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APOCALYPSE AND THE LEADERSHIP

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TURKEY SEEKS BETTER SAUDI TIES
DESPITE KHASHOGGI SLAYING

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Clamour for Covid jabs in urban India

Various States
complain about
vaccine shortage

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

There huge demand for vaccination is from urban areas mainly.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Superstition, fear derail vax drive in rural India

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

The Pilana vaccination centre in Baghpat in Western UP witnessed a similar scenario. "There are about 200 houses with 1500-2000 people. Of this, about 500 people are aged above 50, but the coverage in the past month would just be a third of the target

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

Covid-19 IN INDIA	
TOTAL CASES: 2,29,67,832 (+3,05,284)	
DEATHS: 2,49,641 (+3,493)	
RECOVERED: 1,89,96,654 (+3,31,192)	
ACTIVE: 37,11,738	
MAHA: 51,38,973 (+37,236)	
K'TAKA: 19,73,683 (+39,305)	
KERALA: 19,30,116 (+27,487)	
UP: 15,24,767 (+21,277)	
DELHI: 13,36,218 (+12,651)	

Nepal PM Oli loses vote of confidence

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

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

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

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

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

Detailed report on P8

45 'Covid' bodies found floating in Ganga in Buxar

PTI/IANS ■ PATNA

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

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

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

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



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

while ensuring that these are disposed of in a decent manner."

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

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

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

Bodies in Yamuna trigger scare

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

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

File plea for early hearing on Central Vista: HC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

Cong defers party chief poll over Covid crisis

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

Lok Sabha polls.

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

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

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

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

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

J&K Lt Governor's Twitter handle suspended briefly

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

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

The '@OfficeOfLGJandK' handle with over 50,000 followers had an account suspension notice displayed with a line below reading

"Twitter suspends accounts which violate the Twitter Rules" in the evening.

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

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

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

CAPSULE

LOOKOUT NOTICE AGAINST WRESTLER SUSHIL KUMAR

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

DATA: CRPF LOST 108 PERSONNEL TO COVID

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

WHO LABELS STRAIN IN INDIA AS CONCERN

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

Court refuses stay on coercive action against Kalra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

"No stay on Delhi Police's coercive action," the court said. The judge will take up the matter at noon on Tuesday.

During the course of proceedings, Public Prosecutor Atul Shrivastava opposed the pre-arrest bail application.

Postmen give new lease of life to serious patients

PNS ■ NEW DLHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Kafan resale! Victims not spared even after death

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

the novel coronavirus.

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

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

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

dents of Baghpat district in Uttar Pradesh.

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

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

Covid-19 patients to get ‘Birs Jeevan Aayush Kits’ in J’khand

PNS ■ RANCHI

Chief Minister Hemant Soren inaugurated "Birs Jeevan Ayush Program" online from his residential office on Monday. The Chief Minister said, on the occasion, that the State government is working on many new dimensions to overcome this global epidemic. Today another program is being inaugurated in this episode. Many lifesaving medicines by homeopath method have been prepared by homeopathic experts to fight Covid-19 infection. These medicines are useful in correcting oxygen deficiency in patients' body from infection.

The CM said that under this program, ‘Birs Jeevan Aayush Kit’ will be made avail-

able to the Coronavirus infected patients. The ‘Birs Jeevan Aayush Kit’ will have immunity booster medicines to increase immunity, which will be useful in quick recovery of coronavirus infected patients. This kit will also be delivered to the homes of patients living in home isolation. Under this programme, medicines will also be given to the relatives of corona infected patients who have come in contact with them. Besides, medicines will also be given to all the frontline workers working for control of Covid-19. The CM said that this kit of medicines will be made available to the infected patients in all the districts of the State. On the occasion, the Chief Minister flagged off three vehicles plying under ‘Birs

Jeevan Ayush Programme’.

On this occasion, State Health Minister Banna Gupta, Development Commissioner cum Additional Chief Secretary Health Department Arun Kumar Singh, Urban Development Secretary Vinay Kumar Choubey, AYUSH Director Chand Prasad, The Homeopathic Medical Association of India Ranchi Secretary Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Chairman Dr. Naresh Kumar, Members Dr. Mona Kumari, Dr. Ramji Yadav, Dr. Ajay Singh and Ravi Kumar and others were present.

The CM today, stated in a separate message that Covid testing and recovery from Covid-19 is continuously increasing in the State. “The infection rate has also

decreased in the last 10 days. The number of beds / general beds containing ICU / oxygen has also been increased significantly in the last one month. Due to the Amrit Vahini App and the hospital circuit, now everyone is relieved from getting all kinds of beds on time. We are constantly working on how to ban oxygen and other essential medicines' black marketing, and how to make them accessible to you with ease,” he said.

“Through the Corona Relief Kit, we are making every effort to deliver medicines on time to every needy person. Your government is making every necessary effort to protect you, but I apologize for any kind of trouble you may have suffered due to lack of these efforts. I would like to assure you that in our limited resources we will provide you all the best facilities. Now our next priority is to provide free vaccines to all the people of Jharkhand, which we will definitely fulfill.

Banking Correspondent Sakhis become the backbone of rural economy

PNS ■ RANCHI

The Government of Jharkhand is putting every effort to curb the spread of the Covid19 pandemic in the state without impacting the delivery of essential services and ensuring benefits of government schemes reaches the beneficiaries. At the request of Chief Minister the Banking Services Sakhis are proving to be handy in making the banking services accessible to all in the village at their doorstep. These women, known as Bankwali Didi in the villages, are proving to be the backbone of the rural economy. With the help of these BC Sakhis, along with other banking facilities, services like widow pension, old age pension, wages of MGNREGA workers are also being provid-

ed door to door. Bouyed by the tremendous success of this arrangement, the Chief Minister has also set a target of appointing one Banking Correspondent Sakhi in every panchayat.

Anjum Ara is a Banking Correspondent Sakhi of Maganpur panchayat in the Gola block of Ramgarh district. During the lockdown period, Anjum has completed transactions worth more than 46 lakhs through the service delivery to the beneficiaries. Anjum says, 'I provide banking services to people in my panchayat as well as other nearby panchayats. Even during the previous lockdown, I was offering banking services to the people of my area. While delivering banking services to the people, I am constantly in contact with people.

This may expose me to the virus infection. I take all precautions and proper care while providing banking facilities to the people."

Similarly, Sonia Kansari of Karra block of Khunti district is also providing banking facilities to the people of her panchayat at this time of crisis. All the services ranging from money deposit, withdrawal and insurance are available to the people of Karra block at their doorstep. Sonia processes up to 25-30 lakh rupees of transaction every month.

Today, the entire country is fighting a war against the Covid-19 pandemic. In this hour of crisis, many banking correspondents like Anjum and Sonia are continuously providing banking services to the villagers even during the lockdown. Last year

too, during April-July 2020, when a strict lockdown was imposed across the state, 1679 Banking Correspondent Sakhis had processed transactions of more than Rs. 327 crores in doorstep delivery of essential banking services to the rural population. B.C. Sakhis active in the state, making banking services available to the people of their village/panchayat, are continuously running awareness drives related to Covid appropriate behaviour in rural areas. They are playing important role as a frontline warrior and contributing to the fight against the Covid19 pandemic.

The Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society, under the Rural Development Department, has 3383 Banking Correspondent Sakhis working across the state, who are providing banking services to the villagers. The sisters of Sakhi Mandal are being trained and posted as Banking Correspondent Sakhi by linking them with various banks under NLM and NRETP.

Haryana CM launches field hospital

To facilitate Covid-19 patients

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Monday virtually inaugurated another new field hospital having a facility of 100 oxygen beds in Karnal and 30 oxygen beds facility in two hospitals of Assandh for treatment of Covid-19 patients.

The Chief Minister also launched the Karnal resource locator mobile app prepared by the Karnal District Administration for Covid-19 patients.

"Information about all necessary facilities related to hospitals, ambulances, medical stores, plasma donors, vaccination centres can be obtained on the mobile app in Karnal, the Chief Minister said. He also reviewed the Karnal District

Administration's detailed plan made to tackle the expected third wave of Covid-19.

Khattar said that this time, the virus spread is not confined to urban areas only as it is also hitting rural areas hard. For this, everyone should ensure that the necessary arrangements are made on a large scale, he directed.

The Chief Minister said that there is a need to provide the immediate facility of oxygen beds at every community health centres. For this, he directed the Additional Chief Secretary Health and Family Department to ensure the availability of oxygen beds along with other necessary arrangements at the health centres functional in rural areas at the earliest so that the villagers can immediately get this facility.

He said that as many as 1800 vaccination centres have been set up in the state and so far 43 lakh vaccines have been administered. The vaccination drive in the state is being further intensified, he added.

He said that 3.50 lakh vaccines will be made available soon and on a priority basis, the vaccination would be administered to 8,000 teams who are conducting survey in rural areas, frontline workers, government employees working during this pandemic.

The Chief Minister said that there are 1.16 lakh active patients in Haryana and 10,500 beds are available in hospitals. Besides this, 1.5 lakh patients are in home isolation, requiring 12,000 oxygen beds. Therefore an arrangement of 1250 oxygen beds is being made.

Additional arrangement of 500 beds each has also been made in the hospitals in Panipat and Hisar and in the premises of Jindal school, he said.

Khattar further said, "In this way, the required action is being taken to increase beds in hospitals of every district. SGT Medical College and Medanta are also increasing beds in Gurugram."

During the meeting, the Chief Minister was apprised that out of the total active cases in Karnal, around 7 to 8 per cent of patients are undergoing treatment in hospitals, while the rest of the patients are either in home quarantined or in are admitted Covid Care Centres. As many as 200 MBBS students have been imparted special training so as to provide supervised home care facilities to these patients.

1000 APPLICATIONS RECEIVED FOR REFILLING OF OXYGEN CYLINDERS AT HOME

The Chief Minister said that a portal has been started to ensure the supply of oxygen to the patients living in home isolation. So far, nearly 1000 applications have been received on this portal.

As many as 150 social organizations have been registered on this portal to ensure door to door supply of oxygen cylinders.

The Chief Minister further said that Haryana's oxygen

quota has increased from 156 tonnes to 282 tonnes. Besides this, a request has been made to the Centre to further increase this quota so as to ensure that in future if the number of patients increase, an uninterrupted supply of oxygen should also be ensured, he said.

"10 to 40 percent of the patients admitted in the hospitals located in NCR and GT road hospitals are from Delhi. Presently, the state is also making adequate arrangements for ensuring uninterrupted oxygen supply in these hospitals as ethically we cannot deny admission to the patients coming from outside," he said.

He also said that the teams of various departments have started conducting door to door village surveys. The Health Department team will reach out to every person and conduct a preliminary health check and thereafter those who test Covid-19 positive will be admitted to hospitals, he added.

Army’s Western Command sets up 100-bed hospital for Covid-19 patients in Chandigarh

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To assist Chandigarh administration in the fight against coronavirus, Indian Army's Western Command on Monday operationalised a dedicated hospital at Panjab University's Sector 25 campus for civilian patients.

The 100-bed hospital, set up under Operation Namaste, was inaugurated by the Governor of Punjab and Administrator of Chandigarh, VP Singh Badnore, who went around the facilities and discussed its functional modalities with the doctors and staff.

Badnore thanked the Western Command Chandimandir and officials concerned for setting up a 100 bedded covid hospital in International Hostel, Panjab University and assured that all possible help from Chandigarh Administration will be provided to this hospital for covid treatment. He advised the army authorities to arrange for oxygen concentrators and ventilators.

The General Officer Commanding-in-Chief,

Western Command, Lt Gen RP Singh, who was also present on the occasion, highlighted the efforts put in by both, the Indian Army as well as the civil administration, in the early operationalisation of these Hospitals. He assured the governments of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh of continued support of the Armed Forces in the fight against Covid-19.

In addition to this, similar 100-bed facilities will also be operationalised by the Army under Operation Namaste at the Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Medical College in Faridabad and the Rajindra Government Hospital in Patiala on May 11 and May 12, respectively.

The three Covid care facilities, which will treat patients with mild to moderate symptoms, have been set up on a war footing in coordination with the civil administration of respective states and union territory. The Army has temporarily relocated its field hospitals for the purpose.

According to officials, the Army has deployed its doctors, nursing officers and paramedics

for holistic treatment to patients as per ICMR guidelines, provided service ambulances and trained personnel for administration and management of the hospitals.

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

The hospitals will also cater for basic laboratory, X-ray, pharmacy and catering for patients. The admission to these Hospitals is open for all affected citizens and coordinated by the chief medical officers of the respective districts. On admission, ISO numbers will be issued to patients by the respective hospital management and the discharge will be on recommendation of the Army medical officer treating the patient. Patients requiring higher grade of treatment will be shifted to other hospitals, coordinated by the CMO as per availability of ICU facilities, he added.

Curfew extended in Chandigarh by a week amid surge in Covid-19 cases

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a bid to curtail the spread of Covid-19 infection, the UT Administration on Monday decided to extend the present corona curfew in the city by another week. The non-essential shops will continue to remain closed and night curfew will continue to be from 6:00 pm to 5:00 am.

Administrator, UT Chandigarh, VP Singh Badnore took this decision while reviewing corona cases over a War Room meeting with the UT administrative officers.

Adviser Manoj Parida said that it was decided that the day time movement will be allowed, however, residents have been advised to avoid non-essential travel. Morning walkers will be allowed from 6 am to 9 am and crowded places like Sukhna Lake, Museums,

Libraries, Rock Garden will remain closed, he added.

Parida further said that a maximum of 20 guests will be allowed in wedding functions and written permission from the Deputy Commissioner will be needed. For funerals, the number will be restricted to 10 and no separate permission will be required.

Keeping in view the fact that corona is a new disease with unknown variants and mutations and its treatment needs to be updated daily, the Administrator directed that the top doctors from all the three medical institutions must meet in video conference every day and analyze the medical treatment of critical patients.

The senior doctors of PGIMER should guide all concerned regarding new medication and upto date protocol for

the treatment of corona patients.

Administrator also stressed that there should be an audit of each fatality, so that the line of medical treatment could be improved and lapses, if any, could be rectified.

In view of the directions of the High Court for setting up Unified Command Centre for tri-city, a meeting of all the three Chief Secretaries will be held on Tuesday so that a common strategy could be chalked out for fighting covid in the tri-city.

Badnore also inaugurated a temporary Covid hospital in Sector 45, where an existing dispensary has been converted into a full-fledged covid hospital.

863 NEW CASES, 7 DEATHS IN CHANDIGARH

registered seven more deaths and 863 cases of coronavirus, taking the infection count to 51,070. So far, 575 people have died from the infection in the union territory, according to a medical bulletin.

The city is witnessing an alarming rise in Covid-19 deaths as about 97 persons have succumbed to the virus in the last 10 days, a sharp increase in the toll over last month that saw 99 deaths. The number of active cases stood at 8653. The total number of samples tested in the last 24 hours was 3756.

While cases were reported from all sectors, Manimajra reported 108 new cases. A total of 714 patients were discharged after they recovered from the infection. A total of 441,625 samples have been taken for testing so far.

Rape accused in Tikri border case to be brought to justice: Anil Vij

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

After the state police filed an FIR against six persons in connection with rape of a 25-year-old activist associated with the farmers' agitation at the Tikri border, Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij on Monday said that the all the six accused named in the FIR would be arrested soon and brought to justice.

"Such crimes cannot be allowed on the pretext of farmers' agitation. It is really unfortunate," Vij said while talking to the mediapersons in Ambala on the issue of alleged rape case. The Minister said that each and every accused would be arrested.

The victim from West Bengal had died of Covid-19 at a hospital in Jhajjar's Bahadurgarh on April 30.

Notably, the state police have registered a case against six people including two women on the complaint of the victim's father, who alleged

that the accused, who were associated with the 'Kisan Social Army', travelled with her in a train from West Bengal on April 10.

The deceased father said that the accused worked with 'Kisan Social Army', the IT cell of farmers' group protesting against the three central farm laws passed in September last year. In his complaint, he said the woman was sexually harassed while travelling and on reaching the border she was gang raped.

On the night of April 25, as per the police, she was admitted to a private hospital in Bahadurgarh for treatment of COVID-19. She died there on April 30.

In his complaint, the victim's father alleged the main accused — Anil Malik and Anup Singh — also tried to kidnap her. The other accused are Ankush Sangwan, Jagdish Barad, Kavita Arya and Yogita Suhag.

A Special Investigation

Team (SIT), headed by the DCP (Bahadurgarh), has been formed by the government to conduct a probe into the matter. Anup Singh, who is one of the accused in the alleged rape case has claimed that the allegations against him are a conspiracy to defame farmers' agitation. In a video message, Singh said that there was an incident of assault on-board a train, but the allegations of rape at the Tikri border are false.

Culprits should be punished. But rape accusations are wrong, he claimed.

A day before the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), the group of protesting farmers unions, had issued a statement stating that it "stands with the struggle for justice for the deceased woman colleague and is committed to taking this fight for justice to its logical conclusion."

It said the tents and banners, etc., of the so-called Kisan social army have been removed.

"The accused were barred from participating in the movement and public appeal was issued for their social boycott. The SKM has made it clear that the Kisan social army was never the authorized social media voice of the SKM and none of its handles have anything to do with the movement. In addition to these steps, from day one the SKM has assured the family of the deceased colleague that it will extend them every possible support in any legal recourse that they prefer," said its statement.

"The SKM will extend full cooperation to the police in bringing out the truth of this matter. No one shall be spared," added the statement.

Hundreds of farmers from northern states of Punjab and Haryana have been camping at Haryana's borders with Delhi at Singhu and Tikri for over six months, demanding a repeal of the three agriculture reform laws enacted by the Centre in September last year.

Haryana to release funds upto ₹50,000 to gram panchayats to tackle Covid crisis

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

With an aim to curb the Covid-19 spread that is growing exponentially in the rural areas, Haryana Government has decided to release funds up to Rs 50,000 for all gram panchayats of the state.

Isolation wards will be set up in the villages through these funds and other necessary items associated with Covid treatment such as oximeters, steam machines, thermometers, blood pressure monitoring machines will also be arranged so that the fight against the second wave of Corona pandemic can be fought firmly at the rural level, said Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala on Monday.

Dushyant presided over a meeting with officers of the Panchayat Department here to review the COVID-19 situation in the state.

He said that the State Government will allocate funds of Rs 30,000 to all the villages having population less than

10,000 and those with more than 10,000 population, the government will allocate Rs 50,000.

Corona isolation centres would be built in Chaupals, Government Schools, Anganwadi Centers of the villages, he said.

The Deputy Chief Minister informed that a team will be formed to operate these centres, which will include Health Staff (ANM), Anganwadi Workers and Gram Panchayat Representatives and these teams will be monitored by the incharge of CHC and PHC.

Dushyant said that the increasing cases of Covid in the villages are a matter of concern. In order to prevent the spread, 8,000 teams are being formed by the State Government to increase Covid testing in rural areas. He said that to curb the Covid infection in the rural areas, it is mandatory to set up Corona treatment facilities within the villages for which the State Government will provide funds to the panchayats immediately.

Deadliest day so far in Punjab with 198 Covid-19 deaths

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Monday (May 10) turned out to be a deadliest day since the coronavirus pandemic broke out in Punjab. As many as 198 persons — the highest-ever single-day figure — succumbed to the deadly contagion in the past 24 hours, which means that on an average, eight casualties were reported every hour.

With this, the state's death toll currently stood at 10,704 at the case fatality rate (CFR) of 2.38 percent.

Breaking all previous records, Ludhiana district witnessed whopping 30 fatalities — highest ever reported by any district in Punjab — along with 1,470 fresh cases.

Other than that, eight other districts reported deaths in two-digit figures — including 19 deaths from Bathinda; 17 Covid infection in the rural areas, 8,000 teams are being formed by the State Government to increase Covid testing in rural areas. He said that to curb the Covid infection in the rural areas, it is mandatory to set up Corona treatment facilities within the villages for which the State Government will provide funds to the panchayats immediately.

Jalandhar, and Pathankot; five each from Faridkot; four each from Gurdaspur, Kapurthala, and Mansa; three each from Nawanshahr and fatehgarh Sahib; two from Barnala; and one each from Moga and Tarn Taran.

As many as 8,625 more persons were tested positive for the COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, pushing the state's infection tally to 4,50,674. The state recorded the positivity rate of 16.13 percent on Monday.

Mohali district, with 1,382 fresh cases, reported highest positivity rate of 33.85 percent on Monday. Besides, seven other districts have higher positivity rate than that of the state.

Ludhiana reporting highest 1470 cases in a single day at the positivity rate of 15.73 percent; followed by Mohali with 1,382



fresh cases (33.85 percent); Patiala 676 (18.82 percent); Bathinda 629 (20.51 percent); Jalandhar 619 (13 percent); Amritsar 561 (12.10 percent); Muktsar 401 (28.77 percent); Pathankot 396 (22.07 percent); Hoshiarpur 385 (11.24 percent); Mansa 353 (27.99 percent); Fazilka 283 (24.21 percent); Sangrur 214 (10.17 percent); Gurdaspur 206 (8.08 percent); Ferozepur 181 (14.81 percent); Ropar 180 (16.35

percent); Kapurthala 171 (6.19 percent); Moga 119 (18.95 percent); Faridkot 104 (12.94 percent); Tarn Taran 103 (11.76 percent); among others.

The state's active case load surpassed 75,000 figure which accounts for 16.82 percent of the total positive cases. Of the total 75,800 active cases, a total of 9,376 patients are on oxygen support; while 298 critical patients are on ventilator support.

Haryana reports more recoveries than fresh Covid cases and 161 deaths

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

161 deaths were reported in Haryana as 12718 fresh COVID-19 cases surfaced on Monday. The state, however, recorded more number of recoveries at 16192 than the fresh cases in the last 24 hours.

The death toll due to COVID-19 has reached 5766 while the state's cumulative tally stood at 628615, as per Haryana's health bulletin. There were 113,232 active cases in the state till the evening.

According to the bulletin, Rohtak reported the highest number of 17 fatalities in the last 24 hours. 16 deaths each were reported in Hisar, Mahendragarh and Bhiwani, 12 each in Gurugram and Jind, 10 each in Faridabad, Ambala and Panipat, eight in Kaithal, nine in Yamunanagar and Sirsa, five in Fatehabad, four in Panchkula, three in Kurukshetra and two each in Palwal and Sonapat.

The worst affected

Gurugram district reported the highest number of 2749 fresh infections followed by 1347 cases in Faridabad and 1185 cases in Hisar.

The cumulative positivity rate has increased to 7.97 percent while the recovery rate stood at 81 percent in Haryana. The fatality rate in the state was recorded at 0.92 percent. The state recorded a positivity rate of 25.30 percent on Monday. Till date, more than 79.19 lakh samples have been tested in Haryana, the bulletin stated.

A day before, the State Government had extended lockdown till May 17. Home-cum-Health Minister Anil Vij on Monday said that 'Mahamari Alert, Surakshit Haryana' has been declared for one week. A few rules have been added to the guidelines imposed earlier during the first lockdown. Only 11 persons will be allowed to attend the wedding and funeral, he added.

1.5 crore vaccine doses ordered: Singh Deo



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Health Minister T.S. Singh Deo on Monday told officials to step up vaccination against Covid-19 and said the government has ordered 1.5 crore doses of the vaccine.

Singh Deo was addressing a meeting of health officials. He also asked officials of the Chhattisgarh Medical Services Corp (CMSC) to coordinate with the vaccine suppliers and manage to make available more and more vaccines for the state.

He said the government had ordered 1.5 crore doses of vaccine -- 75 lakh each from Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute. It is expected that 9 lakh doses of vaccine will arrive in May, he said.

Children, staff of child care home healthy: Govt

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The condition of 45 children and 5 employees in a child care home in Mana in the outskirts of Chhattisgarh's capital who tested positive for Corona is normal after treatment, the government said on Monday. The District Programme Officer of Women and Child Development Department here said there are 73 children in the child care home whose rapid antigen and RTPCR tests were done on April 29. After 45 children and 5 staffers tested Covid-19 positive, immediate treatment was started, a press release said. Medicines were made available to all infected children and staffers through the Chief Municipal Officer of Mana Nagar Panchayat. A doctor and six nurses were deployed for their treatment. The condition of the children is said to be normal, the release said.

1.09 lakh vaccinated in 18-44 age group

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

A total of 109,869 persons have been vaccinated against Covid-19 in the 18-44 age category in Chhattisgarh, and 50,105 of them are in the Antyodaya category. The vaccination is on in 483 centres in the state, Dr Subash Mishra, Director (Epidemic), told the media on Monday. He said that till May 9, the state has vaccinated 59.36 lakh people in all. Out of the 3.39 lakh health workers, 3.02 lakh have been vaccinated; against a target of 2.93 lakh frontline workers, 2.99 lakh have been vaccinated. In the 45-plus category, against a target of 58.66 lakh citizens, 43.31 lakh have been administered the vaccine. Thus, the coverage percentage in the three categories is 89 percent, 102 percent and 74 percent



respectively. In the 18-44 age category, 1.09 lakh people have been vaccinated. The positivity rate in Chhattisgarh has further dropped to 19 percent, he said. He said in a few districts like Surguja, Gariaband, Sukma and Narayanpur, there has been an increase in the number of positive cases. But in 24 districts, the

positive cases were lower compared to other days. Dr Mishra said Chhattisgarh has recorded 1.3 percent wastage, which is lower than the national average of 6 percent. He said a directive has been given to the vaccination teams to open a vial only when 10 people reach the centre. This will help reduce the wastage further.



Heavy concrete blocks supporting the under construction Expressway near Shankar Nagar in Raipur fell on Monday. These were lifted safely. No casualties were reported. *Pioneer Photo*

Covid positivity rate 19%, steady decline



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Covid positivity rate in Chhattisgarh is declining steadily over the last six days. On May 9, it was 19 percent. Based on the results of 48,732 samples tested on May 9, a total of 9,120 individuals were found Covid infected. The positivity rate has fallen below 20 percent for the first time after April 5, 2020 when it was 18 percent. On May 4, 2021, the positivity rate in Chhattisgarh was 28 percent. On May 5, it slipped to 25 percent and to 23

percent on May 6. It was 20 percent on May 8 and 19 percent on May 9. In the previous week as well, a significant decline was noticed in the positivity rate of Raipur district, an official communication said on Monday. On May 2, the positivity rate of Raipur district was 31 percent, which has gradually declined to 15 percent at present. On May 3 and 4, the positivity rate in Raipur was 25 percent. On May 5, it slid to 21 percent. On May 6 it fell further to 18 percent and on May 7 and 8 to 16 percent. Positivity rate in Raipur on May 9 was 15 percent.

Health Minister inspects vaccination centres in capital



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Health Minister T.S. Singh Deo on Monday made a surprise inspection of Covid vaccination centers in Raipur and gave necessary instructions to the healthcare staff there. A sudden rush of mostly youths was witnessed at the centers in recent days as the vaccination resumed following a direc-

tive of the Chhattisgarh High Court. There were long queues in the APL and BPL vaccination counters but the counters for Antyodaya card holders had few takers. In some centres, all APL and BPL card holders could not be vaccinated due to the number of vaccine doses available. The Minister turned up to see the condition in some of the centres. He also took feedback from the beneficiaries.

Application invited for awards in Biodiversity

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Applications are invited from institutions and individuals working to protect, conserve and create awareness on biodiversity for 'Biodiversity Award' given by the Chhattisgarh State Biodiversity Board. Every year on May 22, the International Day for Biodiversity is observed, with the state government giving away the award. In four sectors, a total of eight awards is given, said an official communication on Monday. Applicants can also send photographs till May 20. The proposal for the award can be sent in the Chhattisgarh State Biodiversity Board office email. The winners are given certificates, with individuals also getting Rs 25,000 in cash and institutions Rs 50,000.

BJP delegation seeks Governor's intervention in Covid situation



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

A delegation of the Chhattisgarh BJP called on the Chhattisgarh Governor on Monday and sought her intervention in the Covid-19 situation in the state. The delegation urged her to issue directives to the state government on issues raised in a representation to counter the



pandemic in state. Addressing the media, former Chief Minister Dr Raman Singh said: "The opposition had taken an initiative to interact with the Chief Minister and forward suggestions how to fight the pandemic in the state, shoulder to shoulder." State BJP President Vishnudeo Sai sought one-on-one interaction with the Chief

Minister but only a virtual appointment was given. The state government is disrespecting the initiative taken by the opposition, he said, adding that is why the Governor's intervention was sought. He asked the government to come up with a work plan for six months as 1.30 crore beneficiaries have to be vaccinated.

Life term for two for murdering Abhishek Mishra

"Senior advocate Rajkumar Tiwari told The Pioneer that Jain and Singh were convicted and sentenced for 'imprisonment till their last breath'"

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The District and Sessions Court in Durg on Monday sentenced to life imprisonment two men on charges of

murdering of Abhishek Mishra, an education baron's son who allegedly had illicit relations with a woman. District and Sessions Judge Rajesh Shrivastava pronounced Vikas Jain and



Ajit Singh guilty after a virtual hearing into the matter. But he acquitted Kimsi Kamboj Jain, giving her the benefit of doubt. Senior advocate Rajkumar Tiwari told The Pioneer that Jain and Singh were convicted and sentenced for "imprisonment till their last breath". Mishra was Vice President of Shri Gangajali Education, a renowned educational society in Chhattisgarh which runs around a dozen colleges offering courses in engineering, pharmacy, nursing and management. The murder was reportedly executed as

Kimsi Kamboj Jain was reluctant to continue her relationship with Mishra after her wedding. Kimsi Jain was said to have been in touch with Mishra after quitting her job in a college. Mishra allegedly used to force her to maintain contact with him. Kimsi Jain and Vikas Jain allegedly planned to kill Mishra with the help of Ajit Singh, a relative. Vikas Jain and Ajit Singh were arrested from Bhilai after around one and a half months after the murder on November 9, 2015. Kimsi Jain was arrested in Delhi. On the fateful day, Kimsi Jain reportedly

called Mishra to her Chouhan Town house in Bhilai where Vikas Jain and Ajit Singh attacked him with a heavy rod. After Mishra died, his body was buried in the premises of Ajit Singh's rented house at Smriti Nagar. To mislead the police, the accused abandoned Mishra's car on VIP Road in Raipur and made a ransom call to his parents. Police formed around 35 teams to trace Mishra. Vikas Jain and Ajit Singh were arrested based on their call records and after they reportedly confessed to committing the crime.

Centre defends jab policy in SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

Navy warships bring O₂ from Kuwait, Qatar and Singapore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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



Oxygen. The consignment is part of the French mission “Oxygen Solidarity Bridge” to support India’s fight against Covid-19 pandemic, they said. INS Kolkata arrived at New Mangalore with 400 bottles of Oxygen, two 27 MT containers of Liquid Medical Oxygen and 47 concentrators that were embarked at Qatar and Kuwait.

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

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

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

In a related development,

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

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

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

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

Priyanka slams Govt over Central Vista project



IANS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

Himanta takes oath as 15th CM of Assam

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Five years down the line



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

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

Asked if one needs to be a non-Brahmin from Upper Assam to become the chief minister candidate from the BJP party, Sonowal said “This is a very very...this is a question that should not be raised. Our party BJP

is a very democratic party and we believe in people’s democracy.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In another tweet, he thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying, “This is the biggest day in my life, and I so fondly cherish your generous affection. I assure you we shall leave no stone unturned to carry forward your vision of taking Assam, & NE to greater heights.” Sarma has an LLB From Government Law College and a PhD from Gauhati University. Sarma practised law at Gauhati High Court from 1996 to 2001.

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

Sonia seeks explanation for electoral losses from general secretaries

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



house in order.

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

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

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

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

KIND ATTENTION RAIL PASSENGERS

IMPORTANT NOTICE

RESTRICTIONS TO GOA BOUND PASSENGERS

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Published in JACC

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India) on Monday said waiving intellectual property rights will not lead to increased production of Covid-19 vaccines, as it is not the barrier to their adequate availability in India. The industry body said it is cognizant that with the rising Covid-19 cases in India and other developing nations, there is an urgency to rapidly-produce greater quantities of Covid-19 vaccine. Vaccine manufacturing is a complex process and scaling up capacities involves the transfer of critical know-how, it added. The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA) has already opposed the transfer of Intellectual Property (IP) waiver saying a waiver is the simple but the wrong answer to what is a complex problem.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

way of equitable access to vaccines.”

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

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

MHA extends security cover to BJP candidates who fought Bengal polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Didi retains loyalists in 3rd Cabinet

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

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



Minister and TMC general secretary back as the Industry Minister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Attacking the Centre for sending central team to visit the

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

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

Suvendu Adhikari named Bengal Opposition Leader

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

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

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

ence of Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad.

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

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



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

PTI

Covid-19 positivity rate drops marginally in J&K

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

The positivity rate on Monday stood at 9.8 per cent. On Sunday the positivity rate recorded was 10.68 per cent.

On Monday, 56 more patients succumbed to the deadly virus, 39 from Jammu

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

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

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

According to the media bulletin, out of 220546 positive

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

cases, 49951 are Active Positive, 167813 have recovered and 2782 have died; 1210 in Jammu division and 1572 in Kashmir division.

Meanwhile, Principal & Dean Government Medical College Jammu and Associated Hospitals, Dr Shashi Sudhan Sharma Monday urged the public to cooperate with the

health system amidst the rising challenge of Covid-19.

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

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

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

Daily death drops to 549 in Maha on Monday

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As 61,607 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the State after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year went up from 44,07,818 to 44,69,425. The recovery rate in the state went up from 86.04 per cent to 46.95 per cent.

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

With 74 fresh deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai increased from 13781 to 13,855, while the infected cases went up by 1732 to trigger a jump in the

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

While Pune accounted for a maximum 97,593 “active cases” in the State, Nagpur stood second 56,458, followed by Mumbai with 47,054,) Nashik (34,755), Thane (34,185), Ahmednagar (23,661), Solapur (23,028), Satara (22,463), Chandrapur (22,265), Beed (15,586), Jalgaon (13,711), Aurangabad (12,594), Latur (12,085), Parbhani (11,010), Osmanabad (7568), Jalna (7015), Bhandara (6122), Buldhana (5687), Nanded (5487) and Nandurbar (3395).

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

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

Slight improvement in Kerala post 3-day lockdown

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

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

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

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

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

The doctors demand the setting up of domiciliary care centers and step down Covid First Line Treatment Centers in panchayat and block levels. “These centers could be manned by health professionals other than doctors and could be used to accommodate the category-one patients who do not require the physical presence of doctors,” said the doctors. Such centers could make use of tele consultation. The KGMOA also called for the setting up of 24X7 call centers making use of the retired Government doctors.

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

Goa CM upset after Covid victim denied cremation

Panaji: Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Monday expressed displeasure after a village panchayat in North Goa refused to cremate the remains of a local resident who had died of Covid-19 infection.

Speaking virtually to elected representatives of village panchayats and municipalities from across Goa, Sawant said the village panchayats and municipalities should cooperate with people during the pandemic crisis.

“I felt bad on Sunday. The Bastora sarpanch and villagers refused to cremate the body of a local resident. Where was he from? Was he not from the same panchayat (jurisdiction)?” Sawant added.

On Sunday, relatives of the deceased victim Ashok Naik had alleged that the Bastora village panchayat had refused permission to cremate him as he had died from Covid-19. The body was later taken to another cremation ground where the final rites were performed.

According to Ranjit Usgaonkar, the panchayat was not involved in the decision to refuse cremation of the deceased Covid-19 patient.

“We do not know who has refused to cremate Ashok Naik. The panchayat does not take such a decision. The decision is taken by the local temple committee. There could be a misunderstanding among the victim's relatives,” Usgaonkar said. **IANS**

Puducherry CM hospitalised after testing +ve

Chennai: Puducherry Chief minister N Rangasamy tested Covid positive and has been admitted to a private hospital in Chennai according to Puducherry Lieutenant Governor Dr Tamilsai Soundararajan's office.

Rangasamy, who was sworn in as Chief minister of Puducherry on May 7 tested positive on Sunday evening after a test at the Indira Gandhi Government Medical College hospital, Puducherry. He left for Chennai to get treatment and was admitted to a private hospital.

All the public programmes of the Chief minister stand cancelled. Rangasamy is the leader of the All India NR Congress(AINRC) and led the NDA to victory in the recent elections. The AINRC won 10 seats while its coalition partner BJP got 6 seats. Independents garnered 6 seats, DMK 6 seats and the Indian National Congress won 2 seats. **IANS**

Lower testing size leads to lower Covid tally in Andhra

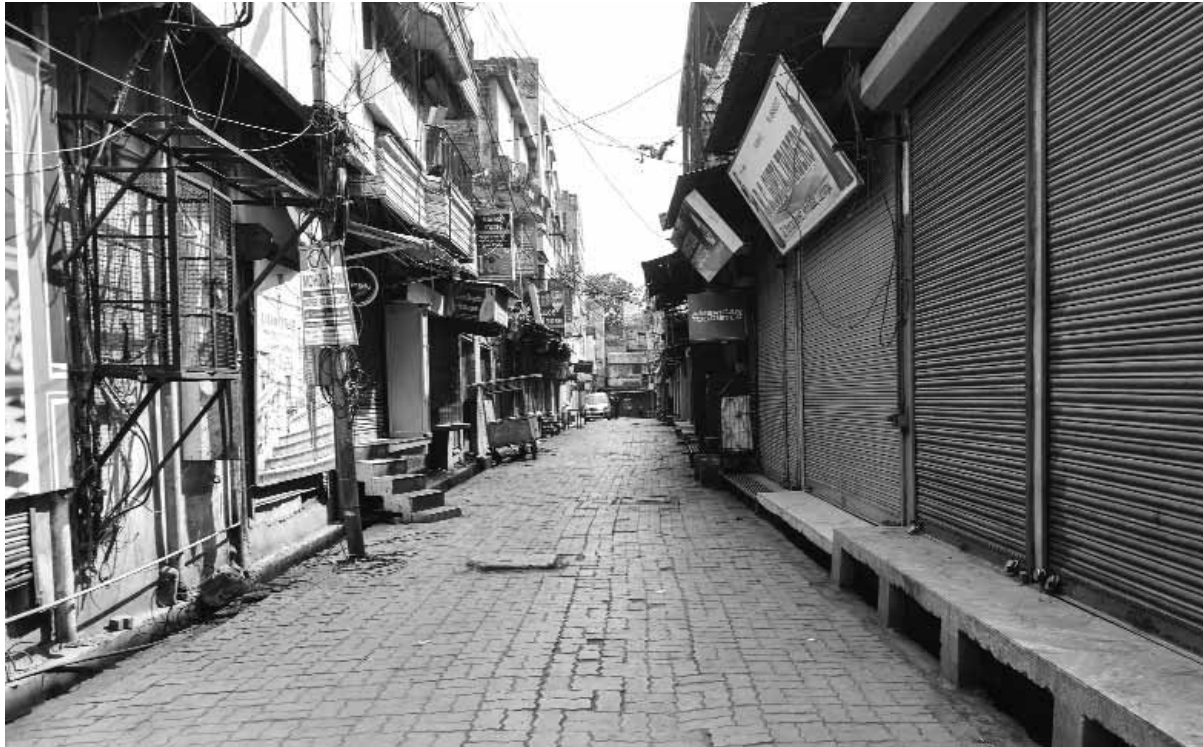
IANS ■ AMARAVATI

Reduced testing during the preceding 24 hours saw Andhra Pradesh report lesser numbers on Monday. Compared to around 1 lakh samples that are usually tested every day, only 60,124 samples were tested, and 14,986 new cases were detected during the 24 hours, ending 9 am Monday.

For the past few days, the State has been consistently reporting daily covid tallies above 20,000.

There was a relative dip in the number of deaths reported on Monday, as 84 people succumbed to the pandemic. In comparison, the death toll on Sunday was 93.

The fresh fatalities pushed the State's cumulative death toll to 8,791, while the cumulative tally of covid cases in the state climbed to 13,02,589.



Aminabad market wears a deserted look amid Covid-19 induced lockdown in Lucknow on Monday

PTI

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Hope floats

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

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



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

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

PICTALK



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

PTI

In the slow lane

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

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

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

Apocalypse and the leadership

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

ions to handle the problems.

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE PM HAS FAILED TO HANDLE COVID CRISIS

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

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

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

GOVT MUST TAP ONLINE EDUCATION POTENTIAL

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

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

Govt must help prison inmates



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

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

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

THE ASSAM CM MUST ACT URGENTLY

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

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

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

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

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

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



Congress leader
— Rahul Gandhi



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

Russian President
— Vladimir Putin

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



Actor
— Angelina Jolie



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

New Zealand cricketer
— James Neesham

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



Congress interim president
— Sonia Gandhi

FIRST COLUMN

INDIA'S PATH TO CARBON NEUTRALITY

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



SANJAY GUPTA

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

There are two issues to consider. One, is it in India's medium and long-term interests to become a carbon neutral economy, gradually moving towards decarbonisation of all the sectors? As the past experience of economic history shows, countries and economies that adopted newer technologies and approaches have benefited socially, economically and in geostrategic terms. The difference between a "future" green economy and non-green economy will be the same as an industrialised and non-industrialised economy in the current scenario. Further, the Global Commission on Adaptation avers that investments in adaptation consistently deliver higher returns and create more jobs than traditional investments. Second, should the country declare a date for achieving the net-zero carbon emissions status, what should be that date? Given the current global mood, it will be strategic for India to declare its intent on achieving carbon neutrality but only on its own terms. The path to India's green economy should not emerge out of Paris or Glasgow but rather out of every village, town and city in the country. Its net-zero emissions date should be a time band such as from 2065-2085. The later date should be offered as a more likely target. However, if there is adequate green finance made available, supported by development and availability of appropriate technologies, the earlier date of 2065 or thereabouts could be possible. What can India hope from countries that are less than supportive of a Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver on COVID-19 vaccines and medicines to avert an ongoing global tragedy? How much support will the same set of rich countries provide to India and other developing countries to address a "wicked" problem such as climate change?

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

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

NEP: A bundle of pious intentions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Simultaneously, the Government gave them a financial restructuring package (FRP) under which their entire debt of about ₹400,000 crore was condoned. This led to a dramatic impact on their losses which declined from ₹52,000 crore during 2015-16 to a low of ₹17,000 crore during 2017-18. However, Discoms did little to set their house in order.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



UTTAM GUPTA

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

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



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



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

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

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

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



SHIVAJI SARKAR

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

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

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

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

The massive vote surge in

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

cent in 2019 says a lot. The loss of all other parties was a gain for the TMC. It has also busted the myth that West Bengal votes along communal lines. The wash out of the Left and Congress for its alliance with the highly communalised ISF is enough testimony. This also proves that West Bengal votes for social and economic issues and rejects any polarisation, barring some exceptions, either for Furfura or Ram. Another noticeable aspect is the vote for Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose whose anniversary the BJP celebrated as *Parakaram Diwas* and Mamata as *Deshmayak Diwas*.

Surprisingly, nobody pointed out this incongruity which Mamata aptly encashed with a heightened nationalistic presentation - a message went out strong that the Centre is not only disrespectful to Netaji, but is also blatant-

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

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



Nepal PM Oli loses trust vote in Parliament

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

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

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

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

"As the votes cast in favour of the motion fell short to

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

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

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

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

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

After its alliance Nepal



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

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

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

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

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

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

Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 last

year after President Bhandari dissolved the House and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10 at the recommendation of Prime Minister

Oli, amidst a tussle for power within the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Oli's move to dissolve the House sparked protests from a large section of the NCP led by his rival 'Prachanda'.

In February, the apex court reinstated the dissolved House of Representatives, in a setback to Oli who was preparing for snap polls.

Oli repeatedly defended his move to dissolve the House of Representatives, saying some leaders of his party were attempting to form a 'parallel government'.

Oli, who joined politics as a student activist in his teenage and spent 14 years in jail for opposing the now-abolished monarchy, became Nepal's Prime Minister for a second time in 2018 as a joint candidate of the Left alliance. **PTI**

Israeli police and Palestinians clash at Jerusalem holy site

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

have waged a lengthy legal battle to take over properties.

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

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

Several Arab members of parliament were among those trying to stop Betzalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, amid shouting and jostling.

At one point during the scrum, the protesters pounded on the sides of a dumpster, and one man yelled at Smotrich in Arabic, "Get out of here, you dog!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

been any instance of falling debris causing damage.

"So the likelihood is extremely low. The issue should be left to professionals and it is unnecessary to hype up the issue to cause any panic," she said. Hitting out at the US, Hua said "American media used romantic rhetoric like 'shooting stars lighting up the night sky' about the debris of the US rockets in the past. "But when it comes to the Chinese side, it's a completely different approach. We are willing to work with other countries, including the US, to strengthen cooperation in the use of outer space, but we also oppose double standards on this issue." The spokesperson said China is taking part in the international cooperation to predict the (crash) results and is also cooperating with other countries to deal with the debris in outer space to make sure that outer space activities are sustainable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

China denounces US appeal for Taiwan to join WHO meeting

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

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

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

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

The US and other major

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

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

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

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

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

Man stabs 5 at New Zealand supermarket; 3 critically hurt

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

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

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

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

Turkey seeks better Saudi ties despite Khashoggi slaying

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

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

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

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

conflict in Libya.

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

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

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



Abhishek

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

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

Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>
E-mail Id - cic@cbi.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641 **SHO**
Fax No. 011-24368639 **P.S. Shalimar Bagh, Delhi**
DP/775/NW/2021 **Ph.: 011- 27495198, 8750870226**



NORTHERN RAILWAY

AUCTION NOTICE

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

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

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

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

Sr. Divisional Engineer -III
Northern Railway/ Moradabad

1004/21

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Reversing Trump, US restores transgender health protections

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

The action by the Department of Health and Human Services affirms that federal laws forbidding sex discrimination in health care

also protect gay and transgender people.

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

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

"Everyone — including

LGBTQ people — should be able to access health care, free from discrimination or interference, period."

Becerra said in a statement the Biden administration policy will bring HHS into line with a landmark 6-3 Supreme Court decision last year in a workplace discrimination case, which established that federal laws against sex discrimination on the job also protect gay and transgender people. **AP**

Pak Govt to set new rules to meet FATF demands

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

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

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

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

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

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

The three outstanding action points (out of a total of 27) include (i) demonstrating that terrorist financing (TF) investigations and prosecutions target persons and entities acting on behalf or at the directive of the designated persons or entities.

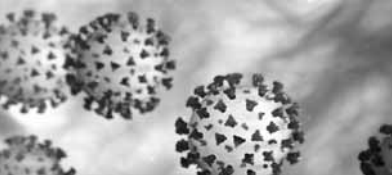
Demonstrating that TF prosecutions result in effective, proportionate, and dissuasive sanctions; and (iii) demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all designated terrorists, particularly those acting for them or on their behalf. **PTI**

Malaysian PM announces 1-month lockdown

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

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

Muhyiddin said drastic action was needed to battle a new aggressive outbreak



before it turns into a national catastrophe. He said the emergence of new virus variants with higher infection rates, constraints on the public health system and public failure to observe health measures were worrying. **AP**

UN says 5 migrants drowned; over 700 intercepted off Libya

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sri Lanka on Sunday set a new record with the number of daily Covid-19 infections exceeding 2,500 for the first time since the epidemic began, the Colombo Gazette reported.

The coronavirus cases are surging as health authorities continue to struggle to provide care for the confirmed cases. The government said action to create 10,000 care beds has been fast tracked. **PTI**

India remains vulnerable to further waves of Covid: Fitch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



"We expect the shock to economic activity from the latest wave

of the pandemic in India to be less severe than in 2020, even though caseloads and fatalities are much higher.

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

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

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

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

More than 2.46 lakh people in India have died from the coronavirus infection. Public health system is buckling under the weight of surging

infections and deaths with several parts of the country reporting shortage of hospital beds, medical oxygen, medicines and vaccines.

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

Govt relaxes procurement norms for health, pharma Ministries, DRDO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Currently, COVID-19 vaccines are being provided free of

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



RBI modifies norms for undertaking Govt business by private banks



PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Domestic equities continued to defy concerns of ris-

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

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

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

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

PTI

Users not accepting privacy terms to face limited functionality: WhatsApp

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



functionality on WhatsApp until you accept the updates".

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

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

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

phone". WhatsApp said it won't delete the users' accounts if they haven't accepted the update but highlighted that its existing policy related to inactive users will apply.

WhatsApp accounts are generally deleted after 120 days of inactivity, wherein inactivity refers to users not connecting to the messaging platform.

While the company did not respond to specific queries around these reminders, how long they will run and other modalities, a WhatsApp spokesperson said: "We'll continue to provide reminders to those users within WhatsApp in the weeks to come".

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

IMPORTANT NOTICE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Zverev wins Madrid title

AFP ■ MADRID
Alexander Zverev recovered from a set down to defeat Matteo Berrettini 6-7 (8/10), 6-4, 6-3 and win the Madrid Open for a second time on Sunday as he clinched a fourth Masters 1000 title. The German fifth seed recorded his third consecutive top-10 victory this week, having eliminated five-time Madrid champion Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem to reach the final. Zverev, last year's US Open runner-up, added to his 2018 Madrid triumph as he denied Berrettini successive titles following the Italian's win in Belgrade last month. "It is great (to win this



title), especially after losing my last three finals I played at Masters 1000 events," Zverev said. "This is definitely special and I just want to enjoy this one."

Zverev is now targeting a second Rome title at the Foro Italico this week. He captured his first Masters there in 2017 before also winning in Montreal later that year. "Rome is also an event I like and enjoy, so I hope I can perform in the same way as I did here and we will see how it goes there. I feel awesome," said Zverev. After Rome, the German star will target a maiden Grand Slam title at Roland Garros. However, he has yet to get beyond the quarter-finals in Paris. "To play well at Roland Garros, you have to play well during the season on clay. In that sense, it's (Sunday's win) important to me," said Zverev.



Pak seal series

AP ■ HARARE
Pakistan quickly took the one wicket it needed on Monday for another innings victory over struggling Zimbabwe in the second Test and a 2-0 series sweep. It took only five overs on Day 4 for Shaheen Shah Afridi to end it by having Luke Jongwe caught behind by wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan for 37. Pakistan won by an innings and 147 runs at Harare Sports Club to go with the innings and 116-run win in the first Test at the same venue. Pakistan also claimed a slice of history with Afridi's 5-52 making him the third Pakistan bowler in the Test to take a five-wicket haul. He and Nauman Ali (5-86) took five each in the second innings after Hasan Ali's five in the first. It's the first time Pakistan has had three bowlers with five wickets in a match, and the first time it has happened in Tests since 1993. Zimbabwe continued on 220-9 in its second innings, on the brink of defeat and still 158 runs short of making Pakistan bat again. The home team added only 11 more runs to be all out for 231.

Doubt IPL 2021 will continue in India: Neesham



Even though we were flying on chartered planes, we have to go through customs, hand your details over to people, walk through terminals, so there were always going to be pinch-points there," he said. Neesham said that it is difficult to comprehend how the bubble was breached. "We obviously don't know yet exactly how teams were infiltrated, but... It's such a difficult prospect to

the commitment to go and never had any thoughts of pulling out individually before the tournament finished," he said. "Guys will have different opinions on that, but it's my job, I'm a professional and you have plenty of times you tour countries you're not that keen on going to, but it's about getting on the field and getting the job done. "I would sign up again, especially once vaccinations start rolling out. I don't think anyone really predicted how quickly it would all come crashing down over there and how quickly we would be on the first plane out." The IPL was suspended last Tuesday after four players and two coaches from four different teams tested positive for the dreaded disease within a space of 48 hours. "To be honest, I wasn't expecting it to get called off. I think, when you've got so many teams in different bubbles, the expectation was that there would always be some cases at some point during the tournament," Neesham said. "We thought teams might have to lock down and miss a couple of games, like we've seen in other organisations, like the NBA. The show must go on. "The thing that was so shocking was how quickly it came up in so many different teams at the same time and we didn't really have an option in the end." Neesham said they were "not out of the woods yet" and may develop symptoms in the coming days.

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

AFP ■ LONDON
Team director Ashley Giles says England have no plans to "rush" their IPL stars back for next month's Test series against New Zealand and could introduce new faces to cope with a packed schedule. The suspension of the IPL because of the devastating coronavirus outbreak in India has left England with a potentially larger player pool than they envisaged for the two-Test series against New Zealand. Among those currently serving quarantine periods are Jos Buttler, Chris Woakes and Sam Curran, all of whom have Test contracts with England. They could be available for County Championship matches starting on May 20 before joining the England 'bubble' ahead of the first Test against New Zealand at Lord's, which begins on June 2. But even if the trio are in contention, England may have to call up fresh reinforcements given Ben Stokes and Dom Sibley are currently injured, while fast bowler Jofra Archer has only recently returned to action with Sussex's 2nd XI. "All these guys (returning from the IPL) are currently in quarantine and have had a number of spells in quarantine and bubbles," Giles said on Monday. "We need to look after them, with the amount of cricket they've got coming up. We're not going to rush or force them back into cricket. "Chris Silverwood (the England coach) will work with each and every one of them, as will our medical teams on what's best for their progress." After the New Zealand series, England have five Tests at home to India before travelling to Australia later this year in a bid to regain the Ashes. England also have numerous white-ball commitments, including the planned T20 World Cup in India.



Malinga could return to play World T20

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Kandy: Sri Lanka fast bowler Lasith Malinga could return to the national team for the T20 World Cup, said the national selection committee chairman Pramodya Wickramasinghe. "We will talk to Lasith soon. He is in our plans for the forthcoming T20 tours, including the T20 World Cup coming up in October," said Wickramasinghe. With back-to-back T20 World Cups scheduled in 2021 and 2022, Sri Lanka would need an experienced bowler like Malinga to marshal the attack. "Lasith is in our plans. We always should not forget that he is one of the greatest bowlers in our country even in his present form. His records speak for that. There are two back-to-back T20 World Cups that are coming up, this year and next year. We are going to discuss our plans with him when we meet him in the next couple of days," Wickramasinghe added. Malinga said he is "looking forward" to meeting the selectors. "I have retired from both Test and ODI cricket but not from T20s. I am keen to know how the selection committee is going to get the services of a senior player like me for the national side. In my career, I have proved on many occasions that I can come back after a long break and perform well for my country," he said.

No point in comparing yourself with anyone: Nagwaswalla

thinking too much about the result," Nagwaswalla told bcci.tv. "If you follow the process correctly, you will surely get the desired outcome. In addition to that, it is important to be patient. There is no point comparing yourself with anyone and ponder over why someone else is selected and not me," the 23-year-old added. The left-arm pacer was Gujarat's leading wicket-taker with 41 scalps in the 2019-20 season when his side made the Ranji Trophy semifinals. The youngster said he was mighty impressed with the way the Indian team played and won in Australia and he just can't wait to see the senior players in flesh and bone, whom he has so far watched only on TV. "I am excited to meet and

see all the cricketers jinko abhee tak bass TV par India ke liye achha karte hue dekha hai. They have secured some big wins against Australia and England recently. So, I am looking forward to learning as much as I can from all of them." "I am very excited to meet this team. Despite the injuries, we went on to win the series in Australia. I just can't wait to witness the team which has such a strong self-belief," Nagwaswalla said. He is also a big fan of the team's bowling coach Bharat Arun. "Under Bharat Arun sir, our fast bowling has seen a great transformation. We have a superb bench strength. I am sure I will get to learn a lot from Bharat Arun sir"

AC Milan push Juve out of top 4

AFP ■ TURIN

AC Milan pushed Juventus out of the Serie A top four with a 3-0 win at Allianz Stadium on Sunday which increases their hopes of Champions League football for the first time since 2014. Brahim Diaz put Milan ahead just before the break with Ante Rebic and Fikayo Tomori adding two more in the second half after Franck Kessie had missed a penalty. Milan move up to third, equal on 72 points with second-placed Atalanta, with Napoli a further two points behind in fourth and the final Champions League berth. Juventus are now fifth, one point behind the top four with three games left to play, including next weekend's clash with newly-crowned champions Inter Milan. "We had a great game, a victory over a direct rival at this moment in the championship is very important," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli whose side lost 3-1 to Juve in the San Siro in January.



"We still have to fight. But I have a very young team, that is maturing as this evening proved."

PSG HOPES DENTED

Neymar was on target the day after signing his contract extension but Paris Saint-Germain were held to a 1-1 draw at Rennes on Sunday that leaves Lille a step closer to a remarkable Ligue 1 title triumph. PSG led at half-time after Neymar converted a controversial penalty award, but they were pegged back in the second half as Serhou Guirassy headed in the equaliser. Presnel Kimpembe was later sent off for Mauricio Pochettino's side, who could not get back to winning ways on their return to domestic action following their Champions League semi-final exit against Manchester City. PSG are now three points adrift of Ligue 1 leaders Lille, who know they will be champions for the first time since 2011 by taking four points from their remaining two matches of the season.

Real salvage dramatic draw

Madrid: Eden Hazard's 94th-minute equaliser salvaged Real Madrid a dramatic 2-2 draw against Sevilla on Sunday as an extraordinary penalty decision swung La Liga's title race back in Atletico Madrid's favour. Zidane's side had levelled through Marco Asensio midway through the second half and thought they had a penalty when Karim Benzema was brought down after rounding Sevilla goalkeeper Yassine Bono. But VAR prompted referee to check an Eder Militao handball a few seconds before, with a huge decision seeing Madrid's penalty cancelled and a spot-kick awarded to Sevilla instead. Ivan Rakitic converted and while Madrid still managed to hit back in injury time, Toni Kroos' shot deflecting in off Eden Hazard's foot, the draw hands the advantage back to Atletico at the end of another dramatic weekend in the Spanish title race. **AFP**