

WORLD 9
JAPAN, US, FRANCE HOLD MILITARY
DRILL EYEING CHINA PRESENCE**SPECIAL 11**
YOUNG ONES
ON TARGET**SPORT 12**
ENG IPL STARS LIKELY TO
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Delhi's death rate 4th in world; Maha follows suit

UP too has high
Covid fatality rate

NAVIN UPADHYAY ■ NEW DELHI

When it comes to death, Delhi has emerged as one of the most favorite hunting grounds for coronavirus across the globe. With a case fatality rate (CFR) of more than 5 per cent, the national Capital is now only behind Poland, Mexico, and Romania on the daily casualty chart. Delhi's CFR is way above the national average of 1.2 per cent. While the caseload continued to show a downward trajectory across the country, the rise in CFR is worrisome. On Saturday, Maharashtra too recorded a high CFR of 2.6 per cent. The daily Covid-19 infections dropped further to 34,848 in Maharashtra, while the number of daily deaths surged to 910 in the State.

Delhi's neighbour Uttar Pradesh also recorded a relative-



ly high case fatality ratio of around 2 per cent. The State logged in a caseload of 12,513 and a death tally of 281 during the last 24 hours.

On Saturday, the national Capital recorded 6,430 new Covid-19 cases and 337 fatalities. This translates into a fatality rate

of 5.22 per cent, which is only behind Poland, Romania and Mexico in the global arena and way above the other States in the country.

On Friday, Romania recorded 105 deaths as against 835 fresh Covid-19 cases for a case fatality rate of a whopping 13 per cent.

Romania is followed by Poland which has a case fatality rate of 8.76 per cent. The country recorded 3,289 cases and 289 deaths on Friday. Poland is closely followed by Mexico which has a CFR of 8.56 pc (311 deaths and 3,632 cases).

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From Kerala to Bengal, impact of elections on Covid-19 surge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The impact of aggressive campaign and massive mobilisation by political parties

in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam and Puducherry in the run-up to the Assembly polls are seen as the principal reasons for massive spread of

corona in these States and Union Territory.

The judiciary, World Health Organization, and health experts have unequivocally agreed that the election-related mobilisation paved the way for a later day Covid-19 surge.

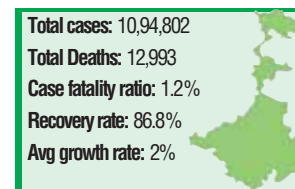
Here is a reality check:

3% positivity rate before Bengal campaign, 31% after elections

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With corona cases spiraling up by the day, Bengal health data experts have started questioning whether March-May electoral extravaganza played the main villain in pushing up cases in the State.

According to State Government reports, while in the second week of March when election campaigns had just started the rate of corona infections was just about 3-4 per cent of the total RT-PCR tests done, the figure leaped up to 31 per cent in the first week of May when the election process ended.



"You do not need rocket science to prove that election rallies with thousands of people made a perfect recipe for disaster and the disaster is in front of you to see ...Bengal had a pretty controlled affair till the month of March and the cases started jumping up with each electoral phase..." said Dr Kajalkrishna Dey.

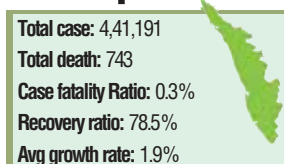
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Recuperating Kerala relapsed

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

On February 26, 2021, while then Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora addressed a nationally televised Press meet to announce the poll schedule for the Assembly election to be held in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and also the Union Territory of Puducherry, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was in a relaxed mood.

Kerala had almost recovered from the Covid-19 cases which shot up during the Onam and Christmas festivals. Minutes before he left for a public meeting at the Capital city to launch the State-wide election campaign of the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic



Front, Minister for health KK Shylaja mailed him the details of the day's Covid figures.

It read that the State had diagnosed 3,671 new cases while 14 deaths were recorded from across Kerala. The positive rate was 5.41 per cent. The figures, new cases or fatalities, were comparatively lower than the national average and the scenario on that Friday did not warrant any apprehension, member of the task force had told him.

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UP govt extends corona curfew till May 24

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In order to break the transmission chain of coronavirus, the Uttar Pradesh government has decided to extend the corona curfew in the state for another week. The curbs which were imposed till May 17 were extended till 7 am of May 24, UP government spokesperson and minister Sidharth Nath Singh here on Saturday evening. However, he said that online classes could be resumed from May 20.

Essential services like vaccination, industrial activities, medical work, etc will continue, he said. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath chaired a meeting of the state council of ministers on Saturday. Though the positivity rate of Covid was receding in the state, the corona curfew was required for further control, he said.

The UP government has also decided to provide Rs 1,000 to registered street vendors, rickshaw-pullers and

the poor along with free ration card-holders. Singh said that 15 crore people would be benefited with free ration and one crore people would be benefited with Rs 1,000.

Meanwhile, Yogi Adityanath announced on Saturday that the treatment of patients for post-Covid complications will be free in the state. The CM said the patients who have tested negative but still need post-Covid care should be provided with the same medical care as Covid patients.

"Many patients who have recovered from COVID-19 still require periodic monitoring and medical assistance. Post-Covid care and treatment is also important. Upon careful assessment of their medical condition and based on the intensity of the care required, such patients must be assigned beds with requisite oxygen availability in L-1 hospitals," the CM said while addressing a

high-level Covid review meeting on Saturday evening.

According to an official communique, Uttar Pradesh has witnessed significant improvement with the aggressive T3 (test, trace and treat) mechanism of the CM. The active Covid cases have shown a steep decline in the last fortnight. The active cases have come down from 3,10,784 on April 30 to 1,77,643 at present.

With daily recoveries consistently improving, more than 14,14,259 patients have defeated the deadly virus even as the state's recovery rate has now gone up to 88%. A total of 12,547 new cases were recorded in the last 24 hours, the lowest in 15 days, while the recovery figures stood at 28,404.

To break the transmission chain, over 2,56,755 Covid tests have been conducted in the last 24 hours, of which 1,12,000 were RT-PCR tests. UP is the first state to have conducted 4,44,27,447 tests.

Covid-19 IN INDIA	
TOTAL CASES:	2,46,79,908 (+3,07,423)
DEATHS:	2,70,254 (+4,010)
RECOVERED:	2,07,82,276 (+3,55,605)
ACTIVE:	36,17,185
MAHA:	53,44,063 (+34,848)
K'TAKA:	21,71,931 (+41,664)
KERALA:	21,18,264 (+32,680)
UP:	16,09,140 (+12,513)
DELHI:	13,87,411 (+6,430)

TN contained virus, polls unleashed it

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu has seen both the extremes of the pandemic Covid-19 during the last year. The State succeeded in controlling the transmission of the pandemic in the initial days when delegates of Tablighi Jamaat congregation held at New Delhi returned to Tamil Nadu in the first week of March 2020. Though the pandemic peaked by mid-2020 the total lockdown, had helped the authorities in bringing down the number of newly diagnosed cases from 40,000 in mid-2020 to below the 500 marks by February 2021.

Continued on Page 13

PUDUCHERRY SEES 60 TIMES JUMP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On February 26, when the Election Commission of India announced the schedule of Assembly polls, the Union Territory of Puducherry recorded just 29 Covid-19 cases and zero death. The total caseload stood 39,669 and the death figure at 667. Ten and a half weeks down the line, the UT has seen 60 times jump in corona cases. The UT is recording at an average of 1,800 new cases and 25 deaths every day during the last week.

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Poll fever changed it all in Assam

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Assam lived with little trace of coronavirus till the electioneering picked up and leaders descended on the State from all parts of the country amid massive mobilisation of people and resources on the ground.

When the poll schedule was announced on February 26, the State recorded just 34 cases and one death in a 24-hour period. People lived without any fear of Covid, which was just beginning to show an uptick in other parts of the country in the early second week of February. But that was it. The poll fever changed it all.

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Industrialist Prakash Hinduja fined ₹1,270 crore for tax violations by Geneva court

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ NEW DELHI

A court in Geneva has fined Indian industrialist Prakash Hinduja 157 million francs (₹1,270 crore) for tax violations.

According to Swiss newspaper *Gotham City* and *Le Temps*, the Geneva Court imposed the fine on Hinduja for claiming tax exceptions by showing his Monaco residency, while he was actually living in Geneva.

"The Geneva tax authorities suspect the billionaire of Indian origin Prakash Hinduja of staying in his villa in Cologny (GE) until April 2018, when he had officially settled in Monaco in 2007," reported *Gotham City*.

"In July 2018, the Geneva public prosecutor sought to collect information on Prakash Hinduja and members of his family on behalf of the cantonal tax authorities, in the context of criminal proceedings, according to a judgment of the Federal Court rendered on April 21 (5A_1042/2020).

In April 2019, the Federal Tax Administration opened its own investigation into this case, which targets several individuals. The following month, the Geneva tax authorities

declared two receiverships, amounting to 154 million francs for cantonal and municipal taxes, and 3 million for federal taxes," reported *Le Temps*.

Hinduja Group controls Ashok Leyland, IndusInd Bank and Gulf Lubricants. The Indian origin conglomerate having business across the world was started by late PD Hinduja in early 1940s. The Hinduja Group's companies are controlled by holding companies situated in tax havens like Mauritius and Geneva.

Two months ago, apart from Swiss newspapers, London and Mauritius newspapers reported the charges by Geneva and Mauritius tribunals against Prakash Hinduja's son Ajay Hinduja. The reports flagged the illegalities in holding companies in Mauritius which controls the entire firms of Hinduja Group. Apart from the violations in Mauritius, Sunday Telegraph of London reported in a case of alleged forgery against billionaire businessman Ajay Hinduja, which has added to the woes of one of India's richest families. According to the story published on Sunday (February 7), Ajay was subject of a criminal

Continued on Page 13

Israeli airstrike destroys Gaza tower housing AP, other media

AP ■ GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP

An Israeli airstrike on Saturday targeted and destroyed a high-rise building in Gaza City that housed offices of *The Associated Press* and other media outlets. Hours later, Israel bombed the home of Khalil al-Hayeh, a top leader of Gaza's ruling militant Hamas group.

The Israeli military said Al-Hayeh's home served as part of what it said was the militant group's "terrorist infrastructure." Al-Hayeh is a senior figure in the Hamas political leadership in Gaza, and the attack marked a further escalation, signaling that Israel is going after Hamas' top leadership, and not just military commanders. His fate after the strike was not immediately known. Earlier, AP staffers and other tenants safely evacuated the building after the military telephoned a warning that the strike was imminent within an hour. For 15 years, the AP's top-floor office and roof terrace were a prime location for covering Israel's conflicts with Gaza's Hamas rulers, including wars in 2009 and 2014. The news agency's camera offered 24-hour live shots as militants' rockets arched toward Israel and Israeli airstrikes hammered the city and its surrounding area this week.

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Pouring water on the hopes of people on plasma therapy for Covid-19 treatment, a study has found that it's no silver bullet and its usage is not effective on virus patients. In other words, it has no effect on disease severity or mortality.

Plasma therapy is basically using blood plasma from recovered patients and infusing it into newly infected patients. Doctors have been divided over its efficacy with several of them from across India have been recommending the therapy, asking the patients to arrange for plasma. They



believe that it helps to transfer antibodies from recovered patients to new patients. It is said to boost the immune response of a new patient.

However, a team of doctors after conducting the Randomised Evaluation of

Covid-19 Therapy [recovery] trial, said in the "In recovery, the largest clinical trial of convalescent plasma for any infectious indication, we did not find evidence that high-titre convalescent plasma improved survival or other pre-specified

clinical outcomes in patients hospitalised with Covid-19.

"Whether convalescent plasma would benefit other patient groups is unknown and would need to be evaluated in other, adequately powered, randomised clinical trials," the study published in *The Lancet* said.

The trial is underway at 177 NHS hospitals from across the UK. Earlier, other studies including India's ICMR-PLACID Trial, as well as Argentina's PlasmAr Trial have also shown that plasma therapy has no benefit on hospitalised Covid patients.

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Modi orders audit as many ventilators lying unutilised

PM stresses on curbing spread in rural areas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday took serious view of reports about ventilators lying unutilised in storage in some States and directed that an immediate audit of installation and operation of ventilators provided by the Central Government should be carried out.

Chairing a high-level meeting to take stock of the Covid-19 situation in the country, the Prime Minister asked for a distribution plan for ensuring oxygen supply in rural areas where, he said the spread of virus must be prevented.

The Prime Minister asked States to be "transparent" while



reporting their cases "as high numbers does not mean that they have not done enough to contain the virus."

He said localised containment strategies are the need of the hour and instructed that testing needs to be scaled up further, with use of both RT-PCR and Rapid Antigen tests, especially in areas with high test positivity rates.

Modi asked for augmentation of healthcare resources in rural areas to focus on "door to door testing and surveillance."

Continued on Page 13

India's corona situation 'hugely concerning', says WHO chief

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

India's Covid-19 situation remains hugely concerning, with several States continuing to see a worrying number of cases, hospitalisations and deaths, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Friday, warning that the pandemic's second year will be "far more deadly" than the first for the world.

Ghebreyesus added that the WHO is responding to the Covid-19 surge in India and has shipped thousands of oxygen concentrators, tents for mobile field hospitals, masks and other medical supplies.

"India remains hugely concerning, with several states continuing to see a worrying number of cases, hospitalisations and deaths," he said at the daily media briefing.

"And we thank all the stakeholders who are supporting India," the WHO Director-General said.

Continued on Page 13

Steroid misuse sets off black fungus attacks post Covid: Guleria

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Misuse of steroids is a major cause behind rising cases of black fungus, also known as mucormycosis infection, among vulnerable Covid-19 patients, including those suffering from diabetes, AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria on Saturday said, asking the doctors to follow Government protocol while dealing with such drugs.

He said that patients who are diabetic or Covid-19 positive and are taking steroids have an increased chance of contracting the fungal infection as it could lead to weakened immune systems.

"It is thus all the more important to properly follow protocols of infection control practices at hospitals," he said, indicating that during Covid-19, patients prescribed heavy and prolonged steroid doses can have weakened

immune systems.

Mucormycosis spores are found in soil, air, and even in food, said the AIIMS chief while addressing a press conference here on Saturday. He said that the black fungus can affect the face, infecting the nose, orbit of the eye, or brain, which can even cause vision loss. He added that it can also spread to the lung.

In a new advisory over black fungus infection, the Centre has asked people to be extra careful regarding infection protocols since the fungus enters the body through a cut, scrape, burn, or other types of skin trauma when the skin comes in contact with fungal spores in the environment.

Dr Guleria also said that the mucormycosis fungal spores are of low virulence and usually do not cause infection.

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CAPSULE

IMD: CYCLONE TAUKTAE MOVING TOWARDS GUJ

Mumbai: Cyclonic storm Tauktae has intensified and is heading towards the coast of Gujarat and the Union Territory of Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, though it could bring gusty winds and showers to Mumbai, the IMD said.

TOP JAMAAT LEADER HELD IN B'DESH

Dhaka: Top Jamaat-e-Islami leader and listed 1971 war criminal Shahjahan Chowdhury has been arrested by the police for allegedly instigating the violence unleashed by radical outfit Hafazat-e-Islam on March 26 during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh.

Third Covid wave likely in 3-6 months’ time

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■
LUCKNOW

The third wave of novel coronavirus is likely to strike Uttar Pradesh in the next three to six months. Nodal Covid officer of King George’s Medical University, Dr Surya Kant Tripathi, while giving a very scientific reason for the expected third wave of coronavirus coming within this period said, “If we look at the first wave, the peak was reached on September 16 last year and exactly six months later -- March 16, 2021 -- the second wave arrived which means that we have to gear up and prepare for October-November this year for the third wave to arrive.”

Talking about other reasons why the third wave would occur between three to six months, he said that all those who caught the novel coronavirus infection in April and May would develop antibodies and this antibody titre would go down after three months, keeping them safe till July, August. He said that it also depended on how fast the people were vaccinated. “We need to vaccinate 90 crore people in the country which means 180 crore doses

of the Covid vaccine. The Central government has announced that by the end of December 200 crore doses of the vaccine will be available which will suffice for India. They are predicting that by the end of July 25, crores of people will be vaccinated,” he said. Dr Surya Kant pointed out that the UP government was also taking a lead at the national level and had already ordered one crore vaccine doses -- 50 lakh doses of Covishield and 50 lakh of Covaxin. “However, UP is a big state and the population below 18 years will be around 10-12 crore. For a proper herd immunity to develop, 8-9 crore people will have to be vaccinated in the state which is a very big target and I believe that by the end of July we can cover 3-4 crore people,” he said.

The KGMU nodal Covid officer said that the vaccination started in January 2021 and would continue till December 2021. “The very big question here is what happens in 2022 is something which we cannot comment upon. Time will only tell whether we need the booster dose or not,” he said.

Lucknow records 617 cases

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The corona graph continued to decline as only 617 fresh coronavirus infection cases were detected in Lucknow on Saturday while 2,371 patients recovered. Besides, 12 patients succumbed while battling the deadly disease. Uttar Pradesh reported 12,547 fresh Covid cases in the past 24 hours while 28,404 patients recovered during the same period. As

Dr Surya Kant admitted that with more and more people getting vaccinated and with more people infected recently, the state had a larger number of people who were protected having developed antibodies in UP. “The virus will now look for unprotected hosts,” he added. He said the third wave would be weaker because most of the countries had already vaccinated large populations. “Israel is the only country in the world which has vaccinated over 81 per cent of its people and did not face the

third wave,” he said. Meanwhile, Dr Surya Kant said that things appeared to be on a brighter side as the waiting time for bed had gone now for the COVID-19 patients. “Occupancy of beds is now 95 per cent. The demand for ICU beds has gone down by 5-10 per cent. We had to close two wards on Saturday,” he said. The KGMU nodal Covid officer said that the oxygen supply was good and there were adequate beds. However, he said, the bed strength would be continued for the

ed 617 fresh cases but the recovery was more than three times at 2371. Now active cases in Lucknow have come down to 12,474. Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Amit Mohan Prasad said in Lucknow on Saturday that on Friday, 2.56 lakh people were tested for Covid infection taking the total investigations to 4.44 crore in the state. He said that the recovery percentage has gone up to around 88 per cent.

expected third wave. When asked if testing was now low as a result of which a lesser number of people were testing positive, he said even if testing was low, it could be seen that now a lesser number of serious patients were coming to hospitals. “If the patient is serious, irrespective of the fact that testing is low, the patient has to go to some place for treatment. He/she cannot be confined to the home alone,” he said. Meanwhile, president of People Health Organisation, Dr Ishwar Gilada, said the

third wave was expected anywhere between 4-6 months and it would be less severe. He said the extended lockdown in various states had helped in breaking the novel coronavirus chain. “The urban UP is getting better and better every day,” he pointed out. Commenting on the increase in the gap between two Covishield doses by the Central government, Dr Gilada said that studies carried out in the United Kingdom and by the World Health Organisation had shown that the vaccine was more effective when given a large months gap. “The Government of India has decided on a gap of 12 to 16 weeks between two doses of the vaccine. The fact is that one dose of the vaccine is enough and the second dose is a booster. The second dose is given because some people do not respond well to the first dose. In the UK, they decided to give the first dose to many people rather than two doses to a few people in a gap of 8-12 weeks,” he said. Dr Gilada said that giving the dose in a gap of 12-16 weeks would help in achieving two goals, one being that the demand would be less and secondly better results would be obtained.

KGMU counselling for comforting kin of Covid patients

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A new facility has been added at KGMU in the form of a group for the counselling and comforting the family and relatives of COVID-19 patients. KGMU spokesperson Dr Sudhir Singh said that for each Covid ICU, two interns and a supervising senior faculty had been deployed for this service. “They are supposed to make regular calls to the families of COVID-19 patients admitted in ICU from 3 pm to 5 pm. They express empathy and ensure their trust in our doctors and

ensure that they are well informed about the status of patients,” he said. “Interns will then provide feedback and submit a report to the medical superintendent’s office every week for any help in psychological counselling. Resource person is Dr Pawan, faculty, department of psychiatry,” he said. Meanwhile, the district administration has also started Covid and post-Covid counselling services free of cost. It was launched by District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash at the Smart City Office. Patients can dial 0522-4523023 for counselling.

SGPGI imparts online training on black fungus management

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Mucormycosis, commonly called black fungus, is an uncommon opportunistic invasive fungal infection which occurs in immunosuppressed patients. Uncontrolled diabetes is the most common risk factor for acquiring this infection. These spores of this fungal are found in the air and on decomposed debris and gain entry into sinuses and lungs by breathing contaminated air and patients of COVID-19 with uncontrolled diabetes and those undergoing treatment with steroids are at higher risk of mucormycosis. A multidisciplinary approach is paramount to its successful management. This was stated in a virtual programme organised by Sanjay Gandhi Post-graduate institute of Medical Sciences on Saturday on ‘management and treatment of mucormycosis’ on zoom platform that was shared with 52 medical colleges of UP. SGPGI Director Prof RK Dhiman said that a microbiologist, ENT specialist, ophthalmologist and diabetologist played a very important role in diagnosing and treating patients with mucormycosis so a multidisciplinary approach was paramount to its successful management.


Dr RK Singh, professor and head of emergency medicine at SGPGI, elaborated on the types of mucormycosis, its prevention and early diagnosis. “Though several types of mucormycosis exist, Rhino-Orbital-Cerebral (ROC) Mucormycosis is the most common and most aggressive form in diabetic patients. High index of suspicion for early diagnosis is essential to its effective management and optimal outcome. Prolonged antifungal therapy along with an aggressive surgical intervention by trained ENT specialists is urgently needed. Prevention is the key to management,” he said. Dr Amit Kesari, professor, neurology at SGPGI, said that patients with high blood sugar and high ferritin were at high risk of mucormycosis. “Microbiologist and radiological evaluation and ENT examination can diagnose it in the early stage. MRI can show the blood vessel which is being invaded. Any ENT surgeon can perform the surgery in the first or second stage that is nasal cavity or sinus,” he said.

This was followed by a talk by Dr Rachna Agarwal, professor, ophthalmology at SGPGI, who elaborated on the involvement of eyes in this fungal infection. She said that vision loss should be documented, examination of pupils and ocular movements should be done for early diagnosis. “Early surgery should be done and it can also be done in all the medical colleges by trained ophthalmologists,” she said. Dr Rumi S Marak, professor, microbiology at SGPGI, explained the need and techniques of blood sampling and tissue biopsy for diagnosing mucormycosis.

This was followed by an educative talk by Dr Subhash Yadav, professor, endocrinology, who elaborated on the treatment modality of patients with uncontrolled blood sugars in managing this deadly fungal infection. “It is important to identify the at-risk patients, stricter glycemic control, judicious use of steroids in COVID-19, wearing of masks all times by patients, improved air quality index within hospital, optimal manpower, screening for it at time of admission and during hospital stay as well as during follow up can help mitigate this threat,” the professor said. The session was attended by 546 participants and 176 questions were asked by them. Participants demanded a repetition of the session. The session will be repeated again on May 19 in case-based discussion mode.

Man killed in freak mishap

Lucknow (PNS): In a freak incident, a milk vendor died after an iron rod got pierced through his chest in Mall police station area. Kin and villagers protested, demanded compensation. The deceased was identified as Aquil of Sarthara village. He was going to bring milk from a neighbouring village on a bike. When he reached Pataura village, he was hit by a rod being carried over shoulders by two labourers. Aquil died due to excessive bleeding. The news spread like wildfire and a huge number of villagers and kin of the deceased gathered at the scene. They blocked the road and demanded compensation. Senior officials reached the scene and counseled the protesters to end the dharna. The police detained a labourer, identified as Buddhu. The police said the labourers carrying the iron rod over their shoulders were working at a construction site in Pataura.



कोविड-19 संक्रमण से हुई दुःखद मृत्यु की दशा में ससम्मान अंतिम संस्कार किए जाने हेतु महत्वपूर्ण सूचना

- ग्रामीण एवं शहरी क्षेत्रों में कोविड-19 संक्रमण से दुःखद मृत्यु होने पर **अंतिम संस्कार के लिए 5000 रुपये** की सहायता राशि तुरंत दी जाएगी।
- किसी कारणवश अगर परिजन अंतिम संस्कार न कर पा रहे हों तो ग्राम पंचायत अथवा नगरीय निकाय द्वारा ससम्मान निःशुल्क अंतिम संस्कार करवाया जाएगा।
- ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में जरूरतमंद सहायता के लिए अपने ग्राम पंचायत सचिव, नगर पालिका क्षेत्र में अधिशासी अधिकारी तथा नगर निगम क्षेत्र में नगर आयुक्त से तुरंत सम्पर्क करें।
- कोविड-19 प्रोटोकॉल का पूर्णतया पालन कर जैसे पी.पी.ई. किट, हैण्ड ग्लस्स व मास्क आदि पहनकर ही अंतिम संस्कार किया जाएगा।


कृपया नदी में शव न बहाएं, इससे जल प्रदूषित होता है एवं बीमारियां फैल सकती हैं

सफाई, दवाई और कड़ाई जीतेंगे कोरोना से लड़ाई

पंचायती राज विभाग, उत्तर प्रदेश

**स्वच्छाई भी**

**दवाई भी**

**कड़ाई भी**

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In an eerie similarity to the murder of ganglord Munna Bajrangji by a fellow inmate inside Baghat Distrit Jail in 2019, two listed gangsters aligned with jailed don-turned politico Mukhtar Ansari were shot dead by another notorious criminal by Sumit Dikshit alias Anshu using a 9 mm pistol inside Chitrakoot District Jail on Friday. The gangster allegedly

2 listed gangsters shot by notorious criminal

held five other inmates hostage before being neutralized by a police team. While officials claimed that Dixit snatched the service pistol of a Jail Guard and went on the shooting spree, sources maintained that the sophisticated handgun was smuggled into the prison to execute the crime.

Taking serious note of the incident, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ordered DG, Prisons, Anand Kumar to send a first hand report on the incident and carry out a detailed probe along with Divisional Commissioner of Chitrakoot, DK Singh and IG of Chitrakoot Zone, K Satya Narain. Hours after the incident, Jail Superintendent SP Tripathi and Jailor Mahendra Pal were suspended for the major security goof up and a departmental inquiry was also ordered. Reacting to the murders, DG, Prisons, Anand Kumar conceded there had been lapses by jail officials and promised strict action against the erring officials. As per reports, the inci-

dent took place shortly after 10 am when prison inmates came out of their barracks. West UP gangster Mukeem alias Kala facing 61 criminal cases, including the murder of three policemen, and Merajuddin, a close aide of gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari wre strolling in an open space outside their barrack, when Dixit brandishing 9 mm pistol approached them. After a brief verbal exchange, Dixit suddenly opened fire and killed the two. When other inmates came there to enquire, the assailant reportedly held five other inmates hostage, threatening to kill them. The District Jail officials later sought help from the local police to control the situation. A police team later rushed into the prison compound and eliminated Dikshit thereby rescuing the hostages. The 9 mm pistol used by Dixit was also seized by the police.

In December, 2019, Sitapur ganglord Anshul Dixit was transferred from Sultanpur jail to Chitrakoot jail while Mukeem alias Kala was shifted to Chitrakoot from Saharanpur jail in March this year. On the other hand, Mukhtar Ansari's aide Merajudeen was transferred from Varanasi jail barely a week ago. Dixit faced over 15 heinous crime cases that included the murder of former in Lucknow University Student Union general secretary Vinod Tripathi in 2007.

Meanwhile, a native of

Shamli and criminally active in western UP, Mukeem alias Kala had over 61 criminal cases registered against him including the murder of three policemen. Kala operated extortion rackets in Saharanpur, Shamli and Muzaffarnagar where he mostly targeted businessmen and traders and was blamed for businessmen shifting out of the region. He started out as a sidekick in the Mustafa Kaggga gang, infamous for robberies and contract killing in Haryana, west UP and Uttarakhand and later started his independent operations. On the other hand, Merajuddin has three cases but his claim to infamy was his proximity to Mukhtar Ansari.

While ssources revealed that the killings were the all out of a gang-war, an old video featuring Dikshit also surfaced online where he alleged that IG (STF) Amitabh Yash and the Chitrakoot ail administration were conspiring to murder him. Former IPS officer Amitabh Thakur and his social activist wife Dr Nutan Thakur have written to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath seeking a judicial inquiry into the matter. The couple pointed out that Dikshit had narrated the sequence of events leading to his killing in the video and that was exactly how the entire incident panned out in Chitrakoot jail on Friday and hence a judicial probe headed by a sitting High Court judge must be ordered.



Muslims offered Eid-ul-Fitr namaz at Aishbagh Eidgah with social distancing and other Covid protocols on Friday

-Pioneer

Two boys drown in lake in Kakori

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two boys drowned in a lake while another was feared drowned in Kakori on Saturday. Police recovered the bodies and one of the deceased was identified as Abdul Wahab of Saadatganj. The identity of another deceased was being ascertained while divers were searching for another person.

Reports said Abdul Wahab, along with 8-10 friends, had gone to take a dip in the lake which was given a facelift

under a government scheme recently. The lake is located alongside the road between Kakori and Malihabad. The police got a call and reached the scene and Abdul Wahab was taken out and rushed to KGMU, where he was declared dead.

Meanwhile, another group of boys reached the scene and after a while, the police were tipped off that two boys had drowned in the lake. The police got the body of a 15-year-old boy fished out but his identity

could not be ascertained. In another incident in Kakori, a youth was found hanging from a tree with a rope tied around his neck in the forest cover near Tikoniya locality on Saturday.

Meanwhile, a BA (I) student ended her life at her uncle's house where she was living for the last one year, in Talkatora police station area on Friday night. She was identified as Shalini of Madhoganj locality in Hardoi. She was staying at her uncle Ram Sahai's house in Ashok Vihar Colony.

On Friday afternoon, Ram Sahai and his family went to his in-laws' house in Rasoolpur locality in Hardoi while Shalini stayed back. "We returned around 10:30 pm on Friday and gave calls to Shalini but she did not respond. We somehow gained entry into the house and went into her room, only to find her hanging from the ventilator with a dupatta tied around her neck," Ram Sahai said. Police sent the body for autopsy and started further probe.

यूपी प्रोजेक्ट्स कारपोरेशन लिमिटेड
(उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार का उपक्रम) CIN:U15209UP1976SGC004285
कार्यालय : महाप्रबन्धक ज़ोन-7, यूपीप्रोजेक्ट्स कारपोरेशन लिमिटेड, लखनऊ
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पत्रांक : 769/ पी0सीएल0/महाप्रोजेक्ट-7ई-टेण्डर दिनांक : 11/05/2021

अति अल्पकालीन ई-निविदा सूचना

वर्तमान में कोविड-19 के मरीजों में लगातार अति वृद्धि हो रही है। चिकित्सालयों में दूधित सीवर एवं बायोमेडिकल वेस्ट की हाइजीन के दृष्टिगत सुरक्षित एवं क्वड्रैंट में एकत्रकर ट्रीटेड अवस्था में लाना अति महत्वपूर्ण है, जिससे चिकित्सालयों के अत्याधिक दूधित वेस्ट का प्रभाव महामारी में बढ़ने से सहायक "Construction of STP/ETP plant at Rajkiya Medical College- Prayagraj" के कार्य हेतु इस कार्यालय की अल्पकालीन ई-निविदा सूचना-10/UPPCL/GM-7/E-TENDER/2021-22 दिनांक-11.05.2021 द्वारा ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। यह निविदा वेबसाइट <http://www.etender.up.nic.in> के पोर्टल पर दिनांक - 18.05.2021 से दिनांक- 24.05.2021 तक डाउनलोड/अपलोड की जा सकती है, जिसे दिनांक-24.05.2021 को अपरान्ह 1.00 बजे तक सबमिट/जमा किया जा सकता है। टेक्निकल विड उसी दिन अपरान्ह 2.00 बजे अधोहस्ताक्षरी के उपरोक्त कार्यालय में खोली जानी प्रस्तावित है। निविदा से सम्बन्धित अन्य विवरण एवं शर्तें इत्यादि कारपोरेशन की वेबसाइट www.upprojects.org पर देखी जा सकती है।

महाप्रबन्धक ज़ोन-7

B-85

WORKS DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER,
EASTERN CIRCLE (R&B), BALASORE
e-mail: -seec_bis@rediffmail.com
Government of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice
Bid Identification No. SEEC-Q2/2021-22
No: 2098 / Dt: 28.04.2021

Nature of work:- **Building Works**
Number of works: **05 (Five) No Building Works**
Amount put to Tender: - **Rs.106.79 Lakh to Rs.552.87 Lakh**
Class of Contractor: - **"B" & "A" & "Special" Class**
Date & Time of availability of bid document in the portal: - **Dt.18.05.2021 at 10:00 AM**
Last Date / Time of receipt of bid in the portal: - **DL07.06.2021 up to 05:00 PM**
Date of opening of bid: - **DL08.06.2021 at 11:00 AM**
Name & address of the Office inviting bid: - **Superintending Engineer, Eastern Circle (R&B), Balasore**

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

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

OIPR-34026/11/0002/2122

कार्यालय अधीक्षण 09 / विननिम (पं०) / ले सा / अभियन्ता विद्युत 2021-22: उत्तरेंडिया बाईपास रेलवे नगरीय निर्माण मंडल लाइन के बंगला बाजार-बिजनौर (पंचम) मध्यांचल मार्ग पर स्थित सम्पार संख्या- 5C/2E-DOH पर (रेलवे क्रासिंग से बंगला बाजार की तरफ जाने वाले मार्ग पर) फोर लेन रेलवे उपरिगामी अधोहस्ताक्षरी द्वारा निम्नलिखित सेतु के संरक्षण में बाधक 33 के0वी0 प्रस्तावित कार्यो को संपादित करने व 11 के0वी0 उपरिगामी लाइनों एवं के लिए अनुमती एवं कार्य में दक्ष भूमिगत केबिलों को अन्यत्र विस्थापित ठेकेदारों का चयन ई-निविदा के कर भूमिगत करने का कार्य एवं माध्यम से किए जाने हेतु ई-निविदा तत्संबंधी अन्य कार्य। निविदा प्रपत्र दो भागों में निम्न विवरण अनुसार मूल्य रू 3540.00 एवं घरोहर उधरा0 सरकार के ई-टेण्डर पोर्टल धनराशि रू 25000.00। ई-निविदा etender.up.nic.in पर आमंत्रित की प्रस्ताव अपलोड करने की अंतिम जाती है। निविदा सम्बन्धी विवरण तिथि 24.05.2021 समय 12:00 बजे www.mvvnlin.in पर भी अवलोकित तक तथा ई-निविदा का प्रथम भाग किया जा सकता है। अधोहस्ताक्षरी खुलने की तिथि 24.05.2021 समय को बिना कारण बताए निविदा को 15:00 बजे। 3. अति-अल्पकालीन निरस्त करने/अवधि विस्तारण ई-निविदा सं 10/ विननिम (पं०) / करने/संशोधन करने एवं निविदा लेसा/2021-22: "उत्तरेंडिया बाईपास कार्यो को बिभिन्न फर्मों के मध्य विभक्त रेलवे लाइन के बंगला बाजार- करने का अधिकार सुरक्षित है। 1. बिजनौर मार्ग पर स्थित सम्पार अति-अल्पकालीन ई-निविदा सं संख्या- 5C/2E-DOH पर (रेलवे क्रासिंग से बिजनौर की तरफ जाने वाले मार्ग पर) फोर लेन रेलवे मण्डल-पंचम, लेसा लखनऊ, उपरिगामी सेतु के संरक्षण में बाधक अधीनस्थ कार्यालय निर्माण 33 के0वी0 एच0टी0 उपरिगामी खण्ड-द्वितीय एवं निर्माण उपखण्डों लाइनों एवं भूमिगत कबिलों को अन्यत्र में स्थापित 08 नग कम्प्यूटर्स, प्रिन्टर्स, विस्थापित कर भूमिगत करने का यूपी0एस0 एवं उससे संबंधित कार्य एवं तत्संबंधी अन्य कार्य। उपकरणों की मरम्मत एवं रख-रखाव निविदा प्रपत्र मूल्य 3540.00 एवं का कार्य। निविदा प्रपत्र मूल्य रू घरोहर रू 22000.00। ई-निविदा 1180.00 एवं घरोहर धनराशि रू प्रस्ताव अपलोड करने की अंतिम 1500.00। ई-निविदा प्रस्ताव अपलोड तिथि 24.05.2021 समय 12:00 बजे करने की अंतिम तिथि 24.05.2021 तक तथा ई-निविदा का प्रथम भाग समय 12:00 बजे तक तथा खुलने की तिथि 24.05.2021 समय ई-निविदा का प्रथम भाग खुलने की 15:00 बजे। अधीक्षण अभियन्ता तिथि 24.05.2021 समय 15:00 बजे। पत्रांक-325 दिनांक 15.05.2021 2. अति-अल्पकालीन ई-निविदा सं "राष्ट्रहित में बिजली बचाये"

646 students awarded degrees at 35th IIM-L convocation

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

For the first time since its inception, the Indian Institute of Management (Lucknow) held online convocation on Saturday in view of the Covid pandemic.

At the 35th convocation of the IIM-L, 646 students were awarded degrees by Chairman of IIM-L Board of Governors N Chandrasekaran, and Director Prof Archana Shukla. Dr Janmejaya Sinha, Chairman of India, Boston Consulting Group, was the chief guest on the occasion. As many as 404 students from the 35th batch of PG programme in Management, 74 students from the 16th batch of PG programme in Agri-Business Management, 19 students from Doctoral Programme (FPM), along

with 103 students from International Programme in Management for Executives (IPMX), 29 students from PG programme in Sustainable Management and 17 students from Executive Fellow Programme in Management (EFPM) received their degrees. The Chairman's Gold Medal was awarded to Agarwal Vishal Satish, Director's Medal to Sauhard Gupta, Chairman's Medal to Radhika Chappolia, Budhiraja Medal for best all-rounder to Kaushik G and Harishankar Singhania Medal for best all-rounder to Piyush Kedia.

Prof Archana Shukla highlighted the accomplishments of students, alumni and faculty of the institute in the academic year 2020-2021. "This year, the institute

achieved a massive digital transformation. IIM-L also worked in close coordination with the chairperson, board of governors, board members, senior alumni and faculty to discuss, debate and adopt a perspective plan and Vision-2030 document. The perspective plan and vision document has drawn clearly defined goalposts on programme consolidation, Technological upgrade, collaboration and alumni involvement, focus on entrepreneurship and hybrid management development programmes," she said.

N Chandrasekaran spoke about the challenges the pandemic has thrown and how all have to work together to start afresh. He said that not everything is dark and bleak in this pandemic as there are some positives too.

Constable kills self after stabbing wife to death, injuring 7 children

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a tragic incident in Ghazipur, a police constable killed his wife and attacked his seven children with a sharp-edged weapon before ending his life by jumping before a speeding train in Usiya village in Dildarnagar area on Saturday morning. After a preliminary probe, the police said that among the seven children attacked, the condition of three was critical.

As per reports, constable Munshi Yadav (42) was transferred to Fatehpur from Prayagraj district in January this year but he did not join his new posting and instead went on medical leave from January 5. On Friday night, Yadav had a dispute with his wife Reena (38) but later the family retired for the day. However, on Saturday morning, the neighbours heard frantic screams so they rushed to Yadav's house and were shocked to see Munshi attack-

ing his wife with a sharp-edged weapon. After causing critical injuries to his wife, the cop later targeted his children Neha (16), Ritu (13), Nitu (10), Varsha (8), Sudha (6), Krishna (4) and Shyam (2). Some neighbors along with Munshi's elder brother tried to overpower the assailant, but he managed to wriggle free and escaped from the scene. Later Munshi fled towards Kakrahi Dera where he jumped before an approaching train to end his own life.

The villagers said that while Reena succumbed to injuries, three children-- Sudha, Krishna and Shyam, were battling for their lives in District Hospital, Ghazipur. The bodies of both Reena and Munshi were sent for autopsy and a case was registered. While the police suspected the murderous attack to be a sequel to a domestic dispute, an investigation was underway to zero in on the actual motive for the brutal attack.

Yogi slams Punjab govt for creation of new district

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath slammed the Congress-led government in Punjab for creating a new Malerkotla district with Muslim majority population.

"The creation of the new district in Punjab is a reflection of the divisive policy of the Congress. Any distinction based on faith and religion is contrary to the spirit of Indian Constitution. At this time, the formation of Malerkotla district carving it out from Sangrur is indicative of the myopic policy of the Congress," Yogi Adityanath tweeted in Hindi, a day after Punjab Chief Minister Amrinder Singh made the announcement.

On Friday, the Punjab CM declared Malerkotla as the 23rd district of the state and announced several projects for the development of the historic city, located 131 km from Chandigarh. Malerkotla was carved out of Sangrur district.

Reacting to Yogi's tweet, Amrinder Singh on Saturday



"The creation of the new district in Punjab is a reflection of the divisive policy of Congress. Any distinction based on faith and religion is contrary to spirit of Indian Constitution"

slammed Yogi Adityanath over his 'inflammatory' tweet. In a tweet, the Punjab CM asked his UP counterpart to stay out of Punjab's affairs, which he

claimed were in much better shape than those in UP under the divisive and destructive BJP government that has been actively promoting communal discord in the state for the past over four years.

"What does he (Yogi Adityanath) know of Punjab's ethos or the history of Malerkotla, whose relation with Sikhism and its Gurus was known to every Punjabi? And what does he understand of the Indian Constitution, which is being brazenly trampled every day by his own government in UP?" Amarinder said in a statement.

Malerkotla was established in 1454 by Sheikh Sadruddin-i-Jahan from Afghanistan, and subsequently the State of Malerkotla was established in 1657 by Bayazid Khan. It was later merged with other nearby princely states to create Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). During the reorganisation of states in 1956, the territory of the former state of Malerkotla became part of the state of Punjab.

SCHOOLSCAN



CMS STUDENT SELECTED FOR ADMISSION TO 4 PRESTIGIOUS UNIVS

Umar Shafi, a student of City Montessori School, Aliganj Campus I, has been selected for admission to four prestigious universities of Finland and the Netherlands. He has received offers for admission from the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Oulu University of Applied Sciences and South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences of Finland and Radboud University of the Netherlands. Thus, another student of CMS has brought name and fame to the city of Lucknow by being selected in noted universities abroad due to his academic excellence, diligence, and skills. Umar attributed his achievement to his mentors, the dedicated CMS teachers.

UPERC to hold virtual hearing for power tariff revision from today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

UP Electricity Regulatory Commission (UPERC) will hold virtual hearing from May 17 for revision in power tariff for the current fiscal 2021-22. The Central Electricity Regulatory Commission has directed the UPERC to hold the hearing on

the annual revenue requirement (ARR) filed by the UP Power Corporation Limited in January this year.

UP Power Consumer Forum has filed its objections against the ARR filed by UPPCL. The forum has pleaded for the reduction in power tariff by 25 per cent. The power tariff is, however, all set to be

hiked as the regulator is likely to allow the slab revision for power consumption by different categories of consumers.

Avadesh Kumar Verma, chairman of the forum, said the power regulator, in its previous tariff order in 2019, had approved line losses of only 11.08 per cent. The UPPCL, in its ARR for 2021-22, has shown

the line losses of 16.64 per cent. Verma said the high line losses shown by UPPCL are clear violation of the order of the power regulator.

UPPCL, seeking hike in power tariff, had filed fresh ARR for the fiscal 2021-22 with the UP State Electricity Regulatory Commission in January last. ARR is a projec-

tion of power tariff, which UPPCL seeks to recover in a new financial year. UPERC sources said that UPPCL's efficacy in recovering revenue from consumers will be keenly examined before taking a decision on tariff hike.

"Revenue recovery needs to be improved and aggregate commercial and technical loss-

es, essentially signifying line losses from power theft, need to be brought down," an official of UPERC said. The development gains significance as it will be a difficult decision for the state government to implement the hike in tariff as the challenge in coming months will be the resumption of economic activity post-lockdown.



Varanasi Junction (Cantt) wears a deserted look during corona curfew on Saturday

Pioneer

Recovery rate close to 90 per cent as corona curfew enters 17th day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The continuation of the corona curfew for the 17th day in succession here on Saturday has helped in bringing a good result by controlling the deadly spike of the second wave of coronavirus pandemic to a great extent. Though till 1 pm rush was seen in some markets, most of the time during the day, the roads wore a deserted look. Due to this, now within a week an improvement of 6-7 per cent was seen in recovery rate, though the Health department is not testing all the corona patients being treated in home isolation. During the one week, recovery rate has improved from 83.41 per cent to 89.14 per cent (by Friday) as out of 78,230 positive patients, 69,741 were cured either in home isolation or in hospitals.

Despite this rise in recovery rate, a fear is still prevailing over the reports of arrival of third wave and black fungus

as many cases of the latter had already been detected here. The recovery rate had declined sharply when a record spike was seen in corona cases during last month 45,346 Covid positive patients were found. Due to this sudden spike the recovery rate which was 98.12 per cent in February dropped below 70 per cent in the beginning of the month. Meanwhile, during the corona curfew, the roads, markets, ghats etc wore a deserted look. As in view of a surge in Covid cases several trains were cancelled in the recent time, thin attendance of passengers was seen at Varanasi Junction (Cantt), Manduadih, Varanasi City and other stations. The Roadways is also incurring losses in absence of passengers as none of the bus depots including Cantt is not functioning as per their capacity. Earlier, the festival of Eid was celebrated with traditional gaiety and religious fervour when the majority of Muslims offered namaz staying at home

and only a few did the same at mosques maintaining social distance.

Meanwhile, apart from providing treatment to cancer patients, the Tata Memorial Centre (TMC) is also playing an important role in the fight against corona across the country. Under the visionary leadership of TMC Director, Dr RA Badwe and Director of TMH Dr CS Pramesh, CCE Deputy Director and in-charge of Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital and Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya Cancer Centre (both in Varanasi) Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi has started working on a war footing to counter the calamity. In view of the problem of oxygen during the second wave of corona, TMC is constantly contacting donors from other countries including India and the oxygen concentrators are being transported to different parts of the country. Recently several donors from the US have sent 3,800 oxygen concentrators as well as other

medical equipment to TMC. Out of them, 92 oxygen concentrators were handed over to Divisional Commissioner (DC) Deepak Agrawal by Dr Satyajit Pradhan, Director of Bhabha and Malviya Cancer centres here on Friday. Besides, 58 more oxygen concentrators will be made available to the respective district administration soon for the treatment of corona patients of Varanasi, Chandauli, Jaunpur and Ghazipur districts of the division. These oxygen concentrators will be used for timely delivery of oxygen to Corona patients at community centres in rural areas of Varanasi, Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Chandauli districts, so that their condition can be improved in time. On this occasion, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Madho Singh, Deputy Director Dr BK Mishra, Assistant Medical Officer Dr Akash Anand and Public Relations Officer (PRO) Akhilesh Pandey were also present.

No restrictions on bringing bodies for cremation: DM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma said that neither there was any restriction on bringing dead bodies to the city for cremation in the past, nor the same has been imposed now. Categorically denying some reports, he said that the movement of dead bodies has also been allowed even during the lockdown, partial lockdown and weekend lockdown. As this holy city is also known as

'Mahashamshan', a large number of people from adjoining districts and states bring their dead bodies for their consignment to the flames at two ancient burning ghats, Manikarnika and Harishchandra so that the departed souls can get salvation as per mythological beliefs.

While directing the Superintendent of Police (Rural Areas) in a letter, he said that rumours were being spread by many people regarding putting a ban on bringing bodies to the

city from outside districts but the same is not true as neither any such restriction was imposed in the past nor in the present.

He also instructed the SP (RA) to redirect all the border police stations that no such restrictions on movement was imposed even during any type of lockdowns and such people can easily carry their bodies to the ghats for cremation. He also asked the police that if any person is bringing body for cremation, he should be helped to

reach the burning ghats easily.

Meanwhile, the DM has introduced the availability of Remdesivir injections for COVID-19 patients at the District Rifle Club, saying that anyone whose patient needs Remdesivir injections, can buy three doses from the Rifle Club by showing the doctor's original prescription and Aadhaar card at the rate of ₹1800 per patient. The injections will be sold through the Red Cross Society daily from the Rifle Club.

426 more test positive in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In a major relief, the district recorded less than 500 cases for the first time in the second wave of the pandemic. As many as 426 cases of COVID-19 were recorded on Saturday evening increasing the total number to 78,656 crossing the 78K-mark. With 7 more deaths recorded during the last 24 hours, the death toll increased to 686. As many as 900 patients of home isolation recovered, while as many as 77 have been recovered from the hospitals. The total number of patients cured in the district increased to 70,718 including 65,650 in home isolation and 5,068 in COVID-19 hospitals.

In the first report of the day, 295 positive patients were found out of 4,686 reports received and this figure increased to 426 out of 8,468 received samples as per report provided by the Health department this evening. The total active cases also decreased to 7,252 from 7,810 which was a day ago. On Friday evening, as many as 503 positive cases were recorded and the total number was 78,230, while 7 deaths were reported and the



death toll was 669. Earlier, in view of finding hundreds of new positive cases, with 3 new hotspots, the number of active hotspots was 495 with 3 green zones having been converted to red zones by a day ago. Out of total 3,305 hotspots, 2,810 are green zones and 495 are red zones.

The Health department continued the vaccination drive on Saturday at the vaccination centres for the beneficiaries aged above from 45 years at vaccination centres of the district including Ramkrishna Mission Home of Service in Luxa, Shree Ram Lakshmi Narayan Marwadi Hindu Hospital in Godowlia, Mata Anandmayee Hospital in Shivala, Raja Baldev Das Birla Hospital in Machhodari, Mahila District Women

Government Hospital in Kabirchaura, Pt Deen Dayal Government Hospital, near Pandeypur and ESIC, near Pandeypur.

Besides, the vaccination drive was also launched for the beneficiaries aged above 18 and below 45 years at 17 vaccination centres including LBS Hospital, Ramnagar, Sir Sunder Lal Hospital in BHU, Rajkiya Ayurvedic College in Chowkaghat, District Government Hospital in Kabirchaura, Central Hospital in BLW and a few CHC & PHC of urban and rural areas. The long queues of the beneficiaries, particularly of aged between 18 and 45 years were seen at Women Government Hospital. On Friday, a total of 6,830 beneficiaries took the vaccines including 5,056 got the first dose and the second dose was administered to 1,784. Out of them, 2,948 beneficiaries who took vaccines were below 45 years and 3,882 were above 45 years. The Health department also conducted a corona test of 7,090 at eight development blocks including an antigen test of 5,074 and RT-PCR test of 7,090 persons.

Meanwhile, the District

Magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma on Saturday directed for opening all the Jan Seva Kendras of the district from 10 am to 1 pm all the days of week even on Saturday and Sunday. The DM also made 30 oxygen concentrators to six community health centres including five each to one centre and directed the concerned authority to ensure the food for each corona patient in case to be admitted.

The social organisation Seva Bharti, affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) has opened a post-covid rehabilitation centre at Madhav Seva Prakash in Lohta where such corona patients will be provided free medical services who had recovered from the pandemic but are feeling unwell physically. The patients will be treated by the teams of expert doctors in this 15-bed rehabilitation centre through Ayurvedic process, Yoga and spirituality along with the modern medical methods. The RSS leaders Ajit Prasad Mahapatra, Dr Rakesh Tiwari, Alok Nath, Dr Vishwambhar Singh, Jyut Ram and Vinod were mainly present on the inaugural occasion of the centre.

93 pc recovery rate in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The recovery rate in the district has reached 93 per cent due to the decrease in the number of new infected people and the increase in the number of infection-free people.

In the case of Corona, there was big relief news on Friday night compared to the rest of the days. As many as 191 new cases of coronavirus were reported in the last 24 hours on Friday night. After 43 days the number of newly infected people came down to 200.

Earlier on March 30, the number of corona patients was found to be under 200. However, the death toll has not decreased. On Friday, six people died, including Father Rolfie D'Souza, former Principal of St. Joseph's College.

Nodal Officer of Corona, Dr Rishi Sahai said that on Friday, a total of 9,938 Corona suspects were tested in the district. About 191 new infections were found in it. Of the 36 people were found positive through the antigen test, 109 were confirmed by RTPCR. About 46 people have also been found infected by Trunat's testing and 29 positive have been received from rural areas and 152 in the city. However, antigen screening has been done to 5,546 people. RTPCR tests of 3,956 people have been done.

About 326 people have been screened from private labs and 110 from Trunat. However, the total testing conducted on Friday is less than a day earlier or more. On Thursday, a total of 10,699 people were screened for corona. Out of that, 241 were

found infected. On the other hand, experts say that the number has come down due to less than other days. At present, the recovery rate of Corona patients in the district has reached 93% due to the decrease in the number of new infected, which has increased by more days.

The surge in the number of new Corona patients in the district came on March 31, according to Health department data.

On that day, 213 new patients were found in 24 hours crossing the figure 200, which was 156 more than the day before. Since then, the figure has risen sharply by April 17 while 60 new infections were found on March 30, the day before March 31.

On Friday, the number of people who became infection free was higher than those

infected with the corona. Home isolation of 484 people was completed in the district on Friday.

While 51 people were discharged from various hospitals including Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital, Beli, Railway Hospital and private hospitals. Due to the number of patients being discharged and the number of new patients reduced, beds in hospitals were also emptied and the demand for oxygen has decreased.

Those who got infected on Friday included teachers of Government Inter College in Phulpur and Holagarh, Medical Officer of Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital, junior engineer of Irrigation department, a clerk of Agriculture University and COD Chheoki, peon of Meja Primary School, a police personnel of Daraganj police station.

Number of patients inflicted with black fungus increases to six

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The number of patients inflicted with black fungus has increased to six in the Prayagraj district. The condition of the two infected admitted to the Covid ward of L3 SRN Hospital is stable. On Friday, two suspects suffering from black fungus were marked at a private hospital in Tagore Town.

These post-Covid patients have been advised to undergo MRI and fungal examination. One of the suspect patients was referred to the SGPGI, Lucknow.

The district identified an infection of black fungus (mucormycosis) four days ago. The doctors are stating the condition of patients admitted in SRN's Covid ward. At the same time, the fungus of the patient admitted in the post-Covid ward is being tested. The team

of experts from the Medical College's E&T, Medicine, Surgery Department is monitoring the case history and health of black fungus infected and suspected patients.

On Thursday, the referral patient to the E&T department did not return. The patients sent to Lucknow are being supervised by the experts of SGPGI. On Friday, two patients were found to be suffering from black fungus at a private hospital in Tagore Town. The suspects have been advised to undergo MRI, nasal endoscopy and fungal examination.

According to SRN co-incharge Covid ward Dr Sujit Verma, one patient is admitted to Covid and the other post-Covid ward in the hospital. People who are free from infection should not panic, just take care of the diabetes sufferers, they will avoid trouble.

Dr Ram Siya Singh,

Assistant Professor, E&T Department of Moti Lal Nehru Medical College, said that people suffering from post-covid diabetes should pay attention to the symptoms. If they see fungus, clean it with Betadin or Dettol.

They need to see the advice of a doctor if black coloured water comes from the nose. Fungus is easy to treat at the initial stage, but carelessness can increase the difficulty. Dr Singh further said that there is no need to panic from black fungus.

He asked such patients to control their sugar to shun the possibility of getting infected with black fungus.

According to E&T expert Dr Shashank Ojha, OPD was closed in the Corona era, but there is a fear of black fungus among those seeking online counselling. Patients who have diabetes, who are free from

corona infection, are troubled. He said that patients suspected of black fungus are being advised to take care of cleanliness and get some necessary tests done.

Dr Shanshak said that in severe cases of black fungus infection, it may be necessary to perform fungal endoscopic sinus surgery, sometimes major jaw surgery or eye surgery. Primary level infections of black fungus are overcome by drugs. Diabetes victims may have problems if they are negligent.

He has advised the patients not to be worried from black fungus infection and advised the people to increase the body's immunity, remain stress-free, eat fresh digestible food, and drink ample water. By doing so, they will not only be saved from black fungus but corona infection and other diseases also.

Giri makes allegations against his mentor Mahant Narendra

ALLAHABAD (PNS): After being expelled from the Akhara Parishad and Niranjani Akhara, Yoga Guru Anand Giri's anger has erupted. He has made many serious allegations against his mentor and Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad (ABAP) president Mahant Narendra Giri.

Yoga guru Anand Giri said that the time of the downfall of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad president has come to a close. That is why they are doing unrestrained work. He also accused Narendra Giri of selling the property of the monastery. He alleged that since becoming a Mahant, Narendra Giri has made the monastery hollow by selling the lands of Baghmabari Gaddi Math.

It may be pointed out here that Swami Anand Giri, the administrator of the Bade Hanuman temple at Sangam, a close disciple of Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad president Mahant Narendra Giri, has been expelled from the panchayati akhara Niranjani. There were complaints of Anand Giri being caught in the family charmed after he became recluse. After this the Panch Parmeshwar Committee of the Akhara investigated it. After the allegations were found to be true in the investigation, the Executive Committee of Akhara held a meeting in

Haridwar and decided to evict him. The president of the Akhara Parishad on Friday confirmed the eviction action.

A letter regarding his expulsion has been issued by Niranjani Akhara. It states that he has been expelled for having ties with his family despite being reclusive. After this action of the Akhara, Akhara Parishad president Mahant Narendra Giri has also separated Anand Giri from the arrangements of the Baghmabari Gaddi Math and the Bade Hanuman Temple at Sangam.

Meanwhile, Swami Anand Giri, the administrator of the Bade Hanuman temple at Sangam, a close disciple of Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad (ABAP) president Mahant Narendra Giri, has been expelled from the panchayati akhara Niranjani. There were complaints of Anand Giri being caught in the family charmed after he took sanyas. After this the Panch Parmeshwar Committee of the Akhara investigated it. After the allegations were found to be true in the investigation, the Executive Committee of Akhara held a meeting in Haridwar and decided to evict him. The president of the Akhara Parishad on Friday confirmed the eviction action.

A letter regarding his expulsion has been issued by Niranjani Akhara. It states that

he has been expelled for having ties with his family despite taking sanyas. After this action of the Akhara, Akhara Parishad president Mahant Narendra Giri. He was also called the successor of Narendra Giri. Last year the Hanuman temple in Noida was entrusted to Mahant Anand Giri.

Anand Giri Banbharabi Gaddi was shouldering the responsibility of the Bagambhari Gaddi math and Bade Hanuman temple as the administrator.

Yoga Guru Swami Anand Giri was arrested in Australia on charges of assault and indecency with two of his female disciples in the year 2019.

Suddenly he came in the headlines. In 2016 and 2018, he was arrested by the Australian police in an old case of assault and misbehaviour with his disciples. He was acquitted by a Sydney court.

Sant Anand Giri associated with the Akhara for the last 12 years. Mahant Narendra Giri's letter was received a few days ago.

In which it was mentioned that Sant Anand Giri was removed from the temple due to family ties and it was asked to investigate it at the Akhara level too.

The charges against Sant Anand Giri were found to be correct and ousted him from the akhara, said Mahant Ravindrapuri, Secretary Niranjani Akhara.

Search operations conducted in Naini Jail

ALLAHABAD (PNS): Three deaths following a gang war in the Chitrakoot Jail sent the jail officials on their toes in whole of Uttar Pradesh, and they conducted search operations in their respective prisons.

In Naini Jail the officials checked thoroughly all the barracks on Saturday morning during surprise search operation just a day after the Chitrakoot incident. Fortunately nothing objectionable could be found out from the barracks.

Owing to Covid restric-

tions the family members of the prisoners are not allowed to meet them, and supply of food from out side has also been banned, so no outsider is coming in contact with the prisoners in present.

During surprise raids by the district administration and the police in the past, objectionable things including knife, mobile phones, SIM cards, and intoxicants were found from the jail barracks a good number of times. But this time all was well in Naini Jail a day after Chitrakoot incident.

At present Naini Jail is free from the big gangsters and mafia dons. All of them have been shifted to other jails, so the supply of weapons and mobile phones besides lavish food is almost stopped, still the jail authorities are going through the criminal records of the inmates to gear up themselves accordingly.

Naini jail is infamous for gang war like situations and incidents of murder and attack. One inmate of Naini jail was killed and then hanged in the bathroom, one had been

attacked with a hunter, while one had escaped after digging a tunnel.

The Chitrakoot jail gang war has raised an alarm bell, and the jail officials are gearing them up.

TRIPATHI NEW DIG JAILS: The vacant post of DIG Jails here at Prayagraj, has immediately been filled by transferring the Lucknow DIG Jail Sanjiv Tripathi to Prayagraj.

This transfer order was issued in a haste immediately after the Chitrakoot Jail incident by the top brass.



Divisional Commissioner, Dr Raj Shekhar visits a village along with medical team in Kalyanpur Block

Pioneer

DC asks officials to reactivate monitoring & coordination committees; visits village

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Dr Raj Shekhar said that in view of COVID-19 spreading in sub-urban and rural areas, the UP government had decided to reactivate the monitoring and coordination committees to monitor counter measures being taken to contain the novel coronavirus and treat the patients to minimise life loss.

He said village vigilance committees (gram nigrani committees) had been set up in every gram panchayat comprising a dozen members including Asha Bahus, Anganwadi workers, lekhpal, secretary, ANM, prominent persons of the villages and a few more.

He said the UP government was taking every possible measure to handle the situation effectively and timely to treat and localise the resources and prevent the virus from spreading to urban areas again. He said more rapid response teams (RRTs) had been set up for the rural areas to assist the gram

nigrani committees to successfully and effectively carry out testing and tracking and ensure the distribution of medicines in a transparent manner.

The divisional commissioner expressed satisfaction over the working in the Pargahi Bangar village in Kalyanpur block of Kanpur Nagar. He said focus should be on vaccination and sanitisation drives, sanitation and quarantine and the rural people need to be informed about the protocol of home isolation as well.

There are 360 families in the village and in the house to house survey, 77 people were found with COVID-19 symptoms. Dr Shekhar said that after checking of symptoms, 19 people were shortlisted for Covid test through RT-PCR and others were screened through antigen test in which one person was found positive. He said one person was being given medication and recommended for home isolation said 38 persons were administered Covid vaccine, 15 of them the second dose.

He said cleaning of the vil-

lage was done on a regular basis, but fogging was not done for the past many months because of the non-availability of kerosene for use in the fogging machine. He said this could be a problem in other villages as well. He directed the district magistrate and the chief development officer to examine the issue and to issue necessary directions so that fogging was done effectively and quickly.

The divisional commissioner said though a quarantine centre had been established in this village, no patient was put in isolation or kept in the quarantine centre till date. He added that the quarantine register was also not maintained at the centre. He directed the district magistrate and the chief development officer to issue a standard format to all the quarantine centres in the district to maintain and update the data in a standard format.

He also advised them to put up banners or wall paintings for the quarantine centre so that the people were informed about it.

Dr Shekhar then visited a

few houses and interacted with the residents and family members of those who were in home isolation and enquired if they were given free home isolation kits or not. He said in several cases the prescription slip and medicine kits were not given to the patients or identified persons. He warned the MOIC and asked the CMO to ensure that the prescription slip (both in Hindi & English) was kept in every medicine kit and the patient or family members are briefed by the ASHA bahus during distribution of the medicine kits.

He said one patient in home isolation had turned negative after 14 days but later he developed post COVID-19 symptoms. He asked DM and the CMO to examine this case and issue detailed instructions to the nigrani committees for post-Covid follow-up of the patient so that timely and effective necessary treatment could be given to them.

The divisional commissioner was accompanied by CDO, DD panchayat, CMO, SDM, DPRO, MOIC & other officials.

Lady doctor dies after falling from 8th floor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Mystery shrouds the death of a lady doctor who died after falling from the eighth floor of an apartment in Bithoor police station area in the early hours of Saturday.

Police said preliminary investigation suggested that the doctor herself jumped from the eighth floor of the apartment to end her life. However, her parents alleged the she was killed.

Reports said that Dr Sushil Verma, a native of Rae Bareilly, her doctor wife Manju and 18-month-old son Rudransh lived in flat No 8A on the eighth floor of Tower No. 5 of Rudra Apartment in Singhpur in Bithoor.

Dr Sushil Verma is an assistant professor in Jalaun Medical College while Dr Manju had completed her MBBS from Swaroop Rani Medical College in Prayagraj.

Around 1:30 am on Saturday, Dr Manju died after falling from the eighth floor of her apartment.

The local police immediately reached to the spot and carried out an investigation. Dr Manju's parents also reached the spot on Saturday morning.

Personal assistant of a judge of the Allahabad High Court, Arun Singh, said his daughter Manju was married to Dr Sushil Verma in January 2019. He said in the early hours of Saturday, Dr Sushil Verma's younger brother Sudhir informed him that Manju had fallen from the balcony of their flat and when he reached the spot with family members in the morning he found Manju dead.

Singh alleged that his son-in-law had taken a loan of Rs.40 lakh to buy the flat and used to press Manju to bring money from her parents to pay the installments of the loan and when she refused to do so, he pushed her off the balcony of their flat on the eighth floor.

Bithoor police have started an investigation. Dr Sushil Verma's brother Sunil Verma is basic Shiksha adhikari (BSA) in Kanpur Dehat while the youngest brother Sudhir is a lawyer.

Young couple killed for 'family honour'

KANPUR (PNS): In a case of honour killing, a minor lovesick couple was axed to death by the girl's father and uncle in Birahinpur village in Ghatampur Kotwali police area on Saturday morning.

While peeping through the window, the youths father kept urging the assailants to leave his son but they axed the couple to death. According to reports, a truck driver of the village has four children. His minor daughter had an affair with a youth of a neighbouring village. On this, both the families often had heated arguments. However, despite several warnings, the girl did not stop meeting her lover.

On Thursday, the truck driver along with wife and two children went to attend the marriage of his brother-in-law in Barua village of Banda. His minor daughter and a son were present in the house. While leaving for Banda, the truck driver had asked his brother to keep an eye on both the children. Late Friday night, on coming to know about the presence of the neighbouring village boy in the girl's room, her uncle put a lock on the main gate of the house and informed his brother in Banda.

The truck driver immediately returned to the village by 7am on Saturday and along with his brother entered the room and locked it from inside. He scolded his daughter and her lover for continuing their affair despite being warned. Meanwhile, the youths father also reached the spot.

Suddenly, when his daughter argued with him, the truck driver lost his cool and with the help of his brother, axed the couple to death. On getting information from gram pradhan Pappu Singh, local police reached the spot and arrested the father of the deceased girl along with the blood-stained axe.

28-yr-old man's body found

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

The body of a 28-year-old man was found near a brick kiln under Jigna police station on Friday. On getting information about the body at Kashi Sarpati village SHO Pranay Prasoon Srivastava reached the spot. The body was identified as Sukaru Bind (28) son of Vishwanath Bind, a resident of Jaraila village under Jigna police station. As per the family members, the victim had left the house on Thursday evening along with his friends and did not return home at night. The police was speculating that a scuffle took place in a drunken state and the victim was murdered. The police authorities, including SP incharge, Shubhash Chandra Shukla, visited the place and directed the area police to man the culprits. Till filing the report no any arrest had been done and the investigation was on. An earlier report said that the Padari police arrested three juvenile delinquents and recovered one android phone along with the ₹62,500 cash recently. Uma Shankar, a resident of Putariha village under Padari police station, had lodged an FIR stating that cash along and valuables had been stolen from his house at night. After registering the case SHO Venkatesh Tiwari formed a team to investigate the matter. The police ultimately arrested the three accused identified as Indrakumar alias Chhotu, Babloo Kumar, and Prakash Maurya, all residents of Putariha village under Padari police station and recovered the cash and mobile phone. For working out the case the SHO has patted the back of the team.

FUND PROVIDED: DPRO Arvind Kumar said the government has already provided adequate fund to villages so that gram pradhans were able to give impetus to development after oath. Talking to 'The Pioneer' on Saturday he said though new allotment of fund under 15th

Finance Commission was in the pipeline but till date an amount of ₹85.07 crore was already in the account of gram sabhas of the district which could not be spent till panchayat elections.

REVIEWED: District Magistrate Praveen Kumar Laxkar has warned the working agencies complete the work within the stipulated time. These views were expressed by the DM during the review of the schemes AMRUT, Namami Gange and rural potable water supply at Collectorate on Thursday. In the meeting the DM directed the Forest department, Irrigation,



Minor irrigation and Jal Nigam to solve the problem of the agencies and cooperate to complete the works timely. He said no department should prove to be a stumbling block in the works which were already under priority. He directed the working agencies that for any problem in work they should inform him. He told the agencies to carry out the work in such a planned way that it could create minimum inconvenience to the locals. On the occasion he directed the ADM (Namami Gange) to inspect the sites and give him ground report about payment. He directed to engage more manpower if required. He reviewed the progress in the works of intake wells, boundary wall at the reservoirs, approach bridges etc and instructed to withhold the payment of those whose progress was very slow. He directed the inspecting officers to report to him with video so that it could be sent to the government for further action.

Spltrains to remain cancelled

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

Due to operational difficulties and lack of adequate number of passengers the cancellation of the following special trains has been done by the railway administration till further orders, Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Pankaj Kumar Singh said.

CHHAPRA-LUCKNOW JN SPECIAL: The 05053 Chhapra-Lucknow Jn special train will remain canceled from May 16 until further notice.

LUCKNOW JN-CHHAPRA SPL: The 05054 Lucknow Jn.-Chhapra special train will remain canceled from May 15 till further notice.

FARRUKHABAD SPECIAL: The 05083 Chhapra-Farrukhabad special train will remain cancelled from May 15 till further notice.

FARRUKHABAD-CHHAPRA SPECIAL: The 05084 Farrukhabad-Chhapra special train will remain canceled from May 16 till further notice.

120 persons vaccinated

PNS ■ VARANASI

Continuous efforts are being made by the Varanasi division of North Eastern Railway (NER) for the prevention of coronavirus infection.

In the same sequence, under the direction of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM), Varanasi, Vijay Kumar Panjari and under the leadership of Chief Medical Superintendent (CMS) Dr MS Nabiyl in collaboration with the district administration, 120 persons, including 27 railway persons and their families and 93 others were vaccinated at the Divisional Hospital here on Friday. According to DRM VK Panjari for protecting all railway personnel working on Varanasi division from Covid-19 their vaccination is important and they are also being encouraged for it. This vaccination is being carried out as a campaign on NER. Apart from it at Varanasi division's various rail sections and stations in order to vaccinate employees connected with operations and their families at their workplace the medical van



(SPARME) of the railway was run as Vaccine Express. The employees were administered vaccine at the workplace/station. Along with it at various railway health units/hospitals, including the Divisional Hospital, better treatment of Covid patients and availability of necessary medical equipment and medicines for them is also being reviewed.

In addition at all major railway stations and different sections of Varanasi division railway passengers are being made aware about protection from Coronavirus through public awareness system.

Along with it through video messages and big video panels at Manduadih station effective messages are being broadcast in order to protect people from Covid-19 infection and for checking it. At station premises awareness-related messages are being displayed through posters. Meanwhile earlier on Thursday, a total of 90 persons were vaccinated against Covid-19, including 45 railway employees and as many others.

Girl meets tragic end

CORRESPONDENT ■ CHANDAULI

A 10-year-old girl, Jyoti, who was taking part in her cousin brother's wedding ceremony near Gandhinagar village under Chakia Kotwali died after being hit by a speeding Bolero recently. As a result celebrations turned into lamentation. According to a report received here, Lalji, a resident of Janakpur village, had come to attend his nephew's wedding along with his family members and children. On Thursday morning preparations for the 'barat' to go were on. In the

meantime the 'parichhan' ceremony of the bridegroom was taking place near the house along Ilya Road in nearby Gandhinagar village. Jyoti was also present along with family members in the programme.

It is learnt that the Bolero which was coming from Ilya side suddenly hit Jyoti while its driver fled from there along with it. Her family members rushed her to the Chakia primary health centre (PHC) where the medical officer declared her dead. Meanwhile inspector Nagendra Pratap Singh said that he had knowl-

dge about the incident and the matter was being investigated.

In another incident a speeding Wagon R car coming from Bihar side and going towards Varanasi suddenly went out of control and collided with the rear portion of a container which was parked on the side of the National Highway-2 in Naubatpur under Syedraja police station here recently. As a result one person in the car died. On getting information, the police reached the spot and sent the body of the deceased for the post-mortem examination.

Nursing & paramedical staff honoured

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

At NTPC Vindhyachal Hospital the birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale is observed as International Nurses Day every year. Florence Nightingale is considered to be the first nurse in the world. This day is a tribute to show respect to indomitable courage and commendable work of nurses and their contribution during the difficult times of Covid pandemic. On the occasion maintaining social distancing and following all precautions in the time of this pandemic as per the guidelines of the Government of India at NTPC Vindhyachal the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) BC Chaturvedi honoured the nursing and paramedical staff and praised their services during the challenging times of the current Corona pandemic. Along with Chaturvedi senior specialists Dr AK Mishra, Dr Ashok Kurkanji, Dr Rajpal Singh, Dr Raj Bongankar, Dr Manisha, Dr Juri Dutta and Dr Hema Oraon were present on the occasion.

VACCINATION DRIVE

NTPC Ltd, India's largest integrated energy company has inoculated over 70,000 of its employees, workers and their family members

across its operations. The massive vaccination drive continues across plant locations, which also includes NTPC's associates and their dependents along with retired NTPC employees. Vaccination drives have been undertaken across NTPC stations in coordination with respective state administrations. NTPC has been organising Covid-19 vaccination drives across its plants from the time the vaccination programme was announced in the country. NTPC has ensured that its frontline workers, current and retired staff over 60 and employees above 45 gets inoculated on priority. NTPC has also started vaccinating those are eligible in the 18-44 years category at its plant locations. NTPC aims to cover all eligible employees and their dependents under the protection of the vaccine. The vaccination drive has been running across 72 locations of NTPC which includes the JVs and subsidiaries. Besides the vaccination drive, NTPC has constituted a taskforce at central level for various Covid-related activities. India's largest integrated energy player runs 24x7 control rooms for better coordination for patients across sites. The taskforce also helps in coordination for hospital beds and other treatment facilities across various empanelled hospitals.

Medical College prepared to deal with black fungus

KANPUR (PNS): GSVM Medical College, Kanpur Principal Prof RB Kamal said in view of the threat of black fungus, the medical college had girded up its loins to handle the situation if it cropped up in the district. He said a requisition for the anti-fungal injections had been sent to the government and 100 vials of the injection had been arranged locally to remain prepared for any such case, if it emerged.

The principal said a special committee comprising

Medicine, ENT, Ophthalmology, Microbiology and Radio-Diagnostics had been formed and if any case of black fungus surfaced then MRI would be carried out a nasal swab of the patient would be sent to the microbiology department for test. He said mucormycosis, also known as black fungus, was a rare but dangerous infection caused by a group of moulds called mucormycetes and it often affected the sinuses, lungs, skin, and brain. He said people

inhaled the mould spores or came in contact with them in things like soil, rotting produce or bread, or compost piles.

Doctors believe that mucormycosis, which has an overall mortality rate of 50 per cent, could be triggered by the use of steroids, a life-saving treatment for severe and critically ill COVID-19 patients. He said steroids reduced inflammation in the lungs of COVID-19 patients and appeared to help stop some of the damage that could happen when the

body's immune system went into overdrive to fight off the novel coronavirus. He said steroids also reduced immunity and pushed up blood sugar levels in both diabetics and non-diabetic COVID-19 patients and it was feared that this fall in immunity could be triggering these cases of black fungus. However, Chief Medical Officer Dr Nepal Singh had recently announced officially that there was no case of black fungus as on date in Kanpur Nagar.



District Magistrate, City, Alok Tiwari inspecting private hospitals

Pioneer

Govt's bad jab policy will ensure 3rd wave: Rahul



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi on Saturday called for a national vaccine strategy and claimed that the Government's "disastrous" inoculation policy will "ensure a devastating third wave" in the country.

He also accused the prime minister of making "mother Ganga cry" after bodies of suspected coronavirus victims were found floating in the river.

"The Government of India's (GOI's) disastrous vaccine strategy will ensure a devastating third wave. It can't be repeated enough - India needs a proper vaccine strategy," he said on Twitter.

Tagging media reports claiming that over 2,000 bodies have been found in 1140 km area along the Ganga, he alleged, "One who used to say 'Ganga' has called him has made Mother Ganga cry."

Rahul and the Congress have been attacking the prime minister and his government over its vaccine strategy and handling of the pandemic.

Senior Congress leader and former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram too slammed the government over the issuance of 1.23 lakh death certificates between March 1 to May 10 this year in Gujarat and



said that government, in conjunction with some state governments, is suppressing the actual numbers of new infections and Covid-related deaths.

"The increase was an alarming number of about 65,000 death certificates. This increase cannot be explained as a natural annual increase in the number of deaths. It can only be attributed to a pandemic or any other natural disaster," the Congress leader said.

Hitting out at the government, Chidambaram said that the party's suspicion on the actual death toll were confirmed by the fact that hundreds of unidentified bodies have been found floating on the river Ganga and nearly 2,000 unidentified bodies have been found buried on the sands along the river Ganga.

"We have a strong suspicion that the Government of India, in conjunction with some State Governments, is suppressing the true numbers of new infections and 18 Covid-related deaths," he alleged.

He said, "If our suspicions are true, this is a grave misdeed

apart from being a national shame and a national tragedy."

Chidambaram said that Central government and the Gujarat government owe an explanation to the people of India. "We demand answers and an explanation," he added.

Chidambaram also said that the National Human Rights Commission should collect the true numbers from every state about the death certificate issued last year and this year.

In a separate tweet, Rahul Gandhi appealed to people to stay safe after cyclone Tauktae warning was issued by the government in many states. He also appealed to Congress workers to provide all assistance to those in need.

"May 15 Cyclone Alert has been issued in Kerala, Maharashtra, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Karnataka. Cyclone Tauktae is already causing heavy rains in many areas.

"I appeal to Congress workers to provide all possible assistance to those in need. Please stay safe," he said on Twitter.

Tauktae ravages Kerala's coastal areas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As torrential rain and fierce winds influenced by cyclonic storm 'Tauktae' (pronounced as 'Tau' 'Te') in the Arabian Sea have left a trail of destruction in Kerala's coastal areas on Saturday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the cyclone 'Tauktae' has intensified and likely to intensify into a 'very severe cyclonic storm' in the next 12 to 15 hours with a wind speed of 120 to 130 kmph gusting to 145 kmph. It is also expected to move north north-westwards and cross the Gujarat coast between Porbandar and Naliya as a very severe cyclonic storm around May 18 afternoon or evening. The IMD has placed a 'cyclone watch' for south Gujarat and Diu coasts.

This is the first cyclonic storm this year as India fights a deadly second wave of Covid, which has led to a frightening surge in the country's caseload over the last two months. Many flights have been cancelled for Kerala, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad due to bad weather on Saturday. Officials said that Tauktae intensified very rapidly from a depression to a cyclone on Friday. "There were two more cyclones in the past with similar tracks. One in 1933 between May 13 to 19 and another in 1975 between May 20 and 21," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reviewed the preparedness of states, central ministries and agencies concerned to deal with the situation arising out of cyclone Tauktae and asked them to take every possible measure to ensure that people are safely evacuated. He also called for

The IMD said the cyclonic storm will be a very severe cyclonic storm from May 16-18 and cross the Gujarat coast on May 18

ensuring maintenance of all essential services such as power, telecommunications, health and drinking and their immediate restoration in the event of damages caused to them, a statement said.

The IMD said the cyclonic storm will be a very severe cyclonic storm from May 16-18 and cross the Gujarat coast on May 18. Along with Gujarat, coastal areas of Goa, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have been put on alert after the IMD said the impact of the cyclone will be felt in the southeast, east-central and northeast Arabian Sea, Lakshadweep islands, Maldives area, triggering heavy rainfall in coastal and adjoining districts of all states.

"Very heavy to extremely heavy rainfall 'causing flash floods and landslides' over the coastal districts of Kerala, Karnataka and Goa till Sunday and Saurashtra, Kutch in Gujarat on Tuesday and Wednesday is expected, the IMD has said. Fishermen have been asked to avoid heading to Arabian Sea till Tuesday, tourism activities have been restricted and necessary precautions have been advised for naval operations in anticipation of rough sea. Tidal wave of about 2-3 m above

astronomical tide is likely to inundate coastal areas of Morbi, Kutch, Devbhoomi Dwarka and Jamnagar districts and 1-2 meters along Porbandar, Junagarh, Gir Somnath, Amreli, Bhavnagar and 0.5 to 1m over the remaining coastal districts of Gujarat, IMD has warned. The cyclone is likely to cause rain - of varying intensity - in parts of Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan too.

Due to the bad weather, Air carriers like Vistara and IndiGo have already issued a travel advisory to passengers travelling to and from Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Goa, and Ahmedabad. As per the advisory issued by Vistara on Saturday, flights to and from Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Goa and Ahmedabad might be impacted till May 17 due to the adverse weather conditions expected over the Arabian Sea triggered by cyclone Tauktae. Due to the adverse weather conditions expected over the Arabian Sea, flights to and from Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Goa and Ahmedabad might be impacted till May 17 due to the adverse weather conditions expected over the Arabian Sea triggered by cyclone Tauktae. Due to the adverse weather conditions expected over the Arabian Sea, flights to and from Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Goa and Ahmedabad might be impacted till May 17 due to the adverse weather conditions expected over the Arabian Sea triggered by cyclone Tauktae.

Visuals showed that from Thiruvananthapuram in the south to Kasargod in the north, hundreds of families living close to the sea have had to abandon their homes and rush to relief camps set up by the state government in the face of massive sea-incursions. Several houses close to the sea in districts like Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Thrissur, Ernakulam and Alappuzha have been partially or completely damaged by the impact of the cyclone.

In cities like Kochi, Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram, there are widespread reports of waterlogging due to overflowing drains and canals. Rupturing of trees and electric posts have resulted in power outages and damage to vehicles.

Airports Authority of India (AAI) has took stock of the preparedness of western coastal airports in Southern Region and Western Region airports through a Video Conference and directed the concerned airports to take all precautions and plan preparedness.

According to the IMD, over Devbhoomi Dwarka, Kutch, Porbandar, Junagarh, Gir Somnath and Jamnagar

districts of Gujarat extensive damage is expected on May 18. There could be total destruction of thatched houses or extensive damage to kutcha houses; some damage to pucca houses; threat from flying objects; bending/ uprooting of power and communication poles; major damage to kutcha and pucca roads; flooding of escape routes; minor disruption of railways; overhead power lines and signalling systems; widespread damage to salt pans and standing crops etc. Similar damage is also expected in Amreli, Rajkot and Morbi districts.

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Experts for action as WhatsApp privacy policy comes into effect

IANs ■ NEW DELHI

With the controversial WhatsApp privacy policy coming into effect from Saturday for its over 2 billion users, including more than 400 million in India, industry experts emphasised that the Government must implement stricter data privacy rules and restrain the Facebook-owned app as was done while banning Chinese apps to protect the sovereignty of the country.

Giving an interim solace for those who do not accept the new policy, WhatsApp has said that its users will not immediately lose their accounts or face curtailed functionalities on the platform on May 15, but they will have to eventually go through limited functions if they fail to accept the new norms in the due course of time.

On Thursday, a senior Ministry of Electronics and IT official said during an Assocham event that the Government is pro-actively looking at a best possible action over the new WhatsApp privacy policy.

MeitY Special Secretary and Financial Advisor Jyoti Arora stated that the ministry is aware about the fact that Germany has banned the privacy policy of WhatsApp.

"There is no judicial order in favour of WhatsApp. In view of the unlawful nature of this privacy policy, the government should restrain WhatsApp as was done while banning Chinese apps to protect sovereignty of India," said Advocate Virag Gupta, who is arguing K.N. Govindacharya's matter before the Delhi High Court for disclosure of details of designated officers of social media companies.

India will have 51.6 crore vaccine doses by end of July: Vardhan

IANs ■ NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Saturday said India will have 51.6 crore Covid-19 vaccine doses by July end including the 18 crore doses already administered.

Vardhan reviewed the public health response to Covid-19 and progress of vaccination with Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

These states are depicting a higher growth rate in the number of daily cases, rise in positivity, high mortality and saturation of healthcare capacity.

The Minister highlighted the critical challenges faced by the states.

Vardhan expressed a strong view that the present plateauing of Covid cases should not be taken as a sign for complacency but as a breathing space to expand, revamp and improve Health Infrastructure.

State health administrators were advised to increase ICU



and oxygenated beds, undertake oxygen audits, take stock of availability of medicines in the state and strengthen their medical workforce.

A common point of consensus among the state health Ministers was that vaccines had resulted in milder forms of Covid thereby preventing loss of precious lives.

Taking note of the fact that all the states require more vaccines to expand their vaccine coverage, Vardhan said, "Production is being steadily ramped up to cater to

increased demand while vaccines that are being produced now continue to be equitably apportioned and swiftly sent to states/UTs."

Detailing the ramping up of vaccine production, he said, "We will have 51.6 crore vaccine doses by the end of July including the 18 crore doses already administered. Sputnik has been approved.

This along with the slated approval of the new vaccine of Zydus Cadila, Serum Institute of India- Novavax vaccine, Bharat Biotech's nasal vaccine

and the Genova mRNA vaccine will push the availability of Covid vaccines to 216 crore doses in the August-December period."

Union Minister of State for Health, Ashwini Kumar Choubey assured his colleagues in states that the Union government will listen to all their requirements and try to fulfill them as per capacity.

States were advised to ensure complete utilization of available vaccination slots for 45+ age-group, health care workers, frontline workers with awareness campaigns for conveying the importance of completing the second dose of vaccine.

It was reiterated that States need to focus on reduction of vaccine wastage as that will be factored in subsequent allocations to that state.

States were advised to constitute a 2/3-member team at State level on the lines of the dedicated team at Union Health Ministry to regularly coordinate with manufacturers for timely supplies of vaccine through 'other than government of India channel' and also to coordinate with private hospitals for their procurement.

The Union Health Ministry has already shared the list of private hospitals along with doses contracted and supplied with state/UTs.

CRPF directs med wing to brace up for 3rd Covid wave

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Amid estimates of prediction of a third wave of Covid-19, the CRPF headquarters has directed its medical directorate to prepare for this and keep the infrastructure created during the first wave of the pandemic as also the equipment fully operational to face the eventuality.

The whole nation is hit by the second wave of Covid and the CRPF has also not been left untouched by this. During the course of the pandemic, the paramilitary has put in all the efforts to strengthen medical infrastructure which was developed during the first wave and has succeeded to some extent, officials said.

"Factoring in the prediction of the third wave, the Competent Authority has desired that top priority must be given to maintenance of infrastructure/equipment developed so far and they should be kept functional and in working order, and regularly reviewed and audited in a compact manner, a senior official said.



The headquarters has also directed all the sectors, medical directorates and composite hospitals to take requisite action and submit a report of action taken for perusal of the Director General Kuldiep Singh, they said.

In a record of sorts, the 3.25 lakh-strong force has completed the vaccination against Covid-19 with both the doses barring about 8,500 personnel who could not be

administered the doses due to temporary postings or comorbidities. Those left from vaccination are being sought to be inoculated in top priority after stabilising their comorbidities fixing posting issues.

The CRPF is the lead agency for counter-insurgency, anti-terror operations and law and order duties. It has a strong deployment in Jammu and Kashmir, Naxal-hit States and the Northeast.

Plea in SC seeks using PM Cares Fund for oxygen plants, vaccines

IANs ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been moved in the Supreme Court seeking directions to utilise PM Cares Fund for the purpose of installation of oxygen plants, procurement of Covid-19 vaccines and other essential equipment at 738 district hospitals across the country.

The plea added that it was already announced on April 25 that PM Cares Fund would allocate money to set up 551 oxygen plants using pressure swing adsorption at public health facilities.

The plea has been filed by advocate Vipul Sharma also urged the top court to issue directions to the states/UTs to ensure that all the private/charitable hospitals within their jurisdiction to procure, installed and commissioned the subject medical plant with essential backups and thereby, have become self-sufficient in having more than adequate inhouse basic and essential life support service of medical oxygen within the shortest possible time.

The petitioner also sought

a stay on April 24 notification issued by the Centre to the extent it capped the exemption from import duty granted to medical equipment, for a period of three months.

The plea said: "Three-month time period is too short a period from the standpoint of logistics involved in importing these highly sophisticated medical equipment in India by over 300 concerned notable hospitals throughout the country."

"Pass appropriate urgent directions to the respondents to ensure forthwith setting up of electric and all other kinds of crematoriums in all cities within their respective administration and also they also forthwith undertake to maintain/improve the existing electric crematoriums all of which have been used much beyond their respective capacities and may soon get non-functional," added the plea.

The plea also asked the top court to direct states to set up electric and other crematoriums in all cities and additionally, maintain and improve the condition of existing facilities.

Covid situation in country stabilising, says Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With 11 States reporting over one lakh active Covid-19 cases while eight have active cases between 50,000 and one lakh and 17 have less than 50,000 cases, India is presenting a mixed trend of Covid-19 situation in the country even as the Government on Saturday asserted that overall, the situation is stabilising.

India in a day recorded 3,26,098 Covid-19 cases that took the tally to 2,43,72,907, while 3,890 new fatalities pushed the death toll to 2,66,207.

The Central Government officials at a press conference here also took a dig at the Delhi Government for reporting Single-dose vaccination coverage among healthcare workers below the national average of 89 per cent.

"Single dose vaccination coverage is 95 per cent in Rajasthan, 96 per cent in Madhya Pradesh and 99 per cent in Chhattisgarh. In Delhi, it stands at 78 per cent, which is 11 per cent below the national average. It should be taken to above 95 per cent," Dr VK Paul,

Niti Aayog (Health) member said.

Similarly, he said, overall single-dose vaccination coverage among frontline workers stands at 82 per cent in the country. It is 93 per cent in Gujarat, 91 per cent in Rajasthan, and 90 per cent in Madhya Pradesh -- well above the national average. He said, it stands at 80 per cent in Delhi which has been complaining of shortage of vaccines for its citizens.

Talking about the overall Covid-19 situation in the country, he said it is stabilizing and the government will work towards ensuring further stabilization.

"Some states have shown a clear pattern, in some states there are concerns and in some others there is a trend towards an increase. It is a mixed picture. But overall, the situation is stabilising and we hope and we will work towards ensuring further stabilisation and rapid decline of this pandemic."

He said that ten states account for 85 per cent of the total coronavirus cases in the country.

The official said 11 states have over one lakh active

Covid-19 cases, 17 have less than 50,000 cases while eight have active cases between 50,000 and one lakh.

Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh, which are recording a high number of novel coronavirus cases, are also reporting decline in the number of active cases.

Twenty-four states have a COVID-19 positivity rate of more than 15 per cent while Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Daman and Diu, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh have reported a major drop in case positivity, he said.

The active cases have reduced to 36,73,802 and comprise 15.07 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has improved to 83.83 per cent, he stated.

Law Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health, said a total of 18.04 crore vaccine doses have been administered so far in the country. This includes 12.74 crore people above the age of 45 years, 1.62 crore healthcare workers, 2.25 crore frontline workers and 42.59 lakh people between the age of 18-44 years who have received their first dose.

110 medical cadets commissioned as officers join battle against Covid-19

IANs ■ NEW DELHI

The medical cadets of the Armed forces commissioned as Medical Officers on Saturday have joined the battle against Covid-19. They will be leaving immediately to join as interns in 31 Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) hospitals across the country, which are also designated for Covid care.

The Defence Ministry said 110 medical cadets, including 21 female cadets, of the 55th batch of the Armed Forces Medical College were commissioned as Medical Officers into the Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) on Saturday. The cadets were commissioned by Commandant, AFMC Lt Gen Nardeep Naithani in a brief ceremony. Ninety four cadets were commissioned into the Indian Army, 10 in the Indian Air Force and six in the Navy. The Passing Out Parade had to be called off for the first time since 1982, keeping in mind the Covid-19 restrictions.

In his commissioning

address, Lt Gen Naithani congratulated the newly commissioned officers for joining AFMS which is the finest integrated medical organisation in the country. He complimented the parents of the students for the success of their children. He added that it has the unique distinction of having the entire batch that entered AFMC in 2016 graduating together with 100 percent success, which by itself is the best tribute to the teachers at AFMC.

The Commandant reminded the graduating batch that they were joining the medical profession at a time when the country was passing through a difficult phase. He exhorted them to use their knowledge and skills acquired at AFMC to provide the best possible care to their patients as they join the nation's battle against Covid-19.

Lt Gen Naithani expressed confidence that given their academic rigour and training, the newly commissioned Medical Officers would always measure up to the highest standards expected from military doctors.

"The increase was an alarming number of about 65,000 death certificates. This increase cannot be explained as a natural annual increase in the number of deaths. It can only be attributed to a pandemic or any other natural disaster," the Congress leader said.

He said that the Congress had independently verified the two numbers referred to for the period of 71 days.

"We have collected the numbers from 33 districts (including the cities), the sum of the number of the death certificates nearly tallies with the numbers published by Divya Bhaskar -- 1,23,873 in 2021 versus 58,068 in 2020.

"During the period March 1, 2021 to May 10, 2021, the government of Gujarat has officially admitted to only 4,218 Covid-related deaths," he said.

"The difference between the increase in the number of death certificates (65,805) and the official Covid-related deaths (4,218) must be explained. It cannot be explained as 'natural annual increase' or 'due to other causes'. We have a strong suspicion that the bulk of the increased number of deaths is due to Covid and the state government is suppressing the true number of 18 Covid-related deaths," Chidambaram said.

Bengal announces full lockdown till May 30

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

With the number of corona cases galloping up to about 22,000 cases per day, the Bengal Government on Saturday announced a full lockdown till May 30.

"The Government has taken the steps in view of rising number of cases," Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay said.

Bandopadhyay said the State would go for a full lockdown whereby all the private offices, schools and colleges would remain closed. The bazars selling vegetables, fruit etc would remain open as usual from 7-10 am every day while the local trains, metro services, inter-state bus and train and ferry services would remain closed he said. The local trains had already been suspended last week.

While intra-state goods trucks movement would be



People sit on the top of the buses to go to their native places, ahead of Covid-induced complete lockdown, at a bus stand in Howrah on Saturday

PTI

restricted to essential supplies no private cars, taxis and auto movement would be allowed, he maintained adding the auto repairing shops and petrol pumps would however remain open. The banks would function from 10 am to 2 pm and cinema, bars eateries, spas, malls and parlours would also remain closed he maintained adding anyone violating the

orders would be dealt with strongly under pandemic laws.

Meanwhile, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday lost her second brother Ashim Banerjee to corona infection. He was undergoing treatment at a city private hospital in South Kolkata. He was cremated at the designated Nimtalla Mahashman (funeral) Ghat.

63 more die of Covid in J&K, toll 3,090

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the arrival of the high level team of experts from New Delhi to study the high mortality rate of Covid-19 patients in Jammu, 63 more patients succumbed to the deadly virus taking the tally of deaths to 3,090 while total active positive cases stood at 51,475 as 3,677 fresh cases of coronavirus were detected across the region on Saturday.

Significantly, 4,140 more Covid-19 patients recovered and were discharged from various hospitals including 1,086 from Jammu Division and 3,054 from Kashmir Division.

Meanwhile, the corona curfew was also extended by the UT administration till May 24.

On the other hand to cover the left over population in the age group of 45 plus across Jammu district special vaccination camps are being organised across 100 centres in Jammu to vaccinate them.

So far around 98% of estimated 45+ population in Jammu

given first shot till date.

According to a statement issued by the office of Principal, Government Medical College, Jammu, "As per the recent sequencing data analysis of positive Covid-19 patients received from NCDC, New Delhi, B.1.617 variant is responsible for the recent surge in Covid-19 cases in Jammu division.

Dr. Shashi Sudhan Sharma said that the Department of Microbiology at GMC, Jammu besides testing of Covid-19 samples is also coordinating with NCDC New Delhi for routine sequencing of positive sample and as per the latest report received from them UK Variant was reported in >60% samples in March, 2021.

However, in April the %age of UK Variant dropped to 47% and B.1.617 increased from 5.8% to 38%.

Dr. Sharma further added that till date 434 samples have been sent to NCDC from Jammu Division among which a report of 64 samples is still awaited.

Goa Govt takes control of Covid admissions in private hospitals

Panaji: The Goa Government on Saturday decided to take over the rights to admission in all the 21 private hospitals in the State treating Covid-19 patients from May 17 citing various violations of norms.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said the move will ease the load on facilities like the Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMCH). A total of 75 Covid-19 patients had died during treatment at the GMCH in the last four days, ringing the alarm bells in the administration.

Explaining the rationale behind the State Government's decision, Sawant said private hospitals were not reserving 50 per cent of their total beds for the treatment of Covid-19 patients. "We have also come across the instances wherein private hospitals were not providing Covid-19 treatment under the DDSY scheme (the medical insurance scheme of the state government)," he told reporters.

There are instances wherein private hospitals were found charging patients exorbitantly, he said. Sawant said the government will only take over the rights of admissions in these hospitals while their management will remain with their owners. "There are 21 private hospitals which have been providing treatment to Covid-19 patients in Goa," he said.

The chief minister said Covid-19 treatment in private hospitals would be covered under the DDSY (Deen Dayal Swasthya Seva Yojana) scheme. "We will ensure that 50 per cent of beds in the private hospitals will be kept reserved for treating Covid-19 patients. This will help to ease the load on facilities like the Goa Medical College and Hospital," Sawant added.

Goa sees 3,512 recoveries

PTI ■ PANAJI

Goa on Saturday reported 3,512 recoveries against 1,957 fresh coronavirus positive cases, while 58 patients died, a health department official said.

Goa's overall caseload now stands at 1,34,542 while the death toll reached 2,056, he said.

A total of 3,512 patients recovered during the day, taking the number of recoveries in Goa so far to 1,01,712, the official said, adding the coastal state is now left with 30,774 active cases.

With 5,571 new tests, the total number of samples examined so far in Goa went up to 7,53,271, he added.

Goa's Covid-19 figures are as follows: Positive cases 1,34,542, new cases 1,957, death toll 2,056, discharged 1,01,712, active cases 30,774, samples tested till date 7,53,271.

No decision yet on lockdown in Tripura, says CM Biplab Deb

Agartala: Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb said on Saturday that no decision has been taken yet on imposing lockdown in any part of the state, even as Covid-19 cases continued to jump.

Speaking to reporters while visiting Covid care facilities in the Sepahijala district, Deb said such a decision is taken when healthcare experts and the administration collectively feel the necessity.

"There is no decision on lockdown yet," he said, adding that all updates will be made public.

In the Sipahijala district, 200 new beds have been prepared at two Covid care facilities,

and more than 1,400 beds are being prepared at two other centres.

Meanwhile, a door-to-door survey has started in three containment zones in the Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC) area.

The State Government has decided to conduct rapid antigen tests in all houses in the AMC area, Health Department officials said.

Tripura recorded 449 new Covid-19 cases on Saturday, pushing the tally to 40,055.

The number of active cases climbed to 3,781.

With three more fatalities, all in the West Tripura district, the death toll rose to 426. **PTI**



Jammu & Kashmir highway wears a deserted look during lockdown, on the outskirts of Jammu on Saturday

PTI

59,073 more patients discharged in Maha

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

The daily Covid-19 infections dropped further to 34,848 in Maharashtra, while the number of daily deaths surged to 910 in the State.

A day after daily deaths dropped from 850 to 695 and number of infections dropped from 42,582 to 39,923, Maharashtra logged 910 deaths and 34,848 new cases.

With 960 new deaths, the total number of deaths in the state climbed from 79,552 to 80,512. Similarly, with 34,848 new infections, the total number of cases climbed from 53,09,215 to 53,44,063.

As 59,073 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery,

the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year went up from 47,07,980 to 47,67,053. The recovery rate in the State went up from 88.68 per cent to 89.2 per cent.

The total "active cases" in the state dropped from 5,19,254 to 4,94,032. The fatality rate in the state stood at 1.51 per cent.

With 62 fresh deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai increased from 14,102 to 14,164, while the infected cases went up by a relatively low 1450 to trigger a jump in the infections from 6,84,845 to 6,86,295.

The situation in Pune improved a bit as the "active cases", which had come below

one lakh mark early this week, improved once again as the "active cases" dropped from 96,028 to 93,245.

Nagpur with 36,560 active cases stood second in the state, followed by Mumbai (34,083), Thane (29,654), Ahmednagar (30,221), Satara (21,283), Nashik (20,218), Solapur (21,093), Beed (12,076), Jalgaon (11,016), Chandrapur (11,008), Latur (8,799), Aurangabad (8043), Parbhani (7222), Jalna (7123), Osmanabad (6108) and Buldhana (6295). Of the 3,08, 39,404140 samples sent to various laboratories across the State so far, 53,44,603 have tested positive (17.33 per cent) for Covid-19 until Saturday.

FADNAVIS' LETTER TO SONIA GANDHI ON COVID-19

Maha Cong hits back, dares Fadnavis show courage to show mirror to Modi

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Miffed by a letter written by former chief minister and senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis to Congress president Sonia Gandhi advising her party not to indulge in politics over vaccination but to play the role of a constructive Opposition, Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole on Saturday dared Fadnavis to show courage and write a similar letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the Covid-19 situation in the country.

Hours after Fadnavis shot off a four-page letter to the Congress president, Patole charged that by writing a letter to Sonia Gandhi, the BJP leader was trying to push under the carpet the "sins" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of converting the country into a cremation ground.

Charging that the Modi government had miserably failed in handling the Covid-19 crisis in the country, Patole said: "Rahul Gandhi had warned way back on February 12, 2020 of a Corona Tsunami, but BJP leaders like Modi and Fadnavis did not take him seriously. The result is that a staggering 4 lakh infections and more than 4,000 deaths are being reported every

day in the country. The Modi government's arrogance and mismanagement of affairs is responsible for the curvy situation in the country"

"By writing a letter to Sonia Gandhi, Modi is trying to push under the carpet the "sins" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of converting the country into a cremation ground.... Instead of writing a letter to the Congress president, Fadnavis should be asking his party's chief minister as to how 'Navami Gange' has turned into 'Shavami Gange', Patole said.

Dubbing Modi as a "liar" for claims that the Centre had provided more than stocks of Remdesivir and Oxygen to states, Patole said that the Supreme Court had called the BJP's bluff by passing strictures over its false claiming in handling the Covid-19. "The Centre had claimed that utilising money from the PM's Care fund, it would set up Oxygen plants. But not even one plant has been set up in Maharashtra. In fact, Maharashtra which needs 1750 metric tonnes of medical oxygen, the state itself produces 1,200 metric tonnes of Oxygen. Such is the sad state of affairs that the Centre is not able to provide the remaining 550 MT of Oxygen to the state," the

state Congress chief said.

Charging that the BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh were hiding information relating to Covid-19 infections and deaths, Patole asked: "Please let us as to how many Covid-19 tests in these BJP-ruled states. How many patients are getting Oxygen? How many deaths have taken place in the BJP-ruled states? Fadnavis should write a letter to the BJP president and statistics in this regard"

Patole said that there have been 1,23,871 deaths in just 71 days in Gujarat, the government there pegged the number of deaths at 4,218, and blamed the ego and greed of the BJP government at the Centre for the mess. "The BJP-ruled state governments of Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Bihar are using JCBs to remove bodies of the people who died of Covid. And the bodies are floating in river Ganga," he said.

Patole said that while the Centre had claimed it had made an allocation of ₹35,000 crore, the private vaccine manufacturers were selling vaccines to the centre at ₹150 per vaccine, ₹400 per vaccine to the state government and Rs 600 to individuals.

Govt, admin, public — all dropped guard after first Covid wave, says RSS chief

PTI ■ NEW DELHI:

After the first wave of Covid-19, the Government, administration and public dropped their guard which led to the current situation, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said on Saturday and urged people to stay positive and proactive to fight the pandemic.

Addressing a lecture series 'Positivity Unlimited', Bhagwat said the country should stay united and work as a team in these testing times, instead of pointing fingers at each other. "We are facing this situation because, whether it is the Government, administration or public, everyone dropped their guard after the first wave despite indications from doctors," he said.

Bhagwat said there is talk of a third wave. But, "we will not be scared. We shall stand like a rock."

"We have to stay positive and take precautions to keep ourselves Covid-19 negative in the present situation," he said.

The RSS chief said that this is not an appropriate time to point fingers and all should avoid making irrational remarks.

Won't allow inimical elements to disturb peace in Valley over Gaza war: J&K Police

Jammu: Jammu & Kashmir police on Saturday warned 'inimical' elements against disturbing public peace and order in the Kashmir valley in the garb of prevailing situation in Palestine.

A young mural artist, Mudasir Gul, was also picked up by the J&K police as he had painted a wall graffiti on the request of few local residents in Padshahi bagh area.

Gul had reportedly painted a face of a sobbing woman, wearing Palestine's flag as the headscarf, and wrote "We Are Palestine". Local reports claimed, Gul was directed by the local police officers to deface the graffiti on his own. Few other residents in the area who had participated in raising slogans and attempted to stage a demonstration in solidarity with Palestine were also rounded up by the police. Posting a series of tweets J&K

Police said, "it is keeping a very close watch on elements who are attempting to leverage the unfortunate situation in Palestine to disturb public peace and order in the Kashmir valley".

Claiming that restoring peace remains their top priority J&K Police in another tweet said, "We are a professional force and are sensitive to public anguish. But J&K police has a legal responsibility to ensure law and order as well. It, however, wouldn't allow cynical encashment of the public anger to trigger violence, lawlessness and disorder on Kashmir streets". "Expressing opinion is a freedom but engineering and inciting violence on streets is unlawful. All irresponsible social media comments that results in actual violence and breaking of law including Covid protocol will attract legal action". **PNS**

ISRO team suggests measures to restart O₂ production at Sterlite Copper

Chennai: An expert team from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Saturday visited Vedanta Ltd's copper smelter plant Sterlite Copper and suggested measures to set right the technical snag that halted oxygen production, the company said.

Oxygen production at Sterlite Copper located in Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu was stopped on Friday due to

a technical snag. According to Vedanta, an expert team from ISRO came to the smelter plant to support the ongoing efforts and collaborate with the company's technical team. "They have suggested some measures to help rectify the production snag. This has helped fast track the repair process for which we are thankful to the local administration, who was instrumental in facilitating this coopera-

tive effort to recommence our oxygen production," Vedanta said.

On Friday the company said a technical snag had developed in the cold box in the oxygen plant, leading to a temporary pause in production.

"The possibility of minor technical fluctuations was anticipated given that the plant has been unattended for three years," the company said in a

statement.

On Thursday the company said one of its oxygen plants commenced production from May 12. "The first tanker carrying 4.8 tons of liquid oxygen is going to Tirunelveli/Thoothukudi. We will be dispatching two oxygen tankers on a daily basis to begin with, and gradually scale this up as we expand production," Vedanta had said. **IANS**



Children enjoying in the Arabian Sea at Badhwar Park area. As per IMD, depression in the Arabian Sea likely to intensify into cyclonic storm 'Tauktae' on Saturday

PTI

Govt relaxes certain norms to fast track approvals for imported cylinders, pressure vessels for medical O₂

New Delhi: The Government on Saturday eases certain norms under Gas Cylinders Rules, 2016 to fast track approvals for imported cylinders and pressure vessels for storage and transportation of medical oxygen amid rising Covid cases.

The relaxations would be valid for six months or till further orders of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), an official statement said.

The department said that the certification of Petroleum and Explosive Safety Organisation (PESO) will not be mandatory before importing consignment of oxygen cylinders, and containers.

The certification of PESO will be required before use of the oxygen cylinders, which entails weight and hydro testing, it added.

"The Indian missions should, however, ensure that the oxygen cylinders should comply with India or international standards before shipment," it said. In case of filled cylinders, the agency exporting to India would have to certify that the oxygen filled in the cylinder is of such purity and concentration that is fit for medical use.

The certification would be attested by the Indian mission in the exporting country and soon upon arrival in India, such filled cylinders will be inspected on sample basis by an

empanelled agency of PESO. "All the filled cylinders must be verified for quality of gas filled therein under the supervision of medical/ Food and Drugs Controllers and if quality of gas conforms to their requirement of medical oxygen, cylinders may be sent directly to hospitals for use," the department said.

Regarding PSA (pressure swing adsorption) installations at hospitals with filling facilities or at COVID centres, it said PSA plants where generated oxygen is directly supplied to hospital and no filling of cylinders is taking place, in such cases the facilities do not need any permission or license under PESO rules. **PTI**

Gehlot: Create special strategy to prevent infection in Jaipur

Jaipur: Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has expressed his deep concern over the continuous increase in the number of Covid patients in the State Capital, and directed the officials to formulate a special plan to prevent the spread of infection in Jaipur. He directed to further strengthen the arrangement zone, more testing, contact tracing etc. in the entire district to control the situation of Covid infection in Jaipur.

Gehlot was conducting a high level review on Friday night through video conference on other related topics including Covid compression, lockdown and availability of resources. He said the number of active cases in Jaipur has



increased from 18 thousand to more than 51 thousand in the last three weeks and it is a matter of great concern to keep the positive rate around 30 percent continuously. "We need to devise a new strategy for effective prevention on this."

Israeli airstrike on Gaza home kills 10

AP ■ GAZA CITY

An Israeli air raid in Gaza City killed at least 10 Palestinians, mostly children, early on Saturday in the deadliest single strike since the battle with Gaza's militant Hamas rulers erupted earlier this week. Both sides pressed for an advantage as cease-fire efforts gathered strength.

The latest outburst of violence began in Jerusalem and has spread across the region, with Jewish-Arab clashes and rioting in mixed cities of Israel. There were also widespread Palestinian protests Friday in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces shot and killed 11 people.

The spiralling violence has raised fears of a new Palestinian "intifada," or uprising at a time when there have been no peace talks in years. Palestinians were set to mark Nakba (Catastrophe) Day on Saturday, when they commemorate the estimated 7,00,000 people who fled or were driven from their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its creation. That raised the possibility of even more unrest.

US diplomat Hady Amr arrived on Friday as part of Washington's efforts to de-escalate the conflict, and the UN Security Council was set to meet Sunday. But Israel turned down an Egyptian proposal for a one-year truce that Hamas

rulers had accepted, an Egyptian official said Friday on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations.

Since Monday night, Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, which has pounded the Gaza Strip with strikes. In Gaza, at least 126 people have been killed, including 31 children and 20 women; in Israel, seven people have been killed, including a 6-year-old boy and a soldier.

Rocket fire from Gaza and Israel's bombardment of the blockaded Palestinian territory continued into early Saturday, when an airstrike on a three-story house in a refugee camp in Gaza City killed eight children and two women from an extended family.

Mohammed Abu Hatab told reporters his wife and five children had gone to celebrate the Eid al-Fitr holiday with relatives. She and three of the children, aged 6 to 14, were killed, while an 11-year-old is missing. Only his 5-month-old son Omar is known to have survived.

Children's toys and a Monopoly board game could be seen among the rubble, as well as plates of uneaten food from the holiday gathering.

"There was no warning," said Jamal Al-Naji, a neighbour living in the same building. "You filmed people eating and then you bombed them?" he



An Israeli airstrike hits the high-rise building housing *The Associated Press'* offices in Gaza City on Saturday

AP

said, addressing Israel. "Why are you confronting us? Go and confront the strong people!"

Shortly afterward, Hamas said it fired a salvo of rockets at southern Israel in response to the airstrike.

A furious Israeli barrage early Friday killed a family of six in their house and sent thousands fleeing to UN-run shelters. The military said the operation involved 160 warplanes dropping some 80 tons of explosives over the course of 40 minutes and succeeded in destroying a vast tunnel network used by Hamas.

Palestinian march in Paris defies ban, is met by tear gas

Paris: French riot police fired tear gas and used water cannons Saturday in Paris as protesters supporting Palestinians in the Gaza Strip defied a ban on marching in the French capital. Hundreds of people marched peacefully in other cities in France and elsewhere in Europe.

In Paris, protesters scattered and played cat-and-mouse with security forces in

the city's northern neighborhoods after their starting point for a planned march was blocked.

Paris police chief Didier Lallemand had ordered 4,200 security forces into the streets and closed shops around the kick-off point for the march in a working-class neighborhood after an administrative court confirmed the ban due to fears of violence. **AP**

Japan, US, France hold military drill eyeing China presence

AP ■ KIRISHIMA TRAINING AREA (JAPAN)

Dozens of Japanese, American and French troops landed amid pouring rain from a CH-47 transport helicopter onto a grassy field at a training area in southern Japan, part of Saturday's joint scenario of defending a remote island from an enemy invasion.

The three nations' first joint drills on Japanese soil — dubbed "ARC21" — which began Tuesday — come as they seek step up military ties amid growing Chinese assertiveness in the region.

Japanese soldiers and their counterparts from the French army and the U.S. Marine Corps also conducted an urban warfare drill using a concrete building elsewhere at the Japanese Self-Defense Force's Kirishima Training Area in the southern Miyazaki prefecture. Around 200 troops took part in Saturday's exercises.

On Saturday, the three countries were also joined by Australia in an expanded naval exercise involving 11 warships in the East China Sea, where

tensions with China are rising around the island of Taiwan.

The drills come as Japan looks to bolster its military capabilities amid a deepening territorial row with China in regional seas. Japan is increasingly concerned about Chinese activity in and around Japanese-claimed waters surrounding the Japanese-controlled Senkaku islands, which Beijing also claims and calls Diaoyu. Since the end of World War II, Japan's constitution has limited the use of force to self defense. Japan in recent years has continued to expand its military role, capability and budget.

Japan's Vice Defense Minister Yasuhide Nakayama, who observed the exercise, stressed the significance of French participation in the joint exercises regularly held between Japan and the U.S., and often with Australia.

"It was a valuable opportunity for the Japanese Self-Defense Force to maintain and strengthen its strategic capability necessary to defend our remote islands," Nakayama said.

UN chief: Foreign fighters in Libya are violating cease-fire

United Nations: The UN chief said foreign fighters and mercenaries remain in Libya in violation of last October's cease-fire agreement and called for their withdrawal and an end to violations of the UN arms embargo, saying these are "critical elements" for lasting peace in the north African country and the region.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a report to the UN Security Council obtained Friday by *The Associated Press* that the smooth transfer of power to a new interim government, which took power in March, "brings renewed hope for the reunification of the country and its institutions and for a lasting peace."

But he said progress must continue on the political, economic and security tracks to enable elections to go ahead on December 24. Libya has been wracked by chaos since a NATO-backed uprising toppled longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011, and split the oil-rich North African country between a U.N.-supported government in the capital, Tripoli, and rival authorities based in the country's east, each backed by armed groups and foreign governments. **AP**

Saudis to host meeting of Muslim nations' FMs

Dubai: Saudi Arabia has called for foreign ministers of the world's largest body of Muslim nations to hold a meeting Sunday. The gathering is to discuss Israeli acts of violence against Palestinians and the Israeli police's use of force against protesters at Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

The kingdom will host the virtual summit, gathering ministers of the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation "to discuss the Israeli aggression in the Palestinian territory," particularly acts of violence in the vicinity of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the body said Saturday.

The Saudi-headquartered OIC includes countries Iran, Turkey, Indonesia and a range of Muslim majority nations.

The sanctity of Al-Aqsa mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites, is a sensitive and emotive issue for Muslims around the world. The OIC was formed 51 years ago in response to a Jewish extremist arson attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in east Jerusalem. **AP**

Indian-American policy expert Neera Tanden appointed WH senior adviser

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Indian-American policy expert Neera Tanden has been appointed as a senior adviser to US President Joe Biden, two months after she withdrew her nomination as Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget due to stiff opposition from Republican senators.

Tanden has been entrusted with two tasks — launch a review of the US Digital Service, and plan contingencies that could result from the Supreme Court's consideration of Republican lawsuits seeking to strike down the Affordable Care Act.

Tanden, 50, is currently the president and CEO of a progressive think-tank, Center for American Progress (CAP). She expected to join the White House team on Monday.

"Neera's intellect, tenacity, and political savvy will be an asset to the Biden administration," CAP founder and director John Podesta said.

He said the White House has made remarkable progress combating numerous once-in-a-generation challenges — from vaccinating millions of Americans to delivering real

Iran's hard-line judiciary chief registers for presidential run

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's judiciary chief, a hard-line cleric linked to mass executions in 1988, registered on Saturday to run in the Islamic Republic's presidential election next month, a vote that comes as negotiators struggle to resuscitate Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

The cleric, Ebrahim Raisi, is among the more prominent hopefuls — he garnered nearly 16 million votes in the 2017 election. He lost that race to Iran's relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani, whose administration struck the atomic accord.

Raisi's close ties to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his popularity — due partly to his televised anti-corruption campaign — could make him a favorite in the election. Analysts already believe that hard-liners enjoy an edge as Rouhani is term limited from running again.

The public has widely grown disenchanted with Rouhani's administration after 2018, when then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the nuclear deal.

Raisi, wearing a black turban that identifies him in Shiite tradition as a direct descendant of Islam's Prophet Muhammad, offered fiery remarks to jour-



Ebrahim Raisi, head of Iran's judiciary leaves a news conference after registering his candidacy for the June 18 presidential elections at the elections headquarters of the Interior Ministry in Tehran, Iran on Saturday

AP

nalists at the Interior Ministry as he registered. He vowed that if he wins the June 18 vote, corruption will be "dried up."

"Those who founded and partnered with the current situation can't claim they can change it," Raisi said. "People are complaining about the current situation. They are upset. Their disappointment is on the rise. This should be stopped."

The 60-year-old sought to strike a populist note, urging the public to donate to his campaign and "turn their homes into election headquarters" as he wasn't wealthy.

"We need individuals who believe in change," he said.

Raisi had been named as a

possible successor to Iran's 82-year-old supreme leader, leading some to suggest he wouldn't run in the race. His entry immediately saw some hard-liners announce they would withdraw, raising Raisi's prominence further among the candidates.

A February telephone survey conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Toronto-based organization IranPoll found Raisi with an approval rating of 27 per cent, the highest among likely candidates. The survey found 35 per cent undecided; the poll interviewed 1,006 Iranians and had a margin of error of 3.09 per cent.

GLOBE TROTTER

12 KILLED IN TORNADO STRIKES IN CHINA

Beijing: Twelve people were killed and over 300 injured when two powerful tornadoes walloped Chinese cities of Wuhan and Suzhou on Friday night, leaving a trail of destruction of houses.

PAK: 11 DEAD AS VEHICLE PLUNGES INTO CANAL

Lahore: Eleven people, including seven children, of the same family were drowned after their vehicle plunged into a canal in Pakistan's Punjab province, rescue authorities said. The accident happened on Friday in Sheikhpura district, some 50 kms from Lahore, when the vehicle heading towards Khanqah Dogran from Qila Didar Singh skidded off the road and plunged into the canal.

ETHIOPIA AGAIN DELAYS NATIONAL ELECTION

Nairobi: Ethiopia has again delayed its national election after some opposition parties said they wouldn't take part and as conflict in the country's Tigray region means no vote is being held there. The head of the national elections board, Birtukan Mideksa on Saturday said the June 5 vote in Africa's second most populous country would be postponed until a yet-unknown date.

Kid reporter who interviewed Obama at White House dies at 23

West Palm Beach (US): The student reporter who gained national acclaim when he interviewed President Barack Obama at the White House in 2009 has died of natural causes, his family says. Damon Weaver was 23 when he died May 1, his sister, Candace Hardy, told the *Palm Beach Post*. Further details were not released. He had been studying communications at Albany State University in Georgia.

Weaver was 11 when he interviewed Obama for 10 minutes in the Diplomatic Room on Aug. 13, 2009, asking questions that focused primarily on education. He covered school lunches, bullying, conflict resolution and how to succeed.

Weaver then asked Obama to be his "homeboy," saying then-Vice President Joe Biden had already accepted.

"Absolutely," a smiling Obama said, shaking the boy's hand. He used that meeting to later interview Oprah Winfrey and athletes like Dwyane Wade.

"He was just a nice person, genuine, very intelligent," Hardy said. "Very outspoken, outgoing. He never said no to anybody." Weaver got his start in fifth grade when he volunteered for the school newscast K.E. Cunningham/Canal Point Elementary in a farm community on the shores of Lake Okeechobee. **AP**

China lands its rover on Mars

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Saturday successfully landed a spacecraft on Mars after surviving "nine minutes of terror", becoming the second country in history to have a rover on the red planet.

The rover, Zhurong, named after a god of fire in Chinese mythology, successfully landed at the pre-selected area in Utopia Planitia on Mars, the official Xinhua news agency reported on the Communist giant's latest achievement in its ambitious goals in space.

The six-wheel solar-powered Zhurong rover weighs about 240 kilograms and carries six scientific instruments. It will be later deployed from the lander for a three-month mission in search of life on Mars' surface.

Tianwen-1, consisting of an orbiter, a lander and a rover, was launched on July 23, 2020. It was the first step in China's planetary exploration of the solar system, with the aim of completing orbiting, landing and roving on the red planet in one mission.

The China National Space Administration (CNSA) said in a statement that its rover has successfully landed on Mars on Saturday after "nine minutes of terror".

The lander, carrying a Mars rover, touched down at its pre-selected landing area in the southern part of Utopia Planitia, a vast plain on the



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, members at the Beijing Aerospace Control Centre celebrate after China's Tianwen-1 probe successfully landed on Mars, at the centre in Beijing, Saturday

AP

northern hemisphere of Mars, at 7:18 a.M. (Beijing Time), the CNSA said.

It took ground controllers more than an hour to establish the success of the pre-programmed landing. They had to wait for the rover to autonomously unfold its solar panels and antenna to send the signals after landing, and there was a time delay of more than 17 minutes due to the 320-million-km distance between the Earth and Mars.

"The Mars landing of the Tianwen-1 mission has been a total success," Zhang Kejian, head of the CNSA announced.

Zhang Rongqiao, chief designer of China's first Mars exploration mission, said that the landing had been a textbook case of accuracy.

More than 40 Mars missions have been launched since

the 1960s, but only about half have succeeded. The success rate for landing is even lower.

The successful touchdown of the Chinese spacecraft on Mars is a remarkable achievement, given the difficult nature of the task. Only the Americans have really mastered landing on Mars until now.

All other countries that have tried have either crashed or lost contact soon after reaching the surface of the Mars.

Thomas Zurbuchen, Associate Administrator for the Science Mission Directorate at NASA was quick to congratulate China.

"Congratulations to CNSA's #Tianwen1 team for the successful landing of China's first Mars exploration rover, #Zhurong!"

"Together with the global science community, I look for-

ward to the important contributions this mission will make to humanity's understanding of the Red Planet," Zurbuchen tweeted.

Significantly, it will now be a space race on Mars as the Chinese spacecraft has landed three months after the successful landing of US space agency NASA's Perseverance rover which is busy exploring the red planet's surface with a helicopter hovering around.

Previously the US, Russia, the European Union and India have succeeded in sending a spacecraft to Mars, regarded as the most complex space mission.

President Xi Jinping has congratulated the space scientists on the successful landing of China's first probe on Mars. Xi said in the message that the landing marks an important step in China's interstellar exploration and a leap from the exploration of the Earth-Moon system to interplanetary exploration.

"The landing left a Chinese mark on Mars for the first time. It is another landmark progress in China's space industry development," said Xi. "Thanks to your courage in face of challenges and pursuit of excellence, China is now among the leading countries in planetary exploration," Xi said.

"The country and people will always remember your outstanding achievements," he said. The Perseverance and Zhurong explore different parts of Mars.

Nepal scales back chariot festival amid virus surge

AP ■ KATHMANDU

A drastically truncated version of a Hindu chariot festival took place Saturday in Nepal's capital amid strict COVID-19 restrictions, following an agreement by organizers and authorities that prevented a repeat of violent confrontations between police and protesters last year.

Typically, a five-story-high wooden chariot of the deity Rato Machindranath whose statue is made from clay and covered in red paint with wide-open eyes is pulled by devotees around a suburb of the capital, Kathmandu. The annual festival lasts about a month and draws tens of thousands of people.

But this year, only around a hundred hand-picked devotees were allowed to pull the

chariot for just a few meters (yards), as riot police sealed off the neighborhood to prevent any spectators from entering.

The Himalayan nation is experiencing a coronavirus surge, with record numbers of new infections and deaths. Authorities imposed a lockdown across most of the country last month, and extended it in recent days by another two weeks.

The agreement to drastically scale back the festival came after consultations among local politicians, officials, security forces, priests and organizers. Many devotees stayed home and celebrated with feasts and rituals with their families.

Last spring, the statue was built but remained parked because of virus restrictions until September, when thou-

sands of protesters defied a lockdown to take part in the festival. Several people were injured as police in riot gear blocked protesters as they moved the chariot, dousing them with water cannons and firing tear gas. The protesters threw stones at the police.

The festival is held in the belief that it will to please gods so they can provide for a generous rainfall, a good harvest and prosperity. It's thought to have been held for more than 1,350 years.

Nepal, with a population of around 30 million, has reported 447,704 confirmed coronavirus cases and 4,856 deaths.

On Friday, China canceled attempts to climb Mount Everest from its side of the world's highest peak because of fears of importing COVID-19 cases from neighboring Nepal.

Poles cheer reopening of bars, restaurants

Warsaw (AP): Poles pulled off their masks, hugged their friends and made toasts to their regained freedom as restaurants, bars and pubs reopened for the first time in seven months and the government dropped a requirement for people to cover their faces outdoors.

The reopening, for now limited now to the outdoor consumption of food and

drinks, officially took place on Saturday. Yet many could not wait for midnight to strike and were out on the streets of Warsaw and other cities hours earlier on Friday evening to celebrate, gathering outside popular watering holes. Some brought their own beer to hold them over until the they could buy drinks at midnight though some bars were also seen serv-

ing up beers and cocktails early.

Now they are opening and I feel so awesome. You know, you feel like your freedom is back, said Gabriel Nikilovski, a 38-year-old from Sweden who was having beer at an outdoor table at the Pavilions, a popular courtyard filled with pubs in central Warsaw. It's like you've been in prison, but you've been in prison at home.

‘I’m having loads of fun working with kids’

LAVINA TANDON, who plays Jhanjharika in Nikki Aur Jadui Bubble, a fantasy show on Dangal TV, speaks with SHALINI SAKSENA about her role, the challenges faced and fun that she is having shooting with the kids

■ What is Nikki Aur Jadui Bubble about?

It is a kids’ fantasy show where there is the real world and the magical one which merge together. Sometimes our characters are in the real one sometimes in the magical. It is about a girl, Nikki; it’s her story. Her father is a great magician and passes on his talent and world to his father without him realising this.

■ What’s your character here?

I play the grey shade here — Jhanjharika. I am also a magician and a powerful one at that amongst the women in the world of magic. She was not always evil but then a competition took place and she lost. She wanted the coveted bubble which has immense power and the bubble went to Nikki’s father played by Himmanshoo Malhotra. From here on, my character becomes negative and I become the evil witch and my job is to trouble everyone.

■ How did you come on board the project?

I was shooting for another project as an assistant intern. But I keep getting scripts since I have done other shows. I have worked for Dheeraj Kumar earlier as well and my experience was good and saw no reason to say no. I went and gave the audition. After three weeks I got a confirmation call. But I was shooting in Goa for a web series and told the team that once I am done, I will be on board.

■ It is a kid’s fantasy show, are you having lots of fun?

We had lots of fun. There are no adults in the scenes with me. There are adults but we are never in the same frame. The good is that there is gossip, the atmosphere is stress-free. There is a negativity like there might be in other

adult shows — she got this costume, I didn’t; she got this jewellery, I didn’t. There is no such thing here. Kids are natural, they have no pretense. They come, shoot and go back to their studies. We spent a lot of time together and chatted and generally had fun. I learnt a lot from them as well. They are so full of energy.

■ Were there any challenges since you are working with kids?

There were no challenges working with the kids like I said the kids in the show are extremely intelligent. I psyched myself saying that it is a kids’ show so I need to have patience working with them. But they are quick learners. The challenge came in the form of getting into the look. I have two —one the normal and the other the evil witch. Switching and change in costume was time consuming.

■ How did you get into acting?

I never had plans to get into acting. Acting chose me. I was 12 when my mother’s friend was coordinating for a show — *Tum Bin Jaaon Kahaan* on Zee TV — that had a requirement for a girl with curly hair. It was a show by Aruna Irani Production House. I went for the audition and got selected. The minute I stood in front of the camera they chose me since I fit their character to a T. I shot 70-80 episodes. But then my Class VII finals came and I had to leave the show. But I kept getting work sometimes back-to-back.

■ Hero Bhakti Hi Shakti Hai was a role you did and grabbed eyeballs. What made the show popular?

It was one of the few superhero shows. Back then, there was just *Shaktiman*. *Hero Bhakti...* became

popular because the story was interesting and attracted the kids. Also, every week there was a new character that kept the interest. Kids back then watched TV. Today, they are glued to their mobiles, video games and social media.

■ Is there a role that you hated doing?

No, not really. I never put myself in a position where I ended up hating doing something. Acting is my profession. If I don’t love I can’t do justice to the characters I have done.

■ What’s next?

At present, I am not willing to work on anything due to the pandemic. I was even scared to go out to buy groceries let alone step out to shoot. But I am committed to *Nikki Aur...* so I will shoot for it but no new projects for the time being.



WEEKLY NATTER

ASIM RIAZ TURNS RAPPER

The heartthrob of the young generation, Asim Riaz has a huge surprise in store for us. The livewire who has amassed the love of people as an actor and featuring artist has yet another talent that he stages for the world on Eid. Riaz debuts with a fiery rap titled *Back To Start* released under India’s leading record label, Sony Music India.

The teaser of the rap that dropped not long ago got the Asim Riaz squad excited scaling up the anticipation around it as it releases today.

Making this year’s Eid special, Asim opens about his struggle and hustle in his debut as a

rapper through the song. *Back To Start* has been penned and performed by Asim.

Asim says: “We take a look around us and we see that everything is changing and so much of the good change is being embraced. I had *Back To Start* with me since 2015 and I wanted to polish it till I was ready to put it out there for the listeners. I’m very pumped that it’s releasing. My wish for everybody this Eid is to have the strength to embrace changes and hustle their way forward.”

Released by Sony Music India, *Back To Start* is now available on all streaming platforms.

CINDERELLA TO LAUNCH WORLDWIDE IN SEPTEMBER

Kay Cannon’s *Cinderella* featuring an all-star cast including Grammy nominated singer/songwriter Camila Cabello, Idina Menzel and Billy Porter, will launch exclusively around the world in over 240 countries and territories on Prime Video this September. The highly anticipated musical incorporates pop songs from contemporary global artists and original songs by Camila Cabello and Idina Menzel.

“*Cinderella* is a classic we all know and love, but this time with a modern unique twist and starring the sensational Camila Cabello and an all-star cast. Producer James Corden and the filmmaking team have taken this beloved fairytale and revamped it with a fresh, empowering perspective that will resonate with audiences and families around the world. We couldn’t be more

excited for our global customers to sing and dance along to director Kay Cannon’s reimagination of this classic story,” said Jennifer Salke, Head of Amazon Studios.

Cinderella is a musically-driven bold new take on the traditional story you grew up with. Our heroine (Cabello) is an ambitious young woman, whose dreams are bigger than the world will allow, but with the help of her Fab G (Billy Porter), she is able to persevere and make her dreams come true.

Written for the screen and directed by Kay Cannon with covers of songs written by some of the top-selling musical artists of all time, *Cinderella* has an all-star cast that includes Idina Menzel, Minnie Driver, Nicholas Galitzine, with Billy Porter and Pierce Brosnan. Producers are Leo Pearlman, James Corden, Jonathan Kadin and Shannon McIntosh.

RASHMI AGDEKAR BECOMES CAUSE AMBASSADOR

After many Bollywood celebrities being tested positive for Covid-19 and understanding the hard times actress, Rashmi Agdekar opens up about duty towards fighting the disease and helping the country by being a cause ambassador. Agdekar has blown the audience’s mind with her brilliant performance. The young and talented actress started her acting career in 2017, in the web series *Dev DD*. Since then she has played various critically acclaimed roles in several web series and movies.

Celebrities like Varun Dhawan and Kartik Aryan have also joined initiatives as cause ambassadors are contributing during these tough times by sharing verified information with their followers. Rashmi Agdekar herself being a Covid survivor understands the need to support people at this hour and has

therefore become the cause ambassador for the campaign *Find a Bed*. The actor says: “In these tough times, many volunteers, NGOs, students, entrepreneurs etc are doing a lot of groundwork and helping people in need. If all these people are doing the actual hard work, the least I can do is amplify it. As a responsible citizen, it is my duty to spread awareness as much as I can in my capacity during this second wave. Being a Covid survivor myself, I know how much it takes a toll mentally and physically. Anyone in need of beds in their area or nearby can use this website (www.findabed.in) to search. This will hopefully reduce the stress of running from one hospital to another in an emergency.”

On the work front, Rashmi Agdekar played the lead role in the MX player web series *I’m Mature* which was critically acclaimed. The young and talented actor made her big-screen debut in Bollywood with *Andhadhun*.

TELLY TALE

DANCE IT OUT

Colors’ *Dance Deewane* is a show that never stops to surprise, impress and entertain the viewers. In the upcoming episode, special guest dancers who garnered a lot of fame with their deewangi for dance like Yogesh Shaw, Alok Shaw, Siza, Kishen Bilagali, Rupesh Bane, Tejas Varma, Sagar, Jayshree, Mukul, Akash and Vaishnavi will perform in pairs with the *Dance Deewane* contestants. The performances surely will be filled with entertainment, passion, and a whole lot of swag.

The most highlighted dance performances of the evening were by Alok and Aman who impressed Madhuri. Even Gunjan’s performance with Sagar



Bora on the *Mirchi* song was spellbinding. After Gunjan’s performance, Dharmesh Yelande couldn’t hold back his praises and was in complete awe of her. He said: “I’m speechless. The stage is different every time and the level at which you dance is very high. I would like to thank Sagar too as he is so good and catches the audience’s attention. When he performs in his group, we only look at him. Today I could feel that my one eye was on Gunjan and the other on Sagar because this *jodi* is just amazing.”

Pallavi and Siza sent Madhuri Dixit on a nostalgia trip when they performed a medley of her songs choreographed by her guru Saroj Khan. Madhuri was extremely touched and gave them ₹101 as token of appreciation. The chocolate boy of *Dance Deewane* season 1 Kishen Bilagali danced on an extremely scintillating performance with Arundhati, the dance raised the temperature of the set.

‘I HAVE NEVER DONE A SCREEN TEST’

Over the past few years, Raima Sen has performed a host of impactful roles in movies and OTT series and has dazzled audiences with her beauty and stellar acting skills. For those eagerly

awaiting her next project, Raima will be seen next in Amazon Prime Video’s upcoming series *The Last Hour*. Raima shared her experience of getting auditioned and her selection for Nyima’s role.

Talking about Nyima’s character and on bagging the role, the actor spoke about her experience of giving a screen test for the first time and shared her thoughts on it. Giving it her best shot with the help of a stellar director Amit Kumar by her side, it sure seems that Raima had a blast on set with the cast and packed a punch on the show that is all set to keep us on the edge of our seats.

On auditioning for the role and her character, Raima shares: “In all these years in the industry, I have never done a screen test. When I learnt that Amit wanted to do a screen test for my character in Calcutta, I first avoided it, as I have always had a phobia of auditions. Later, I gathered my strength and somehow decided to do it. I first thought I am never going to get this part but surprisingly, I got a confirmation call from him in a couple of days. I am very happy and excited to be a part of this series. With all my work, I’ve always tried to understand the vision of the director and then added my own individuality to it which helps me stay focused on my character. My director Amit told me what he expected from the character, but at the same, asked me to keep it real and feel it. His guidance and my vision helped me get the best out of me. It was such a great experience shooting for the series.”

The Last Hour stars Sanjay Kapoor, Shahana Goswami, Karma Takapa, Robin Tamang, and Shaylee Krishen along with Raima Sen. It will exclusively stream on Amazon Prime Video from the May 14, 2021 in more than 240 countries and territories.

HIBA’S FAVOURITE SEHRI DELICACY

Hiba Nawab aka CP in Sony SAB’s *Jijaji Chhat Parr* Koii Hai was in Bareilly with her family and friends during Ramadan.

Get up close and personal with Hiba as she gets candid about her favourite Ramadan memory, the food she loves, and how is she spending her Ramadan in her hometown this year.

Talking about the holy month of Ramadan, she said: “I believe the most vital part about this sacred month is fasting and praying, which means *ibadat*, by keeping *rozas* and by reading the Quran. We celebrate this month by cherishing each and every moment and by worshipping. I think it is essential to help people in need and do charity. My fondest memory for the holy month of Ramadan dates back to the days I observed my first *roza*. I was eight years old and was super



excited about it. We eat some delicious dishes this month, and this year I am in Bareilly with my family and friends after so long to celebrate the month of Ramadan and Eid. I avoid eating fried food across the year, but I grab a bite of spicy and fried food to my heart’s content during this time of the year. My favourite *sehri* delicacy is *khajla*, I love to eat sweet dishes as I have a sweet tooth. My resolution for Ramadan is to do more of *ibadat*.”

ATHARVA ASKS A TRICKY QUESTION

Sony SAB’s *Wagle Ki Duniya – Nayi Peedhi Naye Kissey* continues to keep the audience glued to the show with exciting and relatable day to day. In the upcoming episodes, we see how Atharva gets frustrated with his parents as they keep calling him a ‘kid’ in certain situations but ‘old enough’ as per their convenience otherwise.

Atharva feels his parents’ behaviour is unfair towards him as they change their stance about his age and maturity according to the situation, which irritates him. As a protest, the innocent Atharva decides to go on a hunger strike. Rajesh and Vandana try to calm him down and request him to not go on a hunger strike so instead Atharva puts a condition, that for the next three days if anyone refers to him as ‘old enough’, the person will have to perform an act of punishment as decided by him.

The question is, will the Wagles’ come to a common conclusion for this problem or will Atharva’s frustration increase? What is the punishment Atharva has in mind?

Pariva Pranati, essaying the role of Vandana, said: “As artists, we always endeavour to bring a smile on the faces

of our fans and I feel so lucky and blessed that with the role of Vandana, I am able to do it. The upcoming track is very interesting not only for the kids who love the show but also for the parents as well. We have all faced this situation growing up, parents wanting us to behave maturely in certain situations and enjoy like a kid in certain other. The challenge put by my son, Atharva would be interesting to watch and the climax of that challenge would be very intriguing in a way that would reveal a different facet of Atharva. We all are working very hard and putting our heart and soul into the episodes. I would like to request the audience to keep watching the episodes from the comfort of their homes!”

Sheehan Kapahi, essaying the role of Atharva, said: “Baccha ya Bada? This is a confusing question, and the upcoming track will address this



dilemma brilliantly. Throughout our show’s journey, we have always tried to bring highly relatable topics, which I feel has struck the right chord with our viewers. For kids of my age, this is the biggest question in our minds, and for our parents, they are probably facing similar questions too. How will my parents react to this question? The upcoming episodes will unravel the mystery.”

Plan Your Stay At Home Sunday

Give your Sundays a perfect start by cooking some delicious meals. How about Fluffy Banana Walnut Pancakes or Almond Cinnamon Tart for breakfast? Here are the recipes.

FLUFFY BANANA WALNUT PANCAKES

Ingredients
Maple Walnut Cream:
■ 1/2 cup California walnuts
■ 1/4 cup water
■ 1 tablespoon pure maple syrup
■ 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
Pancakes:
■ 1 medium-size very ripe banana
■ 3/4 cup milk
■ 2 tablespoons melted butter, plus additional tablespoon for skillet
■ 1/3 cup liquid egg whites
■ 1 cup flour
■ 2 tablespoons sugar
■ 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
■ 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
■ 1/4 teaspoon salt
■ 1/3 cup chopped California walnuts
Preparation:
■ To prepare maple walnut cream, place all ingredients in a



small food processor and process until light and fluffy.
■ Mash banana with a fork in a large bowl and stir in milk and melted butter. Stir together dry ingredients in a medium bowl and stir into banana mixture, being careful to not overmix. (A few small lumps are ok)
— California Walnuts

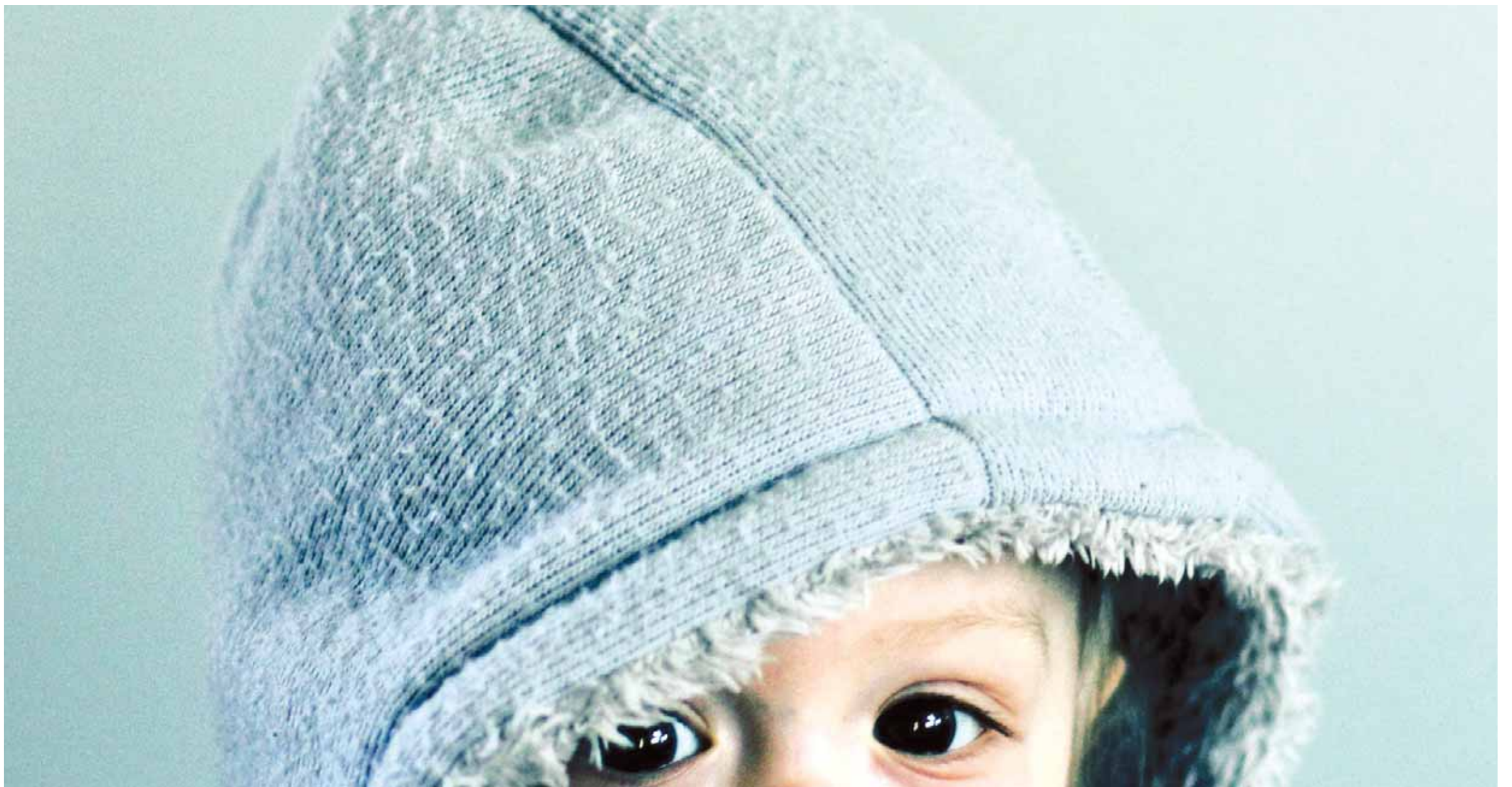
ALMOND CINNAMON TART



Ingredients
■ 1 cup almond flake
■ 150 gm monaco biscuit
■ 2 gm cinnamon powder
■ 200 gm fine sugar
■ 200 ml fresh cream
■ 60 gm unsalted butter
Method:
■ Roast the almond flake in preheated oven at 180 degree celsius for 4 minutes or till golden in colour.
■ For toffee sauce, caramelise sugar, add 40 gms of butter followed by cream and thoroughly mix it
■ For monaco crumble, crush biscuits and mix 20 gm of butter with it. spread this mixture in 6inch mould and bake at 160 degree celsius for 10 min.
■ In a bowl mix, roasted almond silvers and toffee sauce and pour this mix over biscuit crumble in the mould.
■ Bake the mix set in mould in a preheated oven at 180 degree celsius for 15 min.
■ Serve once done and demould the tart. serve with vanilla bean ice-cream.
— Almond Board of California

YOUNG ONES ON TARGET

While the second wave of COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc, doctors and experts are predicting the onset of the third wave, a killer for children. MUSBA HASHMI reports on how, in the absence of a paediatric vaccine, children can be protected. But for that a robust paediatric healthcare system is crucial



We are stuck right in the middle of what appears to be a very lethal second wave of COVID-19. With not less than 3.5 lakh cases per day, the curve seems to not flatten any time soon. However, the horror doesn't end here. Doctors, scientists and experts have started predicting the third wave of COVID-19 which is expected to wreak further havoc. More so, because it may hit children in a hard way. While this is a major cause of worry, the question here is how prepared are we to tackle the upcoming third wave? The answer might not be what we want to hear.

"Viruses hunt for a susceptible population. With schools closed presently, children will be that group once the educational institutes reopen. This will bring on the third wave which will hit children big time," Dr Arvind Taneja, MBBS, MD (Paediatrics), Diplomat of the American Board of the Paediatrics, Fellowship — Infectious Diseases and Chief Advisor-Senior Consultant, Paediatrics, Rainbow Children's Hospital, tells you.

In the absence of an effective vaccine for children, they become the most susceptible group and masking and sanitising is the only way out.

"When 70 to 85 per cent of the population is immunised 'herd immunity' kicks in to protect people, especially children. Till then masks, social distancing continues to be the norm for children too," he advises.

The need, he says, is to speed up vaccine trials in children. "If adults vaccinated are safe so should children be. We have experienced this with polio, measles, mumps, rubella live viral vaccines for 60 years and viral influenza for 40 years in infants as young as months old," Taneja adds and tells you that pediatric trials of vaccines are expected to be completed by October-December.

"However the onset of the third is wave unpredictable," he says.

The disappointing fact is that we haven't emphasised enough on paediatric care and as a result we are lacking in it.

"India's preparation for paediatric COVID-19 is woefully inadequate. We have very few paediatric hospitals in the country, very few paediatric critical care specialists and pediatric trained nurses. In order to be prepared for the third wave, each major and medium sized city in India should have at least one dedicated children's hospital to care for this fragile population so that we are ready when and if catastrophe such as COVID-19 strikes. This is expected to happen in the third wave," he tells you.

However, the silver lining is that we may expect a decline in cases by May end, as per the doctors.

"According to a study, we may

expect a decline in cases by the end of May in most States. There could be one or two more peaks of Coronavirus cases but they may not be as huge as the current wave. Different States may see peaks at different times. The prediction is that we may see a declining trend by end of this week in India all together. But if we are to check as a nation, with all cumulative figures, we are either at our peak or are very close to it. Different states will have different trajectories," Dr Yash Javeri, Critical Care, Anesthesia and Emergency Medicine, Regency Superspecialty Hospital, Lucknow, tells you.

The third wave, he says, may hit a few States in the next two-three months.

"If we put strict measures in place, the third wave may not happen at all places or might not be as huge as the second wave. It depends on how effectively control measures are implemented at the local level in the States, districts and cities everywhere. In a few months, when the naturally developed immunity of people or the one with the help of vaccination fades, the virus can strike again. The only thing that can stop the virus from bouncing back is how people are guarding themselves," Arya opines.

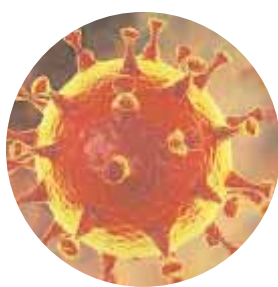
He adds that if people follow COVID-appropriate behaviour in the coming months which includes double masking, using hand sanitiser, maintaining social distancing and avoiding going out unnecessarily then we can probably cut the peak.

"If we are able to vaccinate a majority of population then the magnitude of third wave will be decreased," he says.

However, Dr Animesh Arya, Senior consultant in Respiratory Medicine, Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute, is of the opinion that it is hard to predict the declining trend. "There is no definite answer as to when we can expect a decline in cases, but epidemiologists feel that with all peaks there will be a fall after two to three months so decline is expected in June. But we can be way off our predictions as in the past," he says.

Many scientists, infectious diseases experts and people from economics and modelling background are trying to predict the third wave, but from a scientific point of view which is based on the previous outbreak of severe epidemics especially Spanish flu, the expectations are all in the press and it may be in September-October. "It is also being assumed children in the age group 12-15 are likely to be affected largely in the third wave as they are naive and the new mutant strain is very potent and it challenges the immunity of people not naturally protected or partially protected by immunisation," Arya explains.

He adds that as we all know building infrastructure of tertiary healthcare is essential to treat sicker patients and prevent mortality, we must not forget that pri-



INDIA'S PREPARATION FOR PAEDIATRIC COVID-19 IS WOEFULLY INADEQUATE. WE HAVE VERY FEW PAEDIATRIC HOSPITALS IN THE COUNTRY, VERY FEW PAEDIATRIC CRITICAL CARE SPECIALISTS AND PEDIATRIC TRAINED NURSES. IN ORDER TO BE PREPARED FOR THE THIRD WAVE, EACH MAJOR AND MEDIUM SIZED CITY IN INDIA SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST ONE DEDICATED CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL TO CARE FOR THIS FRAGILE POPULATION — DR ARVIND TANEJA CHIEF ADVISOR & SENIOR CONSULTANT, PAEDIATRICS, RAINBOW CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL



mary aim to contain disease by early detection, extensive testing of all levels of contacts, isolating them and treating them well ahead of time of going into serious complications and mortality remains the key.

With that being said, there are several doctors who believe that children might not get affected as badly as it is anticipated, because all these predictions are based on statistics. Hence, parents need not angst too much. However, this doesn't mean we can put down our guards. All precautions have to be in place, both in the presence or absence of a vaccine.

"There is no evidence that the third wave will hit children. It can happen, but these are only predictions. Though, the symptoms in children are usually mild till date, but this doesn't affect the importance of vaccination for them. We can't anticipate if the symptoms will turn severe in the third wave. However, in the absence of a paediatric vaccine, the only way out is to take precautions. Immunity is another important thing. Children should be given nutritious food, including lots of green leafy vegetables and fruits in their diet. Keep them hydrated. Coconut water, twice a day, can do the job. Avoid junk at all costs. And last, but not the least, increase their Vitamin C intake," Dr Swetha Reddy P, Consultant Paediatrics, Apollo Telehealth, tells you.

Though several States Governments like Maharashtra have already started prepping up for the third wave by setting up paediatric centres, the need is to increase the number of paediatric hospitals, ICU beds and care centres to tide over the third wave with less fatalities and more recoveries.

"To curb the impact of the third wave, the need of the hour is to increase the number of ICU beds and hospitals for children, get more paediatric nurses on board and also to make sure there are ample doctors to attend to children. Our healthcare infrastructure basically needs a revamp, which is definitely not possible at this hour. Hence, now focus should be on building a robust healthcare system, well-equipped with proper staff so that doctors and nurses don't have to deal with fatigue. The strategy should be to vaccinate 100 per cent children before the third wave hits. Also according to observations the mutants have been severely affecting the children," Dr Aashish Chaudhry, Managing Director and Senior Consultant, Dept of Orthopaedics & Joint Replacement, Aakash Healthcare Super Speciality Hospital, Dwarka, says.

One of the many ways to prevent children from the risk of getting infected is to get the parents vaccinated quickly. "It is not the children that carry the virus, it is their parents or families who pass on the virus. There are no reports to back the



YOUNGVACCINE

- While many companies like Bharat Biotech and Pfizer have started the second and third phase vaccine trials on children from two to 18 years, there is still a long way to go for the vaccines to be available in the market for use.
- The Drugs Controller General of India has cleared phase II and III clinical trials of Covaxin COVID-19 vaccine for children from two to 18 years.
- US biotech firm Novavax had also started clinical trials of its proposed Covid-19 vaccine on children.
- Pfizer is running a trial for children 6 months to 11 years old.
- Moderna is also running a trial in the United States and Canada for kids between 6 months and 11 years old.

fact, but this is an observation that is made during the first and second wave. Hence, in order to prevent children from catching the infection, the elders need to get vaccinated with both doses quickly. With the shortage of vaccine, this might seem a Herculean task, however it is the only feasible option to reduce the impact of a possible third wave," Dr Gitali Bhagwati, Consultant and Head, Department of Microbiology and Infection Control, Dharamshila Narayana Superspeciality Hospital, tells you.

And apart from the rest of the measures, we need to prepare an army of young nurses and doctors on standby to move from one city to the other based on

the COVID wave, to support busy hospitals. For this, we need to motivate and encourage them largely, because money alone, won't motivate young people to risk their lives in COVID ICU wards.

And lastly, mildly symptomatic patients should be isolated immediately, in order to reduce the risk of them spreading infection. "In order to flatten the curve and reduce the exposure to vulnerable population of children who are at the higher risk due to lack of herd immunity or passive immunity, mildly symptomatic patients should be provided isolation facilities till they get infection free since the infection rate this time is high," Arya tells you.

RAMAN ALLEGES SMEAR CAMPAIGN

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sacked as women's cricket team coach, WV Raman has alleged that a "smear campaign" against him has gained unwarranted traction and urged the BCCI president Sourav Ganguly to stop it.

In a mail that has also been marked to National Cricket Academy head Rahul Dravid, Raman wrote it will be "extremely disconcerting" if his candidature was rejected due to reasons other than "my incompetency as a coach".

In a surprising move, Raman was not retained as the head coach of the senior women's team by the Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) which picked Ramesh Powar for the top job.

It was under Raman that Indian team cherished a runner-up finish at the women's T20 World Cup last year.

"I presume you might have been told different views about my style of functioning and work ethic. Whether those views conveyed to the officials of the BCCI had any impact on my candidature is of no consequence now," Raman wrote in the letter.

"What is important is that the smear campaign seems to have gained some unwarranted traction with some BCCI officials which needs to be halted permanently. I am prepared to give an explanation should you or any of the office bearers require it."

He said he was not used to "moaning and whining" but was bringing up the issues in case the BCCI president wishes to do a course correction.

"If I were to be rejected due to my incompetency as a coach, there is no argument on a judgment call at all. But what will be extremely disconcerting is if my candidature was rejected due to any other reasons," said the former India opener who played 11 Tests and 27 ODIs between



1988 and 1997.

"Especially if it was due to allegations from people who were more focussed on achieving their personal objectives at the expense of the overall hygiene and welfare of the Indian women's team and the pride of the country."

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

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

"If some people in the sys-

Sthalekar slams BCCI over Veda's treatment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former Australian captain Lisa Sthalekar has claimed that the BCCI neither checked on Veda Krishnamurthy after the twin tragedies in her family nor communicated to the bereaved India cricketer its decision to not consider her for the upcoming tour of England.

Earlier this month, the flamboyant middle-order India batter lost her elder sister Vatsala Shivakumar to Covid-19, two weeks after her mother succumbed to the dreaded virus.



On expected lines, she was not included in the Indian Test and ODI team for next month's tour of the United Kingdom, but ICC

Hall of Famer Sthalekar was not convinced with the BCCI's handling of the whole episode.

"Whilst not selecting Veda for the upcoming series may be justified from their point of view, what angers me the most is that as a contracted player she has not received any communication from BCCI, just to even check how she is coping," Sthalekar said in a note on her Twitter handle.

She added, "A true association should deeply care about the players that play the game... Not focus solely on just the game at any cost. So

tem have been highly accommodative to the extent of being seemingly obsequious to an accomplished performer for years on end and if that performer feels constrained to adhere to the culture, then I would leave it to you to decide if the coach was asking for too much.

"In a coaching career spanning 20 years, I have always created a culture in which the team always comes first and insisted on no individual overriding either the game or the team."

He said "paying heed to only one individual's views while disregarding everyone else's over a long period of time has resulted in gaping holes in the process and the system."

"The time has come for you two accomplished former legends to salvage women's cricket falling which things could gather momentum in the wrong direction," he warned.

"I have some suggestions that might help in the improvement of women's cricket. I will be delighted to share those if you are interested," he signed off.

disappointed."

Bengal's wicketkeeper-batsman Shreevats Goswami, who has also had stints in the IPL besides representing the country in the U-19 level, backed Sthalekar.

Goswami said state cricket associations in India don't care about their players.

"I don't think cricket Associations caring about their players are even thought by the management in India, Mental health & communicating with players on drawing a future guide for their players doesn't even cross their mind, I can say this for domestic cricket," Goswami tweeted.

Shafali gets maiden ODI, Test call-ups

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rookie wicketkeeper-batter Indrani Roy from Jharkhand was rewarded with maiden Test and ODI call-up for India's tour of England next month but senior left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad missed out as she is recovering from Covid-19.

The 29-year-old Gayakwad is also nursing an injury.

The Neetu David led selection panel made a course correction with teen batting sensation Shafali Verma and seasoned pacer Shikha Pandey making it to all three squads after their South Africa home series snubs.

"This time Neetu and her colleagues didn't go for any outrageous experiments. Shafali and Shikha were two of the earliest names listed in all three squads. There was one Swetha Verma of UP whose name was discussed but it was found that she hasn't even scored 200 runs in a season," a source close to developments said.

Sneh Rana and Indrani were two stellar performers in the National One Day competition and thus got their call-ups.

The controversial picks of the last time like Monica Patel, C Prathyusha have been dropped from the squad altogether in the team selection meeting which was keenly followed by BCCI president

Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah.

Indrani was rewarded for her string of scores which included 103 against Chattisgarh, 86 against Karnataka and 49 against Railways in the final.

Rana on her part was the Player of the Final for her all-round show while representing Indian Railways.

As expected Mithali Raj will lead the team for the one-off Test and three ODIs while Harmanpreet Kaur will take over the reins during the three T20 Internationals.

SQUADS

Test & ODI: Mithali Raj (C), Smriti Mandhana,

Harmanpreet Kaur, Punam Raut, Priya Punia, Deepti Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Sneha Rana, Taniya Bhatia (wk), Indrani Roy (wk), Shikha Pandey, Pooja Vastrakar, Arundhati Reddy, Poonam Yadav, Ekta Bisht, Radha Yadav.

T20I: Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana,

Deepti Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Richa Ghosh, Harleen Deol, Sneha Rana, Taniya Bhatia (wk), Indrani Roy (wk), Shikha Pandey, Pooja Vastrakar, Arundhati Reddy, Poonam Yadav, Ekta Bisht, Radha Yadav, Simaran Dil Bahadur.



shortpasses

LIFTERS TO LEAVE ON MAY 18

NEW DELHI: A two-member Indian team, including Youth Olympics Gold medalist weightlifter Jeremy Lalrinnunga, will leave on Tuesday to take part in the World Junior Championship in Tashkent from May 23 to 31.

SURINDER EYE JR SELECTOR'S JOB

NEW DELHI: Former India batsman Surinder Amarnath has applied for the post of national junior cricket selector, and is banking on his Morocco experience as a coach and selector in early 2000s to get the job.

JEJE PATROLLING RIVER

NEW DELHI: Away from the football field, India striker Jeje Lalpekhlua has been patrolling a long stretch of Tuichang river in Mizoram to prevent "overfishing" and help sustain the livelihood of local fishermen.

INDIA OFF TO QATAR ON MAY 19

NEW DELHI: The Indian football team will leave for Qatar on May 19 after the gulf country, in a big relief, accepted AIFF request to allow its players to train there ahead of the 2022 World Cup Qualifiers next month.

HOLDER TO MISS INITIAL WI CAMP

ANITGUA: All-rounder Jason Holder, who was part of the postponed IPL with SunRisers Hyderabad, has been rested for the first part of West Indies' three-week high-performance camp that begins on Sunday in St Lucia.

MCKEOWN MISSES SMITH'S WR

SYDNEY: Australian teenager Kaylee McKeown fired a warning shot on Saturday ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, swimming the second fastest women's 100 metre backstroke ever to narrowly miss Regan Smith's world record.

MARY'S QUARANTINE OVER

NEW DELHI: Olympic Games-bound MC Marykom has completed her seven days quarantine period at the national boxing camp in Pune, but will still train in isolation to stay safe, says a coach associated with the camp.

WFI CANCEL SONEPAT CAMP

NEW DELHI: The planned camp for eight Olympic-bound Indian wrestlers in Sonapat has been cancelled due to hard quarantine and they will instead train in multiple European cities, with the national federation allowing each of them a sparring partner of their choice.

IPL BEST IN WORLD: RIAZ

LAHORE: Pakistan pace bowler Wahab Riaz has called IPL incomparable and the No 1 T20 franchise league in the world, but added that bowling standard of the PSL is the best.

OMAR BANNED FROM OLYMPICS

GENEVA: American triple jumper Omar Craddock was banned for 20 months over missed doping tests and will miss the Tokyo Olympics and 2022 world c'ships in Oregon.

AUSSIES MAY LAND IN SYDNEY

MALE: The Australian contingent that was part of the IPL will return home within a day or two and quarantine in Sydney with BCCI likely to foot the bill for travel & quarantine. Agencies

Silverwood will skip Pak, SL series

Thorpe, Collingwood to take reins during busy summer

PTI ■ LONDON

England head coach Chris Silverwood will take a break after his team's two Tests against New Zealand, handing over the reins of the ODI side to his assistants for the home series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan, starting late June.

Having been part of England's tours of Sri Lanka and India earlier this year, Silverwood said he will take a break to refresh himself before returning at the helm for the marquee Test series against visiting Indians, starting in August.

In Silverwood's absence, his assistants Paul Collingwood and Graham Thorpe will take charge of the ODI team for one series each in the home



matches against Sri Lanka and Pakistan from late June to mid-July.

"I'll be passing the reins on for the ODI series. It's not fair on the players if I am operating at less than 100% and it is not fair on myself either," Silverwood was quoted as saying by

the British media.

"Thorpey will do one and Colly will do the other and I'll use it as my break to refresh and get ready for what is ahead of us," he added.

After the two-match home Test series against New Zealand, starting on June 2, England will play 12 white-ball Internationals at home. Their limited overs home series against Sri Lanka begins on June 23 with the first of the three T20Is, followed by three ODIs.

Then, Pakistan's tour of three ODIs and as many T20Is begins on July 16. This will be followed by a five-match home Test series against India beginning August 4, when Silverwood will return at the helm of affairs.

After hosting seven Tests as well as the 12 white-ball Internationals, England is scheduled to tour Pakistan and Bangladesh ahead of the T20 World Cup scheduled for October.

Joe Root's Test team then travels to Australia for the Ashes series, followed by a tour of the Caribbean at the start of next year.

Conway warms up for India with kitty litter on pitch

Auckland: New Zealand batsman Devon Conway is sprinkling kitty litter on practice wickets to simulate spin bowling on the rough, hoping this will help him counter the likes of Ravichandran Ashwin during the World Test Championship final against India next month.

The 29-year-old has been named in the 20-member visiting NZ squad for the two-match Test series against England. The squad will then be trimmed to 15 for the WTC Final in Southampton starting on June 18.

Conway, who impressed in his first International season for his adopted home country last summer in ODIs and T20s, says he has been sprinkling kitty litter on practice wickets to simulate spin bowling pitching in the rough created by bowlers' footmarks.

"Basically the idea is to get the ball to sort of spit out of the rough," Conway, who has featured in three ODIs and 14 T20Is for New Zealand, told *Spark Sport*.

Kitty litter is granulated clay which absorbs waste products of pets like cat or dogs.

"It's a bit harder to play, but good practice. It's about finding a gameplan to combat that and just practice how you're going to play in the game," said the left-handed batsman.

"When it does roughen up and the ball does spit and turn a lot, it's all about being positive."

Conway said he didn't want to rely on just defending against spinners. "If you're going to look to just defend throughout, at some point there might be a ball that's going to have your number."

PTI



Eng IPL stars likely to miss NZ Tests

PTI ■ LONDON

England are unlikely to rush their Indian Premier League players straight from quarantine to the Test squad against New Zealand as they would be lacking red-ball practice, according to reports.

This will mean that the likes of Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow, Chris Woakes, Sam Curran and Moeen Ali, who are serving a mandatory 10-day quarantine after returning from the currently-suspended IPL, are likely to miss the two Tests against NZ, starting on June 2.

Their isolation period expires at the weekend, leaving little more than two weeks before the first Test at Lord's.

"The timeline is considered too tight for the (IPL)

returning players, meaning calls up are expected for the likes of Ollie Robinson, Craig Overton and James Bracey," according to a report in *BBC Sport*.

"While fitness levels could be managed, the lack of red-ball practice could be a concern — particularly with other options having spent several weeks competing in the County Championship," said another report in *The Independent*.

Head coach Chris Silverwood on Tuesday will convene his first selection meeting since taking full control of the process from Ed Smith.

England men's cricket managing director Ashley Giles had earlier hinted that players who returned from the suspended IPL are unlikely to feature in the Test series against New Zealand.

MOTION PICTURE



The New Zealand men's cricket team departed for England on Saturday night to play a two-Test series, followed by the ICC World Test Championship final against the Virat Kohli-led India. NZC posted pictures of the departing team on Twitter and Instagram

Batra in favour of conducting Olympics despite virus fears



People against the Tokyo 2020 Olympics protest around National Stadium

AP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition to the Olympic Games will be there amidst a raging Covid-19 pandemic but conducting the biggest sporting spectacle in Tokyo will send out a strong message that the world is moving beyond the catastrophic situation, IOA President Narinder Batra said on Saturday.

The Tokyo Olympics, which was scheduled to be held last year, was postponed because of the pandemic. The Indian Olympic

Association (IOA) President, who is also an International Olympic Committee (IOC) member, is hoping that the Games will be held as scheduled, from July 23.

"Life has to move on and conducting the Olympics will give a strong message that we have moved beyond the Covid-19 pandemic," Batra said.

"Opposition to the Games will always be there but it is now up to the organising committee of Japan and IOC to decide.

"But as far as Indian athletes are concerned we are taking all necessary precautions and have

been preparing to the best of our abilities to put up our best-ever performance in the Olympics," the IOA chief added.

Batra's comment has come after critics from Japan on Friday submitted a petition, calling for the Games to be cancelled as the host nation fights a fourth wave of coronavirus infections.

The IOA chief assured that the travel ban imposed on India by Japan wouldn't affect country's participation in the Games.

Japan on Thursday suspended entry of foreign nationals from 153 nations, including India in the wake of the recent surge in Covid cases across the globe.

"This is a temporary travel ban which has been issued by many countries but when it comes to Olympics, there are different protocols in place which a member nation has adhered to," Batra said.

"I assure all the accredited Olympics-bound Indian athletes that they will face no problem in entering Japan. There are enough guarantees being ensured by the Organising committee and IOC," he said.

"There will be no restrictions for them."



LEWANG40LSKI

Robert Lewandowski, dubbed a “machine” by his wife, has added the Bundesliga record for most goals in a season to the long list of major honours and achievements he has claimed in his illustrious career.

Gerd Müller’s mark of 40 goals in a campaign, set in the 1971/72 season, had withstood the test of time until Lewandowski converted a first-half penalty for Bayern Munich at Freiburg on Saturday.

While Müller set his record over 34 league games, Lewandowski has scored his 40 goals in 28 matches, due to a knee injury last month and squad rotation.

Lewandowski has scored five Bundesliga hat-tricks this term, including a four-goal haul in a 4-3 win over Hertha Berlin in October. “I have to be honest, I am astonished. I thought Müller’s record would last for forever,” Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said last weekend, after Lewandowski’s treble against Borussia Mönchengladbach.

With 276 goals in 349 games for Bayern and Borussia Dortmund, Lewandowski is already the second-most successful striker in Bundesliga history after Müller, who scored 365



in 427 matches.

Lewandowski was crowned FIFA’s best male player last December, edging out superstars Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi.

Lewandowski’s 55 goals in all competitions in 2019/20 were key to Bayern winning the treble, as the Poland striker was the first player to

be top-scorer in the Champions League, Bundesliga and German Cup competitions in a single season.

He was recognised by FIFA after proving himself in the knock-out stage of the Champions League last term.

But Lewandowski was sidelined by a knee injury for Bayern’s

quarter-final exit to Paris Saint-Germain last month, as the French giants avenged their 2020 final defeat in Lisbon.

He is set to be the Bundesliga’s top-scorer the sixth time in eight seasons, but Lewandowski was yet to inspire Bayern to European glory until last year.



Juventus win Derby d’Italia

AFP ■ TURIN

Juventus kept alive its Champions League qualification hopes by winning at Serie A champion Inter Milan 3-2 on Saturday, when Atalanta clinched a place in Europe’s premier competition. Antonio Conte’s Inter squad had already ended Juventus’ record run of nine straight Serie A titles, and it could have ended his former team’s chances of reaching the Champions League.

Referee Gianpaolo Calvarese had a busy game, awarding three penalties and relying on VAR for assistance. The first spot kick was awarded to Juventus through VAR, which showed Matteo Darmian holding back Giorgio Chiellini with his arm. Cristiano Ronaldo took his second chance from the rebound in the 24th after a poor first effort.

Leicester win maiden FA Cup trophy after beating Chelsea in final

AFP ■ LONDON

Leicester won the FA Cup for the first time in the club’s 137-year history on Saturday as Youri Tielemans’s sensational strike beat Chelsea 1-0 in front of 22,000 fans at Wembley.

The largest crowd for a sports event in England since the coronavirus pandemic hit 14 months ago were treated to a goal worthy to win any trophy as the Belgian midfielder blasted into the top corner on 63 minutes. Kasper Schmeichel

produced a stunning save to deny Mason Mount late on and Chelsea also had a goal ruled out by a VAR review for offside.

Five years after the Foxes stunned the Premier League’s giants to become champions, Leicester have now claimed

English football’s other prestigious trophy at the fifth time of asking. Four times they had previously lost the final, but the last of those was 52 years ago.

A historic week for Brendan Rodgers’s men could get even better as they are on

the verge of sealing a place in next season’s Champions League.

The sides meet again in three days’ time at Stamford Bridge in a pivotal clash to decide who secures a top-four finish in the Premier League.

Chelsea need a quick response after losing for just the fourth time in 27 games since Thomas Tuchel replaced the sacked Frank Lampard in January. The Blues also have a Champions League final to look forward to against

Manchester City in two weeks’ time, but could end the campaign without silverware or a place in Europe’s premier club competition next season.

Chelsea’s success under Tuchel has come thanks to an excellent defensive record, but

their struggles at the other end were again exposed.

Tuchel’s men dominated before half-time but laboured to create clear-cut chances despite Leicester losing defensive lynchpin Jonny Evans to injury midway through the first half.

FROM PAGE 1

DELHI’S DEATH RATE 4TH IN WORLD

Some of the worst affected nations like the USA and Brazil recorded a CFR of below 3 percent on Friday.

The Delhi abnormally high CFR is by no means a case of aberration. The same trend has persisted for over a week. A week-long calculation shows that the national Capital recorded 88,114 cases between May 7 and 14 with an average of 12,600 per day. During this period, Delhi recorded 2,178 cases. The CFR for the weeks stands 4 plus pc, which is again very high on every count and comparison.

Compared to Delhi, Kerala has the lowest case fatality rate of .5 per cent even though the State is recording high number of cases every day.

The situation in the national Capital is baffling because the state government has resolved the oxygen crisis and also taken steps to ensure that issues related to unavailability of beds don’t come in the way of hospitalisation of any serious patients. Incidentally, at the peak of the first corona wave in November last year, Delhi had recorded a CFR of around 1.2 per cent. The national capital recorded 6,746 new Covid-19 cases on November 20, 2020, with the day’s death count of 121. At that time, several experts had claimed that the rise in the death count was due to pollution caused by stubble burning. Now that there has been a near three-fold rise in the CFR, nothing on the surface explains this spike.

INDUSTRIALIST PRAKASH HINDUJA FINED

order in a Geneva court in December 2019 on a charge of forging a document at a bank. The Swiss prosecutor believed there were grounds to proceed against Ajay Hinduja, who has denied any wrongdoing. The Geneva prosecutor’s office confirmed that he had challenged and the matter is due to be heard in court, but has been delayed due to Covid.

The four Hinduja brothers — Sirichand P Hinduja, Gopichand Hinduja, Prakash P Hinduja and Ashok P Hinduja — are for the past two years bickering over transfer of shares to the next generation. It is mainly because of the e family tussles that Ashok Hinduja and Prakash Hinduja’s son Ajay are facing legal troubles in Mauritius and Geneva courts.

According to lawyers, Sirichand and Gopichand are unhappy with the handling the affairs of the operation of the companies across the World.

The family disputes started in November 2020, when Ajay stood for reelection as Director in the Annual General Meeting of the Mauritius-registered company IndusInd International Holdings Ltd or IIHL. His uncle, Ashok Hinduja who lives in India chaired the board. Other elder brothers are settled in London and Switzerland.

MODI ORDERS AUDIT

There were reports that a high number of imported ventilators have not even been unpacked weeks after they arrived in the country. The PM further said that refresher training for properly operating ventilators should be provided to health-care workers if necessary.

He also spoke about empowering

ASHA & Anganwadi workers with all necessary tools. Modi asked for guidelines to be made available in easy language along with illustrations for home isolation and treatment in rural areas.

Top officials briefed the Prime Minister saying testing has gone up rapidly in the country, from around 50 lakh tests per week in early March to around 1.3 crore tests per week now.

Modi has been taking regular high-level meetings to review of Covid19 situation with a focus on Oxygen supply, increased vaccination and ways to prevent spread of Covid19 in rural areas.

STEROID MISUSE

There were very few cases before Covid-19, but a large number of cases are only being reported in recent times due to the coronavirus disease infection, which affects immunity. Since steroids like dexamethasone also repress the immune system, it is necessary to be extra careful regarding its use, now more so than ever. The statement follows several deaths being reported from the country due to infections caused by the black fungus.

Earlier in the day, the Haryana Health Minister Anil Vij said black fungus has been declared a notified disease in the state. “Now, if any cases of this disease are found, the doctors will have to report them to the concerned chief medical officer (CMO),” Vij said.

Dr Anoop Misra, Chairman, Fortis CDCO Hospital for Diabetes and Allied Sciences said, “physicians should use steroids judiciously, and use insulin aggressively to control sugar. Once that is done, black fungus will not occur.”

Experts say that those with compromised immune systems, for example, those with blood cancer undergoing chemotherapy or bone-marrow transplant (BMT) patients who can’t form neutrophils-a type of white blood cell that defends against infections-in the initial weeks, are vulnerable to black fungus.

INDIA’S CORONA SITUATION ‘HUGELY CONCERNING’

India is in the midst of a deadly wave of the coronavirus pandemic, with 3,43,144 people testing positive for the virus on Friday, taking the country’s caseload to 2,40,46,809. The death toll stands at 2,62,317. India’s Covid-19 tally crossed the 10 million mark on December 19 and in under six months it has doubled, surpassing the grim milestone of 20 million cases on May 4. Ghebreyesus pointed out that the emergency-like situation was not restricted to India. “Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Egypt are just some of the countries that are dealing with spikes in cases and hospitalisations,” he said adding that some countries in the Americas still have high numbers of cases and as a region, the Americas accounted for 40 per cent of all Covid-19 deaths last week.

There are also spikes in some countries in Africa. “These countries are in heightened response mode and WHO will continue to provide support in all ways possible,” he said.

Noting that Covid-19 has already cost more than 3.3 million lives across the world, Ghebreyesus said, “We’re on track for the second year of this pandemic to be

far more deadly than the first.”

He lamented that vaccine supply remains a key challenge and that saving lives and livelihoods with a combination of public health measures and vaccination — not one or the other — is the only way out of the pandemic.

PLASMA THERAPY NO SILVER BULLETS: STUDY

In the absence of any cure of Covid-19, patients and their relatives have been desperately seeking plasma donors, making requests on social media like tweeter. In fact since last year during the Covid-19 spread, States like Delhi and Maharashtra set up the plasma bank, for donors and needy. However, the Union Health Ministry’s AIIMS-ICMR National Covid Task Force guidelines issued on April 22 had allowed the “off label” use of plasma therapy at the stage of early moderate disease, i.e, within seven days of the onset of symptoms, and if there is availability of a high titre donor plasma.

Disagreeing with the Ministry’s protocol, a group of 18 clinicians and public health professionals last week wrote to the Central Government asking it to change guidelines in this regard.

Agreeing with the study, Dr CS Pramesh, Thoracic surgeon and director of Tata Memorial Hospital tweeted, “We have to let science decide our treatment policy. Not personal opinions, eminence, or experience. And based on very good science, we now know that #ConvalescentPlasma is not useful in #Covid-19.”

As per the study, between 28 May 2020 and 15 January 2021, 13,127 (81 per cent) of 16,287 patients enrolled into the recovery trial were eligible to receive convalescent plasma. Of this, 1,569 (12 per cent) were randomly assigned to the REGN-COV-2 group and are not included in the study. Of the remaining 11,558 patients, 5,795 were randomly assigned to the convalescent plasma group and 5,763 to the usual care group.

Outcomes were assessed at 28 days after randomisation, with additional analyses specified at 6 months.

The study found no significant difference in 28-day mortality between the two groups: 1,399 (24 per cent) of 5,795 patients died in the convalescent plasma group and 1,408 (24 per cent) of 5,763 patients died in the usual care group. The median time to discharge was 12 days in the convalescent plasma group and 11 days in the usual care group.

“Patients in the convalescent plasma group had a similar probability of being discharged alive within 28 days compared with the usual care group (3832 [66 per cent] of 5,795 patients in the convalescent plasma group vs 3822 [66 per cent] of 5,763 patients in the usual care group,” the study said.

Even in terms of progressing to secondary outcomes, which include requiring intrusive medical ventilation, the study found no difference in the two groups. “The number of patients progressing to the pre-specified composite secondary outcome of invasive mechanical ventilation or death was similar in the two groups (1,568 [29 per cent] of 5493 patients in the convalescent plasma group vs 1568 [29 per cent] of 5,448 patients in the usual care group,” the study said.

“The results of this large, randomised trial show that convalescent plasma did not improve survival or other clinical outcomes in patients hospitalised with Covid-19,” the study said.

TN CONTAINED VIRUS, POLLS UNLEASHED IT

The day the Chief Election Commissioner announced the poll schedule for the State, Tamil Nadu had logged 481 new cases with five deaths. The State had 4,046 active patients undergoing treatment for Covid-19.

Dr CV Krishnaswamy, eminent physician, who had been monitoring the “progress” of the Covid-19 curve from day one itself, had declined to make any comment when the poll dates were announced. “This is not the ideal time to hold the election in Tamil Nadu. But I do not know the nitty gritty of politics and you may kindly leave me alone,” Dr Krishnaswamy had told The Pioneer on that day.

On March 14, the State diagnosed 759 new persons with pandemics. There were four deaths recorded from all over the State with test positivity rate of 1.13 per cent. By March 21, the number of new persons diagnosed with Covid-19 rose to 1,289 with 9 fatalities. Since then there was no going back in Tamil Nadu. By March 28, the figures read 2,194 new cases, 11 deaths and TPR 2.58 per cent. Campaigning was approaching the peak as face masks had altogether disappeared and there were no social distancing norms.

Data provided by the Directorate of Health and Preventive Medicine in subsequent days showed a steady and speedy hike in the transmission of the pandemic. While on April 6, there were 3,645 new cases and 15 deaths, the TPR rose to 4.54.

By April 20, the figure for new cases neared the 11,000 mark (10,986 to be precise) and 48 deaths were logged. The TPR was 11.07 percent. On May 7, the State saw the number of new patients reaching 26,465 with 197 deaths and 18.21 per cent TPR.

Since May 9, the State has declared total lockdown which has been extended to May 24. “It was the peak of callousness and irresponsibility that made the authorities go ahead with the election. The free-for-all campaign in Tamil Nadu was not unknown to the authorities in the State. They should not have gone ahead with the poll at this juncture,” said Dr T Jacob John, a renowned virologist who headed the Christian Medical College Vellore.

He also blamed the Kumbh Mela for the hike in pandemic cases. “I do not know how many persons from Tamil Nadu made it to Kumbh Mela but there are thousands who went to the ritual from Karnataka and the result is there to see,” said Dr Jacob John. The virologist was of the view that had the authorities taken enough precautions the pandemic would not have reached this level in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. “If you had the option to put the election on hold, you could have done that. Otherwise, be strict and stringent with the people,” said Dr John.

RECUPERATING KERALA RELAPSED

On February 27, there were 3,792 new

cases diagnosed in Kerala while the death figures stood at 18. The Chief Minister asked the people in the State not to violate the protocols and guidelines prescribed by the Government during the campaign. It is not known whether the message has gone down well with the people.

On March 15, the number of new patients had come down to 1,054 while the fatalities reported in that day stood at 11. “Since then the flood gates were opened and there was no looking back. While election campaign peaked, all leaders cutting across party lines threw the protocols to the winds and that’s why we are in a grave situation as on today,” said Dr Rajeeve, physician, who leads the rapid response team of medical doctors and health workers in Ernakulam district. He said the open violation of the dos and don’ts has resulted in the triple lockdown of the district and extension of lockdown in the State.

Dr D Reghu, head of the department of pathology, Government Homeopathy College, Trivandrum fully agreed with Dr Rajeeve. “There should have been stringent regulations in place. The leaders themselves should have set an example to the followers and cadres by observing these guidelines with diligence,” said Dr Reghu, who is the secretary of Arogya Bharati.

The figures for March 30 showed 2,389 new cases with 16 deaths and TPR (Test positivity ratio) of four percent marked the arrival of Covid’s second wave in the State. The festival of democracy came to a close on April 6 while the festivities of Vishu ended on April 15.

“The balance sheet for April 15 read 8,126 new cases, 20 deaths and TPR of 13 percent. Since then it was a north-bound journey,” said Dr Madhu, senior Government Physician at Ernakulam. He is of the view that the Government and the ECO should have decided to postpone the polls till the pandemic subsided.

3% POSITIVITY RATE BEFORE BENGAL CAMPAIGN, 34% AFTER ELECTIONS

To quote from Bengal Government records, the State had registered a single day spike of 812 cases with the death of two persons on March 27 the first election day. By April 4 the number of daily spike had reached 2,000. By April 11 it had breached 4,000 mark. And then in a week’s time it had more than doubled. In the next one week the total number of daily cases had witnessed a near 100 per cent rise with more than 15,000 cases.

While in the first week of May the figure was hovering around 17,000 the number has crossed 21,000 post Friday, Health Department sources said, adding, however, that the percentage rate of daily spike had come down by a fraction in the past few days to about 30 per cent.

To hammer home their point, the Government health experts said the rate of increase has been higher particularly in the areas that witnessed large rallies: For instance North and South 24 Parganas, East Midnapore, Howrah, Nadia and Capital Kolkata.

The number of samples tested in the 24 hours intervening Thursday and Friday for the first time exceeded 70,000 (70,473) with the number of active cases going up to 1,28,684. Kolkata and North 24 Parganas

have recorded the highest number of 44 deaths. The death toll in the State has also mounted to 12,993 after 136 more people died on Friday.

“In the first wave, we managed to save rural areas of the state but this time the situation is alarming essentially because of rallies and roadshows ...the doctors had been repeatedly asking the politicians to avoid large rallies but they would not listen. This is why we are in such a mess ... otherwise Bengal was in a comparatively better situation,” said Dr Sibashis Banerjee. Criticising the Election Commission for holding elections in 8 phases TMC MP Saugato Roy said, “We asked them to bring it down to 3 or 4 phases because of the pandemic situation but they would not listen ... everyone knows why ... now the people will have to bear the brunt” Congress Lok Sabha leader Adhir Chowdhury too said, “We had asked the poll panel to stop elections after the fourth phase till the situation improved but they did not listen to us.”

In fact it required two strong orders from Madras and Calcutta High Courts for the elections to take steps towards curbing big rallies. But by then the damage had been done, experts said.

POLL FEVER CHANGED IT ALL IN ASSAM

The campaigns, which directly and indirectly, involved tens of thousands of people on a daily basis, provided corona the perfect manure for growth. On April 6 when the three-phase poll ended, Assam was still recording a two-digit caseload (92), but the virus had spread far and wide during the six-seven week of campaigning. With every passing of day more and more cases began to surface and the death count also rose proportionately.

The State is witnessing 4,000-plus cases and 75 deaths per day during the last one week. There will be few instances of such multiplication of cases in any other parts of the country.

For example take the case of Maharashtra, the worst affected state in the country. On February 26 the State recorded 8,333 cases and 48 deaths. Subsequently, the state recorded nearly 70,000 cases at the peak, which translates into a below nine-time rise. Compare that with Assam’s phenomenal growth of nearly 1,225 per cent, and the impact of poll mobilisation on the spread of corona is crystal clear.

PUDUCHERRY SEES 60 TIMES JUMP

Puducherry has seen more than 60-time rise in the number of cases during this period, the better part of which was in the throes of aggressive poll campaigning. The poll in the UT took place on April 6.

While it’s true that on April 6, the State was relatively safe from the scourge of corona, but the data were misleading. The UT recorded no fatality on that date and the caseload on that day was just around 225. But the bomb exploded after the polls when infections began to spread. In the last one week, the number of new infections has grown by an average of 2.4 per cent every day and the case fatality ratio is 1.4 percent, way ahead of country’s average of around 1.2 per cent.

The second wave of COVID-19 is leaving death and destruction in its wake. Amidst this chaos there are people who are working round the clock to help those looking for plasma as a treatment to save lives. SHALINI SAKSENA chats up these COVID warriors

Last year, when the virus gripped the world and killed lakhs, a new ray hope came in the form of plasma therapy. Several people came forward and did whatever they could to connect the recipient with the donor. However, in 2020, the situation was not what it is today. Cut to April 2021, the situation is just the opposite.

The demand for plasma donation is sky high. This is when people like Adnan Shah and Chef Sanjay Raina stepped in. The idea to create a Twitter handle — PlasmaNCR — was to field requests and expand plasma donor pools.

“It was quite a spontaneous decision. When the COVID-19 hell broke loose, we saw some requests on Twitter for plasma which were not getting as much attention as requests for hospital beds and oxygen cylinders. We decided that this would be our focus area and PlasmaNCR was born,” Raina says. And it began with him and Adnan Shah, his friend, to assist fellow Kashmiris in NCR in getting a hospital bed. But the moment they saw the scale of unfolding disaster, they decided to help whomsoever they could.

And disaster it is. Shah and Raina work round the clock to help recipients connect with the donors. Shah tells you that he and Raina sleep only four hours each to handle the number of calls they get 24X7.

“I sleep from 12 am to 4 am; Raina sleeps from 4 am till 8 pm. That is how we manage to address the many calls as possible. So much so that my number (07006946304) has now gone viral since then. We want to reach out to as many people as fast as possible in the shortest possible time because every minute is crucial. People can reach out on our Twitter handle where the patient or his family member can share the details and fill out a concise form there. We then reach out to people who can come forward and become donors. At the same time, we are trying to create a donor pool. We started this social cause on the day things went out of control. On Day 1 we got 100 calls and since the number has only been rising. Today, we are getting 1,000 requests. The minute there is a thumbs up on a request it means that we are working on connecting the donor with the recipient. And it is not first come first serve. It depends on the urgency and criticality of each case,” Shah explains.

However, it is not always possible for the duo to close to request at their end. That is when they reach out to others doing similar work to help them out. No request is closed until a recipient is connected with a donor.

“We have been working for the last 26 days. To begin with we were closing 150 request. Today it is 200. The nation is in crisis and it is not possible to give the exact number

since we are also not keeping track



Nitesh Singh, TeamSOS India

of the numbers. When we started this initiative, we never realised that we would get so many calls; never realised that our work would be recognised in Delhi-NCR. Now, we get requests from Mumbai and the Valley as well. We have a contact in Mumbai. whatever calls we get from the city, we direct it to that person. Similarly, we have contacts in Kashmir and ask them to help us when a request comes from that State. We are also trying to lend a helping hand in States where there is a need,” Shah says.

Nitesh Singh, who started Team SOS India in April 2020, tells you that their initiative has 1,723 volunteers spread all across the country today. However, he tells you that this is a small group given the number of requests they get.

“Our team works till 4 am daily to handle the cases we get. To make it easy for us to meet requests, we have three teams — North, Central and South. On an average, we are getting 500-600 requests for beds and 2,000 plasma requests. When I started this last year, it was on my personal number but soon realised I needed a big team and created Team SOS India. The idea is to save one person and in doing so, one is saving one’s soul,” Singh says.

He tells you that the situation at present is not good. “We are getting requests from places people would have never heard of. Take an example — Tanuku, in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh or Machilipatnam. Last year, we weren’t getting any cases from the South. Today, we get five-six requests daily. Also, people are scared this time round,” Singh says.

The challenge or the gap that exists today is in Delhi-NCR.

“There is so much negativity around

LIFE SAVIOURS



Sanjay Raina and Adnan Shah, owners of Twitter handle, PlasmaNCR



Bhawna Arora



Nikhil Chawla

in the Capital due to shortage of oxygen, medicines and beds. All this makes people of Delhi scared. Then there is Black Fungus scare,” Singh tells you.

Another challenge he faces is that not many donors come forward as they fear they may test positive again. Also, they don’t want their number to be given out.

“In such a situation, a person is assigned to the donor who are volunteers and their extended family. We coordinate everything. Just arranging the donor doesn’t solve the problem. Donation has to go through too. The donor has to go to the hospital where the recipient is, give the patient ID and donate plasma. Since we have been doing this for a year, things are in place,” Singh says who is an educator by profession and teaches students to prepare for JEE.

Singh is on a mission — Mission 2024 — to ensure that nobody dies due to lack of blood. “If I can get 10,000 people from across India who can donate blood, we can meet the challenge of any pandemic,” Singh says. Bhawna Arora, founder of Kamla Arora Blessings Foundation and based out of London tells you that her journey began in 2017 when her mother died due to a rare blood disease in India. “I saw the com-

plexities to get blood donors. We have been for the last three years working in the donation campaign. Since the pandemic hit in March 2020, we have been working to fetch a donor for the recipient. We have received over 60,000 calls since last year for plasma requests,” Arora says.

Her number (8810618253) has been circulated on social media platforms and she gets WhatsApp messages and Facebook. She and her India coordinator, Vivek Jain (9810063261) manage to attend to the requests between the two on them. “Looking at the demand, we are working day and night. One doesn’t look at the time when there is a life involved,” Arora says.

She tells you that the need of the hour is to give the right advocacy to the people so that they can forward and serve humanity. “Second there is a need to streamline communication between all stakeholders. We live in the time of AI. Why not use it to optimum. There is so much information out there, some verified some not. We need to structure it more so we can serve more people. It is necessary to motivate people to donate as well. There is a need to have one large platform — we need one channel where the needs are met, faith will develop and the people will come forward and do what is required. Things have become competitive today. There are so many people working trying to bring donor and recipient together but we don’t know who is giving value output. The fraud and mistrust is too hampering donors from coming forward,” Arora opines.

Agrees Sarthak Verma of Plasma Connect app. Back then he used to get one or two downloads. “Today, there are over a 1,000 users. Also back then, few people knew about plasma therapy. Today, there is far more awareness as it has become a critical treatment for COVID-19,” Verma says.

According to him the biggest challenge is the authenticity of the requests made and the donors. “Many brokers have emerged and are charging to connect them with donors. We don’t want such people. It creates mistrust among the donors. When people come to my app now, a form has to be filled in. The information is then verified. This takes care of any false leads and we are able to connect the correct donor with the correct recipient,” Verma says.

For Nikhil Chawla, in the Capital, it all started with a family member needing plasma. “When I was running around trying to arrange for the same I realised the lack of infrastructure and the huge gap between the need for plasma and donors. I contacted everyone on my social media if they were willing to donate plasma and the journey began,” Chawla recalls.

And it has been a tough one for him personally. In the last 15 days he has lost four immediate family members and had thought of giving it up. But then he got a message from a mother thanking him for helping her get in touch with a donor that saved her daughter’s life. “When I lost two of my cousins, *taiji* and *tauji*, I thought all my efforts to create a data and putting it out had come to not. But messages like the one sent by the mother keeps me going,” Chawla says.

He tells you that a donor doesn’t have to go to the hospital to donate plasma. “There are blood banks. The donor can go there, donate blood and walk away with plasma. There are many banks that give plasma in lieu of blood. There is lack of awareness leading to wrong information; people think that if they donate plasma their antibodies will reduce. This is incorrect. The only thing to remember is that one can donate only once a month,” Chawla tells you.

Initially, the idea was to help people around Delhi but he couldn’t turn down a request that came from another city. “It has become an obsession to try and help as many people as possible. I just manage to sleep couple of hours at night. My work is on hold for now. So I am trying to help whoever I can. It brings me peace when I am able to people,” Chawla says.

‘With little exposure, rap culture in Jammu is slow’

Shayaan Bhat aka rapper SHEN B from Jammu, who has released his latest hip hop track Zamaana, speaks with SHALINI SAKSENA about how he got into music and the challenges he faced



❖ What is Zamaana, the EP, about?

Basically, the EP has all the songs that are really close to me. They talk about things that have happened and experiences that I have been through over the course of time that I have been doing music like bullying, censorship and my faith in God. It is a mix of many things. When I am writing a song, it has many things; it is a journey. I ask myself a set of questions. For example, it could be about society. I then answer these myself. That is how *Zamaana* was born.

❖ The songs highlight issues the youth face like bullying, censorship, self-esteem, corruption and faith. Why choose these subjects?

I have faced a lot of bullying when I was growing up because the way I used to think about the world. My interests were different when I was in school. I was an introvert. I would bunk my school to go to learn music. I loved to spend time playing the instruments. Others kids would make fun of me and say that I was weird. I was fat too that led to bullying as well. Body shaming was so common. People would look down upon me because I am an artist. Where I come from Jammu. There is only one acceptable job, a Government job. People don’t understand art here. I was pressurised to take up a Government job but I rode all that.

❖ From Shayaan to Shen B, how did that happen?

I gave this name to myself. I could have just gone with Shayaan; I love my name. But I wanted to create a totally different persona for myself - one who is expressive and is an extrovert. When I became Shen B, it gave me the power to express myself. I had a few friends who supported me. I had left music for four years to do m masters. I went to Mumbai and worked there but then I came back home because I wanted peace in my life. My friends encouraged me to get back to music and here I am.

❖ How did you get into music?

It has been with me since I was a toddler. My grandparents were musicians so I would say that music is in my blood. I come from an orthodox Muslim family and they don’t encourage music. But I continued to learn. It was only when I turned 22 when my mother told me about our family’s legacy but they stopped due to religious reasons. I got into music because I saw a few people play guitar. I was hooked. I was in Class VIII. I joined them, became drummer and was part of their band.

❖ Why hip-hop?

If I could sing, I would. Unfortunately, I don’t have the voice of a singer. I can just express myself. I had made a rap about a man who had bullied me and it went viral in Jammu and that got me more interested.

❖ What is the hip-hop scene in the city?

It is growing but sadly, those in underground rap have never left the city. There is lack of exposure. But we are slowly getting there. We have gatherings; rappers from other cities come. Since there is no club culture, the rap scene is slow.

❖ What are the challenges faced to be a singer?

When I came back home in 2019, I didn’t know much about rap but I started putting up my music. During the lockdown, we had no Internet. I had to look for locations where I could get good reception to post my music. I lost my mother due to COVID-19. She was my only supporter so things changed for me after that. I also don’t get many gigs. But I am a graphic designer and earn enough to work on my music.

‘Staying safe is need of the hour’

■ Tell us about your experience of being part of Bigg Boss 13.

That was of course, was back in 2019. There was no Bigg Boss in 2020 for obvious reasons. I would say that 2021 is also turning out to be like 2020. To come back to Bigg Boss, the experience was fantastic. It was not the first time that I was offered to part of this reality show. I was offered Bigg Boss 1 and since then it came to me almost every year. But I kept turning it down. I was not ready to be part of the show till 2019. It is a very intense game that one needs to be ready for. When it came to me again, my gut told to be go ahead with it. I am glad that I did it since it is the only season to have the highest rating. I had a lot of fun of doing it.

■ What was the take away from it?

Now that the season is behind me, I can think of only good things it brought me — the good changes. It makes you realise how important family is. One is cut off from the world when one is in the House. You are living in a beautiful luxurious house but there are a lot of restrictions and limitations. It is about survival of the fittest. One has to be prepared to be part of it because it can take a toll on you mentally.

■ You kept refusing and said yes to Season 13. What was the attraction?

I do follow my gut and intuition when it comes to choosing projects. When I was offered the season, I was ready and there was something in me that told me to go for it. I had been offered so many times and felt this was like a now or never for me.

■ You did Nach Baliye as well.

In *Nach Baliye*, I was in my zone. I was known for my dancing. I think I am the only one to have been part of the show twice. It was great to dance with Parag, him being a non-dancer. It was tough to make him get up and dance and I have such love for it.

■ You have done a few reality shows? What’s your take on them? Does it help get noticed in the right circles?

The people who have already been established are the ones who get an

I would say it was my calling. The album was destined to happen because of the way things unfolded and it carved a path for me. Once the song became popular I felt it was something that I was good at, be a good dancer than an engineer

opportunity to show another side to you. Reality show are great but it is different from a talent-based reality show. Shows like this come to artists who are somewhat established. Reality shows, on the other hand give you the opportunity to showcase your talent and get noticed. Bigg Boss does give you an opportunity to stand out, garner attention and have a large fan following. But matters is what you do after that to achieve a high.

■ Does it bother you that people still think of you are the Kaanta Laga girl?

Not at all. Just the opposite, it is wonderful. People spend years to create an identity and with my very first song I was able to make such a strong one and no matter what I did after that, I would forever be the *Kaanta Laga* girl and there is only one *Kaanta Laga* girl in the whole world. I am proud to have this tag. It makes me happy that after so many years, people still enjoy the song.

■ Did you think that the song would be such a hit?

Forget back then, it feels so surreal that the song garnered so much attention even today. I find it difficult to believe the popularity and success of the song. I was just a college girls when she was spotted outside her college and offered the music. I had no aspirations to be part of the industry. I did purely

because I wanted to be seen on TV.

■ How did you end up doing a music album?

I was sitting outside my college when I was spotted by director duo Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru. I was not even looking my best that day but they probably felt I fit the bill. Back then songs were made like films. We spent two-three months preparing. I was such a spoilt brat and didn’t understand the seriousness of the work. It was only when the song became hot that I understood. It was such a fairy tale for me — a Gujarati girl from a middle class family became a star overnight.

■ What was about the album that made you join the industry?

I would say it was my calling. The album was destined to happen because of the way things unfolded and it carved a path for me. Once the song became popular I felt it was something that I was good at, be a good dancer than an engineer. From the dancer, I branched out and did two web series and looking forward to more projects.

■ Things have once again come to a standstill for the industry. How are you coping?

I have understood that I need to deal with the situation since I am not alone. I do have a few projects but they are on hold. *Jaan hai to jahan hai*. Money can be earned again. Staying safe is the need of the hour.



Talktime

SHEFALI JARIWALA

The Kaanta Laga girl, who was part of Bigg Boss 13, speaks with Shalini Saxena about how she ended up doing the music video that propelled her into the industry.

the pioneer agenda



FROM THE INSIDE

The potency of sound

A *mantra* is an instrument of the mind that helps us to concentrate, intensify and spiritualise our consciousness

2



4

The tale of Ganapati

Be it an animal or a human existence, their dynamic existence is rooted in a common factor — the consciousness element

You are only as beautiful as the many beautiful things you do for others without expectation
— Janelle Monae



The impact of the pandemic on the youth is disruptive. While they are actively helping others, they are also simultaneously dealing with immense emotional turmoil of their own, writes Dr CHANDNI TUGNAIT, as she suggests ways to move beyond it to create a life outside of it

THE FIGHT FOR SANITY

The present scenario, with the rise in Covid-19 cases and deaths, is nothing short of a nightmare. Most people are experiencing mixed emotions and a lingering feeling of, “I don't feel like doing anything”. This is not only because of the news and information overload on social media, but also the fact that people are losing their near and dear ones without as much of a hint.

The pain, overwhelm, fears, anger, social isolation and uncertainty are not only impacting the youth but even the kids. The years 2020 and 2021 have changed not just how we live or work but also how our children study and play. While the working youth seem to be grappling with the situation, whether it is loss of a job, business, medical facility, or life, the kids are a witness to it all. The impact is much more than what meets the eye. The confused feelings, unprocessed emotions, unclear thoughts and panicky actions are leaving a deep impact on our mental and emotional health as well.

The immediate and the long-term mental health impacts of the pandemic on the kids is difficult to estimate. However, the cases of anxiety, stress and depression amongst children between the age group of 5-16 years has seen a huge spike in the last one year. While initially they felt relieved with the online classes, the severity of the pandemic and the impact of the changes in their lives (and that of their parents) soon began to dawn upon them. The common complaints that I get from parents these days is lack of focus, lack of physical exercise, over-eating, irritability, anxiety, bouts of anger, fears and sadness in kids.

Ironically, all this is being experienced by the parents as well. No matter how we conduct ourselves in front of our children, they know exactly what is happening around us. The TV, news, social media, conversations on phone and with each other, the quarantine of a family member, life-threatening situations, the panic on our faces — they can sense it all.

The schools are rushing with the syllabus online because the education of the child is important but are we considerate towards their mental health? How are the current experiences and unprocessed emotions going to impact these children as adults?

Our mental health impacts how we respond, feel, think and act. Our behaviour, decision-making and physical health is all linked to our mental health. Hence, it is essential to give love and assurance and impart coping skills to not only the adults but also to the children.

The pandemic has reshaped the world beyond imagination. The suffering in India has gone to the level of basic requirements of food, shelter, medical facility and transport not being met for a large part of the population. The situation is grim with high levels of insecurity and chaos.

Of late, there is propensity for blame towards the authorities. It's never easy to lose a loved one, never. The fear, anger, blame, guilt — the whole gamut of emotions is all justified. But what is also important is to pause for a moment and accept all these emotions and begin to process them. Situation is grim for everyone (in some way or the other). What we need in today's times is prayer, compassion, love and gratitude.

The impact of the pandemic on the youth is disruptive. While they are actively helping others, they are also simultaneously dealing

with immense emotional turmoil of their own.

The fact is that as a country we do not have a strong medical infrastructure *vis-à-vis* our population. We all know this (we knew it all along). But what we didn't know is the severity of the virus and how it could take away our loved ones away from us, forever, in a matter of hours. We are all guilty at some level. We all have to take the ownership for the present situation in order to change it. Despite knowing the safety protocol, a large part of the population didn't follow it. Do we always need a lockdown to exhibit appropriate behaviour? Do we know someone who doesn't wear masks, someone who went for the Diwali party at a friend's house with 20 others, someone who couldn't wait to travel to Goa, Kerala, Maldives, someone who refuted the existence of covid all together?

Now is not the time to find faults with self or others but to change the focus to what good is happening around us and how can we make it better. The brain is extremely powerful in amplifying whatever we focus upon. Till we keep complaining about our present circumstances, our mind will focus on it. The more we talk about it, write about it or feel negative about it, the more we reinforce the same neural pathways in our brain that keep adding to the misery. To change this, let's focus on the good around us.

Look around, there are many people trying to help with oxygen cylinders, connections in hospitals for beds, arranging plasma, food, support, counselling, therapies and more. Not everyone is trying to bribe, blackmail or take advantage of the situation. It is commendable how the youth is also coming forward to offer assistance, structure communities and make a difference.

Research shows that over 70% of the youth is deeply traumatised with the uncertainty the pandemic has created whether it is with respect to life, relationships, social interactions, forms of expression, health and lives of their loved ones or the disruption in future prospects for education and employment for the youth.

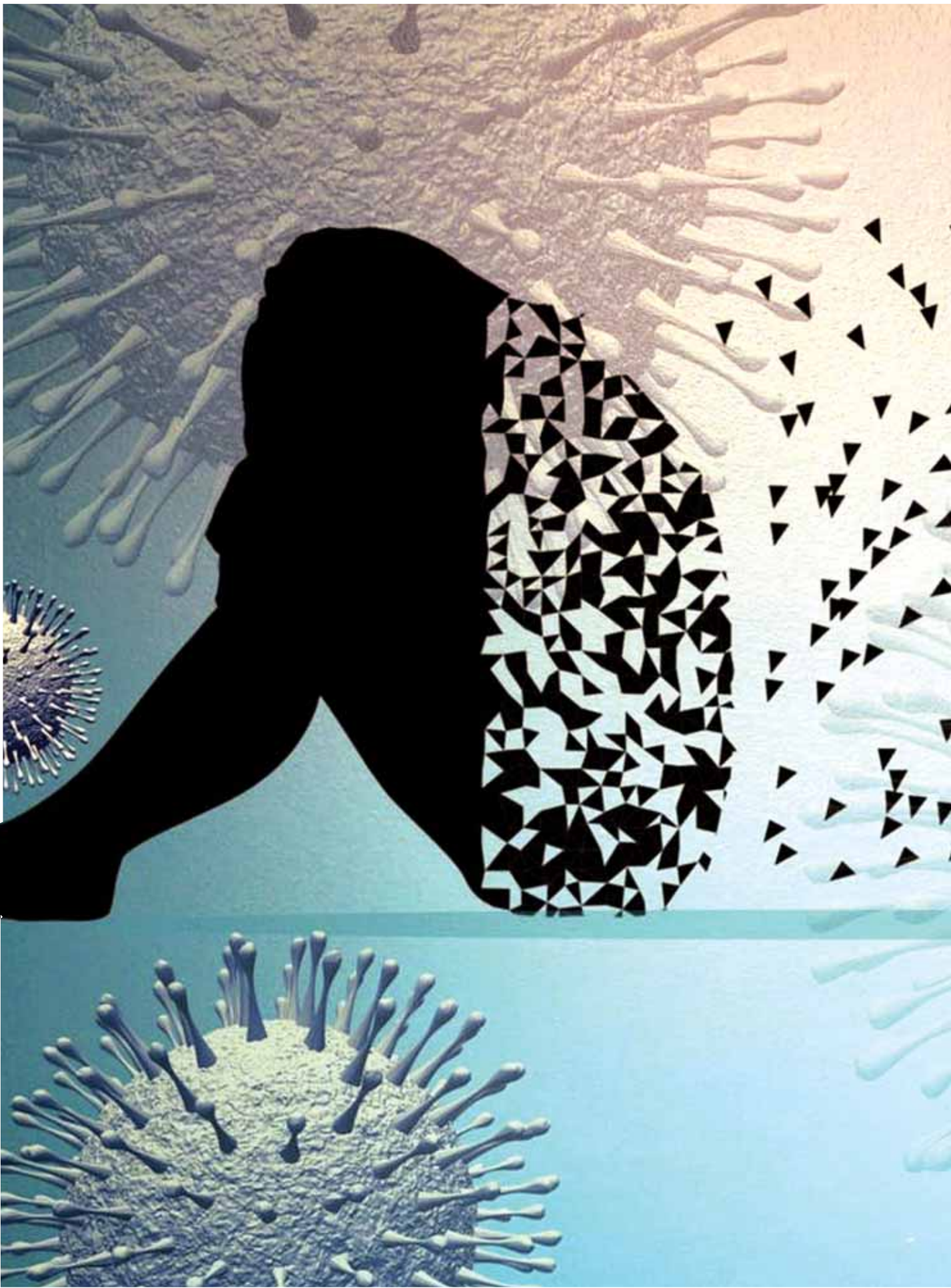
In addition to the grief and loss, there is an impending feeling of doom as over 43% of youth are uncertain about their future career prospects. Many even contemplate suicide. This darkness remains unnoticed as we are fighting to survive this situation.

Despite all odds, the youth is stepping up, raising their voice, offering support, structuring communities, enabling groups and volunteering in ways more than one to fight the situation.

While we should offer them social and psychological support to deal with all this, we should also come up with measures to protect this generation from being permanently scarred by this crisis — physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, financially and behaviourally. Initiatives by the government as well as private sector organisations will help in the long run though immediate support in the form of counselling, therapy, and open communication can go a long way.

The future of our nation lies with our youth and it's of grave importance that we do not take this lightly by letting their life be in a quandary.

There are many people bracing and surviving the virus amidst all the deaths, there



RESEARCH SHOWS THAT OVER 70% OF THE YOUTH IS DEEPLY TRAUMATISED WITH THE UNCERTAINTY THE PANDEMIC HAS CREATED WHETHER IT IS WITH RESPECT TO LIFE, RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, FORMS OF EXPRESSION, HEALTH AND LIVES OF THEIR LOVED ONES OR THE DISRUPTION IN FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT FOR THE YOUTH



are many who are offering relentless care and prayers for humanity at large. There is help and compassion in many places, if not all. Hold onto that and allow yourself to be a conduit for more compassion, gratitude and assistance in any way possible instead of fear and uncertainty.

Coronavirus is probably going to be here for a long time. But we have to move beyond it to create a life outside of it, responsibly.

- Some points to take into consideration are:**
- **Process emotions, don't vent nor bottle them up:** Allow open communication to address the stressors. Listen and express deeply without judgments and in case of chronic stress or anxiety, seek support from an expert.
 - **Respond, don't react:** There is already a lot going on in everyone's lives. Don't snap at people at home or even on other people's social media feed. We can share our views without attacking others.
 - **Operate from love and compassion and not fears and anger:** Say a kind word, offer support, just hold the space for others to be themselves and accept the situation but do not cause panic with minute-by-minute update of statistics.
 - **Be responsible, not reckless:** Follow the safety protocol. Even if you have recovered from Covid, do not act as if all is well. Our actions inspire many others and by being responsible we save not just ourselves but many people around us. The parties, social gatherings, important meetings, can all wait or be done online. Life is precious.
 - **Help in any way possible, don't panic:** When someone you know is in a crisis, get valid connects, check the sources, be mindful, take precaution, help in every way possible and pray for the best. This is all we can do

currently. Also, limit the news and social media intake to up to 15-30 minutes a day to be well apprised of the situation and not be engulfed by it.

- **Do your bit, refrain from judging self and others:** Judgment only takes us away from action thereby delaying results. Be proactive and sensitive to the battles everyone is going through.
- **Take care of yourself:** You can't pour from an empty cup. So, take care of yourself — eating habits, sleep, exercise, breathing and mindfulness practices, get vaccinated and be in the attitude of gratitude.
- **Ask:** “What can I do today to make a difference?” instead of complaining.

It's imperative we come together from the space of love, compassion and gratitude to fight the pandemic. There's no other way.

No act is small. No prayer is negligible. No support is trivial. Looking around and complaining and blaming will only cause more pressure on our emotional, mental and physical well-being.

Operate from awareness and take care of self and others. We are undeniably in a crisis and there are faults at every level — from the root to the top. However, this is not the time to find faults and indulge in blame-game.

It's time to focus on “what can I do to make a difference today?” and then purely from a space of compassion, ACT; without worrying about the results.

Will we be able to save the world? I don't know. But what I do know is that with that one act a day, and thirty acts a month, we can create ripples of change. It all matters. Choose change over complaints. We always have a choice.

The writer is a renowned Psychotherapist & the founder of Gateway of Healing and Life Artistry

In conclusion, we can state that there is the omnipotent God to both protect us and reward us, some rogue souls notwithstanding.

Bishnoi is a spiritual writer and can be reached at spiritual@ajitbishnoi.com

Hawks cash in on Israel-Hamas war

Gaza has once again grabbed the headlines. In East Jerusalem, blood-stained streets and smoldering tyres are telltale signs of a gory fight between the Israeli security forces and the Hamas. The region is witnessing the worst violence since the 50-day war that took place in 2014. Today, the bitter truth for Israel is that Hamas, an Islamic militant group, controls the sensitive Gaza region.

Palestinians live under Israeli settler colonialism. Their fear is based on experience of torture, daily bout of humiliations, constant denial of basic freedoms, absence of dignity of life, living and labour, imprisonment and finally maiming and killing. So it is very natural that every Palestinian born there will have the basic instinct to fight against the Israeli occupation. The hatred is growing towards Israel and its security forces. And if it goes like this for any longer, war-like situation will be a daily affair.

The moot point is what Israel wants? Israel wants total control over East Jerusalem. The current conflict has emerged because of the forced expulsion of Palestinian families from the occupied East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. Some sources say the lands occupied by these families were originally under Jewish ownership. But the Palestinians see this as an extension of an Israeli policy to displace as many Palestinians as possible from Jerusalem. The final aim is to reclaim and retain a majority Jewish identity in the city.

Will Palestine ever get the desired independent land? No, at least for the foreseeable future. It must be said here that the struggle and jihad for Palestine will continue. The Islamic resistance movements like the Hamas, meaning strength, will keep challenging the very identity of the Israeli state. In fact, the Hamas Covenant which consists of 36 articles clearly highlights how the group will take the Islamic movement further. Article 15 of the Covenant says that the jihad for the liberation of Palestine is an individual duty.

It says, "The day that enemies usurp part of Muslim land, jihad becomes the individual duty of every Muslim. In face of the Jews usurpation of Palestine, it is compulsory that the banner of jihad be raised. To do this requires the diffusion of Islamic consciousness among the masses,



Smoke rises following Israeli airstrikes on a building in Gaza City on Friday

AP

both on the regional, Arab and Islamic ummah levels. It is necessary to instill the spirit of jihad in the heart of the nation so that they would confront the enemies and join the ranks of the fighters."

Palestinians have resisted Israeli occupation and colonisation for decades now. Anger on the Palestinian street has grown. People are raising the banner of protest against Israel. They claim that Israel is making concerted efforts to erase the Palestinian identity from the land.

For now, Tel Aviv has rebuffed any discussion for ceasefire. It vows to continue the offensive. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, is in favour of stepping up its Gaza strikes. He said, "At the conclusion of a situational assessment, it was decided that both the might of the attacks and the frequency of the attacks will be increased."

He also commented that "Hamas and Islamic jihad paid... and will pay a very heavy price for their beligerence... their blood is forfeit". This indicates that Israel will continue its offensive. There is a possibility that this will add fuel to the fire over the decade's long crisis in West Asian region.

The spokesman for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he is saddened by the increasingly large number of casualties, including children, from Israeli air strike in Gaza and of Israeli fatalities from rockets launched from Gaza. He called for maximum restraint by the Israeli security forces. The UN has warned that the planned expulsion of the Palestinian families from East Jerusalem by Israel could amount to war crimes. But it also lashed out at the Hamas for the indiscriminate launch of rockets and mortars towards Israeli population centres.

Meanwhile, the US postponed a UN Security Council meeting on the ongoing flare-up between Israel and the Hamas for the next week. The discussion was supposed to take place this week, but the US is trying to make room for diplomacy so as to avert the worst situation in the contested Gaza territory. The US, a key ally of Israel, has confirmed on multiple occasions that the latter has the full right to defend itself as the terrorist groups from Gaza have launched about 1,750 rockets into its territory. However, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has brushed aside all speculation that Washington

is trying to torpedo the crucial talks altogether. President Joe Biden said, "One of the things that I have seen thus far is that there has not been a significant overreaction."

Around the same time, Israel has been pummeling Gaza with air strikes, levelling buildings leading to killing of dozens of people. Biden has already touted Israel's right to self-defense amid rocket attacks from the Hamas that have killed dozens of people. Thus the White House clarified that Jerusalem must be a place of co-existence.

The European Union, a group of 27 nations, too has criticised the Hamas for the war, by saying that Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel were totally unacceptable. And the EU called on all sides to aim for de-escalation and to prevent more civilian casualties. At the same time, EU foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell condemned eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem. He also called the evictions illegal, saying it only serves to fuel tensions.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson aired his view that "the UK is deeply concerned by the growing violence and civilian casualties and we want to see urgent de-escalation of tensions". Arab League chief

Ahmed Aboul Gheit called the Israeli air strikes indiscriminate and irresponsible.

However, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, a known bete noire of the Israel state, said "Zionists understand nothing but the language of force, so the Palestinians must increase their power and resistance to force the criminals to surrender and stop their brutal acts." Meanwhile the 57-member group of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation voiced its concern over the deteriorating security scenario in East Jerusalem.

Now, as international call for restraint has been raised, both the Hamas and Israel must understand that they are simply killing innocent civilians. War is not the solution to the land problem. The current crisis is only offering the radical elements on both sides a chance to advance their agenda.

The massive deployment of ground troops by the Netanyahu Government on the border signals a broader offensive in the coming days. Moving armed forces near Gaza raises the possibility of an invasion and a bloody war. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) is preparing for all kinds of eventualities and an esca-

lation at the moment. Such deployment of forces took place only in 2014.

As the war continues, global media reports that most of the rockets fired by the Hamas are being blocked by Israel's Iron Dome Defence System. However, some of the rockets that got through the superior defence circuit killed only a few people on the side of Israel. On the other hand, the attacks launched by Israel through its air force over Gaza have been more deadly, with a reported death toll over 90 so far. The Iron Dome is designed to selectively deal with rocket attacks. And also this system intercepts those enemy rockets that head for populated areas. The IDF claims that the Iron Dome is around 90 per cent effective. However, the sources say even a high probability intercept rate can make the Hamas efforts to destroy populated areas purely ineffective. It is to be noted here that the Iron Dome system was made with American finance.

The constant struggle for Palestine to establish its sovereign identity has become a permanent irritant for Israel. On the other hand, Israeli attempt to maintain its status quo and further expand and also to evict illegal Palestinian occupants (according to Tel Aviv) from East Jerusalem foment an ever greater war in the region. The Hamas wants the Jews dead and the state of Israel eliminated. For them, it is not about Israel, but this is ultimately about the Jews.

Today, situation in East Jerusalem is terribly unnerving. It is time for the Israeli garrison state to talk peace. The Hamas, only by working as a proxy, will find it really difficult to bring a solution to the Palestinians. Only result would be death of civilians. And the hawks will be happy. When the deadly, Covid-19 is killing millions across the globe, Tel Aviv and the Hamas must not venture out to take more lives anymore.

(Dr Makhan Saikia has taught political science and international relations for over a decade in institutions of national and international repute across the country after specialisation in globalisation and governance from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He is the chief editor of the Journal of Global Studies, an international research journal)

Tel Aviv's concerted efforts to evict 'illegal' Palestinian settlers from East Jerusalem and Hamas' ceaseless attempts to destroy Israel and Jews are the biggest hurdles in arriving at a peaceful solution. The ongoing war offers the hawks from both sides the much sought-after opportunity as they have some political axe to grind



MAKHAN SAIKIA

PERSPECTIVE

The biggest problem, more relevant to India, is the presence of an extremely high educational hierarchy, which places MBBS course at the top while degrading all other health professionals and scientists. However, when it becomes difficult for qualified doctors to treat patients with the existing knowledge, the role of virologist, geneticist, veterinary doctor, microbiologist, pharmacologist and immunologist becomes crucial to understand the properties and origin of the new virus to develop medicines and vaccines



NIKITA RAWAT

Systemic flaws in Indian health sector exposed

The second wave of Covid-19 has exposed our lack of preparedness for any medical emergency as India has not been able to meet any basic medical requirements that do not need complicated technology or high investment i.e. medicines, oxygen, ventilators, PPE kits, vaccine, etc. Had we faced any other medical emergency related to a virus deadlier than SARS-Cov or some other deadly radiation (as faced by Japan after nuclear attack), probably Indian population would have halved by now.

Covid-19 has provided the nation an opportunity to introspect problems in our health-care system to effectively deal with the ongoing pandemic (which doesn't seem to get over before 2022), and any potential health emergency in the future. Rather than squarely blaming any past or present government at the Centre or State, the purpose of this column is to shake our policy makers to realise the systemic flaws and bottlenecks in the way of development of robust and inclusive health infrastructure in India.

First, we need to recognise that the human health is interconnected with his surrounding environment, including living species i.e. various animals, birds, etc. Rudolf Virchow, a famous German physicist and pathologist, also known as Father of Modern Pathology, coined a term called Zoonosis to refer to any infectious disease which is transmitted from animals to humans. A zoonotic disease is caused by virus, bacteria, fun-

gus, etc, and travels from animals to human. He asserted that there are no dividing lines, nor should there be between animal and human medicine.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization's report "World Livestock 2013" states an important fact that 60 per cent of all new infectious diseases that emerged in last three decades are zoonotic diseases. Viral outbreaks in recent years like nipahvirus, ebola virus, swine flu (H1N1) virus, avian influenza (H5N1) virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS CoV) are all zoonotic viruses. According to World Health Organization (WHO), zoonotic pathogens represent a clear threat to global health. The entire world is at higher risk of future pandemics, primarily of animal origin and combating it would require good co-ordination among medical science, veterinary science, environmental science and other biological sciences.

Realising the importance of this coordination, William Osler, the father of modern medicine and founder of the discipline of veterinary pathology, and Calvin Schwabe (chairperson of a new Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at the University of California) advocated "one medicine" for all.

The second systemic flaw is more relevant to India. It is the presence of an extremely high educational hierarchy, which places MBBS course at the top while degrading all other health professionals and



Photo: Ranjan Dimri

scientists. This mindset is so deep rooted that any talented student pursuing a course in virology, immunology, nursing, physiotherapy or non-allopathic medical courses, etc, is considered inferior because of his/her inability to secure admission to an MBBS course. On the one hand, this hierarchy demoralises other allied fields, and on the other, it paves the way for undue interference by MBBS doctors in the other fields. This leads to a barrier in the development of these fields. Moreover, Indian doctors despite their huge potential, rarely take up medical research as it is less remunerating compared to consultancy, which is highly paid.

A lot of services that can be taken care of by these professionals cannot be performed by MBBS doctors. When a new and unknown disease first hits

a country, the role of doctors/nurses becomes vital. They are expected to treat/care patients with the existing medications/knowledge. When it becomes difficult to treat patients with the existing framework, then the role of virologist, geneticist, veterinary doctor, microbiologist, pharmacologist and immunologist becomes crucial to understand the properties and origin of the new virus to develop medicines and vaccines. After developing vaccines, nurses play an important role in vaccinating the people. Depending on the kind of disease, if it causes complications relating to mobility, muscular contractures, etc, among patients, then the role of physiotherapist becomes important; and if complications make the patient physically disabled or orthopedically handicapped

then begins the role of prosthetist and orthotist to figure out devices to help them.

The risk of zoonosis has increased due to the present human activities such as demographic alterations, increased movement across various continents, disturbing natural phenomenon and over exploitation of the environment. It brings the environmentalist into the picture. Thus, it is clear that an integrated approach toward a public health emergency is an effective way to deal with the unknown disease. Creating a hierarchy between the professions of the same sector can weaken our fight against any disease.

Moreover, these professionals (virologists, immunologists, orthotics & prosthetics, physiotherapist, occupational therapist) could have played a very crucial role during the

ongoing pandemic to meet the shortage of health workers, by being given a very short training. It is worth mentioning here that the educational courses studied by these professionals have a lot of syllabi common with MBBS course. Unfortunately, we have failed to utilise their huge potential.

Thirdly, India has a huge shortage of doctors which is reflected by the indicator of population served by a doctor, which is one of the highest in the world. Despite availability of huge talent, this artificial shortage is due to unnecessary stringent rules to establish a medical college and limited medical seats. Devi Prasad Shetty, one of the leading cardiologists in India, suggested that the Government can build around 300 new medical colleges without any cost which can offer 30,000 new seats. He argued that medical education can be provided to the students even in a single building and for practical training they can be taken to hospitals. According to him most governments refrain from creating new medical colleges since it requires an investment of around ₹450 crore and a time span of around 5 years. Further, the annual maintenance cost of a medical college is also around ₹150 crore. Educating medical students in a simple building without health infrastructure and training them practically in hospitals is the simplest and most cost-effective way of meeting the current demand for doctors.

Lastly, gradual withdrawal of most successive govern-

ments from health infrastructure has resulted in the shortages of hospital beds, oxygen, ventilators, etc. We can clearly notice an obsession of all governments with health insurance schemes especially for the last two decades, rather than expanding existing public health infrastructure. It is worth mentioning here that health insurance generate additional burden on the existing health infrastructure rather than creating any new health infrastructure. If the same amount that has been spent on health insurances by all governments in last two decades had been used to expand health infrastructure, it would have expanded our medical facilities by around 10 per cent, which would have not only provided a lot of jobs but also saved the lives of lakhs of people. Moreover, we can find numerous reports of misuse of insurance schemes by private hospitals by inflating bills through unnecessary medical testing. This has depleted most of the insurance coverage.

It is high time when all Governments in India (Centre or State) should come together to prepare a roadmap to abolish all systemic flaws in our health system. Let us learn from this pandemic and prepare ourselves better for any other such threat to human life in the future.

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Lucky number 10
Lucky colour Yellow
Lucky day Sunday

Lucky number 13
Lucky colour Grey
Lucky day Tuesday

Lucky number 15
Lucky colour Black
Lucky day Saturday

Lucky number 22
Lucky colour Brown
Lucky day Friday

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The tale of Ganapati

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