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DESPITE KHASHOGGI SLAYING

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MADRID TITLE

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11 VIVACITY



Clamour for Covid jabs in urban India

Various States
complain about
vaccine shortage

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is the biggest producers of vaccines, but its own nationwide vaccination drive launched on January 16 seems to be faltering amid mismatch between the vaccine availability and the number of seekers in urban India with various States complaining about vaccine shortage.

So far, over 19 crore people have registered on CoWin — the Government's portal — including around 6.42 crore who registered from May 1 to 7, as per the data available from the Union Health Ministry.

The huge demand for vaccination is from urban areas mainly.

However, so far, just 2.6 per cent of the total eligible population has been fully vaccinated (two doses). On the other hand a country like the USA which was hit hard by the Covid-19 for better part of the last year has vaccinated at least 40 per cent of its population with both jabs.

The Ministry has claimed that more than 1 crore Covid vaccine doses (1,04,30,063) are



People wait in long queues to receive Covid-19 vaccine doses outside ESI Hospital in Noida on Monday

still available with the States/UTs and more than 9 lakh (9,24,910) vaccine doses will be provided in the next three days, but it is not enough even to cover 50 per cent of those (2.42 crore) who registered in the last week from May 1 to May 7.

Realising that vaccines availability is going to take time, the Union Health Ministry last week asked the States to prioritise administering the second dose and use supplies from the Centre in a 70:30 ratio of second and first doses.

Clearly, because of the shortage of the vaccines and the Government opening up the vaccination drive for those above 18 from May 1 (an estimated 59 crore people that become eligible to receive the shot, as per the affidavit filed by

the Union Health Ministry in the SC, many from both the categories who have registered on the Co-Win will have to wait for little more before they could get the jab.

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Delhi has only one day's Covaxin stock left: Satyendar Jain

New Delhi: Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Monday said Delhi has only one day's Covaxin stock left and its Covishield doses will last for just three to four days. The Minister's remarks came a day after Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal urged the Centre to direct manufacturers to increase vaccine supplies to the Capital between May and July.

Superstition, fear derail vax drive in rural India

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

From Ballia in Uttar Pradesh to Nuh in Haryana, from Sampat Chak in Bihar to even Manjhwali in Faridabad, close to Delhi, the Covid-19 vaccination drive in India's rural areas has taken a hit as the fear of an adverse reaction, superstition, and a lack of information and awareness have made villagers either hesitant or completely unwilling to take the jab.

In fact, there have even been reports that vaccination centres have been destroyed and health workers beaten up in various part of the country.

Villagers of Manjhwali in Faridabad damaged the vaccination centres at Gurukul school and beat up health workers a few days ago. The health workers were going to this village to disseminate information for Covid vaccinations. In another case in Nuh, Haryana, villagers threatened to beat health workers if they insisted for vaccination.

Besides the shortage of vaccines, the vaccination process slowed down in this district as the majority of people think the jab could cause infertility. Health workers are facing an uphill task to convince them for inoculation.

In Bihar, most of the vaccination centres are far away from the villages. For instance, vaccination centres for Bahuaara, Kandap, Sohgi villages are set up in Sampat



Chak, which is five kilometres away from these villages. Most of the villagers are hesitant to walk and get a jab.

"Even if counselled, villagers are unable to travel 17-20 km to the nearest centre just for vaccination. And if they eventually do reach, the internet is too slow and it takes hours to register and verify online," said in-charge of vaccination centre, Sampat Chak.

"In Ballia's Basdih Road vaccination centre in UP, there are over 20,000 population in five villages but only 800-1000 turned up for vaccination so far," said a health worker on the condition of anonymity.

The Pilana vaccination centre in Baghat in Western UP witnessed a similar scenario. "There are about 200 houses with 1,500-2,000 people. Of this, about 500 people are aged above 50, but the coverage in the past month would just be a third of the target

group," said an anganwadi worker who goes door-to-door explaining to villagers about the vaccine and the need for it.

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Covid-19 IN INDIA	
TOTAL CASES:	2,29,91,927 (+3,29,379)
DEATHS:	2,50,025 (+3,877)
RECOVERED:	1,90,21,207 (+3,55,745)
ACTIVE:	37,10,896
MAHA:	51,38,973 (+37,236)
K'TAKA:	19,73,683 (+39,305)
KERALA:	19,30,116 (+27,487)
UP:	15,24,767 (+21,277)
DELHI:	13,36,218 (+12,651)

Daily Covid deaths must be 25,000 in India, says expert

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian-origin renowned US-based public health expert Dr Ashish K Jha has said India's data of Covid cases and deaths are far less than the actual numbers. Dr Jha has placed India's daily fatalities count to close to 25,000.

"Wrote about why India likely has 25K+ deaths daily. Pushback: we lack hard data on crematoriums so we can't be sure. True. But we get 25K+ deaths no matter how you look. Another approach: 400,000 cases, 22% test positivity. Likely means we're missing 90% of infections," Dr Jha said in the first of a series of tweets.

"Truth is, no one knows exactly how many Indians dying from Covid. We make estimates from cases, tests, IFR (Infection Fatality Rate). And look at real-world experiences: crematoriums, people's homes. I don't know the exact number but I know this. There is immense suffering. And it must be brought to an end," said Jha.

Dr Jha is a physician and researcher of the Brown University of Public Health in the United States.

Dr Jha said the situation at crematoriums reveals that the official data is under-reporting the number of deaths from



A family member conducts last rites of a person who died of Covid-19, at Nigambodh Ghat cremation ground in New Delhi on Monday

Covid-19. He based his conclusion about death number going by the fact that scenes from the crematoriums suggested that they were handling "two to four times spike in business".

"About 27,000 Indians died on typical day. Crematoriums handle that level of deaths every day. Additional 4,000 deaths won't knock them off their feet," he claimed. Jha said he believes that Covid-19 is contributing 25-50 thousand deaths daily to India's overall per day mortality numbers. "Crematoriums running 24x7 and running out of firewood suggest that the actual deaths are at least 25,000 a day," he adds.

Nepal PM Oli loses vote of confidence

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal Prime Minister P Sharma Oli lost a trust vote in the House of Representatives on Monday, in a fresh setback to the embattled premier seeking to tighten his grip on power after the CPN (Maoist Centre) led by Pushpakamal Dahal 'Prachanda' withdrew support to his Government.

Prime Minister Oli secured 93 votes in the Lower House of Parliament during a special session convened on the directives of President Bidya Devi Bhandari.

Oli, 69, required at least 136 votes in the 275-member House of Representatives to win the confidence motion as four members are currently under suspension. A total of 124 members voted against the confidence motion while 15 members stayed neutral, Speaker Agni Sapkota announced. The session was attended by 232 lawmakers.

With this, Prime Minister Oli is automatically relieved from his post as per Article 100 (3).

Detailed report on P8

45 'Covid' bodies found floating in Ganga in Buxar

PTI/ANS ■ PATNA

Several bodies, decomposed, bloated and suspected to be of people who succumbed to Covid 19, were on Monday found floating in Ganga River in a Bihar district.

Officials in Chausa block of Buxar, which borders Uttar Pradesh, rushed to the spot of the unseemly sight upon hearing the news.

"We were alerted by the local chowkidar that many bodies have been spotted floating from upstream. We have so far recovered 15 of these. None of the deceased happens to be a resident of the district," Chausa BDO Ashok Kumar told PTI over phone. Ashok Kumar said the administration has spotted 45 dead bodies at Mahadev Ghat.

He said, "Many Uttar Pradesh districts are situated right across the river and the bodies may have been dumped in the Ganges for reasons not known to us. We cannot confirm whether the deceased were indeed Covid-19 positive. The bodies have started decomposing. But we are taking all precautions while ensur-



Dozens of decomposed bodies washed up at the bank of the Ganga River amid ongoing Covid-19 pandemic at Chausa in Buxar on Monday

ing that these are disposed of in a decent manner".

Some news channels claimed the number of bodies to be as high as 100, but the BDO dismissed as "highly exaggerated".

Many local residents claimed the district administration is "in denial over many such unfortunate incidents involving residents of Buxar".

Buxar SDO KK Upadhyay said, "During preliminary investigation, it has appeared that the bodies are in decomposed state and over 5 to 6 days old. We are interacting with our counterparts in Varanasi and Prayagraj to investigate the incident."

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Bodies in Yamuna trigger scare

Lucknow: Locals in Hamirpur spotted five bodies floating in the Yamuna, creating a scare that these were of Covid patients, an apprehension dismissed by the authorities.

The residents had spotted the bodies, including a half-burnt corpse, under a bridge on the Yamuna on May 6. "After speaking to people and looking at the bodies, prima facie, it can be said these were not of Covid-19 patients as these were draped in a traditional manner and no body was wrapped as done in the case of Covid-19 victims," said the DM.

File plea for early hearing on Central Vista: HC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A request was made to the Delhi High Court on Monday to give an early hearing to a PIL seeking a stay on the construction of the Central Vista here amid the raging Covid pandemic.

The request was mentioned before a bench of Chief Justice DN Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh by senior advocate Sidharth Luthra, and the court said an early hearing application be filed first.

Luthra told the bench that he was mentioning the matter as the Supreme Court on May 7 asked the petitioners to seek urgent hearing before the High Court on May 10.

Petitioners — Anya Malhotra, who works as a translator, and Sohail Hashmi, a historian and documentary filmmaker — had moved the apex court against the HC's May 4 order adjourning their plea to May 17.

The HC had adjourned the matter saying it first wants to study the SC's January 5 judgement giving a go ahead to the Central Vista project.

Cong defers party chief poll over Covid crisis

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday once again deferred the election for the post of a new party chief due to the prevailing pandemic situation. The decision was taken at the Congress Working Committee (CWC) chaired by interim chief Sonia Gandhi.

The election will be only after the Covid situation in the country improves. June 23 was the scheduled date for holding the election.

This is the third time in a row the election for the Congress president has been postponed amid speculation that Rahul Gandhi will again take up the reins of the party.

Addressing a Press conference after the CWC meet, AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal said the committee members felt that this was not the right time to conduct elections. "All energy should be channelised to provide relief and support work. It was unanimously decided to defer elections further temporarily," Venugopal said.

The post of Congress president has remained vacant since party leader Rahul Gandhi resigned after the 2019

Lok Sabha polls.

When the discussion was initiated by Sonia Gandhi to hold the polls, senior leaders like Ashok Gehlot, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma said there is no need for elections at this time due to Covid-19.

By the time Sonia had informed the meeting that the party's Central Election Authority chief Madhusudan Mistry had already worked out a schedule.

The issue of leadership is crucial as the group of 23 Congress dissenters (G-23) had been pushing for a revamp of the party organisation. Some prominent G-23 members such as Ghulam Nabi Azad and Anand Sharma are also members of the CWC.

The grand old party has been waiting for a president for almost two years now. Rahul Gandhi, who had assumed the post in 2017, had resigned as the party president after Congress lost the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Since then, the party has been operating under the aegis of Sonia Gandhi as interim president. The CWC has postponed the election for the Congress president thrice now.

J&K Lt Governor's Twitter handle suspended briefly

Jammu: The official Twitter handle of Jammu & Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha was suspended briefly due to an "automated systems error" and was restored later.

A Twitter spokesperson, when approached, said, "The account was flagged by our automated systems in error. This action has been reversed, and access to the account has been reinstated."

The '@OfficeOfJ&K' handle with over 50,000 followers had an account suspension notice displayed with a line below reading "Twitter suspends accounts which violate the Twitter Rules" in the evening.

Raj Bhawan officials said the matter was taken up with the authorities concerned for resolving the "technical error".

The handle was subsequently restored but the number of followers had been reset.

PDP spokesman Mohit Bhan was among the first to flag the issue of suspension of twitter account of the Lieutenant Governor, saying "meanwhile @TwitterIndia suspends the account of Office Of J&K citing rules violation. What did they do by the way. Did I miss something?" PTI

CAPSULE

LOOKOUT NOTICE AGAINST WRESTLER SUSHIL KUMAR
New Delhi: The Delhi Police has issued a lookout notice against two-time Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler here, officials said. A senior police officer said notice was issued late Sunday evening.

DATA: CRPF LOST 108 PERSONNEL TO COVID
New Delhi: The CRPF has lost 108 personnel to Covid-19, the highest among the Central forces that function under the command of the Union Home Ministry, according to data.

WHO LABELS STRAIN IN INDIA AS CONCERN
Geneva: A Covid-19 variant spreading in India, which is facing an explosive outbreak, appears to be more contagious and has been classified as being "of concern", WHO said.

Court refuses stay on coercive action against Kalra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Court on Monday refused to grant any stay on coercive action against businessman Navneet Kalra in connection with the seizure of oxygen concentrators from his restaurants 'Khan Chacha'.

Kalra, against whom the Delhi Police's Crime Branch has launched a manhunt, moved the Saket Court seeking anticipatory bail in the case.

Special Judge Sumit Dass has directed the Investigating Officer (IO) to file the reply to the application by tomorrow.

"No stay on Delhi Police's coercive action," the court said. The judge will take up the matter at noon on Tuesday. During the course of proceedings, Public Prosecutor Atul Shrivastava opposed the pre-arrest bail application.

Postmen give new lease of life to serious patients

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dakiya dava laya. The vanishing tribe of postmen who formed the inseparable part of our old world, linking loved ones with each other, have again proved to be a new lifeline in the time of crisis.

Take the case of Muradabad in Uttar Pradesh. "Dakiya babu" in Muradabad is working overtime, even on Sundays, to deliver and reconnect the needy and serious patients with their doctors and hospitals as far as Mumbai, Kolkata, and Delhi.

The online treatment of over 30 patients, including some suffering from cancer, has not stopped. The hospitals which used to despatch medicines by private couriers have



switched to post office services following the current lockdown where most of the air and train services have been stopped.

According to senior post office official Veer Singh, the moment patient informs that medicines have been dispatched through postal courier, "We immediately check

online and deliver medicine parcels to patients the moment they land here, even on Sundays or night."

Officials and postmen are contacted and offices are unlocked on holidays and packets are reached at patients' doorsteps.

A cancer patient in Majhola, who was prescribed medicines by a Mumbai hospital, kept receiving his special drugs as postmen ensured his life is not disrupted by coronavirus clamp down as it did to many in over last on year.

The Government has issued a notification to exempt the postal service from the purview of the Covid lockdown.

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Kafan resale! Victims not spared even after death

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the deadly onslaught of Covid-19 across the country, unscrupulous elements have not even spared the kafans (shroud of clothing for wrapping bodies of dead) and other offerings made to the dead before cremation.

The Baghat police on Sunday busted a gang of seven thieves, including a cloth shop owner and his family members besides others who used to steal kafans and other such clothes from the corpses in the dead of night when even those who perform last rites and the watchmen are asleep after cremating countless victims of

the novel coronavirus.

The police have arrested all the seven gang members, including the ring leader and cloth merchant Praveen Kumar Jai. The police recovered 520 kafans, 127 kurtas, 140 white shirts, 34 dhotis, 52 sarees, three packets of ribbon, a tape cutter, and 152 pieces of label/stickers of a Gwalior-based cloth brand from the shop-cum-residence of Jain at Baraut market.

The stolen items were packed neatly with the labels and ribbons and subsequently sold to other unsuspecting cloth merchants.

Prime accused Praveen Jain's son Ashish Jain, nephew Rishabh Jain, Shrawan Sharma, Raju Sharma, Shahrugh Khan, and Bablu Kashyap, all resi-

dents of Baghat district in Uttar Pradesh.

The police have registered a case under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) including theft, trespass, public nuisance, spreading an infectious disease, theft in a dwelling or house, forgery and forgery for cheating among others besides provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) relating to lock-down/curfew violations.

According to Hindu traditions and local customs, the relatives and friends of the deceased offer kafans and other clothes to the dead persons before cremation. Before the bodies are lit on the pyre, these offering are divided among those performing cremation.

'500 ICU beds in city for Covid patients'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi will have 500 ICU beds for critical Covid-19 patients from Tuesday, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Monday after the inspection of a Covid Care Centre at the Ramlila Ground near GTB Hospital, along with Health Minister Satyendra Jain.

Taking to twitter, Kejriwal tweeted, "500 ICU beds have been constructed in 2 weeks at Ramlila Maidan opp. GTB hospital. Patients will be admitted from Monday. My heartfelt gratitude to all the engineers who made it all happen, in a record time."

The Chief Minister said, "We're at the Ramlila Ground, in front of the GTB Hospital, where we've set up a 500-bed ICU Centre within 10 days. We know how dangerous the second wave has been. It has seen several people being affected; it has seen several deaths and the infection spread on a massive level. There has been a great need for ICU beds. Since Delhi saw a shortage of ICU beds, 500 such beds have been set up here. Only some monitors are left to be put up which, too, will be made available by tonight. Starting tomorrow, these 500 ICU beds, attached with the GTB Hospital will become functional."

On the question of the possibility of a third wave,



Kejriwal said, "We should certainly prepare for the third wave, for which we will have to further expand our infrastructure. Delhi witnessed a wave in November when 8,500 cases emerged, which we had successfully managed. With this wave, we touched a maximum of 28,000 cases, which brought our entire infrastructure under duress. However, the scale at which we are preparing our infrastructure, and the scale at which we are executing the same, even if 30,000 cases are to come up in the next wave, we are ready to deal with it."

He said, "I hope the peak has passed, I hope the cases reduce in the coming days but after being in the Government and as the Chief Minister of Delhi, I would not want to give any concessions. From my end, I'd like complete preparations to be done, should the cases suddenly begin to increase from tomorrow. Nobody can predict anything about this contagion. If the cases begin to increase, we are prepared and the people need not be worried."

"Delhi is left with vaccines

that will last only three-four days. Today, we are giving out 1-1.25 lakh doses, and will take it to three lakh doses in the next few days. Therefore, if we are to give three lakh doses per day, we can give 90 lakh doses in one month. We can vaccinate entire Delhi in the next three months. Experts all around the world believe that in the UK and the US, where the cases declined, vaccines have played a major role. If we can vaccinate our people on a large scale, then probably we can be saved from the third wave," he added.

Delhi ramping up infrastructure

NEW DELHI: Amid signs of an inevitable third wave of Covid-19, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said that his Government was boosting the healthcare infrastructure in the national Capital by increasing the number of oxygen beds. "We must prepare for the third wave," he said.

His comments come on a day when Delhi's Health Minister said that the city was running out of vaccines, with just three to four days' of supplies of Covishield and a day of stocks of Covaxin remaining.

Centre indulging in politics of lies over shots: Sisodia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia slammed the Central Government for overlooking the needs of the citizens and accused the BJP Government of engaging in politics of lies as it gave only 3.5 lakh Covid shots to Delhi against an order of 1.34 crore vaccines. Sisodia said that the BJP Government supplied unlimited vaccines to foreign nations but limited the supply for Indian citizens.

He stressed that vaccines were the need of the hour not the sly politics the BJP Government was indulging in, which was based on lies and deception.

Sisodia said that by depleting the supply of vaccines for its own citizens and exporting the jobs to foreign nations, the Central Government had committed a grave crime. He underscored that the reasons behind the Central Government's inability to distribute vaccines to State Governments was unclear.

The Deputy Chief Minister said, "At a time when the whole nation is suffering from Covid-19, the Central Government has turned a blind eye to the needs of the people of our nation."

"The youth of our nation needs to be vaccinated. However, the Centre exported 6.5 crore doses of the vaccine to foreign countries. What is



more astonishing is that the Central Government has blamed the Delhi Government, and insinuated that we only asked for 5.5 lakh doses.

This is a lie that has been served to the people of this nation in the times of a crisis," he said.

Presenting documents procured from vaccine companies and signed letters attained from the Central Government, Sisodia said, "When the Central Government had decided in April that State Governments could directly tie-up with vaccine companies to sell the doses, the Delhi Government issued a letter seeking to acquire 1.34 crore doses for citizens between 18-45 years of age. But instead of receiving the shots, the Delhi Government received a letter from the Central Government stating that we would get just 3.59 lakh vaccines, out of which

92,840 doses were of Covaxin and 2,67,690 doses were of the Covishield vaccine."

Condemning the Central Government for its flagrant behaviour, Sisodia said, "The Central Government is only interested in exporting vaccines to foreign nations."

It is time for the Central Government to put an end to this politics of lies and deception and understand that we are in a full-fledged crisis. They need to open their eyes to all the suffering and pain the people of this nation are facing because of this deadly virus."

Accusing the Central Government for escalating the crisis, he said, "When the whole nation was in agony due to the pandemic, the Central Government was busy fighting elections in West Bengal and created super-spreader events by holding massive election rallies and organising the Kumbh Mela."

Now, when it is time to actually step up and save lives, the Central Government is busy managing its image internationally and exporting vaccines abroad."

"This apathy of the Centre is a grave crime. I request the Government to open its eyes to the suffering of the people and immediately make vaccines available in adequate numbers to the State Governments instead of mismanaging the crisis and indulging in politics of lies," he said.

Deputy CM visits Mount Carmel Covid centre

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia visited Vijay Williams Covid Care Centre at the Mount Carmel School which has been transformed into a Covid-19 centre with essential medical facilities such as oxygen beds, oxygen concentrators and medicines.

Sisodia said, "We may be able to link this Covid Care Centre with one of our big hospitals in the city. This Covid Centre, which has been started under the aegis of the Mount Carmel School Society, is a mark of humanity and generosity. The availability of beds and other facilities gives us confidence that we have the resources to fight this deadly crisis."

"We see that nations are experiencing one of the worst pandemics ever. The period from April 22 to May 5, was the most challenging one for Delhi. We received the highest number of cases and the infection rate was staggering. We responded immediately by increasing hospital beds in the city, however, the scarcity of oxygen has been one of the most challenging problems we have faced," he said. "The decreasing positivity rate shows that we are slowly coming out of the crisis and all the credit goes to the doctors and the corona warriors for ensuring such a decline," he added.

NDMC organises Webinar on emotional and physical well-being

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the rampaging second wave of the pandemic, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) organised a webinar on emotional and physical well-being of its teaching community.

The key speaker, Dr Sumit Dubey, Deputy Commandant (Medical) ITBP, elaborated upon the various issues regarding Covid-19 symptoms, treatment, home isolation, home remedies and vaccination etc. He further said that during this difficult phase, when normal life has been hit by the pandemic, it is vital for everyone to be mentally and physically healthy.

Eminent psychologist Dr Geetanjali Kumar, explained the chronological effects of the Covid-19 pandemic which altered the way we all look at life. Most of us are suffering from varied psychological disorders like anxiety, loneliness, depression and pessimism, among others. In the webinar, she focussed on how mental health can be maintained during this difficult time. She specifically mentioned how mental health was responsible for the declining oxygen level of Covid-19 patients. The webinar was chaired by DP Singh, Director (education) NDMC, who said that spirituality was key to come out of this depressing phase.



Metro trains parked at the Timarpur Yard during the Covid-induced lockdown, in New Delhi on Monday. All Delhi Metro services will also remain suspended for commuters till May 17

Lookout notice issued for Olympian Sushil Kumar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Days after a budding wrestler died following a brawl in the Chhatrasal Stadium, the Delhi Police has issued a lookout notice against two-time Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar. Police said that the notice was issued late on Sunday evening, after Kumar failed to appear before the Investigating Officer (IO). Police teams were carrying out raids on possible hideouts in Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Kumar, who has been named in the First Information

Report in the case, is on the run and efforts are on to trace him. Raids were being conducted in Delhi-NCR and neighbouring States to nab him, a senior official had said earlier. The victims, in their statement before the police, have alleged that Kumar was present when the clash took place. The 23-year-old wrestler Sagar and two of his friends were assaulted by other wrestlers inside the Chhatrasal Stadium last Tuesday. Sagar was rushed to hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries later on, a police official said.

Investigations have

revealed that the brawl involved Kumar, Ajay, Prince Dalal, Sonu, Sagar, Amit and a few others who are yet to be identified. A case was registered under Sections 302, 365, 120B of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Arms Act at the Model Town Police Station.

Police had recovered two double barrel guns, seven live cartridges, two sticks and five cars from the spot. Dalal (24), a resident of Jhajjar in Haryana, has been arrested and his interrogation has revealed certain facts pertaining to the conspiracy that was hatched to attack Sagar.

With Kalra still on the run, Crime Branch issues notice

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police has issued a lookout notice for absconding businessman Navneet Kalra in connection with the recovery of over 500 oxygen concentrators from his restaurants in the national Capital. Kalra is suspected to have fled Delhi along with his family.

A senior police official said that a lookout notice has been issued against Kalra for allegedly hoarding the oxygen concentrators in his restaurants in South Delhi's posh Khan Market area and selling them to

people in need on exorbitant rates. Police teams are conducting raids in Delhi-NCR and its neighbouring States in a bid to nab the absconding restaurateur. Meanwhile, a Delhi Court on Monday refused to grant any interim relief to Kalra in connection with the case. Kalra had appealed for interim relief from the police's coercive action in the case.

The police transferred the case to the Crime Branch on Saturday after the oxygen concentrators were recovered from three upscale restaurants and a farmhouse in South Delhi dur-

ing raids conducted on Thursday and Friday. Four men were arrested during the raids.

The oxygen concentrators had been imported from China by a private company, Matrix owned by one Gagan Duggal in partnership with Kalra.

Though the original cost of the oxygen concentrators, with varying capacities of five and nine litres, was between ₹16,000 to ₹22,000, the accused were selling them at a major mark-up and charging desperate people anything between ₹50,000, to ₹70,000 for the machines, police said.

Delhi's positivity rate dips, 12,651 new cases reported with 319 deaths

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi recorded 12,651 new Covid-19 cases and 319 deaths on Monday. The positivity rate, however, dropped further to 19.10 per cent. If figures are any indication, Delhi appears to be bending the curve.

A total of 66,234 tests, including 57,265 RT-PCR tests and 8,969 rapid antigen tests, were conducted the previous day, according to the bulletin issued by the Delhi Health Department on Monday.

The national Capital has had 85,258 positive cases so far. The death toll due to the viral disease stands at 19,663, the bulletin said.

It is significant that Delhi's Covid positivity rate has fallen each day during the last few days. At the beginning of this month, the city recorded a



positivity rate of 31.6, which came down to 28.3 on May 2, followed by a positivity rate of 29.6 on May 3. On May 4, the positivity rate stood at 26.7, on the fifth, this was 26.4 per cent, on the sixth it was 24.29 and on ninth it hit 21.67 and on May 10 it further came down to 19.10 per cent.

A senior Government official said that a team of officers is working round the clock to monitor the demand and supply of the oxygen in the nation-

al Capital.

"Real time monitoring of oxygen tankers is being done by the team formed by the Government to mitigate the challenges and obstacles in the supply chain management of oxygen in the national Capital. The Delhi Government has also deputed a team of officers to each of the oxygen plants to make sure that there are no glitches and any administrative obstacles in oxygen supply," he said.

SDMC Mayor opens vaccination centre at Jaitpur for 18+

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta and South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) Mayor Anamika on Monday inaugurated a vaccination centre for people aged between 18 and 44 years at a school run by the civic body at Jaitpur.

With this, SDMC started vaccination under the third phase at its 11 schools located in all four zones. On the occa-

sion, Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Delhi BJP vice-president Ashok Goyal, former president of South Delhi District Mithlesh Singh and senior officials from Health Department were present.

Additional Commissioner (Health) Randhir Sahay along with senior officials of Health Department took stock of necessary arrangements at these centres ahead of starting of vaccination process.

45 'Covid' bodies found floating ...

From Page 1

"There is also a shortage of wood and other material required for cremation. Availability of these has taken a hit because of the lockdown. So many bereaved family members are impelled to immerse the bodies of their departed relatives in the river," one of the residents said.

Anjoria Devi, wife of the Dom Raja of Mahadev Ghat in Chausa, alleged that relatives of the deceased are also coming to the Ghat and throwing the dead bodies into the Ganga without cremation. "Around

10 dead bodies are being thrown in every day. When they were asked not to do so, they assault us. They also argue who would bear the expenses of cremation," she told reporters.

Often family members of a Covid victim are not handed over the body by the administration which claims it would perform the last rites observing the protocol in place for the deadly virus, another local stated.

"What indeed happens is that the officials develop cold feet later and fearing that they might catch the infection themselves, they dump the bodies in the river and flee. Little do they realize that they are also polluting the river," he added.

Clamour for Covid jobs in urban India

From Page 1

The total population eligible for vaccination when it was limited to healthcare and front-line workers and those above 45 was about 34 crore. Now, the total population that will be inoculated stands more than 90 crore including 59 crore adult population including 18 plus to 44 years.

It is not only those in the age group of 45 and above who are complaining of not getting the vaccines so are those in the age bracket of 18 plus to 44 which was an estimated 59 crore population as of May 7, just 11.81 lakh have received the shot.

What's more, overall vaccination numbers too are declining. On May 9, around 6.89 people were vaccinated, on May 8 the number was 20.15 lakh while on May 7 and May 6, the number of people who were inoculated was 22.89 lakh and 23.59 lakh respectively. Dismal figures given that inoculation had reached as high as 40 lakh in early April.

At the current pace of vaccination, experts said it would take nearly three months to vaccinate just those registered till now. At the current rate of vaccination - less than 17 lakh a day - the 170-crore remaining doses needed to fully cover the entire 94-crore adult population would take about 1,000 days - or close to three years. The new phase of vaccination has also slowed down because now the private entities are dealing with multiple issues such as shortage, procurement as well as transportation etc.

The current production capacity of Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech is 6 crore and 2 crore per month or

roughly 26 lakh doses per day. Both companies are enhancing capacity, but that might have to wait till July, as was also pointed out recently by Aadir Poonawalla, CEO of SII.

The Government is already drawing flak for exporting the vaccine instead of vaccinating its own people. "The Centre has donated 6.6 crore since March. On April 22, when India had the world's highest number of 3.32 lakh cases, the Central Government had also exported two lakh vaccines to Paraguay," Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said recently.

Experts also pointed out that no advance purchase pact was made with vaccine makers and no funds were made to them to increase production have led to shortage of vaccines.

Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief economic adviser at SBI, in a note on recently points out the gaps. "We have given only 160.5 million doses with around 131 million taken the first dose and 31.5 million the two doses."

The percentage of people who have taken two doses to total vaccination doses is a low 19.5 per cent. However, the daily vaccination is going down now with an average of 17 lakh compared to an average of 28 lakh in April.

"Given this trend, we believe we can only be able to vaccinate 15 per cent of the population by October which is required for herd immunity but only if we are able to vaccinate around 55 lakh daily in September and October," he said adding that accelerated vaccination is the only solution to contain the raging pandemic.

Superstition, fear.

From Page 1

The story is similar in rural areas of Varanasi, Baghat, Aligarh, Agra, Gorakhpur and Rampur in UP. Reports said a sizeable share of the population is reluctant to take the job due to fear of the viral infection and side effects of post-vaccination.

"Fear of hospitalisation, loss of daily wages and inability to reach faraway vaccination centres were some factors the villagers cited, officials of union health ministry said adding that the story is similar in southern States. "Scepticism about the safety and efficacy of Covid-19 shots is high in India, particularly in rural areas and misinformation via social media platforms and word-of-mouth have preventing many to take shots," an official of UP health department has been quoted as having said.

Postmen give new lease ...

From Page 1

"Considering the fact that postal services are essential services and are required to continue un-hindered during any partial lockdown or restrictions imposed by the respective State/UT Governments, the postal circles are hereby directed to kindly adhere to the broad guidelines," the Government said in a notification. The extra zeal and inspired work of postmen here has ensured that the medical treatment is not discontinued even for one day. And now in Muradabad, it is turning out to be a changed song instead of "Dakiya daak laya.., of poet-song writer Gulzar," it is now "Dakiya dava laya."

DELHI FIGHTS CORONA

DEDICATED COVID-19 HELPLINE: 1031 SERVICES FOR ALL DELHI RESIDENTS

FOR BED AVAILABILITY STATUS –

Download the delhi corona app from google or apple store. You can also check the updated status on www.delhifightscorona.in The status is updated every two hours. For real-time status update, you can call up the hospital. Contact details of hospitals are available on both the app and the website. You can also call **1031** for finding out the bed availability status.

NEED FREE TELECONSULTATION WITH A DOCTOR?

Call **1031**. You will be put in touch with a doctor from a team of doctors put together by the Delhi Govt. This facility is available free of cost on 24*7 round-the-clock basis.

FOR COVID POSITIVE PATIENTS ON HOME ISOLATION –

Our teams contact you on your registered mobile number beginning day zero of your positive report till the 10th day. A kit including medicines, oximeter and thermometer is delivered to your place free of cost. For any query / guidance, or if you don't receive the kits, please contact on the district control room numbers given at the bottom

MEDICINES & DRUGS ARE AVAILABLE IN ADEQUATE SUPPLY –

All commonly prescribed drugs for Covid management are available at the local chemists and pharmacies. Remdesivir injections are supplied to Covid hospitals only as per their projected demand. Tocilizumab injections are also allotted to Covid hospitals based on stocks received from Govt. of India. Hospitals shouldn't ask patients to arrange these medicines.

FOR LAST RITES OF A COVID PATIENT WHO DIES AT HOME –

Please contact your District Control Room at the numbers indicated below district-wise. You can also call **1031** if you don't know the district you are located in. The District Magistrate's office will make all arrangements, ensuring Covid-appropriate protocols.

FOR OXYGEN CYLINDER ON THE PRESCRIPTION OF A DOCTOR–

Please go to any of the depots/ dealers mentioned in the list available on <http://oxygen.jantasamvad.org/> with your identity proof, patient's identity proof and doctor's prescription. You may also call **1031** to find out the re-fillers or dealers available around your location.

NEED AN AMBULANCE?

Call 102 or 1099 for round-the-clock free ambulance service of the Delhi Government.

OTHER DELHI 24X7 HELPLINE NUMBERS FOR COVID-19:

- 011-22307145, 011-22300012, 011-22300036, 011-22391014, 011-22302441
- 011-22304568 (For pregnant and lactating women suffering from Covid-19)

DISTRICT CONTROL ROOM NUMBERS:

S.No.	Control Room /Helpline	Contact Number
1.	State Helpline for COVID-19	1031
2.	District- Central	011-23270151
3.	District- East	011-22029103
4.	District-North East	011-22120014, 011-22120015, 011-22120016, 011-22120017, 011-22115287, 011-22115289
5.	District-North	011-27201325 , 011-27201327
6.	District- North West	011-25951182
7.	District-South	011-29533217, 011-29533229 , 011-29533249, 011-29533260, 011-29533262
8.	District- South East	011-26476410, 011-26476411
9.	District- South West	011-25073502, 01125073505, 011-25073507, 011-25073508
10.	District-West	011-25195529, 011-25170142
11.	District -New Delhi	011-23385743
12.	District-Shahdara	011-22120019, 011-22120021, 011-22111077



Centre defends jab policy in SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has justified in the Supreme Court the Covid-19 vaccination policy saying its response and strategy is completely driven by expert medical and scientific opinion which leaves little room for judicial interference and emphasised that citizens of all age groups will get free vaccination throughout India.

In view of the unprecedented and peculiar circumstances under which vaccination drive is devised as an executive policy, the "wisdom of the executive should be trusted", it said. In a global pandemic, where the response and strategy of the nation is completely driven by expert medical and scientific opinion, "any overzealous, though well-meaning judicial intervention, may lead to unforeseen and unintended consequences", the government said.

In 218-page affidavit filed late Sunday night in the top court's suo motu case on Covid-19 management, the Centre said, this policy "conforms to mandate of Article 14 and Article 21 of the Constitution of India and is made after several rounds of consultation and discussion with experts, state government and vaccine manufacturers requiring no interference by this Court as while dealing with



a pandemic of this magnitude, the executive does have a room for free play in the joints, in larger public interest."

The Government further said, "It is also submitted that citizens of 18 to 44 years are getting vaccination free of cost as all the State Governments have announced free vaccination for this population group of 18-44 years. Thus, all citizens of all age groups will get free vaccination throughout the country." States have also been provided the information of the total number of doses of both vaccines available to them and the UTs from "Government of India channel" for the identified priority groups (health care workers, frontline workers and population above 45 years of age) free of cost from May 1 to 15 and this data would be released every fortnight, it said.

"It is most respectfully submitted that in the times of such grave and unprecedented crisis which the nation is fighting the disaster of an unprecedented magnitude, the executive functioning of the government needs discretion to formulate policy in larger interest. It is submitted that in view of the unprecedented and peculiar circumstances under which



vaccination drive is devised as an executive policy, the wisdom of the executive should be trusted," the affidavit said.

The Government said in a plethora of judgements, the SC laid down the parameters for judicial review of executive policies, which can only be struck down or interfered with on the grounds of manifest arbitrariness, allowing sufficient play in the joints to the executive, to function in accordance with its Constitutional mandate.

"In the context of a global pandemic, where the response and strategy of the nation is completely driven by expert medical and scientific opinion, there is even little room for judicial interference. Any overzealous, though well-meaning judicial intervention may lead to unforeseen and unintended consequences, in absence of any expert advice or administrative experience, leaving the doctors, scientists, experts and executive very little room to find innovative solutions on the go", it said.

It said the policy, strategy and steps taken, based on expert scientific advice, have to be appreciated in the context of a medical crisis.

Not possible to give migrants free food grain this time: Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Monday ruled out the possibility of free food grains distribution to migrants saying there is no complete national lockdown, unlike last year. However, the Government has started distributing additional free grains again under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) for two months — May and June — to 80 crore ration cardholders.

"Migrant crisis is not as big as it was last year... It is not a complete national lockdown. It is a local lockdown, the industry is working. The complete lockdown is not there. That panic is also not there," Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey said in a virtual press meet. The Government said there is no impact on the prices of food grains in the open market due to free grains distribution under PMGKAY. Those migrants, who have gone back to their villages, are availing ration supply either through State or central ration cards, he said.

The Secretary was responding to a query why the government has not announced a free grains scheme for migrants amid a resurgence of the Covid cases.

Last year, the government had distributed 6.40 lakh tonne of foodgrains for free to migrants and stranded migrants.

Navy warships bring O2 from Kuwait, Qatar and Singapore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the ongoing national effort to augment supply of oxygen, three Indian Navy warships carrying the gas from Kuwait, Qatar and Singapore reached India on Monday. The Army set up three hospitals in Faridabad, Chandigarh and Patiala for treating Covid-19 patients.

Giving details about the naval endeavour, officials said three ships including Kolkata, Trikand and Airavat reached India with Liquid Medical Oxygen.

As part of the ongoing Operation 'Samudra Setu II' to support the nation's fight against Covid-19, INS Kolkata arrived New Mangalore, INS Trikand entered Mumbai and INS Airavat arrived in Visakhapatnam.

These ships are part of nine ships deployed for Covid relief Operation 'Samudra Setu II' for shipment of Liquid Medical Oxygen and associated medical equipment from friendly foreign countries in the Persian Gulf and South East Asia.

INS Airavat arrived in Visakhapatnam with eight cryogenic oxygen tanks and 3,898 oxygen cylinders along with other critical medical equipment from Singapore.

INS Trikand was deployed to augment shipment of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) cryogenic containers from Hamad Port, Qatar to Mumbai. The ship arrived at Mumbai with 40 Metric Tons (MT) of liquid



Oxygen. The consignment is part of the French mission "Oxygen Solidarity Bridge" to support India's fight against Covid-19 pandemic, they said.

INS Kolkata arrived at New Mangalore with 400 bottles of Oxygen, two 27 MT containers of Liquid Medical Oxygen and 47 concentrators that were embarked at Qatar and Kuwait.

While these ships entered ports to augment oxygen supply in three different States, two more warships are enroute to India from Kuwait and one ship is at Brunei to embark medical supplies.

As regards the Army's role, they said the force has set up a 100-bed Covid care hospital at the Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government Medical College, Chhainsa, located 20 kms from Faridabad town.

The Army and the Civil Administration, Faridabad District worked in close coordination on a war footing to ensure that the hospital is functional from Tuesday to provide Level 1 medical care to mild/ symptomatic patients suffering from Covid-19.

Western Command chief Lieutenant General RP Singh on Monday announced the operationalisation of Western Command Covid Hospitals at International Students Hostel of Panjab University, Sector 25 Chandigarh and Rajindra Government Hospital, Patiala besides the facility at Faridabad. The hospital at Patiala will start functioning from Tuesday.

The Army has deployed its Doctors, Nursing Officers and Paramedics for holistic treatment to patients as per the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines, provided service ambulances and trained personnel for administration and management of the hospital.

The civil administration is facilitating essential amenities, service management, uninterrupted oxygen supply, patient admission and discharge and ambulance services at these hospitals.

The hospitals will also cater for basic laboratory, X-Ray, Pharmacy and catering for patients. The admission to these Hospitals will be opened to all citizens.

Priyanka slams Govt over Central Vista project

PIANS ■ NEW DELHI



Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Monday attacked the Narendra Modi-led Union Government over the Central Vista project and questioned the expenditure being made on a new residence for the Prime Minister when the amount could be utilised for providing Covid related medical assistance.

"PM's new residence & Central vista cost = Rs 20,000 cr = 62 crore vaccine doses = 22 crore Remdesvir vials = 3 crore 10 litre oxygen cylinders = 13 AIIMS with a total of 12,000 beds. WHY?" Priyanka tweeted.

The Government has brought the construction work for the ambitious Central Vista project under the ambit of "essential services" to ensure smooth movement of labourers during the ongoing lockdown in Delhi.

Both Priyanka and her brother Rahul Gandhi have been critical of the Central Vista project, saying that it shouldn't be continued at a time when the country is reeling under the Covid pandemic with many people complaining of not getting hospital beds, Covid vaccines, oxygen cylinders and life-saving drugs.

Himanta takes oath as 15th CM of Assam

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

Credited with BJP's 'political surge' in the North-East, Himanta Biswa Sarma, a non-tribal, was sworn in as the 15th Chief Minister of Assam on Monday by State Governor Jagdish Mukhi, replacing former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal.

Sarma had joined the BJP from the Congress in 2015 at the residence of senior BJP leader Amit Shah's and was then appointed Convener of the Election Management Committee for the upcoming Assembly Elections in Assam in 2016 that catapulted Sonowal as the State Chief Minister.



Sarma, 52, expanded his clout in the North-East as also in the BJP and upstaged his seven years senior Sonowal.

An interesting comment of Sonowal reported locally in March, this year, at a book launch function in Assam reflect that Sonowal was, in a way, still confident that 'democratic election' would pave way for him for the second time.

Asked if one needs to be a non-Brahmin from Upper Assam to become the chief minister candidate from the BJP party, Sonowal said "This is a very very...this is a question that should not be raised. Our party BJP is a very democratic party and we believe in people's democracy."

His fate was decided in Delhi before it was formally announced in BJP legislature party meet a day before at Gauhati.

Sarma, a Brahmin, and Sonowal, a kachari-tribal had begun their political careers and honed their political skills as leaders of All Assam Student Union (AASU) and then went separate ways for years before joining hands together in the BJP.

Prime Minister who had hand-picked Sonowal in 2016, Congratulated Himanta and the other Ministers who took oath.

"Congratulations to Himanta Biswa Ji and the other Ministers who took oath today," tweeted Modi.

"I am confident this team will add momentum to the development journey of Assam and fulfil aspirations of the people," the Prime Minister added.

Modi also praised Sonowal for his "immense contribution in strengthening the party in the State"

"My valued colleague @sarbanandsonwal Ji was at the helm of a pro-people and pro-development administration over the last five years. His contribution towards Assam's progress and strengthening the party in the state is immense," prime Minister said to heal the hurt sentiments of the ex-CM and his loyalists.

Sarma took to Twitter to express his gratitude to the people of the state. "With fragrance of Assam in my heart & love of my wonderful people in my veins, I offer my deepest gratitude to you all. I would not have been what I am had it not been for your pious faith in me. On this Day, I vow to work with & for each one of you with greater passion Assam," he tweeted.

In another tweet, he thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying, "This is the biggest day in my life, and I so fondly cherish your generous affection. I assure you we shall leave no stone unturned to carry forward your vision of taking Assam, & NE to greater heights."

Sarma has an LLB From Government Law College and a PhD from Gauhati University. Sarma practised law at Gauhati High Court from 1996 to 2001.

He has married Riniki Bhuyan Sarma in 2001, with whom he has a son and a daughter. In 2017, he was elected as the Badminton Association of India president.

Sonia seeks explanation for electoral losses from general secretaries

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Monday came down heavily on the party cadre for the party's debacle in the just-concluded Assembly elections.

Sources within the party said that an annoyed Sonia sought an explanation for the electoral losses from the general secretaries in charge of the States that went to polls, she also raked up the issue of pending party's President post and organisational elections to be held by month of June.

During the party's Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting, Sonia talked more about the prevailing situation within the party and discussed measures to be taken to "pull up the socks" to strengthen the party base.

In a surprise move, Sonia asked Assam general secretary Jitendra Singh, Kerala general secretary Tariq Anwar, West Bengal in-charge Jitin Prasada, Tamil Nadu & Puducherry in-charge Dinesh Gundurao to make a presentation and explain why the party lost in these States.

"I expect them to brief us very frankly on our performance in their respective States. We want them to tell us why we performed well below expectation. These results tell

us clearly that we need to put our house in order," she said.

"We have to take note of our serious setbacks. To say that we are deeply disappointed is to make an understatement. I intend to set up a small group to look at every aspect that caused such reverses and report back very quickly. We need to candidly understand why in Kerala and Assam we failed to dislodge the incumbent governments, and why in West Bengal we drew a complete blank. These will yield uncomfortable lessons, but if we do not face reality, if we do not look the facts in the face, we will not draw the right lessons," Sonia said in the virtual meeting of the CWC which is the party's highest decision-making body.

Sources said that West Bengal in charge Jitin Prasada in his presentation said that alliance with ISF ruined the party prospects in the state and mentioned that the ISF alliance was finalized by the Left parties and not the Congress. In the midst of elections, senior party leader Anand Sharma had raised the issue but was snubbed West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury that the Left had given its share of seats to ISF.

Jitin also blamed the committee for delaying the seat sharing pact and also said by the time campaigning for the last phases began where the

Congress was strong, the election became bipolar between TMC and BJP, and the party could not get any seat in Malda and Murshidabad, which are its strongholds.

Prasada also said that there was no clarity whether to attack Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee or not and requested the CWC to throw light on the issue of alliance and how to move forward.

For Assam, according to sources, the general secretary in-charge Jitendra Singh highlighted that it was wrong to make CAA as a poll issue, though the party was hopeful to wrest power from BJP and early campaign at the grassroots level by the local leadership would have been result-oriented. The incharge for the Tamil Nadu conveyed that the wave was for DMK and in Puducherry the people was looking for a change due to the allegations of misgovernance by the Naranswamy government, according to the sources. While the Kerala incharge said that though the party worker hard and a regular campaigns by Rahul Gandhi was positive, but the cause of real loss is being assessed and a report in this regard will be shared soon.

Sonia further said the recent Assembly election was a clear indication that the Congress needed to put its



house in order,

She said calling the results disappointing would be an understatement and announced the setting up of a small group to analyse the results.

On the occasion Sonia also slammed the Narendra Modi government for ignoring expert advice on Covid-19 and allowing it become a "catastrophe". She also targeted the government for being "woefully short" on vaccination.

The meeting also saw presentations by chief ministers of Congress-ruled states on the Covid situation and challenges. "The country is paying a horrendous price for the Modi government's neglect of the pandemic, indeed its wilful patronage of super-spreader events that were allowed for partisan gains. A far deadlier second wave has now overwhelmed us. Some scientists have now cautioned about a third wave overtaking us soon. Some States have already announced a complete lockdown. The public health system across the country has all but collapsed," she said.

A party colleague, and leader of Congress in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, wrote a letter to the Government to convene a special session of the Parliament to discuss and debate on the pandemic which is taking a heavy toll on the health of the nation every hour, every minute.

KIND ATTENTION RAIL PASSENGERS

IMPORTANT NOTICE

RESTRICTIONS TO GOA BOUND PASSENGERS

It is notified for the information of the general public that as per Goa State DC order no 07/DMC/ CORONA/2021/4571, the travelers bound to Goa State i.e Kulem, Sanverdam Chuch, Madgaon, Vasco Da Gama and other stations in Goa State should have RT-PCR NEGATIVE TEST report, test done within 72 hours of entry in Goa State or full (2 Doses) vaccination certificate.

The following categories of people are exempted from the above requirement.

- Residents of Goa State on production of proof of residence.
- Person entering in Goa for work on production of work ID/proof/letter from employer.
- Person entering in Goa for medical emergency, on production of proof or coming in ambulance.

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

RailMadad Helpline No. 139

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Serving Customers with a Smile

Mild Covid symptoms unlikely to cause major damage to heart: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

People who had Covid-19 infections with mild or no symptoms should have a sigh of relief as a team of scientists has, for the first time, found that virus in such patients is unlikely to cause lasting damage to the structure or function of the heart.

This should reassure the public, said the scientists given that it is a well known fact that severe hospitalised Covid-19 infections are associated with blood clots, inflammation of the heart and heart damage, mild infections may cause similar complications.

According to a study led by UCL (University College London) researchers and funded by the British Heart Foundation (BHF) and Barts Charity until now, there has been little information specifically looking at this group of people and the effects on the heart further down the line after infection.

Cardiovascular Imaging, the study of 149 healthcare workers recruited from Barts Health and Royal Free London NHS Trusts is the largest and most detailed study to date into mild Covid-19 infection and its longer-term impact on the heart. Researchers identified participants with mild Covid-19 from the Covid sortium, a study in three London hospitals where healthcare workers had undergone weekly samples of blood, saliva and nasal swabs for 16 weeks.

Six months after mild infection, they looked at the heart structure and function by analysing heart MRI scans of 74 healthcare workers with prior mild Covid-19 and compared them to the scans of 75 healthy age, sex and ethnicity matched controls who had not previously been infected.

They found no difference in the size or amount of muscle of the left ventricle - the main chamber of the heart responsible for pumping blood around the body.

Waiving intellectual property rights won't raise vax production, says pharma body

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) on Monday said waiving intellectual property rights will not lead to increased production of Covid-19 vaccines, as it is not the barrier to their adequate availability in India. The industry body said it is cognizant that with the rising Covid-19 cases in India and other developing nations, there is an urgency to rapidly produce greater quantities of Covid-19 vaccine. Vaccine manufacturing is a complex process and scaling up capacities involves the transfer of critical know-how, it added.

No barrier should come in way of equitable access to vaccination: Gates' NGO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Days after philanthropist Bill Gates said that he was against sharing intellectual property (IP) rights on Covid-19 vaccines with developing countries, his NGO, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has issued a statement that no barriers should stand in the way of equitable access to vaccines, including intellectual property.

Bill Gates had said in an interview said that he would not be willing to share the Covid-19 vaccine patents or IP rights with developing countries like India. The statement had drawn flak from various quarters.

However, now the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has issued a statement that "no barriers should stand in the

way of equitable access to vaccines."

Gates had cited vaccine safety and security issues and shortage of vaccine factories justifying his statement to move a vaccine to developing countries like India. His statement was slammed worldwide with reports highlighting the profit-making aspect of Gates foundation and also the lack of an open distribution model for vaccine production in the past.

Gates Foundation CEO, Mark Suzman, in a press statement this week noted, "No barriers should stand in the way of equitable access to vaccines, including intellectual property, which is why we are supportive of a narrow waiver during the pandemic. Those negotiations will occur via the WTO process, led by country negotiators."

MHA extends security cover to BJP candidates who fought Bengal polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Citing the ongoing political violence in West Bengal, Union Home Ministry has decided to extend the central security cover to all those who contested on BJP ticket in the Assembly polls.

The MHA provided central security cover to all BJP candidates from March onward. Many of them are getting X-category security, mainly from CRPF, CISF and BSF.

According to officials, the recent high-level security appraisal meeting has analysed the threat perception to BJP MLAs and those lost elections. Many BJP candidates have requested MHA to continue their security for a while, citing the ongoing political violence facing from TMC cadres.

Didi retains loyalists in 3rd Cabinet

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday unveiled her third Cabinet retaining almost her entire team of Ministers — from the previous Ministry — while at the same time drafting in a bevy of new faces like cricketer Manoj Tiwari, tribal actress Birbaha Hansda and Akhil Giri a veteran MLA from East Midnapore that houses Nandigram.

Giri is known for his daggers-drawn chemistry with Nandigram MLA Suwendu Adhikari a former pointsman of the Chief Minister who defected to the BJP a few months ago and defeated Banerjee by a wafer-thin margin.

Forty three Ministers were sworn in at a toned down ceremony in the Throne Room of Raj Bhavan. The ruling Trinamool Congress roared back to power with two-third majority leaving the BJP back by a huge margin.

While the Chief Minister retained the crucial Home, Health, North Bengal and Cultural Affairs departments she did some reshuffling in the portfolios of her other senior colleagues bringing senior



Minister and TMC general secretary back as the Industry Minister.

The TMC Government had to digest massive criticism for failing to bring in investment in its decade-long rule of Bengal. Another Minister Bratya Basu a dramatist and a prominent intellectual has been redrafted as the Education Minister. Basu had been removed from the ministry several years ago. Both Basu who has been recuperating from corona infection and Finance Minister Amit Mitra — suffering from COPD) were sworn in virtually from their residences.

Veterans Subrata Mukherjee, Firhad Hakim, Aroop Biswas, Sujit Bose, Chandrima Bhattacharya and Shashi Panja are back as minis-

ters too with Mukherjee getting the Panchayat portfolio and Hakim a former Kolkata Mayor given the Housing and Urban Development department.

Incidentally Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar who has been quite critical of the new TMC Government for allegedly ignoring the ongoing post-poll violence in the State on Sunday sanctioned the prosecution of Mukherjee, Hakim, Madan Mitra a TMC MLA and former Minister and Sovan Chatterjee a former member of Mamata Banerjee Cabinet — who left the TMC to join the BJP before leaving the saffron party too. The CBI had sought the Governor's permission to prosecute them in the Narada payoff case.

Sitting Rajya Sabha MP Manas Bhuniya has also been drafted as a Cabinet Minister alongside Soumen Mahapatra, Jyotipriya Mullick and Javed Khan. Former IPS officer Humayun Kabir, Ghulam Rabbani, Siddiquillah Chowdhury and Siuli Saha have also been made ministers.

Soon after the swearing-in ceremony the Chief Minister said that her Government's first priority would be to fight the corona crisis even as she hit out

at the Centre for ignoring the situation, questioning the export of vaccines at a time when India did not have its own quota Banerjee said that the Centre should make alternative arrangements for doses immediately even if it meant allowing other concerns to manufacture the medicines.

Attacking the Centre for sending central team to visit the

alleged violence-hit areas of the State Banerjee said "at a time when the country is fighting a pandemic here are some people busy doing politics sending central teams to states."

She wondered "why this central team is going to BJP families only and why they are not going to other victims if any ... this team has been sent to create violence in the State."

Suwendu Adhikari named Bengal Opposition Leader

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

Amid speculation about who would take charge as the Leader of Opposition or for that matter whether the post should be given to a man with RSS background the BJP on Monday nominated Suwendu Adhikari on the post.

"Suwendu Adhikari was chosen unanimously as the Leader of the Opposition and his name was proposed by our senior leader Mukul Roy," State party president Dilip Ghosh said. The selection of Adhikari was done in the pres-

ence of Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad.

Appointment of Adhikari a TMC turncoat who left that party a few months before the election to join the BJP and defeated Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee from Nandigram seat took place after much inner rumbling sources said.

After being nominated to the post Adhikari said, "I will act constitutionally," adding his first priority would be to work for the pandemic and save the lives of the victims of post-electoral violence.

Palaniswamy elected LoP

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

E. V. S. Dappadi Palaniswamy was elected as the leader of the AIADMK legislature party in a meeting held at the party headquarters at Chennai on Monday. Though there was no official word about the mode of election, party sources said 55 out of the 66 MLAs supported Palaniswamy while O Panneerselvam could manage the support of only a handful of MLAs.

Though Panneerselvam had proposed the name of P Dhanapal, Speaker of the outgoing legislature Assembly for the post, he was shouted down. With his election as leader of the AIADMK legislature party, Palaniswamy became Leader of the Opposition in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. Signals of resentment were visible immediately after the election of Palaniswamy. A grime faced Panneerselvam stormed out of the party headquarters and was seen speeding away in his swanky limousine. The look on the face of Panneerselvam gave enough indications of discontentment and Palaniswamy is in for troubles from various corners in the AIADMK.

CRPF identifies remaining 8,500 for first Covid jab

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The CRPF has identified about 8,500 personnel who have not taken the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine and sought to expeditiously vaccinate them. The remaining over 3,15,000 personnel have been given the jabs.

The details have emerged following a review of the vaccinations in the ranks of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) earlier this month during which it was found that a total of 8,441 personnel across the formations have still not been administered the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine. Another 16 persons of the CRPF Directorate here have not been given the first dose and 57 personnel have not taken the second dose of the vaccine.

Director General of CRPF, Kuldip Singh has decided to personally monitor the progress of the pending cases of vaccinations.

Further, the Force has decided to undertake a headcount of all pending cases and trace all

the personnel who are away on leave/temporary duty attachments.

The paramilitary headquarters has directed all the formations and medical directorates to personally contact the personnel over telephone and plans for vaccinating should be made accordingly, officials said. It has also sought a break up of pending cases in the area of operations of various formations and offices.

For those personnel who have not received the vaccine shots on the ground of comorbidity, they should be advised to undergo laboratory test (CRP - C-reactive protein quantitative). If the reports of CRP are on the higher side in normal range or it is above normal range, vaccination of that comorbid person should be avoided and the patient should be treated vigorously for the illness so that the CRP test comes in normal range.

When the CRPF test reading comes in normal range after treatment, vaccination can be carried out in consultation with the physician, they said.



Farmers harvest rice crop at a paddy field in Nadia on Monday

Covid-19 positivity rate drops marginally in J&K

Jammu: Even though the positivity rate across Jammu & Kashmir on Monday dropped down marginally below 10 per cent for the first time in the recent days but high mortality rate, especially in Jammu district, remained one of the biggest worries for health administrators pooling in all possible resources to treat patients.

The positivity rate on Monday stood at 9.8 per cent. On Sunday the positivity rate recorded was 10.68 per cent. On Monday, 56 more patients succumbed to the deadly virus, 39 from Jammu

region and 17 from Kashmir while 3614 patients tested positive for coronavirus taking the tally of active positive cases to 49,951.

According to the media bulletin, out of 3614 new positive cases of novel Coronavirus (Covid-19), 1496 were reported from Jammu division and 2118 from Kashmir division.

Moreover, 2855 more Covid-19 patients have recovered and discharged from various hospitals including 1070 from Jammu Division and 1785 from Kashmir Division.

According to the media bulletin, out of 220546 positive

"The pandemic has come as an unprecedented and unforeseen challenge for all of us and especially the health fraternity. The prime need is to build trust between the public and the health system," the GMC Principal said

health system amidst the rising challenge of Covid-19.

"The pandemic has come as an unprecedented and unforeseen challenge for all of us and especially the health fraternity. The prime need is to build trust between the public and the health system," the GMC Principal said. "With the number of Covid-19 patients increasing, the administration is also ramping up facilities, equipment, infrastructure besides increasing the number of frontline workers.

The GMC Principal expressed empathy for the patients and their families fac-

ing hardship and said that the Jammu Medical College Hospital has increased the number of critical care beds and is treating more than 700 critical Covid patients, while patients with mild and moderate symptoms are being looked after at Covid health Centres and Covid Care Centres. She also expressed concern over the high positivity rate observed while testing, saying that the high positivity rate also underlines the greater need for adopting Covid appropriate behaviour for saving oneself as well as saving the lives of our loved ones. PNS

Daily death drops to 549 in Maha on Monday

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

For the first time in more than a month, the "active cases" in Pune — which is the worst Covid-19 affected city in Maharashtra — dropped below one lakh mark on Monday, even as the daily deaths in Maharashtra dropped further to 549 and infections dipped to 37,236.

In a relief to the state health authorities, the "active cases" in Pune — which is the worst Covid-19 affected city in Maharashtra — dropped from 1,00,316 to 97,593.

The development came on a day when Pune recorded 10 new deaths and 4,685 new infections. While the total deaths in Pune went up from 10,049 to 10,059, the total case-load climbed from 9,26,124 to 9,30,809.

Currently, Pune has the highest caseload of 9,30,809,

while Mumbai's total number of infections is 6,77,412, followed among other districts by Thane (5,38,963), Nagpur (4,66,959), Nashik (3,53,279) and Ahmednagar (2,06,629).

It may be recalled that on April 9, the "active cases" in Pune had breached a grim landmark of one lakh, as an alarming 10,083 cases were reported on that day to take caseload in that city to 1,00,051.

Meanwhile, the Covid-19 graph showed a downward trend in Maharashtra for the second consecutive day on Monday, as the daily deaths came down further from 549 while the infections dipped to 37,236.

A day after the State recorded 572 fatalities and 48,401 new cases, the deaths came down to 549, while the infections dropped by 11,165 to register a daily caseload of 37,236.

With 549 new deaths, the total number of deaths in the state climbed from 75,849 to 76,398. Similarly, with 37,236 new infections, the total number of cases rose from 51,01,737 to 51,38,973.

As 61,607 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 from 44,07,818 to 44,69,425. The recovery rate in the state went up from 86.04 per cent to 46.95 per cent.

The total "active cases" in the state dropped from 6,15,783 to 5,90,818 cases. The fatality rate in the state stood static at 1.49 per cent.

With 74 fresh deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai increased from 13,781 to 13,855, while the infected cases went up by 1,732 to trigger a jump in the

infections from 6,75,630 to 6,77,412.

While Pune accounted for a maximum 97,593 "active cases" in the State, Nagpur stood second 56,458, followed by Mumbai with 47,054, Nashik (34,755), Thane (34,185), Ahmednagar (23,661), Solapur (23,028), Satara (22,463), Chandrapur (22,265), Beed (15,586), Jalgaon (13,711), Aurangabad (12,594), Latur (12,085), Parbhani (11,010), Osmanabad (7,568), Jalna (7,015), Bhandara (6,122), Buldhana (5,687), Nanded (5,487) and Nandurbar (3,395).

Of the 2,96, 31,127 samples sent to laboratories, 51,38,973 have tested positive (17.34 per cent) for Covid-19 until Monday.

Currently, 36,70,320 people are in home quarantine while 26,664 people are in institutional quarantine.

Stalin orders opening of 12 Sidha Covid care centres

CHENNAI: Chief Minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin has cracked the whip to flatten the corona curve in Tamil Nadu. To begin with he has ordered the opening of 12 Sidha Covid Care Centres across the State following the findings of a Chennai based scientist that a Sidhaa herbal preparation has the potential to counter Covid-19 virus.

M Subramanian, Medical and Family Welfare Minister dedicated to the people a 240-bed exclusive Sidha Centre in Chennai metropolis on Sunday.

The Chief Minister has asked his council of ministers as well as bureaucrats not to leave any stones unturned in their search for a solution to check the spread of the pandemic in its second coming.

Stalin took notice of the positive signals from Ministry of Ayush which gave green signal to the use of Kabasura Kudineer, a Sidha poly herbal preparation in the treatment of Covid-19.

"The Chief Minister is of the view that opening of Sidha hospitals would bring down the pressure on tertiary hospitals. Not all patients require oxygen support," said Subramanian.

The move to go for Sidha Care Centres comes at a time when a Chennai based scientist along with his colleagues in South Korea and Ethiopia suc-

cessfully established the efficacy of Kabasura Kudineer in neutralising viral infections that cause SARS or Covid.

Prof Savariar Vincent, former dean of Research, Loyola College, Chennai, S Arokyaraj (Sejong University, Seoul), M Saravanan (Mekelle University, Ethiopia) and Manoj Dhanraj through a painstaking research found out that Kabasura Kudineer is effective against fever, cough, sore-throat and shortness of breath (similar to SARS-CoV2-like symptoms).

"We established by a process known as molecular docking that the main compounds from Kabasura Kudineer plants inhibit Covid -19 giving the better energy score compared to synthetic drugs," said Prof Vincent who led and integrated the research operations that took place in laboratories spread across India, South Korea and Ethiopia.

He said that 145 phyto-compounds from Kabasura Kudineer were subjected to research. "This study hypothesizes that a group of compounds from KK may exert its antiviral properties against novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 by either blocking the host cell receptor or inhibiting the key viral protease required for its replication in the host cell," Prof Vincent told The Pioneer. PNS

Slight improvement in Kerala post 3-day lockdown

KOCHI: Three days of total lockdown has slightly improved the pandemic situation in Kerala. On Monday, the State diagnosed 27,487 persons with Covid-19 while 65 deaths were reported during the period ending 6 pm. "But the number of people tested on Monday was limited to 99,748 and this could be the reason for the small reduction in Test Positivity Rate to 27.56 per cent," said Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in his media briefing.

Vijayan said there were 4,19, 726 Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment in the State as on Monday. He continued blaming the Centre for its reluctance to provide oxygen, vaccine and financial help to Kerala. Thiruvananthapuram had highest number of Covid patients on Monday (3,494).

Severe shortage of medical professionals including doctors is causing severe stress to the medical fraternity in Kerala, according to Kerala Government Medical Officers Association, the umbrella organization of all the Government doctors in the State.

The Association has sent an urgent communication to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan listing the grievances faced by Government hospitals, first line covid treatment centers and primary health centers in Kerala. The list of shortcomings highlighted by the KGMOA is shocking and explains the dangerous conditions under which the doctors, nurses and para medical staff in the State work.

"The Government should appoint doctors, nurses and other medical professionals as per the nationally accepted doctors to patients ratio. If this is not done immediately, the public health system in the State would break down," said the memorandum signed by the president and secretary of the Association.

The doctors demand the setting up of domiciliary care centers and step down Covid First Line Treatment Centers in panchayat and block levels. "These centers could be manned by health professionals other than doctors and could be used to accommodate the category-one patients who do not require the physical presence of doctors," said the doctors. Such centers could make use of tele consultation. The KGMOA also called for the setting up of 24x7 call centers making use of the retired Government doctors.

They pointed out that the number of health workers getting infected with Covid-19 is high in the State. PNS

Unauthorized Adoption of a Child is Crime

Follow legal process to adopt a child

- COVID pandemic has made many children orphans. Some frauds are trying to use this for trafficking purposes.
- If a child loses both the parents to COVID, do not give away the child to any random person or shelter.
- If you come across any illegal or fraudulent offering for child adoption on social media, whatsapp or facebook etc. immediately inform Delhi Police.
- Remember, it is MANDATORY to follow Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA) guidelines and Child Welfare Committee (CWC) orders for child adoption.

For guidance and information, call:

Child Helpline

1098

Delhi Police

112 1291 011-23469900

Register online for child adoption @ cara.nic.in

Email to CP, Delhi at: cp.snshrivastava@delhipolice.gov.in | Write to: CP, Delhi at: P.O. Box No. 171, GPO, New Delhi

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Hope floats

Can Mamata's win spur the Opposition into unity? More importantly, will the Congress be the nucleus?

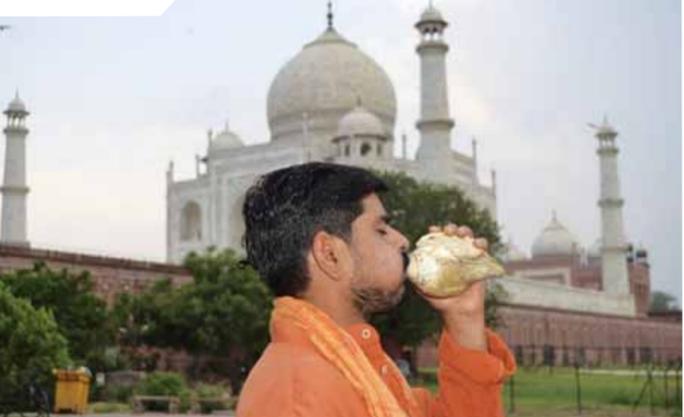
The resounding victory of Mamata Banerjee against the BJP's concerted effort to wrest power in West Bengal has allowed the languid Opposition to dream afresh of an anti-BJP alliance well in time for 2024. Such buoyed spirits were seen in the past, too, but the current one stands out. One, the West Bengal victory following the never-seen-before hype created by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah left a strong message in its wake. Two, the satraps hailed Mamata, but of greater import was a congratulatory tweet by JD(U) parliamentary board chairman Upendra Kushwaha about Mamata breaching the BJP's "chakravarty" (a circular, military formation). The tweet by the BJP's ruling ally in Bihar caused its own ripples and raised eyebrows. Three, Shiv Sena's Sanjay Raut took the narrative forward not only by asserting that the shrivelling Congress continued to be the "soul" of any Opposition alliance, but also by presenting Maharashtra's Maha Vikas Aghadi as a model of a political alliance against the BJP at the national level. The positive reception to Mamata's victory in the Opposition-ruled States will not automatically lead to a common national front; it merely points to such a possibility. There are many pre-conditions to be met first: The next round of Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, for example. Can the SP and the BSP reach an electoral understanding? Will the Left, AAP and even the Trinamool Congress allow a straight fight



between the Congress and the Akali Dal and/or the BJP in Punjab? Both States will test the Opposition's resolve, while the UP result will be the clincher.

The regional leaders are coming to terms with their shared problems of one-upmanship, a Congress snapping at their heels and a BJP trying to poach their brood. Will the prospect of a united fight against the BJP prompt them to adopt the jointly-at-the-Centre-and-severally-in-States formula of decentralised unity? One way to find out is for them to overcome the COVID-19 challenge by opening two-way communication channels among themselves. The Congress cannot automatically stake claim to be the "soul" just because its leadership may favour a default principle that the index of Opposition unity will work in its favour and it can seek the top post by getting most seats in the Opposition camp. It has shown maturity to be the junior-most partner in Maharashtra. It may believe that the satrap's inability to leave their States for a national role for fear of political backstabbing will leave the Congress as a default alternative. The MVA model has worked because the Shiv Sena, NCP and the Congress were compelled to bury their differences. Noticeably, the Sena did not interfere with the Anil Deshmukh case and left it to the NCP to sort it out. Also, all the partners fared reasonably well in the State elections without having to be a drag on the alliance. The question therefore is: Should the Opposition search for a leader first or an alliance? To date, six Prime Ministers have come from the Congress and an equal number from the formerly Congress but non-BJP fold. Who can break the tie?

PICTALK



A man blows a conch shell as part of an exercise to strengthen his lungs, near Taj Mahal

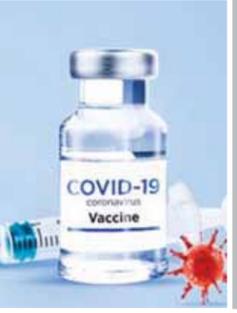
PTI

In the slow lane

Experts say that vaccinating all against COVID is the only way out but the drive is spluttering

The world applauded us for supplying indigenous COVID vaccines under the "Vaccine Maitri" initiative. Well, that was before the second wave hit home. When it comes to dealing with the pandemic in our own backyard, our vaccination efforts run into a wall of challenges — from manufacturing to pricing to supply chain bottlenecks. Several States had expressed inability to start the vaccination drive for 18-44 years, citing shortage of vaccines. The situation hasn't improved yet; if anything, inequitable vaccine prices have only exacerbated it. No doubt, there exists a wide demand-and-supply gap and India needs to ramp up its vaccine production capacity manifold. While the nation faces a vaccine deficit, how logical is it for the Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII) to plan to pump 240 million pounds (₹2,400 crore) for making vaccines in the United Kingdom? This huge amount should have ideally been spent on increasing the production capacity in India. In the looming shadow of a more lethal third wave, achieving herd immunity seems to be the only way out. However, going by the current pace — India fares poorly on the index of percentage vaccination — achieving herd immunity is easier said than done.

Since most of the predictions by our scientists with respect to the nature and peak of the second wave have fallen flat, there is no point relying on their predictions on the timing and intensity of the third wave. Adding to these woes are disturbing reports that a "black fungus" is maiming those who have recovered from COVID. The rare infection, called "Mucormycosis", has an overall mortality rate of 50 per cent. Doctors believe it may be triggered by the use of steroids that are given as life-saving drugs to critically ill COVID patients. If that is true, fighting SARS-CoV-2 virus and its variants is not the only challenge that we face. We must also get ready to face the fungal infection that severely damages our skin, lungs and brain. The crisis is certainly deepening as the Government's best efforts to contain the pandemic notwithstanding, the desired results are nowhere in sight. The Centre has claimed in the Supreme Court that its vaccine policy is "just, equitable and non-discriminatory" and there is no need for the courts to interfere. However, this explanation doesn't agree with the situation on the ground. Far from reaching even the halfway point in the fight against COVID, the Government must employ sincere, coordinated and gigantic efforts to deal with the crisis.



Apocalypse and the leadership

The handling of the pandemic, both by the Centre and the States, since the first wave leaves much to be desired



DEEPAK SINHA

Despite the darkness and the chaos that currently engulf us, one can say with certainty that this, too, shall pass. Undoubtedly, the cost has been tragically unconscionable, and nothing could have prepared us for the trauma and heartbreak that confronts us on a daily basis.

The fact is that we had expected to be overwhelmed by the pandemic's impact during the first wave, given the state of our health infrastructure and the Government's apathy. Especially, since the latter's complete focus was on Donald Trump's visit, the opposition to the Citizen's Amendment Act and the Delhi riots. For reasons that we still do not fully understand, that did not happen and we got away lightly, believing for some reason that our generally poor standard of hygiene and prevalence of disease had made us immune to the virus. Clearly a combination of inverse snobbery, arrogance and complacency gripped us, allowing us to forsake common sense and ignore basic science in an effort to quickly regain our pre-pandemic lives.

Suffice it to say, the handling of the first wave by those mandated to do so was apathetic in the initial stages and panic-stricken subsequently, especially after they saw it decimate Europe, the US and South America. We locked ourselves in, at a moment's notice, without any consideration for our less fortunate brethren, the daily wage earners, whose livelihoods disappeared overnight. The inability of the State to anticipate the consequences or mitigate their suffering resulted in the largest migration of population seen since Partition. The migrants attempted to get back to the safety of their villages, treks on foot involving thousands of kilometres for some.

To compound their misery, the Centre as well as most State Governments responded, as the Governments here invariably do, with inherent savagery, totally bereft of empathy or compassion. As a result, thousands died by the wayside. The Government



was seemingly unaware that even in the tragedy that was Partition, the fledgling Government of the time utilised the military to establish the Military Evacuation Organisation to coordinate the movement of all refugees and helped them reach their destinations in relative safety.

In complete contrast, despite the grave nature of the threat confronting the Government, the military remained a mere bystander, utilised for such "critical" tasks as serenading hospital staff and other frontline workers by showering hospitals and police memorials with flowers from helicopters! Even now, there are allegations that the military has been used to establish field hospitals in the constituencies of a few VIP politicians.

Clearly, in hindsight, it was not our systems and processes in place to deal with just such a contingency that were found wanting, as Kerala showed us, but the lackadaisical approach of most Ministers and bureaucrats whose responsibility it was to ensure their implementation. They, in their wisdom, or rather the lack of it, treated the NDMA's detailed guidelines and SOPs with contempt, leaving it to their min-



THE HANDLING OF THE FIRST WAVE BY THOSE MANDATED TO DO SO WAS APATHETIC IN THE INITIAL STAGES AND PANIC-STRICKEN SUBSEQUENTLY, ESPECIALLY AFTER THEY SAW IT DECIMATE EUROPE, THE US AND SOUTH AMERICA

ions to handle the problems. Inherent arrogance and a belief that we had put the pandemic behind us ensured that the Narendra Modi Government took its eyes off the ball, even going so far as to ignore advice, received in early March from its own advisory group, on the likelihood of a second wave impacting us with even more ferocity. As a result, it didn't bother to make up for the infrastructural and procedural deficiencies observed earlier but, worse, refused to hold accountable for acts of omission and commission those responsible for the lapses and delays that led to unnecessary and avoidable deaths of thousands. In short, it was a Government more focused on garnering power and prestige than ensuring the well-being of its citizens. An uncaring civil society, a divided and defunct Opposition spearheaded by a party in the death throes and a pro-Government media preferred to remain silent on these issues. By doing so, we enabled them to cover up their misdeeds and perpetuate false narratives and bold-faced lies.

While Modi may have excellent reasons for not venturing outside his bio-bubble at the Race Course Road, prefer-

ring to lead from within, he should note that leaders need to be seen, otherwise they are redundant. Interestingly, such an absence in a war zone on the part of a military leader would result in his immediate removal from command, probably on grounds of incompetence, if not sheer cowardice.

Whatever the spin this Government may attempt to push, Modi has been completely shorn off all the gloss and charisma he earlier projected. His unwillingness to take responsibility for the disaster implies that he lacks the moral fibre. The question that arises is if he will do the right thing and fall upon his sword. One way or the other, we will know the answer soon. But let us be totally clear that his reputation is done and dusted, forever connected to his handling of the pandemic and what it has wrought. As the Bard, insightful as ever, wrote: "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones."

(The writer is a military veteran, who is a Visiting Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation and Senior Visiting Fellow with The Peninsula Foundation, Chennai. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE PM HAS FAILED TO HANDLE COVID CRISIS

Sir — Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces growing criticism across the political spectrum for holding large election rallies as the country's health system reels under the deadly wave of COVID-19, forcing the citizens to beg for oxygen and hospital beds. Modi, at a campaign rally in West Bengal, said he has never seen such huge crowds at any event. Leaders of key States lashed out at Modi as the Congress and the Left called off campaigning in West Bengal due to the virus surge. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, whose State includes India's financial centre, tried calling Modi to address the shortages of oxygen and the drug Remdesivir but was told the PM was too busy addressing rallies. India now has the world's fastest-growing COVID-19 caseload, leaving it behind only the US in terms of total numbers.

The growing gap between Modi's optimism in fighting the virus and the reality on the ground is particularly evident in Delhi, among the worst hit in India.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

GOVT MUST TAP ONLINE EDUCATION POTENTIAL

Sir — Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, degree colleges and universities have resorted to complete online methods of conducting semester examinations. They also believe that online examinations are the way forward because the pandemic has made it difficult to conduct offline examinations. In addition, the use of advanced technology and digital software has made it easier to conduct examinations virtually, do complete assessment and declare results faster. Till now, degree colleges conducted the last two semester examinations online after the COVID-19 pandemic hit India in March, 2020. Currently, degree colleges, the University of Mumbai (MU) and major universities in Maharashtra are conducting the final-year last semester examinations online.

With the second wave of COVID-19 lashing the country, the Government has closed the schools and colleges to contain the spread of the virus. Classes are suspended and examinations are either cancelled or

Govt must help prison inmates



Very few in the Government — the Centre and the States — would have given a second thought to the plight of the inmates in India's overcrowded prisons, especially in relation to the pandemic. In the times of distress, it is only the Supreme Court that the hapless inmates can turn to for some type of succour. The top court of the land had, in 2020, freed prisoners, nearly 60,000 of them, on interim bail to decongest the prisons. Subsequently, 90 per cent of them returned. The SC has again ordered that those released on parole during the first phase of the pandemic be freed on a repeat parole for 90 days.

postponed indefinitely. The new academic year which began late, but with lots of hopes for the students, was disrupted once again. The online education has once again acquired a new urgency during this period.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

THE ASSAM CM MUST ACT URGENTLY

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Fair deal?' (May 10). The elevation of Himanta Biswa Sarma as the Chief Minister of Assam has been an inevitable choice for the BJP's top brass. Ever since he crossed over to the BJP from the Congress in 2014, he has been instrumental in increasing the BJP's footprint not just in Assam but throughout the Northeast. As the convener of the North East Democratic Alliance, Sarma has been BJP's main troubleshooter and strategist in the region. Even when the party in Assam was hit by anti-CAA

According to the apex court, it is important to save the lives of the prisoners and the personal guarding and interacting with them. Obviously, because States cannot have one rule for the public and another for the prisoners, it is not as if every person would jump at the idea of going home albeit for a short period. Fear, anxiety and apprehension rule many prisoners. Those hesitant to spend a brief period with their loved ones need to be tested in the prison premises and taken care of. Also, the law enforcers would do well to avoid unnecessary arrests during the pandemic. In the case of Armesh Kumar versus the State of Bihar, the SC had ruled that arrests should be an exception in cases where the offences are punishable with less than seven years' imprisonment. Quite understandable, because 'humane attitude' should be the cornerstone of criminal jurisprudence. Several verdicts of higher courts have advised the subordinate courts to bear in mind that Article 21 of the Constitution speaks about protection of life, and public liberty, is a fundamental right of a citizen.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

protests and COVID crisis last year, it was Sarma who was at the forefront of navigating the troubled waters for BJP.

With a huge political clout, Sarma has played a big role in changing the political calculus of Assam by engineering an unspoken electoral alliance between Assamese and Bengali Hindu voters of the State. All of this has seen Sarma achieve a bigger stature than Sonowal in Assam. And with most new MLAs in BJP supporting Sarma, it would have been risky for the party central leadership to overlook him for the CM's post.

However, Sarma takes over at a challenging time for Assam. With the rising number of cases, Sarma clearly has his task cut out and must hit the ground running.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

SOUND BITE

The Government's repeated chest-thumping at receiving foreign aid is pathetic. Had GOI done its job, it wouldn't have come to this.

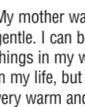


Congress leader
— Rahul Gandhi



Russia consistently defends international law. At the same time, we will steadfastly defend our national interests and ensure the security of our people.

Russian President
— Vladimir Putin



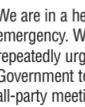
My mother was very gentle. I can be many things in my work and in my life, but I am very warm and gentle with my children.

Actor
— Angelina Jolie



I think we've already seen plans for the T20 World Cup to move out of India...and they're going to be ultra-cautious about that sort of a thing.

New Zealand cricketer
— James Neesham



We are in a health emergency. We have repeatedly urged the Government to call an all-party meeting to demonstrate resolve.

Congress interim president
— Sonia Gandhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

INDIA'S PATH TO CARBON NEUTRALITY

A decarbonised economy will also be knowledge-based and knowledge-driven



SANJAY GUPTA

As the Glasgow Conference of the Parties (GoP) meeting draws near, there is considerable discussion and speculation on India's future commitments and plans; not just on further reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions but to offer a date by when the country would achieve carbon neutrality or net-zero emissions. While India is the only G-20 country on track to meet its Paris Climate Agreement goals, it is also being projected as a big emitter. With recent date announcements made by China, the EU and the USA to achieve carbon neutrality, both the domestic and international climate community are now looking to India to declare its deadline.

There are two issues to consider. One, is it in India's medium and long-term interests to become a carbon neutral economy, gradually moving towards decarbonisation of all the sectors? As the past experience of economic history shows, countries and economies that adopted newer technologies and approaches have benefited socially, economically and in geostrategic terms. The difference between a "future" green economy and non-green economy will be the same as an industrialised and non-industrialised economy in the current



scenario. Further, the Global Commission on Adaptation avers that investments in adaptation consistently deliver higher returns and create more jobs than traditional investments. Second, should the country declare a date for achieving the net-zero carbon emissions status, what should be that date? Given the current global mood, it will be strategic for India to declare its intent on achieving carbon neutrality but only on its own terms. The path to India's green economy should not emerge out of Paris or Glasgow but rather out of every village, town and city in the country. Its net-zero emissions date should be a time band such as from 2065-2085. The later date should be offered as a more likely target. However, if there is adequate green finance made available, supported by development and availability of appropriate technologies, the earlier date of 2065 or thereabouts could be possible. What can India hope from countries that are less than supportive of a Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver on COVID-19 vaccines and medicines to avert an ongoing global tragedy? How much support will the same set of rich countries provide to India and other developing countries to address a "wicked" problem such as climate change?

India will have to forge its own unique path towards decarbonisation. It has achieved immensely in areas such as energy efficiency and solar power. By 2030, it aims to install 450 gigawatt of renewable energy capacity, far exceeding its Paris targets. But these are low-hanging fruits compared to the long and arduous path ahead. The process to achieve carbon neutrality will be integrated and interconnected across geographies, people and multiple sectors of the economy. Inclusion of the voice and choice of the socioeconomically underprivileged and climate-vulnerable groups will be critical to success of the "green" transition and inclusive growth. Farmers will need to adapt, innovate and improvise to achieve climate resiliency while also attaining higher productivity and profitability. India should proactively seek Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in green technologies for that is what it will take to obtain access, not just international climate negotiations that have largely ignored the needs and aspirations of the developing countries. The list of current and future technologies will be long but each one will need to be judged and imbibed based on its social relevance, economic viability and the ability to solve critical problems. A decarbonised economy will also be a knowledge-based and knowledge-driven economy.

(The writer is an independent consultant and expert in climate issues. The views expressed are personal.)



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The eastern State definitely remains at the centre of attention. A hawai-chappal wearing and white sari-clad Mamata Banerjee has virtually challenged the dazzling development model that has put India's public sector on sale and is engaged in a visual extravaganza of over ₹30,000 crore (in reality possibly over ₹50,000 crore) to change Delhi's central vista. Nobody explains why that should be a priority instead of creating a strong healthcare sector and hospitals capable of producing their own oxygen.

The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.

NEP: A bundle of pious intentions

The Government should avoid overambitious targets that will result in gross underutilisation or even scrapping of the assets already created



UTTAM GUPTA

In yet another attempt to improve the power sector, the Modi Government has come up with a new draft National Electricity Policy (NEP), the major objectives being to promote clean energy such as power based on renewable and gas without debunking coal; revitalise power distribution companies (discoms) and developing an efficient market for electricity distribution.

All the three objectives are laudable. These are crucial to development of an efficient, competitive and sustainable power sector to meet the needs of the economy on a high growth trajectory while at the same time, meeting the environment goals (especially India's commitments under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change). What is being done on ground zero to achieve these goals?

At present, India has a total generation capacity of about 360 GW (one gigawatt equals 1000 megawatts or MW) including 63 per cent based on fossil fuels, of which coal alone accounts for 54 per cent and nearly 22 per cent based on renewable energy, viz., solar, wind, bio-mass, small hydro, etc. and gas-based capacity accounting for another seven per cent. However, only 50 per cent of this installed capacity is currently utilised.

This has to do with indiscriminate setting up of capacity on coal (to some extent on gas) much before Prime Minister Narendra Modi started giving a boost to the renewable energy sector. Many of those plants were set up without ascertaining whether or not power produced by them would find any takers (the promoters could not even sign power purchase agreements or PPAs) while others did not even have fuel supply tie-ups (several gas-based plants fall in this category). Many coal-based plants have been impacted by availability of much cheaper power, at about ₹2.4 per unit from renewable-based plants (against ₹5 to ₹66 per unit from coal) prompting Discoms not to buy power from the former. In turn, renewable-based plants are affected as some State Governments (for instance, Andhra Pradesh) are not honoring PPAs.

Meanwhile, Modi has more than doubled the original goal of renewable-based power capacity from 175 GW by 2022 to 450 GW by 2030.

The current capacity being 80 GW, to reach the scaled up target, the country will need to add 370 GW. Plus an additional 50 GW from coal-based projects already under implementation, the total capacity will go up to 780 GW by 2030. Against this, the projected demand being about 320 GW (on the basis of an average six per cent annual Gross Domestic Product growth), this would imply utilisation of mere 40 per cent.

The Government should avoid over-ambitious targets which will result in gross under utilisation or even scrapping assets already created.

It overarching focus should be on ensuring optimum utilisation of every megawatt of capacity created and viability of all efficiently run power generation plants. This brings us to the second objective, namely revitalising Discoms. In this regard, the Modi Government has taken numerous steps, the latest being the ₹300,000 crore electricity distribution reform program unveiled by the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, in the Union Budget for 2021-22.

Christened 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBSD), the scheme



AT THE ROOT OF PERSISTENT AND INCREASING LOSSES OF DISCOMS ARE THE ORDERS ISSUED BY STATE GOVERNMENTS TO SELL ELECTRICITY TO SOME PREFERRED CONSUMERS VIZ. POOR HOUSEHOLDS AND FARMERS, EITHER AT A FRACTION OF THE COST OF PURCHASE, TRANSMISSION AND DISTRIBUTION, OR EVEN FREE. ON THESE UNITS SOLD TO THESE GROUPS, THESE COMPANIES INCUR COLOSSAL UNDER-RECOVERY. THIS IS AGGRAVATED BY AT&C LOSSES — MOST OF IT PLAIN THEFT

The writer is New-Delhi based policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.



sets targets for losses and efficiency of Discoms. The aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses and shortfall in the average revenue realisation (ARR) from the sale of electricity vis-a-vis the average cost of supply (ACS) or the ACS-ARR gap are major causes behind the losses of Discoms and their financial stress. Accordingly, the scheme aims at reducing AT&C losses to 12-15 per cent and ACS-ARR gap to 'nil' by 2025.

When viewed in the backdrop of Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY), launched in November 2015, wherein the targets were missed by a huge margin, this scheme does not inspire. Under UDAY, Discoms were required to reduce AT&C losses from 20.7 per cent during 2015-16 to 15 per cent by 2018-19. Further, they were to reduce the ACS-ARR gap from ₹0.59 per unit during 2015-16 to 'zero' by 2018-19.

Simultaneously, the Government gave them a financial restructuring package (FRP) under which their entire debt of about ₹400,000 crore

was condoned. This led to a dramatic impact on their losses which declined from ₹52,000 crore during 2015-16 to a low of ₹17,000 crore during 2017-18. However, Discoms did little to set their house in order.

During 2019-20, their AT&C losses were 18.9 per cent against the 15 per cent target for 2018-19. The ACS-ARR gap during 2019-20, stood at ₹0.42 per unit against target of 'zero' for 2018-19.

During 2020-21, discoms reported a staggering loss of ₹58,000

crore. Correspondingly, their debt galloped to about ₹450,000 crore by the end of 2020-21 and is estimated to reach ₹600,000 crore mark by the end of current fiscal. The collateral damage is a pile-up of their dues to power generators to over ₹150,000 crore (current). This is despite a special loan of ₹90,000 crore promised by Nirmala Sitharaman under 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' in May 2020 (the loan amount has since been raised to ₹130,000 crore).

Against this backdrop, the latest talk, of achieving those targets which should have been achieved by 2018-19 by March 2025 under RLRBSD, is laughable.

At the root of persistent and increasing losses of Discoms are the orders issued by State Governments to sell electricity to some preferred consumers viz., poor households and farmers, either at a fraction of the cost of purchase, transmission and distribution, or even free. On the units sold to these groups, these companies incur colossal under-recovery. This is aggravated by AT&C losses - most of it plain theft.

Inflated tariff allowed to generators under purchase agreements adds to the revenue shortfall. Unless, these three fundamental factors are addressed, any other attempt to revitalise Discoms - as intended in the NEP - will be a non-starter.

As for developing an efficient market for electricity distribution - as promised in the policy - it is easier said than done. When an overwhelming share of power generated in the country is procured by

Discoms under PPAs (mostly under long-term contracts), distributed by them at tariff controlled by States/owners of Discoms (regulatory commissions merely approve what is proposed by them) and a mere five per cent of the electricity is traded, it will take ages before one can hope to see 'efficient' and 'competitive' markets.

Meanwhile, under the draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2021, in sync with the intent to develop an efficient market under NEP, Modi Government proposes to de-license the distribution business, bring in competition, and give the consumer power to choose supplier. If only the States give subsidies directly to farmers and households, rein in power theft and improve efficiencies in purchase, wheeling and distribution, will help in revitalising the Discoms.

In view of the entire distribution network viz., transmission lines, feeder lines, transformers etc that caters to households, industries etc in an area being owned and controlled by the Discoms, any talk of letting private license is a misnomer. Instead of indulging in such rhetoric, Modi will do well to get States resolve the basics.

If only the States give subsidies directly to farmers and households (instead of riding piggy back on Discoms), rein in power theft and improve efficiencies in purchase, wheeling and distribution, this will help in revitalising the Discoms and also give relief to industries which are currently paying exorbitant charges for cross-subsidising the preferred customers.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE PM IS TAKING EVERY STEP TO SAVE LIVES. TODAY, MOST OF THE COUNTRIES ARE STANDING WITH US DUE TO HIS EFFORTS.

— UNION MINISTER ANURAG THAKUR



THE GOI'S REPEATED CHEST-THUMPING AT RECEIVING FOREIGN AID IS PATHETIC. HAD IT DONE ITS JOB, THINGS WOULDN'T HAVE COME TO SUCH A PASS.

— CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI

States vote for new economy; will Mamata lead the Oppn?

The West Bengal Chief Minister has virtually challenged the dazzling development model that has put India's public sector on sale

The recent Assembly election results reflect more than politics. Indian voters are larger issues and economy is at the core of their concern. Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal have separately endorsed a new economic course for the nation.

The eastern State definitely remains at the centre of attention. A hawai-chappal wearing and white sari-clad Mamata Banerjee has virtually challenged the dazzling development model that has put India's public sector on sale and is engaged in a visual extravaganza of over ₹30,000 crore (in reality possibly over ₹50,000 crore) to change Delhi's central vista. Nobody explains why that should be a priority instead of creating a strong healthcare sector and hospitals capable of producing their own oxygen.



SHIVAJI SARKAR

Populist largesse of Mamata for women, youth and *Duare sarkar* (Government at the doorstep), the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK's) welfare policies in Tamil Nadu or the Left alliance in Kerala, when studied closely, virtually refutes the "aggressive privatised development" model of the Centre. All these States have voted against farm Bills that seek to create large house monopolies, junk scrapping policy of poor man's vehicles, high fuel prices, fares, tolls, taxes and so-called user charges. The vote endorses that the country has more poverty to address than create cosmetic central vista that serves none but a few, big corporate houses. They have together rejected 'Manmohanomics' — that ended up in a political disaster for its proponent, the

Congress, and its follower, the BJP. The people are pitted against the disinvestment of prime banks, LIC, financial institutions, defence establishments and others with a target of ₹1.75 lakh crore in 2021-22. This is lower than ₹2.1 lakh crore it hoped to garner through divestment in 2020-21; an admission of failure of the Government bid. This failed economic concept is rejected now by the voters.

While in Tamil Nadu the change was inevitable, Kerala not very surprisingly voted for the Left front, following people's perception that the Government was delivering. The voters equally perceived that the Congress-led UDF was incapable of opposing the BJP's onslaught for privatisation, now a national concern. So, the LDF has returned with a bigger mandate.

The massive vote surge in



West Bengal for the Trinamool Congress was not possible if the people did not perceive the Centre's economic policies as a grave threat. The Left-Congress, the TMC and even a section of the BJP voted for economic policy changes that, ironically, Mamata Banerjee symbolises. The 47.93 per cent votes for TMC up from 43.3 per cent in 2019 and reduced numbers of votes for BJP to 38.13 per cent from 40.2 per

cent in 2019 says a lot. The loss of all other parties was a gain for the TMC. It has also busted the myth that West Bengal votes along communal lines. The wash out of the Left and Congress for its alliance with the highly communalised ISF is enough testimony. This also proves that West Bengal votes for social and economic issues and rejects any polarisation, barring some exceptions, either for Furfura or Ram. Another noticeable aspect is the vote for Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose whose anniversary the BJP celebrated as *Parakaram Diwas* and Mamata as *Deshmayak Diwas*. Surprisingly, nobody pointed out this incongruity which Mamata aptly encashed with a heightened nationalistic presentation - a message went out strong that the Centre is not only disrespectful to Netaji, but is also blatant-

ly promoting some private houses. No wonder that some days later the Rafael bribery charge revived as an issue following a French Government exposure. India is not against private companies. Many have contributed significantly; many enjoy people's trust and have set standards. The nation, however, is against overt domineering by any group. The present elections have exposed that. The country wants privatisation neither at the cost of the public sector nor does it want to get it enslaved to any private player.

In the UP's panchayat elections, the BJP gets only 580 against Samajwadi Party (SP) 782, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) 361, Congress' 61 and 1266 others. So, will this election lead to an overt cry for economic changes? The rightist centrist party is too inclined towards the corporates and

may not bring about the changes. But the opposition though too has its corporate connections and may try to forge an alliance to clinch a political change. Its leadership is not yet obvious. Mamata may emerge as one but her all-India acceptability may not be easy.

Some like Akhilesh Yadav have spoken for her. Either way, a change of guard may be inevitable. The combine would have to come out with a new economic policy - against privatisation and for strengthening the people's economy; one may call it socialist or by any other name. It has to be contrary to a centrist, aggressive privatisation that the present rulers are trying to dispense. India is at the threshold of an economic and political change. It may gel before the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections next year.

Nepal PM Oli loses trust vote in Parliament

Kathmandu: Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli lost a trust vote in the House of Representatives on Monday, in a fresh setback to the embattled premier seeking to tighten his grip on power after the CPN (Maoist Centre) led by Pushpakamal Dahal 'Prachanda' withdrew support to his government.

Prime Minister Oli secured 93 votes in the lower house of parliament during a special session convened on the directives of President Bidya Devi Bhandari.

Oli, 69, required at least 136 votes in the 275-member House of Representatives to win the confidence motion as four members are currently under suspension.

A total of 124 members voted against the confidence motion while 15 members stayed neutral, Speaker Agni Sapkota announced. The session was attended by 232 lawmakers.

"As the votes cast in favour of the motion fell short to achieve a majority of the existing strength of the House of Representatives, I hereby declare that the prime minister's motion to seek a vote of confidence has been rejected," Sapkota announced before adjourning the House.

With this, Prime Minister Oli is automatically relieved from his post as per Article 100 (3).

Some 28 Lawmakers belonging to Oli's rival faction led by Madhav Nepal-Jhala Nath Khanal abstained during the voting.

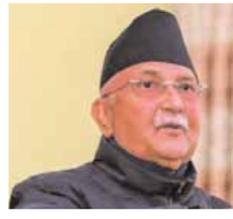
The main Opposition Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), which control 61 and 49 votes, respectively, voted against Oli's trust motion.

The Janata Samajbadi Party, which has 32 votes, however, was divided. The Mahanath Thakur-led faction stayed neutral while the Upendra Yadav-led group voted against Oli.

After its alliance Nepal Communist Party Maoist Centre led by Prachanda withdrew its support to the government last week, Oli's government was reduced to a minority one.

After losing the Vote of Confidence, the Prime Minister is automatically removed from his post and now the new coalition government will be formed as per the constitutional process, said senior Nepali Congress leader Prakash Man Singh.

Senior leader of CPN-Maoist Ganesh Shah said that Oli should immediately resign from the post and pave way for the formation of an alternative government.



Portrait of Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli.

The CPN-Maoist will join hands with the Nepali Congress and other parties who voted against Oli to form a coalition government at the earliest, he said.

Meanwhile, Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba, CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" and Chairman of Janata Samajwadi Party Upendra Yadav have issued a joint statement urging President Bhandari to start the process of forming an alternative government after Oli's defeat.

"We call upon President Bhandari to initiate the process of appointment of a new prime minister as per article 76 sub-clause 2 of the constitution," the joint statement said. There is a provision in the Article 76 sub-clause 2 of the constitution to form a coalition government with the help of two or more political parties representing in the House.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 last

Israeli police and Palestinians clash at Jerusalem holy site

Jerusalem: Israeli police firing tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets clashed with stone-throwing Palestinians at a flash-point Jerusalem holy site on Monday, the latest in a series of confrontations that threatened to push the contested city toward wider conflict.

More than a dozen tear gas canisters and stun grenades landed in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites, as police and protesters faced off inside the walled compound that surrounds it, said an Associated Press photographer at the scene.

Smoke rose in front of the mosque and the iconic golden-domed shrine on the site, and rocks littered the nearby plaza. Inside one area of the compound, shoes and debris lay scattered over ornate carpets.

More than 305 Palestinians were hurt, including 228 who went to hospitals and clinics for treatment, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent. Seven of the injured were in serious

More than 305 Palestinians were hurt, including 228 who went to hospitals and clinics for treatment, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent

condition. Police said 21 officers were hurt, including three who were hospitalized. Israeli paramedics said seven Israeli civilians were also hurt.

The confrontation was the latest after weeks of mounting tensions between Palestinians and Israeli troops in the Old City of Jerusalem, the emotional center of their conflict. There have been almost nightly clashes during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, already a time of heightened religious sensitivities.

Most recently, the tensions have been fueled by the planned eviction of dozens of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of east Jerusalem where Israeli settlers

have waged a lengthy legal battle to take over properties.

Monday was expected to be particularly tense since Israelis mark it as Jerusalem Day to celebrate their capture of east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war.

On Monday, two anti-Arab members of Israel's parliament, surrounded by an entourage and police, pushed through a line of protesters in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.

Several Arab members of parliament were among those trying to stop Betzalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, amid shouting and jostling. At one point during the scum, the protesters pounded on the sides of a dumpster, and one man yelled at Smotrich in Arabic, "Get out of here, you dog!"

Smotrich and Ben Gvir eventually got to the other side of a police barricade and entered a house already inhabited by settlers. AP

China slams US 'double standards', plays down concerns over rocket debris falling in Indian Ocean

Beijing: Accusing the US of maintaining 'double standards', China on Monday played down global concerns over its out-of-control rocket remnants re-entering the Earth's atmosphere and crashing into the Indian Ocean near the Maldives.

The remnants of China's biggest rocket, Long March 5B, crashed into the Indian Ocean near the Maldives on Sunday with no reports of damage, but Beijing was criticised by US space agency NASA for its failure to "meet responsible standards" regarding its space debris.

Reacting to NASA Administrator Senator Bill Nelson's criticism, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying at a media briefing here said some countries, including America, are hyping up the issue even though the rocket debris was burnt on re-entry into the atmosphere.

China followed the debris "very closely" and there were no reports of any damage to the ground caused by the debris, she said. "Any concerns or misgivings in some media over this issue are unnecessary," Hua said, adding that there has never

been any instance of falling debris causing damage.

"So the likelihood is extremely low. The issue should be left to professionals and it is unnecessary to hype up the issue to cause any panic," she said. Hitting out at the US, Hua said "American media used romantic rhetoric like 'shooting stars lighting up the night sky' about the debris of the US rockets in the past."

"But when it comes to the Chinese side, it's a completely different approach. We are willing to work with other countries, including the US, to strengthen cooperation in the use of outer space, but we also oppose double standards on this issue," the spokesperson said. China is taking part in the international cooperation to predict the (crash) results and is also cooperating with other countries to deal with the debris in outer space to make sure that outer space activities are sustainable.

Responding to a question on whether China has notified India and Maldives about the crash, Hua said, "Our competent authorities have made notifications on multiple occasions and

we have international cooperation channels to share information on the final result of the space debris."

The bulk of the out-of-control rocket, which had put into orbit the core module of China's planned space station on April 29, was mostly destroyed as it re-entered the atmosphere, according to Chinese official media.

The space vehicle re-entered the atmosphere on Sunday morning and the debris from the 18-tonne rocket, one of the largest items in decades to have an undirected dive into the atmosphere, landed in the Indian Ocean.

The uncontrolled fall of the Chinese rocket sparked concerns among US officials, NASA and international astrophysicists that it could hit inhabited areas. Harvard astrophysicist Jonathan McDowell, who tracked the debris of the rocket part for the past few days, said that it was a reckless gamble by China.

"An ocean reentry was always statistically the likely. It appears China won its gamble...But it was still reckless," he tweeted. PTI

China denounces US appeal for Taiwan to join WHO meeting

Beijing: China's Government criticised US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday for urging the World Health Organisation to invite Taiwan, the island democracy claimed by Beijing as part of its territory, to participate in a meeting this month.

Blinken's statement on Friday adds to a similar joint appeal by foreign ministers of the Group of Seven major economies this month in London. That irked the Communist Beijing government, which insists Taiwan has no right to conduct foreign relations or join global bodies.

Blinken's appeal seriously violates the one-China principle and joint US-Chinese declarations, said a Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying. China firmly deplores and rejects it.

Taiwan split with the Chinese mainland in 1949 after a civil war. The two sides have extensive trade ties but no official relations. The US and other major

governments have no official ties with Taiwan, but Washington and some others have expressed growing support for Taiwan during the coronavirus pandemic and in response to Beijing's increasing assertiveness abroad.

Blinken called Taiwan a force for good in the world and said it should be invited as an observer at the meeting of the World Health Assembly, the WHO decision-making body. He said it could make valuable contributions as the world tries to end the pandemic.

Hua accused Washington of making the appeal for political purposes. She said it is detrimental to future global response to public health crises.

Hua said Taiwan is part of China's core interests, a term Beijing uses to describe issues over which it might be willing to go to war.

China has no room for compromise on this, she said. We advise individual countries to immediately stop hyping Taiwan-related issues. AP

Man stabs 5 at New Zealand supermarket; 3 critically hurt

Wellington: A man began stabbing people at a New Zealand supermarket on Monday, wounding five people, three of them critically, according to authorities. Police said a suspect had been arrested and taken into custody after the incident at a Countdown supermarket in the city of Dunedin. Two supermarket staff members were among those wounded.

People in the store at the time told local media that it was a chaotic scene as people began screaming and running toward the exits. They said some brave shoppers had tried to stop the man and pin him down.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the motivation for the attack had not been established but police didn't have any evidence to suggest it was domestic terrorism.

"Needless to say that such an attack is hugely concerning, and I do want to acknowledge the really early reports of courageous acts by bystanders who have taken action in order to protect those around them," Ardern said. AP

Turkey seeks better Saudi ties despite Khashoggi slaying

ANKARA: Turkey's top envoy is traveling to Saudi Arabia as Turkey seeks to mend ties with the kingdom that hit an all-time low over the 2018 killing in Istanbul of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will meet with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, to discuss bilateral relations and regional issues during his two-day visit, according to a Turkish Foreign Ministry statement.

The visit is the first by a high-level Turkish official since the killing of Khashoggi by Saudi agents inside the kingdom's consulate increased tensions between the two regional powers.

The killing added to tensions over Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which is viewed by Riyadh as a terrorist group. The two countries have also been at odds over Turkey's support for Qatar in a dispute among Gulf countries as well as over the

conflict in Libya. Cavusoglu's visit is also part of a wider effort by Turkey to normalize ties with Arab nations as it finds itself isolated internationally at a time when its economy is faltering.

Last week, a high-level Turkish delegation traveled to Cairo to improve relations with Egypt, which have been strained since the Egyptian military's 2013 ouster of President Mohammed Morsi, an Islamist who hailed from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Khashoggi was killed on October 2, 2018, after he entered the consulate to get documents that would allow him to marry his Turkish fiancée, who was waiting outside. Turkish officials allege Khashoggi, who had written critically about Saudi Arabia's crown prince for the Washington Post, was killed by a team of Saudi agents and then dismembered with a bone saw. AP

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

General Public is hereby informed that one boy **Namely: Abhishek, S/o: Lt. Sandeep Kumar, R/o: H.No. 542A, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi, has been missing/kidnapped since 06.04.2021** at about 9:30 pm. from his house from the area of P.S. Shalimar Bagh, Delhi. In this regard a case vide **DD No. 74A dated 11.04.2021** has been lodged at P.S. Shalimar Bagh, Delhi. The description of the missing/kidnapped boy is as under: **Age: 18 years, Height: 5'7", Face: Oval, Build: Thin, Complexion: Fair, Wearing: Maroon colour shirt, black colour lower and yellow colour sport shoes in feet.** Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing boy but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about this missing boy kindly inform to the following.

Website: http://cbi.nic.in
E-mail Id - cbc@cbi.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax No. 011-24368639
DP/775/NW/2021

SHO
P.S. Shalimar Bagh, Delhi
Ph.: 011- 27495198, 8750870226

NORTHERN RAILWAY AUCTION NOTICE

No. LMC/TREE/MB/2020 Dated: 10.05.2021

Auction of Lot No. 1, KM 1284/0-1295/5-7, 71 numbers Dangerous trees and Lot No. 2 KM 1298/18-20 To 1320/18-20, 113 Numbers dangerous trees under Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway Bareilly will be auctioned in the office of Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway Bareilly. All the interested bidders are invited to participate in this auction.

Auction place: - Office of the Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway/Bareilly on date 03.06.2021 at 11:00 AM

- All the bidders will deposit cash Rs 100/- in the office of Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway/ Bareilly which will not be refunded and shall also deposit Rs 8000/- in favor of Sr. Divisional Finance Manager Northern Railway Moradabad as a Demand Draft of SBI or Other Nationalized Bank.
- All the bidders who will take part in the auction will also have proper knowledge of Auction rules and other allowances.
- Successful bidders will deposit the Demand Draft of SBI or Other Nationalized Bank in favour of Sr. DFM/MB or station earning in cash on same day with following rate:-
 - 10% amount of selling price or minimum amount Rs 25,000/- whichever is maximum on purchase of more than Rs. 1,00,000/-
 - Balance amount will be deposited within 10 days including the date of auction.
 - GST @ 18% will be deposited on total cost within 10 days including the date of auction.
- The work should be completed within 60 days including the date of auction.
- Railway has right to close the work any time. In this situation the balance amount will be returned without interest.
- Complete Details of tree with locations will be available in the Divisional Office Moradabad.
- Bidders are requested to quote their rates according to the tree locations.
- Trees will be delivered and handed over in the presence of SSE/works, ISA and RPF.
- If the balance amount is not deposited within 10 days including the date of auction, then initial deposited amount will be forfeited.
- Bidders will not make any Kutcha/Pakka construction in the land of Railway.
- Bid will be quoted below the base price.
- Demand draft will be deposited in the office of Assistant Divisional Engineer/Northern Railway/ Bareilly from 09.00 am to 10.30 AM. After that no demand draft will be accepted.

Sr. Divisional Engineer -III Northern Railway/ Moradabad

1004/21

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Reversing Trump, US restores transgender health protections

Washington: The US will protect gay and transgender people against sex discrimination in health care, the Biden administration announced on Monday, reversing a Trump-era policy that sought to narrow the scope of legal rights in sensitive situations involving medical care.

The action by the Department of Health and Human Services affirms that federal laws forbidding sex discrimination in health care also protect gay and transgender people.

The Trump administration had defined "sex" to mean gender assigned at birth, thereby excluding transgender people from the law's umbrella of protection.

"Fear of discrimination can lead individuals to forgo care, which can have serious negative health consequences," said HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra.

"Everyone — including

Malaysian PM announces 1-month lockdown

Kuala Lumpur: A year of Malaysia will be placed under a near lockdown for about a month to fight the coronavirus, but businesses will be allowed to continue to operate at reduced capacity, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin announced on Monday.

The lockdown, starting Wednesday until June 7, took the nation by surprise because restrictions on movement are already in place in many parts of the country, including Kuala Lumpur and the richest State of Selangor.

Muhyiddin said drastic action was needed to battle a new aggressive outbreak before it turns into a national catastrophe. He said the emergence of new virus variants with higher infection rates, constraints on the public health system and public failure to observe health measures were worrying.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE (Through E-Tendering)

Name of work with its location: Provision of Wi-Fi zone with 14 access point for the work of creations of maintenance and testing facilities for homing of electric locomotives in Diesel loco shed, TKD

Approximate cost of the work(₹): ₹13,38,923.33/- only **Earnest Money** ₹0/- only

Address of the office: Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3rd Floor, Annex-1, DRM office, New Delhi-110055

Date & time for upload the tender & closing of tender: Tender uploading / closing date & time 02.06.2021 upto 15:00 hrs.

Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.: See The Northern Railway website <http://www.ireps.gov.in> & Notice board at S&T branch, 3rd Floor, DRM Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055

Tender No.: 558-Sig-16-Tele-OT-931 **Date:** 10.05.2021 **999/21**

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY Corrigendum

No.: CIID/SLR/Tender/2020 (Part-V)

Ref: Tender published date: 27.04.2021 and Tender opening date:- 12.05.2021.

It is to inform all concerned, that due to curfew imposed by Delhi Government from 19.04.2021 to 17.05.2021 till 05:00 AM, the NIT for leasing of SLR parcel space in special trains, published in various English & Hindi newspapers, which was earlier scheduled to be opened on 12.05.2021 through IREPS portal i.e. www.ireps.gov.in is now postponed and the same shall be opened on 24.05.2021 at 15:00 hrs.

Other information of NITs shall remain unchanged. **1005/2021**

Serving Customers with a Smile

E-Tender Notice

Supply of Machinery and Equipments for Common Facility Centre in Diamond Cutting and Polishing Cluster, Surat

Re-Tender ID - CFC/LGD/2021/04

Online e-tenders are invited for supply, installation and Commissioning of Machineries and Equipments for **Common Facility Centre in Lab Grown Diamond Cluster, Surat.** Detailed tender document can be downloaded from the website npurchase.com

Duration of Downloading	11/05/2021 to 24/05/2021
Tender Document (On Line)	(Up to 18:00 Hrs)
Pre Bid Meeting with Bidders	17/05/2021 at 12:00 Hrs (Online)
Submission of Physical documents,	24/05/2021 (Up to 16:00 Hrs)
Tender Fee, EMD etc.	
Closing of Submission of tenders (Online)	24/05/2021 at 18:00 Hrs
Technical Bid opening (on line),	27/05/2021 at 12:00 Hrs (Tentative)

DIRECTOR

THE CENTRE FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

BLOCK NO 1, 9th FLOOR, UDVOY BHAVAN, SECTOR- 11, GANDHINAGAR

Phone No: (079)232-43847/ 232-43706, 09435506403

URL - www.ced.gujarat.gov.in

ZNF/166/21-22

Pak Govt to set new rules to meet FATF demands

Islamabad: Pakistan, keen to exit from the grey list of the FATF, is set to introduce new rules relating to anti-money laundering cases and change the prosecution process to meet its remaining tough conditions, a media report said on Monday.

Pakistan was put on the grey list by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global watchdog for money laundering and terror financing in June 2018 and the country has been struggling to come out of it.

The Dawn newspaper reported that the changes being made also include the transfer of investigations and prosecution of anti-money laundering (AML) cases from police, provincial anti-corruption establishments (ACEs) and other similar agencies to specialised agencies.

This is part of two sets of rules including the AML (Forfeited Properties Management) Rules 2021 and the AML (Referral) Rules 2021 under the National Policy Statement on Follow the Money approved by the federal Cabinet meeting a few days ago, the report said.

These rules and related notifications for certain changes in the existing schedule of Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010 (AMLA) would come into force immediately to be followed by the appointment of administrators and special public prosecutors for implementation.

Based on these measures, the FATF would conclude if Pakistan has complied with three outstanding benchmarks, out of 27, that blocked its exit from the grey list in February this year. Several review meetings of the FATF are scheduled to begin in the second week of June, culminating in the next FATF plenary on June 21-25.

The three outstanding action points (out of a total of 27) include (i) demonstrating that terrorist financing (TF) investigations and prosecutions target persons and entities acting on behalf or at the directive of the designated persons or entities. Demonstrating that TF prosecutions result in effective, proportionate, and dissuasive sanctions; and (iii) demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all designated terrorists, particularly those acting for them or on their behalf. PTI

UN says 5 migrants drowned; over 700 intercepted off Libya

Cairo: At least five people, including a woman and a child, drowned when a boat carrying at least 45 Europe-bound migrants capsized off Libya, a UN migration official said on Monday. The wreck was the latest disaster in the Mediterranean Sea involving migrants seeking a better life in Europe.

Safa Msehli, a spokeswoman for the International Organisation for Migration, said the wreck took place on Sunday. She said fishermen rescued 40 migrants and returned them to the shore. Msehli said the boat was among nine others carrying more than 700 migrants inter-

cepted Sunday by the Libyan coast guard off the coast of the North African country.

The migrants were taken to overcrowded detention centres, where the UN migration agency fears more threats to their lives and violations of their rights, she said.

Libya has in recent years emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East. The oil-rich country plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime ruler Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. AP

Sri Lanka records highest single-day spike with over 2,600 new Covid cases

Colombo: Sri Lanka has recorded over 2,600 coronavirus cases, the highest-ever single-day count recorded so far in the island nation since the pandemic began last year, authorities said on Monday.

Gen. Shavendra Silva, the head of the National Operations Centre for the Prevention of Covid-19 (NOCPOC), said some 2,672 cases were confirmed on Sunday, up from 1,896 a day earlier.

Sri Lanka on Sunday set a new record with the number of daily Covid-19 infections exceeding 2,500 for the first time since the epidemic began, the Colombo Gazette reported. The coronavirus cases are surging as health authorities continue to struggle to provide care for the confirmed cases. The government said action to create 10,000 care beds has been fast tracked. PTI

India remains vulnerable to further waves of Covid: Fitch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Monday warned that India's slow pace of vaccination could mean that the country remains vulnerable to further waves of the pandemic even once the current surge subsides.

Just 9.4 per cent of the population had received at least one vaccine dose as of May 5, according to figures from Our World in Data, the agency said.

"India's slow pace of vaccination means that the country could remain vulnerable to further waves of the pandemic even once the current surge subsides," Fitch added.

The Centre has already provided more than 17.56 crore vaccine doses to states/UTs free of cost.

The cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country exceeded 16.94 crore on May 9.

The global rating agency said there are growing indications that the latest wave of coronavirus infections will add to risks among financial institutions (FIs).

It also anticipates that the RBI may introduce additional measures to support the financial sector if indications of economic stress mount.



"We expect the shock to economic activity from the latest wave of the pandemic in India to be less severe than in 2020, even though caseloads and fatalities are much higher.

"Nonetheless, indicators show activity dropped in April-May, which is likely to delay the country's recovery, and the number of newly recorded cases remains extremely high," Fitch Ratings said in a report.

It said that currently, authorities are implementing lockdowns more narrowly, and companies and individuals have adjusted behaviour in ways that cushion the effects.

"There is a risk that disruption could persist longer and spread further than our baseline case assumes, particularly if lockdowns are introduced in more regions, or nationwide," it added.

India is facing the world's worst outbreak of COVID-19 cases with more than 3 lakh new daily COVID-19 cases being reported for two weeks now and the new cases reached more than 4 lakh new daily cases over the weekend.

More than 2.46 lakh people in India have died from the coronavirus infection. Public health system is buckling under the weight of surging infections and deaths with several parts of the country reporting shortage of hospital beds, medical oxygen, medicines and vaccines.

Last month, Fitch had said the surge in COVID-19 cases could add to headwinds facing India's banks and non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) if it led to a resurgence in asset-quality pressures.

Govt relaxes procurement norms for health, pharma Ministries, DRDO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the world's worst outbreak of Covid-19 severely straining the health system in the country, the government has made sweeping changes in the way departments procure medical supplies, including allowing procurement of the same item at different rates.

Relaxing tendering norms, the Department of Expenditure has allowed global tenders to be floated for less than ₹200 crore as well.

The Department of Expenditure, under the Ministry of Finance, on April 24 issued special instructions relating to relief operations for Covid-19 pandemic and said that the prevailing health emergency on account of the unprecedented surge in Covid-19 cases across the country requires immediate procurement of certain items in quantities which may not be available with a single supplier and/or within the time frame in which they are needed.

"In the present situation, vendors under GeM, even if orders are placed, may not always be able to effect deliveries of supplies on time and desired locations, due to the rapidly changing situation on account of the critical pandemic situation which requires extreme flexibility in making available the critical life saving goods," as per the instructions, which would be in force till May 31.

and hence it shall be permissible to invite GTE where necessary," said the instructions, which have been put up on the ministry's website on Monday.

As part of its Aatmanirbhar Bharat package, the government in May last year notified amendments to General Financial Rules (GFR) to ensure that goods and services valued less than Rs 200 crore will be procured from domestic firms, a move which was aimed at benefiting small and medium enterprises.

Rule 149 of GFR provides that procurement of goods and services through the Government's e-marketplace (GeM) will be mandatory for items available on GeM portal.

"The instruction in this Department's OM (Office Memorandum)... Dated May 15, 2020... Specifying that no Global Tender Enquiries shall be invited for tenders up to Rs 200 crore shall stand relaxed

Budget heading for vaccination expenditure does not inhibit Centre from using funds: FinMin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry on Monday said provisioning ₹35,000 crore-expenditure for vaccines in the Union Budget for FY22 under the title "Transfers to States" does in no way inhibit the central government from using the funds to buy Covid-19 shots.

The amount of ₹35,000 crore provided in the Union Budget for fiscal year starting April 1, 2021 (FY22) under the Demand for Grants No. 40, titled "Transfers to States" has been done for several administrative advantages, including expenditure under such head being exempted from the quarterly control restrictions.

Also, it allows the Union government to procure the vaccines and pass them on to the states as grants in kind.

Refuting reports that no provision for expenditure on Covid-19 vaccination has been done by the central government, the finance ministry said, "vaccines have actually been, and are being, procured by and paid for by the Centre through this head of account (Demand for Grants No.40 Transfers to States)".

Since expenditure on vaccine is one-off expenditure outside the normal Centrally-Sponsored Schemes of the health ministry, separate fund-



ing ensures easy monitoring and management of these funds, the ministry noted.

The amount provided under this head for vaccinations is operated by the Ministry of Health. Vaccines are passed on to the states as grants in kind and the actual administration of vaccines is being done by states, it said.

Further, there is enough administrative flexibility to change the nature of the scheme between grants in kind and other forms of grants, it said in a statement.

"The use of the Demand titled 'Transfers to States' in no way implies that expenditure cannot be incurred by the Centre," the ministry said.

Currently, COVID-19 vaccines are being provided free of

cost by the Centre to those who are 45 years of age and above and to all frontline workers.

The Centre has so far provided more than 17.56 crore vaccine doses to states/ UTs free of cost.

The Centre has placed total orders of 26.60 crore doses for Rs 3,639.67 crore with the Serum Institute of India which is manufacturing Covishield vaccine while an order for 8 crore doses involving an amount of Rs 1,104.78 crore has been placed with Bharat Biotech for Covaxin.

India is facing the world's worst outbreak of COVID-19 cases with more than 3 lakh new daily cases being reported for two weeks now and the new cases reached more than 4 lakh daily over the weekend.

Govt rules out possibility of free grains distribution to migrants this time

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Monday ruled out the possibility of free foodgrains distribution to migrants saying there is no panic situation and no complete national lockdown unlike last year.

However, the Government has started distributing additional free grains again under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) for two months - May and June - to 80 crore ration cardholders.

The Government said there is no impact on prices of foodgrains in the open market due to free grains distribution under PMGKAY.

"Migrant crisis is not as big as it was last year. ... It is not a complete national lockdown. It is a local lockdown, industry is working.

The complete lockdown is not there. That panic is also not there," Food Secretary

Sudhanshu Pandey said in a virtual press meet. Those migrants, who have gone back to their villages, are availing ration supply either through state or central ration cards, he said.

The Secretary was responding to a query why the government has not announced a free grains scheme for migrants amid resurgence of the COVID cases.

Last year, the government had distributed 6.40 lakh tonne of foodgrains for free to migrants and stranded migrants.

Stating that there is an increase in use of ration card portability service during the pandemic year since April 2020, Pandey said almost 18.3 crore portable transactions have taken place during the COVID period, out of the total 26.3 crore transaction ever since this service was launched in August 2019.

RBI modifies norms for undertaking Govt business by private banks

PTI ■ MUMBAI



The Reserve Bank on Monday came out with modified guidelines that allow sound private sector banks to undertake Government business, whether at the Centre or in states.

According to the modified norms, scheduled private sector banks, which are not under the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework of the RBI, can undertake government business after executing an agreement with the central bank.

"Scheduled private sector banks, not having agency banking agreement with RBI, but intend to handle government agency business, may be appointed as agents of RBI upon execution of an agreement with RBI.

"This will be subject to the condition that the concerned bank is not under PCA framework or moratorium at

the time of making the application or signing of the agreement with RBI," the central bank said in a notification.

It may be mentioned that the Finance Ministry in February 2021 had lifted the embargo imposed in September 2012 on further allocation of government business to private sector banks.

In view of the lifting of the embargo, the RBI has decided to revise the framework for authorising Scheduled Private Sector Banks as agency banks of RBI for conduct of government business.

The notification further said existing private Sector agency bank with whom RBI already has agency banking agreement and who are authorised to do government agency business may continue to do these government agency businesses for Central and/or State Governments without taking any fresh approval from the central bank.

Sensex, Nifty rise for 4th straight session; pharma, banking stocks lead rally

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity gauges Sensex and Nifty rallied for the fourth straight session on Monday on hectic buying in mainly pharma, power and banking shares as investors brushed aside concerns over rising coronavirus cases amid positive global cues.

At the closing bell, the 30-share BSE index quoted 295.94 points or 0.60 per cent higher at 49,502.41.

Over the last four sessions, the Sensex has gained 1,248.90 points or 2.58 per cent.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty jumped 119.20 points or 0.80 per cent to 14,942.35 - taking its total gains over the four days to 445.85 points or 3.07 per cent.

On Monday, L&T was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying over 4 per cent, followed by Dr Reddy's, Sun Pharma, NTPC, PowerGrid, IndusInd Bank, ONGC and M&M.

On the other hand, UltraTech Cement, Infosys, Reliance Industries, HCL Tech and Axis Bank were five losers among the 30 shares.

Sectorally, BSE metal, capital goods, healthcare, power, utilities and industrials indices rose up to 3.53 per cent, while IT was in the red.

Broader midcap and smallcap indices rallied up to 0.97 per cent.

"Domestic equities continued to defy concerns of ris-

ing COVID-19 cases and extended mobility restrictions by several states by extending gains for the fourth consecutive trading day," said Binod Modi Head-Strategy at Reliance Securities.

Favourable global cues, steady March quarter earnings along with favourable commentary, liquidity support announced by the RBI and absence of nationwide lockdown have aided domestic equities to shrug off rising COVID-19 cases in the country, he further noted.

Rupee rises for 3rd day to close at 1-month high against dollar

Mumbai: The rupee rose by 16 paise to close at more than one-month high of 73.35 against the US dollar on Monday, marking its third straight session of gains on the back of positive domestic equities and weak American currency. However, sharp gains were prevented on surge in crude oil prices and FI outflows, analysts said. At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened at 73.34 and hit an intra-day high of 73.33 and a low of 73.48.

PTI

Investors' wealth jumps over ₹6.44 lakh cr in four days

New Delhi: Investors' wealth has increased by ₹6,44,760.45 crore in four trading sessions on the back of an equity market rally. In the last four trading sessions, the 30-share BSE benchmark has gained 1,248.90 points or 2.58%. On Monday, the index jumped 295.94 points or 0.60 per cent to close at 49,502.41. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies zoomed ₹6,44,760.45 crore to ₹2,13,28,658.05 crore in four trading days starting May 5.

"Domestic equities continued to defy concerns of rising Covid-19 cases and extended mobility restrictions by several state by extending gains for the fourth consecutive trading day. "We note that favourable global cues, steady March quarter earnings along with favourable commentary, liquidity support announced by RBI and absence of nationwide lockdown have aided domestic equities to shrug off rising Covid-19 cases in the country," Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities, said. PTI

BioNTech to build first mRNA manufacturing facility in Singapore

Berlin: German biotechnology company BioNTech on Monday announced plans to expand its global footprint to Asia by building its first mRNA manufacturing facility in Singapore.

The Covid vaccine maker will establish its regional headquarters for Southeast Asia in Singapore, later this year, it said in a statement. The facility will be operational as early as 2023, it added.

The fully integrated mRNA manufacturing facility will provide regional and global supply capacity of BioNTech's growing pipeline of mRNA-based product candidates. It will be equipped to produce a range of novel mRNA vaccines and therapeutics for infectious diseases and cancer.

IANS

Users not accepting privacy terms to face limited functionality: WhatsApp

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

WhatsApp will not delete any account for not accepting its new privacy update, but users not agreeing to the controversial terms after "several weeks" will not be able to access their chat list, and eventually, will not be able to answer incoming phone or video calls over the app.

Last week, the Facebook-owned company had said users not accepting its privacy policy update by its May 15 deadline will not face deletion or lose functionality of their accounts on the said date.

WhatsApp, on its website, said it is continuing to remind those who haven't had the chance to review and accept the terms, and after a period of several weeks, "the reminder (that) people receive will eventually become persistent".

It, however, did not divulge the timelines set for these reminders.

Explaining the course of action after 'persistent' reminders are sent to users, WhatsApp said: "At that time, you'll encounter limited



functionality on WhatsApp until you accept the updates".

"This will not happen to all users at the same time. You won't be able to access your chat list, but you can still answer incoming phone and video calls.

If you have notifications enabled, you can tap on them to read or respond to a message or call back a missed phone or video call," it said.

The messaging platform said after a few weeks of limited functionality, users, who still won't accept the terms, "won't be able to receive incoming calls or notifications and WhatsApp will stop sending messages and calls to your

Govt expects edible oil prices to cool off with release of imported stock

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Monday expressed hope that retail prices of edible oils would soften following the release of imported stock that was stuck at ports due to clearance issues.

According to the government data, retail prices of edible oils have shot up by 55.55 per cent in over a year and are adding to the woes of consumers already reeling under the economic distress induced by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Responding to a query on steps taken to contain the rise in edible oils prices, Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey said the government monitors edible prices closely.

The secretary said that the industry mentioned recently there was some holding of some stock at Kandla and Mundra ports because of clearances related to tests done by various agencies as part of the general risk analysis in view of the COVID situation.

"That problem has been



addressed along with customs and FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India). With that stock getting released in the market, we hope to see the softening impact on the oil prices," he told in a virtual press conference.

The Secretary further said that India is dependent on imports to meet the shortages of edible oil. Annually, the country imports edible oils worth Rs 75,000 crore.

According to the government data, retail price of vanaspati has increased by 55.55 per cent to Rs 140 a kg on May 8 this year, from Rs 90 per kg in the year-ago period.

Similarly, retail price of palm oil has risen by 51.54 per cent to Rs 132.6 per kg from Rs 87.5 per kg.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is notified for the information of passengers that Railways have decided to withdraw the stoppage from Dimapur station and to provide temporary alternate stoppage at other stations on temporary basis with immediate effect until further advice. The details are given below:-

Train No. & Name	Alternative Stoppage	Arr.	Dep.
05909 Dibrugarh - Lalgarh Jn. (Via Barabanki & Lucknow) Special Express	Bokajan Station	15:42	15:44
05910 Lalgarh Jn. - Dibrugarh (Via Lucknow & Barabanki) Special Express	Bokajan Station	08:50	08:52
05933 New Tinsukia Jn. - Amritsar Special Express	Bokajan Station	13:41	13:43
05934 Amritsar - New Tinsukia Jn. Special Express	Bokajan Station	21:25	21:27
02503 Dibrugarh - New Delhi Special Express	Bokajan Station	00:04	00:06
02504 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Special Express	Diphu Station	01:17	01:19
	Diphu Station	22:03	22:05
02423 Dibrugarh - New Delhi Special Express	Bokajan Station	00:54	00:56
	Bokajan Station	01:38	01:40
02424 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Special Express	Diphu Station	02:39	02:41
	Diphu Station	00:07	00:09
	Bokajan Station	01:22	01:24

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

For any kind information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

RailMadad Helpline No. 139

Visit RailMadad website : www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in & download Railmadad app.

Please join us on **NORTHERN RAILWAY**

Visit us at: www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

HEALTH

Ivermectin Hopes

As Goa continues to top the country's Covid positivity rate chart, the state government on Monday cleared a new Covid treatment protocol which recommends all residents above the age of 18 to take five tablets of the ivermectin drug, in order to prevent the steep and sometimes fatal viral fever, which accompanies a Covid-19 infection



HEALTH IS WEALTH

Following a healthy lifestyle is important. More so, when health and overall wellbeing is at the forefront.

DIPAK KUMAR SINGH shares tips that can help



One cannot escape death, but can certainly prevent old age. The fundamental principle of a healthy, relaxed, happy and stress free life is that one must follow a self-determined routine — self-discipline in daily routine. Here are a few suggestions based upon my learning:

One, try to make the moment of getting up in the morning, your happiest moment of the day. Smile at the world when you open your eyes or even laugh loudly. This forms the base of your feelings for the whole day.

Two, water regime. Drink at least four litres of water every day. Also, drink at least three glasses of warm water, first thing in the morning. Avoid drinking cold water. It should be at least room temperature.

Three, follow a good food regime. Take three meals and nothing in between, unless you have been medically advised to take five meals or more. Breakfast should be ideally within four hours of waking up and should be the heaviest. Fruits should be consumed in the first half of the day only. Avoid fruits after mid-day. Curd should be taken with the breakfast, unless prohibited by doctor. *Mattha* with lunch. And no curd item in the dinner. Emphasis should be on quality of food rather than quantity. Consume those foods, which gives more energy and nutrients, in less quantity.

Four, work place regime. In case you have long sitting job: Use straight back chair, keep your back straight, aligned with the chair back, get up after every 45 minutes and take a stroll for five minutes and stretch your neck backwards whenever you remember.

Caution: Whenever you stretch your neck backwards, keep your eyes closed.

Five, post dinner regime. Dinner should be taken ideally before 8 pm. There should be about four hours of gap between dinner and sleep. Brush your teeth after having the meal. Walk for at least 20 minutes. Take steam and gargle with salt and *haldi* mixed in hot water. Switch off your mobile at least half an hour before you go to bed, unless your profession demands to keep it on 24 hours.

Six, after you go to bed put two drops of mustard oil in your navel and rub it with your finger tip, 40 times clockwise and 40 times anti-clockwise. Put two drops of mustard oil in each nostril. Once on bed, close your eyes and remember each and every event that has happened since morning. Forgive those who have hurt you in any way on that day. Ask forgiveness from those whom you have hurt in any way. This will relax your mind and you will have a sound sleep with positive thought, and will wake up smiling the next morning. Have at least seven hours of sleep in the night. Try to follow the age old maxim — early to bed and early to rise.

And last but not the least, follow a good work out regime. spend at least one hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening on your personal exercise regime. Remember walking, jogging and breathing exercises have to be a part of your exercise regime.

The writer is Principal Secretary, Environment, Forest and Climate Change Dept, Government of Bihar



ALL ABOUT BLACK FUNGUS

MUSBA HASHMI speaks with DR RAHUL BHARGAVA to bring you a report on Mucormycosis, a rare fungal infection reported in COVID-19 patients

As if the second wave of COVID-19 wasn't enough to make you shiver with fear, the country is reporting a rash of cases involving a fungal infection. Mucormycosis (sometimes called zygomycosis) is a serious but rare fungal infection caused by a group of molds called mucormycetes. These molds live throughout the environment. When someone breathes in these spores, infection in the sinus or lung can occur.

Mucormycosis can also develop on the skin after the fungus enters the skin through a cut, scrape or other type of skin trauma. Mucormycosis primarily affects people who have health problems or take medicines that lower the body's ability to fight germs and sickness.

"The symptoms associated with the disease include one-sided facial swelling, headache, nasal or sinus congestion, loss of vision or pain in the eyes, swelling in cheeks and eyes, fever and black crusts in the nose. The US Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates Mucormycosis with an overall all-cause mortality rate of 54 per cent," Dr Rahul Bhargava, Head ENT & Neck Surgeon, Bhargava ENT & Gynaec Clinic and Medical Consultant — ENTOD

International, tells you.

Mucormycosis is affecting COVID patients more because of prolonged administration of steroids and subsequent immunocompromised state.

"Diabetic patients are at much higher risk of mucormycosis if affected by COVID-19 because Covid-19 further impairs their immune system and second, they are given corticosteroids for their treatment. This leads to a rise in their blood sugar level thus increasing their risk of mucormycosis. This combination of Diabetes and Covid-19, therefore, becomes a dangerous and deadly challenge to manage. Some cases of mucormycosis have also been observed in patients with an asymptomatic Covid-19 infection who were not even aware of their diagnosis," Bhargava, who has come across three patients in past one week who have contracted this infection after recovering from COVID-19, explains.

A cause of worry is that presently, there are no feasible measures to prevent mucormycosis however, early detection is the best solution for now.

"Some of the things which can be done to prevent it are nasal douching and gargles with Betadine

Diabetic patients are at much higher risk of mucormycosis if affected by COVID-19 because Covid-19 further impairs their immune system and they are also given corticosteroids for their treatment

solution, proper control of Diabetes and using steroids only on prescription by a physician. Turmeric contains curcumin which is also good for fungal-infections," he says.

Bhargava tells you that it is a serious infection and needs to be treated with prescription antifungal medicine, usually posaconazole, amphotericin B or isavuconazole. "These medicines are given

through a vein (amphotericin B, posaconazole, isavuconazole) or by mouth (posaconazole, isavuconazole). Other medicines, including voriconazole, fluconazole and echinocandins, do not work against the fungi that cause mucormycosis. Often, mucormycosis requires surgery to cut away the infected tissue," he adds.

The correlation between COVID-19 and Mucormycosis, Bhargava says, is not surprising at all. "Because the major risk factor for Mucormycosis is uncontrolled Diabetes mellitus which is also a high-risk factor for COVID-19. Secondly, steroids — which are known to suppress immunity — are the only of treatment, like I have mentioned before, which has shown to decrease COVID-19 mortality. So, it is the combination of COVID-19, with decreased immunity and the steroids which probably predispose a patient to Mucormycosis," he says.

Since the association between the deadly virus and mucormycosis is the state of weakened immune responses in patients, it depends from patient to patient when one can develop this infection. It may take days or even weeks after one has recovered from COVID to get infected with the fungus.

DOCYARD

DR ASHU RASTOGI

Asso Professor, Dept of Endocrinology

PGI CHANDIGARH



Vitamin D intake is vital



Many studies have now found high association between Vitamin D levels and COVID-19 severity and mortality. Such studies showed that patients with COVID-19 had significantly lower Vitamin D levels. In addition, fever was significantly higher in patients who had deficient Vitamin D levels compared with patients who had sufficient levels. Additionally, it has been found that older adults with Vitamin D deficiency and COVID-19 had worse morbidity outcomes compared with those who were not deficient.

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin that plays a number of critical roles in body. This nutrient is especially important for immune system health. Since, it is a group of fat-soluble compounds responsible for intestinal absorption of calcium, magnesium, and phosphate, and for a variety of additional biological effects; low levels of Vitamin D can increase the likelihood of developing multiple acute and chronic ailments. A weaker immune system means body's weak defence against infection and disease.

A prospective, interventional study found that a high dose of calcifediol reduced the need for intensive care stays in patients infected with COVID-19. Because Vitamin D deficiency has been shown to potentially increase the risk of severe respiratory infections, Vitamin D supplements are suggested for prevention and treatment of COVID-19 complications, especially acute respiratory disease. Nowadays many brands of Vitamin D supplementation are available in market like D3 Must, Caldikind, Calshine, etc.

Because Vitamin D deficiency has been shown to potentially increase the risk of severe respiratory infections, Vitamin D supplements are suggested for prevention and treatment of COVID-19 complications

It is noticed that those receiving Vitamin D supplementation have fewer respiratory tract infections.

According to the SHADE study published by BMJ and led by Dr Rastogi and his team, greater proportion of vitamin D-deficient individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection turned SARS-CoV-2 RNA negative with a significant decrease in fibrinogen on high-dose cholecalciferol supplementation.

We have seen that seven days high dose of Vitamin D3 (60000 IU) supplementation helps in Coronavirus clearance.

Given the evidence supporting the role of vitamin D in modulating immune function, and the impact of vitamin D supplementation on vitamin D-deficient patients with COVID-19, practical recommendations should be synthesised as follows:

■ Current public health guidelines for optimising vitamin D status should be followed always

■ Patients hospitalised with COVID-19 should have baseline serum 25(OH)D concentrations measured and should be supplemented to a level >30ng/mL (optimal 40-60ng/mL), especially when the baseline level is <10ng/mL

■ In COVID-19 patients with 25(OH)D serum concentrations under 20ng/mL the recommended dose for correction of deficiency is 6000-7000 oral IU/ day for 6-8 weeks. For maintenance, the dose varies from 2000 to 3000 oral IU/day depending on the age and clinical condition of the individual up to reach optimal concentrations.

■ When it is not possible to measure baseline 25(OH)D concentrations in COVID-19 patients, it seems essential supplementing with 2000-3000 oral IU per day up to the suggested optimal serum concentrations (40-60ng/mL).

Though India is a subtropical country with adequate sunlight, Vitamin D deficiency is prevalent. Sunlight rapidly inactivate SARS-CoV-2 on surfaces, suggesting that there may be an environmental benefit associated with Vitamin D as a result of sun exposure. It is necessary for people to understand the importance of Vitamin D so that they can take relevant medications.

COVIDCARE

GARLIC: While many of us might not like the smell of garlic, and hence avoid eating it, this herb is highly nutritious. It is low in calories and rich in Vitamin C, vitamin B6 and manganese. It also contains trace amounts of various other nutrients. Hence, it may help in boosting immunity which is undoubtedly the need of the hour.

appear to improve blood pressure for those with known high blood pressure (hypertension). In some instances, supplements may be as effective as regular medications.

It also seem to reduce total and LDL cholesterol, particularly in those who have high cholesterol.



We can't emphasise enough on the importance of oiling long hair regularly. One can use coconut, almond, mustard or even olive oil. Massage it into the scalp and leave it overnight. Wash with a mild shampoo in the morning. However, if you have an oily skin, oil your hair and leave it for an hour and then wash off. One can wrap a hot towel around the head for 10 minutes to help in the better absorption of the oil. If one reason why you

don't want to sport long hair is because they fall, use aloe vera. It soothes the scalp and conditions hair. It reduces dandruff and unblock hair follicles that may be blocked by excess oil. You can apply pure aloe vera gel to your scalp and hair a few times a week.



Apply a mask made of egg; it is an excellent source of protein, which helps your hair grow longer. Just crack open two eggs, strain the yolks and use the egg white on your hair. Let it stay for 20 minutes and wash off.

DadiKaKehna

Long and silky hair are a dream of many. But, many of us end up cutting it short because of the hair fall that follows. ROSHANI DEVI shares easy to follow home remedies that can help



TIPTOP

Public health experts and social activists on May 10, 2021 rooted for a more sustained communication for behaviour change in the realm of hand-washing in India, not only to save people from the COVID-19 pandemic but for a longer-term prevention. Speaking at the Hand Hygiene Summit, organised by the Integrated Health and Wellbeing (IHW) Council, supported by Dettol, on World Hand Hygiene Day, they also emphasised the need of inter-ministerial coordination and collaboration for holistic communication.

"There is a lot of diversity in needs and inequity in India when it comes to handwashing practices. Behaviour change in people has remained unaddressed for a long time. We need a localised, multi-channel, sustained communication to nudge behaviour change, starting with children and schools — people them-

selves can come up with innovative localised solutions for their needs," says Urvashi Prasad, Senior Public Policy Specialist in the Office of Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog.

Highlighting that the better handwashing practice in the past one year is a fear-driven adoption, Arundati Muralidharan, Manager Policy (WASH in Health & Nutrition, and Schools), WaterAid India, says, "We need to make hand hygiene a social norm because fear-driven adoption of hygiene practices can remain active for a limited time. Hygiene should be a part of a group of protective behaviours, but there are mindset barriers for which raising awareness is important. We have not made enough investment on hygiene in the community setting or public space; inter-ministerial involvement is important to achieve that goal."

SLIMLINE

In response to the massive surge of COVID-19 cases, Gurugram-based Elanpro (Elan Professional Appliances Pvt. Ltd.), India's one of the leading commercial refrigeration company hailed its efforts by providing 2050 Oxygen Concentrators at zero-profit. Available with different capacity, Elanpro has airlifted 2050 oxygen concentrators to distribute it across India in order to support people during these difficult times. Offering at a zero-profit price, the company is contributing for the betterment of society.

With the second wave of COVID-19, it is even more imperative to ensure that apart from metropolitan cities, every district or rural area should be provided with the necessary equipment. The demand for Oxygen Concentrators and Cylinders have increased. Considering these factors, Elanpro has been reaching out to several NGOs and hospitals to lend a helping hand to the district and rural areas. Deepening its engagement with the Government, Elanpro has also reached out to Gurugram District Commissioner's office to contribute 100 units of Oxygen concentrators in COVID Centre at Gurugram.

INBRIEF

At a time when Delhi's medical infrastructure is reeling under a menacing COVID wave, leading Delhi-based dermatologist Dr Chiranjiv Chhabra has launched a new initiative to provide medical support and guidance to patients by converting her skin and wellness clinics into COVID tele-support centres.

The initiative aims to help provide medical guidance, monitoring and support to patients with mild or moderate illness in a bid to bridge the medical care gap being experienced by a large number of patients.

Led by Dr Chhabra, her team of 12 doctors and health educators have taken charge of the tele-support initiative with an objective to enable early treatment for as many patients as possible, thereby preventing complications and need for critical care.

"Over the past few weeks, we have been witnessing an alarming situation where healthcare is crumbling under the weight of the pandemic and patients are running from pillar to post to be able to find a doctor. We have seen a number of people experience severe complications because of delay in treatment as doctors are heavily occupied treating critically ill patients. This is a gap we want to bridge through our tele-support initiative. Our main objective is to treat mild and moderately ill patients early so that we can save them from reaching a stage where they would need hospitalisation or oxygen support," said Dr Chiranjiv Chhabra, leading dermatologist and founder of Alive Wellness Clinics.

To undertake this initiative, Alive Wellness Clinics has tied up with general physicians and chest specialists to facilitate tele-consultation of patients under the guidance of the team.



'Sui Dhaaga became extra special when I got the chance to share the screen space with my mom.'
 —Namit Das

The emergence of edtech

Until some years ago, the concept of an online classroom was frowned upon and not considered with any seriousness. However, the pandemic has changed such thinking, says VIKAS KAKWANI



The education industry has undergone a revolutionary change in recent times. Although these were ushered in by a chain of unfortunate events, the results have been astounding, especially for the Edtech industry where start-ups that had received \$553 million worth of investment in 2019. These have shot up to nearly \$2.22 billion now. A report by RedSeer and Omidyar Network India states that India's EdTech industry is expected to touch \$3.5 billion by 2022. Almost all the companies in this sector have fared well and are looking forward to expanding themselves in the coming quarters. But that was not the case before the pandemic.

Until some years ago, the concept of an online classroom was frowned upon and not considered with any seriousness. The only role that technology was thought to play in children's lives was that of a distraction, making them stray away from their actual goals. Though it hasn't been smooth sailing, times are changing. In India, accessibility is a major road-

block, with only 20 per cent of students having access to both laptops and smartphones, whereas 20 per cent have access to just smartphones, 30 per cent have access to only feature phones, while the remaining 30 per cent don't have any devices. Such a scenario does bring forward lots of challenges along with a myriad of opportunities for the Edtech industry. To understand the opportunities and to gauge its growth, one has to return to the time when the pandemic had just hit the country.

The nationwide lockdown in March 2020 had sent over 250 million student population into a state of disaster. Given that the country was still grappling even to understand the situation, the hardships faced by students were barely considered.

While some urban institutes and student populace did turn to the online medium without a fuss, their strength was still numbered. It has to be duly noted that in rural areas where the technological infrastructure is limited, such solutions are out of reach. Returning to the brick and mortar



classroom was unlikely and in face of such a crisis, edtech companies proved to be godsend for students as well as parents.

The technology used by these platforms is well-researched as are the teaching methods. Combining cutting-edge technology with a person-

alised learning methodology, arguably, these are delivering much better results than conventional teaching methods.

Now, if you are wondering how Edtech can reach out to rural masses and the disadvantaged, you only have to look at the innovations

brought on by some of the leading companies. Using the impetus of the government for Digital India along with the increased internet penetration, these firms are ensuring that their resources are available at the lowest possible cost.

The fact that these apps can be downloaded easily with most of the content being free for users implies edtech companies are striking the right balance between profit and the cause of imparting quality education.

With the pandemic showing no signs of abating, analysts have predicted that these companies' positive growth trend will sustain in the forthcoming quarters. However, even after the situation changes, these platforms are here to stay. What is likely to change is rather the conventional attitude to education. The time is not far when almost all conventional classrooms will depend on edtech solutions for a more wholesome learning experience.

(The writer is the founder of an edtech firm - AAS Vidyalaya.)



Kubbra reveals her idea of perfect old age

Sacred Games' actor Kubbra Sait says that in her sixties or seventies, she would like a tiny home with a little garden probably growing cabbages. "Oh yeah, if it faces the beach, then that will be amazing," quips Kubbra.

The performer, who left behind a successful corporate career for acting, recently featured on the *My 3 Secrets To Success* audio series on Audible Suno.

Answering a question on what her 60s or 70s should look like, she adds, "So, some clean air to breathe, a book to read and probably my fingers entwined with someone I love. I think that would be an ideal 60s-70s to me. We're not chasing every day. I don't think I'm chasing today either. I'm thinking of the opportunities that come to me at the moment but there isn't a chase anymore, and I think if you stop chasing things, you automatically reach a point of calmness and that's very different from being numb from the chase."

On the work front, Kubbra shared her excitement about

Foundation, that's about to release this year. "It's I think one sole project that I have put in about a year and a half of mine, and that feels extremely valuable," says she.

"I don't think today your currency is money. Your currency is time. So if I have been able to break out of that mental block and invest time in a project that I believe in, I think it's going to pay off pretty well and I'm quite excited about it. Apart from that, I've got three work projects in process and when they come to realisation, I'll share them with you. But otherwise I can say that, I've got a book coming, I've got a show coming out, I've been on this Audible podcast," adds she.

Finally, speaking about her Zen mode: "I'm being in a state of solitude in a state of Zen. I am being that person. And it's just allowing you to recognise the past, the present and the future as it's going to be. I think it's very important to be in a state of Zen so that you can allow the future to unfold. It's exciting. So, what's keeping me busy, my Zen is keeping me busy." —IANS

Promising crossover

The *Mission Majnu* team spills the beans on what made actor RASHMIKA MANDANNA the first and the best choice for the role

Actor Rashmika Mandanna will soon be seen in her Bollywood debut opposite actor Sidharth Malhotra. *Mission Majnu* is her first foray into a spy thriller yet the team unanimously felt that she was their first and best choice for the film.

"We were looking for a formidable actor with a fresh face when we chanced upon some of Rashmika's work. I was especially impressed by her nuanced performance in *Dear Comrade*. We felt she had the right mixture of innocence and beauty required for the crucial role, which needed a sensitive interpretation of the character. I think there's a very good chance the Indian audience will discover another film star from the South," said Shantanu Baagchi, the director of *Mission Majnu*. The prominent ad filmmaker is making his directorial debut with the forthcoming film.

Producer Amar Butala also expressed his admiration for Rashmika, "My first interaction with her was over a zoom call during the lockdown when we narrated the script of



Mission Majnu. It was remarkable to see how she picked up every nuance of her character even though we were on a video call. It's been a pleasure working with her because not only she brings a solid experience and confidence of a big film star with her, but also has the sincere energy of a newcomer."

Producer Garima Mehta chimed in, "The first thing you see in Rashmika is her dazzling smile, the sheer energy and charm that she exudes. Since her debut film *Kirik Party*, later *Geetha Govindham* and *Dear Comrade*, she has grown into an exceptional actor. We were sure she would bring alive her role in the film. Rashmika and Sidharth share great on-screen chemistry in *Mission Majnu* and would surely be loved by her fan base."

The actress' impeccable work has not only left the audience in awe but a team of producers and directors as well who wasted no time to bring her on board for the film. Besides *Mission Majnu*, Rashmika has another Bollywood film in the pipeline, *Goodbye* with Amitabh Bachchan. She would also be starring in the Telugu action thriller titled *Pushpa*, along with Allu Arjun later this year.

Technology comes to the rescue to ensure personal hygiene. Let's find out how

Go waterless

Hygiene is an important aspect of today's lives, especially with the ongoing pandemic. Inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene practices are the cause of death for lakhs of people every year, majority of them being children. Provision of clean water is one of the most effective methods of saving lives.

However, clean water is a novelty in the current world as we are using tons of it every day to drink, bathe and cook. But it is not available around the world on an equitable basis. Hence, we all should make sure that water is conserved.

Benefits associated with waterless formulations include reduction in plastic waste, reduction in costs and aiding the creation of effective products. Along with reduce-reuse-recycle processes, a sustainable life can be achieved with the use of waterless personal care products wherein technological advancements play a key role.

Waterless technology can now be used in every aspect of personal hygiene in these ways:

Hand hygiene

Hand hygiene could be easily managed with waterless soaps which require no or less water to rinse off the foam. Such waterless products can come handy on a long trip and in distant places with less water availability.

Bodily hygiene

A daily shower is necessary to



maintain personal hygiene and healthy living. A well-showered body reduces the odour produced by perspiration, and get rid of most germs. In situations with no water availability or inability to take a shower, use a waterless body bath and shampoo to maintain a shower routine.

Oral hygiene

The use of a toothbrush for cleaning after all meals is essential for the prevention of oral cavities and infections. Food and drinks leave residue in the teeth that grow.

Newer technology like waterless toothpastes could be a new addition to your personal care kit where you would require no water to rinse off the

residue. A safe to swallow formulation makes it easy to use and effective for dental hygiene.

Intimate hygiene

Avoiding infections, fungus or itching is essential. Women should wash their genitals more than twice a day to avoid bacterial infections such as by *E.coli*. This can be done by using waterless intimate hygiene products as personal care. For men, it is advised to keep hygienic with waterless products.

Head hygiene

Hair should be washed two or three times a week. Waterless shampoo is another addition to personal care for maintaining hygiene with no water. It is

an easy to use spray formulation rinsed off with a towel or a tissue.

Another feature of waterless products is that they are free from parabens and preservatives. That concludes to them being extremely safe for all skin types. A transition to waterless products is a road taken by lesser people but once the move has been made it would lead to a lesser carbon footprint.

The products are sold in more concentrated, compact packages, they can significantly decrease the number of materials needed to house them. And, shipping waterless formulas requires less space and therefore, less fuel. It's these seemingly small benefits that actually have the potential to make a real impact. —IANS

TRENDBLAZER



FEEL LIKE OUTSIDER: SHARMAN

Actor SHARMAN JOSHI has worked in Bollywood for over two decades now. While he understands how the film industry and the connections work, he says he still feels like an outsider and feels sorry for himself for not being connected to the star parivaars of Bollywood.

"I understand that there is a certain monogamy of certain generations of families that have been in business, and tomorrow my children would."

fairtalk



'I don't want to take up any cop role for sure. I really want to cut down on playing intense roles as it's started to play with my head. I want to do lighter roles, common man roles... even a dark comedy would do. Actors get stereotyped in everything. It's your responsibility how to get out of it. You need to think about yourself, no one else will.'

dailytalk



'I think artistes who are constantly writing music, putting out videos, and entertaining everyone since the last one year while staying at home are also acting like frontline workers. Artists are frontline workers. Our audience never knows what mental condition we are going through while singing a song but what keeps us going is their love.'

I AM WARM WITH MY CHILDREN: JOLIE

Actor ANGELINA JOLIE said that she makes sure to always be very warm and gentle when it comes to her kids.

She added that this is something that she has learnt from her late mother Marcheline Bertrand.

She said, "My mother was very gentle. I can be many things in my work and in my life, but I am very warm and gentle with my children. That kindness and warmth is a foundation that's unbelievably important."



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BABAR ICC PLAYER OF MONTH
DUBAI: Pakistan skipper Babar Azam and Australian women's team wicketkeeper Alyssa Healy were on Monday declared the ICC players of the month for their stellar performances during the month of April.

WEST BROM RELEGATED
LONDON: West Brom was relegated after one season back in the Premier League after losing 3-1 at Arsenal, ending Sam Allardyce's record of never having taken a side down from England's top division as a manager.

VIKAS, ISHANT GET FIRST DOSE
MUMBAI: India captain Virat Kohli and senior pacer Ishant Sharma on Monday received their first dose of Covid-19 vaccination. While Kohli, who now lives in Mumbai, posted a photo on Instagram, Ishant and his wife Pratima, a former India hoopster, also uploaded their selfie in front of a vaccination centre.

VARUN, WARRIOR BACK HOME
NEW DELHI: KKR leg-spinner Varun Chakravarthy and pacer Sandeep Warrier, who were the first to test +ve for Covid-19 in the currently-suspended IPL's bio-bubble, have returned to their respective home cities after completing 10 days of mandatory isolation.

CAVANI EXTENDS MAN UTD STAY
MANCHESTER: Edinson Cavani has agreed to extend his contract by one year and will remain with Man United until June 2022.

GORETZKA COULD MISS EUROS
MUNICH: Bayern Munich midfielder Leon Goretzka will be ruled out for the rest of the season and could miss the start of Euro 2020 after picking up a thigh injury.

SRH OWNERS DONATE ₹30 CR
NEW DELHI: Owners of IPL team Sunrisers Hyderabad, Sun TV, on Monday donated ₹30 crore towards Covid-19 relief work being undertaken by the state and central Governments along with various NGOs.

SHAFALI TO PLAY FOR BIRMINGHAM
NEW DELHI: India's teen batting sensation Shafali Verma is set to play for Birmingham Phoenix in the inaugural edition of The Hundred and might also turn up for a Sydney franchise in the Women's Big Bash League.

SINNER SETS UP NADAL CLASH
ROME: Jannik Sinner booked a second-round showdown with nine-time champion Rafael Nadal at the Italian Open after a 6-2, 6-4 win over Frenchman Ugo Humbert on Monday.

BACH'S JAPAN VISIT POSTPONED
TOKYO: IOC chief Thomas Bach has been forced to postpone a visit to Japan, organisers said on Monday, after a coronavirus state of emergency was extended less than three months before the Tokyo Games.

FLICK AGREED GERMAN DEAL
BERLIN: Hansi Flick, who is stepping down as Bayern Munich coach at the end of this season, will take over the German national team after this summer's Euro, a German newspaper reported on Monday.

MEDVEDEV RETAKES 2ND SPOT
PARIS: Daniil Medvedev reclaimed the world number two spot from Rafael Nadal in the latest ATP rankings released on Monday, with no Americans in the top 30 for the first time.

MURRAY TO COMPETE AT QUEEN'S
LONDON: Andy Murray will warm up for this year's championship at Queen's, where he has lifted the trophy five times.

Doubt IPL 2021 will continue in India: Neesham

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

New Zealand all-rounder Jimmy Neesham doesn't think that there is any chance of the remaining 31 matches of Indian Premier League happening in India this year, after the tournament got postponed due to Covid-19 cases inside the bio-bubble.

He also has serious doubts whether India would be able to host the 16-team T20 World Cup later this year.

Both IPL and T20 World Cup are set to be re-scheduled to the United Arab Emirates.

"If it did start up again, I doubt the IPL would be in India again," said Neesham told *Newshub*.

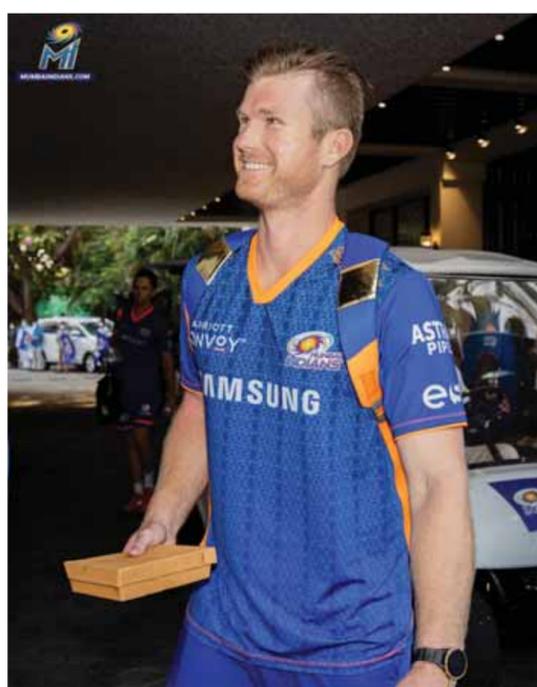
"I think we've already seen plans for the T20 World Cup to move out of India later in the year and they're going to be ultra-cautious about that sort of thing," said Neesham, who was playing for Mumbai Indians in the now suspended league.

Neesham feels the bio-security lapses could be due to the fact that the teams were travelling across the country.

"Even though we were flying on chartered planes, we have to go through customs, hand your details over to people, walk through terminals, so there were always going to be pinch-points there," he said.

Neesham said that it is difficult to comprehend how the bubble was breached.

"We obviously don't know yet exactly how teams were infiltrated, but... it's such a difficult prospect to



keep everything perfect and when you've got so many guys that are close to each other, there are going to be social interactions after games.

"Once one team has it, you start looking back through your last week at who you talked to and who you shook hands with. It certainly

gets your mind racing."

However Neesham isn't averse to the idea of going back to India again and playing the IPL if it resumes.

"For me, I signed up for the IPL knowing what it might be like. I felt like it was an obligation — I made

the commitment to go and never had any thoughts of pulling out individually before the tournament finished," he said.

"Guys will have different opinions on that, but it's my job, I'm a professional and you have plenty of times you tour countries you're not that keen on going to, but it's about getting on the field and getting the job done.

"I would sign up again, especially once vaccinations start rolling out. I don't think anyone really predicted how quickly it would all come crashing down over there and how quickly we would be on the first plane out."

The IPL was suspended last Tuesday after four players and two coaches from four different teams tested positive for the dreaded disease within a space of 48 hours.

"To be honest, I wasn't expecting it to get called off. I think, when you've got so many teams in different bubbles, the expectation was that there would always be some cases at some point during the tournament," Neesham said.

"We thought teams might have to lock down and miss a couple of games, like we've seen in other organisations, like the NBA. The show must go on.

"The thing that was so shocking was how quickly it came up in so many different teams at the same time and we didn't really have an option in the end."

Neesham said they were "not out of the woods yet" and may develop symptoms in the coming days.

Poms won't force quarantining IPL stars back for NZ series

AFP ■ LONDON

Team director Ashley Giles says England have no plans to "rush" their IPL stars back for next month's Test series against New Zealand and could introduce new faces to cope with a packed schedule.

The suspension of the IPL because of the devastating coronavirus outbreak in India has left England with a potentially larger player pool than they envisaged for the two-Test series against New Zealand.

Among those currently serving quarantine periods are Jos Buttler, Chris Woakes and Sam Curran, all of whom have Test contracts with England.

They could be available for County Championship matches starting on May 20 before joining the England 'bubble' ahead of the first Test against New Zealand at Lord's, which begins on June 2.

But even if the trio are in

contention, England may have to call up fresh reinforcements given Ben Stokes and Dom Sibley are currently injured, while fast bowler Jofra Archer has only recently returned to action with Sussex's 2nd XI.

"All these guys (returning from the IPL) are currently in quarantine and have had a number of spells in quarantine and bubbles," Giles said on Monday. "We need to look after them, with the amount of cricket they've got coming up. We're not going to rush or force them back into cricket."

Chris Silverwood (the England coach) will work with each and every one of them, as will our medical teams on what's best for their progress."

After the New Zealand series, England have five Tests at home to India before travelling to Australia later this year in a bid to regain the Ashes. England also have numerous white-ball commitments, including the planned T20 World Cup in India.



Pak seal series

AP ■ HARARE

Pakistan quickly took the one wicket it needed on Monday for another innings victory over struggling Zimbabwe in the second Test and a 2-0 series sweep.

It took only five overs on Day 4 for Shaheen Shah Afridi to end it by having Luke Jongwe caught behind by wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan for 37.

Pakistan won by an innings and 147 runs at Harare Sports Club to go with the innings and 116-run win in the first Test at the same venue.

Pakistan also claimed a slice of history with Afridi's 5-52 making him the third Pakistan bowler in the Test to take a five-wicket haul. He and Nauman Ali (5-86) took five each in the second innings after Hasan Ali's five in the first.

It's the first time Pakistan has had three bowlers with five wickets in a match, and the first time it has happened in Tests since 1993.

Zimbabwe continued on 220-9 in its second innings, on the brink of defeat and still 158 runs short of making Pakistan bat again. The home team added only 11 more runs to be all out for 231.

Malinga could return to play World T20

Kandy: Sri Lanka fast bowler Lasith Malinga could return to the national team for the T20 World Cup, said the national selection committee chairman Pramodya Wickramasinghe.

"We will talk to Lasith soon. He is in our plans for the forthcoming T20 tours, including the T20 World Cup coming up in October," said Wickramasinghe.

With back-to-back T20 World Cups scheduled in 2021 and 2022, Sri Lanka would need an experienced bowler like Malinga to marshal the attack.

"Lasith is in our plans. We always should not forget that he is one of the greatest bowlers in our country even in

his present form. His records speak for that. There are two back-to-back T20 World Cups that are coming up, this year and next year. We are going to discuss our plans with him when we meet him in the next couple of days," Wickramasinghe added.

Malinga said he is "looking forward" to meeting the selectors.

"I have retired from both Test and ODI cricket but not from T20s. I am keen to know how the selection committee is going to get the services of a senior player like me for the national side. In my career, I have proved on many occasions that I can come back after a long break and perform well for my country," he said.

No point in comparing yourself with anyone: Nagwaswalla

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Left-arm pacer Arzan Nagwaswalla, who will fly to the UK with the Indian team as a stand-by player, says shutting down comparisons, staying patient and focussing on routine played a key role in yielding the desired outcome for him.

Only a few Parsi cricketers have made the cut for the national team and Nagwaswalla is hoping to join the list after his stellar performance for Gujarat has placed him at the doorstep of the Indian team.

"The grind in domestic cricket has helped me understand the importance of routine. How to practice, how to bowl during practice and how to focus on the process and keep following the same, without

thinking too much about the result," Nagwaswalla told *bcci.tv*.

"If you follow the process correctly, you will surely get the desired outcome. In addition to that, it is important to be patient. There is no point comparing yourself with anyone and ponder over why someone else is selected and not me," the 23-year-old added.

The left-arm pacer was Gujarat's leading wicket-taker with 41 scalps in the 2019-20 season when his side made the Ranji Trophy semifinals.

The youngster said he was mighty impressed with the way the Indian team played and won in Australia and he just can't wait to see the senior players in flesh and bone, whom he has so far watched only on TV.

"I am excited to meet and

see all the cricketers *jinko abhee tak bass TV par India ke liye achha karte hue dekha hai*. They have secured some big wins against Australia and England recently. So, I am looking forward to learning as much as I can from all of them."

"I am very excited to meet this team. Despite the injuries, we went on to win the series in Australia. I just can't wait to witness the team which has such a strong self-belief," Nagwaswalla said.

He is also a big fan of the team's bowling coach Bharat Arun.

"Under Bharat Arun sir, our fast bowling has seen a great transformation. We have a superb bench strength. I am sure I will get to learn a lot from Bharat Arun sir"

AC Milan push Juve out of top 4

AFP ■ TURIN

AC Milan pushed Juventus out of the Serie A top four with a 3-0 win at Allianz Stadium on Sunday which increases their hopes of Champions League football for the first time since 2014.

Brahim Diaz put Milan ahead just before the break with Ante Rebic and Fikayo Tomori adding two more in the second half after Franck Kessie had missed a penalty.

Milan move up to third, equal on 72 points with second-placed Atalanta, with Napoli a further two points behind in fourth and the final Champions League berth.

Juventus are now fifth, one point behind the top four with three games left to play, including next weekend's clash with newly-crowned champions Inter Milan.

"We had a great game, a victory over a direct rival at this moment in the champi-



onship is very important," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli whose side lost 3-1 to Juve in the San Siro in January.

"We still have to fight. But I have a very young team, that is maturing as this evening proved."

PSG HOPES DENTED

Neymar was on target the day after signing his contract extension but Paris Saint-Germain were held to a 1-1 draw at Rennes on Sunday that leaves Lille a step closer to a remarkable Ligue 1 title triumph.

PSG led at half-time after Neymar converted a controversial penalty award, but they were pegged back in the second half as Serhou Guirassy headed in the equaliser.

Presnel Kimpembe was later sent off for Mauricio Pochettino's side, who could not get back to winning ways on their return to domestic action following their Champions League semi-final exit against Manchester City.

PSG are now three points adrift of Ligue 1 leaders Lille, who know they will be champions for the first time since 2011 by taking four points from their remaining two matches of the season.

Real salvage dramatic draw

Madrid: Eden Hazard's 94th-minute equaliser salvaged Real Madrid a dramatic 2-2 draw against Sevilla on Sunday as an extraordinary penalty decision swung La Liga's title race back in Atletico Madrid's favour.

Zidane's side had levelled through Marco Asensio midway through the second half and thought they had a penalty when Karim Benzema was brought down after rounding Sevilla goalkeeper Yassine Bono.

But VAR prompted referee to check an Eder Militao handball a few seconds before, with a huge decision seeing Madrid's penalty cancelled and a spot-kick awarded to Sevilla instead.

Ivan Rakitic converted and while Madrid still managed to hit back in injury time, Toni Kroos' shot deflecting in off Eden Hazard's foot, the draw hands the advantage back to Atletico at the end of another dramatic weekend in the Spanish title race. AFP

Zverev wins Madrid title

AFP ■ MADRID

Alexander Zverev recovered from a set down to defeat Matteo Berrettini 6-7 (8/10), 6-4, 6-3 and win the Madrid Open for a second time on Sunday as he clinched a fourth Masters 1000 title.

The German fifth seed recorded his third consecutive top-10 victory this week, having eliminated five-time Madrid champion Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem to reach the final.

Zverev, last year's US Open runner-up, added to his 2018 Madrid triumph as he denied Berrettini successive titles following the Italian's win in Belgrade last month.

"It is great (to win this



title), especially after losing my last three finals I played at Masters 1000 events," Zverev said. "This is definitely special and I just want to enjoy this one."

Zverev is now targeting a second Rome title at the Foro Italico this week. He captured his first Masters there in 2017 before also winning in Montreal later that year.

"Rome is also an event I like and enjoy, so I hope I can perform in the same way as I did here and we will see how it goes there. I feel awesome," said Zverev.

After Rome, the German star will target a maiden Grand Slam title at Roland Garros. However, he has yet to get beyond the quarter-finals in Paris.

"To play well at Roland Garros, you have to play well during the season on clay. In that sense, it's (Sunday's win) important to me," said Zverev.