

**OPINION 6**  
THE GENESIS OF THE ISRAEL-HAMAS SCUFFLE

**WORLD 8**  
SEVERE WEATHER KILLS 21 CROSS COUNTRY RUNNERS IN CHINA

**SPORT 12**  
VERSTAPPEN WINS MONACO GRAND PRIX

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VIVEK OBEROI  
TURNS  
NOSTALGIC  
10 VIVACITY

## Centre pushes for 12th Board exams

Gives States two choices; seeks reply by May 25

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After months of indecision, the Centre on Sunday took steps to build a consensus for the conduct of the pending Class 12 Board examinations by putting two options before the States during a virtual meeting chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in the presence of Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank.

Sources present in the two-hour-long meeting said the Centre proposed that the States either hold Class 12 Board examinations in select major subjects, or hold the exams based on multiple choice single paper objective questions. The Centre asked the States to respond latest by May 25 after taking a call and announce the exams by June.

LIST OF BOARD & ENTRANCE EXAMS POSTPONED DUE TO COVID-19 IN 2021		
Name of the Exam	Actual Dates	Revised Exam Dates
CBSE 12th Board Exams 2021	May 04 to June 14, 2021	To be Notified in June
CBSE 10th Board Exams 2021	Cancelled	Cancelled
CISCE ICSE Class 10th Exams 2021	From May 04, 2021	Cancelled
CISCE ISC Class 12th Exams 2021	From May 04, 2021	To be notified
International Baccalaureate (IB) Exams 2021	Cancelled	Cancelled
JEE Main April 2021	April 27 to 30, 2021	To be notified
JEE Main May 2021	May 24 to 28, 2021	To be notified
VITEEE 2021 (Preponed)	June 18 to 26, 2021	May 29 to 31, 2021
SRMJEEE 2021 (Preponed)	June 11 to 16, 2021	Phase 1 - May 23 & 24, 2021
		Phase 2 - July 25 & 26, 2021
NEET PG 2021	April 18, 2021	To be notified
TISS MAT 2021	May 08, 2021	To be notified

high-level consultation saw full participation of education ministers and education secretaries of States and Union Territories and chairpersons of State Examination Boards. Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren represented his State. In a series of tweets, Pokhriyal said the meeting was

of five and a maximum of six subjects. Of these, usually four are major subjects.

Sources also said that the CBSE has proposed two options to the Education Ministry for conducting the Board examinations for the major subjects.

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## Dirty hospitals could be culprits

Over 8,000 cases of black fungus reported so far in the country

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Contaminated hospital settings among others can also be one of the major reasons for the spike in mucormycosis or 'black fungus' cases among immune-compromised Covid patients and those who have recovered from the infection in the country, doctors have said. India has reported more than 8,000 cases of black fungus so far.

As mortality associated with the black fungus is as high as 50 per cent, reports of deaths have started trickling in from the States which are facing acute shortage of the anti-fungal drug, Amphotericin B.

Many patients will sustain permanent damage to their health, said the doctors and warned that not only diabetics but even those who have undergone transplants, or are suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, chronic kidney disease, as well as critically-ill people, besides those who are malnourished, are equally vulnerable to the disease because of the weak immunity caused by the steroids given to them during Covid management.

India has been a hotbed for



A worker tries to clear water after heavy rains flooded the premises of a Covid-19 hospital being set up at Ghaziabad on Sunday

black fungus for long, said Dr Hariprasath Prakash and Dr Arunloke Chakrabarti in their recent article titled 'Epidemiology of Mucormycosis in India,' that was published in the journal 'Microorganism'. Dr Chakrabarti is a prominent mycologist and head of the Department of Medical Microbiology at the PGIMER (Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research), Chandigarh, while Dr Prakash is at the International Higher School

of Medicine, Issyk-Kul Regional Campus, Kyrgyzstan. "The environment, both indoor and outdoor, has a higher mucor spore count. This means that the spores (microscopic biological particles that allow the fungi to reproduce) belonging to the mucor group are present in the air in high numbers," they said.

In fact, hospital-acquired infections among patients in India have always been a matter of concern. "The infections are caused due to the lack of compliance with infection control guidelines, such as hand hygiene, use of outdated technology, misuse or excessive use of antibiotics and more."

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## 2nd dose elusive as States report jab shortage

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

For several people, who have received the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine, the second one seems to be elusive, at least in near future, as States have reported shortage of drugs while the Centre is scouting foreign land for importing as well as enhancing manufacturing of the jabs to meet the vaccine need for its people here.

For instance, a random click by The Pioneer on CoWin, the Government portal, found that the slot for the second dose in several vaccine centres and hospitals even under the 45 plus category is showing nil doses.

The Government's overall vaccination data under the nationwide jab programme launched from January 16 also show that of total 97,52,422 healthcare workers (HCWs) who have taken the first dose, just 67,00,147 have taken the second dose so far. Overall, 19,49,51,603 vaccines have been administered so far.

The first phase of the vaccination programme was opened for the health workers and then above 45 plus having comorbidities. The Government had plans to cover

## No slots for second shot in vaccine centres for 45+

30 crore people by June-end. Similarly, 1,49,47,941 frontline workers (FLWs) have received first dose but just 83,22,058 FLWs have received second dose while 6,06,73,244 for over 45 years old to 60 years old have been vaccinated first dose of which 97,84,465 have been given second dose. At least 5,65,49,096 for above 60 years have administered first dose of which just 1,82,42,554 have received second dose.

While vaccine has become an urgency amid second wave, many rue that second dose is nowhere to be seen.

"No second dose. What if at least a person took the first dose in February end and wants to take the second dose now, after three months? Will s/he be registered for the second dose? And where?" questioned a doctor from a Government hospital refusing to be quoted.

Continued on Page 2

## CAPSULE

### BENGAL GOV 'STUNNED' OVER TMC MP CLAIMS

Kolkata: West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar was left flabbergasted on Sunday as TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee launched a tirade against him, claiming that it was at his behest the three TMC leaders and a former city mayor were arrested in the Narada sting operation case.

### CAIRN ARBITRATION AWARD CHALLENGED

New Delhi: India has challenged an international arbitration tribunal asking it to return \$1.2 billion to UK's Cairn Energy Plc on grounds that it had never agreed to arbitrate over a 'national tax dispute', the Finance Ministry said.

### YASS CYCLONE: PM ASKS FOR TIMELY EVACUATION

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday called for timely evacuation of those involved in off-shore activities as he chaired a meeting to review the preparedness of States and Central Governments to deal with the cyclone Yaas.

### WTO'S TRIPS COUNCIL TO DISCUSS IPR WAIVER

New Delhi: The TRIPS Council of the World Trade Organization will discuss a revised proposal submitted by 62 co-sponsors.

## Defiant farmers begin gathering at Delhi for 'black day'

May 26 marks 6 months of stir, 7 years of Modi Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defying the Covid lockdown, a large number of farmers from Haryana, Punjab and Western Uttar Pradesh (UP) have marched to Delhi ahead of the 'black day' protest planned for May 26 to mark six months of their protests against the three controversial farm laws.

The growers chose to observe May 26 as a 'black day' as Narendra Modi had first taken oath as the Prime Minister on this date in 2014 and the Government will complete seven years in office then. Meanwhile, 12 Opposition parties, including the Congress, the NCP and the TMC have come out in support of the decision of the farmers' union to observe a countrywide protest on May 26.

Led by the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Gurnam Singh Charuni, the farmers set

off in hundreds of vehicles from the Bastada toll plaza in Haryana and headed for the Singhu border point near Delhi. They will perform langar seva for a week after reaching their destination, the farmer leader said.

Farmers' leader Balbir Singh Rajewal appealed to supporters and others to raise black flags at their homes and atop their vehicles and shops on May 26. "We will also burn effigies of Narendra Modi as a form of protest," he said. Visuals from Karnal showed many of the growers, either wearing no masks or wearing them improperly while raising slogans in groups.

On May 20, a large convoy of farmers from Punjab's Tarn Taran had left for Delhi and a prominent farmer leader has promised that convoys of around 2,000 vehicles each would leave every week from one district of the State for Delhi to participate in the May 26 protests.

Continued on Page 2

## India becomes 3rd country to cross 3L deaths due to Covid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's death tally crossed the three lakh mark on Sunday even as the country's caseload saw a sustained decline and hit a five week low of 2,22,704.

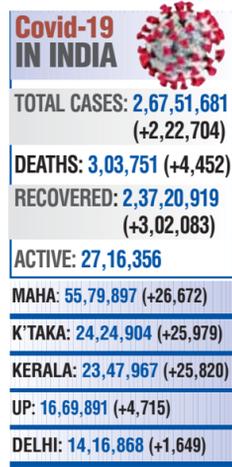
India added 4,452 deaths during the last 24 hours to reach a total of 3,03,751 deaths. The country is now only behind the USA (6 lakh plus deaths) and Brazil (4.5 lakh plus deaths). The total global death count stood at 34.75 lakh as on Saturday.

During the last few weeks India's death rate has steadily climbed up, going from 0.5 per cent to 1.8 per cent as virus penetrated the rural belt and hit those who didn't have access to even basic health care.

Maharashtra leads the country in terms of total death. The State has reported 88,620 deaths followed by Karnataka (25,282 deaths) and Tamil Nadu (20,468).

On Sunday, States like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi reported major declines in the numbers of cases. But southern States still remained in the grip of the virus.

Maharashtra recorded 1,320 Covid-19 deaths on Sunday — including 726 old unaccounted deaths that were



added to the day's cumulative tally, while the infections climbed marginally to 26,672.

A day after the state logged 682 deaths and 26,133 infections, the infections went up marginally to 26,672, while the State added 1,320 deaths — comprising 398 deaths that occurred in the last 48 hours, 196 that took place last week and 726 old unaccounted deaths that were added to the State's daily Covid-19 toll.

Continued on Page 2

## Delhi Govt extends lockdown till May 31

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday announced that the lockdown in the national Capital has been extended by one week till May 31.

Also, he said if the cases continue to decline at this pace, the Delhi Government will start the unlock process in a phased manner.

Delhi has to be completely prepared for the third wave of corona and administering vaccines is the Delhi Government first and foremost agenda to protect people from the third wave, the Chief Minister said in a digital broadcast. He said it is the top priority of the Delhi Government to figure out how to vaccinate 2.5 crore people of Delhi within three months and the Government is ready to spend whatever budget is required for the procurement of vaccines.

"The battle is pending and is not over yet. More than 1,000 cases are emerging even now. I asked a lot of people as to what should be done. A general opinion surfaced that the lockdown should be extended for another



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal addresses a digital Press conference on Covid-19 situation in New Delhi

week as whatever Delhi has gained during the lockdown might be lost if lockdown is lifted," he said.

Talking about the infection rate which has reduced rapidly, he said there was a time when the infection rate reached 36 per cent in April. "In the last 24 hours, the infection rate has fallen below 2.5 per cent. In April, there was one such day when 28,000 cases were recorded in a single day. In the past 24 hours, 1,600 cases have been recorded in Delhi. The levels have come down from 28,000 to 1,600. So

## Delhi records 1,649 Covid cases, positivity rate 2.42%

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 1,649 fresh Covid cases on Sunday while the positivity rate came down further to 2.42 per cent.

According to the health bulletin released by the Delhi Government, the national Capital reported 189 fatalities on Saturday. As per the report, 46,745 tests were conducted. Of the 25,048 hospital beds for coronavirus patients in the city, 15,388 are vacant, it said.

the speed of the coronavirus has declined rapidly in Delhi," he said. Lauding the efforts of doctors and health care workers during the period, Kejriwal said, "Our doctors and nurses have not slept for days and have not been to their homes for so many days."

## The fear that kept visitors off parks & plazas

NAVIN UPADHYAY ■ NEW DELHI

Be it Delhi's Lodi Garden, where Delhi's elites hang around in the morning, or Mumbai's Marine Drive, or Bengaluru's sprawling Kabban park, the fear of coronavirus hangs so heavily in the air that the number of their visitors have come down sharply.

The fear of an invisible enemy is one of the worst sorts of phobia that has haunted mankind from ages. Deserted roads patrolled by police and dogs, empty parks, desolate cinema halls, shuttered or padlocked pubs and bars, closed malls, for better parts of the last 15 months, the world has been reduced to a haunted place, its inhabitants living in the dread of an unseen enemy stalking their streets and every nook and corner of their existence.



spaces has declined by as much 44 per cent during the last three months due to the panic triggered by the spread of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdown

and curfew restrictions imposed by States. The theories that the virus is lurking in the air waiting to pounce on you if you venture outdoors, has cre-

ated such an atmosphere of fear that only the most hardened of souls chose to keep their outdoor morning date with nature.

According to statistics provided by Our World in Data, when the pandemic first hit India the people didn't care for the enemy, but as the caseload grew and fatality increased so did the tendency to remain indoors. The fear of the unseen was more pronounced during the second wave, which saw people promptly retreating to their homes to secure themselves from the dreaded virus.

For example, when the country first came in touch with coronavirus few people took precautionary measures till the Government announced a nationwide lockdown, first a three-day affair from March 21, and then a three-weeks shutdown from March 24. On March 20, the number of people who avoided going outdoors was just around 5.86 per cent. The definition of public places for this study included places like local parks, national parks,

public beaches, marinas, dog parks, plazas, public gardens.

The number kept rising till April 22 when as many as 60 per cent of people avoided going to parks or strolled to their nearby plazas or beaches to unwind themselves.

The trend reversed as the country came to terms with the enemy and the fear of the unknown subsided to a great extent with medical science providing hope that it could tame the enemy. Every morning more and more health freaks and pleasure seekers put on their sneakers and revisited the parks and gardens.

The number of those still indoors was a mere 9.47 on March 14, when the Second wave started to attack the nation. In month time, — by April 14 to be precise, — ten per cent more people chose to keep off parks and plazas.

Continued on Page 2

## Cops finally get a stranglehold on Sushil Kumar

SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar and his associate were arrested by the Southern range of Delhi Police's Special Cell on Sunday from Mundka area in connection with the murder of a 23-year-old budding wrestling champion Sagar Dhankar. Meanwhile, the Rohini Court sent the wrestler and his associate to six days' police custody for interrogation.

Kumar was on the run for nearly 20 days and he was continuously changing his location to evade arrest. Sources also said that the wanted gangster, Sandeep alias Kala Jathedi, who is Sagar Dhankar's maternal uncle was also looking for



Olympics medal-winning wrestler Sushil Kumar being escorted by the police at Saket Police Station in New Delhi on Sunday

Kumar. According to Pramod Singh Kushwah, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell, on Sunday,

Continued on Page 2

# UP reports 506 cases of black fungus

**Lucknow:** Uttar Pradesh has so far reported 506 cases of black fungus and 19 deaths. According to a status report prepared by the state Health Department, the infection has been recorded across 66 health centres of the State. The State Government on Friday had declared black fungus a notifiable disease. Meanwhile, on Sunday, the King George's Medical University (KGMU) administration has stated that 124 cases of black fungus have been

reported at their centre. The other centres where cases of black fungus have been reported include: RMLIMS (14), Chandan Hospital (16), Era's Lucknow Medical College and Hospital (1) and Super Speciality Hospital, Burns and Trauma Centre (5). In Meerut division, 115 cases have been recorded. The list recorded 46 cases in Ghaziabad, 23 in Gautam Buddha Nagar, 17 in Varanasi, 10 in Agra, and eight each in Jaunpur, Azamgarh, Ghazipur, Gorakhpur and Bareilly. **IANS**



Vessels anchored in River Ganga during the ongoing Covid-induced lockdown and as a part of preparation for Cyclone Yaas in Kolkata on Sunday

# 26,672 more test +ve in Maha

PN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

**M**aharashtra on Sunday recorded 1,320 Covid-19 deaths - including 726 old unaccounted deaths that were added to the day's cumulative tally, while the infections climbed marginally to 26,672. A day after the State logged 682 deaths and 26,133 infections, the infections went up marginally to 26,672, while the State added 1,320 deaths - comprising 398 deaths that occurred in the last 48 hours, 196 that took place last week and 726 old unaccounted deaths that were added to the state's daily Covid-19 toll. Sunday's was the second occasion in three days when a large number of old deaths have been added to the daily Covid-19 tally. Earlier on Friday, the state added 1,263 deaths - comprising 369 that occurred in the last 48

hours, 186 that took place last week and 708 old unaccounted deaths that were added to the State's daily Covid-19 toll. With 1320 deaths, the total number of deaths in the state climbed from 87,300 to 88,620. Similarly, with 26,672 new infections, the total number of cases climbed from 55,53,225 to 55,79,897. As 29,177 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 increased from 51,11,095 to 51,40,272 on Sunday. The recovery rate in the state went up from 92.04 per cent to 92.14 per cent. The total "active cases" in the state dropped from 3,52,247 to 3,48,395. The fatality rate in the state stood static at 1.57 per cent. With 49 fresh deaths, the

Covid-19 toll in Mumbai increased from 14,516 to 14,565, while the infected cases went up by 1427 to a relatively low 1283 to trigger a jump in the infections from 6,95,483 to 6,96,910. The situation in Pune improved vastly as the "active cases" dropped from 54,198 to 51,182. Mumbai with 28,234 active cases stood second in the state, followed by Thane (24,894), Solapur (18,487), Satara (18,336), Nagpur (17,635), Ahmednagar (16,903), Nashik (15,946), Beed (9438), Amaravati (8778), Jalgaon (7465), Aurangabad (7115), Chandrapur (6469), Osmanabad (5891), Jalna (5539), Buldhana (4585) and Latur (4478). Of the 3,30,13,516 samples sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 55,79,897 have tested positive (16.97 per cent) for Covid-19 until Sunday.

## Ramdev withdraws comments on allopathic medicine after protests

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

**Y**oga guru Ramdev on Sunday withdrew his recent statements on allopathic medicine which had triggered strong protests from the medical fraternity. Responding to a letter from Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, Ramdev said he wants to put the matter to rest. "Hon'ble Minister, I have received your letter. I withdraw my statement, putting to rest the controversy over various medical practices... (jee aapaka patr praapt hua, uske sandarbh mein chikitsa paddatiyonn ke sangharsh ke is poore vivaad ko khedapoorvak viraam dete hue main apna vaktavya vaapis leta hoon)," Ramdev tweeted from his personal Twitter handle, attaching his statement.

## AP witnesses more recoveries than new cases

**Amaravati:** Andhra Pradesh reported 20,109 recoveries while adding 18,767 fresh cases of coronavirus in 24 hours ending 9 am on Sunday. Also, 104 fresh fatalities were recorded in the state in a day, a health bulletin said. Principal Secretary (Health) Anil Kumar Singhal noted that the Covid-19 positive cases showed a declining trend over the past five days. "There has been a reduction of more than 1,000 new cases per day in the last five days. The positivity rate also declined to 20.48 per cent on Sunday," he pointed out.

According to the bulletin, the gross positives touched 15,80,827, recoveries 13,61,464 and toll 10,126. The active caseload in the state is now 2,09,237, it added. East Godavari district added 2,887 and Chittoor 2,323 new cases in 24 hours while seven districts added between 1,000 and 2,000 each. Four districts reported less than 1,000 new cases each. Prakasam district became the 10th in the state to cross the aggregate of one lakh coronavirus cases while Vizianagaram went past the 70,000 mark. **PTI**

## FIR against Kamal Nath for creating panic through remarks on Covid-19

**Bhopal:** An FIR was registered against Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Kamal Nath on Sunday for allegedly creating panic over the coronavirus pandemic through his remarks, a police official said. The case against him was registered based on a complaint lodged by Bhopal BJP district president Sumeet Pachouri and two BJP MLAs- Vishwas Sarang and Rameshwar Sharma-, among others, he said. Nath, a former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, was charged under section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by a public servant) of the IPC and section 54 (making or circulating a false alarm or warning as to disaster or its severity or magnitude, leading to panic) of National Disaster Management Act 2005, the official said. The FIR was registered at the Crime Branch police station, Bhopal, he said. On the basis on which the case against Nath was filed, Bhopal Headquarter Superintendent of Police, Ramji Shrivastav,

said the action was taken based on the complaint and two videos provided by the complainants in a pen drive. Investigation into the case is going on, he said, without giving any further details. In the complaint, the BJP leaders alleged that Nath had said in his press conference at Ujjain on Saturday that, "Corona, which has spread in the world, is being known as the Indian variant of the virus." Kamal Nath's statement at this moment of crisis is creating confusion and defaming the country internationally, the complaint said. It added that Nath has disobeyed the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines to stem Covid-19 and his act amounts to sedition according to IPC. Besides, the complaint also said Nath's "false allegations" that the government was hiding the real number of deaths occurred due to coronavirus amount to creating fear and falls under the category of criminal offence. **PTI**

## Amid pandemic, charity begins from home for Lucknow NGO

**Lucknow:** The community kitchen operated by Dr Akhilesh Das Foundation is an example of charity beginning at home, and then gradually expanding to lend a helping hand to others. According to Viraj Sagar Das, the chairman of the foundation named after the former Union minister, the idea of starting the community kitchen came to him when he began sending food to his uncle and aunt, after they got infected with Covid-19. "It was around April 12, the death anniversary of my father Akhilesh Das, that the community kitchen started its operation. The idea to start it came as we were sending food to my

'taau' and 'taai', both of whom had tested positive for Covid-19 infection and were living alone," he told **PTI**. "We thought that if my uncle and aunt are facing this problem, there would be many people in the city dealing with the same issue," Das said. "Initially, we were sending 50 'thaalis' (food plates) of lunch and dinner per day. But, as of now, we are sending as many as 500 'thaalis' of lunch and dinner every single day. This is free of cost," he added. Das also informed that the foundation provides free ambulance services, thereby helping people save precious time and money. **PTI**

## Lockdown extended in Pondy till May 31

**Puducherry:** The Puducherry Government on Sunday announced extension of the ongoing lockdown till May 31 as Covid-19 cases continue to soar in the Union Territory. The two-week long lockdown clamped on May 10 is to come to an end on May 24 midnight. Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan said the lockdown is extended till month end, beyond midnight of May 24. All restrictions imposed from May 10 would continue and only essential services such as vegetables would be available till noon every day, an official release said. Milk and essential services would continue to be available and the government is keen that livelihood sources should not suffer any setback. With Puducherry registering unabated incidence of covid 19, extension of lockdown to rein in the pandemic has become necessary, an official source said. **PTI**

## Dirty hospitals could be...

**From Page 1**  
These infections are further leading to morbidity, mortality and increased financial burden among patients. Implementation of proper guidelines and preventing the infection with bacterial resistance rather than treating it with antibiotics will help reduce the disease burden," said Dr Victor D Rosenthal, Founder and Chairman of the International Nosocomial Infection Control Consortium (INICC). Dr Kushal Kalvit, a physician working as a critical care intensivist at the Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai, said while the tropical climate of our country is a perfect environment for them to grow, there have been many surveillance studies that have revealed heavy mold spore counts in hospital wards. Dr Prakash estimated that prevalence of mucormycosis is nearly 70 times higher in India than the global average while "mortality associated with mucormycosis, too, is as high as 50 per cent." They said that diabetes mellitus is the most common underlying disease, followed by hematologic malignancies and solid-organ transplants. However, mucormycosis in the immunocompetent host is an alarming threat to the Indian population, said Dr Chakrabarti. He said that trauma too is a risk fac-

tor for cutaneous mucormycosis while isolated renal mucormycosis in an immunocompetent host is a unique entity in India. "Though Rhizopus arrhizus is the most common etiological agent of mucormycosis in this country, infections due to fungi species like Rhizopus microsporus, Rhizopus homothallicus, and Apophysomyces variabilis are rising," warned the doctors and called upon the authorities to ramp up the facilities to manage the cases. Many States have already notified the disease. Dr Chakrabarti asserted that once the patient has recovered from Covid-19, s/he before discharge from hospitals should be provided with guidelines about the early symptoms of mucormycosis and should also be advised to seek immediate medical help on detection of any such symptoms. Early detection and treatment is the key word. Dr Yash Pal Sharma, Professor & Former Head, Department of Botany University of Jammu, said that basic hygiene and sanitation remains the key. "Aeromicrobiological monitoring in and around the hospitals, better indoor air quality, cleanliness of contaminated air-conditioning systems, sanitation of the oxygen-generating filling units and cylinders etc. need immediate and regular attention," he said.

## The fear that kept...

**From Page 1**  
This number grew to 44 per cent as the states brought in strict curbs and coronavirus seemed to be lurking in every tree and bush, and grass, or watching one from the tree tops and thickets. The cuckoos freely sang and squirrels raced around in the parks, only the footprint of regular two-legged invaders was nowhere around. Compare India with the United States, which has seen the highest number of infection and casualty from coronavirus across the world. The US also saw people taking refuge inside their homes and avoiding parks and beaches. In July last year more than half of the American population kept off parks, plazas and gardens for the fear of catching corona. On July 6, the number peaked to 64 per cent and remained there for a month. As the cases subsided, the parks and beaches came to life and the number of those shunning them came down to 30 per cent by February 17 this year. Though the caseload has seen a sustained decline in the USA during the last few weeks, the number of those still avoiding parks and plazas have again inched up to 36 per cent.

## Centre pushes...

**From Page 1**  
Under the first option, the national Board has proposed that examinations for the major subjects be held in the "existing format" and at designated examination centres. And marks for minor subjects be calculated based on the performance in the major subjects. This option would require one month of pre-exam activities and two months for conducting the exams and declaration of results and another 45 days for compartment exams. Under the second format, which will take only 45 days, the CBSE has proposed that Class 12 students sit for the major subject exams in their own schools. The Board has also recommended that, under the second format, each examination should be of one-and-a-half hours instead of three hours. The question papers should have only objective and short-answer questions. In this scenario, a Class 12 student will appear for one language and three elective, in this case major subjects only. The marks for the fifth and sixth subjects will be decided based on the performance in the elective subjects. If the Board opts for the second option, then the examinations will be conducted in two phases. Any student who is not able to sit

for an examination due to Covid will get another opportunity to appear for it. The Education Ministry had announced the decision to cancel the Class 10 Board examination and defer the exam for Class 12 students due to the second wave of the pandemic. On May 1, the Board announced a special marking scheme for Class 10 students in its affiliated schools. According to the sources, the entrance exams for the undergraduate engineering course (JEE Main) and medicine (NEET) will be scheduled after the Board exams are announced. While Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia told the Centre that conducting Class 12 Board exams before vaccinating students will prove to be big mistake, Maharashtra Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad said providing a safe environment for the students was a priority. Later at a Press conference, Sisodia said that several States rejected both options at the meeting and instead demanded that there be "zero exams." He also said that "about eight to 10" States had agreed to the point about having students vaccinated before holding exams. For holding entrance exams, JEE Main 2021 and NEET 2021 and others, the only solution is vaccinating all, said Sisodia. The country's 1.5 crore students and 1.5 crore teachers should all be vaccinated first.

## India becomes 3rd...

**From Page 1**  
Sunday's was the second occasion in three days when a large number of old deaths have been added to the daily Covid-19 tally. Earlier on Friday, the state added 1263 deaths - comprising 369 that occurred in the last 48 hours, 186 that took place last week and 708 old unaccounted deaths that were added to the state's daily Covid-19 toll. With 1,320 deaths, the total number of deaths in the state climbed from 87,300 to 88,620. Similarly, with 26,672 new infections, the total number of cases climbed from 55,53,225 to 55,79,897. Meanwhile, Delhi reported 1,649 fresh Covid cases on Sunday while the positivity rate came down further to 2.42 per cent. According to the health bulletin released by the Delhi government, the national Capital reported 189 fatalities on Saturday. The low positivity rate has provided much needed relief to the people who have been fighting the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. As per the report, 46,745 tests conducted, including

21,298 RTPCR/CBNAAT/True Nat tests and around 5158 people also recovered from Covid-19 disease on Sunday. Of the 25048 hospital beds for coronavirus patients in the city, 15,388 are vacant, it said. Uttar Pradesh also showed further improvement in the recovery rate at 93 per cent while the positivity rate dropped to around 2 per cent as the state reported 4,844 new Covid cases in the last 24 hours. However, as many as 234 patients lost their battle to the deadly virus in the last 24 hours. Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Amit Mohan Prasad said at present, there are 84,880 active cases in the state while 19,209 people have succumbed. The maximum deaths were reported from Jhansi (21), followed by Lucknow (18), Varanasi (15), Agra (11), and Saharanpur & Gorakhpur (10 each). Lucknow reported 301 fresh cases while 851 patients recovered. Meerut reported 297 fresh cases, Varanasi 241, Saharanpur 264 and Gorakhpur 201.

## Defiant farmers...

**From Page 1**  
The continued protests have also sparked concerns of a potential spread of Covid-19 infections, but the farmers have refused to give up the agitation, citing it as a matter of their livelihood. It would be interesting to see how the farmers will enter the national Capital during the lockdown and with the stringent Covid protocols in place. Also, Haryana, Punjab, UP and Delhi are under lockdown, which might make things difficult for them. In a related development, 12 political parties have supported the farmers' protest in a joint statement signed by Sonia Gandhi (Congress), HD Deve Gowda (JD-S), Sharad Pawar (NCP), Mamata Banerjee (TMC), Uddhav Thackeray (SS), MK Stalin (DMK), Hemant Soren (JMM), Farooq Abdullah (JKPA), Akhilesh Yadav (SP), Tejashwi Yadav (RJD), D Raja (CPI) and Sitaram Yechury (CPI-M). "On May 12, we had jointly written to Prime Minister Modi saying: 'Repeal the farm laws to protect lakhs of our annadatas from becoming victims of the pandemic so that they can continue to produce food to feed the Indian people.' We demand the immediate repeal of the farm laws and the legal entitlement to the Minimum

Support Price (MSP) of C2+50 per cent as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission," the joint statement said. Earlier, the SKM, an umbrella body of 40 farmers' unions, has written to Modi seeking resumption of talks over their demands to repeal the three laws and a legal guarantee for MSP. The SKM in its letter also warned the Government that farmers will intensify their agitation from May 26 if there is no resumption of talks. So far, 11 rounds of talks between 40 farm leaders and the Government have failed to resolve the crisis. Both the Government and farmers called off the series of discussions on January 22, citing lack of progress. The unions have rejected the Government's offer to freeze the laws for 18 months. The farmer unions, which are spearheading the protests, had written to Modi on Friday, seeking resumption of talks. Farmers have been protesting at five sites in large camps near Delhi's borders: Singhu, Ghaziabad, Tikri, Dhansa and at Shahjahanpur on the Rajasthan-Haryana border, demanding the rollback of three laws passed in September last year to lift restrictions on trade in farm produce. They have described the laws as pro-corporate. However, the Government has maintained that the laws are for their benefit.

## 2nd dose elusive...

**From Page 1**  
He said he had inoculated his old father in February and was facing some health issues so he thought to wait for him to improve healthwise. Now he is fine but where are the jobs. His father got Covishield while he himself took Covaxin. Another person pointed out that he had used pin 201301 on the Government portal to get the Covishield under the free category. There were a total 383 slots available for May 24 with entire vaccines meant for those seeking dose 1. The second dose showed zero meaning no dose. Ditto happened with Ramesh Kumar from East Delhi who tried for a vaccination centre for 18-44 group at RSKV Vidyalaya W Vinod Nagar-1 last few days. The pin he used was 110092. "There were a total 217 slots available on May 20 that too for those needing dose 1. The Dose 2 category was showing zero." Now, with the Delhi Government announcing to halt the vaccine drive in view of the shortage of vaccines, I don't know how long I will have to wait. And if taking a vaccine after such a long duration will build any immunity in me against the virus," he said. There have been several such instances being reported from across the country as vaccine supply dries up. The Centre has already asked the States to focus on providing doses to the age group above 45 years. So far, the cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country exceeded 19.49 crore on Saturday, as per the Union Health Ministry. Around 6,82,398 beneficiaries of the age group 18-44 years received their first dose on Saturday, and cumulatively 99,79,676 across 37 States/UTs since the start of phase-3 of the vaccination drive. To meet the shortage the Centre has while allowing the States to float global tender, for its parts it is in the talks with various foreign manufacturers to launch their vaccine here. The Government is also looking for ways to ramp up the production of Covaxin and Covishield.

## Cops finally get a stranglehold ...

**From Page 1**  
a team of the Special Cell, led by Inspector Shivkumar, Inspector Karambir and supervised by Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Attar Singh arrested the 38-year-old Kumar and Ajay alias Sunil (28) from Mundka. "He was on a scooter with Ajay when the police team nabbed him," said a senior police officer, adding that Kumar accepted that he was present at the crime spot. While seeking his custody for interrogation, police also stated that the camera at the stadium was dismantled and Kumar took away the DDR (video records) of the crime scene, which have to be recovered from him. The case relates to the May 4 incident at the stadium in which Sagar Dhankar died and two of his friends, Sonu and Amit Kumar, were injured after they were allegedly assaulted by Kumar and other wrestlers. The Delhi Police had announced a reward of Rs 1 lakh for information leading to the arrest of Kumar. Another reward of Rs 50,000 was announced for Ajay's arrest. A wrestler told The Pioneer on the condition of anonymity that Kumar was afraid of being caught by the members of the Jathedi gang. "Sushil had contacted Jathedi but the talks between them were inconclusive. Jathedi had also threatened to kill him and others involved in the incident," he said. He also claimed that Kumar had harboured Jathedi in one of his flats in Delhi a long time ago. Police said that Kumar had been travelling between Delhi, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana while trying to evade arrest. The champion wrestler had spent May 5 and 6 at a yoga guru's ashram in Haridwar, sources said. During his bid to evade arrest, the wrestler kept switching his mobile phone off and made WhatsApp calls to connect with his aides. It is also suspected that he was helped by his friends and some gangsters to stay off the grid.

# Crime Branch to probe wrestler's murder case

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police has been asked to investigate the case related to the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a 23-year-old budding wrestler Sagar Dhankar. The case, which is currently being investigated by the northwest district police, will be officially transferred to the Crime Branch unit by Monday.

A senior police official said police have been told verbally that the case will be further investigated by the team of the Crime Branch. "But the case will be officially handed over to us latest by Monday," he said.

The development comes after Olympic medalist wrestler Sushil Kumar (38) and his aide Ajay (28) were arrested from outer Delhi's Mundka area. Kumar and his associate have been sent to six days police custody for interrogation by the Rohini Court on Sunday.

The case relates to the May 4 incident at the stadium in which wrestler Sagar Rana died and two of his friends, Sonu and Amit Kumar, were injured after they were allegedly assaulted by Sushil Kumar and other wrestlers.

Sushil Kumar left the city as soon as he got to know about the wrestler's death, the police said, adding that multiple teams were formed to trace him and his



Olympics medal-winning wrestler Sushil Kumar and his associate Ajay Kumar after they were arrested in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

aide but he kept changing his location regularly.

Several teams, including the Crime Branch and four teams of the Special cell, conducted raids in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana and Punjab, another official said.

The Delhi Police had announced a reward of Rs one lakh for information leading to the arrest of Sushil Kumar, who had since been on the run. Another reward of ₹50,000 was announced for Ajay Kumar's arrest.

"On Sunday morning, police received specific inputs that Sushil Kumar, along

with his associate, was on the way to collect cash from one of his friends in West Delhi when he was caught by a team of special cell from Mundka," a police official said.

Metropolitan Magistrate Divya Malhotra granted the police six-day custody of Sushil Kumar, who was physically produced in court.

Police are also probing the link between Sushil Kumar and alleged gangster Kala Jatheri, whose nephew Sonu was also injured in the brawl, and the exact motive behind the incident, the officials said.

Earlier, a Delhi court had refused to grant anticipatory bail to the two-time Olympic medalist, saying he was prima facie the main conspirator and allegations against him were serious in nature.

The Delhi Police filed an FIR in the case under sections 302 (murder), 308 (culpable homicide), 365 (kidnapping), 325 (causing grievous hurt), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 341 (wrongful restraint) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The case was also registered under sections 188 (Disobedience to order by public servant), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease), 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (common intention) of the IPC and various sections under the Arms Act.

# Vaccinate students first before making them sit for 12th Board exams: Sisodia to Centre

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP Government is not in favour of the CBSE exploring options to conduct the Class 12 Board examinations without vaccinating the students, said Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday. Sisodia reiterated that the Central Government needs to vaccinate students first before making them sit for any examination.

He said the Centre should completely cancel Board exams and initiate the "no-exam policy" for students, awarding grades on the basis of their unit tests, pre-Board exams and practical exams. "Families across the nation have suffered immense pain and trauma due to Covid-19.

It is time for the Union Government to take a decision with respect to Board exams considering it has caused enough tension among our students and teacher community," he said. Conducting Board exams in these unprecedented times would be a big mistake on behalf of the Central Government, he said, adding that holding Board exams when the world is preparing for the third Covid-19 wave is irresponsible and at a time when there are daily 2.5 lakh Covid-19 cases in our country, our students, parents and teachers will not be in a good mental state to sit for any kind of exams."

He said, "In such a time of crisis, the Central Government should speak with Pfizer that already has developed vaccines for children of 12 plus and acquire it for



the 1.4 crore students who are currently studying in 12th grade."

"Two options were discussed at a high-level meeting called by the Ministry of Education to decide the fate of the pending Class 12 Board exams.

The first was conducting the exams in the present format for the major subjects and marking for the rest of the subjects on the basis of the performance in these papers. "The second was having the exams in the students' home schools, reducing the duration and changing the exam pattern. The Delhi Government is not in favour of these options.

We cannot play with the safety of students just to fulfil our stubborn wishes," he said. Sisodia said the Central

Government should speak with health experts and enquire whether vaccines given to 18 plus age group can be administered to students in 12th grade, as 95 per cent of these students are approximately 17.5 years old.

The Delhi Government will vaccinate all 12th grade students within a span of two days if vaccines are made to be available by the Central Government, he said.

"The consensus of the entire education community is that conducting exams is important but not by putting our students and teachers at risk. As a guardian of the State, the Delhi Government is taking a stand to keep the safety and security of our students as the first and most important priority," he said

# City records 1,649 Covid cases, positivity 2.42%, 189 fatalities



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 1,649 fresh Covid cases on Sunday while the positivity rate came down further to 2.42 per cent.

According to the health bulletin released by the Delhi Government, the national Capital reported 189 fatalities on Saturday. The lowest positivity rate has provided much needed relief to the people who have been fighting the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As per the report, 46,745 tests conducted, including 21,298 RTPCR/CBNAAT/True Nat tests and around 5,158 people also recovered from Covid-19 disease on Sunday.

There are 27,610 active cases and 15,844 of them are in

home isolation. The number of cumulative cases stands at 141,686 and the death toll at 23,202. Over 1,366,056 people have either recovered, migrated out or have been discharged, according to the health bulletin.

Of the 25,048 hospital beds for coronavirus patients in the city, 15,388 are vacant, it said.

Doctors at various city hospitals attributed the higher number of deaths in Delhi being reported due to the critical patients who were admitted in hospitals earlier during the peak. Experts also stressed that Delhi has passed its peak since the initial wave of the Covid-19 as the test positivity rate has come down drastically to 2.42 per cent on Sunday from about five times that figure only a few weeks back.

# No Covaxin doses left for 45+, healthcare workers in Capital after May 24: AAP MLA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There will be no Covaxin doses left for those aged above 45, frontline and healthcare workers in Delhi after Monday, with no clarity on the supply of the next installment from the Centre, AAP MLA Atishi said on Sunday.

She said the national Capital has so far received 45.94 lakh vaccine doses for healthcare workers, frontline staff and those aged above 45, of which, 43.79 lakh have been administered to the beneficiaries.

"Delhi has only 25,000 Covaxin doses left for this (above 45 years) category. Though the last installment received from the Centre is being used for second doses, there will be no doses left after Monday," she said. The AAP leader rued that there has been no clarity on the supply of the next installment of Covaxin for this category, though the central government had promised to provide more doses in June. She said the city has received 8.17 lakh vaccine doses for the 18-44 age group so far, of which, 8.07 lakh doses had been utilised by Sunday morning.

# Cops give masks, flowers to Covid violators

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Sunday did not impose a fine on people for violating Covid-19 guidelines but gave them masks and flowers in order to educate them about strictly following coronavirus-appropriate behaviour to fight the deadly infection.

In a special drive across the national Capital, police personnel distributed pamphlets, masks and gloves, made public announcements, gave flowers and made violators pledge to follow the protocols instead of issuing challans for a day. Chinmoy Biswal, the Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Delhi Police, said rather than issuing challans for violations, the focus of the police on the ground in all the 15 districts under its special drive would be to sensitise those violating Covid-19 guidelines and make them pledge to follow them.

"Fines and prosecution will be continued, but for Sunday, focus was largely on creating awareness. Police personnel were instructed not to indulge in any kind of harsh behaviour with people and instead create awareness and educate violators through public announcement systems, placards and giving them flowers, masks and gloves if required," said Biswal.



In Shahdara district, police personnel observed, "No challan, only awareness day a special drive against Covid and curfew violations." R Sathiyasundaram, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Southeast, said only prosecution will not serve the purpose and the focus should be on educating the violators and creating awareness among them to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour.

"Police did not issue challans on Sunday, instead those caught violating norms, will be made to take a pledge, those without masks will be given masks and gloves. Police teams also distributed pamphlets to

educate them and encouraged violators to sensitise others as well to strictly follow the guidelines," said the DCP. Officials said picket teams remained in place to check and identify violators, but through pledge and public announcement systems will educate the violators.

Meanwhile in the east district, rather than issuing Covid challans on violations, awareness was created among people towards the danger of coronavirus and the directions issued by the Government.

"Violators are also being made to take oath to follow Covid guidelines," said Deepak Yadav, the DCP, East district. In Southwest Delhi, the district



team along with the DCP, Ingit Pratap Singh patrolled the streets and gave roses to the violators.

"Violators were educated with a rose as token and not issued challan. Police began this as there were complaints all over Delhi that police were being harsh on violators. So, the violators were stopped but were not fined. Police gave them masks and roses," said a senior police official.

According to a data shared by the Delhi Police, a total of 6,50,768 challans were issued for mask violation till 4 pm on Saturday from June 15 this year while 3,774 were issued for spitting and 48,037 for violating

social distancing.

The police said they have collected a total of Rs 11 crore in fines last month for various Covid-19 violations, including spitting and social distancing violations.

In outer Delhi, police started the awareness drive by welcoming lockdown violators with roses and masks. Parvinder Singh, DCP, Outer District, said police teams sensitised and briefed people about the violations. "Free masks were provided and police also sought public cooperation to fight Covid in the city. Police teams educated them about the protocols that they need to strictly follow," said the DCP.

## PICTALK



Former international powerlifting champion and national-level shooter Gaurav Sharma distributes food among the homeless during Covid-induced lockdown, at Chandni Chowk in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

## ATTEMPT TO ROB A BUSINESSMAN

# Police constable held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested two men, including a Delhi Police constable, while two juveniles have been apprehended in connection with a robbery attempt with a businessman in north Delhi's Wazirabad area.

Police said the accused, Jatin, who is posted as a constable in Timarpur police station, was arrested while his associate, constable Amit posted in Vivek Vihar police station of Shahdara district is absconding in the case.

According to a senior police official, the constable Jatin was arrested following a raid after arrested accused Naresh and the two juveniles disclosed about the involvement of the two policemen in the incident.

"The incident took place on May 12, when the man was returning home on his four-wheeler after closing his shop. He was also carrying Rs. two lakhs with him. On the way, when he reached near Wazirabad area, he was stopped by another four-wheeler. They knocked on his window and subsequently was cornered by persons on a motorcycle and a scooter," said the senior police official.

"Meanwhile, police constable Manish posted at Wazirabad police station who was on his way to duty spotted the victim being cornered by the group. As he approached to check on him, fearing police, the suspects fled the spot on



their respective vehicles leaving a scooter at the spot," said a police official privy to investigation.

"When the victim was asked to give a complaint, he was reluctant but after taking the scooter into his custody, police took suo moto cognisance and registered an FIR in the case and an investigation was undertaken," he said.

"Using the registration number of the seized scooter and technical surveillance, one of the accused identified as Naresh (38) was arrested from Majnu ka Tila and two juveniles were also apprehended in the case. Accused Naresh is previously involved in several cases including that of theft and robbery," he said.

"The accused disclosed names of the two policemen who were also involved in the incident and said the constables were part of the conspiracy and had shared information about the victim with them," said the police official. "The four-wheeler used in the commission of crime belonged to constable Jatin who along with his associate Amit was also present at the spot at the time of incident," police said, adding efforts are being made to nab the co-accused in the case.

# Property dealer killed over financial dispute, 6 held

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A property dealer was allegedly beaten to death by twelve men over a monetary dispute at Sikenderpur Badha village near here, police said on Sunday.

Six people were arrested in connection with the case. Those arrested included the key accused identified as Mukesh Yadav, Pramod and Raj, all residents of Hayatpur village of Gurugram.

The deceased was identified as Hargovind a resident of Sikenderpur Badha village in Gurugram.

Police said the prime accused Mukesh was the brother of gangster Rakesh Hayatpur, who had killed the sarpnach of Hayatpur village in 2011. The deceased's wife Pooja told the police that she, along with her husband Hargovind and his friend Sandeep, were returning from Farukh Nagar area in their car late night on Saturday and when they reached near canal chowk, Sikenderpur Badha village in Sector-86, their car was forcefully stopped by Mukesh, Pramod and Raj at gun point.

They were in their two SUVs, along with 14-15 men, who then stepped out of their cars and started beating her husband with sticks and later



fled the spot after threatening Pooja and Sandeep.

Thereafter, the victims called the police to the spot who took the injured property dealer to a hospital for treatment but he was declared dead on arrival.

"There was some financial and property dispute between my husband and Mukesh. Mukesh had earlier beaten my husband at our home over the matter and had threatened him several times," Pooja said.

A police officer privy with the matter said preliminary investigation revealed that some property and money related disputes led this murder, a few of the accused have been arrested remaining will soon be nabbed and further probe is on.

# Youth cheats relative of black fungus patient, held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested a 28-year-old man for allegedly cheating the relative of a patient who is suffering from black fungus by promising to home deliver the drug required for the treatment at ₹ 3,000 in the national Capital.

The accused identified as Prasant Kumar Sharma hails from Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh and he worked as a part time driver. Police said he was arrested on Saturday after a resident of Shahdara reported the inci-

dent to the police. According to R. Sathiyasundaram, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Shahdara district, a complaint was received in which the complainant alleged that his brother-in-law was admitted at Sir Gangaram Hospital where he was being treated for Black Fungus.

"On Friday, his doctor prescribed him a medicine named Lipsomal Amphotericin-B. Since, the medicine was not available in the market, they contacted a number which was

getting circulated on whatsapp groups for help. When contacted, accused Sharma assured that he would provide them the prescribed medicine and demanded Rs 3000 for the same. After the asked money was transferred on his Paytm account, neither had he provided the required medicine, nor did he return the money," said the DCP.

"A case was registered and during investigation, police team analysed the call detail records of the alleged phone number and scanned through

the online transactions made. With the help of technical surveillance and local intelligence, our team apprehended Prasant Kumar Sharma from Ghaziabad and subsequently arrested him," said the DCP.

"When Sharma was interrogated, he revealed that he did not have any other source of income during this pandemic, so he started cheating people with this modus operandi. He also disclosed that he had earlier posted his contact number on Facebook as well for Plasma donation," said the DCP.

# Indian Army rescues many after volcanic eruption

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Even as the Army is actively engaged in fighting corona pandemic and helping in restoring normalcy in the wake of cyclone Tautake, it also came to the rescue of people and United Nations (UN) personnel in Congo and rescued them from a volcano.

The daring rescue operation took place on Saturday after the volcano at Mount Nyaragongo overlooking Goma town erupted spewing lava, gases and sediments. It took place at about 6.30 pm and the Indian Army contingent under the United Nations peace keeping mission (MONUSCO) assisted in protecting civilians and UN officials.

Giving details here on Sunday, army officials said Mount Nyaragongo erupted resulting in panic within the civilian population. Most of the lava, however, has flowed towards Rwanda and only a small stream is trickling towards Goma, it stated.

While the UN's internal security system calculated that evacuation will not be required and asked various country contingents to be on alert, a major-



ity of the country contingents including aviation contingents evacuated immediately, the Army statement said.

The Indian Brigade headquarters held their ground and thinned out 70% of the strength of the camp and sent them to the Himbi company operating base for safety. A minimum strength continued to hold onto the camp ensuring no threat to the UN and national assets as also providing security to empty aviation base and aviation fuel stored there.

An observation point was also established which is giving real time updates of the lava flow to the Brigade headquarters, enabling them to pass the correct information to UN, the army said.

"Currently, it is ascertained

that the lava flow has considerably slowed down. Lava flow at this stage is unlikely to reach Goma town unless there is fresh eruption through fissures. Intermittent earthquakes of very low intensity are being currently experienced," the Army added.

India is one of the largest troop contributing nation to MONUSCO, which is headquartered in the Eastern town of Goma and bordering Rwanda. The Indian Brigade headquarters is located adjacent to the Goma airport.

Actions by the Indian contingent in the face of imminent danger has facilitated the smooth evacuation and protection of civilians and other UN personnel in Goma, officials added.

# BJP must expose disguise, mischief of Twitter: BJP MP

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

Taking the BJP's confrontation with the Twitter a step further, senior BJP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Vinay Sahasrabudhe on Sunday sought Government to expose the "disguise and mischief" and "examine" whether the microblogging site is a "platform" or acting as a "media house".

Sahasrabudhe, who is also Chairman of Indian Council of Cultural Relation, stressed that the "mischief" played by twitter in a "disguise of a platform" needs to be "exposed", according to sources.

The senior party leader recalled the 2018 Standing Committee on IT which, he said, had deliberated whether microblogging sites are "platforms" or "as media houses".

He said the committee had then party leaders like veteran L K Advani and the present Minister of State, Finance, Anurag Thakur.

"If you are a platform then you just allow views to land on the platform and not be judged like a media house" and otherwise "FDI norms be applicable",

sources quoted him as saying. He has demanded that the government takes action against the social platform after examining their operations in India.

The twitter-BJP faceoff was triggered by the Twitter red-flagging BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra's tweet on the Congress tool-kit as "manipulated media". The confrontation has only intensified with an unfazed Twitter continuing to red-flag few more BJP leaders.

Tweets posted by verified accounts of Sahasrabudhe, BJP (Mahila Morcha) national social media in-charge Priti Gandhi, co-incharge Sunil Deodhar, BJP media panelist Charu Pragna and Delhi BJP general secretary Kuljeet Singh Chahal were tagged as manipulated.

The Modi-Government is still waiting for a formal reply from Twitter for tagging BJP's tweets.

The Government has described the Twitter action as "totally unwarranted", "unilateral", "unfair" and as an attempt to colour the local investigation into the issue.

# Navy warship brings 300 MT oxygen from Singapore, Brunei

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the largest consignment of liquid medical oxygen to India, the Navy's warship INS Jalashwa arrived in Visakhapatnam on Sunday with 300 Metric Tonne (MT) of Oxygen and more than 3,600 oxygen cylinders from Singapore and Brunei under the ongoing 'Operation Samudra Setu II'.

Covid-19 medical equipment brought by this ship also includes ventilators and empty cryogenic containers, the Navy said here. Another ship, INS Trikand also brought 40 MT Liquid Medical Oxygen from Qatar and 100 Oxygen cylinders and arrived at Mumbai.

In first week of May, the Navy, as part of Op Samudra Setu II, had diverted nine warships mission deployed on the high seas to various ports in the region extending from Kuwait in the West to Singapore in the East to pick up emergency medical oxygen and other supplies.

Continuing its efforts towards the ongoing Covid 19 relief operations, the IAF brought in oxygen containers from three different countries

on Saturday, officials said here on Sunday.

An IL-76 airlifted three Cryogenic Oxygen Containers from Bangkok to Hyderabad. IAF C-17s airlifted 4 Cryogenic Oxygen Containers from Frankfurt to Hindan and four from Ostend, Belgium to Panagarh, West Bengal. In addition an IAF C-17 is bringing 2 Oxygen concentrators from Bordeaux to Hindan.

Meanwhile, within India IAF C-17s airlifted 22 Oxygen Tankers from various locations to their refilling stations on Saturday. The IAF has deployed more than 40 aircraft for ferrying medical equipment to different parts of the country and airlifting oxygen from several countries since April 22.

Contributing its bit in the national effort to fight the Corona pandemic in the second wave, the Army has set up 4,851 oxygenated beds in last one month. The earlier strength of these beds was 1,821 beds. Similarly, in the same period the force increased its oxygen storage plants from 24 to 47 besides providing for 93 oxygen concentrators and 1,223 pediatric beds.

Besides assisting the civil

administration in many states in augmenting their capacity of covid-19 treatment facilities, the Army also repaired two civil oxygen plants at Agra, facilitating the resumption of supply of up to 1800 cylinders per day.

Same process took place in Nangal, Punjab where the Oxygen Plant at Nangal Dam was unused since 2011. An Indian Army team serviced the compressor and purifier portion and made the plant functional. Such procedures were repeated at many places all over the country to enhance the oxygen production capability, officials said.

Moreover, 145 BOMs (Bogie Open Military) and 274 MBWTs (Military Bogie Well type) were employed for the transportation of Oxygen. More than 380 oxygen tankers have been transported till date through 99 military special trains.

The Indian Army procured and delivered 100 bull-nose rings to Goa Medical College & Hospital (GMCH) within 24 hours of receiving the request from the hospital. Bull nose fitting is a life saving device used for administering Oxygen to Covid Patients.

# Ramdev's statement on allopathic medicines unfortunate: Vardhan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drawing flak from various quarters, including from his own fraternity, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Sunday called yoga guru Ramdev's statement on allopathic medicines "extremely unfortunate" and asked him to withdraw the remark, saying it disrespects "corona warriors" and can break the morale of healthcare workers.

However, this has not appeased the medical fraternity who have called for stringent action against Ramdev who, they said, has disregarded the allopathy stream.

Dr Harshvardhan in a letter to Ramdev said that "through your statement you not only disrespected corona warriors but also deeply hurt the sentiments of countrymen".

"Your statement on allopathy can break the morale of healthcare workers and weaken our fight against COVID-19," Vardhan said and added that doctors are fighting day and night to save people's lives.

Citing a video circulating on social media, the Indian Medical association on Saturday had said Ramdev has claimed that allopathy is a "stupid science" and medicines

such as remdesivir, faviflu, and other drugs approved by the DCGI have failed to treat Covid-19 patients.

The doctors' body IMA also quoted Ramdev as saying that "lakhs of patients have died after taking allopathic medicines". "You calling allopathy treatment a 'drama, useless and diwaliya' (causing bankruptcy) is unfortunate," it said adding that if today deaths due to COVID-19 is just 1.13 per cent and recovery rate more than 88 per cent, it is because of the contribution of allopathy and its doctors.

Dr Vinay Aggarwal, ex-national president of IMA too had expressed displeasure saying that the negative and unwarranted comments against the allopathy sector of which the Minister was also one of the members were unfortunate. "...remarks of Ramdev have publicly tarnished the image of the allopathic medical professionals. This calls for an explanation and immediate action against Ramdev."

While welcoming the Union Minister's action in the matter, FAIMA President Dr Rakesh Bagdi said that such quacks must be put behind bars for misguiding people and defaming allopathic doctors.

# Yaas likely to intensify into cyclonic storm by Monday

New Delhi: The depression over Bay of Bengal is very likely to move north-northwestwards and intensify into a cyclonic storm by Monday morning and further into a very severe cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours, the India Meteorological Department's National Weather Forecasting Centre said on Sunday.

Sharing latest satellite imageries and ocean buoy observations of cyclone 'Yaas', the IMD said Saturday's low-pressure area which became well marked over east central Bay of Bengal in the same evening has concentrated into a depression over the area.

"It lay centered at 11.30 a.m. on Sunday near latitude 16.1 degree north and longitude 90.2 degree east, about 560 km north-northwest of Port Blair (Andaman Islands), 590 km east-southeast of Paradip (Odisha), 690 km south-southeast of Balasore (Odisha) and 670 km south-southeast of Digha (West Bengal)," the IMD said.

Cyclone 'Yaas' is very likely to move north-northwestwards and intensify into a cyclonic storm by May 24 (Monday) morning and further into a very severe cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours, it said.

"It would continue to move north-north-westwards, intensify further and reach Northwest Bay of Bengal near West Bengal and north Odisha coasts by May 26 morning."

The cyclone is very likely to cross north Odisha-West Bengal between Paradip and Sagar islands by May 26 evening as a very severe cyclonic storm.

Light to moderate rainfall is expected at most places with heavy to very heavy falls at isolated places on Sunday and Monday in Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

In Odisha, light to moderate rainfall is likely to take place at many places with heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places in the north coastal districts on May 25. Heavy to very heavy rains at a few places with extremely heavy falls is likely in Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Mayurbhanj and heavy to very heavy falls at a few places in the districts of north Odisha, namely Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Jajpur and Keonjhar is expected on May 26.

The IMD forecast suggests light to moderate rainfall at most places in West Bengal and Sikkim. Heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely over Medinipur, South and North 24 Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly districts of West Bengal on May 25.

Extremely heavy rainfall is expected at isolated places over Jhargram, Medinipur, North and South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Kolkata and heavy to very heavy rainfall at a few places over Nadia, Bardhaman, Bankura, Purulia, Bhirbhun, Murshidabad, Malda and South Dinajpur districts on May 26. Extremely heavy rain is expected at isolated places in Malda and Darjeeling. Dinajpur, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Sikkim, Bankura, Purulia, Bardhaman, Bhirbhun, and Murshidabad on May 27.

Squally wind speed reaching 45-55 kmph gusting to 65 kmph is likely to prevail over and around Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Andaman Sea and adjoining east central and southeast Bay of Bengal on Sunday, the IMD said.

It is very likely to increase becoming 55-65 kmph gusting to 75 kmph over east central Bay of Bengal and adjoining north Andaman Sea from Sunday night.

It is very likely to increase further becoming gale wind speed reaching 65 to 75 gusting to 85 over major parts of central Bay of Bengal from May 24 forenoon for subsequent 12 hours and would decrease gradually thereafter. IANS

# Armed forces ready to deal with Yaas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With Cyclone Yaas likely to make landfall at the Eastern Coast including Odisha and West Bengal on May 26, Wednesday, the Armed forces have stepped up their preparations by deploying nearly 40 aircraft and eight warships for rescue and relief efforts. Moreover, several teams of divers and 950 personnel of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are already present in Kolkata and Bhubaneswar.

Giving details here on Sunday, officials said the IAF airlifted the NDRF personnel and 70 tonnes of load from Jamnagar, Varanasi, Patna and Arakonnam to Kolkata, Bhubaneswar and Port Blair in 15 Transport Aircraft.

Moreover, 16 transport aircraft and 26 helicopters are on standby for immediate deployment. Indian Navy, fresh from Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) and rescue operations on the Western Coast during Cooled Tautake, has moved 10 HADR pallets to Bhubaneswar and Kolkata, while five HADR pallets are ready at Port Blair.

Eight ships of Eastern Naval

Command and Andaman and Nicobar Command have been embarked with HADR Bricks to provide succour to the people likely to be impacted. Four diving and 10 flood relief columns have been pre-positioned at Kolkata, Bhubaneswar and Chilika for rendering assistance to civil administration at short notice, they said.

Seven flood relief teams and two diving teams are ready at different locations in Andaman and Nicobar Islands to deal with any eventuality. In addition, Naval aircraft and helicopters in Vishakhapatnam and Port Blair are on operational readiness to undertake search and rescue missions. Eight flood relief columns and three Engineer Task Forces of the Indian Army are ready for immediate deployment on requisition by the civil administration.

The Armed Forces are in constant touch with the civil administration of the affected states. Armed Forces teams are aware of the need to keep the road and rail links open to ensure uninterrupted supply of life saving oxygen and drugs required for treatment at COVID-19 hospitals.

# Future Govt should remove plaque on Central Vista: Sibal



IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Coming down heavily on the continuation of Central Vista project, Congress leader Kapil Sibal in a statement on Sunday said, future Government should remove the plaque from the project and should write about the apathy of the Government towards citizens.

Kapil Sibal in a statement on Sunday said, "The Government which comes to power in future must remove the plaque and instead write that this project was built despite the fact that money was needed to save people's lives during the pandemic. It is an act of monumental insensitivity not to voluntarily stop the project."

Sibal said that the government should purchase vaccine and vaccinate every citizen and pool all the resources including the PM CARES fund and use ₹35,000 crore earmarked for vaccination in the budget.

"The real problem that the country is facing these days is absence of adequate vaccines and production facilities," he said.

He asked why there has been limit to companies involved in production of the vaccines and international vaccine manufacturers are excluded. He justified the suggestion made to the Government by the opposition and alleged that the government has not performed at the time of crisis.

Twelve major Opposition parties including four chief ministers had on May 12 wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding that the government should stop the Central Vista project and instead use the money to procure oxygen and vaccines.

The letter said, "We have repeatedly in the past drawn your attention, independently and jointly, to the various measures that are absolutely imperative for the Central Government to undertake and implement. Unfortunately, your government has either ignored or refused all these suggestions. This only compounded the situation to reach such an apocalyptic human tragedy."

The Congress has been attacking the government over mishandling of the pandemic and not heeding to the advice of ex-PM Manmohan Singh, party president Sonia Gandhi and the opposition parties.

The Delhi High Court has reserved its verdict on a plea seeking to halt the construction of Central Vista redevelopment project against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic.

# Diabetes may increase risk of black fungus post Covid: Experts

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Since the early days of the Scoronavirus pandemic, patients with diabetes have been in the spotlight for their increased risk of severe Covid-19 outcomes. Now health experts say diabetes, coupled with Covid, may be the reason for the sudden spike in mucormycosis or 'black fungus' infections in the country.

India is known as the world's diabetes capital. Nearly one in six people with diabetes in the world is from India. Available scientific literature reveals that diabetes damages the pancreatic beta cells and leads to insufficient insulin production, resulting in hyperglycemia -- a condition which causes dysfunction of the immune response. Besides, diabetes medication also suppresses immune responses.

Covid also decreases immunity and the drugs used for its treatment such as steroids and IL-6 inhibitors (tocilizumab) also leads to further immune suppression.

The second wave of Covid has been more lethal in India. The country has also seen more persons with diabetes getting affected by Covid -- almost 76 per cent, Dr V. Ramana Prasad, senior pulmonologist, KIMS hospital Hyderabad, told IANS.

# J&K police on way to blunt negative perception about its anti-terrorist ops

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Jammu and Kashmir police has sought to counter the negative perception of the successful counter-terrorist operations in Jammu and Kashmir last year leading to elimination of a number of terrorists in Srinagar and OGW (over ground workers) network in the Valley.

"While unprecedented work has taken place in terms of a large number of Counter-Terrorist operations in Srinagar, eliminating terrorists and their OGW (Over Ground Workers) network operating in the city during 2020, such acts, however, didn't go well with the public perception on improving security environment for the last over two years. Therefore, the senior officers from Kashmir Zone and the CRPF shall have to put their heads together to counter such trending," reads a recent letter of Jammu and Kashmir police Director General Dilbag Singh to the Special DG CRPF, ADGP (now DGP) CID, J&K Jammu, Joint Director of Intelligence Bureau, Kashmir and IG (Operations), CRPF, Srinagar.

In order to further ramp up the security set in the Valley, the top J&K police official also stressed on the use of technology at some selected spots for

recognition of known terrorists, OGWs/suspects, especially in vulnerable areas in order to check the movement of undesirable elements.

In most of the terror incidents, vehicles have been used by the ultras to reach the target and escape from the scene after the terror acts and a checking plan of vehicles is required on a daily basis in a surprise manner on different routes and on different timings should be included in the plan, according to the top official.

Counter measures like CCTV cameras, vehicle mounted cameras and other surveillance gadgetry like drones and facial recognition systems need to be used in crowded places under surveillance. "Installation of CCTV cameras under the Smart City Project needs to be expedited for which concerned authority may be sensitized and activated," reads the letter.

The DGP also emphasized on the need to generate intelligence by all the field officers especially relating to newly joined terrorists and their OGWs in Srinagar as well as their network outside the city. The terrorists' database should be updated and utilised at checkpoints to identify the ultras and their associates.

# Don't believe in prescriptions available on social media for Covid, say doctors

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Even as recovery rate in India is improving, doctors advise people to take proper care of their body post Covid-19. They also urge that people should not believe on prescriptions available on social media and should consult doctors before taking any medicines as excessive use of medicines is also a concern.

In a conversation with IANS, Dr Ashish Jaiswal, who did fellowship in Pulmonology and Critical Care Disease from the US and Europe, said that if one has tested Covid positive and isolating at home, then they first need to identify their problems, which they call 'Long Covid' or 'Covid Haul Syndrome' as it can last for months.

Jaiswal, who is with Bharadwaj Hospital in Noida, said that the most common symptom in long haulers are chronic fatigue and body pain and the other most common thing is chest involvement.

"We notice that 60 per cent patients are showing these chest involvement and other 40 per cent are asymptomatic. But we see patches in them too. Usually this patch lessens, but in some cases, it might increase after 13-14 days in post Covid storm.

# J&K police set to upgrade security grid

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a spurt in terrorist violence in Srinagar in quick succession earlier this year, the Jammu and Kashmir police chief has raised security concerns on the efficacy of the existing security grid with regard to the non-locals, security forces and politicians.

The top police official has also sought to revisit the counter-terrorist security grid in the Valley and got an approval from the Centre for deployment of 5,000 additional troops of the Central paramilitary forces.

Following the request for additional deployment on the ground, the Union Home Ministry has approved the proposal and 50 companies of Central paramilitary forces have joined duty last week, sources said.

In the backdrop of a number of incidents of terrorist violence happening in Jammu and Kashmir capital Srinagar in quick succession in the first quarter of the ongoing year, the Union Territory police chief has raised security concerns on the efficacy of the existing security grid with regard to the non-locals, security forces and politicians.

In a recent letter, Director General of Police Dilbag Singh directed the Inspectors General of police and CRPF to review the



city deployment and security grid with their Deputy Inspectors General and Superintendents of police in order to have a well-designed deployment plan of a large number of Central paramilitary forces' battalions with a grid comprising Nakas, mobile vehicle check posts (MVCs), city patrolling and manning of major entry and escape routes.

"While unprecedented work has taken place in terms of a large number of Counter-Terrorist operations in Srinagar, eliminating terrorists and their OGW (Over Ground Workers) network operating in the city during 2020, such acts, however, didn't go well with the public perception on improving security environment for the last over two years," reads the letter sent to Special DG CRPF, ADGP (now DGP) CID, J&K Jammu, Joint Director of Intelligence Bureau, Kashmir and IG (Operations), CRPF, Srinagar.

Insiders in the CRPF said

despite the deployment of a large number of the paramilitary personnel in the Valley, it has not taken the lead role in counter-terrorism operations as was the case when the BSF was the designated agency for securing Srinagar and conducting anti-terrorist actions in the Valley. This has led to resurfacing of the terror groups in the city leading to casualties of the security forces personnel, SPOs and political leaders.

"Though, in some cases, Police/SFs response to a terror incident has been appreciable, the terrorists have generally taken advantage of floating movement of the people and vehicles in the city and escaped after an act without getting intercepted in the security grid," it said, adding deployments for more vulnerable areas/persons have to be designed accordingly so as to minimize the threat and maximize the chances of interception of the anti-national elements.

# Eight militants killed in Assam

**Diphu:** Eight Dimas National Liberation Army (DNLA) militants were on Sunday killed in an encounter with security forces in Assam's West Karbi Anglong district, along the Nagaland border, a senior police officer said. Earlier, he had claimed six died in the exchange of fire, as the bodies of two others were yet to be recovered. Acting on a tip-off, a team of police officers and Assam Rifles personnel launched an operation, led by West Karbi Anglong Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Prakash Sonowal. An exchange of fire ensued between the security personnel and the militants in Michibailung area, following

which eight members of the outlawed outfit were gunned down, the officer said. Six bodies were initially recovered, and two others, suspected to be that of the outfit's top leaders, were spotted later in the day during combing operations in the remote region, along the interstate border. Four AK-47 rifles and several rounds of ammunition were found in the possession of the slain militants, the senior officer pointed out. Search operations had been underway in the district since last week after a priest was killed in Daujiphang area, he said, adding that more details are awaited about the encounter. **PTI**

# WB Gov a bloodsucker: TMC MP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee has said that Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar would be given a taste of his own medicine after the end of his term when he would be thrown behind the bar for acting like a "bloodsucker." Making a repulsive remark against the Governor for allegedly "acting on behalf of the BJP by continuously disturbing the State Government" the TMC MP who is also a senior advocate said, "This man is a bloodsucker on the prowl... he has orchestrated the arrest" of senior Bengal Ministers Firdhad Hakim and Subroto Mukherjee and former Ministers Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee. "I know that no legal steps can be taken against him now as he enjoys immunity but still the TMC men should file FIRs against this man in all the police stations of Bengal to be taken up at a future date when he is not in the chair... after his term ends we shall take it up and throw him behind the bar in the same Presidency

Jail where he has sent our senior leaders by acting vindictively," Banerjee also a senior advocate said. "If the phone calls of the Governor, his officials and his other activities are placed under scrutiny then you will find how he has manipulated the arrests of the senior politicians in Bengal and caused them to be sent behind the bar," he said. Soon after the Governor reacted to the TMC MP's statements saying he was "hurt" and "surprised" by the comments made by a "senior functionary," like Banerjee. State BJP president Dilip Ghosh too hit back at the TMC MP saying "a lawyer of his standing should have known a Governor cannot be booked for his acts in office," adding "it is perhaps this ignorance of his that the Trinamool Congress Government could not rely on him and brought in Abhishek Manu Singhvi to fight the case of the ministers." The four leaders were currently placed under house arrest by Calcutta High Court for their alleged involvement in the 5-year-old Narada payoff

case after a two-judge bench failed to concur on whether they should be released on bail or kept in judicial custody. Subsequently acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal ordered them to be kept under house arrest. The case is being investigated by the CBI. The Sunday's attack by the Trinamool MP is seen as the part of the ongoing war between the Raj Bhavan and the Nabanna (State secretariat). With no love lost with Mamata Banerjee Government, the Governor's repeated comments and tweets against the State Government on issues of corruption and falling law and order situation has created multiple flash points. Things reached a situation when the Governor early this month sanctioned a request of prosecution by the CBI following which the central agency arrested the four politicians. Meanwhile the high profile case is likely to be heard on Monday by a larger five-bench comprising Justices Bindal, Harish Tandon, IP Mukherjee, Arijit Banerjee and Soumen Sen.



A zoo-keeper feeds a Roofed Turtle at Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden, on World Turtle Day, in Guwahati on Sunday **PTI**

# P-305 mishap toll at 70 as 4 more bodies found

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Hours after INS Makar—housing specialised diving teams and equipment—located the wreckage of accommodation barge P-305 that sank on last Monday, the Indian Navy on Sunday recovered the bodies of four more persons working on board the affected barge, taking the total number of casualties in the mishap to 70. In a development that came an overnight after the INS Makar—employing expert diving teams and advanced side scan sonar—located the barge P-305 on the seabed, the Navy personnel recovered four more bodies from under the water in the vicinity of Mumbai High fields where the P-305 had sunk on May 17. "Seventy mortal remains have been recovered from under

the sea. Search and Rescue (SAR) operations for remaining others are continuing. There are 188 survivors—186 from P-305 and two from tug Varaprada," Navy's chief spokesperson Commander Mehul Karnik said. "Eight bodies have reportedly been recovered along the coast at Raigad district in Maharashtra and eight more bodies along Gujarat coast near Valsad," Commander Karnik said. "Thus all 274 crew reported missing have been accounted for. Final confirmation will however be pending till the identification of all bodies recovered is completed," the Navy spokesperson added. "Diving on the sunken wreck of Barge P305 has been completed by specialised teams onboard INS Makar and no

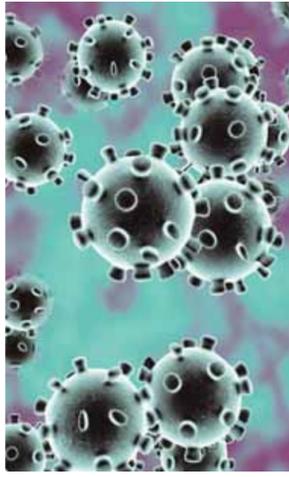
bodies have been found. INS Makar is proceeding to locate the wreck of Tug Varaprada; and diving operations will be conducted tomorrow," Commander Karnik said. "Search and Rescue Operations by ships and helicopters/aircraft will continue in the area to locate the remaining crew of the sunken vessels," the Navy spokesperson added. The Indian Navy deployed INS Makar and INS Tarasa to the BHF, around 175 kms off Mumbai coast to make an underwater search for the wrecks of the two vessels which sank and trace more bodies using expert divers and special equipment. INS Makar is a lead ship of the Makar-class of Catamarans used for hydrographic surveys by IN, producing navigational charts and is capable of collect-

ing marine environmental information by conducting limited oceanographic surveys. INS Tarasa is an IN patrol vessel of the Car Nicobar-class in the series of four Water Jet Fast Attack Craft. Indian Naval ships and aircraft are currently engaged in Search and Rescue (SAR) operations to locate the missing crew members of Accommodation Barge P-305, which sank on Monday, 35 nautical miles off Mumbai coast. Ships INS Kochi, Kolkata, Beas, Betwa, Makar, Tarasa, Teg, P81 maritime surveillance aircraft, Chetak, ALH and Seaking helicopters are involved in the SAR operations, while INS Talwar has also been diverted to provide assistance in relief and rescue operations.

# Covid-19 claims 51 more lives in J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Fifty one more patients succumbed to the coronavirus across Jammu & Kashmir on Sunday while close to 5,000 patients fully recovered and returned home. According to the media bulletin, a total number of 3,308 new positive cases of novel coronavirus (Covid-19), were reported on Sunday. Out of this, 1,121 cases were reported from Jammu division and 2,187 from Kashmir division. Out of 51 deaths, 34 were reported from Jammu Division and 17 from Kashmir Division. The highest number of 15 deaths were reported from GMC, Jammu. According to the media bulletin, "4956 more Covid-19 patients were recovered and discharged from various hospitals including 1883 from Jammu Division and 3073 from Kashmir Division. The total caseload of active positive cases stood at 47,437 on Sunday.



The overall positivity rate of 7.32 percent was recorded on Sunday. Meanwhile, the Lt Governor Manoj Sinha Sunday urged the elected PRI representatives, teachers, ASHAs, Anganwadi, ANM workers and voluntary organizations to play an active role in effective implementation of Covid preventive measures in rural areas. In view of the spread of Coronavirus in rural areas of Jammu & Kashmir, the administration has initiated the setting up of 5-bedded Covid Centre including one Oxygen-supported bed in every panchayat to provide immediate medical attention to the people, observed the Lt Governor. "I urge all DDC & BDC Chairpersons, members; Sarpanchs and Panchs, to extend their support and participation in the establishment and operation of the grass-root level Covid Care facilities in Panchayats, besides spreading awareness among the rural communities", the Lt Governor said.



Artists paint on the road to create awareness on coronavirus during the Covid-induced lockdown in Howrah on Sunday **PTI**

# Credibility of State police under scanner

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

An innocuous and routine order issued by the Special Secretary to the Government of Kerala on May 18, 2021 has snowballed into a controversy and the credibility of the sensitive State Special Branch of the State Police has come under the scanner. The order signed and issued by R Sheela Rani, Special Secretary, Governor of Kerala says, "Sri Sini Dennis Deputy Superintendent of Police, CB, Kottayam and Sri Shereef S, Deputy Superintendent of Police, SSB, Kollam are mutually transferred with immediate effect on administrative convenience and public interest. The above officers shall join the station to which they are posted immediately and shall furnish the Report of Transfer of Charge to Government without fail. The State Police Chief shall furnish the compliance report of this order to the Government within 15 days." The seriousness of this outwardly harmless Government Order could be understood only if the layman gets to know what the SSB and CB stand for. The CB is Crime Branch while the SSB is the State Special Branch, the wing dealing with terrorist organizations, their activities in the State and shadowing of the Ministers of the Government. According to senior police officers, this mutual transfer is not a routine one as it has been made out. "The arrest and

interrogation of Siddique Kappan, the Keralaite who was on his way to Hathras in Uttar Pradesh reportedly to foment trouble in connection with the rape and murder of a young girl opened a floodgate of details linking some cops in Kerala police with extremist elements based in the State," said a senior police officer who did not want his name to be quoted. G K Suresh Babu, author of "The Roots of Communalism", a book that won the Appan Menon memorial Prize, said Kerala police has been infiltrated by many extremist elements. "There was a WhatsApp Group Green Light in the Kerala Police to facilitate communication with extremist elements and the cops. Though it was shut down the group is active in another name," said Suresh Babu. The antecedents of Shereef were established during the interrogation of Kappan and his associates. The transfer was the only option available to the government to save its face. "In normal circumstances, the concerned officer should have been placed under suspension pending inquiry. But in our State, things are different," said a former police chief who too spoke on condition of anonymity. He pointed out the act of another DySP who was asked to probe the charges of religious conversion involving Akhila, the homeopathy student in 2017.

# 2nd year Eng student invents PPE kit for Corona Warriors

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Living literally up to the much-used phrase "necessity is the mother of invention", a second-year student of Mumbai's K J Somaiya College of Engineering has invented Cov-Tech, a compact and frugal innovation—a ventilation system for PPE kits that will provide much-needed relief for Covid-19 frontline workers. Son of Dr Poonam Kaur Adarsh, a doctor who has been treating Covid-19 patients at her Pune-based Adarsh clinic, 19-year-old Nihaal has invented Cov-Tech Ventilation system. The Cov-Tech Ventilation System became a reality, thanks to a ₹10,00,000/- grant for prototype development and product innovation, which Nihaal received from NIDHI's Promoting and Accelerating Young and ASpiring technology entrepreneurs (PRAYAS), of the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. The budding entrepreneur had created a start-up called Watt Technovations, under the umbrella of which the ventilation system was developed. Besides the PRAYAS grant, the startup also received a support of ₹5,00,000, from New Venture Investment Programme, conducted jointly by RIIDL & K J Somaiya Institute of Management. "Cov-Tech Ventilation System is like you are sitting under the fan even while you are inside the PPE suit. It takes



about the difficulty faced by doctors and other health workers like her who have to wear PPE suits and get themselves drenched in sweat. How can I help her and others like her, I thought. Then my subsequent experiments led me to come with the ventilation kit for frontline Covid-19 warriors," Vishaal recalled. The recognition of the problem led him to participate in a design challenge for Covid-related equipment, organized by Technological Business Incubator, Research Innovation Incubation Design Laboratory. The design challenge led Nihaal to work on the first prototype. With guidance from Dr. Ulhas Kharul of National Chemical Laboratory, Pune, Nihaal was able to develop the first model in 20 days. Dr. Ulhas runs a start-up which does research on a membrane to filter air, with the aim of preventing spread of Covid-19.

# Surajpur Collector removed after video shows him slapping man

**Raipur:** The Collector of Chhattisgarh's Surajpur district, Ranbir Sharma, was removed from the post on Sunday after a viral video showed him slapping a man and throwing his mobile phone for alleged Covid-19 norms violation. Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel issued instructions for the removal of the 2012-batch IAS officer from the post. The CM also directed officials to provide a new mobile phone to the man, identified as Aman Mittal (23), as his handset was damaged in the incident that took place on Saturday. There were several other videos of Saturday's drive in which the collector and other officials were purportedly seen making people do sit-ups

for allegedly violating the lockdown norms in Surajpur. In one such video, another official was also seen slapping a man while asking him to do sit-ups at the same site where Sharma had slapped Mittal. The collector along with some policemen had stopped Mittal, who was on his motorcycle, on a road in Surajpur where the coronavirus-induced lockdown is in force. **PTI**

Collector's behaviour unacceptable, against basic tenets of civility: IAS Association **New Delhi:** The IAS Association on Sunday strongly condemned the behaviour of Collector of Surajpur, Chhattisgarh, Ranbir Sharma, whose video of slapping a man for alleged Covid-19 norm violation has surfaced on social media, saying it was against the basic tenets of the service and civility. "Civil servants must have empathy and provide a healing touch to society at all times, more so in these difficult times," it said. Asked about the clip, an official said the man was stopped by the collector and a posse of police in Surajpur district, where a lockdown is in place to combat Covid-19.

# Applicants told to line-up outside GMC Jammu amid pandemic

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The premises of the Government Medical College hospital in Jammu, epicentre of war against Covid-19, was converted into a potential breeding ground for the spread of the deadly virus here on Sunday after hundreds of aspirants converged to deposit their job application forms for the temporary posts being filled to operationalise 500 bedded makeshift Covid hospital with the assistance of Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO). The office of Principal GMC, Jammu had invited applications on May 20 to fill the posts of Pharmacist, Lab technicians and X-ray techni-



cians. May 23 was the last date of submission of offline application forms till 4.30 p.m. In contrast to this the office of GMC, Srinagar had invited online applications to fill these posts in Srinagar. At the peak of the pandemic, the aspirants, hailing from remote areas of Jammu division, not only had to face hardships while commuting from different district headquarters due to strict lockdown but were also forced to stand in a queue for long hours. The GMC authorities had not made any arrangements to ensure social distancing. No volunteers, security personnel were deployed to organise the rush of aspirants. It was free for all. As the

GMC authorities wasted some precious time and started accepting the applications after 11.00 a.m on Sunday the aspirants, converging outside the office, were forced to violate the existing guidelines aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus. Exposing the GMC authorities, some of the aspirants claimed, "we are here to submit applications to fight the Covid 19 pandemic but here it is turning out to be a breeding ground for the spread of virus". No one is following the SOP's here. An aspirant demanding anonymity claimed, "I really don't know why we are still opting for offline modes for recruitment especially during the peak of Pandemic? I don't know why don't people making

decisions fail to anticipate such scenarios". "If the office of GMC Srinagar is accepting online application forms there why are we exposed to such risks that too inside GMC where a large number of patients are undergoing treatment". Raising question marks over the whole exercise another aspirant informed, "we really don't know what they are doing to do with our applications. They are not giving us receipts or any other acknowledgement. How do we know whether they have accepted our application and what proof do we have with us that we had submitted our applications and the same was received by them in the office of GMC, Principal.



View of the historic Taj Mahal obscured by a blanket of dust and haze in Agra on Sunday **PTI**



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Hasty decision?

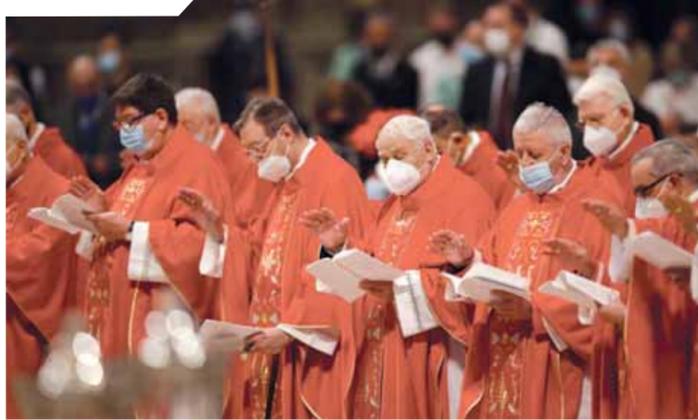
Our vaccination drive is sputtering, and now there are doubts over the time gap between the doses

Should the Indian Government reconsider its May 13 decision to increase the gap between Covishield doses to 12-16 weeks? The Government has accepted the recommendation of the technical group to extend the gap from six-eight weeks after reports that the second dose after a longer gap can develop stronger immunity. NITI Aayog member VK Paul said the efficacy of even a single dose was not a problem. A month earlier, Adar Poonawalla of the Serum Institute of India had said the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine was 90 per cent effective when the gap was three months. The Indian Government got a shot in the arm when scientist Andrew Pollard, who co-developed the AstraZeneca vaccine with Sarah Gilbert at the Oxford University, said that a three-month interval produces "very good" protection; this gets even better with a longer interval from three to four months. However, within days of India extending the gap, the UK Government, which was earlier following a three-month gap, reduced it to eight weeks. This was done because of concerns that an extended first dose may not be of help against the notorious B.1.617 variant that was first discovered in India. *The Financial Times* reported using the latest UK data that a single dose "offered 33 per cent protection against symptomatic infection from B.1.617.2 and 51 per cent against B.1.1.7". These

are the mutants of B.1.617. Both doses together reduced this gap in protection to six percentage points, giving 81 per cent protection against B.1.617.2 and 87 per cent against B.1.1.7.

The Cornell University's Weill Cornell Medicine community said the UK Government's decision to delay the second dose was controversial and risky and the Indian policy needs "reconsidering". A virologist of the centre said a single dose does not give enough protection against B.1.617. India is in an unenviable situation as on date. The vaccination for 18+ has either stopped or is at a snail's pace. There is vaccine shortage in the country since the last week of April. From a total of 2.47 crore vaccinations in the week of April 3-9, it has come down to 92.1 lakh during May 15-21. Of the 19.33 crore people who received vaccination till May 22, only 4.13 crore received both doses. Delhi, for instance, has halted vaccination in the 18-44 age group centres, claiming shortage. Against a demand of 80 lakh doses a month, it got only one-fifth, or 16 lakh doses, in May. Full relief is not available till July end when the SII would have reached ramped up production capacity. And yet, the Government is confident of vaccinating all adults by this year's end as 16 crore doses would become available in July and 25 crore in October. Where does this confidence emanate from? It may be too soon to say if the delayed dose policy is a definite risk, but there are no second thoughts on the need for scaling up vaccination.

### PICTALK



Cardinals pray as Pope Francis celebrates a Pentecost Mass inside St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican

AP

## Corona's cost

Inconvenience, rising prices, job and revenue losses are the byproducts of the continuing lockdown

For more than a year now, the Corona pandemic has been playing havoc with people's lives and livelihood. Hundreds of thousands of people have died within the year, and many have been rendered homeless. The pernicious virus has not only impacted individuals, but also businesses and normal life. The lockdown, which has been seen as an effective tool in the fight against the virus, is now showing side effects. It has brought the nation's economy to almost its knees. Many industries, like aviation and tourism that provided a huge number of jobs, have been maimed.

The indicators suggest that the economy of the country is going through a grim phase and the lockdown is partially responsible for it. The biggest effect of the lockdown has been psychological as many people have postponed their business decisions or curtailed their operations, leading to more job losses and weaker purchasing power in the hands of the people. On the one hand, people have lost jobs and their source of livelihood; on the other, the prices of essential commodities are on the rise. This comes as a double whammy for the people.

For instance, mustard oil that sold for around ₹120/litre is now selling at ₹180/litre. Arhar dal, which sold around ₹90 in March last year, is selling for around ₹110 a kg. Since several expenses, like the home rent, cannot be curtailed, the daily earners are leaving for their villages and hometowns. This has led to the migration of the workforce in large numbers, having repercussions for various industries. The pandemic, let's face it, is here to stay. We know that it will not go anywhere, anytime soon. As we approach the end of the second wave, a third wave is staring us in the face; experts say in October, probably. So the businesses in the revival mode will face another jolt then. It is not clear how much has the lockdown helped in containing the disease. In Delhi, the number of cases rose and fell with the rest of the country despite the lockdown. However, the Government doesn't seem keen on lifting the lockdown. People are already questioning the rationale for going ahead with the lockdown in Delhi when the positivity rate is 3.5 and the total deaths recorded have come down to less than 2,500 a day. It is not only inconvenient to the people but also a great revenue loss for the country.

# The genesis of the Israel-Hamas scuffle

The various sides claiming to be the rightful owners of the land of Palestine, or Judea, have their sharp arguments at the ready



PRAFULL GORADIA

Who has the superior or right over Palestine or, say, Judea? Hamas *per se* is an authorised organisation but it does represent the Arab point of view. Just as the Israeli forces are acting on behalf of virtually Jewish sentiment the world over. Who provoked the current clash and why or how, is a matter of detail. If only one side were to get the whole of Palestine, which side has a more valid right to the ownership of that land?

I had an opportunity to discuss this fundamental issue with a few educated Jews as well as Arabs and, believe it or not, also with an Israeli Christian couple when we were visiting Jerusalem a few years ago. The Arab viewpoint was that we have lived in Palestine for centuries and the fewer Jews who were here were treated well by us. There was no tension, no rioting and no fighting. Even when we saw shiploads of Jews arriving in the late 19th century and early years of the 20th, we did not resist. We might not have welcomed them warmly but we took them as people of the Book or *ahl al-kitab*. They call our first prophet Abraham, we call him Ibrahim; their biggest prophet was Moses, whom we call Musa and respect him. So we were cordial.

It was the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which gave us Arabs a jolt. Britain then was a big imperial power and Prime Minister Lloyd George had blessed the declaration which promised the Jews a homeland, by implication, in the Holy Land. As the 20th century progressed, more shiploads of Jews started coming in. That is when the tensions started between us and the Jews. In due course, we came to know that they were also importing arms and ammunition. That left us no choice but to get military help from the neighbouring Arab countries. After all, Palestine belonged to the Arabs who had been in a majority for centuries; it is our homeland.



Where else could we go and resettle, and why should we? Remember our Prophet, riding Barukh the horse, ascended to Heaven to meet Allah the Merciful from Jerusalem and returned at the same place in two days. That also makes the city one of our holiest ones. Until a few decades ago, our *namaz* used to be read facing Jerusalem. Only recently the *mehrab*s in the *masjids* point to Mecca. Above all, the whole of Palestine is ours legally by adverse possession for centuries.

Quite accidentally, soon after listening to these Arab gentlemen, I bumped into a Christian couple at the hotel who claimed that their family always belonged to Palestine and, since 1948, the parents became Israelis. They said they were happy in Jerusalem which should belong to Christians, if at all, not to Muslims just because of the Al Aqsa Mosque which celebrates Prophet Muhammad's journey to Heaven and back. On the other hand, Jesus, the son of God, was born at Bethlehem, a few miles from Jerusalem. The Lord spent his life around here,



IT WAS THE BALFOUR DECLARATION OF 1917 WHICH GAVE THE ARABS A JOLT. BRITAIN THEN WAS A BIG IMPERIAL POWER AND PRIME MINISTER LLOYD GEORGE HAD BLESSED THE DECLARATION WHICH PROMISED THE JEWS A HOMELAND, BY IMPLICATION, IN THE HOLY LAND

preached in Judea, was betrayed and crucified on Calvary Hill. The lady was more articulate and she pleaded fluently. She asked me: "So, you judge, is it an Arab area by right or more Christian? The Jews are nice to us Christians here."

The several Jews I got to talk to on the subject were clear that they had the first right to Judea. They belonged here before they went to Egypt for employment but, unfortunately, the Pharaoh trapped and enslaved us. When Prophet Moses after long years liberated us, he brought us back to Judea. He was a great soul and wrote the five books of the *Torah*. In fact, there were no Islam in this world until 14 centuries ago where-as the Jewish right to this land is thousands of years old. Jerusalem was founded by us, we believe. Our temple on the mount was built by our ancient kings but demolished by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. We rebuilt it and it was destroyed by another invader. Now only the mount is there on whose Wailing Wall local as well as visiting Jews pray, often

break down and weep.

Please remember that we have no other country that we can call our homeland and go to. We have had to roam all over the world like gypsies since we had no place of our own. Muslims have nearly 57 countries; they have no problem, why harass us with bombs and missiles from time to time? At present, it is the Hezbollah; tomorrow it could be the Hamas and the day after another group. Palestine should have been reserved for us Israelis. That would have averted so much of our suffering, anti-Semitism, pogroms and all that. It has been nice of us to let others stay in Israel and be happy. Half of Palestine is still theirs. "What more, sir?" one of them asked.

When I raised the issue of adverse possession they have enjoyed in Palestine for centuries, the answer was ready and reflex. You mean that because I stole your grandfather's watch 30 years ago, it is legitimately mine now? You have no right over it? How would you feel?

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### WITHER THE CONGRESS PARTY?

Sir — Today, the Congress is a party without any active cadres and is saddled with a lifeless leadership. Unless the Gandhis vacate their position at the top, fresh blood and ideas won't flow into the party and it won't be seen as a serious player in national politics.

Can its soul-searching begin now, at least? For the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi, the recent election results are a grim reminder that they have no viable politics going for them at the moment. Rahul has to rethink his freelancing, footloose politics and the recent verdicts are no indication that a national-level alternative is in the making.

The Congress would do well to try and lead the formation of like-minded Opposition parties. It should also take care of the rumblings in its Punjab unit and revive the practice of annual organisational sessions, inviting mass leaders from across the country, to be able to hope to reach the grassroots. It is evident that Sonia will not have anyone other than Rahul as the party's president but he does not want to take the chair. The party must enlarge its footprint by bringing in new ideas, new talent and, most importantly, greater national participation by way of bigger crowds and campaigns to change the public perception about it.

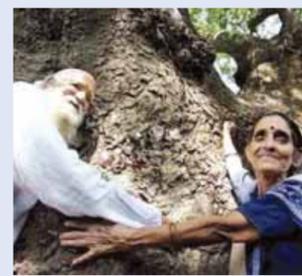
Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

### AN EXERCISE IN FUTILITY

Sir — The verbal duel between West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the BJP at the Prime Minister's COVID meeting in the midst of the ongoing health emergency clearly reveals the existence of trust deficit between the Centre and the Opposition parties. In fact, having shown disdain for every meeting called by the Prime Minister, Mamata's contention now that he deliberately bypassed protocol to insult the Chief Ministers at the meeting appears far-fetched.

Mamata's intervention and not allowing a district magistrate of her State to air his views on the best practices adopted in the latter's district to contain the pandemic once again revealed her disruptionist agenda, besides her intent to pin down the Prime Minister. In short, a meeting — called to focus

## Sunderlal Bahuguna, a visionary



With the passing away of well known environmentalist and Gandhian Sunderlal Bahuguna, also known as Vrikshmitra across the world, the country has lost a true son of the soil. He was one of the pioneers of the Chipko Movement, a tree-embracing campaign in the 1970s, to save trees in the Himalayan region.

In fact, his never-say-die attitude, extraordinary ability to communicate as a journalist, social activist and following the tenets of "simple living and high thinking" raised his stature to an iconic figure. He was against the

people's sufferings due to the brutal spread of Coronavirus and to work in partnership for providing succour to them — ending on a sour note is disturbing.

All in all, it appears to be a wasteful exercise where Mamata threw tantrums and turned her ire on the Prime Minister, revealing clearly that her interaction was only meant to settle political scores rather than working with the real intention of meeting the challenges currently being faced by our nation.

KR Srinivasann | Secunderabad

### WE MUST FULFIL OUR DUTY, TOO

Sir — The Bengali proverb, "*Nere beltola ekbar-e jaye* (A scalded dog fears even cold water)", is applicable as the Narendra Modi Government has promptly directed all the States to notify the cases of black fungus or

construction of big dams, like the Tehri dam, and sat on two long hunger strikes. His 4,800-km Kashmir to Kohima foot march in 1981-82 was an awareness drive to save the Himalayas from deforestation.

His life was devoted to the protection and conservation of forests in the foothills of the Garhwal Himalayas. By mobilising the region's womenfolk who embraced trees in order to protect and preserve them from the onslaught of commercialisation in the then Chamoli district of UP, he and the other activists brought about a transformation in the people's attitude towards their immediate environment and, in no time, spread to other States. It was only due to his valiant efforts that the cutting of trees was banned in 1981 by the then Government.

In recognition of his efforts, he was conferred with the Jannalal Bajaj Award in 1986 and the Padma Vibhushan in 2009. His immortal words, that "soil, water and air, the gifts of forests, are the foundation of life", sum up the selfless path of harmonious living with nature and its protection that he chose in order to make the planet a better place to live in.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

mucomycosis under the Epidemic Act. The SARS-CoV-2 virus has given birth to several new diseases; among them the rapidly spreading infection post-COVID recoveries is black fungus. If not treated in time, the infection can turn fatal.

Shockingly, amid the rising cases of black fungus infection, four cases of white fungus infection have been reported from Patna. The latter is considered more dangerous than black fungus as it affects lungs as well as other parts of the body. To beat these fungi, check the local advice where you live and work. Don't forget that it's our duty to save ourselves from these killer diseases.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## SOUND BITE

The Government is committed to making the State drug-free by adopting a multi-pronged strategy.

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister — Jai Ram Thakur

Pakistan desires normal relations with India; however, the onus is on India to create an atmosphere to enable meaningful engagement.

Pakistan Foreign Minister — Shah Mahmood Qureshi

I've learnt so much living in India, and I feel blessed about it. The struggles have truly been worth it.

Actor — Elli AvrRam

For me, Ravindra Jadeja will be the X-factor (in the WTC final). He's been in terrific form in the Indian Premier League.

Former England captain — Monty Panesar

While choosing a project, I make it a point to choose stuff that will blow me and not let me sleep a couple of days before we shoot, and this is bang on.

Actor — Sunil Grover



## FIRST COLUMN

### SEEKING DIRECTION IN RUSHING WATERS

Many protocols in these testing times are at different stages of evolution



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

COVID times will someday get chronicled. The coverage will have a special place in history. The experience will add to human endeavour to be healthy. The responses to the virus have been diverse in different parts of the globe. Solutions in the field to meet the situation have somethings in common, but much in diversity. Understandable because of the changing variables in different countries in terms of sophistication of technology, application of science and how exhaustive planning is. And then there is the pharmaceutical sector, evolving from drug producer to vaccine creator, its profit motive never completely written off.



There are many protocols for response to COVID circulating the world. From the World Health Organisation to the designated bodies nation states they all have some kind of a protocol they have adopted. In India, the protocol which has the highest authority is that of the Indian Council of Medical Research. Instead of comparing protocols, it is purposeful to realise that each one is a sincere effort to find a solution in terms of the empirical evidence available to that given agency. It also depends on research competency.

Possibly, several of these respected protocols are among themselves at different stages of evolution. Illustratively, in one research environment an elevated D-Dimer, (a sign of thrombosis), is taken as something which has to be responded to with anti-coagulants of different types, compositions and potency. In another environment, research points out the abundant use of ambulation, plenty of fluid intake and letting nature take its course. In certain other environments, response to Covid requires quick use of steroids. The pros and cons of these approaches cannot and need not be analysed here. More to the point, it is this lack of uniformity which can and does cause a problem in the range of responses.

Add to it the fact of bulging numbers and how there are simply not enough qualified doctors. Apart from the sheer numbers of patients, it is also because physical examination has become a rarity and teleconsultation has become the norm. It ultimately boils down to chance as to what kind of doctor one has access to. It is these issues that will ultimately determine the effectiveness of the response to the disease.

Each patient is unique and whereas standard protocols do go a distance they do not necessarily enable an organic progression that can fully respond to a patient's need. When this is coupled with less than total reliability of the screening tests of the disease, the level of confidence the line of treatment evokes becomes ambiguous. Under the circumstances, there needs to be a far greater accessibility of medical solutions so that the patient has an intelligent choice of what works for him or her.

One can make out some of the complexities of and shortcomings in our Covid responses. Singapore, Taiwan and now in the United States of America have succeeded in overcoming the problems. So much so that in parts of the US they are considering stopping usage of masks, media reports say. The point is a simple: one has to collectively create a climate of evidence-based protocols making allowances for individual characteristics of body system. There is no crash course to achieve this target. What can be done is strengthen a policy framework for enabling it. It will take time. The journey must begin somewhere.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal.)

# The challenge is the missing compassion

There were no lessons learnt from the first wave of the pandemic. Now, though we remain united in grief, the hollowness of several institutions stands exposed



MANOJ KUMAR JHA

The last eight to 10 weeks have shaken the very foundation of how we perceived and deconstructed the 'idea of India.' For all our commitment to inclusive development and 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas,' hopelessness and despair are writ large - irrespective of our class hierarchies. From the power elite in the metropolitan centres to ordinary citizens in the peripheries, suddenly we have been caught unawares; however united in grief. But this united-in-grief moment has exposed us to the hollowness of the institutions we thought were robust.

While the first wave of Covid-19 last year brought out the vulnerabilities of the working-class population, particularly the labourers and migrant workers, these second waves transcended these class hierarchies and barricades and engulfed the entire nation. Visuals of people helplessly running for ICU beds, oxygen cylinders, and external institutional support shall remain etched in our collective memory forever. The spin doctors of the establishment have been playing around with data, numbers, statistics. Still, the nation's 'collective conscience' does not always accept manipulation from a regime or its para-troopers. An alternate discourse is being woven around empty catchphrases of 'inculcating positivity,' especially when a large part of the nation grieves in want of some recognition and assurance, let alone timely assistance.

Sadly, the establishment has repeatedly failed to take cognizance of how the nation and its people are evolved enough to deconstruct the 'subjectivity' behind the objectivity of data. Those in power must remember the deaths and cases are no longer distant or remote. The nation, her people - the most important actors in a democracy can now see, witness, and perceive the casualties up-close - not in a detached or a clinical manner, which the dispensation would like us to interpret as. Most regrettably, it will be a travesty of truth to club Covid-19 deaths and deathstake place as a result of scarcity of healthcare services and delayed treatments. An overwhelmingly high number is reported to have said goodbye to their near and dear ones on account of abysmal health infrastructure. Covid-19 first hit us in 2020. For a country that has a 90 percent-plus workforce employed in the informal sector, a country whose mainstay is agriculture; having not considered warning signals hinting at a poor emergency health care system, inadequate rural capacities, limited oxygen infrastructure, and grave implications of Covid-19 on villages and the urban poor - such absolute lack of preparedness cannot ever be forgotten or forgiven.

Amateur democracy can withstand the gravest of challenges because people, as active participants in democratic processes feel they have a stake in it. However, substantive participation of people is only possible when democracy is perceived to be an entity that does not expire right after the counting days of elections. For very long, we have been taking pride in overstating 'we are the largest democracy' without paying any heed to what constitutes the distinction between 'the largest' and 'the greatest.' These two superlatives mean different things, and the disruption caused during the pandemic has told us in unambiguous terms that we have not only failed the people that make our democracy but have shaken the very foundations of our collective consciousness and all that constitutes our social



WE MUST REMEMBER THAT COUNTING OUT, NEGATING AND VILIFYING THE OPPOSITION DENTS A NATION'S IMAGE AS A DEMOCRACY. THERE ARE INSTANCES GALORE WHEN POLICYMAKING AND LEGISLATING ARE BEING DONE WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST PRETENCE OF DELIBERATION. AS A RESULT, THE JUDICIARY HAS HAD TO INTERVENE TO ENSURE THAT THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS PROPERLY AND SAVES LIVES

The author is Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), represents the Rashtriya Janata Dal. The views expressed are personal.



capital, elements like trust, faith, empathy, and confidence.

One can never overlook that while the pandemic was ravaging different parts of India, supposedly the world's largest political party, was keen on proving its political prowess. Words of caution from diverse sections of the civil society and the opposition were not only ignored but ridiculed. Suggestions or ideas for course correction offered by anybody, whether a former Prime Minister or any political leader, were either ignored or passed off as some 'tool-kit.' Regrettably, they do not wish to change their priorities even amid a pandemic costing us socially, economically, and psychologically. Voices of opposition or dissent within or outside the parliamentary structure are denigrated. Limited attempts at consensus-building are seen - efforts that would have been more inclusive, collaborative, and participatory for the regime that takes pride in introducing concepts of 'cooperative federalism.' And it must show in action that there is a distinction between dialogue and monologue. Communication is meaning-

less if there is no feedback mechanism between the transmitter and the receiver. Least of all the prime minister and his team can do is to develop the art of listening.

We must remember that counting out, negating, and vilifying the opposition dents a nation's image as a democracy. There are instances galore when policy-making and legislating are being done without the slightest pretence of deliberation. As a result, the judiciary has had to intervene to ensure the basic executive functions properly and saves lives. The critical observations made by different High courts shall remain a living testimony to these impossibly difficult times when personal grief transcended into a state of collective despair reeking of abandon, neglect, and apathy.

The people of this country desperately sought their elected government at the centre to acknowledge what should have been done but could not be done. People also needed to see a genuine sense of regret and remorse so they could have found some consolation, empathic resonance, and a sense of ownership

- essential to physical, emotional, and mental healing. Simply put in the context of these haunting images of the destruction caused by the second wave what people from the hinterland to the big cities need to listen to from the government is -- We are sorry!!

In times of unprecedented collective grief, healing demands much more than premeditated wet eyes from the top. It demands an immediate course correction at every level. It requires assessing the huge gaps in the public health infrastructure and work on addressing them at a war footing. All ambitious projects including the central vista be put on hold and all the resources be diverted to protect life and save livelihoods. Failing which the grief can turn into anger at a level where it shall be impossible for the regime to contain or deal with. It is amusing to see the audacity of some people who keep repeating - yes! The situation is not good but what is the alternative? Who is the alternative? To all of them a piece of unsolicited advice - When people become an alternative the question is over.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

A HIGH-LEVEL VIRTUAL MEETING IS BEING CONVENED WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO DISCUSS THE PROPOSALS FOR THE CONDUCT OF EXAMS FOR CLASS 12. — UNION MINISTER RAMESH POKHRIYAL 'NISHANK'



I FAIL TO UNDERSTAND THE REASONING BEHIND HOLDING THESE EXAMS, NOT TO MENTION HAVING STRETCHED THIS DECISION OUT FOR MONTHS. — CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY PRIYANKA GANDHI

# Leprosy must not be forgotten amid the pandemic

Today, we can see parallels in discrimination and hostility between the COVID-19 patients and those affected by leprosy

The 74th World Health Assembly (WHA) takes place from May 24 to June 1. This year's gathering is likely to be dominated by COVID-19, but here I want to talk about a different disease - leprosy - and a resolution that was adopted at the WHA exactly 30 years ago.



YOHEI SASAKAWA

This resolution called for the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem at the global level by the year 2000, with elimination defined as a prevalence rate of less than 1 case per 10,000 population. It was a landmark resolution for the time.

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is a chronic infectious disease caused by the bacillus Mycobacterium leprae. It mainly affects the skin and peripheral nerves and is said to be one of the oldest diseases in human history.

The author is WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, Japanese Government Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of Persons Affected by Leprosy, Chairman, The Nippon Foundation. The views expressed are personal.

Today an effective treatment exists in the form of multidrug therapy (MDT) and with early detection and treatment, the disease is completely curable. But if treatment is delayed, leprosy can cause impairments to the skin, nerves, face, hands and feet, and lead to permanent disability. Together with deep-seated fears and misperceptions about the disease, this has subjected persons affected by leprosy as well as their family members to severe discrimination, which continues to this day.

Sadly, amid the coronavirus pandemic, we can see parallels between the discrimination and hostility toward COVID-19 patients, their families and health personnel that has been reported in different parts of the world and society's attitudes toward leprosy.



Following the 1991 WHA resolution, elimination of leprosy as a public health problem was successfully achieved at the global level by the end of 2000, and almost all countries, including India, have replicated that success at the national level.

Unfortunately, this does not mean that leprosy has disappeared. Each year, around 200,000 new cases of leprosy are reported to the WHO, with India accounting for more than half of these. There are still endemic areas

and scattered hot spots of leprosy in many countries and some three-four million people are living with visible impairments or deformities due to leprosy. Meanwhile, the persistence of stigma and discrimination can inhibit people from seeking treatment.

Since becoming WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination in 2001, I have visited some 120 countries and observed the situation on the ground for myself. This has led me to think of leprosy in terms of a motor-cycle: the front wheel symbolizes curing the disease, and the back wheel represents eliminating discrimination. Unless both wheels are turning together, we will not reach our ultimate goal of zero leprosy.

As regards the front wheel, the WHO recently

published its new Global Leprosy Strategy 2021-2030, which includes the ambitious targets of zero leprosy patients in 120 countries and a 70 percent decrease in new cases detected globally by 2030. In order to achieve these targets, there will need to be commitments and financial support from governments; this is not something the WHO can achieve on its own.

Concerning the rear wheel, I have worked hard to have leprosy recognized internationally as a human rights issue since the early 2000s when I first approached the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. One result has been the resolution on elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members, adopted by the

UN General Assembly in 2010. But the real measure of success will be when principles and guidelines accompanying the resolution are fully implemented. This must include abolishing or amending laws that discriminate on the grounds of leprosy, of which there are around 100 in India.

Over the past half-century, in India, the government is working diligently to combat the disease, and in the private sector, NGOs such as the Sasakawa-India Leprosy Foundation and the Association of People Affected by Leprosy (APAL) have an important role to play. But challenges remain. Especially now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that we do not lose sight of leprosy and continue to build on the progress made.

# Nepal tightens security as Opp prepares to move court

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Authorities in Nepal on Sunday tightened security around the Supreme Court building and Government offices here as top leaders of the Opposition alliance prepared to file a writ petition at the apex court against the "unconstitutional" dissolution of the House of Representatives by the President, according to a media report.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House of Representatives on Saturday for the second time in five months and announced snap elections in November on the advice of Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli, heading a minority Government.

She rejected the bids of both embattled Prime Minister Oli and the Opposition alliance's claims to form a Government.

Oli and Opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba had staked separate claims to the premiership.

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

As leaders of the Opposition alliance prepared to move the court, security forces have increased vigilance around the Singhadurbar-Supreme Court area, The Himalayan Times reported.

The security has been tightened in a bid to avert crowding and protests, a Nepali Police official stated.

Police have made a few arrests on Sunday as political groups have taken to the streets to protest the government's move.

Nepali Congress, Maoist Centre, Upendra Yadav-led faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal and the Rastriya Janamorcha leaders were gathering signatures of their lawmakers before filing the writ.

On the other hand, leaders from Madhav Nepal, Jhlanath Khanal-led faction of ruling CPN-UML are expected to submit their signatures too.

The Opposition alliance on Saturday convened a meeting to discuss their strategies forward and decided to unitedly fight the unconstitutional, regressive, autocratic move of the government by every political and legal means possible.

In a joint statement issued at the end of their meeting, the Opposition leaders said the President did not follow her constitutional responsibility of appointing a new prime minister based on the constitutional claim as per Article 76 (5) of the constitution with signatures of majority lawmakers.

"Instead she sided with Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli with mala fide intentions and dissolved Parliament in an attack on the Constitution and democracy. This regressive move has pushed the country

towards new political polarisation and complexity," they said in a joint statement.

The statement was signed by Nepali Congress President Deuba, CPN-Maoist Centre Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', CPN-UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal, Chairperson of Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal Upendra Yadav and Vice-Chair of the Rastriya Janamorcha Durga Paudel.

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

The Supreme Court had annulled the duo's move in February. Nepal's political crisis took a dramatic turn on Friday as embattled Prime Minister Oli and the Opposition parties staked separate claims for the formation of a new government by submitting letters of support from lawmakers to the president.

Oli claimed the support of 121 lawmakers from his party CPN-UML and 32 lawmakers of Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N) for his reappointment under Article 76(5) of the Constitution.

Nepali Congress President Deuba claimed to have garnered the support of 149 lawmakers.

However, a dispute

emerged after a few lawmakers from the Madhav Nepal faction put out statements claiming that their signatures were misused and that they did not sign any paper to install Opposition leader Deuba as the prime minister against their party chief.

Earlier on Thursday, the president's office stated that the government had forwarded a request to invoke Article 76 (5) as Prime Minister Oli, it has been learnt, is in no mood to undergo another parliamentary floor test as there is no prospect of an otherwise result given the complex internal dynamics within parties represented in the federal parliament.

Meanwhile, Oli's CPN-UML party has initiated the process to take action against 11 lawmakers of the dissolved parliament on charges of supporting the Opposition party leader to oust the premier.

A Standing Committee meeting of the party held on Saturday decided to seek clarification from 11 lawmakers, including senior leader Madhav Kumar Nepal. They were asked to furnish clarification by Monday morning.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 last year after President Bhandari dissolved the House and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10 at the recommendation of Prime Minister Oli, amidst a tussle for power within the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

# EC tells PM Oli to conduct Nov snap polls in single phase

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's Election Commission has advised the Government led by embattled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli to conduct the mid-term elections, slated for November 12 and 19, in a single phase to prevent the further spread of coronavirus infections during electioneering.

After a meeting with Prime Minister K P Oli on Saturday, Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Kumar Thapaliya said it is Election Commission's constitutional duty to successfully conduct polls once the date has been announced.

"We have abundant time for preparation and have suggested to the Government to conduct the election in a single phase," Thapaliya was quoted as saying in a report in My Republica.

In the meeting, the representatives of the Election Commission also suggested to the government to create a favorable political environment for elections, maintain peace and security, and prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections among others, it said.

Nepal's President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House of Representatives on Saturday for the second time in five months and announced snap elections on November 12 and November 19 on the recommendation of prime minister Oli.

Oli suggested that the Election Commission officials set up preparations for elections by devising a proper strategy based on its past election-management experience in view of the coronavirus pandemic.

"On the one hand, COVID pandemic is raging, and on the other, the election should be carried out within six months. There is no situation for deferring the election due to the pandemic. Amid the pandemic too, various countries including India, the US, the UK, and Brazil have successfully completed elections," Oli said.

Nepal on Sunday reported 8,980 new coronavirus cases, taking the national tally to over 505,643 while the death toll stands at 6,153, according to the health ministry.

# Severe weather kills 21 cross-country runners in China

PTI ■ BEIJING

Twenty-one ultra-marathon runners were killed in northwest China after high winds and freezing rain struck a 100-kilometre mountain race at the weekend.

Extreme weather hit participants in the race on Saturday in the Yellow River Stone Forest, a tourist site in Gansu province, the State-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Twenty-one people were killed in the tragedy, officials said on Sunday.

A total of 172 people participated in the mountain marathon.

The rescue work, which lasted almost 24 hours, was completed on Sunday and the remains of all 21 victims had been transferred from the site of the incident, the rescue headquarters said.

Over 1,200 well-equipped rescuers took part in the operation.

Another 151 participants were confirmed safe, of whom eight with minor injuries were treated in hospital and were in stable condition, the Xinhua report said.

The public safety incident was caused by a sudden change in local weather. The provincial authorities have set up an

investigation team to look further into the cause of the incident, Zhang Xuchen, mayor of Baiyin City told the media.

"As the organiser of the event, we feel a deep sense of guilt and remorse. We express our deep condolences and sympathies to the bereaved families and the victims," Zhang said.

According to the rescue headquarters, at about 1 pm on Saturday, hail, freezing rain and gales hit the area of the race's high-altitude stage, between 20 km and 31 km. Participants suffered from physical discomfort due to the sudden drop in air temperature.

The race was halted when some participants went missing.

"At 1 pm on Saturday, the wind got stronger. It was hard to stand up straight and move forward. When the wind was the strongest, I had to grasp the ground with both my hands to avoid being blown over," Xinhua quoted one survivor, who declined to be named, as saying.

"I felt nothing but cold at the time," said the survivor.

"I just ran about 30 km and quit the race ahead of the third checkpoint. I faintly halfway down the mountain."

# Pak FM calls for UN's decisive role in resolving Kashmir dispute

Islamabad: Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has called on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to take decisive measures and ensure implementation of the UN Charter and the UN Security Council Resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir and play a key role in resolving the longstanding dispute.

"Pakistan desires normal relations with India, however, the onus is on India to create an atmosphere to enable meaningful engagement," the Minister said during his interaction with the Guterres in New York.

Qureshi also renewed his invitation to India for a dialogue and said that the only solution to the Kashmir dispute is through talks, based on the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

"India is running away from table talks with Pakistan on Kashmir," he said.

Qureshi briefed Guterres about what he called serious human rights violations in the

"Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir", including incarceration of political leaders and extra-judicial killings.

The Foreign Minister also brushed aside the criticism on Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, by the opposition political parties, for selling of the Kashmir cause, stating that the premier can never compromise on the Kashmir cause as he is the "Ambassador of the Kashmir cause and is the voice of the people of Kashmiris to the world".

"Let this be clear, Pakistan's position on the issue of Kashmir is very clear. There can be no talks until India reverses its decision of August 5, 2019," he insisted.

Talking about his visit to New York for the Palestinian cause, Qureshi said that his visit to attend the UNGA session on Palestine was "an expression of Pakistan's support for the legitimate case of the Palestinian people for their right to self-determination".

IANS

# Bangladesh lifts ban on travel to Israel

Dhaka/Jerusalem: Bangladesh has announced to lift a decades-long travel ban to Israel, a move welcomed by the Jewish State which called upon Dhaka to establish diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv for the benefit of the people of the two countries.

Bangladeshi passports earlier had a clause written on them that said "This Passport is valid for all countries of the world except Israel", but the Government on Saturday decided to remove "except Israel" from the document making it valid for the entire world.

Israel has welcomed Bangladesh's decision to remove the travel ban.

"Great news! #Bangladesh has removed the travel ban to Israel. This is a welcome step & I call on the Bangladeshi government to move forward and establish diplomatic ties with #Israel so both our peoples could benefit & prosper," Deputy Director General at Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Gilad Cohen tweeted.

Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal says they are bringing the changes to ensure that the passports meet the "international standards".

In the Israel-Palestine conflict of eight decades, Bangladesh has all along stridently supported the Palestinians' cause. It has never recognised the existence of Israel, and so the two countries do not have diplomatic relations. Kamal said that the move "does not mean that there has been a change in Bangladesh's position" regarding Israel. PTI

# Access relaxed to Temple Mount as Gaza ceasefire holds

Gaza: The Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City, referred to by Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary, reopened for Jewish visitors on Sunday, days after a ceasefire came into force between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza.

Violence between Palestinians and Israeli security forces at site, which is sacred for both Muslims and Jews, contributed to increasing tensions before the outbreak of the 11-day military conflict in and around Gaza, reports dpa news agency.

The unrest earlier in May was triggered by Palestinian anger over Israeli police blockades in the Old City during the fasting month of Ramadan.

The confrontations meant that for Ramadan, no Jewish visitors were allowed in to the Temple Mount until access was restored on Sunday.

In another sign of confidence that the ceasefire between Israel and the militant Hamas in Gaza will continue to hold, government offices in Gaza were set to resume their work on Sunday, a spokesman for the local government said.

Local government activities had ceased when Israeli airstrikes began on May 10 in response to rockets fired at Jerusalem.

In Gaza, Islamist Hamas controls the administration.

The airstrikes targeted Hamas military infrastructure and also caused extensive destruction to residential and high-rise buildings, health facilities and other



public buildings, bringing the daily life of the more than two million inhabitants of the impoverished coastal strip to a standstill.

A ceasefire has been in place since May 21, ending 11 days of Israeli air raids and Palestinian rocket fire that left more than 240 people dead in Gaza, including 66 minors, and claimed 12 lives in Israel.

Tensions in Jerusalem have remained high, however.

Israeli police arrested nine people on Saturday, according to a report.

Five Palestinian men were taken into custody in their homes in East Jerusalem and the Old City, and four other Palestinians near the al-Aqsa Mosque, according to the Palestinian news agency Wafa, citing witnesses.

The report said security forces had already arrested dozens of Palestinians on May 21. IANS

# Israeli police allow Jews to visit flashpoint Jerusalem site

Jerusalem: Israeli police on Sunday escorted more than 120 Jewish visitors to a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem where police actions in recent weeks had ignited protests and violence that triggered war in Gaza, according to the Islamic authority overseeing the site.

The UN humanitarian coordinator meanwhile said hundreds of homes in Gaza had been completely destroyed and many more had been badly damaged in the 11-day war, which was brought to a fragile halt on Friday.

Police cleared young Palestinians out of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and barred entry to Muslims under the age of 45, according to the Islamic Waqf, which oversees the site under Jordanian custodianship.

Muslims who entered were required to leave their IDs with police at the entrance. It said six Palestinians were detained, with four later released.

Israeli police denied there was any age restriction and said they arrested five suspects who

"violated the public order." Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said the site was open for "regular visits" and that police had secured the area to prevent "incidents".

Israeli police had briefly clashed with Palestinian protesters after Friday prayers in an early test for the truce, which had taken effect hours earlier. The Waqf said Sunday was the first time Jews had been allowed to visit the site since May 4, a week before the war broke out.

The Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam. It sits on a sprawling hilltop in Jerusalem's Old City that is revered by Jews as their holiest site because it was the location of the biblical temples. The site has often been the scene of Israeli-Palestinian violence over the years and was the epicenter of the 2000 Palestinian intifada, or uprising.

Israeli police repeatedly clashed with Palestinian protesters in the days leading up to May 10, when Gaza's militant Hamas rulers fired long-range rockets at Jerusalem. PTI

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# Pakistan records lowest Covid-19 positivity ratio

Islamabad: Pakistan on Sunday reported its lowest number of positive coronavirus results in three months, as life returns to normal and business activity and educational institutions reopen gradually.

The national positivity ratio was recorded at 4.96 per cent, its

lowest since March, according to the Health Ministry.

There were 3,084 new cases out of the 62,061 tests conducted during the last 24 hours, dpa news agency reported.

Pakistan has so far recorded 900,522 cases and 20,251 deaths. Most of the deaths occurred during the ongoing third wave, as a majority of the new patients were infected by a variant first found in Britain.

A downward trend in the number of new infections encouraged authorities to ease coronavirus-related restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus.

National Command and Operation Centre (NCO), the body responsible for the country's response to the pandemic, will allow the reopening of markets, businesses and educational institutions in districts where Covid-19 positivity ratio is less than 5 per cent, to start on Monday.

Meanwhile, educational institutions nationwide will be reopened in a staggered manner from June 7. The tourism sector will also be reopened under strict Covid-19 protocols, also starting on Monday.

Meanwhile, a free vaccination drive has started picking up pace, with reports of more than 5 million doses administered.

A Health Ministry spokesperson said that more vaccination centres are being set up across the country as more people are getting themselves registered. IANS

# HK residents will require jabs to travel: Lam

Hong Kong: Hong Kong residents will need to get vaccinated against Covid-19 if they want to travel abroad, Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced on Sunday.

"When the SAR (special administrative region) Government discusses travel arrangements with other countries or places, it will require Hong Kong residents to be vaccinated, to make sure they would not be infected when they are abroad, and would not bring the virus back to Hong Kong," Lam wrote on social media, in a discussion about the Government's plan to tackle the fact that relatively few residents have availed themselves of vaccines.

The World Health Organization (WHO) say that at least 60 per cent of any population need to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity.

Hong Kong has struggled to get 20 per cent of its residents to get vaccinated with their first dose, dpa news agency reported.

Critics blame Hong Kong's vaccine hesitancy on the lack of trust people have in the government, following two years of anti-government protests that were brought to an end with a national security law that went into effect almost a year ago, bring with it a vast changes to the city.

Safety concerns have also stifled the roll-out of Covid-19 jabs, after the government briefly halted its vaccination programme in March amid packaging concerns about a batch of Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines, a move that further knocked public confidence.

Meanwhile, experts say that vaccinations have a limited shelf life and warn that centres will close operations in September. IANS

# Iranian Parliament calls to limit cooperation with IAEA

Tehran: The Iranian Parliament on Sunday called to limit cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), even though a resolution is in sight regarding talks with the US about ending sanctions linked to Tehran's nuclear programme.

"The IAEA had three months to fulfil its obligations,

it did not do so and the deadline expired yesterday (Saturday)," Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said on Sunday.

Accordingly, the UN agency should no longer have access to pictures of and information from Iran's nuclear facilities, dpa news agency quoted Ghalibaf as saying.

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi said he would make a statement later on Sunday.

Under an interim agreement reached between Tehran and the IAEA at the end of February, full monitoring of Iran's nuclear facilities would only start when the 2015 Vienna nuclear deal was implemented, and US sanctions lifted.

# Bangladeshi woman journalist arrested under colonial-era official secrecy law released from jail

Dhaka: A prominent Bangladeshi senior woman investigative journalist was released from jail on Sunday after a court granted interim bail to her, a week after she was arrested on charges of violating a colonial-era official secrecy law that triggered widespread protests, including by the UN.

Rozina Islam, a senior reporter of Bangla daily Prothom Alo, the largest daily newspaper based on circulation, was detained on Monday last for over five hours by Health Ministry officials for allegedly clicking a picture of a document with her cell phone without permission.

She was later arrested by the police.

She was released from the Kishampur Women's Central Jail on Sunday evening, a prison official told Dhaka Tribune.

Earlier in the day, the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Baki Billah granted her bail till July 15 on a bond of Tk 5,000 (approximately USD 59). She was also granted bail on condition of submitting her passport.

While pronouncing the bail order, the magistrate said, "It is the duty of journalists to protect the image of society and state. I hope that from now on, we will all act responsibly."

The health ministry filed a case against Islam under the draconian 1923 Official Secrets Act that carries harsh penalties,

including a possible death penalty, the Daily Star newspaper reported.

Reacting to reports of Islam's arrest, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres's spokesperson Stephane Dujarric on Tuesday said it is obviously "something concerning".

"Journalists need to be able to do their work free of any sort of harassment or physical threat anywhere around the world. And, obviously, that includes Bangladesh and every other country. I think we have seen the very important work that journalists all around the world have done during the pandemic," Dujarric said at a regular media briefing at the United Nations headquarters in New York. PTI

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[निविदा निरस्तीकरण सूचना]

इस कार्यालय की ई.ओ.आर्डी. 04 / 2021 दिनांक 24.04.2021 (सिरस्टम निविदा क्रमांक 76517) को अपरिहार्य कारणों से निरस्त किया जाता है। जिसका जी. न. 60385 दिनांक 28.04.2021 है। जिसे शीघ्र ही पुनः ई.ओ.आर्डी. आमंत्रण की कार्यवाही की जावेगी।  
हस्ता / -  
कार्यपालन अभियंता  
लोक स्वास्थ्य यांत्रिकी खण्ड  
महासमुन्द्र (छ.ग.)  
R.o. No :- 60726/6  
R.o. Date:- 22/05/2021

COVID-19

# WTO's TRIPS Council to discuss revised proposal of IPR waiver



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The TRIPS Council of the World Trade Organisation will discuss a revised proposal submitted by 62 co-sponsors, including India, South Africa, and Indonesia, seeking patent waivers to manufacture Covid-19-related medical products, an official said.

In October 2020, India and South Africa had submitted the first proposal suggesting a waiver for all World Trade Organisation (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.

According to the revised

proposal, the waiver should be in force for at least three years from the date of the decision on the matter.

The co-sponsors have stated that the duration has to be practical for manufacturing to be feasible and viable.

"The revised proposal will now be discussed in the TRIPS Council," the official added.

The revised text has proposed waiver for health products and technologies as the prevention, treatment or containment of Covid-19 which involves a range of things and "intellectual property issues may arise with respect to the products and technologies, their materials or components, as well as their methods and means of manufacture."

The co-sponsors have stressed that the proposed waiver is limited in scope to Covid-19 prevention, treatment and containment.

"The international community is dealing with a novel pathogen, with many uncertainties.

"For instance, investigation is still underway for effective therapeutics, and there are still many unknowns with respect to vaccines which will have a bearing on the scale manufacturing and supply that will be needed to control the pandemic such as the duration of immunity conferred, effectiveness of vaccines against new variants, and the effect of vaccines on children," the submission has said.

The submission was made by these countries to the WTO on Friday.

The communication was circulated at the request of the delegations of the African Group, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Egypt, Eswatini, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Kenya, the LDC (least developed countries) Group, Maldives, Mozambique, Mongolia, Namibia, Pakistan, South Africa, Vanuatu, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Zimbabwe. Commenting on the revised proposal, Biswajit Dhar, professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, said the three-year period is important as interested companies look for certainty before taking a decision to make investments.

"Final decision on this will put a moral pressure on WTO member countries to share methods and means of manufacture of products and vaccines to fight against COVID-19," Dhar said.

## Reliance-BP 'bubble' delivers two deep water gas fields despite massive Covid-19 challenge

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Just four months in a year are available for construction in Bay of Bengal. Even that window got complicated with constantly changing restrictions on movement of people and material across the globe because of the pandemic.

But work bubbles for over 4,000 persons at peak of the project alongside navigating restrictions to source material and people globally helped deliver two deep sea gas fields. Since 2017, Reliance Industries Ltd along with its JV Partner bp had embarked on concurrent development of three deepwater fields in the Krishna Godavari basin block, KG-D6, to monetise 3 trillion cubic feet of resources with an overall capital investment of ₹35,000 crore.

But the outbreak of pandemic early last year disrupted global supply chains and impaired movement of personnel who are essential for executing a complex project that involved installing equipment and pipelines in water depths of almost 2 km.

An RIL official said that to execute these complex deepwater projects, teams have been

working across 34 countries and at peak more than 4,000 persons were deployed offshore and onshore.

Those working on the project were organised into cohorts that interacted only with each other to minimise contact with outside people. Cohorts were organised on the principles that work bubbles should include the least number of people required to do the job and strictly separated from other bubbles in time and/or space to prevent virus transmission between groups.

Also, this involved navigating through different and constantly changing restrictions on movement of people and material across the globe, the official said adding the narrow four month in a year offshore construction and installation window on the east coast of India added to these challenges.

"Despite the unprecedented challenge, the joint venture successfully commissioned two out of the three deepwater fields: R Cluster field - India's first ultra-deepwater gas field and Asia's deepest offshore gas field, in December 2020 and Satellite Cluster in April this year,"

## GST Council to decide on IGST levy on oxygen concentrators imported for personal use



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GST Council is its upcoming meeting, scheduled to be held on May 28, is likely to take a call on levy of 12 per cent tax on import of oxygen concentrators for personal use.

The Delhi High Court last week said that imposition of 12 per cent Integrated GST (IGST) on oxygen concentrators for personal use or those received as gifts is "unconstitutional".

The Court's observation came on a plea filed by an 85-year old Covid patient whose relative had sent oxygen concentrator from the US.

It also quashed a May 1 notification of the Finance Ministry which said that a 12 per cent IGST will be levied on

## Curfew restrictions impact retail sales

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retailers are having continued growth in health and hygiene category products as well as in food, personal care and home care items, but discretionary categories like beauty and cosmetics, fashion and apparels have been affected adversely during the second wave of the pandemic.

Now, there is a renewed focus on healthy alternatives such as ayurvedic toothpaste and juices, while instant foods and ready-to-eat snacking items with nutritional offerings are also seeing larger penetration.

Moreover, value packs are doing well this time as smaller packs of Rs 5 and Rs 10 have witnessed a rise of up to 20 per cent across categories like biscuits, ketchup and jams, while the large and premium packs have been affected as people are cautious about their disposable income.

Besides, some retailers are also facing the issue of excess stocking in categories such as apparel, fashion and home care categories, as they had stocked up their inventory in March in anticipation of the upcoming season after having a good run rate in the January-March quarter.

## FMCG stocks significantly outperformed market over 20 yrs

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Consumer staple sector or FMCG stocks have significantly outperformed the market over the past 20 years.

As per a research by Jefferies, over the last two decades, while Nifty has returned 11.4 per cent Cagr, the market-cap weighted performance for eight FMCG companies (HUL, ITC, Nestle, Britannia, Dabur, Marico, GCPL, Colgate) stood at 14.2 per cent Cagr.

In absolute terms, while



Nifty is up 10x in 20+ years, FMCG is up c.17x over the same period.

Most of this out-performance has come in the last decade (2010-20), with FMCG

returns at 15 per cent Cagr, materially higher than those generated in Nifty (9 per cent Cagr).

In the prior decade (2000-2010), the sector performed

broadly similar to the broader market although there were periods of significant underperformance and outperformance, the report said.

Consumer staple stocks have seen periods of both strong outperformance as well significant underperformance vis-a-vis the broader market.

For example, among the seven time periods considered in the analysis, consumer staples underperformed the Nifty in three time periods (CY02-CY03, CY04-CY07 and April-2020 to till date).

## Birlas betting big on realty

### Line up ₹1,000-cr capex for Birla Estates this fiscal

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Century Textiles & Industries, which runs three business verticals — paper & pulp, realty and paper tissues, and nets over 70 per cent of the income from the first — is diverting its focus onto the real estate business and has lined up ₹1,000 crore for capex this fiscal for its ongoing and upcoming projects, including the super premium Worli project. At this level, the capex is

nine times the other two businesses are getting, a top official of the AV Birla Group firm has said.

Birla Estates was launched as the real estate business vertical of Century Textiles in 2016, and has large land bank cushioning the price impact thus making it more attractive considering the massive cost of land in the cities it is focusing on - Mumbai and its suburbs, Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru

and Pune.

"We've set aside ₹1,000 crore in capex for Birla Estate this fiscal and going forward, our main focus will be on real estate and we want to be among the top 5 players over the next three to five years," Century Textiles managing director JC Laddha told PTI in a weekend interaction.

As against this, the pulp & paper vertical, which fetches it over 70 per cent of topline, has a capex of only ₹100 crore and

that too for routine technology upgrades and other working capital expenses, he said, adding the paper tissue business also has adequate installed capacity.

Of the ₹2,567-crore revenue it had in FY21, pulp & paper business contributed over 70 per cent of it, textiles 25 per cent and realty the remaining 5 per cent or around ₹125 crore by way of rental income from the many Mumbai assets, Laddha said.

## Poultry industry demands duty free import of 12 lakh metric tons of Soya bean

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On behalf of the Livestock Farmers and Poultry Industry, Poultry Breeders Association, citing the Soybean price escalation in India and its impact on the Poultry sector, has plead Government of India to allow duty free import of 12 lakh metric tons of Soya bean meal by the feed millers in India to safe guard the livestock farmers until September 2021.

In Indian soybean prices have moved more than 100% in the last year. From ₹36,420 per ton to over ₹81,000 per ton. Whereas the prices in the international market are just half of the Indian soybean and soymeal prices.

It means that the cost of production for the small poultry farmer has gone up by ₹45 per kg.

Unless quick decisions are not taken in this regard, the livestock sectors and livestock farmers will suffer another massive financial loss, soon after huge losses suffered during the first wave of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns.

"The livestock sector, mainly poultry, is going through the worst crisis in the recorded history of independent India.

In this regard," said Bahadur Ali, Chairman, Poultry Breeders Association.

"The unsustainable price escalation is killing small farm-

ers due to reduced demand and very high risk. Most of the farmers are not placing new chicks in the farms.

The major negative impact will be on maize and soybean prices in the coming harvesting season for maize and soybean farmers.

An equilibrium in price and demand growth is essential to ensure the welfare of all," he added. As the government has granted issue to allow duty free import of 12 lakh metric ton of Soya Meal to provide a major relief to poultry farmers, also requesting to regulate the soybean commodity trade on commodity exchanges which may end speculations driven surge of soya seeds.

## CAIT condemns US Mission remarks about Piyush Goyal

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a strong note of a media story released by a global wire Agency titled "U.S. defended Amazon after article showed company bypassed Indian law" of May 21, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has strongly condemned the most uncalled for remarks of US Mission in India about Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal protecting misdeeds of Amazon.

As per media story of the wire agency, the US Embassy in India in an internal email pur-

ported & reportedly sent by Thomas Carnegie, a U.S. embassy official in New Delhi, to John Kerry, one of President Joe Biden's top envoys in reference to questionable business practices of Amazon said, "This could come up in the call since as you know Minister Goyal is prone to bring up tangential topics."

It is most striking that the note was prepared by Carnegie, a U.S. embassy official in New Delhi, defending Amazon India's business illegal practices which have come under the lens of regulatory and enforcement agencies in India.

## Fuel prices rise, diesel above ₹84/litre in Delhi



IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

The oil marketing companies (OMC) hiked petrol and diesel prices on Sunday across the four metros.

In the national capital, diesel price crossed the ₹84 per litre mark. Price of the fuel in Delhi increased 27 paise to ₹84.07 per litre.

Similarly, in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, diesel was priced at ₹91.30, ₹88.87

and ₹86.91 per litre respectively, up from the previous levels of ₹ 91.01, ₹88.62 and ₹86.64 per litre.

Petrol prices also increased in the country on Sunday. In Delhi, petrol was sold for 93.21 per litre, 17 paise higher from 93.04 a litre on Saturday.

Price of the fuel in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata was ₹99.49, ₹94.86 and ₹93.27 per litre, respectively, higher from their previous levels.

## CII suggests changes in RBI norms for appointment of statutory auditors by banks, NBFCs

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

The Confederation of Indian Industry has come up with several recommendations for changes in the Reserve Bank of India's guidelines for appointment of statutory auditors by banks and NBFCs.

Commending the RBI's intent of working towards strengthening the audit quality and governance process, CII in a statement, noted that this process is critical and fundamental to trust and credibility of the capital market.

CII has suggested that the requirements related to reduction in the tenure of audit engagement, cap on number of audits and extended cooling of periods, may not specifically address any perceived concerns on audit quality.

These are inconsistent with the provisions in the Companies Act, 2013 and are not comparable with interna-

tional practices and regulations as prescribed by the IESBA, PCAOB, SEC, etc., which are widely accepted and adopted globally, it said.

"Implementing these requirements is likely to create avoidable complications without any appreciable enhancement to audit quality and governance.

Further, lack of harmony amongst various regulations on this subject is likely to add to complexity and confusion in the sector and also impact ease of doing business," it said.

Further, it said that it is a widely accepted principle that, to reduce uncertainty and implementation challenges, significant policy measures are not applied retrospectively and also allow for a reasonable transition period.

This helps various stakeholders to better understand, plan for the change and ensure effective compliance, it said.

## Drone deployment by Coal India arm delayed by Covid-19

Kolkata:Deployment of high-end drones at Coalfields by CMPDI, a subsidiary of Coal India, is getting delayed due to Covid-induced lockdowns and other restrictions in several states, even though the company has secured approval for using the equipment from the Centre, an official said.

Central Mine Planning and Design Institute, the research and technical arm of the miner, is one of the organisations in the country to introduce drones for conducting coalfield survey. The company has planned to deploy drones at Coal India mines for specialised survey applications such as generation of high-resolution images, 3D terrain mapping and volumetric measurement of excavation, the official said.

"We are ready to deploy drones as permission from Directorate General of Civil Aviation has been given. Training for operations and maintenance of data was scheduled from April 25 but it couldn't be held due to lockdown," CMPDI GM (Geomatics) Rajneesh Kumar told PTI. PTI

**EXTENSION OF PARTIAL CANCELLATION OF SPECIAL TRAINS**

It is notified for the information of passengers that Railways have decided to extend the Partial Cancellation of Train No. 02443/02444 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Jodhpur - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Superfast Special as per the details given below:-

PARTIAL CANCELLATION OF SPECIAL TRAINS			
Train No. & Name	Terminate at/ Originate from	Partial Cancelled between Stations	Extended Date
02443 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Jodhpur Superfast Special	at Degana	Degana - Jodhpur	Upto 31.05.2021
02444 Jodhpur - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Superfast Special	from Degana	Jodhpur - Degana	Upto 31.05.2021

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

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

RailMadad Helpline No. 139

Visit RailMadad website : [www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in) & download Railmadad app.

Please join us on **NORTHERN RAILWAY** Visit us at : [www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in)

**SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE**

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**

It is notified for the information of passengers that the cancellation period of following earlier announced cancelled trains due to operational reasons, has been extended upto 31.05.2021 as under:-

**EXTENSION OF CANCELLATION OF UNRESERVED MEMU/EMU EXPRESS TRAINS**

Train No. & Name
04184/04183 Delhi Jn - Tundla Jn - Delhi Jn MEMU Special Express
04417/04418 Hathras Qilah - Delhi Jn - Hathras Qilah MEMU Special Express
04427/04428 Hathras Qilah - Hathras Jn - Hathras Qilah MEMU Special Express
04415/04414 Aligarh Jn - New Delhi - Aligarh Jn EMU Special Express
04420/04419 Ghaziabad - Mathura Jn - Ghaziabad EMU Special Express
04444/04443 New Delhi - Ghaziabad - New Delhi Special Express

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 NTESApp.

Visit RailMadad website: [www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in)

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**"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"**

# FRAME A LIFETIME OF MEMORIES

Photography, as a field, is no longer limited to just professionals as millions of pictures are posted on social media platforms every day. So here are a few trends that one can dig in to catch up with the ever-evolving industry. By KUNAL GIROTRA

When we see people going out for an early morning walk, on a solo trip, celebrating a special event or advertising a product, one common thing is the art of capturing the subject with the lens of their eyes, a phone camera or a DSLR. Photography is an art of expression and with the evolution of time, the way people express their art has also transitioned. From black and white pictures to high-definition photography, the main agenda has always been to lock the subject or memories for life.

The photography industry is an unusual sector to say the least since it allows people to capture human emotions through a lens. The art was not easily accessible to anyone until a few years ago. It was within the reach of the privileged, who could afford the cameras and the expensive accessories it came with. However, with the introduction of the latest technologies and smartphones becoming cheaper, everyone in the world can now capture whatever they want whenever they want, allowing people beyond the professional photography circle to introduce newer trends and changing the photography industry landscape.

Photography, as a field, is no longer limited to just professionals, especially since millions of pictures are posted on social media platforms every day. So here are a few trends that one can dig in to catch up with the ever-evolving industry:

**HDR photography:** This method of photography has taken both advanced photographers and amateurs by the storm, especially because it does not require any specific equipment. Anyone who is interested in any kind of photography can take this up as several cameras available in the market have built-in HDR mode which adjusts contrast ratios, allowing the user to take unrealistic pictures. Thus, high dynamic range photography is constantly getting popular in recent times.

**Light painting:** A fun technique that enables the photographer in taking the most artistic pictures by adjusting exposure time, natural lightening, aperture and other features on the camera. This form of art allows the photographer to create great pictures with the use of soft glow or different sources of light. Every picture is equally unique as creativity varies from person to person as well as the camera settings.

**Phonegraphy:** Smartphone photography a.k.a. phonegraphy is a widespread phenomenon. Today, more and more people have access to smartphones, allowing them to explore their creative skills and capture subjects the way they see them. Clicking pictures has transitioned from managing background noise or free spaces to just making the subject of the image more aesthetically pleasing.



This culture that has influenced the photography world. Over the last decade, it has created its niche in the industry. Some of the biggest developments since the invention of the smartphone are the ability to instantly share pictures with a large crowd at the click of a button, or even print it on the go using a portable pocket-size printer. It has allowed photographers to ditch their heavy DSLRs and move around easily.

**Panography:** Photography is not just bound by some limiting factors such as lighting, exposure time, etc. It is an art that takes shapes and sizes, and so, the frame size also helps the photographer to express a different kind of story. Panography a.k.a. panoramic photography is 360-degree wide format photography. This form of photography allows the user to capture a landscape from an angle like a human eye would see it, creating unforgettable impressions of real life.

**Instant photography:** Next to phone and DSLR photography, instant camera photography has also found a sweet spot in the heart of the photographer for its ability to create a time capsule in form of small credit card size pictures. Earlier, the availability of instant cameras was only limited to people who could afford it, but with the technology being available for the masses, people have turned to instant photography to capture and behold their precious times. Besides, instant cameras allow users to take a normal, square or wide picture, inspiring them to tell the story behind a picture in a frame they like. The trend is influencing many every day. Embracing the art of unexpected, instant photography is on the rise, especially among the millennials.

due to its artistic and raw representation of what they perceive of the world. The subtle concept allows the users to stay in the moment, value the time and really look at what's in front of them instead of looking at the display of the camera. Furthermore, it allows the users to get close to the subjects and capture them not just as a beautiful picture but also imprint them on their minds.

**The way ahead:** Technology is the solution to almost every problem today as it maximises convenience while improving quality. The Photography world is no different. In the coming times, technology will take the world of photography to the next level with advanced effects, precision, among other features. And, with a range of cameras available in the market, the trends take new forms enabling one and all to dive into artistic expression.

(The writer is the Head of Division, Image Capturing, Fujifilm India.)



## WEBBED



**SWEET TOOTH**  
 On a perilous adventure across a post-apocalyptic world, a lovable boy who's half-human and half-deer searches for a new beginning with a gruff protector. Season one releases on Netflix on June 4.



**AWAKE**  
 After a global event wipes out humanity's ability to sleep, a troubled ex-soldier fights to save her family as society and her mind spiral into chaos. Starring Gina Rodriguez, Ariana Greenblatt and Frances Fisher, the film releases on Netflix on June 9.



**SKATER GIRL**  
 When a teen in rural India discovers a life-changing passion for skateboarding, she faces a rough road as she follows her dream to compete. The film releases on Netflix on June 11.

## TREND TOOL

The post-2020 world is a completely different one. Priorities have shifted and so have the things we consider basics for our lifestyle. Wondering how to pick must-have items that will help you pull through in the coming months? Here is a list of five lockdown essentials. Take a look and make a note for yourself and your family.

# Lockdown essentials

Priorities have shifted and so have the things we consider basics for our lifestyle. Here is a list of must-have items that will help you pull through in the coming months

### LOCKDOWN NON-NEGOTIABLE: THE FACE MASK

The face mask is not only the most non-negotiable essential of our times but it is also the most life-saving item of the decade. Those who are serious about their own safety as well as of others around them are making sure to even double-mask in these troubled times. Be it cloth, surgical or N-95, take your pick and mask up before stepping outside.



**Our pick:** Protect yourself during the pandemic in these effective N-95 masks on flipkart.com and play it as safe as possible.

### ANTI-FALL, ANTI-ACCIDENTS, ANTI-FOG

Want to prevent accidents and mishaps due to lenses that fog up easily? Especially while wearing a mask, eyeglasses tend to get foggy due to breath



that gets redirected upwards. This pesky phenomenon also occurs while sipping hot beverages and during the monsoon season. Opt for this breakthrough innovation to avoid clouding your eyes and keep your vision crystal-clear.

**Our pick:** John Jacobs' trendy eyewear range comes with anti-fog lenses. These are handy and practical for the lockdown phase and beyond.

### A DYNAMIC WORK-STATION: THE PORTABLE LAP DESK

Let's keep it real: WFH can be a drag. Without any colleagues and the chance to step out even if only to go to office, working from home can get you stuck in a rut. A great remedy for this is to get yourself a portable ergonomic lap desk that will allow you to work in different

areas of your home with ease. **Our pick:** Desk Talk makes these absolutely comfortable lap desks in ultra-utilitarian and sleek designs.



### THE ULTIMATE ESSENTIAL: HAND SANITISER



This one is obvious but still doesn't hurt for a mention. Get your lockdown game on-point with a bottle of hand-sanitiser. Keep bottles handy around your house, at your front door and carry one wherever you go. There is nothing more essential than this one. Isn't it?

**Our pick:** Enriched with the natural goodness of aloe and lemon peel oil, Sanio's Hand Sani Mist does the sanitising and the moisturising in one go.

### WFH MUST-HAVE: BLUE-CUT LENSES



Spending all your time either working in front of a screen or binge-watching your favourite shows on OTT apps? Take a digital detox in glasses that feature blue-cut lenses to protect your eyes from harmful blue rays emitted by digital screens. This one is a must-have for the lockdown phase.

**Our pick:** John Jacobs provides striking Supreme Steel eyeglasses in three different packages — BLU Thin, BLU Essential and Zero Power BLU lenses. Give your eyes and your style a major upgrade.

Lockdown is surely a time to stick to the essentials. With these items in your kit, you are sure to be better prepared for the situations that might arise. Stay safe, protected and productive.

# Not just a pretty face: Zareen Khan

Zareen Khan recalls being rejected from a film for looking the way she does. The Bollywood actress says she was bluntly told about the industry perception that pretty girls cannot act.



"It's not just me who has been typecast. I feel every person in this industry gets typecast. When I came out with Veer, I was typecast as pretty girl, a girl next door — just comparisons and everything. So, I did not get enough chances. Actually, did not get a chance at all after that. I was called fat, and this and that," Zareen said.

She says her dance number *Character Dheela* in the Salman Khan-starrer *Ready* somewhat helped in changing perceptions. "People were like, she can look like that also. She has lost weight, nice!" Then came *Hate Story* and people said she is so hot," she recalled.

Still, Zareen was rejected when she tried looking for roles that would give her something meaningful to portray.

"After that when I tried meeting people for not so 'hot' roles or roles that would need me to play something meaningful or serious, I was rejected and I was out and out told in our industry it's a percep-

## TREND BLAZER



### VIVEK OBEROI TURNS NOSTALGIC

Mani Ratnam's *Yuva* turned 17 and **VIVEK ANAND OBEROI**, who was part of the film's multi-star cast, turned nostalgic looking back at his experience while shooting the film in Kolkata.

"Seventeen years ago in the land of *mishti*, on Kolkata's most iconic bridge, I took the actor's adage 'break a leg' a bit too seriously. Haha! From being airlifted for emergency surgery in critical care to fabulous critical acclaim. What a crazy journey," he said.

### fairtalk ELLI AVRAM



"From the day I entered Bollywood till now, things have opened up and changed quite a bit. I've got many offers where I sometimes have had to choose which one to do, due to dates clashing. When that happens, I feel a lot of gratitude because it tells me your hard work and talent pay off in the end."

### dailytalk ARJUN KANUNGO



"The kind of growth we have seen in the non-film sector — it's kind of now competing with films on frequency level at least. I think that we are a couple of years away from films and non-films running completely. The actors will be the first people to now adopt strategies that work. If stars are working in music videos you can tell it's doing well."

### LIL NOT AFFECTED BY HATE COMMENTS

Rapper **LIL NAS X** is rarely affected by online hate because he says the love that comes his way outweighs the hatred.

"The love outweighs the hate by like a hundred. I guess it's because I kind of grew up on the internet and I've been through this before, and I know to take everything with a grain of salt. So it's rare that it'll actually get to me, where I'm like, 'Oh, that hurts'," he says.



# DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS

After testing positive for COVID-19 in the first week of April this year, 27-year-old Bisma Jan was extremely worried. She was more concerned about her parents' health than her own. "I was not in favour of my old parents taking me to the hospital as I feared they would be risking infection. I called the toll-free number of Ehsaas International where I was connected to a doctor in Saudi Arabia. For the next two weeks, apart from providing regular consultations, the doctors also prescribed medicines and advised measures that had to be followed during the period of home isolation. They would push me to keep a check on my oxygen saturation level regularly and played a major role in boosting my morale," shared Bisma, a resident of Srinagar's Rajabagh. After spending 10 days isolated at home, she tested negative and expressed, "I was relieved that the doctors were so cordial and I felt comfortable enough to call them any time since they assured me that they were available for me 24x7."

In July last year, when the novel Coronavirus was slowly tightening its stranglehold on India, around 250 Kashmiri doctors, serving overseas and in the Valley had joined hands to set up telemedicine consultation services. The initiative was named the *Kashmir Health Care Support Group*. This team, which included general physicians, cardiologists, chest specialists, orthopaedists, general surgeons, psychiatrists and pathologists, had collaborated with a non-profit organisation 'Ehsaas International' for using their toll-free helpline to receive calls from patients. During the last year, these doctors have been catering to not only those who were affected by COVID-19 but to high-risk patients as well. Ghulam Qadir, a diabetic and high blood pressure patient, was a regular visitor to a hospital in Srinagar. During the last year, he did not visit a doctor as such patients are at a higher risk of catching an infection and developing severe complications because of low immunity.

"I have been taking the advice of doctors over the phone. Besides prescribing medicines, they advise me about the diet that I should follow and the precautions I need to take to protect myself from this deadly virus. I also received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccination after consulting a doctor on this helpline," explained Ghulam.

Visiting hospitals is a big no for people with pre-existing medical conditions who are at an increased risk during the pandemic. To make up for the gap, over 250 medical professionals provide free consultations over phone calls to patients. By MUDASSIR KULLOO



A senior consultant cardiac anaesthesiologist who would like to remain unnamed, a Kashmiri doctor based in the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Many doctors serving in Jammu and Kashmir are also a part of this endeavour," he said. The reason behind the initiative was to ensure medical support to patients who were unable to visit hospitals amid the pandemic.

They provide medical advice, create awareness among patients and even provide e-prescription when required. They also maintain records for each patient for easy and effective follow-up. "We have devised a proper mechanism for smooth functioning of the telemedicine consultation. Urgent medical or surgical calls are managed by two 'first responder' groups. While most calls are related

to COVID-19, kidney ailments, diabetes, blood pressure and psychiatric issues, there are different groups such as endocrinology and cardiology where senior consultant doctors provide consultations to a patient as required," he explained.

Hakim Mohammad Ilyas, a representative of Ehsaas International, informed that they have prepared rosters of over 250 doctors who remain available 24x7. "Sometimes, we receive 500 calls in a day on our toll-free number 18008892729. We connect patients with the doctors who are available at that time. Initially, this service was only for residents of J&K but now patients across the country call on our toll-free number. Thousands of people in and outside J&K have availed this service since July, last year," Hakim stated. The toll-free number is supported by 10 lines at the backend to avoid any inconvenience to the patients. The service was started to support the health infrastructure of J&K that was overwhelmed by the

high number of COVID-19 cases. According to Hakim, proper approval was obtained from the concerned authorities to run a teleconsultation service for the patients and, additionally, a list of doctors was also submitted to the authorities in J&K.

Ehsaas International, which currently possesses 60 oxygen concentrators and other medical equipment for COVID-19 patients, has ordered 150 additional oxygen concentrators. "We are also setting up three wellness centres (50 beds in each centre) in Srinagar for COVID-19 patients in collaboration with Srinagar Municipal Corporation. They will be well-equipped with oxygen concentrators, cylinders and will have internet facilities, LCD projectors besides indoor game facilities for the entertainment of patients. Patients at the wellness centre will be treated by volunteer doctors of the NGO," Hakim informed.

Another charitable organisation, Athrout Kashmir, has also collaborat-

ed with the Srinagar administration and converted the Haj house building into a COVID-19 hospital with 100 beds.

Similarly, Social Reforms Organisation (SRO) Kashmir has been helping people since the pandemic broke out last year. SRO Kashmir has over 250 oxygen cylinders, 223 oxygen concentrators, 250 non-invasive machines, four ambulances and other equipment available for COVID-19 patients.

Another NGO, Help Poor Trust, has 11 ambulances including one critical care ambulance to ferry patients to hospitals. It has 150 oxygen cylinders, 100 oxygen concentrators available for patients. The NGO also provides medicines and financial support to the needy.

The number of COVID cases has increased drastically over the last few weeks. Each day, on average, J&K reports over 4,500 COVID-positive cases.

—Charkha Features

## Uniting humans

People want a religion that offers them a realistic, universal, loving and kind God, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

It's a known fact that religion is deeply rooted in man and from time immemorial it has been a dominating factor in man and his ways of life. When one looks at the current situation of the world, especially the struggle going on between two Middle-East nations, between India and its neighbouring nations, or even within India, one may conclude that in some cases, religions have been a major cause of strife and turmoil.

Therefore, the question that arises is, have they not caused confusion and conflicts rather than being beneficial to humanity? If we consider this thought with an impartial approach, we will find that it is true to a great extent. However, it should also be noted that though this charge points to the fact that there are some serious flaws, deformities and discrepancies in existing religions, it does not necessarily imply that religion is unnecessary since the truth is that it fulfills man's many needs.

It was not so long back when Swami Vivekananda reflected on the necessity of the concept of universal religion for society. He realised that the nature of man is such that he won't find rest until he achieves his ultimate destiny — an end to his search for God or his ultimate destiny. Therefore, the whole world is expecting a religion, which is acceptable to all.

It is an undeniable fact that every normal person wants to discover the meaning of his earthly existence and wants to know himself and the Creator, as well as the goal or purpose of his life. This can also be simplified as the urge to attain 'spiritual knowledge'. So, keeping in mind this natural inquisitiveness of man, we have to admit that religion fulfills a great psychological need. That the idea of God is very much needed in man's life to embody qualities such as truth, justice, love, kindness and integrity. Furthermore, faith in God gives man a feeling of security and helps sustain moral values.

But, people are now really sick of religions that seek man's faith in imaginary, multitudinous man-gods and which invariably tends to divide mankind into warring factions. They want a religion that offers them a realistic, universal, loving and kind God who unites mankind and who, though incorporeal, is an entity with whom they can have a loving relationship like that of a mother, father, friend, philosopher and guide. They want a religion that tells of a God who, though infallible and full of wisdom, is not egoistic, authoritarian and unapproachable but one who is welcoming and helps without

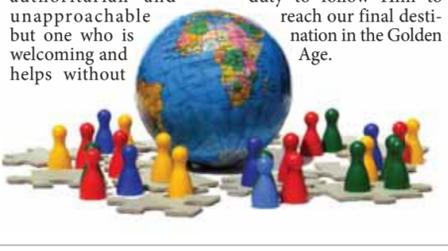


any inhibitions. Moreover, people now don't want a religion that is based on the concept of heaven and hell. Instead, they want a religion that gives them happiness in this very life and enlightens them on how to transform this very world of suffering i.e the hell into paradise. It is this religion, which is universal, altruistic and practicable that everyone seems to be seeking these days.

The majority of people across the world believe that God is One and that truth is one. If that is the case, then why do we have so many messengers and why do we have different messages? If God's message is to establish true dharma on earth, then it should have unified all humans instead of dividing them. Isn't it?

Till date, thousands of religious heads have come on earth to preach about dharma but there never was more adharma in the world than now and why is it so? We must understand a fact that religious preceptors come into the world and shine their light of purity and goodness so that humanity's faith in God is restored and/or sustained. Their teachings help people hold onto their beliefs. However, liberation and salvation, purification, world transformation and the establishment of dharma and the destruction of evil are tasks done by God himself when he reincarnates at the end of the iron age. True seekers of the 'truth' should understand that God is supreme, omnipotent and omniscient. He is the creator and hence, he alone has the wisdom and power to provide redemption to his creation. He is the seed that emerges when the tree becomes old to gradually take its place.

Thus, it is only through his directly imparted wisdom that the gates of liberation and salvation open up. This is precisely why he is known as the purifier, liberator and guide. As children of one God, it is our duty to follow Him to reach our final destination in the Golden Age.



While it may sound weird to tell people with depression to go outside and garden, there is a considerable amount of clinical evidence which suggests that spending time with plants improves our mental health, particularly depression. Even spending time with indoor plants works wonders to alleviate both mental and physical stress in people of all ages.

Vinayak Garg, founder, Lazy Gardener, says, "Many researchers have found that gardening or 'green care' stimulates our bodies' natural development of happy chemicals, which may help keep depression and anxiety at bay, with unexpectedly amazing results. Even during this pandemic, each nation is battling a war where the enemy is not visible nor are the weapons. In these times, along with other safety measures, why not turn to the potential benefits of gardening as a way to help in the mental and physical war against coronavirus."

Here are some interesting and the creative way to fight depression and anxiety as suggested by Garg.

### Get your hands dirty

Getting your hands dirty in the garden boosts your serotonin levels, according to studies. Serotonin is a happy chem-

## Spend time with plants

Can gardening be an effective way to fight depression? Let's find out



ical that also serves as a natural antidepressant and immune system booster, lack of which is responsible for depression. When you come in contact with soil, a particular soil bacterium, *Mycobacterium vaccae*, causes serotonin to be released

in our brain, making us feel better and happier from within. At the very least, now we understand why people prefer to garden without gloves and always enjoy the sensation of getting their hands into the dirt and compost heap.

### De-stress therapy at your doorstep

Gardening is an awesome diversion from our increasingly technologically driven lives. Spending time gardening and enjoying nature can help us mentally de-stress by keeping

us involved. When you directly contribute to the nurturing of the buds and witness the plants grow gradually, believe me, your happiness and contentment will know no boundaries and you'll keep coming back to it. This is a small yet

a very powerful exercise to even boost your self-esteem, leaving no space for stress at all.

### Cultivate your creativity

How about simply finding out ways to keep those garden pests away and improving soil quality to keep the garden healthy? How about deciding what kind and colour of a pot will suit your favourite plant the best? Get yourself into it once and this green care will take care of your positivity, creativity, mood upliftment, skill building and ultimately help you fight depression naturally and gradually.

### Build your strength

Working in the garden improves dexterity and strength. Digging, raking and mowing are especially calorie-dense activities and the aerobic exercise involved will easily burn the same amount of calories as a gym workout. During gardening, physical exercise is combined with social contact. You get exposed to nature and sunlight. Sunlight works two way on your body: Reduces blood pressure while also increasing vitamin D levels, and the fruits and vegetables grown have a positive effect on the diet. Sounds healthier right?

—IANS

“Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one.”  
 —Marcus Aurelius

### YOUNGSTERS FACE CHRONIC FATIGUE POST-COVID

Young adults who survived COVID-19, even with mild infections, are at increased risk of a serious post-Covid or 'long haul' problem — chronic fatigue syndrome, say researchers.

A recent review of three case studies by Johns Hopkins University researchers provides first evidence that one serious post-Covid problem may be myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) — the complex, multisystem disorder previously known as chronic fatigue syndrome.

"In the three patients studied — all of whom had confirmed or highly probable COVID-19 infections early in the pandemic — we observed ME/CFS-like symptoms within the first two weeks of illness," said Peter Rowe, director at Johns Hopkins Children's Center and Professor of Paediatrics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

### TOP CAUSES OF PREMATURE MORTALITY

Hypertension and tobacco are the top most causes of premature mortality and people consuming tobacco in any form are at high risk of many diseases, as nicotine is solely responsible for constricted arteries, heart failure, inflammation, many types of cancers, blindness, and gangrene, while it also complicates existing hypertension.

The above was mentioned by noted interventional cardiologist Dr (Prof) (Col.) Shekhar Kashyap while speaking at a webinar on *Hypertension, COVID-19 and Tobacco - A Deadly Triad*. Kashyap is the former Head of Department (Cardiology), Army's Research & Referral Hospital in New Delhi.

### SMART TOILET TO ANALYSE STOOL SAMPLE

Researchers are developing a new artificial intelligence (AI) tool that can be added to the standard toilets to help analyse patients' stool and give gastroenterologists the information they need to provide appropriate treatment.

The new technology could assist in identifying and managing chronic gastrointestinal issues indicates the study selected for presentation at Digestive Disease Week (DDW) 2021.

The technology can be retrofitted within the pipes of an existing toilet. Once a person has a bowel movement and flushes, the toilet will take an image of the stool within the pipes.

The data collected over time will provide a gastroenterologist a better understanding of a patient's stool form (i.e. loose, normal or constipated), allowing them to diagnose the patient and provide the right treatment for their condition.

### LOCKDOWNS MAY AFFECT CHILDREN'S FITNESS

Strict lockdowns can reduce the spread of COVID-19, but might be responsible for delaying normal cardiorespiratory development in children, according to a research.

The study, led by a team of researchers from Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in the UK and University of Zaragoza in Spain, showed that boys and girls aged 12-14 showed lower levels of cardiorespiratory fitness than would be expected with normal VO2 max rate development.

VO2 max is a well-known cardiorespiratory fitness indicator and levels increase during adolescence, in line with physical growth and development.

Healthy Fitness Zone (HFZ) levels — a standard measure of health based on age and sex — also fell by 3.4 per cent over the 12-month period.

### GOOGLE USES AI TO DECODE SKIN CONDITIONS

Google researchers have showcased an AI-powered dermatology assist tool that will help you understand what's going on with issues related to your body's largest organ: Skin, hair and nails.

The AI-powered tool is a web-based application that Google hopes to launch as a pilot later this year, to make it easier to figure out what might be going on with your skin.

"Once you launch the tool, simply use your phone's camera to take three images of the skin, hair or nail concern from different angles. You'll then be asked questions about your skin type, how long you've had the issue and other symptoms that help the tool narrow down the possibilities," said Peggy Bui, MD, Product Manager, Google Health.

**shortpasses**

**ASIA CUP POSTPONED TO 2023**  
**DUBAI:** The 2021 edition of the Asia Cup will now be held in 2023 due to a lack of window in a rejigged cricket calendar that is constantly subject to change amid an evolving Covid-19 situation.

**SWANSEA TO FACE BRENTFORD**  
**LONDON:** Swansea and Brentford will meet for a £180 million place in the Premier League after winning their Championship play-off semi-finals on Saturday. Swansea clinched a 2-1 aggregate success against Barnsley thanks to a 1-1 draw at the Liberty Stadium in the second leg.

**INDIA ASSURED OF 7 MEDALS**  
**DUBAI:** A crucial test of preparations for Olympic-bound boxers, the Asian C'ships get underway in Dubai on Monday with India already assured of podium finishes after seven women boxers entered the semifinals due to small size of their respective draws.

**NAGAL TO CLASH WITH MARCORA**  
**PARIS:** India's top singles players Sumit Nagal drew lower-ranked Roberto Marcora while Prajesh Gunneswaran and Ramkumar Ramanathan got matching rivals for their first-round clashes at French Open Qualifiers.

**BURL GETS PUMA SPONSORSHIP**  
**HARARE:** Frustrated with financial constraints, Zimbabwe batsman Ryan Burl requested for sponsorship for the national team by posting a photo of his worn-out shoes to highlight the plight of his country's cricket and was obliged by footwear giant PUMA. Burl's plea worked as sportswear giant Puma promised him sponsorship.

**WINDIES HALTS TRAINING CAMP**  
**GROS ISLET:** The West Indies team was forced to halt its red-ball training camp here this weekend after Jamaican pacer Marquino Mindley tested positive for Covid-19. The 26-year-old returned positive in his second test.

**21 DIE IN CHINA ULTRAMARATHON**  
**BEIJING:** Twenty-one people were killed after hail, freezing rain and high winds hit runners taking part in a 100-kilometre cross-country mountain race in China. The extreme weather hit a high-altitude section of the race held in the Yellow River Stone Forest near Baiyin city in northwestern Gansu province on Saturday.

**TSITSIPAS BLASTS TO LYON TITLE**  
**LYON:** World No 5 Stefanos Tsitsipas swept to the Lyon ATP clay court title on Sunday with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Briton Cameron Norrie. With a week to go before the prestige Roland Garros tournament the 22-year-old Tsitsipas lifted his seventh career title and his second red surface win this year. Agencies

# India will be more conditioned for WTC final: Taylor

Kiwi batsman feels IPL suspension gives Virat & Co more time to prepare for marquee clash

PTI ■ LONDON

Senior New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor feels the suspension of the IPL "played into India's hands", giving Virat Kohli's team more time to get acclimatised to English conditions before next month's World Test Championship final.

The Indian Premier League, which was suspended earlier this month due to multiple cases of Covid-19 inside its bubble, was due to finish on May 30, while the WTC final between New Zealand and India is scheduled to start from June 18 in Southampton.

"For India, IPL finishing early under unfortunate circumstances has probably played into their hands a little," Taylor told reporters on Sunday.

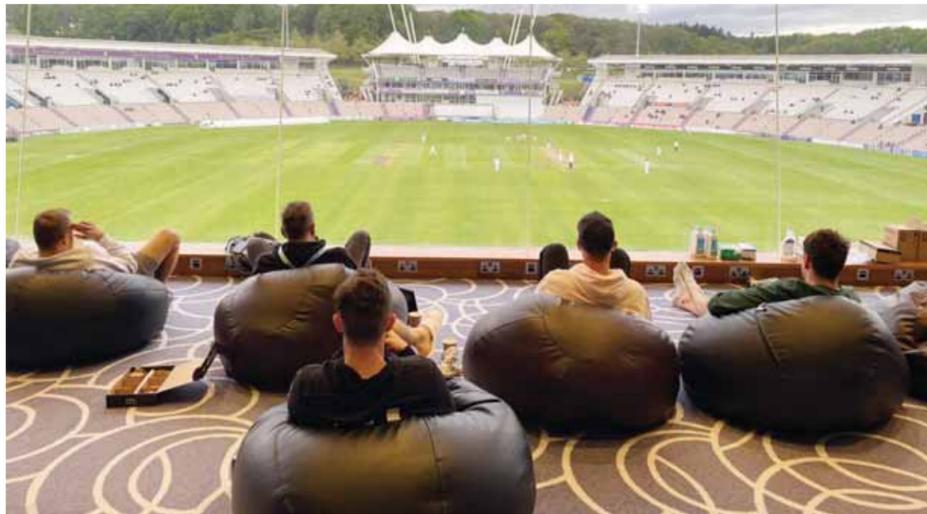
"If IPL would have gone on they would have had a smaller preparation but now they will be a lot more conditioned, their bowlers will have their loads up," he added.

However, Taylor reckons New Zealand will still have slight advantage over India as they are scheduled to play two Tests against England in the run up to the WTC final.

"I would be lying if you think there isn't some sort of thought about the WTC final but I couldn't think of a better preparation than playing two Tests against England. At the end of the day it's a neutral venue.

"Playing two Tests gives us a slight advantage but this Indian team has been number one for a long period of time and has had a lot of success over here," he added.

The right hander, who has featured in 195 Tests, 233 ODIs and 102 T20Is for New Zealand also squashed rumours regarding his retirement.



New Zealand touring for the two-Test series against host England, as well as World Test Championship final against India next month, took a break from training to witness the final day of a county game between Hampshire and Leicestershire at Ageas Bowl

"Age is just a number and as long as you're still enjoying it and feel like you're good enough and can contribute to the team on and off the field."

"I did have 35 in my mind because of the 2019 World Cup but I went there and felt I could still contribute, and therefore, I didn't think just because it was a World Cup it was time to retire, but no I don't have a number in mind," he added.

There had been some talks that the BCCI has requested to alter the schedule for India's five-Test series against England for completing the IPL, something the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has denied.

Asked if he was concerned about the future of international cricket amid T20 leagues' boom, Taylor said, "IPL is probably the most high-profile and countries move it around when they don't have the same

power. It is what it is, players have to play in it.

"I hope that International cricket still has relevance and can contribute at times. As long as things are being moved around it is fine... As long as they aren't getting cancelled and what not."

**DUKES PREP BENEFICIAL**

New Zealand batsman Devon Conway feels preparing with the Dukes ball back home has helped his side immensely as it gears up for three Tests in England, including the WTC final against India here.

Conway, who is among the three uncapped players in the 20-man squad, feels the camp back home in Lincoln ahead of the tour was ideal. New Zealand play with the Kookaburra at home.

"That was very beneficial for us, you know, having that opportunity to play amongst the Dukes ball, get to learn

how it works, and try and formulate a game plan, how to go about things," Conway said in an online press interaction.

"But yeah, I think not a lot changes. You know, we understand that the Dukes ball does swing a little bit more than what the Kookaburra does, but you know, you've just got to face the ball and come up with a game plan and stick by it," said the South African-born player, who made the team after impressing in limited overs cricket.

During the camp back home, Conway sprinkled cat litter on practice wickets to simulate spin bowling on the rough, hoping it will help him counter the likes of Ravichandran Ashwin during the WTC final.

On his first Test tour, the 29-year-old is trying to soak in as much as he can from established names like Tom Latham and Ross Taylor in his team. "It has been a massive

learning curve for me, in terms of how the protocols are all set in place, and just trying to adhere through all that. You know, just seeing the guys being around the group for an extended period, it's been fun. And, yeah, a lot of memories created already in the short period.

"In the Test set up the guys have been here for a very long time. So you know, it's good to sort of learn from the experience of players that have been at this level, they've been playing at this level for a long period.

Adjusting to the cold weather in England is a challenge though, feels Conway.

"...It's about adapting to the lower degrees. I think that's a slight challenge in itself but I think, you know, once the body acclimatised to that, it's about just really understanding what you want to do and not overcomplicate things..." the southpaw added.

## WTC final result will depend on conditions: Panesar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former England spinner Monty Panesar feels New Zealand will hold the edge over India in the World Test Championship final if conditions favour the pacers at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton.

It is rainy and cold in the UK at the moment and if it stays that way for the WTC final starting from June 18, then it will be advantageous New Zealand, feels Panesar.

"At the moment there is a lot of rain around. If the weather stays like this then it will be an interesting battle between the Indian and New Zealand seamers. The New Zealand batsman also play the moving ball better than Indian batsmen.

"So, that, that would be quite interesting to see if the ball is swinging and moving at some stage during the Test match, how the Indian batsmen, stand up to it compared to the New Zealand," Panesar said from UK.

However, if it is nice and sunny in the port city of Southampton, then the conditions will suit India more, said the former spinner.

Panesar also expects the ICC to prepare a neutral wicket and not a green top as the WTC is supposed to be a good advert for the five-day game. "They have got a great draining system at the Ageas Bowl. Normally you see nice good hot weather. Hopefully, the game will go on for the whole four to five days," he

said. "On that basis, you are looking at two spinners (Ashwin and Jadeja) from India and three seamers. If the weather is clear then India become favourites. So it depends a lot on the conditions."

Panesar feels Jadeja "will be the X-factor" in the WTC final. "For me, Ravindra Jadeja will be the X-factor. He's been in terrific form in the IPL. If India decides to go with just one spinner, I'll go with Jadeja instead of Ashwin as the spin-bowling option. Jadeja's defensive bowling skill and being a left-armers give him an upper hand," Panesar said.

Indian team will arrive in the UK on June 2 and will get a little over 10 days to train.

New Zealand, on the other hand, are playing two Tests against England before the WTC final and many see it as a big advantage but Panesar reckons it can be a double-edged sword.

"If New Zealand do well in the next two Test matches, then the momentum is going to favour them against India. But if England can beat them, suddenly they're going to be low on confidence and it is a good time for India to come," he said.

"James Anderson and Stuart Broad are usually very effective at this time of the year but England have picked a B team (for NZ series) in the absence of some key players, so we will see."



## Mehidy, Mushfiqur star in B'desh win

IAN S ■ DHAKA

Mehidy Hasan Miraz's four-wicket haul, coupled with wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim's 84, helped Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka by 33 runs. Sri Lanka were all out for 224 in reply to Bangladesh's 257/6.

Miraz dismissed Sri Lanka openers Danushka Gunathilaka and captain Kusal Perera within the first eight overs. Miraz then dismissed Dhananjaya de Silva and Ashen Bandara to leave Sri Lanka on 106/2.

Sri Lanka were given some hope by Wanindu Hasaranga,

who put up 47 runs for the seventh wicket with Dasun Shanaka and 62 runs for the eighth with Isuru Udana but the target turned out to be too big for Sri Lanka to chase.

Earlier, Bangladesh were buoyed by a 109-run partnership for the fifth wicket between Rahim and captain Mahmudullah, who scored 54.

**Brief scores:** Bangladesh 257/6 in 50 overs (Mushfiqur Rahim 84, Mahmudullah 54; Dhananjaya de Silva 3/45) beat Sri Lanka 224 all out (Wanindu Hasaranga 74, Kusal Perera 30; Mehidy Hasan Miraz 4/30) by 33 runs

## Verstappen wins in Monaco

AFP ■ MONACO

Max Verstappen capitalised on Ferrari pole-sitter Charles Leclerc's cruel last-minute withdrawal to win Sunday's Monaco Grand Prix and go top of the drivers' world championship for the first time.

Carlos Sainz for Ferrari took second with Lando Norris of McLaren completing the podium.

Red Bull's Verstappen displaced Lewis Hamilton at the top of the 2021 standings after the Mercedes world champion finished in seventh.

The Dutch driver pitched up in the Principality trailing Hamilton by 14 points, and leaves it four points ahead.

"It's so special to win. The first time for me on the podium here. It was all about looking after the tyres. I was pretty much in control," said Verstappen after taking the chequered flag waved by tennis superstar Serena Williams.

Hamilton had a low key weekend, qualifying in seventh and finishing in seventh.

His teammate Valtteri Bottas was in contention to pounce on any mistake by Verstappen.

But then his race came to



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen celebrates with his team after winning the Monaco Grand Prix at the Monaco racetrack in Monaco on Sunday

an embarrassing end when a routine pitstop took a disastrous turn as a wheel refused to come off.

The Finn's frustration will have been nothing to the heartache Leclerc suffered just before the start when he reported a gearbox problem on his Ferrari.

For the locally-born Leclerc it was a cruel end to his dream of winning his home grand prix.

"In the garage it was very difficult to feel ok, but I guess now I'm getting used to this feeling here unfortunately," said Leclerc.

"I've never finished a race here — this year, I don't start it. It's a difficult one to take and I also feel for the team."

His last minute absence was all the more unexpected as a couple of hours earlier Ferrari had announced repairs had been carried out without a grid penalty after Leclerc's accident in qualifying 24 hours earlier.

For the 23-year-old it was just the latest misfortune at Monaco.

Despite his familiarity with the narrow, unforgiving street circuit his record at his home race remains bleak.



Inter Milan players celebrate with the Serie A winner's trophy after clinching the Scudetto at the end of the Serie A match between Inter Milan and Udinese at the San Siro stadium in Milan on Sunday

## Liverpool, Chelsea secure CL spot at Leicester's expense



**Birmingham:** Chelsea qualified for next season's Champions League on Sunday despite a 2-1 defeat at Aston Villa as Leicester's loss against Tottenham saved the Blues' top four place in a thrilling end to the Premier League season.

Thomas Tuchel's side were 14 minutes away from missing out on a top-four finish when they trailed at Villa Park while Liverpool and Leicester were both winning.

Bertrand Traore put Villa ahead late in the first half before the former Chelsea winger won a penalty that was converted by Anwar El Ghazi.

Ben Chilwell got one back for Chelsea, but at that stage the Blues were still heading out of

the top four. An own goal from Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel was followed by two late Gareth Bale strikes, condemning the Foxes to a 4-2 loss as Chelsea received an unexpected favour from Spurs.

But the Blues finished one point above fifth-placed Leicester, illustrating the slender margins at play in a pulsating conclusion to the top four race. It was a huge escape for Chelsea as they enjoyed a significant measure of revenge for their FA Cup final defeat against the Foxes last weekend. AFP

## Aguero signs off in style in Man City romp

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

Sergio Aguero signed off for Manchester City in style on Sunday, scoring twice in a 5-0 romp for the Premier League champions against Everton.

City's record goalscorer, who is leaving the club after next week's Champions League final, hit a quick-fire double after coming off the bench with 25 minutes remaining.

His efforts added to earlier strikes from Kevin De Bruyne, Gabriel Jesus and Phil Foden as City showed no sign of letting up ahead of the showpiece clash against Chelsea in Porto.

Everton were overwhelmed on an emotional occasion, with City presented with the Premier League trophy and fans returning to the stadium after 14 months away due to coronavirus restrictions.

It was the first chance for the supporters to salute the champions and acknowledge their European exploits. Before the game large numbers



Manchester City players lift Sergio Aguero at the end of his final Premier League game for the club

spilled into the road as City's team coaches made what is normally a straightforward journey from the training complex to the stadium. Only 10,000 were permitted inside

the Etihad but the atmosphere they generated inspired the team and few left before the post-match ceremonies, which included the club tributes to Aguero.

Everton formed a guard of honour to greet City onto the field and players from both sides then did likewise for Aguero.

Supporters would have to wait to see the Argentine in action, however. The striker, having been troubled by injury in recent weeks, was not fit enough to play the full 90 minutes and had asked manager Pep Guardiola if he could start from the bench.

City, who were 3-0 up, sent on Aguero with just under half an hour remaining and he soon made his mark.

The Argentine made it 4-0 as he jinked through the area in the 71st minute and deftly flicked the ball past Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford with the outstep of his right boot. He claimed his second, and City's fifth, soon after as he leapt from the edge of the area to plant a header past Pickford from a Ferdinandinho cross.

He could even have had a hat-trick as he connected with another header but this time Pickford saved.

## Mane double takes Reds to 3rd

**Liverpool:** Liverpool secured a place in next season's Champions League by sweeping aside Crystal Palace 2-0 as 10,000 fans returned to Anfield on Sunday.

Sadio Mane struck either side of half-time as the Reds registered an eighth win in their final 10 games of the season to finish third in the Premier League.

Jürgen Klopp's men had to celebrate the club's first league triumph for 30 years in an empty stadium last season and their Premier League title defence was blown off course by a series of long-term injuries to key players. But they avoided the financial hit of missing out on Europe's premier club competition by finding their form in the final months of the season. AFP

