meet its strategic interests. The US, on the other hand, is irked by Oli after he showed no interest in joining the Millennium Challenge Cooperation (MCC), which aims to provide affordable and green transportation, electricity, regional security, peace and development to partners, only because China calls it a military platform.

No-show invite: Nepal stands on the verge of severe climate challenges. The devastation caused by the 2015 earthquake to implications on Mount Everest, forest fires, toxic air quality and the scarcity of freshwater supply in the country are a few examples where Nepal requires international aid. Under the Biden Administration, the US has re-affirmed its commitment to climate change, and the Paris Declaration and the recent climate summit were a fresh effort in this regard. While an invitation to Nepal was obvious at the summit, the diplomatic mishandling over the MCC by the self-centred Oli saw no ticket to the show for Nepal. The US has often requested Nepal to consider the MCC on priority. Still, all successive Communist Governments have made it a US versus China deal.



The Government has announced the Sagarmath Sarnad (Everest Dialogue) as a multi-stakeholder dialogue forum committed to deliberating on the prominent issues of global, regional and national significance. The first Sarnad was to be convened on April 2-4 but it has been postponed due to the pandemic. Although Nepal has invited the US, India and China to participate in the deliberations, a no-show for Nepal at the Climate Summit says a thousand words of an increasing unease in Washington DC towards Nepal. For the record, Nepal has prioritised climate change as a "national security threat" in its first-ever National Security Policy 2016; it stands as a political manifestation to seek international funds to the cause.

Soured ties: With India, Oli has left no stone unturned in capitalising on soured ties. As a next-door neighbour, India has stood with Nepal in all rough seasons. India was at the heart of bringing the guerrilla Maoist fighters down from the hills for the dialogue which ultimately resulted in the establishment of democracy in Nepal. Yet, all the previous Governments and the Oli-led Government have misused India's goodwill



ALL THE PREVIOUS COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS AND THE KP OLI-LED GOVERNMENT HAVE MISUSED INDIA'S GOODWILL FOR POLITICAL BENEFITS. AT THE TIME INDIA PROVIDED HELP TO NEPAL IN FIGHTING AGAINST COVID-19, OLI WAS ENGAGED IN A BORDER FIASCO WITH INDIA TO APPEASE CHINA

for political benefits. At the time India provided help to Nepal in fighting against COVID-19, Oli was engaged in a border fiasco with India to appease China. As a responsible neighbour, Nepal could have used diplomatic channels to discuss the border issues, but it chose to demonise India.

Bonhomie in question: The Nepalese Prime Minister may swear upon the so-called "peaceful intentions" and cooperation with China and defend its micromanagement of Nepal's domestic affairs, but Beijing is not at all pleased with Oli. He played a masterstroke by inviting Chinese President Xi Jinping to Nepal, where several pacts were signed in 2019.

However, China did not get what it wanted during Xi's visit. Beijing was expecting an extradition treaty with Kathmandu, which would allow China greater control to suppress the "free Tibet" voices of the Tibetan refugees living in Nepal. With mounting international pressure from the UNHCR, human rights organisations and the Opposition at home, the treaty was taken off the table at the last minute, which has not gone down well with China. In the joint statement, Beijing had conveyed its hopes

for the treaty in a shorter span. While the Oli-led Communist Government may have surrendered before the Chinese interests, Beijing will not bargain for anything less than the extradition treaty as it concerns its Tibet policy.

Conclusion: Politics and diplomacy are two sides of the same coin, and they require equal attention at the mint. In Nepal, the personal and party interests have been prioritised over national interests. Leaders like Oli have spared "special relations" with India for electoral gains and surrendered diplomatic autonomy to Chinese interests. While Nepal is a landlocked country and requires assistance from India and other friendly countries, its diplomatic conduct towards them has been shortsighted. A refurbished relationship with India and the US will help Nepal keep China in balance. As Nepal's politics and politicians remain unreliable, its people will have to take the lead in charting the course of its destiny.

(The author is an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow at the JNU and Visiting Fellow at the Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs, Kathmandu. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HOSPITALS MUST FOLLOW SAFETY NORMS

Sir — It is not only the shortage of medical oxygen, hospital beds and essential medicines that are taking a toll on people during the second wave of COVID-19 but also tragedies like the fire accidents in hospitals. It is really shocking to read that at least 18 people were killed after a fire broke out at the ICU of a hospital in Bharuch district of Gujarat on Saturday. There is an urgent need to not only ramp up the healthcare infrastructure in the country but also make the existing infrastructure safer and more robust.

The fire department officials believed that a short-circuit might have led to the blaze while the patients slept. After noticing the fire, the hospital staff tried to rescue the patients who were on ventilators. The hospitals in our country, especially the ones in big cities, often fail to comply with the fire safety norms and standards. The corrupt officials of fire safety and other departments give these hospitals the No-Objection Certificate (NOC) after pocketing hefty bribes. Most private hospitals are owned by rich or politically connected people and thus no action is taken against them. It is high time that a hospital be allowed to operate only if it fulfils all safety conditions. Several hospital buildings in metropolitan cities are also not earthquake-resistant.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

ELECTIONS WERE SUPER-SPREADERS

Sir — The Assembly elections in four States and a Union Territory are associated with the spread of Coronavirus infection at a rapid rate. They will be recorded as super-spreaders that worsened the COVID-19 crisis than as a democratic exercise to express political aspirations and elect new Governments. It doesn't depreciate the proverbial wisdom of the Indian electorate in any way. The Election Commission drew strictures from the Calcutta and Madras High Courts for turning a blind eye to the reckless disregard for the mandatory protocol and COVID-appropriate behaviour during the election campaigns.

The countrymen facing the worst times are not at all attached to the outcomes of

Nations repay India's goodness



India had already extended a helping hand to the international community during the COVID pandemic with as many as 150 nations benefiting from New Delhi's philanthropy. We sent out vaccines and other medical supplies and now the world, in a reciprocal gesture, has reached out to India as it is battered by a second wave of the pandemic. Australia, along with Singapore, has promised to send a retinue of non-invasive ventilators and, in the meantime, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Thailand and the UAE have decided to pitch in to mitigate the unprecedented medical oxygen crisis the country is faced with.

these elections. It's true that election results matter as politics determines everything. Elections were held in the midst of a pandemic. Still public health did not figure prominently as an election issue. It was really shameful that when the country was busy fighting the pandemic, political parties and their leaders organised large rallies and road shows that eventually led to a spurt in the number of COVID cases. The issue of the health of society is certainly above the elections and results.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

THE SECOND WAVE IS OUR FAILURE

Sir — As I write to you, another hospital is maxed out on capacity. We are averaging 150 deaths per hour due to COVID-19. The people are dying due to lack of basic items such as oxygen and Remdesivir. We are a country that spends a mere one per cent of our GDP on healthcare; it's

The UK has pledged to send vital medical equipment. Biden reaffirmed that the US is determined to support India in its efforts to contain the pandemic as he quickly deployed resources and adding oxygen equipment supplies, therapeutics, medicines, ventilators and other critical material for vaccine manufacturing. The US will be sending supplies worth more than \$100 million to India, including 1,000 refillable oxygen cylinders, 15 million N95 masks and 1 million rapid diagnostic tests. The Biden Administration has also redirected its own order of AstraZeneca manufacturing supplies to India, which will allow it to make over 20 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine. The US Department of Defense, USAID, Department of State and the White House are working in sync to provide relief to India. France and Russia are among the other nations in this list of donors and Russia is supplying the Sputnik V vaccine. It has happened due to the coordinated efforts by the Indian Government and our relations with the international community.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

absolutely appalling considering the fact that we are the "pharmacy of the world". We have now become an international embarrassment but what is even more disgusting is that we are still defending our horrendous rollout of vaccines.

Vaccine *Maitri* has been an absolute sham and the Centre has ripped its own people off. We have become beggars, asking for aid and alms from the international community. It has never happened in the history of our country. We were busy gifting ventilators and oxygen to the world instead of realising that we might need them. When the second wave was crushing the world, we messed up by not preparing for the worst. We are the worse off now than we were earlier. And, the worst is yet to come!

Sean Colin Young | New Delhi

SOUND BITE

What is happening in Uttar Pradesh is nothing less than a crime against humanity and the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) is playing along.

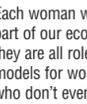


Congress leader — Priyanka Gandhi



India has been very generous in the past crisis in helping other countries; now is the time for other countries to try to alleviate the immediate problem that India has.

US Chief Medical Advisor — Anthony S Fauci



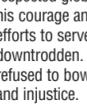
Each woman who is part of our ecosystem, they are all role models for women who don't even have the opportunity to decide what they would want to do in the next minute.

Actor — Gul Panag



My teammate and New Zealand all-rounder Kyle Jamieson wants to learn Hindi from me.

RCB cricketer — Yuzvendra Chahal



Sri Guru Teg Bahadur ji is respected globally for his courage and his efforts to serve the downtrodden. He refused to bow down to tyranny and injustice.

Prime Minister — Narendra Modi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

BOOST SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENTS

Greater investor outreach is needed to grasp the risks versus opportunities of sustainable land use



SAURAV MALHOTRA

Green is in. As the world gears up to set key climate goals at COP26 in Glasgow this year, countries and corporations are racing to institute new policies to limit carbon emissions and invest in sustainable business models and practices. Countries like China and the US have outlined ambitious programmes to ramp up Government spending to aid a complete renewable energy transition while creating jobs for their economies and strengthening their GDP. Pressure is mounting on India to commit to similarly ambitious climate goals, as the third-largest source of carbon emissions globally. The country is currently on track to meet its Paris Agreement commitments but its goals fall short of the policies needed to reduce emissions in line with the targets needed to keep the global temperature rise below 1.5° Celsius by 2050. New policies on coal mining, forests and businesses within environmentally sensitive zones diverge from the global move towards protecting and restoring forests.



For climate vulnerable regions like the Eastern Himalayas, including India's North East, even a 1.5° Celsius rise will transform its climate, impacting everything from its water sources, to the crops that can be grown, its biodiversity and by extension, the lives of the 246 million people living there. India's farmlands account for 21 per cent of its total emissions. However, effective management of farmland will mitigate its emissions by 222.44 million tonnes of carbon a year. These solutions include mosaic restoration of agricultural land, the use of biochar, optimising grazing intensity, nutrient management and improved rice cultivation techniques. According to data compiled by the World Resources Institute, the country has the opportunity to transform 87 million hectares (ha) of agricultural land by planting trees on farmland - mosaic restoration. In India's Eastern Himalayas, this farmland is 1.8 million ha. Under the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture, farmers received support of up to ₹70 per tree planted on agricultural land or in the periphery/boundary areas. This support needs to be streamlined with existing policies and subsidies, which currently focus on increasing production of cash crops like oil palm through monoculture cultivation, often in unsuitable areas.

With a growing global appetite for sustainable investment in energy and sustainable land and ocean use, India is rife with opportunities that must be leveraged effectively. Sustainable funds have outperformed their regular counterparts, with the Nifty ESG Index delivering a five-year return of 10.80 per cent compared to 8.99 per cent on the Nifty 50. The global push to eliminate deforestation from supply chains must be foregrounded in the Indian context. Both the stock exchange's ESG guidelines and SEBI's new guidelines on Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting include environmental concerns in reporting indices, but must be expanded to mandate deforestation/habitat loss audits across a firm's supply chain. Stronger, robust climate and environment impact and risk reporting must be mandatory for businesses and must be weighted in their investment rankings. Uniform standards need to be introduced for ESG funds, with robust minimum requirements on environment and climate sustainability for businesses to be included in ESG portfolios. Global opportunities in sustainable land and ocean use stand at approximately \$3 trillion according to the World Economic Forum. For natural capital rich regions like India's Eastern Himalayas to benefit, stronger mechanisms are needed to define a local carbon market to allow firms to invest directly in forests for their carbon sequestration services. More studies and robust assessments are needed on the scale of business opportunities in sustainable land use and forestry. Greater investor outreach and awareness is needed in India, to calculate the risks versus opportunities of sustainable land use against business as usual scenarios, particularly in eco-sensitive zones.

(The writer is co-founder Rural Futures and designer, Balipara Foundation. The views expressed are personal.)

When we wrong our own people

Mizos clamour for closure so that the burden of 'Zoram Day' and life in PPVs can be relieved. Closure and acknowledgement will sow the seeds for a deep reconciliation in the future

Half a century ago, an entire populace of a largish Indian town vanished into the jungles in a matter of hours. They converged in the neighbouring satellite villages and silently watched the city burn from a distance; an event now remembered as the 'Zoram Day'. And now, while millions of citizens of this diverse land go on with their daily lives, the pervasive forgetfulness of a nation that takes its history lightly cannot relegate painful memories of a catastrophe that continues to evoke strong opinions among the old and the young of Mizoram.

For, it was the day when we bombed our own people. And how can the memories be wiped clean — when shell casings are still found in nooks and corners of Aizawl and elders talk of the event in a hushed tone? Yet, sitting in an overcrowded Sumo Maxi-cab, a friendly Mizo neighbour narrates his story nonchalantly as he chews a heady cocktail of fresh betel nuts. Friendly, warm and at ease with nature, the Mizo also happens to be one of the last remnants of a true ecosystem community in India.

As he speaks, it becomes apparent that as proud custodians of one of the most forested States in the nation, Mizos make constant efforts to protect their natural landscape. The younger generation is aware and they take steps to protect the ancient forests. Several initiatives to protect water sources are ongoing. However, the high forest cover is deceptive with almost 67 per cent of forest area categorised as open forest. With the increasing threat of plantations and barely 200 square kilometre of very dense forest remaining, Mizos are taking an active interest in protecting their land.

Hearing these stories while driving in the State makes the hill more mesmerising than at first glance. Seeing their sustainable lifestyle, one wishes that the rest of the country was as environmental conscious as the Mizos. But then, your co-passenger reminds you to visit prominent landmarks in Aizawl. And you visit the graveyard there. Crisscrossed with graves and a small monument, the first reaction of a visitor is usually "It must be related to the Japanese Invasion." But that is not the case. The graveyard commemorates the Mizo people who died during the period of conflict in the 1960s and 70s. The monument was a reminder of the rarest of rare atrocity that a State could perpetuate against its own people — bombing the town using fighter jets of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

During the turbulent times of the insurgency in February 1966, the Mizo National Front (MNF) launched 'Operation Jericho' to throw out the security forces stationed in Mizoram — launching simultaneous attacks on Assam Rifles garrisons in Aizawl and Lunglei and capturing several significant buildings including the Government treasury at Aizawl. The front subsequently declared independence from India forcing the then Central Government to take a step that is unprecedented in India's post-Independence history. On March 5, 1966, fighter jets of the IAF strafed Aizawl with machine gunfire.

The jets returned on March 6 to drop incendiary bombs. This bombing continued till March 13 with significant damages reported across the town. Then just as suddenly as they started, the



THE SOCIOCULTURAL IMPACTS OF FORCING COMMUNITIES TO LEAVE THEIR TRADITIONAL LANDS WHILE THEIR LIVES BURNT TO THE GROUND IS FELT TO THIS DAY, WITH A BEWILDERED COMMUNITY STILL SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS FOR THAT SENSELESS ACT OF BRUTALITY

The writer is Assistant Professor at Azim Premji University. The views expressed are personal.



bombings stopped and temporary peace was restored. It is a story that has few parallels in modern Indian history. Unbelievably, it is true and the collective scars of those days constitute a significant portion of the memories of all Mizos who remember the event in precise details while the rest of us are blissfully unaware.

The anti-establishment movement finally came to an end in June 1986 when the Mizoram Peace Accord was signed between the MNF and the Government of India. As per this agreement the region was given statehood and the separate State of Mizoram was born in February 1987. MNF chief Laldenga became the State's first Chief Minister.

A young local stooped over a mobile phone, mentions wistfully that his generation looked at the events of those days through history books and often cannot relate to the events. But it is the elders who have a painful memory and do not want to talk about it. Many elders fall into a chilling silence and seem to want to forget it. But he goes on to add that there are a lot of people who keep the memory alive, especially the younger generation, some of whom have made short films on the era.

Local organisations have also worked hard to claim compensation for victims who faced atrocities during those years. As he succinctly mentions, "The collusion of the sufferers", especially the old, does not

wipe out the memories of the days.

Late in the day, a jarring feeling returned. And it was then, that a Mizo friend spoke about the unnaturally hanging villages by the roadsides. After the bombings of 1966 which was not even officially accepted by the Government till the 1980s, the Government decided to create Protected and Progressive Villages (PPV). A misnomer if there ever was one, the authorities herded villagers from across the tiny hill State into 110 such camps and sowed the seeds of an undisguised annihilation of traditional customs.

The sociocultural impacts of forcing communities to leave their traditional lands while their lives burnt to the ground is felt to this day with a bewildered community still searching for answers for that senseless act of brutality.

For many people, the bombing was a minor event when compared to the PPVs. These forced segregations had a long-lasting effect on Mizo society as many people lost their ancestral bearings. The pain was not even about burning of assets, but the perceptible change in societal norms with people forced to live in proximity with other villagers.

The widespread human rights abuses, pervasive food shortage in a new place, and a growing disconnect from their ancestral villages, have left a scar. Even after the PPVs were disbanded and many people returned, they reverted to a broken

society. Many did not even return and continued staying near the camp grounds.

The break up meant that many small clusters of pseudo-villages came up in the State. Administrative decisions on developing infrastructure in the villages became a challenge as choices had to be made upon where to start a school, which village should get a water supply and so on. The results have been long drawn but often visible in the faces of children who must walk long distances to attend school, increased isolation and poverty, poor healthcare and scanty water supply, the hinterland is still picking up the pieces from living forcibly.

Now New Delhi's measures to prevent Myanmarese nationals fleeing the junta from entering Indian States bordering Myanmar have opened up old wounds.

The Mizos do not ask for much, as those lucky enough to make the arduous journey to the Mizo hills will attest to. They love unconditionally and care for their land as few other communities do. Above all, they exude the same extraordinary warmth that many hill communities display — be it the Himachali, Uttaranchali, Sikkimese and Arunachalis. However, the Mizos do clamour for closure so that the burden of 'Zoram Day' and life in PPVs can be relieved. Closure and acknowledgement of those days will sow the seeds for a deep reconciliation in the future.



KUNAL SHARMA

POINT COUNTERPOINT

SHUT DOWN THE COUNTRY FOR A FEW WEEKS...HANG IN THERE, TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER, WE'LL GET TO A NORMAL.
—US CHIEF MEDICAL ADVISOR
ANTHONY S FAUCI



CAN'T AMERICA AND ALL THE OTHER COUNTRIES COME TOGETHER AND ASK CHINA SOME TOUGH QUESTIONS? WHY HAVE THEY SPREAD IT IN THE WHOLE WORLD?
—INDIAN CRICKETER
HARBHAJAN SINGH



Why Netanyahu, or someone like him, can't lose in Israel

It is a hard fact that the centre of gravity of Israeli politics is now far to the Right, and still moving rightwards. This will remain so, with or without 'Bibi'

There was a tempest in a small teapot recently, as Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused Israel of apartheid. That echoed the views of the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, which said in January that the current Israeli Government is an "apartheid regime." But the official response was different. The Israeli Government ignored B'Tselem, but its Washington Embassy gave HRW the standard response to foreign criticism: "We strongly reject the false accusations that HRW is spreading about Israel. This is an organisation known to have a long-standing anti-Israel agenda." Then the caravan moved on, leaving the barking dogs behind.

Some aspects of Israel are reminiscent of South Africa — high fences, lots of guns, and large, unfriendly



GWYNNE DYER

Gwynne Dyer's new book is 'Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work.' The views expressed are personal.

dogs — and religion has played a big role in politics in both countries. But the caravans are moving in opposite directions: South Africa towards democracy, Israel away from it.

The usual chicken-or-egg question arises at this point. Was it extreme Right-wing politics that drove Israel to its current dilemma, condemned to perpetual subjugation of its Arab population under the leadership of a political thug like Binyamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu? Or was it the need to keep the Arabs down that drove Israelis so far Right?

History says the latter. For Jews in the shtetls of late 19th century Eastern Europe, facing unrelenting prejudice and occasional pogroms in the countries where they were born, there were only two ways out: A revolutionary

socialism that promised to drown all the national hatred in a shared post-nationalist paradise, or a nationalism that created a sovereign state to protect all Jews.

The younger generation of Jewish activists split: The idealists became Communists and the realists became Zionists — Jewish nationalists, in other words. Both groups achieved their goals: A significant proportion of the Bolshevik leaders in Russia in 1917 were Jews, and Zionists created the state of Israel in 1948.

But despite their nationalism, most of the Zionists were also tempted by socialism, and for the first 30 years after independence all Israeli Governments were Left-wing coalitions led by the Labour Party.

For another two decades, until 1996, Israeli coalitions



alternated between Left and Right. For all but three years of the past quarter-century (since 1996, when Netanyahu first became Prime Minister), Israel's Governments have all been led by the Right. Nor is that situation likely to change in the foreseeable future.

You can trace the drift to the Right back to the Six-Day War of 1967, when Israel

conquered enough land from Syria, Jordan and Egypt to quadruple its size. It gave the Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt in exchange for a peace treaty in 1977, but Israelis could not bring themselves to return the rest. They kept it, which meant keeping all the Palestinians who lived there.

That was the fatal step. Just before the Six-Day War, thanks to massive Jewish immigration from the diaspora, Jewish Israelis outnumbered the Arabs who had not been driven out in the 1948 war by around seven-to-one. That's a comfortable majority, big enough that Israel could afford to let its Arabs have citizenship, the vote, all the usual democratic rights. And it did.

But after 1967 Israel ruled a far larger territory on which almost exactly half the population was Arab. More than

half a century later it still does, and it doesn't want to give that land up. But it cannot afford to give all those Arabs citizenship and all the rights that go with it, so the only solution is permanent subjugation of all its post-1967 Arab subjects. Only hard Right-wing Governments can do that and still be at peace with themselves, so that is what Israel has ended up with.

As former Prime Minister Ehud Barak said in 2017: "If we keep controlling the whole area from the Mediterranean to the river Jordan where some 13 million people are living, if only one entity reigned over this whole area, named Israel, it would become inevitably ... either non-Jewish or non-democratic."

Netanyahu's solution to this dilemma is never stated

explicitly, but a majority of Jewish Israeli voters understand and accept it. It is that the Arabs in the occupied territories will have to live under permanent military occupation, in order that Jewish Israelis may continue to live in a Jewish State that extends from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River.

In four consecutive elections in the past two years, Netanyahu has failed to get an outcome that delivers him a possible winning coalition. He's playing for a deadlock and a fifth election now, but he may end up out of office and in jail instead.

Any politician who replaces 'Bibi', with or without another election, would pursue the same basic policy. The centre of gravity of Israeli politics is now far to the Right, and still moving rightwards.

N Korea warns US of 'very grave situation'

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea on Sunday warned the United States will face "a very grave situation" because President Joe Biden "made a big blunder" in his recent speech by calling the North a security threat and revealing his intent to maintain a hostile policy against it.

Last week, Biden, in his first address to Congress, called North Korea and Iran's nuclear programs "serious threats" to American and world security and said he'll work with allies to address those problems through diplomacy and stern deterrence.

"His statement clearly reflects his intent to keep enforcing the hostile policy toward the DPRK as it had been done by the US for over half a century," Kwon Jong Gun, a senior North Korean Foreign Ministry official, said in a statement. DPRK stands for the Democratic People's



Republic of Korea, the North's official name.

"It is certain that the US chief executive made a big blunder in the light of the present-day viewpoint," Kwon said. "Now that the keynote of the US new DPRK policy has become clear, we will be compelled to press for corresponding measures, and with time the US will find itself in a very grave situation."

Kwon still didn't specify what steps North Korea would

take, and his statement could be seen as an effort to apply pressure on the Biden administration as it's shaping up its North Korea policy.

The White House said on Friday administration officials had completed a review of US policy toward North Korea, saying Biden plans to veer from the approaches of his two most recent predecessors as he tries to stop North Korea's nuclear program.

Press secretary Jen Psaki

did not detail findings of the review, but suggested the administration would seek a middle ground between Donald Trump's "grand bargain" and Barack Obama's "strategic patience" approaches.

Kwon's statement didn't mention Psaki's comments.

After a series of high-profile nuclear and missile tests in 2016-17, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un launched summit diplomacy with Trump on the future of his growing nuclear arsenal.

But that diplomacy remains stalled for about two years over differences in how much sanctions relief North Korea could win in return for limited denuclearization steps.

In January, Kim threatened to enlarge his nuclear arsenal and build more high-tech weapons targeting the US mainland, saying the fate of bilateral ties would depend on whether it abandons its hostile

policy. In March, he conducted short-range ballistic missile tests for the first time in a year, though he still maintains a moratorium on bigger weapons launches.

"If Pyongyang agrees to working-level talks, the starting point of negotiations would be a freeze of North Korean testing and development of nuclear capabilities and delivery systems," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said. "If, on the other hand, Kim shuns diplomacy and opts for provocative tests, Washington will likely expand sanctions enforcement and military exercises with allies."

Also Sunday, an unidentified North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman vowed a strong, separate response to a recent State Department statement that it would push to promote "accountability for the Kim regime" over its "egregious human rights situation." He

called the statement a preparation for "all-out showdown with us."

Kim's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, also slammed South Korea over anti-Pyongyang leaflets floated across the border by a group of North Korean defectors in the South. The group's leader, Park Sang-hak, said Friday he sent 5,000 leaflets by balloon last week, in a defiance of a new, contentious South Korean law that criminalizes such action.

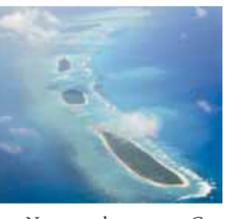
"We regard the maneuvers committed by the human waste in the South as a serious provocation against our state and will look into corresponding action," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement.

She accused the South Korean Government of "winking at" the leaflets. South Korean officials earlier said they were checking if Park truly floated the leaflets and that they would deal with the case in line with the law.

China's carrier group conducts exercises in SCS

AP ■ BEIJING

China's Shandong aircraft carrier group has recently conducted routine annual exercises in the South China Sea, the People's Liberation Army said on Sunday, after Beijing criticised the US for sending Navy ships into the strategic area.



The Chinese Defence Ministry last week urged the US to restrain its front-line forces in the air and seas near China. US reconnaissance aircraft and warships have become more active around South China since President Biden took office, it said.

The South China Sea is particularly contentious because China's smaller neighbours also have competing claims to one of the world's busiest sea lanes, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety. China has constructed several man-made islands in the disputed waters in what the US says is a move to militarise the area.

Navy spokesperson Gao Xiucheng said in a statement that the exercises were completely legitimate and part of safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, as well as maintaining regional peace and stability.

"We hope the outside world will view it in an objective and rational way. In the future, the Chinese navy will continue to hold similar exercises as planned," said Gao. The Shandong is the second Chinese aircraft carrier to enter service after the Liaoning, which was originally purchased as a hulk from Ukraine and entirely refurbished.

Israel bans travel to India, 6 others

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Israel has temporarily barred its citizens from travelling to India and six other countries, citing high Covid-19 infection rates there. A joint Press release issued by the Prime Minister's Office and the Health Ministry on Friday said that Israelis will not be allowed to travel to Ukraine, Brazil, Ethiopia, South Africa, India, Mexico and Turkey.

This regulation will come into force on May 3 and will remain in place until May 16. Non-Israelis, however, will be able to travel to these countries, provided they plan to reside there permanently, the press release said.

The regulation will not be applicable to those who stay at airports in transit in one of these countries for a time period of up to 12 hours while waiting for a connecting flight.

The Israeli government also authorised its health and interior ministers to appoint

representatives to head an appeal committee and the panel reviewing special cases.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry proposed that those returning from the seven countries enter a two-week mandatory quarantine, even if they have been vaccinated or recovered from Covid-19, local media reports said.

Those who have received two negative Covid-19 test reports will be required to be in a 10-day quarantine, they said. These additional restrictions are also expected to come into force on May 3, but are subject to the approval of the Knesset's (Israeli parliament) Arrangements Committee.

A record 3,689 daily Covid-19 fatalities pushed India's death toll to 2,15,542, while the infection count reached 1,95,57,457 with 3,92,488 more people being confirmed positive for the disease, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

UK in last lap in fight against Covid: Minister

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK is very close to turning the corner in its fight against the coronavirus pandemic and it is important to remain careful in the last lap of the process, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said on Sunday.

The senior Cabinet minister was defending the government's roadmap out of the lockdown, which is now set to ease further on May 17 when greater indoor interactions are expected to be allowed, with June 21 set as the date for a near complete end to lockdown rules.

Some groups and businesses such as restaurants have called for a quicker lifting of restrictions. "I know that people are hankering to go a bit faster but actually we feel vindicated at taking steady steps out of the lockdown is the smart way to go," Raab told 'Sky News'.

Nepal records highest daily surge of 7,137 new cases

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal on Sunday reported a record 7,137 new cases of Covid-19, the highest daily surge in the country.

According to the latest data received from the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), as many as 7,137 new cases of Covid-19 were detected while conducting RT-PCR tests on 16,147 people in the past 24 hours.

There are currently 48,711 active cases across the country. Similarly, 1,612 people who were earlier infected have been discharged after their recovery in the past 24 hours.

The Health Ministry also recorded 27 more fatalities due to Covid-19, taking the total number of Coronavirus related death to 3325. The number of people diagnosed with Covid-19 in Nepal has increased by 136.8 per cent compared to the last week.

Pak's death toll crosses 18,000-mark

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Covid-19 death toll on Sunday crossed the 18,000-mark after 113 people succumbed to the deadly contagion in one day, according to health officials.

According to the Ministry of National Health Services, as many as 4,414 new cases were reported in the last 24 hours, taking the national tally to 8,29,933, while the number of deaths jumped to 18,070.

It said that 5,193 people recovered in the same period while 5,448 patients were still in a critical condition.

The positivity rate was 9.75 per cent. Meanwhile, the government has banned all kinds of religious processions ahead of Ramadan.

Separately, the official data of the Health Ministry showed that over 15,000 children and people between one and 20 years of age tested positive for the Covid-19 in April.

Sri Lanka issues tough guidelines amid spike in Covid cases

Colombo

Sri Lanka's health authorities have issued new tough guidelines, including banning wedding receptions and gatherings at religious sites, to prevent the spread of the coronavirus as the island nation continued to record a spike in daily infections.

For the fifth on Friday, the daily number of cases reported crossed the 1,000-mark.

The country recorded several cases of the UK variant which has a bigger mortality rate, health officials said.

"We continue to monitor and place isolations on critical areas," Army chief Gen Shavendra Silva, the head of COVID prevention, said.

He said the government was reluctant to order blanket lockdowns due to possible adverse economic impacts.

Under the new guidelines, wedding receptions will not be permitted until May 21. No gatherings are allowed at religious sites. PTI

Turkish police say top ISIS group figure captured

Istanbul: A close aide of killed Islamic State group leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has been caught in Istanbul, police said on Sunday. The Afghan national, only identified by the codename Basim, was detained in the Atasehir district on the city's Asian side on Wednesday, according to an Istanbul police statement.

News reports of the joint operation with Turkey's intelligence agency said the suspect had been involved in helping hide al-Baghdadi in Syria's Idlib province after the fall of the group in 2019. Al-Baghdadi was killed in a raid on his Syrian hideout by US special forces in October 2019. AP

GLOBE TROTTER

ROARING TANKER FIRE KILLS SEVEN IN KABUL
Kabul: A searing blaze that roared through several fuel tankers on the northern edge of the Afghan capital of Kabul killed seven people and injured 14 others, the Interior Ministry said on Sunday. Investigators were combing through the dozens of tankers that lay in smoldering ruins and a gas station caught in the flames that roared through the area late Saturday, said Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian.

MUSLIM MINERS BREAK FAST UNDERGROUND



Zenica (Bosnia-Herzegovina): Groups of men are preparing for long hours of hard labour deep underground in a troubled coal mine in Bosnia's central city of Zenica. During Islam's holy month of Ramadan, observant Muslims among them are easy to spot. Arriving for their shift and assembling for a roll call before riding an elevator into the mine tunnels, they carry with them transparent plastic bags containing simple meals brought from home with which they will break their daily fast 500m below the surface.

CHEMICAL FACTORY CATCHES FIRE IN IRAN

Tehran: A chemical factory near the central city of Qom caught fire Sunday, Iranian media reported, a blaze that injured at least two firefighters. Videos showed heavy black smoke rising from Mowaleedan chemical factory in the vicinity of Qom, one of Iran's prominent religious cities. The cause of the blaze was not known. Twenty fire engines and 150 firefighters were dispatched to the site, the semi-official ISNA news agency quoted Qom fire department spokesman as saying.

Dozens of German police hurt in May Day riots

AP ■ BERLIN

At least 93 police officers were injured and 354 protesters were detained after traditional May Day rallies in Berlin turned violent, Berlin's top security official said Sunday.

Protesters threw bottles and rocks at officers, and burned garbage containers and wooden pallets in the streets. "Violence against police officers and a blind, destructive rage has nothing to do with political protest," Berlin state interior minister Andreas Geisel said.



Police officers stand in front of a fire set up by demonstrators during a May Day rally in Berlin on Saturday. AP

Iranian FM apologises for leaked comments

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran's Foreign Minister apologised on Sunday for recorded comments that were leaked to the public last week, creating a firestorm in Iran less than two months before presidential elections.

The recordings of Mohammad Javad Zarif included frank comments on powerful late Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was killed by a US drone strike in 2020. The attack at the time brought the US and Iran to the brink of war. Soleimani's funeral processions in Iran drew millions of people to the streets.

In the recordings, Zarif criticizes Soleimani's separate relations with Russia and his refusal to stop using the national carrier Iran Air for Syrian operations despite Zarif's objections. Iran Air has been sanctioned by the US. Zarif said in an Instagram



post Sunday he hoped Soleimani's family would forgive him. "I hope that the great people of Iran and all the lovers of General (Soleimani) and especially the great family of Soleimani, will forgive me," he said.

Zarif's leaked comments were highly controversial in Iran, where officials mind their words amid a cut-throat political environment that includes the powerful Revolutionary Guard, ultimately overseen by the country's supreme leader.

2 killed in shooting at Wisconsin casino

Gunman slain

AP ■ GREEN BAY

A gunman killed two people at a Wisconsin casino restaurant and seriously wounded a third before he was killed by police late on Saturday, in what authorities said appeared to be a targeted attack.

Brown County Sheriff's Lt. Kevin Pawlak said investigators believe the gunman was seeking a specific person he was angry at.

"He was targeting a specific victim who was not there, but he decided to still shoot some of the victim's friends or co-workers, it appears," Pawlak said.

Neither the gunman nor the shooting victims were immediately identified. Pawlak wasn't sure if the shooter was a former employee of the restaurant, but said it

appears there's some relationship that had to do with employment.

"Whether or not they all worked there, we're still working on," he said. The wounded person was being treated at a Milwaukee hospital, Pawlak said.

The attack happened around 7:30 pm at the Oneida Casino, operated by the Oneida Nation on the western side of Green Bay, with the casino tweeting that an active shooter was on the scene.

Jawad Yatim, a witness, said he saw at least two people shot.

"I know for sure two, because it happened right next to us, literally right next to us," Yatim said.

"But he was shooting pretty aggressively in the building, so I wouldn't doubt him hitting other people."

Yatim said the shooting began in a casino restaurant.

SORIL INFRA RESOURCES
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NOTICE
Notice is hereby given, pursuant to Regulation 47 of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, that a meeting of the Board of Directors of **SORIL Infra Resources Limited** ("the Company") will be held on Saturday, May 8, 2021, to consider and approve, *inter alia*, the audited financial results of the Company for the quarter and financial year ended March 31, 2021.

For further details, please visit the website of the Company (www.sorilinfraresources.com) or that of National Stock Exchange of India Limited (www.nseindia.com) and BSE Limited (www.bseindia.com).

for **SORIL Infra Resources Limited**
Sd/-
Vikas Khandelwal
Company Secretary

Place : Gurugram
Date : May 2, 2021

yaari
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(formerly Indiabulls Integrated Services Limited)
(CIN: L51101HR2007PLC077999)
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for **Yaari Digital Integrated Services Limited**
Sd/-
Priya Jain
Company Secretary

Place : Gurugram
Date : May 2, 2021

Admin control of Pak's Katas Raj temples handed over to Govt body

Lahore: The administrative control of historical Katas Raj Temples has been handed over to the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), a statutory body of the federal government which looks after holy places of minorities in Pakistan, for its "proper upkeep".

Katas Raj is one of the holiest places for the Hindu community in Pakistan. The temples in Punjab province form a complex surrounding a pond named Katas — which is regarded as sacred by the devotees. "In the light of the Supreme Court decision, the administrative control of historical Katas Raj Temples has been taken back from the Punjab government and given to the ETPB after 15 years. PTI

State TV: Iran reaches deals to release prisoners; US denies

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran will free prisoners with Western ties in Iran in exchange for billions of dollars from the United States and the United Kingdom, state television reported on Sunday. The US immediately denied the report, while the UK did not respond.

The state TV report quoted an anonymous official just as Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei began giving what authorities earlier described as an "important" speech. However, Khamenei did not immediately discuss any proposed swap amid negotiations in Vienna over Tehran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers. The official quoted by Iranian state TV said a deal made between the US and Tehran involved a prisoner swap in exchange for the release of \$7 billion in frozen Iranian funds.

"The Americans accepted to pay \$7 billion and swap four Iranians who were active in bypassing sanctions for four American spies who have served part of their sentences," state TV said, quoting the official in an on-screen crawl.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price immediately denied the Iranian state TV report.

"Reports that a prisoner swap deal has been reached are not true," Price said. "As we have said, we always raise the cases of Americans detained or missing in Iran. We will not stop until we are able to reunite them with their families." Price did not elaborate.

Tehran holds four known Americans now in prison. They include Baquer and Siamak Namazi, environmentalist Morad Tahbaz and Iranian-American businessman Emad Shargi.

SpaceX returns 4 astronauts to Earth; rare night splashdown

AP ■ CAPE CANAVERAL (US)

SpaceX returned four astronauts from the International Space Station on Sunday, making the first US crew splashdown in darkness since the Apollo 8 moonshot.

The Dragon capsule parachuted into the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Panama City, Florida, just before 3 am, ending the second astronaut flight for Elon Musk's company.

It was an express trip home, lasting just 6 1/2 hours. The astronauts, three American and one Japanese, flew back in the same capsule — named Resilience — in which they launched from NASA's



NASA astronauts Shannon Walker, left, Victor Glover, Mike Hopkins, and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) astronaut Soichi Noguchi, right are seen inside the SpaceX Crew Dragon Resilience spacecraft onboard the SpaceX GO Navigator recovery ship shortly after having landed in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Panama City, Florida on Sunday. AP

Kennedy Space Center in November. Their 167-day mission is the longest for astronauts

launching from the US The previous record of 84 days was set by NASA's final Skylab station crew in 1974. Saturday night's undocking left seven people at the space station, four of whom arrived a week ago via SpaceX.

Govt waives late fee for delayed filing tax payment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has waived late fee for delayed filing of monthly return GSTR-3B and tax payment for the months of March and April and also reduced interest rate for late filers.

The Finance Ministry in a statement said it has provided several relief measures in view of the challenges faced by taxpayers in meeting the statutory and regulatory compliances under the Goods & Services Tax (GST) law due to the outbreak of the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic.

Taxpayers with a turnover of over Rs 5 crore have been given 15 days extra time to file monthly summary return GSTR-3B and pay taxes without paying any late fees. They would be required to pay a lower 9 per cent for these 15 days, after which the rate would be 18 per cent.

Businesses with turnover of up to Rs 5 crore in the preceding financial year, have 30 days more time for filing their original due date for filing 3B returns for March and April, with late fee waiver. Interest rate would be 'Nil' for the first 15 days, post which it would be a concessional 9 per cent rate.



After 30 days, the normal 18 per cent interest would be levied.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) on May 1 issued the notification, saying that these relaxations come into effect from April 18.

Also the due date for filing April sales return GSTR-1 has been extended till May 26, from the original due date of May 11. For composition dealers filing sales return GSTR-4, the deadline for filing returns for the financial year ended March 31, 2021, has been extended by a month till May 31. AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said owing to Covid induced exigencies, the government has

introduced compliance-related reliefs for the block of two-month March and April, 2021. Every taxpayer of the country is eligible for some form of extension irrespective of the size of operations.

"Large taxpayers will enjoy a full waiver of late fee, and partial relief in levy of interest wherein GSTR-3B filings are delayed up to 15 days. However, small taxpayers will enjoy similar benefits even if such filings are delayed up to 30 days," Mohan added.

While businesses file GSTR-1 of a particular month by the 11th day of the subsequent month, GSTR-3B is filed in a staggered manner between 20th-24th day of the succeeding month.

Telecom infra operation, maintenance work running smoothly amid curfews: TAIPA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body TAIPA has said that essential telecom infrastructure operations and maintenance activities are by-and-large running smoothly amid pandemic-induced curfews and movement curbs across various states.

The telecom tower industry is better prepared to handle the work on ground as many processes and practices are already in place following last year's nationwide lockdown.

The association had also reached out to the Centre and various states to address some of the issues early on, leading to timely action and outcomes, T R Dua, director-general, Tower and Infrastructure Providers Association (TAIPA), told PTI.

"This time we are better prepared in so far as processes are concerned, and we took immediate timely action thinking COVID wave is likely to be more stronger," he said.

Remote working and massive data requirements of people have led to 65,000 new towers coming up over the last one year, Dua said.

Asked if the recent surge in COVID cases will hit new tower installations to some extent, Dua said in his view

while there could be a "little bit of slowdown in new installations" in the immediate short term, the momentum will pick up from May onwards with vaccination drive opening up to a larger population, and given that surge in data consumption will continue unabated.

Elaborating on the TAIPA's outreach programme, Dua informed that the association had reached out to its members and various circle heads to ensure contingency planning measures were in place, and that a portal with dashboard tracking 8-9 key parameters including movement of people, availability of diesel, support needed and coercive actions, if any, is up-and-running to monitor on ground activities.

"Sporadic issues will keep coming but there has been continuous flow of information, so movement of technicians and field personnel has not been prohibited. Things are moving smoothly for now," Dua said adding that the industry has not encountered major issues as it had faced last year in the immediate aftermath of the March 2020 lockdown.

Earlier, TAIPA had sought Telecom Department's support to ensure round-the-clock availability of telecom connectivity as strict movement

Unsold housing stock dips 2% in Jan-Mar at 7.05 lakh units

BUILDERS MAY TAKE 4 YRS TO LIQUIDATE

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Unsold housing inventories in primary markets across eight major cities fell marginally by 2 per cent at 7.05 lakh units during January-March as compared to the previous quarter and it will take four years for developers to sell these units at current speed, according to a report.

In its report 'Real Insight', housing brokerage firm PropTiger reported that nearly 18 per cent of the total unsold inventory falls in the ready-to-move-in category.

As per the data, unsold housing stock declined to 7,05,344 units during the first quarter of 2021 calendar year across eight cities from 7,18,483 units in the previous quarter.

This was because housing sales across eight major cities stood at 66,176 units while new supply was 53,037 during January-March 2021.

"Mumbai and Pune continue to hold the maximum share of unsold stock.



Both the cities together account for 54 per cent of the total available stock, followed by NCR and Bengaluru with 15 per cent and 10 per cent share, respectively," said Mani Rangarajan, COO of Housing.Com and PropTiger.

In terms of inventory overhang, Housing.Com and PropTiger Director Research Ankit Sood said the overall inventory overhang increased to 47 months as of March 2021, as compared to 28 months in Q1 2020 and 43 months in Q4 2020.

"This implies that with the current sales velocity, it will take nearly four years to absorb the current residential inventory," he said.

According to the data, unsold inventories in Ahmedabad and Chennai have risen while the other cities

have reported a drop. Unsold housing stocks in Ahmedabad rose to 42,991 units from 38,614 units in the previous quarter, while in Chennai, the numbers grew to 37,697 units from 36,609 units.

In Bengaluru, unsold inventories declined to 69,285 units from 71,198 units. Delhi NCR has 1,05,279 unsold housing units in January-March 2021

period as against 1,06,689 units in the previous quarter. In Hyderabad, unsold inventories dropped marginally to 39,191 units from 39,308 units. Unsold housing stock in Kolkata decreased to 28,827 units from 30,210 units.

In Maharashtra's two major markets, Mumbai saw unsold housing stock declining to 2,54,183 units from 2,63,987 units.

RBI to strengthen risk-based supervision of banks, NBFCs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank has decided to review and strengthen the Risk Based Supervision (RBS) of the banking sector with a view to enable financial sector players to address the emerging challenges.

The RBI uses the RBS model, including both qualitative and quantitative elements, to supervise banks, urban cooperative banks, non-banking financial companies and all India financial institutions.

"It is now intended to review the supervisory processes and mechanism in order to make the extant RBS model more robust and capable of addressing emerging challenges, while removing inconsistencies, if any," the RBI said while inviting bids from technical experts/consultants to carry forward the process for banks.

In case of UCBS and NBFCs, the Expression of Interest (EOI) for 'Consultant for Review of Supervisory Models' said the supervisory functions pertaining to commercial banks, UCBS and NBFCs are now integrated, with the objective of harmonising the supervisory approach based on the activities/size of the supervised entities (SEs). "It is intended to review the

existing supervisory rating models under CAMELS approach for improved risk capture in forward looking manner and for harmonising the supervisory approach across all SEs," it said.

Annual financial inspection of UCBS and NBFCs is largely based on CAMELS model (Capital Adequacy, Asset Quality, Management, Earnings, Liquidity, and Systems & Control).

The RBI undertakes supervision of SEs with the objective of assessing their financial soundness, solvency, asset quality, governance framework, liquidity, and operational viability, so as to protect depositors' interests and financial stability.

The Reserve Bank conducts supervision of the banks through offsite monitoring of the banks and an annual inspection of the banks, where applicable.

In case of Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBS) and NBFCs, it conducts the supervision through a mix off-site monitoring and on-site inspection, where applicable.

A technical advisory group consisting of senior officers of the RBI would examine the documents submitted by the applicants in connection with EOI.

India's fuel sales drop in April on Covid wave

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The second wave of coronavirus sweeping the nation has pummeled fuel sales in April as local restrictions clamped to curb the spread of infection stifled demand, preliminary data showed.

"At the end of April, overall fuel demand is down by about 7 per cent from pre-Covid level of April 2019," Arun Singh, Director for Marketing and Refineries at Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), said.

India was under one of the world's severest lockdowns in April 2020, bringing to a halt almost all economic activity. Fuel sales had halved that



month and so comparing current month sale to April 2020 will not throw a correct interpretation.

Sales of petrol -- used in cars and motorcycles -- fell to 2.14 million tonnes in April, the lowest since August, according to the preliminary data of state-

owned fuel retailers.

Petrol sales in April were 6.3 per cent lower than March 2021 and 4.1 per cent lower than April 2019. Petrol sales in April 2020 were 872,000 tonnes.

Demand for diesel -- the most used fuel in the country

-- fell to 5.9 million tonnes in April 2021, down 1.7 per cent from the previous month and 9.9 per cent from April 2019. Diesel sales in April 2020 were 2.84 million tonnes.

With airlines continuing to operate at less than capacity, jet fuel (ATF) sales in April were 377,000 tonnes, down 11.5 per cent over March 2021 and 39.1 per cent over April 2019. Jet fuel sales in April 2020 were 5,500 tonnes.

Sales volume of cooking gas LPG fell 3.3 per cent to 2.1 million tonnes in April 2021 when compared with the previous month.

The sales were 11.6 per cent higher than 1.88 million tonnes in April 2019.

Exports jump to USD 30.21 bn in Apr

TRADE DEFICIT WIDENS TO USD 15.24 BN

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's exports in April jumped nearly three-folds to USD 30.21 billion on account of healthy growth in key sectors including engineering, gems and jewellery, and petroleum products, even as trade deficit widened to USD 15.24 billion, according to commerce ministry's preliminary data released on Sunday.

The country's merchandise exports were to the tune of USD 10.17 billion in April 2020. Trade deficit in that month was

USD 6.92 billion.

Imports too rose by over three-folds to USD 45.45 billion last month as against USD 17.09 billion in April 2020.

"India's merchandise exports in April 2021 were USD 30.21 billion, an increase of 197.03 per cent over USD 10.17 billion in April 2020 and an increase of 16.03 per cent over USD 26.04 billion in April 2019," the ministry said in a statement.

In percentage terms, the growth rate in exports and imports are at record high, mainly due to base-effect.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdown last year, exports shrank by a record 60.28 per cent in April 2020. In March this year, exports grew by 60.29 per cent to USD 34.45 billion.

In April 2021, oil imports stood at USD 10.8 billion as compared to USD 4.65 billion in the corresponding month last year.

Major export commodities which have recorded positive growth in April include gems and jewellery, jute, pharmaceuticals, carpet, handicrafts, leather, electronic goods, oil meals, cashew, engineering, petroleum products, marine products and chemicals.

Exports of engineering, gems and jewellery, and petroleum products rose multifold to USD 5.55 billion, USD 3.3 billion, and USD 2.12 billion, respectively in April. Gold imports surged to USD 6.12 billion during the month under review as against USD 2.83 million in April 2020.

BRIEFS

AAI FELICITATES INDIAN RECURVE TEAM

New Delhi: Archery Association of India (AAI) held an online

felicitation function on Sunday to honour the Indian Recurve team for their stellar performance at the recently concluded Archery World Cup (Stage-1) in Guatemala. In the Women's and Men's Individual Recurve event, Deepika Kumari and Atanu Das won the Gold Medal in their respective categories. Shri Arjun Mundra, President, AAI & Union Tribal Minister was the Chief Guest at the function. Shri D.K. Patel, Director (HR), NTPC, Dr. Narinder Dhruv Batra, President, Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and Shri Sandeep Pradhan, Director General, Sports Authority of India (SAI) were the Guests of Honour.



VIT-AP UNIVERSITY'S MERIT SCHOLARSHIPS FOR UG/PG NON-ENGINEERING PROGRAMMES

Dr G Viswanathan, Founder & Chancellor, VIT, announced GV Merit Scholarship and Rajeswari Ammal Merit Scholarship aimed at

supporting candidates enrolling Non-Engineering programmes such as BBA, B.Com., Law, B.Sc. and B.A. and Post Graduate programmes from the academic year 2021-22. Dr SV Kota Reddy, Vice Chancellor, VIT-AP explained that the GV Merit Scholarship is for any Board Topper across the country. Under this scholarship, the admitted candidate will get 100% scholarship for all years of the UG programme.



COVID PREVENTION STATUS IN CG IS BETTER THAN BEFORE

Raipur: Sufficient number of beds of all kinds are available in Raipur for treatment of the COVID patients. Timely availability of beds for COVID patients in the hospitals of Raipur is being ensured. The situation of prevention and treatment of COVID infection is presently better than before. According to the information received, the number of common beds in Raipur district is 988, out of which 767 beds are vacant. Likewise, the number of oxygen beds in the Raipur district is 2170, and 1150 of these beds are vacant. Also, 333 out of the 584 HDU beds and 374 out of the 1024 ICU beds are vacant. Number of ventilator beds in Raipur district is 346, out of which 131 beds are vacant.

Ola to take e-scooter to international markets this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ola Electric is looking at taking its electric scooter to international markets, including countries like France, Italy and Germany, this fiscal, a top company executive said.

The company, which is working on setting up a 'Hypercharger Network' for its electric vehicle, is slated to launch its electric scooter in India in July this year.

"We are going to be launching internationally...This financial year itself, we will be selling internationally also. We start with India first but soon, we move into international markets with a focus on Europe," Ola Chairman and Group CEO Bhavish Aggarwal told PTI. The company has not yet disclosed details like pricing of the e-scooter. Last year, Ola had announced a Rs 2,400-crore investment for setting up its first electric scooter factory in Tamil Nadu. Upon completion, the factory will create nearly 10,000 jobs and will be the world's largest scooter manufacturing facility that will initially have an annual capacity of 2 million units.

FPIs turn net sellers after 6 months

WITHDRAW ₹9,659 CR IN APR AMID SECOND WAVE OF COVID-19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Snapping their six-month buying spree, foreign investors turned net sellers in April and pulled out ₹9,659 crore from Indian equities, spooked by the intense second wave of coronavirus and its fallout on the economy.

If the fears of Covid-19 increases among foreign investors, we can witness further redemptions, which can result in some more volatility in the market, Harshad Chetanwala, co-founder Mywealthgrowth.Com, said.

According to data available with depositories, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) withdrew a net sum of ₹9,659 crore from Indian equity markets in April. This was the first net withdrawal since September 2020, when they had pulled out a net of ₹7,782 crore from equities. Prior to the last month's outflow, FPIs invested over ₹1.97 lakh crore in equities between October 2020 and March 2021.

India's coal import likely to be subdued in coming months: Mjunction

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's coal import is expected to be subdued in coming months on account of various factors like prevailing Covid situation, high coal stock in the system and higher international prices, according to mjunction.

Mjunction - a joint venture between Tata Steel and SAIL - is a B2B e-commerce company and also publishes research reports on coal and steel verticals.

The country's coal import fell 12.62 per cent to 215.92 million tonnes (MT) in FY21 from 247.10 MT in FY20, according to a provisional compilation by mjunction services, based on monitoring of vessels' positions and data received from shipping companies.

"The overall decline in coal imports during the year 2020-21 was on expected lines. In coming months, import demand is likely to be subdued in view of the surge in COVID-19 infections, high coal stock in the system and high prices prevailing in the international market," mjunction services MD and CEO Vinaya Varma said. India's coal import in

March 2021 was at 19.79 MT as against 19.87 MT imported in the same month a year ago, mjunction said.

For the financial year 2020-21, total coal and coke imports stood at 215.92 MT, about 12.62 per cent lower than 247.10 MT imported during FY20.

During FY21, non-cooking coal import was at 141.02 MT as against 170.75 MT imported during FY20. Coking coal import was recorded at 49.44 MT, flat against 49.17 MT imported during FY20.

Of the total imports in March 2021, non-cooking coal was at 12.12 MT, against 13.16 MT imported in March 2020.

Coking coal import was at 5.47 MT during March 2021, up against 4 MT imported in March 2020.

Hotels' body seeks liquidity support amid 2nd wave of Covid

IANS ■ MUMBAI

As the severe Covid crisis and the resultant lockdowns have again brought the travel and hospitality industry to a halt, the Hotel Association of India (HAI) has written to the Central government seeking liquidity support in the form of lower interest rate and further customisation in the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS).

The industry body has also sought a complete or partial waiver of statutory expenses like property tax, lease rentals, license fee, and excise fee payable by hotels to various government authorities.

HAI noted that the second wave of the pandemic has stopped the recovery of the hospitality and tourism sector. Hotels in India, which were shut for nearly 6-8 months reopened in a staggered manner and were recovering somewhat on the strength of domestic leisure tourism and weddings and family get-togethers, only to be impacted yet again on account of lockdowns in some states, night and weekend curfews, it said.

Yes Bank rescue happened in nick of time before pandemic struck, happy with progress: CEO Kumar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Yes Bank's rescue act in early March 2020 happened in the nick of time ahead of the Covid-19 pandemic, and even a 15-day delay in it would have meant great difficulty for a lender about to close down, its new managing director and chief executive Prashant Kumar said.

Speaking for the first time about the journey since the RBI and the government moved in to bailout the lender seeing an exodus of deposits with a Rs 10,000-crore rescue act led by SBI, Kumar acknowledged that the thread was very slender and the timing was very apt. "... if this decision had been delayed by even 15 days, I don't know whether we would be able to see ... whether we would be able to speak today," Kumar told PTI, expressing satisfaction at the way the reconstruction has panned out.

Within six days of the move to supersede the board and freeze deposit withdrawals, the WHO announced COVID-19 as a pandemic. Infections kept on increasing across India and within 20 days, the entire

country was in a national lockdown. SBI took the lead in the rescue and was supported by all the lenders in the system, who have become stakeholders in the bank by infusing capital.

"We are at least very happy in terms of what we have achieved," Kumar said, listing out the 55 per cent growth in deposits, a 42 per cent jump in operating profit during pandemic-marred FY21 and a Rs 5,000 crore cash recovery as key wins.

However, the timelines of the recovery got stretched because of COVID and what should have been achieved in FY21 got deferred to the next fiscal, he said, acknowledging that the second wave is upon us now.

"I think COVID is creating more issues for us. There are no regrets, but the timelines have a little elongated," he said.

He stressed the overall quantum of stressed assets from the legacy book has now come down to Rs 45,000 crore from the Rs 50,000 crore at the time of the bailout and includes over Rs 28,000 crore in non-performing assets and written-off loans.

462 infra projects report cost overrun of ₹4.36L crore

New Delhi: As many as 462 infrastructure projects reported a cost overrun of over ₹4.36 lakh crore as of April 1, 2021.

The Flash Report on Central sector projects for March published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation showed that 557 projects are running behind schedule.

"Out of the 1,737 projects, 13 projects are ahead of schedule, 229 are on schedule, 557 are delayed, 462 projects reported cost overrun and 136 projects reported both time and cost overrun with respect to their original project implementation schedules," the report said.

It, however, said that the number of delayed projects decreases to 412 if delay is calculated on the basis of latest schedule of completion. Further, for 938 projects, neither the year of commissioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported. "Total original cost of implementation of the 1,737 projects was ₹22,33,409.53 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be ₹26,69,649.35 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of ₹4,36,239.82 crore (19.53 per cent of original cost)," it said.



Bollywood
 I didn't want to act in films, most of the films didn't inspire me.
 —Adil Hussain

It's essential to ensure emotional, social and behavioural health during the pandemic

Mind the child



While some states and cities in India saw the partial opening of schools for a short period of time prior to the new virus mutations that make the second wave so much more severe, it is a fact that pre-schoolers and those in elementary years, including primary years, continued to operate with their virtual engagements. As it was not deemed 'safe' for them to be in physical environments other than the safety of their homes given a host of reasons that were agreed upon by governments, education departments, local administration, etc. In fact, if reports are to be believed, even those that could attend school as a physical class had many parents deciding against this, forcing schools to adopt the blended format of learning. This 'wait' for the physical school for those that were denied entry, to the 'anxiety' associated with the physical classes did create a further impact on children and the way they express themselves.

The conversations around Covid are not joyous ones and be it news channels or discussions at home with everyone is locked in did their fair share of damage to these little minds who suddenly found themselves 'distanced', isolated, restrained, and being exposed to circumstances that were totally alien. From the 'breaks' they got from their home when in school, or outdoors, playing or even in classes, this around the clock with nowhere to go and dependent on their family for support was a challenge for these children and that is a simple fact. They missed their friends, the comfort of their teachers helping them and generally life turned on them! The 'distance' for the younger children was especially difficult and teenagers have complained of fatigue as well. Their little world turned upside down in the past 12 months,

a school year has gone by, and to be told yet again that the world will not normalise despite some 'vaccines' because the 'numbers are rising' is all too much for children this young. If adults are experiencing languishing, lethargy, lack of motivation, depression, and loneliness, imagine the children. As Harvard researchers point out, they are still 'work-in-progress' and do not have the experience to manage or cope, and yet they are being forced to! This makes for a strong case for adults be it teachers or parents to think long and hard about the well-being — emotional, social, and behavioural health — of the children. For starters, consider that they are a 'little broken' despite those smiles and the strong facade and with that create an approach of being compassionate, communicative, proactive, and empowering.



10 simple things to remember:
 ♦ Be alert for signs and have a 'routine' of checking-in protocols which are not 'how are you feeling' questions, but instead sharing a story of someone feeling low and testing what their reactions are. Children

respond with ease when the attention is shifted to someone else, and while they begin to identify with the story, they may find themselves opening up without pressure.
 ♦ Before jumping into solving the problem, and being very mindful of

allowing them to express themselves without judgement, remember to focus on the 'emotion' or the moment as opposed to the individual. During a temper tantrum instead of calling the child, a 'bad boy' considers saying, 'I sense that you are feeling bad about something, and I know it is making you upset, once you are ready to talk, I am here to listen.' Sometimes, a hug will work and at other times walking away will do wonders.
 ♦ The 2 F's (Food and Fitness) for me are always a huge trigger point that results in emotional and behavioural challenges. Ninety per cent can be attributed to lack of exercise or fitness routines and a diet that does nothing for the nutrition that will not help them regulate their moods. Kids need to have some form of physical activity be it yoga, skipping, running, playing, or even doing errands through the day by organising themselves! For every two hours of sitting in one place, there must be 20-minute breaks.
 ♦ Kids need to interact with the kids of their own age, and therefore recommend to families to make an effort (if safe) to connect with other families in their building or neighbourhood to meet with social distancing and safety norms. This 'physical' presence helps them develop the social skills. Or try to games played online with fellow kids, chatting in zoom parties, or participation in summer classes where they can engage with children of their own age.
 ♦ Sleep deprivation is another contributor to the emotional and behavioural changes in a child. A child needs 10 to 12 hours of sleep to allow the mind and the body to develop and this sleep deprivation is a major cause, this would be non-negotiable as a recommendation to parents.
 ♦ Communication does not always have to be direct with children. Use books, YouTube videos, or a movie to get kids into conversations and discuss about their feelings, their fears, their joys. Instead of the negative, focus on the positives. It allows the child to ease into a conversation and makes it less threatening. Also, do not play the guilt game or reward them for opening

up. It takes time and patience and by maintaining this consistent communication, you have allowed them to know that they can connect with you which is critical for the emotional needs.
 ♦ Maintain a journal and a diary of the child's behavioural changes if any. It is important to understand the trigger points, the pattern and in some cases of trauma or abuse, it must be important to report this to the counsellor to seek professional intervention
 ♦ As facilitators, it is critical to understand that this Covid schooling requires a re-orientation of some academic targets for the students in favour of mental well-being. Children need to feel enthused to learn, and if there is a period of 'languishing' then better to bring in the ice-breakers and games than try and teach them fraction word problems. Be flexible, adjust and prioritise well-being.
 ♦ Planning activities to include plenty of group work, group games, etc will help children slowly regain their confidence with social skills. They can be 'taught' these by encouraging words, giving them strategies, and reassuring them that they are on the right path by role modelling as well!
 ♦ Home-school partnership cannot be emphasised enough, and the connection must be real-time, proactive, and transparent about the challenges faced in school and at home to help the child transition to this Covid phase.
 Academic milestones are critical when one thinks of developmental goals, but these can be 'made-up', what is extremely difficult is regaining the strength or the confidence to be emotionally secure, and content, aware and more which means the focus for adults who engage with these children must be about well-being a priority.
 Schooling isn't about words and numbers, and learning about mountains and rivers and moon and stars, what does any of this mean when the child is lugging around a heart that is so full of emotion, and pain that it dulls every information coming in!
 —IANS

The ordeal of finding a parking spot to park is daunting. Standing in the queue and waiting for your chance to park your vehicle, or constantly roaming around in the hope of finding that one spot is indeed a cumbersome process. However, this can be managed efficiently with a few simple hacks.

Ultimate parking hacks

Find the perfect spot in five simple ways. By CHIRAG JAIN

REVERSE PARKING
 This is one of the most basic yet feasible parking solutions one could ever provide you. Whenever you visit an extremely crowded venue, be it festivals, concerts, sports matches, etc. you often find yourself in a fix. You struggle with finding a parking spot and then exiting the place seems to be a hassle. In situations like these, reverse parking comes to the rescue. This will not only save time but efforts as well as you will be able to make a smooth exit.



For those who are amateur drivers, all you need to do is spot two spots before an empty parking space. Check for any passing car or people and once the way is clear, you just need to turn the vehicle.

next to the curb. However, your steering should always be away from it to avoid the occurrence of accidents. While parking down the slope, you need to turn your steering towards the curb that is in the opposite direction.

PRO PARALLEL PARKING
 All one has to do is place your car two feet ahead of the vehicle parked right after you. Then, you need to cut your wheels towards the right and simultaneously reverse your car. You need to keep doing so till the time the license plate of the car behind you is clearly visible in the side view mirror. Straighten the car and back it up until you are right before the other car and you will have parked the car in a parallel manner.

In cases when there is no curb, you just need to turn your wheel to the right, and voila! You would successfully park your vehicle on the slope!

It might seem complicated but is extremely simple when it comes to execution. However, not many people are aware that this is one of the viable parking hacks and helps a lot of space, time, and efforts.

WHEN IT'S COLD, BE A SUNFLOWER
 This parking solution is specifically for people living in cold or snowy regions. In these regions, parking amidst the snow and frost

can be a major issue. However, by following the simple rule of science and parking your wheels facing the east direction will allow the sun rays to directly fall on the windshield. This sunflower technique will help in de-frosting them in the morning and will help save the scraping time as well.



PARKING THE APP WAY
 There are scenarios when even after knowing all the tips and tricks, you still struggle with getting the right parking spot. In the present digital times, smart parking apps help resolve this issue. They make use of the state of the art predictive software, ultrasonic sensor systems,

and help in real-time data collection, analysis, and algorithm application. All you need to do is input your destination on the app and it will share information about the available vacant parking spaces in your

desired destination or in its proximity. Using the parking app will save you from the aimless roaming around in search of that one spot.
 —The author is co-founder and CEO, of a tech start up that integrates parking and mobility globally

WEBBED

ARMY OF THE DEAD
 After a zombie outbreak in Las Vegas, a group of mercenaries takes the ultimate gamble by venturing into the quarantine zone for the greatest heist ever. Zack Snyder's zombie heist thriller is coming to Netflix.



JUPITER'S LEGACY
 Netflix gets a new superhero series based on a Mark Millar comic book. The super-powered children of superheroes struggle to live up to the legendary feats of their parents on Netflix.

LUCIFER
 The much awaited second part of season 5 is rolling out now. The Devil's tryst on earth has been grabbing eyeballs on Netflix.



THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW
 Agoraphobic Dr. Anna Fox witnesses something she shouldn't while keeping tabs on the Russell family, the seemingly picture perfect clan that lives across the way. Catch it on Netflix



TRENDBLAZER

DIFFICULTIES WON'T FADE SOON: ELNAAZ
ELNAAZ NOROUZI who started her Bollywood career with acclaimed series *Sacred Games*, says she never knew if she could establish herself in the Hindi film industry given her outsider tag. "The most difficult part was getting into the industry. It took me years to set my foot in the industry. I never saw if it would ever happen because I am an outsider. The journey is still going on and I don't think the rest of the difficulties will fade away anytime soon, but it is getting better," Elnaaz says.



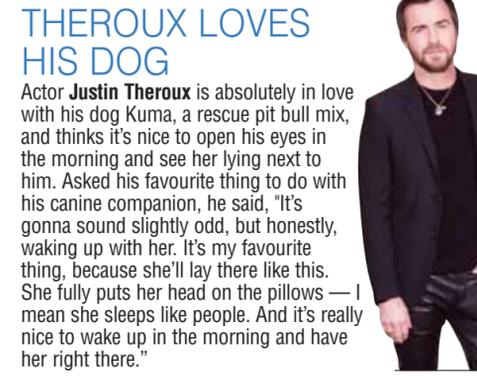
fairtalk
SANJANA SANGHI
 "There was never a rule book handed to any of us, on how to cope with a catastrophic pandemic like we are presently facing. And in the absence of that rule book, amidst such a grave crisis that is ridden with loss of life and uncertainty - we can easily find ourselves consumed with all kinds of worrying thoughts, fears, anxieties, and confusion."



dailytalk
VARUN DHAWAN
 "If we all survive this, as I hope we shall, remember that ... we didn't fight for land or weapons...for concert tickets or fancy designations or religions or politics... or shares in a company or a seat at the table... or business class tickets or the keys to a house by the beach... remember, that we fought for air."



THEROUX LOVES HIS DOG
 Actor **Justin Theroux** is absolutely in love with his dog Kuma, a rescue pit bull mix, and thinks it's nice to open his eyes in the morning and see her lying next to him. Asked his favourite thing to do with his canine companion, he said, "It's gonna sound slightly odd, but honestly, waking up with her. It's my favourite thing, because she'll lay there like this. She fully puts her head on the pillows — I mean she sleeps like people. And it's really nice to wake up in the morning and have her right there."



VALLEY PREPARES FOR THE NEXT WAVE

Doctors and non-government organisations in the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir are gearing up to fight the new strain of Covid-19, says **BISMA BHAT**



The second wave of Covid-19 has caught the entire country unprepared. Alerted by the extreme situation in states like Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Kolkata, medical practitioners, and heads of non-profit organisations in Jammu and Kashmir have started preparing for it in the newly formed Union Territory (UT) as well. They have appealed to the people on social media to strictly follow all the precautionary measures. They have also requested them to arrange oxygen cylinders and concentrators at the local Mohalla Committee level to be prepared for future emergencies.

On April 21, the Superintendent of North Kashmir's Baramulla district's Government Medical Hospital requested the people of the valley to follow the SOPs both in letter and spirit. He suggested that social organisations and religious groups should act proactively and must prepare to deal with the second wave of COVID-19 which can possibly overwhelm the health infrastructure of J&K in the same way which it has in other states of the country.

"All Masjid/Mohalla Committees should arrange oxygen facilities in their respective areas. A disastrous wave is on its way. This little time should be utilised to build these small domiciliary facilities which will help the system from overloading," Syed Masood, Superintendent Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital posted on social media.

On April 25, J&K reported 2,382 fresh positive cases of Covid-19 — the biggest single-day spike and around 20 deaths. Till April 24, 2,030 positive cases were recorded with 15 fatalities while on April 23, 1,937 cases and 19 deaths were reported. Compare this with April 1, when there were only 461 positive cases. It was from this week onwards that a surge was seen



in the number of cases in the UT. On April 30, a total number of 14,544 cases were reported while more than 2,283 patients had died of the deadly virus.

After medical practitioners raised the alarm, many local voluntary organisations that were already providing medical facilities to the people across Kashmir valley, have stepped up their work. They have started keeping stock of necessary equipment that might be needed in the coming days.

Mohammad Aafaq Syed, Project Director, Oxygen — which is run by Social Reform Organisation (SRO) Kashmir, a Srinagar-based non-government organisation — informed that they have been arranging for various essential medical equipment to fight the second wave of this deadly pandemic.

"We have around 250 oxygen cylinders, 220 oxygen concentrators, 30 Non-Invasive Ventilator (NIV), and 120 oxygen tanks of 25 LPM. Besides, we are planning to procure small ICU set-ups which can be used at home. These can monitor the five parameters of a patient including blood pressure, oxygen saturation, temperature, pulse, and ECG. The

plan is to provide a bed, an oxygen concentrator, one high-flow oxygen cylinder to each patient who would also be visited by medics assigned to them twice a day or as per requirement. This plan is in the pipeline and hopefully, we will be able to execute it, shared Aafaq.

At present, he said, they have enough infrastructure to deal with the virus, but if the cases rise at a rate similar to Delhi, then it would not be enough. "Precaution is better than cure. It is better to take early precautions to save our people from succumbing to this virus," said Aafaq whose organisation is operating round the clock and is currently receiving more than 50 calls for oxygen.

One of the volunteers at Srinagar-based Athrout — another non-government organisation, committed to assisting vulnerable communities in this crisis — said that they have more than 200 oxygen concentrators of which 125 have already been provided to the people in need.

"Currently, we have around 75 concentrators in stock. We have 37 auto BIPAP and CPAP machines which we are supplying to the patients as per requirement. All our 10 litre

concentrators are with patients as the demand is quite high and the availability low in the market," the volunteer informed. They have also donated 54 oxygen concentrators to different NGOs across J&K and Ladakh.

Apart from this, the managing body of Athrout is planning to set up an 'Oxygen Baitulmaal' at their head office in Srinagar's old city. Here, they will provide oxygen to the patients in a dedicated space that will have proper beds and will be supported by paramedical staff.

"We will be offering PPE kits to the families with Covid-19 positive members. We will also offer oximeters to those in need. The caretakers of the patients admitted in a hospital can also avail this facility at our office," he added.

Medical practitioners are anxious about the next three weeks which, they feel, will be crucial in deciding the intensity of the second wave of Covid-19 in J&K.

Dr Syed Mudasar Qadri, Consultant and Associate Professor, Internal Pulmonary Medicine, Sher-I-Kashmir Institute of Medical Science (SKIMS), while speaking to the writer over the phone said, "Doctors are noticing a considerable difference in the second wave of the pandemic. This year, we are seeing patients who are as young as 19-, 20- and 30-year-olds infected with the virus, which is quite disturbing."

Kashmir is witnessing 2,000 positive cases every day. As per Dr Qadri, these are the registered cases. There are hundreds of people, he believes, who are Covid-19 positive and opt for home consultation without informing the authorities. They conduct self-tests (RAT) at home and do not report them, so the actual numbers may be more.

"We have a good supply of oxygen and our infrastructure is also bet-

ter. As the Covid-19 burden is increasing, we need to strengthen the peripheral hospitals and make them fully functional to take care of patients with mild to moderate symptoms and not refer them to tertiary care. This will avoid overburdening of the tertiary hospitals with referral cases. This can help us handle the situation in a better way," Dr Qadri suggested, adding that doctors at tertiary care should redistribute patients to the peripheral hospitals after treating them in the acute stage.

Peripheral hospitals have everything in place, he said, including infrastructure, medical equipment, and specialists. What needs to be strengthened is the regular supervision of these hospitals and quick response to their requirements which can act as a roadblock for patient management.

Dr Irtifa, spokesperson of resident doctor's association, Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital — another tertiary care hospital in Srinagar — said that seeing the sudden spike in the cases, the hospital authorities immediately shut the outpatient department to avoid patients with other ailments.

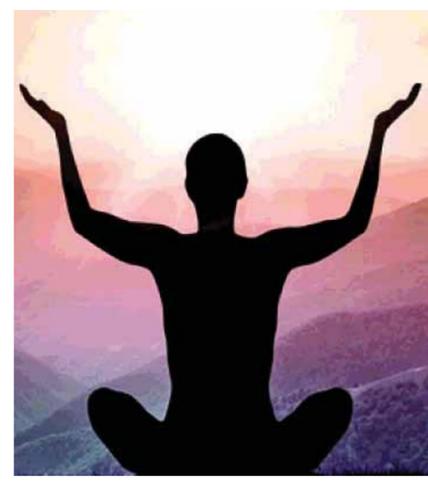
"Keeping in mind the situation we faced last year, it was decided to activate the isolation wards for Covid-19 positive patients and allocate staff for Covid-19 duty. As far as availability of oxygen is concerned, we have three oxygen plants here and the fourth one is in the pipeline and an adequate number (more than 1,000) of large oxygen cylinders are available. Kashmir is in a better situation than other states. What is helping us is that several people are opting for home management and only severe cases are coming to the hospital," shared Dr Irtifa.

He added that several NGOs are helping people to get oxygen concentrators at home. "I would suggest that people should consult with the doctor over the phone and if there is a need to visit a hospital, please be proactive. Don't play with your lives and with that of others," he said.

"We are in a better situation but with the number of cases increasing every day and people not taking proper precautions, we are bound to register a spike. As predicted by the senior epidemiologists, there will be a big wave in early or mid-May. There is a need to have systematic lockdowns that can save the lives of thousands. You cannot have markets closed while keeping the gardens open, which makes no sense. There should be a proper mechanism in place which can take people into account for violating Covid-19 guidelines," Dr Irtifa noted.

The UT is under complete lockdown till 7 am on May 3.

— By Charkha Features



Essence of spirituality

Purity and divinity lie at the heart of every religion, says **RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI**

It's a known fact that religion is deeply rooted in us and from time immemorial it has been a dominating factor in the way we think and behave. In its earliest stage, every religion had an inner strength of morals and spirituality, its followers have more genuine devotion, sincerity, simplicity and renounce creature comforts. They have the inner power to face heavy odds without giving up their principles and values. But with the passage of time and increase in the number of followers, the community passes through some tests and begins to give up morals and principles for some mundane considerations. As a result, their inner strength of *tyaag, tapasya* and *seva* weaken a bit. So, from its earliest stage that was spiritually powerful, practiced meditation and where spiritual experiences were the backbone, it now down to the next stage. During the last 2,500 years or so this has been happening with every religion as we know these today.

So, the utmost degeneration of moral and spiritual values, which is quite visible today, is because all religions, without a single exception, are now at the end of their Iron Age. Every religion has become more a faith today than the practice of meditation, self-abnegation and purity of mind, word and deed. It is more a set of rituals and less a practise of withdrawal from the sense-organs and body. As a result, the followers or the disciples

lose the power of self-control, mental concentration, inner silence and tolerance. They have also very little power to obey faithfully the commandments of their founders and to maintain the purity of mind, speech and action. Again and again, they wish and resolve that they will give up anger, hatred, ego and more only to fail as they are defeated by maya or satanic forces. They come to believe that, as long as their spirit is in human flesh, it will be subject to temptations. They think that only the merciful or the founder of their respective religion can, by His grace, extricate them out from the wired web of maya.

Reflecting deeply on this will lead us to the conclusion that though the Almighty, or whosoever else, will guide us and help us, we, on our part also, will have to make sincere efforts so that we determine our future as distinguished from others. This would also lead us to feel the great joy of our achievement in our own efforts. The effort will have to be for spiritual empowerment because it is our moral and spiritual weakness, as has been explained earlier, that has resulted in our present predicament. If we were to put it briefly, spiritual power comes from — and in the form of main achievements — purity and divine virtues, spiritual meditation based on soul-consciousness, *tyaag* -*vairaga*, unconditional service (*seva*), good wishes for all and surrender of self to Supreme and leading a life as His trustee.

Purity and divinity are the essences of spirituality, as they enable the soul to stabilise its original nature and stature. Purity comes when one realises fully the consequences of sinful actions and tendencies such as anger, hatred, arrogance, observes self-restraint and inculcates divine qualities as opposed to vice, avoids bad company, books or visual material and eating satvic food.

Spiritual meditation gives one the experience of withdrawal from the body, peace and bliss and naturally makes the foundations and the edifice of purity and divine qualities strong. It is through meditation that one's spiritual battery is charged and one gets guidance and help from Almighty. Meditation also builds the spirit of renunciation, dispassion while creating and sustaining an attitude of good wishes and service. Similarly, the spirit of service enables one to get the blessings of all. Now, to achieve all these, one has to make a little effort to understand the true knowledge, inculcate divine qualities and vicelessness while practising soul-consciousness and meditation, having good wishes for all and doing *seva* through the mind, speech and action. The rest will be done by the Merciful Almighty. Remember! It's not as difficult as it sounds. Nor does it take long to experience the self and supreme if one sincerely practises what He has revealed and asked us to practise.



□ In summers we tend to wash our hair often, so it is recommended to dilute your shampoo every time with water. Those who have dry hair you can wash your hair with a conditioner also, that will not only nourish your hair but make it dirt free also.

□ In summers it is better that you avoid heavy oils for oiling, rather use a hair toner. Massage your hair with it for about five-10 minutes and wash it off. This will close the pores and tame the dandruff.

□ Like our skin, our hair also requires exfoliation. A good & natural way to exfoliate your hair is take our shampoo, add aloe vera gel and about half teaspoon of sugar to it. Massage it thoroughly into your hair, like you do your regular shampoo and rinse it off. The aloe vera will nourish the hair and sugar will remove all the dead skin.

□ It is better to avoid hair

Manage that mane

Dr. **BLOSSOM KOCHHAR** details 10 haircare and styling tips for the summer season

packs at this time and go for rinses. Use a vinegar rinse where you can add a regular or apple cider vinegar to your last mug of water and just pour it on your hair. If you do this two-three times a week you will see how beautifully your hair will shine. In case you feel you are having hair fall because of vinegar rinse, reduce the quantity of vinegar that you put in your mug. Another rinse that you can try is, tea water rinse. This will give body to your hair. Another option that you can try is take equal amounts of soda and water and add few ice cubes to it. A last rinse with this will make your hair look fresh and frizz free.



□ If you want your hair to shine and smell wonderful, take a few drops of either lavender, lemon or ylang ylang essential oil on your palm and just rub your hands over the entire length of your hair.

□ Summer styling always involves high ponytails, but it is very important to remember to not use rubber bands, they make your hair tight which leads to hair fall. Rather pull a few strands from below the ponytail and tie it around the ponytail. This will look stylish and will also protect your hair from breakage.

□ Since, we can't do much makeup nowadays considering that half of it is covered with a mask, but that doesn't mean that you can't deck up your hair. Try to accessorise your hair, use organza scrunchies, ultra-wide headbands or hats to pep up your look.

□ Curtain bangs are very big this year. We all have wanted

bangs at some stage of our lives, and this will be the perfect time to don them since you don't have to cut them really short, rather have them long, covering your forehead and side face giving your face a slimmer demure.

□ Natal wavy hair is super popular these days. Open your Instagram and every celebrity or influencer that you follow will be donning long beachy waves. Remember we are not talking about tight waves, done with ironing rods and loads of spray. These are more in layers and give your hair bounce and give it such a fresh look.

□ So there are two ways about this trend, either you go for pop colours or you have just learned to live with your natural hair colour. There is nothing in between. We have seen people going all out and trying purple, wine, red colours and then there are others who just want to keep their colour as natural as possible.

“ **What doesn't kill me, makes me stronger.** —Friedrich Nietzsche”

DOMESTIC TRAVEL BANS CAN SPIKE INFECTION

A new study has concluded that policy makers should resist imposing domestic travel bans if they cannot commit to sufficiently long restrictions. Certain travel bans can counter-intuitively lead to an increase in Covid-19 cases. This is because release of travel bans of intermediate duration are associated with an increase in the total number of infections in the country as the sink destination—where migrant workers (many of whom are likely to be infected due to the time spent in Covid-19 hot spots before being allowed to travel) return — also record a spike. This was seen in the case of Mumbai last year. The working paper by academics at the University of Chicago published in the Becker Friedman Institute for Economics' website uses data from travel restrictions imposed in Mumbai during the first wave of Covid-19 last year.

PROTEIN CAN HAVE A KEY ROLE IN ILLNESS

A paper, published in the journal, *Circulation Research*, found that Covid-19 is a vascular disease, demonstrating exactly how the SARS-CoV-2 virus damages and attacks the vascular system (comprising the blood vessels) on a cellular level. The findings help explain Covid-19's wide variety of seemingly unconnected complications, and could open the door for new research into more effective therapies, the Salk Institute said in a media release. Salk researchers collaborated with scientists at the University of California San Diego on the paper. "A lot of people think of it as a respiratory disease, but it's really a vascular disease. That could explain why some people have strokes, and why some people have issues in other parts of the body. The commonality between them is that they all have vascular underpinnings," the Salk Institute quoted Professor Uri Manor, co-senior author of the study, as saying.

MISCARRIAGES ARE COMMON

Worldwide 10 per cent women have experienced at least one miscarriage in their lifetimes, resulting in 23 million miscarriages every year, new research has found. It draws attention to a simple point: miscarriages are common — more than we probably believe. To put the studies' findings into perspective, 44 women lose a pregnancy every minute. And according to the authors, the actual number might be even higher since many miscarriages go unreported or even undetected. *The Lancet* published a trio of papers by 31 international experts calling for a "complete rethink of the narrative around miscarriage and a comprehensive overhaul of medical care and advice offered to women who have miscarriages." Basically, a variety of factors can result in pregnancy loss, none of which are the fault of either parent. Most experts believe miscarriages are simply the body's way of ending a pregnancy that is unlikely to develop into a healthy fetus.

CHANGED METABOLISM REDUCES CANCER RISK

Scientists at McMaster University, Canada, have shown that changing the metabolism of natural killer (NK) immune cells allows them to overcome the hostile conditions found inside tumours and destroy advanced ovarian and lung cancer. "In this study, we discovered that the metabolism, or energy 'hub', of NK cells is paralysed by tumours, causing the NK cells to undergo an energy crisis and lose their tumour-killing functions," said Sophie Poznanski, a PhD student and lead author of the study. "With that understanding, we were able to reverse the dysfunction of NK cells by repurposing a pre-existing metabolism drug that restored their energy production." Published in *Cell Metabolism*, it shows that NK cells can also be modified to mimic the metabolism of tumours. These modified NK cells are better adapted for the hostile tumour environment.

LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Studies prove that regular laughter offers both physical and psychological health benefits which are both short- and long-term according to the Mayo Clinic. When you laugh, you increase your intake of oxygen-rich air. This stimulates your heart, lungs, and muscles, and prompts the release of endorphins in your brain. Laughing activates and then relieves your body's stress response, and also increases and then lowers your heart rate and blood pressure—all adding up to a calmer feeling. In addition, a good chuckle aids muscle relaxation and can stimulate circulation, both of which can help relieve stress. As for long-term effects, regular bouts of laughter can improve your immune system, according to medical experts. "When we laugh, it decreases the level of the evil stress hormone cortisol," said Edward Creagan, MD, in an article in *The Seattle Times*.



GAME 2021

CAPTAIN'S CALL

THERE ARE NUMBER OF LEADERS IN THE GROUP. IT'S IMPORTANT WE STAY TIGHT. AND FOR US IT IS ABOUT BUILDING AS A SIDE AND MAKE ADJUSTMENTS
— KANE WILLIAMSON



JOS THE BOSS

boundarymeter

4s	810
6s	379

Buttler's maiden T20 hundred (124) sets up Royals big win against Sunrisers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jos Buttler announced his return to form with belligerent maiden T20 hundred as Rajasthan Royals made a mince-meat of an out-of-sorts Sunrisers Hyderabad, winning Sunday's IPL encounter by a whopping 55-run margin.

Opening the innings, Buttler smashed a breathtaking 124 off 64 balls while Sanju Samson was effective in his 48 off 33 deliveries which powered Rajasthan to a commanding 220 for three.

Even a change in captaincy couldn't bring in luck for SRH as they could manage only 165 for eight in their 20 overs.

Chris Morris (3/29) and Mustafizur Rahman (3/20) did the bulk of the work with the ball while Kartik Tyagi (1/32) Rahul Tewatia (1/45) picked a wicket apiece.

With the win, the Royals moved up to fifth spot while SRH continued to stay at the bottom, having won only one match all season.

GOOD START
Looking to register their second win of the season, SRH raced to 57 for no loss in the first six overs.

However, Bangladesh pacer Rahman struck right after the first strategic time out, getting rid of Manish Pandey (31). The dangerous Jonny Bairstow (30) and Vijay Shankar (8) soon followed.

With the pressure mounting, skipper Kane Williamson (20) went for the big shot only to be caught at deep midwicket by Morris off Tyagi as wicket



Rajasthan Royals batsman Jos Buttler celebrates after he completes his maiden T20 hundred on Sunday during IPL clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad @Rajasthanroyals

ets tumbled at regular intervals. Mohammad Nabi (17 off 5) injected some hope in the SRH camp, as he smashed Tewatia for two sixes in the 14th over. However, the Afghan was back in the dug out after a quick cameo. With 91 needed in the last

quoteunquote

ALWAYS A PLEASURE TO BAT WITH JOS. WHENEVER HE GOES ON WE WIN GAMES. HAVING HIM IN GOOD FRAME OF MIND IS GREAT NEWS FOR US
Sanju Samson, RR captain

IT WAS JOS' DAY AND HE WAS OUTSTANDING. WITH THE BAT YOU DO NEED TO GET A FEW THINGS TO GO YOUR WAY AND WHEN YOU'RE LOSING WICKETS IT MAKES IT ALL THE MORE HARDER TO CHASE 220
Kane Williamson, SRH captain

Buttler and Samson stitched a 150-run partnership for the second wicket after the Royals lost opener Yashasvi Jaiswal (12) cheaply.

While the Englishman hit the ball 11 fours apart from eight maximums, Samson also had four fours and two sixes to his credit.

For SRH, Rashid Khan (1/24),

Vijay Shankar (1/42) and Sandeep Sharma (1/50) picked a wicket each.

The Royals were off to a sedate start as they managed just five runs of the first two overs.

Williamson, searching for wickets early on in the innings, introduced spin in third over by bringing in star bowler Rashid.

Jaiswal smashed three fours, before the Afghan showed his class and trapped the youngster leg before.

RR skipper Samson, who was dropped on 23 by Manish Pandey in the 10th over, announced his arrival with a six over mid-wicket off pacer Khaleel Ahmed.

At the other end, Buttler, who looked in sublime touch, also hit Bhuvneshwar Kumar for two boundaries in the sixth over as the Royals amassed 42 runs for the loss of one wicket in the Powerplay.

The duo continued to hit boundaries at regular intervals at the small Feroz Shah Kotla ground, collecting 18 runs, which

included two sixes, off all-rounder Vijay Shankar in the seventh over.

Having successfully navigated Rashid's four overs, Buttler and Samson upped the ante in the 13th over, plundering 17 runs. The Englishman muscled a six over wide long on before lofting one over extra-cover for boundary.

With all bowlers leaking runs, Williamson turned to Mohammad Nabi, who is playing his second game of the season, but Buttler hammered the off-spinner for two sixes and as many fours.

Vijay Shankar managed to get rid of Samson in the 17th over with young Riyan Parag (15 not out) walking in.

There was no stopping Buttler, who was in complete control, as he continued to hit boundaries at will. Sandeep Sharma, eventually brought his innings to an end of the penultimate over but he had inflicted the required damage by then.

SRH were guilty of being sloppy in the field, dropping catches and missing run outs.

Leading from the front

Opener Dhawan takes DC to top of the table with 7-wicket win



Delhi Capitals opening batsman Shikhar Dhawan chats with skipper Rishabh Pant @IPL

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Shikhar Dhawan's delightful 69 swarfed Mayank Agarwal's unbeaten 99 as Delhi Capitals defeated Punjab Kings by seven wickets here on Sunday to go atop of the IPL points table.

Agarwal, leading the side in the absence of regular skipper K L Rahul, used the straight bat effectively in his lone hand to take Punjab Kings to 166 for six.

Delhi Capitals hardly broke a sweat in the run chase, centering to victory in 17.4 overs, their sixth win in eight matches.

For Punjab Kings, it was their fifth loss in eight games, summing up their inconsistent run so far.

The destructive opening duo

of Prithvi Shaw (39 off 22) and Dhawan (69 not out off 47) gave another flying start to Delhi who raced to 63 for no loss in six overs. Both struck delightful drives and punches on the off-side.

Against the run of play, left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar carried on from where he left off in the game against RCB to dismiss the set Shaw on his very first ball which turned just enough to clip the off-stump.

After that wicket, Punjab were able to bring down the scoring rate by conceding almost run-a-ball from over 7 to 10.

However, they also needed regular wickets to keep themselves in the game but that never came.

And there was no stopping

Rahul diagnosed with appendicitis

Ahmedabad: Punjab Kings skipper K L Rahul has been diagnosed with acute appendicitis and has flown to Mumbai for surgery and further treatment, which will likely keep him on the sidelines for at least two weeks and might even force him out of the tournament.

"K L Rahul complained of severe abdomen pain last night and after not responding to medication, he was taken to emergency room for further tests which revealed that he was diagnosed with acute appendicitis," the team said in a statement.

"It will be resolved surgically and for safety measures, he has been transferred to the hospital for the same," it added.

Rahul is expected to operate on Sunday night at the Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai. His franchise expects him to return to action within a week or 10 days. PTI

Delhi as in the end West Indian batsman Shimron Hetmyer (16 off 4) smashed two sixes and a four in the 18th over to take DC home with 14 balls to spare.

Earlier, Agarwal single handedly took the team past 160 with his crucial knock comprising eights fours and four sixes.

Star-studded RCB stand in way of KKR revival

KEY PLAYERS

ANDRE RUSSELL
After a quiet season with the bat last year, Dre Russ' is back to his best and hitting big sixes

GLENN MAXWELL
Despite the first ball duck against PBKS, Maxi is in form and he would like to continue that run

VENUE: NARENDRA MODI STADIUM, AHMEDABAD

HEAD TO HEAD

Matches	27
Kolkata Knight Riders	14
Royal Challengers Bangalore	13

MEETING IN IPL 2021

Royal Challengers Bangalore defeated Kolkata Knight Riders by 38 runs in Chennai

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Star-studded Royal Challengers Bangalore would look to get their mojo back when they face struggling Kolkata Knight Riders who need a complete overhaul for their revival here on Monday.

From leading the table with four wins on the trot, the Virat Kohli-led team has slipped to third spot at the halfway stage after suffering two defeats from their last three matches.

In fact, RCB would have lost three in a row if pacer Mohammed Siraj had not defended 14 runs in the final over against Delhi Capitals' explosive duo of Rishabh Pant and Shimron Hetmyer.

The onus would be on their famed batting lineup of Kohli, AB de Villiers and Glenn Maxwell to start firing once again and put pressure on the KKR batsmen. Talented opener Devdutt Padikkal would also be keen to get back among runs as he has not clicked after his unbeaten 101 against Rajasthan Royals.

Having started the season with much promise under Eoin Morgan, KKR so far have failed to inspire, suffering five defeats in seven matches. They are at the seventh spot in the eight-team table, staring at early elimination for a third season in a row.

The biggest letdown for KKR this season has been their top-order batting as the top three Shubman Gill, Nitish Rana, Rahul Tripathi have been patchy.

Head coach Brendon McCullum had questioned their batsmen's "intent" after they posted a below-par 154/6 to go down to Delhi Capitals by seven wickets in their last match.

At the same stage, under Dinesh Karthik in IPL 2020 in UAE, the team had fared a shade better with four wins and three defeats, before he relinquished the captaincy to let English World Cup-winning



skipper Morgan lead the side.

Given the current scenario, skipper Morgan needs to take some tough calls with regards to his top-order, something he has stuck to since match number one against Sunrisers Hyderabad this season.

It's a pity that KKR are yet to give an opportunity to new signing Karun Nair who has a strike rate of 155.49 and has two centuries as a T20 opener. They also have uncapped talented batsman Venkatesh Iyer.

The bowling on the other hand has impressed, especially the spin duo of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy. Their eight overs against the likes of Kohli, De Villiers and Maxwell would be key as they look to avenge their first leg defeat.

shortpasses

BASILASHVILI WINS IN MUNICH
MUNICH: Nikoloz Basilashvili won his fifth career title and second of 2021 on Sunday when he defeated Jan-Lennard Struff 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) in the Munich clay court final.

AJAX CLINCH DUTCH TITLE
THE HAUGE: Ajax Amsterdam clinched their 35th Dutch league title on Sunday with a 4-0 victory over Emmen. Erik Ten Hag's side hold a 15-point advantage over second-place PSV Eindhoven, who have four matches to play.

CHELSEA VS BARCA IN WCL FINAL
LONDON: Pernille Harder scored a key late goal and Fran Kirby netted twice as Chelsea overturned a 2-1 first-leg deficit with a 4-1 victory over Bayern Munich to set up a Women's CL final against Barcelona.

MAN UNITED GAME POSTPONED
MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Premier League game against Liverpool was postponed on Sunday after supporters stormed into the stadium and onto the pitch as thousands of fans gathered outside Old Trafford to demand the Glazer family ownership sells the club.

OSAKA DUMPED OUT
MADRID: Naomi Osaka suffered a second-round exit at the Madrid Open as the second seed lost 6-4, 3-6, 6-1 to Karolina Muchova.

REAL MADRID DEFEAT OSASUNA
MADRID: Real Madrid held their nerve to beat Osasuna 2-0 and retain 2nd spot. Agencies



Inter Milan fans celebrate in Piazza Duomo square in front of the gothic cathedral after Inter Milan won its first Serie A title in more than a decade AP

Inter win Scudetto

AFP ■ MILAN

Inter Milan claimed the Serie A title on Sunday for the first time in 11 years to end Juventus' nine-year reign in Italy.

Antonio Conte's side clinched their 19th Scudetto after nearest rivals Atalanta drew 1-1 at Sassuolo to leave the Nerazzurri 13 points clear with four games remaining.

Conte had started Juventus' record run, winning the first three titles in a winning streak that stretched from 2012 to 2020.

The 51-year-old took over Inter in 2019 and lifted the trophy after finishing second last season.

"I'm astonished," said Conte. "We're breaking

up a dynasty. Not even in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that we'd make up this much ground on the team that dominated Serie A for nine years in the space of two seasons.

Inter are now second for league trophies in Italy, one ahead of city rivals AC Milan's 18, but still some way short of Juventus' 36.

Inter are now second for league trophies in Italy, one ahead of city rivals AC Milan's 18, but still some way short of Juventus' 36.



Hamilton wins Portuguese GP

AFP ■ PORTIMAO

Lewis Hamilton delivered a flawless drive in his Mercedes to win the Portuguese Grand Prix on Sunday from his arch title rival Max Verstappen.

Seven-time world champion Hamilton's 97th Grand Prix triumph extended his early season lead over Red Bull's Verstappen in the Formula One drivers' standings to eight points.

In third place in Portimao was pole-sitter Valtteri Bottas in the other Mercedes with Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull in fourth.

"That was such a tough race physically and mentally. I didn't get a good start and also lost out at the restart but it was a great result in the end," said Hamilton.