



## SHINING STAR

Elli AvrRam bags 'Best Actress' award at Stockholm City Film Festival for her role in short film 'With You'

LEISURE P2



## OLI GOVT LOSES MAJORITY

With the Communist Party of Nepal withdrawing support, the KP Sharma Oli-led government has lost majority support

INTERNATIONAL P10



## FIRST FINAL

Riyad Mahrez helps Man City reach their first-ever CL final beating PSG 4-1 on aggregate

SPORTS P12

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



He's free and you can go in. But if it's about COVID I can answer your questions better!

## SHORT TAKES

### Mamata sworn in for 3rd term in WB

**Kolkata:** Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo Mamata Banerjee was Wednesday sworn in as the chief minister of West Bengal for the third consecutive term. Immediately after assuming office, she shot off a letter to PM Narendra Modi demanding free vaccination for all and asking for 'transparency' in distribution of vaccines. She also said that her main priorities would be to contain Covid-19 as quickly as possible and end the political violence and book all those guilty in West Bengal. **P8**

### SC strikes down Maratha quota law

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court struck down Wednesday the Maharashtra law granting quota to Marathas in admissions and government jobs, terming it as 'unconstitutional'. It held there were no exceptional circumstances to breach the 50 per cent reservation cap set by the 1992 Mandal verdict. The top court also refused to refer the Mandal judgement to a larger bench for reconsideration, saying it has been upheld time and again by its various verdicts. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray termed the verdict as 'unfortunate'. **P8**

## MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VARIATION
SENSEX	48677.55 ↑ 424.04
NIFTY	14617.90 ↑ 121.40
DOLLAR	74.85 ↓ ₹0.03
EURO	89.17 ↓ ₹0.07
GOLD	₹46,909 ↑ ₹38
SILVER	₹69,440 ↓ ₹209

## WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
TEMP	37.2°C	36.0°C
MAX	37.2°C	36.0°C
MIN	24.0°C	23.5°C
Humidity	65%	92%
Rainfall	Nil	5.8mm
Forecast	Light to moderate rain likely	

# Oximeters vanish from medicine shops

SURGE IN COVID CASES LEADS TO INCREASE IN DEMAND FOR OXYGEN-MEASURING DEVICE

MANISH KUMAR, OP

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** As the surge in Covid-19 cases continue in Odisha, there has been a huge rise in demand for oximeters. Panic-stricken people now want to keep oximeters handy to monitor the oxygen saturation level in their bodies. However, suddenly the device has become a scarce commodity in the Odisha capital. People are running to every nook and corner in search of oximeters, but are returning empty-handed.

A survey of various shops in the city proved that there indeed is a shortage of oximeters and some other items needed to fight the menace of Covid-19. Sodium Hypochlorite (NaOCl) which is used as a disinfectant is also unavailable. The non-availability of such vital items has become a headache for residents of this city.

"Around two weeks ago I bought an oximeter for ₹650. In the last three days I have visited several medicine shops and have not been able to procure one. In some shops, oximeters are being sold at rates between ₹2,500 to ₹3,500," informed one of the buyers.

Shop owners are claiming that due to the sudden increase in demand, they have exhausted their stock of oximeters. "There has been a huge demand and the medicine stores were not ready for the rush. Due to this, most stores do not have the device available with them," said the



owner of a medicine shop. Wholesalers informed that the supply of oximeters to Odisha have also dwindled as there is a demand for the machine now in all states of India. "We are now buying the device at ₹2,500 per piece. So we have no option but to sell it at a higher price. As prices have in-

creased manifold, many shops have stopped stocking the device, because they may not get a customer," a representative of the wholesale market said.

The association for chemists however said that shortage of oximeters will end in a week or so. "Yes it is true that there was a shortage of oxime-

ters in the last few days. However we have talked to various manufacturers and new stocks will arrive very soon in the state," said Prasanta Mohapatra, general secretary of Utkal Chemist and Drugist Association. Medicine shop owners however, assured there is no shortage of other Covid-19 related drugs like Ivermectin,

## Virus claims 16

**BHUBANESWAR:** Odisha registered 9,889 new Covid-19 cases Wednesday, pushing the total tally to 4,89,641, while 16 fresh fatalities raised the toll to 2,104, a senior Health department official said. This is the highest fatality rate recorded during the 2nd wave in Odisha. Of the new cases, 5,611 were reported from quarantine centres and the rest were detected during contact tracing, the official informed. Odisha currently has 77,257 active cases, while 4,10,227 patients have so far recovered from the highly infectious disease. Odisha's positivity rate stands at 4.74 per cent. Khurda district once more topped the list of new cases with 1,331 reported in the last 24 hours. **P3**

# Delhi gasps as O<sub>2</sub> battle rages

TEMPORARY SC RELIEF FOR CENTRE, BUT 700MT MUST BE PROVIDED DAILY TO NATIONAL CAPITAL

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 5:** The Supreme Court stayed Wednesday contempt proceedings initiated by Delhi High Court against Central government officials for non-compliance of the direction to supply 700MT of medical grade oxygen for Covid-19 patients in the national capital. It will certainly be a relief to the Centre. However, the stay will not restrain the high court from monitoring Covid-19 management related issues, a bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and MR Shah said.

The top court, in an urgent hearing, directed that a meeting be held between officials of the Centre and Delhi government by Wednesday evening to discuss various aspects of augmenting the oxygen supply to the national capital.

This is an all-India pandemic situation and we will have to find ways to ensure oxygen supply to the national capital as 'we are answerable to people of Delhi', the bench pointed out.

"We are also in Delhi. We are helpless and have been on phone. We can imagine what citizens are going through," Justice Chandrachud said. He added that his office is hearing cries from people including lawyers seeking help.

The top court said it cannot review its order of April 30 and the Centre will have to inch towards sup-



LIFE-SAVER: A positive Covid-19 kid gets oxygen relief on the premises of a hospital in New Delhi

# Online sale of liquor proposed

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** The state Excise department urged Wednesday Special Relief Commissioner (SRC), PK Jena to allow home delivery of liquor during the lockdown period. Excise Secretary SK Lohani submitted a proposal to Jena in this regard. However, no final decision has so far been taken by the government.

The Odisha government has imposed a 15-day lockdown with effect from Wednesday. Hence all non-essential shops will remain closed as will be liquor

shops. Based on past experience, the Excise secretary said in such situations black marketing of liquor becomes rampant. Spurious liquor is also sold leading to health and safety hazards.

Lohani requested Jena to allow home delivery of India made foreign liquor and beer by authorised food aggregators, online platforms and delivery service providers as well as by the shop licensees. Similarly, country-made liquor should also be allowed for home delivery, he said. Lohani also requested the SRC to allow operation of all godowns

of Beverage Corporation for wholesale trade between 6.00am to 2.00pm and ensure free movement of vehicles carrying genuine duty paid liquor.

During the lockdown period last year, the government had permitted home delivery of liquor by food aggregators/delivery service providers/technology platforms.

It should also be stated here that the government earns substantial revenue through sale of liquor. Closing down liquor shops will result in considerable loss to the state exchequer.

## Oxygen shortage claims 5 more lives

**Dehradun/Haridwar:** Five Covid-19 patients, including a woman, died at a private hospital in Roorkee in Uttarakhand's Haridwar district allegedly due to disruption in oxygen supply to the facility for around 30 minutes. The incident occurred in the early hours Wednesday when oxygen supply to the hospital remained disrupted between 1.30 and 2.00am, a doctor said. One of the patients who died was on ventilator support while four others were on oxygen beds, he informed.

ply of 700MT of oxygen daily for Delhi. It asked the Union government to place before it a plan by Thursday on the issue.



Policemen instruct shop owners to wind up business at the Unit-I market in the state capital after they were found selling vegetables even after the prescribed closure time of 12 noon

# Action promised against hoarders

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Ranendra Pratap Swain asked Wednesday civil supply officers (CSOs) to check black marketing and hoarding of essential consumable items. This development comes as Odisha went into a 15-day lockdown beginning Wednesday.

There is a possibility that some traders may resort to hoarding of essentials like potato, onion, edible oil and wheat during lockdown. So the minister has directed the CSOs of various districts to personally visit grocery shops and store houses and check on those.

Swain in his official Twitter han-

dle said Odisha has sufficient stock of all essential goods and there is no need to resort to panic buying.

The state government is keeping a vigilant eye on availability of the essential items, he said. Field level officials have been directed to visit shops every day and take action against traders who unnecessarily hoard items, the minister stated.

During lockdown, shops providing ration under PDS and stores selling groceries, fruits, vegetables, dairy and milk products, meat, fish, animal fodder, seeds and pesticides have been allowed to open. These shops will remain open Monday to Friday (6.00am to 12 noon). However weekly and daily haats will remain closed.

# PANCHAYAT PUNCH FOR BJP IN UP

AGENCIES

**Lucknow, May 5:** After Bengal it is the turn of Uttar Pradesh to give a jolt to the BJP. The verdict is from an early round of biggest electoral fight in the business - the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections to be held next year. However, the results of the recently-held panchayat polls in UP did not augur well for the saffron party and UP CM Yogi Adityanath. There is a peculiar rule in the UP panchayat elections. Candidates are supported by political parties but they do not contest as their representatives.

The BJP has managed only eight of a possible 40 seats in Ayodhya which has been in the news for Ram Mandir. It saw a 'bhoomi puja'



in August, 2020 for the Ram Mandir presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In Ayodhya, Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) managed 24 seats, Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) won four and independents four.

In Mathura, which the Sangh has decided will be the new nerve centre of Hindutva with a high-decibel campaign planned, the BJP won only eight of the 33 zilla panchayat seats, while the BSP emerged as the biggest gainer with 13 seats.

In Varanasi, which has twice elected Narendra Modi to the Lok Sabha, the SP won 15 seats, the BSP plus independents 17 and the BJP just eight.

The Ayodhya unit of the BJP has conceded that it did not do as well as expected. "The results are disappointing. Despite having sitting BJP MLAs in all constituencies in Ayodhya district, we won only eight out of 40 zilla panchayat seats," BJP's district spokesperson Diwakar Singh said Wednesday.

Yadav said the results are an indication of things to come. "The panchayat election results showed that the BJP is a sinking ship. Signals emanating from the polls in the state show that the BJP will be wiped out in 2022," he asserted.

# Fuel prices increase for 2nd straight day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 5:** Petrol and diesel prices were increased for the second day in a row Wednesday as state-owned fuel retailers resumed daily rate revision after a more than two-week long hiatus during Assembly elections in states like West Bengal. Petrol price was increased by 19 paise per litre and diesel by 21 paise a litre, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers. Petrol in the national capital now costs ₹90.74 a litre and diesel comes for ₹81.12 per litre.

Rates have been increased across India and vary from state to state depending on the local incidence of taxation (VAT).

## CITY FUEL PRICE (MAY 5)

PETROL:	₹91.48 (+0.19)
DIESEL:	₹88.42 (+0.23)

Oil companies had Tuesday resumed daily price revision in line with cost after ending an 18-day hiatus. Prices were hiked Tuesday by 15 paise per litre for petrol and 18 paise on diesel.

In two days, more than half of the 67 paise a litre reduction in petrol and 74 paise per litre cut in diesel prices effected between March 24 and April 15, has been wiped out.

Despite the concerns about rising COVID-19 cases in India denting demand, crude oil prices in the international market have risen primarily on account of strong US demand recovery and a weak dollar. Prices have been on a continuous uptrend since April 27, an industry official said adding crude oil price hit USD 65 per barrel mark. It is expected that the crude oil prices will remain firm in the near future.



# leisure



## BEHR'S MAKES YOGA HER 40-DAY GOAL

Actress Beth Behrs, popular as Caroline Channing in the sitcom *2 Broke Girls*, has been spending time practicing yoga going by her new Instagram boomerang clip Wednesday, India time. She shared a clip featuring a burning candle and some incense sticks and wrote: "Day #2 #40daysof yoga".

## TIFFANY HADDISH WANTS TO ADOPT A FIVE-YR-OLD CHILD

Actress Tiffany Haddish, who is in a relationship with rapper Common, is taking parenting classes to prepare her for adopting a child. She wants to be mother to a child who is at least five years old.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshaSpeaks.com  
accuracy • reliability • trust  
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

**ARIES**  
You probably have a big circle of friends, and though most of them may be casual friends, they may sometimes prove to be favourable. They may help you overcome some dejections. It will also help you figure out the importance of the role friends can play.

**TAURUS**  
You have an easy care-free day ahead. There will be no woes or worries, says Ganesha. But to will be inclined to take up too many things at one time, more than you can handle. This may, in turn, get you stressed and uptight. You are advised to be practical and not to overdo things.

**GEMINI**  
You will tend to be religiously inclined today, feels Ganesha. For this purpose, you may spend some time visiting a temple, mosque or church. You are also likely to go shopping, and chances are that this too is for a religious purpose. May God bless you, says Ganesha.

**CANCER**  
Ganesha predicts an excellent and exceptional day for you at work. You are likely to need all your business acumen while negotiating deals. Your leadership skills are likely to come to the fore during the final stage of a deadline, be it about completing an order or launching new products and marketing them, says Ganesha.

**LEO**  
Today may not be the best time to mess with you, considering the aura of invincibility that you possess. Be it a game, a competition, or an argument, you will have the edge over others in every sphere, says Ganesha. Also, you may come across people with whom you will have personal differences, and those who will try to change your fortunes.

**VIRGO**  
Ganesha feels that today may be an important turning point in your life. You will look to secure the money much required for your bright future. Relationship matters will top your priorities during the afternoon today.

**LIBRA**  
Today is an important day for you, and you will learn a lot from your life partner. Even on the work front, business partners will extend their best possible cooperation to you. Your chances of winning in cut-throat competitions are very bright today, predicts Ganesha.

**SCORPIO**  
There is nothing more enchanting and alluring to you than some passionate time with your love interest. The only problem that Ganesha sees here is that there may be too many love interests. Your chosen partner, though, may get to see a different side of you in the evening.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
According to Ganesha, money is likely to slip-off your hand easily today. Try to wave off unnecessary expenditure. The entire day is spent managing funds, while the evening brings a lot of positive energy with it. You prefer to sit back and relax.

**CAPRICORN**  
Your grand orchestration may not come to fruition, and even your best-laid plans may go awry, says Ganesha. Squabbles with people over petty issues will add to your growing vexation; keep calm and you'll handle all of it just fine.

**AQUARIUS**  
Finally, you've decided to clean up the mess! And you will do a fine job, whether it's your workspace, your bills, your finances, or even your closet. And now that you're inspired, you might as well sort out your mental clutter too, chuckles Ganesha.

**PISCES**  
Financially, you have bright prospects awaiting you today. You will be able to deal with the mind-numbing financial jugglery required to take stock of your monetary matters with precision. You might be dealing with people who secretly have an axe to grind against you, cautions Ganesha.

## Elli shines at Stockholm film festival

Mumbai: Actress Elli AvrRam has won the Best Actress award for her role in the short film *With You* at the Stockholm City Film Festival.

The 23-minute film is based on the socially relevant subject of mental health awareness, sexual abuse and childhood trauma.

"I'm just so thrilled and grateful for this recognition. We all went in with our heart for this project, and to see it getting this response at such prestigious film festivals is truly heart-warming. I feel so happy for all of us, grateful to my director Peppe Segura, and especially for the fact that a story like this is being noticed and appreciated," she says.

Talking about the process of shooting the film, she adds: "I flew down from Mumbai to Stockholm to shoot the film because I wanted to be part of such films that raise awareness about important issues. Everyone who worked on the film felt it's important to bring in light, in the darkness, because that's what we all need to be able to find the strength and to change things."



## Mandira's way of beating anxiety

Mumbai: Actress Mandira Bedi took to Instagram Wednesday to post a picture that captures her doing a headstand.

The actress wrote about how such an exercise helps her beat anxiety and added that she has been able to achieve this after regular practice.

"All inverted poses help keep my anxiety at bay. Be it the headstand (which I needed today after a long time) or the 10 wall assisted handstands I practice every day. Karam karo.. phal ki chinta mat karo. Bas chinta door hi rakho #stayhome #staysafe #stayactive," she wrote.

On the work front, Mandira will soon be seen playing a cop in an upcoming murder mystery web series. It will also star Sid Makkar, Dipannita Sharma and Nauheed Cyrusi. The details of the series are under wraps, including the title.

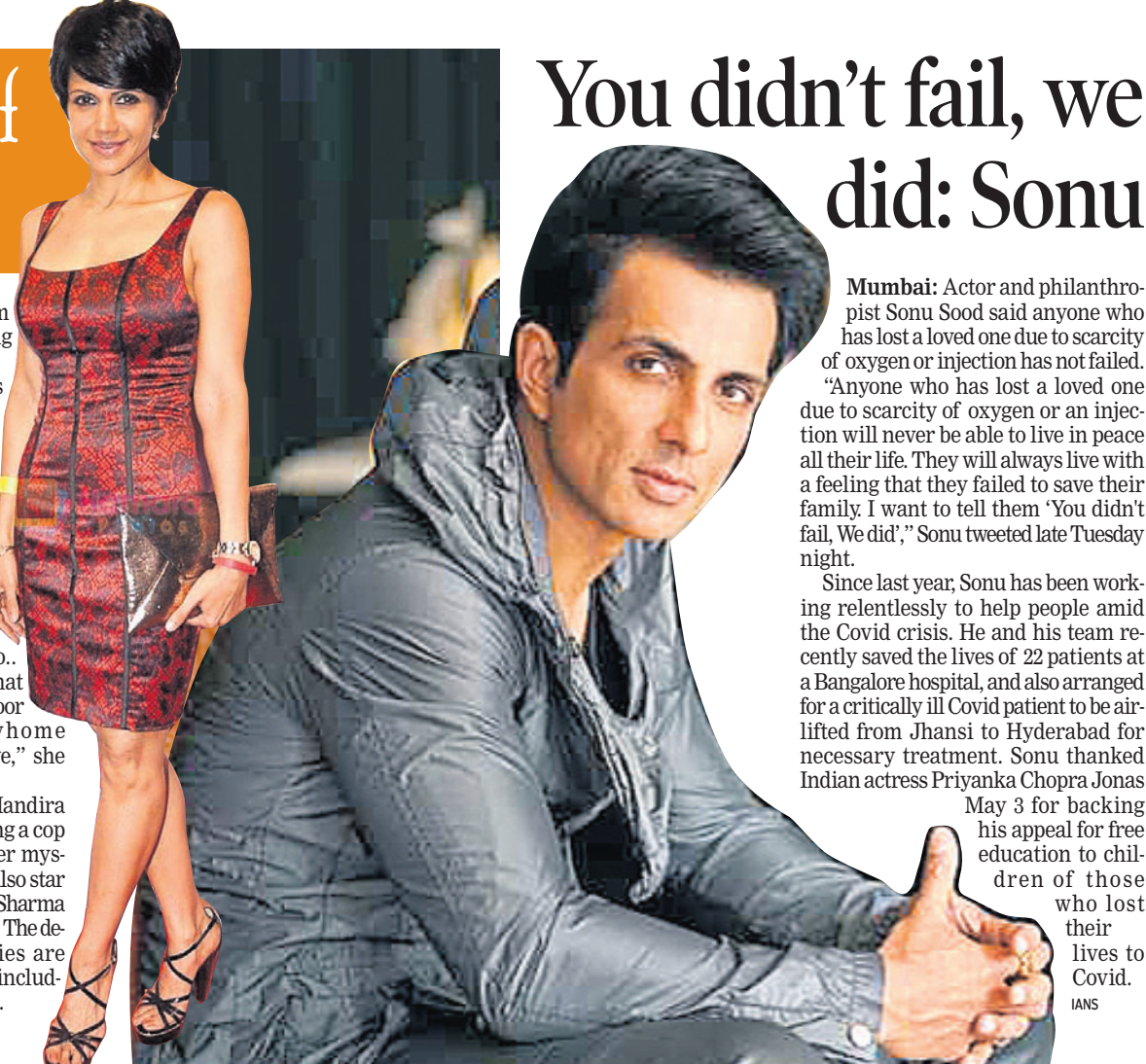


## You didn't fail, we did: Sonu

Mumbai: Actor and philanthropist Sonu Sood said anyone who has lost a loved one due to scarcity of oxygen or injection has not failed. "Anyone who has lost a loved one due to scarcity of oxygen or an injection will never be able to live in peace all their life. They will always live with a feeling that they failed to save their family. I want to tell them 'You didn't fail, We did'," Sonu tweeted late Tuesday night.

Since last year, Sonu has been working relentlessly to help people amid the Covid crisis. He and his team recently saved the lives of 22 patients at a Bangalore hospital, and also arranged for a critically ill Covid patient to be airlifted from Jhansi to Hyderabad for necessary treatment. Sonu thanked Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas

May 3 for backing his appeal for free education to children of those who lost their lives to Covid.



## Oscar winner-backed Indian web series to release May 14

Set in a Himalayan town, *'The Last Hour'* explores the story of a shaman (healer), who joins a newly transferred cop to track down a mysterious killer



Mumbai: Oscar-winning filmmaker Asif Kapadia is an executive producer on the supernatural web series *The Last Hour* featuring Sanjay Kapoor, Raima Sen, and Shahana Goswami. The series is written and produced by Amit Kumar and Anupama Minz, and is all set to release May 14.

Set in a Himalayan town, the series explores the story of a shaman (healer), who joins a newly transferred cop to track down a mysterious killer. "Amit and I share an interest in the supernatural, and he is particularly fascinated by the concept of playing with time. We wanted to create a series that was original, authentic and riveting. I am so excited to launch *The Last Hour* to audiences across the world," said Kapadia, who bagged the Academy Award for the Best Documentary (Feature) in 2016, for his film *Amy*.



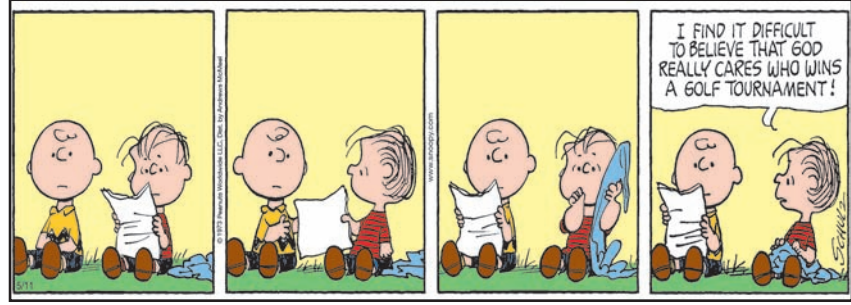
## Namrata lauds drive-in vaccination centres

Hyderabad: Actress Namrata Shirodkar Wednesday lauded the drive-in vaccination centres in Bhopal and Mumbai, saying it is a super cool initiative that will help senior citizens and the differently-abled to get their vaccines.

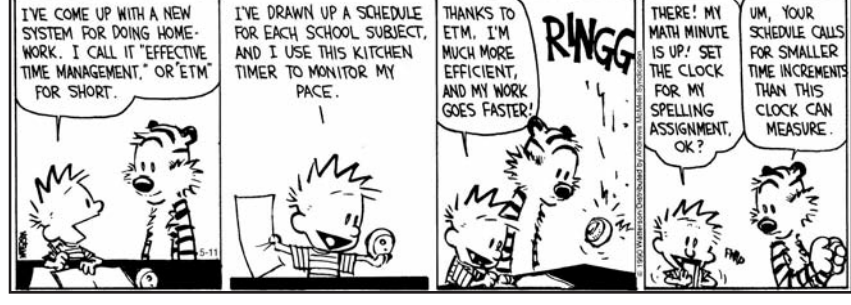
*The Bride and Prejudice* actress posted two pictures on Instagram, featuring drive-in vaccination facilities in the cities.

"Drive-in vaccination centers in Bhopal and Mumbai... a super cool initiative helping senior citizens and the differently-abled get their shot in a car. Requesting all the other state governments to have this implemented. Vaccination is the only way out of this crisis! #GetVaccinated," wrote Namrata as caption, with three folded hand emojis.

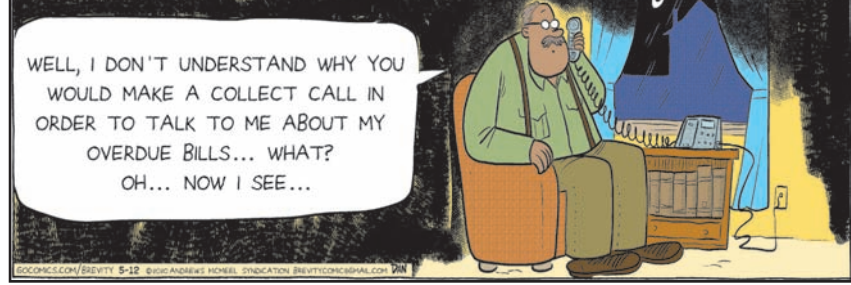
### PEANUTS



### CALVIN AND HOBBS

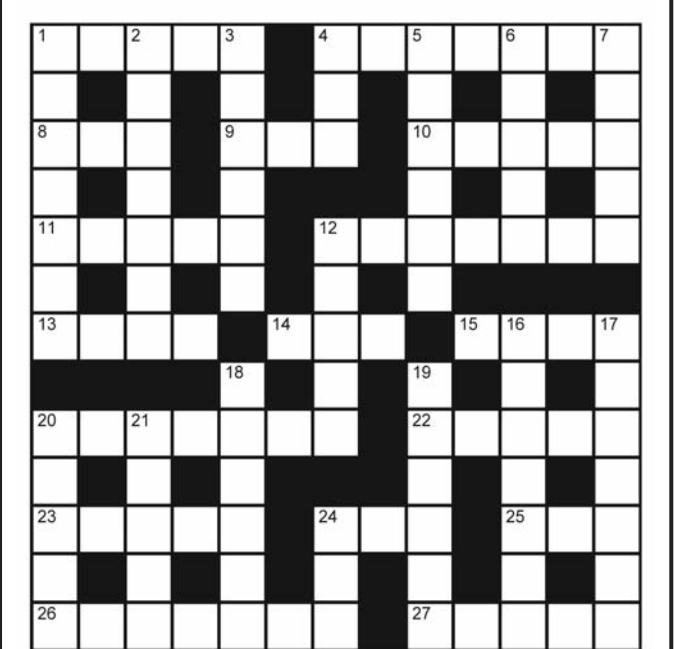


### BREVITY



### FUN post

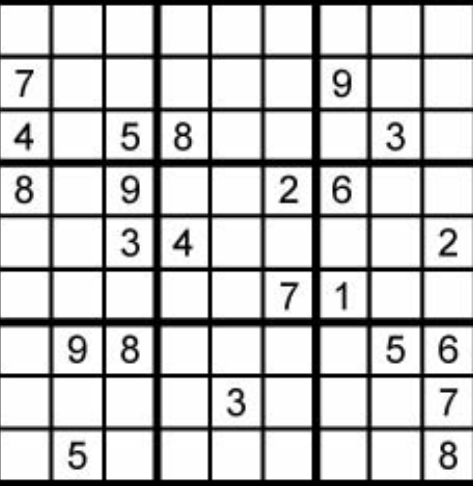
### CROSSWORD



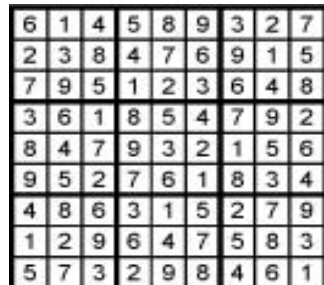
- Across**
- 1 Moving about
  - 4 Okapi relative
  - 8 Send packing
  - 9 Insect
  - 10 Plato's plaza
  - 11 Waste away
  - 12 Farewell remark in the UK
  - 13 Exam
  - 14 Like some humour
  - 15 Wedding item
  - 20 Cloud type
  - 22 Library find
  - 23 Scoundrel
  - 24 Hit the slopes
  - 25 Forest female
  - 26 Loathes
  - 27 Op-ed piece
  - 5 Spoke like a lion?
  - 6 Baker's stock
  - 7 Poetic Muse
  - 12 They're found in wine bottles
  - 16 Intrudes upon
  - 17 Links audience
  - 18 U.F.O. crew
  - 19 Punctual (2,4)
  - 20 Healed
  - 21 Strength
  - 24 Plea at sea
- Down**
- 1 Antediluvian
  - 2 Fragile
  - 3 Gemstones
  - 4 Muzzle

### 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



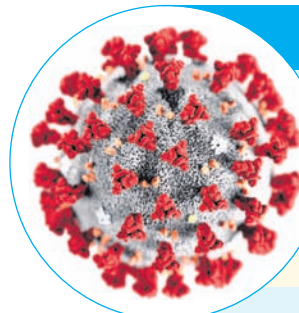
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



# downtown



**NORMS IGNORED**  
People flout social distancing norms while buying fish from roadside vendors at Sayered Seminary Chhak in Cuttack, Wednesday



COVID-19 TRACKER			
	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	15,51,03,234	13,25,88,805	32,43,862
India	2,06,65,148	1,69,51,731	2,26,188
Odisha	4,89,641	4,16,403	2,104

## Dip in Mahaprasad sale hurts servitors

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Puri, May 5:** The Suar-Mahasuar Niyog of Srimandir has urged the district administration and the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) to take steps for the sale of Mahaprasad during the 14-day lockdown in the state.

Suar-Mahasuar Niyog secretary Krishna Chandra Pratihari Wednesday claimed that the sale of Mahaprasad witnessed a drastic fall as the 12th century shrine has been shut for devotees till May 15 to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"The volume of Mahaprasad cooked at Srimandir has come down by 60-70 per cent due to the virus-induced restrictions. Now, we are cooking the temple delicacies for offerings before the presiding deities and meeting the demands of around 200-300 people," Pratihari said.

The Srimandir servitor, however, rejected reports that claimed huge quantities of unsold Mahaprasad are being buried at Koili Baikuntha on the shrine premises. "We usually distribute the unsold Mahaprasad among the inmates of orphanages and the

### PANDEMIC BLOW



destitute. As per Srimandir record of rights, servitors bury Mahaprasad only when there are some untoward incidents and disruption in rituals," he added.

Pratihari further claimed that the 14-day lockdown in state would add to the woes of Suar-Mahasuar servitors and all other people who assist in the preparation and sale of the temple delicacies.

"The restrictions imposed by the

state government would cause financial miseries to Suar-Mahasuar servitors and Pania, Tunia and Bojhia workers of Srimandir. The administration should think about it seriously," Pratihari said.

Pratihari urged the district administration and the SJTA to allow devotees to buy Mahaprasad from the north and south gates of Srimandir during the lockdown.

"The temple authorities had opened two temporary counters at the north and south gates of Srimandir for Mahaprasad sale during the prolonged lockdown last year. They can go for similar arrangements this year too. Devotees can buy Mahaprasad from the temporary counters by following Covid protocol," he said.

■ Srimandir servitor Krishna Chandra Pratihari rejected reports that claimed huge quantities of unsold Mahaprasad are being buried at Koili Baikuntha on the shrine premises

■ Sale of Mahaprasad witnessed a drastic fall as the 12th century shrine has been shut for devotees till May 15 to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus

■ The volume of Mahaprasad cooked at Srimandir has come down by 60-70 per cent due to the virus-induced restrictions

## No vaccination in 9 dists today

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** The state Health department Wednesday said that there would be no Covid-19 vaccination in nine districts Thursday due to shortage of Covishield doses.

The districts where vaccination has been halted are: Bolangir, Bargarh, Boudh, Gajapati, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Koraput, Nabarangpur and Sonepur, said the department.

According to sources, the vaccination programme was suspended in 15 districts Wednesday due to the shortage of doses. The Health department was able to inoculate only 21,804 persons through 92 sessions Wednesday. It used Covaxin doses during 41 sessions, sources said. The government claimed that till now a total of 7,535 persons in the age group of 18-44 years received the first dose of Covaxin shots. Till date, the government has been able to vaccinate 59,51,329 people in the state.

By Wednesday evening, the state was left with a stock of 1,04,070 doses of Covishield and 3,00,180 doses of Covaxin.

The department said that 97.5 per cent of the frontline workers in the state have taken their first doses.



### Don't crowd vax centres sans booking: BMC

**Bhubaneswar:** Urging the citizens not to flock to vaccination centres in the Capital city without booking a slot, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Wednesday, stated that strict action would be taken against those flouting lockdown norms.

"During the first day of the lockdown, it was observed that there was overcrowding at some vaccination centres in the city along with violation of social distancing norms. I request people to come out of their homes after proper appointment followed by

informing the local authorities. Wandering around vaccination centres without registration increases the risk of spreading infection and it is strictly prohibited," said BMC Commissioner, Prem Chandra Chaudhary.

It can be mentioned here that the Odisha government, Tuesday, had relaxed the norms imposed on the movement of vehicles during the 14-day lockdown and the weekend shutdown to facilitate smooth movement of people to vaccination centres, Covid-19 testing and certain other purposes.

## STF NABS TWO GUNRUNNERS

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** The Special Task Force (STF) of the state Crime Branch Wednesday claimed to have arrested two interstate gunrunners in Bhadrak.

Acting on a tip-off, the team intercepted the accused near Ranital in Bhadrak.

"Rabindra Prasad of Munger in Bihar and Biswanath Bisoi of Srikrishnapur in Balasore district have been arrested on charges of illegal possession of firearms. At least five 7mm automatic pistols, seven magazines and as many live ammunition have been recovered from their possession," an STF official said, adding that a case has been registered under Sections 25 and 27 of the Arms Act.

Earlier April 9, the STF had arrested two gunrunners from Niali in Cuttack district and recovered eight illegal firearms, including two sophisticated guns, from their possession.

## 16 deaths, 9,889 new infections in Odisha



PNN/AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** Odisha Wednesday registered 9,889 new Covid-19 cases, pushing the tally to 4,89,641, while 16 fresh fatalities raised the toll to 2,104, a senior Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department official said.

Of the 9,889 new cases, 5,611 were reported from various quarantine centres and the remaining during contact tracing, the official said.

Khurda district, of which the state Capital Bhubaneswar is a

### DEADLY SECOND WAVE

Of the 9,889 new cases, 5,611 were reported from various quarantine centres and the remaining during contact tracing

Khurda district reported the maximum number of new cases at 1,331, followed by Sundargarh at 1,137 and Cuttack at 790

As many as 1,03,19,104 samples have been tested in the state thus far, including 48,101 Tuesday

part, reported the maximum number of new cases at 1,331, followed by Sundargarh at 1,137 and Cuttack at 790.

At least five districts recorded more than 400 cases - Bargarh (483), Sambalpur (470), Angul (443), Kalahandi (424) and Puri (437).

Khurda accounted for the maximum number of fresh fatalities at four, followed by Gajapati and Kalahandi at three each and Rayagada and Sundargarh two each.

One patient each succumbed to the infection in Puri and Sambalpur. This apart, 53 other Covid-19 patients in the state have died due to comorbidities.

Odisha currently has 77,257 active cases, while 4,10,227 patients have so far recovered from the highly infectious disease. The coastal state's positivity rate stands at 4.74 per cent, the official said.

As many as 1,03,19,104 samples have been tested in the state thus far, including 48,101 Tuesday.

## Freeze on govt rate of plots, flats

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** The state government has decided not to raise the price of immovable properties like land, plots and flats in view of the prevailing Covid-19 situation.

The Revenue department Wednesday issued a circular in this regard to all district Collectors, who are the chairmen of district valuation committee.

"The price of immovable properties of all districts of previous financial year (2020-21) as on March 31, 2021, shall remain in force till the end of current financial year (2021-22), to give relief to registrant public due to second wave of Covid-19," the department circular said.

As the price would remain the same like that of the last fiscal, people will have to pay the same registration fee for purchasing immovable properties in any part of the state.

Last year, the value of the im-



As the price remains the same like that of the last fiscal, people will have to pay the same registration charges like the last year

movable properties in Khurda and Bargarh districts was enhanced by 10 per cent while the price remained unchanged in 28 other districts. Later, in October, the government withdrew the order issued for hike in the property price.

## Unitary university status granted to Khallikote College

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday announced unitary university status for Khallikote Autonomous College. Khallikote Autonomous College, one of the oldest and famous colleges in the state, has a rich academic tradition.

Many of its alumni have established themselves in various fields. Unitary university status to this college has fulfilled the aspirations of the people of southern Odisha.



With the unitary university status, the institution would now usher in a new academic journey promoting research and new studies relevant to current times, Chief Minister's Office sources said.

## Roads empty, markets shut as curbs imposed



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** Streets were largely empty and shops dotting the thoroughfares mostly closed Wednesday morning as a 14-day lockdown came into effect in the coastal state with the imposition of several restrictions.

Movement of goods carriers, however, was not affected by the shutdown enforced by the government to break the chain of Covid-19 transmission in the state.

Early in the day, a handful of residents here were found buying essentials at grocery stores which have been given permission to operate from 7am till noon.

Queues were also witnessed outside some of the city's vaccination centres as people waited patiently for their turn to take the Covid-19 jab.

Police personnel deployed in the residential areas and along the arterial roads were seen stopping one or two persons to check if they had a genuine reason to venture out of homes.

All educational institutions,

Queues were witnessed outside some of the city's vaccination centres as people waited patiently for their turn to take the Covid-19 jab

shopping malls, marketplaces, entertainment parks and cinema halls remained shut during the day in accordance with the government order.

Meanwhile, the state's Excise department has requested the government to make provision for home delivery of liquor amid the two-week lockdown.

"Based on our past experiences, we can say that people may resort to illegal and informal channels to procure liquor if a provision is not made for them by the government," Excise Principal Secretary SK Lohani wrote to SRC P K Jena.

Odisha Wednesday registered 9,889 new COVID-19 cases and 16 more fatalities.

# LOCKDOWN BACK IN ODISHA

Life came to a standstill in the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, Wednesday, as the state government clamped a 14-day lockdown across Odisha to check the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. Barricades were put up and security personnel were deployed at traffic junctions to enforce the restrictions while shops selling essential commodities were allowed to do their business till the noon. Some passengers were left stranded at railway stations and bus stands due to the lockdown



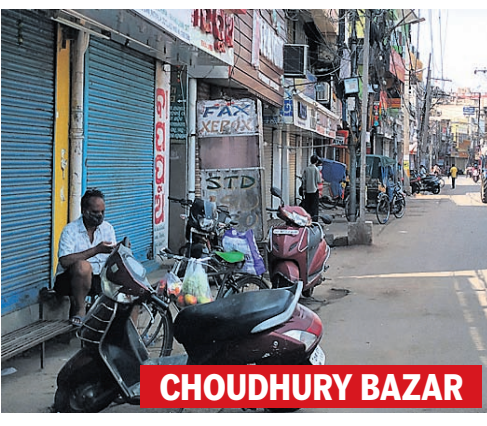
VANI VIHAR SQUARE



RASULGARH SQUARE



BARAMUNDA BUS STAND



CHOUDHURY BAZAR



LINK ROAD



# HE dept plans 15 regional directorates of education

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** The Higher Education (HE) department is planning to raise the number of Regional Directorates of Education (RDEs) in state to strengthen monitoring and supervision of educational system.

According to sources, the department is considering a proposal of creating 15 RDEs in Odisha.

As per the suggestion of the Finance department, the proposal for the increase in the number of Regional Directorates of Education will be resubmitted to the government after normalisation of Covid-19 pandemic situation.

In 2018, the state government had created two new RDEs at Balasore and Jeypore. Now, the state has five RDEs at Bhubaneswar, Sambalpur,

**Now, the state has five RDEs at Bhubaneswar, Sambalpur, Berhampur, Balasore and Jeypore**

Berhampur, Balasore and Jeypore. The RDEs have been looking after the educational systems of 30 districts of the state.

The Balasore RDE looks after four districts—Balasore, Bhadrak, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj. Similarly, Jeypore RDE takes care of four tribal-dominated districts -- Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur and Rayagada. The RDEs of Bhubaneswar and Sambalpur had nine districts each, while Berhampur RDE has four districts.

The RDEs not only look after the

matters relating to the Higher Education department but also monitor the affairs of the directorate of higher secondary education coming under the jurisdiction of School and Mass Education department. They streamline the administration and expeditious disposal of various matters in the field of education.

The regional directors conduct inspection of government and non-government colleges including general supervision of the work of the principals of non-government colleges and government colleges except autonomous and lead colleges. They can recommend the government to accord permission or recognition of non-government colleges. They can also give recommendations for opening of new streams/ subjects/ honours subjects and raising the seats in colleges.

# Covid infection linked to miscarriages: Expert

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** Expectant mothers have been advised to take special care as there are chances of miscarriage for those who contract the novel coronavirus.

Speaking at a state-sponsored health awareness programme on Covid-19, Wednesday, Dr Tushar Jyoti Kar, gynaecologist from SCB Medical College, Cuttack said, "In the last one year, we have found cases of premature delivery of kids from infected pregnant women. This has been proved. In India this is happening. In some of the cases, the growth of the baby is seen a bit compromised."

He also said, "In some cases, abortion is also reported among the women infected by the virus. Covid infection is having links with the overall health of the child and the mother."

The gynaecologist also said that pregnant women need regular medical attention. "There are no guidelines which bar women from con-



During Covid period, the immunity of the pregnant women gets affected. This can cause several complications to the mother as well as the child. Thus, one needs to take medical attention as soon as possible. Pregnant women need to take special care while visiting the hospitals.

**THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR SMOOTH CONDUCT OF DELIVERIES FOR COVID-INFECTED WOMEN**

**In the last one year, we have found cases of premature delivery of kids from infected pregnant women. This has been proved. In India this is happening. In some of the cases, the growth of the baby is seen a bit compromised**

**TUSHAR JYOTI KAR | GYNAECOLOGIST FROM SCB MEDICAL COLLEGE**



ceiving during this period. However, if you become pregnant you need to visit doctors immediately for

their guidance. One could have waited for two months during pre-Covid era. But during Covid pe-

riod, the immunity of the pregnant women gets affected. This can cause several complications to the mother as well as the child. Thus one needs to take medical attention as soon as possible," he said.

He also said that in case of any complication one must visit the doctor first.

"Further, pregnant women need to take special care while visiting the hospitals. We suggest pregnant women to go for ultrasound for at least three times during the pregnancy. However, ultrasound needs to be conducted in strict compliance with Covid safety protocol," he said.

The physician, however, said that the state government has made special arrangements for smooth conduct of deliveries for Covid-infected women.

"There is a dedicated centre with 30 beds at SCB Medical College and Hospital. Apart from oxygen and ICU, there are other facilities too," he said.

# ROBBERS' GANG BUSTED; 5 ARRESTED

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** The twin city Commissionerate Police Wednesday claimed to have busted a notorious gang of criminals robbing mostly morning walkers by arresting five of its members.

"The Commissionerate Police busted the 'Katuri' or 'Pulsar' gang that had created panic among residents in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. A Special Squad of the Commissionerate Police with the help of Sahid Nagar and Khandagiri police managed to apprehend five members of the gang," said police commissioner Saumyendra Priyadarshi at a press meet.

The arrested were identified as Shankar Das, Jagannath, Sushant Guru, Ganesh Marty and Sudam Nayak. Priyadarshi said that the gang was active in the twin cities for the past four months.

**The arrested were Shankar Das, Jagannath, Sushant Guru, Ganesh Marty and Sudam Nayak**

"Its members usually target morning walkers. They [criminals] would attack the victims with dagger and snatch their belongings like jewellery and cellphone before fleeing the scene," Priyadarshi said. As many as 19 gold chains worth 200 gram, 6.2 kg silver ornaments, Rs 13,600 in cash, two two-wheelers and a few sharp weapons have been recovered from them," he added. He added that the gang was involved in 25 cases of which 18 had been registered with different police stations in Bhubaneswar and seven in Cuttack.



**IN LORD'S SERVICE:** Workers paint a boat ahead of Chandan Yatra at Narendra pond in Puri, Wednesday. OP PHOTO

# OHRC seeks report, CCTV footage

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** Taking suo motu cognisance of media reports regarding the death of a 31-year-old man at Golanthara police station in Ganjam May 3, the Odisha Human Rights Commissions (OHRC) Wednesday directed the DIG of Police (Southern Range) to submit a factual report on the incident within four weeks.

The rights body also sought the CCTV footage of at least four hours prior to the shifting of the deceased to the hospital. The commission posted the hearing to June 8.

In its order, the OHRC said, "Since this is a case of custodial death which raises issues of violation of human rights and negligence on the part of police, the commission takes cognisance of the matter suo motu."

On Tuesday, Berhampur superintendent of police (SP) suspended

# GANJAM CUSTODIAL DEATH



an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) and a constable besides transferring the inspector in-charge of Golanthara police station in connection with the custodial death.

According to police sources, a special team under the supervision of an additional SP-rank officer has been formed to conduct

a thorough investigation into the incident.

According to sources, Ganesh Dakua of Rangipur village in Ganjam was picked up by police on the charge of assaulting and abusing the labourers working in a brick kiln. "Due to Covid restrictions, Dakua was made to sit at the reception of the police station where he allegedly hanged himself with a belt Monday evening," said a source.

Though he was immediately shifted to MKCG Medical College and Hospital for treatment, Dakua was declared 'dead on arrival', police sources said, adding that as the incident took place on the police station premises, they would follow the norms laid down by the National Human Rights Commission in the investigation.

# Leader of Oppn PK Naik critical

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** The health condition of Leader of Opposition Pradipta Kumar Naik (BJP), who was infected with the novel coronavirus became critical Wednesday night.

Naik, who was admitted to the Bhubaneswar AIIMS April 20, was sited to Covid ICU, April 26.

Expressing concern over Naik's health condition, Health Minister Naba Kishore Das Wednesday asked additional chief secretary (ACS), Health, PK Mohapatra to send a high-level medical team to AIIMS, Bhubaneswar to ensure better treatment for the Leader of Opposition. A team comprising five senior doctors of AIIMS and SCB Medical College visited him Wednesday.

The doctors' team advised tocilizumab injection single dose as a reasonable option. Furthermore, the committee is also of the opinion that Naik may be shifted to a higher healthcare centre where facilities for ECMO are available, subject to administrative approval, with all risks of transport taken into consideration.

# Takeaways begin at Aahar centres

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) began distribution of packed food at its 12 Aahar centres as the 14-day lockdown came into force Wednesday.

Observing the shortage of availability of food to the destitute and poor during the weekend shutdowns, the civic authority here had decided to distribute food packets at the Aahar centres. The move came after a notification issued by the Special Relief Commissioner stated that only takeaways will be allowed and no dine-in will be permitted at the Aahar centres.

"Availability of food at Aahar centres is very important for people as the meals are safe and cheap. No one should be deprived of food owing to the lockdown. Thus abiding by the lockdown protocols, the BMC has decided to take this move which will help the needy. This is a step forward to consider the re-

quirements of citizens who are consuming Aahar food," said Kamala Kanta Behera, Deputy Commissioner, Welfare.

Behera also mentioned that as per their assessment and low demand the quantity of meals prepared has also been reduced. "It was felt that the requirement of meals would be less in view of the lockdown. Thus, the preparation would be less on daily basis to avoid wastage. It will be increased post lockdown or as per the demand," he added.

The BMC had earlier roped in about nine NGOs to distribute food to the poor and needy. As per sources, individuals belonging to the economically disadvantaged sections and those residing in different shelters and colonies in the state capital have been found living in absolute shortage of daily meals during weekend shutdown. The NGOs were permitted to distribute hygienic food to them in strict adherence to Covid-19 guidelines.

# High Court order scrapping school merger plan hailed

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** Several organisations associated with education sector Wednesday welcomed the Orissa High Court's order quashing school merger plan of the state government as part of a policy of rationalisation and consolidation of schools.

The Orissa High Court Tuesday scrapped a notification issued by the state government for the merger of schools having less than 20 students with nearby schools.

Hailing the order, Odisha Parents' Federation (OPF) chairperson Basudev Bhatt said, "Now, the Adivasi, dalit and below poverty line (BPL) students will not be deprived of school education." He also thanked several political parties for their support in this regard.

**Odisha Right to Education Forum had visited several districts and found several dropout students due to closure of schools**

Similarly, Odisha Right to Education Forum (ORTEF) also welcomed the order. The forum along with other outfits has raised voice against state government's decision on closure and merger of primary schools in remote pockets especially in tribal dominated districts of Odisha.

ORTEF convener Anil Pradhan said the members of the forum had visited several districts and found several dropout students due to closure of schools in their villages. Girl children were forced to leave

studies to support their parents in household chore and agricultural works. Incidences of child marriages and child labourers also escalated due to closure of schools, the forum observed.

A year ago, the state government had sent closure/merger notifications to 11,560 primary schools having less than 20 students, forcing the children in several remote villages to drop out from the schools.

Concerns were then raised by parents in different part of Odisha. An all-party meeting was organised in Bhubaneswar and subsequently in the Odisha Legislative Assembly over the issue. Many School Management Committees filed a PIL with the High Court against the government's order. The court Tuesday pronounced its order in response to the PIL.

# 60L Olive Ridley hatchlings emerge at Gahirmatha

PNN & AGENCIES

**Kendrapara, May 5:** Over 60 lakh Olive Ridley sea turtle hatchlings have emerged from the eggshells at the mass nesting sites of Nasi-2 in Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary here, an official said Wednesday.

Rajnagar Mangrove Forest and Wildlife Division DFO Bikash Ranjan Dash said while over 54 lakh hatchlings emerged from 78,000 nests May 4, 4,300 hatchlings emerged May 3 at the nesting ground at Nasi-2, located near the establishment of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at Wheeler's Island.

The Nor'wester that hit the Nasi-2 beach May 3 last had affected the process of hatchlings coming out of the nests.

The hatchlings from eggshells are expected to continue for some more days. The babies broke out of the eggshells and wandered around



the sandy beach for nearly an hour before making their way to swirling seawater. About 3.49 lakh of endangered

Over 54 lakh hatchlings emerged from 78,000 nests May 4 and 4,300 hatchlings emerged May 3 at the nesting ground at Nasi-2, located near the establishment of DRDO at Wheeler's Island

As bright lights generally disorient the turtle hatchlings, the DRDO at Wheeler's Island have masked the bright light to provide a congenial atmosphere for the baby turtles to crawl into the seawater

Olive Ridley sea turtles arrived at Gahirmatha Marine sanctuary for laying eggs within a span of two weeks from March 10 to 24 last.

Due to multi-layering, more than 10 per cent of eggs laid were destroyed in some of the segments during the mass nesting as turtles were laying eggs on the same spot, by digging the earth with its flipper and destroying the laid eggs, where eggs were laid earlier by turtles. Predators like crows and seagulls also destroyed some per cent of eggs.

In addition to it thousands of nests were washed away due to high tide April 28 last, Dash said.

The DFO said that the Forest personnel were asked to follow all Covid protocols while guarding the hatchlings against the predators and help them crawl into the sea.

As bright lights generally disorient the turtle hatchlings, the DRDO at Wheeler's Island have masked the bright light to provide a congenial atmosphere for the baby turtles to crawl into the seawater, Dash added.

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# Porous borders up Covid infections

### PEOPLE COMMUTE THROUGH SHORTCUT ROUTES CONNECTING TO CHHATTISGARH

## Rayagada on the edge over Andhra, Telangana returnees

**RAYAGADA:** Amid a quick spread of the second wave of Covid-19 in Rayagada district, people in its fringe areas are panicked over the continued return of migrants from hotspots like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, a report said.

Meanwhile, more police were deployed on border check posts connecting to the two neighbouring states.

Collector Saroj Kumar Mishra visited Kereda check post on Andhra borders Wednesday and took stock of the situation.

About eight border points in the district have been sealed. The migrants and others coming from the two states are asked to show Covid negative reports before being allowed entry into the district.

The Collector said that the returnees are mandated to stay in quarantine for 14 days. Those having RTPCR negative reports (48 hours) are told to go in for seven-day quarantine.

People, especially those speaking Telugu, in fringe areas are fully dependent on Andhra markets so far as normal life and sale and purchase of essential commodities are concerned.

Checking was stepped up at railway stations in the district as well.

It was alleged that though the administration had sealed border entry points, there are several lesser-known routes in the fringe areas through which people commute in and out of the neighboring state on a daily basis.

The administration has asked the local authorities to identify those secret routes and seal them immediately.

Special Relief Commissioner Pradeep Kumar Jena has written to Collectors of six districts in Andhra Pradesh, adjoining Rayagada, to tighten Covid curbs across the border so that infections can be checked in Odisha side.



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Umerkote, May 5:** Even as the state government has sealed several border entry points in Nabarangpur abutting Chhattisgarh, there are still some routes in remote rural areas that are far from the sight of the administration. Traders from the neighbouring state routinely commute on these routes, triggering Covid infections in the fringe areas of the district.

A similar route in Jamranda panchayat was facilitating communication to the neighbouring state. People of Dugalhandi were

worried over the upward trend of the Covid infection in the area. They sealed the route Tuesday by laying trees and logs on roads.

According to reports, the graph of Covid infection is soaring in parts of Jharigaon, Chandahandi, Raigarh and Umerkote blocks due to trading links with the fringe areas in Chhattisgarh. Traders from the adjoining state sneak into the fringe areas under these blocks through porous borders.

Various outfits have demanded that other porous points with Chhattisgarh need to be sealed as soon as possible so as to check Covid infections.

# Minor girl dies while walking home from AP

**MV-79:** A migrant worker of Kalahandi district lost his only daughter while returning home walking from Hyderabad at Chintur bordering Motu in Malkangiri district as no vehicles were plying due to Covid-19 induced lockdown, Wednesday.

The deceased was identified as Neha, 10, daughter of Durba

Bansur, a migrant worker of Sinapali in Kalahandi district. Durba worked at a private establishment in Hyderabad and lived there with his family. However, he lost his job after Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc. He failed to get work elsewhere and decided to return home.

He was returning home walking

with his family members as no vehicle was plying. He had reached Chintur bordering Motu in Malkangiri district when his daughter who had heart problem collapsed due to exhaustion and died.

On being informed, Motu tehsildar Shasank Mishra, police officials and a doctor rushed to the spot and provided assistance to the be-

reaved family.

A post-mortem was conducted and later, the bereaved father performed the last rites wearing a PPE kit at a roadside jungle bordering Sileru river. The officials also conducted Covid test on the couple which came out negative. Later, the officials arranged a vehicle and sent them back to their village.

## IN PROTEST



Vegetable vendors protesting tightening of restrictions for the Covid-19 induced lockdown and their possible eviction from the area dump vegetables at daily market in Bolangir, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

# Kin know patient's death after 10 days

### BODY CREMATED SANS KNOWLEDGE OF FAMILY IN SUNDARGARH

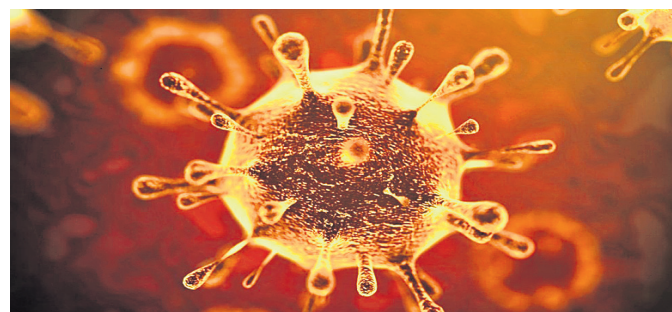
POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bargaon, May 5:** In a shocking case, the body of a woman Covid victim was allegedly cremated without the knowledge of her family. Such incident has happened at Raidiha under Bargaon block in Sundargarh district. The kin also alleged that they got to know the death of the Covid patient 10 days after the admission at Sundargarh Covid hospital.

The family members of the victim filed a written complaint at the police station in this regard.

According to the complaint, Chandra Kisan (50), wife of Kati Kisan was admitted to the Covid hospital April 17 after she tested positive for Covid.

The family members had contacted the hospital authorities sev-



eral times between April 25 and April 27 about the condition of Chandra. Her condition was said to be stable. The family also contacted the hospital April 30. A nurse told the family that the patient had recuperated and she can be taken back home the same day.

When the family members reached the hospital April 30, they

were told that the patient had died April 19. The family was shocked to know that her body was also cremated without their knowledge.

As per guidelines, if a Covid patient dies during the lockdown, the police station or the hospital in the nearby area of the patient is first informed about the death so that the family can know it.

# Bengal traders cash in on groundnut distress sale

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jaleswar, May 5:** Distress sale of groundnuts in Jaleswar, Bhograi and Baliapal blocks of Balasore district has left farmers in a spot. Traders from neighbouring West Bengal are taking advantage of the situation. Groundnut farmers have to sell their crop at throwaway prices to Bengal traders, a report said.

**As there has been no provision of the government-backed procurement for the groundnut, farmers are selling the cash crop for Rs 52 a kg to the Bengal traders**

According to the report, groundnut has been raised across 9000 hectares in the three coastal blocks. It is said that farmers have harvested about 70 per cent of the crop. But the problem is that there are no takers for the cash crop in the locality.

Some farmers alleged that the state government was promoting cash crops to augment the income of the farmers, but there is no provision of procurement of the cash



crop like paddy.

They said they have spent a lot of money on seeds purchase, land tilling and wages. The input cost for farming groundnut in an acre is Rs 20,000. They allege that they are entitled to input subsidies, but they are deprived of it in most cases.

"If the crop is sold immediately after the harvest, we are a little relieved. We have to clear the pending dues of labourers and credit in the input costs. But now the crop has no takers and we are bound to sell it to Bengal traders for peanuts," they lamented.

Groundnut is grown in 3000 hectares in Jaleswar; 3500 hectares in Baliapal and 2500 hectares in Bhograi. As there has been no provision of the government-backed procurement for the groundnut, farmers are selling it for Rs 52 a kg to the Bengal traders.

"In the current year, the groundnut has been grown at Kotasahi, Rayanramchandrapur, Gobarghatta, Maohammednagarpatana, Paikasida, Jhadpial, Baiganbadia and Laxmannath panchayats," said Rajlaxmi Mohanty, assistant agriculture officer of Jaleswar.

## HOUSING SCAM

### Probe starts a year after allegation

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kaptipada, May 5:** A year ago, it was alleged that massive irregularities were committed in the construction of quarters for firefighters and other staff of Kaptipada fire station in Mayurbhanj district. Now, the administration has started an investigation into it.

According to reports, Kaptipada fire station was set up in October 2015. Later, staff quarters were built by the Odisha State Police Housing and Welfare Corporation (OSPHWC) at a cost of Rs 1 crore. But the work was allegedly botched up. Before the quarters were handed over to the fire department, plasters had fallen off from CC roofs while there were cracks at the plinth level of the buildings. Sub-standard wood was used for doors and windows of the quarters. The floor was supposed to be covered with marble, but it was paved with poor quality tiles.

Low quality iron was used for gates while steel railings were not of good quality. Poor quality electrical equipment - wires, switch boards, and other fittings - were used in the wiring of the quarters. What is shocking was that in records, Rs 40,000 was shown as expense for felling of trees on the land, but in reality there was no tree at all there.

# 2 girls killed in lightning



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kosagumuda, May 5:** Two minor girls were killed while another was rendered critical after lightning struck them at Temra village under this block in Nabarangpur district, Wednesday.

The deceased were identified as Urmila Bhatra and Hiradei Bhatra. Lata Keuta was rendered critical in the mishap while another escaped unhurt.

The incident occurred when four girls of the village had gone to pluck greens near Maniguda village pond on the outskirts. They were plucking greens when lightning accompanied by thundershower struck them.

While Urmila and Hiradei died on the spot, Lata lost her sense and collapsed. On being informed, Temra villagers rushed them to Koshagumuda community health centre where doctors pronounced the two brought dead. Lata has been undergoing treatment.

EAST COAST RAILWAY	
File No. DRM/Engg/KUR/21-22/	E-Tender/ST/12 Dt.: 30.04.2021
Tender No. e-Tender-Estate/KUR-029-2021	Dtd.: 29.04.2021
Description: CONSTRUCTION OF NEW OPD COMPLEX OF CENTRAL HOSPITAL EAST COAST RAILWAY AT MANCHESWAR, BHUBANESWAR.	
Approx. Cost of the work: ₹ 91.09 Lakhs	
Completion period: 3 (Three) Months, Tender closing date & time : 1500 hrs. of 13.05.2021.	
No manual offers sent by Post/Courier/Fax or in person shall be accepted against e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.	
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website: <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">http://www.ireps.gov.in</a>	
Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to visit the website 10 (Ten) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/ corrigenda issued for this tender.	
Divisional Railway Manager (Engg), Khurda Road PR-73/M/21-22	

# 10th century Vishnu idol found from Bhadrak pond

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhandaripokhari, May 5:** Residents of Sathagaon village under Kurigaon panchayat of Bhadrak Wednesday demanded excavation of the area after an idol of Vishnu dating back to 10th century AD was found May 2.

The district administration and the state archaeology department should excavate the place to unearth the ancient carvings that are supposedly buried underground, some villagers said.



A number of ancient stone carvings were also found from the area. According to a source, a rare stone idol of Lord Vishnu in sleeping gesture (Anant Sayan mudra) was found during the digging of a pond on a private farmland near Dudheinala creek of Kurigaon panchayat under Bhandaripokhari block in Bhadrak district.

A villager named Ramesh Parida had been digging a pond in his farmland when the stone idol, around two feet in height, was unearthed. The idol is made of sand stone, a local researcher Biswambar Rout opined. Fearing that the ancient idol might be stolen by miscreants, it was brought to Maa Sunamuhin temple premises in the village. Later, the villagers informed the district administration about it.

# Farmers stare at crop loss as canal goes dry

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sambalpur, May 5:** Farmers living in the downstream of Sasan canal in the district are staring at a possible crop loss this year due to unavailability of water from the water body for their farmland, a report said.

Farmers allege that water does not reach their farmland on the downstream while it overflows in the upstream due to lack of renovation of the water body. They apprehend that they might face serious crop loss if the water problem persists for long.

Reports said that paddy cultivation in Sambalpur district depends on water available from Hirakud reservoir in various canals like Sasan, Paramanpur and Huma tail. Water drawn from Hirakud reservoir passes through these three canals and helps in irrigation of the farmland in the district.

This has happened as the Sasan canal which was built 50 years back is in a dilapidated condition and is in an urgent need of repair. The main canal is 80 km in length while the branch canal and channel is 300 km in length. Its embankments have become weak resulting in seepage of water from the canal.

## SASAN CANAL



As a result, the water flow does not reach the downstream but overflows at the upstream. They said the state government wants to increase the cultivable area and has launched various schemes for the purpose.

The government is also constructing minor and lift irrigation projects for the purpose. However, these projects have limited socio-economic benefits for the people for whom they were designed. While the state government sanctions the funds for new plans, it does not release funds for the renovation of the Sasan canal.

Meanwhile, the district administration and the irrigation department have prepared a detailed project report (DPR) for the renovation of the canal. They have submitted it before the state government for its approval. Although two years have passed since the DPR was submitted, the government is yet to give its approval to the plan.

Sources said unavailability of water happen during Rabi season. The water retaining capacity of Sasan canal is 630-ft. However, the water flow in the canal is much more than its capacity. The water flow has hampered due to formation of massive moss in the canal. A

study has revealed that two to three centimeter of moss is formed on a daily basis which also obstructs the flow of water downstream.

Reports said that cultivation is done on 26,000 hectares of farmland during kharif while rules have been made to carry out cultivation on 14,500 hectares in rabi season which is about 60 per cent of the kharif cultivation.

The crops cultivated during rabi season include paddy, green grams, black grams, pulses, cash crops like sesame, mustard and vegetables. However, the cultivation has been carried out on 18,000 hectares which is more than the target fixed by the district administration.

Moreover, paddy has been cultivated in over 3,500 hectares in non-command area. However, lack of water flow to the downstream of the canal has left the farmers high and dry.

Pramod Panda, executive engineer, irrigation department, admitted that the Sasan canal is in a bad shape and is in urgent need for repair. However, unavailability of funds has hit its renovation. He said farmers are facing water shortage due to increase in the cultivable land and illegal drawing of water for vegetable cultivation.



FOCUS WESTERN MEDIA

# LURID ORIENTALISM



Western media's unvarnished coverage of suffering, grief, desperation, and ineptitude is much more likely to come from distant lands

When reporting on any mass tragedy a basic rule of journalism is to be sensitive to the victims and those who are grieving. Western media, which doubles as the international media, usually observes this rule at home but discards it when reporting on disasters in non-Western societies.

The coverage of India's devastating second wave of COVID is a case in point. Western media has been filled with images of bodies and other graphic scenes that generally would not be shown following a similar disaster in a Western country. About half of global COVID deaths have occurred in Europe and the US alone, yet Western media has avoided presenting harrowing images from those settings.

Even at the height of the pandemic in the US and Europe, it was unthinkable that television crews would barge into emergency rooms to show how overwhelmed the doctors and nurses were. Yet such scenes have been broadcast internationally from inside Indian hospitals, with little concern for how the intrusion could affect life-or-death decisions. Television journalists have also swarmed Indian families who lost loved ones, turning their private grief into a public spectacle for Western consumption.

When covering grief in their own countries, the same media organisations are far more careful. For example, coverage of mass graves being dug to accommodate New York City's early surge of COVID fatalities featured sanitized images of misty tree-lined fields. By contrast, India's pandemic experience will be remembered for the haunting images of bodies burning on pyres - images that the Western media beamed around the world. The funerary fire is a classic trope in Western novels, travelogues, and paintings about India. By directing their cameras to the burning pyres, Western media outlets are satisfying their audience's morbid fascination with the Hindu tradition of cremating the dead (even though this environmentally friendly practice is increasingly catching on in the West). Utterly ignored in this coverage is the fact that showing ghastly images of burning pyres is a grotesque and deeply disrespectful invasion of what is a very private affair in India.

This is hardly the first time Western media outlets have been insensitive in covering disasters abroad. In the coverage of the 2011 Fukushima disaster, the victims were treated as a secondary issue to the more lurid story of radiation leaks. Western reporting was also rife with cultural and racial stereotypes: the workers who stayed behind to deal with the accident-hit nuclear reactors were dubbed "nuclear samurai," "human sacrifices," and "nuclear ninjas on a suicide mission." In reality, no radiation casualties occurred at Fukushima, owing to the preventive evacuation of the area's 100,000 residents. But that didn't stop Western

media from feeding the hysteria with false and inflammatory comparisons to Chernobyl. As a result of this sensational coverage, cargo ships started avoiding Japanese ports - even those far from Fukushima - and several countries evacuated their citizens from Japan.

Western media brings a similar approach to Africa, portraying it as a continent of heathen hordes, unending disasters, and very few happy, smiling faces. The 2014-16 Ebola epidemic that swept across Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone ultimately killed 11,325 people, meaning that the death toll over two years was roughly the same as the two-day COVID death toll in the US just three months ago. Nonetheless, the Western media's coverage of the Ebola story was all about body bags, traditional mourning practices, and West African burial rituals. The 2015 Pulitzer Prize for feature photography was awarded to a freelance photojournalist who had followed body collectors and documented West Africans' suffering, death, and despair for The New York Times.

Meanwhile, coverage of COVID did not feature in any of the 2020 Pulitzer Prizes or nominations. And when the 2021 prizes are an-

nounced in June, it would come as quite a surprise if any were to be awarded to journalists who documented the deaths from the pandemic in the West. Western media's unvarnished coverage of suffering, grief, desperation, and ineptitude is much more likely to come from distant lands. While images of dead American soldiers are rarely published, photographs of dead Afghans, Iraqis, and others are all too common. True, Western media should not be regarded as monolithic - indeed, Anglo-American outlets dominate. Nor is Western media averse to offering sensational coverage of bad news when it happens at home. But the overall pattern is clear: Western media coverage of tragedies elsewhere tends to traffic in cultural stereotypes and violations of privacy and dignity that would not be accepted at home.

This double standard has important implications. International perceptions are shaped by how the dominant Western media organisations present the news. As the Ebola epidemic showed, sensational images and stories make us think that a dreadful tragedy is even worse or more widespread than it actually is. The Ebola cases and deaths were almost all confined to three West African countries, yet the virus became associated with Africa as a whole.

A journalist's duty is to inform, not to exploit human suffering with intrusive, voyeuristic, ratings-driven coverage of tragedies in faraway lands. Good journalism rises above clichéd coverage and reliance on shock value. With the coronavirus rapidly mutating and spawning dangerous new strains, we urgently need more responsible, sensitive reporting of these issues.

The writer is a Professor at Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.

PROJECT SYNDICATE



Brahma Chellaney

WHILE IMAGES OF DEAD AMERICAN SOLDIERS ARE RARELY PUBLISHED, PHOTOGRAPHS OF DEAD AFGHANS, IRAQIS, AND OTHERS ARE ALL TOO COMMON



THE MOTHER

You should always do what you say, but it is not always wise to say all that you do.

## Pet-friendly campuses

Some months ago Anoushka, Abhishek, Sarthak, Garvita and Rishabh wrote to me from Thapar Institute and Technology, Patiala College in Patiala, requesting guidance with an animal welfare group they had started on the campus called Puppies Helpers Tiet.

This gave me a new idea - of starting animal welfare groups in every college campus. So we put yet another Anoushka, who came to me as a legal intern, in charge of this. If any of you would like to start a group you can contact her at: anushkapfacampus@gmail.com. She already has 30 college units, and my target is 50,000.

In the meantime, Enactus, which is a student organisation of social work that exists in most colleges in Delhi, has, on its own, started making animal welfare groups in every college in Delhi. The group is called Desi, and it is handled by Lakshita, the President of Enactus, Motilal Nehru College. They are doing an excellent job treating animals, having them adopted, starting campaigns.

Thousands of students across India have been feeding and looking after animals during COVID. Many opted to stay back in their hostels to see that resident animals were fed. When the staff of Jindal University wanted to throw out animals, over 600 students called, wrote in, and went there to protest till the university authorities backed down. The worst case has been IIT Madras: A place ruled by two extreme leftists, who spend much of their time abusing the government and being vicious to animals. In spite of government orders, and dozens of campus staff and students protesting, they made a ghetto for dogs where they were kept chained till most died. They did this in the name of wanting to save the deer on the campus. They then fed the deer dog biscuits and plastic till a number of those died. They finally had to back down under court orders, but not before they had wreaked misery on man and animal. They could have learned a lesson from KG Reddy College of Engineering and Technology in Moinabad, which puts "world's first animal friendly educational campus" as part of its advertising! The campus doubles as a shelter for abandoned and abused animals. I quote from an article on them which made my day: "Most of the videos that captured the cruel treatment of animals, and shared widely this year on social media, had the same set of perpetrators - youngsters. Recognising the importance of making the youth compassionate towards animals, the management of an engineering college has decided to impart more than just technical subjects, by starting an animal shelter within its campus." The college has let dogs, cats, pigeons, turkeys, ducks and rabbits take refuge on the premises. "The thought was that students can bring in a change in society, and be the ambassadors in spreading the message to their family and friends about loving animals and being sensitive towards them," says K. Krishna Reddy, Chairman of the institute.

Students of KJ Somaiya Institute of Management Studies and Research in Mumbai, St Xavier's College in Ahmedabad, and Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication in Pune, also have animals on the campus and students and college administrations work out feeding and vaccination schedules, scheduling visits to the vet, even laying down rules about go and no-go areas - pets are allowed into hostel buildings and canteens. In Symbiosis, they are allowed into classrooms as well.

Institute director Vidya Yeravdekar says: "Students dealing with emotional insecurities, relationship problems and stress, benefit from pet therapy. We want to focus on the emotional well-being of our students too and hence this initiative." Students in Somaiya use a WhatsApp group to sync feeding routines, veterinary visits, and work with a local NGO to care for their campus pets. The group calls itself Animal Welfare Association of Somaiya (AWAS).

Students of IIM-Indore's 193 acre campus, have turned their campus into a dog-friendly vicinity and take care of all campus dogs by joining hands with the NGO - Helping Hands For Animals (HHFA). The campus has approximately 50 dogs and the students feed them daily, take care of their health and ensure their safety, marking the dogs with luminescent collars so that they are visible from a distance at night. The group also plans to train a few dogs for security and safety of the institute at the main gates.

The National Service Scheme volunteers of Kochi's St Albert's College will now get to learn the basics of animal welfare. The college has recently signed an MoU with the Humane Society International to conduct webinars and campaigns on animal protection. Sebastian AV, the college's NSS coordinator says: "We want to create a general cognisance in students that the world belongs to other beings too. We have asked our students to feed strays, keep water bowls for birds and take pictures of these." St Albert's is the first NSS unit in the state to tie up with an animal welfare organisation.

During the pandemic an animal welfare club was formed, to take care of animals on the campus, by The Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology (IIEST), following an appeal from the students' senate. A group of students, under the banner "People for Animal Welfare, IIEST", has been raising funds since April to feed the strays on the campus that has been closed since the third week of last March with the onset of the lockdown. The institute made the club a statutory body to enable the administration to help 200-odd dogs and 30-odd cats. An IIEST professor of electrical engineering is professor-in-charge of the club.

IIT-Delhi has recently invited candidates for the position of a dog-handler in the institute. The position, worth Rs 45,000 per month, is for a Bachelor of Veterinary Science to care for the community dogs on the campus. "I am proud of IIT-Delhi for considering that the planet does not only belong to humans," says a student. "Appointing a dog handler will solve the issues of both animal lovers and animal haters." During the pandemic, when students left, IIT-Delhi used their guards to feed the animals left behind.

The JNU campus in Delhi has over 20 feeding spots, where dogs, nilgais and peacocks are fed by students. It has an animal cell and an animal ethics committee. The lockdown meant students had to leave the premises, leaving these animals with no fixed source of food. Why is it important to have animal welfare groups institutionalised on campus? Research shows that those who commit crimes against animals have a higher disposition to commit crimes against humans. Research has consistently reported childhood cruelty to animals as the first warning sign of later delinquency, violence, and criminal behaviour. Nearly all violent crime perpetrators have a history of animal cruelty in their profiles. We must change attitudes early.

For students the advantage, that all research has shown, is that having dogs and cats around can help lower high blood pressure, and this calming effect is especially important as students juggle lectures, assignments and internships, prepare for exams, feel homesick. Puppies Helpers now has 60 volunteers. It is an official club headed by a teacher. It has made a temporary shelter for campus animals and held first aid classes, and is currently engaged in spreading awareness on how to treat parvo virus. I am so proud of them.

To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org



Maneka Gandhi

Research shows that those who commit crimes against animals have a higher disposition to commit crimes against humans

SPECTRUM SELF-HELP

## Criticism: Accept, stifle or ignore?

As a child, I remember feeling puzzled when reading about people being referred to as critics. I wondered why anyone would want to criticise something, and more importantly, why others not only allowed the critic to make unpleasant remarks, but actually paid him for doing so.

As I grew older, I understood that critics' role included pointing out the good as well as the bad, and also the need to see criticism as a tool for growth and improvement. As someone who has been in the Information Technology domain for a number of years, the importance of critics, or Testers as they are called here, cannot be praised enough. While coders claim all the glory, these backroom warriors ensure that the bugs in the code are caught before the application is released to users.

Which is why, it is both surprising as well as disturbing to see the vehemence with which criticism is being met. Especially, if there is even an imagined hint of a political bias in the criticism. The first step in solving any problem is to recognise its existence. And this recognition is most often triggered by criticism of the existing circumstances. There are three basic charges used to stifle criticism - it demoralises people who are working hard at resolving problems, creating awareness of an existing problem would help enemies in pulling us down, and finally, saying that instead of finding faults, find solutions.

Take the example of the DM of a Northeastern state who was caught on video stopping a wed-

ding ceremony that had gone beyond the curfew hours. Shared widely on social media, it primarily evoked two responses - one group of people applauded the DM for ensuring the law was followed, and saying that criticising his actions would be akin to promoting lawlessness, while the other group criticised him for his uncouth behaviour saying that this was a brazen display of might by an official drunk on the power at his disposal.

While both groups argued their hearts out, I could not help feeling that both were right. It was the DM's duty to ensure the curfew was respected, at the same time, it was also necessary for him to maintain the dignity of his office by behaving with courtesy and respect towards citizens of his district. What remained unsaid was that ultimately, he too is a human being and unlike most of us, has been saddled with huge responsibility. At the end of what must invariably have been an exhausting day, seeing what appeared to be a flagrant violation of the law must have caused the disturbing display of power abuse.

But does that mean he should not be criticised for his actions? The jury is still out on this. It is also true that whenever criticism is expressed, it could be used by those seeking to harm us. However, there are two assumptions being made here - one, that those who wish to do us harm were not aware of the problem, and secondly that those in charge are already aware of the problem and are working to fix it, and hence, criticism should not

have been made. Both these are dangerous assumptions - the first indicates we are underestimating our enemies - for all we know, they may be pretending to not know of the problem so that they can use it to their advantage later. Secondly, assuming the faults are known and are being fixed does not mean they actually are - and if by not pointing out the problem there is a chance that it is not recognised and resolved, it is always safer to bring it to attention.

The rise of social media has made it so easy to criticise - people, products, services, politics - everything is fair game. And this is the reason those opposed to criticism say that instead of criticising, people should try to find solutions. The thrust is to emphasise positivity instead of the negativity that criticism arouses.

However, what this implies is that unless one has the ability and authority to find solutions to a problem, one cannot point it out. This approach effectively silences everyone, for if it is a problem that is my responsibility to resolve, I will not make it public - and for all other problems, since I cannot resolve them, I have to keep silent!

There are also many who espouse the 'ignore' method of handling criticism. The hope is that with the passage of time, criticism - even if it is valid and needs an active response, will be forgotten. The reason for this is simple - acknowledging the criticism means admitting mistakes have been made. And in a society where failures are frowned upon, it is always better to pretend the criticism does not

exist and thus live in denial till such time the problem is forgotten or resolves itself. Of course, this can cause tremendous pain and suffering to those affected, but then, that's karma.

At governmental level, traditionally media has played the role of critic - pointing out mistakes and praising good work. As the fourth pillar of democracy, it ensured that through it, citizens could give feedback to the government about the effects of its policies. This feedback, both critical as well as complimentary, helped the government fine tune its work. Today, thanks to social media, the common citizen too has a chance to have his voice heard directly. While there is no issue with praise, when it comes to criticism, it tests the strength of the nation's democratic values. It was with wonder, interspersed with a little bit of envy, that I watched former President Donald Trump being grilled by correspondents during his press meets. For me, this was the pinnacle of democracy, where the head of the state could be asked uncomfortable questions without fear of consequences.

Which is why, the recent statement from the Supreme Court saying, FIRs against appeals for help in combating Covid on social media would be treated as contempt of court, and that the voices of citizens need to be heard not clamped down, is so gratifying. Hope exists still for Indian democracy.

The writer is an alumnus of XIMB, an IT entrepreneur and a startup mentor for some years now.



Chandra Shekhar Chitrata

THE FIRST STEP IN SOLVING ANY PROBLEM IS TO RECOGNISE ITS EXISTENCE

### Act against anxiety

Sir, Fear and anxiety have shaken the country's psyche. Covid-19 has alarmingly pushed even sensible people to the corner. Educated people are paying heed to all types of rumours, much to their own and society's detriment. Targets of rumour-mongers are the elderly, children and homemakers. Idiotic, irresponsible, and totally reprehensible videos should be brought down immediately before they become viral. People are in a Catch-22 situation - they can neither read nor ignore the messages. The best that they can do is to resist the temptation to forward absurd and dangerous messages. Several myths surrounding the infection have to be broken through awareness. By the same token, experts are trying their best to educate the masses. People should acknowledge and appreciate messages from well-meaning individuals. Yes, the citizens are facing an acute shortage of oxygen and beds. But the only way to get out of the rut is to think ahead. Meaningless messages on social media platforms have knocked the living daylight out of patients and their relatives. Paucity of beds and oxygen is worrying, but anxiety, depression and agitation cannot be substitutes. On the other hand, anxiety can compound the problem by acting as triggers for increased carbon dioxide levels in the blood by rapid breathing. The condition known as hypercapnia or hypercarbia may worsen in the presence of respiratory insufficiency, especially in Covid positive patients.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA (MAHARASHTRA)

### Commendable decision

Sir, It is highly commendable that the BCCI decided to suspend the ongoing IPL matches for an indefinite period following some players testing Covid positive. This was also considered necessary as Covid cases in India are at an all time high. Even petitions had been filed in Delhi and Bombay High Courts for cancelling the matches in view of the rising cases. It was argued that BCCI should cancel these matches and instead, spend the money on the healthcare system. And, this could move the doctors engaged in IPL to the collapsed healthcare system of India. It was also not morally considered good to continue these matches at a time when the country is reeling under such a deadly pandemic where people are dying due to lack of oxygen. This has also led BCCI to consider whether to shift T20 World Cup that is scheduled to take place in India this year to UAE in view of third wave of the pandemic that is expected to hit by November.

Sambit Palei, BHUBANESWAR

### WISDOM CORNER

- Even death is not to be feared by one who has lived wisely. THE BUDDHA
- Friends are the siblings God never gave us. MENCIVS
- Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished. LAO TZU

## 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

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# Covid spikes in rural Karnataka

### DOCTORS SAY LACK OF STAFF AND EXPERTISE ARE MAJOR REASONS FOR INCREASED DEATH TOLL

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Kalaburagi, May 5:** Doctors from remote rural areas like Aland taluk in Karnataka's Kalaburagi where four Covid patients reportedly died due to shortage of oxygen have had their own harrowing experiences of dealing with the spreading pandemic.

Aland in Kalaburagi, which borders Covid-battered Maharashtra, has off late seen the contagion sweep the taluk indicating that Covid has penetrated even into interior parts of the state.

Doctors there reveal that lack of staff and required expertise are major reasons for increased death toll in rural parts of the state.

They said that most of the patients in rural areas come at last minute in most of the cases when their oxygen saturation level drops to below 80 per cent. "At this juncture, we are forced to administer them oxygen. Therefore, hospitals in interior parts do face 'constraint' in supplying oxygen," Aland taluk health officer Ratnakar Toran told reporters.

Aland is a dry area, with low rainfall and most of the population lives in poverty. It also wit-



nesses large scale migration to cities due to lack of water, poor education facilities and employment opportunities besides power shortages. Aland is also one of taluks that records a high level of farmer suicides.

Aland Hospital surgeon, Abhay Kumar said that four patients who died Monday were admitted only at 5 pm and all four had below 80 per cent oxygen saturation, while one of them had below 70 per cent, who was very critical. "All these four died past midnight. There was no oxygen shortage. But peo-

ple tend to attribute all deaths to this factor," he said. The doctors also feel that many people feel ashamed to disclose that their family members have tested Covid positive and continue to mingle with relatives and friends, thus becoming 'super spreaders'.

"Finally when they reach hospitals, their oxygen saturation level would have fallen drastically over which ill-prepared doctors like us have absolutely no knowledge about handling critical care patients... this either leads to overcrowding of neighbouring district hospital or by

the time treatment is given to such patients, it would have been too late," Kumar said, terming himself ill-prepared to handle this contagion at critical stage. "I am a surgeon... all throughout my life I practiced and studied about surgery and related to this subject. Critical care has never been my forte," he said.

He also added that the majority of hospital staff have tested Covid positive, while he being surgeon, and Ratnakar being an ayurvedic doctor, it is very difficult to cope up with the pressure. "Our X-ray machine operator is Covid positive, and still we are managing to run it with the help of Class D employees. There is no one to monitor in-patients. When we leave it to their relatives, they mishandle the oxygen outflow to patients," the doctor rued.

Aland town shot to limelight for all the wrong reasons Tuesday when a report of families of four Covid patients alleging about their relatives dying due to lack of oxygen supply in hospital, while district authorities including newly appointed district in-charge minister, Murugesh Nirani denied there was any oxygen shortage.

# Guj: Women flock religious event to 'eradicate' virus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Ahmedabad, May 5:** Cocking a snook at COVID-19 norms, a large number of women turned up at a religious event organised in a village in Gujarat's Ahmedabad district to "eradicate coronavirus", police said Wednesday adding 23 people, including the village head, have been arrested.

A video of the incident, which occurred in Navapura village in Sanand taluka May 3, showed around 500 women carrying water pots on their heads while walking towards a temple. The video grab also shows some men taking these pots to the top of the temple and emptying them.

After the video clip went viral Wednesday, Ahmedabad rural police said appropriate action had already been taken.

A police officer said villagers believed that coronavirus will just go away if water is poured on the Ballyadev temple.

"The incident took place May 3 at Navapura village where women had gathered in large numbers carrying water pots. A police team rushed to the spot on the same day and arrested 23 villagers, including



**A video of the incident, which occurred in Navapura May 3, showed around 500 women carrying water pots on their heads while walking towards a temple**

sarpanch Gafabhai Thakor, for organising this event. Police had also seized the music system from the

spot," said Deputy Superintendent of Police, Sanand Division, KT Kamariya. He said all the accused have been booked for violating a police notification regarding public gatherings under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and the Disaster Management Act and the Epidemic Diseases Act. In view of the surge in COVID-19 cases, the Gujarat government had banned all kinds of public gatherings in the state.

As of Tuesday, Gujarat's overall COVID-19 tally stood at 6,20,472 with 7,779 fatalities, the state health department had said.

# Augmenting oxygen supply from sources: Centre tells Guj HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Ahmedabad, May 5:** The Centre has told the Gujarat High Court that it is augmenting oxygen supply for COVID-19 patients from all available sources within India and also importing it from other countries through "diplomatic channels as well as personal intervention of the political executive."

In a report on the supply of medical oxygen submitted before the HC Monday, the Centre said a total allocation of 8,410 metric tonnes of oxygen has been made for 22 high burden states and Union Territories based on their demand, the Centre told the HC Tuesday.

The states should also make an effort to manage their oxygen demand through rational usage of this "scarce and critical resource" by continuous and close monitoring of hospitals and stringent audit of the oxygen usage, it said.

A division bench of Chief Justice Vikram Nath and Justice B D Karia had sought the Centre's response while hearing a PIL taken up suo motu on the COVID-19 situation.

The Union government said it is "augmenting oxygen supply from all available sources within India and also importing oxygen from other countries using not only the diplomatic channels but also personal intervention of the political executive."

The process is going on at the national level and is also being undertaken at an international level, it stated.

Any deviation by any judicial order based upon fact, situation and considerations existing in one state will "completely frustrate the whole exercise and shall have a cascading effect", the Centre said.

"It is submitted that while this exercise is primarily in the nature of managing the supply side of medical oxygen, it is imperative that there are simultaneous efforts to manage the demand side by all the states by focusing on rational usage of this scarce and critical

resource in the present circumstances through continuous and close monitoring of all hospitals as well as stringent measures of oxygen usage audit," the Centre said.

It said the supply of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) by the steel sector increased from 1,000 MT per day in the first week of April 2021 to around 2,600 MT on April 21.

From April 28 onwards, Gujarat was allocated 975 MT oxygen, it said. Based on the projected requirements of these critically affected states, 4,880 MT, 5,619 MT and 6,593 MT were mapped for the supply of medical oxygen to 12 states with high number of COVID-19 cases, to meet their projected demand as on April 20, April 25, and April 30, respectively, and duly approved, it said.

The initial demand for 15 states was revised to 5,619 MT from 4,880 MT as on April 20, with the requirement of Gujarat being at 1,000 MT, it said.

Against its production capacity of 847 MT as on April 28, Gujarat required 1,000 MT LMO, and was allocated 975 MT, out of which the state received 902 MT, the central government said.

"No stone is left unturned to ensure quickest possible transit of medical oxygen," it said, adding that the defence aircraft and Indian navy ships are being used for the purpose.

Gujarat Wednesday reported 12,955 new coronavirus positive cases even as 12,995 people recovered from the infection, the state health department said, adding that 133 patients died. With the addition of the new cases and the fatalities, the overall COVID-19 tally in Gujarat rose to 6,33,427 and the toll to 7,912, the department said in a release. At 12,995, the fresh recoveries outnumbered new cases in a day after several weeks. With 4,77,391 recoveries so far in Gujarat, the case recovery rate improved marginally to 75.37 per cent.

Gujarat is now left with 1,48,124 active cases, it said.

# IT veteran Nilekani helps revamp bed allocation software in B'lore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore, May 5:** Information technology industry veteran Nandan M Nilekani has extended a helping hand to revamp the computer software relating to bed allocation for COVID-19 patients in the city, Bangalore south MP Tejaswi Surya said Wednesday.

Surya, along with three BJP MLAs, Tuesday raised issues of alleged irregularities and anomalies in the city's civic body Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) bed booking for the COVID-19 patients.

The MP said he had a conversation with Nilekani, the non-executive chairman of software major Infosys Ltd and former chairman of Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), this morning and sought his help to revamp BBMP bed allocation software.

"Lots of gratitude to him for putting very best tech architects



on the job immediately," the national president of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, the youth wing of the BJP, said.

"This team of tech architects, also assisted by iSpirit @Product.nation, will redesign the bed-booking software to make it efficient,

transparent and minimise manual intervention," Surya tweeted.

"I thank the tech volunteers for helping this cause," he said. Surya and MLAs Satish Reddy, Ravi Subramanya and Uday Garudachar alleged Tuesday that beds were being blocked in the name of asymptomatic patients in home isolation and sold to others by some staff in the south zone COVID war room.

Bangalore police commissioner Kamal Pant said later Tuesday that the matter has been handed over to the Central Crime Branch and two people have been arrested and others were being questioned.

"A case has been registered by the police for fraud and cheating allegedly committed in allotment of beds on BBMP portal for #COVID patients. Two accused have been arrested and others are being questioned for alleged fraud/irregularity in the allotment of beds in return for money from patients," he had tweeted.

# Panel formed to probe 24 Covid patients' death

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore, May 5:** The Karnataka government Wednesday appointed retired High Court judge Justice BA Patil as the one-man commission to inquire into the death of 24 COVID patients in Chamarajanagar district allegedly owing to oxygen shortage.

A notification regarding the appointment of Justice Patil was issued by Additional Chief Secretary in the Home Department, Rajneesh Goel Wednesday. The term of reference of the Commission read, "To inquire into the circumstances and events leading to the death of COVID-19 patients in District Hospital, Chamarajanagar May 3, reportedly due to scarcity of oxy-

gen and any further similar incidents, which are entrusted to the Commission of Inquiry by Government." The office of the commission has to submit its report in one month. The notification said the officers concerned including the Deputy Commissioners of Chamarajanagar and Mysuru districts should hand over immediately all requisite documents and material evidence to the Commissioner of Health and Family Welfare Department for onward submission to the Inquiry Commission. The order came following the directions of the Karnataka High Court, which had taken a serious note of the deaths in Chamarajanagar and recommended a judicial inquiry. The state

government had previously appointed IAS officer Shivayogi Kalasad, the managing director of the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation, as an investigating officer to probe the matter within three days. The state Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar had maintained that only three deaths took place due to shortage of oxygen and not 24 as has been reported. The opposition Congress, however, claimed that 28 people died. Close on the heels of the Chamarajanagar incident, seven COVID patients died in Kalaburagi and Belagavi district allegedly due to lack of oxygen Tuesday. There has been an unprecedented rise in cases in the state, which is reporting over 44,000 cases and over 200 deaths daily.

# Couple raises ₹16cr for treatment of son's genetic disorder

**THE GENE THERAPY INJECTION BY NOVARTIS, CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE COSTLIEST DRUGS IN THE WORLD, IS THE ONLY TREATMENT FOR SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lunawada (Guj), May 5:** A couple from Gujarat has raised Rs 16 crore with the help of a crowdfunding platform to buy a gene therapy injection for the treatment of their 5-month-old son suffering from spinal muscular atrophy, a rare genetic disorder.



The child was administered the injection at a private hospital in Mumbai Wednesday, his father Rajdeepsinh Rathod told PTI.

The spinal muscular atrophy is a genetic disorder in which a person cannot control the movement of muscles due to loss of nerve cells in the spinal cord and brain stem. This causes muscular weak-

ness and affects breathing as well as movement of limbs.

Rathod said he and his wife Jinalba managed to raise Rs 16 crore for their son Dhairyaraj's treatment within 42 days of launching the campaign in March this year, and expressed gratitude towards donors from Gujarat and other places, in-

cluding foreign countries.

While the cost of the gene therapy injection, manufactured by Swiss pharma giant Novartis, is Rs 16 crore in India, the Customs duty is about Rs 6.5 crore, which the Centre has already waived on humanitarian ground, said Rathod, a native of Kanesar village near Lunawada town of Gujarat's Mahisagar district.

He said the gene therapy injection by Novartis, considered as one of the costliest drugs in the world, is the only treatment for spinal muscular atrophy and it has to be imported after placing the order.

"The injection arrived from the US a few days back. We reached Mumbai Tuesday and admitted our son in the hospital, where he was given the Zolgensma injection Wednesday. It is a one-time gene therapy to treat children suffering from spinal muscular atrophy," he said. Rathod works at a private company and lives with his wife and

son in neighbouring Godhra town of Panchmahal district.

The couple learnt about their son's health disorder a month after his birth as he could barely move his hands and legs.

"A doctor diagnosed my son with spinal muscular atrophy type-1, a rare genetic disorder which restricts muscular movements and breathing. We were warned that it could eventually prove fatal as the child grows," Rathod said.

He said the gene therapy injection by Novartis was the only hope, but its price was too high for them.

"Thus, I took the help of ImpactGuru platform for crowdfunding. We launched the campaign in March and managed to raise the money in just 42 days. The Centre also helped and waived the Customs duty of Rs 6.5 crore," he said.

Rathod is now hopeful that his son would be able to lead a healthy life.



COVID-19 patients wait in an ambulance outside a hospital in Ahmedabad, Wednesday. PFI PHOTO



# national

## of the day quote

Mamata didi's victory is relief and comfort despite the sacrifice we as Congress must endure. But for both as indeed many others there is need to return to drawing board for sustainable challenge to BJP

SALMAN KHURSHID | EX UNION MINISTER

It is the beginning of the waning of the communal juggernaut and 'my-way-or-the-highway' brand of politics, with the people of Bengal firmly indicating that the people of the country still hold the reins

FAROOQ ABDULLAH | INC PRESIDENT

India strongly condemns the terrorist attack in Logar province of Afghanistan in which 21 innocent people died and more than 100 were injured during the month of Ramadan

ARINDAM BAGCHI | MEA SPOKESPERSON



Questions about Covid foreign aid: What all supplies has India received? Where are they? Who is benefitting from them? How are they allocated to states? Why no transparency? Any answers, GOI

RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

## GANDHI'S PERSONAL SECY KALYANAM PASSES AWAY

Ninety nine year old V Kalyanam, the former Personal Secretary of Mahatma Gandhi has died here due to old age related illness. Born in Shimla in 1922, Kalyanam was Gandhi's Secretary from 1944 to 1948 when the latter was assassinated. He passed away Tuesday



# SC quashes Maratha quota Act

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, May 5: The Supreme Court Wednesday struck down the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018, which enacted to provide 16 per cent reservation to the Maratha community in educational institutions and government jobs, as it breaches 50 per cent ceiling limit.

The court ruled that the exceeding of ceiling limit without there being any exceptional circumstances clearly violates the Article 14 and 16 of the Constitution. The act is against the principle of equality.

"There is no case of extraordinary situation for exceeding the ceiling limit of 50 per cent for grant of reservation to Maratha community over and above the 50 per cent," the Supreme Court ruled.

The apex court held that the representation of Maratha Community in Grade A, B, C and D in public services is adequate. Thus, it does not



SC strikes down Maratha reservation for breaching 50% ceiling limit

SC refuses to refer 1992 judgment to a larger bench for reconsideration of 50% limit on reservation

SC upholds 102nd Constitutional Amendment that inserted Article 342A

fulfil the Constitutional pre-condition that a backward class is not adequately represented.

A five-judge Constitution bench comprising Justices Ashok Bhushan, L Nageswara Rao, S Abdul Nazeer, Hemant Gupta and S Ravindra Bhat also made it clear that the 1992 judgment in Indra Sawhney vs Union of India, that put 50 per cent cap on reservation, need not be referred to a larger bench as it is a good law.

"We do not find any substance in the argument to refer the judgment in Indra Sawhney to a larger Bench.

The said judgment has been repeatedly followed by this court and has been approved by at least four Constitution Benches of this court," the bench ruled.

Significantly, the top court also upheld the 102nd Constitutional Amendment that inserted Article 342A in the Constitution. Article 342A lays provision for identification of communities in states as socially and educationally backward classes by the President, in consultation with the Governor of the states. The question was that whether the Article 342A deprived the states of

powers to classify any community as SEBC.

The Supreme Court ruled that the Article 342A "does not affect or damage" the federal polity and does not violate the basic structure of Constitution. The bench had different view on the interpretation of the Article 342A. Justices Ashok Bhushan and S Abdul Nazeer held that the use of term 'the Central List' under Article 342A refers to a list of classes for Central government services only and states can make their own list of SEBCs. However, the rest of the judges asserted that the list under Article 342A is to be the only list for all purposes of Constitution in relation to each state and Union territory. It does not imply that the states have any manner of power to publish their list of SEBCs.

It is to be mentioned here that several appeals were filed in the Supreme Court against the order of the Bombay High Court that upheld the Maratha reservation act. The SEBC act, enacted in 2018, was challenged before the Bombay High Court as it increased the reservation in the state from 52 per cent to 68 per cent. The Bombay HC declared the act constitutionally valid but reduced the quantum of reservation to 12-13 per cent for education and government jobs respectively.

# Death due to O2 shortage is genocide: Allahabad HC

AGENCIES

Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), May 5: Taking note of stories viral on social media of hapless citizens begging for an oxygen cylinder to save the life of their near and dear ones, the Allahabad High Court has termed it as a 'criminal act, no less than genocide'.

Observing the Covid situation in India, the high court Tuesday said that the deaths of patients due to non-supply of oxygen amounts to a 'criminal act', nothing short of a 'genocide' on part of those entrusted to ensure such supplies.

We are at pain in observing that the death of Covid patients just for non-supplying of oxygen to the hospitals is a criminal act and not less than a genocide by those who have been entrusted the task to ensure continuous procurement and supply chain of the liquid medical oxygen, read an order passed by the Allahabad high court bench of Justice Ajit Kumar and Justice Siddhartha Varma.

The Allahabad High Court took stock of reports of shortage of medical oxygen due to rise in Covid-19 infections.

The bench also observed the rampant hoarding of oxygen cylinders



and harassment of citizens who are desperately in need of them.

The court pointed out that, "The news went viral that five patients had died in ICU of a new trauma centre of Medical College, Meerut Sunday last. Similarly, news was also being viralised that one Sun Hospital in Gomti Nagar, Lucknow and another private hospital at Meerut had taken their hands off the admitted Covid patients only because oxygen supply was not made even after demand. We find these news items showing a quite contrary picture to one claimed by the Government that there was sufficient supply of oxygen."

The high court further stated, "The current state of affairs about the management of an online portal created by the government today casts a shadow upon Covid-19 hospital management by the state government."

## SHORT TAKES

### Delhi to suffer water shortage

New Delhi: Amid the surge in Covid-19 cases and severe shortage of oxygen, many parts of the national capital are also likely to witness water shortage from May 6 to May 8 due to an alarming dip in raw water supply through the Yamuna. According to a Delhi Jal Board (DJB) notice issued Wednesday, the water level at Wazirabad, which is fed by the Yamuna river, had fallen to 667.20 feet against the standard level of 674.5 feet.

### 3 killed in O2 cylinder blast

Lucknow: Three persons have been killed and six others injured in a blast at an oxygen refilling station in Lucknow Wednesday. According to initial inputs, the blast took place while the workers were refilling an oxygen cylinder. The fire caused by the blast engulfed the refilling station located in the Chinhat area of Lucknow. The injured have been admitted to a hospital. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has expressed grief at the incident and has directed officials to provide help to the affected people. The fire has been doused and rescue operations are underway.

### Himachal imposes curfew till May 16

Shimla: To break the coronavirus chain, the Himachal Pradesh government Wednesday decided to impose curfew in the state till May 16 from Thursday midnight. All government and private offices and establishments will remain closed. However, essential services like health, electricity, telecommunication, water supply, sanitation, etc would be open.

### NSG commando dies of Covid-19

New Delhi: Country's federal counter-terrorist commando force National Security Guard (NSG) reported its first coronavirus linked death Wednesday when a senior commander succumbed to the infection, officials said. Group Commander (coordination) B K Jha was admitted to the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) Hospital in Greater Noida after he contracted COVID-19 and breathed his last early morning, they said. This is the first death from coronavirus in the NSG.

# States asked to vet hospital fire safety

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 5: The Union Home Ministry Wednesday directed all the states and Union Territories (UTs) to carry out a detailed review of fire safety mechanisms at the hospitals and nursing homes to prevent fire incidents.

The direction came after several instances of fires were reported at different healthcare facilities, including those treating Covid-19 patients, in various parts of the country.

Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla issued the order to the chief secretaries of the states and UT administrators, asking them to ensure proper fire safety measures at the hospitals and Covid care facilities.

Given the recent fire incidents in the hospitals and particularly in view of the impending summer months, it needs to be highlighted that short-circuits take place, lead-

The direction came after several instances of fires were reported at different healthcare facilities, including those treating Covid-19 patients, in various parts of the country

ing to fire incidents and loss of lives and infrastructure, either because of high temperature, lack of maintenance or high load on internal wirings within the facilities, the MHA notification read.

It further said that care should be taken to put in place a plan of action to ensure that there is no fire incident in any health facility, particularly those dedicated for Covid patients, both in the government and the private sector.

# Soon after oath, Mamata seeks free vax

AGENCIES

Kolkata, May 5: Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo Mamata Banerjee was Wednesday sworn-in as the chief minister of West Bengal for the third consecutive term. She vowed that there will be no 'respite' for those indulging in political violence and also said that an all out war will be waged against Covid-19. However, she also said that West Bengal cannot survive another lockdown.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar administered her oath of office and secrecy at a low-key ceremony at Raj Bhavan held amid the raging COVID pandemic. Banerjee took the oath in Bengali language. She is the 21st chief minister of West Bengal and eighth person to hold the office. Sources said that Banerjee's cabinet will be expanded with the induction of other ministers May 9, the birth anniversary of the state's icon, nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

"Our first priority is to control the COVID situation," Banerjee said after taking the oath. "The second priority is to tackle the law and order



Mamata Banerjee takes the oath during the swearing in ceremony Wednesday

# Submit report on post-poll violence: Centre

The home ministry dispatched a terse reminder to the West Bengal government Wednesday to submit a detailed report on the post-poll violence in the state, warning it that the matter will be taken "seriously" in case it fails to do so, and asked it to take necessary measures to stop such incidents "without any loss of time", officials said. In a letter dispatched Wednesday, the home ministry reminded the West Bengal chief secretary that May 3, it had sought an immediate report from the state government on the post-poll violence. However, the West Bengal government is yet to send the report, the officials said. According to latest inputs, the violence has not stopped in West Bengal and this means that effective measures were not taken by the state government to control it, the letter said. In case the report is not sent by the state government, the matter will be taken seriously, the letter added. At least six people were killed in post-poll violence in different parts of the state till Tuesday. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has alleged that TMC-backed gangs have killed a number of its workers, attacked its women members, vandalised houses, looted shops of its members and ransacked its offices. Claiming that at least 14 BJP workers were killed and nearly one lakh people fled their homes in post-poll violence in West Bengal, party president J P Nadda alleged Wednesday that the chief minister's silence speaks of her involvement. Banerjee rejected the charges, saying violence and clashes were taking place in those areas where the BJP candidates emerged victorious in the election.

## PARADISE ON EARTH



Shikaras anchored along the banks of Dal Lake during curfew to curb the spread of coronavirus, in Srinagar, Wednesday

## ISRO trials drones for veggies & med delivery

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, May 5: India's space agency Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) trialed drone-based delivery of medicines, vegetables and spraying of disinfectants at its staff quarters located in rocket launch town Sriharikota Wednesday.

In a pilot project, based drones of Garuda Aerospace delivered vegetables and medicines at the ISRO staff quarters and also sanitised the buildings in Sriharikota. We also sanitised the buildings using unmanned vehicles, Agnishwar Jayaprakash, Managing Director of city-based



Garuda Aerospace, told IANS. The city based Garuda Aerospace is a drone-as-a-service company. A senior ISRO official told IANS that the trial delivery of vegetables, medicines and spraying of anti-coronavirus disinfectants were good and satisfactory. Jayaprakash said ISRO may give the order following their internal procedures and many of the

staff are working from their homes.

About 200-300 people in the ISRO staff quarters - employees and their family members were affected by Covid-19.

An official in Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota on the condition of anonymity had told IANS that there are about 3,000 employees with their family members and daily about 30 people are tested positive for coronavirus.

ISRO wants to minimise the physical interaction of the staff with the outside world as a safety measure and looking at automation as a solution, Jayaprakash said.

# High-tech hunt for COVID vax in India raises equity concern

ONLY 2% OF INDIA'S 1.3 BILLION POPULATION HAS BEEN FULLY IMMUNISED. SLOTS ARE HARD TO GET AS DEMAND FAR OUTSTRIPS SUPPLY

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 5: Indian tech experts have written software code and designed websites to help people book scarce COVID-19 vaccinations online, raising concern about an unfair advantage for the tech savvy and jeopardising chances of an equitable vaccine rollout.

India has faced criticism for a slow vaccine campaign as it battles a second wave of coronavirus infections that is seeing about 350,000 new cases recorded every day. Only 2% of its 1.3 billion population have been fully immunised.

The government further opened up vaccination for adults from May 1 but registration on its CoWIN website is mandatory for those between the ages of 18 and 44. Slots are hard to get as demand far outstrips



supply. In a bid to streamline the process, computer experts have used the publicly available coding of the CoWIN platform to create websites that post results every few minutes

after running automated searches on the government website.

Alerts are sent over email and routed to several Telegram app chat groups where thousands are waiting. Berty Thomas, 35, automated

a search to book himself a slot then created a website - under45.in - which checks for slots and sends alerts to about 100,000 people in 60 Telegram groups in various cities.

I feel happy I'm able to use my skills to help people get vaccines, said Thomas, an investment banker based in the southern city of Chennai.

Shyam Sunder said his website - getjab.in - was notifying users by email when slots become available. Some 80,000 people from 400 districts across the country had registered with his site, he said.

But the technological workarounds are facing criticism from those who say they sacrifice the goal of vaccine equity in a country where many people - especially in rural areas - do not have the digital skills to join the online hunt.

What we need Free and equitable vaccination policy. What we have got Techies making use of scripts to quickly book off the entirety of whatever little vaccine slots that open up, Twitter user Rakshith said.

R S Sharma, chairman of the government panel managing the CoWIN platform, told security measures were in place and there was no unfair use of the booking platform, which he said was getting 55,000 hits a second.

### STRESSFUL LOTTERY

To book a slot, users of the CoWIN website need to log in with their mobile phone number and get a one-time password, before beginning their hunt of vaccine centres via an area code or district name. In the short time that takes, slots

often get snapped up. Authorities in the city of Mumbai have faced criticism for issuing a notice on Twitter Tuesday telling people to get ready as limited slots were opening in minutes, wishing the hopeful all the best.

Playing a stressful lottery every day is in extremely bad taste, Twitter user Nanaki wrote.

In their defence, Mumbai authorities wrote on Twitter they were trying their best and just wanted to keep the communication light. Those in rural areas with limited or no access to high-speed internet or smartphones are bound to lose out.

Driver Dhanamali Bariha, 28, in the eastern state of Odisha, said he wanted to get vaccinated but was stumped by the online registration.

"I have no idea how to do it. I have not heard about CoWIN," he told.





Taking into concern the spike in Covid cases in Kerala, we should be allocated oxygen tankers, oxygen concentrates and ventilators on an urgent basis

INDIA GETS 54 TONNES OF O2 FROM BAHRAIN

India Wednesday received 54 tonnes of oxygen from Bahrain as part of Operation Samudra Setu-II launched by Indian Navy to transport oxygen and associated medical supplies from friendly foreign nations



of the day quote

Local trains will be suspended from tomorrow (Thursday). State-run transport and metro services will be reduced by 50 per cent. Starting May 7, air passengers will be allowed in Bengal only if they carry RT-PCR negative report, which is not older than 72 hours prior to boarding

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

Violence witnessed during Partition has returned to Bengal. We will continue to serve the people here, carry forward Modiji's vision for the state. We will strive to break this chain of political violence

J P NADDA | BJP PRESIDENT

If you see the cases over last 10 days, the trend is clear. Things are under control and cases are on decline

SOMESH KUMAR | TELANGANA CHIEF SECRETARY

THIRD WAVE OF COVID 'INEVITABLE'



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 5: The government Wednesday said that a third wave of coronavirus pandemic was "inevitable", although a time-frame for it could not be predicted. In a press briefing by the Ministry of Health Affairs Wednesday, officials said the long COVID wave of such "ferocity" that the country was experiencing currently "was not predicted".

RECORD RISE IN DAILY DEATHS

A record 3,780 fresh COVID-19 fatalities were registered in a single day "in India taking the death toll to 2,26,188, while 3,82,315 new coronavirus infections were recorded, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated Wednesday. With the fresh cases, the total tally of COVID-19 cases in the country climbed to 2,06,65,148.

who are infected with coronavirus. "The response to the changing virus remains the same. We need to follow the COVID-appropriate behaviour such as mask, distancing, hygiene, no unnecessary meetings and staying at home," Dr Paul said. In reply to a question, he said that the disease is not spreading through animals, but through human to human transmission. Union Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said that the foreign aid coming from abroad is being monitored by a group of senior officials. "Our technical wing has made guidelines to see that what hospital would the equipment be suitable for. The equipment is being sent to hospitals where an immediate need has been felt," he said.

IAF brings 352 empty O2 cylinders from abroad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 5: Mighty transporters IL-76 of the Indian Air Force (IAF) brought 352 empty cylinders and cryo-containers from Singapore and Bangkok respectively Wednesday to combat oxygen crunch in the country, officials said. One of the IL-76 brought empty oxygen cylinders from Singapore to Delhi which is facing an acute shortage of medical oxygen amidst another wave of coronavirus. "The IL-76 is picking up 352 empty oxygen cylinders for Delhi. This Union Home Ministry coordinated exercise will help in increasing oxygen availability amid the current COVID-19," a Home Ministry spokesperson said Wednesday. Another one transported three cryo-cylinders from Bangkok to its Panagarh base in West Bengal, he said. Pictures of IL-76s picking up empty cylinders and cryo-containers was also issued by the Press



Information Bureau. Meanwhile, the European Union Wednesday announced an initial Euro 2.2 million (approx Rs 19 crore) in emergency funding to support the World Health Organisation's measures to help India deal with increasing cases of COVID-19. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court Wednesday heard Centre's appeal against Delhi High Court's order of issuing contempt notice and seek-

ing personal appearance of its officials for non-compliance with the directions on supply of 700 MT oxygen daily to treat COVID-19 patients in the national capital. The apex court stayed contempt proceedings against central government officials saying putting officers in jail would not bring oxygen and efforts should be made to save lives. A bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud said that it had or-

dered supply of 700 MT oxygen to Delhi daily from May 3 as the pandemic in Delhi was at a very critical stage. "Tell us how much oxygen you have allocated to Delhi in the last three days," the bench said. Overstretched health infrastructure is gasping for breath because of an acute shortage of medical oxygen in the city after serious COVID cases started flooding the hospitals. Several hospitals approached the Delhi High Court and made SOS pleas on social media, saying their oxygen supplies were running out. On Tuesday, the Delhi High Court asked the Centre to show cause why contempt should not be initiated against it for failing to comply with order on supply of oxygen to Delhi for treating COVID-19 patients. The high court noted that the apex court has already directed, and now the high court is also saying that the Centre will have to supply 700 MT oxygen daily to Delhi right away by whatever means.

HARVEST OF HOPE



Farmers harvest wheat crop in a field on the outskirts of Jammu

PTI PHOTO

TN Governor invites Stalin to form govt

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, May 5: Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit Wednesday invited DMK President and legislature party leader MK Stalin to form the next government in the state. The swearing-in will be a simple function held at the Raj Bhavan at 9 a.m. May 7. Purohit will administer the oath of office to Stalin and his Council of Ministers.

Earlier in the day, Stalin, along with senior party leaders, had met Purohit and staked his claim to form the next government. Accompanied by senior leaders like General Secretary Duraimurugan, Treasurer T.R. Balu and Organisation Secretary and Rajya Sabha member R.S. Bharathi, he handed to the Governor the resolution electing him as the leader of the DMK legislature party. Stalin also gave Purohit a letter of support signed by 133 newly-elected lawmakers and the list of his Council of Ministers.

They will be part of the Indian Air Force's second squadron of the Rafale jets. "Next batch of three #Rafales leave from France to India today; wished the pilots smooth flight and safe landing," the Indian embassy in France tweeted. After the arrival of the new batch, the number of Rafale jets with the IAF will go up to 21. The new squadron of Rafale jets will be based in Hasimara airbase in West Bengal. The first Rafale squadron is based in Ambala air force station. A squadron comprises around 18 aircraft. India had signed an inter-governmental agreement with France in September 2016 for the procurement of 36 Rafale fighter jets at a cost of around Rs 58,000 crore.

3 more Rafales head for India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 5: The sixth batch of three more Rafale fighter jets took off from France for India Wednesday, the Indian embassy in France said.

They will be part of the Indian Air Force's second squadron of the Rafale jets. "Next batch of three #Rafales leave from France to India today; wished the pilots smooth flight and safe landing," the Indian embassy in France tweeted. After the arrival of the new batch, the number of Rafale jets with the IAF will go up to 21. The new squadron of Rafale jets will be based in Hasimara airbase in West Bengal. The first Rafale squadron is based in Ambala air force station. A squadron comprises around 18 aircraft. India had signed an inter-governmental agreement with France in September 2016 for the procurement of 36 Rafale fighter jets at a cost of around Rs 58,000 crore.

India attends G7 summit virtually

In a virtual meeting between Boris Johnson and PM Narendra Modi Tuesday, India and the UK had agreed to begin formal talks on a free trade deal next month

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 5: The entire Indian delegation for the G7 summit in London was Wednesday asked to self isolate after some of its members tested positive for Covid-19.

In a tweet, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who is heading the Indian delegation at the G7 summit in London, revealed that he is attending the meetings virtually because he may have been exposed to the infection. "Was made aware yesterday evening of exposure to possible Covid positive cases. As a measure of abundant caution and also out of consideration for others, I decided to conduct my engagements in the virtual mode. That will be the case with the G7 Meeting today as well," Jaishankar tweeted. Posting a picture of him attending the meeting virtually, he further tweeted, "A cyber participation at the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting. So far, yet so near."

Jaishankar also revealed that he had a useful virtual meeting with the Foreign Minister of



Canada, Marc Garneau, on the sidelines of the G7 summit. "Discussed our respective Covid challenges. Talked about various aspects of our bilateral relationship. Also exchanged views on Myanmar," he said. The Indian delegation, as per the British media, had tested negative for Covid-19 before departing for the UK. But on arrival in London, in the tests conducted by Public Health England (PHE), two of the members tested positive. British media reported that all physical meetings between the

Indian delegates and their counterparts from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US were cancelled immediately. The meetings are being held virtually. Though not a part of the G7, India was invited by the Boris Johnson government to join the summit as a guest. In a virtual meeting between UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Prime Minister Narendra Modi Tuesday, India and the UK had agreed to begin formal talks on a free trade deal next month.

Cheap antibiotics sold as 'life saving' drugs

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 5: Beware of fake life saving drugs. Instead of Remdesivir, which is required for critically ill Covid patients, similar looking vials of Monocef or Zetri, a low cost antibiotic injection, are being sold in the black market.

Criminal gangs and swindlers active in Delhi-NCR and Western Uttar Pradesh are reportedly buying Monocef vials in bulk, each piece costing around ₹52, and selling them to desperate customers for over ₹5,500 to ₹10,000 apiece. Taking note of such rackets gradually reaching the smaller towns and rural areas, the Uttar Pradesh Police have alerted all the districts, particularly in western and central parts of the state, to keep a strict vigil on the stockists, distributors and wholesalers of medicines. "We have raided over 68,000 places to seize genuine or fake drugs being sold in the black markets in the past few days. In a bid to punish such accused persons harshly, cases are being reg-

istered under the National Security Act," Prashant Kumar, Additional Director General of Police (ADG), Law and Order, UP, said. Acting on specific inputs, the Delhi Police on Tuesday unearthed a gang involved in selling fake vials of Remdesivir for ₹5,500 each. The gang, which was active in the Nand Nagri area of the national capital, had purchased low cost Monocef injections in bulk. "They got labels of Remdesivir printed from a local press fixed them on the Monocef vials. One Dhanesh Kumar from Ashok Nagar and Amit from Meet Nagar were involved in the racket. Both have been arrested," said an officer of the Delhi Police. And it's not only in Delhi-NCR and its neighbouring states where such rackets are thriving. Fake Remdesivir injections are being sold in far off places like Gujarat and Odisha. In a major crackdown on such rackets, the Detection and Crime Branch of Ahmedabad Police arrested seven persons last week who were selling antibiotics as Remdesivir.

Intel alert on Hefazat radicals fleeing into India

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, May 5: Indian intelligence has been alerted by their Bangladeshi counterparts about scores of Hefazat-e-Islam militants fleeing into neighbouring Indian states like West Bengal and Assam, which were caught up with conducting polls until recently. A top official of a central intelligence agency said that Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina government has initiated a massive crackdown on the Hefazat-e-Islam after the Islamist radical group unleashed a violent campaign opposing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh in March. More than 50 top Hefazat leaders and some belonging to other Islamist jihadi terror groups have been ar-

rested and nearly 300 donors who paid into Hefazat coffers have been identified. That includes top Hefazat leaders like Mamunul Huq who has reportedly confessed now that his group had set itself the objective of toppling the Hasina government and establishing a Taliban type Islamic state in Bangladesh. Bangladesh intelligence, with whom its Indian counterparts share excellent information-sharing relations, has told Indian agencies that they have reports that some Hefazat topshots have fled or are trying to flee into Indian states like West Bengal and Assam. "We take their alerts seriously because fleeing Islamist radicals can easily melt into states like West Bengal and Assam, where the administration and police was until



recently focussed on conducting elections. We have alerted state police forces and the BSF to be extra vigilant," the top central intelligence agency official said.

But he was not willing to be named for obvious reasons. Last week, two militants of the Jamaat ul Mujahideen were nabbed in Assam. Ruling Awami League

B'desh intelligence, with whom its Indian counterparts share excellent info sharing relations, has told Indian agencies that they have reports that some Hefazat topshots have fled or are trying to flee into Indian states like West Bengal and Assam

Bangladesh targets. "Even Bangladesh's secular politicians and cultural personalities who visit India for a host of reasons may be targeted by these frustrated Islamist radicals. We appeal to Indian authorities, both Centre and States, to ensure our enemies don't get shelter in India much as our government has ensured anti-Indian elements don't get any shelter in Bangladesh," said Awami Mohila League leader Ayesha Zaman Shimu. She said if groups like Hefazat, JMB and ABT set up sanctuaries in India, they can surely "soft Bangladesh targets". "Our people, rich and poor, young and old, visit India for a whole host of reasons all the time. Such people will be very worried if our jihadis find shelter in India," Ayesha said.



# international



Our unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. There is a lot of hard work to be done to ensure a brighter future for all Ukrainians  
ANTONY BLINKEN | SECRETARY OF STATE, US

**NZ PM PLANS TO TIE THE KNOT**  
New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern plans to marry her longtime partner during the southern summer. In an interview on the Coast radio breakfast show, Ardern said she and Clarke Gayford have finally set a date for their wedding after announcing they were engaged two years ago



## of the day quote

All the vaccines that arrived in Iraq are safe and effective. But until this moment, there are some citizens who are afraid of taking the vaccine as a result of malicious rumors  
RUBA HASSAN | HEALTH MINISTRY OFFICIAL, IRAQ

We emphasised our readiness to facilitate direct dialogue between the Palestinians and Israelis in order to resolve all fundamental final-status issues  
SERGEY LAVROV | FOREIGN MINISTER, RUSSIA

The horror in India could play out again and again in other countries if we don't act now. Blocking access to vaccines is anti-humanitarian, anti-diplomatic, and weakens American influence for good on the global stage  
LOYD DOGGETT | CONGRESSMAN, US

## Covid scare at G7 meeting

The Group of Seven foreign ministers' meeting in London was hit by a Covid-19 scare Wednesday when India's foreign minister and his entire team said they were self-isolating after two delegation members tested positive



REUTERS

London, May 5: Britain is hosting the three-day meeting, the first such G7 event in two years that has been heavily billed as a chance to restart face-to-face diplomacy and an opportunity for the West to show a united front against threats from China and Russia.

India, currently undergoing the world's worst surge in COVID-19 cases, is attending the G7 as a guest and had been due to take part in meetings Tuesday evening and throughout Wednesday.

"Was made aware yesterday evening of exposure to possible Covid positive cases," Indian



Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said on Twitter.

"As a measure of abundant caution and also out of consideration for others, I decided to conduct my engagements in the virtual mode. That will be the case with the G7 Meeting today as well."

The meeting is a precursor to the main G7 summit due to take place at a rural English resort in June, with US President Joe Biden and other world leaders set to attend.

A British official confirmed the two positive tests and said the entire Indian delegation was self-isolating. British rules require a 10-day self-isolation period.

The Indian delegation had not yet

attended the main summit venue at Lancaster House, and so meetings scheduled for Wednesday went ahead as planned.

Asked if, in light of the positive tests, it had been a mistake to hold the summit in person, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said: "I think it's very important to try to continue as much business as you can as a government."

Johnson said he would speak with Jaishankar later Wednesday by Zoom.

British foreign minister Dominic Raab was seen greeting and fist-bumping other G7 members as they arrived at the venue.

"We deeply regret that Jaishankar will be unable to attend the meeting today in person," a senior UK diplomat said. "This is exactly why we have put in place strict Covid protocols and daily testing."

On Tuesday, pictures from inside the grand Lancaster House conference venue showed the reality of diplomacy in the coronavirus age - delegates separated by plastic screens, and a "family photo" of ministers carefully spaced two metres apart.

## 'Jamaat, Hefazat leaders determined to create Taliban state in Bangladesh'

The militants have said that several Jamaat-e-Islam and Hefazat leaders are linked to the militant outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Dhaka, May 5: Joint Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan police, Mahbubur Rahman Wednesday said that the Hefazat militants have confessed to creating a Taliban state in Bangladesh, as similar to Afghanistan.

"The militants have said that several Jamaat-e-Islam and Hefazat leaders are linked to the militant outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)," said Rahman. Besides, the police have also collected various evidences in connection with the matter. Mamunul Huq and Harun Izhar, the Islamist radicals led the massacre and anarchy to oust the government headed by Sheikh Hasina, mostly funded by the militant outfit of Pakistan.

"Those are determined to cre-



ate a Taliban state in Bangladesh which goes against the present secular government. The militant leaders said that they are against the values of our 1971 Liberation War," said Rahman.

Meanwhile, a six-member delegation of Hefazat Islam, the militant outfit led by Nurul Islam Jehadi, Secretary General of the defunct Hefazat-e-Islam Committee and Member Secretary of the current convening committee, met the Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal. At the meeting, the

## Donations siphoned off for violence: Police

Dhaka: Top Hefazat-e-Islam leaders misappropriated the donations, including from abroad, meant for madrasas and orphanages for their violent activities, and a probe is on to identify the sources and use of the funds, said Bangladesh Police officials. Police have started an investigation into irregularities and corruption by 23 top leaders of the Hefazat and other organisations, who are in its custody, and 30 organisations, mostly in Chittagong and Siddhirganj of Narayanganj.

Hefazat leaders demanded an end to the arrest and harassment of the organisation's leaders and activists, release of the arrested leaders and reopening of the Qawmi Madrasas, the breeding ground of the militants.

"The Home Minister has assured that our demands would be taken into consideration at the meeting," said Nurul Islam Jehadi to the media.

## Canada okays Pfizer vax for age 12 to 16

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Toronto, May 5: Canada's health regulator has authorised Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine for ages 12 to 16, a person familiar with the decision told the Associated Press Wednesday.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity, as they were not authorized to speak ahead of the upcoming announcement.

The US Food and Drug Administration is also expected to authorize Pfizer's vaccine for young by next week, setting up shots for many before the beginning of the next school year. The announcement comes barely a month after the company found

that its shot, which is already authorized for those age 16 and older, also provided protection for the younger group.

Pfizer in late March released preliminary results from a vaccine study of 2,260 US volunteers ages 12 to 15 showing there were no cases of Covid-19 among fully vaccinated adolescents compared with 18 among those given dummy shots.

Kids had side effects similar to young adults, the company said. The main side effects are pain, fever, chills and fatigue, particularly after the second dose. The study will continue to track participants for two years for more information about long-term protection and safety.

## 60 years since 1st American in space: Tourists lining up

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Cape Canaveral, May 5: Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin company is finally opening ticket sales for short hops from Texas launched by a rocket named New Shepard Wednesday, the 60th anniversary of Shepard's Mercury flight.

Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic aims to kick off tourist flights next year, just as soon as he straps into his space-skimming, plane-launched rocketship for a test run from the New Mexico base.

And Elon Musk's SpaceX will launch a billionaire and his sweepstakes winners in September. That will be followed by a flight by three businessmen to the International

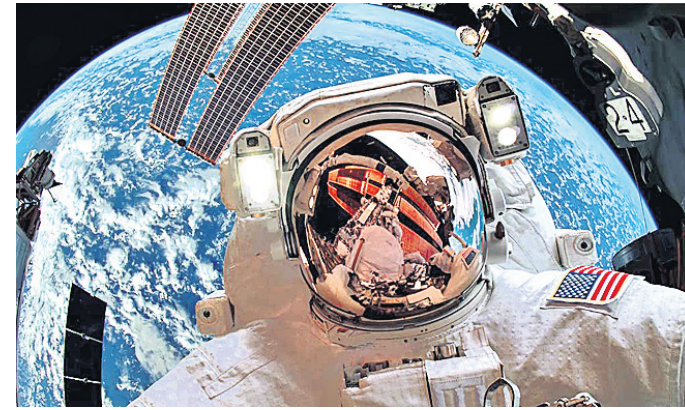
Space Station in January.

"It's a huge leap, right?" said NASA astronaut Shane Kimbrough, commander of SpaceX's most recent flight to the space station. "But it's pretty cool ... Citizens will be able to have the chance to go to space and experience what we get to."

It's all rooted in Shepard's 15-minute flight May 5, 1961.

Shepard was actually the second person in space - the Soviet Union launched cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin three weeks earlier, to Shepard's everlasting dismay.

The 37-year-old Mercury astronaut and Navy test pilot cut a slick sci-fi figure in his silver spacesuit as he stood in the predawn darkness at Cape Canaveral, looking up at his



Redstone rocket. Impatient with all the delays, including another hold in the countdown just min-

utes before launch, he famously growled into his mic: "Why don't you fix your little problem and light

## Nepal's Oli govt now in minority

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kathmandu, May 5: The KP Sharma Oli-led government in Nepal has slipped in the minority after the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) withdrew its support to the government.

With this Maoist's decision, the Oli government has been reduced into a minority who is going to test the floor May 10.

Maoist's decision comes days before Prime Minister Oli had decided to seek a vote of trust from Parliament May 10.

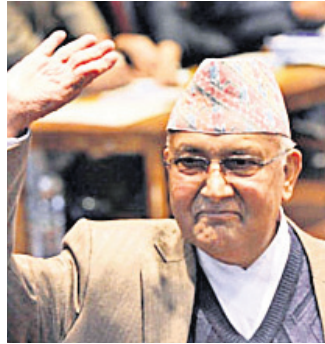
Through the vote of confidence, Oli will try to prolong his stay while the Opposition will try to unseat him who are now struggling to get required magic numbers to remove him.

Opposition party leaders say the talks between primary opposition, Nepali Congress, Maoist Center and a faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party, the fourth largest party in the House, is going on at various levels to form a coalition government after unseating Oli.

After Maoist withdrawal the support, Oli has to garner majority vote or continue as Prime Minister as the leader of the largest party until opposition parties unseat him.

Oli is negotiating with a faction of Janata Samajbadi Party to continue in power that has 32 seats in the parliament.

Opposition parties are also fre-



quently meeting to secure the number to unseat Oli but are struggling. A section of the leaders inside Oli's Nepal Communist Party is likely to support the opposition's bid but no decision has been made yet.

Chief Whip of the party, Dev Gurung Wednesday submitted a letter at parliament secretariat regarding the party's decision to withdraw support to the Oli government. A Standing Committee meeting of the Maoist Center Tuesday decided to withdraw support to the Oli government extended in April, 2018.

The country has become an international playground, Oli compromised on the issue of nationality, running the country through the Ordinances and imposing authoritarianism in the country by violating democratic norms and values, the Maoist Center accused Oli in the letter submitted at parliament secretariat.



Su-25 jet fighters release smoke in the colours of the Russian state flag over Red Square during a flypast rehearsal ahead of a parade on Victory Day, which marks the anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in WW II, in Moscow, Russia

## Kashmir status should not be changed: UNGA prez

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

United Nations, May 5: General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir has said that the status of Jammu and Kashmir should not be changed while acknowledging the 1972 Simla Agreement between India and Pakistan making it a bilateral issue.

"I call on all parties to refrain from taking steps that could affect the status of Jammu and Kashmir," he said at a news conference.

"I support dialogue and diplomacy, and I encourage both Pakistan and India, neighbours, to resolve this dispute through peaceful means," he said. While answering a reporter's question about Kashmir, he said that he would repeat the state-



ment he made last August about it at a news conference when he visited Pakistan as the president-elect.

He recalled that he had said, "The position of the United Nations on Jammu and Kashmir is governed by the UN Charter and applicable Security Council resolutions. And I also recall India and Pakistan's Simla Agreement of 1972, which states that the final sta-

tus of Jammu and Kashmir is to be settled by peaceful means in accordance with the UN Charter."

"So there again, I mentioned that I call on all parties to refrain from taking steps that could affect the status of Jammu and Kashmir."

In the Simla agreement signed in the aftermath of the Bangladesh War by Indira Gandhi, who was the prime minister of India, and

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who at that time held the post of president of

Pakistan, they agreed that their countries would resolve disputes bilaterally, thus ruling out third party intervention.

While India abrogated in 2019 the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution giving Kashmir a special status, Pakistan Prime Minister

Imran Khan announced last year that he would make the Gilgit-Baltistan area of Jammu and Kashmir under its occupation a province of Pakistan.

I recall India and Pakistan's Simla Agreement of 1972, which states that the final status of Jammu and Kashmir is to be settled by peaceful means in accordance with the UN Charter  
VOLKAN BOZKIR | PRESIDENT, UNGA

## Woman gives birth to nine

Bamako: A Malian woman gave birth to nine babies - two more than doctors had detected inside her crowded womb - joining a small pantheon of mothers of nonuplets. The pregnancy of Halima Cisse, 25, has fascinated the West African nation and attracted the attention of its leaders. When doctors in March said Cisse needed specialist care, authorities flew her to Morocco, where she gave birth.

## Sixty years after Alan Shepard became the first American in space, everyday people are on the verge of following in his cosmic footsteps

this candle?"

His capsule, Freedom 7, soared to an altitude of 116 miles (186 kilometers) before parachuting into the Atlantic.

Twenty days later, President John F. Kennedy committed to landing a man on the moon and returning him safely by decade's end, a promise made good in July 1969 by Apollo

11's Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin.

Shepard, who died in 1998, went on to command Apollo 14 in 1971, becoming the fifth moonwalker - and lone lunar golfer.

Since Gagarin and Shepard's pioneering flights, 579 people have rocketed into space or reached its fringes, according to NASA. Nearly two-thirds are American and just over 20% Soviet or Russian.

"Our goal is one day that everyone's a space person," NASA's human spaceflight chief, Kathy Lueders said following Sunday's splashdown of a SpaceX capsule with four astronauts. "We're very excited to see it starting to take off."



# business



**Amidst this crisis, multilateral institutions, such as the ADB, are needed more than ever to support DMCs and prevent the health crisis from cascading into a full-blown economic crisis.**  
NIRMALA SITHARAMAN | FINANCE MINISTER

## CCEA APPROVES 'DISINVESTMENT'

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank. The extent of respective shareholding to be divested by the GoI and LIC, shall be decided during structuring of transaction in consultation with RBI



## of the day quote

**We would really like our employees to take this time off to rest, relax, heal and spend time with loved ones at home. This is applicable to close to 2,000 permanent employees and 600 contract employees working across all our locations in India**

**MOHIT MALHOTRA**  
MD & CEO, GODREJ PROPERTIES

**We had committed ₹100 crores last year to support the fight against this pandemic including contribution towards the PM Cares fund. We will continue our efforts across the country in the coming year and have expanded our original commitment to ₹200 crores for COVID relief efforts**

**SALIL PAREKH** | CEO, INFOSYS

**There is an urgent need for setting up emergency oxygen storage points within 30 minutes distance of all hospitals. Supply of the gas continues to be a challenge amid the devastating second wave of the pandemic**

**SANGITA REDDY**  
JOINT MD, APOLLO HOSPITALS GROUP

## SHORT TAKES

### Tata Steel posts ₹7K cr net profit

**New Delhi:** Tata Steel Wednesday posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 7,161.91 crore for the quarter ended March 2021, mainly on account of higher income. The company had reported a net loss of ₹1,615.35 crore in the year ago quarter, Tata Steel said in a BSE filing. During January-March 2021, the company's total income jumped to ₹50,249.59 crore from ₹37,322.68 crore earlier. Total expenses rose to ₹40,052 crore from ₹35,432.42 crore in the January-March period of 2019-20.

### Will vaccinate all by month-end: AI

**Mumbai:** National carrier Air India has said it will vaccinate all its employees against Covid-19 by the month-end as a pilots' body demanded inoculation of the flying crew on priority basis citing risk to their lives from the deadly infection. Indian Commercial Pilots Association, a union body that represents pilots who fly narrow-body aircraft, in a letter has threatened to stop work if the airline management would not start vaccination camps for the flying crew immediately.

### Maruti production dips 7% in April

**New Delhi:** The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) Wednesday said its total production in April 2021 stood at 1,59,955 units, down 7% from March this year. The company had produced a total of 1,72,433 units in the year-ago period, Maruti Suzuki India said in a filing. Production of mini cars comprising Alto and S-Presso models stood at 29,056 units last month as against 28,519 units in March.

### AITUC rejects draft rules

**New Delhi:** The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) Wednesday rejected the draft rules regarding trade unions under the Industrial Relations Code, saying such a piecemeal approach will create confusion. The Ministry of Labour and Employment issued a notification May 4 on draft rules relating to trade unions under the Code and sought comments within 30 days.

# Global finance majors rush in with Covid aid

**CITIBANK TO DONATE ₹200 CRORE; WELLS FARGO ₹22 CRORE**

AGENCIES

**Mumbai, May 5:** With India continuing to reel under the second wave of Covid-19 infections, multinational financiers pitched in with relief efforts Wednesday, led by a ₹200 crore commitment by Citibank. The relief efforts of the financial sector multinationals - a majority of whom depend on Indian personnel to handle back-office work for their global operations - were focused on providing immediate medical relief to ease the pressure on oxygen availability and healthcare infrastructure.

Other financiers which offered support included Citi's peer from the US Wells Fargo (\$3 million), Swiss bank (\$1.5 million) and alternate investment manager Apollo Global Management (\$1 million).

Till now, a slew of global companies, especially from the tech-



nology sector, and also foreign governments have announced help to India, which is reporting nearly 4 lakh new infections and 3,500 deaths due to the virus every day.

"We have been in India for more than 100 years, and the country is home to over 20,000 of our colleagues. We are determined to support India through this unprecedented health crisis," Peter Babej, the Asia Pacific chief executive of Citi, said.

The bank's efforts will include an immediate relief of ₹75 crore towards medical and humanitarian needs, a statement said, adding this is in addition to the ₹75 crore worth

of expenditure already incurred in FY21.

The ₹75 crore relief will focus on procurement of oxygen supplies, adding beds to hospitals, diagnostic testing systems, personal protection kits and other supplies for India's frontline healthcare workers, it said. Funds will also be utilised towards food and hygiene supplies for low-income families.

The remaining pledged amount for India will be used to fund public and private healthcare infrastructure and to impart employable skills to the youth, thereby

promoting economic revival, important for India's recovery, the bank said.

The bank has already deployed ₹75 crore of pandemic relief in initiatives like 1.15 lakh RT-PCR tests in Maharashtra, delivering 850 tonnes of ration supplies to 26,200 families across 20 locations nationally, and funding six startups incubated at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore's Society for Development and Innovation.

In addition, employees and customers participated in an engagement programme that helped raise ₹2.25 crore towards the PM-Cares Fund, it said.

Meanwhile, its peer Wells Fargo, which runs an offshore unit in the country to support the global operations, also announced donating \$3 million (over ₹22 crore) to civil society bodies in the country to help the Covid-19 relief efforts.

# RBI declares liquidity measures for healthcare infra, services firms

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, May 5:** Amid spurt in coronavirus cases, RBI Wednesday announced an on-tap liquidity window of ₹50,000 crore for companies engaged in healthcare infrastructure and services.

The facility of on-tap liquidity with tenors of up to three years at the repo rate will remain open till March 31, 2022, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said while announcing steps to deal with the impact of the second wave of coronavirus pandemic.

Under the scheme, banks may provide fresh lending support to a wide range of entities including vaccine manufacturers, importers/suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices, hospitals and dispensaries, pathology labs, manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators, importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs, logistics firms and also patients for treatment. The banks, Das said, are being incentivised for quick delivery of credit under the scheme through extension of priority sector classification to such lending up to March 31, 2022.

These loans, he added, will continue to be classified under priority sector till repayment or maturity, whichever is earlier.



"Banks may deliver these loans to borrowers directly or through intermediary financial entities regulated by the RBI. Banks are expected to create a COVID loan book under the scheme," the Governor said. By way of an additional incentive, he said the banks will be eligible to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of the Covid loan book with the RBI under the reverse repo window at a rate which is 25 bps lower than the repo rate or, termed in a different way, 40 bps higher than the reverse repo rate.

A special long-term repo operations (SLTRO) for small finance banks (SFBs) was also announced by Das saying such lenders have been playing a prominent role by acting as a conduit for last mile supply of credit to individuals and small businesses.

## ₹50,000 cr lending, a welcome move

**New Delhi:** RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das' announcement that banks can provide ₹50,000 crore priority lending for ramping up Covid-related healthcare infrastructure and services in the country is a welcome move, Apollo Hospitals Group Joint Managing Director Sangita Reddy said Wednesday. "To boost provision of immediate liquidity for ramping up Covid-related healthcare infrastructure and services in the country, an on-tap liquidity window of ₹50,000 crore with tenors of up to three years at the repo rate is being opened till March 31, 2022," Das said Wednesday.

# 'Services sector PMI dips to 3-month low in April'

AGENCIES

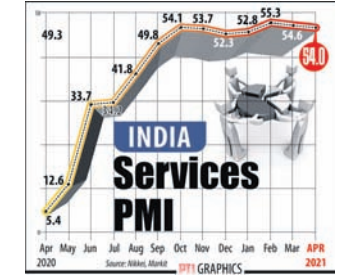
**New Delhi, May 5:** India's services sector activities eased to a three-month low in April, as the rise in business activity was constrained by the pandemic and sentiment towards growth prospects faded, a monthly survey said Wednesday. The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index fell to 54 in April from 54.6 in March, the slowest increase in output in three months.

In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"The PMI results for April showed a more resilient economic performance for the service sector than expected given the escalation of the crisis in India," said Pollyanna De Lima, Economics Associate Director at IHS Markit.

She further noted that firms foresee higher output volumes over the course of the coming year, but business sentiment was dampened by worries surrounding the pandemic. As per the survey, Indian services firms were optimistic regarding the 12-month outlook for business activity, but the overall level of positive sentiment fell to the lowest since last October. The escalation of the pandemic was the main drag on confidence.

On the prices front, service providers noted the steepest rise in



As per the survey, Indian services firms were optimistic regarding the 12-month outlook for business activity, but the overall level of positive sentiment fell to the lowest since last October

overall expenses since December 2011. Some firms lifted their selling prices in April amid the pass through of rising cost burdens to clients, but 98 per cent of companies left fees unchanged due to efforts to secure new work and remain competitive.

"One area of concern was inflation. Services firms noted the steepest rise in overall expenses in over 9 years as global shortages of inputs and higher transportation costs continued to exert upward pressure on outlays," Lima said.

# DoT gives green signal for 5G trials



AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 5:** The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has permitted telecom service providers (TSPs), including Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio Infocomm, Vodafone Idea, and MTNL, to conduct 5G trials.

As largely anticipated, Chinese tech majors such as Huawei and ZTE have not been allowed to participate in the trials.

An official statement said that the TSPs have tied up with original equipment manufacturers and technology providers - Ericsson, Nokia, Samsung and C-DOT. In addition, Reliance Jio Infocomm will also be conducting trials using its own indigenous technology.

The permissions have been given by the DoT as per the priorities and technology partners identified by TSPs themselves. The experimental spectrum is being given in various bands which include the mid-band (3.2 GHz to 3.67 GHz), millimetre wave band (24.25 GHz to 28.5 GHz) and in sub-Gigahertz band (700 GHz).

The TSPs will also be permitted to use their existing spectrum (800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz and 2500 MHz) for conduct of 5G trials.

The duration of the trials is for a period of six months. This includes a time period of two months for procurement and setting up of the equipment.

The permission letters specify that each TSP will have to conduct trials in rural and semi-urban settings apart from urban settings.

# 2nd wave may derail strong recovery: S&Ps

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 5:** The second wave of Covid infections may derail a budding recovery in the Indian economy and credit conditions, S&P Global Ratings said Wednesday projecting a lower than previously anticipated GDP growth rate in different scenarios.

S&P, which in March had seen Indian economy growing by 11% in the fiscal year to March 2022, saw GDP growth rate dropping to 9.8% under 'moderate' scenario where infections peak in May, and falling to as low as 8.2% under 'severe' scenario under which caseload would peak only in late June.

Just as the economy appeared to be inching back to normalcy, India was hit by a second wave of Covid-19 infections in early April, prompting states and cities to restrict public movements and impose lockdowns, which have hit some businesses hard.

India added 382,315 Covid-19 cases over the last 24 hours to reach a total of 2.06 crore, while death rose by a record 3,780 to 226,188, health ministry data showed.

"India's second Covid wave may derail a strong recovery in the economy and credit conditions," S&P Global Ratings said in a note adding the spiraling new infections, which account for almost half of the world's cases, has overwhelmed the health system in the country.

# Centre exempts custom duty on Covid relief materials

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 5:** In a bid to avail adequate Covid-19 related materials, the Central Government has issued notification exempting custom duty and IGST on such materials with the condition that they are utilised for the specific purpose for which permission has been sought for import from the state government, a statement said by Commissionerate of CT & GST.

The Centre has exempted Custom Duty and IGST on Covid relief materials like drugs, medicines, vaccines, oxygen concentrators, equipments and others for free



distribution. NRI, foreign agencies, NGOs are eager to supply such materials to Odisha.

"The importers will apply to concerned Department of State Government for import of such goods. After obtaining permission of the concerned department, the importer will import the said goods

donated from abroad for free distribution in Odisha," said an official. In order to facilitate such imports, Government in Finance Department has appointed Hrushikesh Mishra, Special Commissioner of CT & GST, Odisha as Nodal Officer for purpose of issuing certificate prior to import of such specified Covid related relief materials donated from abroad for free distribution in Odisha.

After the goods are imported and before custom clearance, the agencies will apply to the nodal officer, in a prescribed pro-forma for issuance of the certificate required for custom clearance.

# 'Investment in health, social protection key to achieving recovery'

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 5:** Investment in health, education and social protection alongside deeper regional cooperation can help countries in Asia Pacific region in achieving equitable recovery from the pandemic, Asian Development Bank (ADB) said Wednesday.

Speaking at the board of governors meeting, ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa said the region can emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic even stronger than before by addressing climate, inequality, infrastructure, regional cooperation and resource mobilisation related challenges.

Highlighting that ADB was quick to respond to the coronavirus outbreak by granting assistance followed by \$20 billion Covid-19 assistance package, he said ADB will continue to deliver its "unique synergy of finance, knowledge and partnerships".

"We will prioritise the quality of our assistance over quantity, meeting near-term needs with a clear vision for the future. If we stay on this course, I am confident the region will emerge from the current crisis even stronger than before," Asakawa said while speaking on "Toward a Lasting and Equitable Recovery: ADB's Leadership and Country Presence during the Covid-19 Crisis".



He counted five areas to be critical to achieving a lasting and equitable recovery for Asia

## FIGHTING COVID

Asia can emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic even stronger than before by addressing climate, inequality, infra, regional cooperation and resource mobilisation related challenges

MASATSUGU ASAKAWA | PRESIDENT, ADB

and the Pacific. "First, we must place ambitious climate actions at the centre of de-

velopment, with increased focus on adaptation and resilience, and with full commitment to the goals of the Paris Agreement. Second, we need to address inequality including the gender gap - which has worsened during the pandemic - by investing in health, education, and social protection," he said.

Further, high quality green and digital infrastructure should be promoted to rebuild smartly while closing the digital gap and attracting substantial private investment, he said, adding regional cooperation and integration should be deepened, so that the developing member countries can seize the opportunities of renewed glob-

alization and strengthen regional health security.

"And fifth, we need to strengthen domestic resource mobilization, to ensure that governments have the resources they need to finance sustainable growth and respond effectively to future crises," he added.

Despite the pandemic hitting hard the global economies, he said ADB did not lose sight of its key long-term development programmes with around half of ADB's commitments in 2020 going outside the pandemic response.

The funding agency remained on track to achieve its target of promoting gender equality in at least 75% of its total operations by 2030.



MAHREZ BRACE HELPS GUARDIOLA'S MEN REACH FIRST EVER CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL AS THEY SHOW PSG THE EXIT DOOR WITH 4-1 AGGREGATE WIN IN THE SEMIFINALS

# City light too bright



**MEMORABLE OUTING:** Riyad Mahrez wheels away in celebration after scoring one of his goals Tuesday, while PSG players wear a dejected look at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Manchester, May 5:** By the time Riyad Mahrez completed the counterattack that sealed Manchester City's spot in a first Champions League final, it looked so effortless overcoming a PSG line-up that lost its cool and composure.

It was the Paris-born winger who netted twice before PSG had Angel Di Maria sent off. City won 2-0 to eliminate last season's finalists 4-1 on aggregate, Tuesday.

It's been anything but comfortable for City getting a shot at lifting European football's top prize for the first time despite 13 years of lavish investment. Even reaching this semifinal required a fight in court to overturn a ban from this season's Champions League for breaching UEFA's financial rules.

And it's only two weeks since the Abu Dhabi-owned team exposed itself to fresh sanctions for joining a brief, ill-fated bid to split to help form a breakaway European Super League.

Now City could win the competition it tried to leave in what could be an all-English final May 29 in Istanbul if Chelsea overcomes Real

**“Then they lost their nerve and started to kick us and it was good. They had the red card (of Di Maria) and after, it was more comfortable for us”**

RIYAD MAHREZ | MAN CITY

**“We fought to the end. When you play against big teams, it's impossible to attack for 90 minutes without suffering. We have to accept that”**

MARCO VERRATTI | PSG

Madrid. Chelsea and Real Madrid played to a 1-1 draw in the first leg.

It's not just City that's endured frustration in its quest to win the biggest prize in European football. Pep Guardiola, a Champions League winner as Barcelona coach in 2009 and 2011, has been waiting a decade to return to the final.

He fell short three times with Bayern Munich and has taken until his fifth season at City to even reach the semifinals.

City is now accustomed to success — sitting on the brink of its third Premier League title in four seasons after already collecting the League Cup last month. But its only continental title came with the now-defunct European Cup Winners' Cup in 1970.

PSG missed out on a second shot

at lifting a first European Cup after losing last season's final to Bayern Munich, and Mauricio Pochettino's lineup is even struggling to defend the French title.

And in the clash of European football's Gulf-funded big-spenders, it was the Qatari visitors from Paris on the backfoot quickly in Manchester.

After scoring City's winner in Paris last week, Mahrez took only 11 minutes to score in the second leg. The move began with a long ball by defender Oleksandr Zinchenko running onto a long ball from goalkeeper Ederson.

Zinchenko passed to Kevin De Bruyne, whose shot was blocked by Keylor Navas but Mahrez was alert to the rebound to put the ball through the goalkeeper's legs on a field covered in the remnants of a

spring hailstorm.

Mauro Icardi was proving ineffective in a PSG attack shorn of Kylian Mbappe, who wasn't fit enough to start and never entrusted with being deployed from the bench.

There were headers over from Marquinhos and Neymar but PSG could find no way past a defense that had Ruben Dias proving such a robust barrier.

The PSG back-line was easier to breach, which happened again in the 63rd minute. There was a surging run down the left flank by Phil Foden before a combination with De Bruyne and a cross delivered for Mahrez to sweep into the net.

The frustrations of PSG were clear, even without any crowd to create any intimidating atmosphere. The visitors finished the game with 10 men just like in the first leg after Di Maria was sent off with 20 minutes to go for kicking at Ferdinandino.

PSG turned on the referee, with midfielder Ander Herrera in a post-match interview accusing Bjorn Kuipers of directing an expletive at PSG teammate Leandro Paredes. It wasn't heard by Pochettino.

# ARSENAL'S 25-YEAR RUN IN EURO EVENT ON LINE

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**London, May 5:** So much for Arsenal being one of the elite soccer clubs in Europe. Three weeks after being among the instigators of the controversially closed-off and ultimately ill-fated Super League, the English team is facing the ignominy of being shut out of continental competition for the first time in 25 years.

A failure to overturn a 1-2 deficit against Villarreal in the Europa League semifinals Thursday would end Arsenal's quarter-century run of participating in either the Champions League or UEFA's secondary club competitions.

Such a degrading of status would be ironic, considering the planned Super League — devised and then aborted within a chaotic 48-hour period last month — would have positioned Arsenal as one of 12 elite teams in the European game.

The significance of the match against Villarreal, likely to be played against the backdrop of more fan protests against Arsenal's American ownership for its involvement in the Super League project, isn't lost on Mikel Arteta.

It's not just Arteta's future that could be on the line on Thursday. Arsenal's ability to attract players for next season, and to retain the services of its own best players,



Arsenal players rush to the centre circle after scoring a crucial away goal at Villarreal last week

might hinge on winning the Europa League and gaining the bonus prize of qualifying for next season's Champions League.

Otherwise, it's out of Europe, a situation Arsenal hasn't been in since the 1995-96 season — a year that fell between the storied managerial eras of George Graham and Arsene Wenger. For Arteta, that would be unacceptable.

Arteta delivered the FA Cup to Arsenal in August, at the end of his

first season at the club, but his position would be uncertain should his team be eliminated by Villarreal, which — adding to the weight of the occasion — is coached by Unai Emery.

Emery is a Spaniard who replaced Wenger at Arsenal in May 2018, following the Frenchman's nearly 22 years in the job. He lasted only 18 months. Arteta said the success of this season will now be determined by winning the Europa League or not.

## Chess body launches 'Checkmate COVID'

AGENCIES

**New Delhi/Kanpur, May 5:** Considering the surge in COVID cases in India, AICF (All India Chess Federation) has taken an initiative to help its players and officials in fight against the pandemic.

AICF has launched a fund — 'Checkmate COVID' — to help stakeholders who are suffering due to COVID and require hospitalization. All the active FIDE-rated players and all the arbiters, having 'A' classification or undergone a refresher course in 2021, are eligible to receive this assistance.

Giving details of this initiative, AICF president Sanjay Kapoor told that the national body will appoint a Nodal Officer in every state to help the stakeholders get required assistance. AICF will help the players, who have international meet ahead, to get vaccination on priority

# Thiem marches into third round



Dominic Thiem plays a backhand during his match at Madrid Open, Tuesday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Madrid, May 5:** Looking fresh again after taking a few weeks off, US Open champion Dominic Thiem cruised into the third round of the Madrid Open with a comfortable 6-1, 6-3 win over American Marcos Giron.

Thiem was in control from the start at the 'Magic Box' center court in what was his first match since March. The fourth-ranked Austrian was coming off early round losses in Doha and Dubai and felt like he needed a break.

Thiem, the third seed in Madrid, hasn't won a tournament since breaking through with his first Grand Slam title at the US Open in September. He said his goal is to be back in top form at the French Open. Thiem said he will likely be taking more time off going forward in his career.

Thiem's next opponent in Madrid will be Australian Alex De Minaur, who advanced after Lloyd Harris had to retire from their match. Sixth-seeded Andrey Rublev ad-

vanced to the third round by beating American Tommy Paul 6-7(5-7), 6-3, 6-4, while Kei Nishikori reached the second round by defeating Karen Khachanov 6-7(6-8), 6-2, 6-2. Eighth-seeded Matteo Berrettini defeated Fabio Fognini 6-3, 6-4 in an all-Italian second-round matchup, while Alexander Bublik beat 11th-seeded Denis Shapovalov 6-4, 5-7, 6-4.

American Taylor Fritz lost 5-7, 7-5, 4-6 in a first-round match against Albert Ramos-Vinolas, who is coming off a title at the Estoril Open. Felix Auger-Aliassime suffer a 1-6, 4-6 loss to Casper Ruud.

In the round of 16 of the women's draw, third-seeded Simona Halep, a two-time Madrid champion, was upset by 13th-seeded Elise Mertens 6-4, 5-7, 5-7 in a match lasting more than two and a half hours at the center court.

Two Americans lost — Aryna Sabalenka defeated Jessica Pegula 6-1, 6-2 and Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova beat Jennifer Brady 7-5, 6-7(8-10), 6-3.

## IPL foreign recruits head home

# Eight Englishman back in London



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 5:** The Englishmen were the first ones out with eight of them landing in London, while the Australians awaited an escape to Maldives as IPL's foreign recruits charted their way back home assisted by the BCCI, Wednesday.

Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Chris Woakes, Moeen Ali and Jason Roy landed in London to begin a 10-day quarantine before heading to their respective homes.

England skipper Eoin Morgan, Dawid Malan and Chris Jordan are expected to board a flight to London within the next 48 hours.

"I can confirm that 8 of the 11 England players in India managed to get on a flight to Heathrow last night and have landed this morning," an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) spokesperson told this agency.

"They will now quarantine in government approved hotels. The remaining three — Jordan, Malan, Morgan — should leave India within the next 48 hours," he added.

The Australians, on the other hand, were still waiting to know when they can fly out to Maldives, where they will stay for a few days

before flying home. The detour has been forced by the Australian government's travel ban on India till May 15 because of the explosion of COVID-19 cases here.

Their Prime Minister Scott Morrison has refused to consider an exemption and Cricket Australia has also ruled out seeking one from the government. "All Australians are assembling in Delhi and from there they will head to Maldives by a charter flight," a franchise official told this agency.

CA's interim chief Nick Hockley said the BCCI is helping in every possible way to ensure a smooth return for the 14 players, members of the coaching staff and commentators, who are in India right now.

"What the BCCI is working to do is to move the entire cohort out of India where they will wait until it's possible to return to Australia," Hockley told reporters in Sydney.

"The BCCI has been working on a range of options. That's now narrowed down to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. The BCCI is committed not only to the first move but also to putting on a charter to bring them back to Australia," he added.

IPL also featured cricketers from South Africa (11) and New Zealand (10) West Indians (9), Afghanistan (3) and Bangladesh (2).

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## Barbora Strycova hangs up racquet

**PRAGUE:** Barbora Strycova, a former top-ranked doubles player and Wimbledon singles semifinalist, has announced her retirement. "Until now, tennis was the only world I knew," Strycova said in a statement Tuesday. "I have always had enormous love for this amazing sport. Even though all the pain, tears, renunciation and sweat, all the great moment(s) and victories were worth it." The 35-year-old Czech player previously announced her pregnancy. She won two WTA singles titles and 31 in doubles. At Wimbledon 2019, she won the women's doubles with Hsieh Su-wei to become No.1 and reached the singles semifinals, losing to Serena Williams.

## HI mourns Sanjib Barla's death

**NEW DELHI:** Hockey India Wednesday mourned the death of former India junior player Sanjib Barla, who died in Rourkela due to COVID-19 related complications. Barla died Sunday. He was 34. Barla, who was part of the Indian junior men's camp in 2009, played for Odisha in various domestic hockey competitions. He also worked for Western Railways in Mumbai. "Sanjib was an integral part of the hockey circuit in Odisha and he will be deeply missed by all of us," HI President Gyanendra Ningombam said in a condolence message. "We are extremely saddened to hear the news of his passing and we extend our deepest condolences to Sanjib's family and friends. May they have the strength to pass through this terrible time."

## Fans allowed for EPL's final 2 rounds

**LONDON:** Only home fans will be allowed into games when the Premier League welcomes back spectators to stadiums for the final two rounds of the season. Supporters will return in a reduced capacity from May 17, subject to the British government easing lockdown restrictions as planned, and the Premier League has rearranged its schedule to ensure each of its 20 teams plays at least one game at home in front of fans. The league said away supporters would not get tickets for those matches 'due to varying operational challenges' and to maximize the opportunity for home fans to attend. The penultimate round will take place May 18-19. The final round is May 23.

# Hamilton, Verstappen to resume title fight in Spain

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Madrid, May 5:** The race for the Formula One title has quickly become a two-man show, and it's not expected to change when the circuit goes to Barcelona this week for the Spanish Grand Prix.

At a track all teams know well, Mercedes and Red Bull are expected to continue to dominate with Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen separated by eight points after three races.

"The picture is starting to clarify. Red Bull and Mercedes are the two standout teams, and Lewis and Max are the two standout drivers," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said.

"If we get a pretty standard Barcelona, I think you'll get the four races and we can see where our strengths and weaknesses are. But what we can see is it's incredibly tight."

Hamilton, the four-time defending champion with Mercedes, has the edge over Verstappen after winning the season-opener in Bahrain and last week's race in Portugal.



But Red Bull has significantly closed the gap this season, with Verstappen picking up a win in Italy and a pole position in Bahrain in the first three races. The teams are 18 points apart in the constructors' championship.

"The biggest winner for that is Formula 1," Horner said. "And if it goes like this for 23 races, it's going to be nip and tuck."

Mercedes team principal Toto

Wolff said the team has been enjoying the close challenge from Red Bull. "When we were behind in testing and in Bahrain, it's a buzz that I have not felt in the team since 2013 when we had that first sniff that we could be there," Wolff said.

"The whole place is excited and continues to be excited. I'd like to be happy after Abu Dhabi at the end of the season but for the time being, we'll take it one step at a time."

Hamilton and Verstappen finished in the top two positions in the first three races. Verstappen could easily be in the lead had it not been for track limit violations that cost him some points.

"The whole track limit debate is just frustrating," Horner said. "It's been brutal for us across the first three events. So it's been pretty expensive for us."

The violations cost Verstappen the

win in Bahrain and also hurt him in qualifying in Portugal. He also was stripped of the point for fastest lap because of the limits.

Hamilton's and Verstappen's teammates have yet to come close to them. Mercedes driver Valtteri Bottas earned the pole in Portugal but has struggled in the races. He is already 37 points off the lead, while Red Bull driver Sergio Perez is 47 points back.

Instead, McLaren driver Lando Norris is in third place in the drivers' standings, with Ferrari teammates Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz far behind.

Fernando Alonso, the other Spanish driver this weekend along with Sainz, will be looking to finish in the points for the third straight race after ending 10th in Italy and eighth in Portugal.

The Barcelona-Catalunya track has been home to preseason testing for the last several years, though this season F1 tested in Bahrain because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Spanish GP will take place without fans because of the pandemic.