



GENDER STEREOTYPES

Actor Elnaaz Norouzi feels it is time film industry stopped looking at actresses as just glamour quotients

LEISURE P2



BLOW TO SUGA GOVT

PM Yoshihide Suga's ruling Liberal Democratic Party lost all three seats in parliamentary by-elections Sunday

INTERNATIONAL P10



DC FACE RCB TODAY

Delhi Capitals lock horns with Royal Challengers Bangalore in an Indian Premier League game

SPORTS P12

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Send me to a place where Bure Din prevails, I've seen enough of Achhe Din!

SHORT TAKES

Ex-Phulbani MP dies of Covid-19

Bhubaneswar: Sugrib Singh, the former MP from Phulbani Lok Sabha constituency, passed away while undergoing hospital treatment at a private hospital in Bhubaneswar. He was 58. Singh was elected to the 14th Lok Sabha after winning the 2004 general polls from Phulbani Lok Sabha seat on a BJD ticket. He was born August 1, 1963 at Daringbadi village of Kandhamal. Initially, Singh worked as a journalist. He then joined politics and was elected as chairman of Phulbani NAC.

Bank hours from 10 am to 2 pm

Bhubaneswar: In view of COVID-19 surge, the state government Monday asked all banks to provide customer service from 10 am to 2 pm every working day. However, the bank branches can remain open from 10 am to 4 pm. Finance deputy secretary Tarakanta Bhakta has written a letter to convener of the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) in this regard. The revised timeframe will continue till May 15 and will be reviewed in between or thereafter. P3

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VAIATION	BOURSES
SENSEX	48386.51 ↑ 508.06	
NIFTY	14485.00 ↑ 143.60	
DOLLAR	75.38 ↓ ₹0.26	
EURO	90.76 ↑ ₹0.22	
GOLD	₹47,490 ↓ ₹42	
SILVER	₹68,672 ↓ ₹2	

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	42.5°C	40.2°C
MIN	26.4°C	25.4°C
Humidity	65%	68%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Heatwave

EC RESPONSIBLE FOR 2ND COVID WAVE: HC

AGENCIES

Chennai, April 26: The Madras High Court Monday castigated the Election Commission over the COVID-19 second wave in the country, holding it 'singularly' responsible for the spread, called it the "the most irresponsible institution" and even said its officials may be booked under murder charges.

The EC allowing political parties to take out rallies and meetings had led to the spread of the pandemic, the court said. The first bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy made the stinging observation on a public interest writ from Karur AIADMK candidate and Transport Minister MR Vijayabaskar for the April 6 Assembly polls, seeking a direction to authorities to ensure fair counting of votes May 2 in Karur by taking effective steps and proper arrangements with COVID-19 protocols.

Since as many as 77 candidates are contesting from Karur constituency, it would be very difficult to accommodate their agents in the counting hall. It may affect observance of the protocols, the petitioner alleged. When counsel for the EC told the judges that all necessary steps were underway, the bench shot back saying that by allowing the political parties to take out rallies and meetings, it (Commission) had paved the way for the resurgence of the second wave of the deadly virus.

Inked over the submission of the EC counsel that all precautionary measures would be taken at the counting centres, the Chief Justice replied that the EC must be 'singularly' held responsible for the second wave of the pandemic spike in the country.

The bench even said that EC officials



Poll body in soup

- The bench said EC officials may be booked under murder charges-
- Judges orally warned that they would not hesitate to stop the counting of votes May 2
- The Calcutta HC had expressed similar dissatisfaction with the EC over enforcement of Covid-19 safety norms during WB polls

EC trod with caution: Sources on HC flask

NEW DELHI: After the Madras High Court observed that the Election Commission must be held "singularly" responsible for the second wave of coronavirus in the country, sources said Monday that the poll panel has trodden with caution all along to ensure COVID-19-free polls, first in Bihar and then in four states and a union territory. They said while enforcing the Disaster Management Act to ensure COVID-19-appropriate behaviour is the responsibility of the State Disaster Management Authority, the commission invoked its constitutional powers to place curbs on campaigning in West Bengal to reduce exposure of people to the virus.

may be booked under murder charges. The judges also orally warned that they would not hesitate to stop the counting of votes May 2. On Sunday, Tamil Nadu reported 15,000 new Covid cases, while

its active cases are in excess of one lakh. Elections had been held in four states—Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and West Bengal and the Union Territory of Pondicherry and the counting of polled votes will be taken up May 2. While voting is over in all other states, the seventh of the eight-phase polling in West Bengal is underway Monday, with the last phase scheduled April 29.

Earlier, the Calcutta High Court had expressed dissatisfaction with the EC over the enforcement of COVID-19 health safety norms during the ongoing West Bengal assembly election process, including campaigning. On April 22, hearing three public interest litigations seeking enforcement of Covid protocol during the polls, a division bench presided by Chief Justice TBN Radhakrishnan had said issuance of circulars and holding meetings on Covid safety were not enough. It later directed the authorities to make the people of WB abide by the curbs imposed by the commission.

HEATWAVE LASHES STATE; 6 PLACES SEE TEMP OVER 42°C

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: Severe heatwave condition continued to prevail at many places in the state with temperatures going past 42°C at six places Monday.

Boudh recorded the state's highest temperature of 43°C while it was the capital city of Bhubaneswar that sizzled at a temperature of 42.5°C. The maximum day temperature at Bolangir was 42.2°C, followed by Angul (42.1°C), Nayagarh (42°C) and Titlagarh (42°C).

Apart from the above six stations, 11 other places witnessed day temperatures of 40°C or more Monday. They included Talcher (41.6°C), Sundargarh (41.5°C), Jharsuguda (41.4°C), Baripada & Sambalpur (41.2°C each), Sonepur & Bhawanipatna (41 each), Hirakud (40.9°C), Cuttack (40.2°C), Balasore (40.1) and Phulbani (40°C).

The Bhubaneswar Meteorological Centre director HR Biswas said the day temperature will remain almost at the same level in the interior pockets while the coastal areas are likely to witness a fall in the mercury after next two days.

Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department predicted a wet spell over several parts of the country from April 26 to 30. Thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds are likely to isolated places over Telangana, Kerala and Mahe from April 26. Heat wave conditions are likely in isolated pockets over Gujarat and coastal Odisha, the IMD added. On April 27, thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds are likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, Assam, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Marathawada, Telangana, Kerala and Mahe.

2nd jab at govt hubs free of cost

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: Any person who received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine at a private centre can take the second shot at a government site free of cost, said state family welfare director Bijay Panigrahi here Monday.

The director said this as the Union government has decided to not provide free vaccines at private facilities with effect from May 1. He further said if a person tests positive for COVID-19 after the first dose, he can take the second shot four weeks after his recovery.

He said registration of citizens in the age group of 18-45 years for vaccination will start from April 28.

Eligible people have to do registration on CoWin app or Aarogya Setu app. After the registration, slots will be booked according to the number of Covid-19 vaccine doses available with the state government.

The beneficiaries will get information through SMSes

regarding their dates of inoculation and the places. The third phase of the vaccination will wholly depend on the quantities of vaccines available in the state, he added.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Sunday announced free vaccination for the age group of 18-45 during the third phase of vaccination. As many as 19.3 million people will benefit from the inoculation exercise for which the government will spend ₹2,000 crore.

The state government has placed fresh orders for 10.34 lakh doses of Covaxin from Bharat Biotech and 3.77 crore doses of Covishield from Serum Institute of India (SII). However, the state is yet to get a reply in this regard.

As many as 88,770 people have been vaccinated at 595 centers Monday while the government has planned to conduct the sessions at 602 centers Tuesday. The state has 1,23,170 doses of Covishield and 3,65,750 doses of Covaxin.

RBI caps tenure of bank MDs & CEOs to 15 years

AGENCIES

Mumbai, April 26: In a major reform step, the Reserve Bank of India has capped the tenure of bank MD and CEOs with immediate effect. In a circular to all the commercial banks Monday, the RBI said that the posts of Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer or Whole Time Director cannot be held for more than 15 years.

Further, the MD and CEO or WTD who is also a promoter or a major shareholder, cannot hold these posts for more than 12 years. Banks will have to comply with the instructions by October 1, 2021.

The central bank further said that the extant instructions on upper age limit for MD & CEO and WTDs in the private sector banks would continue and no person can continue as MD & CEO or WTD beyond the age of 70 years.

Within the overall limit of 70 years, as part of their internal policy, individual bank's boards are free to prescribe a lower retirement age for the WTDs, including the MD & CEO. The change in norms may have a major impact on Uday Kotak, the MD and CEO of Kotak Mahindra Bank who would not be eligible for another term at the helm as per these new norms.

The circular added that in extraordinary circumstances, at the sole discretion of the Reserve Bank, MD & CEO or WTDs who are also the promoter or a significant shareholder may be allowed to continue up to 15 years. "While examining the matter of re-appointment of such MD & CEOs or WTDs within the 12/15 years period, the level of progress and adherence to the milestones for dilution of promoters' shareholding in the bank shall also be factored in by the RBI," it said.

TWO HOOTS TO CAUTION



Bapuji Nagar market in Bhubaneswar witnesses a rush of crowds as it reopens after the weekend shutdown, Monday

Govt asks Serum, Bharat Biotech to lower vax prices

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 26: The central government Monday asked the Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech to lower price of their COVID-19 vaccines amid criticism from various states who accused the companies of profiteering during such a major crisis.

The issue of vaccine pricing was discussed at a meeting chaired by Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba. Now the two companies are expected to come up with revised pricing for their vaccines.

The Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech has fixed the price of its COVID-19 vaccine, 'Covishield', for state governments and ₹600 per dose for private hospitals. The Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine maker in terms of volume, has announced a price of ₹400 per dose for its COVID-19 vaccine, 'Covaxin', for state governments and ₹600 per dose for private hospitals.

Both vaccines are available to the central government at a rate of ₹150 per dose. The Centre has relaxed its vaccination strategy in the third phase under which the country's large 18-plus population will get inoculated from May 1.

Under the new strategy, the vaccine manufacturers would supply 50 per cent of their monthly Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL) released doses to the central government and would be free to supply the remaining 50 per cent doses to state governments and in the open market. The government had said the manufacturers would have to make an advance declaration of the price for the 50 per cent supply that would be available to the state governments and in the open market. Many states have objected to different prices for the vaccines, with Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal saying this is not time for profiteering. Kejriwal also appealed to the vaccine makers to bring down the price to ₹150 a dose.

Nomadland best pic at Oscars of many firsts, surprises

AGENCIES

Los Angeles, April 26: It was a night of big wins for meditative road drama "Nomadland" which got the Oscar for best picture as well as best director for Chloe Zhao, the first woman of colour to get the coveted trophy, at the 93rd Academy Awards, a socially distanced event held in the shadow of the pandemic.

The film, about grief and finding connections outside the traditional structure of a family, also won Frances McDormand her third best actress Oscar after " Fargo " and " Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri " as well as a gong for producing it. My Octopus Teacher won the Oscar for Best Documentary.

The usual glitter that accompanies Hollywood's most starry night had dimmed but with women and people of colour creating history as the first-time winners, there was

plenty to celebrate this year.

Veteran actor Anthony Hopkins, who did not attend the ceremony, won best actor Oscar for his performance as a man suffering from dementia in the relationship drama "The Father". The actor stars opposite Olivia Colman in the movie.

It was a surprise win for the actor as many expected the trophy to go to Chadwick Boseman for his turn in "May Rainey's Black Bottom".

The India connection came through with the Academy honouring actor Irrfan Khan and costume designer Bhanu Athaiya in its 'In Memoriam' segment. The night clearly belonged to Zhao and "Nomadland", a front-runner for the awards from the beginning.

Zhao, who moved to the US from China as a teenager, is the first woman of colour and the only second woman after Kathryn Bigelow's 2010 win for "The Hurt Locker" to win



the best director trophy. "This is for anyone who has the faith and the courage to hold on to the goodness in themselves and to hold on to the goodness in other no matter how difficult it is to do that," the 39-year-old director said in her

shut as people across the globe struggled with the coronavirus pandemic.

"One day very, very soon, take everyone you know into a theatre, shoulder to shoulder, in that dark space, and watch every film that's represented here tonight," McDormand said in her speech. Based on Jessica Bruder's book of the same name, "Nomadland" stars McDormand as Fern, a woman who, after the economic collapse of her company town in rural Nevada, packs her van and sets off on the road to explore a life outside of conventional society as a modern-day nomad.

The pandemic forced the Academy to delay its date and shift the ceremony to April even as the entertainment industry grappled with shutdowns of theatres and productions. In a break from tradition, the ceremony announced the best picture winner ahead of the best actress and actor winners.



BEST ACTRESS FRANCES McDORMAND

FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
Today you may try to make your loved one happy, and perhaps even try to woo the person in a fresh manner. You may not be too satisfied with your friends and relatives, but, Ganesh says, you can expect to go to a party in the evening and make new friends.

TAURUS
This day you are likely be prone to daydreaming and fantasizing. Ganesh sees you losing touch with reality and making errors in judgment, in your assessment of facts. You will, by sheer force of your tenacity and determination ensure that things work out in the end.

GEMINI
You will lend your innovative and imaginative spark to your initiatives, which will be quite a few, says Ganesh. Love will bring you immense satisfaction. And you will develop a special bond with your spouse or beloved. You, however, are likely to be dragged into a conflict and will be forced to pick a side.

CANCER
Today, you will need to rise above your emotional leanings and will have to choose between doing the right thing and keeping your loved ones happy. So far, you have managed to strike a balance. It is about time that you learn to deal with your fears, suggests Ganesh.

LEO
The oath of friendship that you once took as a bunch of raggedy misfits still holds true, and your best buddies are the ones who will stand by your side through hell or high water. Ganesh sees in you the desire to cherish such friends and prove your appreciation by treating them with graceful munificence.

VIRGO
You are the banner carrier for those around you today, giving hope and inspiring. Clad yourself in robes of the perfect family man. This should spread warmth and love, and will work wonders in improving relationships.

LIBRA
Connect and Express — these are the two things you must aim for at work today. You tend to do both things supremely well, be it in a business dialogue on phone, in writing, or in meetings. Getting across to people is not an issue today.

SCORPIO
You may find yourself sulking in your shell today, feels Ganesh. One event or another may lead you to shut out work. Hindsight and bitterness will not lead you anywhere, so Ganesh advises that you must steer clear of negativity. Soul searching and inner cleansing may best be complemented with meditation and yoga.

SAGITTARIUS
A nice, easy and pleasant day is on the cards. Your professional approach will bring you much appreciation, especially in the way you handle complicated problems. The way you balance people's opinions will help you make many friends.

CAPRICORN
Recognition and rewards are awaiting you at work, and unlike in most cases, colleagues won't be envious of your success. They will, in fact, provide the much-needed motivation for taking up new and challenging projects, says Ganesh. For those of you looking to switch jobs, wait awhile, this may not be the right time.

AQUARIUS
Today, your social butterflies will set hearts fluttering! Also, whatever you have been working on will reach completion now. You do have a great vision, but you're lost when it comes to executing your plans. Ganesh assures success if only you are a little more practical!

PISCES
Your day today will be like a tug-of-war competition. Try to come out on top in this competition. Ganesh advises you not to underestimate your enemies. It is advisable to find a solution or avoid conflict so that you don't need to waste your energy in this.



TOP GUN BEST FILM I HAVE BEEN A PART OF: McQUARRIE

Writer-director Christopher McQuarrie, who is a part of the writing team on Tom Cruise's *Top Gun: Maverick* and directs next two *Mission: Impossible* movies, has called the aviation drama one of the best films he has been a part of.

KAJAL URGES PEOPLE TO DONATE PLASMA

Actress Kajal Pisal, who recently recovered from Covid-19, has requested people to donate their plasma, adding that she plans to do so soon as she is allowed to.



Bhanu, Irrfan honoured

Los Angeles: Irrfan Khan and Bhanu Athaiya were the Indian film personalities honoured in the *In Memoriam* montage showcased at the 93rd Academy Awards ceremony held here Monday morning according to India time.

Sean Connery and Chadwick Boseman were also among many others that the Academy remembered in the special tribute segment.

Irrfan, who passed away last year in Mumbai at the age of 53 after a two-year battle with neuroendocrine tumour, earned global recognition with his work in projects such as *The Warrior*, *The Namesake*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Life Of Pi*, *Jurassic World* and *Inferno*.

Costume designer Bhanu Athaiya became the first Indian to win an Oscar, for her work in Sir Richard Attenborough's much-feted classic of 1982, *Gandhi*. She won the Oscar jointly with John Mollo. Athaiya was 91 when she passed away at her residence in Mumbai after prolonged illness last year on October 16.

Acting is paid hobby for Hopkins
Actor Anthony Hopkins said being a part of showbiz is like having a paid hobby. "I'm not a method actor. I can't sit in the corner thinking I'm a plant or anything like that. I get a cup of tea or a cup of coffee and say, 'Good morning.' Some people want to make a big deal of it. I can't. I've got a life of my own and acting to me is a hobby, a paid hobby, but I enjoy it," Hopkins said in an interview with *The Sun* after winning the



OSCARS TIDBITS

Best Actor award for *The Father*.



Kaluuya's acceptance speech amuses many

Daniel Kaluuya, who won the Best Supporting Actor for his work in *Judas And The Black Messiah* tickled the funny-bone at the ceremony in his acceptance speech. "My mom, my dad; they had sex, it's amazing! I'm here! I'm so happy to be alive, so I want to celebrate that tonight," he said. As soon as his speech finished, the camera panned to his mother, who had a flummoxed even as the actor's sister could not stop laughing. The clip has now gone viral.

Yuh-jung's epic reply on Brad Pitt
Korean actress Yuh-jung had a witty retort during a media con-

versation after winning her first Oscar as Best Supporting Actress for *Minari*, on being asked how Brad Pitt smells like. "I didn't smell him. I am not a dog," she replied and added that Pitt announcing her name was something she found too good to be true.

AGENCIES

Actresses are more than just glamour quotients: Elnaaz

Mumbai: Actress Elnaaz Norouzi, who was recently seen in the film *Hello Charlie* feels while Hindi film industry is undergoing many changes, the industry has to stop looking at actresses as just glamour quotients in the films.

Asked if B-Town needs to change the mentality of looking at actresses as just pretty faces, Elnaaz says: "It does need to change in our industry. The same notion is not followed in many other film industries but in Bollywood every actress needs to look pretty and for every role, they have to wear a lot of makeup. It is changing for the better now and I really glad about it."

"I don't just want to be part of films where my only job is to look pretty and dance. I also want to take up parts where I can show my acting calibre, just how I did with *Sacred Games*," said the Iranian-German actress. Elnaaz's role in *Hello Charlie* was that of Mona, a traditional 'vamp' prototype of Hindi films who is trying help her lover and the film's villain (played by Jackie Shroff) pull off his vile plan. She triggers off an important plot point.

IAN S



TAAPSEE shuts up troll over offensive remark

Mumbai: Actress Taapsee Pannu Monday shut up a troll calling her 'sasti maal'. The abusive tweet was later deleted.

It all began with a user requesting actor Sonu Sood for an ambulance equipped with oxygen. Taapsee helpfully shared the tweet, writing: "ambulance needed".

However, reacting to Taapsee's tweet, a troll asked her to donate her car instead of spreading the word on Twitter. However, the post was derogatory in the language used to address the actress.

"Apni car de de punnu... sab kaam twitter per hi karegi... baketi karwa lo iss sasti maal se," the user wrote in a tweet, which was deleted later. Reacting to the tweet, Taapsee wrote: "Can you please shut up! Like just STFU! If this is all u wanna say in these times then hold on until this country gets back to breathing normally and then get back to your sh*t ways until then DONT CROWD MY TIMELINE WITH YOUR NONSENSE and let me do what I am doing!"

IAN S



Rashmika hints at third Hindi film



Hyderabad: Actress Rashmika Mandanna held an Instagram live session with her followers Monday, where she revealed she is all set to sign her third Hindi film. Incidentally, Rashmika signed her second film in Mumbai even before her debut feature is out.

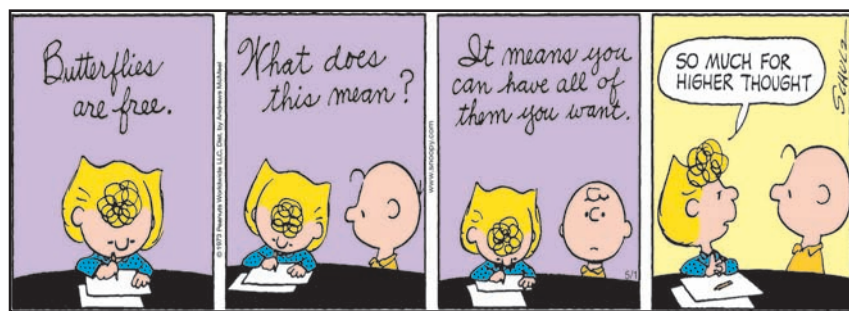
Rashmika shot to the spotlight in the Hindi entertainment domain by starring in the popular *Top Tucker* video filmed on the song by Uchana Amit, Jonita Gandhi, Yuvan Shankar Raja and Badshah.

She will make her Hindi film debut with the spy thriller *Mission Majnu*, and her second Hindi film is the Amitabh Bachchan-starrer *Goodbye*.

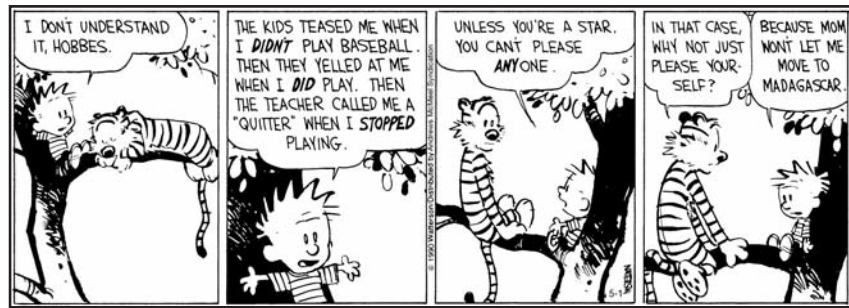
The revelation came when, during the interactive session, a fan asked about her other Hindi projects. "I am doing two Bollywood films and soon I will be signing the third on," she replied. The actress, however, remains tight-lipped on details during the virtual greeting session.

FUN post

PEANUTS



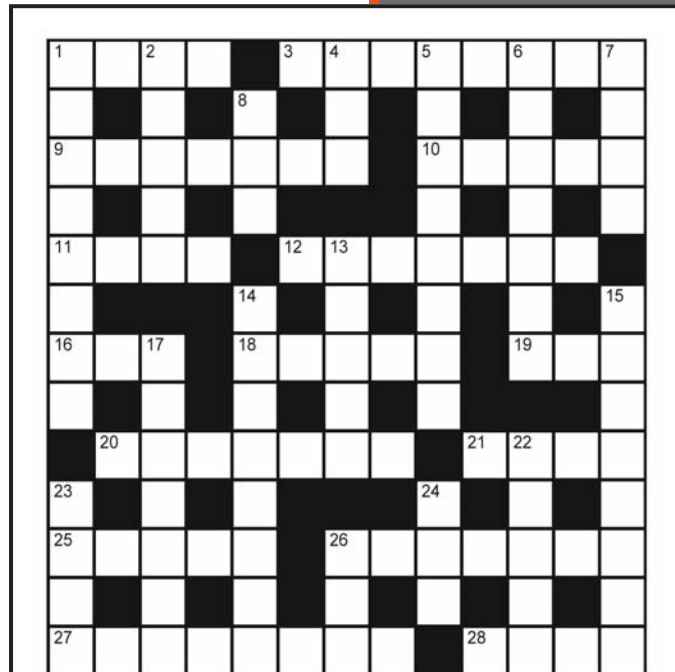
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



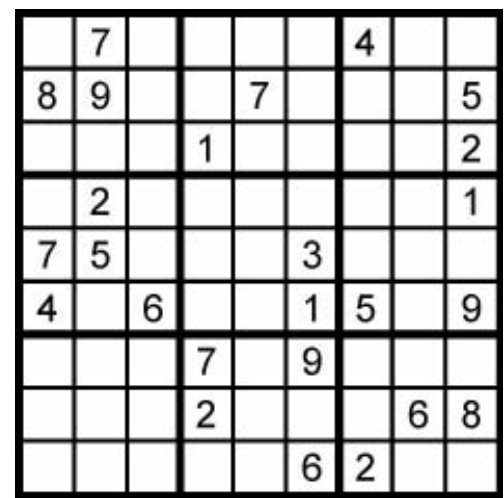
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Spinning toys
 - 3 Abruptly
 - 9 Mexican booze
 - 10 Brazilian dance
 - 11 Rod's companion
 - 12 Annul
 - 16 Recipe word
 - 18 Horse-drawn wagon
 - 19 Health resort
 - 20 Colorful marble
 - 21 Leave speechless
 - 25 ___-Roman wrestling
 - 26 Like some sciences
 - 27 Move
 - 28 Diversify
 - 5 Shows off
 - 6 Unbeatable foe
 - 7 Vintage designation
 - 8 Mouth piece
 - 13 Husky
 - 14 Kind of sale (5,3)
 - 15 Linchpin
 - 17 Chiffonier parts
 - 22 Coronet
 - 23 Food thickener
 - 24 Wax producer
 - 26 Indisposed

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



SOLUTIONS



CROSSWORD

SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



IN MEMORIAM
Dignitaries including, Speaker SN Patro and I&PR Minister Raghunandan Das, pay floral tributes to Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati on the birth anniversary of the latter on the Assembly premises, Monday

COVID-19 TRACKER			
	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	14,78,86,536	12,54,58,500	31,24,726
India	1,73,13,163	1,43,04,382	1,95,123
Odisha	4,14,056	3,67,111	1,997

SECURITY CELLS FOR ELDERLY IN TATTERS

MANPOWER AND FUND CRUNCH ARE SAID TO BE THE BIGGEST IMPEDIMENTS TO PROPER FUNCTIONING OF SCSCs IN CAPITAL CITY

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: The Senior Citizens Security Cells (SCSCs) opened at all the police stations in the Capital city have almost stopped functioning since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic.

The Odisha Police had decided to open SCSCs at the police stations in urban areas across the state in 2008 after several ghastly crimes were reported against elderly persons in the urban areas.

As per Crime Branch's circular (No. 01/08), the cells will be operated with a sub-inspector rank cop as the nodal officer and two/three constables at the police stations as his/her assistants. The senior citizens, especially who were staying alone, have been instructed to register with the SCSCs at their local police stations. They get a senior citizen card along with a booklet of "Do's and Don'ts" clearly advising the card holders about the steps to be taken to remain safe, thereby preventing criminal activities against them.

The nodal officers along with other cops are supposed to visit any of the registered elderly person's residence every week and advise him/her on security related issues.



COVID BLUES

The nodal officers along with other cops are supposed to visit any of the registered elderly person's residence every week and advise him/her on security related issues.

The nodal officers have also been asked to create senior citizen committees in various localities of the urban area.

However, the SCSCs have almost stopped functioning since the outbreak of Covid-19 barring some random distribution of medicines and other essentials among them during nationwide lockdown last year.

committees in various localities of the urban area. The senior citizens can seek the help of cops of the cell in case of emergency.

According to sources, more than 15,000 senior citizens in Capital

city have been registered themselves with the SCSCs at local police stations. Around 2,000 senior citizens have been registered with the SCSC at Chandrasekharpur PS while around 1,500 were registered at Nayapalli police station. Similarly, as many as 2,500 elderly persons have registered themselves with Khandagiri police. As many as 950 senior citizens at Lingaraj, 1,300 at Kharavel Nagar and 950 at Airfield PS have received cards from the police.

However, the SCSCs have almost stopped functioning since the outbreak of pandemic barring some random distribution of medicines and other essentials among them during nationwide lockdown last year. The senior citizen meetings and medical camps used to be held at police stations at regular intervals have also stopped.

On the other hand, lack of fund and manpower crunch has also turned out to be the biggest impediments to proper functioning of SCSCs here. Many ASIs have been appointed as nodal officers of the cells due to the absence of adequate number of SIs.

Similarly, the officers at police stations are reluctant to organise any meetings, health camps or any programme in this regard for dearth of sufficient funds.

State logs 6,599 new cases, 9 more fatalities

BMC focus on slums to curb virus spread

PNN/AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 26: Odisha's Covid-19 tally Monday mounted to 4,14,056 as 6,599 more people tested positive for the highly infectious virus, while nine fresh fatalities pushed the coronavirus death toll to 1,997, a Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department official said.

Of the fresh cases, 3,827 were reported from quarantine centres and 2,772 detected during contact tracing.

Khurda district, which comprises the state capital Bhubaneswar, recorded the highest number of new cases at 958, followed by Nuapada at 551 and Kalahandi at 518.

The remaining fresh infections were registered in several other districts.

"We expect the situation will now improve as the daily infection level reaches a plateau," Directorate of Medical Education and Training chief Prof CBK Mohanty said.

Taking to Twitter, the H&FW department said, "Regret to inform the demise of nine COVID positive patients while undergoing treatment in hospitals."

Of the fresh fatalities, three were reported from Khurda, two from Keonjhar and one each from Bhadrak, Ganjam, Cuttack and Sundargarh.

Fifty-three other Covid-19 patients have also died due to comorbidities, he said.

Odisha now has 49,075 active cases, while 3,62,931 patients have so far recovered from the disease.

Over 90.17 lakh samples, including 39,642 Sunday, have been tested for Covid-19, and the positivity rate stands at 4.17 per cent.

POST NEWS NETWORK

In a bid to contain the spread of local infections, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Monday initiated a special drive of active surveillance, monitoring and control in the slums of the Capital city.

With a high density of population at slums, the drive has been initiated at all 67 wards. While screening in rounds, the drive will focus on different Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) and community participation in different slums spread across the capital.

"The slum areas will be given top priority due to the population density there. The special team comprising Anganwadi workers, ASHA and health activists will be reaching out to every individual and collect data regarding health issues, travel history, age, address, occupation, phone number or any flu related symptoms," said a BMC official.

As per BMC data, the city has about 500 slums with more than 85,000 households having over 3.06 lakh population - roughly 36 per cent of city's total population. Earlier, between August and September, Covid infection was reported from about 20 of these slums with more than half of them being ordered to be sealed.

Orissa Post had earlier reported experts suggesting elaborate plans to be formulated by the BMC to check the spread of virus in slums. While certain residential buildings



Vegetable sellers from Unit-I market in Bhubaneswar start operations from temporary stalls near Mother's Public School in the City, Monday op photo

Satya Nagar crematorium fully functional

BMC Commissioner Prem Chandra Chaudhary, Monday, said that the civic body is well prepared against Covid deaths with the sole crematorium at Satya Nagar fully functional and other proposed crematoriums to be made operational soon. "Even if Puri administration plans to close Swargadwar for deaths outside Puri, we are fully prepared to handle any added burden. The Satya Nagar crematorium is fully operational and others will also open shortly. There is no need to panic as we are ready to face any challenge," Chaudhary said. It can be mentioned here that the city here saw massive spike in Covid cases in October last year. A large number of bodies were reported to have accumulated at Satya Nagar crematorium. Observing this, the BMC Commissioner had declared setting up of two more crematoriums - one in Patia and another in Khandagiri - to reduce the burden. However, the project is yet to see the light of the day.

and government offices have been sealed in the last few weeks, the spread of virus has largely stayed away from slums.

Meanwhile, the BMC in its first round of Covid surveillance covered about 397 slums surveying about 2.53

lakh population in 377 AWCs. While only 17 people were found symptomatic, four were found to have travel history from other states. All symptomatic persons have been asked for home isolation under strict vigil of the BMC.

Banking hours from 10am to 2pm



FILE PHOTO

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: In view of Covid-19 surge, the state government Monday directed all the banks to provide customer service from 10am to 2pm every working day. However, the bank branches can remain open from 10am to 4pm.

Finance department deputy secretary Tarakanta Bhakta has written a letter to convener of the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) in this regard. The revised time-frame will continue till May 15 and will be reviewed in between or thereafter for further course of action.

The state government has asked the banks to implement the weekend shutdown at all urban branches coming under the jurisdiction of ULBs in the state.

All banks are advised to keep sufficient cash in ATMs in all the districts.

situation, the deputy secretary said. The banks were asked to implement the weekend shutdown at all urban branches coming under the jurisdiction of urban local bodies (ULBs) in the state. The state government has further asked to reduce the staff in

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The state government has further asked to reduce the staff in

administrative offices and branches of banks to 50 per cent on rotation basis.

However, for branches having five or less number of staffers, suitable decision may be taken by the respective controlling offices with regard to staff requirement keeping in view the business of the branch, Bhakta said. The banks have been asked to ensure uninterrupted banking service to the public.

Banks were asked to provide mandatory services like accepting deposits, cash withdrawals, remittance and government businesses, lending related activities among others. All banks are advised to keep sufficient cash in ATMs in all the districts.

However, the instructions of local administrations like district Collector and municipal commissioners will supersede this order.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



6 inspectors promoted to DSP rank in state

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: Six inspectors again got promoted to the rank of DSP after they reportedly came clean in the proceedings initiated against them.

Earlier, the state government had demoted 28 cops including the promoted ones to inspectors of police rank while the officers junior to them got promoted to DSP rank

through a notification January 29. The promoted officers are: Manoj Kumar Rout, Suryamani Pradhan, Iti Das, Rabi Narayan Padhy, Puspalata Barik and Atanu Kumar Rout.

The above officers have been promoted retrospectively with effect from the date on which their juniors got promotion January 29. The state Home department also reinstated their seniority as earlier.

Wrap up school admissions by May 31: Govt

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: School and Mass Education (S&ME) department Monday directed all the district and block education officers (DEOs and BEOs) for admission of students to elementary and secondary classes for the session 2021-22.

Additional secretary of S&ME department Raghuram R Iyer said that due to the pandemic, classes pertaining to elementary wing were closed since March 20, 2020 and examination could not be held. Meanwhile, Classes IX and X have been suspended from April 19, 2021.



The government March 16 this year had issued instructions regarding promotion of students of government and aided elementary and secondary schools of the state.

Now, the government is pleased to order that new admissions to elementary and secondary classes are to be completed by May 31. The admission should be conducted be-

RULES TO FOLLOW

The admission should be conducted between 7am and 9am on all working days.

The headmaster should ensure that all Covid guidelines issued by government are strictly followed by the parents

tween 7am and 9am on all working days. Not more than 5 parents should be allowed at a time to attend school for admission. The headmaster should ensure

that all Covid guidelines issued by government are strictly followed by the parents. These instructions will be applicable to all government, government aided and all BSE/CHSE Odisha affiliated schools.

For smooth conduct of admission process amidst the pandemic and prevailing heat wave, a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been issued. As per the SOP, all admissions based on promotion within a school will not require presence of students or guardians. These are rolling admissions and schools will update their admission registers accordingly.

CAR FEST AHEAD



Third lot of logs from Nayagarh reaches Puri, Monday, ahead of the construction of the mega chariots for Rath Yatra in the Holy City OP PHOTO

Refund hiked holding tax to citizens, BMC urged

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: Following Orissa High Court's order on hike in holding tax by BMC, the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) Monday demanded reimbursement of increased taxes paid by Bhubaneswar citizens.

Senior Congress leader and former minister Panchanan Kanungo said the Orissa High Court had ruled that any attempt by Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) to enhance holding tax is not sustainable under law.

The court said transitional provision, Section 694 (3) of the Orissa Municipal Corporation (OMC) Act, 2003 cannot be invoked by BMC to justify either the raising of the rate of holding tax or to continue to levy and collect it, he said. Therefore, the BMC should im-



Congress leaders including Panchanan Kanungo address the media in Bhubaneswar, Monday OP PHOTO

mediately return the enhanced property tax collected from various citizens, he demanded. The Congress leader claimed that the

BMC has collected over ₹22 crore from the people after revising the taxes.

Dubbing the hiked user fees being

collected by BMC 'illegal', the leader urged the BMC authorities to stop charging higher rates from the denizens of the Capital city.

Odisha sends 1,267.931 MT O₂ to other states

Collectors told to campaign against child marriages

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, April 26: As the nation is facing an oxygen crisis amid a massive surge in Covid-19 cases and hospitals demanding more of the life-saving gas, Odisha has sent at least 1,267.931 metric tonne (MT) of medical oxygen to badly-hit states like Delhi and Maharashtra in the past four days, an official said Monday.

Addressing media, additional director general of police (Law and Order) YK Jethwa, who has been designated as the nodal officer in charge of the movement of oxygen supply to other states, said as many as 67 tankers with 1267.931 MT of the life-saving gas have been sent to Covid-hit states in the past four days.

"While 22 tankers with 458.3 MT of oxygen were sent to Andhra Pradesh, Telangana received 17



FILE PHOTO

tankers filled with 291.769 MT of the gas. At least six tankers with 102.06 MT medical-grade oxygen have left for Maharashtra, while

131.23 MT of oxygen filled in eight tankers have left for Madhya Pradesh in the past four days," the senior IPS official told the media.

As many as 67 tankers with 1267.931 MT of the life-saving gas have been sent to Covid-hit states in the past four days

Eight tankers have carried around 187.512 MT of oxygen to Gurgaon and Faridabad in Haryana

Four tankers with 66.39 MT of medical-grade oxygen to Uttar Pradesh and 30.67 MT of the life-saving gas loaded in two trucks to Chhattisgarh have been despatched

The state has formed 22 enforcement squads to prevent hoarding and black-marketing of medicines and medical facilities that are essential for the treatment of Covid patients

He added that eight tankers have carried around 187.512 MT of oxygen to Gurgaon and Faridabad in Haryana. Odisha, on the other hand, has sent four tankers with 66.39 MT of medical-grade oxygen to Uttar Pradesh and 30.67 MT of the life-saving gas loaded in two trucks to Chhattisgarh in the last four days.

Sources said that the state has formed 22 enforcement squads to prevent hoarding and black-marketing of medicines and medical facilities that are essential for the treatment of Covid patients.

The squads have warned 20 healthcare facilities against hoarding the essential medicines in the period.

The squads will not only ensure that the Covid medicines available in Odisha be used within the state, but also keep tabs on the violators, Jethwa pointed out.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: The Women and Child Development (W&CD) department Monday directed all the district Collectors to start a 'fortnight campaign' against child marriage from May 1 to 14 to sensitise people about protection of child rights by preventing child marriages. Earlier, the department had written letters to all District Child Protection Officers (DCPOs) directing the same.

Aravind Agrawal, Director of Integrated Child Development Services, (ICDS) and Social Welfare WCD said that the department has recently received a letter from National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) saying that this year Akshaya Tiritiya will be celebrated May 14, 2021. "They

have requested us to prevent the occurrence of child marriages on this day and protect the child rights in a proactive manner," said Agrawal.

The department directed the Collectors to organise intensive drive on prevention of child marriage and mass marriage, especially in identified vulnerable pockets and communities. The Covid-19 protocol and standards of hygiene must be adhered to during the entire campaign. Child welfare committees may be vigilant during this period. It also directed that to prevent mass child marriages on certain days such as Akshaya Tiritiya, District Magistrate shall function as the Child Marriage Prohibition Officer with additional powers conferred under Sub-section 5 of Section 13 of the Commission for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005.

Plus II students regroup for cancellation of final exams



PPE-clad police personnel hold back an agitating Plus II student OP PHOTO

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: A group of Plus-II students Monday staged a demonstration at lower PMG square here for the second time demanding the cancellation of their final examinations. They had hit the streets April 22 demanding the same.

The agitating students said that they are in a state of confusion as the government is yet to take a decision on the matter. "They (government) are neither announcing

the dates nor cancelling the exams. We are confused. Such apathy will create problems for us when we pursue higher studies," one of the students said.

The students threatened that if the government does not take any decision within the next 10 days, they will gherao 'Naveen Niwas', the official residence of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. The 'Naba Nirman Yuva Chatra Sangathan' has come out in support of the agitating students.

Initially, the police held discus-

The students group has threatened to march towards Naveen Niwas if no decision is taken within next 10 days

Initially, the police held discussions with the agitating students. However, as they were reluctant, police took immediate steps to disperse them. Two members of the group were also taken into preventive custody

sions with the agitating students. However, as they were reluctant, police took immediate steps to disperse them. Two members of the group were also taken into preventive custody.

Reacting to their previous agitation April 22, School and Mass Education Minister Samir Ranjan Dash had advised them to concentrate on their studies. He had said the government would take a final decision on conducting the examinations soon.

Notably, Class X students of various government-run schools had marched towards Naveen Niwas April 20. They had demanded the cancellations of matriculation exams. A day later, Odisha government had the examination cancelled.

DCP flags off 'School on wheels'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Umashankar Dash Monday flagged off special vehicles under 'schools on wheels' by Ruchika, an organization running a child care institute, to bring awareness on Covid appropriate behavior among the children residing in various slums.

As per Ruchika, its volunteers will visit various slums here and educate children on how to avoid being infected. They will address emergency needs of the children including food, clothes, first-aid, medical support and counseling. The outfit will continue to impart non-formal education to street and slum children even after the effects of the pandemic subsides.

nCoV curve flattening: DMET

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: Despite the fact that the daily testing has reduced Sunday as compared to Saturday, the government Monday claimed that the Covid-19 curve in the state has hit the plateau.

The claim was made by Director of Medical Education and Training (DMET) CBK Mohanty. He said that Odisha is witnessing daily Covid-19 cases between 6,000 and 6,500 signifying that the curve is flattening.

He made the claim even after the daily testing was reduced from 43,765 (Saturday) to 39,642 (Sunday).

"In medical science, there is

nothing in absolute. Hence, we can say that we are in plateau stage as the state has not witnessed a sharp increase in Covid-19 cases in the past few days. We hope that the graph will start witnessing a declining trend soon," said Mohanty.

Asked about how he was so sure about the declining trend, the director said, "Every epidemic or pandemic has an upsurge, plateau and declining stage. This also applies to this pandemic."

Mohanty also admitted that local contact cases are certainly a worrying sign. He appealed to everybody to follow Covid-19 appropriate behaviour to control the virus spread.

HITTING THE STREETS



Puri Bar Association members demonstrate at Kacheri Chhak in the Holy City condemning the alleged police atrocity, Monday OP PHOTO

Special trains cancelled for poor occupancy

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: The Railways has decided to cancel the services of 08423/08424 Bhubaneswar-Nayagarh Town-Bhubaneswar Special from April 28 due to poor occupancy.

It is seen that Bhubaneswar-Nayagarh Town-Bhubaneswar Special train has less than 2 per cent occupancy since its restoration.

Similarly, it has been decided to cancel the services of 08413/08414 Paradip-Puri-Paradip Special from both the directions w.e.f April 27, 2021. It is seen that, Puri-Paradip-Puri has less than 10 per cent occupancy since its restoration.

Special train between Trivandrum & Malda

The East Coast Railway (ECoR) has decided to run a special train between Trivandrum & Malda town.

The Trivandrum-Malda Town-Trivandrum Special from Trivandrum will leave Trivandrum at 18hrs on April 27 & May 1, 2021 (Tuesday & Saturday) and from

ECoR transports 302 MT oxygen

Meanwhile, the ECoR said that oxygen trains to Delhi and Uttar Pradesh are on their way. One train is expected to leave Lucknow for Bokaro Monday night to take more oxygen.

Since the first train of empty tankers left for Vizag from Mumbai Region just a few days back, the Indian Railways has transported more than 302 MT of oxygen safely to various states across India. Another 154 MT liquid medical oxygen is on the way. The Railways has picked up the challenge of movement of the life-saving oxygen to the states in dire need of oxygen.

One oxygen express train carrying four tankers is expected to reach Delhi from Raigarh



FILE PHOTO

(Chhattisgarh) Tuesday morning.

For the residents of Maharashtra, a train carrying 44 MT (in 3 tankers) has reached Kalamboli (near Mumbai) from Hapa (Rajkot, Gujarat) Monday.

Another oxygen express is cur-

rently on the run from Bokaro (Jharkhand) to Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) carrying 90 MT of LMO (in 5 tankers) and is expected to reach Lucknow by early Tuesday morning.

Another empty rake will depart from Lucknow to Bokaro to bring one more set of oxygen tankers.

The Railways is responding to all requests received from state governments and is in constant touch with the respective authorities for additional oxygen train requirements.

ECoR General Manager Vidya Bhusan has congratulated the Waitair team led by the Divisional Railway Manager Sh Chetan Srivastava for executing the task.

Malda Town at 19:45hrs April 30 and May 4 (Friday & Monday). This train will have stoppages

at Berhampur, Khurda Road, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Bhadrak under ECoR jurisdiction along with

important stations between Trivandrum and Malda Town from both the directions.

Now, WFH for visually impaired teachers allowed

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: The Higher Education department Monday said that visually impaired teachers do not have to come to the institution to take online classes.

Principal Secretary of Higher Education department Saswat Mishra said that the visually impaired teachers, possessing valid disability certificates, can take online classes from their residence.

However, in case of exigency they have to come to the institution to perform duties assigned by the department, he said.

PIPLI BYPOLL AHEAD



Congress candidate Bishwokeshan Mohapatra files his nomination for the upcoming Pipli bypoll in Puri, Monday OP PHOTO

Odia outfit launches tele-health prog

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: Odia Samaj, New Delhi has launched the 'Odia Samaj Covid Care', an initiative to give relief to the traumatised patients who are unable to access doctors.

The initiative will make it easy for patients to consult doctors and seek solutions for their medical issues. It will be absolutely free of cost.

A special drive has been made to collaborate with doctors and volunteers and make this initiative a success. 'Viveo Health', a multinational tele-health platform has agreed to join this philanthropic activity by providing the requisite IT infrastructure to run this project.

"The pandemic has created so much stress on the health infrastructure of the country that we felt it was imperative to give whatever support we could to bolster it," said Odia Samaj president Sidhartha Pradhan.

Anyone seeking free medical consultation related to Covid health issues may give a missed call or try WhatsApp on 8882497515

As the whole country is reeling under the pandemic and a huge number of people are affected by Covid, this has severely impacted the country's health system, he stated. "Proper medical advice and right nutrition can help people get back good health. Besides physical health, mental health of people is also greatly affected and we also have plans to organise webinars and wellness workshops to help people think positively," he added.

Explaining the ease of tele-medicine platform, associate professor of ILBS, New Delhi Dr. Ashok Choudhury said, "A patient can fix his appointment with a doctor and

consult him through three easy steps. The doctor would listen to his problems, give prescription and medication if needed."

He also added, "We are trying our best to involve more doctors and well-being experts so that more and more Indians are able to benefit from this initiative."

Viveo Health's India Head Prasant Mohanty further explained the ease of methods which a patient needs to follow. First the patient will need to give a missed call from his phone or WhatsApp number. Soon, he will get a call from tele-health customer service agent who will fix his appointment with the concerned doctor. Once the patient gets a text message confirming his appointment, he will click on the text message and get immediately connected to the doctor via a video call.

Anyone seeking free medical consultation related to Covid health issues may give a missed call or try WhatsApp on 8882497515.

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Drop in Luna water level threatens livelihood

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapada, April 26: Farmlands might remain uncultivated and drinking water supply to Kendrapada town seriously affected due to a sharp decline in water level in Luna river, a report said.

Gradual drop in water level in the river is being witnessed since December last. Locals alleged that rampant sand mining has led to a change in river's course and subsequently a drop in the water level, which is threatening the lives and livelihoods of the residents. It is apprehended that over 10,000 hectares of farmland might remain uncultivated due to lack of irrigation facilities from the river.

As a result, drinking water supply to Kendrapada town might get seriously affected, while the farmlands on the river basin will be deprived of water for irrigation preventing the farmers from taking up agricultural activities on these lands. Senior citizens claimed that this problem can only be resolved by linking the rivers flowing through the district.

Khitish Kumar Singh, a resident of Khadianga area in the town, said drinking water is being supplied to Kendrapada town from a pump house installed at Kalpada on the banks of Luna river jointly by the Public Health Engineering



KENDRAPARA WATER WOES

The river is 73 km in length and was used for maritime trade during the British rule. However, lack of maintenance, illegal sand and soil mining coupled with encroachments on the banks have changed the course of the river.

The water level in the river adjoining the pump house has dropped abysmally since January this year. Alarmed over the development, the PHEO officials dug up a channel to the pump house from the opposite bank of the river to ensure that water supply to the town is not disrupted.

Organisation (PHEO) and Water Resources department.

The water level in the river adjoining the pump house has dropped abysmally since January this year. Alarmed over the development, the PHEO officials dug up a channel to the pump house from the opposite bank of the river to ensure that water supply to the town is not disrupted. However, water flow in the channel also dried up soon. It is apprehended that water supply to the town might stop altogether within a fortnight if the situation continues to persist.

Santosh Kumar Panda, a senior citizen, said that check dams have been constructed on Luna river at

Padagayaspur; Gayaspur; Thauri, Chadheiguan, Rajgarh and Angulai to supply drinking water to Kendrapada town and for providing irrigation facilities to the farmlands. However, the water level has plummeted in the river with the onset of summer.

Zilla Parishad member Ganesh Chandra Samal said that Luna river flows through Kendrapada town. The river is 73 km in length and was used for maritime trade during the British rule. However, lack of maintenance, illegal sand and soil mining coupled with encroachments on the banks have changed the course of the river.

Reports said that agriculture is

the mainstay of the residents here due to absence of any industry or other avenues of employment. Over 15,850 hectares of farmlands lacks drainage facilities for disposing waste water, while 32,350 hectares of farmlands is saline in nature.

Moreover, 34,952 hectares of farmlands is flood prone, while 84,910 hectares have been declared as a drought-hit region. Repeated demands made in the Zilla Parishad for proper management of river and canal water are yet to be addressed.

Social activist Pratap Kumar Tripathy said that earlier water from Luna river was used for paddy cultivation and growing various other crops during Rabi season, in-

cluding cash crops like jute and groundnuts as well as vegetables. However, the water level has dropped due to construction of barrages on the upstream of the river by the Chhattisgarh government. Farmer leader Bidhubhusan Mohapatra demanded linking of the seven rivers flowing in the district and construction of barrages which will help in retaining water for irrigating the farmlands.

When contacted, Prabodh Kumar Rout, executive engineer of Water Resources department, said that various plans are afoot for the development of the Luna river and the benefits will soon be reaped by the residents.

Ganjam dist reports year's highest daily Covid-19 caseload



POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, April 26: Ganjam district Monday reported 323 new Covid-19 cases – the highest since the beginning of the second wave. The district is now in the 'red zone'.

Till Monday, the district had been reporting below 200 daily Covid-19 cases. With Monday's spike, the district's caseload has gone up to 23,631. The number of active cases and recoveries are 1,048 and 22,318 respectively. The district also reported one fatality Monday, taking its toll to 257.

Notably, over 17,000 migrants have returned from different parts of the country, including West Bengal, to the district so far. And the returnees have reportedly been blamed for this surge. However, the district administration is keeping a close watch on every one visiting the district.

District Collector Vijay Amruta

This spike in Covid caseload has reminded people here of the initial days of the pandemic last year. In those days, Ganjam reported the highest number of daily cases

Kulange Monday informed via a tweet that admission of Covid-19 patients has been started at Aska Covid healthcare centre. This medical facility has 100 beds and all are supported by oxygen supply.

This spike in Covid caseload has reminded people here of the initial days of the pandemic last year. In those days, Ganjam was infamous for reporting the highest number of daily Covid-19 cases. However, the situation was brought under control, thanks to various steps taken by the district administration.

21 held for gambling during shutdown

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jepore, April 26: Twenty-one persons were arrested for violating Covid-19 guidelines and gambling during the weekend shutdown near Padmapur jungle near here in Koraput district Sunday.

Acting on a tip-off that over 35 persons were gambling near the Padmapur forest, two police teams of Jepore Sadar police station led by the IIC Aditya Mahakur raided the place. The gamblers were trying to flee the spot when policemen pounced on them and arrested 21 gamblers.

Some of members of the gambling group were guarding at different places to keep an eye on police movement. While they managed to flee the spot, others were nabbed by the police.



NEW LIFE

Forest department officials and locals releasing Olive Ridley hatchlings, rescued from Choumukh beach under Baliapal block in Balasore district, into the sea

Youth killed, 3 critical in wild boar attack



The incident occurred when some people from Tamka-Mahulbadi village went to collect wood from the forest

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kalinganagar, April 26: A youth was killed while three others sustained critical injuries when a wild boar attacked them at Mahagiri forest under Tamka forest limits in Jajpur district Monday.

The deceased has been identified as Manoj Das, a casual labourer and resident of Tamka-Mahulbadi village of Kijihar panchayat under Tamka forest limits in Danagadi block. The injured persons have been identified as Mangal Nayak, 58, his wife Kuntala Nayak, 52, and Malati Das, 35.

The incident occurred when some people from Tamka-Mahulbadi village went to collect wood from the forest. A wild boar suddenly attacked Das, who was washing himself at a nullah.

Villagers accompanying them

ran to his rescue after his wife raised an alarm. The animal, however, left Das and attacked another villager and two other women.

On being informed Tamka police and Forest department personnel rushed the injured persons to Danagadi hospital where doctors pronounced the youth brought dead, while the other three are undergoing treatment.

A pall of gloom descended on the village after this tragic incident. Angry villagers also demanded financial assistance for the bereaved family and the injured persons. Tamka forest ranger Ghanshyam Muduli said that the bereaved family will get financial assistance worth ₹4 lakh, while financial assistance to the injured persons will be given after the completion of a probe into the matter.

Use of machine defeats the objective of rural job scheme

POST NEWS NETWORK

Naugaon, April 26: The Odisha government has been laying stress on effective implementation of MGNREGS projects in rural areas so as to create job opportunities for the rural populace who have been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, in many places under Naugaon block in Jagatsinghpur district, machines are being used in MGNREGS projects while job card holders are being deprived of work, a report said.

Since the authorities have allegedly ignored this concern, the rural job scheme has miserably failed in its objective.

According to reports, the Soil Conservation department had sanctioned pond excavation project in 15 panchayats under this block.

The department has allowed development of three types of ponds and also fixed different rates – ₹61,053 for 100 square ft pond; ₹1,26,305 for ponds measuring 300 sq/ft and ₹1,62,480 for ponds with an area of 400 sq/ft.

In many cases, contractors are allegedly violating the guidelines



FACT FILE

The Soil Conservation department had sanctioned pond excavation project in 15 panchayats under Naugaon block

In many cases, contractors are allegedly violating the guidelines and executing the work by engaging machines instead of the daily wagers

cores of local people have been facing shortage of work. Deprived of work, villagers alleged that the department is taking no action against the erring contractors

and executing the work by engaging machines instead of the daily wagers.

It has also been alleged that

there are a few old ponds and contractors are carrying out their restoration at night instead of digging new ponds.

As a result, scores of local people have been facing shortage of work. Deprived of work, villagers alleged that the department is taking no action against the erring contractors.

They demanded stern action against those who are engaging machines.

Overseer of the soil conservation department, Tapan Swain said that beneficiaries (job card holders) are supposed to dig ponds. Job card holders have been tasked to do carry out pond excavation. He denied the allegation that old ponds are being shown in documents as new ones.

Sambalpur adds cremation capacity



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sambalpur, April 26: The capacity of the main crematorium in Sambalpur is being increased as the number of Covid deaths saw a steep

rise, an official said.

Three more crematoria beds are being added to the existing facility in Rajghat so that 13 bodies could be cremated at one go, he said.

The waiting time for cremation will

reduce considerably with the increase in the capacity, said Enforcement Officer of Sambalpur Municipal Corporation (SMC) Subhankar Mohanty.

The civic body has also started cremating bodies of Covid patients at another crematorium, Santidham, so that the burden on Rajghat is reduced, he said.

The crematorium is witnessing a huge rush since the onset of the second wave of Covid-19, said a staffer of Rajghat.

"I have never seen queues for cremation here before. On many occasions, the people are being forced to wait for hours. Under this circumstance, the electric crematorium of the Rajghat has also gone out of order, making our job more difficult," he said.

Around 20-22 bodies are being cremated at Rajghat daily, sources said.

OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, BALANGIR
No.1944/BM/ Dt.23.04.21

e Procurement Notice

BID IDENTIFICATION NUMBER-BLGR MPTY/01(01-15)/2021-22

No.C-156:- Bid Documents consisting of work, Estimated cost, Cost of Tender paper, EMD, Time of completion, Class of Contractor and the set of terms and conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in Govt. Website i.e. www.tendersorissa.gov.in

- Name of the Work : Civil construction work as mentioned in DTCN
- No. of works : 15 (Fifteen) Nos.
- Estimated Cost : Rs.3.00 Lakhs to 30.00 Lakhs
- Period of Completion : 2 Calendar Months
- Date and Time of online Bidding : from 11.00 AM of 27.04.2021 to 5.00 PM of 10.05.2021
- Online Bids shall be Open on : 11.05.2021 on 11.30 AM
- Name & Address of the Officer : Executive Officer, Balangir Municipality
- Inviting Bid
- Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersorissa.gov.in
- Further any addendum/ corrigendum/ clarification issued in connection with the tenders shall be uploaded in the above website and no newspaper advertisement shall be given. Bidders are advised to visit the website regularly for obtaining all such details.

Sd./- Executive Officer, Balangir Municipality
OIPR-13045/11/0003/2/122

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER,
SAMBALPUR (R&B) DIVISION NO. II, SAMBALPUR
E-mail – eesbprnbdivision2@gmail.com, Phone -0663-2410104

BID IDENTIFICATION No. EE / R and B / SBP II / 01(online)/2021-22

E-procurement notice

No. 1280 / Dated, 19.04.2021
No. B-47- The Executive Engineer, Sambalpur (R&B) Division No.II, Sambalpur on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites Percentage Rate bids in single cover System in ONLINE MODE.

- No. of work :- 01 (One) No. Building work (composite)
- Tender Cost :- Rs.6000/(each)
- Class of Contractor :- "C" & "B" class Contractors
- Availability of bid document :- 18.00 Hours of 27.04.2021 to 17.00 Hours of 08.05.2021
- Date of Opening of Tenders :- 11.30 Hours on dt.10.05.2021
- The bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the Website www.tendersodisha.gov.in only. Any Corrigendum / Addendum/cancellation of tender will be displayed in the website said only.

Sd./- Executive Engineer
Sambalpur (R&B) Division No.II
OIPR-34042/11/0003/2/122

MS FALCON CONSULTANCY PRIVATE LIMITED (IN LIQUIDATION)
Liquidator's Address: Poddar Court, Gate No. -2, 18, Rabindra Sarani Sui No.-372, 3rd floor, Kolkata-700001.
Contact : +91-9830285088, Email ID : falcon.liquidation@gmail.com

Notice is hereby given to the public in general under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 and regulation thereunder, that the properties stated in Table below, will be sold by E-Auction through the service provider MS 4CLOSURE, HYDERABAD - via a website <http://ban.kauctions.in>

Date and Time of Auction	Thursday, 10.05.2021 between 01:00 P.M. to 03:00 P.M.		
Last Date for Submission of EMD	07.05.2021 before 05:00 P.M.		
Inspection Date & Time	On 30.04.2021 between 12:00P.M. to 05:00 P.M. The person to be contacted for inspection is CA Sonu Jain, Contact No. 9830285088		
Lot No.	Particulars	Reserve Price (in Crores)	EMD (Rs.) (in Crores)
1	Barala/Satyabadi & No-500/Puri Ac. 21.26 Dec.	1.895	0.0948
2	Natada/Angul/Angul, Banarpal/Angul, Ac. 56.394Dec.	14.612	0.7306

The EMD (Refundable) shall be payable by interested bidders through NEFT/RTGS on or before-07.05.2021 in an account of "FALCON CONSULTANCY PRIVATE LIMITED (In Liquidation)" having Account No. 06210200002314 and IFSC Code IOBA000021 OR by DD/Pay order favouring "FALCON CONSULTANCY PRIVATE LIMITED (In Liquidation)". For detailed terms & conditions of E-auction sale, refer TENDER DOCUMENTS available on <http://bankauctions.in/> For any query regarding E-Auction, contact Mr. savaysakshi (M: 8142000066, 8142000030, 7008535596) or Liquidator on her e-mail at casonu@falcon.com.

Place : Kolkata Liquidator for Falcon Consultancy Private Limited (In Liquidation)
Date : 27/04/2021 IP Reg. No. IBBI/IPA-001/IP/P00575/2017-18/11016

FOCUS VACCINATION

PENNY-WISE, POUND-FOOLISH



The control of the pandemic is a public good. Meaning it will benefit both those who fell sick and recovered and those who did not fall sick. It will protect a much larger share of population by sharply reducing future infections, fatalities

sick. It will protect a much larger share of the population by sharply reducing future infection rates and fatalities. It will reduce the need for harsh lockdowns, which can reduce GDP sharply. Last year's nationwide lockdown starting in March caused GDP during that quarter to fall by 25 per cent. And nearly 12 crore people lost their jobs. Later in the year the economy began to recover, but this second wave is threatening that recovery. So, the immunisation drive will prevent a fall in GDP and rise in unemployment. It is for this reason that government should not act penny wise pound foolish. The universal vaccine rollout must be funded from central fiscal funds.

In her Union Budget speech the Finance Minister had said that she was allocating ₹35,000 crore for this purpose, and would stand by to add more budgetary allocation as needed. That need has come now, and the Centre must be willing to spend fully. At a cost of ₹150 times 2, for 1.3 billion people it comes to ₹39,000 crore which is near the FM's estimate. But even if it is double this amount it is necessary given that this vaccination drive is for the public good. Making it available for free also removes the hassles of payment and collection or any possible vaccine hesitancy. Also remember that vaccine research gets huge public funding anyway, so zero pricing makes sense. Of course, adequate returns i.e. not super-normal profits to vaccine manufacturers have to be ensured, but that is still not inconsistent with a publicly-funded vaccine rollout.

And lastly, this must not be left as a burden on the state budgets since they are already reeling, and do not have the fiscal muscle to increase their borrowing. It is the Centre alone which can and must fund this drive at the lowest cost of borrowing.

The writer is an economist and Senior Fellow, **Takshashila Institution.**

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this vaccine allotment was done centrally to the states, which in turn organised inoculation clinics across the states. From May 1 it is all being opened up. Which leads us to the important question of pricing. For some reason the Centre has seen it fit to fix multiple prices for the same vaccine, depending on where you get it. The states will be charged ₹400 per dose of Covishield, and the private buyers will be charged ₹600. The central government paid ₹150 per dose for both Covishield and Covaxin. The pricing on Sputnik is not known. The price of Covaxin for private buyers is supposed to be ₹1200 per dose, which translates to ₹2400 per person. In a family of four, that is ₹9600, close to the full monthly per capita income of India! With a high proportion of the population living just above the poverty line, and at a time of pandemic induced recession and joblessness it is astonishing that one of the vaccines to immunise against Covid-19 is priced at close to the full monthly per capita income.

But the larger issue is this. The control of the pandemic is a public good. Meaning it will benefit both those who fell sick and recovered and those who did not fall

forming, and mutations running wild. The new mutations can also spread to other parts of the world. That is why India's Covid-19 challenge has become a global challenge. That is why many countries on their own have come forward with offers of help in vaccines (Sputnik of Russia), or cryogenic tanks for oxygen (China) or other kinds of assistance.

Some countries have achieved very high proportions of the fully vaccinated. Leading this pack is Israel, which celebrated freedom from masks this week. But even the USA is closing toward one third of the population in vaccination coverage, and the UK is not far behind. In India, 10 per cent of the population has got the first dose and 1.5 per cent fully vaccinated. The strategy was to cover the frontline people like healthcare workers and government servants, and then the elderly and then others. Because of the shortage of vaccines, the government prohibited private companies from bidding and buying (and possibly cornering the supply) of vaccines. But as of May 1, both public and private sector companies as well as state governments and other organisations are going to be allowed. So far

The worldometer shows real-time data of Covid-19 infections around the world. Most recently it is showing India as the country with the highest infections. Our daily infections are more than the cumulative total of the next eleven countries, including large countries like Turkey, USA and Brazil. The daily number is racing toward half a million and the daily death count too is above a thousand. The public health system around the country is struggling to meet the deluge of demands for oxygen, Remdesivir, hospital beds. Of course, simultaneously we are trying to get as many people vaccinated as fast as possible. It is ironic that the world's biggest manufacturer of vaccines is running severely short of doses.

We could have avoided being in this situation if the vaccine makers had been given large and confirmed orders from the central government in January itself if not much earlier. At a time when the domestic vaccine makers like the Serum Institute of India had export obligations since its vaccine is made by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, it was imperative to lock up its production capacity well in advance for domestic use. Remember last year, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had asked Bharat Biotech to be ready for the launch of the vaccine by Independence Day - August 15? What happened after that ambitious early target date? The Drug Controller General of India had also fast-tracked approval for phase 1 and 2 trials and wanted Bharat Biotech to speed up phase 3 trials and be ready for an early launch. In fact, Bharat Biotech's vaccine Covaxin seems to be the joint intellectual property of the government of India and Bharat Biotech, so the government could indeed have a greater say in the speed of deployment.

The faster we get the population immunised the earlier we can contain the pandemic. This is a race. For otherwise it can spread unchecked, with new variants



Ajit Ranade

THE FASTER WE GET THE POPULATION IMMUNISED THE EARLIER WE CAN CONTAIN THE PANDEMIC



THE MOTHER

EC, The Murderer

The recent utterances of the Madras High Court Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee would have seemed blasphemous a few days earlier while SA Bobde was still Chief Justice of India. Something seems to have changed. Commenting while hearing a plea concerning the Election Commission of India (ECI), the Chief Justice said that if authorities had made proper plans and taken measures during last one year, the "tsunami of infection" could have been avoided. "We were lulled into a false sense of security," the CJ said and continued expressing his dissatisfaction by saying "You (ECI) are the only institution responsible for the situation that we are in today. You have been singularly lacking any kind of exercise of authority. You have not taken measures against political parties holding rallies despite every order of this court saying maintain Covid protocol," and added that officials of the ECI should be charged with murder for being the most irresponsible institution over the last few months in not stopping political parties from wanton abuse of Covid-19 protocols.

Such strong words indicate deep exasperation being felt currently by sensitive individuals in various fields across the country. The recent trend of government officials and judges at high posts showing great willingness to please and bend to the desires of the party in power has been blatantly noticeable. The Supreme Court, for example, has gone through a turbulent time in the near past due to a chain of Justices whose credibility has been questioned. Similarly, the Reserve Bank of India has witnessed a set of Governors who have brought shame and dishonor to the organization. In their quest for personal benefit, these retired individuals, after getting fresh appointments, are found incompetent and incapable to guide the economy of the nation in these troubled times. This has resulted in a death blow to the financial activities of the country and has made the Indian Rupee an unwanted currency at the global level. Even now, the Ministry of Health declaring that India has enough oxygen stock and therefore there is no need to panic is one more bright example of bureaucratic bungling. This message has been given out with the intention that the world should know that India under the present leadership is sufficiently capable of managing its affairs. Ground reality is that people are dying on a daily basis due to lack of oxygen.

Returning to the Election Commission issue, the Madras HC opinions need to be carried forward and implemented honestly. It is known that the charge of murder will never stick to the officials who have masterminded the current election schedules. It can safely be assumed that those working and taking decisions at the ECI were fully aware about the dangers to which they were pushing the voters. In spite of being aware of the threats, their callousness is exemplary. Most prominent leaders were seen campaigning without masks. Some contesting candidates are reported to have been infected by Covid-19. In Orissa, for instance, the Congress candidate for Pipili by-election died of Coronavirus infection during campaign. This forced postponement of polls. The death of this young politician was not due to natural causes. Someone ought to be held responsible for this loss of life. Apart from health issues, the incident of Central forces, deployed in West Bengal, firing upon and killing several voters at a polling booth is an unheard of event. All this muck could be raised because one Chief Election Commissioner, having reached the dusk of his career, obviously desired a new lease of employed life. Therefore, the nation has to suffer the pains of a recurring pandemic and loss of many lives. Charging such bureaucrats with murder may not send them to the gallows but would put the spotlight on the real criminals who always manage to blend into the shadows. Punishing by spotting these individuals could also make those in service currently to be more law abiding and responsible for their actions while in office.

Piate
Tathagata Satpathy

WISDOM CORNER

- The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them. ERNEST HEMINGWAY
- Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes. OSCAR WILDE
- Life was always a matter of waiting for the right moment to act. PAULO COELHO

WORDSWORTH

Mosey
To many British people, it's a classic word of old-time Westerns – "Well, I'll just mosey down to the corral". It means to walk or move in a leisurely manner and is folksy and informal nowadays in North America. A typical usage appears in Peter Jenkins's A Walk Across America in 1979: "I made plans to walk down to see Governor Wallace, especially since he told anybody who wanted to talk to him to just mosey on down to the capital." The experts scratch their heads over the source of this word. It's possible to trace it back to the 1820s in the eastern states of the USA. The Oxford English Dictionary suggests tentatively that it may be linked to British dialect terms. One is mossy, a variation on mossy, which might be applied to hair or overripe or decayed vegetables or fruit, presumably from their mouldy appearance; it can also be used of a person befuddled through drink or who looks foolish or stupid for any reason. The word survives in Newfoundland English, where it's used of the sort of weather that one British radio and TV weather forecaster describes as misty and murky. The other candidate is muzz, of obscure origin, which has meant to study hard or intently, to loiter or hang about aimlessly, or to make someone muzzy or confused. The OED is puzzled by yet another possibility, to mose about, from South Worcestershire dialect, recorded only in the English Dialect Dictionary at the end of the nineteenth century, which is glossed as meaning to go about in a dull, stupid manner. Out of that glorious muddle of meaning, we might guess that there was once a British dialect word, variously spelled and pronounced, one of whose senses is much like that of "mose about". As so often, there's a problem. The earliest appearances of mosey suggest to the OED's editors that it might have meant "to go away quickly or promptly; to make haste", though the first examples don't read like that to my eye. If it's true, then a link with the British dialect words is less likely. The OED's entry doesn't mention another possible source, given in several works, though equally tentatively – that it might be a shortened and altered form of Spanish vamos, let's go. If so, this would make it a relative of vamoose and would fit with the earliest sense of moving fast. There are good phonetic reasons why a shift from vamos to mosey is unlikely and the earliest recorded examples from the US east coast are far from the area of Spanish influence in the 1820s. Other theories are way out on the margins. Eric Partridge suggested in his Name Into Word in 1950 that it might derive from the slouching manner of itinerant Jewish vendors, so many of whom were named Moses or Mose or Mosey. Others believe that it originated in the name of Moses because of the Biblical flight of the Jews into Egypt and their wandering for 40 years in the wilderness. Neither story survives scrutiny. Short answer: we can't be sure where it comes from.

LOL Cow on train tracks

A passenger train is creeping along, slowly. Finally it creaks to a halt. A passenger sees a conductor walking by outside. "What's going on?" she yells out the window. "Cow on the track!" replies the conductor. Ten minutes later, the train resumes its slow pace. Within five minutes, however, it stops again. The woman sees the same conductor walk again. She leans out the window and yells, "What happened? Did we catch up with the cow again?"



SPECTRUM HEALTH

The pandemic within the pandemic



Loice Achieng Ombajo

THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR: IF WE DO NOT ACT NOW TO CURB ANTIBIOTIC USE, WE WILL INVITE A NEW PANDEMIC. AND, UNLIKE COVID, NO VACCINE WILL SAVE US

Fear of COVID-19 is driving increased over-the-counter (OTC) sales and in-hospital prescriptions of antibiotics – and fueling a silent pandemic in its wake. Globally, antibiotic use in hospitals has surged since the start of the pandemic. Even though studies show that only 8 per cent of patients admitted to hospital with COVID-19 also have an infection requiring antibiotics, more than 70 per cent receive them. In addition, many people worried about possible or actual COVID-19 symptoms, and alarmed by global reports about the pandemic, have turned to buying antibiotics without seeing a healthcare worker.

This is further fueling the global crisis of antibiotic resistance, as bacteria evolve and become immune to these drugs. We must move quickly – with international policy, national laws, and local action – to control what the WHO has identified as one of the ten leading health threats to humanity.

Antibiotics treat infections caused by bacteria, and have no impact on a virus such as SARS-CoV-2. Overusing them merely accelerates the emergence of antibiotic resistance, which will undercut our ability to treat common diseases. Simple infections such as pneumonia or urinary tract infections, which currently can

be quickly cleared by common antibiotics, may prove impossible to treat and become deadly.

This is particularly true in many African, South American, and Asian countries, where access to healthcare workers is limited and there are no restrictions on antibiotic sales. In India, antibiotic sales have risen astronomically in recent years, largely driven by unregulated OTC purchases, including of unapproved drugs.

Bacteria that develop resistance to multiple antibiotics are responsible for causing difficult-to-treat infections, which are up to three times more likely to kill people than infections caused by non-resistant bacteria. And data from several countries – including China and Egypt – indicate that up to 50 per cent of bacteria-causing infections in critical-care units are resistant to several antibiotics. In the US, it is estimated that close to three million people get an antibiotic-resistant infection each year, leading to more than 35,000 deaths annually.

Drug-resistant bacteria are also more likely to spread from person to person, and have been known to cause large disease outbreaks in hospitals. Many COVID-19 treatment wards around the world are currently grappling with this problem. As an infectious-disease specialist working on COVID-19 management front line and also leading the treatment of drug-resistant infections in Kenya, I have often struggled to treat patients with severe bacterial infections that had developed resistance to all available antibiotics. Many of the recently developed drugs that could potentially treat resistant bacteria are often extremely expensive and not available in many countries. A ten-day course of one such antibiotic in Kenya, for example, costs almost \$10,000, putting it beyond the reach of most patients.

In fact, many patients entering the hospital for COVID-19 treatment say that they have already taken one or more antibiotics at home in an attempt to address some of their symptoms. Often, using these drugs had made them feel that they were being treated, so they delayed going to the hospital.

What must we do to forestall this next pandemic? For starters, the WHO and other global agencies must speak out much more strongly and explicitly against the use of antibiotics in cases of COVID-19, unless these drugs are specifically indicated for another bacterial infection. In addition, national governments must tighten restrictions on OTC antibiotic purchases. Evidence suggests that introducing and enforcing laws to limit such

sales can be effective if these efforts are sustained over time. Requiring pharmacies to display a notice stating that it is illegal to sell antibiotics to customers without a doctor's prescription also has been associated with reduced antibiotic sales. Hospitals should adopt so-called antibiotic stewardship strategies to reduce unnecessary prescriptions. These measures can lead to reduced antibiotic use and cost, and decrease the risk of antibiotic-resistant infections in hospitals. Effective strategies could include developing guidelines for managing common infections, restricting antibiotic use in viral infections, strengthening laboratory capacity – especially in low- and middle-income countries – to help clinicians identify the correct bacteria to treat, and providing continuing education for all clinicians.

Finally, individuals – despite their understandable fears of COVID-19 – should not risk harming themselves by using antibiotics unnecessarily. The message is clear: if we do not act now to curb antibiotic use, we will invite a new pandemic. And, unlike COVID-19, no vaccine will save us.

The writer is an infectious-disease specialist at the University of Nairobi.

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Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com

Orissa POST
B-15, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Global support

Sir, This is in reference to the news item "US to urgently send raw materials for Covishield", (Orissa POST, April 26). The diplomatic consultations, and a huge backlash against America for its tepid response for the dire pandemic crisis in India and hesitancy to revoke the Defence Production Act – which acted as a stumbling block to export the raw materials required for India's vaccine production – has brought a change of heart in Washington. US Defence Secretary Lloyd J Austin ordered the defence department to use every resource at their disposal to support India to fight against the Covid-19 scourge. Since the pandemic started last year, India supplied hydroxychloroquine to the US and Europe with the total number of countries touching 150. India supplied 6.5 crore vaccine doses to 93 countries in Asia, Latin America and African countries apart from the UK. Overwhelmed by India's medical support last year when the US was in trouble former president Donald Trump had declared that India could have early access to the vaccine for coronavirus, if his country develops one. Medical support to India from countries like the US, France, the UAE, Denmark, Israel and some EU nations has started to come in as New Delhi stood firm with the democratic world in supply of much needed drugs and vaccine. President Joe Biden's tweet that the US will stand by India as the latter stood with Washington during the first wave of Covid-19 infection is an affirmation that India's 'vaccine maitri' initiative paid off with US medical supplies already on their way. **N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE**

Jadeja's excellence

Sir, This refers to the report 'Jadeja stops RCB juggernaut' (Orissa POST, April 26). Chennai Super Kings' talismanic captain MS Dhoni knows how to pull out the best from his players. And why not, he has been doing this job for more than a decade. Ravindra Jadeja's excellence in the match against the Royal Challengers Bangalore is an epitome of this. After a thundering performance with the bat, the left arm all-rounder gave a jolt to the opponent with the ball too. But it was Dhoni who seemed guiding him from behind the stumps after each ball. After having a pathetic season last year in the UAE, the Chennai Super Kings seems to have been back in the form with four consecutive wins. It is imperative for the three-time IPL champions to regain its lost glory. **Tushar Anand, PATNA**

Saved from ICU fire, 4 Covid patients die in other hospitals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Surat, April 26: At least four critically ill COVID-19 patients died at different hospitals in Surat in Gujarat where they were shifted along with 12 others from the ICU ward of a private hospital following a fire, officials said Monday.

A total of 16 patients were rescued and shifted to different hospitals from the ICU ward of Ayush Hospital located on the fifth floor of a building after a fire broke out there around 11:40 pm Sunday due to a short circuit.

Of the 16 patients, four patients died after they were shifted to civic-run SMIMER and private Sanjeevani hospital in Surat, a senior Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) official said.

"Three of the patients died at Sanjeevani Hospital while another patient died at SMIMER," said Deputy Commissioner (Health), Ashish Naik.

Fire department officials had claimed there was no casualty due to the blaze at the hospital as all the



16 patients were successfully rescued and taken to other hospitals.

"As far as the fire department is concerned, all the patients were properly shifted to other hospitals," said SMC Deputy Commissioner NV Upadhyay.

Of these 16 patients, eight were shifted to the SMIMER and the civil hospital, and the rest to private hos-

pitals. As many as fifteen fire tenders were deployed to douse the fire which erupted in the air conditioner unit in the ICU ward of the Ayush hospital located on the fifth floor of a building on station road.

The fire was brought under control quickly but all the patients admitted in the ICU ward had to be shifted to other hospitals.

Mandatory Covid duty for Guj govt docs

There is an acute shortage of manpower to treat the coronavirus patients against the infrastructure created by the state

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, April 26: All MBBS graduates under government bond in Gujarat have been asked to immediately join duty in the wake of a shortage of doctors at COVID-19 hospitals in the state.

The state government will initiate action under the Epidemic Diseases Act against the doctors who fail to join the 'compulsory COVID-19 duty immediately', said a notification issued Monday by state health commissioner Jai Prakash Shivahare.

As per the notification, the number of beds in government hospitals has been considerably increased to cope up with the high influx of COVID-19 patients.

However, there is an acute shortage of manpower to treat the coronavirus patients against the infrastructure created by the state, said the notification.

"The state government urgently needs the services of doctors as coronavirus cases are increasing at an unprecedented pace," Shivahare said in the notification.

"Around 1,000 such bonded doctors, who were already given appointments as Class-2 medical of-



Health workers move a COVID-19 patient to OPD of a government hospital in Ahmedabad, Monday.

ficers, are now required to join the duty immediately," the order said.

Shivahare also instructed all the district collectors and municipal commissioners to take action under the Epidemic Diseases Act against the doctors who do not turn up to join the compulsory COVID-19 duty at their respective places.

Doctors under bond comprise those who have recently completed

their MBBS from government-run medical colleges. MBBS pass-outs of the Gujarat Medical Education & Research Society-run colleges also fall under this category.

As per rules, they are required to serve a specific period in rural areas under bond with the government.

Many such graduates prefer to pay the bond amount, instead of

working in rural areas.

Gujarat Sunday recorded 14,296 new coronavirus cases, its highest single-day spike since the pandemic broke out, the state health department said. This increased its infection tally to 4,96,033.

The state also recorded its highest one-day COVID-19 fatality count of 157, which took the death toll to 6,328, it said.

LDF, UDF continue to exude confidence on poll outcome



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Thiruvananthapuram, April 26: Even though the second wave of Covid has dealt a severe blow to Kerala and various sorts of lockdowns are in place at several places across the state, it has not deterred the political fronts from continuing with last minute calculations on who will eventually turn winners, when the votes are counted May 2.

A media critic pointed out, just as people are fighting the pandemic, for the traditional rival fronts in the state, all eyes are on 'Super Sunday'.

"Even though nothing is to be done now, as their fate has been sealed on April 6, each time the ruling CPI-M led Left or the Congress led Opposition or the also ran BJP led NDA, pull out their notebooks to make one last calculation, all of them stay positive, which is much needed for them,"

said the critic.

Incidentally, the latest calculations from the three political fronts show that while both the traditional rivals have concluded that they are going to be the winners and surprisingly, both of them predict around 80 seats out of the 140 in the Kerala Legislative Assembly, the BJP predicts 12, while their ideological mentor RSS says it's not going to be more than six.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who for the first time in his eventful political career was the sole star campaigner for the Left when asked what's in store, pat came the reply, "none needs to waste time building castles in the air", clearly implying that he is on course to create electoral history by becoming the first in the state to retain power through the ballot.

Not to be left behind one of the two candidates set to become the Chief Minister should the Congress led UDF regains office, the other day Ramesh Chennithala's tone and tenor sounded, when speaking about on how to tackle the surge in Covid cases, as if he has already 'got' the coveted post.

DIRE NECESSITY



People carry oxygen cylinders after refilling them in a factory in Ahmedabad, Monday.

REUTERS

Kerala cautious as UK, SA variants traced in samples

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Thiruvananthapuram, April 26: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan Monday urged people to maintain absolute caution as variants of the UK and South African virus have been identified in the state.

"We have been told that the UK and South African variant virus have been reported in April. Of the total cases now detected, 40 per cent are from these variants which includes 30 per cent of the UK strain, while 7 per cent is the double mutant strain and 2 per cent is the one from South Africa," he said after an all-party meeting here.

Monday, 21,890 people tested Covid positive after 96,398 samples were sent for testing and as a result, the total active cases in the state have reached 2,32,812 - the highest ever so far. "Since the situation is serious, the all-party meeting decided to ensure that across the state, all public places like gymnasium, bars, clubs, pools, indoor stadiums and movie halls should close down. The number of people attending marriages should not exceed 50 and for funerals not more than 20. At no cost should there be any laxity on the part of people as things are grave," said Vijayan.

"We are told that there is going to be a shortage of blood and hence we request all those below 45 to see if blood can be donated. We say this because from May 1, those in the age 18 to 45 will also be eligible to take vaccines. According to medical experts, those who take the vaccines can donate blood only after 30 days and hence, we request as many such people to donate blood and then take the vaccine," he added.

Vijayan pointed out that the situation is so grave because soon after the local body polls in December last year the daily number of cases reached 2,000 and the test positivity rate reached 11 per cent. "In March, the TPR came down below 3 per cent, but things went haywire and now the TPR stands in the range of 20 per cent. We have decided to open a control room for migrant workers and they are best advised to be where they are," he said.

On vaccinations so far, he said so far 57.58 lakh people have taken

the first dose, while 10.39 lakh have taken both the doses.

"Now, we have a problem as our request to the Centre to supply us another 50 lakh doses is yet to receive a response. We will continue to ask the Centre, even as we are making all efforts to procure the vaccines as asked by the Centre from the manufacturers," said Vijayan.

Monday, a mammoth crowd had gathered at a state-run vaccination camp in the capital city, throwing all the mandatory social distancing protocols to the winds. "It has now come to a stage that these vaccination centres will turn into Covid distribution centres, as such was the crowd... it was absolute mayhem," said an angry citizen who was waiting for long.

But authorities said that every person was given a time and the rush took place because people turned up much before their allotted time. Among the other things that were discussed at the all-party meeting include a wait and watch policy with the present protocols which include the present night curfew from 9 pm to 5 am. There was also consensus on continuing with the semi-lockdown protocols that came into force every Saturday and Sunday, when only shops selling essential items will open and all others will remain closed, besides private transport vehicles also will not be allowed and all have to remain indoors.

Also it has been decided that there will be no celebrations May 2, which is the counting day. "Only officials, representatives of the candidates and the media will be allowed at counting centre and all

Of the total cases now detected, 40 per cent are from these variants which includes 30 per cent of the UK strain, while 7 per cent is the double mutant strain and 2 per cent is the one from South Africa

will have to produce a RT-PCR test result or should have taken both the doses of vaccine," added Vijayan.



Ahmedabad gets 19 more private Covid hospitals

Ahmedabad has seen a massive surge in COVID-19 cases over the past few weeks, with the daily infection count rising from 951 April 8 to 5,790 April 25

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, April 26: Nineteen more private medical facilities in Ahmedabad have come forward to serve as dedicated COVID-19 hospitals and care centres, adding 292 beds for patients in the city, officials said Monday.

With this, there are now 167 private facilities requisitioned by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation for treating COVID-19 patients, as per the update made available by an association of city-based hospitals and nursing homes.

The Gujarat government has exempted private clinics, nursing homes, and multi-speciality hospitals from seeking permission to convert to dedicated COVID-19 facilities. They are only required to inform the authorities about it, according to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC).

As part of the policy, 19 more private hospitals, multi-speciality facilities, clinics and nursing homes came forward in the last three-four days to serve as COVID-19 hospitals and care centres, the AMC said in a release. This has made 292 more beds available for the treatment of COVID-19 patients in the city, it said. Amid the second wave of the pandemic, so far over 150 private hospitals here have been designated as dedicated COVID-19 hospitals,

The Gujarat government has exempted private clinics, nursing homes, and multi-speciality hospitals from seeking permission to convert to dedicated COVID-19 facilities

over 170 as COVID-19 health centres, and more than 20 as COVID-19 care centres, the AMC said.

These private facilities have added 9,683 beds in various categories like isolation wards, Intensive Care Units (ICUs) with and without ventilators, and High Dependency Units (HDUs), the release said. Out of the 9,683 beds in these facilities, 7,939 are occupied as of Monday morning, with few vacancies left in the ICUs or HDUs meant for critical patients, it said.

Ahmedabad has seen a massive surge in COVID-19 cases over the past few weeks, with the daily infection count rising from 951 April 8 to 5,790 April 25.

As of now, there are 43,899 active COVID-19 cases in the city which has reported 2,694 deaths so far due to the disease, according to official figures.

Bride dons PPE kit to marry Covid +ve groom in hospital

AS BOTH THE FAMILIES WANTED TO CARRY OUT THE WEDDING RITUAL ON THE PRE-FIXED 'MUHURTHAM', THEY APPROACHED THE AUTHORITIES WITH THE REQUEST TO GET MARRIED AT THE HOSPITAL ITSELF

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Alappuzha, April 26: Time and tide wait for none, not even coronavirus. And this prompted Abhirami to don her PPE kit instead of the traditional bridal wear and tie the nuptial knot with her Covid-infected beau as the families did not want to skip the auspicious 'muhurtham'.

The young bride got hitched in a hospital ward in a small ceremony at a time when Covid cases are spiralling in the southern state.

'Muhurtham' is the auspicious time fixed for weddings and other new initiatives. With the Personal Protection Kit (PPE) replacing the traditional silk saree and other wedding paraphernalia, the 23-year-old bride married the virus-positive groom, admitted to a government hospital in coastal Alappuzha district.

Abhirami, a native of Thekkan Aryad here, donned the disposable wear and got married at a COVID ward of the Alappuzha Vandanam



medical college Sunday. Marking the ritual, the groom, Sarathmon S, tied 'thali', the mangal sutra, and garlanded her with a simple tulusi garland in the presence of his mother, also Covid positive and another close relative of the bride at a special room in the ward.

Fixed a year ago, the wedding happened Sunday, after permission from authorities.

Sarathmon, working in the Gulf, and his mother Jijimol had been admitted to the hospital recently after they tested positive for the virus. Though he had placed himself in quarantine after arriving here from the Middle East for the wedding and showed no symptoms for the initial 10 days, the two developed breathing difficulty Wednesday evening.

They tested positive for the virus at a private hospital at Thathampally

and were later shifted to the COVID ward of the medical college, family sources said.

As both the families wanted to carry out the wedding ritual on the pre-fixed 'muhurtham', they approached the authorities with the request to get married at the hospital itself.

Both the district collector and hospital authorities granted permission for the function adhering to strict COVID protocols.

In compliance with the health department guidelines, the bride was asked to wear the PPE kit and directed that only one or two relatives should attend the wedding.

After the function, Abhirami went back to her uncle's house while Sarathmon continued his stay in the hospital.

The couple would begin a new life after the groom turned COVID negative, family sources added.

of the day quote

In addition to the measures, Goa definitely needs to go under lockdown on lines of the other states like Maharashtra and Karnataka for a particular period. More than economic activities, the lives of the people matter to us

VISHWAJIT RANE | GOA'S HEALTH MINISTER

This government (BJP) has no vision, no planning, no accountability or transparency

ASADUDDIN OWAIISI | MIM PRESIDENT

Such a differential price mechanism (vaccine doses) is inherently unfair since it placed a higher financial burden on states

K PALANISWAMI | CHIEF MINISTER OF TAMIL NADU

SHORT TAKES

Weekend lockdown in Punjab

Chandigarh: The Punjab government Monday ordered a weekend lockdown and extended the night curfew by two hours in a bid to tackle the surge in coronavirus cases. The government has also ordered the closure of shops by 5 pm. "Due to continuous & rapid rise of #Covid19 cases in Punjab, Cabinet today has decided to impose daily lockdown from 6 PM to 5 AM and weekend lockdown from Friday 6 PM to Monday 5 AM. Urge you all to stay at home & step out only if absolutely necessary. Seek your full cooperation," Punjab CM Amarinder Singh in a tweet said.

Maha nCoV cases, deaths fall

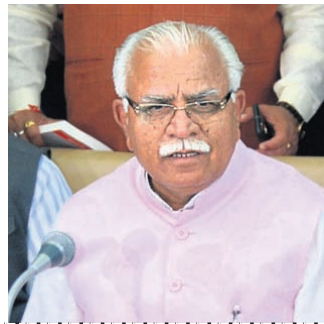
Mumbai: In a breather, Maharashtra saw new Covid-19 deaths and cases fall sharply Monday though the state tally crossed the 43 lakh mark and fatalities went past 65,000, health officials said here. The state recorded 524 deaths -- down from the highest 832 on Sunday, taking up its toll to 65,284 now, the worst in the country. Dropping below the 50,000 mark in over a fortnight, from the record high of 68,631 (April 18), the daily case tally was 48,700, taking the cumulative total to 43,43,727.

Thailand restricts travel from India

New Delhi: Thailand has decided to restrict entry of travellers from India in view of the coronavirus crisis. India Monday reported 3,52,991 new infections. The embassy of Thailand in Delhi said in a statement that certificates of entry (COEs) issued to non-Thai nationals to enter the country from India with the arrival date from May 1 will be cancelled.

Delhi Cong sets up Covid control room

New Delhi: The Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee has set up a control room to help those who are affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in the national capital. It has also been decided to set up control rooms in all the districts wherein the district presidents shall be in-charge. Jaikishan has been made the in-charge of the control room, which will be supervised by former Delhi health minister Kiran Walia, Narendra Math, Sushant Mishra, Parvez Alan and 25 others. The mobile No. 9625777907, and WhatsApp No. 9625777907 will be operational round the clock.



The government is getting oxygen as per the quota. Strict directions have been given to check black marketing

MANOHAR LAL KHATTAR | HARYANA CHIEF MINISTER

AMID PANDEMIC, INDIA-B'DESH TRADE ON

Amid the alarming spike in the number of Covid-19 cases in both India and Bangladesh, the trade between the two neighbouring countries continues to be unaffected as exports-imports are being carried out by strictly enforcing the standard operating procedures (SOPs) laid down by the authorities of both the nations



MHA ASKS STATES TO IMPOSE LOCAL CURBS

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 26: With a large part of the country battling a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, the Centre Monday asked all states and Union Territories to implement an intensive, local and focused containment framework, stressing on specific districts and areas to snap the chain of transmission.

In a communication to all states and UTs, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla reiterated the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's April 25 advisory on containment strategy and said the district authorities should be sensitised on the strategy for imposing restrictions and it should be widely disseminated to the public and to the field functionaries for their effective implementation. Bhalla said that in the recent past, a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases has been observed along with high positivity rate. Considering this unprecedented spike, he said, there is an urgent need for states and UTs to consider strict COVID management



and control measures, in the surge areas to bring the situation under control. Accordingly, he said, the Health Ministry has advised all states and UT governments to implement an intensive, local and focused containment framework, focused on specific districts, cities, areas, and identified based on a

prescribed criterion. "All States/ UTs have also been advised to consider a further graded response in accordance with local situation, requirements and resources. "I would, therefore, urge you to issue directions to district authorities in your State/ UT, to take all necessary measures, as advised

5 nCoV patients die

Hisar (Haryana): Five COVID-19 patients, including one from Delhi, died at a private hospital here on Monday with relatives of the deceased holding a protest alleging that they died due to grave shortage of medical oxygen at the facility. The five deaths came within 24 hours of two similar incidents in Haryana, wherein eight people died in two private facilities in Rewari and Gurgaon allegedly due to shortage of medical oxygen. Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said a magisterial probe has been ordered into the incidents, responding to questions from reporters in Panipat.

by MoHFW in their letter, for the implementation of the containment framework, so as to flatten the curve," Bhalla said. The coronavirus situation continues to be grim in India with 3,52,991 people testing positive and a record 2,812 deaths reported Monday.

Wet spell over several parts of country from April 26-30: IMD



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 26: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) Monday predicted a wet spell over several parts of the country, including central, south and north-east India, from April 26 to 30.

Thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds (speed reaching 30-40 kilometres per hour) are very likely at isolated places over Telangana, Kerala and Mahe from April 26. Lightning at isolated places over Gangetic West Bengal, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, central Maharashtra, Marathawada, Rayalaseema, south interior Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal Monday.

Heat wave conditions are very likely in isolated pockets over Gujarat and coastal Odisha, the IMD added.

On April 27, thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds (speed reaching 30-40 kmph) are very likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, Assam, Meghalaya, central Maharashtra, Marathawada, Telangana, Kerala and Mahe.

Lightning is also likely at isolated places over Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, Himachal Pradesh, Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Konkan, Goa, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Rayalaseema, south interior Karnataka and Tamilnadu, Puducherry and Karaikal April 29.

On April 30, thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds are likely over Uttarakhand, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Telangana, Kerala and Mahe.

On the same day, heavy rainfall is likely at isolated places over south interior Karnataka and north Kerala, the IMD added.

Karaikal. On April 28, thunderstorms with lightning are likely over Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Vidarbha, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, central Maharashtra, Marathawada, Telangana, Kerala and Mahe. Heavy rainfall is likely at isolated places over south interior Karnataka and north Kerala April 28.

According to the IMD, thunderstorms with lightning and gusty wind (speed reaching 30-40 kmph) are likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Telangana, Kerala and Mahe and with lightning at isolated places over Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram & Tripura, Rayalaseema, coastal and south interior Karnataka, Lakshadweep and Tamilnadu, Puducherry and Karaikal April 29.

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On the same day, heavy rainfall is likely at isolated places over south interior Karnataka and north Kerala, the IMD added.

US determined to support India in nCoV fight: Biden to Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 26: US President Joe Biden Monday conveyed solidarity with India in its fight against COVID-19 and asserted that his country was determined to support its efforts by quickly deploying resources such as therapeutics, ventilators and identifying sources of raw materials to be made available for the manufacture of Covishield vaccine, according to a statement here.

Biden expressed the support of the US to India in a telephonic conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during which the two leaders discussed the pandemic situation in their countries, including India's ongoing efforts to contain a second wave of COVID-19 through expedited vaccination efforts, and ensuring supply of critical medicines, therapeutics and medical equipment.

INNOCENCE OVERLOADED



A child looking through the window of a train at Jabalpur railway station

UNI PHOTO

Storytelling sessions in jail

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, April 26: This might leave you flabbergasted but it is true that the women prison here has become a regular witness to the storytelling sessions where women prisoners exchange their stories with other inmates to grow morally stronger and come out enriched with knowledge.



"Amid spike in Covid cases, lockdown has been enforced in the state, that resulted in the restrictions to the jail's visit by the inmates' family, friends or trainers. Hence, the prisoners here have occupied themselves

in a very creative and engaging activities, said Monica Agrawal, DIG, Prisons, Rajasthan. "Unable to do any other task, they are collecting books from the library and reading out stories for other inmates. Also, there are other females who are learning to read and write from these inmates," she added.

Jaipur prisoners last year too had contributed during lockdown in a big way. They had donated their one-time chapati for have-nots and made containers for birds which could be kept outside with water to quench their thirst.

WB Assembly polls: Voting for Phase 7 concludes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, April 26: An estimated 75 per cent votes were cast Monday in West Bengal in the seventh and penultimate phase of assembly election, which was by and large peaceful, an EC official said.

According to the EC, 75.06 per cent voter turnout was recorded till 5 pm in 36 seats where polling was held and is expected to go up as the polling ended at 6.30 PM. Voting began at 7 am in 12,068 polling stations spread over nine assembly constituencies each in Murshidabad and Paschim Bardhaman districts, six each in Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda and four in Kolkata, including in Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's home turf Bhabanipur.

Out of these Malda, Murshidabad and Dakshin Dinajpur are minority dominated districts and the

fight in these districts is between TMC and the Congress-ISF-Left alliance, except in a few pockets where the BJP has gained strength. Although the polling passed off more or less peacefully, but there were a few incidents of scuffle between rival party workers in some parts of the state.

A few such incidents were reported from Asansol in Paschim Bardhaman district where TMC candidate Sayoni Ghosh claimed that BJP activists tried to jam booths in the constituency. The allegation was dubbed as baseless by BJP candidate Agnimitra Paul, who asserted "Ghosh is making excuses sensing defeat".

There was commotion in Rash Behari constituency in the city after BJP candidate Lt Gen (ret'd) Subrata Saha's agent Mohan Rao was accused of molesting women voters inside a polling booth, police



said. The agent was detained after several women voters claimed he tried to drag them by holding their hands inside Bidya Bharati School, a police officer said.

Rao rubbished the allegations and said no such incident had taken place. "We have received a complaint in this regard and a probe is underway," the official said.

The TMC candidate for the constituency, Debashis Kumar claimed that he was stopped from entering a booth in the area by central forces.

The central forces, however, denied the allegations.

In Jamuria constituency, Left Front candidate Aishe Ghosh alleged that agents of CPI-M were stopped from entering a booth by TMC workers, a charge which was denied by the ruling party. In Murshidabad, TMC district president and MP Abu Taher was heckled by party workers when he was touring the area.

Taher, however, claimed that Congress activists had heckled him. The Congress dubbed the allegations as baseless. In Bhabanipur constituency TMC candidate Sovandeb Chattopadhyay claimed that he too was stopped from entering the booth in his area by central forces.

The security forces denied the allegations and the office of the chief electoral officer intervened and sorted out the issue.

Delhi hospitals' struggle for oxygen continues

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 26: Hospitals in the national capital continued to grapple with a shortage of oxygen, saying they are still operating on the "beg and borrow" mode, while three of them also raised the issue before the Delhi High Court Monday, stating they were not receiving enough supplies.

Sources at the elite Sir Ganga Ram Hospital said in the morning they had been waiting for three days to refill their oxygen cylinders, used for transporting critically ill COVID patients. The hospital received 64 refilled cylinders around 4.20 PM.

The Jaipur Golden Hospital in Rohini took to social media, posting at 12 noon that they were still awaiting their supplies. There was no update till around 7.30 pm if the

hospital had received the supply or not. Bansal Hospital, where 40 COVID-19 patients are admitted, received the supply in the nick of time, said Delhi Police officials who arranged the cylinders.

SOS calls were also raised by Tulsi Multispeciality Hospital in Shahdra and Irene Hospital in Kalkaji. Jaipur Golden Hospital, Maharaja Agrasen Hospital and Shanti Mukund Hospital raised the issue before the High Court, saying they are not receiving enough supply despite SOS calls.

"The hospital has 104 oxygen cylinders which are used while moving extremely sick COVID patients in case of emergency which is happening quite frequently now. All the cylinders were sent three days ago to different locations for emergency refill. For the last three days, our staff is camping there but to no

STILL ON 'BEG AND BORROW' MODE



A COVID-19 patient waits in an ambulance outside the LNJP hospital

avail," said an official at Ganga Ram Hospital. The official added the elite hospital is on "beg and borrow" mode. The hospital later confirmed they received 64 refilled cylinders and also 10 tonnes of liquid oxygen during the day.

Jaipur Golden Hospital tweeted, "We are trying to get in touch with INOX @inoxairproducts since morning to ensure our daily oxygen supply reaches on time. Have not got any response or dispatch note yet. Alerting everyone now in the hope of preventing another SOS situation today." Twenty people died at the hospital Saturday amid a shortage of oxygen. The Delhi High Court also took strong note of alleged black-marketing of oxygen cylinders, reportedly being sold at Rs 1 lakh per unit in the national capital for treating seriously ill COVID-19 patients,

and asked the AAP government to take action against those indulging in it, saying distribution of gas cylinders is "your baby".

Hospitals across the national capital and its suburbs have been sending out desperate messages of help on social media and other platforms, flagging their dwindling stocks of oxygen. The Railways had announced that the first Oxygen Express train for the city carrying around 70 tonnes of the life-saving commodity will depart from Jindal Steel Works plant in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, Sunday night.

Central government sources had also said that eight pressure swing adsorption (PSA) oxygen generation plants are being installed in Delhi from the PM-Cares fund and they will enhance the capacity of medical oxygen by 14.4 metric tonnes.

national

of the day quote

There is an appeal to the BSP people all over the country to help corona patients in their neighbourhood as a human being according to their ability. But while helping, they must also strictly follow the COVID rules



MAYAWATI | BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY SUPREMO

The BJP should shun its pride of being in power. They should think like family members of COVID patients and ensure availability of oxygen at their homes



AKHILESH YADAV | SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF

The elections were due in December last year. The pandemic led to delay in reorganization and delimitation of panchayats. The writ petitions and subsequent decision of the high court compelled the state government to hold the election



YOGI ADITYANATH | UP CHIEF MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Andhra to hire hundreds of docs

Amaravati: At a time when the Coronavirus pandemic is raging across the country, the Andhra Pradesh government has decided to temporarily hire hundreds of specialists, general duty medical officers and other health staff to tackle the pandemic. "Government has issued orders to engage 1,170 specialists, 1,170 general duty medical officers, 2,000 staff nurses, 306 anesthesia technicians, 300 FNOs, 300 MNOs and 300 sweepers on contract basis purely on temporary basis," said principal secretary Muddada Ravi Chandra Sunday.

Naxals torch vehicles

Nagpur: Three tractors and one tanker engaged in road construction work in Gadchiroli were set ablaze by Naxals, police said Monday. The incident happened late Sunday night in Medpalli village in Aheri taluka, some 170 kilometres from here, an official added. The Maoist ultras left behind a poster at the site informing about a 'Bharat bandh' Monday.

Arms, ammunition recovered in J&K

Jammu: Security forces have recovered a cache of arms and ammunition, including two pistols, during a search operation in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district, Army officials said Monday. A joint team of the Army and police launched a search operation in Chhatru forest area Sunday, they said.

Woman charred to death in Assam

Silchar: A woman was killed and two others injured in Assam's Cachar district after a car hit a pole, snapping live wires which then fell on an auto-rickshaw, setting it on fire, police said. The incident happened Sunday night at Lathigram in the Udhabond police station area, they said. The car hit an electricity pole along the Silchar- Haffong Road, snapping the live wires. The wires then fell on an auto-rickshaw behind it, setting the vehicle on fire, they added.

Woman gangraped

Agra (UP): A woman in her early thirties was allegedly raped by a confectioner and his friends here, police said Monday, adding one of the accused was detained. The woman, a cook, was allegedly gangraped Sunday night when she had gone to cater for a wedding.



Corona has caused tremendous suffering all over the country. In view of this, the Delhi Government on Monday morning approved the purchase of one crore 34 lakh vaccines. This purchase will be done as soon as possible and all Delhi residents above 18 years of age will be vaccinated for free

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CHIEF MINISTER

O₂ ENRICHMENT TECH FOR COVID

Amid the shortage of oxygen in hospitals across the country the CSIR-CMERI indigenously developed oxygen enrichment technology may be effective in treating COVID-19 patients



COVID SURGE

Unnecessary panic causing more harm than good: Centre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 26: As India grappled with a raging second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, the government Monday sought to allay people's fears, saying unnecessary panic is causing more harm than good.

It also pitched for expediting the pace of the vaccination drive and asserted that women can take COVID-19 vaccine during menstruation as well.

Addressing a joint press conference with other senior functionaries, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Lav Agarwal said many people have been found to be occupying hospital beds out of panic. Hospital admission should only be on the advice of doctors, he stressed. Amid a shortage of medical oxygen, the government said India has enough medical oxygen available, but the challenge is to transport it to hospitals.

The government said it is taking various measures to ensure adequate supply of oxygen to hospitals. The government asked hospitals for judicious use of oxygen and to plug leakage, if any. It also said that rational use of medical oxygen and appropriate prescription of drugs such as Remdesivir, Tocilizumab are critical in the fight against the pandemic. The government said effectiveness of Remdesivir on critical patients is "not well-established" yet as it suggested use of other

prescribed drugs. Agarwal said that however much infrastructure is created, it will come under stress looking at the population of the country and added that it is important to curb the infection.

The government stressed on continuing vaccination of people, even at a faster pace, and maintaining COVID-19 appropriate behaviours.

Research has shown that if no physical distancing measures are followed, one person can infect 406 people in 30 days, it said, adding that if physical exposure is reduced by 50 per cent then one person can infect around 15 people during the period. And, if physical exposure is reduced by 75 per cent, then one person can infect around 2.5 people in 30 days. It's time people start wearing masks inside their homes as well, the government said.

On the vaccination drive, Agarwal said of the 14.19 crore vaccine doses administered in India so far, 9.79 crore people aged 45 and above have got the first dose and 1.03 crore in the age bracket have received the second dose.

India's daily COVID-19 infection tally and death toll have touch new peaks in the past few days. The country recorded 3,52,991 cases, the highest so far, taking the tally of cases to 1,73,13,163 while active cases have crossed the 28-lakh mark, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated Monday.

The death toll increased to 1,95,123 with a record 2,812 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.



'Mask up even inside your homes'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 26: As a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic rips through the country, the government Monday said it is time people start wearing masks inside their homes as well, and refrain from inviting guests.

Addressing a press conference here, NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr V K Paul said if there is a COVID-positive person inside the house, he or she must wear the mask so as to prevent other family members from getting infected. "Rather, I'll say that the time has come that we start wearing masks even otherwise inside our homes. We used to talk about wearing it outside homes, but the way the infection has spread, it will be better if we wear mask in-



side our homes if we are sitting with someone," he said. "But, definitely, if there is a COVID-19 positive person, that person must wear the mask and others inside the house also must wear a mask and the positive person should be kept in a different room," Paul underlined. His statement came days after a new assessment published

CHILLING OUT



A boy dives in to the water to beat the afternoon heat, at Cuff Parade in Mumbai

PTI PHOTO

BATTLE AGAINST PANDEMIC

ARMED FORCES RECALL RETIRED MEDICAL STAFF

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 26: All medical personnel of the armed forces who have retired or have taken pre-mature retirement in the last two years are being recalled to work in COVID-19 facilities within proximity of their present place of residence, the government said Monday.

Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat told Prime Minister Narendra Modi about this decision as they reviewed preparations and operations being undertaken by the armed forces to deal with the second wave of the pandemic raging across the country. Other medical officers who retired from the armed forces earlier than two years have also been requested to make their services available for consultation through medical emergency help lines, a statement said.

Rawat also informed the prime minister that oxygen cylinders available with armed forces in



various establishments will be released for hospitals. Modi was also informed that all medical officers on staff appointments at Command HQ, Corps HQ, Division HQ & similar HQ of Navy and Air Force will be employed at hospitals.

"The CDS informed the prime minister that nursing personnel are being employed in large numbers to complement the doctors at the hospitals," the statement said.

Rawat also said they are creating medical facilities in large numbers and military medical

infrastructure will be made available to civilians, where ever possible. Modi reviewed the operations being undertaken by Indian Air Force as well to transport oxygen and other essentials in India and abroad.

The Prime Minister also discussed with Rawat that Kendriya and Rajya Sainik Welfare Boards and officers posted in various headquarters in veterans cells may be instructed to coordinate the services of veterans to extend the reach to the maximum extent possible, including in remote areas.

14-day lockdown in K'taka from today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, April 26: The Karnataka government Monday announced more restrictions in what it termed as a 'close down' across the state for 14 days from Tuesday night in a bid to control the huge spike in COVID-19 cases in the state.

The state cabinet led by Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa also decided to provide COVID-19 vaccinations free of cost at government hospitals for those between 18-44 years of age. "Strict measures to control COVID will be taken. From tomorrow night till the next 14 days, there will be a close down for the whole state," Yediyurappa said.

Speaking to reporters after a three hour long cabinet meeting here, he said shops selling essential commodities will be allowed to remain open only from 6 am to 10 am. "The agriculture sector, manufacturing sector, construction sector and medical and essential sectors will continue to operate," he said. Night curfew, which is in place now between 9 PM to 6 AM, would continue, the Chief Minister said. The Chief Minister said essential services like banking among others would continue to operate, as also take-aways at hotels, restaurants and liquor shops. Karnataka Sunday had reported the biggest single day spike of 34,804 new COVID-19 cases.

SC advances summer vacation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 26: The Supreme Court Monday decided to advance its summer vacation, which will now commence from May 8 in view of sudden surge in COVID-19 cases. Chief Justice N V Ramana on his first working day held an "emergent meeting" with bar bodies including Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), Supreme Court Advocates on Record Association (SCAORA) and Bar Council of India to take stalk of rising COVID situation.

Senior advocate and SCBA president Vikas Singh said that "it has been decided in the emergent meeting that instead of May 14, the Summer Vacation will now commence from May 8 and would end June 27".

He said that the CJI also approved in principle the opening of the COVID care centre in the



new chamber building of the Supreme Court.

"SCBA executive council has approached the Delhi government to inspect the place and submit a feasibility report. Tehsildar Chanakypuri is already briefed to make arrangements for inspection of the building," Singh said.

Meanwhile, SCAORA secretary Joseph Aristotle said that CJI has principally agreed to provide suitable area for establishing medical facilities for at least 60 beds and other facilities like RT-PCR test and vaccination.

The SCBA and SCAORA have both requested the Chief Justice to advance the summer vacation in the wake of the ramping up second wave of coronavirus pandemic.

Australia-type bushfire ravages Mizoram's southern dists

IN FEBRUARY, MIZORAM FOREST OFFICIALS HAD SAID THAT AROUND 1,300 FOREST FIRES WERE REPORTED IN THE STATE IN 2020

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, April 26: Indian Air Force helicopters with Bambi Buckets have been pressed into service to put out an Australia-type bushfire raging for two days in Mizoram's Lunglei district.

Late Sunday night, the fire had spread to Lunglei town and villages in the adjoining district of Lawngtlai. Mizoram government firefighters, backed by Assam Rifles and Border Security Force troops and local volunteer groups have so far failed to put out the fire, officials said.

Late Sunday evening, the Indian Air Force, receiving a SOS from Mizoram government, pressed into service two Mi-17V5 helicopters, equipped with specialised Bambi

Buckets, to control the raging bushfire.

The fire was sparked around 7 a.m. Saturday possibly by some villagers who were trying to clear the hills near Lunglei town, possibly for shifting cultivation common in the hills of Northeast India.

It snowballed into a raging bushfire spreading to ten village council areas in and around Lunglei town. By Sunday night, it had spread to three rural development blocks of Lawngtlai district.

Officials said the helicopters have somewhat helped control the fire.

"We have controlled much of the fire by Saturday evening itself," said A. Kulothungan, DC, Lunglei district. "However, it erupted again Sunday morning and is still rag-



ing. High winds and dry vegetation have caused the spread of the fire and it is now a huge challenge

to put it out." Mizoram DIPR said in a press statement that the fire ravaged localities such as Zotlang,

Serkawn, Chanmari in Lunglei town, even engulfing "some buildings". But it said the fire in Lunglei town "could be contained and doused before it caused any major loss to property." "As the fire had spread close to human settlements, the administration evacuated residents. But no death or injuries to citizens or damage to their property were reported so far," DC Kulothungan told IANS. However, some damage was reported from Lawngtlai district.

"In Bungtlang South, the fire completely destroyed fourteen houses. Nobody were injured but livestock perished in the fire," said Marilyn Rualzakhumthangi, ADC, Lawngtlai district. "Smaller fires are still burning but that might not jeopardise human settlements but

we cannot be complacent," said ADC Rualzakhumthangi. They said around 1,090 incidents were caused due to Jhum or slash-and-burn cultivation, while 210 were due to natural causes. Jhum involves clearing a forest tract by slashing vegetation and burning it before planting seeds.

The Forest Survey of India (FSI), Dehradun says forests of the Northeast and central India regions are the most vulnerable areas to forest fires. Forests in Assam, Mizoram and Tripura have been identified as 'extremely prone' to forest fire, not only because they have substantial forest cover but because in recent years, monsoon have been delayed and the vegetation dries up.



If we were to have problems, we enter a plan of how to have the field ... our armed forces could one day go into the streets
JAIR BOLSONARO | BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT

THAI PM FINED FOR NOT WEARING FACE MASK

Thailand Prime Minister Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha was fined 6,000 baht (Rs 14,270) Monday for not wearing a mask, as his government struggled to combat a new wave of coronavirus cases in the country



of the day quote

We want to make sure we continue to be a good neighbour in the region, that we work with our partners and with our allies and nobody wants to see conflict between China and Taiwan or anywhere else
PETER DUTTON | AUSTRALIAN MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS

We commend all countries that have reached the ambitious target of zero malaria. Together, they are showing the world that a malaria-free future is possible
ANTONIO GUTERRES | UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL

I am heartbroken by the current situation in India. Microsoft will continue to use its voice, resources, and technology to aid relief efforts, and support the purchase of critical oxygen concentration devices
SATYA NADELLA | MICROSOFT CEO

Johnson urged to put out pharma lobbying messages

UK LAWMAKERS HAVE SIGNED A STATEMENT CALLING FOR PM BORIS JOHNSON TO PUBLISH ALL MESSAGES EXCHANGED WITH PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES AND THEIR LOBBYISTS

REUTERS

London, April 26: British lawmakers Monday called on the government to publish all communications with pharmaceutical companies to understand if private lobbying influenced its opposition to a waiver of intellectual property rules for COVID-19 vaccines.

The United States and a handful of other big countries, including the United Kingdom, have blocked negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) involving a proposal spearheaded by India and South Africa that now has the support of 100 WTO members.

The proposal would temporarily waive the intellectual property (IP) rights of pharmaceutical companies to allow developing countries to produce vaccines.

The waiver is opposed by the US Chamber of Commerce and big pharmaceutical companies



such as Pfizer, BioNTech, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson.

A cross-party group of UK lawmakers has signed a statement calling for Prime Minister Boris Johnson, ministers, and senior civil servants to publish all email, text, and WhatsApp messages exchanged with pharmaceutical companies and their lobbyists.

Patent advocacy and vaccine equity organisations have also signed

the statement, including Global Justice Now, Just Treatment, Stop AIDS, Frontline AIDS, Universities Allied for Essential Medicines UK, Students for Global Health, and Nurses United UK.

"The UK's opposition to an intellectual property waiver on COVID-19 vaccines is utterly indefensible," said Heidi Chow, senior policy and campaigns manager at Global Justice Now, which

organised the joint statement.

A spokesperson for the UK government said it prioritised transparency but stakeholders had a right to expect a reasonable degree of confidentiality in their communications.

The UK was one of the biggest donors to Covax to ensure global access to vaccines and continued to encourage manufacturers to provide their vaccines on a not-for-profit, transparent basis.

"We are committed to exploring ways in which we can improve equitable access further and believe this should be done through the existing Intellectual Property framework," added the spokesperson.

Last week US lawmakers and non-profit groups heaped pressure on the Biden administration to back the patent waiver ahead of the next formal WTO meeting on the issue May 5.

Japan ruling party election loss a blow to Suga government



Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's ruling Liberal Democratic Party lost all three seats in parliamentary by-elections Sunday

REUTERS

Tokyo, April 26: Japan's ruling party suffered a triple blow at by-elections over the weekend, as voter frustration with scandals and government management of the coronavirus risked weakening the influence of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's government.

Suga's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lost all three seats in parliamentary by-elections Sunday, polls widely seen as a verdict on his administration and a bellwether for a crucial Lower House election later this year.

The votes, for seats in both the Upper House and the more powerful lower chamber, were the first significant ballots since Suga took power last September. Two of the seats were left open due to political scandals and a third after the death of a lawmaker from COVID-19.

"I intend to take the people's decision with humility, and make amends where amending is necessary after conducting further analysis," Suga told reporters

Monday, adding that fighting the pandemic is his priority.

Anger with a vote-buying and a separate bribery scandal, as well as with the government's handling of the pandemic and a tortuously slow vaccine rollout, played about equal roles on the election outcome, analysts said.

Though Japan has not suffered as badly as other nations, the government has struggled to cope with a recent surge in cases and on Friday imposed a third state of emergency on parts of the country just three months before the Olympics are set to open.

Only one vaccine has been approved for use in Japan, with roughly 1 percent of the population having been fully vaccinated so far.

"Two of the elections were held due to scandals, so that was definitely in the background," said Airo Hino, a political science professor at Waseda University.

"But anger and frustration on the part of the people due to how the pandemic's being handled, and the slowness of the vaccine rollout, also played a part."

Suga's support rating stood around 70 per cent when he took office in September last year by replacing Shinzo Abe, who resigned due to health reasons after becoming Japan's longest-serving premier. His rating plunged to the 30 per cent level earlier this year but has since recovered slightly.

Missing Indonesian submarine found broken into pieces

REUTERS

Denpasar, April 26: A missing Indonesian submarine has been found, broken into at least three parts, at the bottom of the Bali Sea, army and navy officials said Sunday, as the President sent condolences to relatives of the 53 crew.

Rescuers also found new objects, including a life vest, which they believe belong to those aboard the 44-year-old KRI Nanggala-402, which lost contact Wednesday as it prepared to conduct a torpedo drill.

"Based on the evidence, it can be stated that the KRI Nanggala has sunk and all of its crew have died," military chief Marshal Hadi Tjahjanto told reporters.

Navy chief of staff Yudo Margono said the crew was not to blame for the accident and that the submarine did not experience a blackout, blaming "forces of nature".

"The KRI Nanggala is divided into three parts, the hull of the ship, the stern of the ship, and the main parts are all separated, with the main part found cracked," he said. "There are scattered parts of the submarine and its interior in the water."



President Joko Widodo earlier confirmed the discovery in the Bali Sea and sent the families of the victims his condolences.

"All of us Indonesians express our deep sorrow over this tragedy, especially to the families of the submarine crew." A sonar scan Saturday detected the submarine at 850 metres, far beyond the Nanggala's diving range.

More than a dozen helicopters and ships are searching the area where contact was lost, with the United States, Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia providing assistance.

SHORT TAKES

Scotland, Ireland ease restrictions

London: Scotland and Ireland eased their lockdown restrictions Monday, as the two nations slowly returned to the pre-pandemic life. Scotland, which has a tier system, will allow all shops, gyms and indoor sports facilities to reopen, while pubs, cafes and restaurants will reopen outdoors for groups of up to six people, DPA reported. Non-essential work in other people's homes will also resume, including cleaning, repairs, and painting and decorating. Earlier, only hairdressers and barbers, homework shops, electrical repair shops and vehicle showrooms were allowed to reopen.

Global Covid-19 cases top 146.8mn

Washington: The overall global Covid-19 caseload has topped 146.8 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 3.10 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University. In its latest update on Monday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and death toll stood at 146,830,782 and 3,106,384, respectively.

Germany faces lockdown till June

Berlin: Germany's coronavirus infection rate rose at the weekend despite stricter restrictions and Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said he did not expect moves to ease curbs before the end of May. "We need a timetable how to get back to normal life, but it must be a plan that won't have to be revoked after just a few days," Scholz said. The federal government should be able to outline "clear and courageous opening steps" for the summer by the end of May, allowing restaurants to adjust reopening plans and citizens to plan holidays, he said.

Rocket hits Kunar Guv's office

Kabul: At least five people were wounded after a rocket landed at Kunar Governor's office in the city of Asadabad Monday morning, Iqbal Saeed, provincial Governor, said. The incident happened in the city of Asadabad, the center of Kunar, where an event on the Holy Quran competition was underway, Saeed said. Three students and two employees of the compound were wounded.

IN SOLIDARITY



The Khalifa University building in UAE illuminated with hues of the Indian Tricolor to express solidarity with the country which is struggling to contain the massive surge in COVID-19 caseload

Female owner of car repair shop blazes a trail in UAE

REUTERS

Dubai, April 26: Huda al-Matroushi is one of few Emirati women to venture into the car repair business, an industry that has long been dominated by men in the Arab world.

"I enjoy it a lot," says Matroushi, holding up her oil-stained work glove. "Because I'm on top of my job, and it's my business, I belong to it: I feel proud of myself."

Cars have been a hobby for Matroushi, 36, since childhood.

"I like cars and their models and their details. I like sports cars, I like luxurious cars, even normal non-luxurious cars, I love them all."

She turned that passion into a profession and now owns and manages a car repair shop in Sharjah, one of the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates.

Matroushi's family had doubts about her pursuing a job in car mechanics, but she asked her father



to take a leap of faith with her.

"I said: 'Dad, please trust me and you will see what I will do.' He said: 'OK, OK!'. Most of my family are surprised ... because this project, this business, it's not easy for ladies," she said.

Matroushi's male employee, Mohammed Halawani, said it was initially strange to see a woman in charge of the garage.

"But after I joined and we started working and she'd tell me: disassemble this, assemble that, (it was clear) that she has experience."

Matroushi hopes she can transform her single garage into a big repair centre, or open more garages across the UAE.

Chinese airline retracts plans to suspend cargo flights to India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, April 26: In a U-turn, China's state-run Sichuan Airlines on Monday retracted its announcement to suspend cargo flights taking crucial supplies like oxygen concentrators to India and said that it was working out a new plan to resume the services.

A logistics arm under Sichuan Airlines said that it was discussing a new plan to resume cargo services to India, as the country has been going through COVID-19 resurgence, state-run Global Times reported.

The response came after Indian media reported that Sichuan Airlines had suspended all its cargo flights to India for 15 days, and said that such a move brings "major disruption" to private traders' efforts to buy medical supplies, including oxygen concentrators, from



China, the daily said.

"We are re-evaluating the original plan of suspending cargo services to India, and actively discussing a new plan to guarantee cargo services to the region," the report quoted the airlines as saying in reply to its queries.

In a letter to the sales agents Monday, the Sichuan Chuanhang Logistics Co. Ltd, the company which is part of the Sichuan Airlines, said the airline has suspended its cargo flights on six routes,

including Xian to Delhi, amid hectic efforts by private traders from both sides to procure oxygen concentrators from China.

In the letter sent by PTI, the company said, "in the face of sudden changes in the epidemic situation (in India), in order to reduce the number of imported cases, it is decided" to suspend the flights for the next 15 days.

The Airlines operates about 11 cargo flights to different destinations in India.

Sichuan Airlines usually has two regular flights from the Chinese mainland to India, but neither flight had taken off on Monday, the Global Times report said.

From April 1 to April 25, the number of cargo flights from the Chinese mainland to India averaged five per day, including carried by Sichuan Airlines and SF Airlines, it said.

World military spending grows despite COVID-19 pandemic

GLOBAL MILITARY SPENDING INCREASED BY 2.6 PER CENT TO \$1,981 BILLION IN 2020, WHEN GLOBAL GDP SHRANK 4.4 PER CENT

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Stockholm, April 26: Military expenditure worldwide rose to nearly \$2 trillion in 2020, defying the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers said Monday.

Global military spending increased by 2.6 per cent to \$1,981 billion in 2020, when global GDP shrank 4.4 per cent, according to a report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Diego Lopes da Silva, one of report's authors, told this newsagency the development was unexpected.

"Because of the pandemic, one would think military spending would decrease," he said. "But it's possible to conclude with some certainty that COVID-19 did not have a significant impact on global mil-

itary spending, in 2020 at least," Lopes da Silva said.

He cautioned however that due to the nature of military spending, it could take time for countries "to adapt to the shock".

The fact that military spending continued to increase in a year with an economic downturn meant the "military burden", or the share of military spending out of total GDP, had increased as well.

The overall share rose from 2.2 per cent to 2.4 per cent, the largest year-on-year increase since the financial crisis of 2009.

As a result, more NATO members hit the Alliance's guideline target of spending at least two per cent of GDP on their military, with 12 countries doing so in 2020 compared to nine in 2019.



There were, however, indications the pandemic had affected some countries. Nations such as Chile

and South Korea openly decided to re-appropriate military funds in response to the pandemic.

"Other countries, such as Brazil and Russia, did not explicitly say this was reallocated because of the pandemic, but they have spent considerably less than their original budget for 2020," Lopes da Silva said.

Another response, as in Hungary for example, was to increase military spending "as part of a stimulus package in response to the pandemic".

Lopes da Silva noted many countries responded to the 2008-2009 economic crisis by adopting austerity measures, but "this time around it might not be the case".

The world's two biggest spenders by far were the US and China, with Washington accounting for 39 per cent of overall expenditure and Beijing for 13 per cent. China's military spending

has risen in tandem with its growing economy and has seen an increase for 26 consecutive years, reaching an estimated \$252 billion in 2020.

The US also increased its spending for the third year in a row in 2020, after seven years of reductions.

"This reflects growing concerns over perceived threats from strategic competitors such as China and Russia, as well as the Trump administration's drive to bolster what it saw as a depleted US military," Alexandra Marksteiner, another author of the report, said in a statement.

Lopes da Silva, however, noted that the new "Biden administration has not given any indications that it will reduce military spending."

business

of the day quote

Being into the paper industry and most of the educational institutions closed, we were worried about how we will cope with Covid-19 but our paper food packaging products saw massive growth where consumer market preferred to buy paper food packaging instead of aluminum foil

ATUL GARG | CEO, ODDY UNIWRAPS

Our continued focus on cutting-edge technologies has expanded client engagement with large deal wins this quarter. We are also witnessing a strong acceleration in demand

CP GURNANI | MD & CEO, TECH MAHINDRA

P&G is committed to playing an active role in India's fight against Covid-19 and will contribute ₹50 crore towards 10 lakh vaccine doses covering vaccination of 5 lakh Indians, 100 citizens for every one employee we have in India

MADHUSUDAN GOPALAN | CEO, P&G (INDIAN SUBCONTINENT)

SHORT TAKES

Govt appoints Seth on RBI board

Mumbai: The RBI Monday said the government has appointed Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth on the central bank's board. Seth replaces Tarun Bajaj, who was appointed as Revenue Secretary earlier this month. A 1987-batch Karnataka cadre IAS officer, Seth assumed charge of the DEA last week. "The Central Government has nominated Ajay Seth, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, MoF as a Director on the Central Board of RBI vice Tarun Bajaj," the RBI said.

Former Maruti MD no more

New Delhi: Former Managing Director of Maruti Suzuki India, Jagdish Khattar, passed away Monday morning following a cardiac arrest, according to people close to him. Khattar (79), a former bureaucrat, was considered one of the most high profile leaders of the Indian automotive industry, laying the foundation for Maruti's future growth after the government began its disinvestment in 2002 and gradually exited from its joint venture with Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC).

CBIC sets up helpdesk

New Delhi: The CBIC Monday said it has set up a help desk to handle queries related to Covid related imports for their expeditious Customs clearance. The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), which is the apex decision making body in customs matters, said it has been receiving queries relating to availability of duty exemption benefits, clearance procedures, registration requirements from various ministries etc.

SMIPL launches new 'Hayabusa'

New Delhi: Two-wheeler manufacturer Suzuki Motorcycle India (SMIPL) Monday launched the third generation model of its flagship sport bike, the 'all new Hayabusa', priced at ₹16.40 lakh. The company launched the 'All New Hayabusa' with a full model change for the first time in 13 years. The new sport bike has been developed to achieve comply with the BS6 emissions standards.



Given the resurgence of Covid and the looming uncertainty around economic and market momentum, the company will continue to maintain a cautiously optimistic stance for FY22 and evaluate its approach dynamically

VIBHA PADALKAR | MD & CEO, HDFC LIFE INSURANCE CO.

APPLE PLEDGES 20K NEW JOBS

Apple Monday announced plans to make new contributions of more than \$430 billion and add 20,000 new jobs in the US over the next five years. Over the past three years, Apple's contributions in the US have significantly outpaced the company's original five-year goal of \$350 billion set in 2018



RBI to conduct customer satisfaction survey

The proposed survey will cover a total of 20,000 respondents from 21 states. In all, there will be 22 questions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 26: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to conduct a customer satisfaction survey to find out the impact of the recent mergers of state-owned banks on banking services being availed by individuals.

Among other things, the respondents will be asked whether the merger was positive from the

point of customer services. The choice before the customer will be to tick one of the following options - strongly agree; agree; neutral; disagree; or strongly disagree.

The proposed survey will cover a total of 20,000 respondents from 21 states, including Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat. In all, there will be 22 questions.

Of the 22, a set of four questions has been drafted separately for assessing customer service and grievance redress issues of customers of branches of banks that have been merged with other banks in the year 2019 and 2020.

Among PSBs, Dena Bank and

IMPACT OF BANK MERGERS



Vijaya Bank were merged with Bank of Baroda; OBC and United Bank of India with PNB; Syndicate Bank with Canara Bank; Allahabad Bank with Indian Bank; Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank with Union Bank of India. Also, LVB was merged with DBS Bank.

The questions related to mergers are: 'I did not face any problem in

availing services after the merger'; 'I faced problems in the following product(s)/service(s)/area(s); and The nature of problem I faced in the product(s)/service(s)/area(s)'.
The participants will also be asked: 'overall, the merger has been positive from customer service perspective'; and options against this are 'strongly agree'; 'agree'; 'neutral'; 'disagree'; and 'strongly disagree'.

While inviting quotations for conducting the 'Bank Customers' Satisfaction Survey' from survey agencies, the central bank said the approved vendor will be required to conduct interview over phone with recording of customers of bank branches falling in identified states.

Steel plants cut liquid oxygen storage to boost supply

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 26: Steel plants have reduced their oxygen stock to just half a day from 3.5 days earlier to fulfil the shortage of the life-saving gas being used in the treatment of Covid-19 patients, an official statement said Monday.

Steel plants usually keep a minimum stock of over three days of liquid oxygen from which in an emergency situation gaseous oxygen is extracted and sent for steel making process.



"The plants are normally required to keep 3.5 days of safety stock of LMO (liquid medical oxygen) in their storage tanks. Through continuous engagement with the steel producers, the stock has been reduced to 0.5 days because of which LMO supply has significantly increased," the Ministry of Steel said in the statement.

The steel plants supplied 3,131.84 tonnes LMO on Sunday to various health facilities across the states for treatment of COVID-19 patients, the ministry added.

At 3,131.84 tonnes, the supply was over 8 per cent higher from 2,894 tonnes dispatched by steel plants on Saturday, the statement said.

According to the ministry, the production on Sunday (April 25) was 3,468.6 tonnes, while the plants had produced 3,474 tonnes LMO on April 24, 2021.

Until a week earlier, the steel plants on an average were supplying 1,500-1,700 tonnes a day, it said, adding the units have been able to enhance the supply as most of the plants have reduced production of nitrogen and argon and are producing only oxygen.

'Travel restrictions dampen fuel, ATF sale'



AGENCIES

Mumbai, April 26: Lockdowns and travel restrictions imposed by states such as Maharashtra, Delhi, Jharkhand and Rajasthan have dampened the sale of auto fuels and aviation turbine fuel, leading to refining and marketing companies reducing throughputs, a report said Monday.

Going forward, the possibility of such a trend gathering pace, as more and more states resort to lockdowns amid a surging case count and strained healthcare system, cannot be ruled out, ratings agency ICRA said in a note.

ICRA also notes that the benchmark Singapore gross refining margins (GRMs) remain subdued due to the global supply overhang amid a demand slowdown and are unlikely to materially improve in the near-term, owing to the sec-

ond wave of Covid-19 in certain large economies such as India and Japan.

Additionally, though many countries have put travel restrictions on flights from India, the mutation, thought to be behind India's second wave, has spread to at least 10 other countries. As more countries witness a virulent second wave, oil demand and GRMs could be dampened, it said.

"Refining and marketing companies are cutting down on capacity utilisation although the demand slowdown is not as severe as April 2020.

"Nevertheless, the capacity utilisation and revenues and profitability of the refining and marketing companies are likely to be adversely impacted owing to the demand slowdown," said Sabyasachi Majumdar, Group Head and Senior Vice-President at ICRA.

Oxford Economics lowers India's GDP growth forecast to 10.2%

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 26: Global forecasting firm Oxford Economics Monday revised downwards its India GDP growth forecast for 2021 to 10.2% from 11.8% previously, citing the country's escalating health burden, faltering vaccination rate and lack of a convincing government strategy to contain the pandemic.

Oxford Economics also said that notwithstanding the likelihood of further mobility restrictions, it expects India's targeted lockdown approach, less stringent restrictions, and resilient consumer and business behaviour to mitigate the economic impact of the second wave.

"India's escalating health burden, faltering vaccination rate, and lack of a convincing government strategy to contain the pandemic have prompted us to downgrade our 2021 GDP growth forecast to 10.2% from 11.8% previously," it added.

The global forecasting firm added it expects GDP to contract sequentially in the second quarter. "But if struggling health systems force more states to resort to stricter lockdowns like Maharashtra, we will likely lower our growth forecast further," it added.

WATCHFUL EYES



The forecasting firm expects India's targeted lockdown approach, less stringent restrictions, and resilient consumer and business behaviour to mitigate the economic impact of the second wave

The global forecasting firm added it expects GDP to contract sequentially in the second quarter as well

OXFORD ECONOMICS SAID INDIA'S HEALTH SYSTEM HAS COLLAPSED IN THE WORST-HIT STATES, WITH EVEN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL DELHI FACING ACUTE SHORTAGE OF OXYGEN AND COVID-19 HOSPITAL BEDS

Oxford Economics said India's health system has collapsed in the worst-hit states, with even the national capital Delhi facing acute shortage of oxygen and Covid-19 hospital beds.

"While the official mortality rate has edged lower, it masks a rapidly rising death count. Deaths are now doubling every ten days (as opposed to an average of 29 days in the first wave) and even this figure is likely buttressed by delayed or under-reporting of deaths," it noted.

India is struggling with a second wave of the pandemic with more than 3,00,000 daily new coro-

navirus cases being reported in the past few days, and hospitals in several states are reeling under a shortage of medical oxygen and beds

The IMF has projected an impressive 12.5% growth rate for India in 2021, while S&P Global Ratings has said the Indian economy is projected to grow at 11 per cent in the current fiscal.

In its last policy review, the RBI had projected a GDP growth rate of 10.5% for FY22. According to India's statistics office, the economy projected to contract 8% in 2020-21 while the Economic Survey 2020-21 sees 11% growth in 2021-22.

'Impose anti-dumping duty on stainless steel production'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 26: Odisha MSME minister Diba Shankar Mishra Monday urged the Union Finance Minister to impose anti-dumping duty on stainless steel production with a view to guard domestic manufacturers from cheap imports from China.

Mishra said, "The Centre has recently revoked anti-dumping and countervailing duty for which a country like China will be benefitted and import price would be much higher."

"In a bid to provide a friendly environment to all stainless steel manufacturers and to guard imports from the countries like China and Indonesia, Centre government shall consider imposing anti-



dumping and countervailing duties," requested the minister, in his letter to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

"Odisha is the largest manufacturing state of stainless steel. Over ₹15,000 crore has been invested to boost the sector. Also, about ₹8,000 crore is invested on small scale industries' production," he added.

According to the minister, many industries involved in stain-

less steel production are being benefitted from the state government. The state government has also taken decision to the pricing process on manufactured products in the state. It is also planning to set up a metal cluster and stainless steel park in the state in near future.

State MSME minister has also requested the same to Piyush Goyal, Union Minister for Commerce and Industry.

BIZ BUZZ

Samsung adds smart classes to JNV schools

Bhubaneswar: Samsung India announced that it is adding smart classes to 80 new Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) schools across the country as part of its global Samsung Smart School initiative, providing digital education to less-privileged students and fulfilling its vision of 'Powering Digital India' by empowering the next generation of young India. With this addition, smart classes set up by Samsung will be available at 625 JNV schools and 10 Navodaya Leadership Institutes in 835 classrooms across the country, impacting close to 5 lakh students. A majority of the new smart classes are being set up in very remote rural districts. These new JNV schools are spread across 17 states. Every smart class set up by Samsung is equipped with an interactive Samsung Flip, Samsung tablets, a printer, a server, power backup and digital learning content.



Nilon's launches spices products

Bhubaneswar: Nilon's, one of country's leading processed food company, introduced a range of new-age blended spices. The array of products includes pasta masala, pizza masala, noodles masala, garlic bread seasoning, chow mein masala, piri-piri masala, magical masala and others. Spice is essential in any kitchen and this blended spices category consumption has witnessed exponential growth in India. Pegged at ₹1,000 crore market, the western blended category has shown a growth of 18-20% CAGR against the traditional spices category which has been growing at a CAGR of 10-12%.



COVID IMPACT

Sports industry size falls to ₹5,894 cr in 2020: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 26: The Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing event cancellations have drilled a large impact on sports in 2020, reducing the overall industry size by over 34% to ₹5,894 crore in 2020 as against over ₹9,000 crore in the year-ago period. The company's Head (Sports, E-Sports and Entertainment) for South Asia Vinit Karnik termed 2020 as an 'outlier year' which cannot be compared to any previous ones.

"The running events in January/February, IPL in October and Indian cricket team playing in Australia were the only events that took place," Karnik said.

In the overall industry pie, the biggest share went to media, where advertisement spends on TV, digital and print media contributed to

₹3,657 crore or 62% of the total spends, the yearly GroupM ESP Sporting Report said.

Sponsorship spends, which included on-ground sponsorships, team sponsorships and franchisee fee, stood at ₹1,673 crore, contributing 28% to the industry pie, the report said.

Athlete endorsements increased by 5% as compared to 2019 despite the ravages of the pandemic, the report said.

During the period of inactivity in sports, there was a significant step jump in the level of social media influencer activity among popular athletes, it said. Cricketers commanded 92% of the pie here as 275 of the 377 endorsement deals involved sportspersons from the game, it added.

The year gone by (2020) also saw female athletes pulling in brands,



the agency's report said.

The absence of live sports along with a sub-optimal supply of fresh OTT content led to the shift towards gaming, and April 2020 alone saw an 11% increase in users per week along with a significant jump in

average time spent per gamer, it said adding that there was a sudden boom in e-sports in 2020.

Staging of the IPL in UAE delighted fans, players, franchisees, sponsors and rights holders, the report said.

The pandemic has drilled a large impact on sports in 2020, reducing the overall industry size by over 34% to ₹5,894 crore in 2020 as against over ₹9,000 crore in the year-ago period

GroupM CEO for South Asia Prasanth Kumar said, "With the lockdown being enforced and subsequent stoppage of play on the field, the void was stark with no visibility on how the anti-Covid-19 efforts would pan out. And, even without any activities, our sports heroes stayed close to us."

He added that they came closer

by actively engaging with their followers on social media and the spontaneity of this online content flow. "And, with the open arms that we welcomed it, is the demonstration of the power of sports in our country."

Karnik said many sports properties were either cancelled or postponed and even sponsorship and media spends were impacted.

There are many sporting events lined up in 2021, and fans might have to make choices between certain events in terms of what, when and how much to watch, leading to a rise in demand for subscription viewing in live sports, he added.

"The year 2020 looks like that proverbial backward step we take before a giant leap, like the one we are expected to take in 2021, as part of the making of the sporting nation," Karnik said.

MORGAN, BOWLERS HELP KNIGHTS DETHRONE KINGS



Sunil Narine (R) celebrates a wicket with Dinesh Karthik

EOIN MORGAN

it all, tying things down with the new ball, bowling 15 dot balls in his four overs on the trot, before Cummins and Prasad tightened the noose sharing five wickets between them at the death.

The pace trio removed the top three KL Rahul (19), Chris Gayle (0) and Deepak Hooda (1) in space of 12 balls for six runs to leave PBKS in a disarray in the first 10 overs.

On a pitch, where the ball stayed low and gripped a bit, the Punjab batsmen failed to apply themselves with Narine (2/22) and Varun Chakravarthy (1/24) further denting their progress during the middle overs as well as back-end.

Prasidh had the best figures as he ended Chris Jordan's 18-ball 30 cameo which took the total past the 120-run mark.

BRIEF SCORES

PUNJAB KINGS 123/9 (Mayank Agarwal 31, Chris Jordan 30; Prasadh Krishna 3/30, Sunil Narine 2/22, Pat Cummins 2/31) **lost to KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS 126/5** (Eoin Morgan 47 n o, Rahul Tripathi 41; Moises Henriques 1/5, Deepak Hooda 1/20) by 5 wickets.

IPL sees early withdrawals

ASHWIN, ZAMPA, RICHARDSON PULL OUT OF IPL AS COVID-CASE SURGE RAISES FEAR FACTOR, BUT BCCI SAYS LEAGUE WILL GO ON

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 26: Anxiety pierced through IPL's bio-secure bubble Monday with leading Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and some Australian players withdrawing from the league amid the escalating COVID-19 crisis in India even as the BCCI insisted that the glitzy league will go on.

The 34-year-old Ashwin, competing for Delhi Capitals, decided to take a break saying that his family is currently 'putting up a fight against COVID-19' and he wants to support them. He hopes to return to the side 'if things go in the right direction'.

However, Andrew Tye (Rajasthan Royals) and the duo of Kane Richardson and Adam Zampa (both Royal Challengers Bangalore) withdrew as apprehension set in after a couple of weeks went by smoothly for the league being held in front of empty stands across six venues.

While Zampa and Richardson have not yet spoken about their 'personal reasons' for leaving, Tye said he feared getting locked out of his own country owing to mounting quarantine cases from India in his hometown Perth.

The BCCI, on its part, insisted that the event will continue and it wouldn't come in the way of those wanting to leave. "As of now, IPL is going ahead. Obviously, if anyone wants to leave, that's perfectly fine," a senior Board official said on conditions of anonymity.

While leg-spinner Zampa was bought for ₹1.5 crore, RCB spent ₹4 crore to buy pacer Richardson at the players' auction.

India is recording over 3 lakh daily cases for the past few days and the health infrastructure is struggling to handle the rise with shortage of oxygen and some crucial medicines adding to the crisis.

Kolkata Knight Riders mentor David Hussey acknowledged that Australians in the IPL are a "bit



nervous" about getting back home in the wake of the situation here.

"Everyone is sort of a bit nervous about whether they can get back into Australia. I dare say there will be a few other Australians a bit nervous about getting back into Australia," Hussey, a former Australia international, told the 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

However, not all Australians are willing to leave. Kolkata Knight Riders' ₹15 crore buy Pat Cummins said he has been advised that the Indian government views the league as a welcome distraction from the gloom. He also donated USD 50,000 to the PM CARES Funds to help oxygen supplies in hospitals.

Another pacer Nathan Coulter-Nile, who has a ₹5 crore deal with Mumbai Indians would rather be in the bio-bubble than risk a trip back home at this point. "I feel like it's safer for me to stay in the bubble than try and get home at the moment," he told 'cricket.com.au'.

Delhi Capitals coach Ricky Ponting said he is aware of the "grim" situation outside the IPL bio-bubble but would want the

league to continue for it is a welcome escape for a few hours.

Cricket Australia and the Australian Cricketers' Association also issued a joint statement Monday, saying that they are monitoring the situation.

Several England and New Zealand players are also competing in the event but haven't yet spoken about their concerns. The players from New Zealand, including stars such as Kane Williamson and Trent Boult, are expected to leave early in any case as they have a Test series against England starting June 2.

They will have to head back in last week of May to be available for it because of quarantine rules. The IPL final is scheduled to be held May 30 in Ahmedabad.

Australia, it is learnt, might arrange a chartered flight for its IPL cricketers once their engagement is over. As many as 14 Australian players now remain in the event. Commentators Matthew Hayden, Brett Lee, Michael Slater and Lisa Sthalekar are also among the Australians involved with the league right now.



DC FACE RCB IN BATTLE OF EQUALS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, April 26: Seeing the loss in their previous game as a blip, Virat Kohli-led Royal Challengers Bangalore will have to be at their best to beat a formidable Delhi Capitals unit in the IPL here Tuesday.

While RCB will have to shrug off their 69-runs thrashing at the hands of Chennai Super Kings in their last game and start afresh, Delhi's confidence would be boosted by their thrilling 'Super Over' win against Sunrisers Hyderabad, Sunday.

Up against Delhi, RCB will need to address their middle order woes, to return to winning ways, in what could be touted as a battle of equals.

For the RCB, it will be important that the openers - the in-form Devdutt Padikkal (171 runs) and Kohli (151 runs) - continue to provide a solid



start at the Narendra Modi stadium.

But the opening duo would need the much-needed support from the middle order, which crumbled against CSK. The likes of Glenn Maxwell (198 runs), AB de Villiers (129 runs), and the misfiring all-rounder Washington Sundar (25 runs), will have to perform in uni-

son against a strong Delhi attack.

The RCB bowlers will have to forget the hammering received at the hands of the CSK batters, especially league's leading wicket-taker Harshal Patel, who was taken apart by Ravindra Jadeja, as he conceded 37 runs in his final over.

Pacers Mohammed Siraj and

TODAY'S MATCH

DC **V** S RCB

TIME 7.30 PM

Telecast: Star Sports channels

Kyle Jamieson will have to step up and deliver while spinners Yuzvendra Chahal and Washington Sundar will also have to bowl tightly to contain a strong DC batting-line, full of hard-hitters.

For Delhi, their opener and tournament's leading run-scorer Shikhar Dhawan (259 runs), would be eager to carry forward his fine form, while his opening partner Prithvi Shaw (166 runs), would be looking

Atletico's loss a boost for Barca



Inigo Martinez (L) reacts after scoring the winner for Athletic Bilbao against Atletico Madrid; (inset) Antoine Griezmann celebrates one of his goals against Villarreal, Sunday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Madrid, April 26: Needing a win to stay in control of the Spanish league, Atletico Madrid stumbled again with a 2-1 loss to Athletic Bilbao, giving Barcelona a chance to take over the lead.

Not even the return of Luis Suarez and Joao Felix was enough for Diego Simeone's team, which could drop to second Thursday when Barcelona plays eighth-place Granada at home.

Barcelona put pressure on Atletico by coming from behind to win 2-1 at Villarreal earlier Sunday, getting within two points of the lead with a game in hand. Antoine Griezmann scored both goals for the Catalan club. Atletico will visit Barcelona in two rounds' time.

Defending champion Real Madrid was held 0-0 against Real Betis Saturday but also remain in contention. It is in second place, level on points with Barcelona and two behind Atletico. Also still in the title race is Sevilla, which defeated Granada 2-1 to stay only three points off the lead.

Atletico had won two straight to remain at the top, but it couldn't recover after conceding early at

Athletic's San Mames Stadium. Alex Berenguer opened the scoring for the hosts in the eighth minute.

Atletico equalized with a header by Stefan Savic off a corner kick in the 77th, but Inigo Martinez's header in the 86th sealed the victory for 10th-place Athletic.

Suarez and Felix returned after nursing injuries for the last few weeks. They came off the bench early in the second half but couldn't spark Atletico to victory. Midfielder Thomas Lemar also returned from injury.

Earlier, Griezmann scored twice in the first half as Barcelona rallied to beat Villarreal and stay close to the top. Villarreal, sitting seventh, played with 10 men from the 65th minute after Manu Trigueros was sent off with a straight red card for a dangerous sliding tackle on Lionel Messi. Trigueros had his foot up when he hit Messi's left leg, sliding his cleats on the Argentine's lower shin. Messi was in pain and needed medical attention but was able to return.

The hosts opened the scoring with Samu Chukwueze in the 26th, but Griezmann equalised in the 28th and netted the winner in the 35th.

India among 6 teams to qualify for T20I at CWG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, April 26: India is among six teams which have qualified for the women's T20I competition of the 2022 Commonwealth Games (CWG) as cricket returns for the second time in the multi-sporting event.

The six qualifiers who join home team England in the eight-team T20 competition are Australia, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, and a country from the West Indies. They have secured qualification as a result of their standings in the ICC team rankings April 1.

"As per the qualification process, the winner of a designated Qualifying event will determine which country from the Caribbean region gets to participate as athletes will be representing their individual countries and not the West Indies as they would at ICC events.

"The last participating team will be decided through a Qualifying

tournament to be held by 31 January 2022, details of which will be announced in due course," said the ICC in a statement Monday.

Women's cricket features in the Games for the first time in 22 editions and cricket for only the second time ever; the first occasion being a men's ODI competition in Kuala Lumpur in 1998, when South Africa won. The CWG cricket tournament will take place at Edgbaston, with tickets set to go on sale later this year.

CGF President Louise Martin was also excited about the cricket's return to the Games. "Cricket is a sport that is synonymous with the Commonwealth and we are so excited to have it back in the Games for the first time since the men's competition at Kuala Lumpur 1998.

"The debut of women's T20 cricket will be a historic moment for Commonwealth Sport and a wonderful showcase for women's sport across the world," she said.

'Dee-Das' shoots triple gold

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guatemala City, April 26: Indian archery's star couple Deepika Kumari and Atanu Das led the show with two individual gold medals as the country capped its best ever performance in a World Cup, claiming three golds and a bronze in the tournament's first stage here.

Former World No.1 Deepika claimed her career's third individual World Cup gold to add to the team's triumph, while her husband Das grabbed his first ever World Cup individual medal in style winning the men's recurve individual final.

The two are now automatically qualified for this season's most-coveted Archery World Cup Final. "We travel together, train together, compete together and win together," Das, who got married to Deepika in June last year after a two-year courtship, said after claiming the gold medal, Sunday.

This was the best ever World



Cup finish by India's recurve archers with two individual and one team gold medals in their return to the top International calendar year event after almost two years.

Also, this was India's best ever individual recurve men's result since Jayanta Talukdar triumphed in Croatia way back in 2009.

India started with the women's trio of Deepika, Ankita Bhakat and Komalika Bari winning the first team gold after seven years. They scripted a stunning turnaround to down fancied Mexico 5-

to get more runs under his belt.

DC boast of a strong middle order, comprising skipper Rishabh Pant (125 runs), Australians Steve Smith and Marcus Stoinis and Shimron Hetmyer, who can be highly destructive on their day.

Delhi will miss the services of ace off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who has left the team to support his family in the fight against COVID-19. In his absence, left-arm spinner Axar Patel and experienced leg-spinner Amit Mishra, who had wreaked havoc against Mumbai Indians, will need to shoulder greater responsibility.

Delhi is unlikely to tinker with their pace attack, as Avesh Khan, with 11 wickets from five games has been impressive and South African Kagiso Rabada can do the damage early. The team management can play Lalit Yadav, who bowls off-spin and can also bat, in place of Ashwin, instead of going in for a pacer.