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NEW DELHI, SATURDAY MAY 15, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3

the pioneer

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BE THERE FOR ONE ANOTHER: JACQUELINE
10 VIVACITY

Covid-19 IN INDIA

TOTAL CASES: 2,43,72,243 (+3,26,014)
DEATHS: 2,66,229 (+3,876)
RECOVERED: 2,04,26,323 (+3,52,850)
ACTIVE: 36,69,573
MAHA: 53,09,215 (+39,923)
K'TAKA: 21,30,267 (+41,779)
KERALA: 20,85,584 (+34,694)
UP: 15,96,627 (+15,647)
DELHI: 13,80,981 (+8,506)

Goa still gasps for oxygen, 13 deaths raise toll to 75

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The horror at the Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), the State's largest Covid-19 facility, continued as oxygen shortage killed 13 more Covid-19 patients in the dark hours (between 1 am and 6 am) of Friday, taking the tally to 75 in the last four days.

As per the State Government statistics, 26 patients died at the GMCH during the wee hours of Tuesday, followed by 21 on Wednesday, 15 on Thursday, and 13 on Friday (total 75).

Even as hospitals in Goa see a surge in Covid-19 cases, the scenes at crematoriums in the coastal State are equally grim as bodies continue to line up for last rites. Goa's coronavirus caseload rose to 1,32,585 after 2,455 patients tested positive for the infection on Friday.

According to a resident doctor of GMCH wards, pressure in the central pipeline started falling around 1 am on Thursday, and three patients in his ward succumbed to the fluctuations, despite their attempts to revive them.

"Relatives called us frantically saying patients were gasping for breath and their saturation levels (SPO2) had dropped to 40-50," the resident doctor said, adding, on the night of Wednesday-Thursday, there was a drop in oxygen pressure at least five to six times.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

MONSOON TO MAKE EARLY ARRIVAL OVER KERALA

New Delhi: The southwest monsoon is likely to arrive over Kerala on May 31, a day earlier than its normal onset date, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday. The normal onset date of monsoon over Kerala is June 1.

NO DECISION ON PENDING CLASS XII EXAMS: CBSE

New Delhi: The CBSE said on Friday that it has not taken any decision yet on Class XII board exams even as a section of students and parents have been demanding cancellation of exams in view of the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

BSF RECOVERS AK-47 RIFLE DROPPED BY PAK DRONE

Jammu/New Delhi: The BSF on Friday recovered an AK-47 rifle, a pistol and some ammunition dropped by a Pakistani drone from the border belt of Samba district in Jammu & Kashmir, officials said. The drone is suspected to have flown back into the Pakistani territory after it dropped the consignment, officials said.

Swiss to give India key to Anil Ambani treasure trove

Swiss court agrees to share with Indian Govt details of bank accounts of wife Tina, 2 sons also

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In more troubles for the debt-ridden industrialist Anil Ambani, Swiss Federal Court has agreed to share information with the Indian authorities about the bank accounts of him, his wife Tina Ambani, and their two children Jai Anmol, and Jai Anshul, according to the Swiss media.

Swiss newspaper *Gotham City* on May 12 reported that Indian Finance Ministry's Foreign Tax and Research Division filed a petition in the Swiss Federal Court for getting details of the bank accounts operated by Anil Ambani.

According to *Gotham City*, the court's order came on April 29. The newspaper confirmed from the registrar's office that the order directed to banks named Anil, Tina, Jai Anmol, and Jai Anshul Ambanis, though the order available in the public domain shows only A, B, C, D due to privacy issues.

Gotham City's reporter Francois Pilet reported that the court registrar's office allowed him to see the actual names. "As court reporters, we are allowed to see the names of the parties in every decision on the Swiss Supreme Court," he explained to news portal News Laundry.

Another international investigative portal Global Investigative Review (GIR) on Friday reported in detail about the Swiss court's direction to banks to disclose the details of bank accounts of Anil Ambani and their family. According to Swiss media reports, earlier an Indian whistle-blower approached the Swiss courts seeking Anil Ambani family's bank accounts. Later the Indian Government too filed the petition, they said.

Recently, in a case filed by Chinese banking consortium, Anil Ambani deposed in a London court that he has no money and is living with brother Mukesh Ambani's help.

Continued on Page 2

Goa tourism bears brunt

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With a drastic fall in the arrival of domestic and international tourists due to Covid-19, Goa tourism has taken a big knock.

The State's restaurants, pubs and beaches are deserted due to the imposition of night curfew, ban on international flights, curtailed domestic flights, restriction on visitors and an unrelenting spike in Covid-19 cases and deaths.

Nearly 2,100 of the total registered 3,500 hotels have downed their shutters, 5-star hotels have slashed their rates by nearly 50-60 with a meagre occupancy rate of 5-10 per cent, which is a drastic drop from a high of 80 per cent occupancy in March this year. Footfall in casinos is paltry, and

phones of car/bike rental companies have fallen silent.

Top officials said visitors from other States are not coming as the Government has made it mandatory to carry a negative Covid-19 test report or a vaccination for visitors from other States. Over two dozen film and TV serial makers and their units that moved from Mumbai and Chennai recently shifted their shootings to Goa, now returning as the shooting for permission has been withdrawn due to a spike in Covid cases.

Continued on Page 2

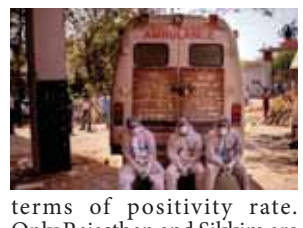
They drank, danced while enemy crept in

PNS ■ PANJIM

When the first Covid-19 wave swept through the country last year, Goa remained largely unaffected. Of course, tourism, the main source of livelihood, took a serious hit, but Goans were able to keep both infection and fatality at the low end of the scale on a national basis.

The Goans threw caution into the sea and celebrated Christmas and New Year as if corona were a long forgotten tale of horror. Few wore masks or took any precaution as they drank and danced and kept alive the spirit of Goa.

But the recklessness of the past few months has now come to haunt Goans. The State with just around 1.5 million population sparsely scattered settled along the Arabian Sea has emerged as one of the worst affected places in India in



terms of positivity rate. Only Rajasthan and Sikkim are ahead of Goa's positivity rate of around 40-50 per cent over the week.

Goa now has a fatality rate of 1.5 per cent which is much higher than the national average of 1.2 per cent, and for every 100 confirmed cases, 25 are currently infected.

The situation is so grim that Goa's total death count more than doubled from 964 to 1,937 in just three weeks. Nearly ten per cent of the current casualties are those who were suffocated to death for want of oxygen.

Continued on Page 2

INSIDIOUS BLACK FUNGUS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

It appears that Covid-19 is not the only calamity that India may have to deal with in the coming days. There are people who are still trying to deal with the chaos, destruction and death that the second wave of Covid-19 has brought. The next punch comes to hit the country is black fungus or mucormycosis. The rising number of black fungus patients, especially in Maharashtra where 111 patients, all Covid-19 survivors, are undergoing treatment according to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, is a cause of worry.

Mucormycosis, also referred to as 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. It primarily affects people who have health problems or take medicines that lower the body's ability to fight germs and sickness. It is affecting Covid patients more because of prolonged administration of steroids and subsequent immunocompromised state.

Dr Monalisa Sahu, Consultant Infectious Diseases, Yashoda Hospitals, Hyderabad shares dos and don'ts to follow to prevent black fungus.

DOS:

1) Keep high index of suspicion of mucormycosis in the below mentioned group of patients, as they are at high risk of developing the disease:
- The Covid-19 patients with uncontrolled diabetes and diabetic ketoacidosis
- Those who have received high dose of intravenous or oral steroids for prolonged period or those who have received immunomodulators

2) Patients with Covid-19, active/recovering/post-discharge: **These symptoms should be immediately intimated to the treating doctor**

Rhino-orbito-cerebral mucormycosis:

Nasal blockade or congestion | Blackish or bloody nasal discharge | Facial pain, numbness or swelling | Headache | Pain in the eyes and orbit | Toothache, loosening of tooth or jaw involvement | Blurring or double vision with pain | Tingling sensation on face | Fever, and blackish skin lesions

Pulmonary mucormycosis:

Fever | Cough | Chest pain | Blood in sputum after cough | Worsening respiratory symptoms

3) Diabetic patients with Covid should target strict glycemic/glucose control, as uncontrolled diabetes itself is a risk factor for mucormycosis

4) Patients should monitor their blood glucose post Covid discharge from hospital, and more so in diabetics

5) For the hospitals, treating centres and physicians: Use of clean and sterile water for humidifiers during oxygen therapy is very essential to prevent mucormycosis

6) Judicious use of steroids, avoiding high doses and for prolonged durations needs to be considered. Judicious use of antibiotics and antifungals is very essential to avoid the surge of mucormycosis cases

DON'TS:

- Don't neglect the signs and symptoms mentioned above which gives a clue to early diagnosis
- Don't hesitate to approach your doctor with the above signs and symptoms, thinking it to be a mild bacterial sinusitis, and the suspicion of fungal infection should be high on the cards
- The treatment of the mucormycosis requires aggressive management and don't hesitate to undergo the aggressive management or lose the crucial window period of early diagnosis and treatment, as early suspicion, early diagnosis and aggressive management are the keys to success in the management of this disease

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU GET BLACK FUNGUS?

- The most common type of mucormycosis is rhino-orbito-cerebral mucormycosis, comprising around 70-75% of the cases, pulmonary mucormycosis seen in 15-20% of the cases and rarely gastrointestinal mucormycosis has also been detected
- The cases of Mucormycosis have been presenting as early as 8-10 days after detection of Covid-19 in a few cases, to as late as about 60 days after Covid detection, the most crucial period being two-six weeks after detection of Covid
- Cases of Mucormycosis are to be treated as fungal emergencies (Medical and surgical emergency)
- All of the presentations of the disease require aggressive management, including extensive surgical debridement of the involved tissue along with intravenous antifungals followed by oral antifungals for a period of at least six weeks to three months
- The antifungals being used to manage the disease include liposomal Amphotericin B, isavuconazole, posaconazole and Amphotericin B deoxycholate

Sputnik V's first dose administered in Hy'bad

Third Covid vaccine in India priced at ₹995.4 a dose

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a first in India, Pharma company Dr Reddy's Laboratories, the Indian partner of Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), said it has commenced Sputnik V's India rollout with the first dose being administered in Hyderabad on Friday as part of a pilot project.

Sputnik V, which has an efficiency of 91.6 per cent, is the third vaccine to be approved for use in India, the other two being Covishield and Covaxin. The vaccine is expected to fill the supply side to give a fillip to halted inoculation drive in many States.

The soft launch took place,

a day after the Centre had said the vaccine is likely to be available in the market from next week. The first consignment of imported doses of the Sputnik V vaccine had landed in India on May 1.

The company also said the imported vaccine has been priced at ₹948 per dose plus an additional 5 per cent GST to be charged on it, putting the price around ₹995.4, just under ₹1,000 a dose.

Continued on Page 2

Innumerable bodies float

Count likely beyond thousands; locals say at least 10 bodies are found everyday

RAMESH K SINGH ■ VARANASI

It all started with the recovery of a handful of bodies from rivers across Uttar Pradesh. The small count increased to hundreds and now it is estimated that thousands of bodies were recovered and then buried in the sand across the State and the river highlighting the devastation corona has unleashed on the rural parts of the State.

The people living along the rivers like the Ganga and the Yamuna recount that not a day passes when they do not come across 10-12 bodies floating in the river.

"If you take the full stretch of the Ganga which is around 1,100 kms, then thousands of bodies have been found in last fortnight either floating or

More than 300 bodies found buried near Ganga in Shivrajpur, Kanpur, on Friday
PTI

buried in the sands across the two main rivers," Sanjay Dutta, a volunteer of Bondhu Mahal Samiti, a philanthropic organisation, said. The organisation is helping Covid positive people and their family members and even cremating unwanted bodies, he said in Kanpur.

There is little doubt the abandoned corpses could be those of Covid-19 patients. "This is unparalleled situation where highly decomposed and bloated corpses are being fished out regularly from the rivers. Many of them are in such a bad shape that one cannot recognise them," he said.

The recovery of bodies has started a war of words between Bihar and Uttar Pradesh Governments after 71 bodies were recovered from Buxar in Bihar early this week. When 45 bodies were found floating in Ballia and Ghazipur region, the SP, Ballia, Vipin Tada said that seeing the wind direction it seems that the bodies are coming from Bihar.

Continued on Page 2

PM, Opp leader, CJI to meet on May 24 to pick CBI chief

Post is lying vacant for more than 3 months

pioneer exclusive

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ NEW DELHI

The three-member high-level selection committee comprising Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Opposition leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, and Chief Justice of India NV Ramana will at last sit together on May 24 to decide the next CBI Director. The post is vacant for more than three months.

The shortlisted names are from the 1984 to 1986 batch IPS officers, including BSF DG Rakesh Asthana and NIA Chief YC Modi. According to highly-placed officials, more than 13 names have been shortlisted and their resumes are already sent to the selection committee members for perusal.

Senior police officers like ITBP chief SS Deshwal, CISF chief Subodh Jiaswal, Kerala DGP Loknath Behera, Gujarat ACB chief Keshav Kumar and Uttar Pradesh DGP HC Awasthy are also short-listed for the post.

According to sources, the Government may bring the name of some non-controversial officers as surprise as it did the last time by making RK Shukla CBI Director in January 2019 after the removal of Alok Verma. Some officials said the Government may also consider officers from 1986 batch as all officers from 1984 batch are retiring from service in May, June and July. CBI Director is selected for two years.

The Modi Government is already facing a case filed by noted lawyer Prashant Bhushan in Supreme Court for not appointing CBI Director on time.

Continued on Page 2

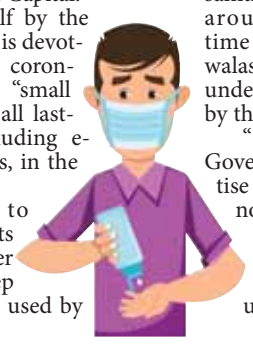
The yogi on mission to sanitise the poor

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Moved by the suffering of the Covid-19 patients, an astrologer turned himself into a "sanitiser man" to save lives in the national Capital.

He calls himself by the name of "Yogi" and is devoted to containing coronavirus in his own "small way" by sanitising all last-mile vehicles, including e-rickshaws and autos, in the West Delhi.

Yogi wanted to ensure vehicle seats were disinfected after the passengers step out from them and used by the new ones.



"Most of owners of these vehicles are either careless or simply not aware about the cleanliness," he said.

A resident of Vishnu Garden, Yogi also cleans and sanitises spaces around small-time earners like "rediwalas", "patriwalas" and areas under the flyovers inhabited by the homeless.

"I realised that though the Government is asking people to sanitise but how would these people with no water or soap do that?" he asked.

He decided to start his sanitising mission by, to begin up, picking-up a six-liter cane of liquid sanitiser.

Continued on Page 2

Hope & despair

Boycotted after infant son tests Covid +ve, IIT officer kills self

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Enveloped by the multitude of complexities involving contraction of Covid-19 by his one-and-a-half-year old son, a stressed Assistant Registrar of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kanpur hanged himself.

Surjit Das, 40, originally hailing from Karimnagar district of Assam, was apparently stressed due to the neighbours distancing themselves from him and his family after they came to know of his toddler son's infection from coronavirus.

Das was employed with IIT, Kanpur in 2015 and resided in the residential campus of the prestigious institution along with his wife Bulbul Das, eight-year-old son Shobhit and Suniyojit (one-and-a-half-year old) and his mother-in-law.

According to the police, he was undertaking treatment of his infected son at his home. Following this, the Health Department officials pasted a notice mentioning "corona infected area." Due to this, the neighbours maintained a safe distance from him and his family. Possibly, Das was perturbed over this stigmatisation.

Reports quoting his wife suggested he took dinner with the family and went to his room to sleep. However, he was found hanging from the ceiling fan in the dining hall.

After the victim's wife raised the alarm, neighbours and security guard lowered him from the fan and rushed him to a nearby hospital where he was declared dead.

No decision yet on pending Class XII exams: CBSE

New Delhi: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) said on Friday that it has not taken any decision yet on class 12 board exams even as a section of students and parents have been demanding cancellation of exams in view of the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

"It is clarified that no such decision (cancellation of exams) has been taken regarding class 12 board examination, as being speculated. Any decision taken in this matter will be officially communicated to the public," a senior CBSE official said.

The official was responding to a question about possibility of cancellation of class 12 board exams following demands by section of students and parents who have expressed concern over the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

The board had on April 14 announced cancellation of class 10 exams and postponed class 12 exams in view of surge in Covid-19 cases. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The exams, which are usually conducted in February-March every year were scheduled to be held from May 4.

"The class 12 exams have been postponed and a review of the situation will be done after June 1. Students will be given at least a 15-day notice before the exams are conducted," a board official had then said.

The CBSE had earlier this month announced the marking policy for class 10 board exams.

According to the policy, while 20 marks for each subject will be for internal assessment as every year, 80 marks will be calculated on basis of the students' performance in various tests or exams throughout the year.

Schools across the country were closed in March last year to contain the spread of Covid-19 ahead of a nationwide lockdown. ***PTI***

Farmers sow potato in a field, after several months of snow, at Jasrath Village in Lahual Spiti district on Friday PTI

Yamunotri shrine opens sans devotees

Uttarkashi (Uttarakhand): The portals of Yamunotri temple in the Himalayas were opened on Friday with only a select group of priests and administrative officials attending the low-key ceremony amid the raging Covid-19 pandemic.

Entry of pilgrims has been barred in view of the pandemic. It is for the second consecutive year that the temple has witnessed a subdued opening after its six-month closure during winter.

The temple gates were opened at 12.15 pm on the occasion of Akshay Tritiya in the presence of just around 25 people including 'teerth purohits' and administrative officials, teerth purohit of Yamunotri temple Pawan Uniyal said.

The first puja after the opening of the temple gates was performed on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said. The SOP had restricted the number of people who could attend the opening ceremony to 25.

The chardham yatra including the pilgrimage to Yamunotri has been cancelled this year in view of the surge in Covid cases. However, the portals of the four Himalayan temples also known as chardham will open as scheduled only for priests to perform regular puja. ***PTI***

Devotees at the Yamunotri Dham after its portals were opened on the occasion of Akshay Tritiya, in Uttarkashi district on Friday. Only a few people, including administrative officials, participated in the 'puja' amid Covid-19 pandemic PTI

Arunachal woman scales Mt Everest, garners praise from Governor, CM

Itanagar: Thirty-seven-year-old Tashi Yangjom, a resident of West Kameng district in Arunachal Pradesh, has conquered Mount Everest, joining the ranks of a handful of women mountaineers who have achieved the feat, official sources said on Friday.

Yangjom, an instructor at Dirang-based National Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports (NIMAS), scaled the world's highest peak on May 11 at 6 am, they said.

"She is the ninth instructor from NIMAS to have successfully climbed the worlds highest peak in a span of three years," Institute's Director Colonel Sarfraz Singh said.

Other Arunachalee climbers who scaled the peak include Tapi Mra (2009), Tine Mena (2011), Anshu Jamsenpa (2011), Nima Lama and Kalden Paljor (2011), Tame Bagang (2013), Kishon Tekseng and Taka Tamut (2018). ***PTI***

B-85

WORKS DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER,
EASTERN CIRCLE (R&B), BALASORE
e-mail: - seec_bls@rediffmail.com
Government of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice
Bid Identification No.SEEC-02/ 2021-22
No: 2098 / Dt: 28.04.2021

Nature of work:- **Building Works**
Number of works: **05 (Five) No Building Works**
Amount put to Tender: - **Rs.106.79 Lakh to Rs.552.87 Lakh**
Class of Contractor: - **"B" & "A" & "Special" Class**
Date & Time of availability of bid document in the portal: - **Dt.18.05.2021 at 10:00 AM**
Last Date / Time of receipt of bid in the portal: - **Dt.07.06.2021 up to 05:00 PM**
Date of opening of bid : - **Dt.08.06.2021 at 11:00 AM**
Name & address of the Office inviting bid: - **Superintending Engineer, Eastern Circle (R&B), Balasore**

The bidders have to participate in **ONLINE** bidding only. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal **"http//tendersodisha.gov.in."** All future corrigendum will be available on ONLINE mode only.

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer
Eastern Circle (R&B) Balasore

OIPR-34026/11/0002/2122

Grant ₹3,000-crore package for Maratha, demands Maha BJP

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The BJP on Friday demanded that the Maharashtra Government announce a ₹3,000 crore package to provide educational facilities and scholarships to the Maratha community on the lines of the assistance given to those from the OBC category.

Speaking to reporters in Kolhapur, some 375 kilometres from here, the party's Maharashtra unit chief Chandrakant Patil said the previous Government under Devendra Fadnavis had proposed a formula to treat the Maratha community at par with the Other Backward Classes when it came to educational facilities and self-employment.

"As part of the ₹3,000 crore package, ₹1,000 crore must be given to Annasaheb Patil Economic Backward Development Corporation to generate employment.

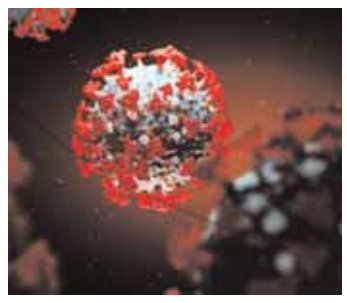
A sum of ₹500 crore must be given to SARTHI (Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj Research Training and Human Development Institute), while Rs 600 crore must be utilised to pay fees of Maratha students," he said.

Patil said the Uddhav Thackeray Government must file a review petition in the Supreme Court in connection with the apex court's order on the 102nd Amendment of the Constitution.

The Supreme Court, on May 5, held that the 102nd Constitution amendment took away the power of State Governments to declare Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) for grant of quota in jobs and admissions.

The SC had also struck down reservations provided to the Maratha community under the Maharashtra SEBC Act.

Covid: Himachal Pradesh sees record 67 deaths in a day



PTI ■ SHIMLA

The Covid-19 death toll in Himachal Pradesh rose to 2,185 on Friday with 67 more fatalities, the highest single-day rise so far, while 3,044 new cases pushed the infection tally to 1,53,717, an official said.

A one-month-old girl in Shimla and a 103-year-old woman in Mandi were among the 67 new deaths, special health secretary Nipun Jindal said.

The highest 32 deaths were recorded in the Kangra district, he added.

The number of active cases in the State stands at 39,623, according to data updated till 7 pm.

The overall recoveries increased to 1,11,878 after 3,362 more people recovered from the infection, the official said.

PM, Opp leader, CJI...

From Page 1

The apex court has directed Government to convene selection committee meeting on May 2. CBI Director RK Shukla retired on February 2 and now Additional Director Praveen Sinha is posted as in-charge.

In 2016 also the Government faced criticism from Supreme Court for not selecting CBI Director on time. When Anil Sinha retired on December 2016, Asthana was appointed as temporary in charge. After three months, the Government appointed Alok Verma as fulltime Director. Later CBI faced an unprecedented tug of war between Verma and Asthana and the Government removed both from the organisation in October 2018.

Swiss to give India...

From Page 1

Last year, the London court asked younger Ambani to pay 770 million dollars to Chinese banks for non-payment of loans of 14 billion dollars. The loan was taken for installation of Chinese equipment in telecom and power sector during 2008 to 2014. The Swiss Court's order will be a source of major trouble for Ambani who concealed his Swiss accounts while claiming as almost a pauper. After the order of London Court, SBI also filed cases against Anil Ambani's companies. SBI has informed the Delhi High Court that it has classified three bank accounts of Anil Ambani's Reliance Group - Reliance Communication, Reliance Telecom and Reliance Infratel - as "fraud". Total amount that the three firms of Anil Ambani owe to the banks is over Rs 49,000 crore, out of which Reliance Infratel has a debt of Rs 12,000 crore and Reliance Telecom owns Rs 24,000 crore.

Sputnik V's first dose administered in...

From Page 1

However, the doses of the vaccine that will be made in India are expected to be cheaper. "Further consignments of imported doses are expected over the upcoming months. Subsequently, supply of the Sputnik V vaccine will commence from Indian manufacturing partners," said Dr Reddy's.

The possibility of Sputnik as India's first single-dose vaccine "depends on approval from the regulator and on the dialogue which we have with them and on the guidance we receive from the regulator," said the company.

For now, the two-dose Sputnik V will be rolled out at 35 centres across India. The first lot of Sputnik vaccines will be imported from Russia, fully developed and ready to administer. It also added it is working closely with its six manufacturing partners to fulfil regulatory requirements to ensure a smooth and timely supply. The country is looking to produce 15.6 crore doses of the Russian Covid vaccine. "Its production will begin in July and it is estimated that 15.6 crore doses will be manufactured in that period," Paul had said.

They drank, danced...

From Page 1

Similarly, the caseload more than doubled in just 27 days to 1,30,130 on May 13.

Goa's handling of the Covid-19 crisis triggered massive controversy when the health authorities in the State decided to use Ivermectin, an orally-administered anti-parasitic drug for generalised use to all citizens above 18 years to reduce the extent of Covid-19 infection The World Health Organisation (WHO) on Tuesday warned against it with its chief scientists Soumaya Swaminathan coming out with a tweet which said, "Safety and efficacy is important when using any drug for a new indication. WHO recommends against the use of Ivermectin for Covid-19 except within clinical trials. As Goa battles with the shortage of oxygen, hospital beds, drugs and expert medical hands, the image of the palm-fringed sylvan retreats with its golden beaches and colourful lifestyle has been replaced with that of a haunted paradise of sufferings and deaths.

राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन
स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण विभाग
मध्य प्रदेश शासन

बैकलॉग रिक्त पदों के विरूद्ध 2850 कम्युनिटी हैल्थ ऑफिसर की भर्ती

क्रमांक / एन.एच.एम. / HWC / 2021 / 8274 भोपाल दिनांक– 13 / 05 / 2021

राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन मध्यप्रदेश द्वारा बैकलॉग रिक्त पदो के विरूद्ध संबंधित वर्गो के उम्मीदवारों से 6 माह के सर्टिफिकेट इन कम्युनिटी हेल्थ प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम में चयन हेतु मध्यप्रदेश राज्य के मूल निवासी अभ्यर्थियों से आवेदन आंमत्रित किये जाते है। चयनित उम्मीदवारो को उक्त प्रशिक्षण सफलता पूर्वक पूर्ण करने के पश्चात् ग्रामीण क्षेत्रो में स्थित उपस्वास्थ्य केन्द्र स्तरीय संस्थाओं पर कम्युनिटी हेल्थ ऑफिसर के पद पर संविदा नियुक्ति दी जायेगी।

- **उपलब्ध स्थान :– लगभग 2850** (माह जून 2021 से अक्टुबर 2021 के मध्य चयन किया जायेगा।)
- चयन परीक्षा हेतु सामान्य दिशा–निर्देश, श्रेणी और प्रशिक्षण बैच वार स्थान, लिखित परीक्षा तिथि और ऑनलाइन एडमिट कार्ड / हॉल टिकट की विस्तृत जानकारी के लिए कृपया www.nhmmp.gov.in या www.sams.co.in पर जाएं।
- **ऑनलाइन आवेदन** :– 15 मई, 2021 को सुबह 12:01 से 31 मई, 2021 को रात 11:59 बजे तक।
- **अनिवार्य शैक्षणिक योग्यतायें** :– बी.एससी. (नर्सिंग) / पोस्ट बेसिक बी.एससी. (नर्सिंग) / जी.एन.एम. / बी.ए.एम.एस.।
- **आयु सीमा** :– 21 से 40 वर्ष (दिनांक 01 / 05 / 2021 की स्थिति में)। अनुसूचित जाति / जनजाति / अन्य पिछड़ा वर्ग / शारीरिक रूप से दिव्यांग तथा महिला अभ्यर्थियों को 5 वर्ष की छूट।
- **प्रशिक्षण सत्र एवं वर्गवार उपलब्ध स्थानो की संख्या :–**

CCCH Batch	Total Seats	Available Seats	UR 355		UR-EWS 652		ST 947		SC 266		OBC 189*		PH 49			
			Open	Female	Open	Female	Open	Female	Open	Female	Open	Female	VH	HH	OH	MD
Jun-21	585	**494**	49	24	89	45	129	65	36	18	26	13	0	0	10	0
Jul-21	1680	**1420**	139	70	256	128	372	186	105	53	74	37	0	0	29	0
Oct-21	585	**495**	49	24	89	45	129	66	36	18	26	13	0	0	10	0
Total	**2850**	**2409***	**237**	**118**	**434**	**218**	**630**	**317**	**177**	**89**	**126**	**63**	**0**	**0**	**49**	**0**

***नोटः–**
1– उक्त अन्य पिछड़ा वर्ग की कुल 630 सीट में से 441 सीटों का आवंटन आरक्षण संबंधी विचाराधीन प्रकरण में मान. उच्च न्यायालय के निर्णय अनुसार किया जायेगा।
2– प्रत्येक वर्ग में 33 प्रतिशत सीटें / पद महिलाओं के लिये आरक्षित रहेंगी।

- मानदेय एवं कार्य आधारित प्रोत्साहन राशिः– कम्युनिटी हेल्थ ऑफिसर (संविदा) के पद पर नियुक्ति पश्चात् मानदेय रू. 25000 / – प्रतिमाह एवं कार्य आधारित प्रोत्साहन राशि अधिकतम रू. 15000 / – प्रतिमाह

महत्वपूर्ण निर्देशः–
1) केवल ऑनलाइन आवेदन स्वीकार किये जाएंगे। किसी अन्य स्रोतों / माध्यम से प्राप्त आवेदनों मान्य नहीं किये जायेंगे।
2) रिक्त स्थानों विरूद्ध चयन एवं पदस्थापना मध्य प्रदेश की राज्य आरक्षण नीति के अंतर्गत नियमों के अधीन किये जायेंगे।
3) अपूर्ण जानकारी या फोटो, हस्ताक्षर / आवश्यक दस्तावेजों के बिना भरे गये आवेदन को अस्वीकृत कर दिया जायेगा।
4) यदि भर्ती के किसी भी चरण में, यह पाया गया है कि उम्मीदवार पात्रता को पूरा नहीं करता है और उसने गलत सूचना / प्रमाण पत्र / दस्तावेज प्रस्तुत किए हैं या किसी भी भौतिक तथ्य को छुपाया गया है, तो उसकी उम्मीदवारी निरस्त कर दी जायेगी।
5) भर्ती प्रक्रिया के किसी भी चरण में भर्ती से संबंधित किसी भी मामले में एनएचएम, मध्य प्रदेश का निर्णय अंतिम और उम्मीदवारों पर बाध्यकारी होगा।
6) चयन पूरी तरह से ऑनलाइन लिखित परीक्षा पर आधारित होगा।
7) सर्टिफिकेट इन कम्युनिटी हेल्थ प्रशिक्षण (CCH) में 6 महीने के प्रमाण पत्र के लिए आवेदन करने वाले उम्मीदवारों को ऑनलाइन आवेदन पत्र जमा करने के समय किसी भी केंद्रीय / राज्य नर्सिंग परिषद या केंद्रीय / राज्य आयुर्वेद, यूनानी चिकित्सा प्रणाली और प्राकृतिक चिकित्सा बोर्ड से पंजीकरण होना चाहिए।
9) राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन के पास रिक्त पदों की संख्या में बदलाव, नियमों में संशोधन और चयन के किसी भी समय प्रक्रिया का अधिकार है। ऐसा कोई भी संशोधन मान्य और बाध्यकारी होगा।
10) उम्र गणना के लिए 01 / 05 / 2021 को संदर्भ तिथि के रूप में लिया जाएगा।

मिशन संचालक, एन.एच.एम, मध्य प्रदेश

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G-12528/21

दो गज की दूरी, मास्क है जरुरी !

The yogi on mission to sanitise the poor

From Page 1

"I carried automatic and manual machine. When battery of the automatic machine runs out , I would switch-over to manual sanitising..I would ride the scooter and sprinkle the seats of all e-rickshaws and auto in and around metro stations," said Yogi, who is also joined by his wife in this holy mission.

Both of them not only sanitised the areas which was not visited by the Government workers but also provided ready tips to homeless as how to protect themselves from coronavirus.

They would stop their scooter at places to fill water on the next cane of liquid sanitiser.

"The happiest blessings for me was when women and children would see me and shout 'Veerji aa gaye. Paji agaye'", says Yogi who in short-time was known in the West Delhi as a "sanitizer man".

"It is a life-time experience for me as the service taught me as how some people without water, food, bed or even home live smiling in this difficult time . I was blessed by the elders, " said an emotional Yogi.

Goa tourism...

From Page 1

According to the Tourism Department, the shoot of Star Plus' Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyar Meiin and Shaurya Aur Anokhi Ki Kahani will move to Hyderabad, the team of Aapki Nazron Ne Samjha has decided to move to Silvassa. Goa is not a new favourite for the entertainment industry but the pandemic has turned the state into the preferred haunt of production units.

With no international tourists or charter flights, hotels have started facing the brunt of it. Many hotels didn't reopen last season since foreign tourists and charter flights weren't open. Unfortunately, some of the hotels which were open are closing down due to lack of business, even though Government has allowed hotels to stay open.

Business has hit an all-time low for shacks this year, as there are no international flights or charters.

A senior official of the Goa Government said though a large number of domestic visitors traveled to the state but the high-paying international tourists were missing - an absence that hit the hospitality industry very hard. "International visitors, mostly from Russia, Israel, the UK and Italy, come for the holidays and often decide to stay on for months. The international flights have been suspended from the past one year. Many domestic travelers do not have the same spending capacity as a tourist from a country with a better rate of currency exchange against the rupee, a hotel owner said, requesting anonymity. Now we are finding it difficult to pay for our employees," he added.

According to a report "Coping with COVID-19; Survival and Revival of Goa's Tourism Industry' compiled by the Goa Tourism Ministry and consultancy firm KPMG Advisory Services Pvt. Ltd, the State tourism industry directly contributes 16.43 per cent revenue towards the state Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and approximately 35 per cent of State's population is directly employed by the tourism sector. In the last quarter of 2020, it was mostly domestic tourists and budget travellers who visited Goa. According to the Tourism department data, a total 1158380 tourists including 282022 foreign tourists had visited Goa till August, 2020 during the Covid lockdown.

Goa is regarded as one of the top beach and nightlife tourism destinations in the country and attracted nearly eight million tourists last year. A typical "peak" season in Goa - December and January - sees throngs of visitors flocking to their favorite beaches for some time in the sun, as northern parts of the country battle dipping temperatures. Seaside shacks and popular restaurants run at full capacity with reservations being made days in advance during the season.

Innumerable...

From Page 1

"In Bihar, there is a tradition of disposing of dead bodies in the river but after viewing the condition of these highly decomposed bodies, there is no doubt that these are old bodies and have come from Bihar region," Tada said.

Bihar, on its part, has placed a net at Raniganj area, bordering UP and Bihar, to stop flow of bodies in their State. The general perception growing among masses is that people are forced to give water burial (cremation) to their relatives because of the high inflow of bodies in the cremation grounds and exorbitant prices being for cremation. Generally, it cost something around Rs 4,000-5,000 but now the rate has doubled and villagers are now disposing off the bodies in the river.

A resident of Harishcandra Ghat in Varanasi said on condition of anonymity that due to heavy rush of bodies at the cremation ghats, many of them could not be burnt fully and were thrown in the river. "This is the reason why many bodies found in this region were in semi-burnt conditions," he said.

This issue has also taken a political turn as Shalini Yadav, SP candidate who unsuccessfully contested against Narendra Modi in Varanasi questioned PM's commitment to protect Ganga. "In 2014 Modi had claimed that he came to Varanasi because "Ganga Ma ne bulaya hai", but now the same Ganga is turned "maili"(dirty) by people who are throwing dead bodies in river because they died without treatment and care," she said. Yadav, who had contested last Lok Sabha poll in 2019 against Modi as Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate, said that the Covid-19 death figures shown by the government were not true as a large number of people is being died without proper treatment and they are not even in position to bear the expenses of cremation.

Meanwhile, Government spokesman Navneet Sehgal said in Lucknow that patrolling along the banks of rivers has started in UP where people are being asked not to throw bodies in rivers and in case of emergency can take help of the police.

Goa still gasps...

From Page 1

A three-member panel has been formed under the chairmanship of Indian Institute of Technology-Goa director Dr BK Mishra. The committee will find out whether the oxygen supplied to the medical facility was adequate and check the efficiency of the supply chain. The panel will also examine how oxygen was administered in the hospital and suggest ways for its improvement. The committee has been asked to complete the probe in three days.The State Government has told the High Court that there were "logistic issues" related to supply of medical oxygen to patients.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said the gap between the "availability of medical oxygen and its supply to Covid-19 wards" at the hospital "might have caused some issues for the patients". He, however, claimed that there was no shortage of oxygen. Sawant's claim was contradictory to State Health Minister Vishwajit Rane, who had admitted that there was a shortage of oxygen at the hospital as of Monday. Goa Congress is set to file a criminal case claiming "cold-blooded murder by the Chief Minister and Health Minister". The party has slammed the "...clear-cut admission by Goa's BJP Government before the High Court of Bombay at Goa that 41 deaths occurred due to shortage of oxygen..."

On Thursday, the Goa Bench of the Bombay High Court said it was informed that some patients may have died because of "logistical issues". The Goa Government had told the HC on Thursday that during the process of attaching the oxygen manifold there was some interruption, which results in a fall of pressure in the supply lines of oxygen to patients.

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I am here: Kejriwal tells bereaved parents, kids

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government will bear the cost of the education and upbringing of children orphaned by the pandemic, and the Delhi Government will also extend financial help to families who have lost their earning members to the coronavirus, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Friday.

Kejriwal added that the number of fresh Covid-19 cases has come down to around 8,500 and the positivity rate has dipped to around 12 per cent, but the fight against the contagion has not ended and there is no room for leniency.

The Chief Minister also said that the Government would extend financial help to families and senior citizens who have lost their lone earning members due to Covid-19.

"In the last few days, despite all our efforts we could not save many Delhi people. In many families, there have been more than one deaths. I know several children who have lost both their parents. I am there. The Delhi Government will bear all the expenses of their education and living. There are also several senior citizens who have lost their children who used to earn. Do not worry your son is still alive. The Delhi Government will provide financial assistance to all those families who have lost their sole earning member to Covid-19," Kejriwal said.

"But such children and the elderly need love at this point in time. They need empathy. It is my request to all the neighbours and the relatives of such families to take care of them," he added.

"The good news is that Delhi has recorded around 8,500 cases as against 28,000 plus cases on April 20 in the last 24 hours and the positivity rate is down to 12 as against 36 per cent on April 22," he said.

"In the last 10 days, the number of patients in Delhi hospitals has reduced by more than 3,000 patients.

This means that 3,000 beds have become empty. However, ICU beds are still full. This means the number of serious patients has not declined much. Around 1,200 new ICU beds have been prepared and are now ready to be utilised soon," he added.

Financial help for paratransit vehicle owners announced

ONE-TIME FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF ₹5,000 TO ALL INDIVIDUALS HOLDING THE 'PUBLIC SERVICE BADGE'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Cabinet on Friday approved a one-time financial assistance of ₹5,000 to all individuals holding the 'Public Service Badge' (PSB) of paratransit vehicles and permit holders of paratransit public service vehicles in the wake of the second wave of the pandemic and the extension of the curfew announced by the Delhi Government.

"In 2020, ₹78 crore was given as financial assistance to more than 1,56,350 auto and taxi drivers. Beneficiaries of the 2020 scheme need not reapply but the ₹5,000 will be directly transferred to their Aadhaar-linked bank accounts, subject to verification of deaths from local bodies," the Government said.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had on May 4 announced that a one-time financial assistance of ₹5,000 would be provided to the PSV badge and permit holders of paratransit vehicles i.e. autorickshaws, e-rickshaws, taxis, Phatphat Sewa, Eco-friendly Sewa, Gramin Sewa and maxi cabs. Delhi currently has over 2.80 lakh PSV badge holders and 1.90 lakh permit holders who are eligible to apply for the scheme. The Delhi Transport Department has already made necessary budgetary provisions for the same. The validity of documents including the PSV badge, permit, driving licence of all public service vehicles has been extended periodically since March 2020, as per the orders of the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH).

Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot in a statement said: "The Delhi Government is doing everything it can to ensure that the implications of a lockdown, especially among the daily wage labourers, including auto/ taxi drivers, are kept to a minimum. I request everyone who is eligible to avail of this assistance."

Centre controlling Remdesivir, Tocilizumab supply: Health Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Satyendra Jain on Friday said that the national Capital currently has stocks only for two or three days to vaccinate beneficiaries in the 18-44 years age group.

"The stocks of Covaxin have almost finished and we have only two-three days' worth of stocks of Covishield vaccines for those in the 18- 44 age group. We can't mix already assigned centres for Covaxin and Covishield vaccines," he said.

Jain also urged the Centre to cap the prices of all vaccines in India at ₹150 per dose.

He asserted that since the supply of Tocilizumab is controlled by the Centre, they have mandated only 1,000 units per month, whereas the demand is much more

Now that three vaccines have been approved for the inoculation in India, Covishield, Covaxin, and Sputnik V, Jain stressed on the need for 'One Nation, One Policy.'

The Health Minister said, "For Remdesivir and Tocilizumab, all the management and control is in the hands of the Central Government, which is supplied to the hospitals through a website managed by the Centre."

The Statewise distribution is also being controlled by the Centre.

"The Centre has mandated just 1,000 units of Tocilizumab injection in one month, which means hardly 30 units per day, while the demand is much more than this. Thus, we have passed the order and formed the expert committee to streamline the supply effectively and mobilise it", he added.

'Situation improving but ICU beds still needed'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal visited the makeshift Covid-19 treatment facility with 500 ICU beds, situated at Ram Lila ground on Friday to oversee the preparations.

Kejriwal tweeted, "I salute our docs, engineers, and workers who worked round the clock on a war footing and constructed these 500 ICU beds in just 15 days at Ramlila maidan opp LNJP Hospital. 250 ICU beds start tomorrow and 250 in the next two days."

Addressing the media, Kejriwal said, "The situation in Delhi is improving, because of which fewer beds are being occupied in hospitals. However, ICU beds are still full. This means that the system still has serious patients, and so we need more ICU beds. I am sure that these 1,200 ICU beds will provide relief to the people of Delhi."

Hope Centre will give vaccines soon: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) senior leader Atishi said that over 1.23 lakh people were vaccinated on Thursday in Delhi and nearly 43.67 lakh doses have been administered so far.

"The Delhi healthcare system is proceeding with vaccination at a good pace. However, the vaccination in the 18-45 age group has declined owing to 144 centres being shut due to the unavailability of Covaxin," she said.

Delhi has three days' worth of Covaxin and two days' stocks of Covishield left for the 45 plus age group, frontline and healthcare workers. Approximately eight days' of Covishield vaccine stock is left for the 18-45 age group, she added.

As many as 10 lakh people have been administered both the doses, she said, while presenting the vaccination bulletin.

The AAP leader said that people who had already taken their first dose of Covaxin and are ready to take the second shot cannot be inoculated due to the unavailability of vaccines. She made an appeal to the Central Government to supply sufficient vaccines for the 18-44 age group and those above 45 as well.

"We are hoping that the Centre will give sufficient stocks of vaccines at the earliest.

We all are aware of the fact that Delhi has been one of the most severely-affected States and is still grappling with the virus. It is a relief that the second wave of the pandemic is abating. However, an impending third wave can only be stopped through mass vaccination,' she added.

IYC chief grilled by cops over Covid relief work

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Youth Congress (IYC) president Srinivas BV on Friday said the Crime Branch of Delhi Police questioned him about the assistance being provided by him to people during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the Delhi Police said the questioning has been done following a Delhi High Court order. According to a senior police officer, the High Court has directed the city police to conduct an inquiry into politicians involved in the distribution of Covid-19 medicines and other items to people, and lodge an FIR in case of an offence.

"In compliance with the directions of the High Court, an inquiry is being conducted into the work being done by several people," said a police officer.

"The police called me this morning and came to my office around 11.45 am. They asked me how I was doing all the work for Covid-19 victims," said Srinivas.

Earlier, on Tuesday the police had contacted Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Dilip Pandey following the High Court's order to examine the instances of politicians allegedly procuring and distributing Remdesivir, used for treating Covid-19 patients, in the national Capital.

The police's move came after AAP MLA Pandey accused the Centre of "harassing" him for helping people during the pandemic and alleged that a team of the Crime Branch questioned him.

A senior police officer said, "On a writ petition filed by one Dr Deepak Singh about politicians involved in illegal distribution of Covid medicines etc, the Delhi High Court has directed the city police to conduct an enquiry and we are following the court' s order."

NDMC launches 'Netra' medical helpline

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the current outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has launched a program 'NETRA' to provide Tele consultations to support its employees and their family members who get infected with Covid-19 and are under home isolation.

A team of dedicated doctors and specialists have been appointed as part of a medical helpline facility for guiding telephonically and through Whatsapp to the employees or their family members who contracted the disease to ensure their well being, the civic body said in a statement.

These medical officers will provide guidance to NDMC employees telephonically and through Whatsapp.

Gurugram vaccination drive for 18+ hit due to jab shortage

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Due to the acute shortage of the Covid-19 vaccine for people in the 18 plus age group in Gurugram, the vaccination drive was suspended by the district health department on Friday, officials said.

The health officials said that though the inoculation of those above 45, who are getting a second dose will continue, but it is also likely to get affected if the district does not receive fresh vaccine stocks from the State Government soon.

The inoculation of those in the 18-44 age group began in Gurugram on May 1 and till May 12, over 43,992 people in this age group had received their first shots. In this category, the targeted population for immunisation is more than 10 lakh.

"Both Covishield and Covaxin stocks for the 18-44 age group are over in Gurugram. Therefore, no sessions have been planned for Friday.

Only Covishield shots will be given to those aged 45 and above, who are waiting for their second shot. If the doses are not allocated soon, vaccination for those in the 45 above slot will also be hampered," said Virender Yadav, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Gurugram.

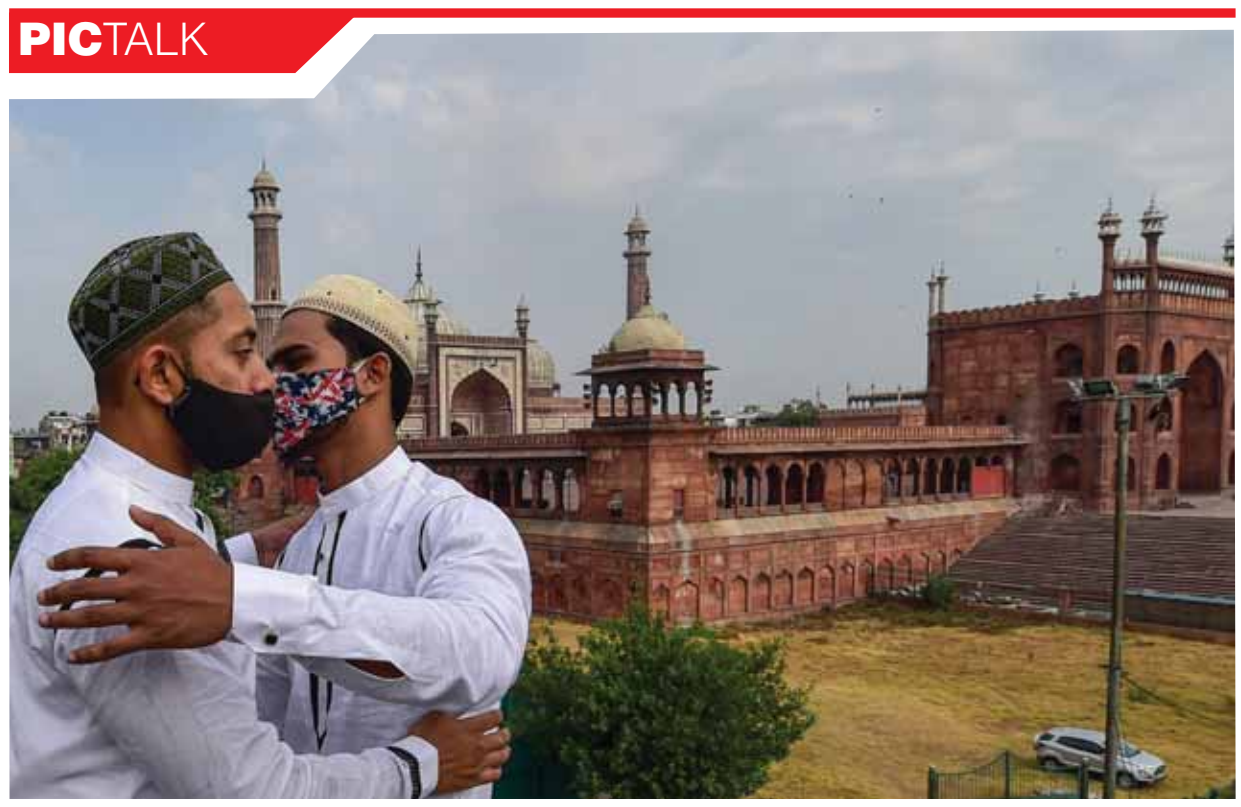
Most session sites in the city are at Government facilities with only two private hospitals — Max and Fortis — administering vaccines at present. On Friday, these hospitals will be the ones that give vaccines to people in the 18-44 category

"We have already urged the State Health Department to provide the stock but cannot say how much and when we'll get this consignment," said Dr MP Singh, the district immunisation officer.

According to Singh, there are about 8,000 doses left for the population in the 45 plus category.

It may be noted that the Haryana Health Minister Anil Vij on Thursday said that the State Government will float a global tender for the Covid-19 vaccines to ensure free vaccination for those aged between 18-44 years.

PICTALK



Muslims greet each other on the occassion of Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of the fasting month of Ramzan, near Jama Masjid in New Delhi on Friday PTI

350 home isolation patients get O2 cylinders via online portal

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

The Gurugram district administration has launched a door-to-door delivery service of oxygen cylinders with the aim of providing better health facilities to people. This initiative has now brought huge relief to Covid-19 patients in a big way. According to the district administration, around 350 home isolation patients have received medical oxygen cylinders at their doorstep.

Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg said that in order to avail the service of oxygen cylinder refill, the patient or their families will have to apply online on the portal — http://oxygenhry.in.

"On acceptance of the application, information will be sent to the patient's mobile number through an SMS. The applicant will also have to upload the photo of the oximeter to show the oxygen level or the doctor's prescription and Aadhaar number while applying.

In addition, it will be mandatory to write the age and address of the patient. An application can be made only once a day from a mobile number," Garg said.

The Gurugram District Magistrate has already fixed the rate of cylinders. Now, a small cylinder (B type) will cost ₹ 80 and a big cylinder (D type) will cost ₹250, while the delivery charge will be ₹100.

Army man accuses wife of domestic violence

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

'A MEDICO LEGAL CASE WAS REGISTERED BY THE ARMY BASE HOSPITAL AUTHORITIES'
LT-COL RAMANDEEP SINGH

A Lieutenant-Colonel has accused his wife of assaulting him in the national Capital. Police said that a case has been registered on the basis of the complaint given by Lt-Col Ramandeep Singh at the Delhi Cantt police station.

According to the First Information Report (FIR), Singh alleged that his wife R Mahajan tried to hit him on his head with a golf stick and punched him over an issue related to the purchase of a luxury car. "When she hit me with a golf stick lying in the room, I tried to protect my head with my right hand. Luckily, because of this evasive action I did not sustain any injury on my head," Singh claimed.

"Then she left the house with the children in a fit of rage. Later I drove myself to the hospital where the doctors diagnosed that I had suffered a metacarpal fracture on my right hand. A medico-legal case was registered by the Army Base Hospital authorities," Singh stated in his FIR.

Claiming that his wife is short tempered, Singh also alleged that his wife had in the past also behaved aggressively and rudely with him and he has video evidence and recordings of the same.

"Till date my wife, who left for her parental home in Punjab, has not returned and she is threatening me with dire consequences and false implication in a case," stated Singh.

Police said they registered a case under Section 325 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) on May 6 and a police team is investigating the matter.

Mahajan is an Associate Professor at the Indian Institute of Architecture and Design, Okhla. The couple has been married for the last 16 years.

₹20,667 cr transferred to 9.5 crore farmers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi released the eighth instalment of the financial benefit under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme via video conferencing on Friday. As part of this instalment, a total of ₹20,667 crore was transferred to more than 9.5 crore farmers across the country, including those from West Bengal. This is the highest amount paid by the Government under the scheme in a single instalment and for the first time, the scheme has reached farmers of West Bengal as about 7.03 lakh of them got their first instalment of ₹2,000 each. The scheme was not implemented till now in West Bengal as the State Government and the Centre were at loggerheads over various issues, including verified data of farmers.

As part of this scheme, the Government is working towards encouraging farmers to take up alternative forms of farming such as organic farming. These crop require less investment. They are good for health and for the soil too. It also sells for a higher amount," he said. All farmers, especially from Punjab, are satisfied with the scheme. I have seen many videos of farmers expressing their satisfaction on social media," PM Modi said.

The PM also interacted with the beneficiaries of the scheme after releasing the amount. Talking to a farmer from Andhra Pradesh, who turned a piece of barren land into suitable land for organic farming, the PM said, "You have set an example for others. Your self confidence speaks for your ability and experience." The farmer from the southern state told PM Modi that she grows three crops on her land throughout the year.

Talking to a farmer from Meghalaya who has set up a business model for organic farming, PM Modi said as many as 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) were being set up in the country and small farmers were also getting associated with them. "Your confidence in what you do makes your model a sought-after one," the PM told the farmer. Talking to a farmer from Meghalaya who has set up a business model for organic farming, PM Modi said as many as 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) were being set up in the country and small farmers were also getting associated with them. "Your confidence in what you do makes your model a sought-after one," the PM told the farmer.

Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar was also present at the event. "West bengal has joined the scheme with more than 7 lakh farmers of the state getting the benefit today," he said. Soon after winning the just-concluded West Bengal assembly elections, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had shot off a letter to the Central Government demanding release of ₹18,000 arrears to each eligible farmer from the State.

The scheme, launched in 2019, was a National Democratic Alliance (NDA) flagship project that aimed at providing financial support to the farmers of the country. Under the scheme, ₹6,000 is transferred to the beneficiaries' bank accounts per year. This amount is paid in quarterly installments of ₹2,000 each. Until now, ₹1.15 lakh crore has been transferred to farmer families under the scheme, a Government release issued on Thursday claimed.

Militant who killed Assam Rifles jawan in 2017 arrested in ambush, says NIA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday said it has arrested a self-styled lieutenant of People's Liberation Army/ Revolutionary People's Front (PLA/RPF) in ambush. He was involved in the killing of an Assam Rifles personnel in Manipur in 2017.

The agency on Thursday arrested Mayanglambam Siromani, 32 of Kakching Khunou Angom Leikai under Waikhong police station of Kakching district of Manipur.

The case was initially registered on November 15, 2017 at Chakpikarong police station in Chandel district relating to an ambush on Road Opening Party of 4th Assam Rifle at Chamol-Sajik Tampak Road in the district resulting in the killing of one Assam Rifles personnel and severe injury to another soldier. Two terrorists were also killed in the encounter.

The NIA had re-registered the case on March 29 in 2018 under various Sections of the IPC, Arms Act, Explosives Act and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and took over the investigation.

During the NIA investigation, it was revealed that Siromani was involved in the conspiracy for the attack on the road opening party of Assam Rifles. Based on the evidence, he was charge-sheeted while absconding. Further, he was declared a proclaimed offender and a cash reward of Rs 2 lakh was announced for information leading to his apprehension.

Plea in SC seeks probe into bodies in Ganga

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been moved in the Supreme Court to constitute a special investigation team (SIT) to conduct the investigation into over 100 corpses, found floating in the Ganga river in Bihar's Buxar, and Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur and Unnao districts, amid the ongoing second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

The plea, filed by lawyers Pradeep Yadav and Vishal Thakre, urged the top court to issue direction the State Government cconcerned to conduct post-mortem of the dead bodies.

"The act of the states is inhuman as they failed to provide facilities for decent burial/cremation of dead bodies and to keep a check on pollution of the holy river, Ganga, by such indecent act either of individuals or of authorities," the petition said.

The petitioners emphasised that the recovery of decomposed bodies from the river is a matter of serious concern

The petitioners emphasised that the recovery of decomposed bodies from the river is a matter of serious concern, noting that the river was a source of water for many areas, and if these bodies were of Covid-19 patients, then there is a possibility of spread of infection through water in the villages of both Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The petitioners also cited the Pt Parmanand Katara case, wherein the apex court had held that the right to dignity and fair treatment under Article 21 of the Constitution, was not only available to a person during lifetime, but also to the body after death.

The plea also alleged that in the present case, the state has also failed to monitor the crematoriums, which exorbitantly charged people for last rites during the pandemic.

The petitioners have claimed that the state governments, till date have not taken any effective measure to purify the water, and this was a violation of Article 21.

Modi directs States to take tough action against O_2 hoarders

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday directed all the States to take strict action against hoarders of concentrated oxygen cylinders.

The Prime Minister's direction came when he was addressing the nation after launching the eighth instalment of financial benefits worth Rs 19,000 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme to benefit more than 9.5 crore farmers that includes first-time beneficiaries in West Bengal.

The Prime Minister expressed dissatisfaction against these hoarders for their indulgence in such acts at a time when even Indian Armed forces comprising all its three divisions-- the Indian Army, the Indian Navy, and the Indian Air Force -- have been engaged to serve the human being amid Covid-19 crisis.

"Our three armed forces are trying to serve the needy and oxygen trains are continuously dispatching oxygen cylinders amid the Covid crisis. But there are a number of people who are involved in hoarding of oxygen. States should take strict action against such people," Modi said.

Despite the acute shortage of concentrated oxygen in various states, several people have been caught hoarding the supply of the life-saving gas.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister also warned the people residing in villages to be very alert and follow all Covid-19 measures without fail to avoid the spread of the deadly disease.

Modi appealed to the villagers as well as those united with Gram Panchayats to spread awareness among others in the village to use "mask, take seriously to each symptom of Covid, go for Covid test, follow precautions until Covid report comes negative, and administer the vaccine".

"People's participation is essential to defeat Covid-19," Modi said.

The cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country is nearly 18 crore (17.93 Crore, said the Union Health Ministry's latest report received on Friday morning.

It said that the Covid-19 vaccination drive has successfully completed 118 days wherein 17.89 Crore doses have been administered to the identified beneficiaries through collaborative efforts of all states and UTs. India is the fastest country globally to reach the 17 crore target in 114 days. USA took 115 days and China took 119 days to administer the same amount of doses.

Indian scientists discover better combo alternative to Remdesivir

The findings provide a scientific rationale for applying Ledipasvir and Daclatasvir in combination with Sofosbuvir for Covid-19 management

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

At a time when people are desperately hankering for Remdesivir injections, paying exorbitant prices in black market too, a team of Indian scientists have found a combination of easily available drug—Sofosbuvir in combination with Ledipasvir and Daclatasvir as better drug than Remdesivir and potential therapeutic agents for the coronavirus.

They had investigated 61 antiviral drugs and found that unlike Remdesivir whose route of administration is intravenous, Daclatasvir and Ledipasvir, are orally administered. Combinations of Ledipasvir and Daclatasvir with Sofosbuvir are clinically approved, said the scientists in a study published in the Current Science journal.

"The combined score suggests that these combinations have superior anti-SARS-CoV-2 potential than Remdesivir and other investigational drugs," said the scientists from Biochemical Sciences Division, CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory, India Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research (AcSIR), Pandit Bhagwat Dayal Sharma Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences, and INTOX Private Limited, Pune who worked on the efficacy of drug repurposing for treating Covid-19.

"Our analysis suggested Sofosbuvir in combination with Ledipasvir and Daclatasvir as potential therapeutic agents for SARS-CoV-2. The combined score suggests that these combinations have superior anti-SARS-CoV-2 potential than Remdesivir and other investigational drugs," they said.

They said the present work provides a rationale-based approach to select drugs with possible anti-SARS-CoV-2 activity for further clinical evaluation. With the shortage of Remdesivir, the combination can be used to save the lives of severe Covid-19 patients.

"Drug repurposing has been utilized as the most preferred therapeutic intervention for Covid-19 mitigation due to its necessity and feasibility. To prioritize the therapeutic regime against COVID-19, we used 61 antiviral drugs and their combinations," said the paper.

Selected molecules were subjected to virtual screening against — human angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 receptor-binding domain (hACE-2) which serves as an anchor for virus attachment and entry, SARS-CoV-2 RNA dependent RNA polymerase (RdRp) responsible for viral RNA replication, and SARS-CoV-2 main protease (MPro) needed for viral polyprotein slab proteolytic processing.

"Based on docking score, pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic parameters, combinations of Daclatasvir, Elbasvir, Indinavir, Ledipasvir, Paritaprevir, and Rilpivirine were analysed further. Our analysis suggested Sofosbuvir in combination with Ledipasvir and Daclatasvir as potential therapeutic agents for SARS-CoV-2," it added.

The team said that the findings provide a scientific rationale for applying Ledipasvir and Daclatasvir in combination with Sofosbuvir for Covid-19 management.

"Recent initial clinical trial data from Iran with Ledipasvir and Daclatasvir in combination with Sofosbuvir against Covid-19 are encouraging. Based on our analysis and available preclinical and clinical data, we recommend prioritization and aggressive perusal of clinical evaluation of these drug combinations," it further said.

Onset of southwest monsoon over Kerala likely on May 31

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The onset of southwest monsoon over Kerala is likely to be on May 31, a day before the normal date of June 1, with a model error of ± 4 days. As a well-marked low pressure area over Lakshadweep area & adjoining southeast Arabian sea is all set to develop into a cyclonic storm along the west coast in the next 24 hours. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Tauktae, (meaning gecko (named by Myanmar) once formed, is likely to intensify into a 'very severe cyclonic storm' with wind speed of 150 to 160 kmph gusting to 175 kmph on May 17. This will be the first cyclone of this year.

The red alert has been sounded in Kerala for several districts for Friday and Saturday. Kerala Chief Minister tweeted, "Red Alert! 14 May - Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, 15 May - Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur, Kasargod. Follow guidelines issued by @KeralaSDMA."

"This year, the onset of the southwest monsoon over Kerala is likely to be on 31st May with a model error of plus/minus 4 days," the IMD said. In the Indian monsoon region, initial monsoon rains are experienced over south Andaman Sea and the monsoon winds then advance north-westwards across the Bay of Bengal.

The normal onset date of the monsoon over Kerala is June 1. Earlier the IMD has stated that monsoon is likely to make its onset over the Indian subcontinent at its normal date of June 1.

The IMD's operational forecasts of the date of monsoon onset over Kerala during the past 16 years (2005-2020) were proved to be correct except in 2015.

According to the IMD, it is very likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm during the next 24 hours and is also expected to intensify further during the subsequent 24 hours. Tauktae is likely to move north north-eastwards initially for some more time and then move north-north westwards and reach the Gujarat coast by May 18 morning. The depression over Lakshadweep area has moved north-north-eastwards with a speed of about 19 kmph and is now centred over Lakshadweep about 30 km south southwest of Amini Divi, 320 km west-southwest of Kannur (Kerala), 1120 km south southeast of Veraval (Gujarat) at about 11.30 am on May 14.

After the cyclonic warning the National Disaster Response Force has deployed several teams on ground. At least 24 teams are pre-deployed and 29 teams are on standby for Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, NDRF DG, SN Pradhan said.

Kazakhstan extends humanitarian aid to India

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

In accordance with instructions from President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and guided by the principles of strategic partnership between the two states, the Kazakhstan Government has provided humanitarian assistance to India during this serious epidemiological situation of Covid-19.

The first of the two Kazakh aircraft with the cargo landed at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi in the morning on May 14 with the second one expected to arrive several hours later.

This humanitarian aid, weighing around 40 tons, includes medical masks, respirators, protective suits and portable artificial lung ventilation devices from Kazakh manufacturers in the healthcare sector. This aid was officially handed over at the airport by Ambassador of Kazakhstan to India Nurlan Zhalgasbayev to Director, Eurasian Department of the Ministry of External Affairs, Bandaru Wilsonbabu.

On May 4, President Tokayev, in a telegram to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, expressed "deep solidarity with the Indian nation over the devastating Covid-19 surge in this country", and on May 7, instructed his government to provide and dispatch the necessary assistance to the Indian authorities.

Congress urges Palestinians, Israel to cease hostilities immediately

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday raised concern over the spiralling violence in the Palestinian territories and Israel and urged an immediate cessation of hostilities.

In a statement, Congress leader Anand Sharma said that the spiralling violence in East Jerusalem, Gaza and Israel, coinciding with the festival of Eid, is distressing and a matter of grave concern for the world.

He also said that the Palestinian peoples' right to pray at Al Asqa mosque without any restriction must always be respected and not violated.

"The orchestrated incidents in Jerusalem were outrageous and triggered tensions and violence," he said.

Noting that people of both Palestine and Israel "have a right to live with dignity in a secure environment, Sharma said that the escalation of conflict, air attacks on Gaza and the rocket attacks by Hamas have resulted in tragic loss of innocent human lives, especially the children and elderly and also injuries to many civilians.

20 civil servants appointed to joint secretary-level posts

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

In a major bureaucratic reshuffle, 20 civil servants were on Friday appointed to joint secretary-level posts.

A 2002 batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, D. Senthil Pandiyan, was appointed as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of AYUSH for a tenure of five years, replacing Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer Roshan Jaggi, a 1988-batch J&K cadre officer.

Nirupama Kotru, a 1992 batch Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer, was appointed as Joint Secretary and Financial Advisor in the Ministry of Coal for an overall tenure of five years in place of Reena Sinha Puri, a 1987-batch IRS officer.

Bhaskar Verma, a 1995-batch Indian Civil Accounts Service (ICAS) officer, has been appointed as the Member Secretary, National Monuments Authority (NMA), Ministry of Culture, for five years replacing Navneet Soni.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the appointments that include the names of Lily Pandeya for the Joint Secretary's post in the Ministry of Culture; Mayank Tewari for the same post in the Department of Defence; Nazli Jafri Shayin in the Ministry of Defence (Finance); Indira Murthy in the Ministry of Earth Sciences; Bhuvnesh Kumar in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology; and Patibandla Ashok Babu in the Department of Health and Family Welfare.

Manisha Sinha, Ashish Vachhan and Sandhya Bhullar were appointed as Joint Secretaries in the Department of Economic Affairs.

Jeetendra Singh has been appointed as Joint Secretary in the Department of Heavy Industry; Sumant Singh in the Department of Home Affairs; Sanjiv Shankar in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting; Manoj Kumar in the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management; and Sonmoni Borah in the Department of Land Resources.

Indian Ordnance Factories Service (IOFS) officer Veena Tamta Bhatia has been appointed as the Additional Central Provident Fund Commissioner (HQ), EPFO, under the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Goyal discusses steps to raise Covid vaccine production

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal on Friday had a virtual meeting with United States Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Chi Tai.

The meeting focused on increasing vaccine availability in an inclusive and equitable manner to combat the Global pandemic caused by Covid-19.

The proposal of India on waiver of certain TRIPS provisions to increase global vaccine production in order to take on the challenge of vaccinating the poorest of the poor and save lives was also discussed.

Goyal thanked the USTR for the US announcing its support for India's proposal.

The minister mentioned the supply chains for the vaccine manufacturers must be kept open and unbridled as the entire world is in dire need of vaccines.

Vaccine supply likely to increase sharply by June

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Come June and supply of Covid-19 vaccines is likely to increase sharply, helping India get close to 300 crore doses in the seven-month period ending December, government officials said on Friday even as it announced of supplying nearly 192 lakh Covid-19 vaccines to the states and the Union Territories (UTs) in the next fortnight from May 16 to 31, 2021. This will include 162.5 lakh of Covishield and 29.49 lakh of Covaxin.

Estimates chalked out by officials suggested that the tentative supply figures in May (8.8 crore doses) could almost double by June (15.81 crore doses) and quadruple by August (36.6 crore doses). In December alone, 65 crore doses might be available, over a seven-fold jump from the May numbers, they said.

Meanwhile, officials from the Union Health Ministry said that Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan will hold a meeting with Health Ministers of four states for Covid-19 vaccination and management on May 15. In addition, a total quantum of more than 4.39 crore doses was also available for direct procurement by the States as well as private hospitals in the month of May 2021.

A total of 17,92,98,584 vaccine doses have been administered through 26,02,435 sessions, according to the provisional report till 7 am. These include 96,18,127 healthcare workers (HCWs) who have taken the first dose and 66,04,549 HCWs who have taken the second dose, 1,43,22,390 FLWs who have received the first dose, 81,16,153 FLWs who have received the second dose and 39,26,334 beneficiaries in the 18-45 years age group who have taken the first dose.

Besides, 5,66,09,783 and 85,39,763 beneficiaries aged 45 to 60 years have been administered the first and second dose respectively, while 5,42,42,792 and 1,73,18,693 beneficiaries of more than 60 years old have taken the first and second dose.

The ministry said 4,40,706 beneficiaries in the age group of 18-44 years have received their first dose of COVID vaccine in the last 24 hours and cumulatively 39,26,334 across 32 states and UTs since the start of phase-3 of vaccination drive.

More than 20 lakh vaccination doses were administered in a span of 24 hours. As on Day-118 of the vaccination drive (May 13), 20,27,162 vaccine doses were given. Across 18,624 sessions, 10,34,304 beneficiaries were vaccinated for the first dose and 9,92,858 beneficiaries received their second dose of vaccine.

The Ministry also said that a national tracking platform will be established soon to determine the impact of the jabs against CovidD-19 and the breakthrough infections that are likely to occur among those with complete and partial immunisation.

BSF finds guns dropped by Pak drone in Samba

PNS ■ JAMMU

A day after the Armies of India and Pakistan exchanged packets of sweets and demonstrated that the bonhomie was prevailing along the Line of Control as not a single incident of ceasefire violation was reported since February 24, the Indian border guards deployed along the International border on Friday claimed they have recovered a consignment of arms and ammunition dropped by a Pakistani drone in the Samba sector. The arms consignment was dropped approximately 250 metres inside the Indian territory.

BSF officials also claimed the consignment was recovered from the same area where BSF had earlier detected a cross border tunnel in the month of November 2020. The tunnel was used by the Pak rangers to push armed terrorists inside the Indian territory.

Recently a Pakistani intruder was also shot dead by the BSF troops in the same area on May 5.

Last year on June 20, 2020 BSF troops had also neutralized a Pak Hexacopter in Samba/Kathua area and recovered a huge quantity of Arms/Ammunition & explosives. According to a statement released by the BSF spokesman in Jammu, "As per input, on 14 May 2021, troops of BSF carried out a search operation in the general area of Samba sector. At about 12.15 hrs, BSF troops recovered a wrapped item with a yellow colour polythene bag in a field. The wrapped packet contained 01 AK -47, 01 Pistol, 01 Mag, 15 rounds of 9 mm, 01 wooden frame (used to attach payload with drone) & wrapping material".

BSFspokesman said, "IG BSF Jammu N S Jamwal congratulated the alert BSF troops for this big achievement which again foiled the nefarious motive of Pakistan and said that BSF is ever alert and vigilant on International Border 24x7 to thwart away the nefarious designs of Pakistan".

Be impartial, prompt, Didi writes to PM on O_2 plants

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Continuing to drop letter bombs on the PMO one after the other, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi wondering why the Centre was not living up to its promises on corona specific equipment.

The Chief Minister wrote another letter to the Prime Minister requesting him to be evenhanded in allotting PSA plants (Pressure Swing Adsorption) plants — needed to generate oxygen — to the States, particularly Bengal.

Complaining that the Centre had promised 70 such plants for Bengal whereas it had only been allotted four in the first phase, Banerjee wrote, "We were told we shall get 70 PSA plants, now we are told that we shall get four in the first phase with no clarity on the remaining plants."

This is her fifth letter to the Prime Minister in the past two weeks.

She also complained in her letter, as to how "…Priorities are being fixed and re-fixed, implementing agencies are being settled and unsettled, quota for West Bengal is being downwardly revised and further downwardly revised every day," adding there was lack of clarity about whether the State would get the remaining plants.

The Prime Minister's Office had earlier approved allocation of funds from PM-CARES for installation of 551 PSA plants in across the country. Out of these Bengal was to get 70.

Mamata further wrote in her letter requesting the Prime Minister "to kindly get the priorities, implementing agencies, and quota fixed, justly, fairly and quickly" as "our own supplementary PSA-installation plans by State agencies... are getting disturbed because of the indecisiveness at Delhi."

Pandemic issues apart, the Chief Minister also hit out at the Centre for making unnecessary delay over the transfer of PM Kisan Sanman Nidhi funds to the Bengal farmers.

Mamata attacked the Prime Minister on a day when the Centre transferred its first installment of ₹2,000 to more than 7.5 lakh eligible farmers on Friday. In an open letter to the farmers the Chief Minister said that the first installment of the PM-Kisan fund was in fact a result of her continuous fight to get the central funds for Bengal farmers.

The Prime Minister on Friday released the eighth installment of over ₹20,000 crore to more than 9.5 crore farmers. About 41 lakh Bengal farmers had applied for the scheme.

In an open letter to farmers, Banerjee said "You all were supposed to get ₹18,000, but have received a very small amount. Even this sum would not have been transferred had we not fought for it. We will continue this fight till you get the entire allocation."

Her Trinamool Congress also hit out at the Centre for releasing only ₹2,000 for each farmers whereas the Prime Minister had promised Rs 18,000 after the elections. "The PM spoke of ₹18,000 and here he has given only ₹2,000… where is the rest?" asked senior party MP Saugato Roy.

Several leaders' phones tapped during Fadnavis regime, alleges Cong

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) president Nana Patole on Friday created a sensation in the State political circles by alleging that during the previous Devendra Fadnavis Government telephones of several leaders belonging to the Congress, NCP, Shiv Sena and BJP, and also some IAS and IPS officers, between 2016 and 2017 were tapped.

Talking to media persons here, Patole charged that he had received information from a private television channel that his telephone was being tapped between 2016 and 2017 when the BJP-led saffron alliance Government ruled the state.

"In the name of busting a narcotics gang, the phones of mine as well as Amzad Khan were tapped during the Devendra FadnavisGovernment using false names. I urge the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government to conduct a high-level inquiry into the phone tapping indulged in by the previous BJP-led Government and bring the culprits behind it to book," Patole said.

The MPCC president also alleged that apart from his phones, the phones of Congress, NCP, Shiv Sena and BP leaders, and also some IAS and IPS officers were also being tapped. "In my case, the previous BJP government tried to link me to drug trafficking gangs and also project in an objectionable manner. While tapping my telephone, the people involved were using a fake name and address".

Patole demanded to know if requisite permission was taken from the authorities concerned before tapping my telephone. "What was the purpose of tapping my telephone? Keeping an individual under surveillance without requisite permission is an offence and invasion into the privacy of the individual concerned," the Congress leader said.

UP records 15,747 new Covid cases, 312 deaths

Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh on Friday recorded 15,747 fresh Covid-19 cases that took the infection count to 15,96,628, while 312 more fatalities pushed the death toll to 16,958, officials said.

In the past 13 days, the number of active cases in the state has come down by over 1.17 lakh. On April 30, there were about 3.10 lakh active cases and the number currently stands at 1,93,815, said Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Amit Mohan Prasad.

As many as 1,57,257 patients are in home isolation, he said.While the state reported 15,747 fresh cases the previous day, 26,174 Covid-19 patients recovered from the disease. So far, 13,85,855 patients have recovered in Uttar Pradesh and the recovery rate stands at 86.8 per cent, Prasad said.

Among the fresh deaths, a maximum of 21 were reported from the state capital Lucknow, 20 from Kanpur, 16 from Bahraich, 15 from Meerut, 14 from Chandauli, 13 from Jhansi, 12 from Varanasi, 10 each from Gautam Buddh Nagar, Hardoi and Mathura, a health bulletin issued here said.

Among the fresh cases, 1,464 were reported from Meerut, 900 from Lucknow, 718 from Gautam Buddh Nagar, 587 from Varanasi, 567 from Gorakhpur, it said. So far, over 4.41 crore samples have been tested for COVID-19 in the state, including more than 2.63 lakh tested on Wednesday, he said. ***PTI***

Deserted streets at the Ganeshguri flyover during Covid-induced curfew in Guwahati on Friday PTI

Centre rushes team to J&K to study reasons for high Covid-19 mortality

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

In the wake of the grim Covid-19 situation in Jammu & Kashmir, the Central Government has rushed a team of experts to study the reasons behind high mortality rate.

The region has witnessed more than 800 deaths in the last one month. The positivity rate is also hovering around 10 percent while the active positive cases stood at over 52,000.

MoS PMO Dr Jitendra Singh, who is regularly tracking the Covid-19 management efforts on Friday tweeted," Central team of experts deputed to visit GMC and other health institutions in Jammu in view of COVID surge. Local authorities are advised to frankly point out constraints faced by them without mincing words, so that Centre can optimally step in to assist them".

On ground zero the Union Territory administration is racing against time to recruit doctors, nurses and other paramedics to utilise their services in the overall management of Covid-19 patients.

Meanwhile, there was no let up in the increasing number of deaths. On Friday 60 more patients succumbed to the virus while 3027 new cases were detected taking the tally of active positive cases to 52,001. The positivity rate dropped down marginally to 9.59 across J&K.

The National Health Mission, UT of J&k Friday released some statistics in order to spread awareness about the importance of vaccination.

According to the analysis of Covid mortality in J&K UT between 15 Apr-12 May, the twitter handle of NHM said,1-93% of Covid +ve critical cases who died in this period were unvaccinated, 7% were partially vaccinated.

"46% of deaths occurred within 3 days of testing +ve thus indicating that they were well into late stages of infection before they got tested".

patients not to remain in a denial mode NHM advocated the need for early testing so that treatment could start early.

Referring to self medication as another reason behind the high mortality rate, NHM data revealed, "49.37% of total deaths were those who arrived just <=3 days before in the hospital".

Kerala extends lockdown till May 23

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Since the nine-day long total lock down in Kerala which is in force since May 9 has failed to bring down the number of Covid-19 patients, the administration has decided to extend the lockdown to May 23.

The lock down declared on May 7 was for nine days which would have ended on May 16.

The move th extend the lockdown was announced by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in his daily press briefing on Friday.

Vijayan said that the total lock down would be in force till May 23. Four districts have been brought under triple lock down measures. These are the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Malappuram. The decision to have triple lock down in these districts was in the backdrop of unabated hike in the number of Covid-19 cases.

On Friday, the State diagnosed 34, 694 new persons with Covid-19 while 93 patients succumbed to the pandemic.

The Test Positivity Rate in the State as on Friday was 26.41.

The Chief Minister asked the people in the State to be extra cautious as the India Meteorological Department has warned of heavy downpours, rains and high sea waves along the Kerala coast as a consequence of the low pressure developed in the Arabian Sea in the West Coast.

The failure of the administration to accommodate Covid-19 patients in First Line Treatment Centres came out in the open in southern Kerala as nearly 50 patients afflicted with the pandemic set up a temporary shed along the paddy fields in Thiruvalla as covid shelter.

An embarrassed administration hushed up the issue by shifting the patients to the nearest FLTC but not before many people were seen running helter-skelter in this predominantly rural area.

288 more die in Tamil Nadu

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu is all set to extend the lock down period with more stringent measures as all measures to check the transmission of Covid-19 have come a cropper. There is no worthwhile change in the number of daily cases reported across the State as the second wave is causing havoc everywhere.

On Friday, the pandemic claimed 288 lives across the State while 31, 892 new persons were diagnosed with Covid-19. The Directorate of Public Health and Preventive Medicine said in its release that there were 1.95 lakh active Covid-19 patients in the State undergoing treatment in various hospitals.

More than 1.53 lakh persons were subjected to RT-PCR tests on Friday. The death toll in Tamil Nadu till date crossed the 17,000 on Friday. A meeting convened by Chief Minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin which was attended among others by legislature party leaders of all political parties with representation in the House decided unanimously to support whatever measures the Government takes to control the transmission and spread of the pandemic in the State.

The leaders of all political parties who took part in the deliberations assured the Government that they would not hold any public meetings or demonstrations anywhere in the State till the pandemic subsides. A high power committee was constituted with medical professionals, policy makers and leaders of various political parties to chalk out ways and means to control the spread of Covid-19.

In a camaraderie which is quite unusual in Tamil Nadu, the political leaders authorised the Chief Minister to take decisions which he feels apt and suitable to check the Covid-19.

Meanwhile, Sterlite Copper, owned by the Vedanta Group, has started despatching tanker trucks filled with medical oxygen to various government owned hospitals in the State. A company representative said that from May 15, the plant at Thoothukudi would be able to produce 35 tonne medical grade oxygen per day and this would be gradually hiked.

53,249 patients discharged in Maha

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In some relief to the health authorities in Maharashtra, the daily Covid-19 deaths dropped to 695 in the State on Friday, while the infections came down to 39,923 .

A day after daily deaths jumped from 816 to 850 and the infections dropped from 46,781 to 42,582, Maharashtra logged 695 deaths and 39,923 new cases.

With 695 new deaths, the total number of deaths in the state climbed from 78,857 to 79,552. Similarly, with 39,923 new infections, the total number of cases climbed from 52,69,292 to 53.09,215.

As 53,249 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 46,54,731 to 47,07,980. The recovery rate in the state went up from 88.34 per cent to 88.68 per cent.

The total "active cases" in the state dropped from 5,33,294 to 5,19,254. The fatality rate in the state stood static at 1.5 per cent.

With 62 fresh deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai increased from 14,040 to 14,102, while the infected cases went up by a relatively low 1660 to trigger a jump in the infections from 6,83,185 to 6,84,845.

The situation in Pune improved a bit as the "active cases", which had come below one lakh mark early this week, improved once again as the "active cases" dropped from 1,01,181 to 96,028.

Nagpur with 40496 active cases stood second in the state, followed by Mumbai (35,843), Thane (31,526), Ahmednagar (27,573), Satara (21,927), Solapur (21,232), Nashik (18923), Beed (18806), Chandrapur (15,701), Jalgaon (11,193), Latur (10237), Aurangabad (8716), Jalna (7072), Parbhani (7060), Osmanabad (6453) and Buldhana (6090).

Of the 3,06,02, 140 samples sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 53,09,215 have tested positive (17.35 per cent) for Covid-19 until Friday.

Currently, 34, 82, 425 people are in home quarantine while 28,312 people are in institutional quarantine.

AP records 22,018 new cases, 96 deaths

Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh reported more than 20,000 fresh cases of coronavirus for the fourth consecutive day on Friday, while 19,177 patients had recovered and another 96 succumbed to the infection.

The latest bulletin said 22,018 positive cases turned out from 89,087 tests in the 24 hours ending 9 am today, taking the infection count to 13,88,803.

The number of active cases increased to 2,03,787 after a total of 11,75,843 recoveries and 9,173 deaths.

The overall infection positivity rate climbed to 7.81 per cent after 1.77 crore tests while the case fatality rate remained stable at 0.66 per cent.

The recovery rate was 84.6 per cent and the active case ratio was about 15 per cent.

East Godavari district reported the highest 3,432 fresh cases in 24 hours, followed by Chittoor 2,708, Anantapuramu 2,213 and Visakhapatnam 2,200.

While Srikakulam reported the lowest 695 and Vizianagaram 899, seven other districts added between 1,000 and 1,800 new cases each. ***PTI***

Sea waves crash onto the shore amid cyclone warning, at a seashore in Kanyakumari district on Friday PTI

Assam Minister orders probe into death of 18 elephants

Guwahati: Assam Forest Minister Parimal Suklabaidya on Friday visited Bamuni Pahar in Nagaon district, where 18 elephants died a day ago presumably due to lightning, and ordered an inquiry into the incident.

A panel, headed by Deputy Conservator of Forest K K Deori with seven veterinarians as members, has been instituted to carry out the inquiry, and file a preliminary report within three days and a detailed account in the next 15 days, an official release stated.

Suklabaidya, who assessed the situation at Bamuni Pahar in Kothiatuli forest range along with top officials, said "no visible sign of any struggle" was found at the site and an initial probe into the incident suggested that the pachyderms were struck by lightning.

The exact cause of death, however, will be clear following the arrival of the post mortem report, and submission of details by the committee, the Minister said. ***PTI***

Steps taken to increase number of Covid-19 beds: Puducherry L-G

PTI ■ KARAIKAL

Puducherry Lieutenant Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundarajan has said steps were underway to increase the number of beds for Covid patients in Karaikal district of the Union Territory.

Speaking to reporters after holding a review meeting here with the District Collector Arjun Sharma, the Lieutenant Governor said considering the rise in the number of Covid cases in Karaikal, the Government has taken steps to increase the number of beds in hospitals.

In addition, privatemedical colleges have been asked to raise the bed capacity and appoint more doctors, she said. Stating that the district has adequate supply of oxygen, she thanked the fishermen who donated 40 oxygen cylinders in their boats for the benefit of patients in the government Karaikal hospital.

The Lieutanant Governor pointed out that it had been observed that late referrals for treatment at hospitals were often the reason for Covid deaths and askd the people to seek proper medical attention in the early stage itself.

She said the district administration would consider increasing the number of Covid care centres and alternative medicine centres. When her attention was drawn to volunteers who are involved in burying the Covid victims in the district, the Lieutenant Governor said she would initiate an inquiry as to why government staff were not involved in the activity and why it had been entirely left to volunteers.

She appealed to the people to cooperate with the government by staying indoors and thereby stop the spread of Covid. Health Secretary Arun and other officials were present at the review meeting.

With no let up in coronavirus surge, lockdown extended by 7 days in Mizoram

Aizawl: The total lockdown imposed in Aizawl and other district headquarters from May 10 has been extended for another 7 days to flatten the Covid-19 transmission curve.

The government order issued on Friday said that the existing complete lockdown, which was scheduled to be lifted on May 17 (4 am) has been extended till 4 am of May 24.

"As Covid-19 positive cases continue to surge inspite of the stringent measures taken, the competent authority has decided to continue with the total lockdown with an anticipation of flattening the curve of the disease transmission thereby preventing probable overburdening of healthcare facilities," the order said.

The second corona wave continues to trouble the northeastern State. Mizoram on Friday reported 201 Covid-19 cases, pushing the state's tally to 8,377.

A total of 90 people were discharged in the state during the day.

The number of active cases now stands at 2,060, while 6,294 people have recovered from the infection. At least 23 people have succumbed to the infection in Mizoram so far. The Government order said that people residing in the state capital and other district headquarters/towns shall strictly confine to indoors and not venture outside without permission. ***PTI***

Priests perform 'aarti' at Sangam on the occasion of 'Akshay Tritiya' in Prayagraj on Friday PTI

NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | MAY 15, 2021

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Opinion 06

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PAPER WITH PASSION

High and dry

Herd immunity is one thing; India needs to do a lot more to protect its people from the pandemic

The COVID-19 vaccination drive in India appears to be wafting in the air with a mind of its own. Never an easy task, what with a billion people to be vaccinated in time to avoid a third surge of the virus, the exercise is taking time even to take off. Whether it is owing to gigantic nature of the task at hand or the scattered nature of the vaccination management plan, one is not sure. The bare facts of the case, if the pandemic is to be brought under control at the very least by the end of this year, are before us. Scientists believe a minimum of 70 per cent of the population needs to be vaccinated for the herd immunity to set in. In India, that means the immunity can be achieved if nearly 94 crore people receive both doses of the vaccine. At two doses each, that calls for 188-odd crore doses. That is a tall order. Even if one were to scale down the vaccination to one dose under the assumption that it is better to give at least half protection to all than complete protection to only a few, even then, just under a 100 crore doses are needed. Where to get the doses from? How long will it take to acquire them? How long will it take to complete the vaccination process? If, at the end, it is only one dose that is given, an identical task stares at the country for giving the second dose.

Bear in mind that all this is for vaccinating only 70 per cent of the population. That means just about a third of the population will be left high and dry unless they largely constitute children who are yet to come under the purview of vaccination. The Serum Institute of India has said it will be in a position to produce 10 crore doses a month after July. One can assume that Bharat Biotech can produce anywhere between five and six crore doses a month after July. Zydus Cadila and Dr Reddy's Labs will be able to pitch in with three-odd crore doses a month. That can stretch the total figure of available doses per month close to 20 crore by August 2021 or thereabouts. That leaves five months till December to complete the task of giving around 100 crore doses. There are reports that are not so confident; they contend that the task may actually take over two or even three years. In any case, assuming the exercise ends by December, a population of 94-odd crore will receive one effective dose or half of them will get two doses each, as the case may be. The result is there for all to see: It is simply impossible to achieve herd immunity before the end of 2021 unless 188 crore doses are available at once and an unprecedented, organised, synchronised, national campaign is undertaken to complete the process in five months. The question to the Centre goes abegging: Where is the plan?

PICTALK

ITBP personnel share a friendly moment at a training centre near Mana, Uttarakhand PTI

Hogwash

Amid the raging contagion, a handful of politicians are providing comic relief to citizens, albeit unintentionally

Chandler Muriel Bing of the *Friends* fame said in the series: "I'm not great at advice. But can I interest you in a sarcastic comment?" Something similar in the nature of an emotion has ostensibly stirred Uttarakhand's former Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat. The BJP leader, no less adept at stoking controversy as the incumbent Tirath Singh Rawat, has now taken to bat for the accursed Novel Coronavirus because, as it would appear, everybody is only hurling doses of vituperation at the poor pathogen. Choosing to look at it "from a philosophical angle", Rawat said that the virus is a "living organism which has a right to live". In the same vein, he warned the human species that despite considering ourselves to be the most intelligent on the planet and out to eliminate the virus, the killer is sensible enough to keep mutating itself. Slipping into some sense midway, he also clarified, to his credit, that people need to outpace the virus to stay safe. So far, so good! By that logic, do we need to go and offer ourselves to a tiger just because it has a life and the right to life? If the virus has the right to live, as an organism, all of us don't?

And, as most of us would agree, the new-age politicians are nothing less than pernicious viruses. But do they really need to open their trap and prove it? As the old saying goes, it is better to keep your mouth shut and let the world think that you are a fool, rather than open it and remove all doubts! The unusual observation, as must have been the desired outcome of the former Chief Minister, went viral at a time when the entire country is battling a killer second wave of COVID-19. A Twitter user sarcastically said: "This virus organism should be given shelter in the Central Vista." Another said: "Shri Rawat should invite the virus home, feed it well and stay with it for at least 14 days." All done and dusted, the statement just goes on to show how devoid of empathy are our political leaders who, in spite of seeing the mass scale of devastation in terms of life, employment and business opportunities, can't keep themselves away from courting a headline-worth-of controversy. As Chandler said, one more time: "Handle? I can handle it. Handle is my middle name. Well, actually it's the middle part of my first name."

The endgame in Afghanistan

HIRANMAY **KARLEKAR**

There's a host of implications emanating from the withdrawal of American troops from that country, and India needs to watch out

The latest available estimates of the number of people, mostly schoolgirls, killed in three blasts in front of a co-educational school in Kabul on May 8, vary from at least 60 (*BBC*) to over 85 (*CNN*). The figure may rise further by the time this column is published. The diabolical intent to kill as many as possible is clear from the fact that a car bomb was first detonated and two improvised explosive devices followed as the girls rushed out of the school in panic.

Two questions arise. Who is behind this ghastly crime? What are its implications? As to the first, no one has claimed responsibility. The Afghan Government has blamed the Taliban, which has denied involvement and condemned the strike. This leaves one with the Islamic State, which has staged terror attack in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan and which retains its ability to strike despite losing a great deal of territory over the months.

The Taliban are the more likely culprits. There is no reason why one should believe them, particularly when the May 8 blasts have to be seen in the background of the surge in their attacks and terror strikes following President Joe Biden's announcement that all American troops will leave Afghanistan by September 11. They know they will not win an election and they do not believe in democracy. They want to control Afghanistan by force and establish the *Sharia* rule.

Will they be able to do it? What will happen if they do? The answer to the first would depend on the fighting qualities of the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces (ANDSF), the support they continue to receive from the US and its NATO allies. As to the first, despite serious problems of desertion and unwillingness to enlist, the Afghan National Army (ANA), the land warfare arm of the ANDSF, has emerged a battle-hardened force capable of confronting the Taliban and other terrorist organisations it faces. Its commando and special forces units have been particularly successful.

Against this, the harsh fact is that the Taliban have expanded their control over huge tracts of Afghanistan's countryside and some cities, besides inflicting a number of heavy defeats on the Afghan troops. At least some of the reverses the latter suffered the beginning of 2020 are attributable to the Trump administration's atrocious policies. These included asking the Government forces early in 2020 to go on the defensive in the interest of its peace negotiations with the Taliban, and arm-twisting it into agreeing to the Taliban demand of releasing 5,000 of their fighters in Afghan jails as a precondition for talks. Many of the released fighters have gone back to combat despite the Taliban's promise that they would not do so.

The Taliban, however, began gaining ground even before the Trump Administration's policies and pressures hampered the ANDSF's operations. Also, while the capabilities of the Afghan troops have improved, a big question mark hangs against the future availability of effective air support, which has played an important role in many of the ANA's successful operations. According to one estimate, 80 to 90 per cent of the air support to it is now provided by the fledgling Afghan Air Force (AAF).

> AS THE DIVERSION TO KANDAHAR OF THE INDIAN AIRLINES HIJACKED FLIGHT IC-814 IN DECEMBER 1999 SHOWED, THE TALIBAN WERE ACTIVELY PROMOTING TERRORISM AGAINST IT BY JAISH-E-MOHAMMED AND LASHKAR-E-TAIBA. DO WE HAVE A COHERENT POLICY TO MEET THE CHALLENGE?

The AAF, however, has been supported by the massive air power of the US. Also, international contractors, now doing the bulk of the maintenance work on its planes and helicopters, will depart with the American troops. This will seriously affect its operational capabilities. This underlines the importance of continued American aid. On July 7, 2012, Hillary Clinton, then US Secretary of State, announced in Kabul that President Obama had designated Afghanistan as a major non-NATO ally of the US. The questions are: How much and of what kind?

Apart from military hardware, there is a need for funds. Countering a blend of insurgency and terrorism is a very expressive business. The US has provided over $86 billion as security assistance to Afghanistan between financial years 2002 and 2019. Since 2014, it has been providing between five and six billion dollars per year to fund the ANDSF. How much and what form of assistance will Washington provide Afghanistan after the withdrawal of its troops?

Clearly, the military outcome in Afghanistan hangs in the balance. So does the fate of Afghanistan. All indications are that the Taliban have every intention to re-impose the medieval, authoritarian theocratic system that had reduced Afghanistan to a cleric-administered prison. As Ahmed Rashid wrote in *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, edicts of the Taliban's Department of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice "had changed the lifestyles of Kabul's once easy-going population and forced Afghan women to disappear from public view".

India needs to watch out. As the diversion to Kandahar of the Indian Airlines hijacked Flight IC-814 in December 1999 showed, the Taliban were actively promoting terrorism against it by Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Do we have a coherent policy to meet the challenge?

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE OXYGEN CRISIS IN GOA

Sir — An oxygen crisis in the Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), the State's largest COVID facility, has led to the death of over 74 patients in the span of four days due to daily disruptions in oxygen supply. Just two days after 26 patients lost their lives at the GMCH within hours, the State Government told the Bombay High Court Bench in Goa that 15 more patients had succumbed.

The Bench was informed of 13 more deaths from the same hospital. The spate of deaths due to the lack of oxygen is causing a serious concern for the COVID-19 patients in Goa's hospitals. However, the Pramod Sawant Government and the hospital both told the court that all the deaths could not be attributed to the disruption in oxygen supply.

The issue relating to oxygen shortage is so severe that the court had ordered the State Government to drop everything and ensure that there are no deaths for "at least one night". The relatives of the patients did raise an alarm after the oxygen pressure began to drop overnight. But it was several hours before anyone was able to fix the problem and ensure a steady supply of oxygen. It was a simple case of utter negligence on the part of the health department and the Government.

CK Subbu | *Goa*

BE CAUTIOUS, BUT NOT SCARED

Sir — The recrudescence of COVID-19 in the form of the second wave has claimed many lives since mid-March 2021. Cold, cough, breathlessness and fever have been experienced from time immemorial. Cold triggers fever and cough triggers breathlessness if curative measures are not taken in time; it is a known fact.

Fever appears in many forms like flu, malaria, typhoid, encephalitis (brain fever), monkey fever, and so on. The said fevers have not given an undertaking that they would not appear since Corona has been appearing on a grand scale. But since Corona made an appearance, we have hardly heard of the fevers experienced earlier. If a patient with cold, cough or fever approaches a doctor, they do not treat the patient without subjecting her/him to a COVID test. Have all other fevers lost ground to Corona? If all other fevers are treated like COVID, the fatalities are bound to occur due to wrong diagnosis and wrong administration of medicines.

Whether malaria, typhoid and flu have not at all revisited after Corona first broke out in March 2020, the other normal ailments are still very much a reality. This aspect must be looked into by the Government, scientists and doctors.

KV Seetharamaiah | *Hassan*

PAY ATTENTION TO RURAL INDIA, TOO

Sir —This refers to the news report, *'Dozens of bodies found buried in sand near Ganga in Unnao'*, May 14. When COVID-19 first hit India, the biggest fear among both the policymakers and public experts was that the pandemic would travel to India's Hindi heartland — primarily across the rural belt of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar.

Given the size of the two States, the density of population, the abysmal healthcare infrastructure and the manner in which the virus could quickly transmit in these regions, this fear was legitimate. There was never any cogent explanation as to why this was the case, but this did not deter speculative, and clearly misplaced, theories about the innate immunity of those in rural India.

The tragic sight of the bodies floating in the Ganga confirms that the numbers of reported COVID fatalities are much higher than the official figures.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | *Bengaluru*

Open up the barred humanity

The suggestion of the Supreme Court about placing convicts under house arrest is worth considering. If one may add, the release of political prisoners on bail or parole too merits consideration. Political and civil rights activists are often incarcerated for speaking out the truth to power or rebelling against the "system". Dissent is now a crime punishable with imprisonment!

It is a matter of immense significance in terms of human rights that the undertrials make up nearly 70 per cent of the total inmates in Indian prisons. Many of them do not have access to legal counsel or remedy. Pre-trial imprisonment in itself is punishment. As they say, the process is the punishment in India. It is a logical premise that the undertrials could be convicted or acquitted. Eventually, be it conviction or acquittal, they cannot be kept in a place where they run greater risk of contracting Coronavirus. They must be spared the 'capital punishment' by the virus!

It is common knowledge that many of India's prisons are congested and have more inmates than they can accommodate and, as such, they remain the hotspots for the contagion. Needless to say, the prison conditions are conducive to the spread of the contagion. When prisons are crammed full of inmates, it is next to impossible to maintain physical distancing. The incorporation of decongesting prisons into the pandemic response is a much-needed measure. Prisoners also share the right to health with those outside prisons for anyone to be dismissive of their greater in-house susceptibility to contract the virus. The non-violent and low-risk offenders pose no significant risk to public safety. Releasing them is a containment measure that has a health benefit by reducing the risk of transmission and an uplifting humanitarian gesture.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

The situation is extremely fragile as there are also constraints in lifting 100 MT of allocated #oxygen from Burnpur and Kalinganagar in the east.

Rajasthan Chief Minister
— Ashok Gehlot

It will take time, but with great firmness, both defensively and offensively, we will achieve our goal to restore peace to the State of Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister
— Benjamin Netanyahu

So thankful to all the love put into making me feel special on my birthday. (But) without family you are nothing.

Actor
— Sunny Leone

My quarantine period is still not over. Otherwise, I am doing much better. Requesting everyone not to spread misleading stories/ information without the whole context.

Cricketer
— Wriddhiman Saha

#breakthechain COVID is not our friend. It's our enemy. Our focus is only & only to keep it as far away from us as possible.

Actor
— Vindu Dara Singh

FIRSTCOLUMN

HEALTHCARE POLICY NEEDS A BOOSTER

The disparity among the masses makes the downtrodden people more vulnerable

ISHANEE **SHARMA**

Till the untoward dissemination of Coronavirus in India, the economic prosperity and healthcare developments were often considered complementary to each other. During the COVID pandemic, empirical corroborations show the gap between the two has not narrowed down, resulting in lopsided development. Every year, the Union and State Governments while appropriating their annual finances accord utmost priority toward superficial sectors or ancilliary enterprises ie insurance sector and proffer marginal policy attention to our medical and health care sectors. It is appalling that since Independence, the percentage-based monetary allocation in healthcare development had never exceeded two per cent of the overall financial allocations. Consequently, it results in a displeasing growth of certain sectors accompanied by social disparity caused by the whopping expenses incurred by the majority of our population in meeting the basic medicinal requirements at private hospitals. This disparity makes the downtrodden masses vulnerable in the spheres of human resource development, in seeking adequate health care benefits from the State. Ergo, the plunder bund-like insurance companies exploit them at their own whims and fancies, which in turn eclipses the

economic development and ultimately takes lives of thousands of people in our country due to inadequate healthcare infrastructure.This pandemic has inadvertently helped our economy in highlighting the existing infrastructure lacunaein the medical and healthcare industry. Due to the glaring deficiency of an adequate infrastructure and sufficient human resource in the public hospitals, the most sought-after health care schemes such as Ayushman Bharat have also failed to meet the legitimate medicinal demands of the masses during the times of the pandemic. A report published in a leading daily newspaper highlights that barely 10 per cent of the Ayushman Bharat cardholders could take the benefit of this centrally sponsored scheme.

We have witnessed that ICUs, ventilators, availability of RT-PCR facilities, oxygen cylinders, cardiac monitors for operation theatres, electrocardiogram machines, adequacy of beds available, vaccines, ancillary medicines and steroids, vertical transport facilities, staff and most importantly sufficient number of doctors were also inadequate in most of the healthcare institutions. Scarcity of testing facilities and vaccines erodes the utility of rural and government hospitals and bulldozes the poor patients to hasten to distant places for availing urgent treatment. It can be said that the genesis of this problem accentuated in the year 1991 when our country adopted the LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation) policy. Since then the government allowed the private sector to take a lead in the health care industry and thereby the state in a gradual manner withdrew from its responsibilities for providing adequate health care means to the masses. This stunted public sector spending on medical services, resulting in excessive reliance upon the private sector in seeking health care benefits. The government needs to realize the fact that the private sector operates in a profit-centric manner and they will not take necessary initiatives to reach the masses at the grass root level. Presently in the rural areas, there are only 0.6 doctors per 1,000 population. A pure mercenary approach in the medicinal industry and inception of users' charges in healthcare sectors have placed the people at a disadvantage. Equilibrium in appropriating budgetary allocation between other sectors of our economy and the healthcare sector is a very crucial policy decision, which our country urgently needs to address for saving the lives of thousands of people who are dying due to the pandemic. Earmarking adequate precedence to the health care sector has also become non-negotiable in the present scenario.

(The writer is the Managing Partner, Ishanee Sharma Law Offices, and works towards achieving gender justice and freedom of speech. The views expressed are personal.)

Time to embrace the biological revolution

BKP **SINHA**

It is an inevitable, irreversible fact. Also, it hides within itself the potential of biological research and its unique opportunities for humanity

While ushering in the era of the biological revolution one cannot fail to notice that one of the biggest ironies in biology is that microbes, which are the oldest self-replicating organisms on earth and which were among the last to be discovered, have largely been ignored. This is evident from the present crisis of the Coronavirus, which has devastated half of the world and has brought it almost to the brink of disaster, partly because of the late discovery of microbes and techniques of genome sequencing.

The lack of attention to micro-organisms is largely due to our observational bias. We tend to ignore what we cannot see. This predisposition allowed us to make great progress in astronomy observing visible objects billions of miles away from us, long before we could appreciate the role of bacteria and viruses on this planet. Life on earth is much more than there are plants. Our inherent knowledge gaps about viruses & microorganisms have brought us to the present-day crisis.

Hence, biological revolution is inevitable. The following facts expose us to the ongoing revolutionary and unprecedented biological research and its unique opportunities.

Microbes have evolved into a complex nanomachine even capable of splitting water via energy from the sun, billions of years ahead, than terrestrial plants. There is only one existing prokaryotic type of bacteria capable of producing oxygen without the sun — the cyano bacteria. We have yet to discover its mechanism.

If one happens to look to the list of noble laureates in the last decade one cannot fail to notice that most of the noble prizes even for physics and chemistry have gone for their study on solving the biological riddle. Several aspects of the mystery of biology are still to be unravelled. Dr Siddhartha Mukherjee of New York University observed that though cancer research started earlier than space travel, cancer is still an unconquerable 'emperor of maladies'. It is no surprise that MIT, an institution known for engineering and technology has changed its focus to molecular biology and some of its faculty members have even won noble prizes for their research on cell biology.

Dr Bruce H Lipton of Wisconsin University and subsequently at Stanford University, USA, in his ground-breaking work, has discovered how cell mechanisms receive and process information in the cell through the critical cell membrane. The cell membrane through its receptor and integral protein that serves as an antenna sends signals from the outside environment. The implication of this research will radically change our understanding of life. It shows that genes and DNA are controlled by signals from outside through the cell membrane. This research in cell biology and quantum physics is being hailed as a breakthrough showing that behaviour can be changed as we train our thinking. Thoughts and minds' energy directly influence how the physical brain controls the body's physiology. Mental 'energy' can activate or inhibit the cells' function to produce proteins.

> WE ALL NEED FRESH WATER TO SURVIVE BUT IT IS ONLY FIVE PER CENT OF THE TOTAL WATER VOLUME OF THE EARTH. MOST OF IT IS IN ICE SHEETS AND THE SOIL. HENCE, WATER PURIFICATION IS CRITICAL FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL. THIS DISCOVERY WILL USE CELL PROTEINS OF THE CELL MEMBRANE TO PURIFY WATER

The writer is an advisor to Amity School of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development, Uttar Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.

Biologists in collaboration with biochemists, biophysicists are working hard to cutting-edge research on most of the areas of the burning issues to meet the demands of the growing population that consumes more and more transportable forms of stored energy. Scientists are turning to alternative sources of renewable energy like solar, hydro, wind and tide. But our energy needs are still not being met because of their intermittent supply and time difference between their production and demand. The alternative renewable energies are getting cheaper, better all the time. However, we are yet to find a way to store these energies ineffective, cheap, reliable ways, without much creation of waste.

If biologists can devise a battery that allows overcoming intermittency problems inherent in solar, wind, and other renewable sources, we could use clean and abundant sources to meet all our energy needs.

The battery converts chemical energy to electrical energy by moving electrons from one metal to another. Electrons are tiny negatively charged particles. The copper-zinc plates form positive and negative poles. It conducts the electric current. It can go as long as all the electrons get transferred. Thus, a battery is an energy transportation device. When the battery is discharged, we use electricity to charge.

Dr Angela Belcher, materials scientist at MIT, is evolving viruses into variants that could organize non-biological materials such as gallium arsenide and silicon for semiconductors. Her experiment gave her confidence to build new tools to build batteries. She found that metals and metal oxides worked particularly well. Viruses do not have cell walls or any structural elements. It is a protein capsule with DNA / RNA. She found that viruses-building elements could be used to make electrodes that can open a door to clean and efficient, new way for making batteries. Her next step is a virus-based state of art battery, but could this battery take the form of a dashboard, seat cover, door panel? Nobody knows.

Until recently, it was undisputed that cell membrane itself is a medium for exchange of water from cells and outside. Dr Peter Agre, molecular biologist at John Hopkin's Institute, in 1980 while purifying Rh protein from red blood cell membranes to identify it made a discovery that the membrane has Rh protein that works as a gate and alters a particular substance vehicle with a pass to allow entry into the cell. These proteins are known as aquaporins.

Starting with a large volume of the red blood cells, he separated the cell membrane from the rest of its content. Next, he carefully isolated Rh protein from other present proteins. We all need fresh water to survive but it is only five per cent of the total water volume of the earth. Most of it is in ice sheets and the soil.

Hence, water purification is critical for human survival. This discovery will use cell proteins of the cell membrane to purify water. We now know the whole family of aquaporin found in virtually all organisms on earth. A particular amino acid occupies a particular pattern of location and pattern.

Contrary to the theory by a famous economist, Thomas Robert Malthus, the world would be engulfed by war, famine and pestilence, but the convergence of biology and engineering is giving us great hope that we can avoid the gloomy future. How to bring together researchers from the fields of science for a collaborative effort in bioengineering by encouraging national investment in fundamental research that motivates scientists to work in interdisciplinary areas.

For all this to happen we must have convergence-minded policies and international collaboration in the field of biology, where scientists and technologists can work on a platform to defer the sixth mass extinction of Holocene or Anthropocene.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

AS PER TV REPORTS, MY NUMBER WAS FALSELY GIVEN AS BELONGING TO SOME AMJAD KHAN, OSTENSIBLY TO LINK ME WITH DRUG TRAFFICKING.
— MAHARASHTRA CONGRESS PRESIDENT
NANA PATOLE

ONE PARTY SHOULD NOT TAP THE PHONES OF THE OTHER PARTY OR LEADERS. THE MATTER SHOULD BE INVESTIGATED BY A COMMITTEE OF RETIRED JUDGES.
— BJP LEADER
SUDHIR MUNGANTIWAR

The nation needs to come up with a transparent vaccine policy

We, as one nation, one people, need to come together. If all of us don't care for each other in this hour of crisis, who will?

KUMARDEEP **BANERJEE**

It was national technology day on May 11 (the day is celebrated to mark 1998 Pokharan nuclear tests) and the irony is Indian science has managed to break an atom and unleash its power but an atomic size virus seems insurmountable. The statement could well be turned around-to, in this battle of humans' vs virus, policy makers ignored science.

A month into one the darkest periods of modern Indian history things look tattered and dishevelled with citizens in queues even for performing last rites of their loving. Early celebrations, political compulsions of a democratic society, vibrant regional sensitivities,one can attribute a ton of reasons to the current level of pandemic devastation, yet what is lacking is sound backing and knowledge of a science-led bunch of experts leading the fight against pandemic. It may not be an exaggeration if one assumes India's second wave COVID battle is being fought in courts, national and local administrative offices. Each one in their desperation or compulsion to make the right announcement is giving a siloed decision, often overreaching each other's territory, therefore creating an unwarranted bottleneck at a critical time. Examples have been quoted of differences between Delhi and Mumbai and will continue to be a case study for any future pandemic management, but what it showed was any governance has to start right at the colony cluster level. The biggest bunch of caregivers/administrators/counsellors are right in the neighborhood and therefore healthcare and civic infrastructure has to be upgraded

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

at the *mohalla* level. Tossing a few social media posts with glossy pictures of infrastructure fail to impress when a person urgently needs to breathe. Running to courts to intervene is allowing the judiciary to walk into executive's core responsibilities while presenting a united face to any calamity/war or crisis is one of the basic rules of public administration. One does not start to gain brownie points before the unconnected and potentially dangerous parties during a crisis situation. It is shocking to see central,state, local administrations if not judiciary, creating opposing guidelines for Covid management or trying to control surge with delays.

Second, it is important for those at the top to understand that the pandemic is a blunt reminder of the gross neglect of rationale domain experts in policy making and governance. India still is governed by bureaucrats, who by training are generalists with no special domain knowledge for handling new world challenges and therefore solutions. Political leaders of any hue would always cater to their constituencies and come up with the most populist schemes, which may or may not impact lives and livelihoods in the long term. An example, free food distribution, while at a humanitarian level it is a noble move yet ensuring a continuous supply of government subsidized ration is the only long-term solution. If the 'one nation one ration card' had been operationalised in major parts of India, along with various schemes for migrants and those out of the social net, tons of public sector human resources such as police could have been better utilized for enforcing other Covid appropriate protocols.If a few scientists, epidemiologists, doctors had been permanently co opted in a steering committee for Covid management in national and State governments (if not local) the permanent tag of India facing worst Covid wave in the world could have been avoided.

Finally, the truth no matter however harsh or shaming if told honestly and with compassion, always benefits the orator. The government has been avoiding queries on vaccination supply and distribution. All domain experts have been suggesting vaccination being the only long-term solution for protecting a large chunk of population and avoiding mass graves. The government had nearly eight months to be prepared for the current onslaught and has been blessed with one of the largest vaccine manufacturing sites in the world, along with a home grown vaccine. It therefore cuts a very sorry figure when despite all the wealth and a team to push India to the next lever of growth, only about 10 per cent of the population has been vaccinated while a sizeable chunk of India, even inmost impacted districts of Delhi and Mumbai,are battling it for *ajab* in the arm. The current vaccine distribution policy of the government is opaque and needs clarity along with an almost daily update on the pipeline for next few months. Estimates suggest nearly one per cent of the India population would be willing to pay for vaccines. Government must prioritise COVID3 management by securing nearly 1.5 billion vaccines for India in the next few months.

Oli sworn in as Nepal Prime Minister again

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

KP Sharma Oli, heading a minority Government, was sworn in as Nepal's Prime Minister on Friday, four days after the embattled leader lost a crucial vote of confidence in Parliament.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office and secrecy to Oli as the prime minister at a scaled-down ceremony at Shital Niwas, the presidential palace.

The 69-year-old Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal-(Unified Marxist–Leninist) was reappointed as prime minister by the president in his capacity as leader of the largest political party in Nepal's House of Representatives.

Oli will head a minority government as he does not enjoy a majority in Parliament after losing the vote of confidence on Monday. He was reappointed to the post on Thursday night as the Opposition parties failed to secure majority seats in Parliament to form a new government.

Oli will now have to take a vote of confidence at the House within 30 days, failing which, an attempt to form a government under Article 76 (5) of the Constitution would be initiated by the President.

The ministers of Oli's Cabinet were also sworn in during the ceremony.

During the oath-taking ceremony, Prime Minister Oli and Deputy Prime Minister Ishwar Pokharel did not mention the word God though President Bhandari had mentioned it.

"I will take oath in the name of the country and the people," Oli said, while President Bhandari had mentioned "God, country and the people."

All the Ministers and ministers of state from the old Cabinet have been included in the new Cabinet.

Pradeep Gyawali has been reappointed as Foreign Minister while Ram Bahadur Thapa and Bishnu Poudyal were appointed as ministers for Home and Finance. The oath-taking ceremony was kept brief keeping in mind the raging COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun and Supreme Court Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana were among the distinguished personalities who attended the ceremony.

There are 22 ministers and three ministers of state in the new Cabinet.

Oli previously served as prime minister from October 11, 2015 to August 3, 2016 and again from February 15, 2018 to May 13, 2021.

Earlier, the President had asked the Opposition parties to come up with the support of majority lawmakers to form a new government by 9 pm on Thursday after Oli lost the vote of confidence in the House on Monday.

Palestinians flee as Israeli artillery pounds Gaza

Gaza Health Ministry says toll from fighting has risen to 119, including 31 kids & 19 women

AP ■ GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP

Palestinians grabbed their children and belongings and fled neighborhoods on the outskirts of Gaza City on Friday as Israel unleashed a heavy barrage of tank fire and airstrikes, killing a family of 6 in their home. Israel said it was clearing a network of militant tunnels ahead of a possible ground invasion.

Israel has massed troops along the border and called up 9,000 reservists as fighting intensifies with the Islamic militant group Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip. Palestinian militants have fired some 1,800 rockets, and the Israeli military has launched more than 600 airstrikes, toppling at least three high-rise apartment buildings, and has shelled some areas with tanks stationed near the frontier.

As Israel and Hamas plunged closer to all-out war despite international efforts at a cease-fire, communal violence in Israel erupted for a fourth night. Jewish and Arab mobs clashed in the flashpoint town of Lod, even after Israel dispatched additional security forces.

The Gaza Health Ministry says the toll from the fighting has risen to 119 killed, including 31 children and 19 women, with 830 wounded. The Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups have confirmed 20 deaths in their ranks, though Israel says that number is much higher. Seven people have been killed in Israel, including a 6-year-old boy and a soldier.

Before dawn Friday, Israeli tanks and warplanes carried out an intense barrage on the northern end of the Gaza Strip.

In the darkness, Houda Ouda and her extended family ran frantically inside their home in the town of Beit Hanoun, trying to find shelter as the earth shook for two and half hours, Ouda recalled.

"We even did not dare to look from the window to know what is being hit," she said. When daylight came, she saw the swath of destruction outside: streets cratered, buildings crushed, their facades torn off, an olive tree burned bare, dust and powered concrete covering everything.

Rafat Tanani, his pregnant wife and four children, aged 7 and under, were killed after an Israeli warplane reduced their four-story apartment building to rubble in the neighboring town of Beit Lahia, residents said. Four strikes hit the building at 11 p.m., just before the family was going to sleep, Rafat's brother Fadi said. The building's owner and his wife were also killed.

A Palestinian relative mourns over the bodies of four young brothers from the Tanani family who were found under the rubble of a destroyed house following Israeli airstrikes in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza Strip on Friday AP

Palestinian attacker killed at post: Israel

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's Army says a soldier has shot and killed a Palestinian who tried to ram his car into a military post in the occupied West Bank, then got out and attempted to stab the soldier.

The incident took place on Friday north of the city of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. The Palestinian health ministry confirmed the death, but no other details were immediately available.

Rights groups have complained about past shootings of Palestinians by the Israeli military under questionable circumstances.

Seven Palestinians dead in West Bank amid violence

Jerusalem: The number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank has risen to seven. The Israeli army says one was killed after attempting to stab a soldier. Palestinian health officials confirmed that death and said six other Palestinians were killed by Israeli army fire in the occupied West Bank. The health ministry said five were killed in stone-throwing clashes with Israeli forces in several locations. *AP*

GLOBE TROTTING

PORTUGAL OPENS DOOR TO BRITISH TOURISTS

Lisbon: British tourists can return to Portugal from next Monday, ending days of uncertainty over whether thousands of UK vacation bookings for Portuguese destinations would be allowed. British visitors will be admitted on nonessential travel from May 17, the Portuguese foreign ministry said in a statement Friday. British travelers will need to show on arrival a negative PCR test for Covid-19 taken in the previous 72 hours.

EX-ARMY GREEN BERET GETS 15 YEARS FOR ESPIONAGE

Falls Church (US): A former Army Green Beret who admitted divulging military secrets to Russia over a 15-year period was sentenced to more than 15 years in prison Friday on espionage charges. The sentence of 15 years and 8 months imposed on Peter Dzibinski Debbins, 46, of Gainesville, Virginia, by U.S. District Judge Claude Hilton was largely in line with the 17-year term sought by prosecutors. Defense lawyers sought a 5-year term. Debbins' lawyer, David Benowitz, argued that Debbins caused minimal damage.

Afghan police say Kabul mosque bombing kills 12

AP ■ KABUL

The mother of the mosque's imam, Mofti Noman, cries inside a car near the mosque after a bomb explosion in Shakar Dara district of Kabul on Friday AP

A bomb ripped through a mosque in northern Kabul during Friday prayers, killing 12 worshippers, and wounding 15, Afghan police said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing, the latest in a surge in violence as U.S. and NATO troops have begun their final withdrawal from the country, after 20 years of war.

According to Afghan police spokesman, Ferdaws Faramarz, the bomb exploded as prayers had begun. The mosque's imam, Mofti Noman, was among the dead, the spokesman said and added that the initial police investigation suggests the imam may have been the target.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid denied any insurgent connection to the mosque attack, condemning it and accusing Afghanistan's intelligence agency of being behind the explosion.

Both the Taliban and government routinely blame each other for attacks. The attackers are rarely identified, and the public is seldom informed of the results of investigations into the many attacks in the capital.

One worshipper, Muhibullah Sahebzada, said he had just stepped into the building when the explosion went off. Stunned, he heard the sound of screams, including those of children, as smoke filled the mosque.

Sahebzada said he saw several bodies on the floor, and at least one child was among the wounded. It appeared the explosive device had been hidden inside the pulpit at the front of the mosque, he added.

"I was afraid of a second explosion so I came immediately to my home" he said.

An image circulating on social media shows three bodies lying on the floor of the mosque.

The explosion comes on the second day of a three-day cease-fire announced by the Taliban for the Muslim holiday this week of Eid al-Fitr, which follows the fasting month of Ramadan. The Afghan government has also said it would abide by a truce during the holiday.

So far, many of the attacks in Kabul have been claimed by the Islamic State group's local affiliate, though the Taliban and government routinely trade blame.

Last week, a powerful car bombing attack in Kabul killed over 90 people, many of them students leaving a girls' school. The Taliban denied involvement and condemned the attack.

Earlier this week, U.S. troops left southern Kandahar Air Base, where some NATO forces still remain. At the war's peak, more than 30,000 U.S. troops were stationed in Kandahar, the Taliban heartland. The base in Kandahar was the second largest U.S. base in Afghanistan, after Bagram north of Kabul.

UN envoy asks Thai leader's aid in ending crisis in Myanmar

Bangkok: The United Nations' special envoy on Myanmar met with Thailand's prime minister on Friday as she continues efforts to end violence in Myanmar sparked by a military takeover in February.

The envoy, Christine Schraner Burgener, told Prayuth Chan-ocha in Bangkok that she hopes Thailand will find ways to work with Myanmar's military to ease the unrest, the prime minister's office said in a statement.

The Army's seizure of power has been opposed by a broad cross-section of Myanmar's population. *AP*

Merkel slams anti-Israel protests

AP ■ BERLIN

Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman says Germany won't tolerate anti-Semitic demonstrations amid tensions in the Middle East.

Anti-Israel protests in several cities this week have drawn concern and condemnation, particularly a protest outside a synagogue in Gelsenkirchen.

A video showed dozens of protesters waving Palestinian and Turkish flags and yelling expletives about Jews.

Merkel spokesman Steffen Seibert said Friday that "anyone who uses such protests to scream their hatred of Jews is abusing the right to demonstrate."

He added that "our democracy will not tolerate anti-Semitic demonstrations."

Thousands of B'deshi Muslims rally against Israel

AP ■ DHAKA

Thousands of Muslims led by activists from an Islamic political party demonstrated in Bangladesh's capital on Friday to denounce attacks by Israel against Palestinians.

After the end of Eid a-Fitr prayers at Dhaka's main Baitul Mokarram Mosque, activists from the Islamic Andolan Bangladesh, or Islamic Movement Bangladesh, began protesting and were joined by thousands of others.

Muslim-majority Bangladesh celebrated the key festival of Eid a-Fitr in a subdued manner after the government urged people to avoid large gatherings. Authorities arranged prayers in phases at the Baitul Mokarram Mosque, where devotees maintained distancing to avoid spreading the coronavirus.

Afterward, protesters crowded together outside, carrying signs reading "Boycott terrorist state Israel" and chanting "Down with Israel."

The current eruption of violence between Israelis and Palestinians began a month ago in Jerusalem. Israel regards all of Jerusalem as its capital, while the Palestinians want east Jerusalem, which includes sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, to be the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Myanmar frees Japanese journalist as gesture to Tokyo

Tokyo: An arrested Japanese reporter returned home Friday after being released by Myanmar's ruling junta in what it called a gesture of friendship to Japan.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said Yuki Kigazumi was released after efforts by Japanese diplomats and others. The reporter boarded a plane at Yangon's airport and landed in Japan on Friday night.

Kitazumi, a freelance journalist and former reporter for Japan's Nikkei business news, said in brief comments at the airport that he learned of his release the night before and was told to pack his bag in 10 minutes. *AP*

House GOP elects Trump defender Elise Stefanik to No. 3 post

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., arrives as House GOP members hold an election for a new chair of the House Republican Conference to replace Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo. at the Capitol in Washington on Friday AP

Republicans vaulted Rep. Elise Stefanik into the ranks of House leadership Friday, electing an ardent Donald Trump defender in hopes of calming their searing civil war over the deposed Rep. Liz Cheney's unremitting combat with the former president.

Stefanik, R-N.Y., a moderate turned Trump loyalist who's given voice to many of his false claims about election fraud, was elected as expected to the No. 3 post that Cheney, R-Wyo., held for over two years.

Backed by Trump and the House's top two Republicans, Stefanik defeated challenger Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, by 134-46 in a secret ballot vote conducted behind closed doors. A member of the conservative House Freedom Caucus, Roy was a prohibitive long shot whose candidacy seemed a signal to GOP leaders that hard-right Republicans expect a robust voice moving forward.

WESTERN RAILWAY

CORRIGENDUM
ON EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

In reference to Expression of Interest notice no WR/Engineering/ Consultancy/ EPC Projects/01/2021 dt 26/04/21 for Short listing of Consultants for Providing Consultancy services for Preparatory activities of preparation of bid documents and associated documentation /drawings and bid process management for inviting EPC and PMC services and their finalization for various Civil Engineering projects over Western Railway. The EOI can be submitted through **E-Mail (in Digital format)** or Physical format to the addresses given in the Original EoI. **The last date of submission of the EoI is extended to 29.05.2021.** All other terms and conditions remain the same. 0103

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of rail passengers that the timings of the following Special Trains will be revised as under:-

Train No. & Name	Station	Existing Time	Revised Time	Date (from Originating Station)
09521 Rajkot Jn. - Samastipur Jn. Spl.	Bharatpur Jn.	04:17/04:22	04:30/04:32	19.05.2021
09177 Mumbai Central - Bhagalpur Spl.	Bharatpur Jn.	04:30/04:35	04:48/04:53	19.05.2021
09133 Bandra Terminus - Ghazipur City Spl.	Bharatpur Jn.	04:12/04:14	04:13/04:15	19.05.2021
09194 Gorakhpur - Mumbai Central Superfast Special	Ratlam Jn.	13:20/13:30	13:50/14:00	19.05.2021
02780 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Vasco Da Gama Express Special	Kopargaon	12:33/12:35	12:18/12:20	with immediate effect.

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 of Information such as detailed Time-Table and Stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website http://www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

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Irish health system targeted in 'serious' ransomware attack

AP ■ LONDON

Ireland's health service shut down its IT systems on Friday after being targeted in a ransomware attack by what it called "international criminals."

Appointments and elective surgeries were canceled at several hospitals and Deputy Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said the disruption could last for days.

"There's lots we don't know but it appears to be a ransomware attack by international criminals," Varadkar said. "The problem could run through the weekend and into next week, unfortunately."

Ransomware attacks are typically carried out by criminal hackers who scramble data, paralysing victims' networks, and demand a large payment to decrypt it. Varadkar called the attack "very serious."

"It's coming at a time when the health service is extremely busy doing lots of other things," he said. "It's going to be a very difficult time for the health service."

Health Service Executive CEO Paul Reid told broadcaster RTE that health bosses had "taken a precautionary measure to shut down a lot of our major systems to protect them."

"We are at the very early stages of fully understanding the threats, the impact and trying to contain it," he said.

The health service said appointments for coronavirus vaccinations were not affected. Varadkar said emergency services, ambulance services, GP systems and pharmacy systems also were unaffected, but said there would be "major problems" for radiology services, radiation oncology, elective surgeries and obstetrics and gynaecology appointments.

UK, US scientists call for fuller probe into Covid Wuhan lab leak theory

London: A group of leading UK and US scientists, including Indian-origin Cambridge University immunology and infectious disease expert Ravindra Gupta, on Friday called for more investigation to determine the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic, including the theory of an accidental release from a lab in the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

In a letter published in the journal 'Science', the experts from world leading universities such as Harvard, Stanford and MIT said knowing how Covid-19 emerged is critical for informing global strategies to mitigate the risk of future outbreaks.

They caution that hypotheses about both natural and laboratory spillovers must be taken seriously until there is sufficient data. *PTI*

Fully vaccinated can drop the masks, skip social distancing

AP ■ WASHINGTON

In a major step toward returning to pre-pandemic life, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has eased mask-wearing guidance for fully vaccinated people, allowing them to stop wearing masks outdoors in crowds and in most indoor settings.

"Today is a great day for America," President Joe Biden said Thursday during a Rose Garden address heralding the new guidance, an event where he and his staff went without masks.

Hours earlier in the Oval Office, where Biden was meeting with vaccinated Republican lawmakers, he led the group in removing their masks when the guidance was announced.

Biden to meet DACA recipients in immigration overhaul push

AP ■ WASHINGTON

As a candidate, President Joe Biden promised to protect those often described as "dreamers," brought to the US illegally as children, and their families by reinstating an Obama-era policy that protected them from deportation.

Biden is scheduled to meet Friday with six immigrants who benefited from the programme.

The Oval Office meeting comes as Biden looks to press Congress to pass legislation codifying the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme that then-President Barack Obama instituted by executive action in 2012, providing limited protections for immigrants brought to the US illegally as children.

Hopeful for early call on TRIPS waiver: Com Secy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday expressed hope for an early decision in the WTO on a proposal of India and South Africa for a temporary waiver of certain intellectual property rights provisions in the TRIPS agreement to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

In October 2020, India and South Africa submitted a proposal suggesting a waiver for all World Trade Organization (WTO) members on the implementation of certain provisions of the TRIPS Agreement in relation to the prevention, containment or treatment of Covid-19.

The agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights or TRIPS came into effect in January 1995. It is a multilateral agreement on intellectual property (IP) rights such as copyright, industrial designs, patents and protection of undisclosed information or trade secrets.

Commerce Secretary Anup Wadhawan said the proposal had received support from several countries.

"I am hopeful that in an early timeframe, some decision will be reached at the WTO...I am hopeful that an early outcome will be achieved on this," he told reporters.

The move would help in scaling up the production of vaccines and other essential products to deal with the coronavirus, he added.

Exports jump to USD 30.63 bn in April; trade deficit at USD 15.1 bn

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's exports in April jumped nearly three-fold to USD 30.63 billion from USD 10.36 billion in the same month last year, according to government data released on Friday.

Imports too rose to USD 45.72 billion last month as against USD 17.12 billion in April 2020, the data showed.

Trade deficit widened to USD 15.10 billion as against USD 6.76 billion in April 2020.

Exports in April last year had plunged by a record 60.28 per cent due to the Covid-19 pandemic induced lockdown.

In March this year, exports grew by 60.29 per cent to USD 34.45 billion.

Due to the low base effect, exports in April 2021 recorded a growth rate of 195.72 per cent.

Oil imports stood at USD 10.8 billion as compared to USD 4.66 billion in the corresponding month last year.

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

Benchmarks end flat in see-saw trade; log weekly losses

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The BSE Sensex eked out marginal gains on Friday after two sessions of deep declines as investors scooped up Asian Paints, RIL and FMCG stocks amid a rebounding trend in overseas markets.

A recovering rupee also propped up the market, though the COVID-19 situation and pace of vaccination weighed on investor sentiment, traders said.

The BSE benchmark swung between gains and losses during the session, before finally finishing 41.75 points or 0.09 per cent higher at 48,732.55. However, the broader NSE Nifty slipped 18.70 points or 0.13 per cent to 14,677.80. Asian Paints was the top performer among the Sensex components, rallying 8.51 per cent, after the company on Wednesday reported an 81.13 per cent jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 869.89 crore for the March quarter.

Rupee settles at near 7-weak high of 73.29, rises 13 paise against USD

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Indian rupee strengthened by 13 paise to settle at a near seven-week high of 73.29 against the US dollar on Friday, tracking weaker American currency in the overseas market.

At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 73.41 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 73.22 and a low of 73.41.

Gold gains ₹146; silver jumps ₹513

New Delhi: Gold rose by ₹146 to ₹47,110 per 10 gram in the national capital on Friday following recovery in global precious metal prices, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at ₹46,964 per 10 gram. Silver also gained ₹513 to ₹70,191 per kilogram from ₹69,678 per kilogram in the previous trade."Spot gold prices for 24 carat in Delhi rose by ₹146 with recovery in COMEX (New York-based commodities exchange) gold prices.

Rates for RoDTEP likely to be announced in 2 weeks: DGFT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rates for the tax refund scheme for exporters - Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) - are expected to be announced in the coming two weeks, a senior official said on Friday.

Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Amit Yadav said it is working with the finance ministry on the scheme.

Last year, the government approved the RoDTEP scheme for reimbursement of taxes and duties to exporters, with a view to give a boost to the country's outbound shipments. The scheme was implemented for all goods, with effect from January 1.

"My sense is that in the coming two weeks, we would be in a position to have an announcement of the rates for RoDTEP," he said at a PHDCCI webinar.

Apex exporters' body the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) has time and again asked the government to announce the rates for different sectors under the scheme as delay would have implications for future exports.

The rates have to be notified by the Department of Commerce, which would be based on the recommendation of a committee chaired by G K Pillai, former commerce and home secretary.

Yadav said due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an impact on both tax collections and expenditure and there is also the challenge of revenue.

On the Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS), the DGFT said it is working with the Department of Revenue on the issue.

"We have proposed to the revenue department that if the MEIS scrips

can be issued, which can be encashable a year after... Something

(on these lines) we are working on," he said.

Forex reserves up by USD 1.444 billion to USD 589.465 billion

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The country's foreign exchange reserves increased by USD 1.444 billion to USD 589.465 billion in the week ended May 7, 2021, RBI data showed.

In the previous week ended April 30, 2021, the reserves had risen by USD 3.913 billion to USD 588.02 billion. The reserves had touched a lifetime high of USD 590.185 billion in the week ended January 29, 2021.

During the reporting week ended May 7, 2021, the increase in reserves was on account of a rise in foreign currency assets (FCA), a major component of the overall reserves.

FCA rose by USD 434 million to USD 546.493 billion in the reporting week, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) weekly data showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves surged by USD 1.016 billion to USD 36.48 billion in the reporting week, the data showed.

The special drawing rights (SDRs) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were down by USD 4 million to USD 1.503 billion. The country's reserve position with the IMF declined by USD 1 million to USD 4.989 billion in the reporting week, the data showed.

Govt to provide liquidity to exporters by fast customs, duty drawback refunds

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

In an attempt to ensure liquidity for exporters in the difficult period of Covid pandemic, the government has decided to credit all customs refunds and duty drawback claims, made by them upto May 14, by the end of the month.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has launched a special refund and duty drawback between May 15 and May 31. Under this drive, efforts will be made by customs officials for priority disposal of all pending Customs refunds, IGST refunds and Customs duty drawback claims pending as on May 14 this year.

In an instructional circular issued to all Principal Chief Commissioners, Chief Commissioners and Commissioners of Customs and Central taxes, the CBIC has instructed officials to closely monitor performance of the special refund and duty drawback drive on a daily basis and, wherever required, suitably guide the officers concerned to maximise the disposal.

CANCELLATION/REDUCTION IN FREQUENCY OF SPECIAL TRAINS

It is notified for the information of passengers that due to low occupancy and other operational reasons Railways have decided to cancel and reduce the frequency of following special trains, as per the details given below:-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS

Train No. & Name	Date from Cancellation
04740 Bikaner Jn.-Delhi Sarai Rohilla Superfast Special	15.05.2021 to till further advice
04739 Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Bikaner Jn. Superfast Special	16.05.2021 to till further advice
02463 Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Jodhpur Jn. Express Special	19.05.2021 to till further advice
02464 Jodhpur Jn.-Delhi Sarai Rohilla Express Special	20.05.2021 to till further advice
04811/04812 Sikar Jn.-Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Sikar Jn. Exp. Spl.	19.05.2021 to till further advice

REDUCTION IN FREQUENCY OF TRAINS

Train No. & Name	Existing Frequency	Revised Frequency	Effective From
02964 Udaipur City-Hazrat Nizamuddin Superfast Special	Daily	Tri-Weekly (Tue, Fri, Sun)	16.05.2021 to till further advice
02963 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Udaipur City Superfast Special	Daily	Tri-Weekly (Mon, Wed, Sat)	17.05.2021 to till further advice
04727 Sriganga Nagar-Delhi Jn. Express Special	Daily	Tri-Weekly (Tue, Thu, Sat)	15.05.2021 to till further advice
04728 Delhi Jn.-Sriganga Nagar Express Special	Daily	Tri-Weekly (Wed, Fri, Sun)	16.05.2021 to till further advice

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

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.

Visit RailMadad website:- www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in
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RailMadad Helpline No.: 139
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Reliance Jio announces free talk time offer for JioPhone users for pandemic

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Jio on Friday said it is working with Reliance Foundation to provide 300 free minutes of outgoing calls per month, which amounts to 10 minutes per day, for the entire period of the pandemic.

The scheme will be available to JioPhone users who have not been able to recharge due to the ongoing pandemic, the company said in a statement.

Reliance Jio is the first company to announce free talk time for users in the second wave of pandemic wherein many states have imposed lockdowns or lockdown-like restrictions as a desperate measure to restrict the spread of the virus.

Fuel prices rise sharply again after day's break

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Maintaining its rising trend, fuel prices increased again on Friday just after a day of pause with state-owned fuel retailers hiking rates of petrol and diesel by 29 paisa and 34 paisa per litre respectively in the national capital.

In Delhi, petrol now costs ₹92.34 per litre and diesel is priced at ₹82.95 per litre up from yesterday's level of Rs 92.05 and ₹82.61 a litre respectively in the national Capital.

Across the country as well the petrol and diesel prices increased on Friday but its quantum varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

In Mumbai, petrol now comes for around ₹98.65 a litre and diesel for ₹90.11 a litre according to a price notification from oil marketing companies

Petrol prices in some states including Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and in some places in Maharastra have breached the ₹100 per litre mark while premium petrol has been hovering above that level for some time now.

Fuel prices have now increased on four of the last five days rising continuously from Monday to Wednesday, pausing on Thursday and again rising on Friday. Prior to holding back auto fuel prices on Saturday and Sunday, its pump rates had also increased sharply on previous four days as well.

Petrol prices have increased by ₹1.79 a litre Delhi in May in the eight increases so far. Similarly, diesel prices have risen by ₹ 2.22 per litre in capital this month.

India needs its own crypto unicorns: Experts

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Stressing that India needs smart and sensible crypto regulation, leading cryptocurrency players in the country on Friday urged the government against the ban and sought engagement to build consensus on crypto regulation.

The government earlier indicated that it would take a 'calibrated approach' towards digital assets and formulating a Bill on cryptocurrencies. A final decision is yet to be taken.

At a webinar organised by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and its Blockchain and Crypto Assets Council (BACC) members, the stakeholders said that consultation and dissemination of information between the government and the industry participants is crucial to determining the most appropriate regulatory framework and supporting innovation. "There are over 1.5 crore Indians holding over Rs 1,500 crore worth crypto-assets. India is no longer a niche market, but a rapidly growing finance market. Despite the growth in crypto adoption, India is behind in terms of both regulations as well as number of successful crypto startups," said Nischal Shetty, CEO WazirX.

Yes Bank to sell property of E Commerce Magnum Solution for recovery of ₹345 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Yes Bank has invited bids for sale of immovable assets of a borrower, E Commerce Magnum Solution Ltd, to recover dues of over ₹345 crore.

In an e-auction sale notice, Yes Bank said it took physical possession of the immovable properties mortgaged to it on August 29, 2020 pursuant to a demand notice issued to the borrower and mortgagor in January 2020.

The e-auction will take place under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (Sarfaesi) Act.

The auction is with regard to One Hughes project at Chowpatty, Mumbai of E Commerce Magnum Solution Ltd, Yes Bank said.

The bank has set the reserve price for the auction at Rs 270 crore.

"The properties will not be sold below the reserve price set by the AO (authorised officer)," it said.

The properties in possession by the bank will be sold by way of e-auction on June 15, 2021 for recovery of ₹ 345.32 crore as on April 27, 2021, Yes Bank said in the notice.0

Metro RPF conducting 'No mask- No metro' campaign inside a running metro to spread the message of Covid Awareness

IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is notified for the information of rail passengers that the Railway's have decided to cancel the following Unreserved Mail/ Express & other Special Trains due to low occupancy and other operational reasons as per the following details:-

CANCELLATION OF UNRESERVED MAIL/DMU EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAINS

Train No. & Name	Date from Cancellation
04523 Saharanpur - Nangal Dam Daily Special	17.05.2021 to till further advice
04524 Nangal Dam - Ambala Cant Daily Special	18.05.2021 to till further advice
04532 Ambala Cant - Saharanpur Daily Special	18.05.2021 to till further advice
04461 Delhi Jn - Rohtak Jn DMU Daily Special	17.05.2021 to till further advice
04462 Rohtak Jn - Delhi Jn DMU Daily Special	18.05.2021 to till further advice
04455 New Delhi - Ghaziabad Daily Special	17.05.2021 to till further advice
04404 Saharanpur - Delhi Jn Daily Special	17.05.2021 to till further advice
04459 Delhi Jn - Saharanpur Daily Special	17.05.2021 to till further advice
09805 Kota Jn - Udhampur Weekly Special	19.05.2021 to till further advice
09806 Udhampur - Kota Jn Weekly Special	20.05.2021 to till further advice

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

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Bollywood

'Hold your loved ones close to you and protect each other at all cost.'
—Sunny Leone

SHORTCIRCUITS

JACQUELINE FERNANDEZ

Stay strong, stay safe, stay healthy. Help others when you can. Spread love and kindness always. We are all battling the pandemic in our own ways, let's be understanding and sympathize with all. Let's be there for one another. Keep sharing your stories of kindness with us and help us spread love and unity.

SHARAD KELKAR

I chose the project *Deja Vu* very carefully and wisely. It is not a big budget film where a lot of money is riding on me, because the content is very good. I believe that the film will be appreciated because of the way we shot it and I have full faith in the director Abhijeet Warang. I am not feeling any kind of pressure.

KAUSHAL KISHORE

There's a lot of difference between film music and independent songs. There are no boundaries while you're working on an independent song. That's why it's called that. You're not bound by a script, in fact, it's the other way around. The storyline is made depending on your lyrics.

SANJANA SANGHI

It is my honour to be joining hands with Save The Children, a century-old Global Child Rights Organisation in our mission to #ProtectAMillion. Together we will be providing support in the form of oxygen, essential medicine, psycho-social support to the most vulnerable communities.

JENNIFER LOPEZ

All of my albums are very special to me, but This Is Me... Then is my favorite album I've ever done so far. I know a lot of you have heard me say that before, so in honor of my #JLovers helping it re-enter the album charts again after 19 years, here is a little throwback of the album.

CAUSE

RACE AGAINST TIME... AND DEATH

When the city was being swept away under the onslaught of the second wave of COVID-19, it was volunteer groups which came to the rescue. CHAHAK MITTAL finds out some stories of resilience, faith and patience

8.45 am: I wake up with a jolt and reach out for my phone and open a WhatsApp group I've pinned on top these days. My immediate concern is if Mr Pathak had found a ventilator bed for his mother in North Delhi, a request that came in late last night. I had sent two verified leads, post which I slept, guiltily. To my heart's relief, the 33-year-old man had met his requirement through the contact. I scroll further and the task for the day seems ready. My friend's father, Mr Ramnarayan in Bengaluru, has been prescribed Tocilizumab and his daughter is frantically searching for the medicine as the hospital has run out of supplies.

9.00 am: In another group, a request lands for oxygen concentrator in Delhi and I tweet it right away, mentioning between asterisks that 'the patient is just 27' and also, forwarding the message to other groups. I am looking for leads for the respective cases by cross-messaging and shifting between social media platforms.

2.00 pm: While I have received 10 contacts for the concentrator, my call log indicates 38 other calls already made in a hunt for the Tocilizumab. I dial the 10 contacts and much to my disappointment, only one gives hope.

5.30 pm: I have lost track of the number of calls I have made today, perhaps 60-70. I even memorise a few numbers now which are being shared over and over again but to no avail. I have found two leads for the Tocilizumab. While one says it will be available tomorrow evening, the other requires full payment before delivery. Leaving this decision on the patient's family, I pass on a verified lead for the concentrator to the Delhi patient.

8.45 pm: I have failed to arrange the medicine for the Bengaluru man despite making desperate calls. I am exhausted and begin to imagine and feel pity for the plight of his daughter. While the concentrator will be delivered by tomorrow morning, my mind is still not at ease.

Next day, **11.00 am:** The concentrator has been delivered without any hassle. The 27-year-old patient's family is thankful. I shed a tear of relief! My focus is back on finding more sources for the Tocilizumab while 20 other requests pile up in my notifications box.

3.00 pm: I learn that Mr Ramnarayan will never need Tocilizumab, or any other medicine now. The search is over. A hope has been killed. Another pyre is being set up. I don't know the man but the grief of his death consumes me, leaves me agitated and helpless like never before. Was an advance and a hefty payment for a medicine more important than a life?

3.30 pm: I feel like quitting but another request for an oxygen bed in the city makes me recollect my thoughts, which do not agree on giving up on another life battling hard.

As the second wave racked every nerve of the country in April, this timeline with few variations became the routine for many people along with juggling WFH. While the demands for resources may have lessened with the falling number of cases this month, the incidents which the volunteers share haunt them and give a detailed insight into the insides of a relief group formed due to the necessity that emerged out of the current pandemic.

THE BEGINNING

For Abu Sufiyan, founder of *Purani Dilli Walo Ki Baatein*, it began when some symptoms started to show among a few of his team members in early April, who were then asked to quarantine and work from home. He got himself tested for COVID-19. Even though the reports were negative, the symptoms were evident. Medical experts alerted him to stay at home since they felt it could be the new mutant spreading in India, which wasn't being detected by the RTPCR tests though the symptoms turn out to be more severe.

He shared, "I started searching for resources for my team as a few of their family members had severe symptoms. And soon, social media and our group was flooded with requests from people in the capital who were looking for COVID resources desperately. There were SOS calls for hospital beds, plasma, Remdesivir, oxygen support, concentrators, cylinders and refillers, ventilator beds, other life-saving medicines like the Tocilizumab and even meals for those who stayed alone and couldn't cook. The demands for ICU home setup followed soon after when people realised how hospitals were now too crowded, understaffed and unequipped. We started preparing lists of verified contacts for the respective needs and put them out as a consolidated information."

Journalist Aditya Raj Kaul, who has been closely and endlessly working with over 500 volunteers, during the second wave to arrange required supplies for COVID-19 patients, said that an extremely dire situation like this demands every one of us to act responsibly. He said that the current struggle of finding oxygen supplies reminded him of his grandmother's demise in 2003 due to the unavailability of oxygen support in time. "It had stayed with me," he added, "and that's how I started from one WhatsApp group to another and because of my good following on Twitter, I would amplify SOS calls and tag several accounts which could be connected to the cases. That's how it grew after people personally started reaching out to me and I could help out more people from places like Jodhpur, areas of Jharkhand, UP and Jammu. In the initial days, we used to get more than 300-500 requests a day, which were different from those 1,000s we received on WhatsApp groups."

DEPLETING RESOURCES, COMMON CHALLENGES AND EVOLVING STRATEGIES

While the information was being verified and shared through personal handles and social media toolkits, due to the rising number of cases and demands, they soon fell short. Abu added, "After a few hours of creating a list of available resources, they would exhaust and hence, would be of no use to people whom it reached by the end of the day. This became one of the major challenges and hence, we started to mention the date and time when a resource was verified for use and a disclaimer for its limited availability."

Chennai-based independent journalist and part of a volunteer group in the city, Manasa R, pointed out at how suppliers seemed to have run out of stock in most scenarios, due to which the meaning of 'a verified contact' changed each day. She said, "From hospitals to officials, they stopped attending the calls when the cases surged. The lines were either busy or unavailable or they'd hang up. Out of 200 calls, two would respond only in the negative. The most unique challenge was the process of verification. After we added a supplier's contact to the database, who could help us find an oxygen cylinder, the supplier would later run out of stock and stop answering calls. And we had to start finding new suppliers from a scratch."

Aeshal Fatima, class 12th student and Delhi-based volunteer, part of nine such groups on WhatsApp, pointed towards the non-functioning of Google spreadsheets, which had been circulated majorly around social media. "No matter how many times I updated the sheet with a verified lead, the contact soon would go out of reach or the resources they had available got exhausted since hospitals were running out of oxygen on an hourly basis," said she.

While finding the supplies was a major issue, their reasonability and affordability became a concern soon after. Pointing towards the challenge that unfolded — unreasonable prices of oxygen cylinders or concentrators due to the high demand, she said, "This is the worst thing someone could do to the one who's already suffering. And the sadder part is that in such a life-and-death situation, one has no choice but to give in, no matter the cost."

HAUNTING STORIES OF VICTORY AND DEMISE

It was 2 am when Kaul received a request from Bengaluru for a 26-year-old girl, whose parents were unable to find a hospital bed. Kaul and his team started working on the case right away, got the girl admitted to a hospital, however, to their disappointment, the girl passed away the same night at 4.30. "One of the volunteers, closely associated with the case, broke down and couldn't come to terms with the fact that we were unable to help save her," he shared.

On her second day as a volunteer, Aeshal came across a request on one of the groups she was part of for an oxygen cylinder in Lucknow. She said, "I sent a few leads and went to sleep with guilt and fear within. I woke up to see that the patient had found the cylinder and was relieved to hear this. That was the first time when I was really motivated to help out as many people as I can during these tough times and I made sure I dedicated myself to it also given the obligation one feels after coming across a request."

While there were stories of victory and demise coming in, there were also certain cases where the already broken-down healthcare system meant that non-Covid patients had a tough time getting relief. Abu shared, "In one of the most unusual cases during those days, we came across a case of my friend's house help's daughter, who had fallen from the stairs and suffered a severe injury on head. Due to the unavailability of beds in hospitals, they were struggling to find a doctor and a bed for her. It took seven hospitals that night, all at different places, to get tests and MRI scans done. She was finally admitted to the eighth hospital."

On the other hand, there are also stories of resilience, faith and patience which passed the test of time and emerged. Manasa shared how her cousin was unable to find a bed for her younger brother for over eight days, "the longest a case took to close," due to which she began losing hope. "I cried in relief when a combination of luck, perseverance and a personal contact" of the family worked in helping the patient. When she shared the story with other volunteers in the group, who were not involved in the case, they listened patiently, celebrated with her as though the patient was one of their own. "Well, everything is significant — a person being saved, a person dying, a person not receiving the resources on time, a person actually managing to find a resource. We, as volunteers, although, are quite careful about our boundaries with patients and their kin, in a time like this, we are all invested in each of them in some way or the other," she added.

An in-depth portrait

North Korea: Inside The Mind Of A Dictator takes viewers on a journey through Kim Jong Un's past and present to understand the man and the myth who holds North Korea's uncertain future in his hands

Kim Jong Un has a decision to make: Maintain his brutal family legacy or become a legitimate leader, a dilemma that could ultimately destroy the Kim dynasty. As North Korea faces a critical crossroads, *North Korea: Inside The Mind Of A Dictator* chronicles the life and reign of Kim Jong Un as the young and unpredictable leader attempts to turn around his nation's fortunes.

The film features never-before-seen interviews that shed new light on the duality of Kim Jong Un, both his capacity for ruthlessness and a softer side nostalgic for his youth. For the first time in an extended global television interview, one of the assassins of Kim Jong Un's half-brother, Siti Aisyah, tells her extraordinary full story. Also, in a world exclusive, João Micaelo, Kim's former childhood classmate, speaks publicly for the first time about visiting Kim in North Korea. It also tracks the game-changing rise of Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jung, to his right-hand woman and voice of the regime, maintaining order using fear and violence while her brother reinvents himself as a modern leader.

First-hand testimonies, intimate archival footage and rare interviews paint an in-depth portrait of a fractured country. Key moments that give a fresh perspective on the notorious dictator and his family's dynasty also include the following:

- A rare interview with Kim Dong Chul, the longest-held American in North Korea, who was imprisoned for spying for the CIA.
- The story of Kim Jong Un's aunt and uncle who cared for him as a teenager before escaping to the United States.
- US Ambassador John Bolton's critiques of Trump's negotiations with North Korea at the summit in Hanoi, insight on the breakdown in peace talks and Kim's subsequent wrath.

- An interview with Lee Young Guk, a bodyguard to Kim Jong Un's father, Kim Jong Il, who spent significant time with Kim Jong Un as a child.

To understand Kim's leadership decisions over the past three years, including his encounters with President Donald Trump and his plans for the "hermit kingdom," experts, journalists and government officials unravel the inner workings of his mind and his tumultuous past as he works to determine his legacy.

The two-hour special delves into the complex family dynamics of the Kim dynasty at the heart of North Korea's history and operations, and offers key insight on his school days in Europe, the failed Hanoi summit and North Korea's growing arsenal of nuclear weapons.

The special also takes a deep dive into the psychology and history of the elusive supreme leader in order to better understand his all-encompassing dynastic power and struggle to keep a grip on control while navigating an uncertain future. From his isolated childhood to the fleeting freedom he experienced in his teenage years to his attempts at diplomacy under the pressure of crippling sanctions, the series pulls back the curtain on a dictator torn between the old ways he grew up with and the encroaching modern world.

The film takes viewers on a journey through Kim Jong Un's past and present to understand the man and the myth who holds North Korea's uncertain future in his hands. *North Korea: Inside The Mind Of A Dictator* is produced for National Geographic by 72 Films. Mark Raphael and David Glover are executive producers for 72 Films and Carolyn Payne is executive producer for National Geographic.

(It premieres today at 9 pm as a part of SPOTLIGHT on National Geographic.)

In demand

Less than a decade after her debut in Bollywood, RAKUL PREET SINGH is a highly sought-after actor with several films lined up for release

Rakul Preet Singh is a self-made actor. In a little over seven years since her Bollywood debut in the 2014 film *Yaariyan,* she has worked her way through the uphill task of dealing with the tag of an outsider, and is today one of the busiest actors in the Hindi film industry.

She attributes her success to her ability to not be cowed down or be scared of losing stardom. "I am not the kind of person who lives in fear. I came with nothing and I always see the brighter side. I got an opportunity to live my dream and here I am. Ultimately it boils down to when people start appreciating your work. That one smile that you bring on someone's face or when they come and say 'we loved that film of yours'. That is what we all work for, after all," she said.

At 30, Rakul is highly sought-after in Bollywood, and has a long list of films lined up for release over the next few months. Currently, she awaits the release of the OTT film *Sardar Ka Grandson,* co-starring Arjun Kapoor. She also has *Mayday* coming up with Amitabh Bachchan and the film's actor-director Ajay Devgn. In *Attack*, she shares screen space with John Abraham. She also has *Thank God* with Ajay Devgn and Sidharth Malhotra, Kamal Haasan's *Indian 2* and the Ayushmann Khurrana-starrer *Doctor G* in the works.

"There is so much love from the audience and the constant thought is to just keep working in different settings with the hope to entertain," she added.

Rakul made her acting debut in the 2009 Kannada film *Gilli*, and her Telugu debut in *Keratam* the same year. A year later, she made her Tamil debut in *Thadaiyara Thaakka.*

In Bollywood, many consider the 2019 comedy hit *De De Pyaar De,* co-starring Devgn and Tabu, her coming-of-age role. She has also been seen in *Marjaavan* and *Aiyaari.*

Ask her what is important — script or the character — Rakul replies that she believes in the theory of "permutation and combination."

"Sometimes you choose a film because you love the story and you want to be a part of the message promoted by the film or the entire premise of the film itself. And then there are times when you go by your character and the script. The rest of the times, it depends on the director and other actors involved with the project. It is subjective to each prospective film," she said.

Talking about *Sardar Ka Grandson* slated for release on May 18 on Netflix, Rakul explained what made her choose this project, "It was the pure emotion of the film that made this a no brainer. While I cannot tell you all about it for obvious reasons, the story depicts a grandson who is willing to go to any extent to fulfill his grandmother's wish."

—IANS

BEHIND THE SONGS

Singer SUNIDHI CHAUHAN, who recently released her latest single *Ye Ranjishein* after almost two decades, shares some unknown trivia about five of her favourite tracks. By TEAM VIVA

There is always an untold story behind every song. While some of those stories do come to fore in some way or the other, most of them remain a secret behind the scenes, well away from the spotlight. Singer Sunidhi Chauhan, who recently released her latest single *Ye Ranjishein* after almost two decades, shares some unknown trivia about five of her favourite songs.

HUI HUI MAIN MAST FROM *MAST* (1999)

Not many people know this but I had no voice to sing this song in the studio on the day of the recording. Just three days before the scheduled recording, I had lost my voice and my doctor told me if I really wanted to make use of this opportunity, I would have to keep my mouth shut right up to the moment when I have the microphone in front of me at the studio. "If you speak at all during the next three days, you will lose your voice. If you really want it that bad, you better keep mum. Sing straight on the mic, on the day of the recording," he said. I was crushed to hear that, especially since I am someone who believes in practising and rehearsing almost to the point of exhaustion. However, for a change, I followed my doctor's instructions and went with his gut feeling. I was really scared, couldn't imagine what I would sound like with a bad throat. Eventually it all turned out for the best. My doctor's instincts were spot on and my voice was back to its usual element and we successfully recorded the song.

AAJ SOCHA TO AANSOO BHAR AAYE FROM *HANSTE ZAKHM* (1973)

My second all-time favourite song is *Aaj Socha To Aansoo Bhar Aaye* by Lata Mangeshkar, and composed by Madan Mohan *ji*. Each time I hear that song, I get transported to another place. I can't help but get lost in Lata *ji*'s voice and the emotions she brought to life in that song. While I am not a sad person, I haven't had anything to be sad about in a long while, I cannot help but relate to this song so much. My eyes start welling up as soon as I hear Lata *ji*'s voice in this song.

'Rehna *Tu* is my all time favourite. It's a masterpiece. The melody and the lyrics, it just takes me to a place where I don't want to come back from'

DIL MEIN JAAGI DHADKAN AISE FROM *SUR* (2002)

There is no way I could ever forget this song; obviously because of its composition. Much gratitude to MM Keeravani sir who gave me this beautiful song. A little story behind this song is that the *mukhda* was to be sung in one breath and I couldn't help but wonder whether it would be physically possible for me to do so because it had too many lines. But Keeravani sir wanted it to be in one breath and he said that he knew I could do this. He told me that he believed in me and I should just take my time to practise as much as I need. I took about 45 minutes to an hour, maybe more. I lost track of time but when I got on the mic, somehow nailed it. I couldn't believe I had managed to sing that *mukhda* in one breath. It is one memory which stands out, it really was a crazy time.

REHNA TU FROM *DELHI-6* (2009)

Rehna Tu is my all time favourite by AR Rahman sir and Prasoon Joshi. They have created a masterpiece. The melody and the lyrics, it just takes me to a place where I don't want to come back from. And I must have heard it a zillion times already but that feeling never wanes...

LE CHALE FROM *MY BROTHER NIKHIL* (2005)

I have to mention *Le Chale* here. When Viveck Philip, who composed this song, and (Onir) Anirban, who is the director of the film, approached me to sing this song, right off the bat I was in love with it. I was head over heels for the melody. Let me share a story behind this song, which not many, in fact, nobody knows. I was kind of choking while singing this track in the studio. I tried to not make it too obvious because I knew that if I stopped singing I would start crying. It was really tough keeping my emotions in check while singing this one. And mind you, this was before I got know about the context of this song in the film. It was purely magical, what that melody was doing to me. Those notes were driving me crazy and I could feel myself choking again and again. Nobody knows this, not even Anirban or Viveck... Well I think they will get to know this now.

'Difficult yet beautiful journey'

Actor ABHISHEK BANERJEE auditioned for his character in *Pataal Lok* half-heartedly because he feared rejection as he was the casting director of the series

It's almost a year since the world witnessed actor Abhishek Banerjee delivering a splendid performance in the crime-thriller series *Paatal Lok*. Having starred in comic roles prior to the project, Abhishek showed the fans how versatile he could be when taking on roles in another genre. He has now shared his experience from the time when he was shooting for the eponymous series.

"Sudip (Sharma) sir went to watch *Stree* in theatre one day and he called me the next day saying that he wanted me to try for the character Vishal Tyagi (Hathoda Tyagi). He said, 'He saw a maniac in my eyes'. It was a shocker as I didn't expect that. I stared at myself in the mirror looking for the maniac in me. Initially, I didn't find the role exciting, Tyagi didn't have many dialogues, even the screen time was less compared to other characters! I was half-hearted about attempting the audition plus I was the casting director too so didn't want to be in an embarrassing situation where I get to hear the news of my own rejection from the the team," he said.

"However, Karnesh (Sharma) sir and Sudip sir were both convinced that I could do a good job with it. They were not liking the other options I presented to them for Hathoda's role! Finally after a long internal duel, I gathered courage and gave the audition. I gave it my all but still was nervous when I finally sent them the test. Next morning Karnesh sir called, I picked it up anxiously. I was told that they really like my audition and I am on board for the part. Phew! That was such a relief. But it was only the beginning of a difficult yet beautiful journey."

The series went on to receive a lot of praise as it opened to strong critical acclaim. Abhishek, for his portrayal of Hathoda Tyagi, also received a lot of appreciation. His role in the series truly helped him break free of the comedy persona onscreen.

His recently released anthology film, *Ajeeb Daastaans,* was again a successful outing. With each new project, he keeps proving his mettle. He now has five projects in line with quite a few more in developing stages. Abhishek will next be seen in *Rashmi Rocket, Bhediya, Aankh Micholi, Dostana 2* and *Helmet.*

Divyanka's adventure mode on

Actor Divyanka Tripathi, who is currently shooting in Cape Town for the stunt-based reality show *Khatron Ke Khiladi 11,* says that it was tough leaving her husband, actor Vivek Dahiya, at home.

"This is the first time after our marriage in 2016 that Vivek and I would be by ourselves for an extended period of time. We have gotten emotional many times. Last week, we had been preparing ourselves for the day when I would leave for Cape Town. Leaving him and going makes me very sad," she said.

The actor also added that the family members of all contestants were reluctant in letting them travel overseas amidst the pandemic. "During these uncertain times, it's understandably tough for family members to let us go. In all honesty, I think they are the biggest *Khatron Ke Khiladi*," Divyanka said.

However, a part of her was overjoyed at being given a chance to engage with something adventurous again.

"I am excited that I am going to do something that was long due. Before coming to Mumbai, I used to get a lot of chances to participate in adventurous activities. I used to participate in a lot of adventure camps when I was a kid. I used to be away from home for 10-day or 50 day-camps, so I was in the habit of staying alone. And in the 15 years since I came to Mumbai, I have never had a chance to travel and be by myself so I have not touched that aspect of my personality in a long while. But I have to say that the next few weeks would be somewhat bittersweet as I have to stay away from Vivek to make use of an eagerly awaited opportunity," she added.

On the deadly second wave of COVID-19, Divyanka expressed, "It is a tough time for the industry, but it is not just limited to our industry. Across professions, just about everyone is going through a tough time. But it is a bit easy for us actors, since we are no strangers to this lifestyle. When we are working, our schedules are erratic, we work rigorously and for extended hours. But when we don't have work, like, between shows we work on ourselves at home."

"These times are a reminder that more than work, life is important. I would urge everyone to follow social distancing norms and to stay safe. During this time, mental health is important, and it is important to stay in touch with your loved ones at all times. Those of us who are lucky to not be affected by the pandemic, we should try to be healthy mentally and keep indulging in activities at home to keep ourselves engaged," she signed off.

—IANS

Love the unknown

Actor ALBERT TSAI says that it is human nature to be drawn to what hasn't been confirmed or discovered yet. By TEAM VIVA

Abominable is a computer-animated adventure film which follows a teenage girl named Yi, who encounters a young Yeti on the roof of her apartment building in Shanghai. She names him Everest and embarks on an epic quest to reunite the magical creature with his family at the highest point on earth along with her mischievous friends Jin and Peng (played by Albert Tsai). But the trio of friends will have to stay one-step ahead of Burnish, a wealthy man intent on capturing a Yeti, and zoologist Dr Zara to help Everest get home. Actor Albert Tsai shares about his experience of working on the film and more. Excerpts:

❒How did you get involved?

As soon as I read the script and the character description of Peng, I just fell in love with him, so I decided to audition for the role. I was really excited to be part of a film that was portraying Chinese culture, with a modern Chinese family, which we haven't had, ever, really. The last major film was *Mulan*, which was about ancient times.

❒How did animator and director Jill Culton pitch Peng to you?

Just that he's a fun-loving, energetic kid. He is always intended to be the younger character and almost comic relief, but with more depth than that. He is also the optimistic one of the group. He's always playing, and when other people are about to give up, he really wants to continue the journey. He has a ton of fun on this adventure with Everest. Peng is the only one, along with Everest, who seems to be taking this journey more like a vacation. When the others are considering the next step, he's over there having a thumb war with Everest.

❒What did you want to bring to the role?

I did try to really infuse some of my personality into Peng. A lot of his body language and movements were sort of inspired by what I did in the recording booth because they had a camera on us when we were recording the audio, just to see what we would do. Being a TV actor, I did the movements along with the lines, which was natural for me and that they imported onto Peng.

❒Did Peng change at all as the film evolved?

He stayed more consistent through the various stages of production. I feel like he was always going to be the younger member of the group, the comedic heart. I think there were slight personality changes... I don't know if he was quite the basketball aficionado that he became.

❒What is it about the Yeti creatures that we're so obsessed with?

I think it's just part of our obsession with mythical creatures. We love the unknown, and what we haven't confirmed or discovered yet. Also, what's really exciting is, we bring a different version of the Yeti into the film, as opposed to sticking to the normal depiction, which is more gorilla-like, abominable snowman who is mean and scary. We bring a cuter, more innocent version. He's got these powers, which aren't normally part of the Yeti mythology, so it's really fun. Jill [Culton] said she wanted to base Everest off of her experience with her dogs, which is why he sort of has dog-like qualities. But he also has his own emotions and he's quite intelligent.

❒Was it fascinating to see the film come to life step by step?

That was one of my favorite parts of this entire experience. It was fascinating for me to see how a scene could go from basic storyboards and sketches to animation and layout. It started out as very rough 3D animation and it got finer and finer, with lighting and effects and all that, until finally it's what you see at the movies. The scenes I saw a lot of were Everest and Yi's escape from the city, and the blueberry sequence. I tracked those two from the beginning and it was exciting for me to see how they were animated.

❒You're usually on your own in the recording booth. What sort of challenge was that as an actor?

It was definitely very different than what I am used to. A lot of times in the recording sessions, we would do a certain line several times, changing the nuance, and then we'd move on to the next one. It had a sequential approach, and we could play around with it a lot more. Jill was so collaborative, along with the whole team, and nothing had been set in stone yet, so we were able to ad lib a bit and improv here and there. The few recording sessions we did do together as a cast were a lot of fun, too, because that was more like traditional acting.

❒You're a big fan of animated film. Any favorites?

I really love The Lion King. I think that was the first animated movie I watched, so it was special for me. And it was a little like Abominable, since it was nature-focused. A favorite DreamWorks movie of mine? I love Shrek and Kung Fu Panda too, those were really funny.

❒You're a producer these days, what prompted that?

I've always been fascinated by what happens behind the scenes and how a team of cast, writers, producers and directors put together a TV show, so I've always wanted to get into that side of things. I've been trying to do that, and it's where I see myself in the future.

(The film premieres on May 16 at 9 pm on Sony PIX.)

Raman's sacking brings CAC under scanner

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former opener WV Raman's unceremonious ouster from the Indian women's team head coach's position has opened a can of worms with both the Madan Lal-headed Cricket Advisory Committee and Neetu David-led selection panel coming under the scanner of BCCI bigwigs.

Raman, who successfully coached the women's team to T20 World Cup final in Australia and is widely acknowledged as one of the best Indian coaches, was removed by Lal and Naik's CAC, which reinstated Ramesh Powar, who was removed from the same post in 2018.

IS LAL'S COMMITTEE ILLEGAL AS PER NORMS?

"*Maddi paaji* (Madan Lal) celebrated his 70th birthday on March 20. The BCCI, in its appeal to Supreme Court against some of the reforms, doesn't ask for rollback of age-cap of 70 years. So how come Madan Lal was allowed to sit in CAC meeting?" a senior member asked.

While the BCCI has no intention of using its veto to over-rule Lal and Naik, the board's top officials are unable to wrap their heads around as to what led to recommendation of Raman's removal.

DID RAMAN & NEETU HAVE A FALL-OUT?

It has been confirmed from multiple sources that Raman had red-flagged the kind of squad that David, Arati Vaidya, Renu Margrate, Mithu Mukherjee and V Kalpana picked for the South Africa series, for which teen batting sensation Shafali Verma was not picked for the ODIs and senior pacer Shikha Pandey was inexplicably dropped.

"Do you know what kind of logic was given for dropping Shikha and Shafali? It is beyond comprehension," a peeved senior official said.

The selectors said that Pandey was unfit because she hasn't worked hard on training during lockdown and was "overweight".

"But when they were asked to prove their point, they couldn't simply do it," the official alleged.

In the case of Shafali, her fielding was questioned and put forth as the reason for her non-selection in the ODI team.

"If Raman had a counter-question that if Shafali's fielding is a problem for 50-over cricket, then it is bigger problem in T20 format where it is more important. Then how is she being selected in T20 format," the official asked.

The selection of leg-spinner C Prathyusha and left arm seamer Monica Patel has also been questioned as they didn't look ready for the rigours of International cricket.

Prathyusha gave 60 odd runs in 8 overs in one of the games.

"How did Monica get selected over Shikha Pandey?" is a question that is being asked.

COUNTER POINTS AGAINST RAMAN

While the majority believe that the stylish southpaw of yesteryears has been hard done by, there are a few critics who feel that there were some loose ends from his side too.

"Some girls complained that he will at times switch himself off during training sessions. Also some girls felt under-appreciated. Someone like Rajeshwari Gayakwad was not even once praised despite she being the best bowler during the series," a member from the anti-Raman camp said.

Another allegation against Raman is that he unwittingly gave gloveswoman Nuzhat Parween a debut cap without knowing that she has already played both ODIs and T20Is for India.

Prima donna culture in women's team: Raman writes to Ganguly, Dravid

New Delhi: Ousted Indian women's coach WV Raman has written to BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, alleging that there is a "prima donna culture" in the national team and it needs to change.

In the mail that has also been marked to National Cricket Academy head Rahul Dravid, Raman has also offered to present a roadmap for women's cricket in the country, if asked.

"As far as I know, Raman has said that he has always 'believed in team being placed above everybody else, and insisted that no individual can really be a prima donna,'" a source privy to Raman's mail said.

The stylish former left-hander's crisp letter to the two former captains is sure to ruffle a few feathers given that it has always been the coaches who have either stepped aside or sacked following fallouts with players, most notably ODI captain Mithali Raj.

While Raman's letter didn't name anyone, it is understood that he has spoken extensively about the star culture that prevails in the team, which he said is probably doing more harm than good.

It is learnt that Raman has written about certain individuals who need to place the team above self.

"Raman has asked *Dada* (Ganguly) that if a past accomplished performer feels constrained by this culture, then he (Ganguly) as a former India captain, should take a call on this matter, whether the coach is asking for too much," the source added.

Raman, it is learnt, is dismayed by allegations that he is not proactive as a coach. "In case the president and secretary want to hear his opinion on allegations about his work ethic, he can explain."

The letter has been copied to Dravid because Raman sincerely believes that he can contribute towards building a roadmap for Indian women's cricket. **PTI**

shortpasses

TURKISH F1 CANCELLED

PARIS: The Turkish Grand Prix, which was only drafted onto the F1 calendar as a replacement for the cancelled Canada GP two weeks ago, was itself axed on Friday. F1 chiefs, forced into another change due to Covid-19 protocols, announced that they will instead return to the sport's safe haven of Austria.

NEYMAR TO MISS FINAL

PARIS: Neymar will not play for PSG in next week's French Cup final against Monaco after a booking in Wednesday's semi-final saw the Brazilian incur a suspension.

LAPORTE CAN PLAY FOR SPAIN

LAUSANNE: Manchester City defender Aymeric Laporte has been approved to play for Spain instead of France at Euro 2020

ALAPHILIPPE TO SKIP OLYMPICS

PARIS: Cycling's road race world champion Julian Alaphilippe said on Friday he will not take part in the Tokyo Olympics. The French rider said the decision was a personal choice.

IRFAN, 4 OTHERS RETURN -VE

NEW DELHI: Olympic-bound race walker K T Irfan and four other elite track-and-field athletes have returned negative for Covid-19 in a confirmatory second test conducted at SAI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

PHILLIPS, MITCHELL GET NZ DEAL

WELLINGTON: White ball batsman Glenn Phillips and allrounder Daryl Mitchell have been included for the first time on New Zealand Cricket's list of centrally contracted players. But Test spinner Ajaz Patel has been dropped from the 20-strong list.

ALVES, SILVA BACK FOR BRAZIL

SAO PAULO: Veteran defenders Dani Alves and Thiago Silva were brought back into the Brazil squad for next month's World Cup qualifiers against Ecuador and Paraguay.

SHOOTERS DOING DRY FIRING

NEW DELHI: In quarantine till May 19, India's Olympic-bound shooters are keeping themselves busy with dry firing in their hotel rooms at Zagreb before they hit the range next week.

JAPAN EXPAND COVID EMERGENCY

TOKYO: Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency on Friday, just 10 weeks before the Olympics, as campaigners submitted a petition with more than 350,000 signatures calling for the Games to be scrapped.

BILES RETURNING TO COMPETITION

INDIANAPOLIS: Reigning Olympic gymnastics champion Simone Biles will return to competition for the first time in more than 18 months at the US Classic next week. Agencies

Slammed Paine clarifies India comments

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia captain Tim Paine on Friday stood by his comments that his team indeed got distracted by India's "sideshow" but clarified that he didn't ever intend to use it as an excuse for their home Test series defeat in January.

A day after receiving online flak from Indian fans for his "side show" comments on Indian team, Paine clarified himself while chatting with Adam Gilchrist in a podcast.

"I was asked a number of things, and one of those was talking about the challenges of playing against India. One of them is the distraction they can create," Paine said in the *Gilly and Goss podcast* on Friday.

"There was a lot of talk that they weren't going to Brisbane. They're always changing gloves and bringing out physios and all that can get on your nerves. Just said that was one of the things that probably distracted me and took my eye of the ball at times."

The 36-year-old Paine had said that his team was distracted by the Indian team's "niggling" during the epoch-making Test series early this year which the visitors rallied to win.

Soon Paine was trolled on Twitter by Indian fans.

"I did say that they simply outplayed us and that they deserved to win but they left that one out. The Indian fans have been slamming me on social media. They say that I'm making excuses again but it's all good fun," Paine said.

"I certainly wasn't making any excuses. I was asked about some of the challenges of the summer, and I said that was one of them for me," he added.

Hussey recovers from Covid, Saha +ve again

New Delhi: Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey has recovered from Covid-19, paving the way for his return to Australia on Sunday but Sunrisers Hyderabad's Wriddhiman Saha has received conflicting results in two coronavirus tests, prolonging his isolation.

Saha, who has been named in India's squad for the World Test Championship final and the subsequent Test series against England, is hoping to join the squad's bio-bubble in Mumbai on May 25. His inclusion is subject to fitness.

"Hussey has returned with negative RT-PCR results and has recovered well. We haven't yet decided when he is going to fly back and which route he will take — Maldives or Australia," CSK CEO Kashi Viswanathan said on Friday.

In case of Saha, he will continue to be in quarantine after one of his two tests came positive.

"My quarantine period is still not over. Out of the two tests done, 1 was negative and other one came as positive. Otherwise I am doing much better. Requesting everyone not to spread misleading stories/information without whole context," the wicketkeeper-batsman posted on Twitter. **PTI**

Bond played major role in shaping Bumrah's career

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's star pacer Jasprit Bumrah has said that former New Zealand speedster Shane Bond, who is currently the bowling coach of Mumbai Indians, has played a major role in shaping his career.

The Mumbai Indians fast bowler, who will lead India's attack in the upcoming World Test Championship final against New Zealand, expressed his views in a video shared by his IPL franchise.

"I always try to talk to him even when I am not here and with the Indian team. So, it's been a good journey, and hopefully, every year I keep learning something new and try to add new things to my bowling.

"He has played a major role in that. It's been a great relationship so far, and hopefully, this continues for many many years to come," Bumrah said.

He said he was always fascinated by how Bond bowled in his playing days and tries speaking to the MI bowling coach even when he is on India duty.

"I met him (Bond) for the first time in 2015. As a child, I had seen him bowl and was always very fascinated by how he used to bowl for New Zealand, and how he used to operate," the India pacer said.

Bumrah, who has so far played 19 Tests, said that Bond assisted him a lot in broadening his horizon which in turn helped him blossom as a cricketer.

"When I met him over here, it was a good experience. He helped me a lot to open my mind to different things that I could try on the cricket field. So that was very good and that relationship has only gotten better each and every year," added the Gujarat pacer.

Bond, on his part, termed Bumrah as the best death bowler in the world.

Seasoned New Zealand left-arm pacer Trent Boult also had words of praise for his compatriot, saying that Bond was a "tremendous thinker of the game and a pretty good tactician."

"He has been here for a long time, he knows what he is doing and he puts in a lot of work into making sure that the bowlers are well equipped and have got enough information to make some decisions on the day. Yeah, really enjoy working with him," said Boult, who has played 71 Tests.

'Hardik needs to bowl for place in playing XI'

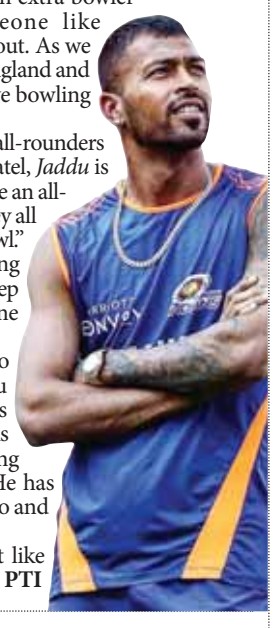
New Delhi: Former India selector Sarandeep Singh has backed the current committee's call to ignore Hardik Pandya from the Test squad and said the all-rounder doesn't fit into the playing XI even in the shorter formats if he can't bowl his quota of overs.

After undergoing a back surgery in 2019, Hardik has not bowled regularly since his comeback and not being able to offer his all-round skills cost him a place in the Indian Test squad for the UK tour.

Sarandeep, whose tenure ended with the historic tour of Australia earlier this year, was also surprised that a rare talent like Prithvi Shaw did not even make the standbys for the England tour.

"The selectors' decision to ignore Hardik for Tests is understandable. He has not been able bowl regularly after his surgery. I feel he has to bowl 10 overs in ODIs and four in T20s to be part of the playing XI even in shorter formats. He can't just play as a batsman," Sarandeep, a former India spinner, said.

"If Hardik doesn't bowl, it disturbs the balance of the side hugely. You have to play an extra bowler because of that and someone like Surykumar Yadav has to miss out. As we saw in the ODI series against England and Australia, we can't play with five bowling options.



"Then team now has other all-rounders in Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, *Jaddu* is back, Shardul Thakur can also be an all-rounder, he has shown that. They all can do the job if Hardik can't bowl."

Talking about Shaw not being picked for the UK tour, Sarandeep said it is way too early to sideline a batsman like him.

"He has the potential to do what Sehwag did for India. You can't sideline him so early in his career. He has scored tons of runs in domestic cricket after being dropped post Australia tour. He has corrected his technical flaws also and look how he played in the IPL.

"You have to back a talent like Shaw for that matter." **PTI**

Nadal ends losing streak against Alex

AP ■ ROME

Rafael Nadal ended a run of three straight losses to Alexander Zverev with a convincing 6-3, 6-4 win over the German on Friday to reach the Italian Open semifinals.

Zverev had beaten Nadal in straight sets at the same stage in Madrid a week ago but their latest meeting went the Spaniard's way from the start.

Aiming for a record-extending 10th Rome title, Nadal raced to a 4-0 lead in the first set and saved all eight break points he faced in the second.

"I played more solid than Madrid. Conditions are different," Nadal said, alluding to the fact that the high-altitude of the Spanish capital allowed Zverev to dominate more with his serve. "Here are little bit more normal conditions. I was able to control a little bit more."

It was a stark contrast from Nadal's long three-set comeback win over Denis Shapovalov a day earlier, when the Spaniard saved two match points.

Nadal's semifinal opponent will be big-serving American Reilly Opelka, who reached his first Masters semifinal with a 7-5, 7-6 (2) win over Argentine qualifier Federico Delbonis.

In the women's tournament, 2019 Rome champion Karolina Pliskova rallied past 2017 French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko 4-6, 7-5, 7-6 (1) to set up a semifinal against Petra Martic. Martic eliminated Jessica Pegula 7-5, 6-4 for her biggest result since recently hiring former French Open champion Francesca Schiavone as her coach.

The only real moment of concern for Nadal came when he tripped over the service line while running down a drop shot when he was serving for the first set.

Roger Federer in action during a training session prior to the start of Geneva Open tournament on Friday AP

The crowd of about 2,500 let out a collective gasp as Nadal tumbled onto the clay and rolled over onto his back wincing in apparent pain.

After putting Nadal's reply away for an easy winner — the Spaniard still managed to get the ball over the net — Zverev hopped over the net to check on the 20-time Grand Slam champion.

Nadal got up, though, dusted himself off and served out the set with his back and even headband still covered in clay.

"Some lines are higher than the rest of court, so when you touch the line it's dangerous," Nadal said.

Zverev, the 2017 Rome champion and winner of the trophy in Madrid last weekend, had numerous opportunities to recover from an early break in the second set but Nadal stepped up his game each time and closed it out on his first match point with a perfectly executed serve-and-volley.

Dortmund rout Leipzig in German Cup final

AFP ■ BERLIN

Jadon Sancho and Erling Braut Haaland both netted twice on Thursday as Borussia Dortmund won the German Cup with an emphatic 4-1 win over RB Leipzig to spoil Julian Nagelsmann's hopes of leaving with a title.

Dortmund turned on the style at Olympic Stadium, converting all of their three first-half shots on target to sweep Leipzig aside as Sancho netted twice either side of a superb Haaland goal.

"I am very happy that I could score two goals and set up one for Haaland," Sancho told *ARD*.

The England winger could have claimed a hat-trick late on after rounding Leipzig goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi, but failed to get his shot away.

Spain midfielder Dani Olmo pulled a goal back for Leipzig, before Haaland grabbed his second in the dying stages despite slipping as he connected.

Dortmund lifted the German Cup for the fifth time in the club's history.

"It's unbelievable, I am proud of the morale the team has shown in the last few weeks," said captain Marco Reus as Dortmund have also recently got back into the Champions League places.

Real trim Atleti's lead

Granada: Real Madrid kept the pressure on Atletico Madrid by thrashing Granada 4-1 on Thursday to reduce the gap to two points at the top of La Liga, with two games left to play.

A draw or defeat for Real Madrid would have given Atletico the chance to win the title on Sunday by beating Osasuna but goals from Modric, Rodrygo, Alvaro Odriozola and Benzema secured a comfortable victory at Los Carmenes.

Atletico could still be crowned champions this weekend if they overcome Osasuna and Real fail to win away at Athletic Bilbao.

Even third-placed Barcelona are still in the running but they need an incredible swing of results if they are to overturn a four-point deficit. **AFP**

Liverpool end Old Trafford hoodoo

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

Liverpool kept their chances of a place in next season's Champions League in their own hands with a thrilling 4-2 victory over Manchester United at Old Trafford on Thursday.

Jurgen Klopp's men still need to win their remaining three games over the next 10 days to guarantee their place in the Champions League for a fifth consecutive season, but cleared the biggest hurdle in their path with a first victory away to United since 2014.

Roberto Firmino scored twice either side of half-time after Diogo Jota cancelled out Bruno Fernandes's early opener for the home side.

Marcus Rashford's strike set up a grandstand finish, but Mohamed Salah secured a vital win in the final minute as Liverpool moved up to fifth in the table.

"We are still in the game, still in the race. That is all we could do tonight," said Klopp.

"It was necessary. Without this result we don't have to talk about it."

The clash between English football's two most successful clubs had been postponed 11 days ago as United fans stormed the pitch and clashed with police amid protests against the club's owners.

A peaceful protest took place before kick-off as supporters again voiced their anger at the Glazer family.