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OLI, A WANNABE
SUPREME LEADER

WORLD 8
BLINKEN TURNS TO 'EFFECTIVE
PARTNER' EGYPT TO CALM WEST ASIA

SPORT 12
FOAKES OUT
OF NZ TESTS

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10 VIVACITY



WhatsApp cites privacy issues; Obey, orders Govt

WhatsApp moves HC against IT rules, says tracing info about originator is against fundamental rights

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
Refusing to come under pressure from the Government to embrace its new rules even a day after expiry of the deadline, Facebook-owned WhatsApp on Wednesday challenged the provision of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. WhatsApp contended that tracing the originator of fake news and objectionable messages are against the right to privacy of individuals and their fundamental right to freedom of speech and expressions.

are against the company's end-to-end encrypted platform. In the petition, WhatsApp apprehended that such a system could put journalists at risk of retaliation for investigating issues that may be unpopular. Moreover, civil or political activists could face the heat for discussing certain rights and criticising or advocating for politicians or policies. Clients and attorneys could become reluctant to share confidential information for fear that the privacy and security of their communications is no longer ensured, WhatsApp has said. Former Telecom IT Minister Kapil Sibal and noted lawyer Arvind Datar are presently representing WhatsApp in courts and they are expected to argue in this case also.

Continued on Page 2

Centre asks social media giants to report compliance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) on Wednesday asked all big social media platforms to inform it about the status of compliance with the new digital rules that came into force from May 26. The Ministry has sought details of Chief Compliance Officer, Nodal Contact Officer, and Resident Grievance Officer appointed by the platforms under the new social media rules. In a note sent to all social media intermediaries, the MeitY has asked the organisations to submit their responses as soon as possible, preferably by Wednesday (May 26).

As you, including your parent company or any other subsidiary, provide a variety of services in India some of which falls within the definition of SSIMs (significant social media intermediaries) in the context of the IT Act and the aforesaid rules. Accordingly, as part of ascertaining the compliance to these rules, you are requested to provide the following information..." said MeitY. While WhatsApp moved the Delhi High Court against the guidelines, Facebook and Twitter have not complied yet.

Continued on Page 2

REGULATIONS AND CONTENTIONS

On February 25, the Modi Government notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 for social media intermediaries that will make it mandatory for platforms such as WhatsApp to aid in identifying the "originator" of "unlawful" messages.

Following are the salient features of the guidelines:

- Due diligence must be followed. In case, due diligence is not followed by the intermediary, safe harbour provisions will not apply to them
- Intermediaries shall remove or disable access within 24 hours of receipt of complaints of contents that exposes the private areas of individuals, show such individuals in full or partial nudity or in sexual act or is in the nature of impersonation including morphed images etc. Complaint can be filed either by the individual or by any other person on his/her behalf
- Intermediaries shall appoint a Grievance Officer to deal with such complaints and share the name and contact details of such officer
- Appoint a Chief Compliance Officer, Nodal Contact person for 24x7 and resident grievance officer who shall be responsible for ensuring compliance
- Publish a monthly compliance report and action taken as well as details of contents removed
- Significant social media intermediaries providing services primarily in the nature of messaging shall enable identification of the first originator of the information that is required only for the purposes of prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution or punishment of an offence related to sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order or of



incitement to an offence relating to the above or in relation with rape, sexually explicit material or child sexual abuse material punishable with imprisonment for a term of not less than five years

Intermediary shall not be required to disclose the contents of any message or any other information to the first originator

Digital news websites will have to follow the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act and Norms of Journalistic Conduct of the Press Council of India

The rules mandate OTT platforms to classify their content into five age-based categories - U (Universal), U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+, and A (Adult), and implement parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, and reliable age verification mechanisms for content classified as "A"

CONGRESS CONTENTION: HIGHLIGHTS

- The rules are dire, drastic and draconian in nature
- The guidelines reflect that BJP Government is suffering from the "Big Daddy" syndrome
- The grounds for such draconian directions have deliberately been kept delightfully vague, including Rule 4(2) which allows an order to be passed "for the purposes of prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution or punishment of an offence related to the sovereignty and integrity of India"
- "Under clause 3(b) (i), any data may be commanded by the government to the platform to be removed on such utterly broad words"
- "Any infraction of the Rules would, under Rule 7, take away the protection given by the parent act under Section 79, which exempts the intermediary social media platforms from direct punishment



People take shelter on a cart during landfall of cyclone Yaas at Digha in East Midnapore district on Wednesday

PTI

Yaas leaves trail of destruction

Cyclone packing 130-145 kmph winds affects 1 cr people in Bengal; 3 die in Odisha

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Cyclone Yaas that hit the coastal areas of north and north-eastern Bay of Bengal on Wednesday have affected about a crore people in Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said, adding however that only one person had reportedly been killed "that too because he had ventured out of the relief camp to catch fish without informing the authorities. Packing winds of up to 130-145 kmph, Yaas whiplashed the country's eastern coasts on Wednesday,

dumping heavy rain, damaging houses and farmlands, and leaving at least four persons dead — three in Odisha and one in Bengal — officials said. Mainly East Midnapore, and the Sunderbans areas of South and North 24 Parganas were affected by the cyclone that on Wednesday made its landfall near Dhamra port some 25 km south of Balasore town bordering Bengal. While in terms of intensity, Amphan made a record landfall (last year) in about 200 years, while Yaas left an impact that could be far more disas-

trous than the former, said experts claiming it was not the storm or the wind gust but the brimming over of the sea and river waters into the villages inundating thousands of hectares of land and displacing lakhs of people that would hurt Bengal for years to come. The impact of the cyclone was complete in around the resort townships of Digha, Mandarmani, Tajpur and Shankarpur which perhaps for the first time since their coming into being saw sea flood, locals said.

"We saw Tsunami on TV but never saw the sea behaving in such an unruly manner before ... Those who have been born and brought up by the sea side and grown up in the lap of Bay of Bengal will fear venturing into it for many months," said Durgapada Jana a hotelier at Digha, adding how the sea water raised its giant hood much like the way it did during Tsunami, brimmed over the twenty-foot high guard wall and entered town sweeping away whatever came in its way.

Continued on Page 2

Corona variant dominant in India spreading tentacles across countries, says WHO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The B.1.617 variant of the coronavirus has not only become the most dominant within India but also in several other nations. The World Health Organization (WHO) on Wednesday said that the highly-transmittable double mutant variant has now officially been recorded in 53 territories. A month ago, it was found in 44 countries across the world.

Additionally, according to media reports, the WHO has received information from unofficial sources that the B.1.617 variant has been found in seven other territories, figures in the UN health agency's weekly epidemiological update showed, taking the total to 60. The report said B.1.617 had shown increased transmissibility, while disease severity and risk of infection were under investigation.

Continued on Page 2

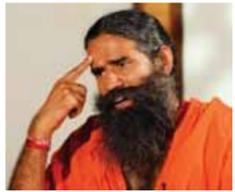
Slap Ramdev with sedition: IMA to PM

Association files defamation suit against yoga guru

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/DEHRADUN

Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev continues to face the heat over his disparaging remarks against the efficacy of allopathic line of treatment in dealing with Covid-19 cases. On Wednesday, the Uttarakhand chapter of Indian Medical Association (IMA) threatened to file a defamation case of ₹1,000 crore if he failed to submit a written apology. At the same time, in Delhi, IMA wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding that yoga guru Ramdev be booked immediately under sedition charges for alleged misinformation campaign on vaccination and challenging Government protocols for treatment of Covid-19.

In its letter to Modi, the IMA said it was gratifying to note that only 0.06 per cent of people who received both the doses of vaccine "got minimal" infection by coronavirus, and "very rarely" vaccinated people had a severe lung infection.



"It is well proved that by vaccination we save our people and country from catastrophic cascades of severe infection. At this juncture, painfully we bring to your kind notice, the video claiming 10,000 doctors have died in spite of taking both the doses of vaccine and lakhs of people have died due to allopathic medicine are circulating virally in the social media, as said by Ramdev, owner of Patanjali products," the body said in its letter. "If someone is claiming the allopathic medicine has killed people, it is an attempt to challenge the ministry which has issued the protocol for treatment to us," it stated. The IMA pointed out that as on date and according to its registry, 753 doctors died in the first wave and 513 lost their lives in the second wave due to Covid-19.

Continued on Page 2

Black fungus cases soar by 46% in 3 days

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The deadly black fungus or mucormycosis continues to sweep India. From around 8,000 plus cases reported on May 22, the cases spiked to 11,717 on Tuesday. In other words, the country has added 1,000 cases of black fungus everyday in the last few days.

As the cases are on upswing so is the demand for Amphotericin B, the main drug to treat the fungal disease. Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers DV Sadananda Gowda on Wednesday said an additional stock has been allocated to all the States and Union Territories.

The shortage of drug has made the people to take recourse to the social media which is flooded with such SOS messages.

As per the data made available by the Government, as on May 25, Gujarat has the highest number of black fungus cases at 2,859, closely followed by Maharashtra (2,770 cases). Andhra Pradesh has reported 768 cases, while Telangana and Uttar Pradesh have 744 and 701 cases respectively.

As per the data tweeted by the Union Minister of Chemical and Fertiliser, no case has been reported from the Northeast region as well as West Bengal. The cases may be on the higher side given that as per various media reports, West Bengal which has notified the disease has recorded two deaths so far and 10 people were under treatment for the disease till Monday.

Continued on Page 2

STATE/UT	PATIENTS UNDER TREATMENT ON MAY 25	ALLOCATION
Gujarat	2,859	7,210
Maharashtra	2,770	6,980
Madhya Pradesh	752	1,910
Andhra Pradesh	768	1,930
Telangana	744	1,890
Uttar Pradesh	701	1,780

Only 1 of 10,000 fully vaccinated got Covid +ve: Study

AFF ■ WASHINGTON

About 0.01 per cent of people became infected with Covid-19 between January and April despite being fully vaccinated, a US Government study confirming the shots' high efficacy showed on Tuesday.

The report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) documented so-called "breakthrough" cases among 101 million people fully vaccinated in the United States.

"Even though FDA-authorized vaccines are highly effective, breakthrough cases are expected, especially before population immunity reaches sufficient levels to further decrease transmission," the

report said. It examined the period from January 1 to April 30. A total of 10,262 infections were documented at 14 days or more after the final dose of a



vaccine provisionally authorized by the Food and Drug Administration — Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson.

Continued on Page 2

INDIA BECOMES SECOND COUNTRY TO REACH 20 CR VACCINATION COVERAGE

New Delhi: India has become the second country after the US to have crossed 20 crore cumulative Covid-19 vaccination coverage, the Union health Ministry said on Wednesday.

VACCINE MIX-UP: 20 UP VILLAGERS GET WRONG 2ND DOSE OF VACCINE
Siddharthnagar (UP): In a major goof-up, health workers in Uttar Pradesh's Siddharthnagar district administered Covaxin to 20 villagers who had been given Covishield in the first dose.

Farmers observe Black Day across country to mark six months of farm laws protest

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hundreds of farmers protesting against the three farm laws on Wednesday observed a nationwide "Black Day", burning effigies of the Modi Government, carried out protest marches and raised black flags in several cities and villages across the country. The day coincides with completion of six months of the farmers' protests around the national Capital's borders and completion of seven years in office by the Modi Government.

Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, who could not reach Delhi, put up black flags atop their houses while women wearing black "chunnis" held protests in their villages and burnt effigies of the Modi Government.

In Delhi, the farmers while observing the "Black Day" took out protest marches. Meanwhile, a brief ruckus was reported from the Ghazipur protest site between protesters and the local police, who tried to stop them from burning the effigy at the UP Gate below the Delhi-Meerut Expressway.

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Doctors scramble for 'proscribed' Remdesivir

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Remdesivir continues to remain doctors' first preference for Covid-19 treatment in most countries despite the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation against using the antiviral Remdesivir as there isn't enough evidence to support its use. India has also not proscribed the usage of the drug.

Remdesivir is approved or authorised for emergency use to treat Covid-19 in around 50 countries, including India, Iran, Canada, Japan, the USA, Australia and Mexico. The USA Food and Drug Administration (FDA) considers it to be a first-in-class

medication. Remdesivir is not the only drug, drugs like Ivermectin, Hydroxychloroquine, Lopiravir/Ritonavir, Plasma therapy, and medicines like Azithromycin and Doxycycline have all been ruled out as Covid-19 treatment by the WHO. At the beginning of the pandemic, Remdesivir and blood plasma emerged as the go-to treatment options.

Remdesivir has been authorised for emergency use in India, Singapore and approved for use in Japan, the European Union, the United States, and Australia for people

with severe symptoms. In February 2021, the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) started an evaluation to decide if the indication for Remdesivir should be modified to include those not requiring supplemental oxygen.

Japan has approved the drug for use based on the US emergency authorisation. Australia has provisionally approved the drug for use in adults and adolescents with severe Covid 19 symptoms who have been hospitalised.

Continued on Page 2

Choksi nabbed in Dominica

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fugitive businessman Mehul Choksi, wanted here in the ₹13,500 crore credit fraud in Punjab National Bank and a related money laundering case, who had reportedly gone missing, has been nabbed in Dominica late on Wednesday.

According to the Antigua media reports, Choksi is currently in the custody of crime investigation department of that country. A Red Corner Notice of the Interpol is pending against Choksi at the behest of the CBI. Choksi might have been caught at an immigration checkpoint in Dominica upon his arrival in that country, sources said. The businessman was last seen on Sunday in his car in the island country.

Detailed report on P2

MODI URGED Withdraw Lakshadweep decisions: Pawar

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Upping the ante over several policy decisions taken by the recently appointed Administrator of Lakshadweep Islands Praful K Patel ever since he took over in December 2020, NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Wednesday rooted for withdraw all "unwarranted" and "irrational" decisions which would "disrupt" the native community way of life in the island.

In a letter written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Pawar apprehended that the decisions taken by the Administrator of

Lakshadweep Islands "would lead to the destruction of traditional livelihood and unique culture of Lakshadweep besides the huge unrest and protests these decisions have already triggered"

Drawing the PM's attention to the issues raised by the Lakshadweep Lok Sabha MP Mohammed Faizal regarding the policy decisions taken by the Administrator of Lakshadweep Islands Praful K. Patel, the NCP chief asked the Prime Minister to have the various policy decisions "re-examined" and "necessary directions are passed on to the Lakshadweep administration to

withdraw unreasonable and unwarranted orders".

The policy decisions that Pawar highlighted in his letter included: Easing of Stringent Standard Procedure (SoP) for Covid Control, Prevention of Anti Social Activities Act (PASA), unemployment, New liquor policy, Animal preservation Regulation draft, Amendments to Constitution of Panchayat, co-operative Societies etc, Pandara Land right, Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation Draft (LDAR), closure of dairy farms, Staff selection commission and unscientific

development plan.

It may be recalled that the Patel came into the limelight after the Mohan Delkar, the Lok Sabha MP of Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu, committed suicide in a Mumbai hotel on February 22 and the Maharashtra police had booked him in March this year for alleged abetment of suicide. Dwelling upon the policy decision relating to the easing of Covid SOP for Lakshadweep, Pawar said that after the Lakshadweep administration revised SOP by doing away with the mandatory quarantine

Lakshadweep - which remained without positive cases for almost one year - started reporting positive cases and these cases soared to high numbers in all Islands with highest positivity rate.

The NCP chief said that under new liquor policy, Lakshadweep -- which was the only UT that had banned sale or consumption of alcohol -- was now allowing bars in government-owned hotels in Kavaratti, Kadamath and Minicoy isles besides the shocking decision of allowing liquor on passenger ships in the guide or promoting tourism.

Fugitive businessman Mehul Choksi captured in Dominica

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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The businessman was last seen on Sunday in his car in the island country. After searches, Police recovered the vehicle but

Choksi could not be found, a statement from the Antigua police had said late on Monday. Choksi is facing two cases in the island nation. According to Antigua Prime Minister Gaston Browne, Choksi might not have fled to Cuba.

The Caribbean country PM said Choksi has two cases against him in courts of Antigua and Barbuda—extradition and revocation of citizenship—for which he has brought in a celebrated lawyer from the United Kingdom to represent him and this showed his willingness to stay and contest the cases. Choksi has been staying in Antigua and Barbuda since January 2018 after his flight from India when the PNB scam came to light. Since reports emerged that Choksi has gone missing, the Royal Police Force of the Caribbean island nation launched an operation to trace him.

Import vaccines to inoculate younger populations: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Kalkaji, Atishi has said that the vaccination of youth has been closed at Government centres amid the shortage. The private hospitals are administering vaccines by charging ₹800 to 1,350 per dose.

On Tuesday, 43,824 vaccine doses were administered in Delhi for the whole day, out of which nearly 33,000 people have been given the first and 10,000 people have been given the second

dose. "Covaxin is completely out of stock for those above 45 years of age in Delhi, Civishield stock is available for 12 days. We would like to again appeal to the Central Government to immediately approve and import other vaccines in India including Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, so that the youth can get the vaccine as soon as possible," the AAP leader said while presenting the vaccine bulletin. Atishi said, "on Tuesday, on May 25, 43,824 vaccines were administered. Out of this, nearly 33,320 were first doses, and about 10,504 were inoculated with their second dose.

South Africa has permitted the off-label prescription of Ivermectin by doctors.

Philippines' Food and Drug Administration granted limited use by two hospitals for Covid-19 "outside well-designed clinical trials", and the WHO also concluded that Ivermectin should only be used to treat the virus in a clinical trial setting.

Similarly, the WHO has discontinued plasma therapy for Covid treatment while the US Food and Drugs Administration had allowed Plasma therapy for emergency use in August last year. Japan is likely to start clinical trial of plasma therapy.

Doctors scramble...

From Page 1

Australia claims to have a sufficient supply of Remdesivir in its national stockpile.

In India, the Government has allocated an additional 22.17 lakh vials of Remdesivir, to all States and Union Territories for the period of May 23 to May 30. Earlier, 76.70 lakh vials of the drug were made available to all the States till May 23. So far 98.87 lakh vials of Remdesivir have been allocated across the country.

Ivermectin, commonly used to treat parasites in animals and head lice in humans, the drug has now been permitted as a treatment for Covid-19 patients in several of the worst-hit countries, including Slovakia, the Czech Republic and swathes of Latin America.

Corona variant...

From Page 1

Globally over the past week, the number of new cases and deaths continued to decrease, with around 4.1 million new cases and 84,000 new deaths reported — a 14 per cent and two per cent decrease respectively, compared to the previous week.

"Despite a declining global trend over the past four weeks, incidence of Covid-19 cases and deaths remain high, and substantial increases have been observed in many countries throughout the world," the document said.

The highest numbers of new cases in the past seven days were reported from India (1,846,055 -- down 23 per cent); Brazil (451,424, up three per cent); Argentina (213,046, up 41 per cent), the United States (188,410, down 20 per cent), and

Colombia (107,590, down seven per cent).

The update gave information on the four mutations classed as variants of concern: those first reported in Britain (B.1.1.7), South Africa (B.1.351), Brazil (P.1) and India (B.1.617).

When counting up the total number of territories reporting each variant, the WHO added together those from which it had official and unofficial information. B.1.1.7 has now been reported in 149 territories; B.1.351 in 102 territories and P.1 in 59 territories.

The WHO split up figures for the B.1.617 variant into three lineages (B.1.617.1, B.1.617.2 and B.1.617.3).

The first has been reported in a total of 41 territories, the second in 54 and the third in six: Britain, Canada, Germany, India, Russia and the United States.

WhatsApp moves...

From Page 1

"With end-to-end encryption, users feel safe to communicate freely...Once citizens become aware that SSMLs have built the ability to identify the first originator of information in India on their end-to-end encrypted messaging services, individuals will not feel safe to speak freely for fear that their lawful private communications will be used against them, thereby infringing their rights to privacy and free speech," said the petition.

The messaging company WhatsApp LLC has submitted that the rule on traceability violates the fundamental rights to privacy and freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India, and Sections 69A and 79 Information Technology Act, 2000.

In its challenge to Rule 4(2) of the Intermediary Guidelines, which requires intermediary platforms to make provisions for "identification of the first originator of the information", WhatsApp

has argued that the provision is manifestly arbitrary and disproportionate as the harm it causes far outweighs its purported benefits. Forcing the platform to build the ability to identify the first originator of information in India would infringe upon the privacy of every individual who uses WhatsApp in India, the company has argued. It is further contended that the rule falls foul of the three-fold test of legality, necessity and proportionality laid down by the Supreme Court in *KS Puttaswamy Vs Union of India*, famously known as *Aadhar* case. Whataas also pointed out that that the rule violates Sections 69A and 79(2) of the Information Technology Act, which defines the scope of the Centre's authority.

The international messaging company now owned by Facebook has explained that although Section 69A(2) inter alia empowers the Central Government to prescribe procedures to block access, determination of the first originator of information in India on end-to-end encrypted platforms is in excess of that power.

Covid-19 IN INDIA	
TOTAL CASES:	2,73,66,958 (+2,10,298)
DEATHS:	3,15,244 (+3,822)
RECOVERED:	2,46,23,543 (+2,80,453)
ACTIVE:	24,17,274
MAHA:	56,50,907 (+24,752)
K'TAKA:	24,99,784 (+26,811)
KERALA:	24,24,389 (+28,798)
TN:	19,45,260 (+33,764)
DELHI:	14,21,477 (+1,491)

Only 1 of 10,000...

From Page 1

Of these cases, 6,446 or 63 per cent occurred in females, and the median patient age was 58 years. Among the total number of breakthroughs, 2,725 or 27 per cent were asymptomatic, 706 or seven per cent were hospitalized for reasons related to Covid, and 132 or one per cent died from reasons related to Covid.

The rate of breakthrough infection is thus roughly 0.01 per cent, hospitalisations are 0.0007 per cent, and deaths are 0.0001 per cent. The genomic sequences were available for five per cent of all infections, and showed that 64 per cent of cases came from variants of concern. The most significant was B.1.1.7 that was first identified in the United Kingdom. The study occurred during a period when the coronavirus was surging through the United States, with approximately 355,000 cases reported in the last week of April alone. "The number of Covid-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths that will be prevented among vaccinated persons will far exceed the number of vaccine breakthrough cases," the authors wrote.

Centre asks...

From Page 1

Apart from details such as the name of the app, website and service falling within the scope of significant social media intermediary, the Ministry has sought details of the three key personnel, as well as the physical contact address of the platform in India.

It has asked the platforms to report on their status of compliance with the new rules.

"If you are not considered as SSML, please provide the reasons for the same including the registered users on each of the services provided by you. The Government reserves the right to seek any additional information, as may be permitted within these Rules and the IT Act," said. The Ministry has asked large social media companies to confirm and share their response at the earliest "and preferably today itself".

Union Minister for MeitY Ravi Shankar Prasad said the Government of India is committed to ensure the right of privacy to all its citizens but at the same time it is also the responsibility of the Government to maintain law and order and ensure national security." In a statement, he said, "None of the mea-

sures proposed by India will impact the normal functioning of WhatsApp in any manner whatsoever and for the common users, there will be no impact."

The Minister termed WhatsApp's last moment challenge to the intermediary guidelines as an unfortunate attempt to prevent norms from coming into effect.

The Centre's response comes after WhatsApp filed a lawsuit in the Delhi High Court challenging the Government's new digital rules, arguing that the requirement for the company to provide access to encrypted messages will break privacy protections.

The UK, US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada require social media firms to allow for legal interception, it said, adding, "What India is asking for is significantly much less than what some of the other countries have demanded."

"Therefore, WhatsApp's attempt to portray the Intermediary Guidelines of India as contrary to the right to privacy is misguided," the official statement said. The Government recognises that 'Right to Privacy' is a fundamental right and is committed to ensure the same to its citizens, it said.

Slap Ramdev...

From Page 1

None in the first wave could receive the vaccine and the majority who had died in the second wave also couldn't take their vaccine for various reasons.

"Now deceitfully attributing 10,000 people have died in spite of two doses of vaccination, is a deliberate move to stall the efforts of vaccination to reach our masses and it needs to be curtailed immediately," the IMA said.

"We are not against any medicine promoted by the ministry and are happy to share in most of our public health treatment centres, the drugs promoted by the AYUSH ministry. We opposed certain drugs promoted without the approval of the ministry as a curative drug."

In Dehradun, IMA State unit wrote to Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat and Chief Secretary Om Prakash seeking strict action against Ramdev. In the letter to

CM, the Secretary of IMA Uttarakhand State branch, Dr Ajay Khanna said the statement of Ramdev has demoralised and angered the doctors fighting the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We at IMA have lost 153 of our doctors in the first Covid wave and 452 doctors in the second wave of the pandemic. The anguish and anger of the doctors might jeopardise our fight towards this devastating pandemic," the letter said.

On Sunday, Ramdev was forced to withdraw the statement made in the viral video clip in which he is heard questioning some of the medicines being used to treat the coronavirus infection and saying that "lakhs have died from taking allopathic medicines for Covid-19".

A day later, however, he posed 25 questions to the IMA in an "open letter" on his Twitter handle, asking if allopathy offered permanent relief for ailments such as hypertension and type-1 and 2 diabetes.

and extended their solidarity. Meanwhile, at Ghazipur on the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border, hundreds of farmers, led by Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait, converged into groups as they burnt an effigy of the Centre in protest.

In Punjab, protesting farmers burnt effigies of the BJP-led central Government at many places. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Singh Badal also raised a black flag at his house in Badal village in Muktsar district while Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu raised black flag at his house in Amritsar.

In Haryana, state Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni said farmers at many places hoisted black flags atop their houses and vehicles to register their protest.

Executive Engineer
C.D, P.W.D, Khurja (Bulandshhar)

No.1096/6A /E-TENDER/2021 Dated : 10.05.2021

E-Procurement Inviting Tenders Notice

On behalf of Government of Uttar Pradesh, E.E. C.D., U.P.P.W.D., Khurja invites following percentage rate bids online Tender <http://etender.up.nic.in> from the eligible and approved Contractors registered with UP PWD, from dt. 05.06.2021 to 11.06.2021 upto 12.00 PM. The technical bids will be opened online on the Same working day that is, on dated 11.06.2021 at 3:30 P.M. at the Office of Executive Engineer, C.D., U.P.P.W.D. Khurja if the office happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened online on the next working day respectively, at the same time and validity of bid will be considered from the original date. The date and time of opening of the financial bid shall be notified on the website.

Sl. No	Name of Work	Estimated cost (Rs. in Lac)	Bid Security (Rs. in Lacs)	Work Completion	Tender document fee including GST	Contractors Category
1	SR of Bhopatpur Village to Nagla Bhopatpur Link road	25.27	0.00	3 Month	Rs. 800.00 Tender Cost +Rs. 150.00 G.S.T.	A, B, C, D (Registered of road work)
2	SR of Makhaina Nahar (A.B. Nager) Patri to Nagla Bhopatpur Link road	9.64	0.00	2 Month	Rs. 800.00 Tender Cost +Rs. 150.00 G.S.T.	A, B, C, D (Registered of road work)
3	SR of Talwar to Gosmi Link road	21.07	0.00	3 Month	Rs. 800.00 Tender Cost +Rs. 150.00 G.S.T.	A, B, C, D (Registered of road work)
4	SR of Dibai Karmwas road to Ghusrana Gail Link road	8.48	0.00	2 Month	Rs. 800.00 Tender Cost +Rs. 150.00 G.S.T.	A, B, C, D (Registered of road work)

- The Tender Document Fee must be deposited through Internet Banking.
- All registered contractors have to upload Turnover certified by C.A. of last 5 Year and details of maximum cost work satisfactorily completed in last 5 years in chanaakya software before submission of tender. details of e-tender uploaded on <https://etender.up.nic.in> shall also be uploaded on Upwdw Chanaakya software, before last date & time of submission of bid.
- Bidder has to upload required documents as per Government order No. 879(1) / 23-7-2020 P.W. Anubhag-7 Lucknow Dt. 25.08.2020 for "Prahari Application" in Chanaakya Software by accessing hyperlink available on <http://roc.upwdw.gov.in> for Tendering Process.
- Terms & Conditions related to bids are available on <https://etender.up.nic.in>
- Performance Security will be applicable from the first lowest bidder as per Government order No. 16/2020/A-1-10 Bha. S/ 10-2020 Dt. 29.12.2020

UP- 163769 Date 21.5.2021
www.upgoc.nic.in पर उपलब्ध है।
(Surenra Kumar) Executive Engineer
C.D. PWD Khurja (Bulandshahar)

Yaas leaves...

From Page 1

The whole six-km coastal road that houses hundreds of shops and hotels were under a waist-deep water giving the Army, Police and NDRF men a trying time to carry out rescue operations when reports last came in.

The villages in Khejuri, Heria, Nandigram blocks were under water with sea and river waters pulling down hundreds of houses and inundating large tracts of agricultural lands and sousing tons of paddy stored as yearly ration by the villagers.

"They have nothing to eat, nowhere to go and nothing to wear... these people are farmers till today but from tomorrow they will be beggars

as their lands have been rendered unlivable for at least 3-4 seasons thanks to the saline water from the sea," said Anupam Maithi, a former Panchayat member over telephone. "Hundreds of villages in South 24 Parganas and many in North 24 Parganas have gone under water due to breach in bunds," said the Chief Minister who was camping for the past more than 36 hours at the control room at State Secretariat. "We have shifted 15 lakh people to more than 14,000 rescue camps and other safer areas," the Chief Minister said. At least 134 river embankments have been breached by in South and North 24 Parganas alone and brackish river water is gushing into the villages submerging thousands of acres of agricultural lands, she said.

Farmers observe...

From Page 1

Many farmer supporters held black flags in their hands, several others had placards that condemned the Government and demanded the withdrawal of the contentious laws, even as Covid-19 protocols on social distancing and face masks were largely amiss at the site.

At Singhu Border, the protestors went to hoist black flags on their tents, trolleys, cars, tractors and temporary structures.

Protestors gathered at the Kajarria Tiles office, held meetings, and took out a march towards the stage. While at Tikri Border local people also joined the protestors

and extended their solidarity.

Meanwhile, at Ghazipur on the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border, hundreds of farmers, led by Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait, converged into groups as they burnt an effigy of the Centre in protest.

In a video message released on Wednesday, Haryana BKU president Gurnam Singh Chaduni said, "We are celebrating the day to oppose PM Narendra Modi. Today is the day to show your opposition for yourself and your family. Raise black flags on your rooftop and vehicles, and burn effigies of the Prime Minister. This is a fight for our economic independence."

"Six months have passed since

the farmers' protest at Delhi borders against the three farm legislations began," said Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee general secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher.

In Punjab, protesting farmers burnt effigies of the BJP-led central Government at many places. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Singh Badal also raised a black flag at his house in Badal village in Muktsar district while Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu raised black flag at his house in Amritsar.

In Haryana, state Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni said farmers at many places hoisted black flags atop their houses and vehicles to register their protest.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER CENTRAL
CIRCLE, RURAL WORKS, BHUBANESWAR

O-266

No. 2563 / Date. 24.05.2021

"e" Procurement Notice for Bridge Work (Balance work) under Biju Setu Yojana For the year 2021-22

1. Name of the Work	Bridge Work (Balance work) under Biju Setu Yojan
2. Total No. of Packages	1 Nos. of Bridge Work (Balance work)
3. Estimated Cost of the Package	RS- 998.62 Lakhs
4. Class of Contractor	Estimated cost more than Rs.6.00 Cores & up to Rs.15.00 Cores. Special Class & Super class (of Odisha PWD) or relevant class of other licensing authorities
5. Period of completion	As mentioned in Column-7 of Annexure
6. Offered rates by bidder	The offered rate by the contractor shall be excluding GST.
7. Other details	

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender on-line for bidding		Date & Time of opening of tender	
		From	To	Technical Bid	Financial Bid
1	2	3	4	5	6
Superintending Engineer, Central Circle Rural Works, Bhubaneswar	Tender-Online-C .C.14 of 2021	07.06.2021 at 11.00 AM	22.06.2021 Up to 5.00 PM	23.06.2021 at 11.00 AM	02.07.2021 at 11.00 AM

Further details can be seen from the web site. www.tendersorissa.gov.in

OIPR: 25082/11/00/10/2122
Superintending Engineer
Central Circle, Rural Works, Bhubaneswar

Black...

From Page 1

The Centre has allocated a total 29,250 additional vials of Amphotericin-B, a key drug to treat mucormycosis cases to the States and Union Territories for the patients currently being treated at different hospitals across the country. Gowda on Wednesday said the allocation has been made based on the number of patients under treatment which is 11,717 across the country.

"Earlier, 19,420 vials of Amphotericin-B were allocated on May 24 and 23,680 vials of the drug were supplied across the country on 21st May." (See Box)

However, the States are

not satisfied at the allocation of the drug as they grapple with the surge in cases among Covid patients and those recovered from it.

For instance, as per the data shared by the Ministry, Delhi has 119 cases, whereas the State Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has put the number at 620. Similarly, Amisha Rajani from Indore Covid Help organization too rued that Indore is grappling with a shortage of key Amphotericin-B injection used in its treatment. "According to the allocation details, there should be at least 2 injections available for every patient in Madhya Pradesh. But we've got 50 injections on for 221 active black fungus cases in Indore. What about the rest of them? 171 patients with no

injections?" she asked. "Usually, four to six doses of Amphotericin-B are to be administered on the first day of treatment to black fungus patients. After that, three to four doses are needed every day for the next 10-days," said Dr Ravi Dosi, head, Chest Diseases Department in Sri Aurobindo Institute of Medical Sciences (SAIMS) in the district.

Dr Rahul Bhargava, Director, Department of Clinical Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplant, Fortis Hospital in Gurugram pointed out that no doubt main stay of treatment of mucormycosis is surgery and amphotericin. But in case of shortfall or not being able to be given because of kidney issues another drugs like

Posconazole and Isavuconazole, both of which are available, can be given for the treatment of the fungal disease. Treatment needs to be taken for 2 to 3 months, he suggested.

Those having health conditions such as uncontrolled diabetes, suppression of immune system by steroids, prolonged stay in ICU, comorbidities post-transplant and malignancy are prone to be attacked by the fungal disease. At least, 11 States have notified the disease so far while others are in the process.

The cases are expected to rise given that the prevalence of diabetes in the country is as high as 12% to 18% of the adult population, especially in urban areas and they are most vul-

nerable to the Covid disease. According to a study, the black fungus mortality rate in India is "considerably high due to delays in seeking medical attention and diagnosing the disease, and challenges in managing the advanced stage of infection."

Caused by mold found in damp environments like soil or compost, black fungus can attack the respiratory tract. It is not contagious and commonly affects the sinuses or lungs after a person inhales fungal spores in the air, and can also affect the skin following a surface injury like a cut or burn. Symptoms depend on where in the body the fungus is growing, but can include facial swelling, fever, skin ulcers and black lesions in the mouth.

Delhi sees 58% fall in Covid cases, fatality rate abates



A healthcare worker in a PPE kit stands near a patient at the Covid Care Centre at the Rakabganj Gurudwara in New Delhi on Tuesday. PTI

The number of containment zones also came down to 36,873 on May 26 from a staggering 56,833 on May 20

CHANDAN PRAKASH ■ NEW DELHI

The proactive measures initiated by the Delhi Government to tackle Covid-19 infections seem to be yielding results as the national Capital has witnessed 58 per cent reduction in the number of coronavirus cases, while the death rate has fallen drastically.

Only 14,758 new infections were reported in the last seven days while 39,308 people recovered or were discharged during the same period. The city reported 130 Covid casualties in the last 24 hours, taking the total death toll to 23,695 on Wednesday. However, the death rate has drastically reduced, as on Tuesday 156 deaths were reported while at least 207 people succumbed to the disease on Monday. The casualty figure was 189, 183, 152 and 233 on last Sunday, Saturday, Friday and Thursday, respectively.

The first day of this month, May 1, saw a 31.6 per cent positivity rate, which came down

to 1.93 on May 26. On May 25, the positivity rate was 2.14 per cent, on May 24 this was 2.52 per cent, on May 23 it was 2.42 and on May 22 it was 3.58, while on the 21st it was at a whopping 4.76 per cent.

As per data issued by the health department, it can be concluded that the positivity rate of Covid-19 has dropped by approximately 58 per cent in the last seven days.

The number of containment zones also came down to 36,873 on May 26 from a staggering 56,833 on May 20. Following the declining trend the numbers of such zones has been decreasing day by day in the national Capital.

DATE	INFECTIONS	RECOVERED OR DISCHARGED	POSITIVITY RATE (%)	DEATHS
26 May	1491	3952	1.93	130
25 May	1568	4251	2.14	156
24 May	1550	4375	2.52	207
23 May	1649	5158	2.42	189
22 May	2260	6453	3.58	182
21 May	3009	7288	4.76	252
20 May	3231	7831	5.50	233

Delhi has been in the throes of a crisis for close to a month, particularly in April, with people struggling to find beds in hospitals, oxygen cylinders for home management of the disease, medicines, as well as help from Government offi-

cial. However, a timely lockdown besides other measures including an increasing number of oxygen beds and ensuring a supply of the life-saving gas to various hospitals in time has certainly saved many lives.

'Team India' must fight Covid war as one, Kejriwal tells Modi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said that 'Team India' has to come together to fight coronavirus and urged the Centre to procure vaccines and distribute them to the States.

Addressing the media, Kejriwal accused the Centre of abdicating its responsibilities and leaving it to the States to procure the vaccines on their own. "The Central Government is responsible for purchasing and supplying vaccines. As a country, India cannot lose this war against Covid," he said.

He assured Prime Minister Narendra Modi that all Chief Ministers of the country were ready to take on any duties, but on its part the Central Government should fulfil its responsibilities as States cannot fulfil some of those responsibilities.

Kejriwal said that India delayed its own inoculation programme by six months. "Many countries had started vaccinating their people. But in India, rather than vaccinating our own people, the vaccines



were sent abroad. Had we started the vaccination programme earlier, we could have saved many people from the second wave that has hit us so badly," he said.

"Vaccines for those above 18 years of age have gotten over in Delhi. For the past four days, the vaccination centres for the youth have been shut.

We have written to the Central Government but the vaccines have not yet arrived. This is not just the case with Delhi but it's the same situation across the country. In a pan-

democratic situation, we should ideally be opening new centres every day, but that is not happening.

"The second wave has proved to be extremely deadly for the country. Barely any family has remained untouched by Covid. This is because India's vaccination drive got delayed by six months due to the vaccine diplomacy. We made a huge mistake at that time. Instead of vaccinating our own citizens, we began exporting vaccines to other nations," he concluded.

Delhi will get Sputnik vaccine soon: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Wednesday said that the city administration will get Sputnik V vaccine soon. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the manufacturers of the vaccine have agreed to supply the Russian anti-Covid vaccine to Delhi, though the quantity is yet to be decided.

"Talks with the makers of Sputnik V are on. They will give us vaccines, but the quantity is yet to be decided. Our officials and the representatives of the vaccine manufacturers met on Tuesday, too," Kejriwal confirmed during his visit to Akash Hospital in Dwarka.

Sharing his concerns over the black fungus cases in the Capital, he said, "600 cases have been reported so far and Delhi has a shortage of Amphotericin-B injections used in its treatment."

While inaugurating the Capital's first drive-through vaccination facility at Vegas Mall in Dwarka, Kejriwal said that the only difficulty was that of vaccination supply. "There is an acute shortage of vaccines, especially for those between 18-44 years of age. The



Government has provided Covishield for those above 45 years, which will last for a few days. I hope the Central Government is making efforts to give Delhi the maximum number of vaccines as soon as possible. The speed of inoculation has reduced as the centres have closed, not just in Delhi, but across the country. Ideally, this would have been the time when we should have increased the number of centres, but that doesn't appear to be the case. Therefore, I hope vaccines are supplied on a war footing soon."

He added, "We have already written, more than once, that Delhi needs 80 lakh vaccines per month, but the paucity of shots remains a constant challenge. The lockdown

cannot be extended indefinitely. People's livelihood is suffering, their businesses are shutting down -- we will have to see how much unlocking can happen. But if we were to connect it to the inoculation process, we do not know how long the vaccines will take to arrive."

He added, "In my view, there are just two-three such drive-through vaccination centres. One is in Chhatrasal, which will open on Saturday and some others will open in the private sector. Please note that we can open as many centres as possible, but we need to have enough vaccines in stock. Here, at the Vegas Mall, vaccines are free for the underprivileged but will be paid otherwise."

14 black fungus cases reported in Gurugram in 24 hrs

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Black fungus cases are increasing in Gurugram at an alarming rate and in the last 24 hours the district health department has confirmed 14 new infections. With this, the total figure has now risen to 170. These include patients living in outer districts of the State apart from Gurugram. The city has recorded four suspected deaths due to black fungus however none were confirmed by the district health department.

Dr Amitabh Malik, Chief of the ENT Department, Paras Hospital, Gurugram said, the black fungus infection was mostly affecting diabetics and patients with weak immunity.

"When a diabetic person gets coronavirus, he is given steroids which weakens immunity and increases the sugar levels. A corona patient without



BLACK FUNGUS

comorbidities does not have this infection. This is not a new form of Covid infection. This includes people who have health problems or take medicines that reduce the body's ability to fight germs and disease. These affect people with diabetes, cancer or people who have had an organ transplant," Dr Malik said.

According to the doctors, common symptoms associated with the disease are headache, facial pain, and nasal congestion, loss of vision or eye pain, swelling of the cheeks and eyes, and black crust in the nose.

BJP attacks AAP over vaccine procurement

NEW DELHI: The BJP on Wednesday slammed the ruling AAP for blaming the Central Government on Covid-19 vaccine procurement from foreign nations. In a joint conference, the parliamentarians, Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly and Delhi BJP president, criticised the Kejriwal Government, questioning the AAP on 50 lakh vaccines administered in the Capital. Gupta said, "When Central Govt allotted vaccines, the Kejriwal Govt was talking about procuring it directly from the manufacturers, but now Kejriwal is approaching the Centre..." -SR

Four associates of Sushil Kumar arrested

SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has started to unmask Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar's criminal syndicate that was being operated from the Chhatrasal stadium in North Delhi. It began with the arrest of four of his associates, who were involved in the alleged property dispute that led to the murder of a 23-year-old wrestler at the stadium.

Three cars including a Mahindra Scorpio and a Maruti Breeza seized by the police from the crime scene belong to them and it is suspected that they came loaded with guns and batons after getting directions from gangsters Neeraj Bawania and Kala Asada. They are residents of Rohtak and Jhajjar in Haryana. Earlier, police had recovered a



double barrel gun and batons from a Mahindra Scorpio car.

A senior police official said that after the North West district police got the custody of Kumar for interrogation, the case was transferred to the Crime Branch for further investigation into the abduction and death of wrestler Sagar Dhanekar.

Meanwhile, Sushil Kumar, who turned 38 on Wednesday, celebrated his birthday behind bars with the Crime Branch putting in a long list of ques-

tions related to Sagar's abduction and death. Sources said that now with the arrest of these four associates police may discover the exact reason behind the dispute and Kumar's role in it. Kumar was also questioned regarding his relationship with the gangsters.

The four associates of Kumar were identified as Bhupender (38), Mohit (22), Gulab (24), all residents of Haryana's Jhajjar district and Manjeet (29), a native of Rohtak district.

They were arrested from Delhi's Kanjhawala area in the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday.

The arrests were made by the team of Special Staff of Rohini district of Delhi Police after specific inputs were received by them.

6 sharpshooters of Kala Jathedi gang held in city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has apprehended six sharpshooters, including four juveniles, of the Kala Jathedi gang, in the national Capital.

The main accused have been identified as Manjeet (22), a resident of Jhajjar district and Mohit Gill (24), a resident of Rohtak district in Haryana.

According to Rajiv Ranjan Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Outer North district, police received information regarding firing at Katewara Nahar in Bawana. They rushed to MV Hospital where Mohit Lamba, a resident of Qutubgarh village was found admitted with multiple gunshot injuries.

"He revealed that one of his acquaintances, Nikhil had called him to Katewara Nahar. When he reached there, he was accosted by five people, including Nikhil. They fired at him but somehow he managed to escape. He hid in a nearby field and saved himself," said the

DCP. "Later, police came to know that a person called Prince was arrested in the Arms Act in Kanjhawala. During investigation, it was revealed that he had given a motorcycle to one of the juveniles near Qutubgarh while they were on their way to kill Lamba. Prince also disclosed that he had received direction from a known criminal Priyavrat to help that juvenile in committing the murder of Lamba," the DCP added.

"Lamba is close to Ajay Rana, who is currently in jail. Rana had an enmity with Priyavrat over the distribution of profits from toll tax operations. Both Rana and Priyavrat are in judicial custody," said the DCP.

"One of the assailants was identified as an associate of the Kala Jathedi gang which was being operated through his aid Priyavrat. After receiving specific inputs, a trap was laid in Bawana and six people involved in the case were apprehended," said the DCP. "Gill was identified as an

Three held for slaughtering cows in Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In three separate incidents, the Delhi Police has arrested three men in connection with cow slaughter in the areas of outer Delhi. Police said that the accused men slaughtered cows and sold the meat at ₹ 100 per kg to their customers including meat shop owners.

Police said that the accused Asif (36), his brother Mohnish (24), carrying a reward of ₹50,000 each have been arrested along with their accomplice Naeem (20) on Tuesday from their hideouts in Jamia Nagar.

According to Parvinder Singh, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Outer district, the first incident was reported at Ranhola police station on May 16 in Baprola village area and on visiting the spot, which was an empty plot, where carcasses of cow were found lying.

"When the spot was inspected, the animal was found to be slaughtered and main parts of the body were

taken away and only the innards were left there. The second incident of cow slaughter was also reported from the same village on the same day where again carcasses of cow were found at vacant plot in a similar pattern while another similar incident was reported from Nihal Vihar area on May 20," said the DCP.

"Inspection of all the three spots showed a common link and indicated involvement of same set of criminals. Post-mortem was conducted and separate cases were registered under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code, Delhi Agricultural Cattle Preservation Act and Prevention of Cruelty of Animals Act," said the DCP.

"As part of investigation, suspects previously involved in such acts were searched for and several meat traders were enquired for any clues about the probable suspects and jail release criminals involved in such acts were also interrogated but police did not get any breakthrough," said the DCP.

दिल्ली सरकार
आप की सरकार

For help during the Corona pandemic, call these numbers

Helpline Numbers

For assistance with various issues arising due to corona pandemic, helpline numbers are listed below. Please call the relevant number according to the assistance required.

1031

Covid Helpline Numbers

- Oxygen Concentrator
- Pulse Oximeter
- Vaccination Information
- Drug Control Room
- Death Certificate
- Rain Basera
- Hospital Beds
- Tele-consultation
- Any other Covid related information

Other Helpline Numbers

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

1075

Home Isolation Covid+ Patient

1800-111-747

Ration Grievance

1967

Child Helpline

1098

Ambulance

102

Mental Health

08046110007

Medical Oxygen for Nursing Homes and Hospitals

41400400

DELHI FIGHTS CORONA

For hospital bed availability or any information related to Corona please log on to delhifightscorona.in or download the app

Directorate of Information and Publicity, Government Of NCT Of Delhi

DIP/Shabdarth/D/0018/21-22

Economic impact of Covid is huge: Modi



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said that the economic impact left by the pandemic is "huge" and "our planet will not be the same after Covid-19" even as he regretted that the "reckless lifestyles" of the present generation are "threatening the future generations".

On an optimistic note, though, the Prime Minister said India is among the "few large economies to be on track to achieve their Paris (climate agreement) targets".

Delivering the keynote address on the occasion of 'Vesak Global Celebrations' on Budjida Purnima through video conference, Modi remarked that "this once in a lifetime pandemic has brought tragedy and suffering at the doorstep of many and has impacted every nation".

He said the economic impact left by the pandemic is "huge" and "our planet will not be the same after Covid-19".

Modi said there have been many noteworthy improvements as well over the last year, like having a better under-

standing of the pandemic, which strengthens our strategy to fight it and having the vaccine, which is absolutely important to save lives and defeat the pandemic.

The Prime Minister stressed that while fighting Covid-19, one must not lose sight of the other challenges faced by humanity like climate change.

He said the reckless lifestyles of the present generation are "threatening the future generations".

In this context, Modi reminded about Lord Buddha's emphasis on a way of life where respect for Mother Nature is paramount. He said, for India, sustainable living is not only about the right words but also about the right actions.

Members of 'Mahasangha', Prime Ministers of Nepal and Sri Lanka, Union Ministers Prahlad Singh and Kiren Rijju, Secretary General of International Buddhist Confederation Dr Dhammapiya were also at the event during Prime Minister's address.

Modi said he dedicated last year's 'Vesak day' programme to

all the frontline workers leading humanity's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

A year later, he said Covid-19 has still not left us and several nations, including India, have experienced a second wave. He lauded the efforts of the scientists for developing the Covid-19 vaccines within a year and said this shows the power of human determination and tenacity.

The Prime Minister said that the 'four sights' in the life of Lord Buddha ignited within him the desire to devote his life to removing human suffering. He said that in the last year, several individuals and organisations rose to the occasion and did everything possible to reduce human suffering.

The Prime Minister remarked that the life of Gautama Buddha was about peace, harmony and co-existence "but today, there are still forces whose existence depends on spreading hate, terror and mindless violence".

He said such forces do not believe in liberal democratic principles and thus gave a call for all those who believe in humanity to come together and defeat terror and radicalisation.

He said Lord Buddha's teachings and the importance given to social justice can become a global unifying force.

Quoting Mahatma Gandhi "Buddha taught us to defy appearances and trust in the final triumph of Truth and Love", the Prime Minister urged everyone to renew their commitment to the ideals of Lord Buddha.

Covid-19 cuts working mothers' sleep by 17%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As they worked to keep their families afloat, the Covid-19 pandemic took a heavy toll — mentally or physically — on working mothers in India. A nationwide survey has found that they had significant reduction in their average sleep time and more than two-fold jump in time taken to care for elderly in the family.

The pandemic also altered their daily routine with less 'Me' time, according to a survey conducted by market research agency Market Xcel Data Matrix Pvt Ltd. It surveyed 1,200 working mothers online in 17 States across the country. However, if there is one factor which has lessened their woes was their saving on their commuting time.

"Working mothers in the country are now sleeping for only 5.50 hours per day as compared to 6.50 hours every day on average in pre-covid era (before 2020), a reduction of about 17 per cent. They are now spending 01.50 hours in taking care of the elderly/others in the family as against 00.50 hours on average in pre-covid times," pointed out the survey.

Also, the pandemic altered the routine and lifestyle of working mothers in many other ways. "They are exercising/working out only for 00.40 hours now as compared to 01.10 hours on average in pre-covid times. Similarly, they are spending far little time on their entertainment of just 01.20 hours now as against 02.30 hours earlier," it added.



Even the time required to complete office work has gone up for them. They are now spending 08.55 hours to finish office work as compared to 06.50 hours earlier. They are also experiencing more time taken to accomplish home chores with the time now required being 04.45 hours as against 03.40 hours before 2020 with the absence of housemaids in many cases.

The working mothers are also spending a lot more time on their children's education now with the absence of proper guidance in schools. They are spending 02.10 hours now while they were devoting 01.20 hours per day on average earlier.

"The present pandemic situation has got a ripple effect into everybody's life. The working mothers have especially been impacted, burdened and stressed working round the clock fulfilling professional responsibilities and household duties. This is definitely not easy. We need to give some extra care for the caregivers," said Ashwani Arora, Senior Vice President, Market Xcel Data Matrix.

Govt's social media intermediary rules draconian: Congress

New Delhi: After WhatsApp filed a lawsuit against the Indian government in the Delhi High Court, saying that user privacy is in its DNA and requiring messaging apps to "trace" chats undermines people's right to privacy, Congress has termed the social media rules issued by the Government as "draconian" and said it's "Modi Government's North Korean approach to free speech".

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, senior spokesperson of the party, said, "The new intermediary rules issued by the Modi Government are dire, drastic and draconian in nature. The issuance of new intermediary guidelines reflect that the BJP government is suffering from the 'Big Daddy' syndrome."

The Congress said the new rules are a severe blow to the vibrant culture of discourse, deliberation and dissent in India, that the Modi government seeks to implement today, without recall or modification and despite unanimous condemnation from all segments of civil and political society. It is the "Modi government's North Korean approach to free speech."

"Free speech and expression is like oxygen. Without it, humanity and democracy cannot survive. Having diminished the latter so much during COVID, we beseech the Modi government not to emasculate the former. Let us not forget that encryption is the technological backbone of privacy.

This is particularly true of messaging apps, the most important subset of social media and digital platforms," Singhvi said.

He said it is an attempt by the Modi government to capture and subordinate every pillar and agency of freedom of thought and expression. Having successfully done so in respect of constitutional and statutory bodies like CBI, ED, EC and several others, along with subjugation of the 'Godi Media', Singhvi said.

"Modiji has now turned his attention to social media and social media platforms to annihilate all vestiges of free speech, thought, and expression," Singhvi added.

The Congress leader said that the dictatorial regimes, including the North Korean one, would blush at the brazenness with which the Modi government has done so. The Modi-led BJP government's pathshala should be the new go-to place for all dictators to hone their skills in controlling free speech and thought, he said.

"When these Intermediary Rules were published on 25.05.2021, the heart and soul of their highly objectionable approach was reflected in Rule 4, which would be actionable after three months, ie from today. During this time, every protest, every entreaty, every demand and every request for recall and modification of such asphyxiating rules have been ignored by this obstinate government and thrown into the dustbin," he further said. IANS

Jaiswal takes up reins of CBI office



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Maharashtra cadre IPS officer of 1985-batch, Subodh Kumar Jaiswal, on Wednesday, took charge as the new CBI director. He will have a fixed tenure of two years.

He assumed the office of the CBI chief after handing over charge of Director General, CISE.

Jaiswal holds a Bachelor's Degree in English (Honours), and a Master's in Business Administration (MBA).

He has served in his cadre holding various positions including SP (Gadchiroli, Aurangabad and Osmanabad, Deputy Inspector General, In-charge Special Investigation Team (SIT), Additional Commissioner of Police, Anti-Terrorism Squad, Mumbai; Additional CP, Central Range, Mumbai, Inspector General Amravati Range and Commissioner of Police, Brihan Mumbai. He was DGP, Maharashtra for nearly two years from February, 2019 before joining the post of DG, CISE.

He has served in Close Protection Teams of the Prime Minister during his six-year tenure with the Special Protection Group.

He has also served in the Research and Analysis Wing in various capacities for 10 years from June, 2008 to 2018.

"Jaiswal has vast experience in various fields like counter-terrorism (left wing extremism), handling VVIP security etc. Jaiswal is recipient of President Police Medal for Distinguished Services in 2009, Indian Police Medal for Meritorious Services in 2001, Internal Security Medal, Special Service Medal (Government of Maharashtra) and Asadharan Suraksha Seva Praman Patra (ASSPP)," the CBI said in a statement.

Ex-babus accuse Govt of Covid mishandling

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A group of 116 former civil servants has expressed its dismay over the handling of the pandemic and said the Narendra Modi-led Government was more concerned with the narrative around the Covid-19 crisis than addressing crucial matters.

"Even authentic data on the testing carried out in different States, the number of positive cases, the number of persons hospitalised and mortality figures have not been publicly disseminated," said the open letter dated May 20 titled "India needs action now" and addressed to PM Modi.

The signatories include former Foreign secretary Shivshankar Menon, former Advisor to PM of India TKA Nair, former IAS Harsh Mander and former top cop Julio Reberio.

"This has had serious implications for the adequate provision of necessary medical facilities in different states as well as for devising appropriate measures in different states to control the spread of the pandemic," they said.

The group also held the PM and other BJP leaders responsible for holding huge public rallies amid a surge in Covid-19 cases. "While the holding of elec-

Another 10K sachets of 2-DG drug to be available from today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a major step to enhance the capabilities to fight coronavirus, the second batch of 10,000 sachets of the DRDO-developed 2-DG drug will be issued on Thursday. Dr Reddy's, the drug manufacturer based in Hyderabad, will release the batch which will now be available commercially.

It implies that even private hospitals and other Government hospitals treating corona patients can now procure the indigenously produced drug, sources said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan had released the first batch of 10,000 doses on May 17.

The sachets were issued to AIIMS, Delhi and some armed forces' hospital. However, at that point it was not available for commercial use.

The DRDO developed this anti-covid oral drug for emergency use. The medicine has to be taken after dissolving it in water. Named 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG), the drug was developed by

Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), a laboratory of the DRDO in collaboration with Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL), Hyderabad.

Clinical trial results have shown that this molecule helps in faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces supplemental oxygen dependence.

Higher proportion of patients treated with 2-DG showed RT-PCR negative conversion in Covid patients. The drug will be of immense benefit to the people suffering from Covid-19.

"The PM-CARES fund was set up when there was already a Prime Minister National Relief Fund in place," the group said. "No disclosures have been made regarding the funds collected and the expenditures on various items.

This fund attracted to itself monies which would otherwise have gone from corporates and the public to the various CM Relief Funds and to NGOs."

The former bureaucrats also pointed out that the Kumbh Mela, hosted in Uttarakhand's Haridwar city also led to a rise in infections.

The group of former civil servants called the elections and the festival "super spreader" events. They also criticised the Union Government for not taking into account the financial assistance that states would need to tackle the pandemic.

India second country after US to inoculate 20 crore people

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has become the second country in the world after the US to have crossed 20 crore cumulative Covid-19 vaccination coverage, the Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday even as it in its latest clinical management protocol for Covid-19, has said the majority of the transmission is believed to occur "predominantly through the airborne route and droplet released when the infected person coughs, sneezes or talks".

This marks a change from last year's clinical management protocol, published in June 2022, in which the ministry said that the infection spreads through close contact, "mainly through respiratory droplets that are released when the infected person coughs, sneezes and talks".

India achieved this coverage in 130 days as against the USA's feat in 124 days, the Ministry said. According to



data available on Our World In Data and multiple sources, other leading countries in Covid-19 vaccination drive include the UK which has reached 5.1 crore mark in 168 days, Brazil that reached 5.9 crore mark in 128 days, and Germany which reached 4.5 crore mark in 149 days.

On the 130th day of the drive, the cumulative Covid vaccination coverage crossed the 20 crore mark (with 20,06,62,456 doses including

15,71,49,593 first dose and 4,35,12,863 second dose of Covid-19 vaccines), according to data available at 7 AM," the Ministry said.

The Ministry also said that the country has achieved a new milestone in its vaccination drive as the cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has exceeded 20 Crore on Wednesday under the Phase-3 of the nationwide vaccination drive.

SC issues circular for listing of cases

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has issued a circular on listing of cases before the vacation benches for hearing "extremely urgent miscellaneous matters". The circular, issued on Tuesday, deals with the benches which would conduct hearing between May 26 to June 2 during the summer vacation.

The Supreme Court is on annual summer vacation from May 10 to June 28. Constitution of the benches for the further part of vacation would be notified later.

The directions were passed by the Chief Justice of India N V Ramana "in order to meet the demand of justice and for hearing of matters of extremely urgent nature during the rescheduled summer vacation".

Between May 26 and June 2 of the rescheduled summer vacation, two division benches will conduct hearing through video conferencing mode.

The first bench will consist of Justices L Nageswara Rao and Aniruddha Bose.

On the second bench, while justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant will hear the matters from May 26 to 28, Justice Krishna Murari will replace Justice Kant on the bench from May 29 to June 2, the circular said.

The matters, whether fresh or after notice, mentioned by advocates/party-in-person requesting for listing during the vacation will be listed before the vacation benches.

"Those desirous of getting their matters listed before vacation benches may send their request for extremely urgent listing, incorporating reasons for extremely urgent listing online on the email address - HYPERLINK "mailto:mention.sc@sci.nic.in" mention.sc@sci.nic.in," the circular said.

History will remember Rlys for its contribution in anti-Covid fight: Min

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday said history will remember Indian Railways for its immense contribution to the fight against Covid-19.

While maintaining national supply chains, it has ensured that the wheels of progress kept moving at a fast pace, Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said while reviewing the operational performance of Zones and Divisions with top Railway officials.

Railways also informed the freight revenue of the national transporter has improved.

Goyal said that during the last 14 months, Railways has demonstrated a high moral strength and ability to rise to the occasion. He also directed the officials to go aggressively for full utilisation of record Capex allocation.

Completion of infrastructure works would generate employment as well especially in these challenging Covid times, the Minister said mentioning that the nation is full of gratitude for all of those



showing extraordinary resilience and ensuring that Indian Railways achieved a double digit growth in freight traffic.

Railways has recorded more than 10% increase in freight loading as compared to the normal year of 2019-20.

In FY 2021-22, Indian Railways' total loading is 203.88 Million Tonnes (MT), which is 10% more than FY 2019-20 loading figures (184.88 MT) for the same period, according to a Railway Ministry Press release.

Goyal complimented the officials of the Business Development Units for working on Mission Mode to boost freight traffic. He further directed that more efforts be made for developing infrastructure like good sheds, terminals, last mile electrification towards sheds, mechanisation of loading/unloading etc to make things more efficient and easy for all operators.

vehicles of more than 100 metres due to some reason, the vehicles will be allowed to pass without paying toll till the queue comes within 100 meters from the toll booth. For this purpose, a yellow line at a distance of 100 meters from toll booth will be marked in each toll lane. This is to inculcate further sense of accountability in toll plaza operators," said an official at Ministry of Road Transport and National Highways.

The new set of guidelines issued by the Central road making and operating agency National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) will also ensure seamless flow of traffic at the toll plazas by not allowing vehicles to queue up more than 100 metres, an official said.

"Although in most of the toll plazas, there is no waiting time after the mandatory FASTag provision, even then if there is queue of waiting

Waiting time at toll plaza reduced to 10 seconds

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

In order to ensure minimal waiting time at the toll plazas, the Centre has issued guidelines to ensure service time of not more than 10 seconds per vehicle even at peak hours on the National Highways.

The new set of guidelines issued by the Central road making and operating agency National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) will also ensure seamless flow of traffic at the toll plazas by not allowing vehicles to queue up more than 100 metres, an official said.

"Although in most of the toll plazas, there is no waiting time after the mandatory FASTag provision, even then if there is queue of waiting

tration in the country, it has been emphasized to have a new design and construct the upcoming toll plazas as per traffic projections for next 10 years to have an efficient toll collection system.

"NHAI values the time of commuters and is committed to provide them a safe, smooth, and seamless journey on National Highways. As social distancing has become the new norm, commuters are increasingly looking at FASTag as a toll payment option as it nullifies the chances of any human contact between the drivers and the toll operators. The constant growth and adoption of FASTag by the highway users is encouraging and has helped in bringing more efficiency in toll operations," said an NHAI official.

Another attempt to dislodge K'taka CM fails

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After Karnataka's rural development minister K S Eshwarappa unsuccessfully complained against Chief Minister K S Yediyurappa of "gross interference" in his Ministry in April and sought action from the central BJP leadership, another attempt to remove the latter by the dissidents has failed with the party top brass refusing to give its ear to the rival camp.

State cabinet minister C P Yogishwar, who rushed here to convince the BJP high command to sack Yediyurappa, has not been able to get any assurance and was instead asked to sort out issues with the State leadership, sources said.

On Tuesday, Yogishwar accompanied by MLA Aravind

Bellad, arrived here to put across rebel camp's view against the Chief Minister.

According to sources, the BJP in-charge for Karnataka Arun Singh and BJP national president J P Nadda did not give the dissidents an audience and conveyed them to go back.

Meanwhile, the ministers and MLAs loyal to Yediyurappa held a press meet in Bengaluru expressing complete faith in his leadership. They ridiculed the efforts by some to oust Yediyurappa and termed them a "waste".

Eshwarappa, a long time rival and minister in Yediyurappa's cabinet, had in April complained to the Governor against the chief minister alleging direct interference in the affairs of his department.

TN to pass resolution against farm laws

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu Government will soon pass a resolution in the Legislative Assembly asking the Central Government to withdraw the three controversial farm laws which saw country-wide agitation during the last six months.

This was stated by Chief Minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin in a statement released on Wednesday. Stalin, in his previous avatar as the Leader of the Opposition had made it clear that the DMK would bring in a resolution condemning the anti-farmer Bills and asking the

Centre to withdraw the same. Edappadi K Palaniswamy, his predecessor had welcomed the Bills passed by the BJP Government at the Centre and had declared that the legislation would bring prosperity to the State as well as farmers.

The three farm laws enacted by the BJP Government are Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation Bill) 2020, Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Service Bill 2020 which were described by the agriculture minister Narendra Tomar as end of the license raj in farm sector.

The Opposition parties

including the DMK had alleged that the legislation would lead to corporatization and finish off the rural communities in the country. The DMK had staged many demonstrations across Tamil Nadu demanding the withdrawal of the laws and had declared in its election manifesto that the party would pass a resolution condemning the new legislations.

Stalin said in the statement that he was shocked over the indifference of the Union Government towards the reservations expressed by the Opposition parties towards the controversial Bills and the failure of the Government to have constructive dialogue with the opposition parties.



Seagulls perch on a floating metal drum during strong winds in the sea, at Vizhinjam coast in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday

Priest found dead inside temple in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a sensational killing in Barabanki, a priest of a Hanuman temple was found hacked to death on Wednesday morning.

Preliminary reports suggested that the priest was attacked with a sharp object when he was asleep. Some devotees who reached the temple to pay obeisance to the deity in the morning found the priest's body lying in a pool of blood and informed police.

As per reports, Suresh Chandra Chauhan (70) was the priest at the famous Hanuman temple in Khamauli hamlet of Inayatnagar and used to live on the campus for the last several decades.

On Wednesday morning

when some villagers reached for prayers, they were shocked to see the priest's body lying in a pool of blood. They immediately raised an alarm and informed the police.

Cops from Inayatnagar police station along with Barabanki SP Yamuna Prasad rushed to the spot and soon a canine unit and forensic team were requisitioned to collect evidence.

During initial investigation, the cops found two empty bottles of country made liquor and three glasses lying at some distance from the murder spot giving rise to the possibility that the assailants might be three in number who consumed liquor and later hacked the priest over some dispute before escaping.

Jab mix-up: 20 get 1st jab of Covishield, 2nd of Covaxin in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In what could be termed as a major goof-up, around 20 villagers in the Siddharthnagar district were given vaccine cocktail—the first dose of Covishield and second of Covaxin.

The Chief Medical Officer, Siddharthnagar Dr Sandeep Chaudhry has ordered a probe into the incident. "This is a case of medical negligence. The guilty will not be spared," he said in a statement here on Wednesday.

The incident was reported from Badhni Primary Health Care Centre where around 20 people from Audahi Kalan village were given Covishield as their first dose of vaccine but on May 14 they were administered a second dose of Covaxin.

Ram Surat, resident of Audahi Kalan village said that he was given the first dose of vaccine on April 1 and second dose on

May 14. "The first dose I got was Covishield while the second dose was Covaxin. When I went for the second dose no one enquired as to which vaccine I got as the first dose. No one even checked the card given to me. Thus, I was given Covaxin instead of Covishield," he told the reporters in Siddharthnagar.

He said he is not facing any problem. "I am fit at the moment but there is a fear that something might go wrong anytime. No one from the PHC has so far come to advise me what to do," he said.

Ram Surat claims that around 20 people from his village were given the wrong vaccine.

The CMO Siddharthnagar, Dr Chaudhry said the health workers have gone and contacted those who got a cocktail of vaccines. All of them are fit and are not facing any health issues at the moment.

Chinnar Bridge now favourite destination for marriages

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Covid-19 pandemic ravaging human lives have some positive side too, at least in the border region between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The bridge built across Chinnar River in Idukki's Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary has become the most preferred venue for people in the neighboring States to tie nuptial knots. Yes, the Chinnar Bridge has played host to 20 marriages since the pandemic forced Tamil Nadu and Kerala to declare total lock out as part of safety measures.

While the rich and mighty hire chartered aircraft to conduct marriages of their off-springs in style up in the skies, the poor and the not so affluent in these States depend on Chinnar Bridge, which over a period of time has become an auspicious and revered venue for marriages. Not without reasons.

If the parties accompanying the bridegroom have to come to Marayur in Kerala from Tamil Nadu, they should furnish RT-



PCR certificates stating that they were free from Covid-19. A ten-member wedding party should part with ₹26,000/- as each RT-PCR Test costs ₹2,600.

As the adage goes, necessity is the mother of invention. The bridge across the Chinnar River is a no-man's land and the simple, humble brains devised a strategy to beat the greedy clinical laboratories. The bride and the groom along with the priest enter the bridge while the guests stand watching the proceedings. Once the groom ties the mangalya sootra and the garlands are exchanged, the function gets over and the newly-weds walk over to the other side of the bridge.

"Though the policemen and forest officials guarding the border were not comfortable initially, they have started taking part in the marriages with fervor," said Jayan Variath, a businessman in Marayur. On Monday, 27-year-old Unnikrishnan married Thankamayi (26) on Chinnar Bridge during the auspicious hours between 09.30 to 10.30 watched by close relations and friends.

The only parties who grumbled over the marriage were owners of medical laboratories who continue charging exorbitant rates for RT-PCR Tests. "Weather in

Chinnar is pleasant and the couple are blessed by Mother Nature. What else you require than the ambience of the sylvan surroundings? The flow of the river, chirping of birds and the trumpeting by elephants from the adjoining wildlife sanctuary are the best orchestra you can ask for," said K P Subash Chandran, author of books on lives of tribals who stay nearby.

According to Subash Chandran, the elite and wealthy class in big societies should learn a couple of lessons from these tribal population about how to survive in times of emergencies. All

who turn out for the marriages wear face masks and wash their hands with sanitizers.

Both Jayan and Subash say that the local residents participate in these weddings. "They stand at safe distance and bless the couple," said Jayan. The Chinnar Bridge could be the only one of its kind crossed by Man and Woman to a new life. In years to come, tourists may make a beeline to get a glimpse of this blessed bridge. Chances of Hollywood's dream merchants making films on this Bridge to Eternal Bliss cannot be ruled out. Marriages are made in Chinnar Bridge too!



Beneficiaries wait to receive the Covid-19 vaccine dose at a mega vaccination camp at Green Park Stadium in Kanpur on Wednesday

Worst is over for Kerala, says CM

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Kerala is making big strides in the path to recovery from the Covid-19 attack, according to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. He said though 28,798 persons tested positive and 151 succumbed to the pandemic on Wednesday, the State has put behind it the worst period.

"The number of persons getting afflicted with Covid-19 is less than the number of persons getting cured daily. This means that there is considerable improvement in the general situation in the State. This is what we concluded after the day's review meeting which was attended among others by the expert committee members," said the Chief Minister during his daily media briefing.

There are 2,48,526 patients undergoing treatment for Covid-19 in the State. "There is no shortage of hospital beds, ventilators or other essential services. Our hope is that the situation improves further so that normalcy would return to the State at the earliest," he said.

The Test Positivity Rate across the State showed 19.95 per cent on Wednesday. The last 24 hours saw 1.44 lakh samples getting tested for the pandemic. Malappuram (4751), Ernakulam (3,444) and Palakkadu (3,038) were the districts with highest cases of covid-19. There was no abatement in the number of health professionals getting contracted with the pandemic. On Wednesday, 91 health workers were affected with the pandemic.

Maha logs 992 deaths, 24,752 new infections

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In what is being witnessed with unflinching regularity, Maharashtra on Wednesday added 992 fatalities – comprising 453 fresh deaths and 539 previous unaccounted deaths – to its daily tally, while the infections in the state went up marginally to 24,752.

Wednesday was the fifth occasion in six days when the previous unaccounted deaths propelled the reconciled daily fatality tally to a substantial number.

On three of the five occasions, the daily death tally crossed 1,000 mark mainly due to the previous unaccounted deaths.

On Friday (May 22), the state had added 708 old unaccounted deaths to the state's daily Covid-19 toll which went up to 1,263.

Subsequently on Sunday, 726 old unaccounted deaths were added to the day's cumulative daily death tally which rose to 1,320. On Monday, 231 previous unaccounted deaths

were added to the day's 361 deaths to take the daily Covid-19 toll to 592.

On Tuesday, the daily deaths jumped to 1,137 – comprising 601 fresh deaths and 531 previous unaccounted deaths.

With 992 deaths reported on Tuesday, the total number of deaths in the State climbed from 90,349 to 91,341. Similarly, with 24,752 new infections, the total number of cases climbed from 56,26,155 to 56,50,907.

As 23,065 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 52,18,768 to 52,41,833. The recovery rate in the state stood static at 92.76 per cent.

The total "active cases" in the state increased marginally from 3,14,368 to 3,15,042. The fatality rate in the state increased from 1.61 per cent to 1.62 per cent.

With 34 fresh deaths, the

Covid-19 toll in Mumbai increased from 14,650 to 14,684, while the infected cases went up by 1358 to trigger a jump in the infections from 6,98,988 to 7,00,340

The situation in Pune remained more or less the same as the "active cases" increased marginally from 45,648 to 45,655.

Mumbai with 28,074 active cases stood second in the state, followed by Thane (21,949), Satara (19,958), Solapur (14,860), Nagpur (15,201), Ahmednagar (13,082), Nashik (13,961), Beed (8,938), Amaravati (8,070), Jalgaon (7,731), Aurangabad (5,493), Chandrapur (4,589), Jalna (4,689), Osmanabad (4,636), and Latur (4,275).

Of the 3,38,24,959 samples sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 56,26,155 have tested positive (16.71 per cent) for COVID-19 until Wednesday.

Currently, 23,70,326 people are in home quarantine while 19,943 people are in institutional quarantine.

Priyanka slams Centre over shortage of vaccines

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Continuing her 'Zimmerman Kaun' campaign, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday slammed the Centre over the shortage of Covid vaccines and alleged that it was a means for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personal publicity rather

than a tool to save people's lives since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Taking to Twitter and Facebook, Priyanka alleged that the Modi government pushed the country into a swamp of vaccine shortage and left India, world's largest vaccine manufacturer, dependent on donations from other countries.

J&K records 40 deaths in 24 hrs

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir on Wednesday recorded a total number of 40 deaths due to Covid-19, lowest since last three weeks. Jammu district recorded nine deaths.

On May 4, a total number of 37 deaths were reported but the number surged ahead as the virus wreaked havoc, especially across twin capital cities of Jammu and Srinagar. Since May 1, 1,324 patients have succumbed to the coronavirus across J&K. Out of 3,702 deaths recorded so far, Jammu district alone reported 1,003 deaths i.e 27 percent while Srinagar district recorded 751

deaths which comes around 20 percent of total deaths. According to the media bulletin, out of 40 deaths reported on Wednesday 19 patients succumbed to the virus across Jammu division and 21 in Kashmir division. A total number of 3,037 persons tested positive out of 47,788 recording a positivity rate of 6.35 per cent J&K.

The total caseload of active positive cases stood at 43,892 while 4,023 patients were discharged from different hospitals.

According to the media bulletin, eight districts across Jammu division reported less than 100 fresh cases of coronavirus, clearly signaling that the virus is on the decline.

PM Cares Fund: NCP demands probe into ventilator supply scam

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra NCP president and senior Minister Jayant Patil on Wednesday demanded a comprehensive inquiry into the alleged scam involving the supply of "defective" ventilators to Maharashtra region in Maharashtra under PM Cares Fund.

In a development that came after the Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court took serious cognisance of the alleged irregularities in the supply of ventilators under PM Cares Fund and asked the Centre to let it know as to what action was being taken against the vendor, Patil rooted for an "end-to-end" inquiry into the

alleged scam.

"This issue needs to be investigated end to end. Questions have arisen about the process of procurement of these ventilators by @MoHFW_INDIA. Why wasn't the proper QC mechanism followed?", the NCP minister asked.

with vested interests behind it should be immediately identified," Patil tweeted as he demanded an inquiry into the scam.

Taking suo motu cognisance of the news reports on the issues relating to the conduct of final rites for Covid-19 deceased, shortage of medical oxygen and black marketing of Remdesivir, an Aurangabad

bench of the Bombay High Court directed the Centre to inform the court about the action being taken against the supplier.

The HC bench --comprising Justices Ravindra V Ghuge and Bhalchandra U Debadwar-- asked Assistant Solicitor General Ajay G Talhar to inform the court about the Centre to inform the about the remedial steps being taken to address the issue involving the supply of "defective" ventilators to Mrfathwada region.

"The company (errant) should not get away with this. It is the state exchequer money, it's not bounty to be distributed," the HC bench said, in an

oral submission.

The HC bench, however, observed that nearly 74 other ventilators supplied by several industrialists including Garware Polyester, Bajaj Auto, Hindalco etc. are "perfectly operational and flawless".

The HC bench asked the Centre's lawyer as to why it could not withdraw all of the 'defective' ventilators and send them back. "We appreciate that the Central ministry gave them (ventilators), but it is likely to be a health risk or health hazard to the patients...Let the government realize they had supplied inferior quality ventilators, let them go back and replace them with certain good quality ventilators. If the PM

cares fund is to be used for providing ventilators, it should be ventilators worthy of medical use, if they isn't worthy of the same, it is just a box," the HC bench observed orally.

The court also expressed its displeasure over politicians' jumping into the issue of non-functional ventilators.

"We find it to be distasteful as some politicians have visited the hospital posing as if they have knowledge or expertise to inspect the ventilators and recommend correctional methods," the Judges noted, as they exhorted politicians to refrain from such statements and visits to hospitals to inspect ventilators.



Tribal women workers wearing face masks pick tea leaves at Kondoli Tea Estate in Nagaon District of Assam on Wednesday

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Tough decision

Big question marks hang over the hows and the wherefores of conducting the class XII examinations

The CBSE class XII examinations are in an avoidable muddle. Still, there is some forward movement in the last few days, from whether to conduct the exams at all to what kind of format and duration should be adopted for the examinations. As things stand, the States are choosing between two formats. One, the standard, three-hour format conducted at designated exam centres for all major subjects; marks for the minor subjects should be given on the basis of performance in the major subjects. Two, a 90-minute examination of multiple choice questions conducted in schools where the students are enrolled. Majority of the States chose the second option; Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan opted for the first. The format is the least of the worries, considering one-fifth of the questions in the current format are multiple choice questions. There are bigger unresolved aspects to consider. The "where", for example. The CBSE prefers conducting exams at its designated centres. But they are fewer than the schools at which the examinees are enrolled. Given safe distancing, it is easier if the exams are conducted in the schools. Unless this is decided, the next issue of logistics cannot be taken up. It is about the required furniture, manpower and sanitation equipment. The "when" is equally complex. Different regions are in different stages on the pandemic curve. Some are in total

lockdown, some coming out of it. After June, the monsoon begins and, till September, any two regions will always experience heavy rains.

Those students planning to go abroad this fall may not be able to do so if their exams are delayed. The "how" is most crucial. If the Governments are still undecided about the exam format, how will the CBSE get the question papers ready in time? Unless, of course, they are preparing two sets. For preparing each board paper, there is an eight-tier system. The preparations begin in January, or maybe even earlier, in the normal course of time. Setting the question papers, checking and finalising them, printing them, ferrying them to the centres, all these take time. A changed format would mean doing the entire exercise all over again. These papers will have to reach the examination centres by July; that is barely two months' time. The "how" also means vaccinating the teachers and students, as the Governments have demanded. How is that possible? If they all are given their first doses in the next fortnight, they will have to wait three months for the second dose. Would a student, suffering from COVID-19 symptoms, declare that for fear of missing out on the exams? What happens if a student tests positive and is unable to take the exams? This is the bottom line: Parents have no issues if the exams are held in schools. Holding the exams is not an issue in urban areas, but what about the countryside where infrastructure, logistics and the COVID-19 protocols are poorly managed? The ball is squarely in the Government's court.

PICTALK



Monks offer prayers to Lord Buddha on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, on the outskirts of Nagpur

PTI

Exercise caution

Climate change is playing havoc with farming and people's lives in Uttarakhand

Climate change is as detrimental to human life as Corona, though not as quickly. The former is more of a silent killer but its effects are far-reaching and irreversible. It is slowly, but steadily, impacting the lives of people in the hills of Uttarakhand. Its first victim, of course, is the agriculture and those involved in farming. The hill State, with an agricultural population of around 71 per cent, is going to be the worst hit in the years to come. The latest study by Germany's Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and The Tata Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) has drawn a scary picture for the beautiful mountainous State. It has revealed that Uttarakhand's temperature would change as much as 1.9° by 2050. This change may look insignificant, yet it will have a major impact on the environment and the lives of people. As per the 2011 census, 40 per cent of Uttarakhand's total population has already migrated to the plains. The farmers in large number are abandoning their traditional vocation, farming. According to a 2018 survey, 734 villages in the State are uninhabited since 2011. The number of such villages, often called "ghost villages", and the rate of migration will only increase.

As most people in Uttarakhand depend upon agriculture for a living, the effect on their livelihood would be severe. Climate change would dent agriculture the most. As per the study, high evaporation due to rising temperature would increase "water stress", leading to floods and changes in crop yields. The Almora, Champawat, Pauri and Tehri regions are going to be the worst hit. The rise in temperature will make various crops unviable and the farmers would have to give them up altogether. It might take a few decades, but its impact is already visible in the hills. Many farming families are finding it difficult to survive as their yield per acre is going down and the traditional crops don't grow anymore. Floods have also become frequent in the hills. Unfortunately, hardly anything is being done to arrest climate change. Steps should have been taken to stop deforestation and construction activity, besides sops given to farmers. But nothing is happening on the ground. The Government is in fact abetting the building of dams amid the fragile ecosystem, which would only add to nature's fury. It is about time that some policy changes were introduced and implemented to avert an impending disaster.

Oli, a wannabe supreme leader

Despite the caretaker PM's shady reputation, India needs to formulate a reliable policy framework towards Nepal in tune with public mood there



RISHI GUPTA

The political volcano in Nepal has erupted yet again, with new vulnerabilities in its womb. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, heading a minority Government, recommended the dissolution of the House of Representatives and President Bidya Devi Bhandari — who adorns the top post only in name — acted upon the recommendation with alacrity. As the Himalayan country suffers from an acute shortage of medical oxygen, hospital beds and vaccines, these political developments have come at the cost of great human agony.

However, this is nothing new in the context of the country's democracy. In the last 25 years, Nepal has been a theatre of civil war, democratic transition and repeated constitutional crises. When Nepal joined the world's rare group of Communist-ruled country in 2008, questions were asked whether Communism and democracy could coexist. With parties like the CPN-UML led by Oli and the Maoists in Nepal, self is always prioritised before ideology, nation and its people. The Communists have done no good compared to the erstwhile monarchy, which ruled the Hindu kingdom for more than 200 years.

Meanwhile, if anyone can be held responsible for paralysing Nepal in every sphere, it's the present-day "Oli-garchy". The Supreme Court of Nepal had nullified the so-called supreme leader KP Oli's earlier attempts to dissolve Parliament. Under public pressure, ill-intended overnight ordinances on political parties were also withdrawn by the President. Oli was once again challenged to prove the majority, but he failed. Currently, unashamed, Oli continues to be the caretaker Prime Minister. Voices are emanating from the Army veterans, civil society and the democratic forces to hold Oli responsible for the current crisis. These are the same voices that fought an autocratic monarchy for more than a decade to establish an envisaged democratic order in the Himalayan country. However, in less than 15 years, leaders like Oli have fueled the ethnic divide, slowed the



economy down, soured relations with India and institutionalised corruption.

As the Supreme Court hears a clutch of writ petitions filed against the controversial move by Oli and Bidya Devi Bhandari, the "supreme leader" in an act to solidify his position in the party ousted the old guard of the CPN-UML and former Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhal Kath Khanal at an emergency meeting of the party. The two leaders have time and again questioned Oli for his unconstitutional moves. They had also joined Maoist party chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' to force Oli to surrender the political reigns to other leaders owing to his failure in handling the COVID-19 crisis in the country.

With the President already in his pocket, Oli is making a mockery of the Prime Minister's Office. President Bhandari seems to be repaying her debt to Oli as it was he who got her into the office. Bhandari was a longtime UML comrade who credits her political career to Oli. The same office, once held in high esteem for its non-partisan actions during the tenure of Ram Baran Yadav who served as the first



THE SUPREME COURT OF NEPAL HAD NULLIFIED OLI'S EARLIER ATTEMPTS TO DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT. UNDER PUBLIC PRESSURE, ILL-INTENDED OVERNIGHT ORDINANCES ON POLITICAL PARTIES WERE ALSO WITHDRAWN. ONCE AGAIN, HE FAILED TO PROVE MAJORITY. CURRENTLY, UNASHAMED, OLI CONTINUES TO BE THE CARETAKER PM

President of Nepal, is now a crying shame in terms of credibility. One may recall the 2008 incident where President Yadav had acted against the unconstitutional suspension of former Army Chief Rookmangud Katwal by Prime Minister Prachanda. Later, Prachanda resigned as the first PM on moral grounds. Thus, the current "Oli-garchy" has become a moth destroying the very sacrifices of the people of Nepal who fought against the Rana oligarchs in the 1950s and the autocratic royals in 2005.

Amid an unstable Nepal, India is once again caught between staunch critic Oli and a united Opposition led by the Nepali Congress. If insiders are to be believed, New Delhi has put its weight behind Oli, considering his recent mega rise in the Nepalese politics. Unlike his predecessors, Oli has stood the test of time and consolidated his position as the Prime Minister and the UML party chairman. With Oli becoming synonymous with the State, India might be unwilling to antagonise him as he may once again use the anti-India narrative to set a political tone in the next elections. However, India's bet on him might prove to be extremely risky. Once New

Delhi's blue-eyed boy, Oli chose to be lured by the Chinese glitter. He has allowed Chinese high-handedness in the political affairs of the country and uses humanitarian foundations in Nepal to receive alleged political funding from the Communist Party of China.

Aiming to create a Chinese-style party system in Nepal with him acting as the authoritarian Supreme Leader, New Delhi needs to chalk its future course in Nepal carefully. India is a reliable "special neighbour" despite political bad-mouthing by certain political sections in Nepal. Its humanitarian response in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake and ongoing assistance in Nepal's fight against COVID-19 are the epitomes of a long-standing "roti-beti" relationship. Therefore, India needs to observe the public mood in Nepal and formulate a reliable policy framework towards Kathmandu as its Nepal policy has for long been the victim of ad hocism.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DOUBTS REMAIN ON GOVT'S JAB POLICY

Sir — It seems certain that many recipients will pay more this time than in the first three phases of vaccination, but key questions about availability, distribution and prioritisation remain unanswered. It was a relief to learn that the Union Health Ministry has decided to revise an earlier policy to allow family members and dependents of employees to get inoculated at industrial and workplace COVID-19 vaccination centres.

The earlier notification, which had kept the family members out of the purview, was a matter of concern as many were worried that they might not be able to ensure the vaccination of their loved ones, given the shortage of vaccines. It is hoped that the revised policy will help accelerate the vaccination drive. The new policy allows the Centre to claim that it has done what the States asked for, while allowing it to shift the blame for vaccine shortages or high prices. Still, the change in eligibility has brought relief.

Vaccines will now be open to all Indians of working age, the vast majority of whom cannot rely on a "work from home" arrangement. The Government has not explained beyond boilerplate language, saying it would make the pricing, procurement, eligibility and administration of vaccines open and flexible, allowing all stakeholders the flexibility to customise to local needs and dynamics.

CK Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai

SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL SHAMED

Sir — It is unfortunate that a teacher of commerce and accounts in the PSBB Senior Secondary School, KK Nagar, has been arrested for sexually harassing the students in person and also during online classes, when he was clad only in a towel. It is more shocking that despite complaints of sexual harassment lodged with the school management by the affected girls, no action was forthcoming which emboldened the accused.

It is sad that the management has now denied having received any complaint in this regard. What is more tragic is that one of the school's trustees and his daughter, who is also a trustee, have abdicated all respon-

IDIOT syndrome is dangerous



If a surfer blindly believes the knowledge imparted to him by the internet without even double checking it or confirming it from reliable people, then the repercussions of such "knowledge" may prove disastrous. Many doctors are baffled by the immense "internet knowledge" of patients and their relatives who blur out their understanding of the subject through the internet with regards to diagnosis, investigation, drugs and treatment.

Often, it seems like the patient is taking the second opinion from a doctor after having consulted the primary doctor — the internet. When the internet addiction propels the users to go for a drug not recommended by the doctor, or discontinue a treatment on their own, the issue can get complicated. In the

process, the fine line between information and interaction, knowledge and experience, treatment and management, use and misuse gets blurred.

Unfortunately, people with the Internet Derived Information Obstruction Treatment (IDIOT) syndrome, or Cyberchondria, are proving to be vulnerable during the pandemic. They are also presenting rare challenges to the physicians. Medical professionals are appalled at people's anxiety and fear about COVID-19. Laks of people, experiencing simple fever and cough, are on self-medication. A quick glance at the internet, and their self-prescription is ready.

As a result of their hesitancy to go see a doctor and excessive dependence on the internet, an increasing number of COVID patients who might have benefited from an early consultation with a doctor are going untreated. Sometimes imaginary symptoms tend to play havoc with the mind, but on a different level. No doubt, the stressed out people are more likely to experience the IDIOT syndrome but, on a lower scale, everyone is susceptible to it.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

val, however, is not applicable to Covaxin. India is currently using only these two vaccines for its inoculation programme.

The gap between the two doses of Covishield has been increased for the fourth time in a row. This clearly proves that the Government is putting people's lives at risk by using them as test subjects by injecting non-proven vaccines whose trials are still incomplete. Many of us are still confused and apprehensive about the jobs due to a lack of requisite information and peer-reviewed studies of the vaccines. At this rate, the next recommendation by the Government will be: No need to take the second dose.

Jubel D'Cruz | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

A year later, the pandemic has still not left us. The economic impact of COVID-19 is huge and our planet will not be the same after the pandemic.



Prime Minister

— Narendra Modi



Our residential representation in Afghanistan and the Australian Embassy in Kabul will be closed after May 28. We hope this measure will be temporary.

Australian Prime Minister

— Scott Morrison



Remembering you is easy. I do it every day, missing you is a headache that never goes away. Happy Birthday PAPPAA!! Miss you every day. #VilasraoDeshmukh76

Actor

— Riteish Deshmukh



Shall I send one invoice for all (football) coaching lessons or will you (Virat Kohli) pay in easy instalments?

India football team captain

— Sunil Chhetri



The new IT rules, instead of seeking accountability, have chosen to control these platforms by bypassing all privacy norms of individuals.

Shiv Sena leader

— Priyanka Chaturvedi



FIRST COLUMN

YOGI'S TRYST AT GROUND ZERO

The UP Chief Minister is working hard. Is it only COVID concern or politics, too?



BISWAJEET BANERJEE

On April 30, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath tested COVID negative and the very next day he was back in action. He went to review the construction of make-shift DRDO hospital at Awadh Shilp Gram in Lucknow. On May 5 he inaugurated the hospital, named after Atal Bihari Vajpayi. Since then, Yogi is on ground zero - visiting districts to take stock of the pandemic situation. In over three weeks since Yogi tested negative, he has assessed the situation in 55 districts of 14 divisions, roughly 70 percent of the state, by either visiting them or through virtual meetings. Uttar Pradesh has 75 districts.

He even went to Noida, considered a jinxed city for Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh, and Saifai, the first non-Samajwadi Party Chief Minister to visit the stronghold of the Mulayam Singh Yadav family. There are many arguments floating around about Yogi's forays into villages. One section says that in April end



there was a surge in fresh cases of corona and UP recorded maximum 38,000 cases per day. At that time Yogi tested positive for Covid-19. Though he was holding review meetings with the officials virtually, the impact of the meeting was missing. Questions were raised by that section whether Yogi was competent enough to handle the disaster of this magnitude.

Another section says that almost at the same time a senior member of Niti Ayog briefed Prime Minister Narendra Modi that Uttar Pradesh was heading for a disaster and if corrective steps are not taken the state would be the biggest hotspot.

That was the time when pictures of cremation grounds, wailing relatives outside hospitals and people clamouring for oxygen and hospital beds were making headlines. Both Modi and Yogi became focus of such criticism and their popularity graphs started dipping. Political pundits prophesied Yogi might even be replaced. No name was suggested, but covertly it was believed that a Thakur would replace a Thakur (Yogi is Thakur by caste).

It is in this scenario that Yogi's personal tours become key to understanding his strategy. Infrastructure in districts was strengthened. Oxygen tankers started arriving in a matter of days. The covid protocol was restored and the Integrated Covid Command Centres strengthened. But this raises one more question: Is Yogi a one-man army? Where are his ministers? Both Deputy Chief Ministers - Dr Dinesh Sharma and Keshav Prasad Maurya - were missing from the scene. Initially, Dr Sharma was down with Covid and has now recuperated. The ministers claim they received no directives from the CM's Office. They kept track of things by checking with District Magistrates, they said.

Lack of co-ordination between the party and the government was another grey area. Last week, a picture went viral of a notice of BJP president of Bahraich outside his office asking workers not to come to him with requests as "district officials" do not listen to him. The situation has now changed. Once Yogi began his forays into the districts, results have started trickling in. The party organization has started its campaign of distributing ration, medicine or other materials among the people. The ministers too have started coming out of their shells and have started interacting with the masses. There is a sense of optimism in the party and the government now that things are claimed to be turning for the better. There is a belief that the dark days are over and better days are round the corner.

(The writer is Executive Director, News, The Pioneer, Lucknow. The views expressed are personal.)

Indian Muslim identity is hardly a monolith

Certain groups and sections have had a vested interest in typecasting Muslims. But the enigma that's their 'identity' is far too complex to demystify thus



GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Muslims are ordained to kill non-Muslims by the Quran and so must be done away with before they do so." This rant comes from the latest Islamophobe on the block — Yati Narsimha Saraswati, a priest of a nondescript shrine in Ghaziabad. A customary FIR was lodged against him for promoting enmity and outraging the religious sentiments. The FIR raises his stature among a section. He is not the first nor will be the last to demonise a community and rupture the social fabric.

The rot runs deeper though. Muslim identity to the majority of Hindus is an enigma. They are labelled as a monolith that thinks alike, lives alike, and of course votes alike. The Muslim identity, what it means, and how it functions, is far more complex.

Identifying Muslim ethos is a full-time job for many. It gets accentuated in elections when Muslim votes are to be reckoned with. The political parties have to figure out how Muslims would vote. Muslim identity like their vote is deceptive. No one knows for sure what it means and how it functions. Yet everyone wants to typecast them for practical purposes.

The people who have a vested interest in typecasting Muslims have resorted to rather bizarre means to identify them and club them together as one. Identifying a Muslim by inspecting his refrigerator or peeping into his wardrobe has worked well for them. All these traits are now the subject of national debate. It has created a perception that Muslims do everything that is anathema to Hindus. Choosing a cultural identity over a religious one is trending.

It lets the Hindu right-wing subtly castigate Muslims. Tablighi Jamaat was sinfully maligned for spreading corona. The narrative was orchestrated well and the mainstream media trumpeted it into every household. It made people look at Muslims with suspicion. By the time the bluff was called the damage was done. The corona conspiracy was all over. It helped the government cover up its own lacunae while blaming the Muslims consolidated their supporters.

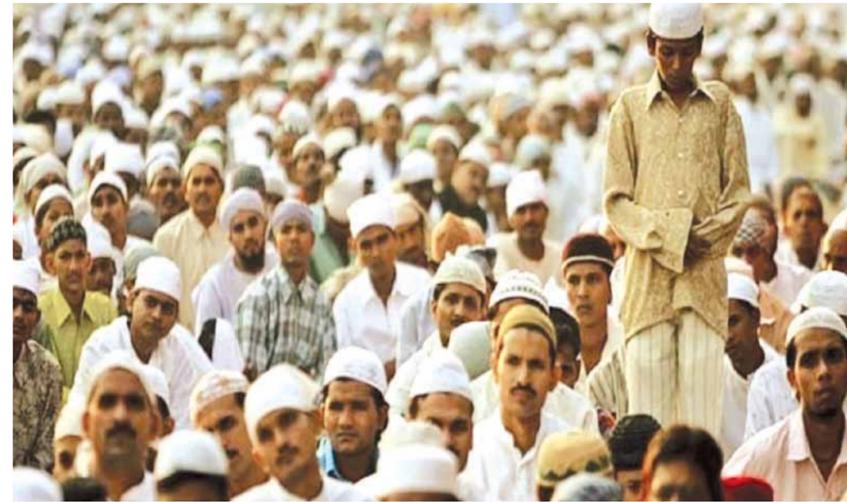
Depending upon your political and religious affiliation, Muslim identity can fluctuate from one end of the spectrum to the other. He can be a patriot who fought the first war of independence or he could be a Pakistan-cheering-anti-national who hates everything Indian. It is a community that has enjoyed appeasement all along. The Congress licking its wounds right now was of course responsible for it. This myth was, however, debunked by Justice Sachar Committee's report. It delved into the Muslim socio-economic status. Its finding was shocking. It placed Muslims below Dalits, socially and economically. It upheld that the Muslims were under-represented in the government, armed forces, and administration. It could be an interesting case of appeasement where the one appeased lagged on every count.

Traditionally, Hindu hardliners weaved Muslim identity around four marriages, triple talaq and large number of children born to them. But their scriptures were left untouched and no one tried to quote Quran to further their malicious arguments. That isn't sacrosanct no longer. Yati Narsimha Saraswati's misquoting of Quran is a leap of diabolical proportions. His recent rant on the Prophet



S/HE CAN BE A PATRIOT WHO FOUGHT THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE OR HE COULD BE A PAKISTAN-CHEERING ANTI-NATIONAL WHO HATES EVERYTHING INDIAN. IT IS A COMMUNITY THAT HAS ENJOYED APPEASEMENT ALL ALONG. THE CONGRESS, LICKING ITS WOUNDS RIGHT NOW, WAS OF COURSE RESPONSIBLE FOR IT. THIS MYTH WAS, HOWEVER, DEBUNKED BY THE JUSTICE SACHAR COMMITTEE'S REPORT

The author is a columnist and documentary film-maker. The views expressed are personal.



is a deliberate attempt to provoke the believers. It could seriously impact whatever communal harmony is left. Misquoting Quran to those who haven't read has an advantage. No one refutes you and tend to believe it. If we look back in history the same sort of propaganda preceded the holocaust against the Jews in the Germany of 1930s. They were demonized, segregated, denied basic rights and livelihood before the final assault.

The hard-line Hindus have never understood Indian Muslims. The Indian Muslim is not a monolith as many would have us believe. First things first, Indian Muslims are Indians and have very little or no affinity with Muslims living in Saudi Arabia or Turkey. Indian Muslims unlike elsewhere have castes and sub-castes. Many have separate mosques to pray and would not have matrimonial relations with others. The Indian Muslim sects are fervent about their views and interpretation of the Holy Quran. So, the Muslims have neither thought alike nor voted alike. It is preposterous to draw parallel with what goes in Syria or for that matter the Arab world. That world is as alien to an Indian Muslim as it is to any other Indian.

Although Islam does not recognize class and castes, Indian Muslims do. There is a distinct divide among Indian Muslims. It can be attributed to ethnic segregation between the foreigners (Ashraf) and the local converts (Ajlaf) who continued to follow the Indian caste system. The Bhiradri system is social stratification in Muslims which is typically

Indian. The untouchable Hindu converts are categorized as Arzal and occupy the lowest position in the hierarchy. In Bihar, the higher caste Muslims do not allow burials of lower caste Muslims in their graveyards. Indeed, it goes without saying that most victims of riots and Hindutva aggrandizement are low-caste Muslims. They pay with their life and livelihood. (Remember boycott Muslims sabziwala campaign).

Unlike caste, sects find a theological basis in the four main schools of thought in Islam i.e. Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi'i. In India, people generally follow Hanafi School, which has sub-sects like Deobandi, Bareilvi, and Ahl I Hadith. This difference is such deep-rooted that every sect has its mosques, and avoids performing prayer with 'others'. Castigating the entire community for the viewpoint of one sect is neither justified nor warranted.

But having said that, Indian Muslims do have certain things common to them that bind them. It is life and livelihood. The intermittent riots that took place after independence led to the ghettoization of the community. A Muslim Identity comes not from within but from without. They are forced to see themselves as one because others have bracketed them like that.

Today, the Indian Muslims are a worried lot. They have already lost their economic and social race to other groups. The last bastion of their political clout has fallen too. In any case, the Muslims are a political force only in a handful of states.

Only in West Bengal, Assam, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Kashmir do they account for more than 25 percent votes. Muslims have only voted enbloc when the elections were toxic and polarized. Even in that scenario, they were at the receiving end as the majority votes far outnumbered them and nullified Muslim votes. And for the record Kashmir does not figure in the Indian Muslim's thought process. They have by large kept aloof from the Kashmir politics right from the very beginning.

The Muslims in the last 70 years have changed in their profile. Their perception hasn't. The crafted narrative of the high Muslim birth rate, many wives, and fatwades-decides-whom-to-vote need to be re-looked at. The Muslims since independence have undergone a sea change. Today Muslims have a middle class that is educated and mingles with non-Muslims. Their acceptance has increased among non-Muslims. Unfortunately, the mainstream media is reinforcing the stereotypes. It is using big-mouthed, ill-informed beard-sporting Maulanas to speak for the community. They are neither qualified nor have the mandate of their community.

The cornering of Muslims is underway in a big way. It has led to a fear psychosis that has seeped in so much that no Muslim individual or organization comes forward for a Muslim wronged by the system. Dr. Kafeel Khan could vouch for what I mean here. And Teesta Setalvad could second it.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

WE WILL SEE MANY MORE SUCH DRIVE-THROUGH FACILITIES AND WE CAN MAKE MANY, BUT WHERE IS THE VACCINE? THAT IS STILL A CONCERN.

— DELHI CHIEF MINISTER ARVIND KEJRIWAL



MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE HAVE THE VACCINE WHICH IS ABSOLUTELY IMPORTANT TO SAVE LIVES AND DEFEAT THE PANDEMIC.

— PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

Chequered history of Legislative Councils in India

With Mamata Banerjee's latest demand, the revival or abolition of Legislative Councils has become one of political expediency

One more flash point has emerged between the Centre and West Bengal with chief minister Mamata Banerjee's cabinet last week deciding to revive the Legislative Council. It was one of her campaign promises. Banerjee had said that eminent people and veteran leaders who were not selected for assembly tickets would be made members of the Vidhan Parishad. In other words, she wants some more leeway for her patronage.

The revival or abolition of legislative councils has become one of political expediency. The Legislative Council is constituted as per Article 168 of the Indian Constitution. Currently only six states - Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka - have Legislative Councils. Kashmir too had one, until the



KALYANI SHANKAR

(The author is a senior journalist and political commentator. The views expressed are personal.)

state was bifurcated into Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh in 2019.

India's transition from unicameral to bicameral legislature started under the Government of India Act, 1919, which established the Rajya Sabha in 1921. The Simon Commission in 1927, citing complexity and expenditure, was also divided about its feasibility. Then the Government of India Act of 1935 set up bicameral legislatures in Indian provinces.

The framers of the Constitution felt that in the beginning, the states of Bihar, Bombay, Madras, Punjab, the United Provinces, and West Bengal would have a Legislative Council. The Constitution gives limited powers to the Legislative Council.

Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, Bengal's first chief minister



after Independence, formed the Vidhan Parishad in 1952. When the Congress lost power in many states in 1967, the United Front coalition government in West Bengal got the council abolished in 1969. Punjab followed suit, abolishing its Legislative Council later that year.

However, having or not having a Legislative Council has now become a political issue. Some argue that it can accommodate individuals and

people of eminence who do not like to contest Assembly polls, exactly as Mamata Banerjee says. They believe that it can act as a watchdog and keep a check on hasty decisions. Those against say that it is a burden on the exchequer and it is normally used to rehabilitate politicians.

The Andhra Pradesh Assembly has passed a resolution seeking to abolish the council in 2020. The council was the first set up in 1958.

Then the TDP chief minister N.T. Rama Rao got it abolished in 1985. The Congress chief minister Dr Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy revived it in 2007. Last year, the Council dominated by the TDP referred three Capital Bills to a Select Committee, which provoked the current chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy into taking measures to abolish the council.

Creating or abolishing a Council has been a contentious issue for the last four decades in Tamil Nadu. The M.G. Ramachandran government in 1986 abolished the council to block the entry of the DMK chief M. Karunanidhi. Since then, DMK has made attempts to re-establish the Council, and AIADMK has opposed such moves. Now that the DMK is back in power revival of the council is on the cards. The Congress in Madhya

Pradesh had passed a resolution in 1967 in the Vidhan Sabha but the resolution did not get the approval of the Centre. In 1993 and 2018 also the party promised a bicameral legislature but could not fulfil its poll promise.

The Odisha Assembly recently passed a resolution for a Legislative Council. Proposals to create Councils in Rajasthan and Assam are pending in Parliament.

The debate on the relevance of the council continues in political circles. B R Ambedkar argued in the Constituent Assembly comparing it to the curate's egg-good only in parts. The US 'Senatorial saucer' is also often cited. The story goes that when the then US President George Washington hosted a breakfast meeting with Thomas Jefferson who was against the senate, "Why," asked

Washington, "did you just pour that coffee into your saucer, before drinking?"

"To cool it," answered Jefferson, "My throat is not made of brass." "Even so," rejoined Washington, "we pour our legislation into the senatorial saucer to cool it," resting his case.

Councils have also played a constructive role on occasion.

A deep study to find out the role of the council in enhancing the legislature process needs to be taken up. But creation or abolition of Councils should not become a frivolous decision based on the whims and fancies of the egoistic leaders and political parties. A parliamentary standing committee has suggested framing a national policy but it may not be the best way forward. Given these circumstances, it will be prudent to leave it to the states.

Blinken turns to 'effective partner' Egypt to calm West Asia

AP ■ CAIRO

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken jetted to Egypt on Wednesday as he pressed ahead with a diplomatic mission aimed at shoring up a cease-fire that ended an 11-day war between Israel and the Gaza Strip's ruling Hamas militant group.

Blinken landed in Cairo a day after holding intensive talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. In Egypt, he met with President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and other top officials. Later he was to travel to Jordan to meet with King Abdullah II.

Blinken has vowed to "rally international support" to rebuild the destruction in hard-hit Gaza while promising to make sure that none of the aid reaches Hamas. He is instead trying to bolster Hamas' rival, the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority.

Blinken set modest goals for the trip, his first official visit to the Middle East as secretary of state. His main goals have been to help rebuild

Gaza and lower the tensions in contested Jerusalem that helped fuel the war.

But he has made it made clear the U.S. has no immediate plans to pursue peace talks between the sides and one little to address the underlying causes of the decades-long conflict, though he expressed hope for creating a "better environment" that might lead to negotiations.

In Cairo, Blinken on Wednesday met with el-Sissi for nearly two hours. Meeting with American diplomatic staff afterwards, he described Egypt as a "real and effective partner" that helped end the Gaza war and is helping "build something positive." El-Sissi spoke to President Joe Biden last week before and after the ceasefire was announced.

"I think we both believe strongly that Palestinians and Israelis deserve equally to, to live in safety and security to enjoy equal measures of freedom, opportunity and dignity. And we're working on that together," Blinken said before departing to Jordan.

Both Egypt and Jordan are key U.S. allies that have peace agreements with Israel and frequently serve as mediators between Israel and the Palestinians. Egypt maintains ties with Hamas, but also enforces a tight blockade on Gaza, along with Israel, with a shared goal of preventing the Islamic group from arming.

The stop in Cairo, along with Biden's phone talks with el-Sissi, signal a closer relationship between the countries after a cooler beginning, when the U.S. expressed concern over el-Sissi's human rights record.

The Gaza reconstruction effort will be an important test. The 11-day war killed more than 250 people, mostly Palestinians, and caused heavy destruction in the impoverished coastal territory. Preliminary estimates have put the damage in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Ahmed Aboul Gheit, secretary-general of the Arab League, said U.S. commitment is critical for the region. Before the Gaza war, the Biden admin-

istration had kept its distance, preferring to focus on higher foreign policy priorities like China and Iran.

"In the absence of an effective role for the U.S., we should expect nothing but more cycles of violence and bloodshed of innocent people," he wrote in the Saudi daily Asharq Al-Awsat. One of the U.S. goals is to ensure that any assistance be kept out of the hands of Hamas, which opposes Israel's right to exist and which Israel and the U.S. consider a terrorist group.

In Gaza, Hamas leader Yehiyeh Sinwar told journalists Wednesday that the group welcomed international reconstruction aid, as long as it did not come from Israel, and had no objections to international oversight.

"Emphasize our commitment in Hamas that we will not take a single penny earmarked for rebuilding or humanitarian issues," he said. Sinwar, who has close ties with the group's armed wing, said Hamas receives ample military assistance from outside sources — led by Israel's archenemy, Iran.

"When I said we do not take money destined for aid, this is because we have comfortable sources of funds covering our activities," he said.

He also lashed out at Blinken for trying to strengthen the Palestinian Authority at Hamas' expense. "They are trying to add more fuel to the fire of Palestinian division," Sinwar said.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab was in Israel on Wednesday to build on the momentum of Blinken's visit.

Echoing Blinken's message, Raab said the U.K. supported Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas rocket fire and would seek to prevent aid money from reaching Hamas. But he also expressed hope that cease-fire efforts would lead to a broader regional peace effort.

"We want to support Israel but we also want the Palestinians to find a track towards an enduring peace," he said.

Blinken said Tuesday the U.S. is trying to bolster the rival government of President Mahmoud Abbas, whose forces

were ousted from Gaza by Hamas in 2007. Abbas' Palestinian Authority now administers autonomous areas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Abbas has been largely sidelined by recent events, is deeply unpopular at home and has little influence in Gaza.

Abbas hopes to establish an independent state in all of the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem — areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war.

In a gesture to the Palestinians, Blinken on Tuesday announced plans to reopen a diplomatic office in Jerusalem that oversees outreach to the Palestinians. He also pledged nearly \$40 million in additional aid to the Palestinians.

In all, the Biden administration has pledged some \$360 million to the Palestinians, restoring badly needed aid that the Trump administration had cut off.

The truce that ended the Gaza war on Friday has so far held, but it did not address any of the deeper issues plaguing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel media urges Twitter, Facebook to stop anti-press hate

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Major Israeli news outlets Tuesday called on Facebook and Twitter to halt what they said were social media posts inciting violence against journalists after a rash of attacks and death threats targeting reporters.

In letters sent to the social media giants, over a dozen newspapers, websites, TV and radio stations said "journalists have become a target for incitement, which has put them in clear and present danger."

Israel has gone through a tumultuous month that included heavy-handed police crackdowns against stonethrowing Palestinian demonstrators at a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site, mob vio-

lence between Israeli Jews and Arabs and an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

Bystanders attacked journalists covering the unrest in Israeli cities, and news anchors and reporters covering the fighting in Gaza faced intense verbal attacks and death threats online.

"There have been countless tweets calling for physical harm to Israeli journalists or labeling them as traitors or enemies of the state in a manner that encourages or justifies violent action against them," the letter sent to the world of 14 Israeli news outlets said.

The posts and tweets highlighted include calls for sexual assault and murder and accusations of treason.

Syrians vote in election certain to give Assad new mandate

AP ■ DAMASCUS

Syrians in government-held areas of the war-torn country headed to polling stations on Wednesday to vote in a presidential election guaranteed to give President Bashar Assad a fourth seven-year term.

The vote is the second presidential election since the country's conflict began 10 years ago and has been dismissed as a sham by the opposition and Western countries, including the United States. The post has been held by members of the Assad family for five decades.

"The Assad regime's so-called presidential election is neither free nor fair," U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said in a Twitter post Wednesday. "The U.S. joins France, Germany, Italy, and the UK in calling for the rejection of the regime's attempts to regain legitimacy without respecting the Syrian people's human rights and freedoms."

Assad blasted countries that have dismissed the vote as illegitimate, saying most of those nations "have colonial history" and "we as a state are not concerned about such statements."

He spoke Wednesday morning after casting his ballot in the Damascus suburb of Douma. The area was one of the main rebel strongholds in the country until it was retak-

en by government forces in 2018. It was the scene of an alleged poison gas attack in April 2018 that triggered strikes by the U.S., Britain and France.

"The vote that we are performing today would not have happened had it not been for the thousands of martyrs that fell while defending the land and people," Assad said.

The 55-year-old Assad arrived at the polling station with his wife, Asma, driving his own car. Assad has been in power since 2000, when he took over from his father Hafez, who ruled before that for 30 years. Despite the war, which seemed at one point to threaten his rule, Assad remained in power supported by regional powerhouse Iran and Russia, which sent in military advisers and air power to push back the armed opposition.

Two other little known figures, Abdullah Salloom and Ahmad Marie, are also running for the country's top post. But competition with Assad is largely seen as symbolic in a country where election results are known in advance.

Starting at 7 a.m., thousands began arriving at polling stations in Damascus, thronging streets festooned with giant posters of Assad and banners praising his rule. Most were not wearing masks, despite a coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Jaishankar offers backing for Guterres re-election

UN ■ UNITED NATIONS

India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has offered India's support to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for his re-election during a meeting in New York at which they discussed a range of issues from Covid-19 vaccine to terrorism.

In a tweet after the meeting on Tuesday, Jaishankar said that he told Guterres that India "values" his leadership and conveyed its support for his election to a second term.

The global crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic featured prominently in their discussions.

Jaishankar tweeted that they emphasised the importance of finding "urgent and effective global vaccine solutions" and the critical need to ramp up the vaccine supply chain to "ensure greater production and fairer distribution."

With India set to assume the rotating presidency of the Security Council in August, their meeting covered a wide range of issues.

In a series of tweets on the meeting, Jaishankar said that they talked about "regional challenges in India's neigh-

bourhood" and "shared our concerns about ensuring that the gains of the last two decades in Afghanistan are adequately protected."

US President Joe Biden is pulling out the nation's troops from Afghanistan after a 20-year deployment even as terrorist activities continue raising fears of regional instability. In his tweets Jaishankar said, "Countering terrorism and radicalisation remain priorities for the entire region."

Jaishankar said that he "highlighted India's constructive role" in the Security Council and "conveyed priorities of our Presidency in August."

He added, "Maritime Security and Technology for Peacekeeping address the needs of the day."

A spokesperson for India's UN Mission said that India planned to hold high-level meetings on those topics during its presidency.

Jaishankar also noted that Guterres expressed "appreciation of India's Peacekeeping operations including at Goma, DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) recently."

India peacekeepers based in Goma have been involved in rescue operations after the

eruption of the Mount Naryangongo volcano displaced several thousand people in the region last week. Several hundred people are also missing following the calamity.

Climate change, a topic that Guterres gives top priority to, also was discussed, Jaishankar tweeted. "Greater resources are essential for larger ambitions (in setting goals for combatting climate change). Financing will determine our seriousness and credibility," he added.

The spokesperson for India's UN mission said that Jaishankar "apprised the Secretary General of India's efforts to meet its Paris commitments (on curbing greenhouse emissions), enhance renewable energy goals, as well as its leadership role in the International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure."

Jaishankar "underlined our strong development partnership with Africa, Small States and Small Island Developing States," the spokesperson said.

"The Secretary-General conveyed his appreciation for the consistent role played by Indian peacekeepers in support of international peace and security."

US Health Secy calls for 'transparent' 2nd phase of Covid-19 origins probe

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US Health Secretary Xavier Becerra has urged the WHO to ensure that the next phase of investigation into COVID-19's origins are more "transparent" and "science-based", amidst media reports here suggesting growing evidence that the virus could have emerged from a laboratory in China.

In March, the World Health Organisation (WHO) issued a report written jointly with Chinese scientists on the origins of COVID-19, saying the chances of it having started in a lab were "extremely unlikely".

But the US and some other countries have raised concerns about the way the mission of the WHO experts was carried out in China, including in Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak, and the lack of adequate cooperation from Beijing.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has also agreed that further studies were needed into the virus' origins.

In a video message on Tuesday at the annual ministerial meeting of the WHO's World Health Assembly,

Becerra called for a second phase of the investigation to be launched "with terms of reference that are transparent, science-based and give international experts the independence to fully assess the source of the virus and the early days of the outbreak."

In his address, Becerra did not mention China directly, but his remarks came days after a Wall Street Journal report in which US intelligence officials are quoted saying three researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in the central Chinese city of Wuhan sought hospital care in November 2019, several weeks before China acknowledged the first case of the new highly infectious disease in the community.

China has angrily rejected the US media reports, repeatedly suggesting the virus may have come from a US laboratory instead.

On Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian said that the Wuhan Institute of Virology in a statement on March 23 had said that the premier lab had not been exposed to COVID-19 before December 30, 2019, and a "zero-infection" record is kept among its staff and grad-

uate students so far.

"What is the real purpose for the US to continue to play up the so-called 'lab leak theory'? Does it really care about the origin-tracing of the virus or just want to divert attention? We hope that the relevant departments in the US will make a clarification and explain that to the world as soon as possible," Zhao said in response to a question at a foreign ministry briefing in Beijing.

Dr Anthony Fauci, senior White House health adviser and director of the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, said recently that he was also not convinced about the natural origins of the coronavirus and called for further investigations.

In his address to the World Health Assembly, Becerra noted that the COVID-19 pandemic "not only stole a year from our lives, it stole millions of lives."

"Now we must honour our departed by taking urgent action this year - to strengthen health security and pandemic preparedness so that we are better prepared for the next global health crisis," he said.

Sudan and main rebel group kick off peace talks in Juba

AP ■ CAIRO

Cairo: Sudan's transitional government and the main rebel group kicked off a new round of peace talks Wednesday, officials said, the latest effort to end a decades-long conflict in the East African country.

South Sudan President Salva Kiir is hosting the talks between the Sudanese government and the Sudan Popular Liberation Movement - North, led by Abdel-Aziz al-Hilu.

Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, head of the ruling sovereign council, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and al-Hilu were attending a ceremonial meeting. Afterward, delegations from the government and the rebel group were to continue their closed deliberations in Juba, South Sudan's capital, according to the prime minister's office. The talks come less than two months after the government and the al-Hilu movement signed a declaration of principles detailing a roadmap for the talks.

Kremlin tempers expectations for Putin-Biden summit in June

AP ■ MOSCOW

The Kremlin sought on Wednesday to temper expectations for next month's summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden but noted the meeting's importance amid soaring tensions between their countries.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov warned against anticipating a "reset" after the June 16 summit in Geneva, emphasizing that differences between Moscow and Washington run too deep.

"It's obvious that the negative potential that has accumulated in our bilateral relations has some inertia," Peskov said during a conference call with reporters. "So it's hard to expect that it would be possible to reach understanding on deep disagreements during just one first meeting."

Russia's ties with the United States and its allies have sunk to post-Cold War lows over Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea, its support for separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine, Moscow's interference with elections, hacking attacks and other irritants. The Kremlin has denied wrongdoing and denounced Western sanctions as an attempt to constrain Russia's development.

"I would caution against having excessive expectations regarding results of the meeting, but proceed from the assumption that the event is very important in practical terms," Peskov said. "It would be wrong to downplay the importance of the meeting."

The summit in Geneva will wrap up Biden's first international trip as president, fol-

The agenda is expected to include arms control, the situation in Ukraine, this week's forced diversion of a Lithuania-bound flight by Russian-ally Belarus, efforts by both nations to stem the coronavirus pandemic and more.

lowing his visit to Britain for a meeting of Group of Seven leaders and a NATO summit in Brussels.

The agenda is expected to include arms control, the situation in Ukraine, this week's forced diversion of a Lithuania-bound flight by Russian-ally Belarus, efforts by both nations to stem the coronavirus pandemic and more.

The White House also is setting low expectations for the meeting, making it clear the Geneva summit isn't likely to yield any major breakthroughs.

The Biden administration has repeatedly said it is seeking a "stable and predictable" relationship with Moscow. At the same time, it has called out Putin on allegations that the Russians interfered in last year's US presidential election and that the Kremlin was behind the massive SolarWinds hacking campaign that targeted at least nine US agencies.

Taliban warns departing US against new bases in region

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The Taliban on Wednesday warned the departing US military against setting up bases in the region, and Pakistan vowed no American bases will be allowed on its territory. Pakistan also said drone strikes from Pakistani territory were also a non-starter.

The statements come amid speculation the United States, as it withdraws the last of its 2,500-3,500 soldiers from Afghanistan, will want a nearby locale from which to launch strikes against militant targets. The warning also comes during stepped-up efforts to jump-start stalled peace talks between the government and the Taliban, possibly in Turkey.

Both Pakistan and the Middle Eastern State of Qatar have been pressing the Taliban to attend talks in Turkey. UN-sponsored talks were to have been held last month in Turkey but the Taliban refused to take part. Meanwhile, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on Tuesday told Pakistan's Senate the country would not allow American bases on its territory.

"Forget the past, but I want to tell the Pakistanis that no US base will be allowed by Prime Minister Imran Khan so long he is in power," he said.

After the Sept 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Pakistan opened four air bases to the US-led coalition to aid in its efforts in Afghanistan to hunt down the al-Qaida perpetrators of the attacks and unseat the Taliban rulers who had given them safe haven.

Islamabad rejects Pentagon claim of access to Pak airbases after withdrawal from Af

UN ■ ISLAMABAD

After the Pentagon official claimed that Pakistan has allowed the US to use its airspace and ground routes as part of its Afghanistan campaign, a debate is underway in Islamabad regarding giving such an access to the US.

Pakistan officials have also categorically denied the claim made by Pentagon, pushing US to rethink its Afghan approach as its troops prepare to leave the country by September 11, this year. In Pakistan, allowing access to airspace and ground routes to the US would be a costly mistake as it would have serious repercussions on Pakistan's national security.

Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri, Pakistan foreign office spokesperson, said in a statement on Monday: "There was no US military or air base in Pakistan, nor was any such proposal envisaged," adding that any speculation on the topic was "baseless, irresponsible and should be avoided."

Since 2001, Pakistan and the US have had a framework of cooperation for Air Lines of Communication and Ground Lines of Communication, but "no new agreement has been made in this regard", the statement added. The Pentagon claim was also echoed in the Upper House, the Senate of Pakistan, where a member submitted a call for attention notice, calling on the house to discuss the Pentagon claim.

"This would be a grave and serious violation of the Parliament of Pakistan's unanimously adopted terms of

engagement for American/foreign forces adopted on April 12, 2021," read the notice submitted by Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed. Syed contested that the decision to give US forces airspace and access to airbases and ground routes would be contrary to the national security interests of Pakistan as he said "Pakistani people experienced the worst blowback from our previous entanglement after 9/11, and people of Pakistan would resolutely resist the encroachment of their sovereignty under any pretext."

Experts say that Pakistan cannot afford to become party with the US again as it would increase hostility against Pakistan in Afghanistan and would have major negative impact on Pakistan's relations with the Taliban.

US recently revealed that even though it would withdraw from Afghanistan, some troops would remain stationed in nearby neighbouring countries, adding that US was in consultation with several Central Asian neighbours of Afghanistan to survey where it can reposition troops to prevent landlocked Afghanistan from becoming a militant hub once again. Pakistan is a key role player in the ongoing Afghan peace process and is also among the prime beneficiaries of challenges, if normalcy is not restored in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal. Experts also highlight that any deal with the US would have a negative impact on Pakistan's relations with China, especially on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

SEARCH FOR MISSING



General public is hereby informed that a person (depicted in the photo), **Name:** Vasim Ahmed **S/o** Lt. Nashir Shah **R/o** H. No. 1267/6, L-1st, Sangam Vihar, New Delhi has been missing since 18.03.2021 from his house. In this regard a case vide DD No. 31A dated 01.05.2021 has been lodged at Police Station Neb Sarai, New Delhi. His physical description is as under:-

Age : 32 Years, **Height:** 5'1", **Complexion :** Shallow, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Normal, **Identification:** Mentally disturb, **Wearing :** Black colour pant and pink colour shirt.

Any person having any information/Clue about this missing person, may inform SHO, Neb Sarai, New Delhi at E-mail ic@cbi.gov.in or Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>

Phone: **SHO**
011-24368638, 24368641 **P.S. Neb Sarai, New Delhi**
Fax No. 011-24368639 **South Distt., Delhi**
DP/520/SD/2021 **Ph. No. 011-29551597, 29551597**

SEARCH FOR MISSING



General Public is hereby informed that a girl namely **Kalpana**, **C/o** Geeta Rani **R/o** H. No. 293, Katra Sujan Rai, Delhi, **Age:** about 21 years, **Height:** about 5'3", **Face:** Round, **Complexion:** Fair, **Built:** Strong, **Wearing:** Black Suit-Salwar, and Sleeper in her feet has been missing from the above address since 30.01.2015. In this regard a **DD No. 14-A**, dated 04.02.2015 has been lodged at **P.S. Chandni Mahal, Delhi**.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing girl but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about this girl please inform undersigned.

E-mail : ic@cbi.gov.nic.in **SHO**
011-24368638, 24368641 **PS Chandni Mahal, Delhi**
Fax : 011-24368639 **Ph. : 011-23271751, 23279338,**
DP/812/CD/2021 **8750870423**

WESTERN RAILWAY

TRACK SUPPLY WORKS

Tender Notice No. WTR/17/2021/06 dated: 21.05.2021. Chief Engineer (Track Supply), Head Quarter Office, Old Building, 2nd floor, Churchgate, Mumbai-400020 invites for tender one-procurement mode only for supply of the following items:

(1) Tender No. : 216012, Short Description : Combination 60kg/52kg welding portions for rails. **Tender Quantity:** 3291 Nos. **Date of Closing tender:** 25.06.2021. (2) Tender No. : 216014, Short Description : Combination joggle fish plates drg. No. T-6594 to T-6597. **Tender Quantity:** 1790 Sets. **Date of Closing tender:** 02.07.2021. **Time of closing of both tenders:** 11.30 hrs. on the date of closing of tenders. For detailed tender conditions/Corrigendum please visit www.ireps.gov.in. 0125

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Govt stimulus likely when unlock starts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the world's worst pandemic outbreak scarring nascent economic recovery, the Government may at the beginning of the unlock phase announce another stimulus package for the most hit sectors such as small business and self-employed, Bernstein said.

The brokerage in a note says its macro index suggests a deterioration in economic activity during April/May.

"Energy consumption has moderated, with power down over 4 per cent and oil consumption down over 16 per cent in May so far (all 2-year CAGR). E-waybills are down 16 per cent, suggesting the impact of scale down in factory production for some product categories, owing to the shut down in retail outlets.

"This is limiting the ability to scale up production, even as supply chains are not as deeply impacted, as the most regional government have lower restrictions on factory operations," it said.

However, the initial strength in the summer crop sowing season (acreage up 21 per cent year-on-year) should

limit inflationary risks and help support the rural economy. "We believe that irrespective of the ability to spend, there will be another stimulus announced by the Government when the unlock phase commences," Bernstein said, adding this is according to a usual script.

"We believe that the most impacted part of the economy remains the unorganised end markets (SMEs/Self-employed). While the impact on the lower middle class remains, this time we have argued that consumer sentiment in the upper-middle class could be weak and this aspect needs to be addressed," it said.

A stimulus, the brokerage said, in the form of loans and guarantees is required anyway, as downside support but the government needs to improve consumer sentiment.

"We wonder if there is any tool to manage that, as tax breaks or direct stimulus cheques for discretionary spends will be limited by budgetary constraints. Time is a healer for sentiment, though, and we think it will be the same this time as long as another wave doesn't emerge," it added.

While overall COVID cases have started to decline, key focus states witnessing a surge in cases have changed from north/western states earlier to the east/southern states now.

The second wave of COVID cases started to peak from the second week of May, as cases started to fall in the key 5 states. Daily COVID cases have halved from the peak of 4 lakh cases to 2 lakh cases daily.

The top 5 states (Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh) which account for 36 per cent of India's GDP, were witnessing an upsurge in cases in April. These states have started to see a reduction in cases and they now account for around 30 per cent of new cases reported (down from 70 per cent in April).

Apart from those 5 top states, other states which are witnessing an increase in cases are Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Odisha, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh - which now constitute 48 per cent of new cases reported (as of May 24). These 5 states collectively account for 25 per cent of India's GDP.

Inflation back to haunt on higher input prices, rural economy disruptions: Crisil

WPI INFLATION HAS SURGED IN DOUBLE DIGITS IN APRIL ON-YEAR FOR ITEMS DIRECTLY LINKED TO THESE COMMODITIES

PTI ■ MUMBAI



Higher input prices and disruptions to the rural economy have resulted in price pressures and inflation is back to haunt us, a rating agency said in its research report on Wednesday.

The report by Crisil said it sees upside risks to its 5 per cent estimate on consumer price inflation in FY21 because of this. It can be noted that the Reserve Bank is required to maintain the crucial number at 4 per cent in the medium term, with a 2 percentage point leeway on either side as part of its inflation target.

A surge in inflation worries had led it to desist from introducing rate cuts during much of FY21, despite the over 7.6 per cent contraction in the economy.

In its note, Crisil said data

collection was disrupted in April and May 2020 because of the national lockdown, and last year's base will not reflect accurate trends. Therefore, it has focused on sequential price trends on a seasonally adjusted basis.

"When viewed thus, both WPI (wholesale price index) and CPI indices continued to increase on-month in April 2021," it said.

Input costs are rising because of a surge in global commodities, which are raising manufacturing costs and hence fanning domestic inflation, the report added.

It said crude oil price at USD 65 a barrel is double that of seen last year and back to 2019 levels, edible oils are up 57 per cent on-year, the metals index is up by 76 per cent, and

transportation costs are also high with the surge in the Baltic index.

WPI inflation has surged in double digits in April on-year for items directly linked to these commodities, it said, adding crude-linked inflation has risen the sharpest, partly led by the base effect too.

Producers are currently bearing a higher burden of rising input costs than consumers. However, as demand revives, these costs can get increasingly passed on to consumers, the report noted. On top of the commodity prices, supply disruptions brought on by the intensification of the second COVID-19 wave in rural India are resulting in inflationary pressures, it said, adding that "upside inflation risks are clearly growing".

Retailers witness massive sales de-growth: RAI survey

AIANS ■ MUMBAI

As India battles the severe second wave of Covid-19 and states undergo lockdowns, retailers across the country have witnessed a sales de-growth of 49 per cent in April compared to the same period of 2019, according to a survey by the Retailers Association of India.

In March, the nationwide sales de-growth was recorded at 12 per cent, showed the survey.

Region-wise, western India was the most impacted in April with a contraction of 72 per cent, followed by 45 per cent in the north. South and eastern India witnessed a contraction of 40 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively, in retail sales last month.

Among the sectors, sales of sports goods and footwear contracted by 66 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively, followed by a 59 per cent de-growth in both jewellery and beauty, wellness and personal care categories.

Other categories - food and grocery, apparel and clothing, quick service restaurant and consumer durables and electronics -- witnessed a sales contraction of 49 per cent, 47 per cent, 45 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively.

Earlier this month, the industry body urged the government to take steps for capital infusion into the retail industry with ECLGS benefits and loan moratorium in the wake of the lockdowns, restrictions, and their impact on the retail sector.



Govt looks at exit option while BPCL seeks open offer exemption

AIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Privatisation bound Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd is seeking exemption for successful bidder of the company from mandatory open offer to be made to shareholders of two promoted companies - Petronet LNG and Indraprastha Gas Ltd.

Sources said, the oil refiner is looking to get the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to give exemption for the open offers to the successful bidder of BPCL as already done when ONGC acquired a Government stake in HPCL.

BPCL is one of the promoters of both PLL and IGL with a shareholding of 12.5 per cent and 22.5 per cent respectively.

The promoter status in these companies means that once BPCL changes hands to new entity post the strategic sale process, its new owners will have to make open offer for another 26 per cent stake in both the promoted companies as per SEBI regulations. This would make BPCL's acquisition expensive by about ₹20,000 crore for potential bidders that could further deter interest in company in the time of the pandemic.

"It is right for BPCL to look for exemption from open offer

in case of PLL and IGL. But how this exemption is given, needs to be watched as the earlier experience in case of the ONGC-HPCL deal, the promoters of both the firms were the same i.e. the government of India and there was no change of ownership," said an energy sector expert not willing to be named.

Sources said that open offer exemption has been discussed by BPCL management in their meeting with disinvestment department Dipam. But the thinking in the government seems to be more inclined towards BPCL shedding its promoter status in the two companies by selling stake before its own strategic sale.

Both BPCL and Centre do not want to wane investor interest in the refiner as additional spending could make the already large sized deal further expensive. The sale of government's 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL is valued at about ₹55,000 crore at the current share trading price. The requirement for making an open offer for additional 26 per cent to minority shareholders of the company will cost an additional ₹27,000 crore.

In addition, if open offers has to be made for additional 26 per cent in PLL and IGL, the spending could go up by another ₹18,000-20,000 crore.

Sensex soars above 51,000-mark as IT, finance stocks sparkle

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The BSE Sensex returned to winning ways on Wednesday after a day's pause as technology, finance and auto counters witnessed robust buying amid a largely positive trend in Asian markets.

Overcoming a tepid start, the 30-share benchmark gained momentum through the session to end 379.99 points or 0.75 per cent higher at 51,017.52. The Sensex reclaimed the 51,000-level after March 10 this year.

The broader NSE Nifty extended its winning run to the fourth consecutive session, climbing 93 points or 0.17 per cent to finish at 15,301.45.

Bajaj Finserv was the top performer in the Sensex pack, rallying 4.82 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finance, Infosys, Maruti, HDFC, L&T, Tech Mahindra and M&M.

On the other hand, PowerGrid, NTPC, ONGC, Kotak Bank, Dr Reddy's, HDFC Bank, ITC and Bharti Airtel were the losers, dropping up to 3.11 per cent.

"Domestic equities remained upbeat as improved visibility about economic recovery from 2QFY22 continued to lift investors' sentiments," said Binod Modi, Head

- Strategy at Reliance Securities.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said, "Domestic markets started cautiously positive and witnessed a strong rebound as it gained momentum from expectations of another set of relief measures. The new stimulus package is expected to focus on boosting the worst-hit sectors like tourism, aviation and hospitality along with MSMEs."

Value buying was seen in the IT sector while metal stocks remained in the correction phase due to muted international commodity prices, he added.

Sector-wise, BSE realty, IT, teck, finance and auto indices rose as much as 2.85 per cent, while metal, power, utilities and basic materials closed with losses.

In the broader markets, the BSE midcap index dropped 0.14 per cent, while the small-cap gauge spurted 0.69 per cent.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Tokyo ended on a positive note, while Seoul was in the red. Equities in Europe were trading on a mixed note in mid-session deals. Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude was trading flat at USD 68.50 per barrel.

ST Council sets up GoM on capacity based taxation

AIANS ■ NEW DELHI

The Goods and Service Tax Council has constituted a group of ministers (GoM) to examine the possibility of levy of GST based on capacity of manufacturing units and special composition schemes in certain evasion prone sectors with reference to current legal provisions. The Council has set five-point terms of reference for the GoM which will include examining the legal validity of such changes (manufacturing capacity based taxation and new composition scheme) and the impact of such levy on destination nature of current GST design. "To examine the possibility of levy of GST based on capacity of manufacturing units and special composition schemes in certain evasion prone sectors like pan masala and gutka, brick kilns, sand mining etc with reference to the current legal provisions," the terms of reference of the GoM states. The GoM will also examine any other administrative or systemic mechanism to plug leaked in these sectors.

Also, the GoM will examine the impact of GST on reverse charge on me tha oil and to examine if these could be other class of supplies that could be subjected to reverse charge to augment revenue.

AEPC seeks 'essential service' tag for apparel exports

AIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPCC) has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare apparel exports as essential services and exempt these exporting units from lockdowns across India.

"We request that the Central government should issue necessary instructions to all the State Governments to declare apparel exports as essential services and exempt them from shutdown," AEPCC Chairman A. Sakthivel wrote in a letter to the Prime Minister.

He noted that most of the apparel exports are season and fashion sensitive, and their salvage value becomes zero if the production and shipment are not done in time. Considering the perishable nature of the product, apparel exports should be seen as essential services, the Chairman said.

"Besides, many neighbouring and competing countries have already accorded

apparel exports the status of essential services," he added.

Apparel exporters showed great resilience in getting back on track after being badly hit in 2020 with huge export order cancellations, bankruptcies and labourers going back to native places. Export orders from the US and Europe have revived but now the Indian apparel exporters face the danger of losing these to competing countries as the second wave of Covid-19 crisis has resulted in lockdowns in several states, the industry body said.

"Due to the lockdown, if the units are unable to execute these orders, this will result, not only in the short-term loss of orders and export earnings, but also a long-term loss of the buyers. Our competing countries like Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia and Pakistan are making all efforts to take orders from these regions and if we lose our buyers at this point, they will not come back in the near future," said Sakthivel.

Earlier in the day, the council held a video conference meeting with buying houses and associations to discuss the second wave of pandemic. The AEPCC Chairman requested the buying houses and agents to explain to the international clients that the situation in India is getting better by the day.

NHAI issues guidelines for toll plazas to reduce waiting time

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The NHAI on Wednesday said it has issued guidelines to ensure not more than 10 seconds service time per vehicle even during the peak hours at toll plazas to ensure minimal waiting time. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) in a statement said the new set of guidelines will also ensure seamless flow of traffic at the toll plazas by not allowing vehicles to queue up more than 100 metres. Noting that although at most of the toll plazas, there is no waiting time after the mandatory 100 per cent FASTag, the NHAI said, "even then if there is a queue of waiting vehicles of more than 100 metres due to some reason, the vehicles will be allowed to pass without paying toll till the queue comes within 100 meters from the toll booth". For this purpose, a yellow line at a distance of 100 meters from the toll booth will be marked in each toll lane, the NHAI said, adding that this is to inculcate a further sense of accountability in toll plaza operators.

Google Cloud unveils 3 services to provide real-time insights

AIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Google Cloud on Wednesday unveiled three new services to empower customers with unified data cloud strategy, that will provide organisations real-time insights powered by machine learning.

The three services - Dataprep, Analytics Hub and Datastream - will help organisations break free from data silos to securely predict business outcomes, empower users, and make informed, real-time decisions, Google said during the inaugural virtual 'Data Cloud Summit'. "Data must be thought of as an ability that integrates all aspects of working with it. Every industry is accelerating their shift of being digital-first as they recognise data is the essential ingredient for value creation and the key to advancing their digital transformation," said Gerrit Kazmaier, Vice President and General Manager, Databases, Data Analytics and Looker, Google Cloud. "At Google Cloud, we're committed to helping customers build the most powerful data cloud solution to unlock value and actionable, real-time insights, needed to future-proof their business," Kazmaier added.

Piyush Goyal reviews progress of Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway link Project

Piyush Goyal, Minister for Railways and Commerce & Industry and Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, reviewed the progress of Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail link Project (USBRL) through Video conferencing on Wednesday. Chairman & CEO, Railway Board along with senior officials of Railways were present on the occasion.

Goyal appreciated that

Banks sanction over ₹15 lakh crore under Mudra Yojana

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry on Wednesday said banks and financial institutions have sanctioned about Rs 15 lakh crore to over 28 crore beneficiaries under the Mudra scheme in the last six years.

Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 8, 2015, to promote entrepreneurship.

As of March 26, 2021, loans sanctioned by member lending institutions amounting to Rs 15.10 lakh crore to 28.81 crore beneficiary, the Department of Financial Services under the Finance Ministry said in a tweet.

Under the scheme, collateral-free loans up to Rs 10 lakh in three categories - namely Shishu, Kishore and Tarun for income-generating activities in manufacturing, trading and services sectors and activities allied to agriculture are provided, it said.

Last year, the government decided to provide 2 per cent interest subvention to borrowers under the 'Shishu' category of the flagship PMMY as

part of the stimulus package or Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan Package announced in May to help small businesses tide over difficulties created by the lockdown following the outbreak of coronavirus disease.

Under the Shishu category, collateral-free loans of up to Rs 50,000 are given to beneficiaries.

The scheme was extended to loans that were outstanding as of March 31, 2020, and not in the non-performing asset (NPA) category.

At the end of March 2020, about 9.37 crore loan accounts under the Shishu category of PMMY with a total loan amount of about Rs 1.62 Lakh crore were outstanding.

For borrowers, who have been allowed a moratorium, as permitted by the RBI under the 'COVID 19 Regulatory Package', the scheme commenced post completion of the moratorium period till a period of 12 months (from September 01, 2020, till August 31, 2021).

For other borrowers, the scheme commenced with effect from June 1, 2020, till May 31, 2021.

WESTERN RAILWAY CORRIGENDUM

To Tender Notice No.: BCT/21-22/51 dt.: 21.05.2021 DOP-18.06.2021. Existing as Udhna-Jaiganga section: TRR, CR, TBR P&C and TTR under ADEAN-Nandurbar section in connection of sanctioned track works for the year 20-21. To be read as Udhna-Jaiganga section: CR, CR, TBR P&C and TTR under ADEAN-Nandurbar section in connection with sanctioned track works for the year 20-21. All other terms & conditions will remain the same. This Tender has also been published on the Western Railway's official website www.irps.gov.in 0131

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कार्यालय नगर निगम, भरतपुर

क्रमांक:- न.नि.प्र./निर्माण/2021-22/1307-12 दिनांक:- 24/05/2021

संशोधित ई-निविदा सूचना 1/2021-22

ई-निविदा सूचना 01/2021-22 क्रमांक न.नि.प्र./निर्माण/2021-22/08 दिनांक 05.04.2021 द्वारा नगर निगम भरतपुर द्वारा 18 कार्यों की ऑनलाइन निविदा आमंत्रित की गई थी। कोरोना महामारी के कारण उक्त निविदा की दिनांक में निम्न प्रकार परिवर्तन किया जाता है। निविदा की शर्तें यथावत रहेंगी।

निविदा डाउनलोड एवं अपलोड करने की अन्तिम समय तिथि	टेण्डर शुल्क, प्रोसेसिंग फीस की यू.टी.आर. स्वीड एवं बिड सिक्क्यूरीटी स्टैम्प जमा कराने की समय एवं तिथि	निविदा खोलने की तिथि
दिनांक 14.06.2021 सायं 6.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 15.06.2021 दोपहर 12.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 16.06.2021 दोपहर 12.00 बजे तक

Raj.Samwad/C/1550/2021-22 **आयुक्त, नगर निगम, भरतपुर**

noida New Okhla Industrial Development Authority

Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida G.B Nagar, (U.P.) Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender are invited from firms / contractors with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened / downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on NOIDA Authority's official website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes / amendments & corrigendum etc.

S. No	JOB NO.	NAME OF WORK	AMOUNT
1	01 / DGM (NTC) / SM (NTC) / 2021-22	P/L Thermoplastic paint on MP-3 Road Yamuna Bridge to Sector-71, 72 & 51, 52 X-ing Noida	5654043.20
2	04 / DGM (NTC) / SM (NTC) / 2021-22	P/L Thermoplastic paint on MP-2 Road Sector-16A, Flyover to D.S Road, Noida.	8110823.60
3	35 / DGM (NTC) / SM (NTC) / 2020-21	P/L Thermoplastic paint on road between Sector-51 & 50, Noida.	4502702.40
4	36 / DGM (NTC) / SM (NTC) / 2020-21	P/L Thermoplastic paint on Sector-70 & 71 X-ing to DSC Road Sector-49, Noida.	3055323.20

Which can be uploaded by date **09.06.2021** upto **5.00 PM**. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date **10.06.2021** at **11.00 AM**.

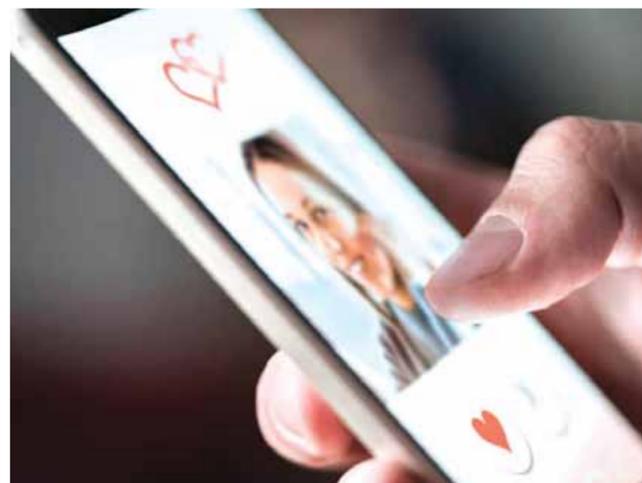
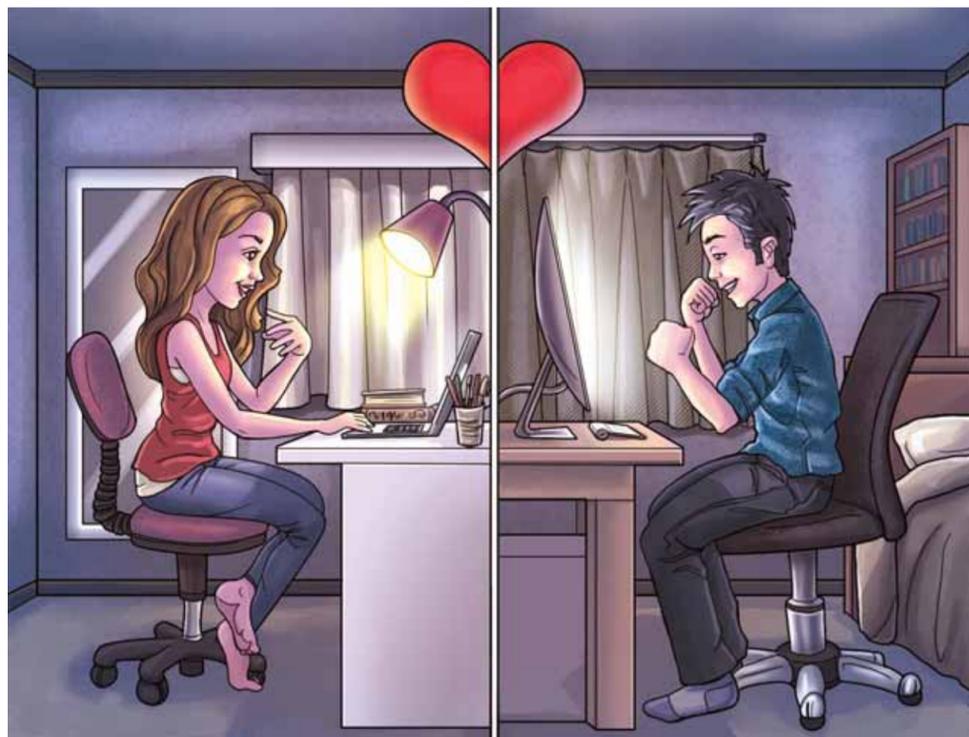
Dy. General Manager Noida Traffic Cell

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA



FROM APP TO ALTAR

Dating apps evolved and changed pace to keep with the socially distanced times. **CHRISTY VARGHESE** finds out that not only was there an upswing in the number of registrations but it seems that more people are getting hitched



continues for all pictures they post of their wedding on social media.

While all the happy tales might have one chiming in that online dating might truly be the future of dating, Anita Mishra, though she is grateful to online dating, would not like that very much. As an ambitious career-oriented woman living in Ahmedabad, Anita met her husband, running his family business in Rajkot, on the TrulyMadly mobile app where they started talking.

"Honesty, it may not get you many friends but it will get you the right ones," goes the saying and I cannot stress enough on this as this trait is what led me to my husband on a dating app of all places. In this fast-paced world where the internet reigns, it's easy to find a short-lived match. But I found my forever," she says.

"Since we matched on a dating app, my parents were apprehensive initially, but once they met him they were utterly smitten by him. I never thought I could find a perfect match on a dating app. But here we are. We got married in June 2020 in an intimate ceremony with just 50 people,

keeping in mind the restrictions in place to tackle the pandemic. We are truly and madly in love with each other," expressed Anita.

Though she agrees that distance does make the heart grow fond, no amount of chatting, phone calls or video calls can replace the feeling of sitting next to our beloved, within touching distance. "Currently, both of us are in two different cities (he is in Rajkot and I am in Ahmedabad). So the long-distance relationship has evolved into a long-distance marital relationship. But the best thing is that we both are with the person we want to be. We are happy together. There have been instances when tempers flared and one of us wanted to leave the other or both of us wanted to part ways. However, we somehow managed to never sleep with conflict in our mind. We ensured to bury the difference over a call before going to bed," Anita shared with a grin.

With changes all around us, it was inevitable that our relationships too evolved to keep pace. These couples are proof enough.

The online dating experience has come a long way. From being an easy-going, fool-proof method of meeting new people with no dearth of options, to being a proven match-maker for many. Ever since the pandemic changed our lives, dating applications like Bumble, Tinder and TrulyMadly have been a boon to many. Our presumption that the users of dating applications would have increased manifold during the lockdowns was proven right by the founder and CEO of TrulyMadly, Snehal Khanor, who says, "Though we were seeing significant spikes in signups and revenues even months before COVID-19, in the first two weeks of the lockdown, we saw the volume surge by nearly 30 per cent."

While the dating applications adapted to the change in times in their own ways, users took to the transformation like ducks to water. In March last year, Tinder made its Passport feature temporarily free. Since Tinder finds prospective matches by showing you profiles of those who are in close proximity to you, the Passport feature being made free was a welcome move as someone who is based in Delhi, India could simply update their location to any place on Earth to discover matches based in that location instead of where he/she truly is.

"Living away from home used to get lonely, and the lockdown made it worse. So right after the lockdown began, I got on Tinder Passport just to pass my time. I stumbled upon Ajita's profile and I found her cute so I swiped right. Luckily, it was a match. That's when I noticed she was in Nepal, 900 kms away from me," says Abhyuday.

He reveals how a silly conversation starter, 'How's life in the future?' - since she was in a time zone that was 15 minutes ahead, resulted in a virtual relationship. With time they shared many memorable moments including their first telephonic conversation followed by their first video call.

"She was the one for me, so six months into our long-distance relationship, I popped the question, 'Will you marry me?' and she went like, 'Are you crazy?' When I told her I was serious, she said yes! My mother adored Ajita, but her dad didn't approve of our relationship. After giving it much thought she said, 'Let's elope!' That was my turn to call her crazy! But she had it all planned out. In March, she flew down to my hometown! She walked out of Raipur airport in a white *kurti*; it was surreal to see her in real life for the first time; we just hugged for five minutes straight! We got married the same week; we just wished her dad was there with us. But I'm sure he'll come around someday," Abhyuday summed up his relationship.

It's only been a couple of weeks since they tied the knot and Abhyuday says they

are still unpacking her bags and redecorating the house, which finally feels like home, now that Ajita's there. After being away from each other for so long, they say they are focussing on the small things, like cooking or having *chai* together every evening. "We're still in our own little space... but this time, without the hassle of 900 kms between us," Ajita signs off for the couple with a smile.

The team working at Bumble was nice enough to share some inside information on the statistics concerning online dating apps. Since the onset of the pandemic, they

observed a 38 per cent rise in the use of video calls and voice chats. Additionally, a recent nationwide survey conducted by Bumble revealed that 40 per cent of single Indians want to opt for virtual dating in 2021 with more than one in two chats turned into something more meaningful with a large number of messages being exchanged.

Angana met her perfect match Vitthal on Bumble in March 2020. His love for beaches, beer and animals was all for her. In four days, they met for their first date. Shortly after his 'rather adorable girlfriend

banegi meri?' proposal, the national lockdown was announced. During that time, Angana recounts how Vitthal helped her when she had injured her leg in an accident. "I still shiver at the thought of being alone at that time since I didn't have many friends in Bangalore". Getting through the pandemic together, they knew they were meant to be together. Vitthal had popped a very sudden 'Shaadi Karegi Mujhse?' question to her, what followed was a beautiful temple wedding in February in Bangalore this year. Their invites to friends read 'From Bumble to Temple' and that

A notable gesture

Actor **RICHA CHADHA** has kickstarted a social media initiative, *The Kindry*, which aims to celebrate everyday heroes and random acts of kindness

It has been almost a year and a half since the world saw its first COVID-19 case. In this 'new normal' life that most of us are still getting accustomed to today, receiving a regular influx of stress-inducing information revolving around the pandemic has become a part of life. Bollywood actor, Richa Chadha realises that since news is by nature negative most of the time, positive deeds aren't amplified enough. However, telling people to 'be positive' and ignore their reality can be termed as toxic positivity. The idea that mankind is unkind is deeply rooted in our collective consciousness, thanks to mass media. All attempts to create an alternative reality, where people value kindness and integrity, are treated as fluff.

Hence, in an attempt to recognise the brave work as well as positive actions of ordinary people of the country during these uncertain times, Richa commenced an initiative to create and commemorate a community of everyday heroes. She would be doing this with the help of the Instagram page called *The Kindry* which will be managed by her and co-founder, Krishan Jagiyya. The page will also host various live sessions, chats and interactions with these real life heroes who have done substantial work for the wellness of people, as well as influencers and other notable persons who have helped humanity.

"With *The Kindry*, I intend to help find relief in a pent-up nation of people. By amplifying stories of courage and selflessness and celebrating unsung heroes via social media live sessions and interviews, I believe we can create a



community of empathetic people who are also willing to share stories and help each other. Through this page, we'd also look at crowdfunding partnerships to possibly provide aid and encouragement to heroes," said Richa.

With a strong mission statement, the idea of *The Kindry* is to take a step towards incentivising good behaviour and celebrating the kindness of common people which usually go unnoticed. Richa added, "We'd even like to create content — short films, feature films, songs, podcasts — that inspire empathy not just to Indians but to the whole world. Over time, I hope this will build a society where people are encouraged to be kinder to one another."

Two in three adolescents are not practising appropriate hand hygiene, a shocking recent global study involving researchers from the University of Queensland revealed. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the conclusive role of sanitation and hygiene, be it physical, oral or sexual hygiene, in our personal lives once again.

The personal care industry has been very vocal about men's intimate hygiene in the recent past, says Sarthak Taneja, co-founder, Skin Elements, adding that maintaining body hygiene is equally important for both the sexes, especially the genitals.

Personal and intimate hygiene, especially in high temperatures, is not just crucial for comfort and freshness all day long, but to keep sexual and dermatological health concerns at bay.

"Intimate care during sum-

Importance of personal hygiene

mers is an essential addition to the daily hygiene check of your body. Not only does it keep your sensitive areas away from pathogens like bacteria and fungus, it also keeps them sweat-free," says Sarthak.

"As the temperature increases, the hot and humid weather can accelerate discomfort and even result in genital infections in both sexes. Therefore, specialists suggest not to wear body fitted clothes as they can impact the ventilation around your genitals and become a favourable environment for bacteria and yeast to grow. Hygiene care products such as intimate washes, chafing products and even wipes are very useful during summers. They help in keeping your privates clean,



dry and fresh. Sweat becomes apparent in this scorching hot weather. If you are fortunate

enough, you may perspire less otherwise it can generate an awful scent," he adds.

HIS ADVICE?

To keep your intimate area clean, use quality products that are chemical-free. If you have an outright need to feel fresh and not stink, ensure that the area does not have excessive hair growth. The humidity emerging from the hairy region could prevent you from keeping yourself sterile and clean. On the off chance that you are already utilising a cleanliness product, pick one with natural ingredients and safe for day to day use that guarantees the fundamental requirements like reduced irritation, dry genitals and safeguards your skin from inflammation.

—IANS

A mother's love

Television and theatre actor **SMITA BANSAL** says that she tapped into her maternal instincts to understand and enact the nuances of her character in a new teleplay

Renowned playwright **Raywant Dalvi's** teleplay, *Chanda Hai Tu*, presented by Zee Theatre, is a tribute to motherhood and parenting. The teleplay, screening throughout the week on Dish TV and D2H Rangmanch Active, depicts the challenges of raising a physically challenged child

with great candour. The play's protagonists Mr and Mrs Shukla find ways to make ends meet while trying to keep their sanity intact as caregivers. They invest their time and energy in raising their son and even though leading a normal life is difficult for them, their determination to



turn a negative situation into a positive one is what gives this story its heart. In these desolate times when maintaining familial bonds forms the crux of life, the

play underlines the selfless role of caregivers.

Smita Bansal, who plays Mrs Shukla, said, "Playing a mother came naturally to me as I have two daughters.

I constantly worry about them, cannot bear to see them in any pain, and want to give them the best that life has to offer. I would do anything to make them smile. That is why it wasn't hard to play Mrs Shukla. A mother's instinct is fundamentally similar and so I tuned into this unconditional love and maternal energy to get her portrayal right. She is a strong woman who is managing her family responsibilities as well as professional commitments. While reading the play, I was overwhelmed by the extent of her dedication, sacrifices, courage, and unwavering commitment."

While rehearsing and attending workshops, Smita

worked hard to get the emotional graph of her character right and she expressed, "The cast spent a lot of time getting the *sur* (the defining note) of each character right. Also, once we all began to connect with each other, the chemistry started building from there. Once you know the lines are connected to a particular emotion, you let go of who you are and become the character. The rest just flows. By the time we shot the play, we were all pitch-perfect and ready."

Bansal calls the whole process 'magical' and hopes the audience will tune in to *Chanda Hai Tu* to appreciate all the love and hard work that went into it.

TRENDBLAZER



'YOG NIDRA TO BEAT PANDEMIC STRESS'

Actor **RAKUL PREET SINGH** shared a tip to overcome anxiety and stress during pandemic-induced lockdowns.

"If the pandemic anxiety is making you sleepless, stressed or if you are recovering from COVID, I highly recommend you give *Yog Nidra* a shot," she said

On the work front, *Sardar Ka Grandson*, which released on Netflix, has her starring alongside Arjun Kapoor and Neena Gupta.

fairtalk

ROSHNI KAPOOR



'Social media helped me build my brand value and connect with fans. While it has helped me grow in multiple dimensions and given me the flexibility to work round the clock, you can't gauge how a person is in real life, their traits, skills or struggles just via social media posts. Judging people on social media is a wrong approach.'

dailytalk

TAMANNAAH BHATIA



'The concept of a 'star' is changing very rapidly. People are watching and liking content for the content and not just for an individual actor. I think the idea of stardom I saw 10 years ago was probably the most organic way of developing a loyal fan following, which I have been fortunate to experience.'

CARO TO DIRECT FILM ON GENDER EQUALITY

Actor **CHARLIZE THERON** and filmmaker **NIKI CARO** have joined hands for a film on gender equality. Theron will produce the film, while Caro will direct it.

The film will focus on four female athletes fighting for equality in big wave surfing. It will revolve around the lives of Bianca Valenti, Andrea Moller, Paige Alms and Keala Kennelly and their journey to make a place for themselves in the sport, which is predominantly male-dominated.



A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

The need for ventilation of closed spaces, which are a hotspot of virus growth, has somehow not received enough emphasis in the fight against COVID-19, says S B SHASHANK

The world embraced Japan's advocacy for avoiding three Cs in combating the spread of COVID-19. It's about keeping away from 'Crowded' places, 'Closed' spaces and 'Close' contacts that the three Cs symbolise. Together, these three refrains sum up what could be called an antidote to causative factors that contribute to the spread of this contagion. They also highlight the ease with which Coronavirus hops from one host to another in certain physical settings.

With variants of concern evolving, the transmission of virus is getting menacingly speedier. This is being witnessed in India since the second wave of the pandemic, with unprecedented ferocity, hit cities and villages last month. While practices such as wearing masks, regularly sanitising your hands and social distancing have slowly found behavioral acceptance, the need for ventilation of closed spaces, which are a hotspot of virus growth, has somehow not received enough emphasis amid the fight against COVID-19. This scenario is likely to change now. Last week, the Principle Scientific Advisor of the Central Government issued an information brochure, which among other things, speaks

about ways of improving indoor air quality, one of the key strategies to reduce transmission of COVID-19.

Closed space in our modern architectural setup is unavoidable for the reasons of security, safety, comfort, privacy, energy and work efficiency, and optimal space use. The infection risk of closed door interaction, therefore, cannot be completely avoided. However, the risk can be considerably mitigated with correct interventions. Every person, even if not exhibiting visible symptoms of Covid, is a suspect carrier of the virus. This answers why building control measures should be applied to indoor spaces such as dwelling houses, office, school or hospital so that there is proper air and there is no buildup of virus concentration to a level which could infect cohabitants. Ventilation is, therefore, a necessity.

Ventilation permits entry of fresh air from outside replacing the stale air containing pathogens. This process helps in reducing viral load and thus, mitigates the transmission potential. The recently released brochure stresses on both natural and mechanical ventilation, which will further depend upon the space use and technical feasibility for ventilation type. Dwelling units



can get natural ventilation through windows and access for cross breeze but this may even require augmentation by installation of a simple fan or exhaust fan. These are simple interventions which individual households can do on their own without need for much expertise. But, the office and commercial spaces including health facilities will require a well designed mechanical ventilation system consisting of ducts, fans, air filters and

other devices as per requirement.

These interventions have special significance for dwelling houses. Ever since the pandemic set in last year, home has become a hub of activities, especially when the work from home is the new norm and schooling is online. Adults and children are spending full time in close physical proximity. In this scenario, homes pose serious concern for indoor transmission of viruses. With one member catching infection, the possibility of passing it to the others in the family increases tremendously. This is evident from numerous examples of entire families getting cross infected indoors.

In India, average family size is five, which implies that one member infected is a potential threat to the other four in the family. This is a significant risk, any effort to counter it will yield proportionate benefit in reducing the disease load. As the clinical treatment guidelines of the ICMR and AIIMS recommend home isolation for mild infections, proper ventilation will be able to reduce ambient viral load and aid in protecting others in the family. In the evolving scenario, when home isolation continues to be seen as an important strategy for Covid management, the architecture

of home setting needs a closer look for infusing proper ventilation.

The World Health Organisation, too, brought out a booklet this year on a roadmap for indoor ventilation. It's about improving and ensuring good ventilation in the context of COVID-19. Depending upon use, this guideline lays the standards of air change rate in different settings of closed spaces. For residential houses, the benchmark standard in terms of air change per hour is lower, whereas for healthcare facilities, it is higher as the risk for cross infection is much more. It also lays down the strategies to be adopted for reaching those standards, both by natural ventilation and mechanical ventilation, such as with use of air extractors, whirlybirds, stacks, ducts and air filters et al.

It's time to devote some energy and resources on creating awareness about ventilation with special focus on how to equip dwelling houses. It is encouraging that the brochure on guideline has put concern for ventilation at par with focus on Covid appropriate behaviour.

(The author is a serving civil servant in Delhi Government. He was Special Secretary, Department of Health.)



Major Rakesh Sharma has had his humble beginnings in a small village of Himachal Pradesh. He got enrolled in the Indian Army in 1995. Dedicating his prime youth in service of the nation, he voluntarily served in insurgency-prone sectors almost his entire Army tenure i.e 10 years. He actively planned and led various combat operations of varied team sizes at various levels. He actively participated in Operation Vijay (Kargil war) in 1999. Besides earning Shaurya Chakra, he is a recipient of the following military medals: Operation Meghdoot (1998), Operation Vijay Star (1999), Operation Vijay Medal (1999), Operation Rakshak (2000) and Operation Prakaram (2001). In 2005, he decided to venture out of olive green with the objective of learning and contributing to other segments. In the corporate sector, he has been associated with some reputed brands and also did some pioneering work in affordable housing for the less privileged. In 2013, Major Rakesh was awarded Shikhar Samman for social service by Shikhar Organisation, a prominent national level NGO, patronised by Virender Sehwag. Further, in 2016, he was awarded Alwar Gaurav by another prominent NGO for his contribution to social development in the field of affordable housing. During his time with corporate, one of the first workshops, Major Rakesh devised was There



Are No Runners Up, based on his actual Kargil War experience. It conveys that it's very critical to possess a winning attitude in life rather than being a mere runner-up. Besides, he has been a guest speaker and an invitee to many educational institutes and organisations like DPS, Atul School, MIT, GMR to name a few. Major Rakesh through his own resources and efforts operates a not-for-profit nursery school for unprivileged children in Delhi — Shaurya School. He is actively involved in many social initiatives including those for Martyrs and Ex-servicemen.



Vax drive in Jammu for tourism stakeholders

A special vaccination drive for tourism stakeholders viz hotel, restaurant owners along with their staff, *dhabawalas*, travel agents, excursion agents, adventure tour operators, paddleboat owners (*shikarawalas*), tourist guides, hawkers et al, registered with Tourism Department, started on May 25 in four districts of Jammu division i.e. Jammu, Udhampur, Kathua and Rajouri. This is as per the decision taken during a high-level meeting chaired by the Chief Secretary J&K for prioritised coverage of high-risk and vulnerable groups in the (18-45) age category.

In this special drive, the tourism stakeholders who play a significant role in this industry will receive the first jab of Covishield vaccine. With people registering for the vaccination, the revival of the tourism industry is not far. Although community spread was mitigated with the safety protocols already in place but through this initiative, the tourism industry as a whole will be safeguarded and protected, bringing Jammu one step closer to being the safest place for travellers.

Director of Tourism, Jammu, said, "The revival of the tourism sector is our primary focus. We aim to safeguard the stakeholders of the industry and work towards a fairly normal setup." He and Pawan Gupta, President of All Jammu Hotels and Lodges Association, thanked the Lieutenant Governor J&K, Secretary to the Government, Tourism and Culture department, District Administration and Health Authorities for implementation of this special vaccination drive.

Pawan said that this step has resolved the problem of people demanding that vaccination should be carried out in a prioritised manner for all the stakeholders. This has created a positive perception and a conducive environment aimed at instilling confidence among travellers who plan to visit Jammu.

On the first day of the camp, over 400 people got vaccinated. The vaccination camps will also be held on May 27 at TRC, Directorate of Tourism, Jammu, GHSS Boys Gole Market, Udhampur, JKTDC's DakBunglow Patnitop, Tourist Information Centre Mansar, Tangri Palace Kathua and near Salani Bridge Rajouri from 10 am onwards. Walk-in facility is available and on the spot registration on the CoWIN portal will be done with the help of the Tourism Department and Health Authorities. The eligible vaccination beneficiaries are required to carry valid ID proof for registration.

Tourism Authorities said that in the near future, the department will devise modules for capacity building for stakeholders in view of the pandemic and various SOPs will be followed while doing business after the crisis recedes.

NBT knowledge partner of ASSOCHAM

National Book Trust of India (NBT) was the knowledge partner for the webinar on *Innovations and Skill Opportunities During The Pandemic: Physical And Psychological Problems*. It was organised by ASSOCHAM Education Council in collaboration with Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak (MDU).

In the opening address, Kunwar Shekhar Vijendra, co-chairman, ASSOCHAM National Council on Education and chancellor and co-founder, Shobhit University, emphasised the importance of the role of educationists, psychologists and institutions like NBT in helping people deal with the pandemic-induced restrictions that are resulting in increasing depression and anxiety among the people. Thanking NBT for its initiatives, he added that books are wonder-

ful companions on our journey inwards.

Yuvraj Malik, Director NBT, India (Ministry of Education), in his address said that the years-old adage 'health is wealth' has developed a new meaning in the current times, where health is not just physical but also mental and spiritual. He added that in these unprecedented times, we, as a society, must leave behind the stigma attached to seeking treatment for mental health. Only the collective might and will of the nation can defeat this physical and psychological enemy. He also shared details about the 'Corona Helpline' that has been set up by NBT, which provides free consultation by eminent psychologists /counselors over the phone to the general public on their concerns over psycho-social issues related to COVID-19.

Dr Jitendra Nagpal, Senior



Psychiatrist & Incharge, Institute of Mental Health & Life Skills Promotion, Moolchand Medcity, and member Working Group, Manodarpan, Ministry of

Education, in his address shared that it is the right time for community participation in addressing the mental health crisis that has pervaded all sectors of society.

He added that we can individually help the healthcare sector of the nation by helping ourselves in seeking help and treatment for our mental health.

Professor of Psychology, Nov Rattan Sharma, Dean Academic Affairs, MDU, Dr Promila Batra, former professor of Psychology and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences MDU, and professor Dr Poonam Devdutt, Director Centre for Psychology and Human Behavior, Shobhit Deemed University also shared their views on measures that can be taken to deal with the psychosomatic impact of the pandemic. The Summit was moderated by professor (Dr) Munish Garg, Director, Centre for Incubation, Innovation and Startup, MDU and coordinated by Neeraj Arora, Senior Director & Head ASSOCHAM National Council on Education.

The summit was attended by educationists, chancellors, vice-chancellors, principals, deans, directors and students from across the country.

Demise of govt employees covered under NPS

Central Government employees covered under National Pension System have been given the option under rule 10 of CCS (Implementation of NPS) Rules, 2021, to choose benefits either from old pension schemes or accumulated pension corpus under NPS in the event of their death. The family of a deceased government employee cannot exercise this option.

In case, the employees could not furnish the option in this regard, there is a default option of benefit under the old pension scheme for the first 15 years of service and thereafter, the default option would be the benefits under NPS. At present, the default option of the old pension scheme is valid till March 2024 in accordance with these rules even if the government employee has completed 15 years of service.

Following benefits are available in the event of in-service death of a Central Government Employee covered under NPS:

- Family pension under CCS (Pension) Rules, 1972, as per option exercised by a government servant or default option or in case, government servant has opted for benefits under NPS, the family would get benefits from his accumulated pension wealth under NPS.

- Death gratuity
 - Leave encashment
 - Benefits from CGEGIS
 - CGHS facilities
- As per rule 20 of CCS (Implementation of NPS) Rules,

2021, if the government servant had opted for benefits under the old pension scheme or if no option was exercised, then the default is option applicable in his case. The concerned office would take action to sanction family pension to the eligible member(s) of the family of the deceased government servant, as done for government servants covered under the old pension scheme. Simultaneously, they would start the process to close PRAN under NPS of the government servant and government contribution, and return thereon would be transferred into the government account. The remaining amount would be paid to the nominee or legal heir as per PFRDA regulations in lump sum.

NFL Nangal unit dedicates ward for Covid care

To support the government's efforts to fight the pandemic, NFL's Nangal Unit in Punjab has handed over the 20-bed facility of its hospital to District Authorities to be used as Covid care centre.

The company's doctors, nurses and other paramedical staff have been deployed to take care of the patients. The facility is equipped with an oxygen supply through an already existing pipeline from the centrally located oxygen cylinders. In addition to the above, the NFL is also setting up oxygen plants in various places.



HUDCO ENSURES EMPLOYEE SAFETY

In the wake of the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic, the Housing & Urban Development Corporation Ltd (HUDCO) has been committed to ensuring the health and safety of its serving and retired employees and their families. An important initiative in this direction was an onsite COVID vaccination programme, organised at its corporate office at India Habitat Centre, for about 300 individuals. HUDCO management's decision to include contractual staff in the vaccination drive, benefitted the housekeeping, security and other service staff serving the organisation, apart from the employees and support staff of India Habitat Centre who also availed the facility.

Through this difficult period, HUDCO has taken several measures to ensure a safe and hygienic work environment for its employees. In addition to regular sanitising of office premises, necessary equipment such as sanitiser dispensers, oximeters and digital thermometers were procured to monitor the health of all those who enter the premises. In view of the spike of infection, flexible working hours as well as work from home were introduced to reduce the footfall in the office and contain the spread of the virus. A month-long special Covid leave was approved



for those suffering from the virus. Further, rules for treatment were relaxed to permit treatment at any of the hospitals across Delhi and NCR. The corporation also collaborated with Max hospitals to offer teleconsultation facilities to help those in home isolation.

In response to the urgent need for guidance and help on various issues related to the treatment of COVID-19, a rapid response team was formed. In addition, HUDCO procured oxygen concentrators and other medical equipment to support employees who might require oxygen support in an emergency situation.

SAIL installs augmented ICU ventilators

The augmented ICU ventilator facilities for treatment of COVID patients at Ispat Post Graduate Institute (IPGI) and Super Speciality Hospital (SSH) in SAIL Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) was dedicated by Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Steel, in the presence of Faggan Singh Kulaste, Union Minister of State for Steel.

The IPGI and SSH complex was dedicated to the nation by the President of India on March 21. As per the instructions of the Minister of PNG & Steel, it was decided to upgrade the facility to a 100-bedded ICU for the treatment of Covid patients. Accordingly, ventilators were procured and installed in the hospital by SAIL, RSP. The virtual event was also attended by the Minister of State for Steel, Faggan Singh Kulaste, Odisha Health Minister, Naba Kisore Das, MP from Sundargarh, Jual Oram, MLAs from the area, chairman of SAIL, Soma Mondal and senior officers of the



Ministry of Steel and SAIL. Speaking on the occasion, Pradhan said that the patients from different places in and around Rourkela as well as neighboring states had started availing the OPD facilities at SSH. The Minister said that this upgraded ICU facility is a significant addition to the healthcare infrastructure in the region. It will bolster Odisha's fight against

the pandemic. He added that domestic steel companies have been putting their best foot forward to combat the deadly virus both in Odisha as well as other parts of the country. Pradhan said that SAIL has taken a slew of measures to contribute to Odisha's fight against the pandemic. Rourkela Steel Plant set up a Virology Laboratory at its

IGH, which enabled quick Covid testing. The capacity of the testing facilities for RT-PCR has been enhanced from the initial levels and the work is in progress to increase it further. He added that ensuring the availability of masks, medicines, sanitisers and other commensurate measures including the use of PA system for creating awareness has also been done. He said, "A concerted effort by all stakeholders of the society to fight the pandemic is the need of the hour." Pradhan also urged SAIL to take up vaccination of its stakeholders.

He shared that since April'21, RSP has been constantly supplying the life-saving LMO, which is dispatched to various states of the country including Odisha. He expressed happiness that as per the direction of the PM, RSP is in the process of setting up a jumbo 500-bedded hospital with piped gaseous oxygen supply directly from the plant along with ventilators and other associated facilities.

Nicholls dubs Ashwin, Jadeja as real threats

Black Caps batsman says the spin duo has proved mettle across the world and lends quality to India's bowling attack

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's pace attack is on par with New Zealand's world class swing operators but the Black Caps batsman Henry Nicholls is more wary of the threat spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja may pose during the upcoming World Test Championship final.

India and New Zealand will fight it out for the inaugural title at Southampton's Ageas Bowl, one of those rare English tracks known to aid the slow bowlers for a considerable period in Test matches. "India have a very good seam attack and also have the experienced spinners like Ashwin and Jadeja. They have been consistent in all parts of the world (of late) and bring quality (to attack)," Nicholls, who has been in good form of late in Test cricket, said.

If there are no injury concerns, the Indian pace trio that is expected to be in the playing XI for the clash starting June 18 would be Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami.

"Mohammed Shami along with Jasprit Bumrah and Ishant Sharma have proven their quality over the years which is similar to our seamers (Tren Boult, Tim Southee and Neil Wagner) on whom we really pride ourselves on.

"So if you are facing that kind of a line-up, it's an exciting challenge and as a group we are expecting it to be tough but also looking forward to the challenge," the 29-year-old southpaw, who enjoys a 43 plus average over 37 Test matches, said.

His teammate Devon Conway's strategy of pouring dry kitty litter on the track in order to create rough was backed by Nicholls as they are



playing at a "neutral venue" which is known to assist the spinners.

"That was something that we experimented in the camp before we came over to UK. You managed to get some more turn and get some practice. So playing at a neutral venue, we need to check what the wickets will be like there. Also the guile of Ashwin and Ravi Jadeja is something that we need to be prepared for,"

Nicholls said.

Nicholls was a part of the New Zealand team that thrashed India inside three days in two home Tests in early 2020, something that will give them confidence going into the final.

"It's an exciting challenge as finally we will be playing a Test match at a neutral venue. So that for both sides kind of levels the playing field.

"We beat them 2-0 a sea-

son back (2019-20). But we know and accept that it's a different challenge but as a group we take a lot of confidence from that series win against India. Obviously, number one and two playing the final is a challenge too," he said.

Nicholls' sequence of scores in the last three Tests is 174 (vs West Indies), 56, 11 and 157 (vs Pakistan).

"It's nice to kick on and get a couple of big scores. A

season before this, I was playing well but not getting the results, so a lot of it was like keeping the things same as it had been.

"If I get in, I want to bat as long as I can. To be able to do that couple of times during the summer, it was good to contribute to couple of Test wins," said Nicholls.

He has recently had couple of big partnerships with skipper Kane Williamson, including a monumental 369 run stand against Pakistan in Christchurch.

"Kane is one of the best in the world and so consistent across all three formats that you just try to watch him and learn as to how he goes about his work," Nicholls said.

"He is a genius and great guy to talk to about the game. He keeps his plans pretty simple. So he is also nice to be someone with whom you want to bat out there in the middle and you have the best seat in the house when Kane is on strike."

Before the WTC final, New Zealand will play England at the Lord's in the first of the two Test matches.

English conditions suit NZ more than India: Cummins



PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia fast bowler Pat Cummins feels if the current wet weather conditions in England persist, New Zealand will enjoy an edge over India in the World Test Championships final, starting in Southampton on June 18.

Cummins, who played for Kolkata Knight Riders in the suspended IPL, however,

refused to predict the winner of the final.

"It is going to be a good match. I think there has been a lot of rain in England from what I have seen in the news. I think, in terms of conditions, it is probably close to New Zealand conditions," Cummins said in a question-and-answer session with fans on YouTube.

"We have seen both teams

not having played Test matches for a couple of months. So, it is a one-off. Anything can happen. I will sit on the fence," said the 28-year-old who is quarantining here after arriving from Maldives following the IPL's suspension.

"If I say anything, the conditions should probably suit New Zealand more than India," he added.

Cummins said he loved the concept of the WTC and rued missing out on the final.

"It is annoying Covid-19 made it a bit more difficult but it is great. I really enjoyed the whole aspect of it. Each series stands for something a little bit more than just the series itself and added a different dimension. I really liked the format.

"Unfortunately, we missed the series. So, we didn't have the six series leading to the final but I do enjoy the concept," added Cummins.

Freak injury rules Foakes out of NZ Tests

London: Sam Billings was called into the England squad for the two Test series with New Zealand on Wednesday after Ben Foakes was ruled out with a torn hamstring due to a freak accident.

Foakes was due to play his first home Test — all eight previous Test appearances have been abroad — but he tore his left hamstring when he slipped on what is believed to be a sock in the Surrey dressing room on Sunday.

Foakes could face three



months out which would place in doubt his availability for the five Test series with India in

August. "Foakes sustained the injury on Sunday slipping in the dressing room after Surrey's County Championship fixture against Middlesex at the Kia Oval," read an ECB statement.

"He will now be assessed and work closely on his rehabilitation with the Surrey medical team and is expected to be out of action for at least three months.

"England Men's Head Coach Chris Silverwood has

called up Kent's wicketkeeper-batsman Sam Billings and Nottinghamshire's top-order batsman Haseeb Hameed."

Billings, an established member of England's white-ball squads, has yet to be capped at Test level and is likely to be reserve with James Bracey set to get the nod.

Hameed, who has been in impressive form during the 2021 County season, has scored 474 runs at an average of 52.66, last played Test cricket in November 2016. AFP

Never felt I would experience D/N Test: Mandhana

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Opener Smriti Mandhana says she never thought the Indian women's team would get to play a Day/Night Test, something the side will experience in a few months' time in Australia.

The Day-Night Test against Australia, part of a multi-format seven-match tour, is scheduled to be played from September 30 to October 3 at the WACA Ground in Perth.

"Frankly, when I used to watch Day-Night Tests of men, I actually never felt that I will be able to experience this moment — it's wrong to say 'I' at the moment — that the Indian team will be able to experience the moment," Mandhana told ESPNcricinfo. "So, when it got declared, I was like, 'Oh, wow. That's going to be crazy.'"

The pink-ball clash will be

India's first four-day fixture (the standard length of women's Tests) against Australia since 2006 and their second Test match this year, with a one-off game against England scheduled to take place next month in Bristol.

"I remember playing my first Day-Night One-Day or T20 match," Mandhana said. "I was pretty excited, like a small kid. I was like, 'Wow, we'll be able to play a Day-Night match' and all of that.

"Now that we are going to play a Day-Night match, (we have) lots of things to work on but (there's a) lot of excitement... excitement about being part of a

Day-Night Test match, and that too in Australia, against Australia, it's always a good challenge. It's going to be a great moment for the Indian women's cricket team."

While she is excited about facing the pink ball, Mandhana said the focus right now is the Test against England, starting June 16.

"It's too early at the moment," she said.

"It's just going to be a process. You have to get adapted to it. It's too early for us to start the pink ball preparations because the match is three-four months later.

"At the moment

it's more about the England Test match, the Duke's ball and all of that stuff, so let's see."

Mandhana has so far played two Tests, the first one coming against England in August 2014 and the second against South Africa in Mysore in the same year. India won both matches — by six wickets and 34 runs — respectively.

The upcoming game against England will be Mandhana's first Test match in more than six years.

"When we got to know of the first Test, against England, the whole team was really excited," Mandhana said.

"We all were looking forward (to it). The last Test match I was part of was in 2014, so it's been quite a long time, we haven't gone out in whites, so that excitement of playing a Test match (after nearly seven years) was on another level."

Archer in fitness race for 1st India Test

PTI ■ LONDON

England fast bowler Jofra Archer has undergone surgery on his right elbow to address a long-standing injury, the ECB said on Wednesday, without specifying any timeframe on his return to action.

The 26-year-old Archer, who had made a comeback before IPL, had undergone a hand surgery in March and returned to first-class cricket earlier this month when his right elbow injury flared up.

"England and Sussex seam bowler Jofra Archer had surgery to address his long-

standing elbow issues on Friday," the ECB said in a statement.

"Archer will now commence an intensive rehabilitation period working with the ECB and Sussex medical teams. His progress will be reviewed by his consultant in approximately four weeks at which point further guidance will be provided as to when he can return to bowling."

England will hope that Archer is able to make a full and swift recovery to play a key role in both the T20 World Cup and the Ashes series in Australia later this year.

18K fans/day for Eng-NZ Edgbaston Test



Birmingham: Around 18,000 cricket fans will be allowed to attend each day of next month's second Test between England and New Zealand at Edgbaston, which will be the first of the Government's next wave of pilot

events. Under current guidelines, smaller outdoor venues are only permitted to be at 25 percent capacity, but the stadium will be 70 percent full for the second Test against the Black Caps, which takes place between June 10 and 14.

To gain entry to the ground in Birmingham, each ticket holder will need to present a negative lateral flow test, taken within the preceding 24 hours.

The first Test at Lord's, which starts on June 2, will be played in line with existing regulations, meaning a capacity of around 25 percent, or around 7,000 people. AFP

Panghal enters Asian C'ship semis

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defending champion Amit Panghal (52kg) and the redoubtable Vikas Krishan (69kg) were among three Indian boxers who advanced to the semifinals on Wednesday as the country assured itself of an unparalleled medal haul of 15 in the Asian Boxing Championships in Dubai.

Debutant Varinder Singh (60kg) was the other Indian to make the last four.

Panghal secured a second successive medal after overcoming a stiff challenge from Mongolia's Kharkhuu Enkhmandakh in the last-eight stage, while Varinder defeated Filipino Jere Samuel Dela Cruz 5-0.

Vikas then pulled off a hard-fought 4-1 triumph over Iran's Moslem Maghsoudi Mal Amir as India surpassed its previous best medal haul of 13 that was achieved in the 2019 edition.

The World Championship Silver-winning Panghal, who is bound for Tokyo Olympics, won 3-2 in a high-octane contest in which he overcame a sluggish start and used his combination punches to telling effect in the last two rounds.



India's Amit Panghal in action during his 52kg category quarterfinal match against Mongolia's Kharkhuu Enkhmandakh at the Asian Wrestling Championship in Dubai

After being somewhat bested in the opening three minutes, the top-seeded Army man's trademark pace came to fore in the second round as he cleverly dodged his rival's aggressive attempts at connecting.

The Mongolian produced some fine body punches to unsettle Panghal but took quite a few hits on the counter-attack.

Panghal will square off against Kazakhstan's Saken Bibossinov. He had beaten Bibossinov in the 2019 World Championship finals.

Vikas, also Tokyo-bound, played his usual defensive game but was pushed quite hard by Amir, who gave the Indian a cut above his left eye.

Vikas has set up a mouth-watering semifinal clash with top seed and defending champion Bobo-Usmon Baturov of Uzbekistan. Baturov is also the reigning Asian Games champion and a Bronze-medallist from the World Championships.

National champion Varinder scored on counter-attacks against the swift-moving Dela Cruz to secure a medal on debut at the event.



Richard Gasquet returns the ball to Pedro Martinez during their match at the Emilia Romagna Open in Parma, AP

Be mature & make comeback for Pak: Akhtar's advice to Amir

Karachi: Former Pakistan fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar has urged Mohammad Amir to show "maturity" in sorting out his differences with national team management and make a comeback in near future.

Amir had announced his retirement from International cricket in December last year after a fallout with head coach Misbah-ul-Haq and bowling coach Waqar Younis and has made it clear that he will not make himself available for selection until they are in charge.

Amir should have realized that

'papa' Mickey Arthur will not always be there to safeguard him and he has to now grow up," Akhtar told PTV.

The outspoken fast bowler of yesteryears said that players should have the wherewithal to handle both good and bad days.

"You must be matured enough to realise that the management is not going to act according to my wishes. Therefore now I have to raise my performance and level of hard work," he said.

Akhtar reminded the 29-year-old Amir that he should be grateful to the for-

mer PCB chairman Najam Sethi, who had a massive role in bringing him back into International cricket post his ban.

"This is a favour the PCB did for Amir. To his credit, Amir won some crucial matches for Pakistan in the Champions Trophy which included the final but after that his performances deteriorated."

Akhtar supported coach Misbah's stance on Amir.

"Misbah is right when he says that Amir's pace has gone down. There is nothing wrong with that assessment," he said.

"I don't think the team management was unfair with Amir. They gave him ample chances before he was dropped from the team." PTI

ANKITA OUT OF QUALIFIERS

PARIS: Ankita Raina's yet another attempt to qualify for the singles main draw of a Grand Slam failed as she bowed out of the French Open Qualifiers with a second-round defeat on Wednesday.

ANDREUSCU PULLS OUT

STRASBOURG: With the French Open just days away, world No 7 Bianca Andreescu pulled out of a key claycourt warm-up event in Strasbourg on Wednesday as a precaution after feeling abdominal pain.

OZ TO PLAY 2 MORE T20IS

DHAKA: Australia cricket team will tour Bangladesh in August for first-ever T20I bilateral series between the two nations, playing five matches instead of three as agreed upon previously.

MAN UNITED FANS ATTACKED

GDANSK: Manchester United fans were attacked outside a bar in Gdansk on the eve of the Europa League final, the club said.

STELLER SHOW BY SHOOTERS

OSIJEK: Led by Saurabh Chaudhary, India's Olympic-bound shooters produced a stellar show in mixed air pistol & air rifle events of the European C'ship on Wednesday.

MILKHA CONTINUES TO BE STABLE

CHANDIGARH: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh "continues to be stable on oxygen support" and he was on Wednesday shifted out of the ICU. But, his 82-year-old wife was on Wednesday admitted after testing positive for Covid pneumonia.

UMAR AKMAL PAYS FINE

KARACHI: Controversial Pakistan batsman Umar Akmal has paid a hefty fine of 4.5 million rupees to PCB, which now entitles him to join Anti-Corruption rehabilitation program of the board. Agencies

Sheuli lifts 313 kg to win Silver

PTI ■ TASHKENT

Indian lifter Achinta Sheuli shattered seven national records, including three senior marks, en route clinching an overall Silver medal in the 73kg category at the Junior World Championship here on Wednesday.

The 19-year-old lifted a personal best of 313kg — 141kg in snatch, followed by



172kg in clean and jerk — at the Gold level Olympic qualifier event, creating three new senior and four junior national records.

The Commonwealth Championship Gold medalist bettered both his earlier personal best in snatch and clean and jerk by two kilograms each. He had lifted 309kg (139kg+170kg) at the Asian Championships here last month.

Indonesia's Juniansyah Rizki 349kg (155kg+194kg) put up a spectacular performance, breaking the junior world record in all three events to win the Gold medal.

Medals are awarded separately for snatch, clean and jerk, and total lift in continental and World Championships. But, just one medal — for total lift — is awarded in the Olympics.